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Henry Fielding on charity and the eighteenth-century English poor.

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HENRY FIELDING ON CHARITY
AND
THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH POOR

BY
BRUCE DONALD

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, English Literature, in the Department of English, University of Windsor

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ABSTRACT

As magistrate in a wretched London court, Henry Fielding had daily evidence of the misery and despair of the poor and the power to do something about it. The question addressed by Henry Fielding on Charity and the Eighteenth-Century English Poor is how successfully did Fielding transform his ideal of charity (as moral imperative, religious duty and the ultimate expression of good nature) into practical programs for the poor. The study also tries to establish the meeting point between his idea of charity, as expressed in the fiction writings, and in his legal and other non-fiction writings on the poor.

The study places Fielding's views on charity within the "benevolist" context of commentators like Isaac Barrow, Shaftesbury and Joseph Addison. Eighteenth-century poverty programs are placed alongside critical assessments by men like Daniel Defoe and Bernard Mandeville. Fielding's legal tracts on the poor are examined for his attitude to poverty as well as his recommendations for creating programs to eradicate poverty in England.

The study reveals the centrality of charity in the body of Fielding's work and underscores his conviction that it is the prerequisite for a humane, vigorous society. The study also establishes Fielding's moral man as no gullible sentimentalist but a reasonable, compassionate creature who will
not support reprobates under any circumstances. To the extent that there is any harshness in Fielding's attitude to the poor, the study suggests that it is typical of the period. Fielding's conviction that the poor are often responsible for their misery is balanced by a desire to mobilize the full power of the law to force the poor to a social productivity which would be, in Fielding's judgement, their liberation. The study concludes that Fielding's solution for the urban poor, the workhouse, is a well-considered ideal but, in practice, a predictable failure.
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INTRODUCTION

...A Person void of Charity, is unworthy the Appellation of a Christian; that he hath no Pretense to either Goodness or Justice, or even to the Character of Humanity; that he is in honest Truth, an Infidel, a Rogue, and a Monster, and ought to be expelled not only from the Society of Christians, but of Men.

For Fielding, "charity" was a moral imperative, both a concept and a natural law, something to be integrated with good-nature to produce a human being with a marked affinity for God. As such, Fielding believed that charity is the central virtue of the moral universe and no man, in his view, could lay claim to humanity unless charity motivated his behavior toward his fellow men. A study of Fielding's extensive literary and journalistic works will reveal his tireless desire to justify charity to his contemporaries and to show how society is weakened and made barbaric by its absence.

Fielding recognized that charity is a virtue easily preached but not easily practised. The ironist in him noted how the theorists of charity could write volumes in praise of charity and then walk with noses in the air in callous disregard for those in need of their help. Human beings, Fielding sadly realized, can be consummate hypocrites. He was anxious to have these hypocrites exposed as singular enemies of the common good.

Fielding's position as tireless advocate of the charitable ideal is somewhat unique in English Literature. He was able
to carry over his theories and beliefs which he so carefully expounds in his novels and miscellaneous works, into the world of the here and now. At the end of his life, Fielding was a magistrate in a grim London police court and as such found himself face to face with the definitive embodiment of human misery. In the daily parade of impoverished and criminal humanity, Fielding found himself having to test the charitable impulse against the exigencies of economics, security and public order. By examining the legalistic writings that ensued from this period of Fielding's career we can see his conviction that charity could be reconciled with the economic well-being of the nation.

The poor in Fielding's England were a conspicuous presence and a public disgrace which threatened, according to Fielding, England's claim to being a Christian country. A social history of the period reveals the desperate standard of living and the overwhelming sense of despair that was the lot of the English poor. The urban centers thronged with an impoverished mass of brutalized humanity. Since unemployment and low wages were economic facts of life, many people turned to crime. The criminal laws of England recognized no extenuating circumstances, and many of the poor were jailed, transported or hung for the crime of trying to stay alive. Fielding felt keenly the failure of the law and the government to make the lower classes self-supportive and productive, and he took it as the responsibility of the charitable man to reform and
and revitalize the social order.

Fielding was not alone in his desire to help those who had fallen victim to the general social malaise. In the eighteenth century, there emerged, especially among the educated, a sense of universal benevolism, a recognition that helping the less fortunate was a signal virtue. An examination of these currents will help to isolate Fielding's contribution to this social phenomenon.

Fielding never advanced the view that man was perfect and could practise charity with the love and rationality of the angels. Man's moral vision, Fielding maintained, was at best clouded. As his novels show, human beings, even with good hearts and intentions, frequently take the wrong course of action. Man can be betrayed as well as saved by the promptings of his heart. Fielding demonstrated that charity required the consideration of the mind as well as the heart. Charity given the unworthy, he felt, was not a virtue but a social evil.

What is never obscure for Fielding is the duty to help one's fellow creatures on the uncertain road to salvation. If man is imperfect, he believed, he can at least strive for perfection. Quoting one of his mentors, Dr. Isaac Barrow, he suggested that this can be done by "advancing our Nature to the utmost Perfection of which it is capable." To promote this aim, Fielding put his own Christian benevolence into print for the instruction (and entertainment) of his countrymen.
His work speaks persuasively of the need for good men to realize that the first principle of the moral life is charity. Later, as Chief Magistrate for Middlesex, Fielding was challenged to implement law and dispense justice so the poor might benefit concretely and not just in the abstract.

What needs to be considered after Fielding's views on charity have been abstracted from the corpus of his work is a possible resolution of the apparent contradiction between Fielding the man of letters and Fielding the jurist and social critic. It should be possible after an assessment to determine whether the same rigorous ethical and social conscience pervades the literary and legalistic writings of Henry Fielding.


CHAPTER I

CHARITY AND POVERTY PROGRAMS
IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

Charity as a Religious-Philosophical Ideal

There is no sort of duties which God hath more
Expressly commanded...than these of bounty and
mercy toward our brethren.

Isaac Barrow, "The Duty and Reward
of Bounty to the Poor"

Thou shall not harden thy heart, nor shut thine hand
from thy brother. Thou shalt open thy hand wide unto
thy brother, unto thy poor, and to thy needy in the land.

Deut. 15: 7-11

All should be set to work that are any ways able,
and Scrutines should be made even among the Infirm:
Employment might be found out for most of our Lame,
and any that are unfit for hard Labor, as well as
the Blind, as long as their Health and Strength
will allow it.

Bernard Mandeville, "An Essay on
Charity and
Charity-Schools"

The idea of charity like motherhood enjoyed almost
universal support in eighteenth-century England. Clergymen
extolled its rewards, and writers of learned works gave it
their highest philosophical blessings. This attitude of
acceptance faltered, however, when applied to the very real
and thorny problems presented by those who were to be the
beneficiaries of this outpouring. Charity and poverty mixed
uneasily in Fielding's England. When faced with the flesh
and blood problems of the poor, Englishmen lost their
unanimity. Their charity became qualified as they struggled
to reconcile a philosophical and religious principle with the demands of economics and public order. It is of interest to examine charity as it stood as a religious-philosophical principle in the eighteenth century and to see how some of the more important thinkers of the period reconciled those thoughts with practical action. Having this background, one can then see where Fielding stood in the debate.

An eighteenth-century Englishman could look to many sources in literature, philosophy and religion and find charity enshrined as a cardinal moral virtue. In the writings of pagan philosophers like Cicero he would learn that man's nature was essentially communal and that man should put back into his society what he takes from it:

All the fruits of the earth are for man's use and all men are born for mutual help and advantage. Hence we ought...to pool all our natural advantages, so that by an exchange of duties on a give-and-take basis we strengthen the bonds of society by contributing our efforts, skills and resources to it. 1

Christianity, as expressed in such Biblical exhortations as

...enter into the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and ye gave me meat; for I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink...

powerfully augmented the arguments advanced by the pagans. The prevailing religious thought as expounded by the Church of England demonstrated that the practice of charity was the central activity of the Christian life and a necessary condition for salvation. Those who felt charity to be a pleasant idea to be publically professed but privately ignored
came under the particular attack of the Latitudinarian movement within the church. According to this view, attending church and being respectful to clergymen were necessary adjuncts to the Christian life but far from the whole story. Instead, as Latitudinarians like Barrow pointed out, charity was more pleasing to God than mere orthodoxy. A benevolent heathen, in the extreme of Latitudinarian theology, had a better chance at salvation than a selfish Christian.

In his published sermon, "The Duty and Reward of Bounty to the Poor," Dr. Barrow makes an overwhelming case for charity. Barrow extols charity as the most fundamentally Christian of all the virtues, fostering a spirit of mercy and forgiveness that bestows Grace on its practitioners. The charitable man loses nothing in his benevolence because he is giving away what has been given to him by God. All bounties and possessions are given to man in trust, and God expects that they be managed "according to [His] direction and order." According to Barrow, God commands that man use His gifts in order to satisfy his basic needs and plan for exigencies. When this has been accomplished, God directs that any surplus be used to relieve the poor:

We are very unjust if we presume to withhold it; doubly unjust we are, both toward God and toward our neighbour: we are unfaithful stewards, mis-applying the goods of our Master, and crossing his order: we are wrongful usurpers, detaining from our neighbour that which God hath allotted him; we are in court of conscience; we shall appear at the bar of God's judgement no better than robbers.
Barrow explains that the pious man gives not because he will gain some advantage from the recipient but out of "conscience, respect, and love to whom he doeth it." Those who are charitable, reasons Barrow, will not act haphazardly out of shame because some object has made a piteous impression on their senses. They will follow, instead, "the clear dictates and the immutable laws of conscience." Nor, asserts Barrow, is charity a passive virtue or mere "good-will":

Goodwill is indeed the root of charity; but that lies underground, and out of sight; nor can we conclude its being or life without visible fruits.

Barrow preaches that man's nature reflects God's liberality. It is therefore absurd, he writes, that Christians who professedly follow God's laws are "so miserable and sordid" that they hoard against their neighbors and covet their goods.

Men are brothers not natural enemies:

We are all but several streams issuing from one source, several twigs sprouting from one stock; one blood, derived from several channels.

According to Barrow, the effect of charity on the bestower and the recipient are powerful motivators for those who would be benevolent. Poor families will remember the benevolent man's bounty while the sick and afflicted will rejoice in the refreshment and ease that he provided. Quite apart from the gratitude of the poor, benevolence is repaid by the joy of doing good:

As also nature, to the act requisite toward the preservation of our life, hath annexed a sensible
pleasure, forcibly enticing us to the performance of them; so hath she made the communication of benefits to others to be accompanied with a very delicious relish upon the mind of him that practises it. 12

The morally good man, Barrow argues, would experience a "very delicious relish" when contemplating the tangible effects produced by his charity. Even the Epicure will be satisfied in his charity because he will discover, in Barrow's view, that "to receive good...is nowise so pleasant as to do it." 13

Secular writers like Shaftesbury justified charity by focusing on the delight of doing good rather than on specifically theological arguments. In his "Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit" Shaftesbury maintains that when there is a "genuine admiration and love" for virtue, happiness inevitably results. 14 Having the regard for virtue and its "power and strength," 15 man will find it logical that

To love the public, to study the universal good, and to promote the interest of the whole world, as far as lies within our power, is surely the height of goodness. 16

Shaftesbury argues that it is important for people to realize that the good of the species precedes the individual good. Promoting the common good is for him the key to human contentment:

...to have the natural, kindly or generous affections strong and powerful towards the good of the public, is to have the chief means and power of self-enjoyment; and to want them is certain misery and ill. 17

Shaftesbury warns that when selfish interests are not
properly subordinated to the good of the whole there will be social anarchy. Only a strict regard for the well-being of others will allow society to flourish. When this concern is not fostered, society reverts to a primitive greed:

Let indolence, indifference, or insensibility be studied as an art, or cultivated with the utmost care, the passions thus restrained will force their prison, and in one way or another procure their liberty and find full employment. 18

Addison, writing in a similar vein, finds that the virtuous man looks outward to his society in order to express his good nature. Not satisfied with mere pretense to a kindly disposition, the virtuous man labors to bring some benefit to others. The ultimate proof of a good nature is the extent to which it manifests itself in "steadiness and uniformity, in sickness and in health, in prosperity and in adversity." 19

Addison argues that charity is the best test of a good nature because the poor and the unfortunate are met so often in daily life. With suffering so much in evidence, the virtuous man has limitless opportunity to translate his moral principles into action.

Addison also writes that the virtuous man will not stint on his charity because his resources are constrained. By forgoing some pleasure or convenience, the man who would be charitable will have some surplus that can be used to advantage by the unfortunate. A little self-imposed hardship is useful in the process because it helps the benevolent man feel the distress of those he relieves:
By this method we in some measure share the necessities of the poor, at the same time that we relieve them, and make ourselves not only their patrons, but their fellow-sufferers. 20

Man, according to Addison, is naturally disposed to feel the suffering of others and to do what he can to provide some relief. Unfortunately, this predisposition is often corrupted in the daily pursuit of self-interest. Men caught up in their own affairs and ambitions are too distracted to see beyond the confines of their own problems. Clinging tenaciously to what they have, selfish men operate on the principle that the more wealth is shared, the less they have for their own needs. Addison believes that in reality the reverse is true. Man's real wealth is in his store of virtuous behavior. Virtue, he writes, can not be diminished by division; the more it is practised, the more each man has for himself.

Addison holds that a man who is ill-natured, committed to neither the best interest of himself or the state, can not be charitable because he can not feel the happiness that comes from helping others:

A guilty, or a discontented mind, a mind ruffled by ill-fortune, disconcerted by its own passions, soured by neglect, or fretting at disappointments, hath not leisure to attend to the necessity or reasonableness of a kindness, nor a taste, for those pleasures which wait on beneficence, which demand a calm and unpolluted heart to relish them. 21

Barrow, Shaftesbury and Addison were quick to point out that human society had fallen short of its moral potential. But this, they agreed, should not be interpreted as the
ultimate demonstration of man's depravity. There were, they argued, virtuous men who could stand fast in the winds of worldly corruption and still maintain a heart-felt sympathy for their fellow creatures. They were anxious to illustrate that the charitable sentiment was man's greatest glory and the final statement of his morality. Their writings were widely appreciated by those who had the education to read them. Much of what they wrote influenced the "benevolist" literature of the period that sought to teach virtue by holding up good men as exemplars. 22

Barrow, Shaftesbury and Addison offered, however, little advice as to how a charitable man might determine whether an unfortunate was worthy of his attention. Barrow cautions good men not to dissipate their resources on "vain or lewd" persons who would just squander what they received on "wanton or wicked profusions...or in riotous excesses." 23 According to Barrow, the first principle of charity should be to be "just first and then liberal." 24 Shaftesbury warns that dispensing public resources to the undeserving would make society dissolute. Charity, writes Addison, must be properly considered before it can lay claim to being a virtue:

...if it exerts itself promiscuously towards the deserving and the undeserving, if it relieves alike the idle and the indigent, if it gives itself up to the first petitioner, and lights upon any one rather by accident than choice, it may pass for an amiable instinct, but must not assume the name of a moral virtue. 25
Eighteenth-Century Poverty Programs

How the poor were actually faring, given the premium placed on the charitable sentiment during this period, is a different question. What can not be questioned is that England had in existence a social structure, regulated by government policy, specifically designed to relieve the poor. The poor in other countries might have to rely on the Christian charity of wealthy citizens, but in England the poor were under the legislated care of the government. It gave Englishmen much satisfaction that these measures were entirely unique to their country and justified to them the general belief that their system of government was in efficiency and fairmindedness, superior to the Europeans'.

