

THE REPUBLICAN THEOLOGY OF BENJAMIN RUSH

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A Christian [Benjamin Rush argued] cannot fail of being a republican. The history of the creation of man, and of the relation of our species to each other by birth, which is recorded in the Old Testament, is the best refutation that can be given to the divine right of kings, and the strongest argument that can be used in favor of the original and natural equality of all mankind. A Christian, I say again, cannot fail of being a republican, for every precept of the Gospel inculcates those degrees of humility, self-denial, and brotherly kindness, which are directly opposed to the pride of monarchy and the pageantry of a court.

DR. BENJAMIN RUSH was a revolutionary in his conceptions of history, society, medicine, and education. He was also a revolutionary in theology. His age was one of universality, he extrapolated boldly from politics to religion, or vice versa, with the clear warrant of the times.¹ To have treated religion and politics in isolation from each other would have clashed with his analogical disposition, for which he was rightly famous.²

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¹Basil Willey, *The Eighteenth Century Background; Studies on the Idea of Nature in the Thought of the Period* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 137 *et passim*. The quotation from Rush at the head of the paper is from his "Of the Mode of Education Proper in A Republic," *Essays, Literary, Moral, and Philosophical* (2d ed.; Philadelphia: T. and W. Bradford, 1806), pp. 8-9.

²Thomas D. Mitchell, *The Character of Rush; An Introductory to the Course on the Theory and Practice of Medicine in the Philadelphia College of Medicine* (Philadelphia: John H. Gihon, 1848), p. 7; Rush, "On the Causes of Death, In Diseases That Are Not Incurable," *Sixteen Introductory Lectures to Courses of Lectures upon the Institutes and Practices of Medicine. . . . To Which Are Added Two Lectures upon the Pleasures of the Senses and of the Mind; with an Inquiry into Their Proximate Cause* (Philadelphia: Bradford and Innskeep, 1811), p. 71; Rush, "An Inquiry into the Relation of Tastes and Ailments to Each Other, and into the Influence of this Relation upon Health and Pleasure," *Medical Inquiries and*

As a boy, Rush observed in his own family that diversity of religious experience which was so true to life in the Middle Colonies. His ancestors had been Quakers and Baptists, his father was Episcopalian, and his mother held fast to evangelical Presbyterianism.³ His father and mother having different religious persuasions, Rush almost naturally inherited from them a liberal and tolerant attitude towards sectarian differences, an attitude later integral to his mature writings on religion.⁴ With so many family circumstances exhorting him to religious freedom—not the least being his ancestor John Rush's taking religious sanctuary in America—it is no wonder that he became a revolutionary defender of liberty of conscience.⁵

Although Rush remembered his father as a saintly man, it was to his mother that he owed his evangelical religious character. She introduced him to the New Side Presbyterian ministers Gilbert Tennent and Samuel Finley, thereby opening to him the hopeful world of revivalistic Christianity. At Nottingham, where he attended his uncle's country school, secluded from the bustling, everyday world of Philadelphia, Rush was shaped by Finley into a devotee of the recent, yet primitive, evangelical religion of the Great Awakening. In fact, the paternal master of Nottingham did such an exemplary job of impressing his nephew with the benevolence of God that, his early Calvinism notwithstanding, Rush later embraced the loving heresy of universal salvation.

Observations (2 vols.; 5th ed.; Philadelphia: M. Carey and Sons, 1818), I, 138, 141; Rush, "An Inquiry into the Cause and Cure of Pulmonary Consumption," *ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

³Rush to John Adams, July 13, 1812, Lyman H. Butterfield, ed., *The Letters of Benjamin Rush* (2 vols.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), II, 1151-1152; George W. Corner, ed., *The Autobiography of Benjamin Rush; His "Travels through Life" together with His Commonplace Book for 1789-1813* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), pp. 24, 27, 162-163.

⁴For example, see: *Autobiography*, pp. 164, 339-340; Rush, "Defence of the Use of the Bible as a School Book," *Rush Essays*, pp. 100-101; Rush, "An Inquiry into the Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty," *Medical Inquiries and Observations*, I, 120; Rush, "Thoughts on Common Sense," *Rush Essays*, p. 252; Rush, "Observations upon the Cause and Cure of Dropsies," *Medical Inquiries and Observations*, I, 120; William Staughton, *Eulogium in Memory of the Late Dr. Benjamin Rush* (Philadelphia: 1813), pp. 16, 29; Mitchell, *The Character of Rush*, pp. 18-19.

⁵Rush, "Of the Mode of Education Proper in A Republic," p. 8; Rush, "On the Causes Which Have Retarded the Progress of Medicine, and On the Means of Promoting Its Certainty, and Greater Usefulness," *Sixteen Introductory Lectures*, p. 149; Rush, "An Inquiry into the Effects of Public Punishments upon Criminals, and upon Society," *Rush Essays*, p. 163.

Rush's years with Finley at Nottingham Academy succeeded in relating his every word and thought to some religious purpose, and, consequently, it was never really possible for him in adult life to think secularly. His pietistic mentor taught him to regard every event, however slight its apparent meaning, as deeply laden with divine import; and thus Rush characteristically sought to fit his thoughts and perceptions into grand religious wholes. There was simply no place for accident in his cosmology."

When he risked his life and fortune by signing the Declaration of Independence, he took it for granted that he had been chosen to serve a heavenly purpose in freeing America; and when he later exposed himself—almost fatally—to the yellow fever epidemic of 1793, he just as confidently assumed his divine instrumentality. It has been said that Rush was self-righteous. He was, indeed, a great-souled, messianic personality. But to say that this made him a self-righteous person, with all the unattractive connotations that this phrase generates, is hardly justifiable and perhaps betrays a modern coarseness of sensibility.

