MILTON'S CONCEPTION OF TRUE LIBERTY

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by

DAVID WILLIAM WATERS, B.A.

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AUTHOR: David William Waters

SUPERVISOR: Professor James Dale

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ABSTRACT: John Milton is one of those bold, progressive Seventeenth-Century Englishmen who devotes much of his life to the fight for religious, domestic, and political liberty. A determined champion of intellectual freedom, Milton believes that all men have fundamental right to know the truth, and to use it for a better, freer life. He proclaims the philosophy of Natural Law and social contract as the foundation of an enlightened, liberated society, his ideal commonwealth. However, Milton is essentially a convinced elitist, who reserves full or substantial liberty for a minority too small to achieve and preserve his ideals.

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INTRODUCTION

When England's mid-Seventeenth Century Protestant individualists proclaim their formidable challenges to episcopacy and monarchy, John Milton becomes their learned champion of liberty. As he rejects traditional clerical and temporal authorities in favour of his Protestant individual conscience and reasonable independent judgment, Milton attempts to extirpate tyranny and superstition, and to realize true Reformation. Between 1640 and 1660 Milton composes a series of passionate, patriotic treatises in defense of: parliamentary sovereignty and rights; the Commonwealth; regicide; the popular right to responsible government; freedom of publication; and civil rights that include liberty of conscience, and freedom of thought, discussion, and assembly. While hoping that England will "progress towards the liberation of...human life from slavery,"[1] Milton publishes the Areopagitica (Nov.24, 1644), The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates (Feb.13, 1649), Eikonoklastes (Oct.6, 1649), A Defence of the People of England (Feb.24, 1651), The Second Defence of the English People (May 30, 1654), and The Readie and Easie Way... (Feb. 1660). These controversial treatises disclose in most lucid manner Milton's individual conception of liberty. These treatises and their lofty conception of liberty are the

focus of the following study.

John Milton's is an excellent conception of Christian liberty; Milton conceives freedom as synonymous with piety, wisdom, justice, temperance, magnanimity and bravery.[2] He believes that "nothing can so effectively mould and create virtue as liberty."[3] He thinks that no man can aspire to a more dignified office than that of liberator.[4] He is also convinced that mature, responsible liberty is most encouraged and best facilitated in a free commonwealth.[5] In order to promote this rational liberty, he defends the ideals of Parliament and Republic against their disparagers. From the 1644 composition of Areopagitica to the 1660 drafting of The Readie and Easie Way, Milton remains dedicated to the liberation of mature men, so that they might grow virtuous, noble, and high spirited. In this respect he is a reformer who seeks to activate the potential goodness within men and to liberate their creative energies from stifling restraints and political oppression. He finds in scripture, nature, and reason the sanctions for both the reforms he advocates and the political philosophy he synthesizes.[6] He accepts the humanistic conception of a liberating law of Nature, which guarantees free-born men natural rights, including the right to enter freely into a social contract with their magistrates and governors.

Milton is, in many respects, a powerful exponent of some of his century's most revolutionary ideas. In the

Areopagitica he petitions boldly for "the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties."[7] In this classic polemic he demands social conditions capable of producing and stimulating the dignified, enlightened, progressive individual. He pronounces religious toleration "more Christian"[8] than the "prelatical tradition of crowding free consciences..."[9] In many respects the Areopagitica exemplifies the rousing Miltonic plea for proper freedom for the good, self-disciplined man, who will be sufficiently strong to resist evil, and adequately intelligent to reject error.

Milton confidently professes that this good man has numerous natural rights; these include life, liberty, the pursuit of goodness, freedom of thought and discussion, and the right to choose responsible, representative government, and to reject or alter an arrogant or oppressive one. In The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates, Milton combines the Natural law philosophy, scripture, and a selection of distinguished historical sanctions, into his case for regicide. Out of "pure zeal to the liberty [of] mankind,"[10] Milton defends the Independent military minority who executed King Charles I. Milton explains that a free-born people possess the right to depose and punish a tyrant who is an impediment to that society's good, creative forces. The Tenure's title declares that "it is lawful...to call to account a tyrant, or wicked king, and after due conviction,

to depose, and put him to death..."[11] In Eikonoklastes Milton reiterates this natural rights--social contract philosophy he has articulated in The Tenure; he announces the supremacy of parliament, and he denounces the king, Charles I, who most undermined popular liberties.[12]

Milton expresses deep gratitude for the opportunity to compose the (first) Defence of the People of England, to publicly defend "the cause of the English people, and thus liberty herself."[13] This Defence is constructed upon Milton's conception of the liberating law of Nature. This treatise extends and expands the social contract philosophy affirmed in The Tenure. In the (first) Defence Milton proudly proclaims the sovereignty of parliament, the institute which, according to Milton, was "to maintain above all else the freedom of the people..."[14] In his subsequent Second Defence, Milton exclaims, "What can tend more to the honor and glory of any country than the restoration of liberty...?"[15] He again writes to free both his country and the church. This Second Defence also contains Milton's most elaborate definition of his conception of liberty.

The good old cause is neither abandoned nor down-played as the 1660 Restoration of Charles II approaches. Milton remains the champion of English liberty, "a word which monarchy and her bishops hate..."[16] While he faces the imminent threat of the Restoration, Milton outlines his

pragmatic (rather than ideal) scheme for a republican commonwealth; he again emphasizes that "a free commonwealth both favours and promotes liberty; and not the word only, but the thing itsself."[17] He also warns of the evils that will ensue if the people reject liberty and restore Charles Stuart's son to the throne of England.

Through two decades of radical political experimentation and heated controversy, Milton faithfully upholds his ideals: liberty and commonwealth. This study aspires to reveal more fully what these Miltonic ideals are; how he defines, defends, and develops his conception of liberty. As he becomes a seasoned veteran of polemical warfare, Milton becomes convinced that good, wise, and brave men will fight to defend liberty; and very few, if any, championed this vital cause as well as John Milton.

FOOTNOTES (INTRODUCTION)

[1] A Second Defence of the English People, IV,i, 622. (All quotations of Milton's prose are taken from The Complete Prose Works of John Milton, gen.ed. Don M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953--). All subsequent chapters will include, in parenthesis in the thesis text, volume and page references for quotations, e.g., IV,i,622, above.)

[2] Second Defence, IV,i,684

[3] Ibid., p.679.

[4] Ibid., p.672.

[5] The Readie and Easie Way, VII, 383.

[6] Of these important authorities, nature in particular will be elaborated on below; see chapter II especially.

[7] Areopagitica, II,560.

[8] Ibid., p.565.

[9] Ibid., p.554.

[10] J.Milton French (ed.), The Life Records of John Milton (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1950), II, 230.

[11] The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates, III, 189. Hereafter frequently referred to as The Tenure.

[12] *Eikonoklastes*, III, 344.

[13] *Second Defence*, IV, i, 549.

[14] Ibid., p.548.

[15] Ibid., p.550.

[16] *The Readie and Easie Way*, VII, 383.

[17] Ibid.

CHAPTER I

AREOPAGITICA[1]

John Milton's Areopagitica is his most celebrated defense of responsible individual liberty; it is his bold and eloquent petition for freedom of thought and discussion, sufficient to facilitate the intellectual and spiritual growth of all good Englishmen. In this profoundly moral, Protestant-Humanist polemic, Milton requests "the liberty to know, to utter and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties" (II,560). He affirms that truth will surely triumph over error, if only good and learned men are permitted freely to speak, debate, and publish their portion of the whole truth. In subsequently constructing his case for freedom of the press, Milton debates the broader philosophic questions of freedom of thought and expression, and religious liberty.

Milton believes that a free quest for truth is integral to the Reformation and the human pursuit of happiness.[2] The Protestant Reformation aspires to recover and propagate the essential Christian truths, which, as Milton explains, the Roman Catholic priests first distorted, and finally lost. In Of Reformation, Milton explains that the doctrine of the Gospel, "through the grosseness, and blindness of her professors, and the fraud of deceivable

traditions" has been adulterated, and transformed into "the new-vomited Paganisme of sensual Idolatry..."[3]. Protestants like Milton seek to purify the Christian religion, replacing the idolatry, ritual, and superstition with plain worship, and a devout belief in a pure Christian truth. Milton states that, "If we will but purge...that intellectual ray which God hath planted in us, then we would beleeve the Scriptures...calling to them to be instructed, not only the wise and learned, but the simple, the poor...attributing to all men, and requiring from them the ability of searching, trying, examining all things, and by the Spirit discerning that which is good..."[4] Milton believes that "God is decreeing to begin some new and great period in his church, ev'n to the reforming of Reformation it self..." (II,553). That these ideals might be accomplished, Milton petitions the English Parliament to encourage "any [who] would write, and bring his helpfull hand to the slow-moving Reformation..." (II,565). Human happiness will, of course, be derived from the productive utilization of human minds, to advance the Reformation, and recover perfect Truth.

> Truth indeed came once into the world with her divine Master, and was a perfect shape most glorious to look on; but when he ascended, and his apostles after him were laid asleep, then strait arose a wicked race of deceivers, who...took the virgin Truth, hewd her lovely form into a thousand peeces, and scatter'd them to the four winds. From that time ever since,

> the sad friends of Truth...went up and down gathering up limb by limb still as they could find them. We have not yet found them all... II,549.

Milton recognizes that knowledge, in his contemporary society, is imperfect; he believes that the only hope, of ever recovering and synthesizing a total truth, lies in a necessary social toleration of a diversity of opinions. The English nation requires the freedom that will allow both, the continuous search after truth, and diverse opinions, to clash and be blended in a fuller truth. Milton declares that "the golden rule in Theology" and the proper employment of a Christian is "to be still searching what we know not, by what we know" (II,551). Milton understands that the interests of Truth and Reformation (synonymous terms in Protestant minds) require that learned men be free to challenge and defeat error in open conflict. He notes that "reforming of a Church...is never brought to effect without the fierce encounter of truth and falsehood...", from which truth prevails.[5] He believes that "the property of Truth is to unyoke and set free the minds and spirits of the Nation...from the thraldom of sin and superstition."[6] Milton adds that "The people, or the greater part, more than at other times, wholly tak'n up with the study of highest and most important matters to be reform'd should be disputing, reasoning, reading, inventing, discoursing, ev'n to a rarity, and admiration, things not before

discourst or writt'n of" (II,557). This is precisely why Milton petitions for liberty not only to know and utter, but to argue; then he might receive helpful criticism and stimulation from persons with differing perspectives. He accepts this process of intellectual confrontation and interaction as the only way to become wise and veracious, and consequently virtuous and free.

Milton believes that in order to recover and reassemble a perfect truth, it is necessary that all religious sects, except the repressive bigoted Catholics, be permitted to speak, publish, and contribute their portions of the truth.[7] Milton states that "all opinions, yea errors, known, read, and collated, are of main service & assistance toward the speedy attainment of what is truest" (II,513). Truth must be arrived at by reconciling opposite views and uniting portions of the truth.

> There must be many schismes and many dissections made in the quarry and in the timber, ere the house of God can be built...neither can every piece of the building be of one form; nay rather the perfection consists in this, that out of many moderat varieties and brotherly dissimilitudes that are not vastly disproportionall arises the graceful symmetry that commends the whole pile and structure (II,555).

Milton is quite convinced that Truth will emerge victorious from free and vigorous debate among the sectaries and others.

Licensing, however, "hinders and retards the importation of...truth..." (II,548). Milton observes that

"if it come to prohibiting, there is not ought more likely to be prohibited then truth it self..." (II,565). He declares that "though all the windes of doctrin were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously by licensing and prohibiting to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falshood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the wors, in a free and open encounter. Her confuting is the best and surest suppressing" (II,561).

Milton resents being deprived of any reasonable, or even semi-reasonable, book that might contribute to the discovery or assembly of a fuller truth; he believes that a good mind can either extract something valuable from, or develop a rebuttal to, even the most impure volume. Milton believes that religious-theological error must be faced if it is to be properly refuted and rejected. Every refutation of error is an additional affirmation of truth which is lost if the challenges of error never arise. In the Areopagitica, Milton champions the liberty of unlicensed printing, hoping that the 1644 English Presbyterian Parliament will rescind the June 14, 1643 Licensing Order, that makes it necessary to license all books prior to their initial publication. He declares, and then demonstrates, before this Parliament that "It would fare better with Truth, with learning, and the Commonwealth, if one of your publisht Orders...were call'd in..." (II,488).

Here is Milton, the radical Protestant

pamphleteer, defending the writer's right to publish and the book's right to be published. Milton writes that "Hee who destroyes a good Booke, kills reason it selfe, kills the Image of God, as it were in the eye" (II,492). Here Milton expresses his Christian humanist conviction that God is reasonable. Milton's Protestant Christianity assimilated certain features of Renaissance humanism; for instance, Milton believed that the ways of God could not and never would contradict just and reasonable human desires and needs.[8]

Milton is extremely concerned that authorities be wary:

> what persecution we raise against the living labours of publick men, how we spill that season'd life of man preserv'd and stor'd up in Books; since we see a kinde of homicide may be thus committed, sometimes a martyrdome, and if it extend to the whole impression, a kinde of massacre, wherof the execution ends not in the slaying of an elementall life, but strikes at that ethereal and fift essence, the breath of reason it selfe, slaies an immortality rather then a life. (II,493).

Milton believes that the state should not limit intelligent men's opportunities to generate ideas; as a seasoned Protestant Milton knows that licensing has always been a concomitant of tyranny, and tends to discourage this free expression of independent perspectives. He recognizes that this suppression of thought and expression tends to curb the individualism and mental autonomy sanctioned by the Protestant Reformation. He recalls that the Roman

Catholic Church has established, in particular, the Inquisition and the Council of Trent to extirpate Protestantism. He sees this current Presbyterian suppression of learning as an extension of the "Prelaticall tradition of crowding free consciences and Christian liberties into canons and precepts of men" (II,554). In fact, he affirms that "Bishops and Presbyters are [now] the same to us both name and thing" (II,539).

With the publication of Areopagitica, Milton distinguishes himself from the Presbyterians, whom he earlier supported in his anti-Prelatical tracts, by adopting a more Independent religious perspective. The Independents are a composite group, and at one time consisted mostly of gentry. They sought to establish a new decentralized form of Calvinist Church organization.[9] The Independents became champions of religious toleration, such as Areopagitica advocates; though toleration was forced upon them by political necessity.[10]

Milton's more radical (but not extreme) 1644 Independent stance is a qualified opposition to censorship. He voluntarily concedes that "it is of greatest concernment in the Church and Commonwealth, to have a vigilant eye how bookes demeane themselves, as well as men; and thereafter to confine, imprison, and do sharpest justice on them as malefactors..." (II,492). Clearly Milton does not object to responsible censorship; in fact he later

serves, between 1649 and 1651, as licenser of Mercurius Politicus (Sirluck in II, 163). Yet, while he condones censorship of harmful publications, he proceeds to demonstrate that in the early days of Christendom, even the books of grand heretics were not prohibited and burned until after the works had been fairly examined, properly refuted, and justly condemned. The 1643 Licensing Order, in its haste to judge and suppress books, is clearly unfair to them. This licensing is born in weakness, in a fear of ideas; its advocates do not wish to be reasonable because they dread an exposing truth or criticism. But, as Milton exclaims, "Truth" needs no policies, nor stratagems, nor licencings to make her victorious, those are the shifts and the defences that error uses against her power..." (II, 563). The state must be more reasonable and not imagine an evil where a good result is more likely.

