

The Rhetoric of Reform:  
Metaphors of Disease in John Howard's The State of the Prisons

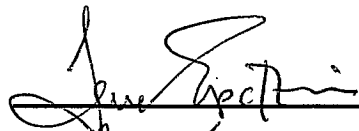
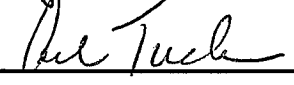

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## **Note to the Reader**

In a number of primary source quotations, there are italicized and capitalized words. In all cases, emphasized terms reflect the original intent of the authors.

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## Introduction

The idea of imprisonment as punishment for crime is relatively new. Prior to the eighteenth century, felons were typically executed while petty criminals were banished or transported to the American colonies. In contrast to modern prisons, which punish convicted inmates, eighteenth century English prisons collected persons awaiting trial. To prevent alleged criminals from evading justice, the English courts imprisoned the accused without bail until courts could pass judgment. Though pre-trial imprisonment offended civil liberties, it was not seen as punishment within itself.<sup>1</sup> Rather, contemporaries viewed jails as disinterested mechanisms to ensure that the accused arrived in court.

While eighteenth century prisons did not carry the stigma of conviction or officially punish inmates for their wrongdoings, they indirectly penalized prisoners by exacting tolls on their physical and spiritual well-being. Particularly for accused inmates who were later acquitted, imprisonment was a wretched, undeserved punishment. As documented by reformers, English prisons were dark, overcrowded, and unsanitary before the 1770s. All types of prisoners were herded together, without regard to sex, age, health, or crime. Corrupt wardens stocked the prisons with gambling rings, prostitutes, and copious amounts of ale, while shady visitors moved freely from the prisons to the outside world – spreading disease and acquiring vice wherever they went. While an inmate might be healthy and innocent going into a prison, it was unlikely that he would be untouched by the time of the trial. Stricken with disease or indoctrinated with the bad habits of his fellows, inmates often left jail as a shadow of their former selves.<sup>2</sup> While prisons had always had these problems, the situation worsened during the eighteenth century. As overcrowding (caused by an increase in prison sentencing and the suspension of transportation to

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<sup>1</sup> J. M. Beattie, "Crime and the Courts in Surrey 1736-175," in *Crime in England 1550-1800*, ed. J. S. Cockburn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 161.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

the American colonies) increased during the 1770s, jails became breeding grounds for hardship diseases and immorality.<sup>3</sup>

As prisons became a matter of increasing public concern, activists such as John Howard (an influential British prison reformer in the eighteenth century) increased their advocacy for prison reform. Drafting a 500-page exposé of The State of the Prisons (1777) for Parliament, Howard decried jails' health problems and immorality. In addition, Howard called into question the purpose of imprisonment. In his address to Parliament, Howard implied that prisons should not only corral prisoners for trial, but they should *reform* them. Howard reasoned that strict discipline, Christian principles, and cleanliness could set prisoners on the path to righteousness and thereby deter them from future crime. In addition to protecting society from criminal recidivism, Howard maintained that prudent measures could reduce the prevalence of disease in England. As long as prison conditions remained unsanitary, inmates were apt to contract communicable diseases which could spread to society upon the prisoners' reintegration with the public, interaction with court officials or visitors, or impressment into the military. Provided, however, that quarantines were enforced, sanitation was improved, and prisoners enjoyed healthy diets, dangerous prison diseases could be reduced.

While Howard's suggestions for stamping out vice and disease were pragmatic and potentially self-interested, The State of the Prisons also appealed to its readers' highest convictions. Drawing upon his audience's religious beliefs, Howard suggested that Parliament

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<sup>3</sup> As England industrialized, large numbers of working-class men and women crowded urban centers and increasingly turned to petty crime. As a result, rising numbers of accused criminals crowded English gaols. The prison population also rose as judges became increasingly likely to substitute imprisonment for capital sentences and banishment. As the prison population grew, so did its visibility. Particularly after 1776 (when colonial rebellion forced the Crown to return transported inmates to English soil), English citizens saw large numbers of convicts living in their midst. As prisons multiplied on the home front (in order to house transported criminals and the rising criminal class at home), imprisonment became an important focus of public policy. Ibid., 186; J.M. Beattie, *Crime and Courts in England 1660-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986). 281-300; Leon Radzinowicz, *Penal Reform in England; Introductory Essays on Some Aspects of English Criminal Policy* (London: Macmillan, 1946).

had a moral obligation to enact reforms. Appealing to the religious sentiments of his audience, Howard argued that England should fulfill its evangelical calling to perfect the world and return wayward souls to the Christian flock. To their Christian duties, Parliament had to accompany such proselytism with attention to their citizens' spiritual and physical needs.

### **Howard the Philanthropist**

While I will argue that The State of the Prisons has both pragmatic and moral appeal, early scholars cast Howard in a completely altruistic light. Believing that reformers were only concerned with the well-being and spirituality of prisoners, early historians did not acknowledge Howard's pragmatism. Such scholars ignored Howard's appeal to social order and national security in celebration of Howard's selfless devotion to the downtrodden. Beginning with John Aiken's A View of the Life, Travels, and Philanthropic Labors of the Late John Howard (1794), historians cast Howard as "the private unaided individual, struggling with toils, dangers and difficulties" in order to enact "a range of beneficence which scarcely ever came within the compass of one man's exertions."<sup>4</sup> Following in Aikin's footsteps, later historians – such as James Brown (1823), William H. Hepworth (1850), John Field (1850), and Leona Baumgartner (1939) – pitched Howard as the benevolent savior of the "prisoner, the sick, and the destitute."<sup>5</sup>

### **Recent Historical Interpretations**

Though John Howard was initially deified, he came under fire in the 1960s. From the revisionist perspective, early prison reformers (like Howard) acted according to self-interest instead of humanitarian principles. According to revisionist historians, alleged medical and spiritual

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<sup>4</sup> John Aikin, *A View of the Life, Travels, and Philanthropic Labors of the Late John Howard* (Philadelphia: W. W. Woodward, 1794), 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 4

improvements such as close administration, solitary confinement, and a regulated environment subordinated prisoners instead of helping them. Writing in this vein, Michel Foucault launched revisionist scholarship on prison reform.

In Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison (1975) Foucault argued that great English prison “reformers” privileged control and retribution over humanitarian concerns. While reformers may have improved conditions for the *body*, reformers built prisons to exact *mind* control over inmates. Through a system of constant surveillance and regulation, reformers actually diminished prisoners’ well-being by creating “an economy of suspended rights” meant to “supervise the individual, to neutralize his dangerous state of mind, to alter his criminal tendencies.”<sup>6</sup> By constantly punishing prisoners with “security measures” (such as prohibition of entering certain areas, probation, obligatory medical treatment), prison reformers reduced inmates to docile bodies that would no longer pose a threat to society.

Hoping to write “the conclusion of Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*,” Michael Ignatieff translated Foucault’s philosophical images of control into an accessible historical text.<sup>7</sup> Like its predecessor, Ignatieff’s A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850 (1979) claims that prison reforms reflected society’s manipulative desire to protect itself. Particularly in regard to medical interventions, Ignatieff suggests that reformers neutralized dangerous inmates by “combining ‘correction of the body’ with correction of the mind.”<sup>8</sup> Ignatieff asserts that Howard’s reforms were meant to punish impoverished inmates and to cement their subordinate position in society. According to Ignatieff, “Since disease in institutions had moral as well as physical causes, hygienic rituals were designed to fulfill

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<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975; repr., New York: Vintage-Random House, 1979), 10, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 220.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.



disciplinary functions. To teach the poor to be clean, it was necessary to teach them to be godly, tractable, and self-disciplined.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, if inmates’ bodies could be disciplined through medical ritual, then inmates’ moral behavior could be rendered harmless to society.

In contrast to Foucault and Ignatieff, who attribute prison reforms to deliberate programs of social discipline, Margaret DeLacy calls for a more conservative reading of prison development. From DeLacy’s point of view, revisionists overstated their case by using generalizations about social control to obscure the variety of factors which contributed to the rise of modern prisons. In Prison Reform in Lancashire, 1700-1850 (1986), DeLacy criticizes scholars who “have assumed that a united elite was acting with a clearly defined motive, the maintenance of domination, and have failed to appreciate both the multiplicity of intentions and the fact that many actual changes have not been intended at all.”<sup>10</sup> DeLacy further suggests that Foucault and Ignatieff are “radical historians” who cited the worst cases of prison abuse, instead of focusing on the broader state of English prisons.

Following DeLacy’s attack on Foucault and Ignatieff, historians have debated the role of prison reformers in English history. One of the few authors to bridge the gap between philanthropic and self-interested interpretations of eighteenth century reform is Donna Andrew. According to Andrew, “The period between the mid 1770s and the early 1790s seemed to be one of unresolved and opposed views on both the theory and practice of charity and relief.”<sup>11</sup> During this period, reformers were divided in their view of whether charity should continue to fulfill disinterested religious obligation to the downtrodden or whether charity should be recast as a means of furthering social utility and the needs of the benefactor. Some reformers invoked the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>10</sup> Margaret DeLacy, *Prison Reform in Lancashire, 1700-1850* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Donna T. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police: London Charity in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 155.

altruistic rhetoric of the traditional church, while others looked forward to the rational self-interest of the Enlightenment.

While Andrew makes a compelling case for the pluralism in charitable rhetoric during the late eighteenth century, her work primarily addresses poor relief and the dispensary movement. On the subject of prisons and John Howard, Andrews is largely silent. Yet, Andrew's pluralistic interpretation of charitable language provides a better framework for analyzing prison reforms than Ignatieff's or DeLacy's tendency to pigeon-hole prison reformers as entirely self-interested or philanthropic. As such, I will apply Andrew's "unresolved and opposed" view of charity to prison reforms.

### **A Man of Mixed Motives**

Analyzing eighteenth century prison reform through The State of the Prisons, I argue that utilitarian and humanitarian rhetoric had equal standing in reform movements. To reach as wide an audience as possible, Howard interwove medical and criminological arguments with religious appeals. Speaking to an enlightened audience, Howard called for changes which would create stability and happiness for the greatest number. Through discipline, rationalism, and science, enlightened reformers wanted to perfect the world around them and take an active stand in human improvement. Thus, Howard's plans to reduce rates of disease and criminality in society by increasing prison regulation aligned with the enlightened notion that imposed order and rationality could improve society.

While Howard's reasoning reflected Enlightenment principles, it also drew upon the Evangelical movement. In contrast to the utilitarian emphasis on the good of society at the expense of individuals (which justified restricting inmates' freedoms in order to protect society

from crime and disease), evangelicalism valued the good of the individual. Instead of ignoring the needs of the lowly prisoners in their quest to protect the rest of society, reformers practiced beneficence (through free medical treatment, increased food rations, etc.) toward those who most needed help. Christian reformers (particularly evangelicals like Howard) believed they had a special duty to protect the weak and the wayward. Quoting the Bible, reformers advocated charity and compassion towards prisoners and other “lost sheep” who had been abandoned by society, but not by God.

To appeal to Enlightenment and evangelical motivations for prison reform, Howard injected The State of the Prisons with disease metaphors designed to spur readers to action. When addressing his secular, utilitarian audience, Howard used the rhetoric of moral and bodily contagion to provide self-interested reasons for readers to fund prison reforms. To appeal to his benevolent Christian audience, Howard used the image of Christ the Physician to inspire altruistic improvements in inmates’ bodily and spiritual well-being. While Ignatieff previously linked the rhetoric of disease, morality and reform, he narrowly interpreted Howard’s diction. Instead of using his argument to explore the various purposes behind medical and religious imagery, Ignatieff only saw Howard’s rhetoric as it related to social utility and elitism. Though the rhetorical intentions of prison reformers were arguably both complex and benevolent, Ignatieff believed that *all* disease metaphors furthered social control; thus, reformers couched “the language of class fear and moral opprobrium in the language of medicine. This, of course, is the language of social and moral condemnation veiled as the language of medicine...Filth and disease were as natural to the poor...as cleanliness and health were to the virtuous and the industrious.”<sup>12</sup> From Ignatieff’s perspective, the medical and Evangelical justifications for improving prison sanitation and moral instruction disguised class-based fear. Hiding their

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<sup>12</sup> Ignatieff, *Just Measure*, 60.

prejudice in the lofty rhetoric of moral and physical uplift, prison reformers used contagionist arguments to strengthen control over inmates.

The following chapters question Ignatieff's premise that prison reform and disease metaphors *only* furthered social utility. I argue that the interaction between eighteenth century medical discoveries and evangelicalism produced pragmatic *and* charitable imperatives to improve prisoners' wellbeing. While Ignatieff is correct that Howard used the metaphor of contagion to prompt self-interested motivations for reform, Ignatieff neglects the philanthropic appeal of Howard's medical rhetoric. Though Howard frightened his audience with contagionist rhetoric, he also appealed to their highest convictions. By reminding readers of Christ's prison ministries, Howard encouraged his audience to make disinterested contributions to inmates' welfare. In short, Howard's use of medical imagery was part of a larger scheme to appeal to both the pragmatic and benevolent sentiments of his audience.

In the first chapter, I will advance this thesis by exploring how the medical idea of contagion and contemporary theories of disease influenced Howard's reforms. Howard's advocacy of improved sanitation and diet, as well as restrictions on the mobility of inmates and prison visitors, were meant to prevent bodily contagion. While revisionists are incorrect to view Howard's health reforms as arbitrary disciplinary mechanisms unrelated to disease prevention, they are correct to contend that disease rituals could further the social interest. By arguing that disease prevention could protect society from epidemics and other disasters, Howard provided self-interested reasons for Parliament to respond to eliminate bodily contagion in prisons.

The second chapter shows how evangelicals like Howard applied the secular ideas of contagion and social utility to immorality. Appropriating medical rhetoric, Christian reformers physically and morally "quarantined" inmates once activists perceived vice as an infectious,

disease-like problem. Contagion became a metaphor for how sin could spread from person to person. To stamp out the “contagion” of immorality, reformers recast the medical idea of quarantine into the means of controlling sin. If sinful, “infected” prisoners could be isolated from one another, vice could be controlled and society protected. Like the medical quarantines that contained prison diseases, moral quarantines protected society by preventing the problems in jails from spreading to the outside world. Rather than waiting for the disease of vice to spread to their neighborhoods, readers were encouraged to protect themselves by reforming inmates.

While reformers borrowed ideas from the medical community, they were equally informed by evangelical notions of disease causation and charity. In Chapter 3, I show how Howard played to the common belief that disease was God’s punishment for sin. If disease was caused by vice, it followed that converting prisoners and turning them to righteousness might cure bodily illness. While Howard acknowledged that society had a stake in using imposed morality to improve inmates’ health and spiritual wellbeing (as explained in Chapter 1 and 2), Howard also encouraged his audience to cure patients out of benevolence. Under the guidance of “Christ the Physician,” who went about healing the sick and doing good works, readers were expected to cure inmates – medically and spiritually -- out of altruism. To balance his appeals to pure self-interest, Howard encouraged readers to enact reforms which would give inmates the gifts of health and salvation.

In summary, the thesis demonstrates that Howard’s use of medical and religious imagery served both pragmatic and high-minded goals. For example, Howard’s support of disease control served to protect society from prisoners’ diseases and to reinforce ethical arguments about physicians’ duties to alleviate human suffering. On one hand, promoting upright behavior reduced criminal recidivism which harmed society as a whole. Yet, moral discipline also offered

inmates perceived benefits such as reducing the likelihood of re-imprisonment and Divine punishment. Because both prisoners and the populace stood to benefit from Howard's reforms, the pragmatic attempts in The State of the Prisons to save society from destruction cannot be interpreted apart from Howard's charitable and evangelical principles.

## Chapter 1: Bodily Disease and Contagion

During the eighteenth century, prisons were plagued with ill health. Throughout England, prisons abounded with starvation, prostitution, typhus, and smallpox. Despite the poor health in jails, Parliament had done little to improve prison conditions. It was not until the late 1750s that calls for prison reform were sufficiently sustained and widespread to attract Parliament's attention. As prisons became more crowded and incidences of disease multiplied, a "broadening scientific interest in the nature of such institutional diseases as jail fever" lent "support and encouragement to laymen anxious to see the dirt and stench of jails removed."<sup>1</sup>

Capitalizing on this newfound interest in jail diseases, John Howard (a medical layman) encouraged Parliament to make reforms. Having witnessed the deteriorating conditions of England's prisons while serving as the Sheriff of Bedfordshire, Howard decided that jails' medical and moral deficiencies posed an "IMPORTANT NATIONAL CONCERN" which could only be remedied through a "*thorough Parliamentary Inquiry*" and a "*comprehensive Statue* for their (prisons') *general regulation*."<sup>2</sup> Hoping to bring about reforms through an exposé, Howard began cataloging the state of hundreds of prisons in England in the hopes that the House of Commons would improve the bodily and spiritual wellbeing of inmates. After years of travel and research, Howard presented The State of the Prisons in 1777 to "those who have it in their power to give redress to the sufferers" and to rectify "the great hardships, from which I am desirous to set them (the inmates) free."<sup>3</sup>

To convince Parliament that prison conditions should be improved for the "sufferers," Howard injected The State of the Prisons with contagionist diction meant to spur the Commons to action. While Howard's rhetoric often played to Parliament's highest principles and Christian

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<sup>1</sup> Beattie, *England 1660-1800*, 305.

<sup>2</sup> John Howard, *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales* (London: William Eyres, 1777), 489.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 6,4.

values (see Chapter 3), the contagionist diction also spoke to Parliament's deepest fears. Maneuvering around Parliament's sense of self-preservation and pragmatism, Howard argued that failing to improve England's prisons would inflame epidemics that could undermine England's national security and the strength of its social body. In order to save their nation (and themselves), Members of Parliament were advised to identify and eradicate dangerous sources of bodily contagion in prisons.