The College of New Jersey, where the young Philadelphian matriculated in 1759, was less confining than Nottingham in many ways, but again the heavy religious influence of one man fell upon Rush. President Samuel Davies's example was more worldly than Finley's in the sense that the younger man had traveled abroad and had become conversant with the thought of the leading dissenters of the age. Rush's closeness to Davies, so evident in his

"For example, see: Rush, "An Inquiry into the Various Sources of the Usual Forms of Summer and Autumnal Disease, in the United States, and the Means of Preventing Them," *Medical Inquiries and Observations*, II, 115; Rush, "Two Lectures upon the Pleasures of the Senses and of the Mind, with An Inquiry into Their Proximate Cause," *Sixteen Introductory Lectures*, pp. 452, 454-455; Rush, "An Eulogium in Honor of the Late Dr. William Cullen," *Rush Essays*, p. 327; Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations upon the Diseases of the Mind* (Philadelphia: Kimber and Richardson, 1812), pp. 298, 320-321, 333, 347; Rush, "An Inquiry into the Cause of Animal Life in Three Lectures," *Medical Inquiries and Observations*, I, 16-18, 24-25; Rush, "An Inquiry into the Relation of Tastes and Ailments to Each Other," pp. 142-143; Rush, "Observations upon Worms, and upon Anthelmintic Medicines," *Medical Inquiries and Observations*, I, 205-206; Rush, "An Account of the State of the Body and Mind in Old Age, with Observations on its Diseases and Remedies," *ibid.*, p. 245; Rush, "Observations upon the Duties of a Physician, and the Methods of Improving Medicine, accommodated to the present state of manners and society in the United States," *ibid.*, p. 263; Rush, "An Inquiry into the Causes of Premature Deaths," *Rush Essays*, p. 310; *Autobiography*, pp. 337-338; Rush to Griffith Evans, March 4, 1796, *Rush Letters*, II, 772.

touching eulogy of 1761 to the prematurely dead minister, almost swayed his career in favor of law.⁷ And this same friendship between teacher and pupil afforded Rush a new scope of religious experience, much more comprehensive than the Nottingham experience, because of Davies's sectarian and doctrinal learning.⁸ Yet Davies's faith was intensely evangelical, like that of the great Jonathan Edwards who had preceded him in the administration of the college.

Back in Philadelphia after his graduation from Princeton in 1760, this time as a medical apprentice, Rush occupied himself with medical duties and grim, pietistic self-examination.⁹ His thoughts were filled with death and what he must do to be saved, and he longed for that gift of divine grace which was necessary to place him among the elect.¹⁰ A melancholy, brooding young man, Rush found the provincial city iniquitous and his fellow youth dissolute.¹¹ And when George Whitefield thundered about the redemptive sufferings of Christ to a Philadelphia congregation in May of 1765, Rush swooned.¹²

Religion and public policy were already at this stage of his life inextricably connected in Rush's thought, as his surviving letters amply show.¹³ By the very nature of his evangelical commitment, personal and social salvation were becoming gradually intertwined for him in a reformed Calvinism which harkened back to the primitive, organic church, while at the same time anticipating his mature Universalistic and chiliastic views.¹⁴

⁷ Rush to Enoch Green, 1761, *Rush Letters*, I, 4; *Autobiography*, p. 36.

⁸ *Autobiography*, p. 35. This in some measure prepared Rush for his liberal contacts abroad with dissenting ministers, *ibid.*, pp. 57, 79.

⁹ Rush to Enoch Green, 1761, *Rush Letters*, I, 3-4; Rush to Ebenezer Hazard, September 27, 1762, August 2, 1764, November 7, 1764, March 19, 1765, May 21, 1765, June 27, 1765, November 18, 1765, December 23, 1765, *ibid.*, pp. 5-6, 7, 8-9, 10-11, 13-15, 16, 20.

¹⁰ Rush to Enoch Green, 1761, *Rush Letters*, I, 4; Rush to Ebenezer Hazard, August 2, 1764, March 19, 1765, June 27, 1765, November 18, 1765, *ibid.*, pp. 7, 10-11, 16, 20; *Autobiography*, p. 164; Rush to Ebenezer Hazard, July 23, 1765, translated from the Latin by Lyman H. Butterfield, ed., "Further Letters of Benjamin Rush," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXVIII (January, 1954), 5-6.

¹¹ Rush to Enoch Green, 1761, *Rush Letters*, I, 4; Rush to Ebenezer Hazard, August 2, 1764, *ibid.*, 7.

¹² Rush to Ebenezer Hazard, May 21, 1765, *ibid.*, 13-14.

¹³ For example, Rush to Enoch Green, 1761, *Rush Letters*, I, 4; Rush to Ebenezer Hazard, September 27, 1762, November 7, 1764, May 21, 1765, November 8, 1765, November 18, 1765, *ibid.*, 5-6, 9, 14-15, 18-19, 20.

¹⁴ See the article, "Christianity," in Edwin A. Seligman and Alvin Johnson, eds., *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (15 vols.; New York: Macmillan,

Ultimately, Rush would extend this youthful revivalistic faith—with its philanthropic, integrating, and egalitarian motives—to its logical conclusion in the doctrine of the salvation of all souls. But in the meantime, he needed to know life more directly, to think and feel more profoundly, to become a philosopher as well as a penitent. He had first to go to Edinburgh.

