

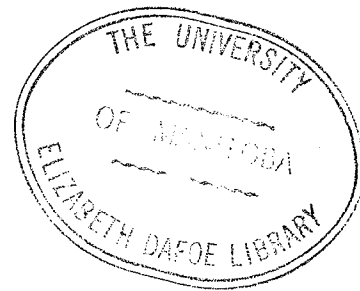
THE RENAISSANCE CODE OF THE GENTLEMAN
IN THE POETRY OF BEN JONSON

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ABSTRACT

In his study, Complaint & Satire in Early English Literature,

John Potter writes:

What matters about Jonson's comedy of humours is his firm grasp of the notion of eccentricity which implies the measurement of everyone against a natural norm; and his social instinct in linking this notion with comedy which is society's most effective weapon against the contrary and anarchical tendencies of human nature.¹

This thesis attempts to show that the norm which may be said to have governed Jonson's moral point of view was largely traditional and based on the same understanding of virtue that governed the thought and writings of his Renaissance predecessors. I have made little or no attempt to set forth or delineate the philosophical systems which may have been the basis for his a priori assumptions regarding the nature of goodness as others have already explored this question. Rather, I have tried to show through an examination of his poetry, that Jonson was a practical moralist concerned with reforming society along lines already well established and widely adopted.

¹John Potter, Complaint & Satire in Early English Literature (Oxford: The Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 24.

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CHAPTER I

JONSON AND THE RENAISSANCE CONCEPT OF THE POET

There is little doubt that the didactic view of poetry was paramount in the minds of sixteenth century writers. Although many critics have argued that the aesthetic interest was uppermost, to do so they have had to ignore much of what was written to the contrary at this time or argue that these writers were merely defending themselves against puritanical attacks on their vocation. But the evidence to the contrary is overwhelming. Sixteenth century theories regarding the nature of art were derived principally from the classics, especially the writings of Horace who

supplied the Renaissance with so many of its critical precepts, especially the mixture of utile and dulce. And one cannot pass by those deities of the Renaissance, Cicero and Quintilian, who said that the great orator—for posterity that meant the poet as well—must first of all be a good man.¹

In addition, the tradition of Christian Humanism had a long history in England which had entrenched these ideas in the minds of its spokesmen. Perhaps the most influential of these humanists who may be said to have given impetus and direction to the English humanists of the sixteenth century was Erasmus. In the following statement Erasmus sums up succinctly the a priori assumptions which could be said to have provided the justification

¹Douglas Bush, The Renaissance and English Humanism, (London: University of Toronto Press, 1939), p.46.

for most of the writers of this period.

I affirm that, as the instinct of the dog is to hunt, of the bird to fly, of the horse to gallop, so the natural bent of man is to philosophy and right conduct. As every creature most readily learns that for which he is created, therefore will man, with but slight effort, be brought to follow that to which nature has given him so strong an instinct, namely excellence, but on one condition: that nature be reinforced by the wise energy of the educator. . . . What is the proper nature of man? Surely it is to live the life of reason, for reason is the peculiar prerogative of man.²

It is in the role of educator—especially moral educator—that most poets found their raison d'être. Sidney in his The Defence of Poesy, writes "Poesy, therefore, is the art of imitation, . . . a speaking picture, with this end, to teach and delight."³ And Jonson himself sums up all the dogma and tradition of his precursors both classical and Renaissance in his preface to Volpone:

. . . For if man will impartially and not a'squint, looke toward the offices, and function of a Poet, they will easily conclude to themselues, the impossibility of any mans being the good Poet, without first being a good man. He that is said to be able to informe yong-men to all good disciplines, inflame growne-men to all great virtues, keepe old men in their best and supreme state, or as they decline to childhood recouer them to their first strength; that comes forth the interpreter, and arbiter of nature, a teacher of things diuine, no lesse then humane, a master in manners; and can alone, (or with a few) effect the business of mankinde: this, I take him, is no subject for pride,⁴ and ignorance to excercise their rayling rhetorique vpon.⁴

²Quoted in Douglas Bush, The Renaissance and English Humanism, p.6'

³Sir Phillip Sidney, "The Defence of Poesy," Tudor Poetry and Prose, ed. by J.W. Hebel, H.H. Hudson, F.R. Johnson, A.W. Green, R. Hoopes. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1953), p.806.

⁴C.N. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson (eds.), Ben Jonson Vol. V, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1952), p. 17.

In this statement, indeed, Jonson comes close to the position that Sidney had assumed which granted to the poet the power of seeing beyond the illusory fabric presented by the senses and reason to the divine order instituted by God.

Neither let it be deemed too saucy a comparison to balance the highest point of man's wit with the efficacy of nature; but rather give right honour to the heavenly maker of that maker, who, having made man to his own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature; which in nothing he showed so much as in poetry, when with the force of a divine breath, he bringeth things forth surpassing her doing with no small arguements to the incredulous of that first accursed fall of Adam; since our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it.⁵

As E.M.W. Tillyard points out, we find in this quotation a blending of the two great traditions which informed much of the thinking of Renaissance poets—Platonism and Christianity.⁶

Further evidence for Jonson's adherence to Sidney's view of the poet as inspired is to be found in his "Ode to Himself."

Where do'st thou carelesse lie
 Buried in ease and sloth?
 Knowledge, that sleepes, doth die;
 And this Securitie,
 It is the common Moath,
 That eats on wits, and Arts, and destroyes them both.

Are all the Aonian springs
 Dri'd up? lyes Thespia wast?
 Doth Clarius Harp want strings,
 That not a nymph now sings!
 Or droop they as disgrac't,
 To see their Seats and Bowers by chattring Pies defac't?

⁵Sir Phillip Sidney, "The Defence of Poesy," p. 806.

⁶E.M.W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture, (London: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 33-34.

If Hence thy silence be,
 As 'tis too just a cause;
 Let this thought quicken thee,
 Minds that are great and free,
 Should not on fortune pause,
 'Tis crowne enough to vertue still, her owne applause.

What though the greedie Frie
 Be taken with false Baytes
 Of worded Balladrie,
 And thinke it Poesie,
 They die with their conceits,
 And only pitious scorne, upon their folly waites.

Then take in hand thy Lyre,
 Strike in the proper straine,
 With Japhets lyne, aspire
Sols Chariot for new fire,
 To give the world againe:
 Who aided him, will thee, the issue of Joves braine.

And since our Daintie age,
 Cannot indure reproofe.
 Make not thyself a Page,
 To that strumpet the Stage,
 But sing high and aloofe,
 Safe from the wolves black jaw, and the dull Asses hoofe.
 (Under-wood No. 25)

The whole theme and subject of the poem, Jonson's repudiation of his own negligence and his determination to continue writing, suggests his sense of the great dignity of the poet, while the line "Aspire, Sols chariot for new fire to give the world againe" reflects Sidney's description of the poet as vates or prophet, inspired by God. In addition the general tone of the poem is aristocratic, or rather, very disdainful of the "common Moath" and may be taken to imply his concern to speak to those more likely to understand his "new fire"—the

⁷All quotations from the poems of Jonson are taken from The Complete Poetry of Ben Jonson, edited by William B. Hunter, Jr. (New York: New York University Press, 1963). Line numbers, where necessary, are indicated in brackets, as above.

aristocracy.

Much of what he had to say to the aristocracy is to be found in his minor poems where, according to Robert Bell:

. . . we must look for him as he lived, felt and thought. Here his express qualities are fully brought out; his close study of the classics, his piety and principles, and profound knowledge of mankind; his accurate observation and his strong common sense.⁸

These poems are for the most part either panegyrics or satires and consequently lend themselves very readily to a didactic purpose. As most of the chapter will concern itself with these poems it would be advisable to show how Jonson related them to his poetic theories. With respect to bestowing honours or praise, he had this to say:

When a virtuous man is rais'd, it brings gladnesse to his friends; grieffe to his enimies, and glory to his posterity. Nay his honours are a greater part of the honour of the times: when by this meanes he is growne to active men, an example, to the sloathful, a spurre, to the envious, a Punishment.⁹

Similar sentiments are to be found in the poems themselves. When he finds himself in the awkward position of having praised a man too much and therefore exposed himself to the charge of sycophancy he argues as follows:

Who e're is rai'd,
For worth he is not, He is tax'd not prais'd.
(Epigramme LXV, ll. 15-16)

⁸Ben Jonson, Poetical Works of Ben Jonson, edited with a memoir by Robert Bell (London: Charles Griffen & Co.), p. 23.

⁹Ben Jonson, Discoveries, p. 51.

At another point, however, he gives an entirely different
 reason for overpraising some men.

I have oft preferred
 Men, past their termes, and prais'd some names too much,
 But 'twas with purpose to have made them such.

(Under-wood 16. 11. 20-22)

Whatever the motive for his overpraising, these quotations reveal a man seriously concerned to justify himself on moral grounds. His biographers without exception have all argued, on the basis of his writings and his frequent courageous disregard for his own safety and interests, that he cannot with any justice be accused of sycophancy, so we should be able to accept the above quotations as sincere expressions of his own attitudes.