Milton declares that a free and untainted exchange of significant ideas will surely have a beneficial rather than detrimental effect on English society. It will broaden and expand many minds, producing wise men who are free and virtuous assets to their community. Milton doubts that unrestricted reading will prove detrimental to society. He declares that, "All kinde of knowledge whether of good or evill; the knowledge cannot defile, nor consequently the books, if the will and conscience be not defil'd" (II, 512). The individual

determined to put his learning to good use in life-enhancing activity will not be debased or corrupted, but offended and repelled, by an evil tract. A good published idea positively expands a recipient's mind; a bad published idea challenges the good man to produce a strong, reasoned, rebuttal or refutation; hence all publications can stimulate, activate, and even expand the minds of readers. Hence Milton proposes, to his Parliamentary audience, that the promiscuous reading of bad along with good books is beneficial, because this develops the powers of human discernment and even resistance. Constant exposure to falsehood challenges the mind to reaffirm a true position against lies. Constant temptation by evil tests and strengthens the will to resist. It is the individual who can confront and quash both evil and falsehood who is truly liberated, by Milton's definition.

As a truly liberated individual Milton champions the liberty of thought, discussion, and publication that may facilitate the advancement of true Reformation. He believes that undiscovered and unclarified truths lie within the Bible, which he, as a Protestant, upholds as the true source of Christian authority, against the counterfeit Roman Catholic tradition and Pope; debate or discussion of these Scriptural truths will advance the true religion and true Reformation, whereas a passive acceptance of the prescribed Orthodox dogma will leave undiscovered and

unclarified truths buried in the good book. Milton recognizes that licensing limits people's exposure to printed ideas, thereby impoverishing their intellects, leaving them narrow-minded or bigoted, rather than broadminded or mature. Conversely, a mature mind is aware of various beliefs, open to criticism from other people with different convictions, and capable of constantly altering and improving personal convictions; this mental development or maturation is an integral part of a good man's self-realization. As a mature, liberated Protestant, Milton welcomes any debate where he can receive and dispense intellectual criticism, challenges, and stimulation. He tries to complete his opinions by assimilating a broad array of both canonical and classical ideas. He petitions for a social environment conducive to this individual mental development; he sees that this action will promote both culture and true reformation.

When an individual interacts with ideas, or with a social environment capable of stimulating them, his mind is developed, and he becomes a fuller (and hopefully better) person. Without adequate mental stimulation by diverse and challenging ideas, human minds are unexercised and underdeveloped; here intelligence is supplanted by stupidity, rigidity, and torpidity. Milton believes that licensing is "but a servitude like that impos'd by the Philistims..." (II,536). He strongly attacks the licensing order because

he cannot "set so light by all the invention, the art, the wit, the grave and solid judgment..." (II,535) in his native England. He believes that the issue of the human brain will be aborted or stifled by oppressive ignorance. He exclaims, "thus...we are hinder'd and disinur'd by this cours of licencing" (II,548). Milton implies that the state has no right to rob the present generation of diverse, important ideas; and he is aware that licensing also prevents subsequent generations from benefitting from the cultural transmission of these ideas (II,534). He notes that "a good Booke is the pretious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasur'd up on purpose to a life beyond" (II,493).

Essentially, Milton is attacking forces that curtail human thinking, be these Catholic or Presbyterian. Because he is a dynamic Protestant individualist, he defends an independent, thoughtful way of life that will develop the minds and personalities of the people. In Milton one can recognize the spirit of reformation encouraging thinking. Thinking can also lead to creativity, provided that critical inquiry has made ideas accessible. Creativity is the imaginative cultivation, expansion and expression of the self-enhancing dynamic qualities, leading towards a richer and more fulfilling life. This richer, more enlightened life is obviously one of Milton's humanist ideals. Milton will not endure the subjection

of all the learning and intelligence of all worthy men in the nation, to a few arrogant, unthinking conformists. His Areopagitica seeks to make reasoning the general tendency among men, so that ideally they can recognize the same basic truths.

Milton believes that it is increasingly possible to promote human intelligence and excellence by exposing people to a broader array of diverse ideas. He hopes that through increased circulation of knowledge, through improved education, it will be possible to stimulate religious regeneration; then individuals may once again live in harmony with the primary law of Nature.[11] The primary law of Nature was designed by God to ensure the optimal functioning of a perfect Prelapsarian creation. When 'the Fall' occurred and depravity ensued, that primary law of Nature was no longer applicable to the human Order; then the secondary law of Nature, an imperfect expression of the primary law, and a law expressed in the Old Testament decalogue, became binding. The secondary law of Nature is that part of the primary law which is apparent to the unregenerate mind. The regenerate however are not bound by this secondary law of nature because they are fit to live in accord with the primary law. Areopagitica is written partly in the hope that men might be spiritually regenerated, so they can recover their link with the

primary law of Nature. It is obvious to Milton that when the state prescribes the indoctrination of the entire populace with a narrow lot of accepted opinions, there is little or no opportunity for spiritual regeneration or a social condition above general intellectual mediocrity. Milton comments specifically on "the servile condition into which learning" has been brought in those "Popish places....where this kind of Inquisition tyrannizes" (II,537). Such practices as mass indoctrination and thought control may indicate the state's fear of a fallen society, but these practices are reactionary, merely licensed bigots promoting mass bigotry. Milton proceeds to assert that the 1643 Licensing Order must greatly discourage learning, by first characterizing the whole English nation as permanently too stupid and weak to be exposed to unlicensed reading, and by subsequently preserving this condition.

Milton defends intellectual liberty for those capable of benefitting from it. When writing Areopagitica he is concerned primarily with liberating the intellectual elite. He realizes that freedom of thought and discussion opens and broadens the intellectual atmosphere by drawing more and new ideas to it, and by allowing people to interact with these ideas. In a free intellectual atmosphere people can assimilate new thoughts and develop their own minds. Milton understands that healthy creativity is

involved in constructing or synthesizing one's personal philosophy or one's independent religious perspective. From a radical protestant position he defends the right of all men to develop a personal religious perspective. He understands also that repressive interference with free thought and discussion prevents intrinsic ideas from ripening and other ideas from being provoked externally. Licensing must cramp human minds, preventing the pursuit of truths beyond the nation's present imperfect orthodoxy; no idea will be permitted unless it is in accord with the generally prescribed, orthodox notions. From Milton's Protestant perspective, this licensing policy is very reminiscent of medieval bigotry and oppression.

Milton confronts this severe and unscrupulous censorship that seems bent on suppressing all writers who are generating new "truths" to please their consciences, instead of reproducing orthodox "falsehoods" to appease the authorities. For Protestant polemical purposes Milton strategically links this 1643 licensing order to the Catholic proponents of tyranny and superstition; he interprets the English licensing of books as a recently imported popish intrigue, as the craft or malice of the "most antichristian Councel" of Trent and the "most tyrannous" Spanish Inquisition (II,505). Milton declares in Areopagitica that "falsest seducers, and oppressors of

men were the first who" took up licensing, "and to no other purpose but to obstruct and hinder the first approach of reformation...(II,507). Both historically and in 1644, official licensers could and would suppress dissident or unorthodox interpretations of Scripture, and sectarian religious perspectives. The radical Protestant Milton defends, tolerates, and even encourages religious diversity as a healthy sign of the reasonable Reformation; to Milton, a variety of religious opinions is evidence of good, thoughtful individual searching and interpreting of scripture. He states that "sects and errors it seems God suffers to be for the glory of good men..."[12] "If sects and schismes be turbulent in the unsetl'd estate of a church, while it lies under the amending hand, it best beseems our Christian courage to think they are but as the throws and pangs that go before the birth of reformation..."[13] "Heresy, indeed, may properly be regarded as indicative of a spiritual vitality that will inevitably lead man to a larger knowledge of religious truth."[14] Milton has long acknowledged "that the forbidden writing is thought to be a certain spark of truth that flyeth up in the faces of them that seek to chok and tread it out, whereas a book autorized is thought to be but the language of the time."[15]

Milton contrasts censorship and suppression to his more reasonable, more liberal, Independent Protestant

recommendations; he presents the former as papal and Inquisitional oppression, referring to "this authentic Spanish policy of licensing books" (II,569). In tracing the English policy of licensing back to the Spanish Inquisition, and in associating this policy with Roman Catholicism, Milton creates a Protestant historical myth. He charges that there was no such licensing in ancient Greece or Rome, that "this project of licensing crept out of the Inquisition, was catcht up by our Prelates, and hath caught some of our Presbyters" (II,493). Milton presents licensing as a policy totally foreign to England; he claims that the Inquisition set the precedent for the English policy of licensing. The Councell of Trent, and the Spanish Inquisition first stifled authors, suppressing and banning not just "matters hereticall, but any subject that was not to their palat" (II,503). Finally, "their last invention was to ordain that no book, pamphlet, or paper should be printed...unlesse it were first approv'd and licenc't under the hands of 2 or 3 glutton friars" (II, 503). "It is remarkable how generally this view has been accepted" (Sirluck in II,158) as accurate history.

Actually, the regulation of opinion, restriction on publications, and policies or licensing have English precedents under Bishop Arundel in 1408, Henry VIII in 1530, and Queen Elizabeth I (Sirluck in II,158-9). During

the Tudor era strict press control had been considered necessary for the maintenance of state stability. The citizens of Tudor England had often surrendered, in order to secure state stability, the traditional rights in which Milton discovers the foundations of his Parliamentary propaganda and defenses. The Tudors had often used press control to dampen the sparks of learning and Reformation (Sirluck in II,159). This policy was meant to ensure that a docile, unlearned, uncritical populace would be unlikely to challenge the stability of traditional conservative institutions.

During the reign of Henry VIII, in the 1540's, the major English printers and booksellers had formed a stationers' guild.[17] This company was subsequently incorporated under Queen Mary I in 1557.[18] These printers and booksellers were granted, by the crown, a conditional monopoly on printing and distribution of books, provided they functioned as state censors; because only these few master printers held the official right to print, they could and did prevent any publication that offended their patronizing sovereign.[19] During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, the Stationers Company had required of all associated printers that they obtain a license before publishing any individual work. This licensing policy was operational in England sixty years prior to Milton's unlicensed publication of the Areopagitica, but Milton,

in categorizing licensing as Catholic, was attempting to annex his polemic to a growing English tradition of anti-Catholicism.

In the year 1637 King Charles I and his Archbishop William Laud had extended literary censorship by granting the Stationers Company a total monopoly on all printing. In the Areopagitica Milton alludes to this, "the fraud of some old patentees and monopolizers in the trade of book-selling..." (II,570). This company remained a prime impediment to all press liberty, even after the Presbyterians gained predominance in the English parliament. When Star Chamber was abolished in 1641 control of the press passed to the Parliament, but during the early 1640's this Presbyterian parliament, like its Tudor monarchical predecessors, sought to maintain state stability through press control. In April 1643, the Stationers Company had petitioned parliament to reinstate customary restrictions on printing. The parliament had responded with the June 14, 1643 licensing order, against which John Milton writes his "Speech for the Liberty of Unlicenc'd Printing" (II,485).

In Areopagitica Milton suggests that a priestly tyranny again threatens to replace mature Protestant individuality and independent judgment. He addresses the Areopagitica to the civil authorities, and especially to the Erastians among the parliament. He suggests that

theocratic dominance again threatens the liberties of state, that the Erastians have been beguiled and betrayed. He explains that a servile press is an important concomitant of theocratic dominance.

> While Bishops were to be baited down, then all Presses might be open; it was the people's birthright and priviledge in time of Parlament...But now...the Episcopall arts begin to bud again..., liberty of Printing must be enthrall'd again under a Prelatical commission..., the privilege of the people nullify'd, and which is wors, the freedom of learning must groan again, and to her old fetters...; all this the Parlament yet sitting (II,541-2).

Milton sees this licensing order as an outrageous threat to Reformation, learning and civil liberties. Milton states that he:

> wrote...the Areopagitica, concerning the freedom of the press, that the judgment of truth and falsehood, what should be printed and what suppressed, ought not to be in the hands of a few men (and these mostly ignorant and of vulgar discernment) charged with the inspection of books, at whose will or whim virtually everyone is prevented from publishing aught that surpasses the understanding of the mob (IV,i,625-6).

Milton addresses the Areopagitica to Parliament, which "by 1640 had become the symbol for the defence of religion, liberty, and property."[20] In the opening paragraphs of the Areopagitica its author suggests that he defends a free press in order to "advance the publick good..." (II,486). In all his tracts Milton similarly aspires to advance the

public good; he believes that this is accomplished only with liberty. Like a twentieth-century psychologist, he knows that liberty is conducive to personal development, personal responsibility, and intellectual excellence. Liberty he conceives as God's gift to his people--the English nation. "Liberty" writes Milton, "is the nurse of all great wits...that which hath...enlarg'd and lifted up our apprehensions degrees above themselves" (II,559). Liberty is life-enhancing; liberty uplifts, betters, enlightens, and nourishes. The removal of this liberty will cause people to grow ignorant, brutal, formal, slavish again. In the Areopagitica Milton is dedicated to securing this liberty for a good, self-disciplined elite. Those who are unable to govern themselves with reason and self-discipline are deemed unworthy of liberty.

The Areopagitica demands Christian liberty, not license.[21] Christian liberty is the freedom to live a responsible, self-disciplined life in accord with one's conscientious interpretation of scriptures. A man is rightly called virtuous when he is free to indulge in vice, but does not because he has developed the power to resist evil. "Corrupting influences are present everywhere and can be met only by building up an inner discipline and the power of rational choosing; this is the fundamental tenet of Milton's ethical philosophy."[22]

Milton knows that good men must be strong enough to resist evil and should not have to be segregated from it. In Areopagitica the superior man can resist sin; the inferior man must be segregated from temptation. Milton declares openly,

> I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd vertue, unexercis'd & unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortall garland is to be run for... Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather: that which purifies us is triall, and triall is by what is contrary." (II,515)

Milton's argument in Areopagitica is that trial can purify those who have free choice; his advocacy of free choice here points away from Orthodox Calvinism to Arminianism. Throughout Areopagitica Milton stresses, contrary to Calvin, man's free will to choose his own future actions. Milton understands that intelligent choosing is conducive to the development of a good man.