In his *Autobiography*, many years after his trip overseas, Rush deplored the effect of travel on his spiritual character and laid it down peremptorily that travel was adverse to religion itself.¹⁵ From what he related about his experiences in Britain and France, and from the tenor of all the available evidence, a case can be made at least for the occurrence of a decisive religious change in him while abroad; or better, perhaps, the beginning of a maturation and sophistication of religious belief.

Before and during his voyage, Rush's conception of God was severe, awful, and terrifying—more in the distressful tradition of Jonathan Edwards's *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* than in the liberal tradition of divine love of man.¹⁶ While abroad, however, his Great Awakening sense of religious exigency was certainly lessened somewhat by the worldly amenities and the religious latitude and nonchalance of his new friends and associates.¹⁷ Whether his fervid religious energies were in part sublimated into directions of almost obsessional study and high romanticism is, although a most interesting question, beyond the competence of this present writer. It suffices to note in this connection that the quality of his experience in Edinburgh, London, and Paris was religiously moderating, deepening, and universalizing.

At Edinburgh, a world center of enlightened thought, boasting philosophers such as David Hume, William Cullen, William

1930), III, 452-453. Also useful are the articles on evangelism by Dawson C. Bryan in Lefferts A. Loetscher, ed., *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, An Extension of The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1955), I, 406-407. Supremely informative and thoughtful is James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (13 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908-1926).

¹⁵ Pp. 164-165.

¹⁶ For example, Rush to Ebenezer Hazard, July 23, 1765, Butterfield, "Further Letters of Benjamin Rush," pp. 5-6; Rush to Thomas Bradford, October 25, 1766, *ibid.*, p. 8; Rush to Ebenezer Hazard, June 27, 1765, I, 16.

¹⁷ *Autobiography*, pp. 79, 164-165; Lyman H. Butterfield, "Love and Valor; or Benjamin Rush and the Leslies of Edinburgh," *The Princeton University Library Chronicle*, IX, No. 1 (November, 1947), 12.

Robertson, Joseph Black, and John Home, Rush came to acquire new modes of understanding in scepticism and rationalism, without at the same time really endangering his fundamental religious belief.

Dr. Cullen's religious scepticism, for instance, disturbed the young American profoundly, but was dismissed by Rush as an innocent yet misguided attempt to make religion conform to the objective methods of science.¹⁸ "Many of the Truths of Religion are Objects of Faith & not of Reason," he wrote in his *Journal*, and "we ought to believe them altho' we cannot comprehend them."¹⁹ Indeed, he went on, science itself was not exempt from reliance upon faith. Everyone agreed, for example, that the sun caused trees and plants to grow, despite the fact that this truth had never been fully demonstrated.²⁰

With the scepticism or agnosticism of David Hume, which he apparently mistook for deism, Rush had far less patience. Yet it was not the infidel, Hume, but the moderate churchman, William Robertson, at whom he lashed out frantically; for, in his view, Robertson and all other lukewarm clergy who abandoned the evangelical Christian spirit for modish rationalism were more dangerous to the pristine faith than any number of infidels. Atheists and infidels were at least forthright in their apostasies, not like those dissembling ministers, Robertson and John Home, who professed belief in Christianity while in fact subscribing to voguish deism.

Still, if Rush found excessive rationalism cold and unattractive, and its churchly advocates perfidious, he did nevertheless begin to admit a greater degree of reliance upon reason in his own defense of evangelical Christianity. Edinburgh University was the home of rationalistic thinkers like Cullen and Joseph Black, and it was only natural that their faithful and very intelligent American pupil should discover in their imaginative use of reason a prop for his convictions. Other graduates of Edinburgh might disavow their orthodox religions altogether after having studied the new scientific curriculum, or perhaps modernize them by adopting intellectually respectable deism or Scotch realism. But Rush in his absolute,

¹⁸ Rush, "Journal Commencing Aug. 31: 1766," Indiana University MS. Xerox copy, September 1767, pp. 66-67.

¹⁹ P. 67.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68; *Autobiography*, p. 335.

evangelical faith would not budge; instead he assimilated the new rationalistic science, improved it by his future work and thought, and employed it to give his version of Christianity a scientific plausibility. And for his guide in this momentous work of making religion and science once again complementary, he eventually chose David Hartley, the master Christian philosopher, who to Rush had "established an indissoluble union between physiology, metaphysics, and Christianity."²¹

Rush followed Hartley and not the Scottish philosophers essentially because the English physico-theologian had not abandoned revealed religion for moral philosophy as Francis Hutcheson and Thomas Reid had done—and Dugald Stewart would soon do.²² In a deeply significant passage, Rush mirrored Hartley's influence:

If moral precepts alone could have reformed mankind, the mission of the Son of God into our world, would have been unnecessary. He came to promulgate a system of *doctrines*, as well as a system of morals. The perfect morality of the gospel rests upon a *doctrine*, which, though often controverted, has never been refuted, I mean the vicarious life and death of the Son of God. This sublime and ineffable doctrine delivers us from the absurd hypotheses of modern philosophers, concerning the foundation of moral obligation, and fixes it upon the eternal and self moving principle of *love*. It concentrates a whole

²¹ Rush to Thomas Jefferson, January 2, 1811, *Rush Letters*, II, 1075; Rush to John Adams, February 1, 1810, *ibid.*, p. 1035; Rush to James Currie, July 26, 1796, *ibid.*, p. 780; Rush, "On the Duty and Advantages of Studying the Diseases of Domestic Animals, and the Remedies Proper to Remove Them," *Sixteen Introductory Lectures*, pp. 309-310; David Hartley *Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty, and his Expectations* (2 vols.; London: 1749), *passim*. It is essential to remember that by metaphysics Rush meant the science of the mind rather than the study of ultimate reality. There is a vital and masterly discussion of Hartley's philosophy in Willey, *The Eighteenth Century Background*, chap. viii, pp. 136-154.

