

Godwin's Anti-Mass Politics Revisited: Sympathy, Retirement, and Epistemic Diversity

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If once the unambitious and candid circles of enquiring men be swallowed up in the insatiate gulf of noisy assemblies, the opportunity of improvement is instantly annihilated. The happy varieties of sentiment which so eminently contribute to intellectual acuteness are lost. (William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, 3:122)

The standardization of world culture, with local popular or traditional forms driven out or dumbed down [...] has been seen by many as the very heart of globalization. (Fredric Jameson, "Globalization and Political Strategy," 51)

From satellite television to Twitter, global media standardizes. Even when raising awareness of diversity, global communication technologies, with their own logics and ideologies, endanger local ways of knowing and thinking.¹ Mindful of such threatened diversity, readers today may hear a familiar note in William Godwin's above warning about lost "varieties" in 1790s England. Fusing anarchism with rationalist philosophy, Godwin's works urge social transformation through the exercise of individual judgment. *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), penned amid unrest in England following the

French Revolution, decries institutions for reducing individual beliefs to a “common mould” (4:337).² *Considerations on Lord Grenville’s and Mr. Pitt’s Bills* (1795) turns such criticisms on the meetings of the working-class London Corresponding Society (LCS), one of which, at Copenhagen Fields in 1795, drew 100,000.³ Such gatherings articulate plebian politics, Godwin suggests, at the cost of opinionative variety. The paradox of mass meetings for Godwin, like that of global media today, is that shared structures for voicing difference threaten the diversity of views.

This essay revisits Godwin’s opposition to mass political action in light of the overlooked importance of diversity in his philosophy.⁴ More than class bias or individualism, as is often suggested, Godwin’s wariness of mass politics springs, I will argue, from his conviction that rationality exists through intellectual conflict and therefore requires the presence of diverse opinions between groups. Because crowds according to Godwin standardize opinions, he dismisses mass meetings, insisting instead that the most effectual medium for political discussion is “smaller,” more diverse “circle[s]” (3:120). The impracticality of this proposed alternative renders Godwin’s desertion of mass politics, already disheartening for activist scholars such as E.P. Thompson, all the more depressing.⁵ But suppose we take seriously that Godwin’s endorsement of “small and friendly societies” (3:121) over political collectives, however impractical, is a plea for variety instead of a product of individualism or prejudice. How different will his philosophy be as a result? Approached thusly, Godwin emerges as a theorist of epistemic diversity, that is, of how diverse views in discussion improve reasoning over what persons achieve alone. This interest in epistemic diversity suggests that even from the very first edition of *Political Justice* Godwin seeks to escape the zealous rationalism for which that work is famous. His alternative to mass action embodies just such an escape: by defying the Enlightenment construal of reason and society as mutually exclusive, Godwin’s small-group scheme gestures at a concept of rationality as a social-material practice.

Any discussion of variety in Godwin's works must also involve sympathy, the physiological process claimed to unify opinions in crowds. The apparent weakness of Godwin's account is that small groups are not the sympathy-free alternatives to mass meetings that he makes them out to be. According to eighteenth-century moral sense philosophy, the non-rational, sympathetic spread of feelings and ideas attends *all* human interaction regardless of the numbers involved. What then permits Godwin to divide mass meetings from small societies, the latter sustaining epistemic diversity? The answer rests, I will argue, in Godwin's imagining sympathetic thought in social-spatial terms, a legacy of both Locke's associationist psychology and Godwin's Dissenting religious background. In these traditions, contiguity invites sympathy: the larger the group and the closer the participants in space, the more quickly opinions standardize. Small discussions not merely diverge from mass assemblies in prolonging the clashes between beliefs that constitute reasoning. Because sympathy eventually levels opinions even in the smallest societies, the existence of multiple groups, in contrast to a single collective, preserves diversity in a culture. In other words, rationality for Godwin arises in the act of socializing between multiple groups espousing divergent opinions and ideologies. Godwin's rejection of mass politics still disappoints us today, but his philosophy is redeemed by this attention to the social maintenance of diversity, a problem we face with new urgency in the global present.

I

Scholars trace Godwin's distrust of mass political gatherings to two factors: 1) his bias against their plebian membership and 2) the individualist bent of his rational anarchism. Yet both factors fail to explain key aspects of Godwin's position. Bias cannot explain his rejection of both popular crowds and aggregations of the political élite. Individualism cannot explain his view that the individuality of judgment, i.e., the distinctiveness of one's beliefs, arises from social interaction. This section will identify the limits of previous accounts invoking these factors and, so doing, will set up my argument that grasping Godwin's

anti-mass politics requires recognizing his commitment to epistemic diversity, or what is much the same, his understanding of rationality as a social practice.

One common explanation for Godwin's aversion to mass meetings relates to the identity of the participants. Because the demographic of the gatherings sponsored by the LCS and the Society for Free Debate was overwhelmingly plebian, Godwin's hostility to mass politics is interpreted as hostility for the masses, i.e., "class bias" (Dart 88).⁶ Many of Godwin's statements, including the following from *Considerations* (hereafter *C*), support this reading: "The speeches delivered at these meetings [...] have not always been of the most temperate kind. The collecting of immense multitudes of men into one assembly, particularly when there have been no persons of eminence [...] mixed with them" is "alarming" (2:130). Reprising his comment in *Political Justice* (hereafter *PJ*) that crowded "associations" are "dangerous" (3:120), Godwin implies that violent resolutions issue from specifically working-class crowds lacking guidance from social betters. David O'Shaughnessy warns against assigning the middle-class Godwin a "static position" on popular crowds, citing Godwin's theatrical writing as proof of a softening stance (425). Yet bias also lurks in Godwin's proposed alternative to mass meetings. In offering discussion in "small and independent circles" (3:122) as a substitute, Godwin endorses an "elite-led" model of reform (Philp, "Progress" 75). Educated, middle- and upper-class men gathered in clubs posit the reformist ideas later spread to the masses.

Closely tied to class is Godwin's discomfort with crowd interaction. Given his anarchist distrust not merely of political institutions but institutionalization as such, i.e., the binding of any human activity to formal organization and rules, Godwin frowns on popular associations for requiring participants to abide institutional structures. First among these structures is oratory. According to Victoria Myers, it is the necessity that crowded associations "rouse the passions and put them under the control of a talented speaker" (415), which invalidates such meetings in Godwin's eyes. Because the only genuine basis for belief

acceptance, at least in Godwin's early works, is reasoning from evidence, emotional appeals always mislead: in "halls of assembly [...] men require a due mixture of spices and seasoning. All oratorical seasoning is an appeal to the passions" (2:133). Oratory heightens social "motives" – sympathy, prudence, fear of rejection, etc. – for accepting opinions as true (3:307). Worse still, oratory creates a division of mental labor, the enthralled listeners resigning their cognitive agency in favor of the speaker's judgments. If dissent persists under such conditions, it goes unvoiced because listeners cannot challenge the speaker, a problem that Godwin experienced in 1796 when he was attacked by James Mackintosh in a lecture not "admitting of an answer" (2:175).⁷ While protesting the oratorical manipulation of the masses, Godwin upholds ruling-class stereotypes of the lower orders as gullible and prone to emotion.