With respect to his satiric verse Jonson had this to say:

If men by no means write freely, or speake truth, but when it offends not; why doe Physicians cure with sharpe medicines, or corrosives? Is not the same equally lawful in the cure of the minde, that is in the cure of the body? Some vices (you will say) are soe foule, that it is better they should bee done, then spoken. But they that take offence where no Name, Character, or Signature doth blazon them, seeme to mee like affected women; who, if they heare any thing ill spoken of their Sexe, are presently mov'd as if the contumely respected their particular: and on the contrary, when they heare good of good women, conclude, that it belongs to them all.¹⁰

The metaphor of the satirists as physician which he uses here occurs in many critical statements of the Renaissance regarding satire. The portrayal of the satirists as one who cures

¹⁰Ben Jonson, Discoveries, p. 88.

the mind of vice reveals the moral basis which is fundamental to his poetic theory. A second instance of this point of view is to be found in the prologue to The Silent Woman:

The ends of all, who for the Scene doe write,
 Are, or should be, to profit, and delight.
 And still't hath beene the praise of all best times,
 So persons were not touch'd, to taxe the crimes.¹¹

He was so insistent on the dignity of the poet and his moral function that he prefaced his collection of epigrams with the poem "To My Booke" wherein he makes very clear that these poems are not written to enhance his reputation nor to gain praise, but for a serious moral purpose.

It will be look'd for, booke, when some but see
 Thy title, Epigrammes, and nam'd of mee,
 Thou should'st be bold, licentious, full of gall,
 Wormewood, and sulphure, sharpe and tooth'd withall;
 Become a petulant thing, hurle inke, and wit,
 As mad-men stones; not caring whom they hit.
 Deceive their malice, who could wish it so.
 And by thy wiser temper, let men know
 Thou are not covetous of least self fame,
 Made from the hazard of another's shame:
 Much lesse with lewd, prophane, and beastly phrase,
 To catch the worlds loose laughter, or vaine gaze.
 He that departs with his owne honesty
 For vulgar praise, doth it too dearely buy.
 (Epigrammes II)

From the foregoing it should be apparent that Jonson's basic assumptions regarding the function of the poet were not antithetical to the didactic tradition that had been adopted by many poets of the Renaissance. Douglas Bush in his study

¹¹Herford and Simpson, Ben Jonson Vol. 5, p.164.

The Renaissance and English Humanism aptly sums up the position of the poets of this period;

In a word, most Greek and Roman literature rests on the belief that a serious author is a moral teacher. In the Middle Ages that belief was, of course greatly fortified by Christianity, and if it was sometimes held with painful literalness, as it often has been since, it was also held by Dante. The Renaissance inherited the Christianized Didactic tradition of the Middle Ages and gave it an added strength derived from fuller knowledge, admiration, and understanding of the ancients.¹²

¹²Douglas Bush, The Renaissance and English Humanism, p. 46.

CHAPTER II

BEN JONSON'S CLASSICISM

The moralist is not only a teacher, he is also an observer. He is not required to formulate an ethical system based upon philosophic assumptions as to the nature of the good, nor is he required to interpret revelation. Rather, his task is to observe what is good or evil in man and "render the one lov'd, the other hated, by his proper embattling them."¹ The moral writings of Jonson are based not only on his wide reading but also on his observation of actual men; thus his moral ideal is not an abstract ideal but a description of what can be. That is not to say that the men Jonson praises were perfect, nor that Jonson thought they were. Jonson was a classicist in the finest sense of the term. Governing all his observations and writings is a sense of proportion and an awareness of human limitations.

Jonson's classicism does not consist simply in his wide reading of the classics nor in the fact that much of his work is based on classical models. Rather, it is to be seen in the point of view he reveals in his poetry. Hiram Haydn defines the

¹Ben Jonson, Timber or Discoveries Made Upon Men and Matter, ed. by F. Schilling (Boston, Ginn & Co., 1892), p. 42.

true classicist as:

a man and artist who finds it possible to accept without misgivings the authority and discipline of a fixed order and rules because he believes in the essential congruence and relatedness of the ideal and the empirically actual—that which should be and that which is.

.
 . . . it is a question of rooting the ideal in the actual and motivating the actual by the ideal—in any case, the classicist recognizes the relation as a direct and certain one, and fixes upon that recognition his aesthetic as well as his moral, philosophical or religious creed.²

The ideal for Jonson, the code of the gentleman evolved by the sixteenth century moralists, places him in the tradition of Christian Humanists (those Christian moralists and philosophers who incorporated pagan philosophies into their thought), which extends from Thomas Aquinas to John Milton.³ Although he may be said to be more of a classicist than a Christian in his writings, his classicism does not in any way negate or contradict his Christianity.⁴

²Hiram Haydn, The Counter-Renaissance (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1960), p. 15.

³Ibid., p. 17.

⁴None of the panegyrics or satires quoted deal with the Christian Theological virtues because they are not concerned with religious themes. In those poems which are concerned with religious themes, it is apparent that, to Jonson, religion was an intensely personal question. They reveal a man very much concerned with his salvation in the role of a penitent. George Burke Johnston, in his study of Ben Jonson's poetry (Ben Jonson: Poet, New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), has pointed out that where Jonson is not speaking personally as a penitent, "all, or nearly all, the religious pieces are addressed to women or are in elegies praising dead women or girls" (p. 67). Because of this, and because this thesis is concerned with the code of the gentleman in the Renaissance, these poems will not be discussed. However, it should be pointed out that Jonson's secular morality,

A distinctive feature of Jonson's classical point of view involves what L.C. Knights calls a double or dual attitude towards life. To illustrate this dualism Knights refers to Volpone's wooing of Caela, in which he promises her great magnificence. The audience could both revel in this luxurious description and, at the same time, recognize it as evil when judged by fundamental human or divine standards.⁵ Knights attributes this double attitude to the fundamental awareness of the cultural and moral inheritance of the English people:

The strength of this attitude is realized if we compare it with the puritanic disapproval of 'the world' on the one hand, or a sensuous abandonment on the other. It is the possession of this attitude that makes Jonson 'classical' not his Greek and Latin erudition. His classicism is an equanimity and assurance that springs—'here at home'—from the strength of a native tradition.⁶

Somewhere between these two extremes of "disapproval of the world" and "a sensuous abandonment" lies the reasonable approach to life. Thus the fundamental criterion in judging acts is a sense of proportion, a consciousness of a mean between two extremes. But Jonson did not have to spell out this mean or proportion for his readers; he portrayed his characters vividly, secure in the knowledge that his audience would recognize the virtuous.

as revealed in the poetry discussed, is not in any way incompatible with Christianity, and, as the religious poetry reveals, Jonson was deeply concerned with his faith.

⁵L.C. Knights, "Tradition and Ben Jonson," Ben Jonson: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by James A. Barish (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 30.

⁶Ibid.

Perhaps the best illustration of this moderate and reasonable point of view is to be seen in those poems which concern themselves with physical or sensual pleasures. In his epigram "Inviting a Friend to Supper" he deals at great length with the pleasures of the table.

It is the faire acceptance, Sir, creates
 The entertaynement perfect; not the cates.
 Yet shall you have, to rectifie your palate,
 An olive, capers, or some better sallade
 Ushring the mutton; with a short-leg'hen,
 If we can get her, full of eggs, and then,
 Limons, and wine for sauce: to these, a coney
 Is not to be despair'd of, for our money;
 And, though fowle, now, be scarce, yet there are clarkes,
 The skie not falling, thinke we may have larkes.
 Ile tell you of more, and lye, so you will come:
 Of partrich, pheasant, wood-cock, of which some
 May yet be there; and godwit, if we can:
 Knat, raile, and ruffe too. How so ere, my man
 Shall reade a piece of Virgil, Tacitus,
Livie, or of some better booke to us,
 Of which wee'll speake our minds, amidst our meate;
 And Ile professe no verses to repeate:
 To this, if ought appeare, which I know not of,
 That will the pastrie, not my paper, show of.
 Digestive cheese, and fruit there sure will bee;
 But that, which most doth take my Muse, and mee,
 Is^a pure cup of rich Canary-wine,
 Which is the Mermaids, now, but shall be mine:
 Of which had Horace, or Anacreon tasted,
 Their lives, as doe their lines, till now had lasted.
 (ll. 7-32)

While he obviously delights in the sensual enjoyment of the pleasures he is depicting, he is careful to insert a significant qualification at the end of this rich description in the line: "Of this we will sup free, but moderately" (l. 35).

Although he does not present this in the form of a moral injunction, he does give it some added emphasis with the internal rhyme which is rare in Jonson. On the other hand, he has many

satires directed at those who overindulge in sensual pleasures.

One of the more amusing is "On Gut":

Gut eates all day, and lechers all the night,
 So all his meate he tasteth over, twice:
 And, striving so to double his delight,
 He makes himselfe a thorough-fare of vice.
 Thus, in his belly, can he change a sin
 Lust it comes out, that glottony went in.

