



Faculty of History

Classicism, Christianity, and Ciceronian Academic Scepticism from
Locke to Hume, *c.*1660-*c.*1760

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T. S-B
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Short Abstract

This study explores the rediscovery and development of a tradition of Ciceronian academic scepticism in British philosophy between c.1660-c.1760. It considers this tradition alongside two others, recently recovered by scholars, which were recognised by contemporaries to offer opposing visions of man, God and the origins of society: the Augustinian-Epicurean, and the neo-Stoic. It presents John Locke, Conyers Middleton and David Hume as the leading figures in the revival of the tradition of academic scepticism. It considers their works in relation to those of Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury, and Bernard Mandeville, whose writings refashioned respectively the neo-Stoic and Augustinian-Epicurean traditions in influential ways. These five individuals explicitly identified themselves with these late Hellenistic philosophical traditions, and sought to contest and redefine conventional estimations of their meaning and significance. This thesis recovers this debate, which illuminates our understanding of the development of the ‘science of man’ in Britain.

Cicero was a central figure in Locke’s attempt to explain, against Hobbes, the origins of society and moral consensus independent of political authority. Locke was a theorist of societies, religious and civil. He provided a naturalistic explanation of moral motivation and sociability which, drawing heavily from Cicero, emphasised the importance of men’s concern for the opinions of others. Locke set this within a Christian divine teleology. It was Locke’s theologically-grounded treatment of moral obligation, and his attack on Stoic moral philosophy, that led to Shaftesbury’s attempt to vindicate Stoicism. This was met by Mandeville’s profoundly Epicurean response. The consequences of the neo-Epicurean and neo-Stoic traditions for Christianity were explored by Middleton, who argued that only academic scepticism was consistent with Christian belief. Hume explored the relationship between morality and religion with continual reference to Cicero. He did so, in contrast to Locke or Middleton, to banish entirely moral theology from philosophy.

Full Abstract

This study explores the rediscovery and development of a tradition of Ciceronian academic scepticism in British philosophy between c.1660-c.1760. It considers this tradition alongside two others, which were recognised by contemporaries to offer opposing visions of man, God and the origins of society, and have recently been recovered by scholars. These were the Augustinian-Epicurean and the neo-Stoic traditions. This thesis presents John Locke, Conyers Middleton and David Hume as the leading figures in the revival of the tradition of academic scepticism. It considers their works in relation to those of Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury, and Bernard Mandeville, whose writings refashioned respectively the neo-Stoic and Augustinian-Epicurean traditions in influential ways. This study illustrates the fruitful encounter that took place between these three philosophical traditions in this period. The five individuals around whose thought this thesis is structured explicitly identified themselves with these late Hellenistic philosophical traditions, and sought to contest and redefine conventional estimations of their meaning and significance.

The recovery of this debate illuminates our understanding of the development of what Hume called the ‘science of man’ in Britain. This was an empirical enquiry into the understanding, passions, and process of moral judgement. It attempted to explain the origins of human sociability, morality, religious belief and political authority. Hume declared that Locke was the pioneer of this ‘science’, which developed, at least in part, in response to Hobbes’ deeply troubling dissolution of the study of morality and religious belief into that of political sociology. Yet the Locke of liberal myth is a theorist, above all, of individual sovereignty. Locke’s account of moral and political obligation and religion, on this hegemonic reading, focused squarely on the rational capacities of the individual, and neglected to consider how the interaction of men together in society affected them both psychologically and morally. To explain Locke’s repeatedly-expressed esteem for Cicero’s philosophical writings, and reconstruct his reading of Cicero as an academic sceptic, is to

recover a context which allows for this mythical Locke to be cast aside. The Locke who emerges is primarily a theorist of society, who sought to explain, against Hobbes, the origins of human fellowship and moral consensus independent of political authority. Locke's moral and religious thought has largely been neglected by scholars. Consequently, the manner in which it shaped the trajectory of philosophical enquiry in eighteenth-century Britain has been insufficiently appreciated.

As the first two chapters of this study explain, Locke forged a highly distinctive conceptual separation between the realms of politics and religion, something scholars have recognised. His distinction between moral motivation and obligation has received considerably less emphasis. In both cases, Locke drew heavily, and increasingly explicitly, from Cicero's philosophical writings, and most especially from *De Officiis*. Cicero explained, as did Locke, how it was men's desire for self-preservation and procreation, and the concern to care for their offspring, which led them into mutual fellowship. Cicero emphasised, as did Locke, the importance of a desire for the favourable opinion of others in harmonising men's estimations of pain and pleasure within society, prior to the instantiation of political authority. Men's judgements of good and ill developed within society according to this-worldly utility. Cicero discussed the virtues chiefly in terms of their utility, to oneself and to others, rather than defending them (as did the Stoics) on account of their normative truth. Cicero also presented men's intellectual faculties as passive, primarily occupied with tracing the causal connections between ideas that were produced from the data of sense-experience. Locke affirmed both of these insights. Locke's account of the origins and development of society and morality was profoundly eudaimonistic, and followed Cicero closely.

This process was placed by Locke, however, within a Christian divine teleology. Men's desires no less than their reason were implanted in them by God to lead them to recognise their duties, to one another and their Creator, under natural law. Locke argued, in contrast to Hobbes, that if the individual's natural faculties (senses and reason) developed without

interference, he would be led to form ideas in religion and morality that were consistent with objective truth. The individual was able to discern the existence of a theistic deity (the author of the natural law), and a future state of rewards and punishments, which provided the greatest incentive to live according to the precepts of that law. Locke argued that these truths could be established by philosophy on the basis of probability. Yet it was the Christian revelation alone that had rendered these truths certain. Christ had similarly clarified the discrete purposes and legitimate scope of political and religious societies under natural law. In Locke's thought, two elements were combined—the explanatory and the normative. Men's collective pursuit of temporal happiness led them to live in accordance with natural law, authored by a perfectly good and loving God, even if they did not realise why they ought to do so. Revelation provided the normative rule explaining moral obligation with a clarity and force of which philosophy was incapable. This elucidates why Locke repeatedly emphasised the conformity between Cicero's moral philosophy and the Christian scriptures. Cicero spoke of virtue and the function of justice and religion in terms of their temporal utility. It was Christ who revealed their purpose in leading men to live according to their true natures as God's created beings, and thereby showed how the useful and the true were united within the framework of God's intentions for mankind.

Locke argued that this harmony between utility and truth had been missed by the dogmatic late Hellenistic sects from which Cicero declared his independence. The Stoics and Epicureans professed to provide accounts of man's true end on the basis of autonomous reason, and thereby denied mankind's collective dependence upon God. Cicero's academic scepticism left a conceptual space for moral theology in a manner not true of Stoicism or Epicureanism. Locke provided a historiography of moral philosophy that was particularly critical of the Stoics, an aspect of his thought almost entirely neglected by scholars. He argued that in the heathen world, speculative philosophy had not interfered with men's collective pursuit of happiness, as the dogmatic sects bickered on the margins of a civil

society to which they contributed nothing. This allowed for moral distinctions and the rules of justice to develop, as they ought, according to the fluctuating demands of public convenience. In a Christian age, however, this had ceased to be the case, as magistrates from Constantine onwards had elided the distinction between men's temporal happiness and their eternal salvation. Speculative definitions of the good and man's end were now imposed on men's minds from infancy, and defended on the basis of the doctrines of universal consent, innatism and the immateriality of the soul. This discouraged men from employing their own labour to understand their duties under natural law for themselves. Unless they were to do so, Locke argued, no man embraced what truly made him human: the search for truth, and the subsequent consciousness of his accountability for his actions before God. Locke turned to Cicero in order to re-establish the limits of philosophy, and to show how revelation provided what philosophy had not— a compelling account of moral obligation.

Chapter 3 offers an interpretation of Shaftesbury's philosophical thought. It explains how he sought to challenge, at every turn, the historiography of moral and religious philosophy provided by his one-time tutor. It also reveals how, following Locke's distinctive intervention, it was the question of moral obligation— rather than the relationship between religious conscience and political obligation— that appeared most pressing to contemporaries. As have many modern commentators, Shaftesbury considered Locke's moral and religious philosophy to be inherently contradictory, something he explained by recourse to Locke's Christian commitments. Recent scholarship on Shaftesbury has neglected the substantive content of his philosophy, and marginalised the extent and significance of his profound classicism for an understanding of his philosophical objectives. It has also seriously underplayed the depth and theoretical sophistication of his hostility towards Christianity. Shaftesbury argued that Locke attempted to erect a moral theory on the basis of a philosophical tradition— academic scepticism— which Shaftesbury dismissed as an exercise in sophistry. Only Stoicism or Epicureanism offered the individual a guide by

which to live. Neither philosophy could be reconciled with the moral and soteriological doctrines of Christianity, which were obnoxious to reason and offensive to men's natural affective responses. Shaftesbury's moral theory developed primarily as a response to Locke, not Hobbes. His philosophical writings attempted above all to vindicate and reformulate a Stoic tradition that was divorced from any association with a Thomist theology of grace. It is here that his ethical theory finds its originality, and with Locke his distinctive refashioning of Stoicism its most important context. Shaftesbury argued that Stoic philosophy, not Christian moral theology, provided a true account of man's end. The individual became truly virtuous and happy only by loving virtue disinterestedly, rather than for the praise of others or still less for the illusory prospect of reward in a world to come.

Chapter 4 explores how Shaftesbury's most acute contemporary critic, Mandeville, sought to provide what Shaftesbury's aristocratic moral theory had not. This was an answer to the question of why most people found it worth their while to adhere to moral codes and exercise the social virtues. Mandeville mined the secularising implications latent within the Augustinian-Epicurean tradition of moral and religious theorising. Disinterested moral conduct of the kind envisaged by Shaftesbury was impossible given human nature. Only self-interest and self-love could explain how the most brutish and unsociable of animals had become the most interdependent and polite. Mandeville deployed the Augustinian language of sin and grace almost entirely for rhetorical purposes. It was Mandeville's determination to respond to Shaftesbury's Stoic ethics that led him, in his later works, to provide a systematic and naturalistic moral theory. This represented the purest rendition of Epicurean philosophy since Lucretius. For Mandeville, as for Shaftesbury, moral obligation owed nothing to any concern regarding divine sanctions. Mandeville developed insights drawn from Locke in remarkably original fashion, but to establish that Locke's placement of the emergence of moral and political order within a divine teleology was sorely misguided.

Chapter 5 examines the writings of the Anglican clergyman and classical scholar Conyers Middleton. Middleton is, in one respect, the anomaly in this study. He alone does not appear in Hume's genealogy of the 'science of man'; and his were works of religious apologetic and classical history, not moral philosophy. As Hume noted, however, the study of natural religion was dependent upon the 'science of man', and Middleton explored the implications of the visions of man and God offered by the Augustinian-Epicurean and neo-Stoic traditions for Christianity. Middleton's critical assault on the sacred sources of Christian history, and on the credibility of the miracles to which they attested, was articulated at every point with reference to Cicero. His works indicate how the tradition of academic scepticism encouraged a self-consciously heterodox approach to the question of religious belief. Middleton argued, more forcefully than had Locke, that both Stoicism and Epicureanism led to atheism. This claim was advanced most comprehensively in Middleton's *History of the Life of Marcus Tullius Cicero* (1741). This work has been neglected by historians, but represents the most concerted attempt in eighteenth-century Britain to present academic scepticism as a discrete philosophical tradition. In providing a genealogy of this tradition, Middleton revealed his debt not so much to Locke as to Erasmus and an eirenic strain within post-Reformation Christian humanist apologetic. Middleton argued that temporal utility was, as Cicero had recognised, sufficient to guide natural and positive law. The moral theology of the Gospels was merely a question of private faith, and of negligible practical ethical consequence. The duty to worship publicly and bear witness, an essential part of man's way to destiny for Locke, finds little place in Middleton. This is reflected by Middleton's Erastian preference for a doctrinally and liturgically eirenic national church subordinated to a resolutely secular state. This was the sole means to render religion benign, and subservient to the temporal demands of morality and justice.

The final two chapters offer a reinterpretation of the relationship between Hume's moral and religious philosophy. Much recent debate has focused on the question of whether Hume

should be considered to have worked broadly within either the Epicurean or Stoic tradition. Hume was, in fact, quite explicit on this point. His philosophical approach was professedly that of the academic sceptic, and he repeatedly articulated his divergence from his contemporaries (not least in Scotland) with reference to the philosophical sects of Cicero's age. More decisively than either Locke or Middleton, Hume provided a historiography of moral philosophy which traced the pervasive influence of the Stoic and Epicurean traditions on western philosophical thought from the classical into the modern world. Hume's moral philosophy was at its most innovative in its emphasis on the role of pride in moral motivation, its reconceptualisation of virtue, and its theory of justice. In all these instances, Hume developed his argument along avowedly Ciceronian lines, and indicated the manner in which he departed from the Epicurean and Stoic traditions. The individual's concern for the opinion and interests of others in society insensibly shaped his affective responses. This moulded self-interest and self-love in ways that made the practice of the social virtues both useful and agreeable.

Hume's religious scepticism was axiomatic to his moral theory, and similarly explicitly indebted to Cicero's philosophical writings. Hume's critical analysis of both natural and revealed theology served to illustrate that there was no criterion other than inherently subjective and socially-determined estimations of utility and agreeableness by which to judge moral codes. Men's moral sentiments were confined to human life and were the product of an affective psychology possessed solely by men. To attribute those qualities esteemed (or despised) in oneself or others to a deity was a form of superstitious anthropomorphism. Theistic visions of human nature and a divine being, Hume suggested, drew from Epicurean and Stoic philosophy. Yet both philosophies led, when explored fully, to the denial of a first cause of the world. Only academic scepticism, Hume argued, was consistent with the belief in a first cause. Yet Hume denied that a first cause could be assigned any moral attributes, was the object of worship, or had any importance for human life. Religious belief— when

taken to imply piety to a deity (or deities) possessed of moral attributes and to demand a set of devotional practices— was symptomatic of emotional and cognitive underdevelopment. In contrast to Locke, Hume argued that the ends of human life, the pursuit of which had led men into society, were confined to happiness in this world. To make this case, Hume borrowed heavily from Cicero in order to draw conclusions quite different to Locke's own. Ciceronian moral philosophy, Hume argued, entirely precluded the possibility of belief in revealed Christianity. This was an interpretation of Cicero that was subsequently contested by those in Scotland who responded to Hume's sceptical challenge, as discussed in the Conclusion.

Conventions

i. Dates

Until 1752, the Julian Calendar ('Old Style') remained in use in Britain, whereas the Gregorian Calendar ('New Style') was adopted in continental Europe from 1582. When quoting from sources written or published on the Continent I use the Gregorian Calendar (as with Montesquieu's letters to Hume), but when quoting from British sources I prefer the Julian. British dating also differed from continental convention in taking the year to start on 25 March. I have preferred to follow the continental practice of treating the year as beginning on 1 January.

ii. Gender

The authors considered in this study do not employ gender-neutral language in their works— the 'science of *man*' is a good example. For reasons of clarity, I have made the decision to follow their practice, given that this study combines lengthy citation with extended textual exposition.

iii. Names

My general rule is to provide the Christian name when first mentioning particular individuals, and thereafter only to refer to surname. There are, however, exceptions, such as Cicero and Montesquieu.

iv. Orthography

I have attempted to preserve original spelling, capitalisation, italicisation and punctuation so far as possible. However, I normalise the long 's', remove diphthongs, expand contractions, correct obvious typographical errors, and change 'u' to 'v' and 'i' to 'j' in accordance with modern orthography. Where the emphasis is my own, I indicate this in brackets in the reference accompanying the citation.

v. References

For all printed editions of texts published after 1600, I provide full references, where applicable, to the relevant Book, Section, Chapter and Paragraph number in the first footnote to the work. Thereafter I provide these references, in this format, in brackets in the text. For classical works, such as those by Cicero, I have resisted providing full references in this manner for reasons of space. The first reference to *De Officiis*, for example, adopts the following format: *De Officiis*, ed. M.T. Griffin & E.M. Atkins (Cambridge, 1991), 1.11-13, referring to Book and Paragraph number.

vi. Translations

When quoting from classical sources, all the translations are taken from the modern editions to which I refer unless specifically noted. When quoting from early-modern and modern sources in languages other than English, all translations are my own.

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Introduction: Late Hellenistic Philosophy and the ‘Science of Man’

This study explores the rediscovery, development and transmission of a tradition of Ciceronian academic scepticism in British moral, religious and political philosophy between c.1660-c.1760. It illustrates the fruitful encounter that took place between the academic sceptic, Augustinian-Epicurean and neo-Stoic philosophical traditions in the development of what David Hume called ‘the science of man’. This was an empirical enquiry into the understanding, passions, and process of moral judgement. Its practitioners offered rival historiographies of moral philosophy into which they placed their own achievements, alongside divergent accounts of the historical development of society, morality, political authority and religious belief. This study presents John Locke, Conyers Middleton and Hume as the leading figures in the revival of the tradition of academic scepticism. It considers their works both in relation to each another, and to those of Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury, and Bernard Mandeville, whose writings refashioned respectively the neo-Stoic and Augustinian-Epicurean traditions in influential ways. The scholarship on these writers, and especially on Locke and Hume, is vast. The purpose of this introductory chapter is three-fold. First, it situates this thesis in relation to recent scholarship. This has established the neo-Stoic and Augustinian-Epicurean traditions as influential modes of thought in this period. Scholars have emphasised how they were seen by contemporaries to offer starkly opposing visions of human nature, God and the origins of society. Second, it explains how, and why, this thesis is organised around the thinking of these five individuals. Finally, it provides some brief remarks on methodology, in order to clarify the particular type of reading offered of those texts upon which this thesis is based.

i. Epicurean and Stoic Themes in Early Enlightenment Moral Philosophy

This study engages particularly closely with the works of those who recently have emphasised the importance of ancient— and especially late Hellenistic— philosophy for early-modern ethical enquiry.¹ This period witnessed an increasing disciplinary separation between the spheres of human natural and positive law, and moral theology. In this regard it perpetuated and brought into the open tensions inherent within a Christian natural law tradition that was far from unitary.² Recent scholarship has explored how the implications of broadly voluntarist and intellectualist strands within this complex intellectual bequest were interrogated— and their mutual irreconcilability emphasised— from the mid-seventeenth century onwards.³ Here the central question in dispute, as many contemporaries recognised, was not in itself new. It could be traced back beyond the Renaissance to the controversy between St. Augustine and Pelagius, and indeed further still to the theoretical disagreements between the philosophical sects of classical antiquity. To what degree were men's natural faculties, cognitive and affective, sufficient to encourage them to form societies and lead moral lives in the absence of efficacious grace? To put the question differently, could a history of morality, and the development of society, be constructed on the exclusive foundation of the principles that governed the human mind and actuated conduct in both pre-political and political contexts?

To respond in the affirmative to this question, made pressing by the religious (and civil) wars that plagued Europe from the sixteenth century, was to cast doubt on the foundational

¹ For broad discussion of this historiographical development, with a particular (though not exclusive) focus on Scotland, see James A. Harris, 'Introduction: The Place of the Ancients in the Moral Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment', *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, 8:1 (Mar. 2010), pp. 1-12.

² On which, see especially William J. Bouwsma, 'The Two Faces of Humanism: Stoicism and Augustinianism in Renaissance Thought', in P.O. Kristeller, H.A. Oberman & T.A. Brady (eds.), *Itinerarium Italicum: the Profile of the Italian Renaissance in the Mirror of its European Transformations* (Leiden, 1975), pp. 3-60.

³ For concise discussion, see Tim J. Hochstrasser, *Natural Law Theories in the Early Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 1-37; and Francis Oakley, 'Locke, Natural Law and God— Again', *History of Political Thought*, 18:4 (Winter 1997), pp. 624-51.

premises upon which the confessional state was established. It re-affirmed the Treaty of Westphalia's separation between the political and the religious spheres.⁴ The objective of those who did so was not necessarily to promote a purely secular ethics, however, or to deny the possibility (or relevance) of revealed religion.⁵ It was instead to clarify the relationship between natural and positive law, and moral theology. A central stimulus to eighteenth-century debates regarding human sociability and the relationship between moral motivation and political and religious authority was provided by the convergence in the seventeenth century of Epicurean insights into human psychology with an Augustinian theology of grace. Taken together, this emphasised the poverty of man's natural moral powers.⁶ In the hands of Thomas Hobbes, the application of Epicurean psychology to the fields of ethics and politics almost entirely severed the link between post-lapsarian man and God, and between the realms of nature and grace. This posed a challenge to the scholastic synthesis between Aristotelian ethics and Christian soteriology. This challenge was reformulated in differing ways by Samuel Pufendorf and Christian Thomasius in Germany, by the French Jansenists of Port-Royal, and by members of the Huguenot émigré community in the Low Countries such as Pierre Bayle.⁷

⁴ For discussion of this point, see Anthony Pagden, *The Enlightenment and Why It Still Matters* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 26-35.

⁵ As emphasised by John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples 1680-1760* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 31-2.

⁶ There is a large (and expanding) body of scholarly literature on the convergence of Augustinianism and Epicureanism in the seventeenth century. For concise discussions, see Jean Lafond, 'Augustinisme et Épicurisme au XVIIe Siècle', in idem, *L'Homme et Son Image. Morales et Littérature de Montaigne à Mandeville* (Paris, 1996), pp. 345-68; and Jill Kraye, 'Moral Philosophy', in E. Kessler, J. Kraye, C.B. Schmitt & Q. Skinner (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 301-86.

⁷ For the German context, see especially Hochstrasser, *Natural Law Theories*; and Ian Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments: Civil and Metaphysical Philosophy in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge, 2001). The moral anthropologies that emerged from the French Jansenist community are well treated by Jennifer A. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: the Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (London, 2008); and Michael Moriarty, *Disguised Vices: Theories of Virtue in Early Modern French Thought* (Oxford, 2009). For the Dutch context, see Elizabeth Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle* (2 vols., The Hague, 1963-4); and Hans W. Blom, 'The Epicurean Motif in Dutch Notions of Sociability in the Seventeenth Century', in N. Leddy & A.S. Lifschultz (eds.), *Epicurus in the Enlightenment* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 31-51.

This neo-Epicurean vision of justice, morality and even national religion as the imposition of a de-sacralised order on passionate subjects through systems of law consented to by means of putative contracts developed alongside— and in constructive opposition to— an alternative, intellectualist tradition. The origins of this intellectualist tradition were frequently explicitly located in the philosophical writings of the ancient Stoics.⁸ It revived the claim that philosophy might provide the individual with a guide to life to some extent independent of a fractured and divisive Christian religion. It also suggested that philosophy might alone furnish men with those insights regarding God’s design and man’s true purpose (natural law) upon which the Christian dispensation had enlarged.⁹ Those who were hostile to the neo-Epicurean presentation of man as enslaved to his passions and motivated to act morally purely on account of self-interest drew from Stoic philosophy to emphasise that he was potentially a rational, autonomous and self-legislating moral agent, naturally inclined towards society and the pursuit of the good. To some extent replaying the controversy between Augustine and Pelagius, those broadly operating in either of these traditions accused one another of profound theological as well as philosophical error.¹⁰ From an Augustinian perspective, the temporizing apologetic approach of Dutch Arminians, French Jesuits and Anglican latitudinarians, erected upon the foundation of the persistence of men’s divinely created nature after the Fall, could be denounced as a species of self-idolatry. It dissolved divine wisdom into human reason and, in stark contrast to Hobbes, subordinated civil law to the natural.¹¹ Neo-Epicureans were accused of denying the reasonableness of revealed Christianity, and thereby divorcing faith from knowledge (‘fideism’). Neo-Stoics were held

⁸ For recent discussion of the development of the Stoic tradition from the sixteenth century, see Christopher Brooke, *Philosophic Pride: Stoicism and Political Thought from Lipsius to Rousseau* (Princeton, 2012).

⁹ On the revival of the conception of philosophy as a guide to life in the early-modern period, see Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. A. Davidson & trans. M. Chase (Oxford, 1995).