These fears over the plebian weakness for oratory are patronizing, but it would be a mistake to assign Godwin's spurning of mass meetings to class prejudice alone. Overlooked is that criticisms of "popular associations" in *PJ* also extend to political "assemblies" of the educated and ranked, implying that the problems discussed in context of popular crowds are not limited to them. This oversight reflects a tendency among recent critics to consign political assemblies, on account of their class and gender exclusivity, to a "private" realm of solitary and small-group reflection over against mass meetings, which embody the true "public" sphere (McCann 60-62; White 88-90). Such a dichotomous treatment masks overlaps in Godwin's presentation of the two meeting types. Just as the LCS assemblies in the "Of Political Associations" section are shown to yield "fallacious uniformity of opinion" (3:122), so the legislative meetings in the "On National Assemblies" chapter generate "fictitious unanimity" (3:306). The process of standardization may differ in each case, but the source is identical: "the fear that our associates should disclaim us" (3:122).⁸ 100,000 in Copenhagen Fields differs from a few hundred at Westminster, but as these parallels suggest, once some threshold is crossed – perhaps twenty-one, the membership of the

Philomathean Society to which Godwin briefly belonged – the unifying effect is the same whatever the overall group size. Size, not participant identity, is confirmed as Godwin’s reason for rejecting mass meetings when he later cites the “British parliament” (3:307) as exemplifying homogeneity. The same holds for his alternative to such gatherings. Given the link between uniformity and “numerous meetings” in *PJ* (3:118), what matters is size and the supposed exemption of small groups from standardization. Less needful of ordering rules, small meetings lack some of the institutional contrivances, including presumably oratory, that foist conformity on crowds.⁹ Godwin’s small-group alternative is a bourgeois form of sociality, but this does not mean that his endorsing it reflects merely class bias.

Another strand of criticism attributes Godwin’s anti-mass politics to individualism. The idea that for Godwin the road to both intellectual and social progress runs through the individual mind, specifically the “private judgment,” is familiar. So far as Godwin’s anarchism privileges individual reflection over legislation and protest as the most effective means of reform, bringing ever more facets of life under the purview of individual judgment is crucial. Whatever constrains the exercise of reason, from governmental institutions to tradition, habit, and expediency, must be abolished or resisted. The emphasis on private judgment is often viewed by scholars as part of a larger “individualism” at the core of Godwin’s thought that prohibits collective action (Anderson 620; White 92). While sometimes labeled “Protestant” (Priestley 80) or “Calvinist” (White 97) individualism in a gesture at Godwin’s Dissenting background, most accounts align Godwin with the secular concept of “possessive individualism,” or the belief that faculties are owned by individuals and not bartered from society (Anderson 631-32). From this belief it follows that the social impedes reason and rarely helps develop or realize it. Thus, even as Godwin admits the usefulness of extensive meetings in diffusing information and promoting a cause (3:44), they are rejected for eroding individual reason through collective persuasion (White 101; McCann 64). When reform entails “any

challenge to the integrity of the individual," so Nicolle Jordan reflects in allusion to Godwin's criticism of mass meetings, the "greater good" becomes "a secondary concern" (253).

That Godwin's scheme of reform includes a social element, ironically, only furthers the argument for individualism. In urging small discussions over solitary cogitation as an alternative to collectives both plebian and élite, Godwin attaches a social dimension to judgment even as he suggests that society threatens reason (Mee, "Conversable" 147). The pre-existing faculty of judgment is "refined" (White 98) in small-group interactions exempt from the social pressures felt in crowds. Through these "collision[s] of mind with mind" truth emerges; deductions are compared and "the weak places of [...] argument[s]" revealed (3:15). But much like Jürgen Habermas's "ideal speech situation" to which Godwin's scheme is often compared (cf. O'Shaughnessy 423-24; Mee, "Press," 84), these societies emptied of social interests are deemed too good to be true. Andrew McCann and Mary Fairclough argue that the small-group substitute, whatever its political efficacy, is an impossibility. Large or small, group discussions must involve non-rational considerations because embodied, socially-situated persons can never judge solely by logic and evidence (McCann 62; Fairclough 98). Godwin's rational individualism becomes obvious in his failure to recognize this impurity of judgment. Further conceding his naivety in this respect are studies identifying the small-group alternative as an idealization of Godwin's own socializing, in Dissenting clubs (Philp, *Godwin's* 15-16) and later with the Philomaths (O'Shaughnessy 435-36), a sociological approach implicitly contesting Godwin's stance that such groups transcend social influences. Moreover, because "reason" in *PJ* seems just as often universal as procedural in nature, as often a body of eternal truths intuited by solitary thinkers as socially-determined criteria for validation (3:20; 4:43-44), interaction appears to simply expedite what already unfolds in the individual mind. Seemingly both naïve and unnecessary, Godwin's effort to socialize reason serves only to reinforce his individualist reputation.

The small-group alternative represents much more than Godwin's futile effort to temper his individualism, however. By involving interaction in reasoning, Godwin attempts to solve a larger problem, an attempt calling into question claims about the inadequacy of his small-society scheme. The problem is the rational-social dichotomy in Enlightenment thought, the view from Descartes to Locke to Berkeley that "rational autonomy is compromised by any kind of social contact other than the most disengaged and cerebral" (Weston 448).¹⁰ The dichotomy spawns an all-or-nothing logic in which, if any social factors impinge on judgment, then rationality is deemed to play absolutely no role in belief formation (Longino 23-24). By this logic, all reasoning is pure reasoning; and rationality, if it exists at all, exists only with the isolated individual. Why Godwin in his small-group alternative refuses this dichotomy is unclear given that such thinking otherwise suffuses *PJ*. Perhaps in 1793 he feels the same discomfort with unqualified rationalism that prompts the well-documented sidelining of reason in later editions (White 94). What is certain is that his small-group alternative challenges such either-or thinking even as the dichotomy justifies the scrapping of mass action:

Truth can scarcely be acquired in crowded halls and amidst noisy debates. Where [social influences such as] hope and fear, triumph and resentment are perpetually afloat, the severer faculties of investigation [e.g., reason and judgment] are compelled to quit the field. Truth dwells with contemplation. We can seldom make much progress in [...] disentangling error and delusion, but in sequestered privacy, or in the tranquil interchange of sentiments. (4:144)

