

Empiricism and Judgment in Fielding's "Tom Jones"

ROBERT JAMES MERRETT

FIELDING'S playful wisdom ensures that the narrative commentary in *Tom Jones* is thoughtfully entertaining.

Its thoughtfulness is due, perhaps more than has been acknowledged, to its coherent treatment of empirical ideas. It has been suggested that Fielding realized that problems of knowledge are prior to the relation of understanding and judgment and that this realization might have caused him to turn his comic attention to the ways in which knowledge is gained from experience. Indeed, John Preston claims that *Tom Jones* contains an epistemological impulse because the narrative stance prepares the reader to recognize that the novel is "about judgment, and the understanding necessary for good judgment" and because the plot "helps us to see how we acquire knowledge of human experience."¹ This essay examines Fielding's serious and comic treatment of empirical ideas to advance appreciation of how he wanted the reader to apprehend and learn from the novel.

To argue that empirical ideas are important to Fielding's narrative commentary is unusual to the extent that customarily his ideas are derived from the Latitudinarian churchmen or from Shaftesbury.² The consequence is that emphasis is most often placed upon benevolence and optimism in his thinking. The little attention that has been paid to Fielding's empirical ideas derives from a sense of his reaction to John Locke.³ Considerable affinities can be noticed, however, between Fielding's and Locke's ideas. Indeed, some of the philosopher's less well-known positions in his educational writings allow us to see how agreeable it must have been for the novelist to introduce empirical ideas into his narrative commentary for serious and comic purposes.

To begin with, Locke and Fielding share ideas about the conditions necessary to learning. In *Some Thoughts concerning Education*,⁴ Locke defends physical and scholarly discipline but opposes mindless corporal punishment and abstract studies. Convinced that pain coarsens children, Locke proposes that, when reproofing misbehaviour, the adult should pretend to be amazed by ill-conduct so that the child will benefit from realizing he is assumed to be responsible (pp. 30, 60-1, and 64). In *Tom Jones* Thwackum, whose name, as well as meditations, is "full of Birch," drives Tom to an understandable but unacceptable rebelliousness (III, v and viii).⁵ But, whereas Thwackum is comically deflated because of his coarse sense of pedagogy, Allworthy is almost an ideal teacher. He does not try to convince Jenny Jones about her immorality, but trusts to her sense of responsibility: "A Hint therefore, to awaken your Sense of this Matter, shall suffice; for I would inspire you with Repentance, and not drive you to Desperation" (I, vii). For Locke and Fielding the conditions under which learning takes place must be humane; both care more for affecting people than for abstract reason. Hence, Locke celebrates the power of example for reaching and touching children's reasoning (p. 61) and Fielding holds that a narrative incident is more enlightening than "the longest Dissertation" (III, iii).

Both Locke and Fielding imply that the conditions necessary to learning should be based on religious assumptions. Hence they distinguish between education and learning. Locke scorns traditional education because he values conduct more than learning, and Fielding delights in revealing how vulnerable traditional education is to doctrinaire thinking. Locke's demand that learning be matched to disposition and that the individual be trained to social affections insists that learning is as much a matter of temperament and habit as it is of step-by-step understanding. For Locke, the individual's acquisition of proper social conduct becomes second nature: it requires no thought or reflection (p. 38). When, with witty and deliberate indirectness, Fielding refers to Tom's conscience, the novelist substitutes implications about the practical integrity of conscience for nominal categories and rational absolutes:

Mr. *Jones* had Somewhat about him, which, though I think Writers are not thoroughly agreed in its Name, doth certainly inhabit some human Breasts; whose Use is not so properly to distinguish Right from Wrong, as to prompt and incite them to the former, and to restrain and with-hold them from the latter. (IV, vi).

With deference to Fielding's commentator, the novelist is not so much discriminating between the guiding and the judging aspects of conscience.⁶ Rather he emphasizes that Tom's conscience is an "active Principle" which "doth not content itself with Knowledge or Belief only" in order to show that virtue is not the object of reason or the effect of education. Both Locke and Fielding limit the scope of education and promote practical virtue on the basis of religious assumptions about human nature. Locke relies upon innate predispositions to temper educational ambition:

God has stamp'd certain Characters upon Men's Minds, which like their Shapes, may perhaps be a little mended, but can hardly be totally alter'd and transform'd into the contrary.