### **The State of the Prisons**

While Howard explored numerous ways that prisons could endanger society, his "attention, was principally fixed by the *gaol-fever*, and the *small-pox*, which I saw prevailing to the destruction of multitudes."<sup>4</sup> According to Howard, gaol-fever was so prevalent and dangerous that "I was fully convinced that many more were destroyed by it, than were put to death by all the public executions in the kingdom."<sup>5</sup> To make the members of Parliament share his concerns, Howard combined his anecdotal statistics of gaol fever with vivid descriptions of illness and filth.

According to Howard:

There are prisons, into which whoever looks will, at first sight of the people confined there, be convinced, that there is some great error in the management of them: the sallow meager countenances declare, without words, that they are very miserable: many who went in healthy, are in a few months changed to emaciated dejected objects. Some are seen pining under diseases, '*sick and in prison*;' expiring on the floors, in loathsome cells, of pestilential fevers<sup>6</sup> ...

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 7.



Howard's emotive descriptions of the "sallow meager countenances" roused Parliament's sympathies while the sick inmates "expiring on the floors, in loathsome cells" were meant to repulse Parliament and inspire it to action.

Given that gaol fever (or epidemic typhus) was a common disease, Howard's readers would have immediately grasped the full horror of "expiring on the floor" and being overcome with pestilential fever. In Howard's day, gaol fever implied "interchanges of heat and cold, a trembling of the hands, sometimes a sense of numbness in the arms, weakness of the limbs, loss of appetite," followed by "lassitude, of a *nausea*, pains in the back, a more constant pain and confusion in his head."<sup>7</sup> Throughout the disease, the eyes were "always muddy, and generally the white [was] of a reddish cast, as if inflamed" and the patient frequently delirious – to the point of sleep-walking and "get[ting] out of bed, without assigning a reason."<sup>8</sup> Often as not, these symptoms culminated in dementia, blindness, or death.

### **The Sources of Gaol Fever: Changing Medical Theories**

Though Howard's readers recognized gaol fever as a serious problem, they lived long before the causes were clearly understood. It was not until the Bacterial Revolution, that scientists discovered that gaol fever is caused by the excretion of rod-shaped bacteria, *Rickettsia prowazekii*, in the feces of lice and fleas.<sup>9</sup> Once scientists discovered the bacteriological link between typhus, lice, and humans, public health campaigns tried to eradicate typhus through

<sup>7</sup> John Pringle, *Observations on the Diseases of the Army*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (1752; repr., London: W. Strathan, 1775), 290-91.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 294, 300.

<sup>9</sup> Once the typhus organism enters the human body, it spreads through the blood stream to the small intestines, where it colonizes. As the bacilli multiply in the cells surrounding the small intestines, the bacilli release toxins which destroy intestinal tissue and lead to intestinal hemorrhaging and perforation. Toxins circulating in the bloodstream eventually reach other organs and cause abdominal constipation, stomach rashes, inflammation of the spleen and liver, and fever, headache, or delirium. Charles W. LeBaron and David W. Taylor, "Typhoid Fever," in *The Cambridge World History of Human Disease*, ed. Kenneth F. Kiple (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1071-77.

hygienic education. By encouraging people to wash their clothes and bodies frequently, burn infected garments, and avoid overcrowded or dirty dwellings, public health boards gradually eliminated typhus as a devastating epidemic disease.<sup>10</sup>

While scientists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had the advantage of sophisticated microscopes and bacteriological theories to analyze the cause of typhus, the eighteenth century medical establishment was divided in its view. While physicians agreed that typhus was a serious problem and was most prevalent in dirty, crowded conditions (such as jails, army camps, and ships), there were disputes about causation.<sup>11</sup> During Howard's time, physicians generally believed that contagion was propagated by at least one of the following causes: air, diseased persons, or goods transported from infected places.<sup>12</sup> Physicians ascribing to the first belief held that plague, smallpox, and typhus were communicated through odorous, poisonous vapors (miasma) emanating from decomposing matter. Other physicians argued that disease spread by touching infected people or objects. Based on these different ideas of causation, some physicians argued that typhus should be stopped by purifying water and air while other doctors favored quarantines and sterilization.

In The State of the Prisons, Howard used these divergent medical theories to frame prison reforms. Unwilling to exclude any explanations of disease causation, Howard recommended medical reforms to counteract all three proposed causes of disease. Although Howard lacked a medical degree from Oxford or Cambridge, Roy Porter believes he was a "medically well-

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 1071-77.

<sup>11</sup> If the symptoms are left untreated, typhus kills 10-20% of infected patients. Among patients who survive, 10% experience progressively worse relapses within a week after the disease's first remission. Ibid., 1071-77

<sup>12</sup> Richard Mead, *A Short Discourse Concerning Pestilential Contagion, and the Methods to be Used to Prevent It*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Sam Buckley, 1720), 2.

informed layman” who was aware of the medical controversies of his day.<sup>13</sup> Not only was Howard elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1756, but he was personal friends with James Lind (a pioneer of British naval hygiene and physician at the naval Hospital at Haslar), John Aikin, and other doctors who did extensive research on gaol fever.<sup>14</sup> According to Howard’s “Certificate of Election and Candidature” to the Royal Society, he was regarded by leading scientists as a skilled mathematician and “a true lover of Natural Philosophy.”<sup>15</sup> These connections, along with Howard’s obvious enthusiasm for medical matters (which later led him on a 50,000 mile tour of European hospitals), placed him in a sound position to interpret prison conditions through contemporary medical perspectives.

Although Roy Porter dismissed Howard as an unworthy spokesperson for the medical profession, because Howard “never referred to specific medical texts to anchor his views on fevers. He never engaged in theoretical dispute regarding rival aetiological hypotheses, as for example the putative controversy between contagionists and miasmatisers,” Porter misconstrued Howard’s relation to the medical field.<sup>16</sup> Far from being a disengaged, misleading layman, Howard explicitly appealed to the leading authorities from different medical perspectives. Although Howard may not be a grossly partisan figure in “the putative controversy between contagionists and miasmatisers,” he nevertheless responded to both perspectives and omnivorously draws upon them when proposing structural changes to prisons.

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<sup>13</sup> Roy Porter, “Howard’s Beginnings: Prisons, Disease, Hygiene,” in *The Health of Prisoners: Historical Essays*, eds. Richard Creese, W.F. Bynum, and J. Bearn (Amsterdam: Rodolpi, 1995), 12.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 12; Leona Baumgartner, *John Howard: A Bibliography* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1939), 47.

<sup>15</sup> John Howard’s election to the Royal Society was endorsed by the 2nd or 3rd Earl of Macclesfield, John Canton, (the first Englishman to successfully repeat Ben Franklin’s experiments in electricity) and John Ellicott, who became the clockmaker to King George III. Macclesfield et al., “John Howard: Certificate of Election and Candidature,” May 13, 1756, Royal Society Archives, London. <http://royalsociety.org>

<sup>16</sup> Porter, “Howard’s Beginnings,” 12.

*Airborne Dangers: Miasmata and Effluvia*

Howard first entered “the putative controversy between contagionists and miasmatisers” when he cited Francis Bacon’s Natural History. Adopting a miasmatiser perspective, Howard argued that “the most pernicious infection next to the plague, is the smell of the jail; when the prisoners have been long and close and nastily kept.”<sup>17</sup> Like a good miasmatiser, Howard suggested that noxious vapors (“the smell of the jail”) were vehicles of “pernicious infection.” According to Howard, the malodorous air was infectious because it was permeated by the “effluvia of the sick, and what else in prisons is offensive.”<sup>18</sup>

According to medical theories of the time, air became poisonous when it absorbed the effluvia (excrement and perspiration) radiating from human bodies. Since the body was viewed as “a smoking dunghill, with a vapour exhalting (*sic*) from every part of it,” poisonous fumes were easily expelled from the body into the air.<sup>19</sup> According to Dr. Richard Mead (a Fellow of the College of Physicians and of the Royal Society), these effluvia infected new victims once “*Contagious* Particles [were] drawn in with the Air we breathe, [and] they taint[d] in their Passage the *Salival* Juices, which being swallowed down into the Stomach presently fix their Malignity there....”<sup>20</sup> Once the poisonous particles were inhaled or otherwise absorbed into the bodies, they attacked the humors and caused disease.<sup>21</sup>

While the ingestion of effluvia always posed a health risk, the “salival juices” were most vulnerable in crowded areas where the air was stagnant. To explain the correlation between infection and overcrowding, Dr. William Grant (a Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians

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<sup>17</sup> Howard, *State of the Prisons*, 18. Quoting Bacon’s *Natural History*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> William Grant, *An Essay on the Pestilential Fever of Sydenham, Commonly Called the Gaol, Hospital, Ship, and Camp-Fever* (London: T. Cadell, 1775), 182, 7.

<sup>20</sup> Mead, *Short Discourse*, 15-16.

<sup>21</sup> Graham A. J. Ayliffe and Mary P. English, *Hospital Infection: From Miasma to MRSA* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003), 2.

an physician to the Misericordia Hospital) reasoned that a rise in population density increased the likelihood that there would be a sick person to emit effluvia into the atmosphere. As such, whenever “a number of people... are long confined in any close place, not properly ventilated, so as to inspire, and swallow with their spittle, the vapours of each other, they must soon feel the bad effects, particularly if any of them should be sickly...”<sup>22</sup> If people inhaled a sick neighbor’s effluvia, the vapours “truly poisonous, and capable of producing a pestilential fever” were absorbed to a “highly deleterious” effect.<sup>23</sup> Since inmates were confined in crowded quarters, they were especially vulnerable to effluvia in the gaol air.

In addition to being overcrowded, prisons were filled with effluvia because the air was stagnant. Since jails often had underground dungeons and few windows, there was little circulation within the jail or between the jail and the outside atmosphere. As a result, any effluvia entering the jail atmosphere were likely to remain. Exploring this argument, Dr. James Lind hypothesized that “though the air be the *vehicle* of the infection, by which they (effluvia) are severally communicated, yet none of these infections can be said to properly *reside* in the air, but are occasionally sent into it; such becoming always more highly infectious in close confined place.”<sup>24</sup> As a result, “the *air*, according as it is more or less confined, becomes more or less strongly impregnated with them (effluvia).”<sup>25</sup> Once the air contained a certain concentration of effluvia, disease resulted.<sup>26</sup>

Based on Grant and Lind, infection could only occur when two things were present: an ill person to emit effluvia and stagnant air to house it. It followed, therefore, that infection could be

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<sup>22</sup> Grant, *Pestilential Fever*, 7.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 182, 7.

<sup>24</sup> James Lind, *An essay on the Most Effectual Means of Preserving the Health of Seamen in the Royal Navy*. (London, 1774), 316.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

<sup>26</sup> For secondary literature on effluvia and miasma, see: DeLacy, *Prison Reform*, 83-84.

lessened by removing stale air and the sick people who polluted it. Pursuing this line of reasoning, Howard outlined ways to better circulate air in prisons – and thus dilute the concentration of effluvia. In addition to recommending the construction of “open windows and apertures for a thorough draught of air,” Howard called for more ventilators in prisons.<sup>27</sup> Citing Dr. Stephen Hales (the inventor of air ventilators), Howard argued in favor of “the circulation and change of the salutiferous fluid without which animals cannot live and thrive”<sup>28</sup> By introducing ventilators, Howard believed that healthy air from outdoors (“the bounteous goodness of Heaven” and the “*genuine cordial of life*”) could restore prisoners to health.<sup>29</sup>

To further ensure good health, Howard also argued that prisons should have running sewers (because standing waste seemed “even to a visitant, offensive beyond expression: how noxious then to people constantly confined in those prisons!”).<sup>30</sup> In addition to providing prisoners with clean-smelling indoor air, Howard argued that inmates should receive regular exercise outdoors. Particularly for prisoners who were housed in stale, subterranean dungeons for most of the day, “where some of those caverns the floor is very damp: in others there is sometimes an inch or two of water; and the straw, or bedding is laid on such floor, seldom on barrack bedsteads,” the *genuine cordial of life* was most essential.<sup>31</sup> To protect those prisoners from ill health, Howard proposed that Parliament should construct outdoor courts surrounded by low walls so prisoners could exercise outside without posing a threat of escape.

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<sup>27</sup> John Howard, *An Account of the Principle Lazarettos in Europe; With Various Papers Relative to the Plague* (Warrington: William Eyres, 1789), 227.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Howard, *State of the Prisons*, 14.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

### *Quarantining Inmates*

While circulating the prison air could steer effluvia away from inmates, Howard saw ventilation as a temporary solution. In order to keep inmates safe in the long-term, Parliament would have to keep effluvia from pervading the prisons in the first place. To keep effluvia under control, Howard recommended quarantining infected inmates so effluvia would be contained and more easily eradicated through medical interventions. Since Howard believed that contagious diseases “were communicated by near approach to, or actual contact with infected persons or things” (and the air they occupied), he reasoned that disease prevention rested on “cutting off communication with the sources of infection.”<sup>32</sup> To isolate diseased patients, Howard recommended that prisons should contain infirmaries and “so many small rooms or cabins... [so] that each criminal may sleep alone.”<sup>33</sup> Whereas wards containing both the sick and the healthy were “almost the constant seats of disease, and sources of infection; to the destruction of the multitudes,” solitary cells and infirmaries meant that “if the small-pox, or the gaol-fever, should infect one ward, the other at a distance may be free from it.”<sup>34</sup>

Such advocacy of medical isolation corresponded with previous scholarship about the importance of quarantining the sick from the healthy. In Howard, we see the influence of scholars of military medicine, such as James Lind, who found that the principal methods of disease control were: “*first*, to cut off all communication between the healthy and the sick; and, *secondly*, to collect the dispersed sick, so as to confine the infection to a narrow spot, where, by

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<sup>32</sup> Howard, *Lazarettos*, 42.

While Howard thought quarantines were effective because they limited physical contact and the transference of effluvia from person to person or from body to air, quarantines were effective because they limited insector vectors. Because the bacteria-infected lice could not fly and have a short life-span, they could only carry the disease over a short distance. Thus, without close contact and overcrowding, the epidemic was self-limiting. DeLacy, *Prison Reform*, 91.

<sup>33</sup> Howard, *State of the Prisons*, 43.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 151, 47.

proper arrangements, it may be totally extinguished.”<sup>35</sup> Because infection did not germinate from the air itself, but was “something emitted from *Infected Persons*” into the immediate atmosphere, Richard Mead similarly concluded that disease could be “effectually kept from spreading” by “strictly preventing all Intercourse of Infected Places with the Neighborhood.”<sup>36</sup>

### *Infected Objects and Architecture*

While quarantines could prevent inmates from spreading effluvia to their neighbors, infected objects still posed a problem. While Howard acknowledged the dangers of inhaling effluvia or touching an infected person, he also worried that “*effluvia* are capable of being carried from one place to another, upon any substance where what is called scent can lodge, as upon wool, cotton, etc. and in the same manner that the smell of tobacco is carried from one place to another.”<sup>37</sup>

Because Howard believed effluvia could inhabit any substance, he worried that everything that came into contact with gaol air would become a health hazard. With this miasmatist view in mind, Howard cited a *Letter from Sir Robert Ladbroke* (1771) documenting how “Dr. Hales, Sir John Pringle, and others have observed, that air, corrupted and putrefied, is of such a subtle and powerful nature, as to rot and dissolve heart of oak; and that the walls of buildings have been impregnated with this poisonous matters for years together.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Lind, *Seamen*, 349.

<sup>36</sup> Mead, *Discourse*, 14.

<sup>37</sup> Howard, *Lazarettos*, 24.

Howard’s logic parallels the reasoning of his contemporaries. For example, Dr. Richard Mead similarly stated that, “WE all know how long a time *Perfumes* hold their *Scent*, if wrapt up in proper Coverings: And it is very remarkable, that the strongest of these, like the *Matter* we are treating of, are mostly *Animal Juices*, as *Mosch, Civet, &c.* and that the Substances found most fit to keep them in, which are most apt to receive and communicate *Infection*, as, *Furrs, Feathers, Silk, Hair, Wool, Cotton, Flax, &c.* the greatest part of which are likewise of the Animal Kind; which Remark alone may serve to lead Us a little into the Nature of *Contagion*.” Mead, *Discourse*, 17-18

<sup>38</sup> Howard, *State of the Prisons*, 13-14.



To purify effluvia-infested furniture and architecture, Howard put great stake in vigorous white-washing and disinfection with vinegar.<sup>39</sup> Thus, when Howard was left in a chamber whose “walls not having been cleaned probably for half a century, were saturated with infection,” he set to work “white-washing my room with lime slacked in boiling water... And the consequence was that my room was immediately rendered so sweet and fresh, that I was able to drink tea in it in the afternoon, and to lie in it the following night.”<sup>40</sup> In hopes that prisoners would follow his scrupulous example, Howard proposed giving “encouragements to the most cleanly” among the inmates.<sup>41</sup>

Just as he believed that “putrified” air was corrosive and “impregnated” the physical structure of the jail, Howard also thought that objects traveling to and from the jail would become carriers of air-born miasmata. As such, Howard records how “The leaves of my memorandum-book were so tainted, that I could not use it till after spreading it an hour or two before the fire: and even my antidote, a vial of vinegar, has after using it in a few prisons, become intolerably disagreeable.”<sup>42</sup> While the memorandum book shows how dangerous effluvia might be transported from the jails to society at large, Howard was also worried that incoming inmates would introduce new effluvia into jails. Howard was particularly concerned that effluvia, burrowed in inmates’ clothing, would accompany the prisoners to jail. Like James Lind, Howard seemed to believe that “polluted rags afford it (disease) a prompt receptacle, and prove a constant source of fresh infection. In several other respects also, besides that of being conveyed by rags and tainted substances...”<sup>43</sup> To prevent effluvia from propagating in prisoners’

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<sup>39</sup> According to contemporaries, vinegar prevented disease by closing porous surfaces and making it difficult for effluvia to penetrate bodies and objects. Ayliffe, *Hospital Infection*, 8.