The social precludes the rational in "crowded halls," but the same is not claimed for small groups. Reasoning unfolds through either "sequestered" thought *or* "tranquil interchange." This asymmetry positions "interchange" as a third option, a rational sociality, between "noisy assemblies" (non-rational sociality) and "privacy" (rational

solitude). Such a tripartite model can be missed because Godwin elsewhere implies that the choice pits solitary "inquiry" against crowded "halls" (2:133), a dichotomy perpetuated by critics consigning both small-group debate and solitary thought to the "private" realm. The implications are significant. Instead of seeing reason as an all-or-nothing quality, this three-part scheme allows rationality to admit of degrees; reason plays a *larger* role in clubs than crowds but is not the sole persuasive force present. Granted, Godwin anticipates an age when reason will be "uninfluenced by [...] compulsion or sympathy" (3:452-53), but looking forward to this future state hardly means that at present he denies the influence of all "triumph and resentment" in small groups. After all, "our opinions, our tempers and our habits are modified by those of each other. This is by no means the operation of arguments and persuasives; it occurs in that insensible and gradual way, which no resolution can enable us wholly to counteract" (4:335).

Some of the supposed naivety of the small-group plan reflects the scholarly use of the same dichotomy that Godwin resists. When McCann presents Godwin as ignoring the "impossibility" of discussion "uncompromised" by social motives (62), for example, he assumes that *pure* rationality is the aim of Godwin's small-group plan because *some* reasoning is involved. In suggesting that rationality only exists in the absence of society and then rejecting Godwin's plan for failing to meet this impossible expectation, McCann reduces questions of epistemology to questions of class conflict, indulging in the type of zero-sum thinking outlined above: to the extent that Godwin's small-group proposal, along with the consensus born of such discussions, is not fully guided by context-independent rules, social interests predominate. But one can admit the social context of Godwin's alternative without reducing it to a mere product of social factors. Moreover, it is unclear that the discussion clubs that Godwin envisions are purified from all social influences or that such purification is even necessary to arrive at knowledge, despite Godwin's own apparent endorsing of an abstract, context-free reason throughout *PJ*. Instead of an embodiment of social conflict, Godwin's

proposal should be grasped as reflecting a special kind of rational individualism, one admitting that reason coexists with habit, expediency, and other social motives for agreement.

Godwin's challenge to the rational-social dichotomy does not end there. Society and rationality not only coexist; reason, though an individual faculty, is actualized only through interaction. When Godwin states that "we should at all times be free to cultivate the individuality and follow the dictates of our own judgment" (3:449), he argues not just for the primacy of individual thought freed from social constraints. He also argues for fostering the *individuality* of judgment. To crib from the sociology of Georg Simmel, two concepts operate here: an Enlightenment view of individualism as "singleness," of the individual as a separate owner of his or her faculties, and a Romantic ideal of individualism as "uniqueness," distinctiveness, or *individuality*, of the individual understood "in contrast with others" (81-82). The second concept is crucial. We depend on society not to judge, but to judge differently. A similar idea that personal identity requires "social validation" will later appear in Godwin's novel *Caleb Williams* (Weston 458), though in *PJ* private judgment is validated less through agreement than disagreement. Some of the apparent needlessness of Godwin's insistence on interaction is thus mitigated. Judgment owes nothing to society, but the individuality of one's judgments is socialized: knowing what opinions are common requires exchanging views, exchanges helping persons "cultivate" distinctive opinions and, since the scope for differentiation depends on the range of competing opinions, also limiting that distinctiveness. Instead of an obstacle to achieving the universal truth posited by Enlightenment thinkers, diversity proves the means by which that truth is secured. By defying the Enlightenment rational-social dichotomy, Godwin presents group debate as a cognitive process rather than an activity exercising a fully-realized faculty. Why individuality matters and why small groups offer the ideal forum for fostering such distinctiveness will be the focus of the section below.

II

I turn now to consider Godwin's interest in the distinctiveness of judgment and how that interest guides his anti-mass politics. Many of Godwin's warnings about crowds raise the issue of individuality, including this advice added to the "Of Political Associations" section in the 1798 *PJ*: "the mind of one man is essentially distinct from the mind of another. If each do not preserve his individuality, the judgment of all will be feeble" (4:113). In seeking to protect the distinctiveness of belief and, by extension, the variety of views in a culture, Godwin's resistance to Enlightenment ideas takes the form of what modern social epistemologists term "epistemic diversity." According to the doctrine of epistemic diversity, maximizing the range of viewpoints in debate or inquiry has epistemological benefits. As Helen Longino and Kristen Intemann explain, diversity improves reasoning beyond what can be achieved by persons in isolation. The wider the range of beliefs involved in a debate, the more likely all beliefs receive criticism. Criticism in turn introduces new information and forces individuals to revisit the grounds for their opinions, producing more accurate, better supported views (Longino 37-39; Intemann 119-20). No mention here of *autonomy* and *purity*, the keywords of a dichotomous understanding of the rational and the social. The obvious parallel between Longino's and Intemann's modern accounts and Godwin's own writings is the prominence given to "cultivating" individuality:

A community must not only treat its acknowledged members as equally capable of providing persuasive and decisive reasons and must do more than be open to the expression of multiple points of view; it must also take active steps to ensure that alternative points of view are developed enough to be a source of criticism and new perspectives. Not only must potentially dissenting views not be discounted; they must be cultivated. (Longino 132)

Recognizing the necessity of diverse views to fuel the "collisions" that drive political progress for Godwin, John P. Clark offers *PJ* as

anticipating the ideal of “enlightenment through social diversity and pluralism” (81) later voiced in John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty* (1859). But where Mill takes diversity for granted and focuses on securing “the maximum degree of free speech and publication” for dissenting views (Kelly 250), Godwin frets over the tenuousness of variety. Anticipating concerns underlying modern responses to globalized media, his argument for freedom of speech and assembly is dogged by a fear that the medium or “the means of [...] diffusion” (3:121), including mass meetings, will reduce the variety of views it claims to transmit. Godwin’s political philosophy thus implies a theory of epistemic diversity. He wrestles with some of the same questions preoccupying modern theorists such as Longino, Intemann, and Miriam Solomon: how is diversity produced? Do some interactive modes yield more variety than others? Godwin’s interest in such questions warrants my reappraisal of his writings through the modern lens of social epistemology.