(p. 40)

Similarly, Fielding's contention that "Men of true Wisdom and Goodness are contented to take Persons and Things as they are" and that "there is, perhaps, no surer Mark of Folly, than an Attempt to correct the natural Infirmities of those we love" (II, vii) is chastening to educational aims. On account of the incurable flaws of human nature, Fielding proposes that men must learn to possess an "over-looking Disposition" in order to exercise friendship. A religious sense of forgiveness together with an awareness of required social conduct is Fielding's goal for learning.

The worst effect of traditional education in Locke's eyes is affectation, which he attributes to lazy teachers who promulgate rules with merely theoretical examples. True learning avoids affectation by enhancing god-given dispositions in a way that harmonises thinking and action:

The Actions which naturally flow from such a well-form'd Mind, please us also, as the genuine Mark of it; and being as it were natural Emanations from the Spirit and Disposition within, cannot but be easy and unconstrain'd. (p. 41)

Locke's definition of affectation as pretence to a good disposition and disguise of a bad one (p. 42) is close to Fielding's explanation of affectation in the preface of *Joseph Andrews*. Despite his distinction between the ostentation of vanity and the deceit of hypocrisy, Fielding is most concerned to show that the discrepancy between thinking and action deserves ridicule. One of the best examples of this concern in *Tom Jones* is Fielding's amusingly generalized presentation of Square's failure to practice what he preaches:

For though such great Beings think much better and more wisely, they always act exactly like other Men. They know very well how to subdue all Appetites and Passions, and to despise both Pain and Pleasure; and this Knowledge affords much delightful Contemplation, and is easily acquired; but the Practice would be vexatious and troublesome; and, therefore, the same Wisdom which teaches them to know this, teaches them to avoid carrying it into Execution. (V, v)

Here Fielding deflates self-contained thinking by ironically granting achievements to mind that make no sense without commitment to practice and social conduct.

Related to concern for the integration of thinking and action is Locke's and Fielding's appreciation of prudence. For both men prudence accommodates the secular and the religious. Although Locke's educational emphasis is secular in that he believes education should enable men to live without excessive suspicion or confidence and to develop mutual understanding through social concourse (p. 71), he insists that education ultimately serves religious faith. "Enlargement of our Minds towards a truer and fuller Comprehension of the intellectual World" (p. 167), since the "Works of Nature" cannot be reduced "into a Science" (p. 166), requires revelation as well as reason. The very deficiencies of natural philosophy and of the systemization of spiritual knowledge mean for Locke that education must be tempered by prudence, and prudence is a matter of understanding religious principles through the practice of faith (p. 116). Indeed, for Locke prudence is second only to faith:

a man may be, perhaps, a good man (who lives in truth and sincerity of heart towards God) with a small portion of prudence, but he will never be very happy in himself, nor useful to others. (p. 196)

Fielding expresses a similar belief in *Tom Jones* when, in a crucial — and playful — paragraph in which he moves from speculating about future readers to magisterially addressing "worthy Disciples," he argues that the individual cannot concentrate upon interior goodness: "Prudence and Circumspection are necessary even to the best of Men." In fact, "no Man can be good enough to enable him to neglect the Rules of Prudence" (III, vii). Tom must add to his good, generous, and honourable temper prudence and religion (V, vii). For Fielding, as for Locke, prudence is not just a consideration of circumstance: "Prudence is indeed the Duty which we owe to ourselves" in order to protect virtue and to earn a morally constructive relation with society (XVIII, x). Locke and Fielding both value prudence not only because it entails upon learning an accommodation of religious and secular ideas but also because it obliges learning to be connected to action and social commitment.

The way in which Fielding employs narrative commentary for the embodiment of ideas can be usefully related to Locke's notions about learning, reading, and the writer's rôle in *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*. In this work Locke details the idolatrous attention men pay to their own ideas (p. 32)⁸ and maintains that conversation is the only remedy of such prejudice (p. 35). Locke also considers the relation between fallibility and reading; he suggests that a training in moral and abstract ideas offsets readers' tendencies to lose themselves in circumstances and to generalize too easily from particulars (p. 65). Locke insists that the writer must consider it his duty to provoke connected thinking in the reader and to assume that reading provides the materials of thought rather than produces actual thinking (p. 73). For Locke, the writer who recognizes that he cannot transfuse knowledge into the reader must accept the priority of truth and make sure that literary devices convey this priority (p. 87).