²² Rush, "Three Lectures upon Animal Life," pp. 51-54; Rush to Thomas Jefferson, January 2, 1811, *Rush Letters*, II, 1075; Rush, "Thoughts on Common Sense," *Rush Essays*, pp. 249-251; Rush, "On the Causes of Death. In Diseases That Are Not Incurable," pp. 86-87; Rush, "On the Vices and Virtues of Physicians," *Sixteen Introductory Lectures*, p. 129; Rush, "On the Education Proper to Qualify A Young Man for the Study of Medicine," *ibid.*, pp. 174-175; Rush, "An Inquiry into the Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty," *Medical Inquiries and Observations*, I, 95-97, 99-100, 103-104; James McCosh, *The Scottish Philosophy, Biography, Expository, Critical from Hutcheson to Hamilton* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1875), p. 22; Willey, *The Eighteenth Century Background*, p. 151; S. A. Grave, *The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), chap. vii, pp. 224-257.

system of ethics in a single text of scripture. "*A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another even as I have loved you* [Rush's italics]."²³

Like Hartley, Rush drew back from the *a priori* moral principles of natural religion, opposing any system which in any way detracted from the scriptural omnipotence of God.²⁴ For the same reason, in his philosophy of animal life, he rejected the existence of a principle of life in the body.²⁵ Man's dependence upon God in ethics, in life itself, and in all things must be total; it was a view perfectly consonant with Rush's evangelical temper.

The "indissoluble union" which, Rush maintained, Hartley had formed between science and religion was cemented in a physiological psychology, which Rush borrowed along with its accompanying Hartleyan doctrines of vibrations and association.²⁶ Although depending mechanistically upon material processes, Hartley's psychology—and this was its chief attraction for Rush—began in

²³ Rush, "Defence of the Use of the Bible as a School Book," p. 105; Rush, "Three Lectures upon Animal Life," 47.

²⁴ Hartley, *Observations on Man*, I, 497-499, 512; Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations upon the Diseases of the Mind*, pp. 10-11, 16; Rush, "On the Influence of Physical Causes upon the Intellectual Faculties," *Sixteen Introductory Lectures*, p. 102; Rush, "Three Lectures upon Animal Life," pp. 12, 16-17, 47, 51; Rush, "On the Opinions and Modes of Practice of Hippocrates," *Sixteen Introductory Lectures*, p. 292.

²⁵ Rush, "Three Lectures upon Animal Life," 5, 7, 9-10, 51-52; Rush, "Observations upon the Duties of a Physician, and the Methods of Improving Medicine, accommodated to the present state of manners and society in the United States," *Medical Inquiries and Observations*, I, 257; *Autobiography*, p. 94. Likewise, Rush objected to the absolute dualism of mind and body which was so precious to the Scotch realists; Rush, "An Inquiry into the Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty," pp. 105, 115; Rush, "Three Lectures upon Animal Life," pp. 9-10, 46-47, 49-50; Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations upon the Diseases of the Mind*, p. 360; Hartley, *Observations on Man*, I, 512 *et passim*; Grave, *The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense*, pp. 200-203. It was Rush's opposition to strict mind-body dualism which principally led I. Woodbridge Riley to oversimplify Rush's position by classifying him as the "head of the Philadelphia school of materialists," "Benjamin Rush as Materialist and Realist," *Bulletin of Johns Hopkins Hospital*, XVIII (1907), 101. More careful, although still understandably missing the profoundly religious character of all of Rush's thought, are Herbert W. Schneider, *A History of American Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947), pp. 74-76, 228-229, 241, 247, 446, and Joseph L. Blau, *Men and Movements in American Philosophy* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961), pp. 46, 56, 61, 65-72, 152, 314.

²⁶ Hartley, *Observations on Man*, I, chap. i, 5-114; Rush, "Three Lectures upon Animal Life," p. 5; Rush, "Two Lectures upon the Pleasures of the Senses and of the Mind," pp. 448-449, 339-340, 427-428.

God, was vitalized by God, and ended in God.²⁷ Moreover, Hartley's deity was a God of love and his world was one of "benevolence."²⁸ There were no *a priori* faculties, like Hutcheson's moral faculty, intervening, however slightly, between God and man: rather, man in every respect was derived *a posteriori* from an omnipotent, infinitely loving God acting through a material world external to man.²⁹ And most acceptable of all to the American evangelical scientist was the final cause of the divine government, whose laws Hartley had described: the "ultimate happiness of all Mankind."³⁰

In his own physiological system, advanced in the famous lectures on animal life, Rush, like Hartley, explained all life as having its only source in external force.³¹ The opposite doctrine of a vital principle or cause of life in the body, he asserted in tacit agreement with Hartley, gave credence to the atheism of Pythagoras and Epicurus.³² Rush's doctrine of animal life, on the other hand, prevented both atheism and deism, for "by rendering the *continuance* of animal life, no less than its commencement, the effect of the constant operation of divine power and goodness, it leads us to believe that the whole creation is supported in the same manner [Rush's italics]."³³ In accordance with true revelation and his own doctrine of animal life, he continued, the "Being that created our world never takes his hand, nor his eye, for a single moment, from any part of it."³⁴

The influence of Edinburgh in Rush's mature thought was not exhausted in rationalistic physiology. His conversion to republicanism took place while he was at the university; and it was, in fact, a political consideration that gave rise to his rational awakening. For Rush, physiology and politics were closely related

²⁷ Hartley, *Observations on Man*, II, proposition 3, pp. 9-13; *ibid.*, p. 245; *ibid.*, I, 512, 83.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, II, proposition 4, 13-30; *ibid.*, p. 245.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 498-499; *ibid.*, proposition 4, pp. 11-12.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, II, proposition 94, pp. 419-425, esp. p. 420; Rush to James Currie, July 26, 1796, *Rush Letters*, II, 780.

