

## The Meanings of the Word 'Greatness'

Keisuke Kodama

## The Meanings of the Word 'Greatness'

### Contents

- I. Introduction
- II. The Meaning of the Word 'Greatness' in 'Of True Greatness'
- III. The Meaning of the Word 'Greatness' in 'A Dialogue between Alexander the Great and Diogenes the Cynic'
- IV. The Meaning of the Word 'Greatness' in *The History of the Life of the Late Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great*
- V. Conclusion

### I. Introduction

The aim of this essay is, first, to study the meanings of the word 'greatness' in Henry Fielding's three works: 'Of True Greatness', 'A Dialogue between Alexander the Great and Diogenes the Cynic' and *The History of the Life of the Late Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great*; secondly, to prove his motive of writing these three works; thirdly, to consider why the meanings of the word 'greatness' change in the works, and, last, to show you his view of man.

### II. The Meaning of the Word 'Greatness' in 'Of True Greatness'

'Of True Greatness' is a poem which Henry Fielding wrote in 1774, when he was thirty-four years old. It consists of 282 lines and is written with passion, just as he says in Preface to the *Miscellanies and Poems of Henry Fielding, Esq.* that 'The poetical pieces which compose the first part of the first volume were most of them written when I was very young, and are indeed productions of *the heart* rather than of *the head*. If the good-natured reader thinks them tolerable, it will answer my warmest hopes. This branch of writing is what I very little pretend to, and will appear to have been very little my pursuit, since I think (one or two poems excepted) I have here presented my reader with all I could remember, or procure copies of.' (Italics mine)

In order to know how he has thought of 'greatness', let us read the opening part of the poem:

Kodama: The Meanings of the Word 'Greatness'

'This strange, while all to greatness homage pay,  
So few should know the goddess they obey;  
That men should think a thousand things the same,  
And give contending images one name.  
Not Greece, in all her temples' wide abodes,  
Held a more wild democracy of gods  
Than various deities we serve, while all  
Profess before one common shrine to fall.

Whether ourselves of greatness are possess'd,  
Or worship it within another's breast.

While a mean crowd of sycophants attend,  
And fawn and flatter, creep and cringe and bend;  
The fav'rite blesses his superior state,  
Rises o'er all, and hails himself the great.  
Vain man! can such as these to greatness raise?  
Can honour come from dirt? from baseness, praise?  
Then India's gem on Scotland's coast shall shine,  
And the Peruvian ore enrich the Cornish mine.

Fielding seems to want to say in the first and the second stanza that there are a lot of, and a thousand, kinds of greatness and, as we can imagine from the word 'democracy', we each are possessed of greatness, and the rhetorical questions in the third stanza seem to tell us about the content of the word 'greatness': a vain man cannot raise to greatness from dirt and baseness, that is, a mean crowd of sycophants.

You may already be aware who is 'the fav'rite'. A great man about whom Fielding wants to write is, I think, Alexander the Great,

. . . hadst thou, Alexander, wish's to prove  
Thyself the real progeny of Jove,

Virtue another path had bid thee find,  
Taught thee to save, and not to slay, mankind.

And, on the other hand, another great man is Diogenes the Cynic, about whom he writes:

Thy highest pomp the hermit dares despise,  
Greatness (cries this) is to be good and wise.  
To titles, treasures, luxury and show,  
The gilded follies of mankind, a foe.  
He flies society, to wilds resorts,  
And rails at busy cities, splendid courts.  
Great to himself, he in his cell appears,  
As kings on thrones, or conquerors on cars.

However, Fielding does not think at all that either such a great man as Alexander or such a great or good man as Diogenes is truly great. What sort of man is great, then? His answer is:

Great is the man, who with unwearied toil  
Spies a weed springing in the richest soil.  
If Dryden's page with one bad line be bless'd,  
'Tis great to show it, as to write the rest.

After all, he expresses true greatness or greatness without any epithet in the last stanza of the poem 'Of True Greatness' like this:

To no profession, party, place confined,  
True greatness lives but in the noble mind;  
Him constant through each various scene attends,  
Fierce to his foes, and faithful to his friends.  
In him, in any sphere of life she shines,

Kodama: The Meanings of the Word 'Greatness'