Social engineering, however, is problematical at best. It is one thing to be barred from watching unmoved while the poor and wretched rot in the streets. As demonstrated, no Englishman of conscience could do so, whether he was directed by his religion or love of abstract virtue. But it is something else to understand society and economics, to understand why the poor are poor and to construct from this knowledge, programs that will position the lower classes to be in step with the general upward movement of society.

Exacerbating the difficulty was the fact that the poor in the eighteenth century lacked a uniform consistency. Included among the ranks of the poor were hardened criminals, incorrigible beggars and, in good measure, the happily indolent.
Relieving these elements, leading them to social productivity and an appreciation of Christian virtue, was immeasurably more difficult than helping an honest, indigent neighbor. Many social commentators, as will be illustrated, thought that the poor were best left to struggle on their own. The thought of a well-fed, self-sufficient lower class raised the spectre of social insurrection. Those elements in society who feared an insurrection most argued that the poor once made prosperous would rise up and destroy their benefactors rather than show gratitude.

An important feature of the Poor Laws was that poverty programs were financed by parishioners in the form of a land tax. The ratepayers in the parishes watched the disposition of funds with great interest. They expected in return for the burden they had been compelled to assume, reduced incidence of beggary and vagrancy, provision for those too old or sick to help themselves and evidence that the able-bodied had been put to work to help reduce the rates. By the middle of the eighteenth century, when the Poor Laws had been in effect for one hundred and fifty years, it had become evident to legislators and those who paid the rates that full value for the financial output had not been received and that the act itself had fallen into chaos.

The breakdown, according to Dorothy Marshall, can be attributed to the growing inadequacy of the local parish to provide for its poor. As trade increased, goods and workers
moved freely from parish to parish, creating a large floating population that could not claim a domicile in any single parish. The solution was seen in the establishment of county rather than parish workhouses. Since the workhouse is central to Fielding's plan for the poor, it is necessary to have some understanding of its rationale.

The workhouse movement, as first conceptualized in the latter half of the seventeenth century, seemed to provide the best answer as to how the poor could be raised in their circumstances and at the same time exploited commercially. All the poor of a single parish could be consolidated and the able-bodied put to work on some project that would benefit the entire community. In addition, advocates of the workhouse believed that the physically handicapped and the old could be better provided for in such an establishment rather than in their scattered homes. Schools, it was argued, might be annexed to the workhouses and provide a practical but moral education that would make the children of the poor more tractable and ready to work.

It is not implied that the movement was entirely motivated by cynical men who were anxious only to clear the welfare rolls. Many of its adherents were high-principled and felt that the honest labor to be performed in the workhouses would be vital in maintaining the vigor and integrity of the poor. After all, if there is a universal brotherhood, as Barrow asserts, each man must help his neighbor. That does not exclude the poor.
from their contribution. In an age when the poor were languishing so conspicuously, the opportunity to have them profitably employed must have been appealing.

Unfortunately, the workhouse movement created more problems than it solved. Instead of the well-equipped, cheerful surrounding envisioned by its supporters, the workhouses brought into existence were grim and cheerless. The unwillingness of responsible citizens to serve as administrators created a vacuum at the top that was willingly filled by the incompetent and the self-seeking. Work in the institutions was left to the discretion of contractors who, in return for feeding, clothing and housing the poor, paid starvation wages and served cheap, unnourishing food. A report written in 1773 describes conditions in an average county workhouse:

A thorough acquaintance with the interior economy of these wretched receptacles of misery or rather "parish prisons," is not easily acquired: in these, as in other arbitrary governments, complaint is mutiny and treason, to every appearance of which a double portion of punishment is invariably annexed...One thing is too publically known to admit of denial, that those workhouses are scenes of filthiness and confusion; that young and old, sick and healthy, are promiscuously crowded into ill-contrived apartments, not of sufficient capacity to contain with convenience half the number of miserable beings condemned to such deplorable habitations and that speedy death is almost ever to the aged and infirm, and often to the youthful and robust, the consequence of a removal from the more salubrious air to such mansions of putridity. 31

Some writers, however, saw that such corruption, waste and inefficiency was the result of too much well-meaning
interference from those who should know better. Rather than creating legislation to provide relief for the poor and getting involved in costly ventures, they thought that the government should do nothing or at least make relief programs so unattractive that only the most desperately poor would be willing to participate in them. Behind these views is the assumption that the poor had themselves to blame for their poverty and the conviction that the only way to help the poor is to integrate them into the ranks of the productively employed.

Bernard Mandeville and Daniel Defoe on Charity and the English Poor

Critics like Defoe and Mandeville expressed a hardened attitude toward the poor in their writing. Defoe, for example, defines the poor as being social parasites rather than as people who need society's care:

[The poor are] a crowd of clamouring, unemployed, unprovided for...People, who make the nation uneasie, burthen the Rich, clog our Parishes, and make themselves worthy of Laws, and peculiar management to dispose of and direct them. 32

Defoe is not so much concerned with the human suffering that comes from poverty as he is with the terrible waste to the nation. The prevailing economic theory, which Defoe supports, held that the wealth of a nation depends on the number of people who work and consume. If there is a large number of unemployed, production and consumption are substantially
reduced. A nation, in his view, must promote universal employment if it is to realize its economic potential. The problem with the Poor Laws, Defoe believes, is that they have abetted in the creation of a class of people which neither produces nor consumes. Charity has its place, he argues, but should be utilized only as a temporary measure to maintain a worker who has been temporarily unemployed or to help a family which has been deprived of its breadwinner because of sickness or death. Giving alms to beggars, he reasons, only insures that the beggar will continue to be a parasite and tempt others to follow his example. Defoe has nothing but contempt for the able-bodied who will not work. He has had some experience in dealing with these people and he suspects that many of the poor are too lazy to work:

When I wanted a Man for labouring Work, and offer'd 9 s. per Week to strouling Fellows at my Door, they have frequently told me to my Face, they could get more a begging and I once set a lusty Fellow in the Stocks for making the Experiment. 33

Defoe also finds the workhouse to be an impractical solution because of the difficulty of creating work that can be carried out by the poor that will not take away jobs from those already employed:

...giving to one what you take away from another; enriching one poor Man to starve another, putting a Vagabond into an honest Man's employment...[is to put] his Diligence on Tenters to find out some other Work to maintain his Family. 34

The real cause of poverty, in Defoe's view, was a lack of initiative and the expensive tastes of the lower orders.
A Dutchman, he argues, could live and thrive on a salary that would force an Englishman to starve and go in rags. He singles out married men to be so totally lacking in sense that instead of bringing home their wages for the benefit of themselves and their families, they dissipate them in the alehouse. England, he describes, as "the Most Lazy Diligent Nation in the World." The reputation that the English have gained for their commercial enterprise is diminished because their lower classes are so resolutely idle and spendthrift:

[There is] a general taint of Slothfulness upon our Poor, there's nothing more frequent, than for an Englishman to Work till he has got his Pocket full of Money, and then go and be idle, or perhaps drunk, till 'tis all gone, and perhaps himself in Debt; and ask him in his Cups what he intends, he'll tell you honestly, he'll drink as long as it lasts, and then go to work for more.  

Mandeville's views support the contention that much that passed for charity in England was wrong-headed and counter-productive. Underneath the charitable sentiment Mandeville finds motivations that have nothing to do with real sympathy for the poor. In his "Essay on Charity and Charity-Schools," Mandeville challenges the myth of English charitableness and notes that what many believe to be charity is merely pity that vanishes when the object of that pity is removed from sight. He writes that many of those who lay claim to being charitable are in fact gratifying their self-esteem and, far from feeling anything for the distressed, give them help only to get them out of their sight. Thus, he asserts, many of the schemes
advanced for the poor may be well-intentioned but are in fact self-destructive because they are based on the nebulous motive of doing good rather than on the principle of lasting results. "Vicious" men, he feels, may be in a better position to do some good because their "charity" is grounded on the gratification of appetites that demand conspicuous public display: "Pride and Vanity have built more hospitals than all the virtues put together." Mandeville advises prudence when considering who should be relieved, lest the gift create more social drones. The more alms-houses that are built, he claims, the more that are needed. These institutions may be established by good men but once their administration is left to executors, incompetence, pettiness and self-seeking eventually destroy the original high-principled aims.

Mandeville's comments on the contemporary proliferation of "charity-schools" illustrates the prevailing opinion that keeping the poor poor was the key to national well-being. Society, he believes, functions to the extent that its lowest members perform all the manual labor and be unquestioningly servile when taking orders from those in authority. He argues that charity-schools undermine these requisites by creating in the lower orders an impertinent sense of self-worth and a love of luxury. With these characteristics, the poor become obstreperous toward their superiors and ill-suited to perform their servile function. But charity-schools are in fashion, he says, and "whoever dares openly oppose them is in danger
of being stoned by the Rabble."

Mandeville, however, enjoyed baiting the bull. Education, he felt, would serve to make poor people more cunning rather than more virtuous:

Craft has a greater Hand in making Rogues than Stupidity and Vice in general...Ignorance is, to a proverb, counted to be the Mother of Devotion, and it is certain that we shall find Innocence and Honesty no where more general than among the most illiterate, the poor silly Country people.

There is only one lesson, according to Mandeville, that the children of the poor need to learn and that is to fear the law. Magistrates, he counsels, can teach this fear by handing down severe punishments that will stand as a warning to young offenders.

The virtue of the men who administer the charity-schools is challenged by Mandeville. Instead of charity, he finds the pursuit of glory and self-esteem:

One Motive above all which is none of the least with most of them, is to be carefully concealed, I mean the satisfaction there is in Ordering and Directing: There is a melodious sound in the word governor that is charming to mean People.

The problem as Mandeville sees it, is that while the directors of charity-schools are congratulating themselves for their public service, the poor under their supervision are losing valuable time that could be spent on productive labor. It would be better for the poor, he argues, to learn to be easily satisfied and accept their position in the social order:
...the Welfare of all Societies...requires that labor should be performed by such of their Members as in the first place are sturdy and robust and never used to Ease and Idleness, and in the second, soon contented as to the necessaries of Life; such as are glad to take up with the coarsest manufacture in every thing they wear, and in their Diet have no other aim than to feed their Bodies when their Stomachs prompt them to eat, and with little regard to Taste or relish refuse no wholesome nourishment that can be swallow'd when Men are hungry, or ask any thing for their thirst but to quench it. 42

In Mandeville's view, it is the duty of the legislature to insure that the poor will thrive and be happy under the meanest circumstance. This, he reasons, will be accomplished by keeping the lower orders ignorant as well as poor.

Mandeville also scoffs at those who out of "an unreasonable vein of petty reverence for the poor" waste their time considering the injustices perpetrated on them. 43 "Beggars must not be beaten," he says ironically, "tho they strike you first." 44 This propensity to make exceptions for the lawlessness of the poor is dangerous to public order, he believes. The poor, he maintains, must never get the idea that they are somehow above the law. The law is there to keep the lower orders in terror of constituted authority. Kept blissfully ignorant and in terror of the law, the poor, as Mandeville expects, would be prepared for the meanest, dirtiest work that society demands of them.

Inspite of the doubts raised by skeptics like Defoe and Mandeville, well-intentioned individuals continued to support
the charity-school movement and other agencies that existed to help the poor receive a practical education. Other charitable organizations came into being during this period to provide medical care for the poor. The hospitals in existence at the beginning of the century (St. Bartholomew, St. Thomas and Bethlehem) were overcrowded and imposed restrictions that in effect barred the poor from admission. One of the new institutions created during this period was the Foundling Hospital. Fielding himself contributed to the building and maintenance of this institution. The primary function of the Foundling Hospital was to dispense food, shelter and medical care to the children of London who wandered the streets without parents, a place to sleep or any means of support.

There is general agreement, however, in any civilized society that such children deserve protection, and it is a relatively easy matter for resources to be mobilized on their behalf. But the notion that such protection was a right under the law for all those who were powerless through debt, undeserved indigence or conviction of a crime, was alien to eighteenth-century England. Society's first concern was to demand that its citizens keep within the law and perform the function that their station and circumstance dictated. To those in authority these rules were so easily understood and observed that the slightest deviation was rigorously challenged.
Much of the callousness and lack of humanity aimed at those outside the law and those unable to contribute or support themselves came from the belief that they had not properly earned their place in the social order. Thus thievery, the taking away of someone's rightfully owned property by someone who had no claim to it, was always punishable by death. Similarly, society was concerned only that debtors repay their loans and would view as irrelevant the fact that they could not pay. A debtor who reneged on his creditors would quickly find himself in prison. Once there, after running up a bill of expense for his food and even decent treatment, he would be deeper in debt and fully incapable of earning his way out.\textsuperscript{47} Conditions in the prisons reflected the principle that those who transgressed against that which society expected of them should have no rights. Brutal jailers bled prisoners for their last halfpenny, leaving them to rot when their resources had been exhausted. Reform was awaiting John Howard, but in the meantime authorities viewed conditions in the prisons as a necessary adjunct to repentance and rehabilitation.

That the laboring poor continued to live in insecurity and wretchedness and pulled down the general well-being of the country, hardened the attitude of many who out of religious or ethical principle might have been more tolerant. The measures designed for the relief of the poor were conspicuous failures, leading many to believe that the character of the
poor was somehow defective and that the poor had not submitted to relief programs with the proper spirit of cooperation. Lurking in the background of these thoughts was the ever present terror that the poor would overthrow the social order in one grand gesture of getting something for nothing. Those in authority could look to Europe and see that the elaborate and costly apparatus for poor relief was not paralleled outside of England. That something extensive had been done led to a reluctance to reform and modify this work. First, they thought, the poor must be forced to meet them half way.

These sentiments complicated and altered the charitable injunctions that Barrow, Shaftesbury and Addison advanced as the highest religious and social duty. Yet the spirit that moved the English to act on their idealism and to attempt to realize their social vision in a world that in many ways was constituted to destroy kindness and benevolence, marks a significant chapter in human progress.

The extent to which Fielding resolves the dilemma of translating the virtue of charity into practical programs that will be of lasting benefit to the poor remains to be seen.
CHAPTER I NOTES


2 Math. 25:34,35.

3 A good general appreciation of English theology in the eighteenth century can be found in John H. Overton's and Frederic Relton's The English Church: 1714-1800 (London: MacMillan, 1906). Methodism, which splintered from the main church during this period, came under Fielding's attack. His main objection came from what he believed to be the extreme preoccupation of the Methodists on "personal faith." Fielding stressed "good works" in his writings and never lost an opportunity to "twit" anyone of Methodist leaning in his novels.

4 Isaac Barrow, "The Duty and Reward of Bounty to the Poor," The Sermons and Expository Treatises of Isaac Barrow (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1839), Vol. I.