¹⁰ For lucid discussion of the Pelagian controversy, see Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: a Biography*, rvd edn (Berkeley, 2000), pp. 340-53. On the prevalence of accusations of atheism in this period, see Alan-Charles Kors, *Atheism in France, 1650-1729: the Orthodox Sources of Disbelief* (Oxford, 1990).

¹¹ On this Augustinian hostility to the Stoic tradition, see Brooke, *Philosophic Pride*, pp. 127-48; Moriarty, *Disguised Vices*, passim; and Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, passim.

accountable for the spawning of heresies, not least Socinianism, that denied the necessity of Christ's Incarnation and Passion and terminated ultimately in 'deism'.¹²

The productive results of this encounter between the continually refashioned and carefully theorised Augustinian-Epicurean and Christian Stoic traditions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has been explored at some length in recent scholarship. In a German context, Tim Hochstrasser emphasises how this encouraged 'the development of a self-conscious reflection on the history of philosophy in general, and the historiography of moral philosophy in particular'. This was, in part, because theoretical innovations on both sides 'had to be concealed behind the unimpeachable authority of generally admired predecessors' to defuse any charge of incipient secularisation.¹³ Ian Hunter further argues that the study of these historiographical debates indicates just how profound were the theoretical disagreements between German moral theorists prior to Immanuel Kant. There were two, 'rival' German enlightenments—the metaphysical and neo-Stoic (Christian Wolff, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz), and the civil-jurisdictional and neo-Epicurean (Pufendorf, Thomasius).¹⁴ A similar bifurcation has been identified by historians working outside of an exclusively German context, even if there has been disagreement as to whether the rediscovery and development of Epicurean or Stoic insights was of greater consequence for the birth of the modern world. The importance of Epicurean insights for the emergence of economic science has been emphasised, as this tradition provided a way of explaining human life and the material and political preconditions for this-worldly happiness in an empirical and naturalistic manner.¹⁵ A revived, neo-Stoic emphasis on man's capacity for moral self-

¹² On the prevalent fear of 'Socinianism' in England in this period, see Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: the Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge, 2010).

¹³ Hochstrasser, *Natural Law Theories*, pp. 2, 40-42.

¹⁴ Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments*, passim.

¹⁵ Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before its Triumph* (Princeton, 1977); Pierre Force, *Self-Interest Before Adam Smith: a Genealogy of Economic Science* (Cambridge, 2003); Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*; and Catherine Wilson, *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity* (Oxford, 2008). A similar, if far less intellectually rigorous or compelling, thesis can be found in Stephen

improvement, defence of fundamental human equality, and belief in the ideal of a universal worldly city governed by one system of ethics (the *cosmopolis*) has been presented as underpinning modern theories of democracy, human rights and religious toleration.¹⁶

This study strongly endorses the view that the focus on the Augustinian-Epicurean and neo-Stoic traditions provides an illuminating means of understanding late-seventeenth and eighteenth-century philosophical thought. It argues that the extent to which the philosophers in Britain who feature in this study provided historiographies of moral philosophy that encouraged their readers to place the arguments they advanced as well as those they criticised in their proper historical perspective has been insufficiently appreciated. It contends that a comparison of these accounts of the history of philosophy, and of its relationship to religion and most especially to the Judeo-Christian tradition, provides an important means of isolating and identifying the innovations in moral philosophy that took place in these years.¹⁷ This thesis nonetheless challenges the tendency in the current literature— most clearly revealed by Pierre Force's treatment of the development and transmission of the Augustinian-Epicurean tradition, and Christopher Brooke's complementary analysis of the neo-Stoic— to interpret the thought of all early-modern philosophers through exclusive reference to these two, antagonistic intellectual traditions.¹⁸ This is particularly problematic in the case of Locke and Hume, both of whom were markedly critical of the Stoic *and* Epicurean traditions. Both positioned their moral, religious and political philosophies within a historiography of the discipline that owed much to a

Greenblatt's bestselling (and Pulitzer Prize-winning) *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (London, 2011).

¹⁶ The case has been advanced most forcefully by Jonathan Israel in a number of works, but see especially *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (Oxford, 2001); and idem, *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* (Princeton, 2010). A similar contention informs the studies of neo-Stoicism provided by Pagden, *The Enlightenment*; and Brooke, *Philosophic Pride*.

¹⁷ Hochstrasser focuses on the 'histories of morality' furnished in Germany from Pufendorf onwards for much the same reason: *Natural Law Theories*, p. 2.

¹⁸ Force, *Self-Interest Before Smith*; and Brooke, *Philosophic Pride*. This tendency is noted, and its limitations discussed, in the editors' introduction to *Epicurus in the Enlightenment*, pp. 1-12.

highly distinctive reading of Cicero as an academic sceptic. By this means, they claimed to identify a methodological alternative to the impasse created by the antithetical visions of man, God and the origins of society presented by the Augustinian-Epicurean and neo-Stoic traditions.

ii. Academic Scepticism and the 'Science of Man'

The particular interpretation of Cicero which informed the writings of Locke, Middleton and Hume has, in the main, not been reconstructed by historians.¹⁹ Many scholars have remarked upon Cicero's importance as a philosopher from the Renaissance onwards. They note that Cicero's reputation reached its zenith in the eighteenth century, before rapidly falling into abeyance in the nineteenth.²⁰ As Quentin Skinner observes, the rediscovery of many of Cicero's writings from the thirteenth century informed the emergence of the Renaissance humanist ideal of the virtuous man. His active participation in the public life of the city-state (*negotium*) combined with his philosophical and theological commitments (*otium*) made him the rightful object of others' reverence, praise and esteem. The recrudescence of a distinctly pagan heroic ethic of political *virtus* in humanist thought was informed by an optimism regarding men's moral powers. It emphasised the transformative role played by rhetoric and pedagogy in their moral and political formation. This cut against an Augustinian denial of the possibility of human perfectibility without the assistance of

¹⁹ One work which draws upon many of the same themes explored in this study, however, and which has largely been neglected by commentators, is Robert Denoon Cumming, *Human Nature and History: a Study in the Development of Liberal Political Thought* (2 vols., Chicago, 1969).

²⁰ For general studies of Cicero's reputation in the early-modern period, see Matthew Fox, *Cicero's Philosophy of History* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 274-303; Günter Gawlick, 'Cicero and the Enlightenment', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 25 (1963), pp. 657-82; Walter K. Lacy, *Cicero and the End of the Roman Republic* (London, 1978), pp. 170-76; and Neal Wood, *Cicero's Social and Political Thought* (Berkeley, 1988), pp. 1-12. All of these scholars acknowledge a debt to Tadeusz Zieliński, whose scholarship challenged Theodor Mommsen and Wilhelm Drumann's influential marginalisation of Cicero's philosophical significance: *Cicero im Wandel der Jahrhunderte*, 3rd edn (Leipzig, 1908), pp. 210-74. For Cicero's reputation in the nineteenth century, see Nicholas P. Cole, 'Nineteenth Century Ciceros', in C. Steel (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Cicero* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 337-49.

divine grace.²¹ By the eighteenth century, however, a more open, equivocal and essentially subversive Cicero had emerged.²² This shift almost certainly owed much to the deliberately elliptical nature of Cicero's writings, not least in his discussion of moral and religious subjects, which he largely presented in dialogue form.²³ Cicero rehearsed the moral and religious theories of both the Stoic and Epicurean schools. Consequently, in England it was possible to appropriate him in defence of Hobbesian materialism (Anthony Collins) or Spinozist pantheism (John Toland). Alternatively, Cicero could be aligned with a Stoic ethics and theistic natural religion that was amenable to the Newtonian brand of Christian apologetic developed by the orthodox primarily in *response* to Hobbes and Spinoza.²⁴

The tradition of Ciceronian academic scepticism explored in this study differed again in its interpretation of Cicero's philosophical writings and their significance. It owed, in the first place, little to a tradition of political republicanism. Neither Locke nor Hume envisaged an abstract notion of a body politic constituted by and reliant upon independent men labouring disinterestedly in the service of *virtus*. This can be contrasted with, for example, John Milton's republicanism, which was intimately informed by his reading of Cicero's political philosophy.²⁵ The abdication of direct participation in the political domain undermined, for Milton, the essentially moral foundations of the commonwealth and the moral character of the individual. For Locke and Hume, in contrast, it was a sign of progress. For men

²¹ Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1978), i, pp. 84-112; and see, too, Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300-1600* (Baltimore, 1989), pp. 121-4, 410. For the development of the civic republican tradition in Anglophone political theory, see J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975).

²² On this shift, see Fox, *Cicero's Philosophy of History*, pp. 274-303; and Gawlick, 'Cicero and the Enlightenment'.

²³ On the interpretative and methodological difficulties this raises for scholars seeking to establish Cicero's opinion on these subjects, see especially Marcia L. Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages* (2 vols., Brill, 1985), i, pp. 61-158; and Yelena Baraz, *A Written Republic: Cicero's Philosophical Politics* (Princeton, 2012).

²⁴ On the 'radical' Cicero developed by freethinkers such as Toland and Collins, see Justin Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: the Church of England and its Enemies, 1660-1730* (Cambridge, 1992).

²⁵ Martin Dzelzainis, 'Milton's Classical Republicanism', in D. Armitage, A. Himy & Q. Skinner (eds.), *Milton and Republicanism* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 3-24.

fortunate enough to be well governed, such intervention was recognised to be symptomatic of political dysfunction, only required— as, regrettably, had been the case in the Civil War— *in extremis*.²⁶ Here it is argued that this vision of politics owed much to the manner in which Locke and Hume recast the Ciceronian tradition as rhetorical, and concerned in the first instance with ethics rather than politics.

Ciceronian academic scepticism was presented by Locke and Hume as providing a means of describing how a (howsoever limited) degree of mutual co-operation and social order might have been possible prior to the instantiation of political authority and the sanctions of positive law. This was a Cicero, then, who had much of value to say on the fundamental questions that preoccupied contemporaries following Hobbes' alarming depiction of the origins of society and morality. The account of moral motivation and the historical development of society encouraged by this reading of Cicero was profoundly eudaimonistic. It emphasised the importance of men's desires, and most especially their desire for happiness, in the creation of society and development of moral consensus. It nonetheless avoided the neo-Stoic tendency to portray society and the rules of justice as the teleological realisation by men of properties inherent in their nature as beings imbued with the divine spark of reason. Meanwhile, it differed in important respects from the neo-Epicurean tradition. Men might be driven by their desire for pleasure and aversion to pain, but their estimation of the causes of both altered insensibly but beneficially once they formed relationships with one another in society. This owed relatively little to the sanctions enforcing positive law. Neither Locke nor Hume was willing to follow Hobbes in basically

²⁶ On which, see John Dunn, 'The Concept of "Trust" in the Politics of John Locke', in R. Rorty, J.B. Schneewind & Q. Skinner (eds.), *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 279-301; and John Robertson, 'The Scottish Enlightenment at the Limits of the Civic Tradition', in I. Hont & M. Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue: the Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 137-78.

dissolving the study of morality (or, indeed, of religion) into political sociology.²⁷ As Hume would show most clearly, this provided the basis for a richer, more meaningful understanding of political obligation and religious belief than Hobbes himself had been able to provide.

This study explores how Ciceronian academic scepticism was portrayed as transcending the perspectives on human sociability and the origins of moral and political order offered by both the neo-Stoic and neo-Epicurean. In his philosophical dialogues, Cicero cast doubt on the definitions of man's true end and happiness (the *summum bonum*) offered by the dogmatic philosophical sects. He emphasised how it was shifting estimations of what was useful and agreeable to men in society (*utile* and *dulce*) that informed their moral judgments. Cicero thereby appeared to marginalise the question of moral obligation. That is, why (or whether) such moral judgments were normatively true (*honestum*), and consequently possessed claims on men above and beyond those of utility and a desire for the pleasure that resulted from behaving in ways approved of by others. Cicero's emphasis on the useful and agreeable was as important for Locke as it was for Hume. In the conclusions they drew from it, they nevertheless parted company in profound and revealing ways.

To a point this indicates the manner in which they sought to address different (if related) questions. Locke's philosophy was concerned, above all, to offer a solution to a dilemma resolved in highly distinctive and troubling fashion by Hobbes. This concerned the relationship between the claims of religious conscience, and the demands of political obligation and civil peace. The importance of this question had been made evident by the Civil War and the emergence from the early 1660s of religious nonconformity and dissent as permanent realities on the English political landscape. In his highly distinctive treatment of

²⁷ A point noted by, among others, John Dunn, *The Political Thought of John Locke: an Historical Account of the Argument of the Two Treatises on Government* (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 77-86; Russell Hardin, *David Hume: Moral and Political Theorist* (Oxford, 2007), passim; and Jon Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan. The Reception of the Political and Religious Ideas of Thomas Hobbes in England, 1640-1700* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 397-402.

this question, Locke forged a categorical distinction between religion and politics. Locke argued that the legitimate claims of both conscience and political authority were necessarily in accord with the dictates of public utility. Locke made this case primarily on the basis of natural law and natural theology. Men, without the need for divine assistance, were able to discover specific duties imposed on them all by natural law, including those of self-preservation, the increase of the species, the establishment of dominion over nature, and public worship. Societies, both religious and civil, were the means found to allow them to serve the purposes for which they had been created by God. The primary question addressed by Hume, conversely, and which lay at the very heart of the 'science of man', had been made pressing by Locke himself. This concerned moral obligation.

Put simply, for Locke the partial banishment of the normatively true from moral philosophy created a conceptual space for moral theology. Christ's teachings in the Gospels provided what philosophy alone could not— a convincing account of moral obligation. In this regard they enlarged upon the limited insights furnished by reason (natural revelation). For Locke the Christian providential scheme showed how moral conduct would be rewarded in a world to come, and united the *utile* with the *honestum*. Locke's eudaimonism, which described how men's shared, innate desire for happiness was shaped by the opinions of others in society due to their concern for praise and aversion to blame, was set within a resoundingly teleological framework. This was affirmed and completed by the Mosaic and Christian revelations. For Hume, in contrast, Cicero's insight that men's moral judgments were guided by their estimations of what was useful and agreeable, to themselves and to others, illustrated how morality was entirely confined to human life. Rather than creating a place for moral theology, for Hume the banishment of the *honestum* from philosophy demanded the rejection of Lockean divine teleology as of no consequence for an understanding of human life.

The presentation of Locke's philosophical thought offered in the first two chapters of this study would, until very recently, have appeared alien even to specialists in the field. The Locke of liberal myth is a theorist, above all, of individual sovereignty. The Lockean individual is entitled to follow his conscience when it comes to religion, which is nonetheless an entirely private matter.²⁸ On this hegemonic reading, focused squarely on the rational capacities of the individual, Locke neglected to consider how the interaction of men together in society affected them both psychologically and morally.²⁹ For those like Leo Strauss, eager to trace the origins of an impoverished liberal tradition to Hobbesian scepticism and egocentricity, this reflected Locke's pragmatic and prudential marginalisation of moral and religious truth from politics.³⁰ As long ago as 1969, John Dunn launched a devastating critique of this profoundly ahistorical tendency to present Locke as either the forerunner of John Stuart Mill, or the acceptable face of Hobbism. Dunn emphasised that Locke's reconceptualisation of the relationship between religion and politics was inseparable from, as erected upon the basis of, theological postulates.³¹ Only in recent years, with a series of important contributions by Ian Harris and Timothy Stanton, has concerted attention been paid to Locke as an exponent of natural theology and natural law, whose treatment of the relationship between civil and religious society developed in part as a constructive response to Hobbes.³² This provides, Harris observes, 'a new way of looking at

²⁸ The canonical interpretation in this regard is Crawford B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford, 1962). For a more recent account of the incipient secularism of Lockean political liberalism, see George Kateb, 'Locke and the Political Origins of Secularism', *Social Research*, 76 (2009), pp. 101-34.

²⁹ John Plamenatz, *Man and Society: Political and Social Theories from Machiavelli to Marx*, rvd edn (3 vols., London, 1992), i, p. 344.

³⁰ Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago, 1953), pp. 202-51. For three (of many) recent reformulations of the Straussian reading of Locke, see Michael S. Rabieh, 'The Reasonableness of Locke, or the Questionableness of Christianity', *Journal of Politics*, 53:4 (Nov. 1991), pp. 933-57; Peter C. Myers, 'Locke on Reasonable Christianity and Reasonable Politics', in D. Kries (ed.), *Piety and Humanity: Essays on Religion and Early Modern Political Philosophy* (Lanham, MD, 1997), pp. 145-80; and Samuel Zinaich, Jr., *John Locke's Moral Revolution: from Natural Law to Moral Relativism* (Lanham, Md., 2006).

³¹ Dunn, *Political Thought of Locke*, passim.

³² Ian Harris, *The Mind of John Locke* (Cambridge, 1994); idem, 'The Legacy of *Two Treatises of Government*', *Eighteenth-Century Thought*, 3 (2007), pp. 143-68; idem, 'John Locke and Natural Law: Free Worship and Toleration', in J. Parkin & T. Stanton (eds.), *Natural Law and Toleration in the Early Enlightenment* (Oxford,

Locke'.³³ This presents him as primarily a theorist of societies, religious and civil. The development and jurisdiction of these societies were to be understood in terms of their subordination to a divinely-instituted law of nature, accessible to human reason, which defined the mutually exclusive purposes and ends each was intended to serve. Locke was broadly able to accept Hobbes' hedonic psychology and insight that morality and justice had their origins in human convention, whilst denying the consequences he had drawn. Societies, and the codes of morality and justice by which they were regulated, were the necessary means found by men to perform immutable duties (to themselves, others, and God) enshrined in a universal law of nature. If they ceased to serve this function, they lost all claim to exercise legitimate authority.

At the heart of Locke's philosophical thought was the claim that men possessed all they required to discern (and, perhaps, fulfil) the ends for which they had been designed (that is, the 'great Concernments' of morality, 'Religion and Justice').³⁴ This cut against an Augustinian interpretation of the debilitating consequences of the Fall on the human economy. Yet it was evident to Locke that most men failed to employ their natural faculties (sense and reason) correctly.³⁵ Locke argued that this was, in part, a consequence of the collapse of the distinction between politics and religion by those who dissolved conscience into political obligation (like Hobbes) or vice versa (antinomian enthusiasts). Locke alighted upon an Augustinian theology of grace as encouraging a portrayal of the post-lapsarian human condition which found support in an Epicurean psychology. This suggested that

2013), pp. 59-105; Timothy Stanton, 'Locke and the Politics and Theology of Toleration', *Political Studies*, 54:1 (Mar. 2006), pp. 84-102; idem, 'Authority and Freedom in the Interpretation of Locke's Political Theory', *Political Theory*, 39:1 (Feb. 2011), pp. 6-30; idem, 'Christian Foundations; or Some Loose Stones? Toleration and the Philosophy of Locke's Politics', *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 14:3 (June 2011), pp. 323-47; and idem, 'Natural Law, Nonconformity, and Toleration: Two Stages on Locke's Way', in *Natural Law and Toleration*, pp. 25-57.

³³ Harris, 'Free Worship and Toleration', p. 105.

³⁴ *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P.H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975), [Bk.] 2. [Sect.] 23. [Para.] 12.

³⁵ This aspect of Locke's thought is well brought out by Sorana Corneanu, *Regimens of the Mind: Boyle, Locke, and the Early Modern Cultura Animi Tradition* (London, 2011).

men were incapable of identifying on the basis of reason those rules by which they ought to live. Locke argued that an alternative, Stoic moral tradition had similarly perverted an understanding of the relationship between religion and justice. Stoic claims for reason and conscience denied man's ultimate dependence upon God. It has not often been remarked that Locke turned to the history of thought— and in particular the historiography of moral and religious philosophy— to place what he identified as being the neo-Stoic and neo-Epicurean arguments of his contemporaries in their proper perspective, and to articulate his divergence from both. Locke cast the neo-Stoic and the neo-Epicurean as endorsing rival species of error. Both obscured the delicate harmony between philosophy (reason) and revealed theology (faith), and between temporal utility and normative truth.

It will be shown in the first two chapters that Locke turned repeatedly to Cicero's philosophical writings to vindicate the positions he adopted. Although certain commentators have noted Locke's admiration for Cicero, they have failed accurately to reconstruct the particular interpretation of Ciceronian philosophy to which Locke subscribed. They have argued that Locke read Cicero as a Stoic.³⁶ However it was Cicero's presentation of academic scepticism as an eclectic philosophy that appealed to Locke. This informed the limits of Locke's own scepticism in his claim that, even if men's capacity to discover truth was severely circumscribed, it was nonetheless sufficient for their (divinely-ordained) purposes. Here Locke emphasised a point that would be laboured by both Middleton and Hume. This was the distinction between Ciceronian academic scepticism, which allowed for probability to be adopted as a guide where certainty was impossible, and the 'perfect' or

³⁶ For discussions of Locke's esteem for Cicero, see especially Raymond Polin, *La Politique Morale de John Locke* (Paris, 1960); Neal Wood, *The Politics of Locke's Philosophy: a Social Study of 'An Essay concerning Human Understanding'* (London, 1983), pp. 29-30; John Marshall, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 157-204, 292-326; and Phillip Mitsis, 'Locke's Offices', in J. Miller & B. Inwood (eds.), *Hellenistic and Early Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 45-61. On the Stoic (and anti-Epicurean) elements of Locke's thought, meanwhile, see Victor Nuovo, *Christianity, Antiquity, and Enlightenment: Interpretations of Locke* (London, 2011), pp. 181-234.

'Pyrrhonian' scepticism of Sextus Empiricus.³⁷ By identifying the potential and limits of reason to establish certain truths regarding the origins and obligatory character of the law of nature in the will and sanctions of the divine legislator, for Locke academic scepticism left ample scope for revelation to provide what philosophy could not. Locke's interpretation of the meaning and significance of the Christian dispensation was intimately informed by his deliberate if delicate delineation in his moral theory between human moral codes, justice and moral theology. Locke's abundantly attested reverence for Cicero's moral philosophy, and the harmony he detected between Cicero's writings and those of Christ, casts considerable light on the style and structure of his philosophical thought (including his political philosophy and theory of toleration) taken as a whole.³⁸

Chapter 3 offers an interpretation of Shaftesbury's philosophical thought. It reveals how he sought to challenge, at every turn, the historiography of moral and religious philosophy provided by his one-time tutor. It also indicates how, following Locke's distinctive intervention, it was the question of moral obligation— rather than the relationship between religious conscience and political obligation— that appeared most pressing to those philosophers later included by Hume within his genealogy of the 'science of man'. As have many modern commentators, Shaftesbury considered Locke's moral and religious philosophy to be inherently contradictory, something he similarly explained by recourse to Locke's Christian commitments. The recent revival of scholarly interest in Shaftesbury presents him as a thinker keenly engaged with the political, cultural and literary currents of his day. It has, however, neglected the substantive content of his philosophy and marginalised the significance of his profound classicism for an understanding of his

³⁷ Of these two traditions, it is Pyrrhonian scepticism which has received greater historical attention. For the most thorough discussion of scepticism in the early-modern period, see Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle*, rvd edn (Oxford, 2003).

³⁸ For a study that similarly emphasises the need to do 'justice to the substantive continuities of [Locke's] thought across the conventional boundaries of discourse', see Harris, *Mind of Locke*, p. xi and passim.

philosophical objectives. It has also seriously underplayed the depth and theoretical sophistication of his hostility towards Christianity.³⁹

Shaftesbury argued that Locke attempted to erect a moral theory on the basis of a philosophical tradition— academic scepticism— which he dismissed as an exercise in sophistry. Only Stoicism or Epicureanism could explain human life or offer the individual a guide by which to live. Neither philosophy could be reconciled with the moral and soteriological doctrines of Christianity, which were obnoxious to reason and offensive to men's natural affective responses. Shaftesbury's philosophical writings attempted above all to vindicate and refashion a Stoic tradition that was divorced from any association with a Thomist theology of grace. It is here that his ethical theory finds its originality, and with Locke his distinctive refashioning of Stoicism its most important context. To take his philosophical arguments seriously, and to consider them contextually, is to raise real doubts regarding the conventional interpretation of Shaftesbury as the founder of a 'moral sense' school of philosophy.⁴⁰ In direct contrast to Locke, Shaftesbury followed his Stoic guides in re-establishing a eudaimonistic explanation of sociability and virtue upon emphatically rational (philosophical) foundations. It was through the rational identification of one's end in a life lived in accordance with one's nature as an autonomous moral agent, Shaftesbury contended, that one became truly virtuous by loving virtue disinterestedly, rather than for the praise of others or still less for the illusory prospect of reward in a world to come.⁴¹

³⁹ For two recent studies on Shaftesbury that fall into this category, and are discussed at greater length in Chapter 3, see Laurence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness* (Cambridge, 1994); and Michael B. Prince, *Philosophical Dialogue in the British Enlightenment. Theology, Aesthetics, and the Novel* (Cambridge, 1996). For an interpretation that deals more seriously (and historically) with Shaftesbury's actual arguments, and takes his classicism as a crucial point of departure, see Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment: a Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1991-2000), ii, pp. 85-152.