Whether she blaze a Hoadley<sup>(1)</sup> 'mid divines,  
Or an Argyle<sup>(2)</sup>, in fields and senate dare,  
Supreme in all the arts of peace and war.  
Greatness with learning deck'd in Carteret<sup>(3)</sup> see,  
With justice, and with clemency in Lee<sup>(4)</sup>;  
In Chesterfield<sup>(5)</sup> to ripe perfection come,  
See it in Lyttelton<sup>(6)</sup> beyond its bloom.  
Lives there a man, by nature form'd to please,  
To think with dignity, express with ease;  
Upright in principle, in council strong,  
Prone not to change, nor obstinate too long:  
Whose soul is with such various talents bless'd,  
What he now does seems to become him best;  
Whether the Cabinet demands his powers,  
Or gay addresses soothe his vacant hours,  
Or when from graver tasks his mind unbends  
To charm with wit the muses or his friends?  
His friends! who in his favour claim no place,  
From titles, pimping, flattery or lace,  
To whose blest lot superior portions fall,  
To most of fortune, and of taste to all.  
Awed not by fear, by prejudice not sway'd  
By fashion led not, nor by whim betray'd,  
By candour only biass'd, who shall dare  
To view and judge and speak men as they are?  
In him (if such there be) is greatness shown,  
Nor can he be to Dodington<sup>(7)</sup> unknown.

---

(1) Bishop of Winchester. (2) Country on the west coast of Scotland. (3) English politician and proprietor of American colonies (1610–1680). (4) English dramatist (1653–1692). (5) Politician and diplomat (1664–1773). (6) Politician and poet (1709–1773). (7) The man to whom Fielding wrote an epistle.

Fielding seems to want to mean by 'him' and 'he' in the last two lines that he himself is 'such'.  
He thinks of himself:

.....

Who hopes to drive out greatness from his mind?

Some greatness in myself perhaps I view;  
Not that I write, but that I write to you<sup>(8)</sup>.

So far we have considered the meaning of the word 'greatness' in 'Of True Greatness', and what he really wants to mean is, I think, literal 'greatness', literal 'true greatness', that is, 'Inherent nobility or dignity (of mind, character, action, or expression)'<sup>(9)</sup>. It is not the greatness of 'rank or station'<sup>(10)</sup>, but the greatness of mind.

### III. The Meaning of the Word 'Greatness' in 'A Dialogue between Alexander the Great and Diogenes the Cynic'

This work is, as its theme tells, a dialogue written in 1974, when Fielding was 36 years old, and consists of only 8 pages. It is interesting to note that in this work the word 'great' or 'greatness' is not often used. The reason, I think, is that perhaps the author regards Alexander the Great as 'great' greatness and Diogenes the Cynic as 'good' greatness.<sup>(11)</sup> The dialogue beings as follows:

ALEXANDER. What fellow art thou, who darest thus to lie at thy ease in our presence, when all others, as thou seest, rise to do us homage? Dost thou not know us?

DIOG. I cannot say I do: But by the number of thy attendants, by the splendour of thy habit; but, above all, by the vanity of thy appearance, and the arrogance of thy

---

(8) I think that 'you' in the last line is George Dodington and at the same time the reader. (9) See *OED* 'greatness' 5. (10) See *OED* 'greatness' 4. (11) I look upon the two characters as 'good' greatness, because Fielding says in Preface to the Miscellanies and Poems of Henry Fielding, Esq. that 'A man may be great without being good, or good without being great.'

speech, I conceive thou mayst be Alexander the son of Philip.

ALEX. And who can more justly challenge thy respect, than Alexander, at the head of that victorious army, who hath performed such wonderful exploits, and under his conduct, hath subdued the world?

DIO. Who? why the tailor who made me this old cloak.

ALEX. Thou art an odd fellow, and I have a curiosity to know thy name.

DIOG. I am not ashamed of it: I am called Diogenes: a name composed of as many and as well-sounding syllables as Alexander.

When the dialogue goes on to the talk of Diogenes, who says 'I shall never place any value on that which such as thou art can deprive me of', Alexander thinks Diogenes speaks 'vainly in contempt of a power which no other man ever yet arrive at', and asks him such rhetorical questions as:

. . . Hath the Granicus yet recovered the bloody colour with which I contaminated its waves? Are not the fields of Issus<sup>(12)</sup> and Arbela<sup>(13)</sup> still white with human bones? Will Susa<sup>(14)</sup> show no monuments of my victory? Are Darius<sup>(15)</sup> and Porus<sup>(16)</sup> names unknown to thee? Have not the groans of those millions reached thy ears, who, but for the valour of this heart, and the strength of this arm, had still enjoyed life and tranquillity? Hath then this son of Jupiter, this conqueror of the world, adored by his followers, dreaded by his foes, and worshipped by all, lived to hear his power contemned, and the offer of his favour slighted, by a poor philosopher, a wretched Cynic, whose cloak appears to be his only possession.