Fielding enjoys exposing characters who idolize their own ideas. For instance, the landlord who deceives himself into believing that Sophia is Jenny Cameron likes to be thought to

see "farther and deeper into Things than any Man in the Parish." Not only is he deflated because of his low political prejudice and self-interest but also his ideas lack authority on account of his abuse of conversation. He pretends to be tentatively reasonable but is actually merely ambivalent: he leaves his hearers to understand more than he expresses. His reputation for wisdom is valueless because "Men are strangely inclined to worship what they do not understand" (XI, ii). Both Squire and Mrs. Western are mocked for their pretension to authoritative and distinctive ideas. Fielding describes their mental perversities in a comically complementary manner. While the Squire never bothers to look ahead but concerns himself only with the present, Mrs. Western, ignoring the actual, views everything from a distant perspective. Their pretensions to talent are excessive and self-defeating. "For as the Sister often foresaw what never came to pass, so the Brother often saw much more than was actually the Truth" (X, viii). The Westerns separate perception and reflection; the Squire overparticularizes and Mrs. Western overgeneralizes, but illusion is the common result.

His awareness of the reader's distinct but thoughtless inclinations to be engrossed by narrative detail and to generalize narrative particulars leads Fielding to comment slyly on the writer's rôle as a way of inducing the audience to be self-conscious and critically intelligent. Frequently, he stresses the factual nature of his story to show that reading provides material for thought rather than thinking itself. When, for example, he says "it is our Province to relate Facts, and we shall leave Causes to Persons of much higher Genius" (II, iv), he warns of the irrelevance of the philosophy of causation while he makes his partial and dictatorial tone the object of the reader's humour. But, if, by emphasizing the factual, he wishes to illustrate the empirical basis of reading and thinking, Fielding refuses to limit himself to a factual content. Often he confesses that he is suppressing detail; that is, he recounts what is minimally necessary: "it is not our Custom to unfold at any Time more than is necessary for the Occasion" (XV, vi). Of course, Fielding tantalizes because he does not always provide what is even minimally necessary. But he does turn this authorial

prerogative into a way of obliging the reader to think under circumscribed conditions. Fielding precisely limits the reader's scope for induction and deduction yet allows the reader an amused reaction to the author. Because the author variously and comically reveals and conceals, the reader painlessly sees the need to connect the particular and general, the fact and idea.

Like Locke, Fielding is aware that he must confront superficial reading: he claims that people commonly "read Books with no other View than to say they have read them" (XVI, i). Hence, he involves readers by obliging them to deduce moral inferences. He frequently provides opportunities for the exercise of controlled conjectures;⁹ but he announces these opportunities with an inductiveness that is suspiciously ironical. For instance, he teasingly pretends that to speculate about unrecorded events is more significant than to conjecture about unspecified mental conduct in a context which renders it imperative to judge characters in terms of general human nature (III, i). Obviously Fielding holds that "every Book ought to be read with the same Spirit, and in the same Manner, as it is writ" (IV, i), but he does not make his spirit obvious or dogmatic because he recognizes the impossibility of transfusing knowledge into his readers. His trust that his novel will mediate knowledge, however, explains why Fielding desires the reader to recognize the need to keep the story within the bounds of human agency and to avoid the imaginative surprises of mere fiction. Fielding will not be accused of "falling into Fiction" (VIII, i): probability and truthfulness to history are criteria that he applies to rhetoric and imagery as well as to plot. Hence, when he describes Mrs. Wilkin's visit to the parish with the simile of a kite, he merely pretends to be the proud, refined, and magisterial writer:

The sagacious Reader will not, from this Simile, imagine these poor People had any Apprehension of the Design with which Mrs. *Wilkins* was now coming towards them; but as the great Beauty of the Simile may possibly sleep these hundred Years, till some future Commentator shall take this Work in hand, I think proper to lend the Reader a little Assistance in this Place. (I, vi)

His intrusiveness, aestheticism, and uncertainty about posterity's response ironically help to stress that Fielding is interested

in the general significance and illustrative force of the simile rather than in any capacity it might have as a token of psychological point of view. This is true of his skilful deployment of literary devices.