<sup>40</sup> Howard, *Lazarettos*, 11.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>42</sup> Howard, *State of the Prisons*, 12.

<sup>43</sup> Lind, *Seamen*, 318-319.

clothing, The State of the Prisons dictated that there should be clean bath water “to wash prisoners that come in dirty, or grown dirty afterwards. It should be filled every morning, and let off in the evening through the privies into the drains. There should also be a copper in the shed, to heat a quantity of water sufficient to warm that in the bath for washing those that are sickly.”<sup>44</sup> In addition to cleaning the prisoners’ bodies, Howard wanted to disinfect their clothing through ovens; for “nothing so effectually destroys vermin in clothes and bedding, nor purifies them so thoroughly when tainted with infection as being a few hours in an oven moderately heated.”<sup>45</sup>

Although Howard was writing before gaol fever had been linked to the bacteria from the “vermin in clothes and bedding,” his contemporaries still noticed a *correlation* between prisoners’ person hygiene and their rate of contracting typhus. Thus, Dr. James Lind advocated the destruction of vermin-filled objects even if he didn’t understand *why* the removal of lice reduced cases of typhus in prisons. According to Dr. Lind, “...every prison should be provided with a large *oven*; as the effectual means of preventing the importation of a disease would be to *strip* every prisoner of his rags immediately on his admission, and to send his *cloaths* (*sic.*) to be baked in an oven. This will answer two good purposes, in both removing *infection*, and destroying all sorts of *vermin*...”<sup>46</sup> While the “vermin” were the true source of typhus, Lind was particularly concerned with eradicating uncleanly looking materials. Consequently, Lind not only wanted to bake dirty clothes in ovens, but he also destroyed “polluted rags” that afforded contagion “a prompt receptacle, and prove a constant source of fresh infection.”<sup>47</sup> Since both the jail distemper and the plague are “conveyed by rags and tainted substances,” and the “infection

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<sup>44</sup> Howard, *State of the Prisons*, 44.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>46</sup> Lind, *Seamen*, 336.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.

extends to not great distance from its source,” Lind reasons that destroying contaminated, filthy-looking materials will promptly stem the flow of typhus.<sup>48</sup>

### *Other Theories*

While Howard believed that filth and noxious air caused infections, he still needed to explain why some people who were exposed to these risk factors caught typhus while others did not. To account for differences in susceptibility to gaol fever, Howard reasoned that individualized factors (such as morale, diet, and exercise) could excite disease. Summarizing Howard’s reasoning, Roy Porter states that “Howard believed that the trauma of incarceration, with its consequent lack of exercise or stimulus, so to speak reduced the powers of life, or as we might say lowered resistance.”<sup>49</sup> While he commented on exercise as it relates to outdoor air, Howard mostly attributed reduced disease resistance to a lack of food.

Perhaps because malnourished bodies could withstand disease less readily than healthy bodies, Howard linked starvation and disease. According to Howard, “The cause of the distress is, that many prisoners are scantily supplied, and some almost totally unprovided with the necessaries of life.”<sup>50</sup> Some bridewells (houses of correction) had “no allowance of FOOD at all,” most places of confinement gave prisoners a food allowance of one shilling a week to one pennyworth (7.5 – 8.5 oz) of bread a day.<sup>51</sup> Even in the most generous prisons, “This [bread] allowance being so far short of the cravings of nature....many criminals are half-starved: such of them as at their commitment were in health, come out almost famished, scarce able to move...”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 319.

<sup>49</sup> Porter, “Howard’s Beginnings,” 13.

<sup>50</sup> Howard, *State of the Prisons*, 7.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 8, 11.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 12.

Although the Lord's Act (Act, 32<sup>nd</sup> of George II) required gaolers to provide imprisoned debtors with four-pence worth of bread a day, Howard only found twelve debtors in the whole of England and Wales who had received proper maintenance.<sup>53</sup> Because the Act wasn't upheld, Howard found "prisoners, covered (hardly covered) with rags; almost famished and sick of diseases, which the discharged spread wherever they go, and with which those who are sent to the Country-Gaols infect these prisons (bridewells)."<sup>54</sup> To keep prisons from starving and becoming vulnerable to disease, Howard recommended that the Lord's Act be upheld and that workshops be installed in prisoners could earn wages and thereby supplement their food allowances.<sup>55</sup>

### **Howard's Reforms: The Cure to Gaol Fever**

An increase in bread rations, along with plans to isolate contagious patients, introduce clean air, and burn dirty clothing, were logical ways to reduce fever. Based on contemporary ideas about typhus, there were tight connections between Howard's proposed reforms and established methods for curing illness. To see the link between disease prevention and Howard's reforms, we have to look no further than Howard's "Plan for a County Gaol." Featured in *State of the Prisons*, this blueprint shows how sound architecture and planning could stop the gaol fever.

To address the miasmatisists' concern that foul air and water created disease, Howard recommended good ventilation and running water. To keep the prisons airy, Howard introduced ventilators and numerous windows on the "Front of Gaoler's House & Debtors Ward" and the "Front of Men Felons Ward" (see drawing). In addition, Howard proposed arcades that would allow fresh air to enter the prison through grates in the second or third floor. Instead of

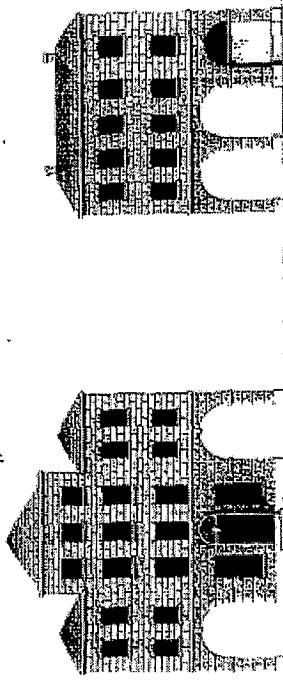
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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 9.

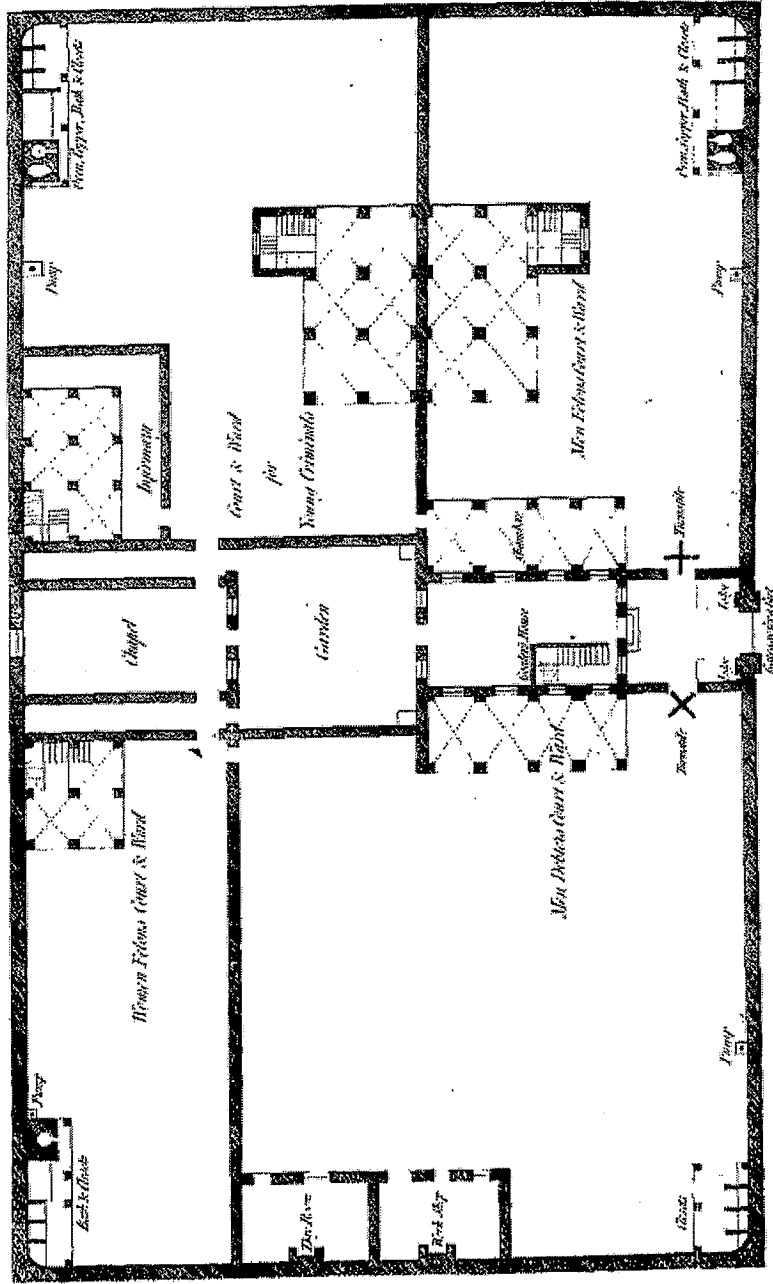
<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 47.

# PLAN for a COUNTY GAOL.



Front of New Prison Ward

Front of Gaol House & Debtors Ward



John Howard, "Plan for a County Gaol" in *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales* (London, William Eyres, 1777), 52.

relegating inmates to subterranean dungeons, Howard elevated prison wards above the arcades so prisoners could enjoy clean air and see the outdoors. To further connect inmates to nature, Howard proposed a garden (in the middle of the gaol) which would permit prisoners to enjoy the fresh air, but keep them firmly behind prison walls. Like the arcades and windows, the open garden ensured that pure air would circulate throughout the prison and dilute dangerous buildups of effluvia. After addressing air problems, Howard found ways to introduce clean water into prisons. Whereas many contemporary prisons lacked indoor plumbing, Howard's ideal gaol contained baths, pumps, and closets around the perimeter. These hygienic improvements ensured that running, potable water would replace the stale water and cesspools often found in prisons. Because odors emanating from open sewers supposedly contained disease particles (or "miasmata"), clean water was a major step towards eliminating gaol fever.

In addition to combating gaol fever through the miasmaticists' methods, Howard introduced reforms to address contagion. For example, Howard facilitated quarantines by grouping prisoners – by class – into different wards. By creating five wards (for women felons, women debtors, men debtors, men felons and young criminals respectively), Howard ensured that outbreaks of disease could be easily contained. Supposing that gaol fever erupted in one ward, gaolers could lock down the remaining wards, and thereby protect the majority of the inmates. Meanwhile, prisoners in the infected ward could be rushed to the infirmary (pictured in the upper right side of the blueprint) and treated by physicians.

To supplement this reactive, contagionist approach to disease, Howard introduced reforms that would prevent gaol fever from arising in the first place. For instance, Howard installed ovens and baths (in the right-hand concerns of the blueprint) to disinfect the clothing of incoming prisoners. Howard hoped that these improvements would free prisoners from effluvia

and vermin before they interacted with other inmates. Lastly, Howard staved off disease by creating workshops that would allow prisoners to earn enough money to supplement the food provisioned by the gaoler. If prisoners' could afford a robust diet, they could better withstand the gaol fever and other wasting diseases.

### **The Enlightenment, Science, and Social Utility**

All said, the miasmatist and contagionist reforms suggested by Howard's "Plan for a County Gaol" were logical ways to prevent disease. Yet, questions remain as to whether Howard's plan would have convinced contemporary readers to improve prisons. Just because Howard proposed a rational plan to prevent gaol fever does not mean that Parliament would act upon it. To make his blueprint and rhetoric inspiring, Howard had to pitch the *State of the Prisons* to a group of "thrusting achievers, sold on science, dedicated to the diffusion of rational knowledge and eager for innovation – be it practical, artistic, or intellectual... [and] devoted to the promotion of a new material well-being..."<sup>56</sup> To be successful, Howard had to join the "enlightened alliance of science, utility and philanthropy" that characterized eighteenth century political activism.<sup>57</sup>

To embrace the join the first prong of the Enlightenment alliance, Howard had to give the *State of the Prisons*, scientific appeal. To achieve this goal, Howard quantified the prevalence of disease in prisons, cited key scientists (such as Lind, Pringle, and Mead) to explain the origins of gaol fever, engaged the miasmatist and contagionist perspective on disease prevention, and proposed specific medical interventions to stop the gaol fever. Rod Morgan suggests that his pattern of observation, explanation, and solution allowed Howard to fit into an empiricist

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<sup>56</sup> Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (London: Allen-Lane-Penguin, 2000), 47.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

tradition of reformers who revealed social evils and assisted in their eradication.<sup>58</sup> By both documenting the problems in prisons and proposing concrete solutions to the fever (as shown by the “Plan for the County Gaol”), Howard made the *State of the Prisons* a credible call to action. For a society that had a new faith in the ability to solve disease through rational manipulation of the environment, Howard’s work served as a launch pad for eighteenth-century Englishmen who wanted to improve the world around them.<sup>59</sup> Because one of the “most prominent beliefs operative during the Enlightenment was faith in the progress and perfectibility of society with the help of science and technology,” Howard’s call for medical solutions was a viable response to prison problems.<sup>60</sup> For Members of Parliament who wanted to escape the “mere vacuous coffee house chatter” of science, such medical interventions afforded “a clear-cut case, one among many, of the practical application of enlightenment thinking.”<sup>61</sup>

After linking his recommendations to the scientific impulses of the day, Howard had to connect the *State of the Prisons* to the utilitarian and philanthropic portions of the enlightened alliance. During Howard’s period, philosophers like Jeremy Bentham and David Hume posited that social projects should have utility – or provide the greatest good for the greatest number.<sup>62</sup> While utility and philanthropy created a duty to maximize individual pleasure and pain (as explored in Chapter 3), greater emphasis was placed on securing the happiness of overall society. Because utilitarian Members of Parliament might be more interested in how medical interventions would benefit society than individual prisoners, Howard had to link prison reforms to social betterment.

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<sup>58</sup> Rod Morgan, “Divine Philanthropy: John Howard Reconsidered,” *History* 62, no. 106. (1977): 392.

<sup>59</sup> Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe*, *New Approaches to European History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 180.

<sup>60</sup> Guenter B. Risse, “Making Sense of Health and the Environment in Early Modern England,” in *Medicine in Society: Historical Essays*, ed. Andrew Wear (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 149.

<sup>61</sup> Porter, *Creation of the Modern World*, 213.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 416.



### *Gaol Fever and the Social Body*

To convince Parliament to finance prison reforms, Howard suggested that the social body would suffer if prison disease went untreated. When making these arguments, Howard appealed to Parliament's enlightened duty to protect the greatest number, as well as M.P.'s personal interest in furthering the public good. Just as Hume and Adam Smith believed that self-love could lead to social betterment, so Howard created ways that Parliament's personal stake in preventing disease could benefit the populace. To convince Parliament that gaol fever represented a threat to themselves and to the general populace, Howard suggested that disease might migrate from prisoners to the social body.

The first way that gaol fever could leap from inmates to the populace was through family members and court officials. Howard cautioned Parliament that the "mischief is not confined to the prisons" because inmates could infect family visitors.<sup>63</sup> When contagious, diseased prisoners (especially those who were malnourished) interacted with the outside world, the illnesses of the prisons migrated from behind prison walls to greater society. Thus Howard warned that "Multitudes catch the distemper by going to their relatives and acquaintance in the Goals," and suggested that prisoners should be quarantined from visitors who could carry diseases from jails to the outside world.<sup>64</sup>

In addition to visitors, disease could be spread through the movement of prisoners into society. For example, "when the prisoners were brought to trial, the disease-bearing insects, being no respecters of persons, were wont to move on to pastures new in the court officials and judges".<sup>65</sup> The people who became infected in the courthouse then spread the disease to the

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<sup>63</sup> Howard, *State of the Prisons*, 17.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>65</sup> Ayliffe, *Hospital Infection*, 38.

people they met in the community. To bolster his claims that inmates contaminated innocent bystanders whenever they left the prisons, Howard cited contemporary examples of diseases originating in courthouses. For instance, Howard claimed that prisoners from the Ivelchester Gaol infected the assize court in Taunton in 1730. In another example, Howard claimed that a sheriff and a chancellor were infected at an assize court when diseased prisoners appeared for trial.<sup>66</sup>

By referring to the transfer of disease from prisons to the population through courts of law, Howard grounded his admonitions of typhus in centuries'-old scholarship about the "Black Assizes." Ever since typhus had migrated from an infected prisoner to the quarter session at Cambridge in 1522, scientists worried that criminal (assize) courts were seats of disease. Looking back on the early "Black Assizes," Howard's contemporaries in the Royal Society's Philosophical Transactions (1757) recalled how "at the quarter-session at Cambridge, in Lent in the year 1522, and the 13<sup>th</sup> of the reign of Henry VIII, the justices, gentleman, and bailiffs, with most of the persons present, were seized with a disease which proved mortal to a considerable number of them; those who escaped, having been very dangerously sick."<sup>67</sup> In addition to the incident at Cambridge, the Royal Society recorded an "unhappy instance of the same kind of contagion"<sup>68</sup> at the Oxford assize. The Royal Society affirmed that "there died in Oxford three hundred persons, and in other places two hundred and odd, from the 6<sup>th</sup> of July to the 12<sup>th</sup> of August."<sup>69</sup>

This 1577 incident at Oxford was believed to have arisen when Rowlande Jenkes was arraigned at the assizes for supporting the Pope. Jenkes, who was found guilty of professing

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<sup>66</sup> Howard, *State of the Prisons*, 16-17.

<sup>67</sup> John Ward and Thomas Birch, "An Account of the Black Assize at Oxford, from the Register of Merton College in That University," *Philosophical Transactions* 50 (1757-1758): 703.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 703.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 702.