5 Ibid., p. 280.

6 Ibid., p. 290.

7 Ibid., p. 282.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., p. 285.

10 Ibid., p. 284.

11 Ibid., p. 298.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.


16 Ibid.
18 Ibid., p. 314.
19 Joseph Addison, "No. 177" (September, 22, 1711), *The Spectator* (London: Jones and Company, 1828).
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., "No. 601" (October 1, 1714).
24 Ibid.
25 "No. 177," *The Spectator*.
26 Given the scope of this study it is impossible to trace the history of English poverty programs. There are many excellent works which have accomplished this task. One of them, Samuel Mencher's *Poor Law to Poverty Program* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburg Press, 1967), was used extensively as background for this study. For the purposes of this study it is necessary to know that legislation collectively known as "The Elizabethan Poor Laws" attempted to relieve and find employment for the poor by organizing them within the structure of the local parish. Other features of the legislation were stringent laws against beggary and vagrancy. Later, new laws were added which provided for the collection of the poor in parish or county workhouses. Mencher's study reveals that many of the administrators of the Poor Laws were corrupt or incompetent.
27 Dorothy Marshall's *The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1969), gives a clear picture of the extreme hardship and brutality faced by the English poor. Included in her study is an assessment of the legal system and how it kept the poor in terror. Hanging, for stealing a pocket watch, for example, was a routine punishment.
28 The English Poor, p. 46.

29 Many of the philanthropists who supported the workhouse movement were practical, successful businessmen. See The English Poor, pp. 42-45.


31 As quoted by Marshall in The English Poor, p. 128.


33 Ibid., p. 12.

34 Ibid., p. 17.


36 Ibid., p. 27.


38 Charity-Schools were established through church and voluntary contributions in order to educate the children of the poor and head them away from the fate of beggary and prostitution. "The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge" provided their major sponsorship. In 1707 there were 55 schools in London and 216 in the rest of the country. Forty-five years later there were 5,604 of these schools in London and 23,421 in the rest of the country. See Kirkman Gray's A History of English Philanthropy (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1967), pp. 104-106.


40 Ibid., p. 268.

41 Ibid., p. 280.

42 Ibid., p. 286.

43 Ibid., p. 283.

44 Ibid., p. 288.

46 Fielding actively supported the establishment of the Foundling Hospital and gave money for the founding and maintenance of the Lying-in Hospital on Brownlaw Street. See "Introduction," The Covent-Garden Journal, p. 24. In The Champion (Thursday, February 21, 1739-40) Fielding comments on the establishment of the Foundling Hospital: "...[it] does honour not only to the noble propagators of it, but to our very age and nation, and leaves us only to wonder, how it was possible, through stupidity or barbarity, to have been delayed so long." All references to The Champion refer to Fielding's Works (1903) Miscellaneous Writings, Volume II, ed. W.E. Henley (Rpt. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967), XIV.

47 Fielding viewed arrest for debt as a blight on the English legal system. See Chapter III of the present work and The Champion, (February 16, 1739-40).
CHAPTER II

HENRY FIELDING AND THE "IDEA" OF CHARITY

If the virtue of a society is measured by its champions and professors, eighteenth-century England was indeed virtuous. Yet, as the moralist notes, the horse can be led to water but not made to drink. Away from the religious texts and the philosophical treatises, virtue, as it has always had to, must pay its way in the marketplace. There, as one of Fielding's "readers" remarks in The Champion, virtue is

...a sort of cash, unknown to the butcher, the baker, the draper, the tailor. If a man carries nothing but virtue to the market, he will carry nothing else from it. 1

No one understood this principle more than Fielding, and he recognized that virtue must be brought forward for scrutiny in the marketplace and defended to the satisfaction of ordinary men and women.

Fielding believed that in human experience the fine lines drawn by the cleric and the philosopher become smudged and distorted. The face of virtue, itself, is often veiled by hypocrisy. With this in mind, it is possible to see a concern that runs through the range of Fielding's writing. Society, as he sees it, is long on talk and short on action, perfect stalking ground for the hypocrite. Proof that the pretender to virtue can flourish with his good name

31
incorruptible can be found in another letter to The Champion:2

At the expense of a little verbal pity...I pass for a very good-natured person: this too is attended with several good consequences; for I often, under the pretence of commiserating, take an opportunity of reviving the sense of any past misfortune, which has befallen another; or the shame of any forgotten weakness, which they have been guilty of: you already... concluded that I have a heart not too charitably disposed; and yet I am the only person of my acquaintance who will tell you that I am not the most charitable person alive; for though I never give any thing myself, yet I always abuse others for not giving more.

There is, then, no real problem in society for the moral reprobate as long as people measure the virtues of a man by his words rather than his actions. A good-nature is easily assumed by the hypocrite and as quickly cast off (in private) as soon as self-interest comes into question.3 That Fielding believed this insincerity to be a menace to social well-being can be seen in the brigade of hypocrites that marches through his novels.

Fielding believed that a claim to virtue must undergo a stricter accounting, and he labored in his writing to show that "good-nature" is more than a sentimental or cynical self-image. Instead, the key element of virtue, in his view, is action. His definition of "good-nature" is very specific on this account:

Good-nature is a delight in the happiness of mankind, and a concern at their misery, with a desire, as much as possible, to procure the former and avert the latter.4
A "good nature," then, is to be considered a means to virtuous behavior rather than an end in itself. To what extent, Fielding asks, does the aspirer to virtue avert the misery and promote the happiness of mankind. He does not exclude from this test those who think themselves virtuous because they are not actively malicious. The truly virtuous man, according to Fielding, will go out of his way to alleviate misfortune and not wait until it comes to his door. Virtue, once again, must express itself in action:

...[virtue is] a certain relative Quality, which is always busying itself without-Doors, and seems as much interested in pursuing the Good of Others as its own. 5

It must be concluded from this assertion that Fielding believed that the ultimate test of virtue was its practice of charity. If we try to abstract the characters of Fielding's "good men," we can see that all possess this quality in good measure. Fielding wanted to make it very clear that the virtuous man did not live in splendid isolation but went out of his way to provide relief for all those who legitimately needed his help. He consequently regarded charity as the necessary virtue of just government, as we shall see more clearly in another chapter. In a later chapter we shall also see how charity is used by Fielding to measure the quality of his "good men" and how he illustrates that its absence is the decisive factor in the viciousness of the "bad" characters. First, we need some understanding of his idea of
charity from a broader perspective.

Such a perspective can be gained from a survey of Fielding's miscellaneous writings. These works cover the period of Fielding's greatest productivity: his work for The Champion (1739-1740) to his editorship of The Covent-Garden Journal (1752). What emerges from a study of these various works is Fielding's constant reiteration of the theme of charity and a sense of the consistency of his philosophical and religious arguments.

Fielding's attempt to justify charity begins with his definition of man's essential, benevolent nature. Quoting Cicero, he notes that "nothing is more agreeable to the nature of man than Liberality." This liberal nature is strengthened, in Fielding's view, when man lives in a proper relation to the whole human race and recognizes that he is but one part of the social structure. He attributes this understanding to a contribution of Stoic philosophy that teaches

...every Man to suppress, as much as possible, all narrow and selfish Principles, and to consider himself only as a Part of a Whole; a Member of that political Body to which he belongs. Fielding assumes on this basis that since men are linked together by a common humanity, they should assist one another for the same reason that "the right hand [should] serve the left." By accepting this interdependence, he reasons, men no longer have any justification to pursue "private advantage" at the expense of others.
Another argument makes its appeal to the "Law of Nature." With Locke as his authority, Fielding notes that the right to property is qualified by a condition. Locke argues that this right to property is logically in effect only when the owner has gained that property through his own labor and has some capacity to enjoy and utilize it. Since a man's ability to utilize his possessions is limited to some degree, Locke reasons, there will always be something left over. To a greater or lesser degree every man will have some superfluity after his own needs have been met. Therefore, argues Fielding, it is a logical imperative that men put their superfluities to some use that will benefit others. Those who refuse to do this, in his assessment, "deserve to be considered as ROGUES AND ROBBERS OF THE PUBLIC."^\(^9\)

A more specifically Christian inducement can be found which supports many of the sentiments expressed in Barrow's "Duty and Reward."^\(^11\) In support of his claim, Fielding borrows a quotation from this sermon which describes those who are to be considered worthy objects of charity and comments on the non-exclusive nature of the charitable passion:

A good man...stints not his Benevolence to his own Family or Relations, to his Neighbours or Benefactors; to those of his own Sect or Opinion, or of his Humour and Dispositions: to such as serve him, or oblige him...but extends it to mere Strangers, towards such who never did him any good, or can ever be able to do him any. 12

At the base of Fielding's religious argument lies the...
Neo-Platonic assertion that human nature reflects, however imperfectly, God's supremely benevolent nature. Again quoting Barrow, Fielding describes God as the "best-natured being in the universe." Man's duty, then, as it is understood by Fielding, is to try to understand God's nature and attempt to emulate it.

Those who are uninterested in the "Natural Law" or unmoved by the precepts of religion can be motivated by an appeal to their desire for pleasure. Good actions, asserts Fielding, as do Barrow and Shaftesbury, convey a pleasure that is its own reward. In support of this contention, Fielding draws on another passage from "The Duty and Reward," in which Barrow explains that the pleasure to be gained from charitable acts is a "very delicious relish" to their performance. In another number of The Covent-Garden Journal (44) Fielding wonders

...what can give greater Happiness to a good Mind than the Reflexion on having relieved the Misery or contributed to the well being, of his Fellow-Creatures?

The charitable man will, then, extend his bounty to all men because they are in fact his brothers. For this reason, argues Fielding, charity is not necessarily confined to the rich. Everyone can make some contribution which will be of some help, no matter how insignificant. Some may donate their labor and skills; others may speak up on behalf of the poor to make sure that the government and those with the resources do
their duty. Those without skills, talent or resources, he adds, may help the poor "with their Prayers."  

Fielding also speculates that there are may reasons why some men are incapable of charity. Some men, he says, hate mankind and delight in the ruination of their neighbors. Similarly, he is suspicious of the Stoic disposition:

Men of this Stamp are so taken up, in contemplating themselves, that the Virtue or Vices, the Happiness or Misery of the rest of Mankind scarce ever employ their thoughts.  

The lack of charity shown by those who call themselves Christian particularly exasperates Fielding. They demand, he says, for "every little act of kindness" a double return. On one hand, they force the recipients of their bounty into "perpetual Slavery" of obligation and, on the other, because they have done a good deed, demand that heaven be opened for their ultimate reception. A truly charitable man is not concerned with the gratitude that might be received from those he has assisted. Fielding describes those who do as "Base Prostitutes [who] must be paid too."

Another excuse for not being charitable that Fielding rejects is the belief that the world is a chaos, a sink of iniquity that gives man the right to look only to himself. Such a man writes to Hercules Vinegar in The Champion. His nature, he exclaims, is so far from being inclined to doing good that he enjoys other people's misfortunes. Finishing his letter, he tells Vinegar that the next day he is going to
poison the greyhound of a man who has slighted him. To this
Fielding as Vinegar disapprovingly comments:

...though the certain existence of such sort of persons, as my correspondent, may justify us in some degree of suspicion and caution in our dealing with mankind; yet should it by no means incline us to their opinions, who have represented human nature as utterly bad and depraved: such thoughts as these can arise from no other spring than finding the seeds of such depravity in our own natures.

It is this kind of ill-nature that is corrected in human experience by Fielding's "good-nature." Good-nature, he elaborates, is a natural expression operating without "any abstract Contemplation on the Beauty of Virtue and without the Allurements or Terrors of Religion."20 In other words, charity follows a human law that possesses a validity independent of religious or metaphysical compulsions. Because man is human, Fielding is saying, he naturally feels the misery of another by imagining what a similar misery would mean if he were the one experiencing it. Thus, Fielding reasons, a man without charity is a "monster." Such men are incapable of feeling the pain of others in themselves and remain oblivious to the imperatives of either philosophy or Christianity.

Fielding also notices that these "monsters" are usually the most forward in censuring the bad behavior of others. The "good man," however, will find a reason for compassion even in those who are vicious. The "censorious," however, are pre-
disposed to pass "...Sentence on the Souls of Men with more Triumph than the Devil..."21 This predisposition to condemn is characteristic of all Fielding's villains and moral reprobates. Whereas characters such as Allworthy in Tom Jones are anxious to find mitigating circumstances and what good they can when confronted with the sins and follies of others. Forgiveness, in Fielding's view, is a crucial adjunct of charity. If you are not forgiving, you can have no hope that "your Father in Heaven, forgive your trespasses."22

Any reading of history will show, however, the extent to which private virtue is subsumed by the general triumph of "might as right." Looking at society from the wide perspective, Fielding knew that survival and self-aggrandizement offered more powerful inducements to the great mass of human beings than the love or virtue or the passion of charity. He saw that lodged inextricably in man's social nature is his sense of being himself, a separate entity that flourishes in accordance to its own tastes and needs. This dichotomy between the private and the public interest leads inevitably, thinks Fielding, to a conflict between meum and teum, the result of which inevitably places some on the top and others on the bottom of the social ladder.23 This sense of self when divorced from its just social context grows perverse and injects into the human community all the deceit and the selfishness that strangles social harmony. The isolated self, Fielding explains, turns to its "own particular and separate advantage."24 Instead
of pursuing the common good with diligence, man learns the arts of villainy and deception and aggrandizes himself at the expense of others. This capacity to scurry to the top over the bodies of fallen victims, Fielding calls, "The Art of Thriving." 25

Society, then, is not necessarily a happy institution wherein all men spring without reservation to the aid of the distressed. On the contrary, as Fielding often illustrates, society's constituent parts are often irreconcilably at war with each other. Where some members actively promote the general good, others are hard at work promoting selfish interest, heedless to the ruination and suffering they inflict on others. Unfortunately, as Fielding notes, it is often supremely difficult to identify those who are destroying social felicity as it is so easy for vicious men to hide behind a mask that presents a visage of sanctity for the world to see. 26

Similarly, from the other perspective, many of those who present themselves as worthy objects of charity may in fact be feigning misfortune in order to dupe well-intentioned but gullible good men. The problem for Fielding's "good man" is how, given the overwhelming compulsion of nature, philosophy and religion to be charitable, can he offer aid to some but deny it to others.

For Fielding the answer lies in the exercise of prudence. "Good nature," he says, "requires a distinguishing faculty"
and it is this "judgement that is perhaps the sole boundary between wisdom and folly." With this faculty the good man can spot the dissemblers who wish to impose upon his goodness and separate from the worthy objects of his charity, all the cheaters and wastrels who more properly deserve his censure.

Fielding's good man walks a thin line between the enthusiasm that his charitable passion excites and the need to guard himself against inadvertently catering to the lawlessness and indolence of social misfits. If the good man's enthusiasm remains unchecked by prudence, Fielding thinks, he will become a fool, dispensing indiscriminate charity and thus contributing to social chaos. On the other hand, an overzealous scrutiny of the merits of others, he suggests, soon leads to a mean-mindedness that will stop all charitable activities.

According to Fielding, man has the moral imperative to be charitable, but also the social responsibility to insure that his charity does not fall into undeserving hands. With Dr. Barrow as his authority, he reminds his readers that charity is to be unstintingly performed but cautions that it must be done, "according to moral estimation prudently rated." This prudence qualifies the charitable impulse, forcing men who act from the heart to pause and reflect on both their ability to help and on the demonstrable worthiness of those who solicit their charity.
We have, then, both a rationale and a prescribed course of action for the individual who wishes to be just in his social relationships. Yet, a question remains. How can the spirit of charity be put into practice by a government charged with the responsibility of promoting the welfare of all the people falling within its jurisdiction? Given the large numbers of the English poor and the complexities of eighteenth-century society, the problem appears to be beyond resolution. Fielding, however, as will be seen, did not shirk from an attempt.
CHAPTER II: NOTES

1 The Champion (January 26, 1739-40).

2 Ibid., December 11, 1739.

3 "Good-nature" is often identified in Fielding as the energizing force motivating the moral man. Yet Battestin in The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1959), p. 55, notes how "good-nature" can be confused with "promiscuous sentimentalism" on one hand and hypocrisy on the other. Battestin sees Fielding's conception of "good-nature" as being "rational, complementing pity and good judgement." Another critic, William Robert Irwin, in The Making of Jonathan Wild (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1966), p. 69, remarks that Fielding's idea of "good-nature" is not inconsistent with valid self-interest but does, in fact, encourage "private well-being."