³¹ "Life is the *effect* of certain stimuli acting upon the sensibility and excitability which are extended, in different degrees, over every external and internal part of the body. These stimuli are as necessary to its existence, as air is to flame," Rush, "Three Lectures upon Animal Life," p. 7. Also in the same work see pp. 5-6, 47-51, 43-44, *et passim*.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 52, 46; Hartley, *Observations on Man*, I, 512.

³³ Rush, "Three Lectures upon Animal Life," pp. 52-53.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54, 47.

because of his belief in the unity of truth. He maintained that truth in physiology should be analogical to truth in politics, just as truth in politics should be analogical to truth in medicine. Writing in his "Three Lectures upon Animal Life," twenty-three years after he had joined with two other Edinburgh graduates in proclaiming America free, Rush put the analogy between politics and physiology this way:

The origin of power which was derived for ages from divine or hereditary right now rests exclusively upon the will of the people, while the origin of animal life which has been, time immemorial, derived from a self moving power . . . now reposes, probably for ever, upon external and internal impressions.³⁵

Thus, the implication was clear in this and other statements, animal and political life were both effects of an all-powerful divine cause. Man neither lived because of a principle of life in his body, nor had life, liberty, and property as imprescriptible, *a priori* natural rights. He had life and other rights only because God gave them to him continuously out of his benevolence.³⁶ "Self-existence," Rush protested over and over again in every imaginable connection, "belongs only to God."³⁷

This view of the direct origin of republicanism in an absolute God, without the mediation of Lockean precepts of nature, was conformable to the language of the Declaration of Independence, especially where it acknowledged the "unalienable rights" bestowed upon man by his "Creator." And the same idea was later elaborated by Rush in his philosophy of history.

Rush's doctrine of animal life further reflected his personal synthesis of physiology, evangelical Christianity, and republicanism by arguing that the Christian religion and republicanism were the best stimuli of their kind to life and health; and that at least in the case of Christianity, the healthful effect of true belief was evidence enough of its divine nature.³⁸ Christianity, moreover,

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 47; D. P. Heatley, *Studies in British History and Politics* (London: Smith, Elder and Company, 1913), p. 46.

³⁶ Rush, "Three Lectures upon Animal Life," pp. 52-53, 5, 7, 9-10.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 43, 39, 13; Rush, "On the Causes of Death, In Diseases That Are Not Incurable," p. 77; Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations upon the Diseases of the Mind*, pp. 39, 71; Eva V. Armstrong, "Portrait of Benjamin Rush from A Student's Note-Book," *The University of Pennsylvania Library Chronicle* V, No. 2 (June, 1937), 45.

like republicanism and physiology, had the same life-giving character but in infinitely greater degree. Just as physiologically the forces of life overcame the forces of death in man and the other animals in the natural world, and as liberty surmounted tyranny and revived man in the political world, so Christianity triumphed over every kind of physical and metaphysical death.

Everywhere in the universe there was evidence of divine benevolence; everywhere there were signs for all to see of the paramountcy of love, of the final victory of everlasting life over death.³⁹ To Rush, the evangelical Christian physician who battled and lost to death so many times, true religion meant quite simply the conquest of mortality in every extended sense of the word, i.e., the full redemption of man through Christ. Rush wrote:

"The Son of Man came not to *destroy* men's lives, but to *save* them." Excellent words! I require no others to satisfy me of the truth and divine original of the Christian religion; and while I am able to place a finger, upon this text of scripture, I will not believe an angel from heaven, should he declare that the punishment of death, for *any* crime, was inculcated, or permitted by the spirit of the gospel [Rush's italics].⁴⁰

If the Savior had come to deliver men from the evil of physical and spiritual death, and if the whole creation bespoke His mercy and love in its economy—propositions which Rush unquestionably accepted—then true Christianity and philosophy joined in dis-

³⁹ For example, see: Rush, "Three Lectures upon Animal Life," p. 54; Rush, "Outlines of the Phenomena of Fever," *Medical Inquiries and Observations* (4 vols.; 3d ed. rev. and enlarged; Philadelphia: Hopkins et al.; 1809), III, 31-32; Rush, "On the Necessary Connexion Between Observation and Reasoning in Medicine," *Sixteen Introductory Lectures*, pp. 13-14; Rush, "An Inquiry into the Causes of Premature Deaths," pp. 315-316; Rush, "An Account of the Bilious Remitting and Intermitting Yellow Fever, as it appeared in Philadelphia, in 1797," *Medical Inquiries and Observations* (5th ed.), II, 43; Rush, "On the Character of Dr. Sydenham," *Sixteen Introductory Lectures*, p. 55; Rush, "An Inquiry into the Consistency of the Punishment of Murder by Death, with Reason and Revelation," *Rush Essays*, p. 169; Rush, "A Narrative of the State of the Body and Mind of the Author, During the Prevalence of the Fever," in "An Account of the Bilious Yellow Fever, as it appeared in Philadelphia in 1793," *Medical Inquiries and Observations* (5th ed.), II, 181; Rush, "On the Origin of Evil of Every Kind," Rush MSS, call number Yi2/7399/F36, p. 17 *et passim*.

⁴⁰ Rush, "An Inquiry into the Consistency of the Punishment of Murder by Death, with Reason and Revelation," pp. 176-177; Rush, "A Plan of A Peace-Office for the United States," *Rush Essays*, p. 185.

crediting any religion which allowed for eternal punishment or spiritual death.