⁴⁰ For one, influential study which offers such an interpretation of Shaftesbury, see David D. Raphael, *The Moral Sense* (London, 1947).

⁴¹ The importance of reason (rather than a faculty of moral sense), and of rational self-command, in Shaftesbury's explanation of moral obligation— which sets him apart from Hutcheson and later common-sense moralists in Scotland— is emphasised by Stephen Darwall, *British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought', 1640-1740* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 16 n. 36, 176-206.

Shaftesbury's writings illustrate how the development of the neo-Stoic tradition was shaped in significant ways by its encounter not only with the Augustinian-Epicurean tradition, but also with an alternative tradition of academic scepticism. Shaftesbury's response to that tradition informed Mandeville's development of an avowedly Epicurean moral and religious theory in his mature writings, as discussed in Chapter 4. Middleton and Hume's development of the academic sceptic tradition engaged closely with— and was partially framed as a response to— both Shaftesbury and Mandeville. It is principally for this reason that, in a study primarily concerned with the tradition of academic scepticism, the scope has nonetheless been broadened to include Shaftesbury and Mandeville.

Chapter 4 explores how Shaftesbury's most acute contemporary critic, Mandeville, sought to provide what Shaftesbury's aristocratic moral theory had not. This was an answer to the question of why most people found it worth their while to adhere to moral codes and to exercise the social virtues. Recent commentators have recognised Mandeville as a significant figure in the development and transmission of the Augustinian-Epicurean tradition.⁴² Mandeville mined the secularising implications latent within this tradition of moral and religious theorising. Disinterested moral conduct of the kind envisaged by Shaftesbury was impossible given human nature. Only self-interest and self-love could explain how the most brutish and unsociable of animals had become the most interdependent and polite. Mandeville deployed the Augustinian language of sin and grace almost entirely for rhetorical purposes. To an extent that has often been underplayed, it was Mandeville's determination to respond to Shaftesbury's Stoic ethics that led him, in his later works, to provide a systematic and naturalistic moral theory. This represented the purest rendition of Epicurean philosophy since Lucretius. If Shaftesbury separated a Stoic ethical tradition from its conventional moorings in a Thomist theology of grace, Mandeville similarly presented an

⁴² See especially Force, *Self-Interest Before Adam Smith*, passim; Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, pp. 261-80; and E.J. Hundert, *The Enlightenment's Fable: Bernard Mandeville and the Discovery of Society* (Cambridge, 1994).

Epicurean moral theory that marginalised the importance of— even as it paid lip-service to— Augustinian theology. For Mandeville, as for Shaftesbury, moral obligation owed nothing to any concern regarding divine sanctions. Mandeville developed insights drawn from Locke in remarkably original fashion, but to establish that Locke’s placement of the emergence of moral and political order within a divine teleology was sorely misguided.

Chapter 5 examines the writings of the Anglican clergyman and classical scholar Conyers Middleton. Middleton is, in one respect, the anomaly in this study. Unlike Locke, Shaftesbury or Mandeville, he did not appear in Hume’s genealogy of the ‘science of man’; and his were works of religious apologetic and classical history, not moral philosophy. As Hume noted, however, the study of natural religion was dependent upon the ‘science of man’, and Middleton explored the implications of the visions of man and God offered by the Augustinian-Epicurean and neo-Stoic traditions for Christianity. Middleton’s critical assault on the sacred sources of Christian history, and on the credibility of the miracles to which they testified, was articulated at every point with reference to Cicero. His works indicate how the tradition of academic scepticism encouraged a self-consciously heterodox approach to the question of religious belief. Both the Augustinian-Epicurean attack on natural religion and the neo-Stoic assault on revealed, Middleton argued, went too far, and led invariably into rival species of atheism. This claim was advanced most comprehensively in Middleton’s *History of the Life of Marcus Tullius Cicero* (1741). This work has been neglected by historians, but represents the most concerted attempt in eighteenth-century Britain to present academic scepticism as a discrete (if eclectic and rhetorical) philosophical tradition.

In providing a genealogy of this tradition, Middleton revealed his debt not so much to Locke as to Erasmus and an eirenic strain within post-Reformation Christian humanist apologetic. This current of thought has been reconstructed in a number of essays by Hugh Trevor-

Roper.⁴³ Middleton argued that the academic sceptic alone could identify the boundary between knowledge and faith, and thereby recognise the moral excellence of Christ's teachings as providing what philosophy could not— a compelling account of moral obligation. To an extent not true of Locke, Middleton nonetheless indicated that the Christian revelation had been of highly limited moral consequence, whilst Christianity as a publicly-taught religion had undermined disastrously the foundations of moral motivation (a desire for merited fame, secured through actions useful to the community). Middleton suggested that utility (temporal happiness) alone was, as Cicero had recognised, sufficient to guide natural and positive law. The moral theology of the Gospels was merely a question of private faith, and of negligible practical ethical consequence. The duty to worship publicly and bear witness, an essential part of man's way to destiny for Locke, finds little place in Middleton. This is reflected by Middleton's Erastian preference for a doctrinally and liturgically eirenic national church subordinated to a resolutely secular state. This offered the sole means to render public religion benign, and subservient to the dictates of temporal utility and justice.

The final two chapters of this study focus on Hume, and offer a reinterpretation of the relationship between his moral and religious philosophy. Much recent debate has focused on the question of whether Hume should be considered to have worked broadly within either the Epicurean or Stoic tradition.⁴⁴ Hume was, in fact, quite explicit on this point. His

⁴³ Hugh R. Trevor-Roper, 'The Religious Origins of the Enlightenment', in idem, *Religion, the Reformation, and Social Change* (London, 1967), pp. 179-218; and 'The Great Tew Circle', in idem, *Catholics, Anglicans and Puritans: Seventeenth Century Essays* (London, 1987), pp. 166-230. Middleton's debt to this eirenic Erastian tradition was nonetheless overlooked by Trevor-Roper, but is explored by Brian Young, 'Conyers Middleton: the Historical Consequences of Heterodoxy', in S. Mortimer & J. Robertson (eds.), *The Intellectual Consequences of Religious Heterodoxy, 1600-1750* (Leiden, 2012), pp. 235-65; and J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion* (5 vols., Cambridge, 1999—), v, pp. 219-37.

⁴⁴ For broadly Epicurean interpretations of Hume, see especially James Moore, 'Hume and Hutcheson', in M.A. Stewart & J.P. Wright (eds.), *Hume and Hume's Connexions* (Edinburgh, 1994), pp. 23-57; and Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, Ch. 6. David Fate Norton has challenged this interpretation, and restated Hume's proximity to Hutcheson in his moral theory: 'Hume and Hutcheson: the Question of Influence', in D. Garber & S. Nadler (eds.), *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy*, II (Oxford, 2005), pp. 211-56. Moore responded in 'The Eclectic Stoic, the Mitigated Sceptic', in E. Mazza & E. Ronchetti (eds.),

philosophical approach was professedly that of the academic sceptic, and he repeatedly articulated his divergence from his contemporaries (not least in Scotland) with reference to the philosophical sects of Cicero's age. More decisively than either Locke or Middleton, Hume provided a historiography of moral philosophy which traced the pervasive influence of the Stoic and Epicurean traditions on western philosophical thought from the classical into the modern world.⁴⁵ Hume's moral philosophy was at its most innovative in its emphasis on the role of pride in moral motivation, its reconceptualisation of virtue, and its theory of justice. In all these instances, Hume developed his argument along avowedly Ciceronian lines, and indicated the manner in which he departed from the Epicurean and Stoic traditions. The individual's concern for the opinion and interests of others in society insensibly shaped his affective responses. This moulded self-interest and self-love in ways that made the practice of the social virtues both useful and agreeable. The importance of Cicero's philosophical writings for Hume's development and articulation of an entirely secular moral theory has largely gone unremarked by modern scholars.⁴⁶

Hume's religious scepticism was axiomatic to his moral theory, and similarly explicitly indebted to Cicero's philosophical writings. Hume's critical analysis of both natural and revealed theology served to illustrate that there was no criterion other than inherently subjective and socially-determined estimations of utility and agreeableness by which to judge moral codes. Men's moral sentiments were confined to human life and were the product of an affective psychology possessed solely by men. To attribute those qualities esteemed (or

New Essays on David Hume (Milan, 2007), pp. 133-69, and see, too, Luigi Turco's summary of the debate in the same volume.

⁴⁵ Donald W. Livingston has paid particular attention to this pervasive theme in Hume's writings: *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life* (London, 1984); and idem, *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium: Hume's Pathology of Philosophy* (Chicago, 1998).

⁴⁶ An exception to this general neglect is the valuable study by James Moore, 'Utility and Humanity: the Quest for the *Honestum* in Cicero, Hutcheson, and Hume', *Utilitas*, 14:3 (Nov. 2002), pp. 365-86. Elsewhere Moore nonetheless places Hume's moral theory largely within the neo-Epicurean tradition (see above, n. 44).

despised) in oneself or others to a deity was a form of superstitious anthropomorphism.⁴⁷ In a remarkable feat of intellectual gymnastics, Hume returned the accusations of atheism levelled at his writings by orthodox Calvinists and more liberal philosophical theists with interest. Their visions of both human nature and a divine being, Hume suggested, drew from Epicurean and Stoic philosophy. Both philosophies led, when explored fully, to the denial of a first cause of the world. Only academic scepticism, Hume argued, was consistent with the belief in a first cause. Yet Hume positively denied that this first cause could be assigned any moral attributes, was the rightful object of worship, or had any importance for human life whatsoever. Religious belief— when taken to imply piety to a deity (or deities) possessed of moral attributes and to demand a set of devotional practices— was for Hume symptomatic of emotional and cognitive underdevelopment. In explicit contrast to Locke, Hume argued that the ends of human life, the pursuit of which had led men into society, were confined to happiness in this world. To make this case, Hume borrowed heavily from Cicero in order to draw conclusions quite different to Locke's. Ciceronian moral philosophy, Hume argued, entirely precluded the possibility of belief in revealed Christianity. This was an interpretation of Cicero that was subsequently contested by those in Scotland who responded to Hume's sceptical challenge, as discussed in the Conclusion.

iii. A Note on Method

This study suggests that a tradition of academic scepticism informed a series of creative, stimulating, and profoundly unsettling interventions in contemporary philosophical debates. In making this claim, three methodological issues need to be addressed. The first concerns the attribution of a tradition to a particular mode of thought. The second regards how one can establish with any degree of precision the significance that ought to be attached to the

⁴⁷ This interpretation of Hume as a 'strong' moral atheist— one who positively denied that the deity possessed moral attributes, rather than merely asserting that those attributes could not be known— supports the recent thesis of Thomas Holden, *Spectres of False Divinity. Hume's Moral Atheism* (Oxford, 2010).

esteem declared by Locke, Middleton and Hume for Cicero's philosophical writings. These two questions lead to a third, which concerns the type of reading offered of the source material upon which this thesis is based. This includes private manuscripts and correspondence, as well as published works written in a number of established literary genres with their own discrete idiomatic and structural conventions.

Shaftesbury and Mandeville quite explicitly identified themselves with respectively a tradition of Stoicism and Epicureanism. In a similar manner, Locke, Middleton and Hume deliberately and repeatedly declared themselves to be academic sceptics. These were traditions, then, that were not ascribed to particular modes of thought solely by their enemies— as was the case, for example, with 'latitudinarianism' in Restoration religious debate— but also by their practitioners, who sought to contest and redefine conventional estimations of their meaning and significance.⁴⁸ Although these traditions can be seen to have converged in significant respects over the course of this period, it is notable that this fact was resolutely denied by all of these individuals. They maintained that the distinctive philosophical insights they offered in their own works had previously only been rehearsed in the writings of (for example) Cicero or those deemed by Shaftesbury or Mandeville to be 'true' Stoics or Epicureans. In this respect these traditions defined themselves in this period, for reasons explored in what follows. This not merely justifies, but positively demands, a focus upon them as important and illuminating subjects of historical analysis.⁴⁹

Assessing the precise extent and significance of Cicero's 'influence' on the thought of Locke and Hume in particular raises taxing methodological questions.⁵⁰ In this period, Cicero was a part of the intellectual furniture. Cicero's philosophical writings were so well-known to

⁴⁸ John Spurr, "Latitudinarianism" and the Restoration Church', *Historical Journal*, 31:1 (Mar. 1988), pp. 61-82.

⁴⁹ For the justification of the ascription of a tradition ('anti-dogmatism') to a particular mode of thought on similar grounds, see Brian Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England: Theological Debate from Locke to Burke* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 20-21.

⁵⁰ On the difficulties of tracing 'influence', see John Dunn, 'The Identity of the History of Ideas', in idem, *Political Obligation in its Historical Context* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 13-28.

literate contemporaries that allusion and paraphrase frequently took the place of direct reference and quotation. As Martha Nussbaum writes, 'to mention the source would be to insult the learning of the audience'.⁵¹ As has been noted elsewhere, it is also true that many insights that can be found in Cicero's eclectic philosophical writings were 'the joint property of various philosophical schools and religious traditions, ancient and modern'.⁵² Yet in the case of Locke and Hume, these interpretative difficulties can easily be overstated. In their highly self-conscious concern to relate contemporary philosophical practice to past achievement, it is striking that both sought to advertise explicitly their intellectual debt to Cicero as they did to no other authority. They also argued that on a great number of points, such as his explanation of the relationship between utility and truth, Cicero adopted a position that sharply distinguished him from all other philosophical schools, ancient and modern. In this regard, they asked their audience to read Cicero, and to evaluate the significance of his insights for contemporary philosophical debate, in a very particular way. In order to understand why they considered Cicero's writings, when read in the manner they advocated, to be of such contemporary significance, those readings must be placed within the context of Cicero's broader appeal in this period. To note that Cicero was popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is not to say very much. To explore how the interpretation of his writings was increasingly contested in this period is to dig rather deeper, and to reveal the conceptual terms in which contemporaries addressed the questions in and about philosophy which appeared to them most pressing.

This leads to a third contention regarding historical method, which informs the style and structure of this study. The interpretation offered of the thought of the individuals with whom this thesis is primarily concerned draws freely from a variety of source materials,

⁵¹ Martha Nussbaum, 'Duties of Justice, Duties of Material Aid: Cicero's Problematic Legacy', in S.K. Strange & J. Zupo (eds.), *Stoicism: Traditions and Transformations* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 216.

⁵² Brooke, *Philosophic Pride*, p. xix.

whether published, intended for publication but subsequently suppressed, or private correspondence and manuscripts. The value to the historian of manuscript sources in particular, as Robert Wokler observes, is that they can offer ‘glimpses of the interpenetration of themes that cross their authors’ minds perhaps more clearly than do published works’.⁵³ This is not to say that unpublished sources provide unmediated access to the mind of a past thinker in a way that published works do not, nor that they can easily be employed in order to uncover what an individual ‘meant’ to say in any given work but for reasons of either prudence or a lack of clarity did not. It is rather that they can (at times) reveal how particular families of ideas and concepts were connected in the contemporary imagination in ways that appear strange to us, not least as a consequence of the rigid disciplinary divisions that exist in our own intellectual world but were quite foreign to those individuals upon whom this study focuses.⁵⁴ To attempt to reconstruct these connections, if only in part, demands that the historian approach the writings of past thinkers with a continual ‘willingness to listen, and a commitment to trying to see things their way’.⁵⁵

A good example of this is provided by the discussion of Shaftesbury’s incomplete draft of a ‘History of Socrates’ in Chapter 3. Recent scholars have suggested that Shaftesbury’s classicism was largely irrelevant to his primary philosophical objectives. Yet the ‘History of Socrates’ challenges this claim in the strongest terms, and suggests that his intentions in his published writings were rather different to those commonly assumed. This alters the perspective of the historian when it comes to deciding which of the many thematic lines of enquiry pursued in Shaftesbury’s *Characteristics* (1711) were considered by its author to be the most important. In this particular instance, it draws attention to the weight placed by

⁵³ Robert Wokler, ‘The Manuscript Authority of Political Thought’, *History of Political Thought*, 20:1 (Spring 1999), p. 107.

⁵⁴ For a discussion of the methodological advantages of studying ‘families of ideas’, see Harris, *Mind of Locke*, pp. 1-16.

⁵⁵ Quentin Skinner, ‘Introduction: Seeing Things their Way’, in idem, *Visions of Politics* (3 vols., Cambridge, 2002), i (*Regarding Method*), p. 6.

Shaftesbury on the story he narrated regarding the historical relationship between the Judeo-Christian and Stoic traditions. As it happens, this story, as Shaftesbury was well aware, directly contradicted another influential treatment of the same subject— that provided by Locke in his published works, and even more clearly in particular journal entries. Locke's consideration of this question has either been missed or deemed to be of marginal interest. Shaftesbury's narrative was, in turn, challenged in distinctive ways by Mandeville, Middleton and Hume. This theme, then, was considered by contemporaries to be intimately related to the question of moral obligation. It is necessary for the historian, therefore, to recognise the existence of this connection in the contemporary imagination, to seek as far as possible to reconstruct it, and to explore its broader interpretative significance. This thesis attempts to situate the texts upon which it focuses 'within such intellectual contexts and frameworks of discourse as enable us to recognise what their authors were *doing* in writing them'.⁵⁶ Yet it nonetheless illustrates how close attention to the full range of a past thinker's writings can alert the historian as to the particular intellectual contexts and discursive frameworks (among many) that ought to be selected without blatant anachronism or excessive exclusivity.

Fundamental to this thesis is the contention that attempts to situate Locke, Middleton or Hume in relation solely to two modes of thought and traditions of discourse— the neo-Stoic and Augustinian-Epicurean— must tend towards the conclusion that their thinking was either hopelessly incoherent or inexplicably idiosyncratic. The context selected, in other words, proves inadequate to the explanatory purpose for which it was chosen. The thought of Locke and Hume in particular is distinctive precisely because they cross-examined these traditions, from which they broke explicitly and the conventions and discourses of which they challenged in highly original ways. The manner in which they identified themselves with a tradition of academic scepticism, in this regard, indicates the sheer ambition of their

⁵⁶ Ibid., 'General Preface', i, p. vii.

philosophical projects. Both sought not to mediate between, but entirely to transcend, the conceptual terms of the contemporary debates they addressed. If Hobbes employed conventional understandings of the concepts of conscience and political obligation in order to reach dazzlingly original conclusions, Locke did away with them altogether.⁵⁷ In his highly problematic moral theory, however, Locke retained the conceptual framework inherited by the moderns from classical moral philosophy. In addressing the question of moral obligation, made pressing by Locke, Hume quite deliberately reconceptualised virtue in a manner that banished entirely the *finis* and *honestum* (and with them, moral theology) from philosophical enquiry. Their shared insight regarding the influence of the Epicurean and Stoic traditions on the moral, political and religious thinking of their contemporaries—recently recovered by scholars—provides one context in which we can begin to explain why and how both took these decisive steps.

⁵⁷ As noted by Timothy Stanton, 'Freedom of Conscience, Political Liberty, and the Foundations of Liberalism', in M. Van Gelderen & Q. Skinner (eds.), *Freedom and the Construction of Europe* (2 vols., Cambridge, 2013), i, p. 152.

1 John Locke and Ciceronian Academic Scepticism: the ‘Essays on the Law of Nature’

‘Scant attention’, Neal Wood observes, ‘has been given by most commentators to the seminal role of Cicero in shaping Locke’s moral, social, and even epistemological attitudes’.¹ Raymond Polin declares that Cicero was ‘always present in the thought of Locke’, a claim reinforced by John Marshall.² Locke’s admiration for Cicero and his writings is well attested by his private as well as published papers. Locke’s library catalogue shows that he owned more works by Cicero than by any other author, with the notable exceptions of himself and Robert Boyle.³ In his writings on education, Cicero’s *De Officiis* was the only ‘System of *Ethicks*’ recommended by Locke, seemingly complementing rather than competing with the New Testament, the ultimate source of moral guidance.⁴ The complementary relationship between Cicero’s philosophy and the Christian scriptures was affirmed by Locke on the title-page of the *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1689), where the authority of the classical philosopher was (from 1700) reinforced by that of Ecclesiastes. More strikingly still, Locke’s private papers reveal that he composed chronologies of the lives of just two men— Christ and Cicero.⁵

These indicators of Locke’s esteem for Cicero might appear to be of relatively limited importance for an understanding of Locke’s philosophy. They represent, however, merely the tip of an iceberg. Locke repeatedly, and increasingly explicitly, drew from Cicero’s writings to develop what contemporaries considered to be some of his most contentious claims across a number of works, and to defend them from his critics. The manner in which

¹ Wood, *Politics of Locke’s Philosophy*, pp. 29-30; idem, *Cicero’s Social and Political Thought*, p. 3.

² Polin, *La Politique Morale de John Locke*, p. 34 n. 4 (my translation); Marshall, *Religion and Responsibility*, pp. 157-204, 292-326. See, too, Cumming, *Human Nature and History*, ii, pp. 113-48; and Mitsis, ‘Locke’s Offices’, pp. 45-61.

³ J. Harrison & P. Laslett (eds.), *The Library of John Locke*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1971), #711-721q, pp. 108-109.

⁴ *Some Thoughts concerning Education* (1693), ed. J.W. Yolton & J.S. Yolton (Oxford, 1989), p. 239; ‘Some Thoughts concerning Reading and Study’ (1703), in *The Educational Writings of John Locke*, ed. J.L. Axtell (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 399-400.

⁵ Bodleian Library, Locke MS c31, ff. 140-46.

he did so indicates that Locke's reading of Cicero's philosophical commitments was distinctive. Locke interpreted Cicero as an academic sceptic, who cast doubt on the ease with which philosophy might identify objective truths in morality and religion, or attain a just view of man's true end. The significance of Locke's reading of Cicero as an eclectic thinker, who dissented from the philosophical sects of the late Hellenistic age in which he lived, has gone largely unremarked. Instead, scholars have implied that Locke read Cicero much as he read Seneca— that is, broadly as a Stoic.⁶ Yet Locke's writings from 1663-4 onwards disclose an increasing hostility towards Stoic moral philosophy, which he presented as informing contemporary Christian moral theology and natural law theory in regrettable ways. The highly distinctive terms in which Locke expressed his dissatisfaction with Stoic ethical theory, it will be suggested, reflected a very particular reading of Cicero.

This and the following chapter reconstruct the manner in which Locke drew from Cicero, and recover a context that allows for the importance he attached to Cicero's philosophical writings to be understood. It is argued that a grasp of the place of Cicero in Locke's philosophy— epistemological, moral, religious and political— provides a means of better comprehending both the style and structure of his thought. It will be shown that Locke found much in Cicero's philosophical writings that spoke to his own, developing concerns in above all three related areas.

The first was in his treatment of morality, especially in the *Essay*. Locke combined a notably naturalistic presentation of the origins and development of moral distinctions and justice with a normative, theologically-grounded account of moral obligation. He drew a highly distinctive division between moral motivation and obligation. A number of commentators have supported Peter Laslett's claim that 'Locke is, perhaps, the least consistent of all the great philosophers, and pointing out the contradictions either within any of his works or

⁶ See, for example, Marshall, *Religion and Responsibility*, pp. 157-204, 292-326.

between them is no difficult task'.⁷ Dunn argues that Locke's 'broken-backed' moral theory most clearly illustrates this fact. Locke 'failed shatteringly' to reconcile his 'profoundly and exotically incoherent' ideas, and in his final years this 'tragic thinker' turned to revelation to gloss over the inadequacies of his philosophical treatment of the subject.⁸ Marshall has, more recently, offered a similar interpretation. Locke's moral theory was 'remarkably fragmentary and rudimentary', and inherently incoherent.⁹ The majority of Locke's contemporary readers, whether sympathetic or critical, cast a similar verdict. Locke, however, rejected their objections in an increasingly splenetic manner. He presented Cicero as an example of how a moral 'science' could, in fact, only be constructed on the basis of the account of human nature and the human understanding which he provided.