Godwin’s theory of epistemic diversity evolves from a broader account of the origins of human difference. On one hand, minds are “essentially distinct,” that is, using Simmel’s terms, both single and unique. “So numerous are the varieties of human understanding,” Godwin indicates, “there is little chance of any two men coming to a precise agreement about ten successive propositions” (3:85). The source of variation rests with a psychological mechanism, the association of ideas, or the process by which upbringing and chance events connect ideas in the human mind (3:34-36). Passing through the writings of Locke and Hume and best known today as the theory behind the social conditioning schemes of Jeremy Bentham, the associationist psychology inherited by Godwin focuses as much on the idiosyncratic effects of association as on predicting its workings for social engineering.¹¹ Despite his concerns about the ways in which associated ideas defy conscious reason (3:34), the vagaries of association appear to buoy Godwin’s confidence in human variability. Since no two persons outside the controlled environs of Bentham’s Panopticon associate ideas in identical ways, opinions are always singular. Realizing diversity just requires

"think[ing] for [one]self," that is, consulting one's private judgment (3:450). The reverse holds true as well: the best evidence that one's private judgment has been consulted is by displaying "individual" beliefs.

Yet there is a disjunctive pattern in *PJ* that complicates Godwin's commitment to diversity. Like so many eighteenth-century thinkers, Godwin confronts the question of diversity through a discussion of "national characters." Taking aim at Montesquieu's climatological theory of such characters, Godwin comments, "if [people] were principally governed by external circumstances such as that of atmosphere," "their characters and actions would be much alike," which is not the case (3:34). However different persons between nations are, though, persons from the same country are relatively homogenous. Godwin opines, "in most countries [people] are capable of little more than like parrots repeating each other" (3:76). As in our own globalizing world, in which the need for diversity perhaps weighs most on those who have it least, Godwin's paeans to variety therefore in this context appear to signal anxiety about actual dwindling variation. If individuality were inevitable as he claims, Godwin would spend less space urging readers to avoid practices "melt[ing] our opinions into a common mould." Popular associations are a prominent example of such unifying practices, but since Godwin's list of homogenizing activities also includes common labor and cohabitation (3:450), few persons can presumably maintain their individuality. The idea that diversity must be fostered undercuts Godwin's claim that difference is natural and inevitable.

At one level, Godwin's mixed signals reflect the difficulty of finding a place for pluralism within his universalist view of truth as "single and uniform" (3:104). If multiplying perspectives exposes untruths in the short term, such exposure in the long term eliminates "false" views and contracts the overall diversity of opinions in society. Gesturing at this dynamic, Godwin distinguishes "real" from "fictitious" unanimity (3:306), the former the agreement on universal truths issuing from unrestricted small-group discussion, the latter a product of state-

sponsored methods (e.g., laws, oaths, and catechisms) enforcing “uniformity of opinion” (3:70). At another level, these conflicting remarks expose incoherency in Godwin’s thought. Although the basic unit of diversity for Godwin is the small group through which natural human diversity is accentuated, in order for his claims in *PJ* about the shaping effects of government on the human mind to appear convincing, Godwin must also present persons within national “groups” as relatively homogenous. As this tension suggests, he struggles to conceive diversity on different scales, but more so he struggles to conceptualize variation as existing *within* groups, especially given that his small groups heighten diversity only to hasten its abolition in favor of universal consensus. More basically still, Godwin’s inconsistent statements try to reconcile individualism with the socialized rationality of his small-group scheme. Montesquieu’s determinism is repudiated not just because it challenges the idea of utopian change. Determinism also questions human variability and, with it, Godwin’s theory of epistemic diversity, or the view that reason is improved by maximizing the range of beliefs in society.

Intellectual diversity has many benefits beyond fostering a rationalist utopia, a fact underplayed by critics subsuming the epistemic usefulness of Godwin’s small-group scheme under the problem of its political practicability. When describing the “small and friendly societies” with which epistemic diversity is associated in his writings, Godwin anticipates in remarkable ways a modern theorist such as Solomon, who argues that clashes between diverse viewpoints “lead everyone to correct and improve their position” (38). By cultivating individuality, one increases the diversity in a group and the total number of positions from which beliefs are criticized. The exposure to heterogeneous views, Godwin agrees, makes good ideas better: “no principle [...] can be so securely established, as when its adversaries are permitted to attack it, and it is found superior to every objection” (2:140). Some principles will survive all objections and come to inform the practices of the utopian future. But Godwin’s primary focus is on

cultivating diversity to ensure that existing beliefs become better supported. As the "On National Education" chapter of *PJ* implies, forcing persons to defend beliefs through the marshaling of diverse perspectives holds value whatever political goal is achieved:

If I cease from the habit of being able to recal this evidence, my belief is no longer a perception, but a prejudice. [...] The man who is in the best sense an intellectual being, delights to recollect the reasons that have convinced him, to repeat them to others, that they may produce conviction in them, and stand more distinct and explicit in his own mind; and he adds to this a willingness to examine objections. (3:358)

Godwin opposes national education not foremost because it instills aristocratic ideology, but because it spawns epistemic bad habits, namely ignoring objections and accepting unsupported claims. Similar concerns appear in *Thoughts on Man* (1831) for the "millions [who] believe [...] propositions and systems [...] the evidence of which they have not considered" (6:173). That such a remark comes in a late work distant from the revolutionary ferment of the 1790s suggests that Godwin's theory of epistemic diversity is detachable from the political program in which it is first articulated. Variety promises utopia, but it immediately produces persons able to defend their beliefs.

The effects of diversity transcend the individual. In the passage taken as my first epigraph, Godwin suggests that reducing the "variety of sentiments" decreases intellectual "acuteness" generally. From one perspective this statement speaks of individuals collectively. But from another angle Godwin's comment moves away from Longino's individualism and towards something like Solomon's position that "epistemic phenomena go beyond the individual" (29). Building on the claim that "if each do not preserve his individuality, the judgment of all will be feeble," Godwin complains in *PJ* that "instead of making each man an individual, which the interest of the whole requires" mass meetings banish "varieties" of mind and reduce all involved to a "mass"

(4:144). Through the phrases “judgment of all” and “interest of the whole,” Godwin implies that cultivating individuality and thus group diversity has a collective effect, despite his insistence elsewhere that groups are simply “aggregation[s] of individuals” (3:54). By insisting that the sum never exceeds the parts, Godwin aims to deny that small-group discussions bypass the judgment of some participants, as is the case, so he tells us, in mass gatherings. This denial does not imply, however, that persons in small groups internalize all the diverse views and information presented there. Later editions of *PJ* concede that humans cannot weigh the evidence behind every proposition (4:44-45; 4:171-72), so they must rely on inherited information (Howell 61-62). Groups likewise concentrate information and objections not available to individuals in isolation, thereby improving the “acuteness” of the reasoning of everyone involved. This is not to claim with Solomon that persons yield cognitive agency to the collective. Individuals judge, but their faculties expand through exposure to diverse objections, a diversity that, as already shown, is itself a product of interaction. Since such amplified reason exists only amid the challenge-and-response of group exchange, individual rationality is realized interactively. Reasoning, at least the most rigorous reasoning, is a social-material practice.