The understanding of the nature of learning which he seems to share with Locke certainly informs Fielding's disposition of narrative stance. There is characteristically comic oscillation between affirmative and tentative expressions in this stance which obliges the reader to consider the limits of knowledge, how knowledge is gained from experience, and what part causal explanations play in the acquisition of knowledge. When, for instance, Fielding seemingly accounts for Northerton's escape from captivity, he employs a sentence structure consisting of a main clause and two subordinate but coordinate adverb clauses of condition. This structure appears to offer a simple, categorical explanation of alternative causes:

But whether *Northerton* was carried away in Thunder or Fire, or in whatever other Manner he was gone; it was now certain, that his Body was no longer in Custody. (VII, xiv)

The reader may be obliged to accept the factual certainty of Northerton's disappearance, but he cannot accept it as a given because the two clauses of condition are not of equivalent status: in the first, Fielding mockingly presents a superstitious explanation, and, in the second, he is irritatingly uncategorical. This second clause simply makes us want to know the landlady's relation with Northerton which Fielding has just before hinted at and ironically pretended to be irrelevant. The alternatives are not even alternate. Fielding has disclaimed narrative omniscience in order to induce the reader to see facts as they are and as they require sensible explanation. Often his pretence to unfold subtle causal alternatives leads the reader to recognize the empirical reality of the event described and to ponder a precise judgment. For example, when the sentinel fires his gun at the ghost-like Tom, Fielding is unable to say "Whether Fear or Courage was the Occasion of his Firing, or whether he took Aim at the Object of his Terror" (VII, xiv). In a sense, Fielding flourishes his lack of omniscience. This alerts the reader to the

deduction that the adverb clauses of condition are not equivalent and that "Courage" in the first is ruled out by "Terror" in the second. Aided by Fielding's ironical avoidance of judgment and by Tom's understanding of the sentinel's superstitious fear, the reader is able to deduce the sentinel's probable mental state. The comic tensions between assertiveness and tentativeness in the narrative stance forestall speculative generalizations and direct attention to proper understanding of evidence.

Even when Fielding's speculation about causes is expressed in more precise and equivalent categories, a humorous and thoughtful response is the outcome. The following disclaimer adds to the bathos of Square's discovery in Molly's closet:

Now, whether *Molly* in the Agonies of her Rage, pushed this Rug with her Feet; or, *Jones* might touch it; or whether the Pin or Nail gave way of its own Accord, I am not certain. (V, v)

The amusing descent into particulars and away from the most likely because most human cause is gradual. The categories become more limited but, paradoxically, more vague. We do not know whether the rug is attached by a pin or nail. By dissolving speculative and empirical categories Fielding illustrates the human reality of his story and obliges the reader to reconstruct the fictional context which supports that reality. By means of the assertive and tentative aspects of his narrative stance, Fielding invites the reader to expatiate responsibly with phenomenal and verbal possibilities: this is both amusing and serious.

Fielding adopts the same narrative stance towards mind, for he seems intent on inducing the reader to realize the difficulty of knowing of the existence of ideas in the mind. For instance, he praises Sophia's modest good sense in her early relationship with Tom, but he will not describe her emotional responsiveness in a theoretical way:

Though neither the young Man's Behaviour, nor indeed his Manner . . . were such as could give her any just Cause of suspecting he intended to make Love to her; yet whether Nature whispered something into her Ear, or from what Cause it arose I will not determine,

certain it is, some Idea of that Kind must have intruded itself; for her Colour forsook her Cheeks, her Limbs trembled, and her Tongue would have faltered, had *Tom* stopped for an Answer. (IV, v)

The novelist refuses causal justification of Sophia's idea of love. But, after denying the applicability of a systematic explanation, he records the changes in her physical appearance as signs of her mental condition. Amusingly, he is hypothetical about her behaviour, while he is not about her ideas. He supposes the existence of a cause of Sophia's love, but will not be categorical about it. In this way he points to the difficulty of knowing mind rationally and to the necessity of knowing it empirically. His narrative stance shows that Fielding purposefully operates within restricted categories and that he is cheerfully cautious in describing the interior life.

If, as in the previous example, Fielding's ambivalence about causation draws us closer to Sophia and leads us to recognize her interior and representative attractiveness, in other instances it compounds the irony and satire. In the following mock speculation about Mrs. Blifil's reaction to her husband's death, the tentativeness of the grammar and the suggestiveness of the vocabulary expose both the histrionic behaviour of the widow and the hypocritical greed of her physicians:

Whether, as the Lady had at first persuaded her Physicians to believe her ill, they had now, in return, persuaded her to believe herself so, I will not determine; but she continued a whole Month with all the Decorations of Sickness. (II, ix)

Clearly, Mrs. Blifil's illness is sham, but there is also a tacit contract of self-interest between her and the doctors. A similarly double ironic effect is produced when Fielding pretends to be unable to judge Dr. Blifil's faith:

Whether his Religion was real, or consisted only in Appearance, I shall not presume to say, as I am not possessed of any Touchstone, which can distinguish the true from the false. (I, x)

Not only does the context make Dr. Blifil's acquisitiveness and hypocrisy apparent but the peremptory and haughty tone of the disclaimer also signals the partial unreliability of the narrator.