Central to Milton's conception of liberty is his conviction that "God sure esteems the growth and compleating of one vertuous person, more then the restraint of ten vitious" (II,528). Milton seeks to promote the self-realization or flowering of that intellectual minority who can and choose to advance culture, govern society, and promote true Reformation. He sees the antagonistic licensing Order as "the greatest discourage-

ment and affront that can be offer'd to learning and to learned men" (II,530).

The author of Areopagitica would have the English Parliament establish new (revolutionary) social conditions, capable of stimulating creativity, and conducive to philosophical speculation. "The ideal seed ground of intellectual growth and national progress was to Milton a free and open clash of wits and ideas."[23] Milton is determined to defend the human right to create--to bring something new or superior into society--to elevate the human mind above mere intellectual copying. Milton also writes that "he who freely magnifies what hath been nobly done, and fears not to declare as freely what might be done better, gives ye [Parliament] the best cov'nant of his fidelity..." (II,488). He ruthlessly attacks harmful religious custom that stifles intellectual advancement and true Reformation. "What a fine conformity would it [the Licensing Order] starch us all into" he exclaims, "Doubtles a stanch and solid peece of frame-work, as any January could freeze together" (II,545). Unintelligent mental conformity prevents the progress of true mental development and true Reformation, by avoiding questioning and the mental development conducive to spiritual regeneration.

Milton clarifies his position in the Epistle of

Christian Doctrine:

> How much it is in the interest of the Christian religion that men should be free not only to sift and winnow any doctrine, but also openly to give their opinions of it, even to write about it, according to what each believes...without this freedom...there is not religion...(VI, 122-3).

In the religious sphere, Milton proclaims the individual conscience sovereign; violations of conscience are irreligious. An individual can only genuinely believe a doctrine if his own mind has examined it and constructed a personal understanding of it. A man must comprehend his convictions in order to say he believes. "A man may be a heretick in the truth...if he believe things only because his Pastor sayes so..." (II,543). He can comprehend a belief only by analyzing the separate component tenets, and perceiving their validity in contrast to error. When confronted by erroneous doctrines he will be reassured of the validity of his true conviction. Also, a genuine religious commitment must be freely entered, just as a genuine love of God or another person must be freely expressed or given. Coercion in religion and love is prostitution of something sacred. "Religion especially... if not voluntary, becomes a sin..." (The Tenure III,238).

Milton envisions his ideal commonwealth as a society capable of guaranteeing intellectual freedom, and ample toleration of the diverse vocal and publishing sects.

In favouring a tolerant religious diversity, Milton rejects and depreciates the orthodox Catholic notion of a uniform religious community. "If all cannot be of one mind," he writes, "as who looks they should be? This doubtles is more wholsome, more prudent, and more Christian that many be tolerated, rather then all compell'd" (II,565). His ideal commonwealth would stimulate and respect true Protestant individuality, encourage independent judgment in religious matters, and allow each mature person to live according to the dictates of conscience. What Calvin intended as theoretical liberty of conscience, Milton intends as a practical liberty of conscience for worthy men.

Milton believes that no alien power should be the judge of any man's conscience in matters of religion. Licensers have no right to suppress the conscientious convictions of any individual; they are fallible and have no right to decide matters of religion for other free citizens of England. Milton's contemporary Independents agreed that God had given men conscience as their guide to conduct. Milton's Protestantism removes the mediators from religion, leaving each individual responsible to God, and free to find and follow conscientiously his own interpretation of the Bible's truth. With Milton the true Protestant becomes his own independent church. Milton's religious liberty supplants what he calls the priestly

despotism. As an Independent, Milton encourages religious discussion that will facilitate progressive interpretation and comprehension of the all-sufficient Bible. Seeking constantly to advance virtue, right reason, and reformation, he writes that "where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making" (II,554). As an enlightened radical Protestant, Milton upholds the duty of free independent inquiry into Scriptures or life. Such inquiry stimulates widespread discussion of religious issues, and ideally leads to religious progress--the advancement of true reformation. Milton justifiably believes that the abolition of thought-control will liberate men's creative energies and lead to a great Protestant cultural advancement.

In justifying the right of the sectarians to independent judgment according to individual conscience, Milton falls back upon the political conception of a liberating Law of Nature, and its derivative natural rights.[24] Each Protestant individual has a natural right to liberty of conscience, to independent judgment, and to work with his personal truth, for a good life. Because St. Paul had declared every Christian equal before God, the principle of spiritual equality could be, and was, transferred to the political sphere, where men began to preach the

doctrine of human equality.[25] The Protestant justifications for religious liberty are readily transferred into the political realm, where they merge with the philosophy of Natural Law and Natural rights, which becomes the basis of a popular demand for civil rights and a responsible representative government.[26]

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER ONE (AREOPAGITICA)

[1] Areopagitica, the title of John Milton's speech, to Parliament, for the liberty of unlicensed printing, is derived from the original Areopagus (Hill of Mars), which was the ancient Athenian Court of the most worthy judges, who upheld moral standards and preserved civil liberty. The only books that they suppressed were either blasphemous or libellous.

[2] John Milton, Of Reformation, I, 566.

[3] Ibid., I, 520.

[4] Ibid., I, 566.

[5] The Reason of Church Government, I, 796.

[6] Ibid., p.853.

[7] Milton excludes Roman Catholicism from his program of religious toleration for several valid reasons. First, Catholicism would forcefully and physically extirpate all other religions if it had an opportunity to do so. Secondly, Milton does not recognize Roman Catholicism as a valid religion; as he confirms in his first Defence: "it is less a religion than a priestly despotism under the cloak of religion, arrayed in the spoils of temporal power which it has violently appropriated in defiance of the teachings of Christ" (IV,i,322). Thirdly, Milton the staunch Puritan challenges the magical element of Catholicism, especially transubstantiation, since he is unable to find any ground for it in either Scripture or reason. Fourthly, Milton recognizes that Catholic persecution and threatening coercion falsify religious commitments and experiences that must be freely entered. Catholicism, through persecution and coercion, violates the sanctity of individual conscience and prevents authentic, personally rooted faith. Milton's Puritanism also disparaged the idolatry perpetrated by the Roman Catholic ministry. Finally, Milton upholds the Bible

as the all-sufficient authority for the Church; he does not recognize the claims of the Papacy. In the first Defence (IV,i,397) he states that, "The pope...is appointed of God in the same way that tyrants are, and was given to the church for its sins...".

8 W.R. Parker, Milton: A Biography (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), I, 238.

9 George Yule, The Independents in the English Civil War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), p.65.

10 "Religious toleration, which has come to be thought of as the hall-mark of 'Independency', was forced upon the 'Independent' members of Parliament by political necessity." Christopher Hill, The Century of Revolution (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1961), p.166.

11 See chapter II below for a detailed definition and discussion of the law of Nature.

12 John Milton, The Reason of Church Government, I, 795.

13 Ibid.

14 W.K. Jordan, The Development of Religious Toleration in England (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1940), p.219.

15 Francis Bacon, "Wise and Moderate Discourse", quoted in John Milton, Commonplace Book, I, 450.

16 See Chapter II below for a discussion of these rights.

17 Fredrick Seaton Siebert, Freedom of the Press in England: 1476-1776 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1952), pp.64-5.

[18] Ibid., p.65.

[19] Ibid., pp.71-3.

[20] Christopher Hill, The Century of Revolution, p.107.

[21] A further distinction between liberty and license will be made in Chapter II below.

[22] J.H. Hanford, A Milton Handbook (5th. ed.; New York: Meredith Corp., 1970), p.81.

[23] Don M. Wolfe, Milton in the English Revolution (London: Cohen & West, 1941), pp.124-5.

[24] Chapter II will define these conceptions as far as possible.

[25] William Haller, The Rise of Puritanism (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972), p.86.

[26] A.S.P. Woodhouse, Puritanism and Liberty (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1938), p.64.

CHAPTER II

THE TENURE OF KINGS AND MAGISTRATES

The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates[1] (1649) is John Milton's initial announcement of the political liberty, rights and privileges which good, enlightened, responsible individuals are guaranteed by the law of Nature. From the Stoics of ancient Greece and Rome, the Seventeenth-Century Levellers, Independents, and Milton derive the idea of the law of Nature, a higher law than the judicial, by which Milton attempts to justify regicide.[2] The Tenure is Milton's bold attempt to harmonize the Independent military minority's post-Civil War subversive political actions, with the universal natural order and its Natural law, "the law which springs from the essence of things and with which they are originally endowed."[3]

Natural law is that part of God's will that can be determined by regenerate human reason or the light of conscience. Milton equates Natural law with reason, conceives his God as essentially reasonable and believes human right reason to be the image of God.[4] Seventeenth-Century radical Protestants consider reason and conscience to be God's guides to Natural law.[5] Milton sees both the reasonable and the scripturally-sanctioned action as in accord with the law of Nature. For him the law of Nature

is an abstract code of justice identical to the divine will.[6] Natural law is called natural because it is ingrafted in the Nature of man by the God of Nature; (it is God's law written in the human heart). The law of Nature is totally life-enhancing, prohibiting all that is destructive, and guaranteeing the supreme good in a human society. This humanist conception teaches that life and liberty ought to be honoured, human health and property protected. It teaches Milton that wicked kings ought to be resisted and deposed in order to preserve the popular liberties that are conducive to the growth of a virtuous elect (III,212). According to Milton, the offenses of Charles I against Natural life and liberty must be, and are, justifiably punished.

For Milton, the law of Nature is a law of liberty.[7] Men are deemed by Nature free (198) and equal, but are worthy of freedom only as long as they live in accord with reason or Natural law. Good people[8] derive from the law of Nature certain natural rights (III,220), including life, liberty, the freedom of thought and expression, the pursuit of goodness, and the right of self-government. Central to Milton's political philosophy and conception of liberty is this condition of worthiness. If an individual is responsible, ethical, liberated, he should be able to choose his government, and hold it responsible. Those most

worthy citizens should be the governors, those who preserve popular liberties, and consequently a good (liberated) society. However, depraved, licentious, and undisciplined people forfeit the right to choose their government and hold it responsible; the unworthy person has no case or recourse against a tyrant. Milton always makes the right of political self-government contingent upon a personal self-discipline and social responsibility.

Milton postulates that the law of Nature was a law prior and superior to any temporal law.[9] Natural law established immutable standards against which all temporal laws could be measured. If English common (or positive) law contradicted Natural law, the former would be declared invalid or sham by the Independents. The law of Nature and reason underlie all proper or legitimate covenants and political institutions devised by the people. Milton sees as the end of all law, natural, divine, or temporal (positive), the good of man; hence he defends regicide in the specific case of a wicked king. In Milton's thought at this time, Christianity and humanistic conceptions like the law of nature are blended and often equated; hence his reputation as a Christian humanist.

Milton uses his Protestant individual interpretation of scripture, and his personal conscientious convictions as his private natural law.[10] This practice is his logical

extension of the individualism and independent judgment promoted by the Protestant Reformation. He believes that the most humble individual has a right to interpret Scripture. Milton's personal interpretation of Scripture allowed him conscientiously to justify the war against Charles I, a demand for a commonwealth, the execution of Charles I, and a demand that kingship be abolished. Like other enlightened Puritans, particularly Independents, Milton has transferred principles from the religious sphere to the political. In the Seventeenth Century English "religion and politics were so inextricably interwoven that the briefest summary of either takes in the other."[11] The ideas of liberty and equality are latent within the Puritan principles of liberty of conscience and independent judgment. Calvinism sought autonomy for the Church (freedom from state control or interference). The Puritan sects placed obedience to conscience above obedience to the monarch.[12] The Puritan principles of spiritual equality inspired a demand for political equality. Where the priesthood of all believers is accepted in the religious sphere, the natural equality of all men becomes the analogous idea in the political realm of debate. "Christian liberty becomes the natural liberty and right of every individual to consent to and share in the government under which he lives."[13] While a Presbyterian congregation theoretically forms a covenant

with their Presbyter, and the Independents actually do form voluntary associations of like-minded believers, these Protestant individuals, collectively, conceive a social contract with their secular rulers. "God's law 'becomes' the law of Nature expressed in the fundamental laws of the constitutions according to which the executive governs by the authority received from the people or its representatives."[14] Men who assert their religious liberty, individuality, and equality, are soon making analogous political claims, and challenging the traditional authoritarian political doctrines.[15] However, it must be observed that "the democratic and libertarian ideas which grew out of Protestantism were not nourished by [conservative, Orthodox (Lutheran-Calvinist)] Protestantism but rather developed in spite of Protestantism."[16]

In the Seventeenth Century, thoughtful individuals turn for guidance to reason and Natural law, rather than to "fallible" church authority. These thinking individuals look to nature as either an alternative to, or second source of, divine revelation; such men believe that they can know God best by consulting his natural work and understanding it.[17] It is thought that God has carefully designed the natural order--all that is--and indirectly revealed his will through it. Independent persons thought that they could consult nature and determine or discern its Natural law. Natural

law was to serve as an unchallengeable (infallible) guideline for human conduct and institutions. Since man was an intricate part of Nature, it was reasonable to examine his nature and determine how he might be governed in perfect harmony with the universal natural order. The subsequent deduction was that morality, religion, and politics ought to conform to God's will as revealed in the essential nature of man.

Milton envisioned man in his original state of primary nature as free, good and reasonable. In the seventeenth century the humanists held that as long as Adam had adhered to the Natural laws, he had been permitted to enjoy Paradise. When he disobeyed, transgressed the law of Nature, he lost his ability to follow it, and fell from harmony with the natural order (Hughes, III, p.74). Milton envisioned a primitive condition of human excellence, corrupted by the Fall, and awaiting regeneration or restoration. "Before Adam's Fall there had been a perfect, primary law of nature, the natural expression of the 'right reason' which God shared with men. That still partly discernible law underlay the second law of nature and nations"(Hughes, III, 74). The law of nations "is customs universally accepted but not always agreeable to the law of nature."[18]

The secondary law of Nature was revealed in the Old Testament, and in right reason. The secondary law of Nature is an imperfect expression of the original primary law of Nature. The precepts of human moral law are thought to be derived from the primary law of Nature. "Milton believed that according to the law of Nature, man is inherently good and free from outward restraint."[19]

In The Tenure Milton affirms that a free-born people are created in God's image, dignified, and endowed with certain natural rights which include the right to enter into a social contract to secure the responsible, representative government most able to serve the true public interests (III,198-9). From the humanist conception of the law of Nature, Milton derives the revolutionary idea that society is made for man (in his regenerate condition), not man for society. Free people surrender some of their natural rights to governors who, in order to maintain a social order, secure and preserve the balance of these rights. (III,211). Milton proceeds to illustrate and defend his conception of social contract, where a public official or administrator holds authority conditionally, only by the consent of the governed; these free people reserve their natural right to correct or discharge any official who betrays their trust or deserts their interests (III,211-212). Milton affirms "that the right of choosing, yea of changing

their own government is by the grant of God himself in the people" (III,207). Milton believes that "It is lawful...to call to account a tyrant, or wicked king, and after due conviction, to depose, and put him to death" (III,189).