Diogenes's retort is as follows:

. . . I acknowledge indeed all the exploits thou hast recounted and the millions thou

---

(12) Ancient city of Cilicia in Asia Minor. (13) An important foothill town in northeast Iraq. (14) Capital of Susiana and chief residence of Darius I and his successors from 521 B.C. (15) The name of three kings of the Achaemenid dynasty of Persia. Darius I the Great reigned from 522 to 486 B.C. (16) (4th century B.C.), an Indian prince, ruler of the country between the Hydaspes (Jhelum) and Acesines (Chenab) rivers at the time of Alexander the Great's invasion (327–326 B.C.)

hast to thy eternal shame destroyed. But is it hence thou wouldst claim Jupiter for thy father? Hath not then every plague or pestilential vapour the same title? If thou art the dread of wretches to whom death appears the greatest of evils, is not every mortal disease the same? And if thou hast the adoration of thy servile followers, do they offer thee more than they are ready to pay to every tinsel ornament, or empty title? Is then the fear or worship of slaves of so great honour, when at the same time thou art the contempt of every brave honest man, though, like me, an old cloak should be his only possession?

At this point Alexander talks of 'the glory' which is 'the foundation of all that honour which is the encouragement to, and reward of, everything truly great and noble', and again his rhetorical questions begin:

. . . in what doth all honour, glory, and fame consists, but in the breath of that multitude, whose estimation, with such ill-grounded scorn, thou dost affect to despise? A reward which hath ever appeared sufficient to inflame the ambition of high and exalted souls; though, from their meanness, low minds may be incapable of tasting, or rather, for which pride, from the despair of attaining it, may inspire thee to feign a false and counterfeit disdain. What other reward than this have all those heroes proposed to themselves, who rejected the enjoyments which ease, riches, pleasure, and power, have held forth to them in their native country, have deserted their homes, and all those things which to vulgar mortals appear lovely or desirable, and, in defiance of difficulty and danger, invaded and spoiled the cities and territories of others; When their anger hath been provoked by no injury, nor their hope inspired by the prospect of any other good than of this very glory and honour, this adoration of slaves, which thou, from having never tasted its sweets, hast treated with contempt?

Changing the topic of conversation a little, Diogenes begins to talk of true honour:

. . . Was it to depend on the suffrages of such wretches, it would indeed be that contemptible thing which you represent it to be estimated in my opinion: but true honour

### Kodama: The Meanings of the Word 'Greatness'

is of a different nature; it results from the secret satisfaction of our own minds, and is decreed us by wise men and the gods; it is the shadow of wisdom and virtue, and is inseparable from them; nor is it either in thy power to deserve, nor in that of thy followers to bestow. As for such heroes as thou has named, who, like thyself, were born the curses of mankind, I readily agree they pursue another kind of glory, even that which thou hast mentioned, the applause of their slaves and sycophants; . . .

So far we have quoted many parts of the dialogue. Let us now pick up the synonyms, or synonymous phrases, of 'greatness', which Alexander regards as greatness:

'power' 'bloody colour' 'fields of Issus and Arbela' 'Susa' 'Darius and Porus' 'groans of those millions' 'valour of this heart' 'strength of this arm' 'this son of Jupiter, this conqueror of the world, adored by his followers, dreaded by his foes, and worshipped by all' 'glory' 'foundation of all that honour which is the encouragement to, and reward of, everything truly great and noble' 'honour' 'fame' 'breath of that multitude' 'reward which hath ever appeared sufficient to inflame the ambition of high and exalted souls' 'enjoyments which ease, riches, pleasure, and power, have held forth to them (= all those heroes) in their native country, have deserted their homes, and all those things which to vulgar mortals appear lovely or desirable, and, in defiance of difficulty and danger, invaded and spoiled the cities and territories of others' 'anger' 'hope' 'this very glory and honour, this adoration of slaves'.

What Diogenes regards as Alexander's greatness are:

'monuments of thy disgrace' 'exploits' 'millions' 'Jupiter' 'every plague or pestilential vapour' 'dread of wretches to whom death appears the greatest of evils' 'every mortal disease' 'adoration of thy servile followers' 'every tinsel ornament, or empty title' 'fear or worship of slaves' 'contempt of every brave honest man' '(no) true honour' 'suffrages of such wretches' 'that contemptible thing' 'curses of mankind' 'another kind of glory, the applause of their (= the heroes') slaves and sycophants' (1) 'secret satisfaction of our own minds' (2) '(true honour) decreed us by wise men and the gods' (3) 'shadow of

wisdom and virtue<sup>(17)</sup>

I can explain the meanings of these words and phrases from the dialogue between Diogenes and Alexander:

DIOG. I have left society, because I cannot endure the evils I see and detest in it.