The disclaimer may be valid theoretically since there can be no *a priori* way of measuring inner integrity. But, even as complacent and abstract judgment is condemned implicitly by the disclaimer, Dr. Blifil is satirized firmly and this satire implies Fielding's trust in a practical touchstone. While the ironical presentation of evidence and conclusion stems from Fielding's unsystematic attitude towards causation and from his belief in the need for personal realization of knowledge and judgment, his practical trust in knowledge of causation can be illuminated by the following passage in *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*:

Every man carries about him a touchstone, if he will make use of it, to distinguish substantial gold from superficial glitterings, truth from appearances. And indeed the use and benefit of this touchstone, which is natural reason, is spoiled and lost only by assumed prejudices, overweening presumption and narrowing our minds. The want of exercising it in the full extent of things intelligible is that which weakens and extinguishes this noble faculty in us. (pp. 38-9)

Locke here insists that the exercise of judgment is essential in the development of human potential, yet he stresses that it can operate properly only by being based on empirical assumptions about learning and knowledge. Fielding's ironical narrative stance exercises the reader's natural reason and induces him to think of judgment in terms of continuous effort, constant practice, and habit.

That Fielding's allusions to Locke in *Tom Jones* are not reverential does not invalidate the contention that the novelist's ideas of learning and judgment are comparable to the philosopher's. For Fielding is usually amusingly indirect about the sources of his ideas. In a passage which emphasizes the accessibility of ancient ideas and indicates the bankruptcy of modern ones, Fielding with comic hyperbole insists that he will never "scruple to take to myself any Passage which I shall find in an antient Author to my Purpose, without setting down the Name of the Author from whence it is taken" (XII, ii). His sense of the commonwealth of ideas frequently leads him to mock the authoritative citation of writers and ideas. For example:

It hath been observed by wise Men or Women, I forget which, that all Persons are doomed to be in Love once in their Lives. (I, xi) It hath been observed by some Man of much greater Reputation for Wisdom than myself, that Misfortunes seldom come single. (III, ix) It was well-remarked by one, (and perhaps by more) that Misfortunes do not come single. (VI, vii)

In such formulaic sentences, Fielding exposes pedantry. The vagueness about authorities and the obviousness of the saws wittily illustrate that ideas are common property because they stem from the accumulated experience of mankind. On the other hand, Fielding wins precise comic effects from detailing the abuse of authorities. Hence, when Mrs. Western defies Sophia to argue with her, she asserts that "The antient Philosophers, such as *Socrates*, *Alcibiades*, and others, did not use to argue with their Scholars" (VII, iii); her claim to follow Socrates's educational ideas clashes ridiculously with her ignorance of the philosopher's dialectical method. Citing authorities is an obvious way of rationalizing pride and laziness and of fortifying moral evasiveness. So, although Square models himself on Plato and Aristotle, he does so with no eclectic capacity. "In Morals he was a profest *Platonist*, and in Religion he inclined to be an *Aristotelian*" (III, iii). Square's merely academic sense of philosophy heightens his lack of integrity. Consequently, it is not surprising that Fielding does not regard modern philosophers with implicit respect. With tongue in cheek he praises Shaftesbury's elegance and greatness, but he is quietly derogatory when he refuses to justify Lady Bellaston's deception of Sophia in terms of the philosopher's sense of allowable prevarication (XIII, xii) and when he deflates Square's enthusiasm for Shaftesbury's stoic ideas by cheerfully describing the disruptive effect which the divine's biting his own tongue causes (V, ii). Fielding is also engagingly indirect in his criticism of Locke. In arguing that invention and judgment are reciprocal as far as writers are concerned, Fielding rejects the well-known, if unspecified, Lockean position that memory and judgment operate separately (IX, i). Furthermore, that Mrs. Fitzpatrick has read Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and uses Lockean explanations of cognitive weakness to excuse

her narrative incoherence implies Fielding's criticism that the authority of Locke is used to conceal moral duplicity (XI, vii).