Milton sanctions revolution by natural law, a higher law than the judicial; because all existing positive (temporal) laws oppose regicide, Milton uses the loftier law of Nature to justify it. He declares that a naturally free people possess the right to depose and punish any tyrant who impedes the liberation and expansion of society's good forces (III,206). In his Commonplace Book he quotes Machiavelli's Discorsos (I,i) to confirm his opinion that "against a bad ruler there is no other remedy than the sword." To cure the ills of the people, words suffice, and against those of the prince the sword is necessary (I,456). "Milton accepted regicide as a civil product of general reformation."[20] Milton conceives true liberty and true godly Reformation as identical ideals. He also conceives tyrannicide as in the best interests of the true and perfect Reformation which will purge all obstacles to goodness, and achieve full Christian liberty for all worthy people.[21] He notes that the discipline of the true Church tends to the dissolution of all tyranny and the establishment of true liberty (III,217).

Milton composes The Tenure primarily to explain by

what authority King Charles I can be legally tried and condemned. When writing The Tenure, "Milton took for granted the fact that the king had been put into the army's power by God..." (Hughes in III,53). Like the millenarians (among whom he is not to be numbered), he believed that "the army was simply fulfilling the purpose of God in human destiny" (Hughes in III,67) by overriding the Presbyterian majority. With the publication of The Tenure Milton is recognized as "one of the first Englishmen to defend the right of the people to call their kings to account..."[22] Milton founds his case upon the Law of Nature and its derivative, the social contract. Milton's political thinking develops in accordance with the Parliamentary "interpretation of the Law of Nature and its relation to divine and human laws"(Sirluck in II,52). Parliamentarians used the theory of natural rights to justify their claim to preeminence over the king. Political power was by nature inherent in each individual, and was transferred to the chosen representatives who formed the House of Commons.

In The Tenure Milton explains that "The power of Kings and Magistrates is nothing else, but what is only derivative, transferr'd and committed to them in trust from the People, to the Common good of them all, in whom the power yet remaines fundamentally, and cannot be tak'n from them, without a violation of thir natural birthright"

..." (III,202). Later Milton adds that "Since the King or Magistrate holds his autoritie of the people, both originaly and naturally for their good in the first place, and not his own, then may the people as oft as they shall judge it for the best, either choose him or reject him, retaine him or depose him though no Tyrant, merely by the liberty and right of free born men, to be governed as seems to them best." (III,206). These rights and privileges of free-born men are valid only as long as the men remain good, self-disciplined, worthy of self-government. Partially in accord with Augustine and Hobbes, Milton thinks that depravity necessitates rule by force rather than choice. Augustine, in fact, postulates that government was a necessary result of original sin (Hughes, III,111). If men are depraved, licentious, undisciplined, unworthy of responsible government, there is no possibility of forming a free commonwealth, whereas if the people are liberated and worthy of a free commonwealth, they can attain one.

Milton affirms that the people are by Nature the source of all political power (III,202) and the House of Commons is the supreme representative of the people. The magistrates and governors are selected by the people to maintain order and stability in a post-Lapsarian world. The power of government resides in each individual as a natural right; the people cede this power conditionally to

their rulers (III,202). A regenerate, reformed, or liberated people need and are worthy of self-government and freedom, but a depraved people forfeit this important right of self government. Nothing is more pleasing to Milton than that the supreme power should be vested in the best and wisest of men; on this subject he is in complete accord with the most venerable political authority, Aristotle (III,111). It is also worth noting, that in his Commonplace Book Milton has written, "It is best, if a king expects to entrust his kingdom to his son after him, that he should so appoint his son that he will believe that his father establishes his succession of the realm, not on the basis of his coming of age, but on the basis of his deserts, and that he is to receive his father's authority, not as inherited spoils, but as the reward of worth" (I,195). On one point in his political philosophy Milton might be called absolute (though not absolutist): the wicked and stupid should never rule the good and enlightened. From this perspective Milton justifies Pride's purge and the execution of Charles I, as actions by the wise and regenerate minority to advance toward true political liberty. The army believes that the execution of Charles I is in accord with the law of Nature; the Independent military minority believe that they have a natural right to remove the royal obstacle to their liberty. If the Parliamentary majority

were deserting the people's real rights and liberties, the army would, since it had the power, protect these.

It is precisely superstitious reverence for wicked kings, and unquestioning servility before established authorities that are challenged by both Milton's Tenure and Eikonoklastes. Milton finds that a counter-revolutionary surge is sweeping through the Presbyterian party, driving them to promote more of this superstitious reverence for the depraved monarch Charles I; Milton must now counter their claim that no good Protestant may prosecute a bad king (III,90). Milton summons all of his "right reason" and many prestigious historical authorities to reduce the institution of kingship to its "proper dimensions"; he demonstrates that a social contract exists, and has always existed, between a legal sovereign and his subjects. Milton explains that kings and magistrates are actually the trusted deputies and commissioners of the consenting people (III,199). When a king like Charles I flagrantly violates this social contract, he can be justifiably rejected by his subjects (III,198).

Milton's line of reasoning follows the late Sixteenth-Century Monarchomachian conception of social contract, which made kings the accountable servants of their people. The Catholic and Protestant monarchomachi had declared that "there are limits to the power of Christian

kings, and if kings become tyrants...their subjects can rise against them."[23] Milton explains that a king or magistrate is justified in holding authority only if he works for the public good (III,199-200). Republicans see legal responsible kingship as rooted in the social contract, whereas unconstitutional tyranny violates the contract. As his Commonplace Book reveals, Milton has long accepted the Aristotelian dictum: "the tyrant seeks what benefits himself, the king what benefits his subjects" (I,443). In The Tenure Milton defines a tyrant as one who disregards the law (which preserves liberty, and the common social good which results from liberty.) He records that "Aristotle and the best of Political writers have defin'd a King, him who governs to the good and profit of his People, and not for his own ends..." (III,202). The tyrant is anyone who exerts his will over another without restraint, without relief, and without consultation with the governed; the tyrant owes his position to custom and the self-centered ambitions of his sycophant supporters.[24] Echoing Aristotle, Milton proposes that "monarchy unaccountable is the worst sort of tyranny, and least of all to be endur'd by free born men" (Hughes in III,206).

Milton's Tenure expresses rudimentary political self-determination; a free born people have a natural right to reject a king or magistrate who acts detrimentally to

the public welfare, and to select a ruler worthy of governing them. The thesis of The Tenure is precisely that man is born free from any form of government which he does not choose or consent to. Milton boldly phrases this in loaded rhetoric: "No man who knows ought can be so stupid to deny that all men naturally were borne free, being the image and resemblance of God himself, and were by privilege above all the creatures born to command" (III,198). Milton postulates that man was originally free by nature, created in the image of God himself, possessing the inalienable right of self-government.

Milton opens his Tenure by introducing the dialectic of reason and tyranny.[25] "If men within themselves would be govern'd by reason, and not generally give up their understanding to a double tyrannie, of Custom from without, and blind affection within, they would discerne better, what it is to favour and uphold the Tyrant of a Nation" (III,190). But "it is the vulgar folly of men to desert thir own reason..." (III,212). If men, within themselves, would be governed by reason, they would be liberated, by Milton's definition. This initial comment anticipates Milton's fuller exposition of inward liberty, in the Second Defence. If men were governed by reason, which is the law of Nature, they would neither accept nor condone tyranny (III,190). Milton's opening sentence proposes a reasonable government and challenges tyranny. Only

inwardly free men seek true political freedom. Milton believes that liberated men are governed within by reason rather than by blind affections, passion, or sentiment; they defend and promote political freedom, as Milton does, rather than surrender to tyranny. However, Milton's contemporaries are slaves, incapable of achieving liberty (III,192), and "they strive...to have the public state conformably govern'd to the inward vitious rule, by which they govern themselves" (III,190). Milton understands by liberated, good, reasonable, responsible, and self-disciplined men; "the rest love not freedom, but licence..." (III,190). Milton believes that tyrants give free reign to licence so that people will not become capable of, or worthy of, living with freedom. He realizes that tyranny discourages the citizens' self-disciplined, responsible actions that make them develop their capacity and aspirations for free government. Milton declares that licence "never hath more scope or more indulgence then under tyrants" (III,190). "Tyrants by a kind of natural instinct both hate and feare none more then the true Church and Saints of God, as the most dangerous enemies and subverters of monarchy... the mind and principles of most devout and zealous men... [tend] to the dissolution of all tyranny" (217).

In The Tenure Milton launches a resounding offensive against absolute monarchy or tyranny. Contemptuous of

hereditary monarchy, Milton declares openly that "if hereditary title were sufficiently inquir'd, the best foundation of it would be found either but in courtesy or convenience" (III,203). Here Milton totally depreciates and discredits the tradition that had arisen from antiquity, that political authority is invested with religious sanction. To discredit the rampant professors of the divine right of kings, Milton recalls that the Jews "chose a King against the advice and counsel of God..." (III,202-3). He argues that "to say Kings are accountable to none but God, [as divine right theorists maintain] is the overturning of all law and government. For if they [kings] may refuse to give account, then all cov'nants made with them at Coronation; all Oathes are in vain, and meer mockeries, all lawes which they swear to keep, made to no purpose..." (III,204). "In the theory which had the divine sanction of Moses' example, the coronation oaths of kings were solemn acknowledgements that they ruled by virtue of the public act of their subjects and for their good" (Hughes in III,89). Milton expects that his social contract philosophy will be tagged treason, so he adeptly reverses the charge, exclaiming that the assumption that the people must be thought created all for him [the sovereign]"...were a kinde of treason against the dignitie of mankind to affirm" (III,204).

In reinforcing his conception of social contract,

Milton contrasts the reasonable attitude of the heathen King Demophoon (in a tragedy by Euripides) with the unreasonable divine right of kings philosophy proclaimed by the English Christian royalists. "How much more rationally spake the heathen..." writes Milton; "I rule not my people by Tyranny...but am my self liable, if I doe unjustly, to suffer justly" (III,205). Later in The Tenure Milton explains that in sixteenth-century Scotland--the very homeland of the Stuart ancestors--there was a social contract in effect: "Regal power was nothing else but a mutual Cov'nant or stipulation between King and people" (III,226). Mary Stuart had been first selected as monarch and then lawfully deposed.

In the seventeenth century, English sectarians are, like Milton, using a philosophy of Natural law and social contract to justify their resistance to kings. In January 1647 the famous leveller John Lilburne published Regall Tyrannie Discovered, suggesting that Charles I had violated the social contract with his subjects, failing to rule in accord with their best interests (Hughes in III,26). "The Levellers interpreted the social contract as subordinating any king to the people as well as to parliament. To them a final military victory must imply radical constitutional changes" (Hughes in III,28). Milton ventures the assertion that the Protestant religion has sanctioned the war against

tyrants (III,227). He notes that John Calvin had justified resistance to rulers, and that inferior magistrates have the legal right to resist and judge a King (III,257). He records concurrently that Calvin has both placed the law of Nature above that of civil magistrates, and proclaimed the doctrines of Natural right and social contract. Actually Calvin had stringently limited the right of resistance "to commands incompatible with obedience to God."[26] In his Institutes Calvin had denied the right of resisting rulers to private persons (Hughes in III,53). Calvin had even professed that unjust kings were divinely appointed as punishment for a sinful people; he had argued that kings were answerable to God alone. As A.G. Dickens confirms, "Calvin did not personally advocate revolt, resistance and tyrannicide."[27] Clearly Milton has selectively assimilated Calvin to suit the Miltonic polemical purpose.

In January and February 1649, when Milton composes The Tenure, he believes that temporal law, in accord with Natural law, should check tyranny. "Justice", he exclaims, "is the onely true sov'ran and supreme majesty upon earth" (III,237). The law is above its administrators; kings and magistrates are answerable to this higher authority. "Be he King, or Tyrant, or Emperour", writes Milton, "the Sword of Justice is above him..." (III,197). "As the magistrate was set above the people, so the law was set above

the magistrate" (III,200).

Milton proposes that the rules established by kings and magistrates must conform to the law of Nature and with reason, which he identifies with the will of God. Milton's key premise is the Platonic principle that sovereignty should reside with the individual, who, when measured against the standards of natural law, is worthy of the consent of the governed.[28] Popular authority is superior to kingly authority. "The power having been originally in the people, it is inevitable that positive law and parliament, both products of the popular will, are superior to the will of kings."[29] Milton also believes that the legislation passed by the commons is law regardless of the response the lords and king give it.

Milton notes that kings and magistrates were originally "not to be...Lords and Maisters, (though afterward those names in som places were given voluntarily to such as has been Authors of inestimable good to the people) but, to be their [the people's] Deputies and Commissioners, to execute, by vertue of their intrusted power, that justice which else every man by the bond of nature and of Cov'nant must have executed for himself..." (III,199). Recalling the origin of social contract, Milton states that historically people "agreed by common league to bind each other from mutual injury...they saw it needful

to ordain som authoritie, that might restrain by force and punishment what was violated against peace and common right. This autoritie and power of self-defence and preservation being originally and naturally in every one of them, and unitedly in them all.." (III,199). The people transfer their power of self government to the ruling authority, but they never discard their fundamental right to responsible government. Milton concludes that a free nation possesses a natural right to abolish or dispose of any governor who is unworthy of his position, who neglects the public interests, who betrays the popular trust, and who acts in discord with the law of Nature.

Milton's Tenure is important because it recognizes revolution as a legitimate socio-political force. Milton clearly affirms that historically, "If the King or Magistrate proved unfaithful to his trust, the people would be disengaged" (III,200), (their obligations to the official or king would be abrogated.) Milton confirms for subsequent generations, for Jefferson's, Mirabeau's, and Herzen's generations, that when kings turn to tyranny and magistrates to abuse and injustice, "they may bee as lawfully depos'd and punish'd, as they were at first elected" (III,198). The Tenure, by thus confirming this popular right of revolution, contributed to Milton's earning a distinguished place "in the international history of revolution."[30]

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER TWO (THE TENURE...)

1 Hereafter *The Tenure*

2 Don M. Wolfe, *Milton in the English Revolution*, pp. 328-330. See also Carl L. Becker, *The Declaration of Independence* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1942), p.37.

3 Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), p.44.

4 *Areopagitica*, II, 492.

5 Carl L. Becker, *The Declaration of Independence*, p.34.

6 Milton, *A Defence*, IV,i,422.

7 A.S.P. Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1938), p.93.

8 Although Milton's abstract political philosophy provides no adequate concrete explanation of precisely who the good or worthy citizens are, he did believe that the best of his contemporary Englishmen came from the propertied middle class, (*Defence*, IV,i,471).