The second aspect of Locke's thought that was informed by insights drawn from Cicero's philosophical writings was the categorical distinction that Locke drew between the realms of politics and religion. This was a distinction which, he claimed, had been understood in the heathen world but had been elided in a Christian age. A striking aspect of Locke's thought, as commentators have long recognised, is the degree to which he severely circumscribed the scope of public reason and justice, and discussed politics in an almost exclusively secular idiom.¹⁰ Thirdly, Ciceronian academic scepticism was presented by Locke as revealing the strict limits of reason (that is, natural revelation).¹¹ This insight underscored Locke's fundamentally individualistic, definitively heterodox apologetic approach in his writings on religion, and informed his deep distrust of the tendency to dogmatism of Christian sects of all denominations. As reason alone could not establish definitively cardinal truths in morality or religion, the true Christian was duty-bound to search for himself for rules by which to

⁷ *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. P. Laslett (Cambridge, 1960), pp. 82-3.

⁸ Dunn, *Political Thought*, pp. 221, 187, 81; idem, *John Locke* (Oxford, 1984), p. vii.

⁹ Marshall, *Religion and Responsibility*, p. 157.

¹⁰ For two lucid, recent discussions of this point, see Harris, *Mind of Locke*, passim; and Stanton, 'Toleration and the Philosophy of Locke's Politics'.

¹¹ A point noted by Stephen Buckle, 'British Sceptical Realism', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 7:1 (Apr. 1999), pp. 1-29.

live. By this means the individual took responsibility for his own actions. In so doing, he would recognise his ultimate accountability to one authority only— the God of the Christian scriptures, made flesh in Christ.

The exploration of the Ciceronian dimensions of Locke's philosophical thought possesses two very considerable benefits. First, it demands that Locke be taken seriously as a philosopher concerned primarily with the interrelation between men's 'great concernments' of morality, 'Religion and Justice' (*EHU* 2.23.12).¹² Locke's interest in politics, it will be suggested, resulted primarily from his insight that morality contained an irreducibly communitarian component. Consequently the enlargement of the scope of political authority beyond what Locke considered as being its proper, divinely ordained jurisdiction necessarily entailed pernicious moral consequences. Second, it dwells upon those aspects of Locke's thought— not least the ambiguities within his moral theory, and his problematic treatment of the relationship between natural and revealed religion— that most troubled contemporaries. They, unlike modern political philosophers, could not simply ignore Locke's treatment of these subjects on account of their apparent incoherence.¹³ In recent decades, scholars have convincingly challenged the once-conventional claim that Locke's political philosophy in the *Second Treatise* dominated the Anglophone intellectual landscape during the eighteenth century and beyond.¹⁴ They have, nevertheless, seriously underplayed the importance of his moral and religious philosophy in stimulating the 'science of man' that Hume later considered to distinguish modern enquiries from those of classical antiquity. It is

¹² References to the *Essay* are provided in brackets in the text, as above, and in the following format: [Bk.] 2. [Sect.] 23. [Para.] 12.

¹³ A central thrust of Dunn's work is to emphasise the historically-bound nature of Locke's philosophical arguments, and to illustrate (quite plausibly) their limited relevance for modern (secular) political philosophy: see, most notably, 'What is Living and What is Dead in the Political Theory of John Locke?', in idem, *Interpreting Political Responsibility: Essays 1981-1989* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 9-25.

¹⁴ J.G.A. Pocock, 'The Myth of John Locke and the Obsession with Liberalism', in R. Ashcraft & J.G.A. Pocock (eds.), *John Locke: Papers Read at a Clark Library Seminar, 10 December 1977* (Berkeley, 1980), pp. 3-24.

important to note that Hume identified Locke, and not Hobbes, as the pioneer of this ‘science’, which he presented as emphatically moral (rather than political) at its core.¹⁵

The controversy created in Oxford by Hobbes’ *Leviathan* nevertheless provides an important context in which to understand why Locke’s interpretation of Cicero as an academic sceptic sheds light on the development of his philosophical thought, and on the questions he sought to address, from the early 1660s. As Jon Parkin observes, the majority of Hobbes’ most vocal contemporary critics had more in common with many of his ideas than they cared to admit. They endeavoured to conceal this inconvenient fact by presenting Hobbes’ philosophy—and the inferences for political and religious authority he drew from it—as a ‘bizarre aberration’ in the history of thought.¹⁶ This was especially true for those who advocated the way of discovery in natural philosophy pioneered by the Royal Society. This was a methodology which they were forced, on account of Hobbes’ work, to deny led necessarily to the conclusions Hobbes himself had drawn.¹⁷ Locke did not explicitly confront Hobbes in any of his writings. Nonetheless a number of contemporaries considered his philosophy to be in dialogue with (or indebted to) Hobbes in certain respects. Locke’s later claim that he had not read Hobbes with any degree of attention, and was unfamiliar with the arguments to be found in *Leviathan*, must be taken with a large pinch of salt.¹⁸

Locke’s earliest, unpublished essays—the ‘Two Tracts on Government’ (c.1660-2)—justified political authority, and the intervention of the civil magistrate in religious questions, on very similar grounds to Hobbes. His attempt to explain the existence and obligatory force of the law of nature in the lectures he delivered as Censor of Moral Philosophy at Christ

¹⁵ See below, Ch. 6.

¹⁶ Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan*, p. 1.

¹⁷ On which, see Harris, *Mind of Locke*, pp. 83-6.

¹⁸ *A Second Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity* (1697), in *The Works of John Locke* (9 vols., London, 1794; repr. London, 1997), vi, pp. 421-3.

Church in 1663-4, however, suggests that Locke's thoughts regarding men's moral potential and the scope of political authority altered decisively in this period. These lectures betray a marked concern to respond to Hobbes' treatment of the origins of morality and, more tentatively, its relationship to political authority. They also disclose a profound shift in Locke's conception of philosophy as a transformative and practical rather than purely theoretical and abstract activity. The importance of this alteration in Locke's thought, and Cicero's place within it, has been underappreciated.¹⁹ A number of Locke's contemporaries at Oxford drew from Cicero's philosophical dialogues to criticise what they considered to be the Epicurean foundations of Hobbes' philosophy using distinctly Stoic arguments. Locke found in Cicero powerful support for an account of man's natural moral powers— and of the scope and end of political and religious authority— that quite deliberately repudiated both the neo-Epicurean and the neo-Stoic.

i. 'Two Tracts on Government' (1660-2)

In his earliest surviving correspondence from the late 1650s, Locke articulated his melancholic reflections on the lessons to be learnt from the chaos and blood-letting that had unfolded with the disintegration of political, religious and moral consensus in the previous two decades. He concluded, in a letter of 1659, that 'tis our passions, that brutish part, that dispose of our thoughts and actions'. Men, Locke continued, only entertain 'truths... as they suit with our affections, and as they demean themselves towards our imperious passions'. Locke asked 'if there be any remains of reason left among men'. All their professed 'knowledge' was mere 'opinion moulded up between custom and interest, the two great

¹⁹ See, for example, Laslett's claim that Locke only 'began his career as a philosopher in his chamber at Exeter House' from 1667, and that all his earlier writings 'can fairly be called the typical product of a mind capable of enormous expansion, as yet unable to expand at all': *Two Treatises* [1960], pp. 22, 27-8. Both Harris and Stanton have, however, recently emphasised the importance of the 'Essays' in the development of Locke's philosophical thought: Harris, *Mind of Locke*, pp. 78-107; and Stanton, 'Natural Law, Nonconformity, and Toleration'.

luminaries of the world, the only lights they walk by'.²⁰ It followed, Locke observed, that reason played little role in directing men's conduct. It was, instead, an admiration for the example and authority of those who contributed to the public good that might alone encourage irrational and self-interested individuals to curb their most destructive tendencies:

Since, therefore, we are left to the uncertainty of two such fickle guides, let the example of the bravest men direct our opinions and actions; if custom must guide us, let us tread in those steps that lead to virtue and honour. Let us make it our interest to honour our maker, and be useful to our fellows, and content with ourselves. This, if it will not secure us from error, will keep us from losing ourselves. If we walk not directly straight we shall not be altogether in a maze, and since 'tis not agreed where and what reason is, let us content ourselves with the most beautiful and useful opinions.²¹

Locke's early reflections on human nature and the causes of the social and political fragmentation he had witnessed exhibit a combination of Stoicism and profound scepticism. Richard Tuck has identified this as the fundamental synthesis at the heart of a 'new humanism' of 'reason of state' that was a marked feature of European thought from the later sixteenth century.²² In this 'new humanism' it was largely Tacitus, Seneca and Sextus Empiricus, rather than Cicero, to whom European philosophers such as Montaigne turned for relevant insights. It was the imperial Rome in which Tacitus and Seneca lived, not the late Republic of Cicero's age, which Locke had in mind in noting in 1659 that 'truths gain admittance to our thoughts as the philosopher did to the tyrant, by their handsome dress and pleasing aspect'.²³

²⁰ Note Cicero's account of ancient Greek scepticism, positing that 'the senses are limited, the mind feeble, the span of life short, and that truth is sunk in an abyss, opinion and custom are all prevailing...': *Academica*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA, 1933), 1.11.44-5.

²¹ Locke to 'Tom', 20 Oct. 1659, in *The Correspondence of John Locke*, ed. E.S. de Beer (8 vols., Oxford, 1976-89), i, pp. 122-4. De Beer identified the 'Tom' in question as Thomas Westrowe, who had studied at Christ Church with Locke in the 1650s, but the evidence for this attribution is limited.

²² Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government 1572-1651* (Cambridge, 1993). A number of historians have seen Locke's 'Two Tracts' to betray a close engagement with early-modern sceptical thinkers such as Pierre Charron and, through him, with Sextus. See the editor's introduction to *Political Writings*, ed. D. Wootton (Indianapolis, 1993), pp. 26-36; and Daniel Carey, *Locke, Shaftesbury, and Hutcheson: Contesting Diversity in the Enlightenment and Beyond* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 34-68. For the revival of scepticism in early-modern Europe, see Popkin, *History of Scepticism*, passim.

²³ Locke to 'Tom', p. 123.

This amalgam of Stoic moral insights with a scepticism regarding the rational capacities of most men was developed in the ‘Two Tracts on Government’.²⁴ In these essays, Locke derived from the lessons of the previous two decades the essential maxim that the multitude, rather than those who ruled, represented the greater threat to political and social order. ‘Whence is most danger to be rationally feared’, Locke asked, ‘from ignorant or knowing heads? From an orderly council or a confused multitude?’²⁵ Locke could agree with Edward Bagshawe that it was theoretically desirable for men to be permitted ‘to go to heaven every one his own way’. Yet it was in practice impossible to distinguish between ‘sincere and tender-hearted Christians’ and those ‘crafty men’ (Puritan demagogues) who would opportunistically exploit claims to liberty of conscience to undermine the fragile consensus upon which all social order depended.²⁶ The ‘interests of both public peace and the growth and dignity of religion’, Locke argued in Hobbesian fashion, could only be secured by a prudent, caring, but ultimately unaccountable sovereign and a trusting and obedient citizenship. It was for this reason that Locke defended the right of the magistrate to pronounce upon ‘things indifferent’ in religious as in moral life. It was not the place of his subjects to question his decisions or his intentions in making them. Ultimately, he was answerable only to God, and it was God’s direct intervention— ‘through a long chain of miracles’— that had restored monarchy and order to the Three Kingdoms.²⁷ In this regard, the law of nature and civil law were in effect near-identical in Locke’s earliest writings. Indeed, the absolute authority of the civil magistrate was required precisely because the

²⁴ For discussion of the manuscripts, the evidence regarding their dating, and the context for their composition and suppression, see the editor’s introduction to *Two Tracts on Government*, ed. P. Abrams (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 3-83.

²⁵ ‘First Tract on Government’ (1660), in *ibid.*, p. 158.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 160-61; see, too, Locke to Henry Stubbe, (?), 15 Sept. 1659, in *Correspondence of Locke*, i, pp. 109-12. The ‘First Tract’ was a point-by-point refutation of Bagshawe’s defence of religious toleration in *The Great Question concerning Things Indifferent in Religious Worship* (Oxford, 1660).

²⁷ ‘Second Tract on Government’ (c.1662), in *Two Tracts*, pp. 218, 211.

‘multitude’ were incapable of correctly distinguishing between them.²⁸ In Locke’s ‘Tracts’ there remains an unresolved tension between the possibly legitimate claims of conscience, and the individual’s obligation to political and religious authority. Locke would address this question in a highly distinctive manner in his later philosophical writings.²⁹

In his early correspondence and the ‘Two Tracts’, Locke’s arguments were overwhelmingly directed (like Hobbes’) by what he considered to be the pragmatic requirements of stable political and religious authority. Locke simply presumed the legitimacy of the monarch and established church, both (gradually) restored from 1660.³⁰ Locke’s emphasis on unitary political and ecclesiastical authority and the practical advice of Stoic authors as the sole means to mitigate the worst consequences of universal human depravity was, in an English setting, orthodox. It had, however, been rendered distinctly problematic by the conclusions recently drawn from such insights by Hobbes. It reflected a well-established synthesis between a voluntaristic Calvinist soteriology and Senecan practical ethics that was an ingrained feature of the Reformed humanist curriculum at Oxford and Cambridge.³¹ Locke’s mention in the ‘Two Tracts’ of redemption as having been ‘purchased with [Christ’s] blood’, along with his mournful reflection on the ‘corruption of man’ since he ‘first threw himself into the pollution of sin’, suggested a similarly orthodox Calvinist interpretation of original sin. Post-lapsarian man, Locke noted, ‘sullies whatever he takes into his hand’.³²

²⁸ Locke did not, of course, deny the fallibility of the civil magistrate, as reflected in his ‘Essay on Infallibility’ (1661), in *Writings on Religion*, ed. V. Nuovo (Oxford, 2002), pp. 69-72.

²⁹ Harris, *Mind of Locke*, pp. 68-77.

³⁰ A point made forcefully by Dunn, *Political Thought*, pp. 11-17.

³¹ Margo Todd, ‘Seneca and the Protestant Mind: the Influence of Stoicism on Puritan Ethics’, *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 74 (1983), pp. 182-99. See, too, Moriaty, *Disguised Vices*, pp. 48-56.

³² ‘First Tract’, pp. 141, 155. The orthodox character of Locke’s early writings is emphasised by John R. Milton, ‘Locke at Oxford’, in G.A.J. Rogers (ed.), *Locke’s Philosophy: Content and Context* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 29-47; and Marshall, *Religion and Responsibility*, pp. 26-8. William M. Spellman suggests that Locke remained wedded to his early Calvinist vision of fallen human nature: *John Locke and the Problem of Depravity* (Oxford, 1988).

Locke's views on toleration and the legitimate remit of the civil magistrate had altered significantly when he revisited the question in his 'Essay concerning Toleration' (1667).³³ What is most striking about the 'Essay' is the degree to which Locke cast any attempt by the civil magistrate to intervene in the moral opinions of the citizen as potentially a species of 'injustice'. Locke's position was ultimately predicated, in sharp contrast to his stance in the 'Tracts', on the capacity of (and need for) the individual to comprehend through the cultivation of his own faculties his duties to God and his fellow man under natural law. Historians have tended to emphasise the probable role of Shaftesbury in Locke's *volte face* on the question of toleration, and in his development of the claim that 'the magistrate ought to do or meddle with nothing but barely in order to securing the civil peace and property of his subjects'.³⁴ Less attention has been paid to Locke's increasing hostility to the synthesis of Stoicism and scepticism that he had previously endorsed. This was disclosed in his attempt to explain how men might arrive at knowledge of the moral law, and recognise its obligatory character, in his lectures of 1663-4.

ii. 'Essays on the Law of Nature' (c.1663-4)

In the Lovelace Collection acquired by the Bodleian in 1942, containing Locke's private papers and unpublished manuscripts, are eight Latin essays concerning how one might establish the existence of the law of nature, and know it to be binding.³⁵ It is likely that these are transcripts of lectures delivered by Locke in his office as Censor in the academic year

³³ For discussion of the development of Locke's thought in this period, see Marshall, *Religion and Responsibility*, pp. 1-72; and Harris, *Mind of Locke*, pp. 44-126.

³⁴ 'An Essay concerning Toleration' (1667), in *Political Writings*, p. 187. Laslett (above, n. 19) is unequivocal regarding Shaftesbury's importance; so too is Richard Ashcraft, *Revolutionary Politics and Locke's Two Treatises of Government* (Princeton, 1986), pp. 75-127.

³⁵ For concise discussion of the Lovelace Collection, see the editor's introduction to the first published edition of these manuscripts: *Essays on the Law of Nature*, ed. W. von Leyden (Oxford, 1954), pp. 1-15 [hereafter *ELN*]. A new edition of the texts, critical of von Leyden's translation and editorial front matter, has subsequently been published as *Questions concerning the Law of Nature*, ed. D. Clay, J.S. Clay & R. Horwitz (London, 1990). I have used the former since the objections raised to it by Horwitz *et al* are far from convincing, and their translation is inferior. For a comparison of the editions, see M.A. Stewart's 'Review' of *Questions* in *The Locke Newsletter*, 23 (1992), pp. 145-65.

1663-4. During his lifetime Locke carefully preserved these texts, and had his amanuensis draw up a fair copy of them in c.1681-2.³⁶ Locke also filed a further transcript with these essays. This appears to be the Valedictory Speech which the Censor was required to deliver at the end of his term.³⁷

In his first 'Essay', Locke responded in the affirmative to the question of whether 'there is a rule of morals, or law of nature, given to us'. He rehearsed notably conventional arguments in a rather uncritical fashion. William von Leyden suggests that this 'Essay' may have been composed by Locke in the later 1650s as part of an ongoing dialogue, or even collaboratively, with the ordained Anglican minister and fellow of All Souls, Gabriel Towerson.³⁸ This 'Essay' is entirely of a piece with Locke's 'Two Tracts' and early correspondence. It fits firmly within the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition of Christian natural law, rehearsing the argument from universal consent as developed in the hands of (*inter alia*) Richard Hooker, Hugo Grotius, John Selden, Robert Sanderson and Nathaniel Culverwell. Man's reason, and here Locke cited Aristotle, furnished him with a divine spark that provided privileged access to discover and interpret the decrees of a divine will which issued commands and prohibitions. To live according to the law of nature was to fulfil one's end as a rational being; and the wisest in all ages had understood that true happiness was to live 'according to nature'. The law of nature, Locke argued, could be equated with 'that moral good or virtue which philosophers in former times (and among them especially the Stoics)' had 'adorned with so many praises'. Locke reserved particular praise for Seneca (*ELN* 109). To be sure, a great many men (and, indeed, whole nations) were misled by their 'violent

³⁶ Horwitz (*Questions*, p. 42) argues that this reflected Locke's aborted intention to have the texts published, but as Stewart has shown there is no evidence whatsoever for this claim and much to be said against it ('Review', pp. 158-9).

³⁷ See von Leyden's discussion of the Christ Church tradition of 'burying the Censor': *ELN*, pp. 11-12, 218-19.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10; see, too, Abrams' comments in *Two Tracts*, pp. 10-17. This claim is predicated on Towerson's allusion to 'the papers that have passed between us' in a letter to Locke: c.3 Nov 1660, in *Correspondence of Locke*, i, pp. 158-9. Further support for this contention is provided below.

passions', life of vice, or limited capacity from cultivating 'right reason'. Yet this did not challenge the argument from universal consent, or indeed the existence of a moral conscience or innate moral principles.³⁹ 'In this matter', Locke declared, 'not the majority of people should be consulted but those who are more rational and perceptive than the rest' (*ELN* 115).

Locke's subsequent 'Essays', however, disclose a pointed hostility towards the distinctly neo-Stoic arguments he had previously recapitulated.⁴⁰ Locke was concerned, as were his contemporaries, to reject Hobbes' attempt to ground his ethical system on the basis of self-preservation and self-interest alone. Hobbes equated definitions of moral good and ill with the pronouncements of the sovereign, and explained moral motivation and obligation in terms of the incentives provided by the sanctions enforcing positive law. In classical philosophical parlance, Hobbes banished normative moral truth (*honestum*) altogether. His hedonic psychology suggested that in their pre-political state, men would simply equate the good with self-interest (the *utile*); and this made mutual co-operation and co-ordination impossible. The attempts of the classical moral philosophers to establish man's true end and happiness on the basis of reason, and to explain to their votaries how it might be secured, were futile:

We are to consider, that the Felicity of this life, consisteth not in the repose of a mind satisfied. For there is no such *Finus ultimus* (utmost ayme,) nor *Summum Bonum*, (greatest Good,) as is spoken of in the Books of the old Morall Philosophers. Nor can a man any more live, whose Desires are at an end, than he, whose Senses and Imaginations are at a stand.⁴¹

³⁹ In the 'Two Tracts', Locke (in passing) similarly endorsed the claim that knowledge of the precepts of natural law had been 'implanted' in men's 'hearts', impinged upon their 'consciences' even after the Fall, and was reflected by the universal consent of the wise: 'Second Tract', p. 225.

⁴⁰ Locke's shifting position in the course of the 'Essays' has been ignored by those who have sought to reformulate a Straussian interpretation of Locke (Strauss' *Natural Right* was itself published prior to the discovery of the 'Essays'), by arguing that these lectures are incompatible with his supposed moral relativism in his later, published works. See, for example, Zinaich Jr., *Locke's Moral Revolution*, pp. 153-76.

⁴¹ *Leviathan*, ed. R. Tuck (Cambridge, 1991), [Pt.] 1. [Ch.] 11, pp. 69-70.

Hobbes' hedonic psychology, moral relativism, voluntaristic theology and materialist metaphysic seemed to many contemporaries to recapitulate errors that could be traced to the ancient Epicurean philosophers. It followed that Cicero's strident criticisms of Epicureanism, especially its political and ethical implications, in his philosophical dialogues provided a treasure-trove of arguments that could be employed to undermine the misanthropic vision of man (and capricious picture of God) presented by Hobbes.

This was the approach taken by Robert Sharrock (1630-84), a fellow of New College, Oxford, and active member of Boyle's circle.⁴² The title of Sharrock's hypothesis of the law of nature, framed as a response to Hobbes, indicates Cicero's presiding presence in the work (*Hypotheses Ethikæ de Finibus & Officiis Secundum Naturæ Jus* (1660)). As Parkin remarks, Locke's final three 'Essays'— in which he denied that the law of nature could be established upon the exclusive foundation of self-interest— repeated many of the criticisms of Hobbes developed by Sharrock. This suggests that Locke read the work shortly after publication.⁴³ This claim is supported by a letter from Towerson to Locke of late 1660, in which he discussed the attempt to reconcile the *utile* with the *honestum* by recourse to the concept of an innate moral conscience. This imposed natural sanctions on men (guilt and remorse) sufficient to ensure that they found their interest in virtuous living even in the absence of political authority.⁴⁴ This was Sharrock's fundamental claim, one defended by Towerson but apparently already rejected by Locke, given that Towerson noted that they disagreed on this point. Indeed, Locke intended to write a further 'Essay' responding in the negative to the question 'does a strong conviction of the mind prove that there is a law of nature?', but failed to do so (*ELN* 99).

⁴² For biographical details, see Anita McConnell, 'Sharrock, Robert (*bap.* 1630, *d.* 1684)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2009 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25243, accessed 10 April 2013].

⁴³ Parkin, *Taming the Leviathan*, pp. 211-14.

⁴⁴ Towerson to Locke, c.3 Nov. 1660, in *Correspondence of Locke*, i, pp. 158-9.