Nonetheless, Fielding's reliance upon Locke's empiricism is evident. For example, in a satirical attack on dramatic conventions Fielding refers to Locke's blind man who ludicrously likened scarlet to the sound of a trumpet. Fielding's point is that the bombastic, archaic language of heroic plays would justify the blind man's likening it to the sound of a trumpet since it produces a mere idea of sensation (IV, i). He refers again to the blind man when he emphasizes that he must be able to assume that his readers have experienced love if he is to write about it. He claims that it would be as absurd for him to write without this assumption as it is for a blind man to talk about colours (VI, i). In the first allusion to the blind man Fielding maintains that simple ideas are important as touchstones and that ideas of sensation must be connected to ideas of reflection and in the second he suggests that ideas of sensation can serve as a paradigm for ideas of reflection.

Frequently, Fielding's comic descriptions of perception and comprehension exemplify serious empirical assumptions. Hence, he enjoys describing "the Operations of the Mind" (II, iv) when Mrs. Partridge's jealousy causes her to fluctuate wildly between certainty and doubt. Fielding limits himself to the evidence she possesses about her husband's infidelity and, with cheerful equivocation, maintains that she has enough to warrant suspicion about his deficiencies but not enough to doubt his sexual conduct. By contrast, Fielding justifies Sophia's suspicion about Mrs. Fitzpatrick's morals. Sophia does not have a "Quicksightness into Evil."¹⁰ Rather she is slow to be provoked and demonstrates "the Faculty of seeing what is before your Eyes, and of drawing Conclusions from what you see" (XI, x). Far from being suspicious or subjective, Sophia is a model of judgment because she balances diffidence and perspicacity in an empirically responsible way. Although he is ironical about Tom's diffident passion for Sophia, Fielding bases Tom's eventual suspicion of Sophia's love for him and his awareness of his feelings for her on an empirical sense of the way the mind works. Alerted by Sophia's atrocious piano playing, perceptive

of her face, and recalling specific events, Tom detects her love for him and discovers his passion for her. The development of observation, memory, reflection, and intuition in this instance wittily betokens an empirical model of mental operations.

Fielding's narrative stance frequently obliges the reader to consider the activity of reading in empirical terms. When, for example, he introduces Sophia, he claims to want to help the reader form an "exact Idea" of the heroine (IV, ii). But the images which for him parallel Sophia's beauty are to the reader mere allusions. Besides, each attempt to elucidate resemblance shows the impossibility of conveying an exact idea of Sophia. Frustrated, the narrator finishes by paralleling his private image of his wife to that of Sophia and by pretending that this image can give the reader an "adequate Idea" of the heroine. The descent from exact to adequate idea is as informative as the actual inaccessibility of the "adequate Idea". For the reader realizes that simple ideas cannot be shared and that the representational force of images is arbitrary and conventional. In this way, the reader is taught to see that fictional ideas can never be exact and that they are adequate only in contradistinction to ideas of sensation. Fielding invites a similar response when he plays with the solipsistic notion that we can only know our own ideas. About a footman's resounding knock he says:

To attempt to describe this Noise to those who have heard it would be vain, and to aim at giving any Idea of it to those who have never heard the like, would still be more vain. (XIII, iv)

He pretends to be trapped by the empirical tenets that words cannot substitute for simple ideas and that experience alone validates the use of words. This ironically excessive commitment to theory prompts the reader to understand the extent to which fictional ideas resist philosophical ideas and to respond to fictional conventions with a practical sense of assumptions.

Fielding does, however, use empirical ideas to control the reader's judgment of the characters. For instance, he justifies Tom's reverence for the gipsy king in terms of the association of ideas. Although the leader of the gipsies has none of the accoutrements of kingship, Tom beholds him with "an Idea of

Awe and Respect." To offset the judgment that this idea is imaginary, Fielding claims that "such Ideas are incident to Power, and almost inseparable from it" (XII, xii). Another example of Fielding's use of empirical ideas to create sympathy for the hero occurs when the novelist humourously describes Tom's need for a shilling to go to the masquerade (XIII, vi). Fielding addresses those readers who might regard Tom's petty wants as ridiculous and asks them to reflect on their own larger wants in order to have "a perfect Idea of what Mr. *Jones* felt." Fielding holds that material need is not affected by the scale of the need. Tom's monetary requirements may be comically small but they represent a modification of the same idea that is shared by the audience. This clear allusion to Lockean simple modes complements the novelist's preference for dealing in natural motives and rejecting supernatural and spiritual ones.¹¹ Indeed, most often Fielding makes perceptual experience and empirical modes the measure of his characters' moral ideas.