9 Don M. Wolfe, *Milton*, pp.328-9.

10 Wolfe, Ibid., p.330.

11 Douglas Bush, *John Milton* (New York: MacMillan, 1964), p.78.

12 G.P. Gooch, *Political Thought in England from Bacon to Halifax* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1914-15), p.16.

13 Arthur Barker, Milton and the Puritan Dilemma, p.141. Milton insists that, in cases of the spiritually regenerate, Christian Liberty means the abrogation of the whole written or external Law that would otherwise be binding. For the regenerate government and positive laws are not only needless, but, unless rigorously restricted, detrimental. The regenerate can be governed by the inward law alone; they are capable of right reason.

14 Barker, loc. cit.

15 A.S.P. Woodhouse, Puritanism and Liberty, p.64.

16 John Marlowe, The Puritan Tradition in English Life (London: Cresset Press, 1956), p.93.

17 Christopher Hill, The Century of Revolution, p.93.

18 Don M. Wolfe, Milton, p.328.

19 Wolfe, Ibid., p.331.

20 W.R. Parker, Milton: A Biography, I, 350.

21 Parker, Ibid., p.292.
Christian Liberty, as Arthur Barker defines it in Milton and the Puritan Dilemma, p.39 is "to practice God's true worship divinely and specifically prescribed in the Scripture."

22 Christopher Hill, Milton and the English Revolution, (London: Faber and Faber, 1977). p.167.

23 J.W. Gough, The Social Contract, p.61

24 John T. Shawcross, and M. Lieb (eds.), Achievements of the Left Hand: essays on the prose of John Milton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1974), p.144.

[25] Milton's Tenure is not an example of dialectical reasoning. The Tenure merely introduces the dialectic of Reason and Tyranny, and then affirms Reason's position.

[26] Barker, Milton and the Puritan Dilemma, p.126

[27] A.G. Dickens, The English Reformation (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), p.199.

[28] G.P. Gooch, Political Thought in England, p.511.

[29] Wolfe, Milton, p.227.

[30] Christopher Hill, Milton and the English Revolution, p.468.

CHAPTER III

EIKONOKLASTES

Milton believes that in a time of crisis a responsible poet must become a patriot, a libertarian, a defender of the true reformed religion (Wolfe in I,131). When in 1649 the Eikon Basilike[1] proves to be a devastatingly effective piece of royalist propaganda, capable of swaying the emotional rabble, and even the undecided citizen, against the regicides, Milton responds like a true, reasoning Protestant image-breaker, with the October 6,1649 Eikonoklastes. Milton thinks "that Queen Truth should be preferred to King Charles" (Second Defence, IV,i,628), and writes Eikonoklastes "to answer only, and refute the missayings" of the king's book, Eikon Basilike; Milton strives to shatter both the sentimental myth of King Charles the martyr, and "the tyranny of blind affections"[2] that it has given rise to.

The author of Eikonoklastes professes Parliamentary sovereignty and rights, and is bent on destroying both monarchy and its traditional supporting theories and apologies. Milton portrays King Charles I as the enemy of liberty and the populace, as he who "sett up his Standard against the Parlament" (III,345). Milton charges that Charles I "offer'd at more cunning fetches to undermine our Liberties, and putt Tyranny into an Art, then any British King before him" (III,244). He

exalted himself, his rights, and his royal prerogative above the very people from whom he originally derived his royal authority.

Milton follows the precedent set by the House of Commons' January 4, 1649 declaration that the people are the source of all legitimate power; he affirms the superiority of Parliament, the people's representatives, to the king.

> Neither God nor the Lawes have subjected us to his will, nor sett his reason to be our sovran above Law...but sett his person over us in the sovran execution of such laws as the Parlament establish. The Parlament therfore without any usurpation hath had it alwaies in thir power to limit and confine the exorbitance of Kings, whether they call it thir will, thir reason, or thir conscience" (III,462).

Milton continues to explain that Parliaments were in existence before there were any kings, legislated without kings, and actually passed the laws by which kings were first created (III,467); in 446 A.D., for instance, the English people elected a king (Tenure,II,221). The Parliament is sovereign and "a king...is bound by law and oath to follow the advice of his Parlament" (III,462). The doctrine of the sovereignty of Parliament (even without the king) emerged once the English Civil War had commenced, and political writers such as Prynne, Hunton, and Parker slowly developed an alternative philosophy to royal

supremacy.[3] From Milton's republican perspective it did not really matter whether Parliament was representative or not, as long as it worked to secure and preserve popular liberty and rights.

In Eikonoklastes, Milton first asserts that a properly liberated, virtuous people are better governed without a monarch, who is but an impediment to their political, cultural, and religious development. While writing Eikonoklastes, Milton was, of course, thinking not of the whole populace, not of the fickle, irresponsible, ignorant and degenerate rabble, who, "exorbitant and excessive in all thir motions, are prone ofttimes...to a civil kinde of idolatry in idolizing thir Kings..." (III,343); Milton was actually contemplating those citizens who could show some stature, stamina and initiative in times of challenge. He believed what he expressed in The Tenure, that a people must be worthy of freedom, as they must deserve a free government. Milton says "people of England, keep ye to those principles [of piety, virtue, and honour] and ye shall never want a King." (III,581). He believes that a ruler, (since in a fallen state there must be a ruler), must also be worthy to govern a free people. In its reiteration of these Platonic ideas of merit, Eikonoklastes complements The Tenure, where Milton declares outright: "it is not, neither ought to be the glory of a Protestant State, never to have put

thir King to death; it is the glory of a Protestant King never to have deserv'd death" (Tenure,III,237).

Milton's composition of Eikonoklastes complements those parliamentary propagandists who have already asserted that the parliamentary armies defend individual rights against tyranny, denounce taxation without representation, and uphold the cherished institution of parliament against those who threaten to destroy it. Milton writes that "where the Parlament sitts, there inseparably sitts...the Laws, ther our Oaths, and whatsoever can be civil in Religion (III,530). They who fought for the Parlament, in the truest sense fought for all these..." In Eikonoklastes Milton reaffirms the right of rebellion that he had announced in The Tenure. When the violating official can no longer be swayed with reason, the people are justified in using force and arms to remove him and preserve their rights and liberties (III,417).

> The Laws of our Land have plac'd the Sword...in that elective body of the Parlament to whom the making, repealing, judging, and interpreting of Law it self was also committed, as was fittest, so long as wee intended to bee a free Nation, and not the Slaves of one mans will, then was the King himself disobedient and rebellious to that Law by which he raign'd; and by autority of Parlament to raise armes against him in defence of Law and Libertie, we doe not onely think, but beleeve and know was justifiable both by the Word of God, the Laws of the Land, and all lawfull Oaths; and they who sided with him fought against all these (III,529).

The Parliament represents law and justice, and has a right to take the sword against the violators of natural rights and privileges, and the oppressors of free born men.

In Eikonoklastes, Milton also reiterates this natural law—social contract philosophy that has formed the core of The Tenure. Eikonoklastes resounds with Miltonic idealism: "liberty of person and the right of selfpreservation, is much neerer, much more natural, and more worth to all men, then the propriety of thir goods, and wealth" (III,454). Seventeenth-Century Parliamentarians, like Milton, profess that English liberty is rooted in a legal tradition that finds its foundations in the Anglo-Saxon era. The Levellers had propagated the myth of English liberties derived from the Anglo-Saxons; they professed that the English people were discarding, in Charles I, the Norman yoke (Hughes in III,97). "Like most of his contemporaries, Milton accepted the myth of the Anglo-Saxon freedom which had been impaired or destroyed by the Normans" (Hughes in III,93). The central declaration of Eikonoklastes is, significantly, that men are "by nature free; born and created with a better title to thir freedom, then any King hath to his Crown..." (III,543). The bulk of Eikonoklastes is a tiresome indictment and denunciation of King Charles I, the wolf who has been misrepresented as a sheep.

As a convinced republican opponent of monarchy, Milton readily affirms both that Parliament and law are superior to the king (III,416&461), and that it became the custom of this tyrannical Charles I to break Parliaments, the bodies of popular representatives (III,344). Parliaments are not lawfully to be dissolved until all petitions and grievances have been heard (III,402). "All Britain" charges Milton, "was to be ty'd and chain'd to the conscience, judgment, and reason of one Man; as if those gifts had been only his peculiar and Prerogative, intal'd upon him with his fortune to be a King" 359. Milton is obviously directing Eikonoklastes at all Protestants who uphold the right of each individual to independent judgment according to conscience; true Protestants will be shocked by Charles' encroachment upon individual rights. Milton also charges that Charles I ignored the law, (the public reason)--"the enacted reason of a parlament" (III,360)--in imposing his prerogative upon the people. Charles monopolized the natural popular endowment of rights and liberties (III,412), and would have enslaved a people whose natural disposition is toward freedom. English men are as free to make laws as were their ancestors who established their fine legal tradition (III,573). However, Charles I "would captivate, and make useless that natural freedom of will in all other men but himself" (III,412). A legal king would rightly

defer to the public will and the popular interests. Milton's social contractarian perspective is that a proper king "should give place to the general good for which ends all his rights were giv'n him" (III,411); anything else is most unnatural. "The crown it self with all those advantages were therefore giv'n him, that the peoples good should be first consider'd..." (III,464).

The king "and his Peers", declares Milton, "represent only themselves, the Commons are the whole Kingdom" (III,415). Charles expected all other men to renounce their natural rights, their reason, their independent judgment, and to conform to his imperial error. Charles claimed a negative voice, "above the unanimous consent and power of a whole Nation virtually in the Parlament." (III,575). Milton emphatically denies that Charles had, or had any right to, this conscientious negative voice because the logical consequence would be a personal rule, absolute monarchy (tyranny). Milton recognizes that it is Charles' fear and mistrust of the people's liberties and rights that led to his tyrannical overriding and usurping of these popular rights. Milton argues that "to be more just, religious, wise, or magnanimous then the common sort, stirs up in a tyrant both feare and envy..." (III,501). In spite of his seeming defense of popular rights, Milton scarcely trusts the popular will, and he believes not in the rule of the

majority, but in the rule of a superior elite.

Milton believes that the tyranny of Charles I is antithetical to God's will and to true reformation. "We may have learnt both from sacred History, and times of Reformation, that the Kings of this World have both ever hated, and instinctively fear'd the Church of God. [Possibly] ... it be for that thir Doctrin seems much to favour two things to them so dreadful, Liberty and Equality..." (III,509). Milton charges that traditional Anglican clergy loosened the people "from all sound knowledge and strictness of life, the more to fit them for the bondage of Tyranny and superstition" (III,483); ministers have traditionally prepared the populace for servility before the incumbent authority. Milton's true reformed Church allows enough individuality and independent judgment that each person has an opportunity to grow and develop as a mature Christian. As he noted in his Commonplace Book, "The nature of each person should be especially observed and not bent in another direction; for God does not intend all people for one thing, but for each one his own work..." (I,405). Milton sees true Reformation as in the very best social interests of the people. His ideal republic will have to be founded upon the principles of true reformed religion. He condemns the tyranny of Charles I for stifling true religion and the independent development of free born men. Milton notes in

Eikonoklastes that Charles always advanced his own cause before the people's, he "brings his own conditional rights to...be preferr'd before the peoples good" (III,458); he meets the Aristotelian definition of a tyrant that Milton had adopted for the cornerstone of The Tenure.

Milton readily reasserts the social contractarian position, "the Kings...were at first chos'n and install'd onely by consent and suffrage of the People, to govern them as Free men by Laws of thir own framing, and to be, ...the entrusted Servants of the Common-wealth..." (III,485-6). The king's "autority was by the People first giv'n him conditionally, in Law and under Law, and under oath also for the Kingdoms good, and not otherwise: the oathes then were interchang'd, and mutual; stood and fell together..." (III,593). Doctrines of Parliamentary sovereignty were derived from and based upon the coronation oath (III,93-4). The kings are bound by their coronation oath to be responsible to the people and the Parliament; the Parliament is to lead the king and initiate legislation in accord with the public, not the narrow kingly, interest. A proper king's interests should, however, be identical with the popular interests anyhow. Milton exclaims that "Doubtless the Law never suppos'd so great an arrogance could be in one man; that he whose seventeen yeares unexperience had almost ruin'd all, should sit another seven yeares Schoolmaster,

to tutor those who were sent by the whole Realme to be his Counselers and Teachers" (III,462). About the monarch Milton writes, "This we may take for certain, that he was sworn...to our condition as a free people; which requir'd him to give us Laws as our selves shall choose" (III,519).

The king has no right to reject, overrule, or transgress any law once it has been properly enacted by the parliament (III,413). The king, the Parliament, and the people are all equally subject to the laws. Divine and natural laws, which are the basis of all valid positive laws, are made also without exemptions. If a king ignores or violates the law, he must be held accountable, judged, and punished. This is consistent with the free people's natural right to maintain a responsible government. It was never the intention of God, nature, or prudent legislators that the entire populace should be subject to an unwise or unworthy monarch (III,486). It was only the arrogant Charles I who claimed that the people should resign their natural freedom before the royal usurpation and prerogative. Thus Milton exposes and dismisses the treachery and tyranny of the dead king Charles and his idolatrous apologists.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER THREE (EIKONOKLASTES)

[1] The Eikon Basilike is attributed largely to Bishop John Gauden, its principal editor (Hughes in III, 152).

[2] Milton, The Tenure, II, 190.

[3] Christopher Hill, The Century of Revolution, p.175.

CHAPTER IV

A DEFENCE OF THE PEOPLE OF ENGLAND

On Monday, February 24, 1651 John Milton's patriotic crusade "against the unrighteous tyranny of kings" (IV,i,535) manifests itself in A Defence of the People of England. In this acclaimed publication Milton proclaims the sovereignty of Parliament, the sanctity of Natural law, the validity of the English social contract, and the legality of tyrannicide.[1] By reiterating and reinforcing the central principles of The Tenure and Eikonoklastes Milton defends "the great works" (IV,i,535) of England's Independent Parliamentary minority against Salmasius' Defensio Regia.[2] In composing this book Milton again conceives his role as that of a liberator of minds; he will explain how the king was legally executed, and thereby free men's minds from the burden of superstition (IV,i,303), one of "the two greatest evils in human life" (IV,i,535).

Milton remains as passionately devoted to the cause of liberty as he had been in 1649, but is now declaring publicly that only the enlightened, regenerate minority, among the populace, desire or deserve liberty.[3] When composing A Defence, "Milton was proud to be...selected by God to defend truth and public liberty against 'the

vulgar sort'."[4] Milton realizes that only a few worthy persons are fit for freedom, and he will gradually lose most of his faith in the public, (especially when they so naively support the restoration of Charles II), concluding wisely that natural rights are only beneficial to the discerning and virtuous citizens. Milton acknowledges that there must be the wisdom conducive to personal responsibility and self-discipline, before there can be proper and effective liberty. Most men, he concludes, are not capable of self-initiative and responsible independence; they prefer just masters to political freedom (IV,i,343) or religious liberty of conscience.[5] "Nations who submit before hereditary rulers" he notes, "certainly cannot be considered citizens or free born or even free" (IV,i,472).