Rather than turning, as had Sharrock, to Stoic arguments in order to explain how men might come to knowledge of the natural law and appreciate its binding force, Locke in effect joined Hobbes in ridiculing Stoic definitions of the *honestum* and *summum bonum*. There is nonetheless every indication that Locke drew as heavily from Cicero's philosophical writings as had Sharrock, albeit to establish quite different conclusions. In his second 'Essay', Locke reaffirmed the proposition that 'the law of nature can be known by the light of nature', but argued that this indicated that 'there is some sort of truth of which a man can attain by himself and without the help of another' (ELN 123). The duties and obligations imposed by this law, Locke reiterated, must be discernible by the individual 'without any teacher instructing him in his duties, any monitor reminding him of them' (ELN 127). This suggestion that the individual might develop true knowledge of good and evil ran directly against Hobbes' foundational insight. For Hobbes, it was precisely the subjectivity of men's claims to do so that exposed 'right reason' as a chimera caused by pride. The deleterious consequences of this subjectivity could only be averted once men recognised their duty to submit their private judgment to that of 'the publique Conscience'.⁴⁵ As Hobbes noted in *De Cive*, 'of doctrines that dispose men to sedition, the first, without question is: *that knowledge of good or evil is a matter for individuals*'.⁴⁶

These passages in Locke's 'Essay' closely mirror an influential paragraph of Cicero's fragmentary *De Republica* (3.22) preserved by Lactantius in the *Divine Institutes* (6.8). Cicero emphasised both the existence of an immutable moral law, and the duty of the individual to recognise it for himself:

We cannot be freed from its obligations by senate or people, and we need not look outside ourselves for an expounder or interpreter of it. And there will not be different laws now and in the future, but one eternal and unchangeable law will be valid for all

⁴⁵ *Leviathan*, 3.29, p. 223.

⁴⁶ *De Cive*, ed. R. Tuck & trans. M. Silverthorne (Cambridge, 1998), [Ch.] 12. [Para.] 1, p. 131. Locke's marked disagreement with Hobbes on this point is noted by Stanton, 'Foundations of Liberalism', pp. 143-9.

nations and all times, and there will be one master and ruler, that is, God, over us all, for he is the author of this law, its promulgator, and its enforcing judge. Whoever is disobedient is fleeing from himself and denying his human nature, and by reason of this very fact he will suffer the worst penalties, even if he escapes what is commonly considered punishment.⁴⁷

Locke now proceeded to deny that the existence of natural law could be established by means of the argument from ‘inscription’ (that is, innate ideas) or from ‘tradition’ (the universal consent of the wise). He thereby called into question the primary philosophical arguments employed by scholastic natural law theorists but challenged by Hobbes. Locke nonetheless maintained what Hobbes denied— that men possessed the capacity to acquire true knowledge of a natural law of divine origin, and that reason might in principle be univocal on the definition of moral good and evil. Historians have struggled to explain why Locke rejected the argument from common consent, or to identify a natural law theorist who had made a similar move.⁴⁸ Here it is important to note that Cicero, in Book I of *De Legibus*, argued that only reason and nature could provide the criteria to establish right laws, not common consent. Cicero emphasised that all men were able to do so if not misled, as they so often were, by the false judgements of others.⁴⁹

Meanwhile Locke’s criticism of the doctrine of innate ideas moved well beyond that offered by Cambridge Platonists such as Ralph Cudworth and natural philosophers like Boyle. Both were willing to deny that God had simply impressed particular moral precepts on men’s minds at birth. They nevertheless defended the Stoic doctrine of *prolepsis*. This suggested that all men possessed anticipations of universal, immutable moral and religious ideas. These

⁴⁷ *De Republica*, trans. C.W. Keyes (Cambridge, MA, 1928), 3.22. See, too, Locke’s later assertion that ‘human nature must needs be changed before this law can be either altered or annulled’ (ELN 199). Rivers observes how commonly this passage was drawn upon in early-modern theological and moral discussion: *Reason, Grace and Sentiment*, i, pp. 60-61. Von Leyden notes that Locke drew from *De Republica*: ELN, p. 127 n. 4.

⁴⁸ See, for example, von Leyden’s attempt (ELN, pp. 39-43) to demonstrate that Locke was influenced by Culverwell. This claim ignores the fact that there is no evidence that Locke read Culverwell closely at this time, and (even more problematically) overlooks the latter’s endorsement of the *consensus omnia* argument.

⁴⁹ Cicero, *De Legibus*, trans. C.W. Keyes (Cambridge, MA, 1928), 1.15.42-1.17.47. See von Leyden’s brief comment that the doubt Locke cast on the *consensus omnia* argument was reminiscent of passages in Cicero: ELN, p. 35.

were subsequently elicited by ‘an *active* exertion of the inward strength, vigour and power of the mind’.⁵⁰ In rejecting the doctrine of innate ideas, Locke adopted an empiricist position regarding knowledge acquisition which would inform all of his subsequent works, not least the ‘Essay concerning Toleration’.⁵¹ Locke argued, in contrast to Cudworth, that men’s intellectual faculties were passive. Reason was the name given to the mind’s ability to order and trace the causal connections between ideas that were generated by the data provided by the senses. Once again, it is significant that Cicero provided a very similar description of the office of reason. In *De Officiis*, a work for which Locke later expressed the highest admiration, Cicero explained that both men and beasts were guided by their senses and desires. Cicero drew particular attention to the desire for self-preservation, ‘the impulse to unite for the purpose of procreation’, and the concern to nourish one’s offspring. Men, unlike beasts, possessed reason, however. This ‘enables him to perceive consequences, to comprehend the causes of things... to compare similarities and to link and combine future with present events’. Cicero focused in a distinctive manner upon reason’s capacity to trace causal connections rather than upon its ability actively to elicit truths and govern the will. Cicero further argued that men’s reason allowed them to recognise the mutual benefits of uniting together in ‘fellowship’ in pursuit of shared ends, most especially to provide more stable and constant ‘comfort and sustenance’ for both oneself and one’s family. The interaction with others in society, Cicero continued, ‘arouses men’s spirits, rendering them greater for achieving whatever they attempt’. Society also encouraged the cultivation of an ‘impulse’ that beasts lacked, on account of their inability to trace causal connections. ‘The search for truth and its investigation’, Cicero declared, ‘are, above all, peculiar to man... so

⁵⁰ Ralph Cudworth, *A Treatise concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, ed. S. Hutton (Cambridge, 1996), p. 74 (italics added).

⁵¹ On which, see Harris, *Mind of Locke*, pp. 81-2; and John Coleman, ‘Locke’s Empiricist Theory of the Law of Nature’, in P.R. Anstey (ed.), *The Philosophy of John Locke: New Perspectives* (London, 2003), pp. 106-26, who observes that by the time of the later ‘Essays’ Locke was already a ‘committed empiricist’ (p. 119).

that a spirit that is well trained by nature will not be willing to obey for its own benefit someone whose advice, teaching and commands are not just and lawful'.⁵²

Given that the 'Essays' are transcripts of lectures, Locke understandably provided few references to the authorities upon which he drew. Their correspondence with Cicero's writings, in their discussion of the interplay between the senses and reason and the doctrines of innatism and universal consent, is nevertheless unmistakable.⁵³ As will be seen in the chapter to follow, in his later (published) writings Locke acknowledged his debt to Cicero on these issues, as on many others. The important point to note here, however, is that Locke's later 'Essays' offered a more favourable assessment of men's natural moral powers than he had previously been willing to provide. Locke argued that it was the error of 'the most cautious and zealous'— a curious coupling— to suggest that men might be led to knowledge of and a sense of obligation towards a moral law 'without any deliberate consideration' of their own. The 'cautious and zealous', the sceptic and the Stoic, both dogmatically defended the authority of the 'wise' over the mass of mankind on the basis of an unfavourable estimation of most men's rational capacities (*ELN* 137). As had Locke in his first 'Essay', they turned to the doctrines of universal consent and innate ideas in order to defend their claim that they (the 'wise' few) were able to attain and live according to true precepts in morality and religion, even if most men regrettably failed to do so. Their superior wisdom, virtue and piety, in turn, authorised them to govern the irrational 'multitude'.

Rejecting the argument from inscription in the third 'Essay', Locke first made mention of the 'souls' of men as 'empty tablets' when born, which were afterwards 'to be filled in by

⁵² *De Officiis*, ed. M.T. Griffin & E.M. Atkins (Cambridge, 1991), 1.11-13. No scholar, to my knowledge, has drawn attention to the similarities between Cicero's treatment of reason's relationship to the senses and that offered by Locke from 1663-4. Mitsis notes Cicero's 'direct and palpable influence on Locke's thinking' in his lectures of 1663-4, but does not explore this point at any length: 'Locke's Offices', pp. 45-61.

⁵³ The similarity is especially striking if one compares Locke's original Latin expressions with those employed by Cicero. Given the restrictions regarding length to which this thesis must conform, such a detailed comparison of lengthy passages (alongside the required translations) cannot be offered here.

observation and reasoning' (*ELN* 137). In the course of his subsequent 'Essays', Locke's emphasis was placed on the labour each individual was required to expend in order to acquire those rules which might allow him to lead 'a good and happy life'. He could not, it was now argued, meekly follow the 'beautiful opinions' of the wise. These 'opinions' were just that— subjective inferences regarding a good life drawn from the 'observation and reasoning' of particular, fallible men. The task facing the individual who would live virtuously in this life and secure salvation in the next was considerably more onerous, Locke noted, than the doctrines of inscription and universal consent implied. As he pointedly remarked, 'we should both be uncertain of our future life and repent of our past life, if we were to doubt that these [opinions] represent the law of nature'. It was precisely such uncertainty, doubt and repentance that Locke's sceptical treatment of scholastic natural law theory demanded (*ELN* 143). As Cicero argued in *De Officiis*, men only truly became human once they embraced rather than denied (as Hobbes required) their natural 'desire for seeing the truth', and critically evaluated the claims made by others to have established that truth. It was the pursuit of truth which, Cicero declared, defined 'a blessed life'.⁵⁴

Locke's allusion to humility and repentance in his third 'Essay' is of considerable importance. Both qualities were demanded of men by Christ for entry into his kingdom. Locke's claim that the existence of a law of nature could be known was established on the basis of natural rather than revealed theology. In his fifth 'Essay', Locke emphasised that 'even if God and the soul's immortality are not moral propositions and laws of nature, nevertheless they must necessarily be presupposed if natural law is to exist' (*ELN* 173). Locke indicated that reason could deduce the laws of nature with certainty, whereas revelation was assented to on the basis of probability (*ELN*, 176). This was a position which

⁵⁴ *De Officiis*, 1.13.

Locke would later maintain, one that suggested that whilst revelation might enlarge upon reason it could not positively countermand it.⁵⁵

As with the moral principles that could be deduced from these theological axioms, for Locke these complex ideas were neither innate, nor sufficiently acquired by means of 'tradition' (the teaching of philosophers, priests or magistrates). Instead, Locke intimated that the individual, without the assistance of revelation, was able to recognise the existence of a superintendent deity who would judge them according to their actions in this life, and reward or punish them accordingly. In his fourth 'Essay', Locke furnished two proofs for the existence of God. He would later reproduce these proofs in both the early drafts of 1671 and the final, published editions of the *Essay*. Both have been judged weak and non-committal by many subsequent commentators.⁵⁶ Firstly, by reflecting on his sense-experience the individual would discern an order and harmony in the observable universe, thereby acquiring an idea of its purposive nature (*ELN* 151). Secondly, by recognising his own capacity for abstract thought, the individual would necessarily acquire the idea of an intelligent, powerful and wise designer by whom, as His created being, he would be held accountable (*ELN* 157).

In reiterating and justifying these distinctly anti-metaphysical proofs for the existence of God in the *Essay*, Locke cited Cicero in his support, a point returned to in Chapter 2 (*EHU* 4.10.6). In developing the claim, first made in the 'Essays', that the principles of morality ('beautiful opinions') taught in societies as eternal and immutable by reference to the doctrines of inscription and tradition were in reality historically contingent and had developed more on the basis of their perceived social utility, Locke similarly cited Cicero

⁵⁵ As noted by Stanton, 'Foundations of Liberalism', p. 150.

⁵⁶ *Drafts for the 'Essay concerning Human Understanding', and Other Philosophical Writings*, ed. P.H. Nidditch & G.A.J. Rogers (Oxford, 1990), §94, pp. 208-15 (in 'Draft B'), and §140, pp. 257-8 (in 'A'): both drafts date from 1671. Dunn (*Political Thought*, p. 14) calls Locke's proofs 'flaccid'; see, too, Nuovo, *Christianity, Antiquity, and Enlightenment*, pp. 53-73.

(EHU 2.28.11). Cicero's *De Officiis* was, perhaps, at its most distinctive in discussing virtue almost exclusively in terms of its social utility rather than its normative truth.

Locke's lectures, then, reveal a distrust regarding the treatment of reason as a divine spark providing privileged access to the order of the universe and the will of the Creator. Instead Locke argued, as had Cicero, that reason was merely a 'discursive faculty of the mind', able to render coherent the data of sense-experience but itself incapable of creating ideas *ex nihilo* (ELN 149). Locke emphasised that sensation and reason must 'assist each other mutually' (ELN 151). Only if they were to do so, Locke suggested, might the individual develop true ideas regarding a deity, a future state, and his duties as God's created being. It was, as a consequence, imperative that the individual be at liberty to do so. Here it is important to note that Locke's journal entries dating from the early 1660s show that he engaged in the study of patristics, with an especial interest in the writings of Clement of Alexandria, Origen and the Cappodocians.⁵⁷ These early Fathers were influential in incorporating Greek *paideia* into Christian apologetics, presenting Christianity as a way of life and a transformative philosophy that enlarged upon and showed the errors within the dogmatic philosophies of the heathen schools.⁵⁸ In the 'Essays' religion ceased to be used by Locke as the instrumental means of supporting *a priori* political objectives, as had broadly been the case in the 'Two Tracts'. Instead worship and piety became both a duty under natural law and, as it had been for the early Greek Fathers, a truly transformative intellectual, spiritual and moral journey. The 'Essays' also provide an early indication, more clearly illustrated in Locke's mature writings and discussed in the following chapter, of how Ciceronian academic scepticism was considered by Locke to complement a distinctly humanized form of Christian piety.

⁵⁷ Milton, 'Locke at Oxford', pp. 40-42.

⁵⁸ On which, see Werner Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Cambridge, MA, 1961); and Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, pp. 126-44.

If, as Locke argued, men's natural faculties were sufficient to lead them to behave morally and to acquaint them with the true grounds of their moral obligation as God's created beings, it was clear that most men's moral principles derived from a quite different source. It was, as Locke had regretted in 1659, custom and the opinions of others which guided men's estimations of moral good and ill. In the fifth 'Essay', Locke drew from the accounts of ethnographers both ancient and modern—a resource referred to far more extensively in the *Essay*—to show how custom and public authority had sanctified shameful moral codes in even the most civilised of nations, including ancient Greece and Rome.⁵⁹ The 'beautiful opinions' of philosophers no less than the positive laws of the civil magistrate, Locke now intimated, could obstruct the seemingly natural process whereby men's (God-given) faculties led them to form true ideas of moral good and ill. This was a consequence of the imposition of false and dogmatic speculative definitions of the *honestum* and man's true end. This theme was explored more fully by Locke in his 'Valedictory Speech'.

In the 'Speech', the development of Locke's thought regarding the 'virtue' of the Stoics (and the general value of heathen philosophy) is made clear.⁶⁰ This text anticipates Locke's significant adoption of a historical method in his later moral, political and religious philosophy. In marked contrast to his praise of Seneca in the first 'Essay', Locke's contempt for the definition of the moral good offered by the Stoics (with whom Locke placed Aristotle⁶¹) was unequivocal. Locke emphasised how few were the gifts nature had bestowed on man. Although she had provided him with a 'small flame of divine origin' (reason), this

⁵⁹ For discussion of Locke's extensive use of travel literature, see Carey, *Contesting Diversity*, pp. 69-97.

⁶⁰ *ELN* pp. 220-43, where both the Latin original and an English translation are provided.

⁶¹ Here Cicero's influence is palpable, as his elision of the distinction between the moral and religious philosophies of the Stoics and Peripatetics is one of the most distinctive aspects of his treatment of the history of philosophy. See, for example, *De Natura Deorum*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA, 1933), 1.7.16. Here the Stoic (Balbus) criticises the academic sceptic (Cotta) for this tendency, one attributed originally to Antiochus, who 'failed to see what a gulf separates the Stoics, who distinguish expediency and right not in name only but in essential nature, from the Peripatetics, who class the right and the expedient together, and only recognize differences of quantity or degree, not of kind, between them. This is not a slight verbal discrepancy, but a fundamental difference of doctrine'.

only served to 'give us more trouble and anxiety than light'. It allowed men to entertain hopes of attaining happiness in this life. However these were inevitably 'vain and directed to the future, whereby the mind, as if set on a rack, is continually stretched out but never satisfied'. The attempt of philosophers to establish a definition of what Locke, in the third 'Essay', referred to as 'a good and happy life' was a case in point. Seduced by the 'riches' promised by philosophy, Aristotle and the Stoics had claimed to identify man's end on the basis of autonomous reason, but had (as Hobbes observed) inevitably failed (*ELN* 221). Far from easing the pains and fears endured by those who looked to them for guidance as to where happiness might be found, they were not even able to inure themselves to the torments of a life to which all were confined by nature 'as to a convict prison' (*ELN* 221). Aristotle had found his desired tranquillity only by leaping into the Euripus. The Stoic philosophers were exemplars of the perils of pride and vanity, not of disinterested moral virtue and philosophical enquiry.

The Stoic philosophers had not only failed to find the true source of happiness and moral good for themselves. Their teachings had also prevented others from doing so. Engaged in 'fashioning their happy man', they were convinced that the only means to do so was to 'despoil him of all his passions' in favour of a reason which Locke considered to be of use only insofar as it was free to discourse with the senses rather than to fight against them. The Stoic concept of *apatheia* (tranquillity), which asserted the sovereignty of reason over the passions, obliterated this harmony, thereby rendering men both ignorant and miserable. As a consequence the Stoics 'destroy the man'. In place of a 'tree of happy growth' they substituted 'a barren stump with a pompous show of words', bequeathing 'to the human race only a sort of happiness which it cannot make use of and enjoy' (*ELN* 223). The metaphor of the tree occupied a central position in debates within Christianity regarding men's natural moral powers. Both Augustine and Luther drew upon Matthew 7.18 ('A sound

tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor a rotten tree bear good fruit’)— and Romans 14.23— to emphasise that without divine grace no man was ‘sound’, and all his actions were rotten.⁶² Locke’s description of the individual as a ‘tree of happy growth’ indicated a conviction that men were provided with all they needed to attain the limited happiness and knowledge they required, if they were permitted to develop without unnecessary interference.⁶³ This was to be a constant refrain in Locke’s subsequent writings, and largely worked to exclude Augustinian accounts of the Fall in explaining most men’s failure to do so.⁶⁴

The Epicureans, meanwhile, had gone to the opposite extreme. They advocated the indulgence of the passions in the quest for tranquillity (*ataraxia*), denying the capacity of the Stoics’ much vaunted reason altogether. The end result of both Stoic and Epicurean philosophy was, however, essentially the same. Locke’s position here was dramatically different to that adopted in his first ‘Essay’, in which the Epicurean equation of the law of nature with man’s hedonic impulses was anathematised in favour of the Stoics’ ‘right reason’. Now, both sects served to illustrate how ‘happiness is so far removed from this life that it is impossible out of these dregs to see where it is’. The most that these philosophers had achieved in their search for happiness was, essentially, ‘to tell us that it cannot be found’ (*ELN* 223). The law of nature could not be understood exclusively in terms of men’s passions (self-interest) or their reason. The two, as Cicero emphasised, had to work in tandem. The pervasive tendency to look back to halcyon ‘golden ages’ of virtue, where men lived according to philosophy, was treated with derision by Locke (*ELN* 227). Neither

⁶² For Augustine and Luther’s continual return to this metaphor, and to these passages in the Scriptures, see Moriarty, *Disguised Vices*, p. 95.

⁶³ The comparison of men’s natural (undisturbed) process of maturation with that of the tree, it is worth noting, occupied pride of place in Cicero’s highly popular *De Senectute*, trans. W.A. Falconer (Cambridge, MA, 1923), 19.71.

⁶⁴ In his third ‘Essay’, Locke noted that the question of the Fall ‘does not particularly concern philosophers’, a position he would maintain even as he might have remained torn on the issue throughout his life: *ELN*, p. 139. On the difficulties of ascertaining Locke’s opinion on the question of original sin, see Marshall, *Religion and Responsibility*, pp. 141-6; and Ian Harris, ‘The Politics of Christianity’, in Rogers, *Locke’s Philosophy*, pp. 197-215.

Hobbes' brutish state of nature nor Plato's idealised golden age adequately captured the reality of the human condition. The former seemed to deny the possibility of happiness and virtue altogether. The latter suggested that they could be realised to a degree, and with an ease, quite impossible for mere mortals. Both discountenanced the labour, and the interplay between the senses and reason, that were required for men to arrive at knowledge of their duties under natural law.

There is once again good reason to read Locke's increasingly strident anti-Stoicism, and his separation of the law of nature from the moral teachings of Seneca and Aristotle, as an extended paraphrase of passages drawn from Cicero's philosophical dialogues. In *De Finibus* and *Tusculan Disputations* on moral questions, and *De Divinatione* and *De Natura Deorum* on religious topics, Cicero had set off the arguments of the Stoics and Epicureans against one another, whilst identifying the errors within both.⁶⁵ In a passage from *Tusculan Disputations* in which Cicero spoke in his own character, he noted 'how few philosophers are found to be so constituted and to have principles and a rule of life' that they were actually able to follow in practice. This passage was paraphrased by Locke in his depiction of the vanity of philosophy in his *Speech*, and was later transcribed in his journal.⁶⁶ Far from identifying a guide that permitted them to live 'according to nature', as Locke had implied in his first 'Essay', Cicero suggested that the divergence between their dogmatic speculative precepts and their moral practice indicated how both the Stoics' and Epicureans' philosophical enquiries into the good had led them to attempt to lead profoundly unnatural lives. It was bad enough— a 'black disgrace', indeed— that philosophers were guilty of 'frivolity and vanity' in their own lives, unable to obey their high-minded 'dogmas'. The disgrace was enhanced because 'he stumbles in the duty of which he aims at being the teacher and fails in

⁶⁵ For discussion see Colish, *Stoic Tradition*, i, pp. 61-158.

⁶⁶ The passage was transcribed by Locke in 'Sacerdos' (1698), in *Writings on Religion*, pp. 17-18. For further discussion of the importance of this journal entry, see below, pp. 69-71, 82-3.

the conduct of life though professing to give the rule of life'.⁶⁷ The 'wise' philosopher not only misled and deluded himself, but also the supposedly irrational multitude over whom he so haughtily professed his superiority.

Cicero argued that the academic, unlike the Pyrrhonian sceptic did not deny men's duty to strive to attain a guide to life by which they might govern their conduct. Nor did he claim that they were incapable of discerning such principles. The question remained, however, as to the foundation upon which the individual might establish those truths— and with what degree of certainty. As Cicero noted in his programmatic statement of academic scepticism (the *Academica*), the academic sceptic, recognising that probability was sufficient to guide him in his necessary duties, 'is not afraid lest he may appear to throw everything into confusion and make everything uncertain (*incerta*)'.⁶⁸ Locke's rejection of innatism and universal consent, as he emphasised, similarly made everything 'uncertain (*incerti*)', and forced the individual to reconsider both his 'past life' and his prospects for a 'future life'. It demanded, Locke noted, that he critically evaluate those 'opinions [that] have crept into our minds with but little attention on our part'. The individual unthinkingly assumed that these 'opinions' were true, had been 'inscribed in our hearts by God', and furnished 'rules by which to live', not least 'because they assert their authority by the general consent and approval of men with whom we have social intercourse'. This conclusion, Locke argued, was unfounded, and could lead men away from understanding the true nature, content and origins of the natural law (*ELN* 143). To compare Locke's claims here with Cicero's description of the distinctive features of academic scepticism is illuminating:

Nor is there any difference between ourselves and those who think that they have positive knowledge except that they have no doubt that their tenets are true, whereas we hold many doctrines as probable, which we can easily act upon but scarcely advance as certain; yet we are more free and untrammelled in that we possess our power of

⁶⁷ Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, trans. J.E. King, 2nd edn (Cambridge, MA, 1943), 1.4.11-13.