Catholicism, was sentenced to be nailed by his ears to the local pillory. Perhaps because Jenkes had already contracted typhus in the jails, his appearance at the assize court was soon followed by “an infectious damp or breath among the people that many there present [at the assize] ... were smothered, and others so deeply affected that they lived not many hours after.” Soon, Oxford was overflowing with victims who were “very calamitous and full of sorrow, occasioned by the rage of their disease and pain. Others like mad men, would run about the streets, markets, lanes, and other places. Some would leap headlong into deep waters.”<sup>70</sup>

Based on the outbreak of typhus at Oxford, scientists concluded that bystanders could catch diseases from prisoners under trial at the assize. The conclusions drawn from the Oxford assizes were reaffirmed in a similar case at the Old Bailey. As documented by Sir John Pringle (the President of the Royal Society of Physicians and personal physician to the Royal Family), on May 11<sup>th</sup>, 1750, over fifty people contracted fatal strains of jail-distemper from criminals brought to the Old-Bailey for sentencing. Among the casualties were the Lord Mayor of London, two judges, a lawyer, an alderman, and members of the jury.<sup>71</sup> A staunch miasmatist, Pringle concluded that the typhoid outbreak spread when the “perspirable matter” of the prisoners spread into the unventilated, closely-packed courtroom.<sup>72</sup> “Pinned up for the most part of the day, without breathing free air, or receiving any refreshment,” court dignitaries and members of “the lower rank, whose death may not have been heard of” quickly ingested the prisoners’ deadly miasmata.<sup>73</sup> Within days, the court bystanders developed fevers, an

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<sup>70</sup>The Oxford Preservation Trust, “The Oxford Castle Curse - 'The Black Assize,'" *Oxford Castle Press Releases* (Oxford), <http://www.oxfordcastleunlocked.co.uk/images/cms/press-releases> (accessed November 12, 2008). Quoting Anthony Wood, register of Merton College.

<sup>71</sup> Beattie, *England 1660*, 304.

<sup>72</sup> Pringle, *Observations*, 330.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 331-32.

inflammatory appearance,” delirium, and a sinking pulse which could “not be raised by blisters, nor cordials.”<sup>74</sup> Soon, all who “were with the fever, died, excepting two, or three at most.”<sup>75</sup>

The rapid transfer of infection and the death toll at the Old Bailey were so shocking to Howard’s contemporaries, that Pringle seemed loath to mention the incident. Apologizing for his documentation of the black assizes, Pringle referred to the outbreaks of typhus as “an unhappy instance in our memory, that I needed not to have mentioned here, had it not been to inform... those who are to come after us.”<sup>76</sup> While Pringle treated the alarming “black assizes” with delicacy so as not to alarm readers, Howard’s contemporaries still grasped the dangers jail distempers posed to larger society. After gobbling up seven editions of Pringle’s book (prior to the publication date of The State of the Prisons) and listening to other accounts of the black assizes, the educated public became so fearful of contracting the “disease which in London has of late approved very alarming to the judges and court at the Old Bailey,” that they lobbied for the “country assizes to be put off for some time.”<sup>77</sup> Based on the incidents at the Old Bailey and Oxford, Howard’s contemporaries constantly feared that infected prisoners could wreak havoc in entire towns.

Capitalizing on deep-seated fears about gaol fever, Howard used references to the black assizes to convince Parliament that prisoners should be kept healthy so they would not harbor diseases injurious to society. Commenting on this rhetorical tactic, J.M. Beattie argues that “The ‘Black Session’ at the Old Bailey cast a long shadow, and the protection of the judges and magistrates and lawyer and jurors from the ‘putrescent tribe’ ... was never far from the minds of

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 332.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 332.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 330.

<sup>77</sup> Lind, *Seamen*, 306.

those who put forward plans for combating jail fever, or from the legislation they inspired.”<sup>78</sup> By conjuring the boogeyman of gaol fever, reformers like Howard spoke to judges and politicians who “had no *other* Object in view – than to prevent the Contagion of the *Gaol* Fever” in satisfy ‘selfish ideas of personal Safety.’<sup>79</sup> By providing influential, self-interested readers with the specter of gaol fever and the means to prevent it, Howard made prison reforms a relevant issue for parliamentary consideration.

### ***Gaol Fever and the Military***

In addition to reminding Parliament of the dangers prisoners posed at assizes, Howard scared readers with the possibility that sick inmates would spread disease upon their release from jail. To explain how one inmate could pose a threat to hundreds of people, Howard documented an incident in 1755 when a prisoner released from the Exeter Gaol infected his family and the town of Devonshire with gaol fever.<sup>80</sup> Although Howard does not say so directly, he implies that England can only safeguard justice (by allowing prisoners to stand trial and be released at the end of their sentences) and the health of the social body by ensuring that society only interacts with healthy prisoners. If health could be improved in prisons, then prisoners wouldn’t contract diseases that could be spread to other people. Since protecting prisoners from disease could indirectly safeguard the public from disease, it followed that Parliament should improve health conditions in prisons if they wanted the nation as a whole to remain healthy.

While a healthy social body was always significant, contemporaries were more likely to see public health as an “important national concern” during times of crisis.<sup>81</sup> Because The State

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<sup>78</sup> Beattie, *England 1660*, 306.

<sup>79</sup> DeLacy, *Prison Reform*, 81, citing Bayley (1785).

<sup>80</sup> Howard, *State of the Prisons*, 19

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 489.

of the Prisons was published 1777, in the context of the American Revolution, readers were likely to accept Howard's claim that poor prison health threatened England's survival. According to Howard, unhealthy prisoners were weakening England's fighting force by spreading disease (through prison visitors and court officials) to the general public – the source of England's soldiers. Furthermore, prisoners directly contaminated England's military when they were impressed into military service. Using Dr. Lind's Essay on the Health of Seamen as evidence, Howard argued that "The source of infection to our armies and fleets are undoubtedly the jails; we can often trace the importers of it directly from them. It often proves fatal in impressing men of the hasty equipment of a fleet..." and "the seeds of infection were carried from the guard-ships into our squadrons—and the mortality, thence occasioned, was greater than by all other diseases or means of death put together."<sup>82</sup> Because jails were "frequent seminaries of contagion, not only to courts of justice and great cities, such as *London*, but also to our fleets and armies, their state," Lind concluded that "the condition in which they are kept, becomes a national and important concern."<sup>83</sup>

Playing open Parliament's patriotism and fears of a debilitated army and home front, Howard argued that England's preservation depended upon the good health of its prisoners. In addition to reasoning that unhealthy prisoners would jeopardize the well-being of soldiers, Howard argued that infectious inmates would undermine the efficacy of the domestic workforce. When released prisoners found employment, they would spread their infections to fellow workers. If prisoners infected the labor pool, they would impair England's ability to manufacture military supplies and trade goods for the wartime economy.<sup>84</sup> Since prisoners were

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>83</sup> Lind, *Seamen*, 347.

<sup>84</sup> Between 1700 and 1800, England fought a variety of wars including the War of Jenkins Ear, the War of the Austrian Succession, the Seven Year's War, and the American Revolution. Such constant conflict meant that the

key components of a healthy workforce and military, they deserved protection. For, “They might no doubt be useful at home or abroad; if proper care were taken in prison, to keep them healthy and fit for labour: but certain it is, that many of those who survive their long confinement, are rendered but it incapable of working. Some of them are grievously affected with scorbutic distemper; others have their toes mortified, or quite rotted from their feet; many instances of which I have seen.”<sup>85</sup> From Howard’s perspective, if prison diseases like the scorbutic distemper and gaol fever could be prevented, prisoners could become an asset instead of a threat to England’s national security and social stability.

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“existence of a large pool of soldiers and sailors was a crucial wartime need. Not only were numbers important, but the health and good spirits of the forces was equally important” Andrew, *Philanthropy*, 56.

<sup>85</sup> Howard, *State of the Prisons*, 39

## Chapter 2: Moral Contagion

While the idea of contagion and social pragmatism powerfully relate to medical ideas, they also have some bearing on Howard's religious rhetoric. In this chapter, I argue that evangelical Christians (like Howard) applied the medical ideas of contagion and social utility to prisons. Appropriating medical imagery and practices, Christian reformers physically and morally "quarantined" inmates once activists perceived vice as disease-like problem. To stamp out the "contagion" of immorality, reformers recast the medical idea of quarantine into the means of controlling sin and saving society. Howard further reasoned that isolating sinful, "infected" prisoners from one another would control vice and thereby protect England from crime, declining productivity, and Divine Retribution. The way that Howard used the metaphor of contagion and appeals to utility to justify moral reforms mirrors his strategy of using theories of disease and pragmatism to advocate medical reforms.

### The Evangelical Revival

To understand why Howard appropriated contagionist and pragmatic reasoning – and what he hoped to accomplish by doing so – requires some insight into the changing religious climate of his time. According to Howard's contemporaries, vice was consuming lives on an epidemic scale and there was a growing concern about England's religious and moral character.<sup>1</sup> With crime on the rise and church attendance sinking, church leaders worried that Christian doctrine was not being taken seriously.<sup>2</sup> All around them, Church leaders like the Bishop of Rochester

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<sup>1</sup> Doreen Rosman, *The Evolution of the English Churches: 1500-2000* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 147.

<sup>2</sup> Roy Porter attributes the eighteenth century increase in vice to the Industrial Revolution and the Enlightenment. Porter implicates industrialization because economic growth gave workers more disposable income to spend on alcohol, prostitutes, and bawdy entertainment. Once wages rose above subsistence levels, "spare cash was widely



(Francis Atterbury) saw a “deluge of impiety and licentiousness which hath broken in upon us and overspread the face of this church and kingdom.”<sup>3</sup> Throughout the land, “Englishmen excused their vices as virtues and indulged them with brio”<sup>4</sup> until “The streets rung with oaths and blasphemy: the taverns were nightly witnesses of lust and drunkenness: open houses of abomination were maintained with many inhabitants, and the fields were polluted with lewdness in the very face of heaven in the sight of the suns or stars...”<sup>5</sup> Once impiety gained ascendancy, men went about defying the Sabbath and indulging their passions. By mid-century, ministers reported that “All laws both sacred and civil are openly defied, the name of God is daily, and hourly blasphemed in our streets, and prevarication and perjury abound in our courts of justice.”<sup>6</sup> Without the fear of God to keep them in check, Englishmen went about defying their Maker and challenging the laws and institutions that bound society together.

In a society of widespread “luxurious consumption” and irreverence for God’s commandments and human law, reformers demanded a return to a more traditional society.<sup>7</sup> In response to the breakdown of the old social order, Donna Andrew maintains that “clergymen offered older remedies for the growth of license... Agreeing with contemporaries on the need for action, they preached reconciliation and the strengthening of personal loyalties, the reforging of link of obligation and respect.” To reconstitute ties of deference and obedience to the law, “they advised civic-minded citizens to encourage and aid attempts to educate and regulate the morals

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laid out on entertainment” and people took “their pleasure noisily, effusively and in public” (214). In addition to providing the means to indulge one’s passions, capitalism condoned egoism – treating greed “not as sinful and anti-social, but as natural and even admirable” (258). In addition to endorsing this “greed is good” approach, Enlightenment thinkers encouraged vice by undermining the church’s role as the policeman of morality. By questioning the legitimacy of religious authority, Enlightenment thinkers weakened the institution most responsible for controlling society’s manners. Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, Penguin Social History of Britain (1982; repr., London: Penguin, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Francis Atterbury, *A Representation of the Present State of Religion* (London, UK: John Morphew, 1711), 000.

<sup>4</sup> Porter, *English Society*, 9

<sup>5</sup> Isaac Watts, *The Works of the Rev. Isaac Watts*, Vol. 1 of 7. (Leeds: Edward Baines, 1800), 629.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Smith, *Righteousness, the Way to Avert Impending Judgments, and the Certain Method to Secure the Divine Protection*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, (London: Smith, 1764), 16.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew, *Philanthropy*, 154.

of the lower classes...<sup>8</sup> To shore up the morals of prisoners and other undesirables, concerned citizens set about restoring England's place as a Christian nation. Around the country, lay organizations such as the Societies for the Reformation of Manners and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge denounced improprieties and taught the path to morality. At the same time, church leaders tried to revive Christian morality and good works. Beginning in the 1730s, concerned Christians set about spreading the gospel and encouraging in devotion to the Bible and emulation of Christ's example. In what would become known as the Evangelical Revival, Christians encouraged sinners to seek forgiveness for their sins and read upright lives. While the Revival initially began as a small movement within Anglicanism, evangelicalism eventually enthralled the nation. By 1850, one-third of Anglican clergyman and the vast majority of Nonconformists embraced evangelical beliefs.<sup>9</sup>

While evangelicalism had not reached this level of popularity during Howard's period, the Revival was still a powerful rallying point for social reformers. For eighteenth century reformers, evangelicalism created an imperative to lead sinners to repentance so that could develop intimate and fulfilling relationships with God. Because a personal relationship with Christ could lead to righteous behavior, "People whose lives were refocused as a result of their evangelical experience were anxious to share what had happened with others."<sup>10</sup> To lead others to salvation, evangelicals actively communicated their faith to others and tried to bring non-believers and backsliders into the Christian fold.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to proselytizing in the outside world, evangelicals tried to shore up morality in their own ranks. For evangelicals, it was not enough to go through the motions of ritual worship

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 153-54.

<sup>9</sup> Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon-Oxford University Press, 1988), 27.

<sup>10</sup> Rosman, *Evolution*, 150.

<sup>11</sup> For more information on evangelical beliefs, see: Hilton, *Atonement*.

once a week – true Christians had to constantly incorporate God into their daily lives. In his sermon, “The Almost Christian,” George Whitefield (the co-founder of Methodism, the most powerful movement in the Evangelical Revival) explained that true Christians “love Him with all our Hearts, with all our Souls, and with all our Strength.”<sup>12</sup> Denouncing those who are “fond of the *Form* [of religion], but never experiences the *Power of Godliness* in his Heart,” Whitfield urged Christians to actively pursue their faith.<sup>13</sup> Instead of passively listening to the Gospel, Christians must act upon its examples. Echoing Whitefield, John Wesley (the other founder of the Methodist movement) beseeched his congregation to “let all your thoughts, words, and works tend to His glory.”<sup>14</sup> Thereby, “walking as Christ also walked” and acting in “entire inward and outward conformity to our Master.”<sup>15</sup>

For evangelicals like Wesley and Whitefield, “walking as Christ also walked” implied spreading the faith and doing good works. In 1736, Edward Cobden (the personal chaplain of George II) clarified how Christians should fulfill these obligations. In a sermon before the Societies for the Reformation of Manners, Cobden insisted that “all of us should be diligent and incessant in” the “great work of reducing others to Piety and Goodness.”<sup>16</sup> Invoking the Book of Daniel, Cobden called upon his followers to convert their neighbors and “turn many to righteousness”<sup>17</sup> When they encountered “the ignorant” or a Christian who had lost his faith, good evangelicals would “explain and confirm to him the Doctrine of a crucify’d Saviour, and all

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<sup>12</sup> George Whitefield, *The Almost Christian: A Sermon* (London: W. Bowyer, 1738), 20.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>14</sup> John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1765 repr., London: The Epworth Press, 1952), 8.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>16</sup> Edward Cobden, *The Duty and Reward of Turning Others to Righteousness: A Sermon Preachers to the Societies for the Reformation of Manners* (London, UK: M. Downing, 1736), 10.

<sup>17</sup> Dan. 12.30 (King James Version). cited in Cobden, *Duty*, 3.

the excellent Precepts of our Holy Religion,” thereby “*turning him to Righteousness*, and bringing him to *Light and Immortality through the Gospel*.”<sup>18</sup>

In addition to proselytism, good Christians were obliged to set upright examples for their neighbors. To show the path to enlightenment, good Christians were “not to put [their] *Candle under a Bushel*, but place it where it may be of Use and Direction to the rest of Mankind.”<sup>19</sup>

According to Cobden, it was this “Light and Influence of a *Good Example*,” and the “Lustre of Religious Patterns” that could turn the wicked to righteousness.<sup>20</sup> By replacing cursing, drunkenness, and fornication with repentance and humility, good Christians could set an example that would “convert a Sinner from the Error of his Ways” and “save a Soul from Death.”<sup>21</sup>

### ***Evangelicalism in Prisons***

While good works, proselytism, and honoring the Sabbath were preached to the population at large, evangelicals particularly wanted to instill these values among delinquents and troublemakers. Seen as the worst of the worst, at-large criminals and prisoners demonstrated all of the vices that evangelicals hoped to eradicate. According to the anonymous author of *A Charitable Visit to the Prisons* (1725), jails were filled with “Sins of the Mind and Thoughts, such as Envy, Malice, etc. and the Sins of the Tongue, such as Cursing, and filthy Talk, etc.” along with “many other Sins, such as Drunkenness and Uncleanliness, even such as are not be named among Christians, nor thought on without Horror...”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Cobden, *Duty*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>21</sup> Jas. 5. 20 (King James Version). cited in Cobden, *Duty*, 6.

<sup>22</sup> *A Charitable Visit to the Prisons, Containing Suitable and Proper Advice or Counsel to Those who are Confined There* (London: J. Downing, 1725), 5.

To keep such vice bay, evangelicals made it their special mission to reform inmates. As such, evangelical ministers encouraged all Christians (not just Church officials) to attend “the kindly Offices of *Visiting the Sick and Imprisoned, Cloathing the Naked, and relieving the Hungry.*”<sup>23</sup> As part of his Christian duty, a good evangelical would “think upon those who languish in the solitary dungeon, deprived of the light of heaven, and the agreeable conversation of their friends, and contribute to their relief.”<sup>24</sup> Instead of shunning prisoners, evangelicals “contribute[d] to their relief” by visiting jails and spreading the gospel. In their prison ministries, evangelicals encouraged inmates to repent and “Recollect your many Sins as far as you are able, and confess them with Shame and Sorrow unto God, with their several Aggravations.”<sup>25</sup> To save prisoners from Divine Wrath (for “Every sin deserve no less than eternal Punishment in Hell”), evangelicals did their utmost to convert nonbelievers and have inmates beg for God’s mercy.<sup>26</sup>

### **Howard’s Relation to the Revival**

The evangelicals’ attention to conversion, repentance, and upright right behavior was not lost on John Howard. Though Howard was technically a moderate Calvinist, he ascribed to many Methodist beliefs and the basic tenets of the evangelical movement. Instead of restricting himself to Calvinist beliefs, Howard agreed with the Revival’s emphasis on personal piety, devotion to the Bible, and outward zeal for spreading the gospel. According to his contemporary, John Aikin, Howard held “the relationship between man and his maker, and the grand support of morality” as the “principal objet of his regard. He was less solicitous about

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<sup>23</sup> Whitefield, *Almost Christian*, 7.