This belief in universal salvation, which came to Rush theologically from Arminian writers such as John William Fletcher and Elhanan Winchester, was the more appealing to him because of its affinities with his characteristic way of integrating and universalizing his experience.⁴¹ Did he as a physician ever acquiesce in the death of a patient? Emphatically not! How then could he accede to the orthodox Calvinist doctrine of Limited Atonement? God, the supreme physician, must heal all, must do what His humble assistant, Dr. Rush, tried to do but could not accomplish.⁴² Did he love his fellowmen to the point of risking his life again and again for their welfare? How infinitely greater, then, must be the love of God for man! Did he find a heavy predominance of good over evil, of pleasure over pain, in this life?⁴³ How perfectly blissful, then, must be the next. Himself a "minister of hope" in medicine, Rush found the only durable, absolute, most plausibly

⁴¹ *Autobiography*, pp. 163-164; Edwin M. Stone, *Biography of Rev. Elhanan Winchester* (Boston: H. B. Brewster, 1836), pp. 67, 200; Joseph H. Allen and Richard Eddy, *A History of the Unitarians and the Universalists in the United States* (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1894), p. 412; Rush to Elhanan Winchester, May 11, 1791, *Rush Letters*, I, 581-582; Elhanan Winchester to Benjamin Rush, July 27, 1792, and July 26, 1793, Library Company of Philadelphia, Rush MSS, XXII, 96-98; Rush to Elizabeth Graeme Ferguson ? January 18, 1793, *Rush Letters*, II, 628. Very probably, it was Fletcher's *Checks to Antinomianism*, so admired by John Wesley, that greatly impressed Rush, Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee (eds.), *Dictionary of National Biography* (22 vols.; Oxford, 1949-1950), VII, 313.

⁴² *Autobiography*, pp. 226, 336-338, 343-344; Rush to Elhanan Winchester, November 12, 1791, *Rush Letters*, I, 611-612; Rush to Jeremy Belknap, June 6, 1791, and October 7, 1788, *ibid.*, pp. 583-584, 490; Elhanan Winchester to Benjamin Rush, July 26, 1793, Rush MSS, XXII, 98; Rush to John Steward, December 28, 1796, *Rush Letters*, II, 783-784; Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations upon the Diseases of the Mind*, pp. 115-116, 95, 81, 158, 320-321; Rush, "Three Lectures upon Animal Life," pp. 10, 25; Rush, "Outlines of the Phenomena of Fever," *Medical Inquiries and Observations* (3d ed.), III, 31-32; Rush, "An Inquiry into the Effects of Public Punishments upon Criminals, and upon Society," p. 145; Rush, "On the Character of Dr. Sydenham," pp. 54-55; Rush, "An Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits upon the Human Body and Mind, with an Account of the Means of Preventing, and the Remedies for Curing Them," *Medical Inquiries and Observations* (5th ed.), I, 170-171; Rush, "An Eulogium in Honor of the Late Dr. William Cullen," p. 327; Rush, "An Account of the Bilious Yellow Fever, as it appeared in Philadelphia in 1793" (5th ed.), II, 175.

⁴³ Rush, "Two Lectures upon the Pleasures of the Senses and of the Mind," pp. 454-455, 424-425.

realizable hope in an all-loving God, whose mercy transcended His justice.⁴⁴

Rush contended that universalism, or the final restoration of all souls, was easily demonstrable from natural and supernatural revelations.⁴⁵ Just as in Rush's physiology the body of man was an entity, responsive to environmental stimuli and living and dying as a unit, so humanity was an entity which must stand or fall as one. Accordingly, the human race as a whole had sinned with Adam, hence it must be redeemed as a whole in Christ.⁴⁶ Moreover, there were, Rush continued to argue from natural science, "passions" native to man which had for their object the integration of man with man and with God.⁴⁷ These passions for integration showed that man and the natural world were moving inexorably towards the ultimate term of reconciliation with their Creator.⁴⁸ As if this gratuitous endowment of love were not enough to prove His benevolence, the Deity even attached pleasure to the use of the altruistic and religious passions.⁴⁹

The supernatural revelation granted to man in the Bible likewise demonstrated the truth of the final salvation of all men.⁵⁰ But it did so more directly and more credibly than the "hyeroglyphics" of nature.⁵¹ The Bible was the ultimate source of truth, and the one deep, unifying truth of the holy text was final restitution.⁵² Progressively, men were discovering hitherto obscured

⁴⁴ Rush, "On the Study of Medical Jurisprudence," *Sixteen Introductory Lectures*, p. 377; Rush, "An Inquiry into the Consistency of the Punishment of Murder by Death, with Reason and Revelation," pp. 174, 182.

⁴⁵ Rush, "Defence of the Use of the Bible as a School Book," pp. 108-109; *Autobiography*, p. 342.

⁴⁶ *Autobiography*, pp. 337-338, 342-343; Rush to Elhanan Winchester, November 12, 1791, *Rush Letters*, I, 611.

⁴⁷ Rush, "Three Lectures upon Animal Life," p. 28.

⁴⁸ Rush, "Information to Europeans Migrating to the United States," *Rush Essays*, p. 211.

⁴⁹ Rush, "Two Lectures upon the Pleasures of the Senses and of the Mind," p. 452.

⁵⁰ *Autobiography*, pp. 342, 344, 164, 226, 336, 339-340; Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations upon the Diseases of the Mind*, p. 116; Rush, "An Inquiry into the Consistency of the Punishment of Murder by Death, with Reason and Revelation," pp. 166, 169; Rush to Elhanan Winchester, May 11, 1791, *Rush Letters*, I, 581-582.