ALEX. Rather because thou canst not enjoy the good thou dost covet in it. For the same reason I have left my own country, which afforded not sufficient food for my ambition.

DIOG. But I come not like thee abroad, to rob and plunder others. Thy ambition hath destroyed a million, whereas I have never occasioned the death of a single man.

ALEX. Because thou hast not been able; but thou hast done all within thy power, by cursing and devoting to destruction almost as many as I have conquered.

Because, judging from 'left my own country, which afforded not sufficient food for my ambition', I think that, on the whole, Alexander always takes an aggressive attitude, while, from 'left society' 'cannot endure' 'detest' 'come not' 'not been able' and 'within thy power', Diogenes always takes a negative attitude. Therefore, Alexander's greatness is that of 'ravaging countries, burning cities, plundering and massacring mankind', while Diogenes's greatness is that of 'biting and snarling at them'. This applies to the synonyms, or synonymous phrases, of the respective greatness of Alexander and Diogenes, and, especially, these three words 'secret' 'decreed' (passive) 'shadow' which Diogenes uses are, I think, negative.

The dialogue between them still goes on:

ALEX. . . . There is more greatness of soul in thee than at present shines forth. Poor circumstances are clouds which often conceal and obscure the brightest minds. Pride will not suffer thee to confess passions which fortune hath not put it in thy power to gratify. It is, therefore, that thou deniest ambition; for hadst thou a soul as capacious as mine, I see no better way which thy humble fortune would allow thee of feeding its

---

(17) All the phrases (1) (2) (3) are those which Diogenes regards as greatness.

Kodama: The Meanings of the Word 'Greatness'

ambition, than what thou hast chosen; for when alone in this retreat which thou hast chosen, thou mayest contemplate thy own greatness. Here no stronger rival will contend with thee; nor can the hateful objects of superior power, riches, or happiness, invade thy sight. But, be honest and confess, had fortune placed thee at the head of a Macedonian army —

DIOG. Had fortune placed me at the head of the world, it could not have raised me in my own opinion. And is this mighty soul, which is, it seems, so much more capacious than mine, obliged at last to support its superiority on the backs of a multitude of armed slaves? And who in reality have gained these conquests, and gathered all these laurels, of which thou art so vain? Hadst thou alone past into Asia, the empire of Darius had still stood unshaken. But though Alexander had never been born, who will say the same troops might not, under some other general, have done as great, or perhaps greater mischiefs? The honour, therefore, such as it is, is by no means justly thy own. Thou usurpest the whole, when thou art, at most, entitled to an equal share only. It is not, then, Alexander, but Alexander and his army are superior to Diogenes. And in what are they his superiors? In brutal strength—in which they would be again excelled by an equal number of lions, or wolves, or tigers. An army which would be able to do as much more mischief than themselves, as they are than Diogenes.

The synonyms, or synonymous phrases, of 'greatness' in the quotation are:

'brightest minds' 'pride' 'ambition' 'soul as capacious as mine' 'What thou hast chosen' 'this retreat which thou hast chosen' 'stronger rival' 'superior power' 'riches' 'happiness' 'Macedonian army' 'this mighty soul' (that is, Alexander's soul) 'multitude of armed slaves' 'these conquests' 'all these laurels' 'Asia' 'empire of Darius' 'troops' 'general' 'great, or perhaps greater mischiefs' 'honour' 'whole' 'Alexander and his army' 'brutal strength' 'army which would be able to do as much more mischief than themselves, as they are than Diogenes'.

The synonyms, or synonymous phrases, of 'greatness' in the part I don't quote are:

'triumph' 'misery' 'pleasures' 'avarice' 'the extending thy (= Alexander's) arms to the

farthest limits of the world' 'nothing certain' 'fire' 'possession of thy (= Alexander's) wish' 'thy (= Diogenes's) humour' 'thy friendship' 'thy philosophy' 'thy morals' 'thy cause' 'my (= Alexander's) army' 'thy just resentment' 'rascals' 'snarling cur' 'wealth' 'massacre the inhabitants' 'demolition of (wealth)' 'a little' 'a moiety' 'poverty' 'vices of mankind' 'perdition'.