Here he satirizes both glottony and lust. But Jonson is not disapproving of all sexual pleasure as the opening stanzas of "Epithalamion" reveal:

Up youthes and virgins, up, and praise
 The god, whose nights out-shine his daies;
Hymen, whose hallowed rites
 Could never boast of brighter lights:
 Whose bands passe libertee.
 Two of your troope, that, with the morne were free,
 Are now, wag'd to his warre.
 And what they are,
 If you'll perfection see,
 Your selves must be.
 Shine Hesperus, shine forth, thou wished starre.

What joy, or honors can compare
 With holy nuptials, when they are
 Made out of equal parts
 Of yeeres, of states, of hands, of hearts?
 When, in the happy choyce,
 The spouse, and spoused have the formost voyce!
 Such, glad of Hymens warre,
 Live what they are,
 And long perfection see:
 And such ours bee.
 Shine Hesperus, shine forth thou wished starre.

Again we see the qualifications which renders this sensual pleasure virtuous. The couple are not only married, their marriage is a love match and they are of equal birth and years. Many other examples might be cited to illustrate Jonson's sense of proportion, but these few should suffice to show that he advocates neither a "puritanic disapproval of

the world" nor "sensuous abandonment."

The poem quoted above is the concluding lines of The Haddington Masque, presented at court on February 9, 1608, in honour of the marriage of John Ramsey, Viscount Haddington. A glance at the index to The Complete Poetry of Ben Jonson reveals that the great majority of his poems are addressed to the titled nobility—those to whom the code of the gentleman was most applicable. This is more true of the panegyrics than it is of the satires, but there is good reason for this. Renaissance theory of satire insisted that it be impersonal.⁷ Consequently, Jonson, rather than identify the objects of his satire directly, gave them names which reflected their particular folly. Names such as "Sir Lucklesse Woo-all," "Old Colt," and "Pertinax Cob," not only provide the necessary impersonality of address, but succinctly characterize the folly he is rendering ridiculous.⁸ The tone of the panegyrics, as Geoffrey Walton in

⁷Oscar J. Campbell, Comicall Satyre and Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida (San Marino, California: C.F. Baun & Co., 1965), p. 39

⁸T. S. Eliot, in a comment on the plays of Jonson, makes an interesting observation which, in my opinion, is also valid with reference to the satiric verse:
His characters are and remain like Marlowe's, simplified characters; but the simplification does not consist in the dominance of a particular humor or monomania. That is a very superficial account of it. The simplification consists largely in a reduction of detail, in the seizing of aspects relevant to the relief of the emotional impulse which remains the same for that character, in making the character conform to a particular setting. This stripping is essential to the art, to which is also essential a flat distortion in the drawing; it is an art of caricature, of great caricature, like Marlowe's. It is a great caricature which is beautiful, and a great humour which is serious.
Selected Essays (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1934), p. 159.

his essay "The Tone of Jonson's Poetry" points out, reveals that Jonson not only addresses the nobility directly but also addresses them with a tone of intimacy which suggests that he must have been very familiar with them. He flatters them splendidly without being at all obsequious and never hesitates to offer them advice based on his personal sense of values and classical point of view. Walton further argues that "there was no impassable gap between the world of the poet's vision and Jacobean and Caroline England."⁹ Thus the ideal could be seen to manifest itself in the actual—the code of the gentleman was reflected in the nobility of England.

⁹Walton, "The Tone of Ben Jonson's Poetry," p. 212.

CHAPTER III

THE CODE OF THE GENTLEMAN

Granted the fact that the Elizabethans adhered to a fixed order of society based on a hierarchical concept of man,¹ it should not be difficult to understand why moralists addressed their writings to the aristocracy. Because of his pre-eminent position the noble was expected to assume the responsibility of governing the realm and setting an example for those beneath him; thus he was the logical subject for a treatise on morality.

As has already been pointed out in chapter two, Jonson addresses himself almost exclusively to the nobility. In doing so he places himself firmly in the tradition of other Renaissance moralists. As Douglas Bush points out,

¹E. M. W. Tillyard concludes his study The Elizabethan World Picture as follows:

. . . we can estimate the eminence of Elizabethan writers by the earnestness and the passion and the assurance with which they surveyed the range of the universe. By this same means we may find an unexpected kinship between writers too often dissociated. Using this criterion I find that the most eminent are Spenser, Sidney, Raleigh, Hooker, Shakespeare, and Jonson, and that all these are united in holding with earnestness, passion, and assurance to the main outlines of the Medieval world picture as modified by the Tudor regime, although they all knew the coherence of this picture had been threatened.

E. M. W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture, p. 130.

The broad aim of Tudor Humanism was trainingⁱⁿ virtue and good letters; the practical aim was training for the active Christian life, especially public life. For Humanism was not only religious, it was also both aristocratic and utilitarian. The mere title of Elyot's book, The Governor, indicates its object.²

Like Elyot and many others, Jonson is concerned to instruct those who would have the greatest impact on the commonwealth.³

The twentieth century reader interested in the climate of social opinion in Jonson's day cannot but encounter grave difficulties. According to one modern critic,

²Douglas Bush, The Renaissance and English Humanism, p.78.

³Thomas Hobbes's discussion of the areas of poetic concern sheds considerable light on the practice of poets of addressing themselves to particular groups. Although written in 1650, it would be based on observation of practice in the past so could be assumed to apply to some extent to Jonson and his contemporaries.

As Philosophers have divided the Universe, their subject into three Regions, Celestiall, Aeriall, and Terrestriall, so the Poets (whose work it is, by imitating humane life in delightful and measur'd lines, to avert men from vice and incline them to virtuous and honourable actions) have lodg'd themselves in the three regions of mankinde, Court, City and Country, correspondent in some proportion to those three regions of the World. For there is in Princes and men of conspicuous power, anciently called Heroes, a lustre and influence upon the rest of man resembling that of the heavens; and an insincereness, inconstance, and troublesome humour of those that dwell in Cities, like the nobility, blustering, and umpurity of the Aire; and a plainness, and though dull, yet a nutritive faculty in rurall people, that endures a comparison with the earth they labour.

Thomas Hobbes, "Answer to Davenant's Preface to Gondibert," Seventeenth Century Critical Essays, ed. by J. E. Spingarn, p. 55, Vol. II.

The social historian who attempts to deduce the moral code of a period finds he is generally defining the undefinable. Only during times of great social homogeneity is such definition possible, although even then the accepted code is bound to be an ideal not completely realized. The Elizabethan age is notable as a period of transition during which entire classes of society were made over by the influx of new philosophies from the continent and the political and mercantile progress of the whole nation.⁴

While the argument advanced in this statement is unquestionably persuasive, it need not deter one from examining the code in terms of the ideal which the moralists of the day advocated.

One factor which makes this examination much easier is the fact that the moralists with whom we are concerned addressed themselves primarily to one rather small class of people, the aristocracy. And although there was a degree of social mobility in Renaissance times, this social mobility does not represent a problem because the writers who took upon themselves the task of instructing the aristocracy in moral standards were concerned with the class and not the individuals who composed it. What does pose a real problem is the fact that this aristocracy in the latter part of the sixteenth century and early part of the seventeenth tended to divide itself into two distinct groups, the court and the country. The court nobles were more attuned to their times and more concerned with the governing of the realm, which, according to the moralists, was

⁴Willard Thorp, The Triumph of Realism in Elizabethan Drama 1558-1612 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1928).

their chief function. However, they also became identified with the corruption of the court and tainted with the vices which usually accompany office-seeking and politics. On the other hand, the nobles of the country tended to dissociate themselves from the court and thus from their prime responsibility of governing. More conservative, they reflected the values of a previous age and became highly critical of the new order of things in London. The problem for the moralists was that they had to present a common ideal for both groups, despite the conflicting demands of the court and the country.

The primary function of both these groups was to serve the commonwealth. They became the ambassadors, the counsellors, the secretaries, the provincial governors, and the magistrates of England.⁵ Unlike their Italian counterparts, who may be said to have been guided by the desire for personal perfection, they were expected to set "duty to the state as the prime consideration of the gentleman."⁶ This duty required a knowledge of the law and it is therefore not surprising that this profession came to be regarded as the fittest for gentlemen.⁷ Whether

⁵Ruth Kelso, The Doctrine of the Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964), p. 53.

⁶Kelso, p. 39.

⁷Sir Thomas Elyot has this to say about the study of law:
But to reseort unto lawyers. I think verily if children were brought up as I have written, and continually were retained in the right study of philosophy until they passed the age of twenty-one years, and then set to the

they served in the court or on a country estate, a knowledge of the law was absolutely essential. Next to the task of governing they were expected to defend the kingdom in time of war. Thus they were required to be learned not only in the liberal arts so necessary to the administration of the kingdom but also in the military sciences.