<sup>24</sup> David Aitkin, *A General Reformation of Manners, the Best National Defense in the Time of Danger: A Sermon* (Berwic: W. Phorson, 1794), 27..

<sup>25</sup> *A Charitable Visit to the Prisons*. 58.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

modes and opinions, than the internal spirit of piety and devotion, and his estimate of different religious societies, and the circumstances to which he principally attended, were their zeal and sincerity.”<sup>27</sup> Because Howard was more concerned about godliness than “modes and opinions,” he worshipped at a variety of churches and regarded the “various [Dissenting] denominations with predilection, and attach[ed] himself to their most distinguished members.”<sup>28</sup> Cozying up to the likes of John Wesley allowed Howard to become fully immersed in evangelical attitudes toward the immorality in prisons.

Like the Dissenters he met, Howard came to believe that criminals and inmates were in need of moral uplift. Drawing omnivorously upon different Dissenting doctrines, Howard ground his concern for inmates in revivalist notions of compassion and Puritanical opposition to sin. The end result of this mix of Calvinist and evangelical doctrines was that Howard became convinced that reformation should be the “leading principle in the regulation of prisons; and it was that which cost him the chief labour of collecting and applying the facts.”<sup>29</sup> J.M. Beattie maintains that in describing moral problems and prisons and proposing their solutions, Howard:

added an important religious argument [to prison reform]: the positive effects that could be anticipated from teaching of the Christian faith to men and women whose education in this area had been neglected. To those who believed that the increase in immorality and thus in crime sprang fundamentally from the disintegration of manner and habits of the working poor and of their neglect of their religious duty,” Howard’s reforms were on target.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Aikin, *John Howard*, 15-16.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>30</sup> Beattie, *England 1660*, 569.

By showing how religious training and discipline could solve these problems, Howard confirmed evangelicals' beliefs that "imprisonment under the right conditions might not merely answer the problem of crime but, more broadly, offer a key to the preservation of social order" through the imposition of Christian morality and deference.<sup>31</sup> This imposition of morality and deference on behalf of the social body is evident in The State of the Prisons. Though altruistic concern for each inmate's salvation and eternal fate is a key part of Howard's work (as explained in Chapter 3), The State of the Prisons unabashedly reminded Parliament of the social benefits to eradicating vice. In its defense of the social body, Howard's exposé harshly denounced the crimes committed by inmates and their ill effects on the outside world.

### **Moral Problems in Prisons**

One of the first "vices" Howard condemns is the idleness he sees among prison inmates. Instead of putting themselves to good use and earning their freedom (in the case of debtors), prisoners spent "their time in sloth, profaneness and debauchery, to a degree, which, in some of the houses [of correction] that I have seen, is extremely shocking."<sup>32</sup> Without industry to keep them occupied, inmates fell prey to another vice – gaming. To amuse themselves in their hours of idleness, prisoners indulged in cards, dice, billiards, tennis, and other diversions which offended Howard's sensibilities. Although Howard claimed that he was "not an enemy to diverting exercises," he opposed the "riot, bawling, and profaneness, that are the usual consequents of their (the prisoners') play."<sup>33</sup>

Not only did games produce disruptions, but they encouraged debtors to cheat their creditors. According to Howard, gambling rings created "circumstances [for] debtors gaming

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 569.

<sup>32</sup> Howard, John, *The State of the Prisons*, 7.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 26.

away the property of their creditors, which I know they have done in some prisons to a considerable amount; accomplishing themselves in the frauds of gamblers, who, if they be not themselves prisoners, are sure to haunt where gaming is practiced; hindering their fellow-prisoners who do not play from walking in the yards while they do...”<sup>34</sup> While imprisoned debtors might otherwise strive to repay their creditors by plying a trade in prison, unregulated gaming in prisons encouraged reckless gambling and honest debtors were heckled for shunning cards and dice. From Howard’s perspective, Parliament needed to save the debtors from themselves by removing the temptation of gambling from prisons.

In addition to gambling, Howard worried that the mixing of the sexes would lead to unnecessary temptations in prisons. Appealing to the modesty of his audience, Howard chastised:

[The] DEBTORS [who] crowd the Gaols (especially those in London) with their WIVES and CHILDREN.... increasing the danger of corrupting the morals of children. This point ought (no doubt) to be treated with tenderness. Man and wife should not be totally separated. Yet the little probability there is of an industrious woman being of service to her family in prison: the number of men in the same room: and of lewd women admitted under the name of wives; prove that this affair needs some regulation.”<sup>35</sup>

From Howard’s perspective, the unregulated movement of children and women between debtors’ prisons and the outside world compromised women’s sexual purity and children’s innocence. To promote the ideal role of women as chaste and supportive, Howard wanted to ban wives from prisons so they could be “of service” to their families – by earning enough money to secure their husbands’ release. Instead of lounging uselessly around the prison, women should temporarily

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 33-34.



take on “industrious” roles which would facilitate their husbands’ release and return to the head of the house.

Besides undermining their roles as useful wage-earners, prison-life diminishes women’s morals. Since ten or twelve inmates could be housed in a middle-sized room, Howard implied that the large “number of men in the same room” can have ruinous moral and sexual consequences for a woman.<sup>36</sup> Howard reinforced the unspoken assumption that chaste women should not mingle with large groups of men, asserting that the female visitors who willingly associate with inmates are prostitutes. In order to remove these “lewd women” from prisons and to protect wives from idleness and corruption, Howard advocated regulated interactions between female visitors and male inmates.<sup>37</sup>

### *The Convergence of Bodily and Moral Contagion*

Part of the reason Howard was so concerned about promiscuity, idleness, and gambling was that he believed that vice was communicable. Within prisons, Howard believed that the “vicious examples” of one inmate could infect the rest of the prison population.”<sup>38</sup> Just as one sick person could infect a group of healthy people, Howard reasoned that one hardened offender could spread moral decay and sin to petty offenders. When prisons confined “all sorts of persons together: debtors and felons; men and women; the young beginner and the old offender,” they ensured that the defects of the most “contaminated” would infect the most innocent.<sup>39</sup> Without a barrier between the morally well and the morally degraded, “the petty offender is committed for instruction to the most profligate” and sin propagates.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 16.

Howard's views of moral contagion closely meshed with eighteenth century scholarship. According to Howard's contemporaries, evil examples and thoughts could emanate from wrongdoers and infect those around them. Since all prisoners lived in close contact, the "benign" young offender would quickly be "infected and corrupted by the Evil Practices and Examples of Wicked Men."<sup>41</sup> Because an inmate is "unavoidably engaged in or confined to the Converse of Society of Wicked Men, where he cant (*sic*) avoid *seeing and hearing from day to day their unlawful deeds and wicked Words, and at the same time, his Righteous Soul is not vexed with their filthy Conversation*, he is in great Danger of being infected and greatly polluted."<sup>42</sup> Unable to seek sanctuary in the companies of their betters, "Persons, who when they were first committed were not so ill-disposed as some others are, have yet been afterwards carried away into the most sinful Courses by the Inundation of all Manner of Vice visibly practiced in such Places, and have contracted ill Habits during their Confinement in such polluted Company..."<sup>43</sup> While an inmate might otherwise leave prison without "being infected and greatly polluted" by sin, the indiscriminate mixing of good and bad prisoners makes contagion almost inevitable. Because man is a social creature who is "apt to imitate the Example of the *Multitude*, or the Generality of those we live amongst or converse with; more especially, is those that are our *constant Companions*, and *intimate Associates*," prisoners were likely to acquire their companions' bad habits.<sup>44</sup> Because "The lewd inflame the lewd, the audacious harden the audacious. Everyone fortifies himself as he can against his own sensibility, endeavors to practice on others the arts which are practiced on himself; and gains the kindness of his

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<sup>41</sup> *A Charitable Visit to the Prisons*, 87.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-88.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-88.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

associates by similitude of manners.”<sup>45</sup> To ingratiate themselves with the criminal community, new inmates would “imitate others in *Sin and Folly*, in *Vice and Wickedness*” and be “degenerated into the rank of the most libidinous Animals, such as the Goat or a Boar.”<sup>46</sup> Left to their own devices, inmates would infect jails “with every corruption which poverty and wickedness can generate between them with all the shameless and profligate enormities than can be produced by the impudence of ignominy, the rage of want, and the malignity of despair.”<sup>47</sup>

### **Howard’s Reforms: The Cure to Moral Contagion**

In response to the burgeoning wickedness in prisons, Christian reformers like Edward Cobden (the Archdeacon of London) wanted to ensure that “the Innocent may not be infected by the Contagion of their (the corrupt inmates’) Examples.”<sup>48</sup> To snuff out the contagion of sin and poor example, church leaders advocated a two-pronged attack on prisons. First, reformers wanted to institute a “moral” quarantine which would prevent inmates from imitating criminal behavior. Secondly, reformers wanted to fortify prisoners against future epidemics of immorality. Since prisoners could become sinful through the force of example, reformers reasoned that inmates could also become righteous if they were given examples of upright living. Much like doctors who wanted to isolate infected patients in the short-term and to promote health and disease-resistance in the long-term, Christian reformers wanted to quarantine sinners and then increase their spiritual strength and resistance to temptation.

To begin the first step of this reformation process, Howard recommended isolating comparatively “benign” prisoners (such as first-time offenders, young people, women, and

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<sup>45</sup> Howard, *State of the Prisons*, 24. quoting the *Idler* no. 38.

<sup>46</sup> *A Charitable Visit to the Prisons*, 90, 96.

<sup>47</sup> Howard, *State of the Prisons*, 24. quoting the *Idler* no. 38.

<sup>48</sup> Cobden, *Duty*, 20.

debtors) from more infectious inmates (such as hardened offenders, older criminals, men, and felons). Accordingly, Howard argued that “women felons should be quite separate from men: and young criminals from old and hardened offenders. Each of these three classes also have their day-room or kitchen and their court-yard and offices are all separate.”<sup>49</sup> In addition, Howard argued that “DEBTORS and felons should have wards totally separate: the peace, the cleanliness, the health and morals of debtors cannot be secured otherwise.”<sup>50</sup> Lest debtors be “annoyed and corrupted by the wicked conversation of felons all day long” and offended by “the curses and other profane language of felons” during the evening hours, Howard argues that “there should be a total separation” between the two classes of criminals.<sup>51</sup>

To realize this separation, Howard recommended assigning prisoners to wards based on the inmates’ criminal history, sex, and age. As such, in Howard’s ideal “Plan for a County Gaol,” (featured on the following page) wards are provided for women felons, women debtors, young criminals, and men felons, and men debtors. Within each ward, Howard also wished “to have so many small rooms or cabins in this ward, that each criminal may sleep alone. If it is difficult to prevent their being together in the day-time, they should by all means be separated by night”<sup>52</sup> By separating prisoners into wards and further “quarantining” inmates from each other at night, Howard could contain the disease of vice and create the “Solitude and silence [which] are favourable to reflection; and may possibly lead to repentance.”<sup>53</sup> Howard’s longing for reflection and repentance among the inmates reveals his second method for reducing vice among the inmates: promoting godly living. Not only did Howard want to remove inmates from the sources of infection (i.e. sinful companions), but he also wanted to instill prisoners with virtue.

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<sup>49</sup> Howard, *State of the Prisons*, 44.

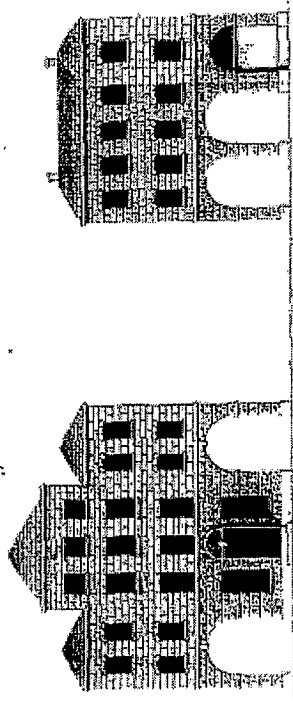
<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

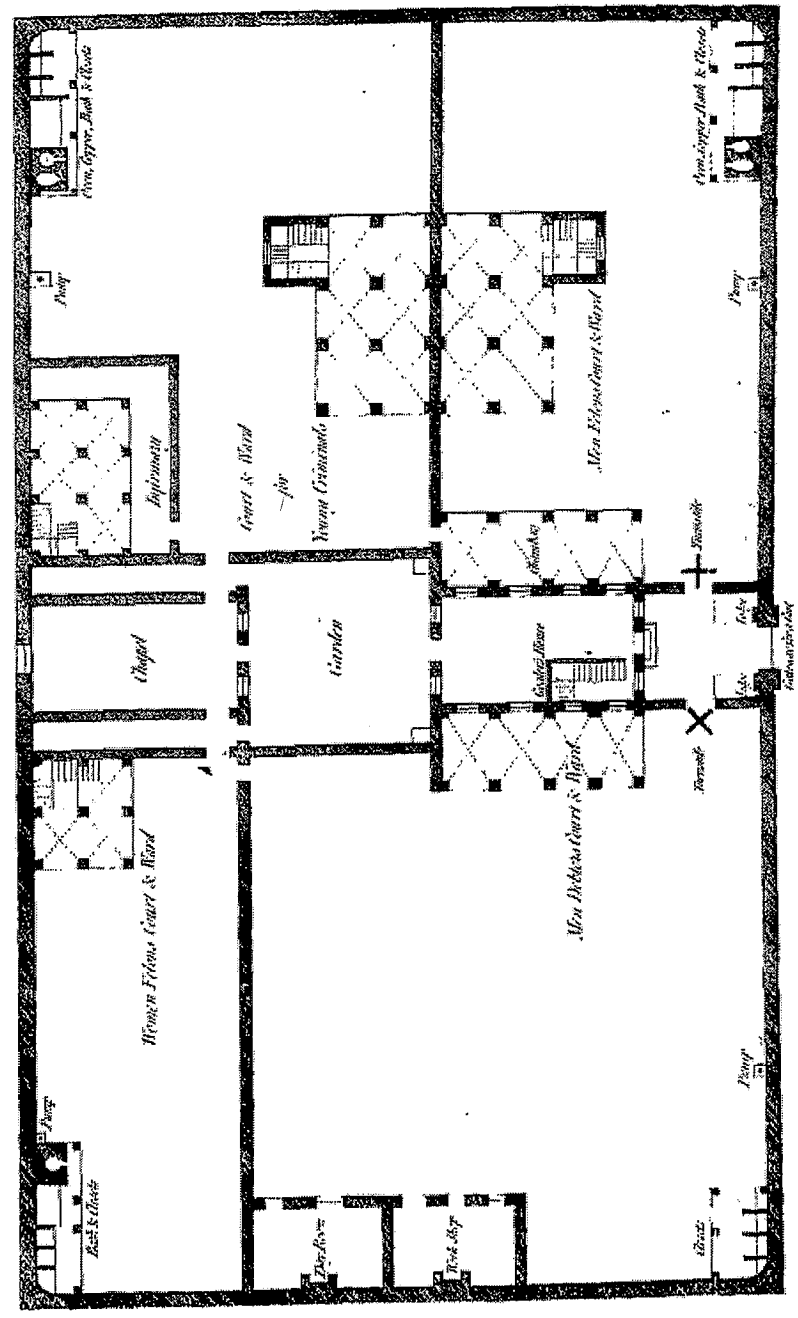
<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

PLAN for a COUNTY GAOL.



Front of Men Below Ward

Front of Garden House & Jailers Ward



John Howard, "Plan for a County Gaol" in *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales* (London, William Eyres, 1777), 52.

If prisoners received religious instruction, lived abstemiously, and worked industriously, they would develop immunity to moral contagion. For Howard, increasing religious awareness was the first line of defense against immorality. As such, Howard argued that “A CHAPEL is necessary in a Gaol... It should have a gallery for debtors or women and the rest may be separated below. Bibles and prayer books should be chained at convenient distances on each side: those who tear or otherwise damage them should be punished.”<sup>54</sup> Following these improvements, fellow evangelicals such as Samuel Palmer (a dissenting minister and author of The Nonconformist’s Memorial), praised Howard for increasing the religious “instruction of the prisoners, by the introduction of Bibles, and other pious books, into their cells, and a more constant attendance of Clergy-men.”<sup>55</sup> According to evangelicals like Howard and Palmer, religious instruction furthered the “*rational plan of softening the mind*” and warming inmates’ hearts to Christianity.<sup>56</sup> In order to internalize a sense of “*decency, regularity and order,*” inmates had to be impressed by the power of “RELIGION, by plan, serious discourse, catechizing and familiar instruction from the chaplains, together with the influence of a *good example...*”<sup>57</sup> Once inmates had internalized biblical teachings and Christ’s example, they could begin to lead abstemious lifestyles.

To help prisoners live humbly, Howard removed sources of temptation and excess from prisons. Most notably, Howard cracked down on the “very brutish and destructive vice” of drunkenness.<sup>58</sup> Although English gaols customarily housed taps (administered by gaolers and turnkeys for a handsome profit), Howard could not countenance the sale and consumption of

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>55</sup> Samuel Palmer, *The True Patriot: A Sermon, on the Much Lamented Death of John Howard* (London: J. Johnson, 1790), 20.