The last dialogue between Alexander and Diogenes is:

ALEX. . . . I admire his obstinacy; nay, I almost envy it. — Farewell, old Cynic; and if it will flatter thy pride, be assured, I esteem thee so much, that *Was I not Alexander, I could desire to be Diogenes.*

DIOG. Go to the Gibbet, and take with thee as a mortification; that *Was I not Diogenes, I could almost content myself with being Alexander.*

I think that perhaps Fielding wanted to describe four kinds of men in the whole dialogue: (1) a man of great and good character consisting of Alexander's 'great' greatness and Diogenes's 'good' greatness; (2) a man who can do both good and bad things, not a man who can do neither good nor bad things; (3) a man who has neither Alexander's 'great' greatness nor Diogenes's 'good' greatness; (4) a man of littleness, not a man of greatness.

The reason of (1) is that Fielding says<sup>(18)</sup> that there are 'three distinct characters; the great, the good, and the great and good. The last of these is the true sublime in human nature'. The reason of (4) is that I think Fielding wanted to find 'littleness' in the word 'greatness'. It is that in the dialogue the author makes Diogenes say: 'Is then the fear or worship of slaves of so great *honour*, when at the same time thou (= Alexander) art the *contempt* of every brave honest man . . . ?' and also that he makes the same character say: 'Thy (= Alexander's) *clemency* is *cruelty*' (Italics mine). The relation between 'honour' and 'contempt' is antonymous and so is the relation between 'clemency' and 'cruelty'. Therefore, the true meaning of the word 'greatness' he uses in this dialogue may be 'littleness'.

---

(18) In Preface to the Miscellanies and Poems of Henry Fielding, Esq.

**IV. The Meaning of the Word 'Greatness' in *The History of the Life of the Late Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great***

This work is a history<sup>(19)</sup> written in 1743, when Fielding was 36 years old, and consists of four books and fifty-six chapters in all. The reason why he wrote this work was that:

'Nothing seems to me more preposterous than that, while the way to true honour lies so open and plain, men should seek false by such perverse and rugged paths: that while it is so easy and safe, and truly honourable, to be good, men should wade through difficulty and danger, and real infamy, to be great, or, to use a synonymous word, villains.

Nor hath goodness less advantage in the article of pleasure than of honour over this kind of greatness. The same righteous judge<sup>(20)</sup> always annexes a bitter anxiety to the purchases of guilt, whilst it adds a double sweetness to the enjoyments of innocence and virtue: for fear, which all the wise agree is the most wretched of human evils, is, in some degree, always attending on the former, and never can in any manner molest the happiness of the latter.

This is the doctrine which I have endeavoured to inculcate in this history, confining myself at the same time within the rules of probability.'<sup>(21)</sup>

Paying attention to the fact that Fielding regards 'great' as 'villains', let us consider (I) Qualifications of 'greatness' and (II) Interchanges of 'greatness'.

**(I) Qualifications of 'greatness'**

Words which Fielding regards as qualifications of 'greatness' are, for example, 'ambition' 'fear' 'deceit' 'hypocrisy' 'discernment' 'insatiability' and so forth. From now I am going to quote the sentences in which 'greatness' and its qualifications are used.

---

(19) It means 'an eventful career; a course of existence worthy of record'. (See *OED* 'History' 4.6.)

(20) In the paragraph just before the quotation, Fielding says that, 'however hypocrisy may deceive the more discerning, there is still a judge in every man's breast, . . . ' so 'The same righteous judge' refers to this 'judge'.

(21) Preface to the *Miscellanies and Poems of Henry Fielding, Esq.*

- (1) Ambition, without which no one can be a great man, will immediately instruct him, . . . , to prefer a hill in Paradise to a dunghill; nay, even fear, a passion the most repugnant to greatness, will show him how much more safely he may indulge in the free and full exertion of his mighty abilities in the lower rank. (Book I, Chapter V)

In the quotation, the dichotomy of 'ambition' and 'fear' in 'greatness' is made, and in the former, the comparison of 'a hill in Paradise' and 'a dunghill' is made, and in the latter, that of 'the higher rank' with 'the lower rank' is made.

- (2) Mr. Thomas Heartfree then ( . . . ) was of an honest and open disposition. He was of that sort of men whom experience only, and not their own natures, must inform that there are such things as deceit and hypocrisy in the world, and who, consequently, are not at five-and-twenty so difficult to be imposed upon as the oldest and most subtle. (II, I)

The comparison of men of 'an honest and open disposition' with 'the oldest and most subtle', and that of the young with the old, and that of 'an honest and open disposition' with 'deceit and hypocrisy'<sup>(22)</sup> are respectively made. In short, the author wants to say that 'deceit' and 'hypocrisy' are qualifications of 'greatness'.