The curriculum designed for the education of gentlemen was broad in scope and largely utilitarian.⁸ It included Latin and Greek as well as modern languages, philosophy, law, history, poetry (though poetry was somewhat in disrepute), mathematics, geography, and even drawing and sculpting, justified on the grounds that they would be serviceable in making maps and designing fortifications. In addition to the cultivation of the mind educators were concerned with the development of the body. Roger Ascham gives a list of the pastimes suitable to a young gentleman:

. . . to ride comely; to run fair at the tilt or ring; to play at all weapons; to shoot fair in bow, or surely in fun; to vault lustily; to run; to leap; to wrestle; to swim; to dance comely; to sing and play of instruments cunningly; to hawk; to hunt; to play at tennis and all pastimes generally which be joined with labour, used in

laws of this realm (being once brought to a more certain and compendious study, and either in English, Latin, or good French, written in a more clean and elegant style) undoubtedly they should become men of so excellent wisdom that throughout all the world should be found in no common weal more noble counsellors, . . .

⁸Kelso, p. 127.

open places, and on the daylight, containing either some fit exercise for war or some pleasant pastime for peace, be not only comely and decent, but also very necessary for a courtly gentleman to use.⁹

As can be seen from the foregoing list the cultivation of social games and recreation was also considered a part of education. In addition, to complete his studies the young gentleman undertook a tour of the continent, usually under the guidance of some older, more experienced person. Moralists were of two minds about this because of the corrupting influence of foreigners, but many recommended it. On this tour the young gentleman was expected to improve his knowledge of society, government, military science, and, of course, languages. Many followed courses of study at the various European universities, though the taking of a degree was never considered a sine qua non of nobility.

A very important part of the education of a gentleman involved moral instruction. While, according to Kelso, "English humanists seldom went so far as to agree with Socrates that to know good was to do good, . . . they did believe that knowledge was an aid to virtue."¹⁰ They adopted the view that while morality is not innate in man, nature had endowed

⁹Roger Ascham, "Toxophilus, the schole of shooting," Tudor Prose and Poetry, eds. J. Hebel, H. Hudson, et al (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts Inc., 1953), p. 643.

¹⁰The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century, p. 120.

him with reason so as to distinguish good from evil. Therefore, with proper education and the proper examples set before him, man could become virtuous. Although the nobility were believed to have been born with a greater inclination towards virtue, it was inclination only and not virtue itself.¹¹ Thus it was necessary to instruct them in virtue in order for them to become good and it is for this reason that all books on education stressed the teaching of virtue. With few exceptions these books are based on the ethical writings of Aristotle and Cicero; not once do they refer to the Thomistic scheme of four cardinal virtues and three theological virtues.¹²

According to Miss Kelso,

the virtues that were by common consent considered the most important for the gentleman were justice, prudence, courtesy, liberality, temperance, and fortitude. The rest may be treated as branches of these, or ignored as merely variations.¹³

These six virtues, along with their variations, will be discussed in conjunction with Jonson's poetry to show his conformity to the ethical system evolved by the ancients and adopted by the Renaissance moralists.

Those gentlemen who lived in accordance with all of these virtues were known as magnanimous, a term which can be said to be synonymous with Aristotle's megalopsychia. Italian

¹¹Ibid., p. 23.

¹²C. B. Watson, The Renaissance Concept of Honour, p. 62.

¹³Kelso, p. 76.

humanists such as Castiglione described the magnanimous man as one who practises all the virtues and by doing so becomes:

most glorious and dear to men and to God, by Whose grace he will attain the heroic virtue that will bring him to surpass the limits of humanity and be called a demigod rather than a mortal man.¹⁴

But English moralists, more ready to acknowledge the limitations of man, seldom, if ever, spoke of magnanimity in this light. For them the magnanimous man was one who reflected all the virtues to a pre-eminent degree, but was not necessarily a demigod. Thomas Elyot's definition of this virtue is as follows:

Magnanimity is a virtue much commendable, and also expedient to be in a governor, and is, as I have said a companion of fortitude. And may be in this wise defined, that it is an excellency of mind concerning things of great importance or estimation, doing all things that is virtuous for the achieving of honour.¹⁵

¹⁴Castiglione, The Book of the Courtier, trans. Charles S. Singleton (New York: Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1959), p. 306.

¹⁵Thomas Elyot, The Governor, p. 194.

CHAPTER IV

BEN JONSON AND THE RENAISSANCE CODE OF THE GENTLEMAN

In most of Jonson's poetry we are given the impression that the poet's sympathies lay with the country nobility. Much of this can be attributed to the fact that he was a city dweller and had the usual city dweller's belief that a simpler, steadier way of life could be found in the country. In addition, it is to be expected that, as a poet and classicist, he was imbued with the sentiments of the pastoral tradition. But it is equally evident that he had experienced at first hand both the corruption and neglect of the court and the generosity and hospitality of the country. "To Penshurst" "is the apotheosis of the Elizabethan country estate and its patriarchal organization."¹ In this poem Jonson describes with a mixture of hyperbole and sincerity the pleasures of country living and the generous treatment he had received at Penshurst. "To Sir Robert Wroth" is in much the same vein. Here he speaks glowingly of Sir Robert's ideal existence. Though Durance, Sir Robert's estate, is not far from the court, it

¹Maurice Hussey (ed.), Jonson and the Cavaliers (London: Heinemann, 1964), p. 5.

is very far from the vices of the court. The poem opens with the lines:

How blest art thou, canst love the country, Wroth,
 Whether by choice, or fate, or both;
 And, though so neere the citie, and the court,
 Art tane with neithers vice, nor sport.

This is followed by a list of the blessings and delights to be found in the country:

But canst, at home, in thy securer rest,
 Live, with un-bought provision blest;
 Free from proud porches, or their gilded roofes,
 'Mongst loughing heards, and solide hoofes:
 Along'st the curled woods, and painted meades,
 Through which a serpent river leades
 To some coole, courteous shade, which he calls his,
 And makes sleepe softer then it is!
 Or, if thou list the night in watch to breake,
 A-bed canst heare the loud stag speake,
 In spring, oft roused for thy masters sport,
 Who, for it, makes thy house his court;
 Or with thy friends; the heart of all the yeere,
 Divid'st, upon the lesser Deere;
 In autumnne, at the Partrich makes a flight,
 And giv'st the gladder guests the sight;
 And, in the winter, hunt'st the flying hare,
 More for the exercise, then fare:
 While all, that follow, their glad eares apply
 To the full greatnesse of the cry:
 Or hauking at the river, or the bush,
 Or shooting at the greedie thrush,
 Thou dost with some delight the day out-weare,
 Although the coldest of the yeere!
 The whil'st, the severall seasons thou hast seene
 Of flowrie fields, of cop'ces greene,
 The mowed meddows, with the fleeced sheepe,
 And feasts, that either shearers keepe;
 The ripened eares, yet humble in their height,
 And furrowes laden with their weight;
 The apple-harvest, that doth longer last;
 The hogs return'd home fat from mast;
 The trees cut out in log; and those boughs made
 A fire now, that lent a shade!

(ll. 13-46)

One of the features to be noticed in these lines is the self-sufficiency of the country estate which enables the owner to live in an independent fashion. His necessities and his

pleasures are at hand; he need not sue to anyone. This is a far cry from the court where nobles were dependent on the crown's largesse for everything and, consequently, were often reduced to a state of sycophancy.

Jonson's most detailed and scathing attack on the court and the city is to be found in "An Epistle to a Friend, to Persuade Him to the Warres," where he attacks first the licentiousness of the court:

How much did Stallion spend
 To have his Court-bred fillie there commend
 His Lace and Starch; and fall upon her back
 In admiration, stretch'd upon the rack
 Of lust, to his rich Suit and Title, Lord?
 I, that's a Charme and halfe! She must afford
 That all respect; She must lie downe: Nay more
 'Tis there civilitie to be a whore.

(ll. 47-54)

A second vice portrayed is that of excessive expenditure on dress motivated by vanity. Jonson ironically asks if the purchase is worth the cost and warns his audience of the consequence of excess:

And are these objects fit
 For man to spend his money on? his wit?
 His time? health? soule? will he for these goe throw
 Those thousands on his back, shall after blow
 His body to the Counters, or the Fleet?
 Is it for these that fine man meets the street
 Coach'd, or on foot cloth, thrice chang'd every day,
 To teach each suit, he has the ready way
 From Hide-Parke to the Stage, where at the last
 His deare and borrow'd Bravery he must cast?

(ll. 101-110)

A third vice castigated is that of drunkenness:

What furie of late is crept into our Feasts?
 What honour given to the drunkennest Guests?

What reputation to beare one Glasse more?
When oft the Bearer, is borne out of dore?

(ll. 117-120)

Nor does he neglect that bane of the court, gambling:

He that no more for Age, Cramps, Palsies, can
Now use the bones, we see doth hire a man
To take the box up for him; and pursues
The Dice with glassen eyes, to the glad viewers
Of what he throwes: Like lechers growne content
To be beholders, when their powers are spent.