⁶⁸ *Academica*, 2.34.110.

judgement uncurtailed, and are bound by no compulsion to support all the dogmas laid down for us almost as edicts by certain masters. For all other people in the first place are held in close bondage placed upon them before they were able to judge what doctrine was the best, and secondly they form judgments about matters as to which they know nothing at the most incompetent period of life, either under the guidance of some friend or under the influence of a single harangue from the first lecturer they attended, and cling as to a rock to whatever theory they are carried to by stress of weather.⁶⁹

Cicero's mockery of the claims of the dogmatic philosophical sects to have established a definition of the *summum bonum* on the basis of certainty carried very different implications to Hobbes' denial that any such '*Finus ultimus*' existed. The fundamental moral of Ciceronian academic scepticism could be interpreted, as it was by Locke, as merely illustrating the severe limits of human reason, and the need to rest content with probability where demonstrative certainty was unattainable.⁷⁰ As Cicero noted, 'even though many difficulties hinder every branch of knowledge, and both the subjects themselves and our faculties of judgement involve such a lack of certainty... [we will not] abandon in exhaustion our zeal for research'. The academic sceptic was willing 'by arguing on both sides to draw out and give shape to some result that may be either true or the nearest possible approximation to the truth'.⁷¹ Cicero's writings indicated that in regard to the eternal law of nature, all men possessed the natural faculties required to gain sufficient knowledge of their duties. They also implied that under that universal law all men, including the civil magistrate and philosopher, were in an important sense equal.⁷²

⁶⁹ Ibid., 2.3.8. For a similar statement of probability as sufficient to guide 'the wise man' in all his actions, see *De Natura Deorum*, 1.5.12.

⁷⁰ For the increasingly widespread use of probability theory in a range of contexts in the early-modern period, see Lorraine Daston, *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment* (Princeton, 1988); Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability: A Philosophical Study of Early Ideas about Probability, Induction and Statistical Inference*, 2nd edn (New York, 2006); Barbara Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: a Study of the Relationships between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law, and Literature* (Princeton, 1983); and Richard Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories: their Origin and Development* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 101-18.

⁷¹ *Academica*, 2.3.7-8.

⁷² Note George H. Sabine's claim that the crucial insight of Cicero's political application of natural law theory was that 'the state itself and its law is always subject to the law of God, or the moral or natural law', and that under that law 'all men, as Cicero insists in the most unequivocal terms, are equal': *A History of Political Theory* (New York, 1937), pp. 163-73.

As early as 1661, Locke had warned that ‘the greatest caution should be taken lest, having trusted too much in our reason, we neglect faith, and, by not having given due regard to the mysteries of the gospel, we embrace philosophy instead of religion’.⁷³ If ‘right reason’ were, as the Stoics maintained, sufficient for the wise few to establish man’s true end with certainty, then philosophy alone was able to provide a guide to life and little of value might be found in the Scriptures. This represented the proud man’s denial of his ultimate dependence upon God— a dependence repeatedly emphasised by Locke in the ‘Essays’. Moreover the individual who lacked the wisdom, or pride, of the philosopher would be encouraged simply to live according to the ‘beautiful opinions’ he taught, rather than to consider his duties for himself. If, by contrast, men were as thoroughly irrational as Hobbes and the Epicureans implied, then they would similarly lack any incentive to employ their own pains and labour to consider their true end and duties. The individual would not make use of the faculties with which, in Locke’s providential rendering of academic scepticism, his Creator had endowed him for this very purpose. This was a theme that ran throughout Locke’s later *Essay*:

So, in the greatest part of our Concernment, he has afforded us only the twilight, as I may so say, of *Probability*; suitable, I presume, to that State of Mediocrity and Probationership, he has been pleased to place us in here; wherein to check our over-confidence and presumption, we might by every day’s Experience be made sensible of our short-sightedness and liableness to Error; the Sense whereof might be a constant Admonition to us, to spend the days of this our Pilgrimage with Industry and Care, in the search, and following of that way, which might lead us to a State of greater Perfection. It being highly rational to think, even were Revelation silent in the Case, That as Men employ those Talents, God has given them here, they shall accordingly receive their Rewards at the close of the day, when their Sun shall set, and Night shall put an end to their Labours. (*EHU*, 4.14.2)

The reconstruction of the Ciceronian dimensions of Locke’s ‘Essays’ of 1663-4 offered in this chapter invites a number of tentative conclusions. First, it provides a context in which to understand the distinctive conceptual separation between moral motivation (driven by

⁷³ ‘Essay on Infallibility’, p. 72.

man's impulses and utility) and obligation (discerned by reason) in Locke's later writings. The error of the neo-Stoic and neo-Epicurean was to fail to recognise the harmony between men's desires and their reason, and between utility and truth. Contemporaries found this separation between motivation and obligation distinctly problematic; and its implications were explored by those who, on Hume's account, followed Locke in pioneering 'the science of man'. Second, in the later 'Essays' Locke pointed, however tentatively, towards a response to Hobbes on the question of the historical relationship between the origins of morality and human fellowship, and political authority.

Locke argued that the individual was capable of arriving at knowledge of moral and religious truth. He further declared that this required a combination of industry and due humility, enshrined in Cicero's *Academica*, regarding the purpose and reach of men's intellectual faculties. They had been furnished by the Creator to lead the individual to understand his duties, both to God and his fellow man, and ought to be employed to this end. As had Cicero, Locke suggested that this 'impulse' to discover truth developed within society. In the same section of *De Officiis* in which Cicero made this claim, he also noted that men entered into mutual fellowship on account of their natural impulses (self-preservation, procreation, love), and without the need for political authority. This was a subtly different vision of the origins of society and moral consensus to that offered by Hobbes. As will be seen, it was explored in highly distinctive fashion by Locke in his later works. Even if he did not develop this point at length in lectures concerned to show how men might attain knowledge of their duties, the conceptual structure of Locke's thought in 1663-4 invites a third comment. The 'Essays' suggested that civil law and the publicly-taught speculative moral and religious doctrines of philosophers could potentially obstruct the individual's understanding of the natural law. Both could subvert their moral and religious formation. This was to be a central

theme in Locke's mature thought, and one that informed his political philosophy and writings on toleration no less than his epistemology and moral theory.

The themes in Locke's lectures of 1663-4 that were recovered in the previous chapter acquired considerably greater prominence in the *Essay*, upon which Locke embarked from c.1670. James Tyrell noted that the *Essay* grew out of discussions at Exeter House regarding 'the Principles of morality and reveal'd Religion'; and the relationship between the two occupied a central place in the work.¹ In a letter of 1693, Newton famously admitted to Locke that upon reading the *Essay* 'I took you as a Hobbist', who had 'struck at the root of all morality'.² Newton was far from alone in this interpretation. In the fourth edition (1700), Locke felt compelled to respond to allegations that he had sought to 'make *Virtue Vice* and *Vice Virtue*' (EHU 2.28.11n.).³ Even friends who did not doubt the sincerity of Locke's intention to defend an objective moral law were perplexed by his claim that moral distinctions and the rules of justice were conventional and guided by temporal utility. William Molyneux and Tyrell pressed Locke repeatedly on the question of how his hedonic account of moral motivation might be reconciled with men's capacity to live according to a law of nature, the precepts of which Locke claimed might be demonstrated to be true with mathematical certainty (EHU 3.11.16-17; 4.3.18-20).

If Locke's moral theory was considered to be decidedly ambiguous, much the same was true of his treatment of religious knowledge. Locke noted, not without a degree of satisfaction, that he was the first philosopher to be accused of both Popery and Socinianism.⁴ His hedonic psychology and epistemological relativism appeared to reduce truth to opinion, a

¹ See Tyrell's marginal note in his copy of the *Essay* in the British Museum, quoted by John Coleman, *John Locke's Moral Philosophy* (Edinburgh, 1983), pp. 1-2.

² Sir Isaac Newton to Locke, 16 Sept. 1693, in *Correspondence of Locke*, iv, pp. 727-8. For a discussion of the personal and intellectual relationship between the two men which, contrary to many studies, explores the profound divergences between their metaphysical, theological and moral views, see Young, *Religion and Enlightenment*, pp. 83-119.

³ Locke was responding explicitly to James Lowde, *A Discourse concerning the Nature of Man* (London, 1694). As early as the second edition (1694), Locke complained that 'my meaning, I find, is often mistaken, and I have not the good luck to be every where rightly understood' (EHU, 'To the Reader', p. 11).

⁴ *Second Vindication*, p. 359.

distinctly Hobbist (or ‘Papist’) step. Locke nonetheless emphasised that the divine origins of revelation could only be attested by the conformity of its teachings with archetypal truths attained by unassisted human reason, a seemingly Socinian manoeuvre.⁵ Locke claimed that ‘Reason must be our last Judge and Guide in every Thing’ (*EHU* 4.19.14). Yet reason was merely a ‘discursive faculty of the mind’, whose base materials were provided by the subjective and unverifiable data of sense-experience (*ELN* 149).

In the *Essay*, as in the *Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695), Locke extended his sceptical treatment of the claims of the Stoics and Epicureans to have identified man’s true end. In the former work, Locke noted that: ‘The philosophers of old did in vain enquire, whether the *Summum bonum* consisted in Riches, or bodily Delights, or Virtue, or Contemplation: And they might have as reasonably disputed, whether the best Relish were to be found in Apples, Plumbs, or Nuts’ (*EHU* 2.21.55). Locke’s mature writings, like his earlier lectures, owed a clear debt to Cicero, whose eclecticism had seen him transcend the confused bickering of the Stoics and Epicureans. Meanwhile, Locke’s works of epistemology read in places like hectoring self-help manuals. They exhort the individual reader to expend the ‘pains and labour’ required to divest himself of the opinions of others, and to search for himself for truths in morality and religion. Were he to do so, Locke argued, he would recognise Christianity to be ‘reasonable’ in two distinct senses. First, it affirmed and enlarged upon insights into an eternal moral law that unassisted men (as the example of Cicero showed) were able to acquire by means of their own natural lights, with which the Creator had furnished them for this very purpose. The Gospels provided in full what philosophy could only establish in part— an account of moral obligation. Second, the ‘Covenant of Grace’

⁵ Establishing the truth of Christianity on the basis of reason was, in Locke’s age, considered to be a profoundly Socinian move. It was for this reason that Jonathan Edwards accused Locke of ‘sailing to Racovia by a side-wind’: *ibid.*, p. 185. Marshall, *Religion and Responsibility*, argues that Locke had indeed adopted a Socinian-Unitarian position by the 1690s. My position is closer to that of Victor Nuovo, *Christianity, Antiquity, and Enlightenment*, who suggests that Locke’s theology was considerably more doctrinally independent, and more ethically orientated, than Marshall allows.

offered by Christ, and the prospect of salvation, provided a truly compelling reason why men ought to make it an essential part of their happiness to live virtuously.

Locke's moral theory, however, contains what appears to be a fundamental paradox. In all of his later philosophical writings, including the *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), Locke strongly implied that it had been easier for individuals to live in accordance with the law of nature, and as a consequence to recognise the divine origins of Christ's moral teachings, in the heathen world than in the Christian. The sceptical nature of Locke's self-appointed task in the *Essay*— '*to be employed as an Under-Labourer in clearing Ground a little, and removing some of the Rubbish, that lies in the way to Knowledge*'— reflected a conviction that human pride (in the form of false philosophy) had led men into profound moral and theological error (*EHU*, 'Epistle to the Reader', 10). Locke identified notable similarities between the tendency to dogmatism of the late Hellenistic schools and contemporary religious sects, including whichever happened to be deemed 'orthodox' by the magistrate.⁶ Yet the public influence exercised by the latter in their professedly Christian societies was incalculably greater than that enjoyed by the former in heathen times. For Locke, the societies of classical antiquity had banished both speculative philosophy and theology to the margins of civil life. The civil magistrate, along with 'Merchants and Lovers, Cooks and Taylors', adopted temporal utility rather than normative truth as a guide (*EHU* 3.11.10). Here the place of providence in Locke's naturalistic account of the development of societies, and of moral distinctions within them, is of primary importance. Actions that advanced 'the general Good of Mankind in this World' by definition accorded with those 'Laws' established by a perfectly good and loving God (*EHU* 2.28.11). Worldly utility and objective truth were in perfect harmony. It was only in a Christian world that speculative philosophy had, quite disastrously, 'invaded

⁶ See Locke's comment in his unpublished 'Defence of Nonconformity' (c.1681-2) that it was no part of the magistrate's concern 'whether I am or am not of the state religion i.e. of that church communion where of he himself is': MS Locke c.34, p. 75. For the nature and importance of this document, see Timothy Stanton, 'The Name and Nature of Locke's "Defence of Nonconformity"', *Locke Studies*, 6 (2006), pp. 143-72.

the great Concernments of Humane Life and Society; obscured and perplexed the material Truths of Law and Divinity; brought Confusion, Disorder, and Uncertainty into the Affairs of Mankind; and if not destroyed, yet in a great measure rendered useless, those two great Rules, Religion and Justice' (EHU 3.10.8).

i. Locke's "Three Laws"

At the outset of the *Essay*, Locke identified 'three Sorts' of 'Moral Rules, or Laws' that had been established by philosophers to explain men's sense of obligation to adhere to compacts. Historians have attached relatively little importance to the distinction Locke made between them; yet in developing his account of obligation, these concepts are made to do a considerable amount of explanatory work.⁷ Each 'Law' was accompanied by its own sanctions. It was for this reason, Locke argued, that they could properly be termed laws at all (a distinctly Hobbesian view of law).⁸ The first, and for Locke the only true law was that of the Christian: God required it of His created beings, and would hold the individual accountable for his moral actions on the Day of Judgment. The second law was that of the 'Hobbiſt': 'because the Publick requires it, and the *Leviathan* will punish you, if you do not'. The third law was provided by 'the old *Heathen* philosophers', most notably the Stoics, who argued that to do so was honest, and suitable to the dignity and perfection of a rational creature (EHU 1.3.5). The first rule was denominated 'the *Divine* Law', and concerned itself with sin and duty; the second 'the *Civil* Law', demarcating crimes and innocence; and the third was originally termed by Locke 'the *philosophical* Law', but from the second edition (1694) was renamed the 'Law of *Opinion* or *Reputation*', and was preoccupied with virtue and vice (EHU 2.28.7-10).

⁷ Two exceptions to this relative neglect of Locke's 'Rules' are James Tully, 'Governing Conduct', in E. Leites (ed.), *Conscience and Casuistry in Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 12-71, reprinted in idem, *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 179-241; and Stanton, 'Authority and Freedom'.

⁸ A point made by Harris, *Mind of Locke*, p. 202, in noting the relative absence of any discussion of fundamental law in Locke's writings.

The ideas of virtue and vice entertained within any given society, Locke declared, 'were not of Nature's, but of Man's making' (*EHU* 3.11.15). Even if they did not reflect immutable moral precepts enshrined in an eternal law of nature, they had nonetheless developed naturally as men came together and interacted with one another in society. The sanctions enforcing the 'Law of *Reputation*' were praise and blame. These were in practice the most powerful of all in shaping men's conduct.⁹ Regrettably few individuals reflected upon God's laws and the terrible punishments of a future state. Even those who did might 'entertain Thoughts of future reconciliation, and making their Peace for such Breaches'. When it came to 'the *Civil Law*' upon which Hobbes placed such emphasis, men 'frequently flatter themselves with the hopes of Impunity'. Yet it was 'a Burthen too heavy for humane Sufferance' to 'live in Society, under the constant Dislike, and ill Opinion of his Familiars, and those he converses with' (*EHU* 2.28.12).

These ideas of virtue and vice, Locke continued, denominated 'nothing else, but that, which has the allowance of publick Esteem' (*EHU* 2.28.10-11). They developed on the basis of what a particular society found beneficial and advantageous in furthering its own ends. It followed that moral distinctions differed between societies separated in space and time, since practices that were found necessary and advantageous to one might prove disastrous to another (monogamy was a case in point).¹⁰ In 'Of Ethick in General', originally composed as a chapter to be included in the *Essay*, Locke reduced these variations to a 'general rule'. 'Those actions are esteemed virtuous', Locke declared, 'which are thought absolutely necessary to the preservation of society, and those that disturb or dissolve the bonds of community are everywhere esteemed ill and vicious'.¹¹ The cardinal error committed by Aristotle and the Stoics was to mistake the moral distinctions developed by a particular

⁹ First explored in a journal entry of 1678: 'Credit and Disgrace', in *Political Writings*, pp. 236-7.

¹⁰ Locke used this example in a journal entry of 1681 entitled 'Virtus', in *ibid.*, pp. 240-42; and see below, p. 78 n. 55.

¹¹ 'Of Ethick in General' (c.1686-8), in *The Life and Letters of John Locke*, ed. P. King (London, 1864), p. 321.

society in a specific historical context as normatively true (*EHU* 3.11.15). The wisest of the heathen philosophers, and here Locke cited Cicero, recognised these moral distinctions to have developed solely on the basis of their utility as attested by experience and observation (*EHU* 2.28.11). The Stoic philosophers mistook the *utile* for the *honestum*, the contingent and variable for the timeless and immutable. They defended on the basis of philosophy those moral distinctions that had developed naturally when men's conflicting interests were harmonised as necessity drove them to gather together in society.¹² In doing so they turned to the doctrines of innate ideas and universal consent, which Locke had challenged in his lectures of 1663-4 and proceeded to eviscerate in Book I of the *Essay*.

Locke's profound hostility to Stoic moral philosophy cannot be grasped if considered in isolation from the divine teleology that structured his thought. Locke argued that God in his goodness had, 'by an inseparable connexion, joined *Virtue* and publick Happiness together; and made the Practice thereof, necessary to the preservation of Society, and *visibly* beneficial to all, with whom the Virtuous Man has to do' (*EHU* 1.3.6). Locke emphasised that there was 'nothing that so directly, and visibly secures, and advances the general Good of Mankind in this World, as Obedience to the Laws, he has set them, and nothing that breeds such Mischiefs and Confusion, as the neglect of them' (*EHU* 2.28.11). As a consequence of God's design, men were naturally geared to pursue those objects that they considered to be essential to their happiness. Locke argued that the only principles innate to human nature were 'a desire for Happiness, and an aversion to Misery'. Without these stimuli to both thought and deed, men would remain idle as though 'in a lazy lethargick Dream' (*EHU* 1.3.3; 2.7.3). Men considered things to be 'Good or Evil' solely in reference to the 'Pleasure or Pain' caused by the prospect of either their presence or absence. Only the conviction that something could help to secure an absent pleasure or (more commonly) assist in the

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 308-309, where Locke attacked Aristotle and the Stoics on precisely these grounds.

diminution of a present pain could cause that 'uneasiness' that determined the will to action (*EHU* 2.10.3). Locke argued that men's largely pre-reflective sense of what could contribute to their temporal happiness was infallible. 'As to their present Happiness, or Misery', Locke noted, 'when that alone comes into Consideration, a Man never chuses amiss', because 'Things in their present enjoyment, are what they seem; the apparent and real good are, in this case, always the same' (*EHU* 2.21.58).

Locke's hedonic psychology owed much to the revival of Epicurean ideas by Pierre Nicole and the Jansenist theologians of Port-Royal, Pierre Gassendi, and Hobbes.¹³ Locke differed from their treatment of the passions in denying that they invariably led men to concupiscence and sin, even though he agreed that they could not be suppressed or controlled by reason in the manner prescribed by the Stoic philosophers (and, more recently, René Descartes). To be sure, 'Men's Appetites' would 'if left to their full swing... carry Men to the over-turning of all Morality' (*EHU* 1.3.13). Yet in society men's ideas regarding the causes of pleasure and pain were very different than in a state of nature, when he was 'single and alone'.¹⁴ This owed little to the sanctions threatened by either the '*Civil*' or '*Divine Law*', and still less to the teachings of philosophers. Rather in society, the '*Law of Reputation*' served effectively, insensibly and quite naturally to render men's sense of their own interest broadly conformable to that of the society of which they were a part, so concerned were they to win the approval of others. It was by this means that Locke was able to explain, as against Hobbes, how a degree of consensus and mutual co-operation had been possible prior to the instantiation of positive law. A desire for the 'esteem and reputation' of his peers was

¹³ On which, see Marshall, *Religion and Responsibility*, pp. 131-7, 186-204; Edward A. Driscoll, 'The Influence of Gassendi on Locke's Hedonism', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 12:1 (Mar. 1972), pp. 87-112; Richard W.F. Kroll, 'The Question of Locke's Relation to Gassendi', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 45:3 (Jul.-Sep. 1984), pp. 339-61; and Thomas M. Lennon, 'The Epicurean New Way of Ideas: Gassendi, Locke, and Berkeley', in M.J. Osler (ed.), *Atoms, Pneuma, and Tranquillity: Epicurean and Stoic Themes in European Thought* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 259-71. For a more general discussion of the contexts into which to place this development, see Susan James, *Passion and Action: the Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Oxford, 1997).

¹⁴ 'Virtus', p. 241.

advantageous to the individual. It furnished him with ‘a sort of moral strength, whereby a man is enabled to do, as it were, by an augmented force, that which others, of equal natural parts and natural power, cannot do without it’.¹⁵ Here Locke followed Cicero closely. In *De Officiis*, Cicero noted how society ‘arouses men’s spirits, rendering them greater for achieving whatever they attempt’. This, Cicero continued, was because their ‘impulse towards pre-eminence’, which was strengthened in society, led them to consider it to be essential to their happiness to win the esteem of their neighbours.¹⁶ This, Locke argued in a similar fashion, allowed societies themselves to cohere, and to serve the ends for which they had been instituted— ‘the preservation of the members of that society in peace and safety together’.¹⁷ Locke’s definition of the purpose of civil society similarly echoed Cicero’s claim that man had united with others in ‘fellowship’ out of a concern to preserve and protect both himself and those ‘whom he holds dear’.¹⁸

Here a comparison between Locke’s moral theory in the *Essay* and the third (of three) of Nicole’s *Essais de Morale* (1671) that Locke translated in the later 1670s is instructive.¹⁹ In his essay, concerned with ‘the way of preserving peace with men’, Nicole noted that ‘one great misery of man is, that they practise their vertues by the advice of their passions, which mingle themselves with their best performances’.²⁰ No passion, Nicole emphasised, was stronger than a love of fame. ‘This passion’, Nicole continued in good Augustinian fashion, ‘is vaine, ridiculous, & unreasonable’. Nicole’s judgment of men’s ‘impulse towards pre-

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ *De Officiis*, 1.13.

¹⁷ ‘Obligation of Penal Laws’ (1676), in *Political Works*, p. 234. There was, however, one society that had been instituted for a rather different purpose, the propagation of true religion, and this was Mosaic Israel: see below, p. 82.

¹⁸ *De Officiis*, 1.12.

¹⁹ ‘A Treatise concerning the Way of Preserving Peace with Men’, in *John Locke as Translator: Three of the Essais of Pierre Nicole in French and English*, ed. J.S. Yolton (Oxford, 2000), pp. 115-259, where the French original is presented alongside Locke’s translation. Locke split the essay (as Nicole did not) into two, with separate paragraph numbering. Locke’s translation has received relatively little historical attention, in large part due to the limited interest in Locke’s moral theory, but see Harris, *Mind of Locke*, pp. 282-8, 384-7; and Marshall, *Religion and Responsibility*, pp. 131-7, 178-86.