4 The Champion, (March 27, 1740).


7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 A close reading of both Nos. 29 and 39 of The Covent-Garden Journal and Barrow's "Duty and Reward" reveals the extent to which Fielding quotes freely from Dr. Barrow on the question of charity.

12 "No. 29," The Covent-Garden Journal.

13 The Champion (March 27, 1740).

14 "No. 29," The Covent-Garden Journal.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 The Champion (December 11, 1739).
21 Ibid., p. 168.
22 Ibid., p. 164.
23 The words with which Fielding designates "yours" from "mine" in speaking about Black George's inability to see the difference. Tom Jones, III, ii.
24 Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men, p. 156.
25 Ibid. Jonathan Wild is the ultimate personification of this credo.
26 See the letter to the hypocrite discussed earlier in the chapter.
27 The Champion (March 27, 1740).
CHAPTER III

THE PROBLEM AND THE SOLUTION

Henry Fielding on the Eighteenth-Century English Poor

Toward the end of his life Fielding observed that "he who loves not his own Friends and Relations, most certainly loves no other Person."¹ This is the link between what Fielding considered private and public charity. If you will not help those you know, you are of no use to the great mass of mankind with whom you can have no acquaintance. From that base, of "charity beginning at home," it is possible to carry over love and benevolence to fellow countrymen who are, otherwise, strangers.

The problems and their solutions become much more complicated in the public arena. As will be shown in the next chapter, Fielding believed that there was much an individual could do for the benefit of deserving people. But what Fielding was after was a comprehensive scheme by which people who were thought to be irremediably poor could become self-supporting and useful to the greater society. This kind of scheme could not be left to bureaucrats or the kind of men exposed by Fielding in Amelia. He demanded of legislators the same kind of moral acumen possessed by the
"good men" of his novels.

To confront this challenge, Fielding's moral man would be obliged to focus not on the individual and the community but on England in its totality. He would need considerable knowledge of politics, the law and even economics. He must also see (and this is most difficult for the good-natured man) that there are "bad apples" in the body politic whom he should discard, without believing that all apples are rotten.

Fielding saw that the charity of a society could not be that on any individual. The motivation is the same, but the manner of execution necessarily is different. The individual may give alms to undeserving beggars and only damage a few people, but if the government is equally thoughtless, the country will be ruined. A government can distribute alms where they are genuinely needed but this, according to Fielding, is not its central concern. He sees (and here he agrees with Defoe and Mandeville) that the government must create the economic and social conditions that make government "charity" unnecessary. The quality of a society's charitableness, therefore, can be measured by the way it answers these two questions: how can society guarantee that help be given only to the deserving, and how can it enact measures to help the poor become productive and self-supporting?

Fielding was in a unique position to understand all the ramifications posed by these questions. In 1748 he was appointed justice of the peace for London's Westminster
district and was in daily contact with those who suffered most from the immediate social and economic breakdown.²

During the period of his magistracy (1748-1754), Fielding's writing reflects his preoccupation with legal problems.³ His published works are remarkable, however, because they are not narrowly legalistic but concern themselves with the larger issues inherent in the questions of criminality and social malaise. Fielding probed into the nature of social ills, looking for causes and effects, and saw ultimately that it was a defect in the social order of Britain which caused the suffering and misery of the lower orders. Gradually, he came to believe that much of the crime he saw daily in his court resulted directly from poverty and lack of opportunity.

Of considerable interest is Fielding's attitude toward the lower orders and what he believed to be their social function. It is an axiom, he argues, that society be so constructed that individuals work for the good of the whole. In support of this idea, Fielding brings Locke into the argument once again.⁴ Locke reasons that the greater the number of people who labor, the greater the production of goods and services that are useful to man. Mere numbers of people, however, are not enough. What counts is "the numbers of people, well and properly disposed."⁵ It is of critical importance, Fielding contends, that government regulate and organize society so that the maximum number of people are
contributing "some share to the strength of the whole."  

From this argument Fielding concludes that each class in the social structure has its own duties and responsibilities. To the higher classes he assigns leadership and administration. He notes that in practice a good portion of those who have the means will follow their own interests rather than burden themselves with onerous civic duties. As socially useless as this might be, Fielding refuses to condemn this practice in the wealthy. This class does not burden the public in any way or ask for government hand-outs. Unlike the wealthy, the poor have only their labor to offer.

In his Inquiry Fielding offers several explanations for the inability of the poor in his own society to fulfill their social and economic obligations. The poor, he says, have been spoiled by a "torrent of luxury" that has lately pored over England. A marked rise in the standard of living has made the pursuit of vain materialism and idle amusement a national mania. This is fine, he asserts, for those with the means to ruin themselves but dangerous for the lower orders who must confine their attentions to earning a livelihood.

In a free country like England people demand, however, the right to be as "wicked and profligate as their superiors." Expensive tastes tempt working people to live beyond their means and may lead them, out of necessity, to turn to crime:

...when this vice [living beyond one's means] descends downward to the tradesman, the mechanic
and the labourer, it is certain to engender many political mischiefs, and evidently the parent of the parent of theft and robbery... induces shame... no one feels more shame than the tradesman at his first inability to make his regular payment... then he may take to the road for "relief." 9

The lower orders are drawn to this luxury out of "voluptuousness" or love of pleasure. 10 This serves to distinguish them from their superiors, who are attracted to luxury out of vanity and love to put on the outward appearance of wealth. Like Mandeville, Fielding is able to give a love of luxury its due because it spawns the need for the goods and services which will provide work for the lower orders.

Fielding is most concerned that profitably employed tradesmen not beggar themselves by trying to live like their "betters." To this end, Fielding would discourage the "meaner" sort of person from attending ridottoes, masques and operas. A tradesman may be tempted to attend one of these functions, attracted by the low admission price, and then, bankrupt himself by hiring "dresses, masques and chairs." 11 That Fielding found this state of affairs ridiculous and dangerous can be seen in his novels. We need not wonder why Mrs. Miller is so reluctant to let her daughter Nancy go to a masquerade in Tom Jones. She notes that Nancy had been to one before and had not taken up her sewing again for a month. 12 The danger is always that a person whose circumstances have dictated that he must work for a living will neglect his work and form notions
above his station. Fielding maintains that, except for a few of the privileged, people must "sweat hard" to produce, in order to consume the fruits of the earth.  

Fielding catalogues the ruination that comes to the working classes from the "contemporary profusion" of gambling; then considers the "late increase of drunkenness" in the same manner. The effects of this vice are socially calamitous. Intoxication promotes robbery and murder. The most timid creatures, "under the influence," are capable of the most heinous crimes. Gradually, society is robbed of its vitality. If the consumption of gin continues at its present rate, Fielding speculates, "there will be few of the common people left to drink it."  

Fielding returns frequently in the Inquiry to his theme that the working classes must be spared the ravages of extravagance in order to perform the tasks society demands of them. Laborers and tradesmen must set their sights lower and be contented with the fruits their honest labor will bring.  

Behind Fielding's desire to have the lower orders working placidly "in their traces" is the fear of insurrection or, as he would put it, "mob rule." This is the ultimate nightmare for Fielding and other eighteenth-century defenders of the political status quo. For this reason, Fielding would have the political rights of the lower orders rigidly controlled and offenders against the established order summarily punished.
Like many of his contemporaries, Fielding had trouble distinguishing between what we might call the democratic impulse and what he would consider mob rule. If power was assumed by the lower orders, he believed, violence and chaos would result, inevitably. To support this contention, Fielding surveyed the history of mob rule in England and detailed the social mayhem that had ensued. Here, for example, is his exposure of the "democratic" principles espoused in the rebellion of Wat Tyler:

They [the mob] not only laid their claim to a Share in the Government, but in truth to exclude all other Estates; for this Purpose, one John Straw, or Ball, a great Orator, who was let out of Maidstone Gaol by the Mob, in his Harangues told them, that as all Men were sons of Adam, there ought to be no Distinction; and that it was their Duty to reduce all Men to perfect Equality. This they immediately set about, and to do it in the most effectual Manner, they cut off the Heads of all the Nobility, Gentry, Clergy etc., who fell into their hands. 16

Fielding's opinion of the morality and the industriousness of the lower orders is also not high. He cites the shambles made of the Gin Laws and notes how the "commonality" demolish turnpikes when they resent paying tolls. The shielding of criminals and a reluctance to help legal authorities are particularly irksome to Fielding. The lower orders hate the law, he says, but in a backhand swipe, he notes how they love to make hangings a holiday. A gentleman walking the streets has ample evidence of the scurrility of the working classes. No gentleman can walk the streets during
the day without being insulted or by night without being
knocked down. Cartmen block the streets with their wagons
and then repair to the local ale-house and "divert...[them­
selves] while [they] are drinking with the Mischief or
Inconveniences which...[their] vehicles occassion." 18

The core of Fielding's argument with the lower orders
lies in his belief that they are often an unscrupulous lot,
inefficient and willing to exert themselves only when wages
suit them. These thoughts occupy him as he is victimized
by the watermen and victualers on the way down the Thames
on his journey to Lisbon. 19 The watermen charge him exor­
bitant prices to row him ashore. They will only work, he
says, if they can have, in exchange for a few hours' rowing,
enough money to get drunk for the rest of the week.

This kind of mischief he attributes to a misapplication
of the notion of liberty. No two people, he contends, have
ever been able to agree on the meaning of the word. Because
of this, the term has come to mean "the power of doing what
we please." 20 This is clearly absurd, he argues, because
even the liberty of the freest people is restricted to some
degree by laws that regulate social behavior. But this is
not the case in England because the lower orders refuse to
accept their social funcion and their subservient role:

...the lowest class of our people having shaken off
all the shakles of their superiors, and become not
only as free, but even freer, than most of their
superiors... 21
Various laws have been passed to force the upper classes to perform their civic responsibilities. But workers, Fielding argues, would prefer to haggle over the last halfpenny rather than getting down to work. His final comment on the English worker is scornful and indignant. He pictures him as the Proverbial grasshopper, fiddling away and heedless of both his social responsibility or the coming winter:

The only one...who is possessed of absolute liberty, is the lowest member of the society, who, if he prefers hunger or the wild product of the fields, hedges, lanes, and rivers, with the indulgence of ease and laziness, to a food a little more delicate, but purchased at the expense of labour, may lay himself under a shade; nor can be forced to take the other alternative from that which he hath, I will not affirm whether wisely or foolishly, chosen.

This indolence typifies the reticence of the lower classes to pay their way in the social order. The proper response is that the government must create conditions in which the poor can find employment and, then, insist that the poor work to their full potential. Work must become a universal principle, and malingerers must be cut off from society's plenty. To promote these ends, Fielding approves of the tone and substance of a comment written by Edward VI:

There is no part...Admitted in the body that doth not work and take pains, so ought there no part of the commonwealth to be, but labour in his vocation. The gentleman ought to labour in service of his country; the servingman ought to wait diligently on his master; the artificer ought to labour in his work; the husbandman in tilling the ground; the merchant in passing the tempests; but the vagabonds
ought clearly to be banished, as is the superfluous humours of the body, that is to say, the spittle and filth; which because it is for no use, it is put out by the strength of nature. 23

The real object of the Poor Laws is not to give hand-outs to the undeserving but to break the chain leading from one generation to another, the chain that determines that children will be raised "in laziness and beggary." 24 The highest end of charity, then, is to find employment for the indigent:

...for though he who gives to any in want does well, yet he who employes and educates the poor, so as to render them useful to the public does better. 25

This ideal, however, is far from the practice of Fielding's time, and he lays the blame for this at the door of the Poor Laws. Parishes would rather give hand-outs than find jobs for the poor. As a consequence, the poor no longer try to support themselves. For their pains, the authorities are ridiculed by that portion of society they are charged to help:

"Hang Sorrow, cast away Care;/ The Parish is bound to find us." 26

How is it possible, questions Fielding, that in a country where the poor are "more liberally provided for than in any part of the habitable globe," there are more beggars and more poverty than can be seen anywhere in Europe. 27 The solution for this state of affairs is obvious to Fielding: enforce what is good in the existing Poor Laws, and legislate new measures based on a more realistic appraisal of social conditions. He begins by defining the poor in the most

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general terms as
such persons as have no estate of their own to support them, without industry; nor any profession or trade, by which, with industry, they may be capable of gaining a comfortable subsistence. 28

He then considers this class under three divisions: those who are unable to work; those who are able and willing to work, and those who are able but unwilling to work. 29 The numbers of the first group in any society will be relatively small. All those of the London poor who are incapable of working because of some physical incapacity might be contained in two London hospitals. 30 Fielding charges that those who object to this assertion by citing the vast horde of the blind and lame begging in the London streets are mistaken.

Many of these pitiful sights are frauds:

Nothing...is more common among these wretches, than for the lame, when provoked, to use their crutches as weapons instead of supports; and for the blind, if they should hear the beadle at their heels, to out-run the dogs which guided them before. 31

Fielding maintains that only a few of the poor are incapacitated through disease: "health is the happy portion of poverty." 32

It would be a simple matter for the poor of this first class to be provided for, according to Fielding. The need to exercise charity toward them is so obvious, he maintains, that the matter is beyond dispute. This class (called by Fielding the "impotent poor") can be maintained by the natural benevolence of the people. It is not necessary, he
thinks, to legislate this kind of charity. But it is important for people to be able to identify those who deserve it and separate from their ranks those who impersonate some incapacity or distress. The problem in dealing with the "impotent poor," in Fielding's opinion, is that good-natured people are so easily duped by any display of distress. On the other hand, those who have been duped will often hold back their charity because they are unsure of the legitimacy of the supplicant.

Those who fall into the second category are in a worse position than that of the handicapped. Unlike the blind and the infirm, these people have no visible affliction with which to stir the benevolence of those who can help them. Fielding argues that these people must have the particular care of politicians who can devise and administer the schemes that will give them useful employment.

The final category, those able to work but unwilling, is by far the most numerous class of the poor, according to Fielding. The legislation is there, he says, to compel the poor to accept employment when it is offered to them. If work can not be found, then Fielding would have these people sent to a workhouse, or failing that, charged with vagrancy.

Added to these categories are a fourth and fifth which include almost exclusively the middle and upper classes. Fielding maintains that the middle and upper classes have a kind of "divine right" to prosperity and that society should
be prepared to guarantee their financial solvency. He defends this proposition by claiming that those bred to a life of ease are constitutionally unsuited for any other kind of life. For this reason, he designates the following as deserving charity. First, he would give charity to those who have been bred to a genteel life but have been reduced to poverty because they have ruined themselves by foolishly trying to live the life of their wealthy superiors. Secondly, he would apply charity to people who have been refused public offices and military commissions because they are the relations of people who have opposed the tyranny of some government minister. In a third category he would place people who have been bred to a life of ease and luxury but have fallen into poverty because of "misfortunes and unavoidable accidents..."

The final category would include all those who have given their lives to some art or science but have never received reward or sustenance because people have been too envious or ill-natured to acknowledge their achievement.