- (3) When breakfast was ended, and the wife retired to her household affairs, Wild, who had a quick discernment into the weaknesses of men, and who, besides the knowledge of his good (or foolish) disposition when a boy, had now discovered several sparks of goodness, friendship, and generosity in his friend, began to discourse over the accidents which had happened in their childhood, . . . (II, I)

Such phrases as 'quick discernment into the weaknesses of men' and 'knowledge of his good (or foolish) disposition' and such a word as 'discovered' mean the keenness of Wild's senses, especially

---

(22) cf. 'The character which he (= Wild) most valued himself upon, and which he principally honoured in others, was that of hypocrisy.' (IV, XV)

sight. And the 'goodness' in the quotation, I think, means 'foolishness'.

- (4) . . . , it will appear in the sequel that Wild did not only propose to make the imposition on Heartfree, who was (hitherto) void of all suspicion, more certain; but to rob the count himself of this sum. This double method of cheating the very tools who are our instruments to cheat others is the superlative degree of greatness, and is probably, as far as any spirit crusted over with clay can carry it, falling very little short of diabolism itself. (II, II)

The author seems to want to say that 'greatness' is synonymous with 'diabolism'.

- (5) . . . the truest mark of greatness is insatiability. (II, II)
- (6) "How vain is human GREATNESS! What avail superior abilities, and a noble defiance of those narrow rules and bounds which confine the vulgar, when our best-concerted schemes are liable to be defeated! How unhappy is the state of PRIGGISM! How impossible for human prudence to foresee and guard against every circumvention! . . . Better had it been for me to have observed the simple laws of friendship and morality than thus to ruin my friend for the benefit of others. I might have commanded his purse to any degree of moderation: I have now disabled him from the power of serving me. Well! but that was not my design. If I cannot arraign my own conduct, why should I, like a woman or a child, sit down and lament the disappointment of chance? But can I acquit myself of all neglect? Did I not misbehave in putting it into the power of others to outwit me? But that is impossible to be avoided. In this a *prig* is more unhappy than any other: a cautious man may, in a crowd, preserve his own pockets by keeping his hands in them; but while the *prig* employs his hands in another's pocket, how shall he be able to defend his own? Indeed, in this light, what can be imagined more miserable than a *prig*? How dangerous are his acquisitions! how unsafe, how unquiet his possessions! Why then should any man wish to be a *prig*, or where is his greatness? I answer, in his mind: it is the inward glory, the secret consciousness of doing great and wonderful actions, which can alone support the truly GREAT man, whether he be a

CONQUEROR, a TYRANT, a STATESMAN, or a PRIG. These must bear him up against the private curse and public imprecation, and, while he is hated and detested by all mankind, must make him inwardly satisfied with himself. For what but some such inward satisfaction as this could inspire men possessed of power, of wealth, of every human blessing which pride, avarice, or luxury could desire, to forsake their homes, abandon ease and repose, and at the expense of riches and pleasures, at the price of labour and hardship, and at the hazard of all that fortune hath liberally given them, could send them at the head of a multitude of *prigs*, called an army, to molest their neighbours; to introduce rape, rapine, bloodshed, and every kind of misery among their own species? What but some such glorious appetite of mind could inflame princes, endowed with the greatest honours, and enriched with the most plentiful revenues, to desire maliciously to rob those subjects of their liberties who are content to sweat for the luxury, and to bow down their knees to the pride, of those very princes? What but this can inspire them to destroy one-half of their subjects, in order to reduce the rest to an absolute dependence on their own wills, and on those of their brutal successors? What other motive could seduce a subject, possessed of great property in his community, to betray the interest of his fellow-subjects, of his brethren, and his posterity, to the wanton disposition of such princes? Lastly, what less inducement could persuade the *prig* to forsake the methods of acquiring a safe, an honest, and a plentiful livelihood, and, at the hazard of even life itself, and what is mistakingly called dishonour, to break Openly and bravely through the laws of his country, for uncertain, unsteady, and unsafe gain? Let me then hold myself contented with this reflection, that I have been wise though unsuccessful, and am a great though an unhappy man.” (II, IV)

In this soliloquy almost every kind of qualification of ‘greatness’ appears: ‘best-concerted schemes’ ‘PRIGGISM’<sup>(23)</sup> ‘human prudence’ ‘circumvention’ ‘to ruin my friend for the benefit of others’ ‘neglect’ ‘outwit’ ‘prig’<sup>(24)</sup> ‘mind’ ‘inward glory’ ‘secret consciousness of doing great and

---

(23) Professional thievery or roguery (*OED*).