Godwin’s pursuit of epistemic diversity at times becomes an end in itself, trumping the rational anarchism it would serve. One such reversal is the priority of multiplicity over accuracy or truthfulness in Godwin’s work. As Solomon points out, even wrong opinions, if sufficiently diversified, merit inclusion in discussion. False beliefs serve a useful purpose by introducing new information and forcing us to ask ourselves why we accept the theories we do (25). Godwin’s insistence on individuality and his surprising tolerance for “mistaken opinions” (5:211) also leaves open the possibility that distinctiveness might be realized by espousing exploded beliefs. Since truth is “single and uniform” according to Godwin’s universalism, the imperative to cultivate individuality seemingly necessitates that everyone at some time entertain false opinions, though such falsehoods are not embraced knowingly.

Even if the "collision of mind with mind" be in fact a "collision of prejudices," as Godwin comments at one point in *PJ*, the consequence is unchanged: "truth is elicited" (3:133). The very mechanism by which truth is secured challenges the primacy of truth.¹²

Godwin's attention to epistemic diversity carries implications for his own writings. To the extent that he appears at times to court singularity or eccentricity for their own sakes, Godwin's philosophical works embody the principles of individuality and diversity they advocate. Philp notes that Godwin exerts himself in *C* to stake out a unique position in the quarrel between the radical LCS and the repressive ministry of William Pitt ("Progress" 63; 74). The polarization of English politics in the 1790s is a key context for understanding Godwin's valorizing of epistemic diversity. But unnoticed is that this pursuit of a third position enacts his advice from *PJ* to resist uniformity and cultivate dissent. Hence it is tempting to think that Godwin's most eccentric ideas, including his oft-ridiculed prediction that future humans will achieve immortality (3:462), are offered less from conviction of truth than from confidence that iconoclasm has epistemic value. From the viewpoint of epistemic diversity, Godwin's prediction of human immortality, however farfetched, is valuable in inviting others to re-examine their beliefs. In his reply to Samuel Parr's *Spital Sermon* (1801), Godwin offers precisely such intellectual stock-taking as the goal of his speculative sallies in *PJ*:

I was by no means assured of the truth of my own system. [...] I knew that my speculations had led me out of the beaten track; and I waited to be instructed by the comment of others as to the degree of value which should be stamped upon them. [...] If [my doctrines] were refuted, I should still have occasion to rejoice, in having procured to the public the benefit of that refutation, of so much additional disquisition and knowledge. (2:171)

The idea that flawed notions can work a public "benefit" reflects a stance in which multiplicity trumps accuracy, and conflict – not consensus –

improves reason. To suggest that Godwin purposefully indulges in eccentric speculation should not be interpreted as diminishing the seriousness of his political or philosophical program. Just the opposite. Statements in Godwin's works that previously struck scholars as outlandish or silly, when framed in terms of epistemic diversity, emerge as part of a serious strategy to inspire through his writings the same rational progress that they describe.

No discussion of the theory driving Godwin's preference for small groups would be complete without remarking on its limitations. For all his stress on diversity, Godwin fails to specify how much and what kinds of heterogeneity are necessary. He hints in *PJ* at a normative ideal, asserting that "a sufficient variety of systems and opinions" must be present to improve reason (3:15). But nowhere is this ideal defined. None of the systems mentioned in his works – "monarchical or republican" (2:140); "whig or [...] tory" (6:174); and "Papist" or "Protestant" (5:210) – reflect the radical heterogeneity that *PJ* appears to envision. Corresponding mainly to religious institutions or political parties, these predictable, binary options for diversification signal a further weakness: the assumption that institutionalized forms of sociality, including mass meetings, necessarily obliterate the variation nurtured through informal socializing. His own examples imply that diversity owes more to institutions than Godwin lets on. He recognizes a negative example of the institutional pooling of information when he complains that the "doctrine of transubstantiation" could never have persisted without help from the Catholic Church (3:20). But he refuses to see that the prolongation of that pernicious doctrine performs a useful function according to his own theory of epistemic diversity. Its survival not only heightened the rigor of opposing theological concepts across the centuries, but it presumably also helped Godwin himself better work out the basis of his own opposition to institutionalized religion.

Of all the weaknesses of his theory, the most relevant is Godwin's failure to fully justify his view of mass meetings. If epistemic diversity establishes the importance of heterogeneity by linking it to improved rationality, the doctrine also offers no explanation for why gatherings of a

certain size diminish both qualities. When, in *PJ*, Godwin declares, "truth disclaims the alliance of marshaled numbers" (3:122), he implies that judgment wanes as group size increases. His rejection of mass meetings reflects a fairly consistent view that great "numbers" damage reasoning by reducing variety.¹³ But from the vantage point of epistemic diversity more participants, no matter how numerous, would lead to greater diversity and improved reasoning. The problems continue with Godwin's alternative. Small meetings would not expand but rather limit the overall quality of reasoning by reducing the range of beliefs present. Moreover, by diminishing the anonymity that in crowds minimizes certain social inducements to agreement such as the need for approval (Solomon 31), "friendly" meetings would in fact intensify the social interests Godwin claims that they moderate. In short, epistemic diversity, a theory assuming a social perspective on reasoning, complements and extends Godwin's challenge to the rational-social dichotomy. But Godwin's views on group size and its effects are not fully explicable in the terms of this theory. Thus, in order to grasp why small groups are the ideal forum for diversity and reason, we must consider a related concept: sympathy.

III

Of the many social forces buffeting judgment, Godwin seizes on sympathy to ground his preference for small groups over mass meetings. As Fairclough observes, "sympathy is singled out as peculiarly alien and threatening to the qualities of rational action" (95). In the "unreserved conversation" of small groups, Godwin notes, "reason will spread itself, and not [...] sympathy" (3:121). Or, "while the sympathy of opinion catches from man to man, especially in numerous meetings [...] actions may be determined on, which solitary reflection would have rejected" (3:118). The second example is important. Where the first passage implies the existence of purely rational, sympathy-free interaction, the second suggests that sympathy pervades all groups. Sympathy is just "especially" intense in "numerous meetings." The strain between the two passages reflects a larger tension in Godwin's work between the

inherited rational-social dichotomy and a view of rationality as a social practice, the latter permitting small-group debate to emerge as a third option collapsing the old dichotomy. The second passage also raises questions central to the discussion to follow. Why is sympathy and therefore the erosion of diversity more intense in mass meetings? How does sympathy relate to group size? What does the inescapability of sympathy mean for rationality construed as a social practice? Asking these questions represents a shift from past studies focusing on Godwin's relative debts to Adam Smith's voluntarist concept of sympathy versus Hume's account in which ideas and emotions flow between persons without conscious choice (Philp, *Godwin's* 150-54; Fairclough 97). Recognizing the merit in these studies, I instead want to trace Godwin's view of sympathy to spatial metaphors borrowed from the associationist psychology of Locke, Hume, and David Hartley as well as from Dissenting religious writings. Such metaphors, by presenting reason as an act of mental "distancing" that parallels a removal of self from society, give rise to Godwin's social perspective on rationality.