People who have been ruined by debt also deserve special consideration, according to Fielding. The problem is the viciousness and absurdity of the present laws which permit creditors to hound a debtor until he is utterly broken and locked in prison. Fielding's indignation at this state of affairs is obvious:

...[debtors are] snatched away from their poor families, from the little comforts of the conver-
sation of their relations and acquaintance, from a possibility of employing their faculties for the service of themselves, their wives and their children, from the benefit of the wholesome air in common with the brute creation; stript of all the poor, little supports of wretchedness, and even that last and greatest, hope itself, and carried to dungeons where no conveniency of life is to be had, where even the necessaries of it are dearer than the conveniences elsewhere, where they are confined together with the vilest of criminals, who are indeed much happier, as a judge is shortly to deliver them either to liberty, or, what is better than their dungeon, to the gallows. 35

Fielding notes that there are more people in gaol for debt in England than there are in all of Europe. This is an evil, he says, on two counts. First, it is a burden to the community because a man must be incarcerated at public expense without the public ever gaining recompense. Secondly, it is inhumane and unchristian for a people to inflict such misery as a matter of public policy. The motivating factor behind arrest for debt, he contends, is revenge because the persecutor often has no hope of getting any of his money back. This is very far from the charitable sentiment: he who will not forgive trespasses, "so surely will his Father in heaven deny to forgive him his." 36

How Fielding would help debtors and members of the higher classes who have fallen on hard times is problematical. He counsels a charitable attitude toward them and implies that they deserve the sympathy and material support of relatives, friends and neighbors. Whether this charity can be instit-
utionalized and provided by the government is a different question. Fielding does say that he would set up a fund raised by selling off the estates and legacies of those who have robbed the public. In this category he would include the following:

...all estates which have been gotten by plunder, cheating, or extortion which would include most prime ministers, scriveners, pawnbrokers, stock-jobbers and petty attorneys...37

Given the ironic tone of much of the writing in The Champion, it is difficult to know whether Fielding is being practical or polemical. In the writing done during his magistracy, there is no mention of setting up such a fund. Given the impossibility of determining which estates are illegally possessed and the power of those who possess them, it seems that Fielding is making a sound point but offering a fanciful solution.

At this stage of the argument, Fielding has made a provision for the impotent poor, debtors and indigent members of the upper and middle classes. Left for consideration is the "Gordion Knot" presented by those who are willing to work but can not find work and, more importantly, by those who can work but refuse to do so. When these two groups are productively employed, Fielding believes, poverty and the social disturbance that ensue from it will substantially diminish.

The first step in making some provision for the unemployed poor is to distinguish between the "incorrigibly idle" and the
genuinely unemployed. "Incorrigibly idle," to Fielding are all the beggars, vagrants and petty criminals who swell the welfare rolls of the parishes. He would immediately subject this class to the most vigorous attention of the law in order to demonstrate that the government will not tolerate or support people who will not work. He recommends that such people be sent to a "Bridewell" (house of correction) and be put to hard labor. "Labour," he argues, "is the true and proper punishment for idleness." The problem, however, is that the houses of correction are unsuited to this task being, in his view, schools of crime turning those who are socially delinquent into crafty, potentially violent criminals. Officials who can be charged with the responsibility of seeking out idle, vagrant and disorderly persons are difficult to find and when found are not often forward in pursuing their duty. It is difficult, Fielding says, to get a gentleman to attend court when members of the incorrigible poor are to be examined and sentenced because "the stench arising from the prisoners is so intolerable."

Fielding believes that many of the problems under discussion can not be solved unless they are confronted in a coherent, coordinated manner. It is for this reason that he creates his Proposal. This pamphlet is a massive, detailed account of how Fielding, if he were to have the authority, would attack the problem of the urban poor. It is Fielding's
ultimate statement on public charity. The work is intrinsically untheoretical. Fielding by this time felt that he had the insight and the practical experience to deal with the problem of poverty directly and efficiently without either malice or sentimentality. He had no illusions about poverty or the crime that emerged from it. He was tired of seeing its effects in his courtroom and, like many of his contemporaries annoyed at the lack of progress made toward some comprehensive solution. What bothered him most was the toll of human suffering that generations of abject poverty had inflicted on the English lower orders. He wonders in the preamble to the Proposal how members of a nominally Christian country can tolerate misery when it stands in such marked contrast to the general prosperity of the country:

If we were to make a progress through the outskirts of this town, and look into the habitations of the poor, we should there behold such pictures of human misery as must move the compassion of every heart that deserves the name of human. What, indeed, must be his composition who could see whole families in want of every necessary of life, oppressed with hunger, cold, nakedness, and filth; and with diseases, the certain consequences of all these...what, I say, must be his composition who could look into such a scene as this, and be affected only in his nostrils. 41

Many of the people, he argues, who are in a position to help the poor are removed from scenes of wretchedness. The suffering of the poor is little known, says Fielding, because "they starve, and freeze and rot among themselves." 42 This is not, however, the case with the misdeeds of the poor.
is conspicuously public. It is difficult, then, to distinguish the deserving poor from the hordes of beggars, vagabonds and thieves that swarm through the country lanes and urban streets of England. Even a "prudent" man would have difficulty separating the worthy from the unworthy. For this reason, people, according to Fielding, tend to see the poor not as individual victims of social and economic malaise but as criminals, shirkers and idlers.

Fielding disputes those who feel that poverty is an inveterate defect in human society and that no cure exists for it in "the art of physic." He acknowledges their frustration and admits that his own proposal may fall short of the ultimate solution, but he feels a start must be made. That Fielding sacrificed most of what was left of his health in writing the Proposal attests to his conviction that the issue was of paramount and pressing concern.

With his Proposal Fielding attempts to correct many of the mistakes inherent in the past execution of the Poor Laws and offers new measures to insure that the poor will contribute their share to the economic well-being of the nation. The main feature of this pamphlet is its specificity; nothing is left to the imagination of Fielding's readers. His plan is to build a workhouse in the county of Middlesex and use it as a prototype for the construction of similar structures throughout the kingdom. As indicated in Chapter I, the workhouse was
an established reality in Fielding's time. What is original in Fielding's conception is his careful elucidation of how the workhouse can be run efficiently and humanely for the benefit of the poor and the greater society.

So, Fielding's proposal calls for the establishment of an institution consisting of two separate but interdependent facilities: a workhouse and a house of correction. Admission to either one of these institutions is to be involuntary. Beggars, vagrants and the idle would be sent (on order of a magistrate or country official) to the workhouse and released only when they had proof of employment outside and had given proof of good character. Unemployed people could seek voluntary admission to the workhouse and be released when conditions for their trade or labor improved. Fielding envisions the "house of correction" as a place where incorrigible vagrants and petty criminals could be "taught" the virtue of hard work. It would also be there to receive discipline problems from the workhouse. It is important to note that all inmates of both houses are to be locked in at night even those who voluntarily enter the workhouse. Fielding does not want the inmates rambling about at night adding to the population of thieves and beggars already in the streets.

The central function of Fielding's workhouse would be to provide employment in difficult times for workers who would normally have to resort to begging. Once this aim was
accomplished, vagrancy, beggary and prostitution would substantially decrease. Furthermore, the mere existence of a country workhouse which the impoverished are compelled to enter will keep many of the poor out of London. Half the poor in London, Fielding claims, do not properly belong there.47

An additional feature of the workhouse would be that new skills could be taught the poor by experienced craftsmen. Workers could improve their chances of employment by widening their abilities. Children could learn marketable skills that would keep them off the streets.

The main targets of Fielding's proposal, however, are the vagabonds and beggars that roam the country-side. Only by halting the wandering of the poor through several jurisdictions could they be helped. To this end, Fielding cites the existing laws that prevent people from moving outside their lawful habitation and suggests that they be strictly enforced.48

Fielding anticipates an objection from those who will complain that a vigorous application of the vagrancy laws damages the liberty of the lower orders, turning the country into a de facto prison for the poor. This claim Fielding dismisses with a contemptuous wave of the hand. The argument "is the natural consequence of licentiousness."49 If you let the lower orders do exactly as they please, he argues, all the evils of social disorder will come to the surface. The
lower orders may be made "free," he says, but it will be the freedom to get drunk and to wander. The consequence of this freedom will be inevitably, "Begging, stealing, robbing... or cutting throats."  

Fielding, then, had no compunction about depriving people of their liberty by confining them to his workhouse. But he wanted the poor to see that the workhouse offered them the best chance for gainful employment during hard times. To this end, he suggests that people sent to the workhouse, even on the direction of a magistrate, should not have their character stigmatized. His county-house should not be looked upon as a "place of infamy" but as an "asylum for the industrious... to fly for protection." Fielding advises, however, that people who are reprobate or have criminal tendencies should never be sent to his workhouse where they would contaminate the industrious. Although this was normal practice in existing institutions of this type, Fielding wants to insure that it will not happen in his.

Fielding sees size as a critical factor in determining whether his workhouse experiment will succeed or fail. He designs his workhouse to accommodate all the poor of Middlesex county. For this reason he wants to shift the responsibility for poverty programs away from the parish to the county. The parish is too small, in his view, to provide either the funds or the administrators capable of carrying out a difficult
and demanding task. By bringing all the poor of a county together one could focus all efforts for their relief and employment in a single area. There is not much difference, he argues, between supervising a small group and a large group if the institution can be run in "regularity and order." In addition, only the larger institutions can attract the financial support to hire qualified and experienced administrators and teachers.

Under current conditions most workhouses or "idle houses," as Fielding calls them, fail because they are too small to carry out the manufacturing that might incorporate the diverse talents and skills of a cross-section of the poor. This is particularly true, Fielding contends, when it is considered that the population of the workhouse would be constantly changing. In a large institution there will always be people with skill in every type of manufacturing. With a work force guaranteed, manufacturing can be established on a permanent and thus more efficient basis.

More fundamentally, it is better to band the poor together into larger bodies because they can be more cheaply provided for than by spreading them out in smaller, isolated institutions. In the larger institutions the poor can be confined in more salutary surroundings; no longer need the poor be turned out into the streets to get them away from the unhealthy environment of the parish workhouses.
But Fielding recognizes that no matter how good his plan is, it will fail in execution if it is not justly and ably administrated. He is anxious, therefore, that the dual evils of incompetence and veniality that ruined other workhouse experiments should not ruin his. To this end, he carefully elaborates on the duties and responsibilities of administrative and custodial officials. Three commissioners are to be accountable for the operation of his county-house. They are to meet at specific times of the year to go over accounts, address problems and make provision for the future. To combat corruption and incompetence, the commissioners are to make a report to a committee of the House of Commons on a regular basis. The officers who are actually to operate the institution are to be paid a specified salary, which makes the employment professional rather than leaving it to well-meaning but incompetent managers on one hand, or corrupt, brutal men on the other.

Acknowledging that successful operation of such an institution requires special judgement and expertise, Fielding pays careful attention to the duties of the chief executive officer, the governor. Fielding's "job description" of this position gives an idea of the enormous and difficult responsibilities:

He shall...have full power to exercise and carry on, in either of the said houses, any such manufacture, trade or mystery as may be lawfully exercised and carried on within this kingdom...
Since workers are to be paid for their work, it would be important to have a very careful accounting of their service or wares. All food and other materials needed by either house, all wages paid to workers or to workhouse officials are to be carefully recorded and periodically checked by the governor, as a guard against fraud. "Human nature without proper checks," Fielding notes, is "far too liable to this vice." 59

In Fielding's plan, a just and efficient administration mirrors a harmonious, humane and productive regimen for the inmates. With the disorder and filth of other workhouses in mind, Fielding envisions the working areas and lodgings of the inmates as functional but in all respects, orderly:

The lodging-rooms of the country-house shall be furnished with beds, allowing one bed to two persons; one large joint-stool, and two small ones, for each bed. The working-rooms of the said house shall be provided with all kinds of implements and tools, for carrying on such manufactures as shall from time to time be introduced... 60

Note, however, the difference in tone and substance set by Fielding when speaking of the "house of correction":

The lodging-rooms...shall be furnished with a coverlet and blankets for the prisoners, and matting to lie on; and the working-rooms shall be provided with implements for beating hemp, chopping rags and for other of the hardest and vilest labour. 61

The daily routine in the workhouse is considered and well-ordered, again with the intention of developing good work habits. 62 A bell is to be rung throughout the house at
four in the morning. Prayers are to begin at five, followed by a "short lecture or exhortation of morality." The working day is to begin at six in the morning and go till nine. After an hour break, work continues until one o'clock in the afternoon, followed by another hour break. Work then resumes until six in the evening. At seven prayers are to be read in the chapel. On Thursdays, two hours in the afternoon are to be spent in any manner which the inmates see fit. There is to be no labor on any of the many statutory holidays throughout the year. Included in his plan is a provision for the exercise and recreation of the inmates. They may refresh themselves in the inclosed ground, contiguous to the said house, in the presence of two at least of the keepers and under-keepers, particularly on Sundays and on every Thursday of the year, when two hours labour shall be remitted for that purpose. 63

With this routine and in these healthy surroundings, the poor should begin to reorder their own lives toward happy productivity. 64 This can be aided, in his view, by a system of rewards and punishments. On the one hand, he would reward industry ("moderately and judiciously"); on the other, he would insist upon "a very gentle inflection of punishment for idleness." 65 In this way the idleness and despair of the poor will be modified.

Even more important in the modification of behavior for Fielding is religious instruction. Only religious teaching will correct and amend the morals of the inmates, who finally
will be let loose on the public. But the ultimate aim of this instuction, he argues, is to hold the lower orders in awe of legal authority: "whosoever resisteth authority resisteth the ordinance of God." 

A note is struck here that echoes what is expressed by Fielding in *Amelia*. Those without religion have no conception of heaven or hell and therefore no concept of hope or fear which can inspire them to obedience or morality. No one would leave Fielding's workhouse without that knowledge.

In that exhortation on the value of religious instruction, we confront Fielding's essential conservatism. He would have the lower orders kept in continual awe of the power of the magistrate and the terror of religion. The lower orders are not to forget their subservient role or to dally with false notions of liberty. Fielding's *Proposal* leaves no doubt that the deserving as well as the undeserving poor are to be led to social productivity by force if necessary. Even voluntary entrants to his workhouse are to be kept locked up at night and released only when the authorities deem them ready to work. It is questionable how many people would voluntarily accept this incarceration "for their own good." A comfortable lodging room and a chance for honest labor does not alter the fact the Fielding's workhouse would be a kind of prison.

Although there are many checks to guard against corrupt administration, there is a large assumption of managerial
reliability inherent in Fielding's plan. He assumes that the administrators can establish the kinds of manufacuture which will be economically feasible in such a way that workers can be paid for their labor and that a certain percentage of those wages can be used for the maintenance of the institution.

Given the realities of other workhouse experiments, Fielding's plan would seem to be doomed. Since most of his potential inmates would be unskilled, they would be able to perform only those kinds of labor which were already available on the labor market. By employing some (the inmates of the workhouse), he would beggar, as Defoe warned, those already profitably employed. His belief that teachers could teach laborers new skills seems a little optimistic. But it must be remembered, that the workhouse experiment was still in its infancy. Fielding was not the only man of his time to believe that these institutions could be made to work. Finally, he himself agreed that many would see his Proposal as unworkable and refuse to help make it work. If Fielding had lived to expedite his proposal personally, he might well have made it a success.
CHAPTER III NOTES

1 "No. 44" (Tuesday, June 2, 1752), The Covent-Garden Journal.