²⁰ Ibid., [Pt.] 2. [Para] 76.

eminence' was quite different to Cicero's. Nicole argued that, because most men's fulfilment of moral offices was motivated by a concern for the good opinion of others ('the insipid considerations of the creatures'), rather than by a love of God, this 'cannot but render his performances lesse acceptable to his creator'. Society engulfed men further in sin and self-idolatry.²¹ Nicole was willing to accept that even as 'the vertues purely humane are but weaknesses', these impure motives might nonetheless be considered within the context of what he termed God's 'grâce générale'. This was the means employed by God to lead men to act responsibly in their dealings with others, even as they deserved no credit whatsoever for having done so.²² It was in this vein that Nicole distinguished between three types of law. The first was the 'lois de justice'. These were God's laws, and hence absolute and inflexible; and none except the regenerate followed them for their own sake. The second type was the 'lois expresses' (civil laws), which were strictly limited in their scope and reach. The third type of law was in practice the most important in regulating men's conduct in society and leading them to perform their 'devoirs' (duties). This was 'the law of decency [*lois de bienséance*], which is founded on the common consent of men, who have agreed to condemn those, who offend against it'. This law, firmly of man's own making, enforced a code of civility ('les devoirs de civilité') which encouraged many of those virtues that were enjoined by Christian charity (generosity, humility, temperance). Yet this law was followed for entirely the opposite reason (self-love rather than a love of God), rewarding well-bred men ('les honnêtes gens') with the praise of their neighbours and punishing those who transgressed with scorn and contempt.²³

²¹ Ibid., 2.42-3.

²² 'A Discourse on the Weaknesse of Man', in *ibid.*, pp. 43-113: [para] 61. On Nicole's moral theory and concept of 'grâce générale', see Edward D. James, *Pierre Nicole, Jansenist and Humanist: a Study of his Thought* (The Hague, 1972), pp. 99-136; and Moriarty, *Disguised Vices*, pp. 241-52.

²³ 'Preserving Peace', 2.82-91.

At times Nicole implied that there might be some degree of harmony between the ‘laws of decency’ and the ‘laws of justice’. In the end, the depth of Nicole’s Augustinian theological commitments ensured that he reinforced the rigid (and, in the absence of grace, unbridgeable) distinction between *officium* and *finis*, and between ‘honnêteté humaine’ (acquired, natural virtue) and ‘honnêteté parfait’ (the virtue of the elect).²⁴ When placed alongside Nicole’s moral theory, the distinctive feature of Locke’s own treatment of moral motivation and obligation emerges more clearly— its eudaimonism.²⁵ For Locke, there was no conflict between the three laws. All were the different means established by God to lead men to the performance of their duties. Men’s desires no less than their reason constituted a crucial part of their divinely created nature. There is no mention by Locke of the need for an infusion of divine grace for men to lead a truly moral life. Locke instead intimated that it was quite possible for men to move, over the course of their lives, from performing the *officium* out of a concern for the ‘Law of Reputation’, to doing so on account of a recognition of their true end (their duties to the Creator, and the desire for eternal happiness).

The natural desire for the approval of one’s neighbours, Locke suggested, provided individuals with an incentive to perform acts that contributed to the common good, even if they did so largely on account of self-interest (the pleasure of being liked). This harmonious vision of the relationship between utility and truth once again echoed Cicero’s *De Officiis*— in this instance, Book III. As against a rigorous Stoic emphasis on the necessity of a disinterested motive in the performance of a truly virtuous action, Cicero described and celebrated the manner in which self-interest and a concern for one’s reputation acted as important stimuli in leading individuals to behave in ways consistent with the moral law. Cicero emphasised the harmony between the *utile* and the *honestum* that naturally resulted as

²⁴ This tension within Nicole’s moral theory is discussed in illuminating fashion by Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, pp. 249-61.

²⁵ Locke’s eudaimonism— and its Ciceronian roots— is discussed by Greg Forster, *John Locke’s Politics of Moral Consensus* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 194-217.

men interacted with one another in society. 'It is never beneficial to do wrong', Cicero declared, 'because it is always dishonourable; moreover, because it is always honourable to be a good man, it is always beneficial'.²⁶ Locke's own treatment of praise and blame as effective means of habituating men to virtue, reflected in his educational writings, owed a clear debt to Cicero's benign (and highly distinctive) view of a love of praise. This is further reflected by Lady Masham's claim that Locke— without any of Nicole's ambiguity— regarded 'civility' (*civilité*) as 'not only the great ornament of life, & that that gave lustre & gloss to all our actions, but looked upon it as a *Christian duty* that deserved to be more inculcated as such than it generally was'.²⁷

Cicero discussed the moral distinctions that prevailed in Roman society primarily in terms of their observable temporal utility. He nonetheless argued, against the Epicureans, that these virtues were entirely consistent with the immutable precepts of an eternal moral law. The claim that, in heathen society, moral ideas had developed according to what was found to be useful was of considerable importance to Locke's moral theory. In the *Essay*, Locke argued that 'even in the Corruption of Manners, the true Boundaries of the Law of Nature, which ought to be the Rule of Vertue and Vice, were pretty well preserved' (*EHU* 2.28.11). In heathen societies, those actions that '*visibly*' contributed to 'publick Happiness' were denominated virtues, and those that exercised a contrary effect were denounced as vices. Given God's guarantee of a harmony between temporal utility and truth, it followed that their ideas of virtue were broadly consistent with the law of nature. This was despite the fact that the heathens had not understood the true foundations of moral obligation in the divine will and a future state. 'It must be allowed', Locke argued, 'that several Moral Rules, may receive, from Mankind, a very general Approbation, without either knowing, or admitting

²⁶ *De Officiis*, 3.64.

²⁷ Italics added. Masham's report can be found in Henry R. Fox-Bourne, *The Life of John Locke* (2 vols., London, 1876), ii, p. 533; and is cited from this source by Harris, *Mind of Locke*, p. 286 n. 26.

the true ground of Morality' (*EHU* 1.3.6). Moral motivation and obligation were, as a consequence, separable. In the heathen world men's desire for happiness had led them to perform their duties under natural law (if imperfectly), despite their failure to understand why they ought to do so.

Just as the individual could not be mistaken in his identification of those objects that made a part of his temporal happiness, so it is evident that Locke considered the same to be true for entire societies so long as moral distinctions were permitted to develop naturally according to what was found to be beneficial. In a journal entry of 1681, meanwhile, Locke noted that knowledge of government, like that of natural bodies, was to be gleaned only from 'history and matter-of-fact'. So long as the magistrate concerned himself solely with what was conducive to the 'public good' he too could 'scarce err'.²⁸ The 'civil law' followed the '*Law of Reputation*'. It promulgated legislation that provided men with the requisite security of property and person to pursue their own interests and that of the commonwealth as a whole. Men's sense of interest in 'the doing of good, either to oneself or others' preceded the formation of political society and, consequently, the formulation of civil law and comprehension of divine law.²⁹ This endorses Harris' observation that Locke's 'concern was to explain society in terms that were independent of government', in notable contradistinction to both Hobbes and Robert Filmer. Locke rendered civil government a 'component and adjunct' of society, rather than an agent in its generation.³⁰ The '*Law of Reputation*', and men's concern for the opinion of their neighbours, provided Locke with a crucial conceptual tool with which to develop this argument. On Locke's account it was passionate men's desires which, moulded and moderated by the opinions of others, encouraged (rather than precluded) mutual co-operation and moral consensus prior to the

²⁸ 'Two Sorts of Knowledge' (1681), in *Political Writings*, pp. 259-61; 'Essay concerning Toleration', pp. 191-2.

²⁹ 'Virtus', p. 241.

³⁰ Harris, 'Legacy of *Two Treatises of Government*', p. 157.

instantiation of political authority. This aspect of Locke's thought has been entirely ignored by scholars such as John Plamenatz, who claims that Locke 'does not trouble to enquire how [men] living together affects them psychologically and morally... Of social institutions prior to government he says not a word'.³¹

In arguing that if societies developed naturally, the three 'Laws' were in near-perfect accordance, Locke provided two primary examples. One was historical, the other theoretical. The former was late Hellenistic society, or 'old Rome', in the age of Cicero.³² There, speculative precepts in religion and moral philosophy exercised negligible influence on the policies of the civil magistrate or over the moral distinctions which developed in society and were expressed in 'Civil Discourse'.³³ This, Locke argued, was precisely as it ought to be. Locke's thoughts on this head are well brought out in a journal entry of 1698 entitled 'Sacerdos'.³⁴ This document reflects Locke's meditation on two citations drawn from Cicero's philosophical dialogues. The first was the passage from *Tusculan Disputations* which, in the previous chapter, it was argued informed Locke's hostility to Stoic moral philosophy in 1663-4: 'how little their lives answerd to their own rules whilst they studied ostentation & vanity rather than solid virtue Cicero tells us Tusc. Quest. I.2 c.4'.³⁵ The second was drawn from Cicero's academic interlocutor in *De Natura Deorum*, Cotta's mockery of the attempts of the Stoics to defend the national (pagan) religion on the basis of philosophy. Locke's immediate source for this citation was Bayle's *Pensées Diverses sur la Comète* (1680): 'I can hear

³¹ Plamenatz, *Man and Society*, i, p. 344.

³² 'Old Rome' was discussed in the 'Essay concerning Toleration', p. 209.

³³ Locke noted that communication by words had a 'double use', 'Civil' and 'Philosophical', at *EHU* 3.7.3. The former allowed for conversation and commerce in the ordinary business of life. The latter sought to convey 'the precise Notions of Things, and to express, in general Propositions, certain and undoubted Truths, which the Mind may rest upon, and be satisfied with, in its search after true Knowledge'.

³⁴ 'Sacerdos', pp. 17-18.

³⁵ See above, pp. 50-51.

a Philosopher explain the Reasons of Religion, but I believe our Forefathers without any Reason at all'.³⁶

These two passages, both critical of the Stoics, were for Locke intimately related. They revealed how in the heathen world the offices of philosopher and priest were entirely discrete. The former claimed to derive his public authority from reason alone. Philosophers 'professed to instruct those who would apply to them, [in] the knowledge of things and the rules of virtue', something *Tusculan Disputations* showed them to be quite incapable of performing in practice. Fortunately, the dogmatic philosophical sects possessed negligible public authority, because their teachings were onerous in seeking to reform men's moral conduct and compelling them to deny their desires. This was not something that the national religion sought to do. Priests established their public authority on claims to 'revelation' ('the pleasure of the gods, antiquity, and tradition') that few interrogated on the basis of reason.³⁷ They professed to act as necessary mediators 'betwixt the gods and men', teaching the laity that they could not seek 'propitiation & atonement' without their assistance. The favour of the gods, the priests taught, was to be secured entirely through the performance of external rituals. Religion had nothing to say regarding men's moral duties. Morality and divinity in the heathen world were 'two parts or provinces of knowledge' between which there was no overlap. They were the exclusive preserves of 'two distinct sorts of men'. Since the national religion offered the sole means by which the credulous multitude might allay their fears regarding the gods' vengeance and secure their favour, its

³⁶ *De Natura Deorum*, 3.2.5-6. Locke followed Bayle in quoting the Latin. The translation has been taken from the 1708 English edition of Bayle's work: *Miscellaneous Reflections, Occasion'd by the Comet which Appear'd in December 1680* (2 vols., London, 1708), i, pp. 252-5.

³⁷ The entire absence of reason from the national Roman religion was emphasised in Locke's 'Discourse of Miracles' (c.1702) in *Writings on Religion*, p. 45, which similarly bears the traces of Cicero's comment in *De Natura Deorum*: 'And indeed it is an astonishing Mark of how far the God of this World has blinded Mens Minds, if we consider that the Gentile World receiv'd and stuck to a Religion, which, not being derived from Reason, had no sure Foundation in Revelation. They knew not its Original nor the Authors of it, nor seem'd concerned to know from whence it came, or by whose Authority deliver'd; and so had no mention or use of Miracles for its Confirmation'.

attraction was obvious. As it did not challenge men's unreflective ideas of good and ill, it was also distinctly undemanding (unlike the hectoring of the philosophical sects). As Locke quipped in the *Reasonableness of Christianity*, 'the Priests sold the better Pennyworths, and therefore had all the Custom' (RC 194).³⁸

Moral distinctions in heathen society were free to develop naturally on the basis of public utility, without the interference of either the dogmatic moralist or priest. The civil magistrate similarly concerned himself solely with the 'temporal good and outward prosperity of the society'.³⁹ It was for this reason that Locke could claim that heathen society had not egregiously violated the law of nature. The rancorous philosophical sects, as *Tusculan Disputations* suggested, were left to bicker on the margins of a civil society to which they contributed nothing. It was not to 'these learned Disputants' but rather to 'Statesmen that the Governments of the World owed their Peace, Defence, and Liberties; and from the illiterate and contemned Mechanick (a Name of Disgrace) that they received the improvements of useful Arts' (EHU 3.10.9).

Locke's hostility to the philosophical sects did not reflect a Pyrrhonian scepticism regarding philosophy itself. As had Cicero, Locke denounced the 'perfect scepticism' of those who argued that since all men's moral and religious ideas were in practice shaped by the opinions of others, true knowledge of things was unattainable.⁴⁰ Such a depreciation of reason by the 'despondent' represented an excessive response to the inflated claims made for the human understanding by the Stoics and Platonists (the 'presumptuous'). Both were equally

³⁸ *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695), in *Writings on Religion*, pp. 89-210. Page references will be given in brackets in the text, as above.

³⁹ *A Letter concerning Toleration* (1689), in *Political Writings*, p. 422.

⁴⁰ *Of the Conduct of the Understanding* (1707), in *Works*, ii, p. 349. Locke could have found this form of (Pyrrhonian) scepticism in Gassendi's presentation of Cicero in his repudiation of Herbert of Cherbury's *De Veritate*. In rejecting the doctrine of innate ideas, Gassendi argued (claiming to follow Cicero) that 'la Vérité, selon mon jugement, est très cachée aux yeux des hommes': Gassendi to Elias Diodati, 29 Aug 1634, in *Actes du Congrès du Tricentenaire de Pierre Gassendi* (Paris, 1957), 'Appendix II', pp. 288-90, discussing *De Natura Deorum*, 1.32.91. For Gassendi's response to Herbert, see Howard Jones, *Pierre Gassendi, 1592-1655: an Intellectual Biography* (Nieuwkoop, 1981), pp. 116-34; and Ronald Bedford, *The Defence of Truth: Herbert of Cherbury and the Seventeenth Century* (Manchester, 1979), pp. 55-6.

dogmatic, and equally erroneous.⁴¹ Locke emphasised that men ‘are furnished with Faculties (dull and weak as they are) to discover enough... to lead us to the Knowledge of the Creator, and the Knowledge of our Duty’ (*EHU* 2.23.12). Yet this required a combination of industry and humility, as enshrined in the citation from Cicero on the title-page of the *Essay*: ‘how fine it is to be willing to confess rather to not know what you do not know than to grow ill spewing forth such stuff and to displease oneself.’⁴² All too many were dissuaded from industry either by an excessive faith in their infallible reason (or in that of others), or an unjustified despondency. This was, Locke argued,

An unfair way which some Men take with themselves: who, because of the unconceivableness of something they find in one, throw themselves violently into the contrary Hypothesis, though altogether as unintelligible to an unbiased Understanding. This serves, not only to shew the Weakness and the Scantiness of our Knowledge, but the insignificant Triumph of such sorts of Arguments, which, drawn from our own Views, may satisfy us that we can find no certainty on one side of the Question; but do not at all thereby help us to Truth, by running into the opposite Opinion, which, on examination, will be found clogged with equal difficulties. (*EHU* 4.3.6)

In *Academica*, Cicero similarly positioned the academic sceptic between the dogmatist and the Pyrrhonian. He weighed their respective arguments, identified the weaknesses within both, and pursued truth in a quite different (and more modest) way.⁴³

Locke’s deep hostility to sects in philosophy, as in religion, reflected a conviction that they invariably sought to prevent men’s moral and religious ideas from developing as they quite naturally ought. ‘All come to be persuaded’, Locke argued, ‘that the Terms of that Sect, are so suited to the Nature of Things, that they perfectly correspond with their real Existence’ (*EHU* 3.10.14). As a consequence their tendency was to impose dogmatically social practices and moral distinctions, which had originated in ‘Civil Discourse’ on the basis of their utility, as immutably and eternally true. Yet Locke stressed that the moral distinctions that

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 386-8.

⁴² *De Natura Deorum*, 1.84. The quotation is in Latin; the translation is provided by Nidditch in *EHU*, Note C, p. 823.

⁴³ *Academica*, 2.3.7-8; above, p. 52.

developed within properly functioning societies provided the building blocks out of which the normatively true precepts of the law of nature could be established with almost mathematical certainty. This claim was fundamental to Locke's moral theory. It was on this basis that he could continue to argue that the individual, by means of the right use of his faculties, was able to discover an immutable standard of good and ill. Yet it was clear that almost all of the 'old *Heathen* philosophers' had signally neglected to perform this act. They failed to recognise that the notions of virtue that prevailed in any given society were merely 'Rules of Convenience', and did not employ their 'Reason to *understand* those Truths, which have given them reputation' in the first place (EHU 1.4.23). They failed to trace their foundations, that is, to a law of nature of divine origin that was discovered by (rather than the product of) reason. There was, however, one notable exception, as there had to be for Locke to claim that unassisted men were capable of true knowledge in religion and morality. This exception was Cicero.

In the *Essay*, Locke argued that 'actual knowledge' could only be derived from '*the perception of the connexion and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our ideas*' (EHU 4.1.2). It was because moral ideas were of man's making that a science of morality might be possible, 'since they are about *Ideas* in the Mind, which are none false or disproportionate; they having no external Beings for *Archetypes* which they are referr'd to, and must correspond with' (EHU 3.11.16). In his moral philosophy Cicero, unlike the sects by which he was surrounded, had recognised that complex moral ideas had been formed in society and 'Vulgar Discourse' on the basis of what was found to be publicly useful. Rather than defending them as true in themselves, Cicero explored the connections between the simple ideas by which they were constituted. By this means he had been able to construct ideal 'archetypes' ('do unto others') that were objectively true. Cicero's *De Officiis* was, in this regard, a work of moral science. 'The Truth and Certainty of *moral* Discourses', Locke

declared, ‘abstracts from the Lives of Men, and the Existence of those Vertues in the World, whereof they treat: Nor are *Tully’s* Offices less true, because there is no Body in the World that exactly practises his Rules, and lives up to that pattern of a vertuous Man, which he has given us, and which existed no where, when he writ, but in *Idea*’ (*EHU* 4.4.8).

Locke gave every indication that Cicero had understood the origins of moral obligation in the will of a perfectly good and just Creator, who would reward or punish men for their conduct in this life in a world to come. As Locke had declared in his lectures of 1663-4, the existence and precepts of natural law could not be known unless one first recognised the existence of God and a future state.⁴⁴ For Locke it was axiomatic ‘that there is a God, and what that God is, nothing can discover to us, nor judge in us, but natural reason’.⁴⁵ Revelation alone could not play this role, and convert men to theism. Immediate inspiration, meanwhile, did not constitute a new form of knowledge that men had previously lacked. To claim otherwise necessarily ‘takes away all reasoning about religion, since it would be ridiculous to goe about to reason a man into a new sense which he yet has not’.⁴⁶ The same was true for the doctrine of a future state. In his arguments in the *Essay* establishing the existence of God and a future state, which many contemporaries found distinctly problematic and inadequate, Locke drew his most important proofs directly (and explicitly) from Cicero. This has gone unremarked.⁴⁷ Locke cited Cicero’s *De Legibus* to establish his primary argument for the existence of God: ‘What can be more arrogant and misbecoming, than for a Man to think that he has a Mind and Understanding in him, but yet in all the

⁴⁴ See above, p. 44.

⁴⁵ ‘Inspiration’ (1681), in *Political Works*, p. 240.

⁴⁶ ‘Immediate Inspiration’ (1687), in *Writings on Religion*, p. 37. See, too, the new chapter, ‘Of Enthusiasm’, added to the fourth edition of the *Essay* (4.19).

⁴⁷ Locke’s arguments regarding the soul, and his exchanges with Stillingfleet, are extensively discussed by John Yolton, *John Locke and the Way of Ideas* (Oxford, 1956), yet no mention is made of Cicero. Marshall, despite his extended treatment of Locke’s appreciation for the heathen philosopher, almost entirely ignores the importance of Cicero’s philosophical dialogues for Locke’s moral theory: *John Locke*, pp. 157-204, 292-326. Similarly in his full-length study of Locke’s moral theory and treatment of natural law, Coleman makes not a single mention of Cicero: *John Locke’s Moral Philosophy*.

Universe beside, there is no such thing? Or that those things, which with the utmost stretch of his Reason he can scarce comprehend, should move without any Reason at all?' (*EHU* 4.10.6)⁴⁸ Locke similarly quoted from *De Legibus* to support his contention that it was equally 'arrogant and misbecoming' to suppose that a perfectly good and just deity would— as the exclusivist sects within Christianity claimed— approve of any attempt to limit men's access to the means of atonement.⁴⁹

Locke's proofs for the existence of a future state will be considered below, in the context of his polemical exchanges with Edward Stillingfleet. However, before doing so, the second, theoretical or conjectural example used by Locke to show the providential harmony that naturally ought to exist between the three 'Laws' needs discussion. This was furnished by Locke in his *Two Treatises* (1689). This work, as scholars have long recognised, presents a vision of all men as possessing true knowledge of the law of nature and indeed of God. It suggests, in sharp contrast to his repudiation of innate ideas or a natural moral conscience in the *Essay*, that this was 'writ in the hearts of all mankind' (*T* II: §11; §56; §67).⁵⁰ This has frequently been taken to illustrate the fundamental contradictions within Locke's thought, and between his works. Yet the *Treatises* are, as Locke himself implied at various points, not properly speaking works of philosophy. They do not seek to examine 'the perception of the connexion and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our ideas', which alone leads to 'true' or 'actual' knowledge (*EHU* 4.1.2).⁵¹ They are, perhaps, better read as translating to the

⁴⁸ Quoting *De Legibus*, 2.16; see above, p. 43.

⁴⁹ 'Adversaria Theologica' (1694), in *Religious Writings*, p. 25. In his introduction, Nuovo considers Locke's turn to Cicero, rather than to a Christian authority, to support this argument to be 'odd' (p. xxxii).

⁵⁰ *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. P. Laslett (Cambridge, 1988). References to the relevant *Treatise* and paragraph number are provided in brackets in the text, as above. The significance of Locke's claim here, and the degree to which it contradicted his epistemological theory, can be severely overplayed, as observed by Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality*, p. 51. Waldron fails to note, however, that Locke was merely reciting Romans 2.14, and Jeremiah 31:33 ('I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts').

⁵¹ Locke does, however, invite his reader to employ his 'pains, himself,...to reduce [Filmer's] words to direct, positive, intelligible propositions, and then compare them with one another' ('Preface', p. 5). That Locke did not consider it to be appropriate in 'a discourse of this nature' to 'find fault with words and names, that have obtained in the world' (in the *Essay*'s terminology, to look beyond 'Vulgar Discourse' to the '*Ideas*'

realm of political theory those archetypal truths in religion and morality that Locke elsewhere emphasised could only be developed with great ‘pains and application’. Locke then implied that they were self-evident as consistent with the insights of reason. There was a precedent for this. Cicero had undermined conventional arguments in favour of natural law (innatism and universal consent) in his moral and religious dialogues. Yet in his political philosophy (*De Republica* and *De Legibus*) he had appropriated the concept and distinctly Stoic language of natural law and translated it to the political plane, in order to defend what he presented as the eternal verities enshrined in an idealised republican constitution that was under immediate threat.⁵²

One archetypal truth underpinning the *Treatises* was that the ‘law of nature... teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all *equal and independent*, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions’. There is a distinction between this claim, and the subsequent explanation Locke provided as to why men ought not to do so. They are ‘all the workmanship of one omnipotent, and infinitely wise maker’, every individual is ‘his property’, and therefore every man is ‘*bound to preserve himself*’ as well as ‘*the rest of mankind*’ (*T II*: §6). The latter provides the true (normative) ‘Rule’ that establishes why men ought to do so. There is no suggestion that, in practice, it was the rational comprehension of this rule that led men to behave in ways conformable with the law of nature. Instead Locke’s emphasis rests on men’s ‘needs’ and ‘wants’, which in society naturally led them to act in accordance with ‘the voice of reason confirmed by inspiration’ (the Scriptures), with ‘God and his reason’, with ‘the law of God and his nature’ (*T II*: §20-21; §66).

signified therein, the role of ‘philosophical Enquiries’) is made clear at (*T II*: §52). It is in this sense that Locke evidently did not consider the *Treatises* to be, properly speaking, a work of philosophy.