(ll. 135-140, p.152)

But perhaps the worst feature of the court to a man of independent spirit was the sycophancy practised by the courtiers. Jonson's attitude to this is revealed in his choosing to make it his final object of attack:

Yet this is better, then
To lose the formes, and dignities of men;
To flatter my good Lord, and cry his Bowle
Runs sweetly, as it had his Lordships Soule;
.
With him, for he is followed with that heape
That watch, and catch, at what they may applaud
As a poore single flatterer, without Baud
Is nothing.

(ll. 145-48 and 155-59)

Before leaving this portrait of the court, it would be advisable to comment on the techniques the satirist employs in as much as they reveal to some extent the attitude of the poet. The most obvious feature of these attacks is that while they are scathing and obviously sincere they are not devoid of humour. Comparing the Lord and his Lady to a stallion and a filly is not without its lighter side nor is the rhetorical questioning technique employed in the attack on finery. The pun on "beare," "Bearer," and "Borne," in the

attack on drunkenness, while it does not mitigate his scorn, certainly reveals a degree of tolerance and a sense of the ridiculousness of the object of his attack. Even the attack on gambling, with its repulsive picture of the old palsy-ridden gambler, is rendered comic by the comparison to an impotent lecher. And what could be more ridiculously inappropriate or more conducive to laughter than the flatterer's statement that his lordship's roll of the ball in bowling runs as smoothly as if it had his lordship's soul? All of these attacks reveal a strong moral indignation tempered by a humane sense of the ridiculous. Jonson is no puritan condemning the world and its pleasures and pastimes, but rather a genial and tolerant man of the world attacking the excesses of men and tempering those attacks with a touch of humour. All of his satires have the same characteristic humorous touch.

So much, then, for the problem of court and country, and Jonson's attitudes towards it; let us continue on to the duties and obligations of the nobility. The first obligation of the nobility mentioned in the code of the gentleman is disinterested service to the commonwealth. Jonson's concurrence with this ideal can be seen in Epigram CIX where he praises Sir Henry Neville as not being one who

fain'st a scope
of service to the publique, when the end
Is private gaine, which hath long guilt to friend.
(ll. 6-8)

Like his predecessors in the field of morality Jonson held

that virtue alone should be the basis of preferment in public life.² This is evident in Epigram LXIV where he states:

But I am glad to see that time survive,
Where merit is not sepulcher'd alive.
Where good men's virtues them to honors bring,
And not to dangers.

(ll. 9-12)

Further evidence for this attitude can be adduced from the fact that the majority of his panegyrics are addressed to men who are praised for their contributions to the commonwealth. Or we might turn to one of the satires such as that entitled "On Some-Thing, That Walks Some-Where" where he presents an object which looks as if it might be a courtier or statesman but is apparently nothing. This epigram concludes with the sentence: "Good Lord, walke dead still," an ironic portrait in miniature of the noble who, because he fails to act as the code dictates, can be described as dead, without life or meaning. Because of his high regard for the responsibility and dignity of the statesman who serves the realm in a disinterested and altruistic manner, Jonson had nothing but contempt for triflers.³ Much of this contempt can be seen in the epigram entitled "The New Crie;" this poem is a virulent attack on the infallible, omniscient young man of the world and his ludicrous attempts to appear knowledgeable in statecraft:

²Kelso, The Doctrine of the English Gentleman, p. 69.

³E. C. Dunn, Ben Jonson's Art (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1963), p. 25.

Ere cherries ripe, and ~~straw~~-berries be gone,
 Unto the cryes of London Ile adde one;
 Ripe statesmen, ripe: They grow in every street.
 At sixe and twentie, ripe. You shall 'hem meet,
 And have 'em yeeld no savour, but of state.
 Ripe are their ruffes, their cuffes, their beards, their gate,
 And grave as ripe, like mellow as their faces.
 They know the states of Christendome, not the places:
 Yet have they seene the maps, and bought 'em too,
 And understand 'em as most chapmen doe.
 The counsels, projects, practises they know,
 And what each prince doth for intelligence owe,
 And unto whom: they are the almanacks
 For twelve yeeres yet to come, what each state lacks.
 (Epigram XCII)

As was pointed out in the third chapter, service to the crown involved a knowledge of the law. It is not surprising, therefore, that Jonson reserves some of his most bitter satires for those who use the law for their own ends. Using a practice he employed in his comedies he devised an appropriate name for the lawyer who misrepresented the law. The name was Chev'rill, meaning kid leather, a commodity notable for its flexibility. In a light-hearted vein he characterizes this lawyer in the following epigram:

No cause, nor client fat, will Chev'rill leese,
 But as they come, on both sides he takes fees,
 And pleaseth both. For while he melts his greace
 For this: that winnes, for whom he holds his peace.
 (Epigram XXXVII)

In a panegyric addressed to an unknown counsellor he characterizes lawyers with great asperity. He describes them as "hirelings," "wranglers," "stitchers-to of strife," "hook-handed Harpies," and "gowned vultures" (Under-wood 35). But he decides in this poem that he must alter his opinion of lawyers,

and pays the subject of the epigram the complement of calling him, "The Courts just honour, and thy Judges love." (11.37). His admiration for such lawyers is evidenced again in Epigram 48 (Under-wood) addressed to Sir Edward Coke, where he says:

He that should search all Glories of the Gowne,
 And steps of all rais'd servants of the Crowne,
 He could not find, then thee of all that store
 Whom fortune aided lesse, or virtue more.
 Such, Coke, where thy beginnings, when thy good
 In others evill best was understood:
 When, being the Strangers helpe, the poore mans aide,
 Thy just defences made th' oppressor afraid.
 Such was thy Processes, when Integritie;
 And skill in thee, now, grew Authoritie;

(No. 48, ll. 1-10)

In these few selections we can see the moralist at work, praising the virtuous and condemning the vicious practitioners of the law.

The second obligation of the nobility was the defence of the nation. Jonson's attitude toward soldiers is revealed in an epigram addressed "To True Soldiers." After having launched a satiric attack on the braggart Captain who trades upon his illusionary exploits to gain a livelihood, Jonson hastens to apologize to true soldiers in the following manner:

Strength of my Countrey, whilst I bring to view
 § Such as are misse-call'd Captaynes, and wrong you;
 And your high names: I doe desire, that thence
 Be nor put on you, nor you take offence.
 I sweare by your true friend, my Muse, I love
 Your great profession; which I once, did prove:
 And did not shame it with my actions, then,
 No more, then I dare now doe, with my pen.
 He that not trusts me, having vow'd thus much,
 But's angry for the Captayne, still: is such.

(Epigram CVIII)

Here, to underwrite his sincerity he adds a personal reference to his own war service. Jonson's esteem for the military is apparent also in the following lines from the Epigram addressed to Sir Horace Vere:

Which of thy names I take, not only beares
 A romane sound, but romane vertue weares,
 Illustrious Vere, or Horace; fit to be
 Sung by a Horace, or a Muse as free;
 Which thou art to thy selfe: whose fame was wonne
 In th' eye of Europe, where thy deeds were done,
 Where on thy trumpet shee did sound a blast,
 Whose relish to eternitie shall last.
 (XCI, ll. 1-8)

Sir Horace Vere is a fitting object for praise because he won his title on the battlefield. Implicit, therefore, in his praise of this warrior is the notion that Jonson regards military service as an important requisite for the gentleman.

Of all the requisites for nobility, knowledge or scholarship seems to have evoked from Jonson the highest praise. Panegyrics are addressed to William Camden, his teacher, Sir Henry Goodyere, Sir Henry Savile, Clement Edmonds, and many other noted scholars of his day, but the most comprehensive is addressed to Master John Selden, jurist, and author of many books. The following lines describe Jonson's ideal of the Renaissance scholar:

Stand forth my Object, then you that have beene
 Ever at home: yet, all Countries seene:
 And like a Compassee keeping one foot still
 Upon your Center, doe your Circle fill
 Of generall knowledge; watch'd men, manners too,
 Heard what times past have said, seene what ours doe:
 What Grace shall I make love too first: your skill,

Or faith in things? or is't your wealth and will
 T' instruct and teach, or your unweary'd paine
 Of Gathering? Bounty in pouring out againe?
 What fables have you vex't! what truth redeem'd!
 Antiquities search'd! Opinions dis-esteem'd!
 Impostures branded! And Authorities urg'd!
 What blots and errors, have you watch'd and purg'd
 Records, and Authors of! how rectified,
 Times, manners, customes! Innovations spide!
 Sought out the Fountaines, Sources, Creekes, paths, wayes.
 And noted the beginnings and decays!

(Under-wood No. 16, 11. 29-46)

Selden is praised for his exhaustive and accurate research and his extensive knowledge, but more for his using that knowledge to correct error and to inform or teach. This praise reflects the utilitarian justification of scholarship seen in the moral treatises of the sixteenth century. A further insight into this Renaissance attitude is evident in the following quotation:

Although to write be lesser then to doo,
 It is the next deed and a great one too.