⁵¹ Rush, "Defence of the Use of the Bible as a School Book," pp. 108, 96.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97; *Autobiography*, pp. 342-345; Rush, "An Inquiry into the Consistency of the Punishment of Murder by Death, with Reason and Revelation," pp. 176-177; Rush to Richard Price, June 2, 1787, *Rush Letters*, I, 479.

truths in the Scriptures, as they were in the natural world.⁵³ And each newly discovered revealed truth, like each discovery in philosophy, confirmed the all-inclusive benevolence of God.⁵⁴

Universalism, which for Rush was synonymous in careful usage with Christianity, was perfectly and historically related to republicanism, in the same way that all truths were related to one another.⁵⁵ Universalism and republicanism were both divine correctives, as it were, to man's perverted doctrines of religious and political absolutism, i.e., strict Calvinism and monarchism. The equality of all men as beneficiaries of divine love and the ultimate restoration and happiness of all men were views which were obviously more congenial to republicanism than to monarchism. Political equality, in fact, drew its very existence from religious equality.⁵⁶ God's free and overspreading love for humanity now leveled all men down to an equal condition in religion and government.

Whereas before, in the *ancien régime* of religion and government, men had been mere subjects to arbitrary power, now, in

⁵³ Rush to Mary Stockton, September 7, 1788, *Rush Letters*, I, 483-484; Rush to Elhanan Winchester, November 12, 1791, *ibid.*, 611-612; Rush, "Observations upon the Cause and Cure of Dropsies," 120-121; Rush, "Thoughts on Common Sense," p. 251; Rush, "Defence of the Use of the Bible as a School Book," pp. 100-101; *Autobiography*, pp. 340-344; Rush, "An Eulogium in Honor of the Late Dr. William Cullen," pp. 333-334. Of great importance here and in other connections is Ernest L. Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia; A Study in the Background of the Idea of Progress* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949).

⁵⁴ Rush, "Three Lectures upon Animal Life," pp. 8-10, 17-18, 24-25; Rush, "On the Origin of Evil of Every Kind," pp. 14-15, 18; Rush, "An Inquiry into the Effects of Public Punishments upon Criminals, and upon Society," p. 163; Rush, "An Inquiry into the Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty," p. 123; Rush, "An Inquiry into the Consistency of the Punishment of Murder by Death, with Reason and Revelation," pp. 176-177; Rush, "An Eulogium in Honor of the Late Dr. William Cullen," pp. 333-334; Rush, "An Inquiry into the Relation of Tastes and Ailments to Each Other," pp. 142-143; Rush, "An Inquiry into the Causes of Premature Deaths," pp. 312-316; *Autobiography*, p. 342; Rush to John Dickinson, February 16, 1796, *Rush Letters*, II, 770; Rush, "An Eulogium, Intended to Perpetuate the Memory of David Rittenhouse," *Rush Essays*, pp. 342-343, 351; Rush, "On the Utility of A Knowledge of the Faculties and Operations of the Human Mind to A Physician," *Sixteen Introductory Lectures*, p. 270.

⁵⁵ Rush, "Of the Mode of Education Proper in A Republic," pp. 8-9; Rush to Jeremy Belknap, June 6, 1791, *Rush Letters*, I, 583-584; Rush to Thomas Jefferson, August 22, 1800, *ibid.*, II, 820-821; Rush, "On the Necessary Connexion Between Observation and Reasoning in Medicine," p. 13.

⁵⁶ Rush to Jeremy Belknap, June 6, 1791, *Rush Letters*, I, 584; Rush, "Defence of the Use of the Bible as A School Book," pp. 112-113.

revolutionary republican society, each man was not only a free and equal citizen but the personally redeemed of God. Just as each man, according to the Declaration of Independence, now held a special place in the new political order, so, according to Rush's doctrine of universal salvation, each man now held a special place in the order to come.⁵⁷ Ultimately all souls would be rendered equal in the enjoyment of universal salvation, in much the same way as the American Revolution had rendered all men equal in the enjoyment of republican government. The perfect republic of men in this life, Rush analogized, would lead directly to the perfect republic of souls in the hereafter. Universalism was a new, revolutionary theology, worthy of the new age signaled by the emergence in history of American republican civilization.

Although Rush himself extrapolated from his revolutionary political universalism to a revolutionary religious universalism, he did not feel it necessary to convert others to the same experience and faith. Nor did he really desire to institutionalize his belief in a church.⁵⁸ He believed that men were by nature religious, possessing what he called variously "the sense of Deity" and the "principle of faith."⁵⁹ Hence there was no reason to force religion upon men or to importune them to accept sectarian doctrines; the way of the Lord was open to all men who used these divinely given aids to salvation and read the Bible. "The opposite systems

⁵⁷ Rush to Jeremy Belknap, June 6, 1791, *Rush Letters*, I, 584; *Autobiography*, pp. 226, 89; Rush to Richard Price, June 2, 1787, October 15, 1785, *Rush Letters*, I, 419, 371.

⁵⁸ Richard Eddy, the Universalist historian, too strongly identifies Rush with the Universalist church, "Dr. Benjamin Rush," *The Christian Leader*, LV, No. 40 (October 1, 1885), and *A History of the Unitarians and the Universalists in the United States*, *passim*. Staughton's position (*Eulogium in Memory of the Late Dr. Benjamin Rush*, pp. 29, 16), as eulogist and close friend of Rush's, that Rush was an eclectic and belonged to no sect, is more consistent with the available evidence; for example, see Rush to John Adams, April 5, 1808, *Rush Letters*, II, 962-963. Even William Cobbett, the famous satirist and bitter enemy of Rush, recognized Rush's lack of sectarian attachment in his virulent way, Peter Porcupine (William Cobbett), *The Rush Light*, No. 1 (February 15, 1800).