In adopting his elitist perspective, Milton is partially in accord with the Orthodox Calvinism that he has rejected; traces of Calvinist influence are apparent in Milton's expressed political philosophy. Milton supports strict self-discipline; his anti-episcopal feelings are intense; his anti-Catholic zeal is blatantly obvious; he has a deep conviction of divine purpose; in his last political pamphlets his sense of election becomes apparent; and the whole Miltonic canon is a testimony to his ideas of strict justice. Where Calvinists affirm that the masses are depraved, Milton believes that they are a

rabble who must be instructed and politically guided by their betters. The Calvinists affirm that there is an elect minority and a damned majority. As Christopher Hill observes, "Calvinism's historical importance lies in the doctrine of the oligarchy of the elect."[6] Calvinism was totally undemocratic, holding that democracy would lead to irreversible heresy; it was quite authoritarian in practice and essentially aristocratic in philosophy. Milton's desire to reform society, of course, derives largely from his early Puritan-Calvinist influences, and partly from Renaissance Humanist influences.[7] In order to promote religious reformation, Milton, like other Protestants (especially Puritans), saw that it was necessary to reform the political institutions that were so entwined with, and often apologetic for, the established reactionary religious institutions. Like other Puritans Milton conceives English bishops and kings in an antiChristian union, designed to thwart the progress of true Reformation, religion, and liberty. Like an Orthodox Calvinist, Milton appeals to Scripture and conscience to call antagonistic authorities and institutions in question, but in Milton one perceives that "the influence of the radical Protestant tradition...[has advanced] far beyond circles which could in any sense be called Puritan."[8] While Milton's ideology may be as aristocratic as an Orthodox Calvinist's, Milton is

not a professor of predeterminism; Milton is not a morbid repressor of all sensuous pleasure; he is not totally pessimistic about the basic nature of man; he is not antagonistic to religious toleration; and he is certainly not contemptuous of the humanistic philosophy of natural rights and liberties as Orthodox Calvinists are (Wolfe in I,2).

In his Defence of the People of England, Milton again finds his justification for regicide in the humanistic conception of Natural Law, that fundamental universal law designed to maintain the perfect functioning of all creation, that primary law and basis of all justice for human societies. Milton adopts Salmasius' definition of the prestigious, yet definition-eluding, law of nature: "That reason innate in all men's minds which considers the welfare of every people where men enjoy mutual association" (IV,i,424). Milton again affirms that in accordance with the law of nature, free-born people have a natural right to liberty, to choose their responsible government, (392) to be free from unnatural hereditary monarchy, and to be rid of all tyrants. "He who deprives a people of the power to choose whatever form of government they prefer surely deprives them of all that makes up civil liberty" (IV,i,392). As he writes this Defence, Milton expresses the staunch opposition to government by a single person, that marks all his last pamphlets. Milton exclaims that

there is in natural law "no place for the rights of kings..." (IV,i,425). The ruler rules through the favour of the people; the tyrant can be punished by the authority of the same people. "It is most in accordance with nature for tyrants to suffer any punishment, and...on nature's own instructions all peoples have often brought this about" (IV,i,432). "Reason, justice and morality command the punishment of all sinners without distinction" (IV,i,397). Milton declares that "as to the punishment of the king and the change in our form of government...,[Salmasius must be attentive until Milton can] show chapter by chapter ...by what law, right, and judgment these things were done.' By what right or what law?', My reply is 'by that law of Nature and of God which holds that whatever is for the safety of the state is right and just.' This was the answer of wise men of old..." (IV,i,317-8). What Milton has, in The Tenure, announced as the right of a people free by nature, clearly becomes in A Defence, "the right of a small parliamentary minority, entrusted with the care of the people's good and supported by military power."[9] This minority are the regenerate who are entitled to full natural liberty and natural rights.

Milton understands that according to the primary law of nature all men originally were theoretically free and equal, but that the Fall brought about their divorce

from this primary law of prelapsarian nature. The secondary law of nature is believed to be a secondary and incomplete expression of that lost primary law of nature; it guarantees all men certain natural rights and liberties, and certain regenerate men full rights and liberties.[10] In A Defence, however, Milton progresses beyond his previous (and conventional Leveller) declarations, in The Tenure and Eikonoklastes, that the English people have natural rights, including the right to form a social contract and to condemn a royal violator of that contract. Milton now acknowledges that Natural law applied only to the regenerate who are capable of the 'natural' liberty which is the end of just government (Wolfe in IV,i,423). Milton now professes that the regenerate minority derive from this secondary law of nature their authority to oppose the depraved or unsound popular will, and to execute King Charles I. This conviction is Milton's transformation of the doctrine of Christian Liberty into the idioms of Humanist Natural Law philosophy; Christian Liberty which is reserved for the regenerate is here conceived of as Natural Liberty which is reserved for the regenerate. Milton believes that nature dictates the policies instigated by the wisest. Parliament must preserve the good and liberty of the nation even if the rabble majority choose servility. The good Parliamentary minority are alone

worthy both to have dominion and to execute the will of God. "If a majority in Parliament prefer enslavement and putting the Commonwealth up for sale, is it not right for a minority to prevent it if they can and preserve their freedom?" (IV,i,457).

Milton believes that Charles I was a tyrannical perversion of kingship; the people's social contract obligations to him are therefore abrogated. "When a ruler becomes unbearably burdensome to al,...it is right for a people to do away with...[this] tyrant..." (IV,i,469). As in The Tenure and Eikonoklastes, Milton uses Aristotle's definition of a tyrant: "one who considers his own interests only, not those of the people" (IV,i,521). Milton charges that Charles I's personal rule was treason against the English people (IV,i,526). "When a people is bound by...an oath and their king turns tyrant or degenerates through his worthlessness, they are released from their bond by his faithlessness, by justice herself, and by the very law of nature" (IV,i,421). The security and prosperity of the people is naturally more important than the well-being of a single tyrant (IV,i,459). Milton declares that "the office of king is granted by the people" (IV,i,358), and that "the people...do with God's approval judge their guilty rulers" (IV,i,359). It had formerly been inconceivable that a king could be a traitor to the realm, especially in

view of the onslaught of divine right propaganda; but now Milton asserts forcefully that it is actually "wicked kings...[who], in order to strike terror into their people, make public proclamation that God is the [sole] source of royal rule" (IV,i,358). Milton's counter-affirmation is that the law of God does most closely agree with this law of nature that sanctions social contract and grants the people the right to judge and condemn a violator of that contract. A leader should be established and removed only with discretion, but "whenever the public interest requires it, the people, which has granted power to another for the sake of public safety, may for the same reason take it back again without injustice" (IV,i,465).

Milton proceeds to locate both classical and biblical sanctions and precedents for the specific case of tyrannicide that he is justifying. He finds clear historical precedents among the best Romans and Greeks; these outstanding men, Milton explains, held tyrannicide to be an honourable, righteous and godly deed (IV,i,446,447). Milton believes that his historical precedents and authorities are of a superior quality to those of his adversary Salmasius. Milton upbraids Salmasius for defending tyrants with the conception of royal rights, which Milton calls "unbridled tyranny" (IV,i,352). He directs a torrent of vituperation at Salmasius, defaming

him as the "worst of two-legged rogues" (IV,i,323), and as a "French vagrant "(IV,i,508). He then pretends to ponder: "Should I call you rascal or dolt or blockhead?" (IV,i,397) and he goes on to call his antagonist a "foul... procurer and hireling pimp of slavery" (IV,i,461). He implies that Salmasius is insane, exclaiming: "Is anyone so mad or foolish as to think that although the law has warnings and provisions against the injury of a people by infection from a diseased king, there is yet no legal remedy for the far more serious case when a godless, unjust, and cruel king plunders and tortures and kills his people and wholly ruins the state?" (IV,i,356). Milton explains that no good, free-born Englishman passively condones a tyrant's trampling upon the laws of the state. He quotes Aristotle to counterbalance and undermine Salmasius' defence of royal rights, "that state of being...dependent on no one and accountable to no man". This "is said by Aristotle... to be particularly tyrannical and not to be borne in a free country" (IV,i,356). English citizens, like their Classical predecessors, have certain rights that cannot be overriden by any rights a king may claim to derive from God. As Milton explains, the "absolute right of God... does not abolish the rights of the people, nor prevent all other kings not appointed by God from owing their rule to the people alone, to whom therefore they are accountable"

(IV,i,358). If God grants divine sanction to royal rulers, he also grants popular rights, that are not overridden by any royal rights. "The rights of the people...just as those of the king, whatever they are, are derived from God. Wherever the people have set up their kings without the direct intervention of God they can by the same right of theirs cast them down. The hand of God is more evident in the ouster than in the establishment of a tyrant, and more of his favor rests on a people when they disown an unjust king than on a king who grinds down his unoffending subjects" (IV,i,359). Again disparaging Salmasius' royalist defense of Charles I, Milton exclaims: "let none be so stupid, none so wicked, as to believe that kings, who are often but lazy louts, are so dear to God that the whole world must depend upon their whim and be ruled by it..." (IV,i,359).

In A Defence of the People of England Milton proclaims the right of any people to call their king legally to account, rather than resort to assassination. When Milton uses the term "people" or "the people" he, of course, means the regenerate who conform to the will of God and a constructive conscience. For Milton, "the people" constitutes an elite class, the bourgeois or the middle-class property-holders. Significantly, Milton considers protection of property to be one of the main

functions of government (Wolfe,in I,61). Milton professes that the few good men who can achieve or handle liberty, deserve to become the equitable masters of the many who neither desire, nor are capable of using, liberty; the virtuous, liberated minority should rule the unregenerate majority. For purposes of parliamentary propaganda, Milton classifies the independent military-parliamentary minority as this select group capable of functioning with liberty. Milton states that "that part of the House... which was uncorrupted, on seeing themselves and the commonwealth betrayed sought the aid of the army..." (IV,i,332). These men are acting against the majority to preserve true liberty and civil rights; and Milton believes that their actions are justifiable because a people may not naturally exercise its power against its own liberated good. He asserts that "our troops were wiser than our legislators, and saved the commonwealth by arms when the others had nearly destroyed it by their votes" (IV,i,333). He notes that the first and the peculiar duty of Parliament...is to maintain above all else the freedom of the people by peace or war..." (IV,i,458). In order to avoid conceding to Salmasius that England has a military and not a popular government, Milton declares that the soldiers are "citizens" and "people". "The soldiers...[are] citizens, forming a great part of the people, and they acted with the consent

and by the will of most of the rest, supported by Parliament" (IV,i,457).

In A Defence Milton declares that God may change the government of a people against their will, that God had acted through the pious minority in opposition to the will of the mad multitude. Many Independents actually believed that they were divinely commissioned to judge and execute the king. (Milton himself professes that a divine inspiration is behind his composition of A Defence (IV,i,536).) Although Milton steadfastly believes that the lowest person should have religious liberty, and the right to select his own ministers, he restricts individual political liberty, making the right to select a personal political representative contingent upon the individual's worth and capacity for right reason and responsibility. Milton believes that liberty is God's gift to his favoured English people, and that it is an offense against God to discard this liberty in a blind and injudicious reverence for tyrannous kingship. Consequently he believes that the English revolution in government has been divinely inspired (IV,i,536). He also notes that "We are right in believing that to entrust the royal sway to men unworthy and undeserving, as has mostly been the case, has brought mankind more harm than good" (367).

While composing A Defence Milton rejects outright

the institution of monarchy; this is a new development in his political propaganda. He affirms that "Nature does not allow an individual to be sole governor" (IV,i,427). Nature does not sanction monarchy (IV,i,426). Echoing The Tenure again, Milton emphasizes that "God would not have his people under a king's rule save with his opposition" (IV,i,432). At this time Milton equates monarchy with the antiChristian obstacles to the true reformed Protestant religion. In order to achieve true Reformation, which will mean achieving full liberty, it is necessary to abolish monarchy itself, and to institute a more progressive form of government. Milton sees tyranny and corruption as inseparable; he thinks that a tyrant like Charles I will of necessity corrupt his people, because a corrupt people produce, and supply a ready rationalization for, tyranny. Milton is waging this propaganda war fully to defeat the philosophy and image of Charles I, and the institution of monarchy itself. Milton hopes that once antiChristian royalists and prelates have been defeated there will be increased social potentials for the development of his ideal progressive republican commonwealth. A commonwealth will encourage the piety, justice and temperance which form the basis of true liberty and true religion.[11] Milton's personal conviction is that a free commonwealth, based upon republican principles, and

rooted in Natural law, is the best form of government; it is more conducive to the intellectual, moral, and economic growth and development of the people, than any kingdom.

Having rejected monarchy, Milton reserves sovereignty solely for the individuals who are most worthy to rule a free people. "It is neither fitting nor proper for a man to be king unless he be far superior to all the rest..." the best, the wisest, and the most courageous men have, by nature, the right to rule the people; as in The Tenure, sovereignty is reserved for the most qualified candidate. The people customarily choose "those who seem by nature most fit to rule, whose understanding, courage, and judgment can accomplish that task" (425). There is by nature no right of succession, and no king but the one who surpasses all others in wisdom and bravery; the rest have become kings by force or favor contrary to nature..." (425). "Nature gives the wisest dominion over those less wise, not a wicked man dominion over the good or a fool over the wise. Whoever takes away their dominion from such as these behaves altogether in conformity with nature" (425).

Milton affirms that God "wishes the same reformation of the state as of the church, especially since it has been found that in both spheres the attribution of infallibility and omnipotence to a human being is the root of all evils" (IV,i,

398). (Here Milton interjects a critique of both monarchy and the Roman Catholic pope). Against all persecuting churches Milton declares that God "has left the church no weapons save patience, righteousness, prayer and gospel teaching..." (IV,i,398). Against the professors of royal prerogative and royal right, Milton writes that God has "handed over to the state and with it all its officers not patience but laws, and arms to avenge wrong and violence" (IV,i, 398). The temporal rulers of state are, and must be held, accountable to the people. "Not even Moses," Milton exclaims, "who was so to speak the very companion of God, could do as he would with God's people" (IV,i,368). It is clear that the English people do not have to endure the indignities and oppressions perpetrated by the tyrant Charles Stuart; Milton declares, "that a master superior to the law should be endured by all men in the person of any single man was never commanded by any law, nor could it be, for a law which overthrows all laws cannot itself be law" (IV,i,401). For Milton there is nothing more in accord with the law of Nature than that the wise should rule, and that the tyrant should be punished (IV,i,425,423).