(24) A thief (*OED*).

wonderful actions' 'CONQUEROR' 'TYRANT' 'STATESMAN' 'private curse and public imprecation' 'hated and detested by all mankind' 'inward satisfaction' 'power' 'wealth' 'human blessing which pride, avarice, or luxury could desire' 'forsake their homes' 'abandon ease and repose' 'expense of riches and pleasures' 'price of labour and hardship' 'hazard of all that fortune hath liberally given them' 'multitude of *prigs*' 'army' 'molest their neighbours' 'introduce rape, rapine, bloodshed, and every kind of misery' 'glorious appetite of mind' 'greatest honours' 'most plentiful revenues' 'desire maliciously to rob those subjects of their liberties' 'luxury' 'pride' 'destroy one-half of their subjects' 'absolute dependence' 'wanton disposition' 'methods of acquiring a safe, an honest, and a plentiful livelihood' 'hazard of life' 'dishonour' 'break openly and bravely through the laws of his country' 'uncertain, unsteady, and unsafe gain'.

- (7) . . . those great arts which the vulgar call treachery, dissembling, promising, lying, falsehood, etc., but which are by great men summed up in the collective name of policy, or politics, or rather *pollitrics*<sup>(25)</sup>; an art of which, as it is the highest excellence of human nature, perhaps our great man was the most eminent master.  
(II, V)

'treachery' 'dissembling' 'promising' 'lying' 'falsehood' 'polity' 'politics' and 'pollitrics' are all the qualifications of 'greatness'.

- (8) In short, he enjoyed in his mind all the happiness which unbridled lust and rapacious avarice could promise him. As to the poor creature who was to satisfy these passions, her whole soul was employed in reflecting on the condition of her husband and children. A single word scarce escaped her lips, though many a tear gushed from her brilliant eyes, which, if I may use a coarse expression, served only as delicious sauce to heighten the appetite of Wild. (II, IX)

'unbridled lust' and 'rapacious avarice' are characteristic of the sensualist Wild and at the same time the qualifications of 'greatness'.

---

(25) A nonce word of 'politic tricks'?

- (9) Our hero passed the remainder of the evening, the night, and the next day, in a condition not much to be envied by any passion of the human mind, unless by ambition; . . . (II, XIII)

'ambition'<sup>(26)</sup> is 'greatness', or 'greatness' may be 'ambition' in this work.

- (10) To omit those glorious heroes who, to their immortal honour, have massacred whole nations, what think you of private persecution, theachery, and slander, by which the very souls of men are in a manner torn from their bodies? (III, III)
- (11) . . . : though as a Christian thou art obliged, and we advise thee, to forgive thy enemy, NEVER TRUST THE MAN WHO HATH REASON TO SUSPECT THAT YOU KNOW HE HATH INJURED YOU. (III, IV)
- (12) A GREAT MAN ought to do his business by others; to employ hands, . . . , to his purposes, and keep himself as much behind the curtian as possible; . . . (III, XI)

In quotations (11) and (12), we can understand the fundamental attitude of a great man in the relations between him and another man or others.

- (13) . . . our hero, . . . was a living and strong instance that human greatness and happiness are not always inseparable. He was under a continual alarm of frights, and fears, and jealousies. He thought every man he beheld wore a knife for his throat, and a pair of scissors for his purse. As for his own gang particularly, he was thoroughly convinced there was not a single man amongst them who would not, for the value of five shillings, bring him to the gallows. The apprehensions so constantly broke his rest, and kept him so assiduously on his guard to frustrate and circumvent any designs which might be formed against him, that his condition, to any other than the glorious eye of ambition, might seem rather deplorable than the object of envy or desire. (III, XIII)

---

(26) cf. ' . . . his most powerful and predominant passion was ambition.' (IV, XV)

Being 'under a continual alarm of frights, and fears, and jealousies' and 'to frustrate and circumvent any designs' are generally 'rather deplorable than the object of envy or desire'.