2 Appointed magistrate for all Middlesex in 1749.

3 The two principal works written by Fielding during this period are "An Inquiry into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers, etc.," Works (1903), Legal Writings, ed. W.E. Henley (Rpt. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967), Vol. XV. The second work A Proposal for Making an Effectual Provision for the Poor, etc., is from the same edition of Henley's Works. All subsequent references to these works refer to this edition.


5 Ibid., p. 136.

6 Ibid.

7 Inquiry, p. 21.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., p. 22.

10 Ibid., p. 23.

11 Ibid.

12 Tom Jones, XIII, vi.


14 Ibid. p. 37.

15 See The Covent-Garden Journal, "No. 47" (Saturday, June 13, 1752) and "No. 49" (Saturday, June 20, 1752).

16 Ibid., "No. 47."

17 Ibid., "No. 49."

18 Ibid.

20 Ibid., p. 239.

21 Ibid., p. 240.


24 Inquiry, p. 48.

25 Ibid.

26 "No. 49," The Covent-Garden Journal.

27 Inquiry, p. 45.

28 Ibid., p. 56.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., p. 57.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Fielding discusses these classes in The Champion February 16, 1739-40 and February 19, 1739-40.

34 Fielding included the families of impoverished clergymen in this list. He hopes that some provision can be made for these people but he does not specify how this could be done. See Tom Jones, IV, xiv, p. 205.

35 The Champion (February 16, 1739-40).

36 Ibid. (February 19, 1739-40).

37 Ibid., (February 16, 1739-40).

38 Inquiry, p. 73.

39 Ibid., pp. 72-75.

40 Ibid., p. 73.
41 Proposal, p. 141.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., p. 142.
44 At the time of publication of the Proposal (1754), Fielding knew he was dying. Ibid., p. 144.
46 Ibid., p. 171.
48 Ibid., pp. 180, 181.
49 Ibid., p. 181.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., p. 182.
52 To distinguish between those who have been confined to the workhouse because they have committed some crime and those who have voluntarily entered, Fielding recommends that the "guilty" wear a badge. Ibid.
53 Ibid., p. 174.
54 Ibid., p. 173.
55 Ibid., p. 172.
56 Fielding computes the cost for building his workhouse at 100,000 pounds. This sum, he says, could be raised by a public subscription, each rate payer in Middlesex contributing 20 pounds. Since he believes his workhouse will largely remove the need for an annual Poor Rate, he is confident that people will willingly subscribe. Fielding speculates that after a few years of operation the workhouse will be self-sufficient and may even realize a profit.
57 Ibid., pp. 157, 162, 167, 179.
58 Ibid., p. 147.
59 Ibid., p. 182.
60 Ibid., p. 146. The sexes (except for families) are to be kept separate.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid., pp. 154, 155.

63 Ibid., p. 155.

64 Ibid., p. 188.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid., p. 184.

67 Ibid., p. 186.
CHAPTER IV

CHARITY IN THE NOVELS

The Challenge of the Ideal

Fielding as social reformer and magistrate is often obscured by the reputation he enjoys as a supremely gifted comic novelist. This is how he is remembered and largely how he is studied. Fielding's contemporaries, nurtured on Joseph Andrews, Jonathan Wild and Tom Jones, resented the apparent intrusion of the dispiriting, reform-minded Fielding who darkened the pages of Amelia. They felt betrayed in the same way modern readers do when they fail to find in Amelia another Tom Jones. Instead there is the dark prison cell and the hopelessness of poverty. Fielding was a truth-teller. In Amelia the "man of letters" and the reformer meet, and few men of his time could match either his experience or his ability to disseminate new ideas.

At first glance, the gulf between Amelia and the first three novels seems enormous. It is as if we are dealing with a new man, one who has abandoned the roistering exuberance which shines through the earlier novels. Having even less in common with the writer of the earlier novels, apparently, is the author of the Proposal and the Inquiry. But looking at
the totality of Fielding's work, we can see a man of diverse talents, interests and energies. It is dangerous to stereotype him, either as comic novelist or muckracking reformer. Both strains follow him through his career, finding different outlets and expression. In the earlier novels, Fielding largely satirized individuals, but he shifted the emphasis in *Amelia* to institutions. For many readers, this was a political act, one which threatened their rosy perception of a world which economically and politically was good for them.

It is Fielding's idea of charity, including the belief that the charitable sentiment originates in the simple desire to wish the good for others, that informs and unifies all of his published writing. Throughout he is remarkably consistent in assessing human possibility and social responsibility and determining how individuals and institutions respond to the challenge imposed by economic and spiritual poverty. We find, then, in all the novels the same concern with human distress that obsessed Fielding to the end of his life.

That Fielding was concerned with the lower classes at all is remarkable given the standard literary preoccupations of his day. Many of his genteel readers, it seems, did not want to read about gamekeepers, beggars and failed highwaymen. This is precisely the kind of attitude that Fielding wanted to expose. He saw that the upper classes had much to learn from what was best in the lower. In the same token, the lower
classes could emulate what was best in the rich. He believed that the virtues and defects of one class are mirrored by the other. Affectation, for example, in the upper class is made ridiculous when it is viewed within the context of the simplicity of the lower class. Rudeness and barbarity become more glaring when placed beside the ruling politesse of the upper. To the upper classes Fielding assigned refinement, elegance and liberality of spirits; while to the lower he delegated plainness, honesty and sincerity.¹

Who, then, are the poor in Fielding's novels? They are not a conspicuous presence in any of his first three novels. The fourth, Amelia, may be considered a special case because there the poverty experienced by Booth and his family is a temporary aberration in their lives. Fielding leaves little doubt that prosperity will come inevitably after the twists and turns of the plot. The comic sensibility of his novels will not allow for a heavy inundation of scenes of grinding poverty. Conditions of distress that could be seen in real life by anyone who cared to look would not find a forceful and uncompromising admittance into popular literature until Charles Dickens wrote nearly a century later. Instead, for the most part, poverty can be found in Fielding's novels as a potential obstacle to be overcome on the road to happiness. For practical purposes, Tom's real problem on being expelled from Mr. Allworthy's house is the fact that he is penniless and will eventually
have to find some way of supporting himself. Fielding does not, however, dwell on this difficulty, focusing instead on the problem of reconciling Tom to Sophia.

Fielding's heroes are essentially middle and upper class, and their problem is not so much in getting the next meal but finding some way of restoring themselves to their former prosperity. Even the lower class Joseph Andrews has his fortunes inextricably linked with the wealthy Boobys. Instead of this, Fielding's characters who have fallen away from prosperity need the help of others on their journey back. For Fielding, those people who have savored prosperity deserve the special consideration of society because they are the least fit to fend for themselves.

There are genuinely poor people in the novels. One thinks immediately of the Andersons and the Seagrims in Tom Jones. Fielding spares no pains to draw their plight with frank and brutal clarity.\(^2\) The scenes of distress of the wretched inmates of Newgate at the beginning of Amelia are sufficiently horrifying to linger throughout the rest of the novel. Fielding does not spare the squeamish feelings of his largely well-to-do readership when he wants to make a point. His overview in the novels may be comic, showing that all will work out for the best, but he is not reluctant to show that there are people in society who suffer disproportionately on the road to happiness.
The reason for this suffering can be perceived clearly by establishing Fielding's social overview. Fielding's England was experiencing a crisis of leadership which made the pressing need for political and legal reform virtually impossible to satisfy. These matters come to a head in *Amelia*, where Fielding obviously despairs of a solution. There are powerful forces operating in society that overwhelm even the most intelligent and good-natured souls.

Fielding believed that these forces can not be eradicated any more than human nature can be changed. Greed, malice and self-seeking will always infect the human community, and some people will always be victimized. Still, it is wrong, thought Fielding, to give up and give in to the law of the jungle. Fielding's legal mind tells him that law reform is essential, so that the social calamities that man is subject to can be minimized. In his own time, he felt, the law was defective and through its loopholes the powerful flourished and the helpless suffered.

*Amelia* represents Fielding's attempt to dramatize this defect in what he refers to as the "British Constitution." For this he follows the life of Captain Booth and his wife Amelia and shows how they are buffeted by the social evils brought about by a breakdown in the constitution. The scenes in the novel vary from prison rooms to the anterooms of politically powerful aristocrats. But everywhere the Booths find either indifference or active malevolence. In their
powerlessness can be seen the plight of the poor everywhere, victims of government mismanagement and individual callousness.

The full magnitude of the problem can be seen in the opening chapters of *Amelia*. In the hideous corruption and stupidity of Justice Thrasher we see a metaphor for all the mindless forces that oppress the disadvantaged. Thrasher makes his decisions on the basis of dress and evidence of gentility. Fielding tells us that the magistrate has "too great an honour for Truth to suspect that she ever appeared in sordid apparel."³

In the wretched conditions at Newgate Prison and the haphazard distribution of Thrasher's "justice," the basic maliciousness of the law is self-evident. In one doleful scene,⁴ Booth sees a young woman in rags sitting on the ground, supporting the head of her dying father. The daughter's crime, Booth learns, is theft of a loaf of bread. Taking the loaf home to feed her father she is arrested, and her father is charged as a "receiver of stolen goods." Another man committed by Thrasher is a former soldier who has lost his leg in the siege of Gibraltar. While waiting for admission to Chelsea hospital, he is arrested for stealing three herrings. After spending several months in jail, he is acquitted. Unfortunately, the man can not pay the fees for his stay in prison and can not be released
Life, then, as Fielding illustrates in *Amelia*, is basically unfair. A man walking late at night is arrested when he intervenes in an assault on a night watchman. A young girl on an important mission is arrested on a charge of prostitution. A loaf of bread is considered, under the law, more important than human life. A soldier wounded in the service of his country is treated like a common criminal because he is indigent. Yet because it is so easy for those with guile and money to circumvent the law, real criminals are left in society to do their worst. Such a "Kafkaesque" situation hardly augurs comedy, but Fielding is merely setting a tone which will establish his belief that something is dreadfully wrong in the social order that can not be easily remedied by good intentions.

This situation is hardly unique to *Amelia*. *Joseph Andrews* has its lawyer Scout, who is prepared to prosecute Joseph and Fanny on the trumped-up charge of destroying property. Joseph is not to stand in the way of the rich and powerful Lady Booby. Scout tells her that "The Laws of this Land are not so vulgar, to permit a mean Fellow to contend with one of your Ladyship's Fortune." In an earlier episode, when the tattered Adams is brought before a justice with Fanny and Joseph on a charge of highway robbery, the clerk of the court is busy writing up the sentence before the charge is
even read. After it is learned that Adams is a clergyman and an acquaintance of Lady Booby, the charge is dropped. "Nobody," says this justice, "can say I have committed a Gentleman since I have been in the Commission."\(^6\) This state of affairs in one of Fielding's overtly comic efforts underscores his belief that the poor are essentially at the mercy of the courts.

It is not surprising to find in Fielding's novels his indignation over arrest and incarceration for debt. In Jonathan Wild Heartfree is hounded by his creditors and left to rot in a debtor's prison. With greater fury Fielding takes up the subject once again in Amelia. Here he suggests that arrest for debt is permitted because of the popular belief that business can not function unless the law provides some punishment for defaulters. The keeper of the "sponging-house," Bondum, clearly articulates this argument. Arrest for debt is constitutional, he says, and "is the way of business."\(^7\) The gist of his argument is that liberty is one thing and business quite another. Liberty is fine, he maintains, but depriving men of their freedom because they are debtors is consistent with the overriding imperative of business. Fielding's sense of justice tells him that this logic is faulty and dangerous. Although Fielding is no anarchist, and never advises that reneging on debts is appropriate social behavior, he is concerned that, where debt is concerned, the law has lost its perspective.
It is, of course, the poor who suffer for this defect. Once in custody, they are further abandoned by the law. Conditions in sponging-houses like the one operated by Bondum in Amelia are unregulated, and inmates have to rely on the particular mercy of their keepers. Bondum's house and his scurrility are typical. Food and refreshment, writing paper, private accommodation, even respectful treatment are for sale. Naturally, a penniless man without friends could expect a speedy removal to Newgate.

In Amelia Fielding takes the opportunity to condemn petty officials who extort the last farthing from the needy. In the words of Dr. Harrison, he offers the remark that instead of feeding such men from "the pockets of the poor and wretched," the law should punish them severely for their brutality. Such men might be performing "a necessary evil" for society, but they should be closely watched, thinks Dr. Harrison. They are "generally the worst of men who undertake [these jobs and]...their office concerns...those poor creatures who can not do themselves justice."

It is important to remember that the Fielding, who calls for the rigorous prosecution of vagrants and beggars, is also able to see the other side of the question. The poor and helpless in society need the protection that the law can offer. But, as Fielding relates, the laws are enforced for the benefit of those who need them least.
Consider the scenes at Newgate prison in *Amelia*: society turns a blind eye, and both the innocent and guilty suffer. No apparatus exists to aid those from the higher classes who have fallen into distress. Without the proper care of the law, Fielding is saying, the poor will languish, and men of merit without influence fall silently to the politics of ruthless and cynical power brokers.

We noted earlier that Fielding assigns to the upper classes the role of stewardship for the lower. That he found little evidence of this in his own society is reflected in the novels. *Jonathan Wild* represents his attempt to embody in one paradigmatic figure the psychology and rationale of self-serving politicians who are charged with maintaining the public good. Fielding loathed political corruption and fought its every manifestation. He was not so much concerned that a few individuals had grown rich and powerful by their chicanery as he was with the fact that society suffered so badly as a consequence. He believed that society needed strong and righteous leadership in order to insure the protection and well-being of all its citizens. As previously noted, Fielding contended that individuals within society must suppress their selfish interests and consider the good of the whole. If political leaders set a conspicuously bad example, there would be little hope for assuming that private citizens would not follow their own particular advantage.
When private aggrandizement becomes a reigning principle, the weak and defenceless are at the mercy of anyone who can exploit them for his or her own ends. This is the social condition that Fielding presents in *Jonathan Wild*.

Wild is like all "great" men who hold power over society and use their office to satisfy their greed of vanity at the expense of the public good. Although Wild is comically caricatured in the novel, we can easily translate the exaggeration into Fielding's exasperation at the antics of those who insinuate themselves into the fabric of society and then set to work to destroy it.

Wild is a social menace because he rejects the idea that he should work for the benefit of the whole. Instead, he contrives by malice and cunning to force the whole to work for his benefit. This policy is justified by Wild's claim that as leader of a gang (or prime minister or political lord), he is no ordinary "worker" and needs special consideration to compensate him for his mental travails. It is only just, he thinks, for great men like himself to live parasitically off the labor of others:

...the ploughman, the shepherd, the weaver, the builder and the soldier work not for themselves but others--they are contented with a poor pittance (the labourer's hire) and permit us the Great to enjoy the fruits of their labors. 10

The practical consequences of this doctrine are socially devastating. Those who actually contribute to social well-
being languish on "poor pittance" while the rich and powerful expropriate the cream for their own use.

The lesson taught by Jonathan Wild is that society can be destroyed from within when the pursuit of money and power takes on the intensity of a religious enthusiasm. That Wild, a high priest of this religion, is finally defeated is more a statement of Fielding's optimism and comic spirit than a reflection of a social reality. The Wilds of this world, Fielding would have to agree, often get their way.