Godwin's relating sympathy to group size draws, perhaps indirectly, on Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). Consistent with the rational-social dichotomy within Enlightenment thought, Locke presents all beliefs "*taken upon Trust from others*," i.e., beliefs owing to social processes rather than solitary reason, as suspect. Readers are assured that the *Essay* was composed at a remove from society, i.e., "*in a retirement*" (7), a phrase marking Locke's ties to the tradition of rational Dissent shared by Godwin. Raised a "moderate Calvinist" (Marshall 260), Locke in his writings shows a familiarity with Puritan-Dissenting religious rituals, including self-seclusion or closet "retirement" for the purposes of self-examination.¹⁴ The *Essay* abounds with metaphors recalling such rituals, including Locke's likening of the mind to "a Closet wholly shut from light" (163). Implying that thought requires distancing the self from society, such figures complement the Dissenting stress on rejecting religious institutions and tracing God's will privately, parallels contributing to the appeal of Lockean epistemology among Dissenters

such as Isaac Watts, whose writings Godwin read at the Hoxton Dissenting Academy.¹⁵ Such figures also supported Locke's habit of distinguishing rational and non-rational in spatial terms. Ideas derived from sense and society are "so united [...] that there is no separation, no distance between them" (119); by contrast, concepts discovered by reason boast component ideas "loose and independent" (397), much like the isolated persons who contemplate them. Similar language features in Locke's remarks on association. Beyond being "wrong" connections, associated ideas "keep in company" (395) so closely that the erroneous link escapes detection and revision. Locke's language anticipates a crucial aspect of Godwin's own discussion of sympathy: the figuring of mental phenomena in spatial terms.

As the phrase "keeping company" suggests, Locke borrows his language for associative thought from the social world, from the assemblies Godwin knew as "popular associations." If reasoning resembles retirement, then association looks like society. Associated ideas not only comprise "companies" and "gangs" for Locke, but also act like persons, "attending" "accompanying," and "introducing" one another (395).¹⁶ Though the link between popular and mental associations could be metaphorical, that so dogged an enemy of figuration as Locke would use this language if the link were purely figurative is doubtful. Locke later confirms a causal connection, stating that associated ideas create popular associations. "Wrong [...] Combinations of Ideas," he declares, "establish the Irreconcilable opposition between different Sects of Philosophy and Religion." Social groups in turn generate associated ideas as well: "independent *Ideas* [...] are by Education, Custom, and the constant din of their Party [...] coupled in their Minds" (400). What starts out as a metaphor ends as a source: popular associations inspire non-rational thought while isolation from society fosters reason.

Godwin contests this sort of dichotomous logic, but the notion that social and mental worlds work in parallel and mutually-constituting ways nevertheless informs the writings both of Godwin and of Dissenters more

generally. Consider this passage from *An Inquiry into the Nature of Subscription* (1792) by Godwin's friend and fellow Dissenter George Dyer (1755-1841):

For these four or five past years I have not regularly attended any place of public worship. [...] Engaged in inquiries, that had much to do with sects and sentiments, it became my duty to be influenced by no bias whatsoever. [...] Retirement seemed my proper post, and in solitude I enjoyed devotion, and found comfort. I frequently found it necessary to separate from all, that I might be controlled by none. (xxiii)

Before joining the debate over the requirement that would-be ministers subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, Dyer retires from "all christian assemblies" (xxii) to avoid the sympathetic uptake of the associated ideas ("bias") specific to these groups. His sense that he must "separate from all" so that his ideas will "be controlled by none" reflects the premise that physical space shapes ideational distance and, in turn, both awareness of and the rational choice between ideas. Godwin writes only occasionally of "retirement," but repetition of a word is not a sufficient register of the importance of the concept in his work.¹⁷ His suspicion of all close "cooperation" elsewhere in *PJ* (3:450) implies an allegiance to a Lockean-Dissenting spatial model of rationality.

Influenced by Locke, Godwin's concept of sympathy derives most directly from Hume. Missing from Locke's account is an explanation for why associated ideas – beyond the implications of the shared name – spread in popular associations and standardize opinions. Such an explanation comes in the form of the concept of sympathy as presented in Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40), a text Godwin was reading before the 1793 edition of *PJ* appeared (Fairclough 107). Hume links mental and popular associations, taking a sunnier view of associated ideas than Locke insofar as he sees association to be more prevalent than reason. His explanation for this prevalence – that people

naturally prefer society to retirement (13) – reinforces the rational-social dichotomy. Popular associations beget mental associations while reason demands "solitude" (172). Sympathy, or the desire to "embrace the opinions of others" (208) resulting from this preference, intensifies with certain physical factors, including "contiguity." "The sentiments of others have little influence," Hume notes, "when far remov'd from us" (207). But sympathy does more than reinforce Locke's dichotomy and the related idea that reason demands distance. In making the spread of opinions a function of social space rather than interaction as such, Hume opens the possibility that one can interact while still maintaining the distance needed to resist sympathy. He construes distance as an effect of group size: the more persons in a finite space, the closer they are and the more strongly they sympathize. Thus, according to Hume's logic, Dyer need not and indeed cannot retire from everyone. Escaping sympathy and other social motives for belief acceptance is impossible because socializing is unavoidable. The way to minimize sympathy is to mix in Godwin's sort of small circles, circles in which persons and ideas alike remain "loose and independent."

The spatial concept of sympathy shapes Godwin's own social practices. Robert Anderson has demonstrated the abundance of "spatial-geographical metaphors" (632) in Godwin's writings, so there is no need to list examples here. More important to notice is the way in which such spatial language blurs the line between cognitive process and social activity. When Godwin remarks in the 1798 edition of *PJ* that "so far as the mind is in a state of progressive improvement, we are perpetually coming nearer to each other" (3:450), he suggests that opinions are growing similar. At the same time, his language implies that standardization involves or requires the act of moving closer to others, thereby anticipating the spatial language of "compression" that modern theorists use to describe the effects of global media (Robertson 8). Inheriting Locke's metaphor hardly commits Godwin to also literalizing it, but as Anderson demonstrates, Godwin's unlikely defense of property in *PJ* appears to result from his taking that metaphor literally (634-39).