Again Milton seeks Classical and Biblical precedents and sanctions for his declaration of law's supremacy to the ruler. As a classical precedent, Milton finds that the best Roman emperors acknowledged the superiority of

the law to their own authority. Also, "Plato in the Laws says it is law which ought to be the most powerful in the state, and in his Letters praises that form of government where law is ruler and king over men; and not men, tyrants over the law. This too is the judgment of Aristotle in the Politics and of Cicero in the Laws, that the laws are ...superior to the magistrates." (IV,i,383). Not only do the teachings of the wisest Classical authorities support Milton's position, but also the teachings he selects from the Gospel. "It is then not the people alone on whom such obedience is enjoined, but kings as well, who are in no way above the law" (IV,i,383). Milton is in accordance with Plato, who in his eighth epistle wrote: "Let the royal power be accountable for its actions; let the law rule the kings too if they contravene the law in any way" (IV,i,455). Milton's conviction is that law, legislated in conformity to the law of nature, is the basis of all true liberty and responsible government in any state.

Milton's interpretation of natural law forms a foundation for the doctrine of popular sovereignty and responsible government. He explains that "the law of nature in arranging who should rule others, looks to the welfare of all peoples: the people then are more important than the king and above him; and since the people are above him and more important, there can be no right of a king by

which he, the inferior can injure or enslave the people, his superior (IV,i,425). However, as D.M. Loades observes, this concept of popular sovereignty "proved to be little more than a theoretical expedient to justify the execution of Charles I whose continued existence had become a political impossibility."[12] As a defender of parliamentary sovereignty and rights, Milton readily explains that "by the law of nature all good kings consider the Senate or people as their equal and their superior (IV,i,466); this is only natural. However since the tyrant is the lowest and weakest of men he must subjugate everyone else in order to avoid feeling threatened by them. Milton reiterates the parliamentary claim that he had announced in Eikonoklastes, "A king, whether good or bad, is inferior to...[the] people" (IV,i,466). It was originally the people who created kings, by transferring their inherent right of self government to their chosen representative, who was deemed worthy to govern them. The people never fully gives up its own power to its king and can withdraw it if the king deserts the popular interests which he was chosen to protect and advance. Power is conferred upon the monarch or governors "only for the sake of the welfare and freedom of the people, and when the king has failed to secure these [ends], the people is taken to have made no grant; for at nature's warning the people's gift was for a definite purpose only,

and if this purpose is not attained by nature or by the people, the gift is no more valid than any broken contract or agreement" (IV,i,467). Parliament is superior to the king because it is to this body of popular representatives that the people's natural rights of self-government are transferred. As Milton explains, "Parliament is the supreme council of the nation, established and endowed with full powers by an absolutely free people for the purpose of consulting together on the most vital issues..." (IV,i,497). Milton ventures to assert that the king derives his power from the decrees of Parliament (IV,i ,500). This perspective is antithetical to the royalist one. Not only can the king pass no law without Parliament, but he must adhere to all laws passed by Parliament (IV,i,482). "Our most venerable documents bear witness that our kings owe their power neither to inheritance nor force of arms nor succession, but wholly to the people" (IV,i,500).

In reinforcing his statement on parliamentary supremacy Milton declares that "the king is no more the master of parliament than a horse is the master of his own bridle" (IV,i,481). The "Commons alone are supreme even without the king and have power to judge the king, because, before any king was created, they used to hold councils and parliament in the name of the whole people, make judgments, pass laws, and create kings--not that they might be masters

of the people but to carry on the people's business. Milton again affirms that the commons has the right to judge a king, and did both legally and properly execute a wicked king in Charles I (IV,i,494).

> Since a king has not right to do wrong, the rights of the people remain supreme; and the right by which men first combined their judgment and strength for common defence before kings were created and by which they placed one or more same right by which they can check or depose either those same persons who for their courage or judgment were put in command, or any others if through sloth, folly, wickedness or treachery they misgovern the state: for nature has always looked, as she now does, not to the dominion of one man or a few, but to the safety of all (IV,i,425).

Obviously a people grants authority over itself not so that those who are granted authority can oppress, exploit, and corrupt them, but so that their best interests can be served (IV,i,459). The king is actually the servant of the people. "To grant to any mortal power over one's self on stronger terms than a trust would be the height of madness. Nor is it to be believed that any people since the beginning of the world which had the choice was so utterly foolish as to surrender title to all its power, or take it back, when it had once been entrusted to its magistrates, without very weighty reasons" (IV,i,459). Milton once again quotes the outstanding classical authorities, Plato, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Cicero, Tacitus, and Livy, to prove that kings or rulers have been accountable

to the people. "It is common knowledge that practically all kings everywhere have received their thrones from the people under certain limitations;...unless the king abides by these conditions, that power which is but entrusted to him should...revert to the people" (IV,i,458). Every nation that thus grants power to its ruler has prescribed that the ruler adhere to their laws. Milton also implies that a people so conferring power reserve the right to judge the ruler if he fails to meet their expectations and standards. This statement of social contract, right of resistance, and popular sovereignty is, of course, marred by a Miltonic contradiction; for while Milton claims that nature decrees the safety and wellbeing of all people, he is using natural law to justify political domination by the Independent military-parliamentary minority alone. Milton professes that this minority is the English regenerate (elect) who are not restricted or bound by the jurisdiction of the magistrates, or the same positive laws by which he would have all kings bound. As Milton postulates, the regenerate need not be exposed to the jurisdiction of the magistrates; they are free by the indwelling of the Spirit, they follow a higher law than the...Law resulting from the Fall" (Wolfe in IV,i,423n). Longing and striving for political progress and true liberty, this wise, brave, elite monority, alone among the people of

England, is deemed worthy of defence by John Milton, Englishman.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR (A DEFENCE)

1 A Defence was acclaimed by European liberals in 1651; it is neither appreciated nor enjoyed by most modern scholars.

2 Claudius Salmasius (Claude de Saumaise, 1588-1626), was a French scholar, a professor at Leyden, who, at a request from the future Charles II, wrote the Defensio Regia, in defence of Charles I, and the institution of monarchy. G.P. Gooch, Political Thought in England from Bacon to Halifax (London: Williams & Norgate, 1914-15), p.104.

3 In The Tenure Milton had defended the military minority, with a democratic ideology that was not applicable to the actual situation, but in the Defence he develops an overt justification of the righteous minority who are acting in discord with the will of the majority.

4 W.R. Parker, Milton: A Biography (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p.385.

5 Milton's conviction anticipates by 300 years the thesis of psychoanalyst Erich Fromm's Escape from Freedom.

6 Christopher Hill, Milton and the English Revolution, p.270.

7 Renaissance Humanism was characterized by individualism, protest against the bondage of Medieval Catholicism, and the affirmation of Reason. Douglas Bush, The Renaissance and English Humanism (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1939),p.19.

8 Christopher Hill, The Century of Revolution, p.173.

9 Arthur Barker, Milton, p.161.

[10] A.S.P. Woodhouse, Puritanism and Liberty (Brighton: Harvester Press Ltd., 1974),p.92.

[11] True religion is perfect freedom or Christian Liberty. As Milton recorded in The Reason of Church Government, "The service of God who is truth, her Liturgy [the Anglican] confesses to be perfect freedom, but...the service of Prelaty is perfect slavery, and by consequence perfect falshood" (I,854).

[12] D.M. Loades, Politics and the Nation: 1450-1660 (Brighton: Harvester Press Ltd., 1974), p.459.

CHAPTER V

A SECOND DEFENCE OF THE ENGLISH PEOPLE

A Second Defence of the English People (May 30, 1654) is Milton's eulogy to liberty ; it is a worthy testimony of a great writer's dedication to the Good Old Cause. This book is also Milton's official reply to the personal attack, launched upon him, in du Moulin's malicious affront to the English Commonwealth, The Cry of the Royal Blood to Heaven against the English Parricides.[1] In the Second Defence Milton both spurns and shatters the charge that the English "convert parricide into a doctrine ..."(IV,i,661). He proclaims the English liberators, not parricides; to deliberately contradict du Moulin, Milton exclaims that "Britain...shall hereafter deserve the everlasting praise of all ages as a country where liberators flourish" (IV,i,552).

Milton writes under an assumption of divine appointment, claiming to speak "for the entire human race against the foes of human liberty..." (IV,i,558). In this, his Second Defence, Milton very clearly expounds his excellent conception of Christian Liberty, which his royalist adversaries so basely misrepresent. "To be free" he declares, "is precisely the same thing as to be pious, wise, just and temperate...magnanimous and brave" (IV,i,684).

"True and substantial liberty" he explains, "must be sought, not without, but within, and is...best achieved... by a life rightly undertaken and rightly conducted" (IV,i,624). Milton equates genuine liberty with responsible, constructive individuality. "True liberty is neither won nor lost by force of arms alone; it springs from piety, justice, and temperance, its deep and intimate root being in the virtuous mind. Unless avarice, ambition, luxury, and superstition are banished, tyranny will reign within--a tyranny worse than any to be found abroad or on the field of battle" (IV,i,680).

Milton also explains that "nothing can be more efficacious than education in moulding the minds of men to virtue [true and internal liberty]..." (IV,i,625). This is a restatement of the aspirations of Of Education, where Milton explains that:

> The end...of learning is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him... as we may the neerest by possessing our souls of true vertue, which being united to the heavenly grace of faith makes up the highest perfection. (II,366-7)

These same convictions also underlay the composition of Areopagitica; there he defends the right of intelligent men to publish and debate, so that valuable ideas might circulate freely, and the intellectual atmosphere be made more conducive to spiritual regeneration. In the Second

Defence Milton reiterates the freedom of expression and freedom of the press themes that he has introduced in the Areopagitica. "Those who wish to engage in free inquiry" should be permitted to "publish their findings at their own peril without the private inspection of any petty magistrate, for so will truth especially flourish..." (IV,i,679). Milton especially admires those individuals who can, and choose to, promote and pursue truth. "The more veracious a man is in teaching truth to men, the more like must he be to God and the more acceptable to him" (IV,i,585). In the Second Defence Milton also begs the Protector Cromwell to ensure freedom of conscience, so that men may first have genuine personal convictions, even before they seek freely to express and publish them.

Milton believes that wise and liberated persons will both seek and advance political liberty from tyrants. Once men are liberated from vice, and are responsibly independent, they will resent being manipulated and misruled by tyrants. When men are capable of true and substantial liberty they will resent any alien power usurping their free will and right to freely choose. A man capable of disciplined reason has a right to self government.

John Milton, champion of liberty, pronounces himself a fully liberated man; "I am incapable of ever disgracing honorable conduct...my life...has ever been far

removed from all vice and crime" (IV,i,611). "I swear that my conduct was not influenced by ambition, gain, or glory, but solely by consideration of my duty, honor, and devotion to my country. I did my utmost not only to free my country, but also the church"(IV,i,587).

Milton also explains that Cromwell, the liberator of his country, was "commander first over himself, victor over himself, he had learned to achieve over himself the most effective triumph"(IV,i,688). He is the most worthy man in England, and most deserves to govern. "Nothing is more natural, nothing more just, nothing more useful or more advantageous to the human race than that the lesser obey the greater, not the lesser number the greater number, but the lesser virtue the greater virtue, the lesser wisdom the greater wisdom" (IV,i,636). He confirms that "there is nothing in human society more pleasing to God, or more agreeable to reason, nothing in the state more just, nothing more expedient, than the rule of the man most fit to rule"(IV,i,671-2). Milton proceeds to proclaim Cromwell as the "liberator of our country, the author of liberty,... likewise its guardian and saviour". For Milton, none could undertake a more distinguished or august role than that of liberator (IV,i,672).

Milton explains that it is only good men who can attain inner liberty, and only liberated men like Milton

himself are respectful of, and thankful to, liberators like Cromwell. Good reformed Christians are capable of self-discipline, and responsible independence in accord with the primary law of Nature; therefore they should be free from all temporal law. Depraved people, however, ought to be subjected to both their human betters and all temporal laws that are binding upon fallen nature, and "made only to curb wickedness..." (IV,i,679). Milton is convinced that an individual will not be fit for political liberty unless he can resist, or refrain from, all hatred, superstition, injustice, and lust. "Such is the decree of law and of Nature herself that he who cannot control himself, who through poverty of intellect or madness cannot properly administer his own affairs, should not be his own master, but like a ward be given over to the power of another". Similarly, "A nation which cannot rule and govern itself, but has delivered itself into slavery to its own lusts, is enslaved also to other masters whom it does not choose, and serves not only voluntarily but also against its will" (IV,i,684).

In the Second Defence Milton again affirms that men and kings must abide by the same standards and laws to be worthy of political rights and privileges. King Charles I had been a depraved tyrant, a man unworthy to govern a free English people. Milton states that about 1645 "All

agreed that a king could be deprived of his throne for three principal reasons: if he should prove a tyrant, if he should alienate the royal property, or if he should desert the people" (IV,i,641). In his personal rule Charles I clearly deserted the people and proved himself a tyrant.

Milton again emphasizes the difference between a legitimate king and a tyrant:

> As a good man differs from a bad, so much, I hold, does a king differ from a tyrant... A tyrant not only is not a king but is always an especially dangerous threat to kings...More kings have been crushed, and overthrown by tyrants than by their people. He who asserts, therefore, that tyrants must be abolished asserts, not that kings should be abolished, but the worst enemies of kings, the most dangerous, in fact, of all their foes. Since a tyrant is not our enemy alone, but the public enemy of virtually the entire race, he can be killed according to the same law by which he can be attacked with weapons (IV, i, 561-2).

Milton stresses that "the murder of a king and the punishment of a tyrant are not the same thing"(IV,i,599). Milton recalls that "those illustrious Greeks and Romans whom we particularly admire expelled the tyrants from their cities without other virtues than the zeal for freedom" (IV,i,550). But because Milton cannot find a recent historical precedent for regicide, the execution of a king, he writes, "We are our own exemplars, accustomed

to lead, not to follow others" (IV,i,656). Milton claims that the execution of Charles I is an example of English bravery and determination against the opponents of liberty. And, "what", he inquires, "can tend more to the honor and glory of any country than the restoration of liberty both to civil life and to divine worship?" (IV,i,550). Adopting universal tones, Milton exclaims, "We have given an example beneficial to all people, dreadful to all tyrants"(IV,i,652).

Milton claims that it was divine guidance that inspired the removal of the tyrannical Charles I and the partial reformation of the English religion. Milton concludes that his own sentiments in the Second Defence are in tune with destiny. While depraved slaves and tyrants may dispute the claim, Milton believes that his Second Defence has won the complete approval of all God's Englishmen (IV,i,685).[2]

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE (SECOND DEFENCE)

[1] In the Second Defence Milton attacks Alexander More or Morus as the author of The Cry of the King's Blood to Heaven Against the English Parricides; however, the real author was Peter du Moulin, an Anglican priest, "who was resident in England during the days of the Commonwealth" (Roberts in IV,i,542-3). "More was a kind of editor-publisher" (Roberts in IV,i,543).

[2] God's Englishmen are of course the worthy minority or remnant, who are called "good" in the actual text (IV,i,685).