<sup>56</sup> Howard, *Lazarettos*, 226.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>58</sup> Cobden, *Duty*, 17.

alcohol and liquor in prisons. Since Howard believed that idleness, immorality, ill health, riots, and financial insolvency all stemmed from excessive drinking, he commanded that “no Gaoler, Turnkey, or other servant be suffered to hold the *Tap*; or to have any connexion, concern, or interest whatever in the sale of liquors of any kind.”<sup>59</sup> To do anything less, would be “promoting drunkenness and midnight revels” in the “profligate and debauched company of both sexes.”<sup>60</sup> As long as inmates were given liquor and endless leisure time, they would fall prey to vice and disregard for Christ. To prevent this problem, Howard accompanied the removal of the taps with the business of “*reforming* criminals, and *inuring* them to habits of industry.”<sup>61</sup>

To give prisoners the tools to overcome the shocking “sloth, profaneness, and debauchery” plaguing England’s prisons, Howard commanded that “IN the debtors ward there should be day-room or kitchen; also a large *Work-shop* for such as are willing to work.”<sup>62</sup> In these workrooms (pictured on the left side of the “Plan for a County Gaol”), Howard foresaw “chair-makers, shoe-makers, &c. employed in their several trades, preserving their habit of industry; contributing to the support of their families; and lightening the burthen that by their imprisonment falls on the respective parishes.”<sup>63</sup> If prisoners could learn to replace vice with industry, they could become productive members of the community who would neither spread sin nor succumb to its effects. Because hard-work, abstaining from excess, and practicing Christian teachings led to an upright lifestyle, Howard’s recommendations could serve as a cure to moral contagion.

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<sup>59</sup> Howard, *Lazarettos*, 234-36 and Howard, *State of the Prisons*, 50.

<sup>60</sup> Howard, *State of the Prisons*, 50.

<sup>61</sup> Howard, *Lazarettos*, 226.

<sup>62</sup> Howard, *State of the Prisons*, 47.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

### *The Well-Ordered Environment*

Howard's advocacy of workshops reflects his larger belief that a well-ordered environment was "a crucible within which the moral regeneration of man might be achieved."<sup>64</sup> Just as he believed that proper prison architecture could prevent gaol fever, Howard also concluded that careful planning could eliminate moral contagion. By constructing separate wards, single cells, and chapels, Howard believed that he could create an atmosphere conducive to moral regeneration.<sup>65</sup> By describing how architecture could fulfill society's interest in preventing immorality, Howard appealed to the broad-based enlightenment belief that "environmental management, the moral economy of people and institutions, space and power" could improve man's behavior.<sup>66</sup>

Like Locke, Howard believed that man's behavior reflected his surroundings. Because man's nature, abilities, and personality were derived from interactions with his immediate area," his soul and character could be influenced by environmental change.<sup>67</sup> Thus, a prisoner thrust amongst bad fellows might catch the contagion of vice, whereas an inmate placed in a well-regulated environment might imbibe positive values. Because man's soul was mutable and sin was not predetermined, Howard rejected "the vulgar idea that our criminals are hardened and abandoned beyond all possibility of amendment."<sup>68</sup> Provided that moral quarantines and religious instruction were properly administered, Howard believed that "remedies, duly administered, would recover a large share" of "the worst cases of mental corruption."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Rod Morgan, *Divine Philanthropy*, 390.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 401.

<sup>66</sup> Porter, "Howard's Beginnings," 11.

<sup>67</sup> Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment*, Studies in European History (Atlanta Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1990), 20.

<sup>68</sup> Aikin, *John Howard*, 54.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.



In explaining how man's soul could be modified through isolation and study of the Bible, John Brewster (the Chaplain to Lord Viscount Falkland and Howard's protégé) reasoned that "When the prisoner is debarred from the Society of every person, it is likely that he will turn his thoughts upon himself." As the prisoner's mind opened, he would "have a book [i.e. the Bible] put into his hands; and as he reads and meditates on serious things, there is every reason to hope, that his heart will be corrected, and that in every respect he will become a *new man*."<sup>70</sup> In practice, this meant that a "he who was received into Gaol a man of the worst morals, may be returned into Society with a disposition to good" provided that proper environmental precautions were taken.<sup>71</sup>

### **Selling Reform to Parliament**

Though architecture held the key to reforming prisoners, Howard still had to convince Parliament to endorse his recommendations. For both bodily and moral contagion, Howard had to provide compelling reasons for Parliament to fund prison improvements. It was not enough resolution was worthwhile. Just as he invoked notions of social utility to convince Parliament to fund health measures in prisons, Howard pitched the moral reformation of prisons as a means to protect the social body. To goad Parliament into action, Howard frightened M.P.'s with the effects of unchecked moral contagion.

The first problem prisons posed to society was their tendency to aggravate criminal recidivism. Similar to his argument that untreated bodily contagion would spread from prisoners to larger society, Howard worried that criminal tendencies would migrate from inmates to hapless bystanders. When prisoners were released into larger society, their vice would spread to previously untouched individuals. Because Howard thought vice was communicable, he argued

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<sup>70</sup> John Brewster, *Sermons for Prisons* (Stockton: R. Christopher, 1790), V-XX, IX.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, IX.

that the “THE general prevalence and spread of wickedness in prisons, and abroad by the discharged prisoners, will now be easily accounted for, as the propagation of disease.”<sup>72</sup> Unless inmates were rendered innocuous before their release, inmate would spread moral pestilence throughout society. Since they left the prisons “fitted, for the perpetration of any villainy,” and ripe with the contagion of vice, inmates could readily breed a new generation of criminals.<sup>73</sup>

Not only would unreformed inmates encourage criminality, but they would also spread the disease of idleness. Having spent their prison terms, “not in hard labour, but in idleness and wicked company,” inmates would “come out fitted, for the preparation of any villainy.”<sup>74</sup> Unwilling to work, released inmates would spend their days in wickedness and rally others to the cause of debauchery. If inmates were allowed to pass on their bad habits to others, Howard worried that “an audacious spirit of profaneness and wickedness will continue to prevail in the lower class of the people in London.”<sup>75</sup> Expanding upon this scenario, Samuel Palmer warned of inmates corrupting the working poor with sin and idleness. Due to the close relationship between inmates’ level of morality and the wellbeing of society, Palmer argued that prison reform would ensure that:

The poor would be more happy and less burdensome. The industrious would live in ease; the idle and profligate would be reclaimed. Crimes would be prevented instead of being punished. Our prisons in time would scarcely need humane visitants, but would often (like some abroad) be almost empty; at least those confined in them would be there useful to the community, and not dangerous to it when discharged. Many would go out reformed, and would become good members of society.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Howard, *State of the Prisons*, 20.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 71, quoting John Fielding.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-71, quoting John Fielding.

<sup>75</sup> Howard, *Lazarettos*, 125.

<sup>76</sup> Palmer, *Patriot*, 31.

While reforming inmates might ultimately lead to productivity, reduced crime rates, and expanded social utility, prisons were slow to realize Palmer's suggestions. Because gaolers and the government did little to improve inmates' characters, confinement continued to "promote and increase the very vices it was designed to suppress. Multitudes of young creatures, committed for some trifling offense, are totally ruined ... in our prisons, those seats and seminaries (as they have been properly called) of idleness and every vice."<sup>77</sup> Far from contributing to the protection of virtue and society, prisons incubated immorality and released inmates "more fully instructed in hellish Arts, and harden'd in Villainy" upon the unsuspecting populace.<sup>78</sup>

In addition to plaguing society with violence and idleness, unreformed inmates threatened to destroy the nation by arousing Divine Wrath. If God saw England becoming overwhelmed with crime, debauchery, and blasphemy – like a modern-day Sodom or Gomorrah – He might obliterate English society. As Miles Atkinson (the Vicar of Kippax and Minister of St Pauls, Leeds) explained, God would punish public calamities with scourges, "which he makes use of to chastise nations for their sins."<sup>79</sup> Looking at the wickedness around him, Atkinson declared that the hand of God would soon be active in the world, and the complacent would suffer "punishments for their sins, or [would be] suffered to befall them in the course of his providence."<sup>80</sup> Echoing Atkinson, David Aitkin warned that "a continuance in the practice of sin, will terminate in the destruction of individuals, of states, and of nations, is as certain as if you had been informed by the voice of a prophet, or an angel of God."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Howard, *State of the Prisons*, 71, quoting John Fielding.

<sup>78</sup> *A Charitable Visit to the Prisons*, 6.

<sup>79</sup> David Atkinson, *The Necessity of a National Reformation: A Sermon Occasioned by the Present Critical State of the Nation* (Leeds: John Binns, 1779), 6.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>81</sup> Aitkin, *Reformation*, 4.

To save themselves from “The Terrors of a justly-offended Deity,” the Englishmen were commanded to mend their ways.<sup>82</sup> While the clergy reserved their harshest criticism for blatant sinners, they also railed against Christians who did not turn their neighbors from wickedness. Invoking the notion of Distributive Justice, the clergy argued that an angry God would not spare the righteous if England was destroyed. Arguing that “A whole Plantation, as well as any single Tree, is to be known by its Fruits,” William Smith (of the parish Church of the Holy Trinity in Chester) suggested that every English man would stand judgment for the sins of the fatherland.<sup>83</sup> Because each person could be punished for the sins of others, individual righteousness no longer assured Divine Favor. In the short-term, failure to spread God’s word could result in the destruction of the nation. In the long-term, those who failed to lead others to emulate Christ, would face eternal damnation. As such, Richard Grey (the Rector of Hinton and Northamptonshire) suggested that a lack of proselytism and soul-saving would leave individuals condemned “before the Judgment-Seat of *Christ*, when that Account is to be given; and how unpitied shall we depart from his Pressence (*sic.*), with a Curse, if found wanting in those Acts of Charity and Mercy...”<sup>84</sup>

To avert the spiritual and earthly destruction of an offended God, individuals had to personally “observe those laws, which the greater preserver of men has established for its defense and preservation” and support projects to turn sinners to righteousness.<sup>85</sup> Because of the perceived inadequacy of personal piety, Donna Andrew argues that “Most felt it was a time to gird ones loins, to look into the concerns of the nation, to do whatever could be done by private

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<sup>82</sup> William Smith, *National Prosperity or Adversity Dependent Upon the Virtuous or Vicious State of a Nation* (London: P. Potter, 1740), 6.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>84</sup> Richard Grey, *The Encouragement to Works of Charity and Mercy, from Christ’s Acceptance of Them as Done to Himself* (Northampton: William Dicey, 1744), 9.

<sup>85</sup> Smith. *Righteousness*, 7.

citizens or societies to turn the impending crisis into a triumph.”<sup>86</sup> Rather than waiting for God to show his anger, Englishmen took up the call to repent, turn others to righteousness, and “wipe off the reproach of sin, and not to involve ourselves in national guilt.”<sup>87</sup> To restore themselves to divine favor and keep the kingdom flourishing, Christians went about “cloathed with the bright ornaments of truth righteousness.”<sup>88</sup> To keep England free of “detestable and unnatural vice,” Christians sought to “exert our utmost endeavours entirely to suppress it, lest we provoke the Lord to wrath, and involve us in the unextinguishable burning, as he did *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*, with fir from heaven.”<sup>89</sup> In the hopes that God might hear his people, and spare the hand, devout Englishmen did their best to stamp out all the sins and iniquities that offended their Maker<sup>90</sup>

Since British readers were looking to stave off “Divine Displeasure against a wicked and impenitent people,” Howard wrote to an audience that was eager to sponsor projects of moral reformation.<sup>91</sup> By outlining inmates’ moral depravities and ungodliness, Howard played to a readership that was willing to see prisoners as a threat to England’s salvation and temporal wellbeing. To ensure that Parliament would sponsor moral reformation in prisons, Howard filtered the specter of prison reminders of England’s practical interests in preventing disease through medical concepts of contagion. To goad Parliament into action, Howard translated the powerful combination of disease imagery and pragmatism into an attack on prison immorality. Like the bodily diseases which propagated in prisons and threatened national security, vice was a pestilence carried by inmates from gaols to assize courts, the military and civil society. If such

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<sup>86</sup> Andrew, *Philanthropy*, 97.

<sup>87</sup> Smith, *Righteousness*, 9.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>90</sup> Atkinson, *Reformation*, Iii.

<sup>91</sup> Smith, *Prosperity*, 9, 7.

contagion was left untreated (by moral “quarantines” and religious intervention), society would be plagued by idleness, crime, and Divine Retribution. When Howard recast immorality from an elusive spiritual problem into a threatening disease, he made immorality an immediate problem with an implied solution (i.e. quarantine and the same medical measures used for bodily disease).

### Chapter 3: Charity and Christ, the Physician

While the first two chapters seem to confirm revisionists' theory that Howard used contagionist diction to "enforce a quarantine both moral and medical" for the sake of larger society, this chapter argues that a reading of Howard's pragmatic rhetoric must be balanced with his appeals to selfless charity. For though Howard placed prison reforms in the sphere of societal protection and self-interest, he also harkened back to older notions of benevolence and Christian duty. Like other eighteenth century reformers, Howard appeared caught in "a Janus-headed drama – looking both backward and forward."<sup>1</sup> Like other charitable movements of the Georgian Period, prison reforms agreed "fully with the ends of earlier charities" but also "began to look for new, more efficient methods to achieve those ends."<sup>2</sup> In their quest to maximize the benefits of charity, reformers began to appeal to a variety of impulses. As reformers looked backward (to the Christian ideal of selfless benevolence) and forward (to social utility and political pragmatism), they came to believe that achieving the ends of charity was more important than recruiting donors with humanitarian intentions. In the extreme, the ends of charity justified all means of obtaining it. As a result, Christian reformers tempered their idealism and recommended charity as having specific benefits to the nation and to the donor.<sup>3</sup> Yet, as Lisbeth Haakonssen has pointed out, although "the religion (of Christianity) was an increasingly pragmatic one, it was nevertheless still concerned with the benefits of the hereafter" and the benevolent call to "active religious duty."<sup>4</sup>

The suggestion that pragmatism and benevolence coexisted in eighteenth century reform movements is borne out by Howard's work. For although Howard framed medical imagery and

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew, *Philanthropy*, 74.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>4</sup> Lisbeth Haakonssen, *Medicine and Morals in the Enlightenment: John Gregory, Thomas Percival and Benjamin Rush*, The Wellcome Institute Series in the History of Medicine (Roldolfi: Amsterdam, 1997), 116.

calls for prison reform in a pragmatic light, he also invoked philanthropic arguments in favor of prison reform. Accordingly, The State of the Prisons contains numerous appeals to benevolence. To generate wide humanitarian support for his moral reforms, Howard cast prison improvements as the fulfillment of evangelicalism and Christian benevolence. At the same time, Howard bolstered support for disease prevention by suggesting that physicians should cure prison disease in accordance with Christian duty and Enlightenment benevolence.

### **Love Thy Neighbor: A Call to Charity**

To drum up Christian support for his reforms, Howard linked improvements in inmates' bodily and spiritual wellbeing with religious altruism. Howard could reasonably believe that such appeals to benevolence could inspire changes in prisons because Christian charity was a powerful force in eighteenth century England. During this period, Christians believed that compassion was a duty second only to devotion to God; for the Bible commanded that "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law..."<sup>5</sup> Because following God's will was part and parcel of being a Good Christian, loving thy neighbor through charity came to represent "an act of devotion involving the giver and God; it was a demonstration of the sincere believer's faith in Providence."<sup>6</sup> According to Isaac Barrow (the Master of Trinity College in Cambridge), the connection between philanthropy and religiosity was such that:

... in many respects charity doth resemble piety: ... it doth grow from the same roots and principles of benignity, ingenuity, equity, gratitude,

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<sup>5</sup> Matt. 22. 37- 40 (King James Version)

For similar commands to "love thy neighbor," see Lev. 19.18 and Matt. 5.43.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew, *Philanthropy*, 15.



planted in our original constitution by the breath of God, and improved in our hearts by the divine *spirit of love*; it produceth like fruits of beneficence toward others and of comfort in our selves; it in like manner doth assimilate us to God, rendring (*sic.*) us comfortable to his nature, followers of his practice, and partakers of his felicity...<sup>7</sup>

Religious scholars, like Barrow, suggested that charity was a means of pleasing God (“rendring us comfortable to his nature”), following His will, and imitating the benignity of the Saviour. To truly follow God’s command to act charitably, Christians were supposed to empathize with the suffering of others and to selflessly attend to the spiritual and physical needs of their neighbors. In commiserating with his fellow man, the good Christian would become morally outraged and incited to acts of benevolence. “Thus any calamity or misfortune befalling his neighbor doth raise distasteful regret and commiseration in a charitable soul.”<sup>8</sup> Whether a man’s “misfortune” was the spiritual affliction of disbelief and immorality or the bodily suffering, the Christian was implored to “take his concerns as our own.”<sup>9</sup>

While all men were entitled to Christian empathy, prisoners had special claims to compassion. Based on the Book of Matthew, God had marked the hungry, the poor, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner as important objects of charity.<sup>10</sup> As such, ministers exhorted their congregations “to think upon those who languish in solitary dungeon, deprived of the light of heaven, and the agreeable conversation of friends, and contribute to their

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<sup>7</sup> Isaac Barrow, “Sermon XXV: Love Thy Neighbor,” in *The Works of the Learned Isaac Barrow*, 1<sup>st</sup> of 3 volumes, 5<sup>th</sup> ed (London: A. Millar, 1741), 240.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>10</sup> “And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.” Matt. 25. 32 – 36 (King James Version).

relief.”<sup>11</sup> Even if prisoners were known to have committed crimes, they still deserved sympathy as being part of the Christian brethren. In explaining Christians’ obligations to prisoners, Samuel Seyer (a Fellow of the Pembroke College of Oxford and the Master of the Free Grammar School in Bristol) argued that:

the poor, the sick, the naked, and the stranger are in a peculiar manner related to him: related to him (Jesus Christ) by the common benefit of Christianity, and also being like him in outward circumstances...on purpose, as it seems, to recommend his distressed brethren to the compassionate regard of his followers, and to give them the comfortable assurance, that they have a claim to relief from all who name the Name of Christ.<sup>12</sup>

In Seyer’s vision, the Bible directed all Christians to “regard mankind, especially the wretched and the afflicted, as the representative of the LORD, to whom we are under infinite obligations.”<sup>13</sup>

Seyer was not alone in believing that prisoners had a special relationship with Christ and deserved at least as much charity as the rest of the Christian brethren. For example, Richard Grey (the Rector of Hinton and Northamptonshire) argued that because: “our Blessed Lord is *not ashamed to call them Brethren*,” “the *Hungry and Thirsty, the Stranger and the Naked, the Sick and the Imprisoned*: -- Some of the lowest and most miserable Part of Mankind... upon the account of that very Want and Wretchedness...most strongly plead for Compassion and Relief.”<sup>14</sup> Even if good Christians differed in outward circumstances from criminals, they were nevertheless “Children of One Common Father...Brethren by *Creation*, and yet so by

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<sup>11</sup> Aitkin, *Reformation*, 27.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Seyer, *Christian Benevolence Recommended Upon Christian Principles* (Bristol: T. Cadell, 1755), 5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Grey. *The Encouragement to Works of Charity and Mercy, from Christ’s Acceptance of them as Done to Himself*. (Northampton: William Dicey, 1744). 3-4.