(Epigram XCV. 11. 25-26)

This is a sentiment to be found in the works of many of the moralists of the sixteenth century and is to be found in Cicero and Aristotle as well. Jonson has little use for the pseudo-scholar who seeks to gain reputation and profit on the thoughts of others. Epigram LII portrays this type of person. Jonson dubs him "Old-End Gatherer" and says that he could only be respected by fools.

It will be remembered that the education of a gentleman was accompanied by physical exercises and training in social pastimes and completed by a grand tour of Europe.

Jonson praises the hunting and dancing as well as the athletic games held in Cotswold in an epigram addressed to Mr. Robert Dover, where, he says that they

advance true Love, and neighbourhood,
And doe both Church, and Common-wealth the good,

(Uncollected Poetry No. 64, ll. 7-8)

His sentiments with regard to the grand tour are expressed in "To William Roe"; he refers to the utilitarian aspects of this holiday as follows:

Roe, (and my joy to name) th'art now, to goe
Countries, and climes, manners, and men to know,
T'extract, and choose the best of all these knowne,
And those to turne to bloud, and make thine owne.

(CXXVIII, ll. 1-4)

Again we see the similarities in point of view between Jonson and other moralists of the Renaissance.

The final requisite of nobility was virtue. All the moralists agreed that virtue was the sine qua non of the gentleman and that Jonson agrees with this attitude is evident in the following quotations :

Who now calls on thee, Nevil, is a Muse,
That serves nor fame, nor titles; but doth chuse
Where virtue makes them both, and that's in thee :
Where all is faire, beside thy pedigree.
(Epigram CIX, ll. 1-4)

That Nature no such difference had imprest
In men, but every bravest was the best:
That bloud not mindes, but mindes did bloud adorne:
And to live great, was better, then great borne.
(Epigram CXVI, ll. 9-12)

Cecill, the grave, the wise, the great, the good,
What is there more that can ennoble blood?
(Under-wood 32, ll. 5-6)

The ultimate importance of virtue is emphasized by the climactic order of the line, "the great, the wise, the good." This is directly and succinctly stated in an epigram addressed to John Kenelme: "'Tis Vertue alone, is true Nobilitie" (1.12).

The virtues most often referred to in determining the virtuous man were, according to Ruth Kelso, justice, prudence, courtesy, liberality, temperance, and fortitude. An examination of Jonson's poetry reveals that not only does he urge the nobility to practise these virtues but also that his understanding of them is much the same as that of his predecessors. Any discussion of these virtues is made extremely difficult by the fact that they tend to blend into one another. This results from their close interdependence, so much so that Aristotle could speak of justice as encompassing all the virtues and Cicero speak of honesty in much the same light. Consequently, it is virtually impossible to distinguish definitely between them. Their meaning, like that of all abstract words, tends to be imprecise, but by selecting the most direct and simple definition possible from those sources which were common to both the earlier sixteenth century humanists and Ben Jonson it should be possible to show that Jonson uses these terms in the same way as those humanists who first devised the Renaissance code of the gentleman.

Justice was defined by Cicero as a "care to maintain that society and mutual intercourse which is between [men];

to render to every man what is his due, and to stand to one's words in all promises and bargains."⁴ Jonson's concept of justice is similar. In an epigram to Lord Watson we find the following:

But you I know, my Lord; and know you can
 Discerne betweene a Statue, and a Man;
 Can doe the things that Statues doe deserve,
 And act the businesse, which they paint, or carve.
 What you have studied are the arts of life;
 To compose men, and manners; stint the strife
 Of murmuring Subjects; make the Nations know
 What worlds of blessings to good Kings they owe:
 And mightiest Monarchs feele what large increase
 Of sweets, and safeties, they possesse by Peace.
 (Under-wood, No. 79, ll. 13-22)

These lines reflect the first two parts of Cicero's definition while the epigram to Thomas Egerton, Lord Chancellor, gives us the final part of the definition:

Whil'st I behold thee live with purest hands;
 That no affection in thy voyce commands;
 That still th'art present to the better cause;
 And no lesse wise, then skilfull in the lawes;
 Whil'st thou art certaine to thy words, once gone,
 As thy consciencé, which is alwayes one:
 (LXXIV, ll. 3-8)

In addition, the first three lines reflect Jonson's concern that a judge should refrain from being swayed either by bribes or affection. There is little doubt that he concurred with other Renaissance moralists in his understanding of justice.

Prudence involved knowledge, understanding, and judgement.

⁴Cicero, The Offices, trans. by John Warrington (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1965), p. 8.

It could only come with learning and experience. Cicero defines it in two senses: as a "sagacious inquiry and observation for the finding out of truth"⁵ and, at its highest perfection, as "that wisdom by which you hold virtue to be capable of fortifying the soul against all the various assaults of human calamities, and are taught to consider happiness as depending upon yourself alone."⁶ The second part of this definition is suggestive of the Stoic disregard for fortune and is closely related to fortitude. As will be seen in the discussion of fortitude which follows, Jonson has much of this Stoic element in his moral point of view.

Jonson's high regard for learning has been discussed earlier in this paper, and, so, needs no further comment here. However, in "A Speech According to Horace" we find evidence for his insistence on learning as an integral part of nobility.

Are we by Booke-wormes to be awde? must we
 Live by their Scale, that dare doe nothing free?
 Why are we rich, or great, except to show
 All licence in our lives? What need we know
 More then to praise a Dog? or Horse? or speake
 The hawking language? or our Day to breake
 With Citizens? let Clownes, and Tradesmen breed
 Their Sonnes to studie Arts, the Lawes, the Creed:
 We will beleeve like men of our owne Ranke,
 In so much land a yeare, or such a Banke,
 That turnes us so much moneys, at which rate
 Our Ancestors impos'd on Prince and State.

(ll. 67-78)

⁵Cicero, The Offices, p. 8.

⁶Ibid., p. 170.

This poem, which Herford and Simpson suggest was written in 1625 or 1626, is an attack on the degeneracy of the times. It is directed principally at the nobility and reveals that there are many who still resist the ideal of the gentleman. The speakers in the quoted lines are the "Tempestuous Groundlings" who argue that their greatness does not impose responsibilities upon them but, rather, grants them licence to do as they will. Jonson's manner of addressing them and the violence of the speech he gives them condemns them as arrogant louts who are a disgrace to their blood.

The Renaissance moralist deemed prudence absolutely essential to the practice of all the virtues, since without prudence a man who tries to practise the virtues inevitably falls into vice.⁷ Thus prudence may be seen, in a limited sense, as knowing to avoid vice. Such is the sentiment expressed in Epigram CXIX:

Not he that flies the court for want of clothes,
 At hunting railles, having no guift in othes,
 Crues out 'gainst cocking, since he cannot bet,
 Shunns prease, for two main causes, pose, and debt,
 With me can merit more, then that good man,
 Whose dice not doing well, to'a pulpit ran.
 No, Shelton, give me thee, canst want all these,
 But does it out of judgement, not disease;
 Dar'st breath in any ayre; and with safe skill,
 Till thou canst finde the best, choose the least ill.
 That to the vulgar canst thy selfe apply,
 Treading a better path, not contrary;
 And, in their errors maze, thou owne way know;
 Which is to live to conscience, not to show.
 He, that, but living halfe his age, dyes such;
 Makes, the whole longer, 'then twas given him, much.

⁷See Kelso, The Doctrine of the English Gentleman, p. 120.

Shelton, here, is portrayed as the man of prudence who avoids vice not because of lack of means or opportunity but because he is wise enough to be guided by conscience.

English moralists seldom discussed the virtue of Courtesy—perhaps because so much had been said on this subject by the Italians. As usually conceived of, it consisted of two parts, "knowledge of what behaviour was fitting to each man, including oneself, and graciousness in bestowing upon each his due."⁸ Something of the Italian idea of manners crept into English thought as well. The idea that manners reflected the character of the person and were not merely laid on is part of the thinking of the English as well as the Italians on courtesy.⁹

Jonson speaks of courtesy in terms of graciousness in giving:

Where any Deed is forc't, the Grace is mard.
 Can I owe thanks, for Curtesies received
 Against his will that doe's 'hem? that hath weav'd
 Excuses or Delays? or done 'hem scant,
 That they have more opprest me, than my want?
 (Under-wood, No. 15, ll. 24-28)

Another interesting reflection on courtesy is evident in th lines:

I thinke, the Fate of court thy comming crav'd,
 That the wit there, and manners might be sav'd:
 For since, what ignorance, what pride is fled!
 And letters, and humanitie in the stead!
 (Epigram CXIII, ll. 5-8)

⁸Kelso, p. 79.

⁹Ibid., p. 82.

There is an antithesis set up in these lines which is very revealing. Wit is identified with letters and opposed to ignorance, while manners is identified with humanity and opposed to pride. This implies or suggests an identification of courtesy or manners with modesty and perhaps even humility which is the natural antithesis of pride.