⁵⁹ *Autobiography*, pp. 335, 339; Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations upon the Diseases of the Mind*, pp. 219-220, 271-275, 358; Rush, "On the Utility of A Knowledge of the Faculties and Operations of the Human Mind to A Physician," pp. 262-263; Rush, "Three Lectures upon Animal Life," p. 43; Armstrong, "Portrait of Benjamin Rush from A Student's Note-Book," p. 45. Whether Rush was aware of how dangerously close he came here to affirming the existence of innate ideas, which he expressly denied in another place ("Three Lectures upon Animal Life," p. 51) is a problem worth pursuing.

of the numerous sects of christians," Rush explained in a key passage, "arise chiefly from their being more instructed in catechisms, creeds, and confessions of faith, than in the scriptures."⁶⁰ There was, however, nothing wrong in having many religious sects, except insofar as they detracted by their special creeds from the Biblical message of universal love.⁶¹

Sectarianism was more than a tolerable fact of religious experience in the United States and elsewhere; it was a positive good and evinced the wisdom and benevolence of the Almighty. A diversity of sects, each cherishing a particular religious truth, was God's way of making sure that His revelation to man was kept alive.⁶² Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, Baptists, Quakers, Presbyterians, Methodists, Unitarians, Lutherans, Moravians, and other denominations, by emphasizing various and different religious truths, safeguarded these precious truths against desuetude and loss. And a synthesis of these truths, Rush argued with his customary ingenuity, produced the grand, supreme truth of universal salvation.⁶³ This, of course, was a reason not only for religious freedom and equality, but for active encouragement of all religious sects.⁶⁴ It was another side to Rush's work as a

⁶⁰ Rush, "Defence of the Use of the Bible as A School Book," pp. 100-101.

⁶¹ Rush, "Information to Europeans Migrating to the United States," p. 203; Rush, "Defence of the Use of the Bible as A School Book," pp. 105, 111-112; Rush to Elhanan Winchester, May 11, 1791, *Rush Letters*, I, 581; Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations upon the Diseases of the Mind*, pp. 45, 81, 115-116; Rush, "On the Education Proper to Qualify A Young Man for the Study of Medicine," pp. 174-175; Rush, "Thoughts on Common Sense," p. 252; Rush, "On the Study of Medical Jurisprudence," p. 387; Rush, "Thoughts upon Female Education, Accommodated to the Present State of Society, Manners, and Government, in the United States of America," *Rush Essays*, p. 82.

⁶² *Autobiography*, pp. 339, 345, 224; Rush to Granville Sharp, April 27, 1784, *Rush Letters*, I, 330-331; cf., Hartley, *Observations on Man*, II, proposition 45, p. 195.

⁶³ *Autobiography*, p. 340; Rush, "Observations upon the Cause and Cure of Dropsies," pp. 120-121; Rush, "Defence of the Use of the Bible as A School Book," pp. 100-101.

⁶⁴ Hence, Rush in public and private life was a member, loyal friend, and backer of many widely different churches. For example, see: Rush to John Adams, April 5, 1808, *Rush Letters*, II, 962-963; Rush to Mathew Carey, November 24, 1808, *ibid.*, p. 989; Rush to Granville Sharp, April 27, 1784, *ibid.*, I, 330-331; Rush to Richard Price, October 15, 1785, *ibid.*, pp. 371-372; Rush to Annis Boudinot Stockton, June 19, 1787, *ibid.*, pp. 421, 425; Rush to Elias Boudinot? "Observations on the Federal Procession in Philadelphia," July 9, 1788, *ibid.*, p. 474; Rush to Jeremy Belknap, January 5, 1791, *ibid.*, p. 573; Rush to Mrs. Rush, July 16, 1791, *ibid.*, pp. 599-600; *Autobiography*, pp. 79, 222-223, 278-279; Rush, "Thoughts upon Female Education," p. 82; Rush, "Observations on the Study of the Latin and Greek

Christian revolutionary: his finding religious, not secular, arguments for the revolutionary new order. And as if to point up his characteristic use of science to justify his religious beliefs, the Edinburgh-trained evangelist hypothesized sectarian differences to be in some measure physically caused and, therefore, involuntary.⁶⁵

But if all Christian denominations were purposeful and more or less republican in nature, as Rush believed, it was still true that only those which fully subscribed to the doctrine of absolute and universal love in the New Testament merited the title of republican Christianity.⁶⁶ For only republicanism and universal salvation together could wholly enfranchise mankind in this world and in the next. Every other combination of politics and religion fell miserably short of perfect human equality and happiness in the loving fatherhood of God. "The Son of Man came not to *destroy* men's lives, but to *save* them," was Rush's motto. The Son of Man would come again soon. And the revolutionary Christian Republic of the United States, which Rush himself had helped found as a divine agent, heralded the millennial reign of Christ, when sickness, pain, and death of every kind would be conquered by absolute love and all men eventually saved. This was to be the ultimate American Revolution.

Languages," *Rush Essays*, p. 49; Mitchell, *The Character of Rush*, pp. 18-19; Nathan G. Goodman, *Benjamin Rush, Physician and Citizen, 1746-1813* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1934), p. 13.

⁶⁵ Rush, "An Inquiry into the Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty," p. 120.

⁶⁶ Rush to Jeremy Belknap, June 6, 1791, *Rush Letters*, I, 583-584.