- (14) Indeed, while greatness consists in power, pride, insolence, and doing mischief to mankind, – to speak out – while a great man and a great rogue are synonymous terms, so long shall Wild stand unrivaled on the pinnacle of GREATNESS. (III, XIII)

## (II) Interchanges of 'greatness'

When he tries to describe the disposition of a man, Fielding first seems to think of a man in ordinary life and then, or at the same time, the man in vulgar life, or, sometimes conversely, of a man in vulgar life and then the man in ordinary life, and he thinks that there is 'such a mixture of good and evil in the same character' and that 'far the greater number (of people) are of the mixed kind, neither totally good nor bad' (Book I, Chapter I), so I believe there are such descriptions as:

- (1) . . . a *Wise man*, that is to say, a *rogue*, considers a trick in life as a gemester doth a trick at play. (I, IV)
- (2) . . . , besides the knowledge of his *good* (or *foolish*) disposition when a boy, . . . (II, I)
- (3) . . . , who are tainted with that mean, base, low *vice* or *virtue* as it is called, of constancy; . . . (II, III)
- (4) We thought proper to give our reader a short taste of the domestic state of our hero, the rather to show him that *great men* are subject to the same frailties and inconveniences in ordinary life with *little men*, and that *heroes* are really of the same species with *other human creatures*, notwithstanding all the pains they themselves or their flatterers take to assert the contrary; and that they differ chiefly in the immensity of their *greatness*, or, as the vulgar erroneously call it, *villainy*. (III, IX)
- (5) Dost thou think . . . , thou *little, paltry, mean animal* (with such language did he treat our *truly great man*), that I will forego such comfortable expectations for any pitiful reward which thou canst suggest or promise to me; . . . (III, X) (Italics mine)

In short, Fielding seems to assert the disposition of a man to be too complicated to describe. This is true of the following two quotations:

- (6) Indeed it may appear strange to some readers that these gentlemen (i.e. the count and Wild), who knew each other to be *thieves*, should never once give the least hint of this knowledge in all their discourse together, but, on the contrary, should have the words *honesty*, *honour*, and *friendship* as often in their mouths as any other man. This, I say, may appear strange to me; but those who have lived long in cities, courts, jails, or such places, will perhaps be able to solve the seeming absurdity. (I, VI)
- (7) He was entirely free from those *low vices of modesty and good-nature*, which, as he said, implied a *total negation of human greatness*, and were the only qualities which absolutely rendered a man incapable of making a considerable figure in the world. (IV, XV) (Italics mine)

The relation between 'thieves' and 'honesty, honour, and friendship' is antonymous in ordinary life but synonymous in vulgar life, and the relation between 'low vices of modesty and good-nature' and 'total negation of human greatness' is, in a sense, synonymous in vulgar life, but the relation between 'low vices' and 'modesty and good-nature' is antonymous in ordinary life. What complicated meanings even one word has in human relations!

## V. Conclusion

I think that long before he writes the three works, Fielding has greatly interested in both the greatness of Alexander the Great and the greatness of Diogenes the Cynic, but that he has never thought that either of the two means, literally, true greatness. Probably, therefore, that is the motive of writing the three works only in two years, changing the forms from the poem, the dialogue to the history.

The reason why the meanings of the word 'greatness' change in the works is that he has long wanted to inquire thoroughly into the range of its meanings, thinking of (1) greatness which means true greatness, not false greatness, (2) greatness which means littleness, and (3) greatness which

means roguery or villainy.

This is the attitude he as the author takes in the works, while he as the man never hates man, just as he says that 'Roguery, and not a rogue, is my subject'.<sup>(27)</sup> In order to show you such a characteristic in him and his view of man, I will, in conclusion, quote the following two paragraphs in *Jonathan Wild*.

. . . , in vindication of our hero, we must beg leave to observe that Nature is seldom so kind as those writers who draw characters absolutely perfect. She seldom creates any man so completely great, or completely low, but that some sparks of humanity will glimmer in the former, and some sparks of what the vulgar call evil dart forth in the latter; utterly to extinguish which will give some pain, and uneasiness to both; for I apprehend no mind was ever yet formed entirely free from blemish, unless peradventure that of a sanctified hypocrite, whose praises some well-fed flatterer hath gratefully thought proper to sing forth. (IV, IV)

Indeed, whoever considers the common fate of great men must allow they well deserve and hardly earn that applause which is given them by the world; for, when we reflect on the labours and pains, the cares, disquietudes, and dangers which attend their road to greatness, we may say with the divine *that a man may go to Heaven with half the pains which it costs him to purchase hell*. To say the truth, the world has this reason at least to honour such characters as that of Wild: that, while it is in the power of every man to be perfectly honest, not one in a thousand is capable of being a complete rogue; and few indeed there are who, if they were inspired with the vanity of imitating our hero, would not after much fruitless pains be obliged to own themselves inferior to MR. JONATHAN WILD THE GREAT. (IV, XV)

(Received September 26, 1977)

---

(27) Preface to the Miscellanies and Poems of Henry Fielding, Esq.