Irony and humour are instrumental in Fielding's education of the reader's judgment with empirical ideas. His constant anticipation and redirection of audience response, especially at the comic expense of the narrator's standing, makes it clear that understanding takes place only together with a sense of fallibility. The reader is seldom allowed a complete or holistic judgment: he has to be satisfied with a series of partial causal explanations. Hence, Fielding comically pretends to be ignorant of whole causes. For example, he is only tentative about Jenny Jones's dismissal from the Partridge household (II, iii): he neither explains her conduct nor analyzes her state of mind. He merely speculates about the violence she forestalls by running away. Nor does he determine whether surprise or fear renders Partridge speechless before his wife, although he is certain about Partridge's sexual consolation of his wife, even if this certainty is couched in mock tentativeness. By exercising the reader's appreciation of the variously ironic withholding of causal explanation, Fielding encourages the reader to think about sufficient and necessary empirical ideas independently of narrative stance.

Fielding frequently disclaims omniscience in order to make the reader properly confident in conjecturing about causes. So he mocks himself as well as the reader when he pretends to be unable to describe Sophia's love for Tom: "Her Sensations, however, the Reader's Heart (if he or she have any) will better represent than I can" (IV, v). Similarly, he will not describe Sophia's reaction to the garrulous and coarse Mrs. Honour because the reader "may probably conjecture" about the heroine's mind in a sound way (IV, xiv). In cases where he claims to find narrative commentary problematic, as in accounting for the deteriorating relationship of Mrs. Blifil and Mrs. Wilkins (II, v) and Allworthy's complex idea of charity (II, vi), Fielding serves ironically as a model for thinking about cause and effect. In his indirect way he stimulates common-sense thinking about causation; he also provokes an awareness about imputing and ascribing motives that respects empirical assumptions.

While his manipulation of narrative stance implicitly reveals his concern to encourage the reader to expatiate sensibly about causation, Fielding also explicitly advises the reader to think according to a restricted model of causation. For example, after surprisingly explaining Betty Seagrim's hatred of her sister, Molly, in terms of sexual jealousy, Fielding announces that "we did not think it necessary to assign this Cause sooner, as Envy itself alone was adequate to all the Effects we have mentioned" (V, vi). To dispel easy notions of cause and effect, Fielding occasionally demonstrates the undesirability of judging narrative events simply. In the case of Sophia's loving and fearful obedience to her bullying father, Fielding argues that "it is no unusual Thing to ascribe those Actions entirely to Fear, which are in a great Measure produced by Love" (VII, vi). At one time, then, Fielding advises the reader to regard causation in a serial manner and at another he counsels a balanced, unconventional judgment.

Out of respect for this empirical estimate of causation, Fielding denies parallels between literary and actual causes. Thus, he undermines the report that Sophia's charming voice caused a horse to stop:

Perhaps, however, the Fact may be true, and less miraculous than it hath been represented; since the natural Cause seems adequate to the Effect: For as the Guide at that Moment desisted from constant Application of his armed Right Heel. . . it is more than possible, that this Omission alone might occasion the Beast to stop, especially as this was very frequent with him at other Times. (X, ix)

Fielding is tentative about the narrative event in order to emphasize the relation of knowledge and experience. The amusing indirectness of style which describes natural, mechanical operations helps to stress the gap between narration and reality. With similar consequences Fielding declares, in the instance of the Lieutenant's anxiety to capture Northerton rather than to aid the injured Tom, that "We mention this Observation, not with any View of pretending to account for so odd a Behaviour, but lest some Critic should hereafter plume himself on discovering it" (VIII, xii). By pretending to eschew causal analysis, Fielding is enabled to deflate merely literary observation. He often insists upon the difference between actual and literary causation in order to heighten the tension between actual and literary judgment. He tenaciously maintains that viewpoints afforded by fiction do not obtain in life. For example, he constantly justifies Allworthy's actions and judgments, at the same time charging his readers to remember their fallibility and to look beyond fictional knowledge. But, while Fielding renders his narrative stance variously and unsteadily as a means of arousing the reader to a sense of judgment that is founded on the separateness of fiction and life, he certainly trusts in the affective quality of literary devices to absorb the reader and to induce him to real knowledge. Despite the playfully experimental, if traditional, styles which introduce Sophia, Fielding's goal is to allow the reader a "perfect Intimacy" with the heroine. Indeed, Sophia is "really a Copy from Nature": the "Idea of Female Perfection" that she represents is to be found in "many of our fair Country-women." Fielding uses the literary medium to lead the reader gradually to this sort of knowledge. As he says, "it is a kind of tacit Affront to our Reader's Understanding, and may also rob him of that Pleasure which he will receive in forming his own Judgment of her Character" (IV, ii),