*Redemption.*”<sup>15</sup> Expanding upon these sentiments, Isaac Barrow argued that “the blood of Christ hath cemented mankind; the favour of God embracing all hath approximated and combined all together, so that now every man is our brother, not only by nature, as derived from the same stock, but by grace, as partaker of the common redemption: Now God *desiring the salvation of all men*, and inviting all men to mercy, our duty must be co-extended with God’s grace, and our charity must follow that of our savior.”<sup>16</sup> In a world where everyone was part of a common humanity (where every man was a brother and all were liable to sin), it was only proper that “every man so weak, so vile, so wretched, so guilty of sin and subject to misery” was deserving of the same compassion as the rest of society.<sup>17</sup>

While extending benevolence to prisoners could aid the public good (as shown in Chapters 1 and 2), Christian reformers argued that charity should extend from a selfless love of God and man. Instead of begrudgingly practicing benevolence to further his own interest, the good Christian would become “a voluntary servant and gladly will stoop to any employment for which the need, or considerable benefit of him whom he loveth doth call.”<sup>18</sup> Like Jesus, good Christians were not supposed to act charitably for personal benefit, but out of devotion to God and their fellow man. For, true charity “recommendeth the imitation of God’s love and bounty, which are absolutely pure, without any regard, any capacity of benefit resounding to himself.”<sup>19</sup> Expanding upon this viewpoint, Boyd Hilton suggests that “Evangelicals were adamant that virtuous action must be spontaneous, that there was no ethical value in doing good by command.”<sup>20</sup> To “betoken a right state of heart and mind,” charity had to proceed from a careful

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<sup>15</sup> Grey, *Encouragement*, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Barrow, *Love Thy Neighbor*, 241.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>18</sup> Isaac Barrow, “Sermon XXVII: The Nature, Properties and Acts of Charity” in *The Works of the Learned Isaac Barrow*, 1<sup>st</sup> of 3 volumes, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: A. Millar, 1741), 263.

<sup>19</sup> Barrow, *Love Thy Neighbor*, 246.

<sup>20</sup> Hilton, *Atonement*, 32.

consideration of the needs of others instead of a distasteful consideration of personal benefit.<sup>21</sup> To be pure, the voluntary impulse to help prisoners would arise from imitation of Christ's compassion towards the lowly; the love "which prompts him to inform the ignorant, enlighten his understanding, and lead him in the way of Righteousness; induces him to feed the hungry, cloath the naked, and pour the balm of comfort into the bosom of wretchedness and affliction."<sup>22</sup> With mercy and devotion in their hearts, Christians could not help but ease the pain of others.

Even though society might not believe prisoners were worthy of sympathy, Wesley argued that Good Christian should be "angry at sin while He is grieved at the sinner. He feels a displacency at every sin against God, but only tender compassion to the offender."<sup>23</sup> "While we hold their crimes in detestation, we are not permitted to indulge resentment against their persons."<sup>24</sup> Instead of judging and placing themselves above sinful prisoners, Christians should pity their immoral actions and hardships. Even if prisoners harm society and "dishonor and wrong their maker, to provoke his anger, and incur his anger" by committing crimes, Christians should behave compassionately towards inmates. Instead of dwelling on how criminals have wronged them, Christians should concentrate on repairing the relationship between God and sinner so that the criminal will not "endamage their spiritual estate, to endanger the loss of their souls, to discost from their happiness, and run into eternal ruin..."<sup>25</sup>

In addition to responding to prisoners' weakened spiritual state, Christians were taught to empathize with inmates' bodily inflictions. Thus, a good Christian could not see a sick inmate "sprawling on the ground, weltring (*sic.*) in his blood, with gaping wounds, gasping for breath,

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 103, 50.

<sup>22</sup> George Laughton, *Righteousness the Certain Foundation of National Security, Reputation, and Happiness* (London: B. Lane, 1773), 4.

<sup>23</sup> Wesley, *Plain Account*, 19.

<sup>24</sup> Aitkin, *Reformation*, 27.

<sup>25</sup> Barrow, "Properties and Acts of Charity," 258.

without compassion?”<sup>26</sup> Such scenes of misery would “touch the heart of a charitable man, and stir his bowels with compassionate anguish.”<sup>27</sup> So great would Christians’ empathy be, that “good men in this world cannot live in any briskness or mirth or height of jollity, their won enjoyments being tempered by the discontents of others, the continual obvious spectacles of sorrow and sin damping their pleasures, and quashing excessive transports of joy: For who could enjoy himself in a hospital, in a prison, or in a charnel?”<sup>28</sup> By asking this rhetorical question, Barrow posited the idea that Christians must love their neighbors strongly enough to empathize with and relieve their afflictions. For, “Loving our neighbor doth imply a sincere and earnest desire of his welfare and good of all kinds... We should tender his health, his safety, his quiet, his reputation, his wealth, his prosperity in all respects; but especially with peculiar ardency we should desire his final welfare, and the happiness of his soul...”<sup>29</sup>

### *The Lost Sheep*

While prisoners deserved at least as much benevolence as free men, there were circumstances where prisoners merited more charity than other groups. Because prisoners were outcasts from society and often plagued with bodily affliction, they held the special status of “lost sheep” and the sick. Since many prisoners had broken the law and strayed from the path of righteousness, Christians had a special mandate to make prisoners repent. As the Tory High Churchman, Francis Atterbury (the Lord Bishop of Rochester and the Dean of Westminster), argued, “Those of the first Rank and Wickedness, the Worst and most Hardened of Men” should be the prime targets of charity and religious instruction because “*Their* Revolt from Sin to Virtue (if it can be

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>29</sup> Barrow, *Love Thy Neighbor*, 256.

compassed) will be a mighty Consequence to Religion.”<sup>30</sup> If the Good Christian became practiced “the kind Offices of *Visiting the Sick and Imprisoned, Cloathing the Naked, and relieving the Hungry,*” he would open the prisoners’ heart to righteousness and “probably draw whole Troops of Common Sinners along with it.”<sup>31</sup>

Even if a Christian only succeeded in opening one heart to righteousness, his actions would be pleasing to God. While God wanted all men to repent, He was especially interested in having wayward Christians return to the fold. Based on the Parable of the Lost Sheep, the good Christian knew that “there would “be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not repent.”<sup>32</sup> Instead of shepherding good Christians further down the path of righteousness, Christians should seek out the wayward. Together with the Prodigal Son and the Lost Coin, the Lost Sheep Parable reminded Christians that the Savior had “more Joy over a poor Soul which has left him, and over the World which was lost but is now found through his Redemption, than over all those Spirits who kept their first Estate...”<sup>33</sup> Because God was anxious to see His sheep wandering home to him, Christians had a special duty to ensure that inmates, and other lost souls, returned to the church.

In addition to providing an imperative for good Christians to bring people to the Church, the Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Prodigal Son suggested that sinners should be treated with compassion. Instead of force-marching prisoners back to God and treating them with contempt,

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<sup>30</sup> Francis Atterbury, “The Power of Charity to Cover Sin” in *Sermons and Discourses on Several Subjects and Occasions*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (1694; repr., London: L. Davis, 1766), Volume 1 of 4: 45.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 45; Whitefield, *Almost Christian*, 45.

<sup>32</sup> Derived from the Parable of the Lost Sheep, Luke 15.3-7 (King James Version):

“[3] Then Jesus told them this parable: [4] ‘Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? [5] And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders [6] and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ [7] I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

<sup>33</sup> John Cennick, *The Lost Sheep, Piece of Silver, and Prodigal Son*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1750 repr., London: M. Lewis, 1770), 12.

For the Parable of the Prodigal Son, see Luke 15:11-32. For the Parable of the Lost Coin, see Luke 15:8-10

Good Christians were taught to guide sinners gently to faith through good example and benevolence. Because all people were vulnerable to sin, devout Christians were made to substitute judgment for kindness. Because there was an essential sameness between the criminal in prison and Good Christians, reformers were not supposed to give prisoners up for lost or to disparage their fallen state. Given that people were inherently sinful and apt to fall into wickedness without constant vigilance, everyone merited spiritual rebirth and a chance at forgiveness. As such, evangelicals were supposed to greet their wandering brethren with outstretched arms instead of disdain. For, just as God looked after the Prodigal Son, had compassion on him, and pitied “*him as a Father pities his son,*” Christians were embrace sinners.<sup>34</sup> “As a Father meets his only Child whom he bewailed as dead, or give over for lost, and falls upon his Neck and kisses him,” so Christians were supposed to love those who “don’t at first discern the *Lord.*”<sup>35</sup>

### ***Howard and the Charitable Impulse***

Such Christian ideals of selflessness, compassion, and duty to help prisoners were not lost on John Howard. In *The State of the Prisons*, Howard sympathized with Reverend Aitkin’s view that “We are naturally taught to respect the unfortunate.”<sup>36</sup> Just as Aiken believed that lost sheep had “a claim upon our sympathy as men and as brethren,”<sup>37</sup> so Howard held that prisoners were “*men,* and by men they ought to be treated as men.”<sup>38</sup> As such, Howard argued that prisoners should receive humane treatment and Christian compassion. In response to arguments

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<sup>34</sup> Cennick *Lost Sheep*, 19.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>36</sup> Aitkin. *Reformation*, 27.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>38</sup> Howard, *The State of the Prisons*, 23.

that prisoners were sinners who deserved poor living conditions, Howard argued that society should show mercy towards its lowliest members. In Howard's words:

THOSE gentleman who, when they are told of the misery which our prisoners suffer, content themselves with saying, *Let them take care to keep out*, prefaced perhaps, with an angry prayer, seem not duly sensible of the favour of Providence which distinguishes them from the sufferers: they do not remember that we are required to imitate our gracious Heavenly Parent, who is '*kind to the unthankful and the evil*.'<sup>39</sup>

Instead of looking upon prisoners with scorn, Howard argued that good Christians should show consideration towards those less fortunate than themselves.

This Christian sympathy motivated Howard so strongly that it became the impetus for The State of the Prisons. According to Howard, "I could not enjoy my ease and leisure in the neglect of the opportunity offered me by Providence of attempting the relief of the miserable. The attention of Parliament to the subject, led me to conclude that some additional labour would not be lost; and I extended my plan."<sup>40</sup> Like the Christians who could not "live in any briskness or mirth" while their brethren suffered, Howard could not rest until he improved the lives of his fellow man.<sup>41</sup> From Howard's perspective, the "irregularities, the sources of misery, disease and wickedness" in prisons could not be lightly ignored by Christians "celebrated for good sense and humanity."<sup>42</sup> Rather than letting prisoners suffer, Howard acted on "a benevolent principle, which without waiting for duty to incite, or reason to approve, inclines us by an involuntary emotion to relieve the distresses of our fellow-creatures, and gives us the purest and most

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>41</sup> Barrow, "Properties and Acts of Charity," 259.

<sup>42</sup> Howard, *The State of the Prisons*, 21.



sensible pleasure for our reward.”<sup>43</sup> Lest anyone accuse him of self-interest, Howard contended that his motives for prison reform were entirely philanthropic. Responding to claims that he improved prison conditions on “the selfish motive of avoiding danger *to our own health*, in attending courts of judicature,” Howard argued that he was driven by “the *liberal and humane* spirit which engages the public to alleviate the sufferings of prisoners in general.”<sup>44</sup>

### **Howard’s Reforms: The Fulfillment of Benevolence**

Taking Howard’s rhetoric at face value leads us to conclude that Howard acted out of charitable impulses. However, the question remains whether Howard’s professed good intentions translated into altruistic actions. If applied, could Howard’s recommendations for health and moral reforms improve inmates’ lives? Did contemporaries see Howard’s suggestions as logical and altruistic ways to help prisoners? To answer these questions, I will analyze Howard’s reforms through Christian and secular definitions of charitable action. On the first front, I will argue that Howard’s reforms satisfied Christian goals of charity because Howard gave prisoners the gift of God’s love and alleviating their spiritual and bodily afflictions. At the same time, Howard met secular, medical standards of charity by healing patients and treating them with compassion.

#### ***Christian Benevolence***

The first way that Howard helped prisoners was by saving them from God’s wrath. According to the evangelical sentiment of the time, the Hand of God was active in the world and sinners would face eternal damnation. Unless drunken, idle, and lascivious inmates were put on the path of

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<sup>43</sup> John Aikin, *Thoughts on Hospitals, with a Letter to the Author by Thomas Percival* (London, 1777), 5.

<sup>44</sup> Howard, *Lazarettos*, 233.

righteousness, they would suffer divine punishment. By providing prisoners with Bibles, workshops, and an abstemious lifestyle, Howard saved prisoners from “the danger of being sent to the Prison of Hell.”<sup>45</sup> Because “Every Sin deserves no less than eternal Punishment in Hell,” unreformed inmates were liable to pay for their sins with “Death Eternal.”<sup>46</sup> Just as God smote down evil nations, He ensured that “a continuance in the practice of sin, will terminate in the destruction of individuals.... Think not that the Almighty slumbereth upon his throne. His eye continually vieweth the inhabitants of the earth. He pondereth their ways. He marketh the conduct of those that rule, and those that obey. His arm is lifted up to punish his adversaries.”<sup>47</sup> If God’s vengeful arm fell upon inmates, the unrepentant would face an eternity in Hell where “No demission of pain, no intermission of sense, no permission of comfort” could be enjoined.<sup>48</sup> In the afterlife, sinners would face a “furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” and would “drink of the wine of God’s anger that has been mixed undiluted in the cup of his wrath, and he will be tortured with fire and sulfur...”<sup>49</sup> Rather than relegate inmates to an afterlife where “the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever and they have no rest day and night,” Howard provided prisoners with the means to repent and save themselves.<sup>50</sup>

Unlike those Christians who believed that damnation was predetermined, Howard ascribed to the moderate Calvinist and evangelical belief that repentance could lead to progressive salvation and avoidance of Hell. According to both Boyd Hilton and Michael Ignatieff, Howard believed that “men could be changed by awakening their consciousness to

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<sup>45</sup> *A Charitable Visit to the Prisons*, 24.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

This passage draws from Romans 6:23 (King James Version), which declares that “For the wages of sin is death.”

<sup>47</sup> Aitkin, *Reformation*, 4-6.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Younge, *A Serious and Pathetical Description of Heaven and Hell* (London: Christ’s Hospital, 1776), 6.

<sup>49</sup> Matt.13.50 (King James Version); Rev. 14.10 (King James Version).

<sup>50</sup> Rev. 14.11 (King James Version).

sin.”<sup>51</sup> To achieve the redemption of individual sinners, evangelicals exerted “moral suasion and the offer of a hopeful Gospel, within a context of spiritual terror.”<sup>52</sup> To inspire hope, evangelicals reminded sinners that God’s love and forgiveness were freely offered to those who believed.<sup>53</sup> Provided that they showed “enthusiasm for the Cross” and mended their ways, men could gradually improve their spiritual state until they were worthy of God’s grace.<sup>54</sup> Thus, prisoners who atoned for their sins stood to gain spiritual rewards. By contrast, those who failed to repent would feel the wrath of an angry God. As such, evangelicals accompanied the carrot of divine grace with the stick of “spiritual terror.” To induce good behavior, evangelicals reminded inmates that providence acted in a rational way and that God would predictable visit punishment on those who violated his moral laws.<sup>55</sup> Because “suffering was the logical consequence of specifically bad behavior,” inmates had to mend their ways if they wanted to avoid damnation and hardship.<sup>56</sup>

Not only did repentance save inmates’ souls in the long-run, but Howard’s reforms also alleviated their earthly suffering. By encouraging inmates to lead upright lives, Howard lessened their bodily and spiritual turmoil. Although the link between Providence and illness had weakened by Howard’s time, Roy Porter contends that sickness was still “regarded as the finger of Providence” smiting down the ungodly.<sup>57</sup> Like the plagues “hurled against the Egyptians” and peoples of the Bible, the diseases raging across eighteenth century England were interpreted as “a reminder of Divine Wrath, and a warning to the wicked to mend their ways...”<sup>58</sup> Throughout

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<sup>51</sup> Hilton, *Atonement*, 216, citing Ignatieff, *Just Measure*, 57, 66-67 .