Grace, which may be considered as an aspect of courtesy was the distinguishing quality of gentlemanly behaviour. Whatever the gentleman did he had to appear to do it effortlessly. He was expected not to regard any of his accomplishments too highly, for that would indicate studied care. He was required to cultivate a certain nonchalance so as to give the impression that he regarded all his talents and abilities as mere trifles.¹⁰

There is an interesting example of Jonson's recognition of the importance of cultivating nonchalance (he calls it "sweet neglect") in a song which, though it is addressed to a lady and is not really concerned with grace in nobility, reflects better than any other poem the poet's attitude to

¹⁰The following quotation from Castiglione's The Courtier illustrates this quality very well:

And although he may know and understand what he does, in this also I would have him dissimulate the care and effort that is required in doing anything well; and let him appear to esteem but little this accomplishment of his, yet by performing it excellently well, makes others esteem it highly. (p. 104)

studied care and extreme painstaking:

Still to be neat, still to be drest;
As you were going to a feast;
Still to be pou'dred, still perfum'd:
Lady, it is to be presum'd,
Though arts hid causes are not found,
All is not sweet, all is not sound.

Give me a looke, give me a face,
That makes simplicitie a grace;
Robes loosely flowing, haire as free:
Such sweet neglect more taketh me,
Then all th'adulteries of art.
They stike mine eyes, but not my heart.¹¹

Here the lady is admonished to practise "simplicitie" and "sweet neglect" because, where there is obvious care, it can only be presumed that something is wanting or not "sound." Much the same advice is given to nobles in many treatises on the code of the gentleman.

Liberality is defined by Aristotle as the mean between prodigality and meanness.¹² Associated with it is the spending of money. Therefore, to be a gentleman one must have means. This virtue solved the question for the Renaissance of whether riches were or were not to be considered good: "without riches the gentleman could not possess the virtue of liberal-ity; without liberality he was no true gentleman."¹³ However, liberality, according to Kelso, also involved prudence; one

¹¹"Song," Hunter, The Complete Poetry of Ben Jonson, p.353.

¹²See Richard McKeon (ed.), Introduction to Aristotle (New York: The Modern Library, 1947), p. 374.

¹³Kelso, The Doctrine of the English Gentleman, p. 91.

must take pains to spend one's money or to dispense rewards where they would do the most good, either as spurs to virtue or in the hope of reciprocation.¹⁴

Jonson agrees that a great deal of prudence is involved in the selection of a worthy recipient of one's liberality:

I do not deny it, but helpe the need
Of any, is a Great and generous Deed;
Yea, of th'ingratefull: and he forth must tell
Many a pound and piece; will place one well;
(Under-wood, No. 15, ll. 75-780)

Perhaps his greatest encomium to liberality or generosity is to be found in the poem "To Penshurst" where he describes his host's hospitality in these glowing terms:

whose liberal board doth flow,
With all, that hospitality doth know!
Where comes no guests, but is allow'd to eate,
Without his feare, and of the lords owne meate:
Where the same beere, and bread, and self-same wine,
That is his Lordships, shall be also mine.
And I not faine to sit (as some, this day,
At great mens tables) and yet dine away.
Here no man tells my cups, nor, standing by
A waiter, doth my gluttony envy:
But he gives me what I call, and lets me eate,
He knowes, below, he shall finde plentie of meate,
Thy tables hoord not up for the next day,
Nor, when I take my lodging, need I pray
For fire, or lights, or liverie: all is there;
As if thou, then, wert mine, or I raign'd here:
There's notning I can wish, for which I stay.
(ll. 59-75)

Much the same sentiments are expressed in "To Sir Robert Wroth," but here in a display of hospitality even distinctions of rank are forgotten:

¹⁴Ibid., p.89.

The rout of rurall folke come thronging in
 (Their rudenesse then is thought no sinne)
 Thy noblest spouse affords them welcome grace;
 And the great Heroes, of her race,
 Sit mixt with losse of state, or reverence.
 Freedome doth with degree dispense.

(52-58)

The most revealing of all the poems in which Jonson is concerned with liberality is the epigram entitled "On Inviting a Friend to Supper," which has been quoted previously. Here we see Jonson's own hospitality in the description of the evening he promises his guest.

Temperance is an inward looking virtue and is related to self control. Aristotle defined it in terms of avoiding self-indulgence.¹⁵ Jonson has many satires addressed to those who are self-indulgent, especially to those who are guilty of sexual excesses. The following epigram satirizes both lust and gluttony:

Gut eats all day, and lechers all the night,
 So all his meate he tasteth over wise:
 And, striving so to double his delight,
 He makes himselfe a thorough-fare of vice.
 Thus, in his belly, can he change a sin
 Lust it comes out, that glutony went in.

(Epigram CXVIII)

Epigram CXVII carries the warning that lust can lead to financial ruin, but its chief adverse effect is the pox, as is evident in Epigram XLI:

Gypsee, new baud, is turn'd physitian,
 And get more gold, than all the colledge can:

¹⁵McKeon, Introduction to Aristotle, p. 373.

Such her quaint practise is, so it allures,
 For what she gave, a whore; a baud, shee cures.

Other epigrams are concerned with many more social evils but they have been discussed previously in connection with Jonson's attack upon the court and need not be pursued further here.

Cicero adapted temperance to all action when he defined it as "the knowledge of putting whatever we say or do in its proper place."¹⁶ He also spoke of it as constance and regularity and advocated that:

We ought to observe such a due regularity and order in our actions, as that the several parts of our whole lives, like those of a regular and coherent discourse may agree and be suitable one with another.¹⁷

Again we see the similarity between virtues, as temperance so defined has much in common with prudence, and both temperance and prudence take on meanings very dependent on the concept of fortitude. The Stoic doctrine of contempt for fortune permeated the philosophy of Cicero and had a great influence on Renaissance Humanist thought. Clarence Hilberry in an unpublished doctoral dissertation entitled "Ben Jonson's Ethics in Relation to Stoic and Humanistic Ethical Thought" has established Jonson's indebtedness to the Stoic philosophers and writers, particularly Seneca, so it should not be necessary to reiterate what he has so ably demonstrated. Although

Hilberry

¹⁶Cicero, The Offices, p. 63.

¹⁷Ibid.

Hilberry refers to Humanistic thought in the title of his dissertation, it is exclusively concerned with the Stoic elements and is devoted primarily to tracing parallels between Jonson and Seneca.

Many of Jonson's poems deal with the idea of constancy or regularity in one's life, as the following quotations reveal:

He that is round within himselfe, and streight
 Need seeke no other strength, no other height;
 Fortune upon him breakes her selfe, if ill,
 And what would hurt his vertue makes it still.
 That thou at once, then, nobly maist defend
 With thine owne course the judgement of thy friend,
 Be alwayes to thy gather'd selfe the same:
 And studie conscience, more then thou would'st fame.
 (Epigram XCVIII, ll. 3-10)

But thou, whose noblesse keeps one stature still,
 And one true posture, though besieg'd with ill
 Of what ambition, faction, pride can raise;
 Whose life, ev'n they, that envie it, must praise;
 (Epigram CII, ll. 13-16)

. . . Whatsoever face thy fate puts on,
 Thou shrinke or start not; but be always one;
 That thou thinke nothing great, but what is good,
 And from that thought strive to be understood.
 (Under-wood, No. 17, ll. 185-188)

And, as a final example, in "An Epitaph on Master Vincent Corbet" we find Master Corbet lauded for having led

A life that knew nor noise, or strife:
 But was by sweetning so his will,
 All order, and Disposure, still. (ll. 12-14)

The sixth of the virtues which were by common consent considered the most important for the gentleman is Fortitude¹⁸—

¹⁸See Kelso, The Doctrine of the Gentleman, p. 76.

which is more often called valour or courage. This virtue has two characteristics: first, the spurring on of men to achievements of valour or great enterprises, and second, the steeling of a person to suffer the misfortunes or pains visited upon him.¹⁹

Ben Jonson deals with both these characteristics in several of his poems. In an epistle to Sir Edward Sackville, he defines fortitude as "a meane, 'Twixt feare and rashness"²⁰—a direct echo of Aristotle. Among those he singles out for praise for their valour are Sir Horace Vere and Sir John Radcliffe, but he had no praise for those who showed an excess of valour or showed valour for the wrong reasons, as we can see in the following lines:

Let others watch in guiltie armes, and stand
 The furie of a rash command,
 Goe enter breaches, meet the cannons rage,
 That they may sleepe with scarres in age.
 And shew their feathers shot, and cullors torne,
 And brag, that they were therefore borne.
 ("The Forrest", III, ll. 67-72)

Obviously Jonson has little regard for those who enter the wars for reputation alone. The true valour is summed up in an epigram addressed to Sir Henrie Clay where he says:

Though every fortitude deserves applause,
 It may be much, or little, in the cause.