if the reader has always to be guided by explicit advice as how to react.

In *Tom Jones* Fielding expects to improve the reader's moral judgment: he founds this expectation upon provoking the reader to understand causation and knowledge in empirical terms. Although he neither composes a "System" nor feels "obliged to reconcile every Matter to the received Notions concerning Truth and Nature" (XII, viii), his playful disposition of narrative elicits an empirical awareness of learning and judgment. His humour prevents the novel from fortifying the predispositions of both wise and silly people: it permits him to avoid continually voicing precepts. He is glad not to be "an ordinary Parson [who] fills his Sermon by repeating his Text at the End of every Paragraph." Nevertheless, he is adamant about "the great, useful and uncommon Doctrine" of prudence which he embodies in his comic narrative. The entertaining ways in which he connects empiricism and judgment show that not only was he aware of the dangers of being didactic but also his doctrine of prudence depends upon the extent to which empirical ideas should inform literature and life.

NOTES

¹See John Preston, *The Created Self: The Reader's Role in Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (London, 1970), pp. 114 and 117.

²Martin C. Battestin, *The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art: A Study of Joseph Andrews* (Middletown, Connecticut, 1959), provides the best account of Fielding's latitudinarianism; George R. Swann, "Fielding and Empirical Realism" in *Philosophical Parallellisms in Six English Novelists* (Philadelphia, 1929), pp. 46-64, explains Fielding's indebtedness to Shaftesbury and suggests that, in as much as Fielding differs from Shaftesbury, he is close to Hume's empiricism. But this suggestion is not detailed. Bernard Harrison, *Henry Fielding's Tom Jones: The Novelist as Moral Philosopher* (London, 1975), especially chapters five and six, charts a moral dialectic in Fielding that places him beyond the influence of Shaftesbury and the Latitudinarians.

³Kenneth MacLean, *John Locke and English Literature of the Eighteenth-Century* (New Haven, 1936), describes Fielding's admiration of Locke (p. 16) and shows that the novelist reacted to the philosopher's epistemology (pp. 35 and 55); Glenn W. Hatfield, *Henry Fielding and the Language of Irony* (Chicago, 1968), describes Fielding's reaction to Locke's theory of language; Henry Knight Miller, *Henry Fielding's Tom Jones and the Romance Tradition* (University of Victoria, 1976), p. 65, contends that, while Fielding opposed Locke's nominalism, the novelist employed the

philosopher's vocabulary describing mental events; C. R. Kropf, "Educational Theory and Human Nature in Fielding's Works," *PMLA*, 89, (1974), 113-120, describes Fielding's exploration of ideas about mental growth and his various relation to Lockean assumptions.

⁴*Some Thoughts concerning Education by John Locke* edited by The Rev. R. H. Quick (London, 1887). All references are to this edition.

⁵*The History of Tom Jones* with an introduction and commentary by Martin C. Battestin and edited by Fredson Bowers (Oxford, 1974). All references are to this edition.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 171, note 1.

⁷See Martin C. Battestin, "Fielding's Definition of Wisdom: Some Functions of Ambiguity and Emblem in *Tom Jones*," *ELH*, 35 (1968), 188-217.

⁸*John Locke's "Of the Conduct of the Understanding"* edited by Francis W. Garforth (New York, 1966). All references are to this edition.

⁹See Robert Alter, *Fielding and the Nature of the Novel* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), pp. 43ff. for an account of the inferences required of the reader.

¹⁰Like Fielding, Locke associates quick-sightedness into evil with unawareness of fallibility: see *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* edited by John W. Yolton (London, 1965), II, xxxiii, p. 335. Fielding's point is that Sophia is distinctive because she is aware of her own fallibility and yet perceives another mind accurately.

¹¹For Locke's definition of simple modes see *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II, xiii, p. 133.