CHAPTER VI

THE READIE AND EASIE WAY

Between 1640 and 1659 Milton's political tracts distinguish him as "the greatest man who wrote on the Parliamentary and Cromwellian side."[1] When, in 1660, political disorder verges on anarchy,[2] and a royalist counter-revolutionary surge makes the restoration of Charles II an imminent prospect, Milton drafts a political plan for averting the restoration of monarchy. Milton the idealistic champion of republicanism suddenly becomes Milton the pragmatic, adaptable, and compromising author of The Readie and Easie Way; this pamphlet's two editions reveal Milton's desperate plan(s) for preserving a semblance of the ideal republican commonwealth that he has, during the last decade, fought for with such dedication.

In the late Feb.1660 edition of The Readie and Easie Way, the valiant, blind defender of the "Good Old Cause" (VII,387) again extols the merits and benefits of a commonwealth, while renouncing the contemptible institution of monarchy. He intends to prove that "a free Commonwealth [is]...the noblest, the manliest, the equallest, the justest government" (VII,359). His strategy is to juxtapose his picture of a commonwealth with "all the freedom, peace, justice, plentie that we can desire" to "the difficulties,

troubles, uncertainties nay rather impossibilities to enjoy these things constantly under a monarch" (VII,379).

Milton is unable to find a Scriptural sanction for monarchy though he finds ample Biblical support for a Commonwealth, and "the Gospel speaking much of libertie" (VII,383). He notes that "God in much displeasure gave a king to the Israelites, and imputed it a sin to them that they sought one" (VII,359). On the other hand, "What government comes neerer to [the] precept of Christ, then a free Commonwealth" (VII,360)? A free commonwealth will produce good, enlightened, progressive men who are both capable of handling political liberty and able to advance true Reformation; the citizens of a Commonwealth will be granted sufficient freedom to do God's bidding. Kingship, however, will produce servility, and will stifle the unfolding and developing of human talent and goodness, much to the detriment of society and the chagrin of God; kingship will enforce a sterile conformity of mind, and stifle the advancement of true Reformation. Kingship is decried as a "burdensome, expensive, useless and dangerous" form of government (VII,355). Milton notes that "a King must be ador'd like a Demigod, with a dissolute and haughtie court about him, of vast expence and luxurie...[all] on the publick revenue" (VII,360). Milton calls kingship "most pusillanimous" (VII,382). "Monarchie and her bishops both fear and hate

[liberty]; but a free commonwealth both favours and promotes [it]; and not the word only, but the thing it self" (VII,383).

Milton believes and warns that the restoration of Charles II will have grave and depressing consequences; it will mean the destruction of all liberties; it will mean the end of any semblance of representative government; it will mean the suppression of all philosophies of popular sovereignty and representative government; it will be an exchange of future reaction for present progress; it will ensure that, in religion, there will be an end to freedom of conscience, and the return of the hated oppressive prelates; consequently religious stagnation will supplant the progression of true reformation (VII,357,366). "As for spiritual [freedom] who can be at rest, who can enjoy any thing in this world with contentment, who hath not libertie to serve God and to save his own soul, according to the best light which God hath planted in him to that purpose" (VII,379)? It seems to Milton that the people must be "madd or strangely infatuated" to hope for any happiness or safety under a king or any "single person" (VII,361). "I doubt not but all ingenuous and knowing men will easily agree with me, that a free Commonwealth without single person or House of lords, is by far the best government" (VII,364-5). Kings are antagonists of the free thought and speech that Areopagitica championed;

kings ignore and transgress the popular natural rights announced in The Tenure; and kings subvert the Parliament, whose sovereignty was defended in Eikonoklastes and subsequent tracts. "Doubtless, no Parlament will be ever able under royaltie to free the people from slavery" (VII,366).

In an attempt to stave off the dreaded restoration of this reactionary form of government, Milton outlines a republican constitution: The Readie and Easie Way. Milton proposes that political authority be vested permanently, not in a monarch, but in a Grand Council or a highly aristocratic perpetual senate, constituted by the nation's finest, most intelligent, bravest, worthiest men. "For the ground and basis of every just and free government... is a general Councel of ablest men, chosen by the people to consult of publick affairs from time to time" (VII,368). In this first edition of The Readie and Easie Way, Milton proposes that the Rump be expanded and perpetuated as the Grand Council (of staunch commonwealthsmen).[3] He affirms that "the small number of those remaining in [the Rump] Parliament...should be...honoured, as the remainder of those faithful worthies, who at first freed us from tyrannie" (VII,365-6). Although Milton inwardly believed that the Rump members were neither virtuous nor worthy, he preferred their political administration, and a modified political and religious liberty, to the election of a new,

and surely royalist parliament.[4] Because of his personal disillusionment with the succession of squabbling Parliaments since 1649, Milton proposes a permanent Grand Council. "Milton [also] reluctantly admits the principle of partial rotation whereby a few members are retired each year and others chosen (apparently by the Council itself) to fill their places."[5] A member of the Grand Council could also be removed if he proved himself unworthy, by crime; and he would, of course, be replaced upon his demise (VII,370). "The happiness of a nation," declares Milton, "must needs be firmest and certainest in a full and free Councel of their own electing, where no single person, but reason only swayes" (VII,361-2). Milton professes that this form of republic will be able to promote internal reforms, national progress, education, culture, civil and religious liberties, and economic prosperity. "A Commonwealth aims most to make the people flourishing, vertuous, noble and high spirited" (VII,384). He certainly recognizes that a good "part of our freedom consists in the civil rights and advanc'ments of every person according to his merit" (VII,383).

In The Readie and Easie Way Milton seeks primarily to provide a program or plan for political stability, which has been absent since the death of Oliver Cromwell. The restored Rump Parliament (1659) has faced both disgruntled left-wing sectaries and mounting royalist opposition.

Throughout 1659 the friction between the Rump and the Army has increased to the point where the people seek political stability above other considerations. Gone now from Milton's proposal is The Tenure's affirmation that the government is revocable at the pleasure of the people; Milton recognizes that the circumstances that made it expedient to justify political change in 1649. have been replaced in 1660 by a public desire for political permanence and durability. The idea of kingship is suddenly reassociated publicly with the ideas of political stability and permanence (VII,370). Therefore Milton proposes a perpetual senate, able to guarantee more stability than even kingship can; this form of commonwealth still retains the semblance of popular representation, and of preserving popular rights. He suggests that the General Council can elect an executive council from its members.

Milton also recognizes that the rural property-holders have recently objected to military interference in their local affairs;[6] so he proposes a series of representative county assemblies, with veto power on legislation of national significance. He argues that "if every county in the land were made a little commonwealth", then the county assemblies could quite effectively administer their own affairs, and promote civil liberties and individual advancement (VII,383). The installation of county councils

will allow the "people...to have the administration and all publick ornaments in thir own election and within thir own bounds" (VII,384). He realizes that these county councils can also serve as training grounds for future members of the Grand Council. Professor Ayers suggests that "What Milton proposes is almost a federal constitution, with as much decentralization of justice and administration as is practicable" (Ayers in VII,185). Milton's total proposal is partly patterned after Plato's ideal commonwealth, with its aristocratic guardian class or rulers, and partly after the government of the Netherlands, which had local regents.[7] "It expresses his lack of faith in a true democracy and yet avoids the equal evil of a one-man power."[8]

Although Milton has suggested an alternative to monarchy, his alternative is an oligarchy, with similar potential for oppression. Professor Ayers suggests that Milton's central "picture" is "one of a central oligarchy balanced by a multiplicity of local aristocracies" (Ayers in VII,216). Milton has again granted to the select minority who constitute the councils the exclusive right to impose their will upon the rest of the populace, who are, in theory, dismissed as the depraved mass. Although Milton is still professing that the free people have a right to choose their form of government, he has not left them much opportunity

to choose or change their government; they are left as mere theoretical participants in the social contract.

In The Readie and Easie Way it becomes obvious that Milton "stood for the dominance of nature's talented aristocrats over both the insolent assumption of hereditary privilege and the incoherent political gropings of the confused multitude."[9] As he did in A Defence, Milton declares that the minority have a right to promote and preserve liberty, even against the majority who would rather escape from it (Ayers in VII,208). When Milton writes of the natural rights and liberties of "the people" he means only a select minority of middle class property-holders, whom he presents as inwardly liberated and worthy of political freedom; significantly, his second edition of The Readie and Easie Way would have limited the franchise to qualified voters, defined as those people possessing £200 or more of personal or real property.[10]

In the much polished and revised (April 1660) second edition of The Readie and Easie Way, Milton makes his strongest pronouncement of the exclusive political rights of the worthy minority. "Is it just or reasonable", he asks,

> that most voices against the main end of government should enslave the less number that would be free? More just it is doubtless, if it com to force, that a less number compell a greater to retain, which

> can be no wrong to them, thir libertie, then that a greater number for the pleasure of thir baseness, compell a less most injuriously to be thir fellow slaves. They who seek nothing but thir own just libertie, have alwaies right to winn it and to keep it, when ever they have power, be the voices never so numerous that oppose it (VII,455).

Here Milton reiterates the doctrine of God's remnant that he has expounded in the Defences; he justifies rule by the minority, whom he presents as God's inspired elect. He counters royalist claims with the doctrine of popular sovereignty; but he concurrently (and inconsistently) announces the exclusive rights of the worthy minority. Clearly this intellectual aristocrat author proposes very little political privilege for the majority of the populace.

In this second edition of The Readie and Easie Way, Milton again proposes that a General Council should represent the people. Because April 1660 elections have swept away all but sixteen of the Rumpers, it is no longer feasible to propose that the Rump form the nucleus of a General Council. Milton now proposes that the General Council be popularly elected, but by a qualified electorate only (VII, 442-3). Milton's aristocratic republicanism is most blatantly obvious in this proposal, in this pamphlet. Because a majority of the dreaded populace (rabble) will regress from political freedom, to a superstitious reverence for restored Stuart tyranny (monarchy), Milton himself

(in theory) deprives this majority of their political privilege and liberty. In effect, Milton reserves full or substantial liberty for a minority too small to achieve or preserve his ideals.[11]

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER SIX (THE READIE...)

1 Perez Zagorin, A History of Political Thought in the English Revolution (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954), p.107 .

2 "It may be that the problem of uniting the popular wing of the Parliamentarian revolutionaries for effective political action...[was] hopeless because of the anarchic individualism which its doctrines fostered...", but Milton intends to synthesize a political proposal that will appeal to as many group interests as possible. Christopher Hill, Milton, p.257.

3 Milton calls his assembly the Grand Council rather than Parliament, because the term Parliament originally signified the parlie of the Commons when the monarch chose to summon them; Milton implies that the popular assembly should not be thus dependent, but autonomous (VII,373).

4 Barbara Lewalski, "Milton: Political Beliefs and Polemical Methods, 1659-60", PMLA, LXXIV (1959), p.195.

5 J.H. Hanford, A Milton Handbook (5th ed.; New York: Meredith Corporation, 1970), p.102.

6 C.Hill, Milton, p.200.

7 Milton also takes into consideration the Venetian republican government.

8 J.H. Hanford, A Milton Handbook, p.102.

9 Don M. Wolfe, Milton, p.342.

10 Wolfe, ibid., p.301.

11 Perez Zagorin, Political Thought, p.119

SUMMARY

From 1644 to 1660 John Milton engages in a heated pamphlet warfare against the multifarious enemies of liberty. He begins in 1644 with a lofty and noble conception of liberty; and in that year he composes the Areopagitica, in defense of free speech and responsible publication. Realizing that ignorance is a primary slavery from which all men must be liberated, Milton defends the proclamation, publication, and circulation of those diverse, intelligent ideas that can stimulate and cultivate good, enlightened men. He believes that all mature men must know the truth, and be sufficiently disciplined and discerning to reject the evil and erroneous. Licensing can only prove pernicious by stifling the intellectual progress, and preventing the spiritual trial, which together produce politically-responsible Christians.

While the Areopagitica may be interpreted as Milton's first fecund contribution to a rational cultural revolution, The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates (1649) is his initial announcement of the popular right of revolution. Having in 1644 petitioned for social conditions conducive to intellectual development, Milton, in 1649, proposes a totally rational political foundation for society. The Tenure clearly epitomizes that type of stimulative, radical

publication that Milton has earlier defended against Licensing. The Tenure presents the purely reasonable Natural Law philosophy as a justification of regicide. Milton declares that good men have a natural right to protect social well-being, by rejecting and removing all perverse, irrational, tyrannous forms of government; free born men have a natural right to enter a social contract to secure a responsible, representative government, that will protect society's best interests.

In order to promote this political liberty, Milton finds it necessary to become an iconoclast. He composes the Eikonoklastes to liberate the beguiled people from their injudicious and servile reverence for the saintly image that the Eikon Basilike has projected of King Charles I. In the Eikonoklastes Milton reiterates the liberating Natural Law philosophy. From his conception of popular natural rights, Milton derives his professed doctrine of popular sovereignty.

Milton's controversial, liberal interpretations of the Natural law philosophy, and his specific, illuminative illustrations of the social contract, raise the ire of significant royalist pamphleteers; but Milton founds his first Defence of the People of England upon the same Natural Law philosophy that he has articulated in his two preceding political tracts. The Defence is Milton's

vindication of the worthy minority, who derive exclusive rights from Natural law. If a mere minority of the English people are worthy of political and religious liberty, they have a right to obtain and secure it, even against the will of the majority. In the Defence Milton pronounces the upright, enlightened, middle-class stalwarts of society capable of handling and appreciating true and substantial liberty; these people only have developed the inward liberty upon which Milton makes all outward or political liberty contingent. For him it is natural that these most worthy few, this virtuous elite, should rule England, and preserve English liberty against the injudicious will of the depraved and servile majority. Milton also emphasizes that because the depraved tyrant Charles Stuart stifled and impeded the unfolding, development and liberation of England's worthy citizens, Charles was justly judged and executed.

This conviction is again expressed in the Second Defence, where Milton offers his fullest and most lucid definition of liberty. Here Milton clarifies that his conception of Christian Liberty is not license. Good men are those who are liberated from all vice; hence Milton claims that only good men love liberty. Bad men are slaves to wickedness, ignorance, and tyranny (a form of wickedness supported by the ignorant); hence Milton calls bad men

servile.

By the 1660 composition of The Readie and Easie Way Milton conceives the majority of the people as a depraved and servile mass, unworthy of substantial political privilege. In this pamphlet he proposes that a seemingly static, perpetual political oligarchy be established; this senate would be responsible and representative in theory only. The second edition's suggestion that the political franchise be reserved solely for men with substantial property, effectively clarifies what this aristocratic republican meant by "the people". While Milton has always proclaimed outwardly the doctrine of natural rights and popular sovereignty, he has inwardly withheld a true liberty from the majority of the people. To his adversaries he has seemed to defend a tyranny of the minority; but in 1660, John Milton is defenseless against their tyranny of the majority.

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