¹⁹Watson, Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honour, p. 110,

²⁰Under-wood, No. 15, ll. 105-106, Hunter, The Complete Poetry of Ben Jonson, p. 139.

Hee's valient'st, that dares fight, and not for pay;
That vertuous is, when the reward's away.

(Epigram LXVI, ll. 15-18)

And again in an epistle to Sir Edward Sackville, he states that the ends of fortitude are "honestie, and publike good" (Under-wood", No. 15, l. iii).

Jonson speaks of the second characteristic of fortitude, or valour—that steeling of the human spirit that enables the individual to accept the pains and misfortunes visited upon him—in an epigram addressed to William, Earl of Newcastle:

it is the Law
Of daring, not to doe a wrong, is true
Valour! to sleight it, being done to you!
To know the heads of danger! where 'tis fit
To bend, to breake, provoke, or suffer it!
And this (my Lord) is Valour!

(Under-wood, No. 61, ll 14-19)

In these lines valour takes on much of the complexion of endurance or suffering patiently and is also allied with prudence or judgement.

Fortitude defined as such has much in common with temperance in the sense of regularity or constancy in one's life. That the two are closely allied in Jonson's thought can be seen in the following quotation:

Men that are safe, and sure, in all they doe,
Care not what trials they are put unto;
They meet the fire, the Test, as Martyrs would;
And though opinion stamps them not, are gold.

(Under-wood, No. 49, ll. 1-4)

and again in these lines from "An Epitaph on Master Vincent Corbet":

Deare Vincent Corbet who so long
 Had wrestled with Diseases strong,
 That though they did possesse each limbe,
 Yet broke them, e're they could him,
 With the just Canon of his life,

(Under-wood, No. 14, ll. 7-11)

That fortitude which enables a man to accept suffering and grief is nowhere more apparent than in the epigram written on the death of the poet's son. The quiet and humane acceptance of death revealed in this poem indicates the extent of Jonson's own fortitude:

Farewell, thou child of my right hand, and joy:
 My sinne was too much hope of thee, lov'd boy,
 Seven yeeres tho'ert lent to me, and I thee pay,
 Exacted by thy fate, on the just day.
 O, could I loose all father now. For why
 Will men lament the state he should envie?
 To have so soone scap'd worlds, and fleshes rage,
 And, if no other miserie, yet age?
 Rest in soft peace, and, ask'd, say here doth lye
Ben Jonson his best piece of poetrie.
 For whose sake, hence-forth, all his vows be such,
 As what he love may never like too much.

(Epigram XLV)

This poem reflects well the Stoic sense of fortitude or endurance and even a Stoic sense of contempt for the world and its miseries, but there is implicit in lines such as "rest in soft peace" a Christian connotation which is foreign to Stoicism. This element of Christianity which gives meaning to his calm resignation is even more explicit in the elegy to his daughter:

Here lyes to each her parents ruth,
Mary, the daughter of their youth:
 Yet, all heavens gifts, being heavens due,
 It makes the father, lesse, to rue.
 At sixe moneths end, shee parted hence
 With safetie of her innocence;

Whose coule heavens Queene, (whose name shee beares)
 In comfort of her mothers teares,
 Hath plac'd amongst her virgin-traine:
 Where, while that sever'd doth remaine,
 This grave partakes the fleshly birth.
 Which cover lightly, gentle earth.
 (Epigram XXII)

These two poems not only reveal Jonson's own fortitude in the face of misfortune but also reveal the reason for this fortitude. His fortitude is not merely the patient endurance of calamity of the Stoics, but is the humble acceptance of the will of God made meaningful and possible by a profound faith in an after-life.

The six virtues which we have so far discussed in this chapter were, according to Ruth Kelso, the most important for the gentleman of Jonson's day, while others were merely variations of these. That such is true is indisputable, but a discussion of the more significant variations will help to complete this view of Ben Jonson's morality in relation to the Renaissance code of the gentleman. The first of these is magnanimity. Magnanimity assumed a great deal of self-sufficiency on the part of the gentleman. In this respect it is closely allied with fortitude. Watson describes it thus: "Contempt for fortune and external influences since the magnanimous man feels self-sufficient and superior to them because of his innate virtue."²¹ Sir Robert Wroth is addressed in much

²¹Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honour, p. 107.

these terms in the epigram addressed to him in The Forrest. But his self-sufficiency and peace of mind are attributed to the bounty of God:

God wisheth, none should wracke on a strange shelve:
 To him, man's dearer, then t'himselfe.
 And, however we may thinke things sweet,
 He always gives what he knowes meet;
 Which who can use is happy: Such be thou.
 (III, ll. 95-99)

However, in his "Ode to Himself" (Under-wood No. 25) the following lines reflect the indifference to the world and its judgment and to fortune which render the magnanimous man superior to both:

Minds that are great and free,
 Should not on fortune pause,
 Tis' crowne enough to virtue still, her owne applause.
 (ll. 16-18)

Other aspects of magnanimity such as heroic stature and resolution and constance have already been discussed in conjunction with the virtue of fortitude, so need not be reiterated here.

Honesty or integrity is frequently regarded as the chief virtue of the aristocracy. It consisted of absolute trustworthiness and thus is related to the virtue of justice. But, more than this, it incorporates all the virtues and is often synonymous with the word virtue itself. Cicero declares that honesty arises from the exercise of the four primary virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.²²

²²Cicero, The Offices, p. 8.

So much significance was attached to this virtue that the greatest insult one could offer a man was to give him the lie. To do so was to cast a great slur upon a man's honour—his most precious possession.

Honour seems to have been understood both in a private and a public sense. In the private sense it referred to a man's self-esteem and thus is related to pride. It also can be seen in the private sense as a sort of conscience guiding the individual towards virtue and away from vice. Burkhardt called it "an enigmatic mixture of conscience and egoism."²³ In the public sense honour is synonymous with reputation, the reward bestowed on one for virtue or achievement. Another sense of honour is the good name one acquires by always acting in a virtuous manner and thus winning the respect and esteem of society.²⁴

Jonson obviously used this term in both senses. In Epigram ~~LXIV~~ we find it used in the public sense of the word:

But I am glad to see that time survive,
Where merit is not sepulcher'd alive.
Where good men's vertues them to honors bring,
And not to dangers.

(ll. 9-12)

²³See Kelso, The Doctrine of the English Gentleman, p.99.

²⁴See Watson, Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honour, p. 11.

And in Epigram CIX we find it used in the private sense of the term, with the implication that honour is closely related to conscience.

Thou rather striv'st the matter to possess,
 And elements of honor, then the dresse;
 To make thy lent life, good against the Fates:
 And first to know thine owne state, then the States.
 To be the same in roote, thou art in height,
 And that thy soule should give thy flesh her weight.
 ("The Forrest", IV)

Other poems of Jonson's, such as "To the World" indicate that he was very wary of public reputation; so it might be more accurate to say that his understanding of the term was more in its private than its public sense.

Humanity included, according to Elyot, the virtues of liberality, benevolence, beneficence, and friendship. As the first three virtues are more or less synonymous and have already been discussed in connection with Liberality, they need not be further discussed at this point. However, although friendship is related to the others, most moralists discussed it at length by itself. Jonson was no exception. The epigram "On Inviting a Friend to Supper" has already been referred to in connection with liberality, but, besides showing the hospitality of Jonson, it also reveals what he considered to be the elements of a good friend. Apart from generosity we see that Jonson expected a friend to have similar tastes and interests. Above all else, he expected that friends would enjoy each other's confidence, that is, that mutual trust should prevail between them. A related quality of friendship

is to be found in "An Epistle to a Friend." In this poem Jonson says:

It is an act of tyrannie, not love
 In practiz'd friendship wholly to reprove,
 As flatt'ry with friends humours still to move.
 (Under-wood, No. 39, ll. 25-27)

Jonson's idea of friendship obviously included the giving and taking of advice, censure, and praise. Aristotle defined true friendship as "the friendship of men who are good and alike in virtue."²⁵ The same idea is clearly the theme of the following lines:

I neither am, nor art thou one of those
 That harkens to a Jacks-pulse, when it goes;
 Nor ever trusted to that friendship yet
 Was issue of the Taverne, or the Spit:
 Much lesse a name would we bring up, or nurse,
 That could but claime a kindred from the purse.
 Those are poore Ties, depend on those false ends,
 'Tis virtue alone, or nothing that knits friends:
 (Under-wood, No. 47, ll. 5-12)

From the foregoing it is obvious that Jonson's moral sentiments are very much the same as those of earlier Renaissance moralists. His understanding of the virtues, like theirs, is largely based on the writings of Cicero and Aristotle. In addition his poetry reveals the same attitude toward the nobility in terms of its raison d'être and its responsibility towards the commonwealth as did the writings of his predecessors. Sir Thomas Elyot and his contemporaries may be said to have set out the code of the gentleman of the Renaissance should follow, while men like Ben Jonson endeavoured to propagate this code and encourage the nobility to follow it.

²⁵McKeon, Introduction to Aristotle, p. 475.

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