Whatever the case, the overlap between mental and physical proximity prompts certain social-material practices, as shown in this passage from the *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798):

influenced by the ideas I had long entertained upon the subject of cohabitation, I engaged an apartment, about twenty doors from our house in the Polygon, Somers Town, which I designed for the purpose of my study and literary occupations. [...] we were both of us of opinion, that it was possible for two persons to be too uniformly in each other's society. Influenced by that opinion, it was my practice to repair to the apartment [...] as soon as I rose, and frequently not to make my appearance in the Polygon, till the hour of dinner. (168-69)

In describing what amounts to a non-religious ritual of retirement, Godwin stresses the distance ("twenty doors") separating his apartment from the Polygon, suggesting that his goal is to minimize contiguity and thus the sympathetic flow of opinions between himself and his wife Wollstonecraft. All conversation involves some sympathy (3:452), so retirement is necessary to preserve individuality of judgment. But as Godwin's return at dinner implies, reasoning involves not merely analyzing ideas in solitude – and not primarily because socializing with Wollstonecraft, as Hume would suggest, is unavoidable. Retirement must be a temporary state because the most "acute" rationality only comes into existence through intersubjective "collision." Godwin's spatial model of judgment occasions a complex social-cognitive practice in which solitude is alternated with interaction so as to minimize the unifying effects of sympathy while still gaining exposure to diverse views.

Most relevant about Godwin's own material practice for grasping his anti-mass politics is the construal of distance and sympathy in both temporal and spatial terms. Persons can be "too uniformly in each other's society," i.e., not only too close but also in company for too often and too long. This idea owes less to Hume than to David Hartley's *Observations*

on Man (1749), an associationist work whose influence on Godwin is well-documented (Philp, *Godwin's* 90-93). Even more skeptical of reason than Hume, Hartley doubts that inherited concepts can ever be resolved into their basic parts; rather, all concepts are "indeterminate Aggregate[s]" of other ideas (421). Reasoning, when understood as the dissolving of associations and distancing of ideas, does not exist (499). If Godwin found this aspect of Hartley's theory troubling in its implying that people were moved by ideas they could not analyze (3:34), then such concerns failed to keep him from adopting Hartley's associationist language. According to the inherited metaphors, the inescapability of associated ideas meant that popular association is also unavoidable. If reasoning exists, then it exists through "association" in both senses. Leaving the Polygon helps Godwin avoid absorbing Wollstonecraft's associations to the exclusion of all others since sympathy grows over time. As Hartley states, people "exposed for an indefinite Time to the same [...] Associations [...] will become perfectly similar" (82). Godwin's practice reflects not only the equation of spatial and mental activity, but also the idea that visiting one circle regularly and for long periods promotes uniformity.

The other key concept for understanding Godwin's anti-mass politics is Hartley's notion of "counter-association." Though rejecting the Lockean vision of the "dis-associated" thinker who, by virtue of his or her isolation, dissolves associated ideas and reassembles them "rationally," Hartley admits that something like reason exists through "counter-association" (346). In counter-association, associated ideas are played off against one another just as truth is elicited for Godwin from collisions between beliefs. Ideas ignored and therefore habitually obeyed, when confronted with a contrasting association, become subject to reflection and choice (Allen 24-25). As the inescapability of sympathy implies, beliefs vary less from individual to individual for Hartley than from group to group, from association to association. To that extent, "counter-association" is as much a sociological as a cognitive phenomenon and can be explicated wholly at the social level, in effect

dissolving the rational-social dichotomy.¹⁸ The implications of Hartley's language for social practice are profound. Counter-association takes place *between* groups, i.e., it requires persons to move from group to group in order to acquire the conflicting associations that constitute reasoning.¹⁹ Persons never linger so long or so often as to identify with the views of any one group, identification that proves less likely when groups remain small. Godwin's own habit of socializing with LCS members but never joining that organization embodies such a practice. By "remain[ing ...] on the edge of the more active republican circles" (Philp, *Godwin's* 76), Godwin confronts differing opinions without risking sympathetic identification. The danger of membership in such groups is not just their "largeness," then, but equally, their "incessant activity" (2:130). Mass meetings demand a regularity of attendance that minimizes occasions for socializing with other groups and thus also gathering the conflicting ideas that make rationality possible.

We can now fully appreciate the foundations of Godwin's rejection of mass meetings. The roots of his anti-mass politics lie with his understanding of rationality on the model of counter-association, a model in which reasoning requires the presence of multiple clubs, groups, and "associations" both social and intellectual. Such a model informs Godwin's own social life. The dinners with Timothy Hollis, the Sundays at John Horne Tooke's house, and the socializing in and around Joseph Johnson's shop – all involved encounters with persons of diverse philosophical and political views ranging from Foxite Whig to Jacobin. The rise of the LCS after 1789 endangered a notion of rationality founded on such a social practice, auguring the possibility for Godwin that "millions of men" would become "united" (2:125) in viewpoint and, as a result, bring about the eclipse of reason. Godwin's response to LCS crowds also reflects the limitations of the associationist model, namely its failure to conceive diversity and rationality, on account of the assumed workings of sympathy, as other than qualities existing *between* popular associations. Similar to modern critics of globalization who lament the loss of diversity across nations and cultures while ignoring the increased diversity within societies (Cowen 14-15),

Godwin struggles to grasp that diversity can and indeed does persist *within* groups, a circumstance clear from Godwin's own socializing. At Johnson's table he encountered not only radicals but also the Tory politician Carrington Smith; and his dinners with the erstwhile liberals Parr and Mackintosh boasted the presence of the fiercely anti-Jacobin scholar Thomas Maurice (*Diary*). Godwin ignores the internal diversity in his own social circles out of apparent allegiance to an associationist paradigm in which groups are the most basic unit of diversity and the individuality of one's judgment is a function of moving between such groups.

IV

Attending closely to Godwin's philosophy reveals that the two forces often cited for inspiring his anti-mass politics – individualism and class bias – have less influence than previously recognized. The root of Godwin's preference for small clubs over crowded gatherings instead lies with his overlooked commitment to epistemic diversity. Because reason not only improves but to some extent only exists for Godwin through debates between persons with differing beliefs, cultivating the individuality of judgment and thus the diversity of opinions in a community is crucial. For Godwin, small groups offer the ideal conditions for diversity according to his social-spatial model of rationality and sympathy, a model indebted to both philosophical and Dissenting sources. With the non-rational spread of ideas seen according to this model as a function of physical distance, small groups allow persons to remain aloof and retain their rationality. Such a model allowed Godwin to escape an inherited rational-social dichotomy in favor of a social-material account of reason. Yet applying social metaphors to mental phenomena also left him unable to conceive of rationality in the absence of multiple groups or "popular associations" churning out the conflicting mental "associations" that constitute reasoning. Hence Godwin rejects mass meetings for destroying reasoning by reducing diversity to a single "association" in both senses of the word. So doing, he extends a cautionary reminder to our own global age about how

diversity is conceived. Preserving variety in the face of globalized media demands not resistance to perceived standardization but rather, as the limitations of Godwin's own anti-mass politics demonstrate, new and more flexible ways of conceptualizing the production and location of diversity.