The truth of the novel is self-evident: the social order has been subverted, and the worst kind of men are in charge. It would not be so bad if those at the top enjoyed their plunder and allowed others to enjoy what they could. The real problem is that those at the top treat the great mass of men as if they are their slaves. The irony in all this is that the "slaves" are the people who perform the labor that is of real benefit to mankind. The reward for this useful work is the contempt of those who disproportionately profit by it. Wild expresses this principle as if it were a law of nature:

> The low, mean, useful part of mankind are born slaves to the wills of their superiors, and are indeed as much their property as their cattle. It is well said of us, the higher order of mortals, that we are born not only to devour the fruits of the earth; and it may be as well said of the lower class that they are born only to produce them for us. 11

This is not to suggest that Fielding believed that there is something wrong with employing others to work for you.
Instead, we find in Jonathan Wild a vision of the social order that Fielding tries to realize in his legal writings: "hands...[must be] employed for the use of community."

Yeoman farmers employ others to produce the fruits of the earth necessary to sustain the community. Similarly, manufacturers may do good not only by supporting their workers but also by producing goods that offer "the conveniences... [and the] necessaries of life" that are needed by all classes of people.

Another, the merchant, may take the redundancies produced and export them so each country of the world may enjoy the "fruits of the whole earth." To the gentleman, Fielding assigns a managerial role:

...by employing hands [the gentleman]...like-wise [helps] to embellish his country with the improvement of arts and sciences, with the making and executing good and wholesome laws for the preservation of property and the distribution of justice, and in several other manners useful to society.

Such a community spirit is not much in evidence in Jonathan Wild. In Wild's assertion that the "useful part" of mankind are the slaves of their superiors, Fielding sees the seeds of social chaos. If the influence of gentlemen who have the sense to regulate society and look after its "useful" members is lost, then society is at the mercy of those who see the lower classes as disposable means to their own selfish ends. In such a jungle the superior men are like Jonathan Wild, able manipulators and power-brokers but
poor leaders and hardly contributors to the common good.

In Fielding's view this callous disregard for inferiors penetrates all ranks of society. The missing element in all social relationships in which no material advantage can be gained is charity. Not only are people incapable of seeing others as members of the same species, they are also incapable of extending a helping hand where it is needed. It is not only the Jonathan Wilds and the political lords of *Amelia* who share this temperament. The lack of charity is, on the whole, the real obstacle to be overcome by the comic spirit in the novels. As shown by Fielding, this barrier is formidable.

This deficiency is most glaring when it is found in clergymen who, after all, make their living by preaching the gospel of charity. Two outstanding examples come quickly to mind: Parson Trulliber in *Joseph Andrews* and Parson Thwackum in *Tom Jones*.

Trulliber is one of Fielding's "sanctified hypocrites" and is, therefore, much concerned with piety and his own dignity but not much concerned with charity. Answering Adams' request for fourteen shillings (to pay the bill at the inn), Trulliber declares that "he knows what Charity is, better than to give it to Vagabonds." When Adams opines that he is no Christian because charity is everywhere commanded in the scriptures, Trulliber becomes furious and
threatens to strike Adams. As Adams leaves, he shakes his head sadly, saying he was "sorry to see such Men in Orders." In an ironic afterword, Fielding notes that Trulliber's "Gravity, Austerity and Reserve" have given him a reputation for wealth in the parish and that this had given him great authority with his parishioners. Trulliber never gives anything away himself, says Fielding, but because he is always exhorting others in its exercise, he is "reputed a Man of great Charity."

Charity is an alien concept in Thwackum's theology. He is more concerned with the need to placate a savage, vengeful god and to see man punished because of what he feels is his natural depravity. With self-satisfied conviction, he is able to watch people be destroyed, even when he has the means to prevent it. "The Almighty," he righteously asserts, "has marked some particular Persons for Destruction." Mercy for him is better left to heaven.

It is not surprising that Thwackum's attentive pupil, Blifil, is incapable of charity. He has acquired an almost maniacal self-interest from the teachings of Thwackum and his other mentor, Square. The misery his mischief causes leaves him unmoved. He is instrumental in the near-destruction of the Seagrim family; he tries to cheat Tom of his inheritance and later in London actively works to have him hanged. After his machinations are discovered, he becomes a parasite, wooing rich widows and saving against the day he will run for
parliament. It is terrifying, as Fielding suggests, to contemplate such a man in public office.

Those who are possessed by greed and the considerations of the cash box are not, in Fielding's view, going to be much concerned with charity. Peter Pounce in *Joseph Andrews* acquires twenty thousand pounds in the service of Lady Booby, but he finds charity to be a "mean Parson-like Quality." He has no sympathy for the distressed because he can not see why the poor can not make their own fortune the way he has done. Besides, in his view, the poor could live like wild animals in the countryside:

> How can any Man complain of Hunger...in a Country where such excellent Salads are to be gathered in almost every Field? Or of Thirst where every River and Stream produces such delicious Potations? And as for Cold and Nakedness, they are Evils introduced by Luxury and Custom. A Man naturally wants Clothes no more than a Horse or any other Animal.

In *Shamela* Fielding notes that lower class parvenues are often the least likely to show some feeling for the class from which they have escaped. The pursuit of wealth and respectability, it seems, is too consuming to allow the exercise of charity. Thus Shamela has the highly moral *Whole Duty of Man* in her personal library but, as Fielding comically adds, the chapter on duty to one's neighbor has been torn out.

Fielding also finds that those who have come into a fortune (like Peter Pounce because he has cheated and
deceived, or Captain Blifil because he has married well) are not anxious to return the favor. Even though he has been the recipient of Allworthy's generosity, the captain is worried lest such benevolence extend to others. Giving alms, he says, is not really charity in the Christian sense as it has been "taught by heathen Philosophers" and lacks the "sublime, Christian-like Disposition." As an exemplum to this argument, he suggests that Christ's disciples were poor and hardly in a position to distribute alms to the poor. God would not command what would be impossible to perform. The captain also frets that charity would encourage the wicked and the undeserving. He is for prudence not charity. "Worthy and pious Men" exercise caution lest they encourage "a Crime of a very black Dye." The captain's comment rings with great irony.

Another uncharitable creature in Fielding's "chamber of horrors" is the "false promiser" of Joseph Andrews. This is the man who promises to provide accommodation for Adams, Fanny and Joseph on their way back home. He piously mouths words in praise of charity. "He esteems Riches," he tells Adams, "only as They give...[him] an Opportunity for doing Good." In a burst of enthusiasm he offers Adams a curacy. Unfortunately, when it is time to have these promises realized, the "false promiser" has vanished.

Fielding can offer no explanation as to why such a man
could perpetrate infamy without any obvious advantage to himself. Perhaps, as Joseph explains, some people are like horses who are inherently vicious, and no one knows why one horse is gentle and another bad tempered.  What is more important, thinks Fielding, is to consider the damage this kind of man can do and to be on your guard when he offers help.

The "false promiser" who creates misfortune for its own sake is closely allied with those who love to jest and see misfortune as an opportunity for a good laugh. This type of personality is personified in the character of the "roasting squire" of Joseph Andrews. The squire rescues Adams from his hunting dogs and then offers his hospitality to Adams and his two companions. But the squire's intentions are somewhat different. He brings the travellers to his estate not to feed and entertain them but to ridicule the motley Adams and to do his worst with Fanny. By the end of the evening Adams has been reduced to a capering fool and gets dunked in a bucket. Later, Fanny is assaulted and nearly raped. So much for the squire's hospitality.

Fielding attributes this species of malice to the squire's pampered, careless upbringing. The effect of this indulgence has led to the squire's delight in the "odious and absurd."  He seeks out the distressed not to help but to laugh and is, therefore, the antithesis of the charitable
Jests of any kind are anathema to Fielding. Distress in others, he says, should invite compassion. Those who laugh at it are "entitled to the basest and vilest Appellation [with which]...they can be stigmatized."29 Clearly such a predisposition can not but undermine any charitable sentiment.

In the deficiencies of Amelia's Colonel James and his wife, Fielding exposes the singular lack of charity that can exist between friends. Mrs. James is too caught up in the social whirl of London to be much help to her friend Amelia. Although she has been told of the distress of the Booths, she is slow to pay a visit to them. When she does, she complains about the long walk up the stairs, and then begins to gossip "about the town." Mrs. James' false notion of "civility" prevents her from inquiring into the circumstances of her friend. Her responsibility toward her friends has been replaced by social ritual, and her compassion for Amelia is lost in her dreams of carriages and fine houses. Friendship for Fielding is more than polite civility.

Colonel James proves an equally unsuitable benefactor to the Booths. His interest in the family ebbs and flows according to his mood. He can be very generous one minute but totally unreliable the next. Fielding attributes this fluctuating benevolence to a Stoic disposition:

The colonel, though a very generous man, had not the least grain of tenderness in his disposition.
His mind was formed of those firm materials of which nature formerly hammered out the Stoic, and upon which the sorrows of no man living could make an impression. A man of this temper...will fight for the person he calls his friend, and the man that hath but little value for his money will give it him; but such friendship is never to be absolutely depended on; for, whenever the favourite passion interposes with it, it is sure to subside and vanish into air. 30

Once again, Fielding takes an opportunity to expose Stoicism as a philosophy inamicable to philanthropy. The Stoic by conviction is immune to feeling the misery of others. He can help others but only according to whim. The prevailing passion of the moment can not always be relied upon to inspire the selfless act. What can be counted on, as Fielding believed, is "a tender disposition." 31 Those who possess this, relieve misery for its own sake, their compassion coming before every other consideration.

Charity has its price. It will always cost something even if the cost is reckoned only by a little effort. People, however, are always in a hurry, their minds centered resolutely on their own priorities. To help others is to get behind schedule. So, for many, charity, as Mrs. Tow-wouse says, is "a F--t!" 32 With this in mind it is not difficult to understand the reaction of the passengers of the stage-coach in Joseph Andrews when they come across the badly beaten Joseph. 33 They must engage in a lengthy debate before they will allow him in the coach. The coachman is "confounded late." The prudish lady in the coach does not want a naked
man sitting beside her. A gentleman does not want to linger in the area and have the same thing happen to him. A lawyer finally recommends that they take Joseph on the coach but only because he is afraid that being "last in his company" the passengers will be charged with his beating. Their excuses are fatuous, but they are Christians and will, in all likelihood, sing hymns of praise to the charitable Savior on the following Sunday.

Many people, Fielding believes, are interested only in the help that can be given them by others. These people will always be able to find an excuse or some "philosophical" reason to preclude their helping. Even when directly faced with some distress, these people will back away from doing what Fielding believes to be their fundamental Christian and social duty. Others, of course, respond unequivocally and are as incapable of walking away from distress as they would be of killing themselves. These two classes of people operate mutually in the world of Fielding's novels. The one shirking its duty and adding to the misery of others; the other busily shoring up the damage done by their callous and unheeding fellows. Fielding was determined not to give the former ultimate victory.

The triumph of the charitable spirit in the novels can be attributed to the active benevolence of Fielding's "good men." Governments may provide bad leadership; political lords
may frustrate the deserving. But the good man is there in the novels to extend a hand and repair the damage done by the malice of others. In Fielding's view there is much the individual can do.

In his portrayal of Parson Adams, Fielding shows us virtue being put to work to promote the happiness of others. Adams is always busying himself "without-doors," never thinking of the cost to himself. Such a selfless attitude frequently gets Adams into trouble—good men, as Fielding shows, sometimes fail to "look before they leap." This attitude, however, exemplifies the kind of spirit that Fielding would have his readers emulate. If his readers accept Adams as the soul of good nature and laugh sympathetically at his tribulations, then, Fielding thinks, they will be able to follow his example. "A good Man," he says at the beginning of the novel, "is a standing Lesson at all his Acquaintance, and of far greater use in that narrow Circle than a good Book." 34

The lesson that Adams imparts is his unfailing activism. Yet, he is scarcely in a position to help others. On his allowance of twenty three pounds per annum he supports a wife and six children. Despite this pittance, he never allows any of the poor to leave his door empty-handed. As a result, his parishioners love him. When he returns to the village in the wake of Lady Booby's carriage, they flock about him "like dutiful Children around an indulgent Parent." 35
Like Adams, Dr. Harrison in *Amelia* conforms to Fielding's ideal of the worthy clergyman. The example set by these men blots out the destructive influence of Trulliber and Thwackum. Notice the premium placed on Dr. Harrison's stewardship:

All his parishioners, whom he treats as his children, regard him as their common father. Once in a week he constantly visits every house in the parish, examines, commends, and rebukes, as he finds occasion. This is practised likewise by his curate in his absence; and so good an effect is produced by this their care, that no quarrels ever proceed to blows or law-suits; no beggar is to be found in the whole parish. 36

It is no accident that Fielding uses the term "father" to describe the relationship between the two clergymen and their parishioners. Like the ideal of the father, they protect and sustain the members of their family. The note of "paternalism" in this relationship would not have bothered Fielding. His social ideal begins with a just and concerned stewardship by those at the top. When the leader of Fielding's community is corrupt, the common man will suffer.

Squire Allworthy in *Tom Jones* is such a "father," and he is able to transfer his moral characteristics to his "son," Tom. The squire is a kind of father to the local community, being a justice of the peace. In this role he presents the other side of the father. He must protect, but he must be prepared to censure and punish for the good of the individual and the family.

There will always be an antagonism between the functions of judge and protector. An imbalance will turn the father
into a tyrant or an indulger. What strikes a balance in Allworthy is his charity:

He was equally entitled to this Virtue in either Sense; for as no Man was ever more sensible to the Wants, or more ready to relieve the Distresses of Others, so None could be more tender of their Characters, or slower to believe Anything to their Disadvantage. 37

How these two aspects of charity are accommodated in Allworthy's life can be seen in his handling of the prosecution of Jenny Jones and Partridge. Acting in his magisterial capacity, Allworthy must pronounce sentence on the unwed mother and her lover. The mob hopes to see Jenny "sacrificed to Ruin and Infamy by a Shameful Correction in a Bridewel." 38 They are disappointed, however, because Allworthy is more concerned with the welfare of the woman than the need to set a brutal example. He gently tells her during the examination in court that he "would inspire[her] with Repentance, and not drive [her] to Desperation." 39 After a very sensible lecture on the evils of pre-marital sex, Allworthy tells her to leave the neighborhood in order to avoid the bad influence of her companions and the unChristian scorn of her neighbors.