<sup>52</sup> Hilton, *Atonement*, 98.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, 10.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>57</sup> Roy Porter, *Disease Medicine and Society in England: 1550-1860*, Studies in Economic and Social History (London: MacMillan, 1987), 27-28.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

Howard's lifetime, people believed that "All bodily diseases are the handy-work of God" and "He is the author of plagues, agues, consumptions and all bodily diseases."<sup>59</sup> Since diseases arose from God's outrage toward immorality, ministers argued that "Sin is a sickness that is the cause of all other sickness. All bodily disease comes from this disease... A distempered soul is the true cause of a distempered body. Sin was the first disease that ever was in the world, and the cause of all that ever followed."<sup>60</sup>

The assumption that God alone could inflict or cure disease created in "Christian thought and practice a close affinity between saving souls and healing bodies"<sup>61</sup> According to David Harley, "The analogy between bodily and spiritual healing was carefully elaborated by English divines, who depicted themselves as surgeons, apothecaries, and physicians of the soul, although only under Christ, of course..."<sup>62</sup> Because "'Christ our medicine' healed the griefs of sinners," and restored the sick to health, Christians were obligated to deliver patients to God's saving grace and emulate Christ by medically healing patients.<sup>63</sup>

Taking up the first call, Howard tried to spur prisoners to righteousness so they could seek Christ's protection from illness. Through church services, solitary reflection, and imposed abstemiousness, Howard helped inmates clean up their lives and become worthy of Christ – the "Physician to the body, as well as the soul," who "heals the sore of the outward man, as well as of the inward man."<sup>64</sup> Once they became good Christians, inmates would be protected by "he [who] not only saves our souls by *forgiving their iniquities*, but succors our bodies likewise by

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<sup>59</sup> James Scot, "Discourse IX: Sin the Disease, and Christ the Physician of Souls" in *A Collection of Sermons of Various and Important Subjects* (Edinburgh: John Gray, 1774), 306.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

<sup>61</sup> Lindemann, *Medicine and Society*, 207.

<sup>62</sup> David N. Harley, "Medical Metaphors in English Moral Theology, 1560-1660," *The Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 48 (Oct. 1993), 401.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 400.

<sup>64</sup> Scot, "Discourse IX," 313.

*healing all their diseases.*”<sup>65</sup> By placing inmates under God’s protection, Howard offered them the gift of health. Just as he practiced charity by saving inmates from eternal damnation, Howard used his moral reforms to save them from disease.

Howard’s moral reforms can be seen as altruistic, because they provided the means for inmates to escape devastating diseases like the gaol fever. Given the assumed link between morality and health, Howard’s reforms safeguarded inmates from “expiring on the floors, in loathsome cells, of pestilential fevers” like their unreformed counterparts.<sup>66</sup> With God’s grace, inmates could escape the horrifying dementia, weakness, and nausea of gaol fever. Rather than waiting to be struck with disease by the Hand of God, reformed inmates could look forward to a life of health and a pleasant afterlife.

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### ***Medical Benevolence***

In addition to offering Christ’s protection to inmates, Howard also alleviated their suffering by actively healing inmates. Just as Christ healed the blind, the lepers, and the deaf in the Bible, Howard set about curing the sick. Through medical quarantines, healthy food, and improved ventilation, Howard helped inmates withstand sickness. By combining these earthly barriers to disease with religious measures, Howard increased inmates’ chances of survival. Although combining scientifically-inspired cures with religion may seem ideologically inconsistent, “few people thought that medicine and the Divine will were at odds.”<sup>67</sup> During Howard’s time, religious and medical cures to disease were not mutually exclusive, but part of a holistic approach for treating disease. Physicians and clergy agreed that caregivers had to preserve the patient’s body to protect the soul (“for it housed the immortal soul, and to neglect that duty

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<sup>65</sup> John Jackson, *God’s Benefits to Mankind, in Healing all Their Diseases*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: James Leake, 1728), 6.

<sup>66</sup> Howard, *State of the Prisons*, 7.

<sup>67</sup> Porter, *Disease Medicine and Society*, 28.

affected the soul's spiritual health") and nurture the soul to protect the body (from diseases imparted by a wrathful God).<sup>68</sup> Because "The separation of functions – between medicine and religion, and between lay and religious practitioners – occurred only slowly," eighteenth century physicians and clergy encouraged patients to accompany medical treatment with prayer and supplication.<sup>69</sup>

The blurring between religious and medical regimens was partly due to the overlap in the duties of clergy and physicians. In the eighteenth century, the clergy were expected to take on aspects of the physician (such as his healing powers), while physicians were supposed to adopt characteristics of the clergy (such as charitableness and religiosity). Eighteenth century physicians assimilated Christian ideals because they believed that doctors and the clergy "were almost exactly homologous, both being appointed by God for the welfare of humanity, both healing only under the providence of God."<sup>70</sup> The duties of both professions were entwined that it was "inconceivable to them [physicians] that science could progress unless the scientist-physician possessed...moral as well as intellectual virtues."<sup>71</sup> Even if a doctor was well-versed in secular, scientific theories of disease, he could not become a good physician unless he became "God's minister to the human body."<sup>72</sup> To excel in his profession, a physician had to combine his medical training with Christian ethics; melding "the virtues of the 'rational' physician with those of 'the man of feeling.'"<sup>73</sup>

To fulfill their medical calling, good physicians extended Christian benevolence and compassion to their patients. Because all patients were "Equal in the eyes God," virtuous

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<sup>68</sup> Andrew Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550-1680* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 31.

<sup>69</sup> Lindemann, *Medicine and Society*, 208-209.

<sup>70</sup> Harley, *Medical Metaphors*, 404.

<sup>71</sup> Haakonssen, *Medicine and Morals*, 27.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

physicians owed the same moral duties to rich and poor, godly and ungodly, free and imprisoned.<sup>74</sup> Instead of discriminating against ostracized groups, physicians had a moral duty to treat whoever it was in their power to cure.<sup>75</sup> This imperative to cure illness stemmed from a religious obligation to imitate Christ's selfless healing of the sick and to protection of God's creation. Because Christ the Physician went about doing good through "the compassion he so often shew'd to mens distres'd bodies, whilst he was on earth," Christ's followers also had a duty to show compassion to the sick.<sup>76</sup> Righteous physicians were obligated to heal the sick because "it can hardly consist with God's fatherly tenderness and compassion to his creatures, to leave mankind languishing and pining away in their diseases."<sup>77</sup> Because God showed compassion toward the sick, physicians were also obligated to act on "that sensibility of heart which makes us feel for the distress of our fellow creatures, and which of consequences incites us in the most powerful method to relieve them."<sup>78</sup>

Even in the realm of science, the religious image of Christ the physician provided a powerful example for how sickness should be addressed. Because ministers powerfully employed medical imagery to describe the healing power of Christ, they were able to shape the practice of charity in the medical community. Through the image of Christ as a man and a physician, "the preachers formulated a Christian ideal of medical practice to stand alongside the pagan ideals of Hippocrates and Galen."<sup>79</sup> Because the medical profession lacked an extensive ethical code of its own, physicians adopted Christ's teachings as their own, and Christian medical ethics became an Enlightenment ideal. Like Christ the Physician, medical professionals

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 163

<sup>76</sup> Jackson, *God's Benefits*, 8.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>78</sup> John Gregory, *Observations on the Duties and Offices of a Physician* (London: W. Strahan, 1770), 18.

<sup>79</sup> Harley, *Medical Metaphors*, 434.

began to espouse the value of selfless healing and medical altruism. Thus, in works like the Observations on the Duties and Offices of a Physician (the first secular book of medical ethics written in the English language), special attention was paid to alleviating human suffering. In Observations, John Gregory reminded fellow physicians that because “A physician has numberless opportunities of giving that relief of distress which the wealth of India could not purchase,” he should act on opportunities for “displaying patience, good nature, generosity, compassion, and all the gentler virtues that do honour to human nature.”<sup>80</sup> Likewise, Gregory William Stukeley (an M.D. and Fellow of the Royal College) claimed that physicians had a special duty to alleviate suffering. Because God gave man the knowledge of how to cure diseases, Dr. Stukeley argued before the Royal College of Physicians, that doctors should “imitate then, my beloved brethren, the greater founder of our religion.”<sup>81</sup> Since God had imparted knowledge of healing (“the greatest gift, the most consummate blessing that God can bestow upon us mortals”) upon physicians, each doctor was obligated “toward healing the moral disease of his patient, as well as the natural.”<sup>82</sup>

In addition to having religious reasons to cure patients, physicians were also bound by Enlightenment concepts of benevolence. While the Enlightenment created the sense that physicians and legislators should advance social utility, it also suggested that men of influence should aid individuals. On the basis of a common humanity between all men, every member of the secular brethren deserved sympathy. Based on this enlightened concept of benevolence, it was the duty of society to increase the happiness of its members. Furthering the well-being of society “consisted in maximizing individual pleasure and minimizing pain” and compelling the

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<sup>80</sup> Gregory, *Observations*, 7.

<sup>81</sup> William Stukeley, *The Healing of Diseases, A Character of the Messiah* (London: C. Corbet, 1750), 21.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, 18.



government to “ensure the welfare of all, each person counting equally...”<sup>83</sup> Thus, as a member of society, a prisoner was entitled certain protections from pain and suffering. Especially since prisoners held at gaol were presumed innocent before being arraigned at assize, it was considered – by both evangelicals and enlightenment thinkers – an unnecessary cruelty to subject inmates to preventable disease and spiritual hardship.

### *Contemporary Perceptions of Howard’s Benevolence*

Because Howard wrote in the vein of enlightened, medical ethicists (who called for compassion toward the sick) and religious leaders (who called for saving sinners’ bodies and souls), his work had broad-based appeal. As a call for altruism, The State of the Prisons appealed to a wide audience because it employed the rhetoric of both the Enlightenment and the Evangelical Revival. Capturing the ideals of two powerful movements, Howard drummed up scientific outrage against prison conditions on one page, and issued call for salvation on the next. If Howard couldn’t affect change by appealing to Parliament’s ethical scruples, he could appeal to their religiosity. If Howard couldn’t convince the Christian M.Ps. to save inmates’ souls, he might stir the conscience of Parliament’s gentleman-scientists into saving prisoners from gaol fever.

Just as he hedged his bets by appealing to Parliament’s pragmatic and benevolent tendencies, Howard increased his odds of achieving reforms by finding secular *and* religious reasons to support altruism in prisons. Since, the eighteenth century “spirit of reform was not only due to scientific zeal but also propelled by the call to active religious duty,” Howard’s success depended on invoking the medical ideal of saving bodies and the religious call to save

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 416.

souls.<sup>84</sup> Commenting on Howard's dual appeal to charity, men like Samuel Palmer (a lawyer and Fellow of the Royal Society) saw Howard's reforms as having scientific and religious benefits. Not only were Howard's recommendations "works of mercy performed on the BODIES of men," but they were "emblems of the greater blessings which he communicated on their SOULS."<sup>85</sup> Because Howard proposed reforms which furthered medical and spiritual charity, Samuel Stennet (the pastor of Howard's church) lauded Howard for "doing good – good both to the *Souls* and the *Bodies* of men."<sup>86</sup> Howard's reforms followed the medical call to "rescue the bodies of men" and the religious imperative of "insisting on the necessity of moral change, or of the 'New Birth.'"<sup>87</sup> As a Christian, Howard went about doing "good to all sorts of men, high and low, rich and poor, young and old, persons of every description" because he "would not suffer their souls to remain under his [the Devil's] dominion."<sup>88</sup> As a "compassionate physician," Howard entered "those dreary mansions of silence and darkness, and, in some instances, of cruel oppression; poured tears of commiseration on the wretched inhabitant; and with his own hand ministered assistance..."<sup>89</sup>

In short, contemporaries were convinced that Howard took up the religious charitable office of soul-saving and the medical duty to healing and empathizing with inmates. In his calls to heal the diseased and the soul-sick, Howard occupied the rhetorical role of the compassionate physician and the disciple of Christ the Physician of the Soul. Through his protestation of charitable impulses, his recommendations to improve inmates' lives, and his personal ministrations of afflicted prisoners, Howard served as a symbol of altruism to his contemporaries.

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<sup>84</sup> Haakonssen, *Medicine and Morals in the Enlightenment*, 116.

<sup>85</sup> Palmer, *Patriot*, 3.

<sup>86</sup> Samuel Stennet, *A Sermon Occasioned by the Decease of John Howard* (London: T. Cadell, 1790), 3.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, 4.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 3.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 27-28.

## CONCLUSION

Although a critical reading of The State of the Prisons shows that Howard's appeals to altruism were coupled with pragmatic motivations for reform, it would be short-sighted to dismiss the altruistic side of Howard's rhetorical appeal. Based on contemporary understanding of charity, Howard's recommendations could easily be interpreted as the fulfillment of benevolence. In recommending services such as protecting inmates from typhoid and Divine Judgment, Howard offered prisoners the largesse of medical and religious charity. Because prisoners stood to benefit from prison reforms, The State of the Prisons is partially a work of philanthropy. Yet, we cannot ignore the ways in which Howard argued that prison reform could benefit people living outside prison walls. Throughout The State of the Prisons, Howard gives self-interested reasons for readers to help prisoners. Because unreformed prisons posed threats of disease, crime, and divine punishment to society, Parliament had pragmatic reasons to promote healthy living, religiosity, and discipline in prisons. Because Howard's rhetoric provides opposing ideological reasons to reform prisons, it is inappropriate to paint Howard as entirely philanthropic or completely self-interested. Rather, the mixed rhetoric The State of the Prisons calls for a more complicated reading of the author.

While it is impossible to determine whether Howard personally privileged humanitarianism over social utility, his writing reflects a general trend among reformers to appeal to many viewpoints as possible. Writing in a time of conflation between the humanitarianism of the Evangelical Revival and the rational self-interest of the Enlightenment, Howard pinned his advocacy to both movements. By mixing the rhetoric of altruism and pragmatism, Howard joined the "Janus-headed drama" of reformers who were looking backward to an era of religious benevolence and forward to an age of self-interest and public utility.

Howard's writing bears out the idea that though strands of benevolence and piety were present in eighteenth century reforms, the utilitarian thread "was so tightly interwoven with the others to be hardly distinguishable."<sup>1</sup> And while reformers like Howard might have been "impelled to relieve distress, and according to their lights, to right wrongs," they tended to stress a philanthropy that was "genuinely humanitarian and even sacrificial at center... [but] shading off toward the circumference into the increasingly sentimental and self-regarding."<sup>2</sup> In creating charities with dual appeal, reformers did not "deny the religious value of [giving], but added the social and practical value, the private- and public-interest aspects."<sup>3</sup>

The fact that Howard's writing returned to the center of humanitarian thought, but also explored self-regarding reasons for prison reform is significant for several reasons. First, as previously stated, the acknowledgment of Howard's mixed rhetoric complicates our understanding of Howard as an important historical figure. Second, it suggests that prison reform – like poor relief and the dispensary movement – was locked in the late eighteenth century "Janus-headed drama" of changing motivations for charity. Given that Howard was a leading voice in the prison reform movement, his style of argumentation may reflect a period of change or uncertainty among activists as to the best way to promote prison reforms. Lastly, Howard's mixed rhetoric provides some insight into Parliament's reaction to *The State of the Prisons* and the prison legislation passed at the end of the eighteenth century.

In the immediate aftermath of the publication of *The State of the Prisons*, Parliament moved to reform prison conditions along the lines suggested by Howard. For example, Parliament improved enforcement of the Act for Preserving the Health of Prisoners in Gaol and

<sup>1</sup> David Owen, *English Philanthropy 1660-1960* (Cambridge: Belknap-Harvard University Press, 1964), 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 14/

<sup>3</sup> Andrew, *Philanthropy*, 20.

Preventing the Gaol Distemper.<sup>4</sup> This Act required justices of the peace to install ventilators in prisons, bathe inmates' clothes and bodies, eliminate underground cells, and construct two infirmaries and isolation wards in each prison. While Howard had encouraged Alexander Popham to introduce this legislation in 1774, gaolers were slow to act on the recommendations. However, by 1779, Howard proudly reported that gaol fever had been largely eradicated thanks to the enforcement of Popham's Act<sup>5</sup> In addition to enforcing existing prison acts after Howard's publication, Parliament passed further legislation that codified Howard's suggestions. For example, Parliament passed Gilbert's Act of 1782 (which required the provision of workrooms and the separation of bridewell prisoners by age and sex) and a 1784 Act which allowed justices of the peace to authorize reconstruction projects of dilapidated prisons and to prohibit gaolers from vending beer in prisons.<sup>6</sup>

While Parliament passed many laws that were of a piece with Howard's recommendations, we cannot automatically assume that such legislation was directly produced by Howard. While it is difficult to establish a direct casual relationship between *The State of the Prisons* and subsequent legislation, we do know that Howard was an author and campaigner of influence who furnished Parliament with more information that had ever been collected on the subject of prison conditions.<sup>7</sup> Because he wrote to a world that was "already moving to the direction he wanted it to go," Howard was immensely influential.<sup>8</sup> Playing on the ambivalent social currents of the time, Howard addressed the different hopes and fears of his readers. He responded to the inspiration of Christ the Physician and to fear of moral contagion; he invoked

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<sup>4</sup> 14 Geo III, cap 59; amplified by 24 Geo, III, c. 54

<sup>5</sup> John Howard, *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales*, 4 the ed. (1777; repr., London: J. Johnson, 1792), 468.

<sup>6</sup> 22 Geo.3 c.83. For more information on the 1784 Act, see DeLacy, *Prison Reform*, 75. Other legislation pertaining to prison reforms included 16 Geo III, c. 43; 19 Geo. III, c. 74; and 22 Geo III, c. 64.

<sup>7</sup> Aikin, *John Howard*, 41.

<sup>8</sup> Beattie, *England 1660*, 307.

religious arguments and played to enlightenment sentiments. Ultimately, by meshing his rhetoric with broader shifts in ideas and actions about social order, discipline, humanitarianism, and religion, Howard increased the likelihood that Parliament would reform prisons according to his designs.

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