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Notes

¹ For both the promise of global media to circulate local concepts and its potential to obliterate such variation, see Eugenia Siapera's *Cultural Diversity and Global Media: The Mediation of Difference* (London: Blackwell, 2010), esp. 5-8.

² All citations from Godwin's works refer to Mark Philp's *Political and Philosophical Writings* (see Works Cited) unless otherwise indicated.

³ Albert Goodwin discusses Copenhagen Fields as well as the other LCS gatherings in *The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

⁴ For the purposes of this essay, *diversity* is not defined as multiculturalism or cultural pluralism, that is, as the range of gender, ethnic, and regional identities in a group. By the modern standard of cultural diversity, the sorts of groups that Godwin has in mind, groups fractured by political and religious rather than cultural differences, are not especially heterogeneous; and in any case, because Godwin privileges an abstract and universalizing reason, the identities of persons in his groups matter less than the opinions and ideas they hold. This is not to say that the experience of a person of a certain gender or ethnicity does not shape their ideas or constrain what they can know, just that for Godwin diversity of opinion, not diversity of identity, is the primary focus. Accordingly, I use *diversity* to specify variety in ideas, opinions, and values without making any claim to the identities of the persons voicing these ideas, opinions, and values.

⁵ In *The Poverty of Theory and other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review, 1978), Thompson, reacting to Godwin's rejection of mass politics, alleges that his philosophy is "divorced from [...] actual social commitment" (181).

⁶ For the class composition of the reform societies, see E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1966), 119-21. Mary Thrale discusses the audiences at the Society for Free Debate and other debating clubs in "London Debating Societies in the 1790s," *The Historical Journal* 32 (1989): 57-86.

⁷ Godwin recounts the episode in *Thoughts Occasioned by the Perusal of Dr. Parr's Spital Sermon* (1801): "The attack proceeds in uniform and uninterrupted style without admitting of an answer. Three times a week did Mr. Mackintosh address an audience of one hundred persons, dissecting and mangling my sentiments and reasonings as he pleased without the possibility of my in any way checking his career" (2:175).

⁸ The quotation from the "Of Political Associations" chapter reads: "Activity of thought is shackled by the fear that our associates should disclaim us" (3:122). The quotation from the "Of National Assemblies" section reads: "The activity of his thought [i.e., the thought of the member of Parliament] is shackled at every turn by the fear that his associates may disclaim him" (3:307).

⁹ Gregory Claeys notes Godwin's dislike of the practice of stopping debate for a vote. See "William Godwin's Critique of Democracy and Republicanism and its Sources," *History of European Ideas* 7 (1986): 253-69.

¹⁰ For a discussion of these dichotomies in the writings of Descartes, Locke, and Berkeley, see George Rousseau, ed., *The Languages of Psyche: Mind and Body in the Enlightenment Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

¹¹ In the chapter "Of the Association of Ideas" added to the 1700 edition of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke, for example, repeatedly stresses the "chance," "accidental," and idiosyncratic nature of association (fl. 396).

¹² Since truth and political progress are linked for Godwin, the pursuit of diversity, in undermining the value of truthfulness, also at times threatens his politics. One consequence of feudalism, Godwin claims in his *Life of Geoffrey Chaucer* (1804), is that modern persons are not “broken down [...] into one mass” by “edicts and institutions”; rather, they consult much oftener the dictates of feeling and promptings of disposition, than the inventions of legislators. The consequence of this is, that we remark and treasure a thousand little sentiments and emotions [...] and our characters, cherished by the warmth of a less artificial mode of society, unfold a variety of minuter lineaments and features, which under other circumstances in man have been blighted and destroyed. (1:55-56)

Where before the rational individualism Godwin advocated in the 1790s offered individuals unparalleled possibilities for differentiation, the feudal order is now presented as offering persons more diverse and “meaningful role[s]” (Weston 461). The vagaries of association rejected, variety now reflects one’s place in the social hierarchy, a source of variation unthinkable within Godwin’s earlier anarchism. Regardless of the accuracy of his portrayal of feudalism, Godwin’s idealizing the variations flowing from such a hierarchical system shows that his pursuit of diversity sometimes outpaced his politics.

¹³ One exception is Godwin’s discussion of cohabitation in *PJ*: “Science [i.e., knowledge] is most effectually cultivated, when the greatest number of minds are employed in the pursuit of it. If an hundred men spontaneously engage [...] a given question, the chance of success will be greater, than if only ten men were so employed” (3:452). It is unclear how this statement, though true from the vantage point of epistemic diversity, squares with Godwin’s dismissal of mass meetings on account of the numbers gathered.

¹⁴ For Dissenting rituals of closet retirement, see Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), Chap 3; and Michael Edson, “‘A Closet or a Secret Field’: Horace, Protestant

Devotion, and British Retirement Poetry," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (2012): 17-41, esp. 21-23.

¹⁵ Watts popularized Locke's theories in *Logick* (1724) and *On the Improvement of the Mind* (1741).

¹⁶ In *Locke, Literary Criticism, and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), William Walker notes that Locke's mind is a "scene of Acquaintance" (76).

¹⁷ Two examples are (1) the comment in *PJ* that "government [...] insinuate[s] itself in its effects into our most secret retirement" (4:12) and (2) the remark in *C* that "sober inquiry may pass well enough with a man in his closet" (2:133).

¹⁸ An article in a 1797 issue of the *LCS Moral and Political Magazine*, for example, refers to the "doctrine of Association." In context, the use of mass meetings is intended. But the phrase, recalling Locke's phrase "the doctrine of association," also evokes the philosophical meaning as if to imply that the former mental process can be viewed as a sociological phenomenon. See Michael T. Davis, ed., *London Corresponding Society, 1792-1799*, Vol. 4 (London: Pickering, 2002), 219.

¹⁹ Godwin uses "counter-association" to describe the Society for Preserving Liberty and Property that sprang up to "counter" the LCS in 1795 (4:143). This sociological usage was common. In *Publications Printed by the Order of the Society for Preserving Liberty and Property Against Republicans and Levellers*, No. 4 (London: J. Downes, 1793), the Society advertises itself as "a counter association rising up, protesting against the other associations, and endeavouring to counteract their effect" (n.p.). At roughly the same time, a later edition of John Gregory's 1765 *A Comparative View of the State and Faculties of Man* (Edinburgh: A. Stahan *et al.*, 1788), can refer in a Hartleian vein to "counter-association" as a cognitive process, "the art of breaking false or unnatural associations of ideas, or inducing counter associations" (275).

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