Toward Partridge, however, he acts with more severity. Allworthy is more troubled with Partridge's obstinate refusal to admit his guilt, than he is with the crime itself. But Allworthy will not let the crime go unpunished. He strips Partridge of the annuity he has been giving him. Partridge...
goes to pieces at the removal of his allowance and the loss of his school, and, as a consequence, he and his wife begin to starve. Some good Christian intervenes and provides them with sustenance. We are not surprised to learn that Allworthy is their secret benefactor. Allworthy will punish Partridge, but his humanity prevents him from seeing him destroyed:

...though he would not openly encourage Vice, [he] could yet privately relieve the Distresses of the Vicious themselves, when these became too exquisite and disproportionate to their Demerit. 40

Humanity and compassion may prompt Allworthy, but largely he acts because he sees need and, being able to help, does what he can. Ultimately, Fielding is saying, charity does not evolve from any complex moral formula but from ordinary common sense. You see need and, if you can, you do something about it. Thus, when Allworthy finds the infant Tom in his bed, he orders that he be clothed and asks that a wet nurse be found. His servant, Mrs. Wilkins, clouds the issue with arguments about the child's dubious parentage. Her first concern is not the baby but the guilty mother who has "abandoned" the baby. She does not want the responsibility that looking after the baby will entail. Instead, she recommends that the baby be left at the church door. The night, it seems, is only a little rainy and if the baby should not last the night, it is "better for such Creatures to die in a state of Innocence, than to grow up and imitate their Mothers."41
Allworthy, however, reacts to the problem of the baby and ignores the irrelevant circumstances which have obsessed his servant. But what settles his mind is his own heart, responding to the innocent supplication of the baby. He feels the distress of Tom as much as he would his own. His moment of decision is warm and human, not coldly rational:

...he had now got one of his Fingers into the Infant's Hand which by its gentle Pressure, seeming to implore his Assistance, had certainly outpleaded the Eloquence of Mrs. Deborah had it been ten times greater...42

Allworthy, then, is emotionally equipped to feel the needs of others and secure enough financially to extend his bounty to them. He can grant annuities to Partridge, take in indigent clergymen, or buy boarding houses for widows of his friends, as the situations arise. His benevolence, in fact, is known throughout the kingdom: "Neither Mr. Allworthy's House, nor his Heart, were shut against any Part of Mankind..."43

The problem with Allworthy's open generosity is that he can be imposed upon by the unworthy. The Blifils come into the picture with Allworthy's encouragement, threatening the virtuous serenity he has established in his own home. Later, he extends his bounty to Thwackum and Square, who destroy Tom's character and establish the odious Blifil as Allworthy's heir.

The deceit of the unworthy is the central problem faced by Fielding's moral man. It is, after all, relatively easy
to give alms or open your house to every beggar or ruined soul coming your way. Those who do will be quickly bankrupt, and probably homeless. Generosity requires no particular talent and may not necessarily indicate moral worth. Enlightened charity takes intelligence, in Fielding's view; it is the ability to screen out the frauds who are looking for a free ride, and finally to be able to say, "No".

As stated before, it is the quality of "prudence" that will, according to Fielding, allow the charitably disposed man to distinguish the worthy from the unworthy. With prudence he can also measure the social consequences of his not act and indulge people who have the ability to take care of themselves. Moreover, with prudence he can look to the propriety of his charity and see that he is not giving to his own detriment.

Prudence, however, is a lesson often taught but seldom realized until after the fact in Fielding's novels. Heartfree should have been prudent and tossed Wild out of his shop at the first sign of his duplicity. Parson Adams with a little reflection should have seen that he was to be the object of entertainment at the house of the "roasting squire." But Adams and Heartfree can not act the way prudence would dictate because of their predisposition to believe the best of others. This is the real problem that surfaces when prudence is applied to the charitable instinct. Barrow
says that charity should be exercised "according to moral
worth prudently assessed." In other words, charity should
not be given to the immoral. This is fine in principle, but
it breaks down in practice. How can the moral worth of people
be rated when goodness is so easily dissembled? The answer
is that the good man is going to make mistakes. Fielding
suggests that prudence is an ideal to be aimed at and is not
the ultimate arbiter of decisions that have to be made in the
real world. Like all moral principles, prudence has its
dangers if it is not tempered by instinct and intuition. Good
men, thinks Fielding, have such expansive hearts and are so
horrified at the misery of others that prudence becomes a
secondary consideration.

When Tom discovers that the pathetic highwayman, Anderson,
has held him up only to feed his wife and five children, he
immediately offers him three guineas, all the money left in
his pocket. A more "prudent" man might have run the wretch
into the authorities, reasoning that his criminal actions
placed him beyond the considerations of charity. Tom merely
advises the highwayman to choose "an honester Means of relieving
his Distress." Partridge, Tom's companion, is for doing
justice:

...it would be better that all Rogues were hanged
out of the Way, than that one honest Man should
suffer. For my own Part, indeed, I should not care
to have the Blood of any of them on my own Hands;
but it is very proper for the Law to hang them all.
What right hath any Man to take Sixpence from me unless I give it him? 45

Later in the novel when Tom learns from Mrs. Miller the full extent of the wretched circumstances of Anderson's family, he shudders to think how a stricter application of justice of the variety advanced by Partridge would have led to the final ruination of the unfortunate family.

Whether Tom has acted prudently here is questionable. He has no way of knowing whether Anderson is really a man driven to desperation or a common criminal who would rather rob than work. Tom's dilemma has wider social implications. What if Anderson was lying to him and returned to the road the next day, this time with a loaded pistol, and shot someone? In that instance his charity would have to be considered a social menace. There is, after all, some truth in Partridge's suggestion. Why should honest men suffer because some men have not the intelligence to make their way in society? These are hard questions, and Fielding leaves the answer to his readers. What we do know is what his good man would do in the situation. Tom chooses charity because instinct and intuition tell him that Anderson is misguided but harmless. That assumption, given the larger truth about Anderson learned from Mrs. Miller, has to be considered prudent. Prudence, it seems, is not always on the side of strict application of the law. It is this kind of considered benevolence that makes Tom the kind of person that Fielding
would have his readers emulate. The good man, ultimately, must learn to be a good judge of character.

Where, then, is the line to be drawn, beyond which people can be righteously allowed to suffer? Allworthy will strip Partridge of his annuity but then raise him up again when his distress excedes his crime. May a man learn prudence but still be predisposed to believe the best of others? The answer to this question becomes more obscure when it is remembered that Fielding does draw the line in his non-fictional writings on crime and the poor. People there are to be whipped, hanged or forced to beat hemp in disease-ridden prisons and, in all cases held to the uncompromising letter of the law. Is there perhaps some inconsistency between Fielding the author of the novels and Fielding the magistrate who comments on the so-called "real" world?

For the most part, Allworthy is prepared to run the risk of having his charity misapplied. He does not feel that the bestower of charity becomes corrupted if it turns out that he has given unwisely. "Charity," he says, "does not adopt the Vices of its Objects." What does corrupt the man who would be charitable and further corrupt the recipients of his charity is the encouragement of vice. Once the vicious man is exposed, thinks Allworthy, the socially efficacious thing to do is to see him properly punished. It is for this reason that
Allworthy will not hear of Tom's last appeal for the forgiveness of Black George. Black George at this point has been exposed as a thief and an ingrate. Allworthy's pronouncement of guilt on him is uncompromisingly severe:

...Mistaken Mercy is not only weakness, but borders on Injustice, and is very pernicious to Society, as it encourages Vice. The Dishonesty of this Fellow I might perhaps have pardoned, but never his Ingratitude. And give me Leave to say, when we suffer any Temptation to atone for Dishonesty itself, we are as candid merciful as we ought to be; and so far I confess I have gone; for I have often pitied the Fate of the Highwayman, when I have been on the grand jury, and have more than once applied to the Judge on the Behalf of such as have had any mitigating Circumstances in their Case; but when Dishonesty is attended with any blacker Crime, such as Cruelty, Murder, Ingratitude, or the like, Compassion and Forgiveness than become Faults. 47

There are limits, then, to what even the best-natured man will tolerate. Mercy and benevolence, the two instincts of men like Allworthy, are wasted on hardened reprobates.

It is the good men like Allworthy who must deal with the crime and poverty of eighteenth-century England. They are not to encourage what Fielding believed to be the sloth and riot of the lower orders. Instead, they will accept as prudent government all efforts to mold the poor, by force and constraint, into productive and law-abiding members of the community. But the charity of men like Allworthy need not be subverted by the social and economic need of compelling the poor to work. Instead, it will be realized in their efforts to establish humane and efficient programs that will
reduce crime and give the poor that sense of self-respect that can only come from their being self-sufficient.

It would be best, thinks Fielding, for people to accept the social position which their temperament, upbringing and education fits best. In a properly regulated society no one would resent his social standing. There is nothing wrong with being a tradesman, a blacksmith, a gamekeeper or a small farmer. Society, Fielding says, is dependent on these people for its existence. But if the lower orders are sneered at and abused and not given sufficient means to carry out their trades, then there will be universal dissatisfaction at being at the lower end of the social ladder. The real end of charity is to remove those evils of social inequality that make the charity of people like Adams, Allworthy and Dr. Harrison a matter of life and death.
1 Tom Jones, IX, i.

2 Tom learns of the wretched poverty of the Andersons in XIII, iii. Fielding titles this chapter "A Scene of Distress Which Will Appear Very Extraordinary to most of our Readers." All subsequent quotations refer to this edition.


4 Ibid., I, iv.


6 Ibid., II, xi.

7 Amelia, VIII, ii.

8 Ibid., VIII, x.

9 Ibid.


11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., I, xiv.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.


18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., II, xv.
20 Ibid.
21 Tom Jones, III, viii.
23 Ibid.
24 Tom Jones, II, v.
25 Ibid.
27 Ibid. III, vi.
28 Ibid., III, vii.
29 Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men, p. 160.
30 Amelia, VIII, v.
31 Ibid.
33 Ibid., III, xii.
34 Ibid., I, i.
35 Ibid., IV, i.
36 Amelia, III, xii.
37 Tom Jones, II, vi.
38 Ibid., I, ix.
39 Ibid., I, vii.
40 Ibid., II, vi.
41 Ibid., I, iii.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., I, x.
44 Ibid., XII, xiv.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., XVII, ii.
47 Ibid., XVIII, xi.
Fielding's consideration of charity found in his novels and miscellaneous and legal writings answers two questions: "what can the private citizen do to help the poor and distressed? and "what can the state do?" Given the condition of the poor in eighteenth-century England, Fielding felt that both the private citizen and the legislator were obliged to grapple with the full complexity of these two questions.

The private citizen, Fielding argues, begins by maintaining a charitable attitude to all who come under his influence, offering material aid to those in need. He does this for several reasons. His religion teaches him that charity washes away his sins and makes him acceptable in the eyes of his creator. From his philosophy comes the conviction that none should be in distress in his presence, while he has the means to relieve them. Finally, self-interest prompts him to charity because he, quite simply, feels happiness at the improved fortunes of his fellow creatures. The only proviso to these motivations is that he must be on guard lest undeserving people feigning misfortune, impose upon him. Thus the private citizen can do much to help his friends, family and even strangers in the community. Such is the picture we have in the novels where charitable men like Parson Adams, Tom Jones, Allworthy and Dr. Harrison...
are like the proverbial Lady Bountiful to their friends and neighbors.

These men are the sort that Fielding would have as statesmen and legislators, men who must deal not with individuals but with a mass of social, legal and economic problems which shape the destinies of individuals with whom they have no personal contact. As such they will effectively combat the influence of all the Jonathan Wilds and the "noble" lords who are out to destroy society for their own benefit. But another question arises. How does the good man change his perspective to that of the legislator? According to Fielding, the good man has already the primary quality in that he has demonstrated that he can love individuals. Without being able to love, says Fielding, no man can hope to feel any compassion for the faceless mass. The other factor needed in the transformation is the conviction that every man should be involved in the affairs of his country. Not every man will. He suggests that people like Allworthy who are of a diffident, introspective nature, are better left to do their best in the local community. It should be remembered, however, that even Allworthy served as justice of the peace.

Fielding contends that it is important to remember that the state is composed of individuals who must work for the common weal. The state is not an autonomous, inhuman self-
The public good is not "No-body's" business but "Everybody's." Fielding lets the spirit of "Everybody" drive this point home in *The Covent-Garden Journal* (44):

...unless I set about it, and that heartily, that Reformation which can alone prevent the speedy Ruin of this Kingdom can never be brought about. It is by my Encouragement of Religion, Virtue, Science and Art, that they can be brought to hold up their drooping Heads. It is I must begin, by setting the Example in everything that is laudable without expecting it from others. I am he that must first shake off Prostitution and Corruption, and every Kind of Infamy. I alone who must resolve to give Praise and Honour to the truly Deserving, and treat Vice and Meaness with their just Contempt, however distinguished and elevated....

When the good man gets into office and is in a position to do some good, he must, according to Fielding, come to terms with his charity. He can not go about with a wagon-load of charity, dispensing food, clothing and housing to the poor. This can be done, but what, Fielding would ask, will happen when the food runs out, the clothes turn to rags, and the houses tumble down? In Fielding's view, this is not charity but criminal profligacy. Those who can not look after themselves (the handicapped and the aged) need this special charity, and Fielding makes it clear that society has a duty to provide it. But for the able-bodied, it is better for the men in government to devise plans to provide and, if necessary, compel the poor and indigent to work. The end of public charity then, according to Fielding, is that...
Fielding's view of the poor was not extraordinary but quite typical of the eighteenth century. Like Defoe and Mandeville, he believed that the poor were largely to blame for their misery. He went so far as to say that many of the poor would prefer their misery to an honest day's labor. Rather than work for a respectable wage, many demanded higher wages, lest they be trapped into working. Since begging was so lucrative, Fielding argued, it was understandable why the condition was a profession to which the children of the poor often aspired. Instead of honest poverty, many persons of the lower orders squandered their time in drinking and holiday. To be fair, he attributed this licentiousness to the bad example set by the upper classes. But, whatever the cause, Fielding never forgave the lower orders their profligacy.

The question for Fielding was not how much liberty the lower orders should be given but how they could be deprived of what they had. All the evidence he had at his disposal convinced him that the lower orders turned even the beginnings of liberty into license. Much of this license, he believed, manifested itself in the crime rates and in stubborn resistance to any law and order or to any self-discipline. Some of this crime he attributed to poverty, but most crime he believed to be the direct result of greed and love of luxury.
What troubled Fielding most about the liberty of the lower orders was that it stood in the way of legislation that would help the poor to self-sufficiency. Most of these measures were predicated on the willingness of the poor to accept having their freedom of movement restricted or being consigned to grim workhouses. That the poor would resent these measures troubled Fielding not in the least. He could only see, like so many of his contemporaries, that the poor were a burden to the nation rather than contributors to the general store of wealth. If in the process of becoming self-sufficient the poor had to be treated like wayward children, then that was a price to be paid.

The centerpiece of Fielding's proposal for the poor, the workhouse, deserves final consideration. His workhouse was never built so that the results of a practical test of its efficacy do not exist. We do know, however, that the workhouse continued to be an institution in Britain and parts of the United States and Canada up until the beginning of the present century. The workhouse continued to be the last resort for the starving and homeless and, in that respect, it did provide charity but often only of a mean-spirited variety. Good intentions and careful planning notwithstanding, the workhouse could never eradicate its identification with prison. Going to one carried a permanent stigma. The workhouse has left its legacy in our literature. What might
Fielding have thought of Oliver Twist's mother, struggling through the rain to seek shelter under the sign "Union Workhouse?"

Everything considered, Fielding would probably not have been surprised at this conspicuous failure. He believed man capable of the most heinous depravity as well as the greatest sublimity. If society continued to treat poverty with such indifference, it would come as no surprise to Fielding that into the vacuum would come all the malevolence and self-seeking of which human beings are apparently capable. The poor would continue to suffer as a consequence.

Fielding's consideration of the English poor in the legal and related writings, and in the novels, is not the least important part of his legacy to us. His assessment of the idea of common-sense Christian charity is rooted in the social and economic milieu of the eighteenth century, but it is timeless. The legal writings attempt to define and prescribe for a world in time. The novels, especially Tom Jones and Joseph Andrews, are imaginative creations, presenting social issues and moral imperatives as part of an exuberant comic world, one which is in time and yet decidedly out of it, beyond any given "reality." No matter how or where expressed, Fielding's concern was remarkably consistent. Through the writings and through his often harrowing life, he never lost sight of our shared identity as part of the same species. For Fielding, to remember that was both a warning and an opportunity. To act upon it was a blessing.
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1967  Graduated from Mimico High School (Toronto).

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