⁵² Cicero’s political dialogues were influential in developing the notion of right reason as a foundation for civil laws, identifying ‘the mind and reason of the wise’ as ‘the rule of right and wrong’ (*De Legibus*, 1.19). On this, see Eric Brown, ‘The Emergence of Natural Law and the Cosmopolis’, in S. Salkever (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Greek Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 331-63. However Cicero’s appropriation of the Stoic discourse of natural law in his political theory can be seen, many classical scholars have argued, as a pragmatic attempt to influence contemporary political events, and flatly contradicted those views on innate ideas and universal consent expressed elsewhere: Colish, *Stoic Tradition*, i, pp. 61-158.

Two elements are combined in the *Treatises*— the explanatory, and the normative— without any apparent tension. The unity between the two (men's desires and needs, and God's commandments through revelation) is ensured by God's authorship of both.⁵³ By this means Locke was able to reconceptualise men's particular needs and desires in the specific (pre-political) conditions under which they naturally emerged as duties under natural law. In *De Officiis*, Cicero had similarly emphasised the importance of men's needs and wants in leading them into society. Nature had given 'to every type of creature the tendency to preserve itself and an 'impulse to unite for the purpose of procreation', along with (in man's case) a 'desire for seeing truth' and an 'impulse towards pre-eminence'. Cicero noted that the desire for self-preservation led, with no need for abstract reasoning, to the establishment of political authority as the best means to attain this end.⁵⁴ In the *Treatises* Locke offered a strikingly similar historical account of the origin and development of society, and placed it within a Christian divine teleology lacking in Cicero's work. The institution of marriage and the family was the means found to sustain the desires to procreate and to care for one's offspring, which 'God in his infinite Wisdom' had implanted in men and were consequently cast by Locke as inalienable duties (*T I*: § 54-6; *T II*: § 77). Similarly the institution of civil government was itself a means to an end. It secured the 'general Rule which Nature teaches all things of self Preservation'. Furthermore, it provided the security of property and person required for men to fulfil the biblical injunction to go forth and establish dominion over the earth (*T I*: §56; *T II*: §32). Even the invention of money, Locke argued, received authorisation from the biblical command in Genesis. It removed a limitation on the cultivation of the earth, and further incentivised a man to labour, even as he did so from the ambition 'to enlarge his Possessions'— a self-interested motive considered inherently sinful by the Augustinian moralist (*T II*: §48-9). In all this, Locke stressed, 'right and conveniency

⁵³ As emphasised by Harris, 'Legacy of the *Two Treatises*', pp. 163-7.

⁵⁴ *De Officiis*, 1.11-14.

went together’— that is, the *honestum* and *utile* were, as Cicero repeatedly claimed, in complete accord (*T II*: §51).

Men following the ‘dictates of the law of reason which God had implanted in him’ were led, as in the *Essay*, by their desires and pursuit of happiness. Their estimations of their own interest were beneficially and providentially altered by ‘the mutual influence, sympathy, and connexion’ with others as men interacted together in society (*T II*: §56; §212). Definitions of virtue were shaped by what was found to be advantageous to that society, as the example of ‘*conjugal society*’ showed; and this process allowed that society to further the ends for which it was constituted (‘nothing being necessary to any society, that is not necessary to the ends for which it is made’) (*T II*: §83).⁵⁵ Men’s desires were moulded in society in a manner that encouraged them to act in ways broadly conformable to the ‘law of nature’ (made synonymous with ‘*Divine Law*’). The ‘law’ established in civil society by ‘tacit consent’ is the ‘rule of propriety’, a term used interchangeably with the ‘*Law of Reputation*’ in the *Essay* (*EHU* 3.7.7; *T II*: §36). All is guided by a concern for ‘*the conveniences of life*’ and the pursuit of temporal happiness. It was for this reason that Locke rendered utility and virtue synonymous, as had Cicero (‘it was useless, as well as dishonest...’) (*T II*: §36; §51). Even as they failed to comprehend the true ‘Rule’ explaining why they ought to do so, men’s divinely-implanted desires naturally led them to serve the purposes for which they had been created. This was precisely the point made regarding pre-Christian societies in the *Essay*, where Locke similarly distinguished between moral motivation and obligation.

⁵⁵ In this regard the great error of Filmer’s patriarchal account of the origins of political obligation was qualitatively identical to that of Aristotle and the Stoics in their moral theory: he took a practice that had developed on the basis of its utility— conjugal society, and a respect for the ‘*Authority and Government*’ of one’s father—as true in itself (and divinely commanded). It was for this reason that Locke contemptuously dismissed Filmer as the ‘Arch-Philosopher’ (*T II*: §74-5).

ii. Christian Philosophy's 'Uneasy and Tyrannical Yoke': the Subversion of the Three Laws

Locke's claim that heathen societies had behaved in ways broadly consistent with 'the true Boundaries of the Law of Nature' stood in marked contrast to 'the schisms, separations, contentions, animosities, quarrels, blood and butchery, and all the train of mischiefs, which have so long harassed and defamed Christianity'.⁵⁶ This raised the vexed question of 'how it comes to pass that the Christian religion hath made more factions, wars, and disturbances in civil society than any other'.⁵⁷ Christianity had subverted the natural (providential) harmony that ought to exist between the three laws outlined by Locke. It encouraged the disquieting suggestion that 'truly the Christian religion is the worst of all religions, and ought neither to be embraced by any particular person, nor tolerated by any commonwealth'.⁵⁸ Yet it was Christ who, in his ministry and teachings as reported in the Gospels, had most clearly explained the precepts, origins and sanctions of the law of nature. This had been identified by Cicero as 'that Eternal Law of Right, which is Holy, Just, and Good; Of which no one Precept or Rule is abrogated or repealed; nor indeed can be; whilst God is an Holy, Just and Righteous God, and Man a Rational Creature' (RC 173-4).⁵⁹

In the historical account of Christ's conduct provided in the *Reasonableness*, Locke laid relatively little emphasis on Christ's miracles or fulfilment of prophecies in attesting to the divine nature of his mission, or indeed on his Passion as an expiatory sacrifice.⁶⁰ Locke instead focused on his moral actions and teachings. These provided the most compelling evidence to attest to the divine nature of his mission. If, when Cicero penned *De Officiis*,

⁵⁶ *Second Vindication*, p. 358.

⁵⁷ 'Essay concerning Toleration', p. 209.

⁵⁸ *Letter concerning Toleration*, p. 431.

⁵⁹ Here again Locke paraphrased, without acknowledgment, Cicero's definition of the law of nature in *De Republica*.

⁶⁰ Something that, of course, did not pass unnoticed and provided Edwards with much of his ammunition against Locke's supposed Socinian proclivities. On Edwards' intemperate response to the *Reasonableness*, see Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660-1714: Variety, Persistence, and Transformation* (Oxford, 2011), Ch. 6; and Roger S. Woolhouse, *Locke: a Biography* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 376-84.

‘there is no Body in the World that exactly practises his Rules, and lives up to that pattern of a vertuous Man, which he has given us, and which existed no where, when he writ, but in *Idea*’, then Christ’s example affirmed both ‘the Truth and Certainty’ of Cicero’s ‘*moral Discourses*’ (*EHU* 4.4.8).

Christ and the Apostles had preached the truths of the Gospel primarily through ‘natural’ rather than ‘supernatural’ means: ‘he does constantly (unless where the confirmation of some Truth requires it otherwise) bring about his Purposes by means operating according to their Natures’ (*RC* 153). Even as the Gospel message ‘suits the lowest Capacities of Reasonable Creatures, so it reaches and satisfies, Nay, enlightens the highest’ (*RC* 201). It reinforced, explained and enlarged upon those moral distinctions that developed within societies as men sought to pursue their happiness. It was for this reason that Locke could claim that: ‘A plough man that cannot read is not soe ignorant but he has a confidence & knows in those few cases which concerne his own actions what is right & what is wrong let him sincerely obey this light of nature it is the transcript of the moral Law in the Gospel, and this, even though there be errors in it will lead him into all the truths in the Gospel that are necessary for him to know’.⁶¹ Christ built upon men’s acquired knowledge of good and ill. It mattered little that the ‘plough man’ was illiterate. It was his pursuit of his happiness (in society) that had furnished him with his moral ideas, not the self-serving and abstruse philosophy of the philosophical sects. Christ’s teachings merely exposed the futility of ‘Philosophical’ as opposed to ‘Vulgar’ discourse as it had developed in the heathen world (with the notable exception of Cicero). It was left to men to remove the ‘rubbish’ that so

⁶¹ ‘Error’ (1698), in *Religious Writings*, p. 82.

marred philosophy— Locke's objective in the *Essay*— as this was not an act performed by Christ: 'Tis plain that the teaching of Men Philosophy, was no part of the Design of Divine Revelation'.⁶²

Christ's revelation had not altered the role or importance of the civil magistrate and civil law. Indeed, it was 'the wonderful Providence of God' that had ensured that Christ appeared at a time when the magistrate properly understood his commission: 'for a Kingdom in another World, *Pilate* knew that his Master at *Rome* concerned not himself' (RC 120). The Romans recognised civil and religious societies to serve entirely discrete ends. The former was concerned with preserving temporal peace and securing property, the latter with the individual's relationship with the gods. Unless they undermined men's sense of obligation to adhere to the civil laws of the commonwealth— as, for Locke, was the case with Roman Catholicism, a distinctly political religion— the magistrate should not concern himself with 'speculative opinions':

But the business of laws is not to provide for the truth of opinions, but for the safety and security of the commonwealth, and of every particular man's goods and person. And so it ought to be. For truth would do well enough, if she were once left to shift for herself [...] She is not taught by laws, nor has she any need of force to procure her entrance into the minds of men. Errors indeed prevail by the assistance of foreign and borrowed succours, but if truth makes not her way into the understanding by her own light, she will be but the weaker for any borrowed force violence can add to her.⁶³

Christ 'instituted no commonwealth', and his law 'hath not at all meddled' with the 'ancient forms of government' that had been retained by those 'cities and kingdoms that have embraced the faith of Christ'.⁶⁴ There was, in short, 'no such thing, under the Gospel, as a

⁶² *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians*, ed. A.W. Wainwright (2 vols., Oxford, 1987), i, p. 114. This work, which Locke considered to provide 'a quite other view' of Christianity to 'the systems of divinity espoused in the several churches and sects of Christians', was published in instalments according to his wishes as expressed to his literary executor, Peter King, in 1704: *Correspondence of Locke*, viii, pp. 412-17.

⁶³ *Letter concerning Toleration*, pp. 420-21. Locke's denial of the need for 'law' and 'force' once again suggests that he was rather more concerned (and acquainted) with Hobbes' philosophy than he cared to admit.

⁶⁴ A point emphasised forcefully in the 'Defence of Nonconformity', where Locke noted that Christ and the Apostles 'took great care... to have nothing at all to doe with secular affaires, or civill societyes' (p. 77).

Christian commonwealth'.⁶⁵ The only 'heathen polity' that had been 'instituted by God for the preservation and propagation of true religion' was Mosaic Israel. Yet even there, men had not been punished for their speculative opinions *per se*, but because as a theocracy under the sovereignty of the Almighty idolatry was by definition seditious. Civil laws against idolaters were 'purely political, in that country'. They were, in any case, fairly lenient in practice.⁶⁶ Christ's message of salvation was intended for all mankind, and not for one nation (the Israelites). This was a point the Jews struggled to comprehend as they sought to appropriate Christ as a temporal messiah to relieve them from the political yoke legitimately imposed by Rome's exemplary civil laws.

Christ was able to explain, in a manner that all could comprehend, the true 'Rule' by which men ought to seek to live, and described the sanctions (a future state) that enforced it. Christ united the useful with the true by teaching men how their chief end lay in living according to their natures as God's created beings, accountable to Him on the Day of Judgement. In 'heathen polities' in which the three 'Laws' functioned as they naturally ought, men had providentially been led to live in accordance with their nature. The separation of philosophy and theology in 'old Rome' had, however, precluded even Cicero from explaining moral obligation. It was for this reason that, in *De Officiis*, Cicero had confined himself to the useful. Philosophy, at any event, could only establish the probability (a 'hope') rather than the certainty (a 'serious' or 'full *Perswasion*') of the existence of a future state (RC 203; EHU 1.3.7). In 'Sacerdos', Locke noted that it was only with Christ that the entire interdependence of the 'two provinces of knowledge' was established. 'Bringing by revelation from heaven the true Religion to mankind', Christ had 'reunited these two again Religion & Morality as the inseparable parts of the worship of God'. It followed that Christian ministers 'have assumed to them selves the parts both of the heathen priests &

⁶⁵ *Letter concerning Toleration*, pp. 418-19.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

philosophers'. They regulated public worship but also taught men, through the Gospels, the duties they owed both to one another and to God. The moral content of Christianity, Locke emphasised, was of far greater importance than those particular rites or ceremonies that had been accorded such weight in Mosaic Israel. The latter were rendered circumstantial or indifferent by Christ. Each church might choose those that seemed to secure 'just soe much decency & order' as was 'requird in actions of publique assemblys'.⁶⁷

Christ revealed a '*Divine Law*' that both accorded with and explained the purpose and end of the '*Civil Law*' and the '*Law of Reputation*'. Obedience to Christ did not, and could not, demand that the compacts men had naturally formed with one another and with the civil magistrate in order to pursue their happiness (and thereby to perform, if unknowingly, their duties under natural law) be breached. Yet this depended upon the civil magistrate continuing to concern himself solely with the temporal happiness and prosperity of his society. In a Christian age, the birth of the chimerical concept of the 'Christian commonwealth' indicated that he had ceased to do so. This explained the central paradox identified by Locke—why the harmony between the three 'Laws' had been subverted in the Christian age. There was a stark contrast between heathen and Christian Rome. Locke developed this point at length in the *Letter concerning Toleration* (1689):

An inconsiderable and weak number of Christians, destitute of everything, arrive in a pagan country. These foreigners beseech the inhabitants, by the bowels of humanity, that they would succour them with the necessaries of life. Those necessaries are given them; habitations are granted; and they all join together and grow up into one body of people. The Christian religion by this means takes root in that country, and spreads itself; but does not suddenly grow the strongest. While things are in this condition, peace, friendship, faith, and equal justice are preserved amongst them. At length the magistrate becomes a Christian, and by that means their party becomes the most powerful. Then immediately all compacts are to be broken, all civil rights to be violated, that idolatry may be extirpated. And unless these innocent pagans, *strict observers of the rules of equity and of the law of nature*, and no ways offending against the laws of the society, I say unless they will

⁶⁷ 'Sacerdos', p. 18. See, too, Locke's assertion in the 'Defence of Nonconformity' that God had limited worship to 'decency order & Edification, & so every thing *in its self indifferent* is unlawfull in his worship unlesse it be expedient for those ends God has assigned' (p. 144). Here Locke once more denied any possibility of a conflict between public convenience and normative truth.

forsake their ancient religion, and embrace a new and strange one, they are to be turned out of the lands and possessions of their forefathers, and perhaps deprived of life itself. Then at last it appears what zeal for the Church, joined with the desire of dominion, is capable to produce; and how easily the pretence of religion, and of the care of souls, serves as a cloak to covetousness, rapine, and ambition.⁶⁸

In a postscript that appeared at the end of the *Second Treatise*, Locke inverted conventional definitions of ‘heresy’, ‘schism’ and ‘sedition’.⁶⁹ These crimes were indeed heinous and possibly damnable, yet ought to be attributed to those who imposed speculative opinions in morality and religion upon other men.⁷⁰ In the ‘Essay concerning Toleration’, Locke justified repressive measures against those who ‘out of pride or over-weeningness of my own opinion and a secret conceit of my own infallibility, taking to myself something of a God-like power, force and compel others to be of my mind, or censure and malign them if they be not’.⁷¹ The sects of heathen philosophers in ‘old Rome’ had sought precisely such dominion, as had the intolerant Israelites. Under Rome’s prudent civil laws, both had lacked the political and social authority to secure it, and could be left to their own devices. With Constantine’s endorsement of a specifically doctrinal (Trinitarian) form of Christianity at Nicaea (325 AD), however, the civil magistrate, misled by self-interested philosopher-priests, considered it essential to public happiness that men possess ‘true’ speculative opinions.⁷² Men’s temporal happiness, the pursuit of which the civil magistrate legitimately sought to facilitate, was conflated with their eternal happiness, which was the concern of the individual alone. This had made it possible for civil magistrates— including Charles II and James II— to be misled into acts that were ‘contrary to the end for which [civil societies] were constituted’. In so

⁶⁸ *Letter concerning Toleration*, pp. 416-17 (italics added).

⁶⁹ As discussed by Harris, *Mind of Locke*, pp. 249-51.

⁷⁰ Locke further explored this theme in responding to Stillingfleet’s *Unreasonableness of Separation* and Hooker’s *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* in the ‘Defence of Nonconformity’.

⁷¹ ‘Essay concerning Toleration’, pp. 189-90.

⁷² See Locke’s comment in the ‘Defence of Nonconformity’ that ‘[once] the temporal authority came to be mixt with Ecc[lesiast]icall jurisdiction, & force was made use of contrary to the nature of the thing to make men Christians, or of this or that Church whether they would or no, Religion became a Businesse of State’ (p. 102).

doing it was these magistrates who were truly '*guilty of rebellion*' (against God and mankind), not those who were compelled to resist their authority (*T II*: §227).

Here Locke's assertion that 'many are beholden to Revelation, who do not acknowledge it' is of the utmost importance (*RC* 200). This statement provides a context in which to understand why Locke drew his philosophical arguments establishing the probability of a future state in the *Essay* from Cicero. The threat of divine sanctions had been employed by professedly Christian magistrates and priests in order to compel men to conform to particular speculative precepts, in religion as in morality. This represented the revival of sectarian dogmatism. True philosophers, Locke noted, must 'find so little reason to be magisterial in their Opinions, that nothing insolent and imperious is to be expected from them' (*EHU* 4.16.4). In contrast, sects in philosophy and religion— and Locke treated of the self-styled 'orthodox' under this head— sought 'Triumph' rather than 'Truth'. This was true even of the Socinians, who 'pretend most to freedom'. They once more divorced philosophy from theology by claiming to be able to 'explain things necessary to salvation more clearly than the Holy Ghost, the eternal and infinite wisdom of God'.⁷³ The only difference between orthodoxy and dissent was that the former, whether inculcated by the 'Father or Schoolmaster, the Parson of the Parish, or such a Reverend Doctor', did so with the connivance of the civil magistrate.⁷⁴ Men in professedly Christian societies grew up '*cooped in close, by the Laws*'. They were prevented from developing their moral ideas

⁷³ *Second Vindication*, p. 295.

⁷⁴ Locke's hostility to established churches rendered his arguments in favour of toleration qualitatively distinct from, and far less equivocal than, those developed within Anglicanism by divines of however 'latitudinarian' a persuasion. Ashcraft emphasises Locke's hostility to established religion; yet by making Locke an ideologist of dissent, he fails to appreciate sufficiently Locke's deep distrust of all sects, whether 'orthodox' or 'heterodox': *Revolutionary Politics*, passim. Meanwhile the equivocal nature of the arguments developed in favour of toleration within liberal Anglican circles has been noted, and the entire concept of 'latitudinarianism' called into question, by Spurr, "Latitudinarianism" and the Restoration Church'. For accounts that interpret Locke, albeit with qualifications, broadly within the 'latitudinarian' paradigm as supportive of the established church, see Spellman, *Locke and Depravity*; and David McCabe, 'John Locke and the Argument Against Strict Separation', *The Review of Politics*, 59:2 (Spring 1997), pp. 233-58.

naturally: that is, on the basis of what was found in practice to further the temporal happiness both of themselves and of the society in which they lived (*EHU* 4.20.4).

This corruption of the ‘*Civil Law*’ in a Christian world had also resulted in the subversion of the ‘*Law of Reputation*’. Men were encouraged to esteem others less on account of their contribution to the common good and more on the basis of their professed speculative principles. In pagan Rome and in the theoretical model of society presented in the *Treatises*, the desire for praise and aversion to blame led men to moderate their desires in beneficial ways. In ‘Christian commonwealths’ this had ceased to be the case, as heresy became more obnoxious than vice. Men were forced to ‘swallow down Opinions, as silly People do Empirick Pills, without knowing what they are made of, or how they will work, and have nothing to do, but believe they will do the Cure: but in this, they are much more miserable than they, in that they are not at liberty to refuse swallowing, what perhaps they had rather let alone’ (*EHU* 4.20.4).⁷⁵ The forced intrusion of philosophical theology into the public square, armed with the sanctions of both civil and (supposedly) divine law, had positively ‘obscured and perplexed the material Truths of Law and Divinity’ that in a heathen age even the ‘plough man’ had in some sense understood (*EHU* 3.10.8).

The Scriptures were powerless to resist the force of false philosophy. As with all texts, they served ‘like a nose of wax, to be turned and bent, just as may fit the contrary orthodoxies of different societies’.⁷⁶ The distinction, and yet entire harmony, between reason and revelation could only be re-established by means of true philosophy. This informed the sceptical nature of Locke’s endeavour in his epistemological works. He sought to demonstrate to ‘*this our knowing Age*’ that autonomous reason was incapable of delivering on the promises made by

⁷⁵ An opposite use of this medical metaphor can be found in Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, as Locke was no doubt aware, in a chapter entitled ‘Of a Christian Commonwealth’ (precisely the political entity the existence of which Locke denied): ‘For it is with the mysteries of our Religion, as with wholesome pills for the sick, which swallowed whole, have the vertue to cure; but chewed, are for the most part cast up again without effect’: *Leviathan*, 3.32, p. 256.

⁷⁶ *Second Vindication*, p. 295.

both the heathen schools and dogmatic Christian sects (*EHU*: 'Epistle to the Reader', 10).⁷⁷ One aspect of this endeavour was to show what reason had, in fact, been able to establish regarding a future state prior to Christ's revelation. In order to do so, as the title-page to the *Essay* suggested, Locke turned once more to Cicero. By establishing the *status quo ante*, men might again be encouraged to cultivate their own faculties, and to place their faith in Christ rather than in those who had usurped his authority.

Historians have been puzzled by Locke's willingness to cast doubt on the doctrine of the immateriality of the soul, given how fundamental the existence of a future state was to his moral theory. Marshall, for example, portrays Locke as 'very lamely' excusing himself from the task of establishing it on alternative philosophical grounds, and presents this as a failure that rendered his entire moral theory broken-backed.⁷⁸ Stephen Forde similarly notes Locke's refusal to furnish compelling philosophical proofs attesting to the existence of a future state, and concludes that 'we may never be able to say for certain why he left it unremedied'.⁷⁹ The fact that Locke drew almost all of his arguments on immortality directly from Cicero's philosophical dialogues provides one means of addressing the question of why he left this 'unremedied'.

In the *Essay* Locke opined that the question of the immateriality of the soul 'seems to me to be out of the reach of our Knowledge: And he who would give himself leave to consider freely, and look into the dark and intricate part of each Hypothesis, will scarce find his Reason able to determine fixedly' one way or the other. Locke emphasised that he did not intend 'to lessen the belief of the Soul's immateriality'. He merely sought to show 'how far

⁷⁷ For a reading of Locke's reference to his '*knowing Age*' as sincere rather than bitingly satirical, see Young, *Religion and Enlightenment*, pp. 1-2, 19.

⁷⁸ Marshall, *Religion and Responsibility*, p. 385. See, too, Lee Ward's recent interpretation, which suggests that 'ambiguity riddles Locke's account of the soul' which is, at best, 'question begging' for his moral theory: *John Locke and Modern Life* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 216.

⁷⁹ Steven Forde, 'Natural Law, Theology, and Morality in Locke', *American Journal of Political Science*, 45:2 (Apr. 2001), p. 400. The implication of Forde's statement is nonetheless clear: it invites a Straussian interpretation of Locke as a religious sceptic.

our knowledge does reach', since 'the state we are at present in, not being that of Vision, we must, in many Things, content our selves with Faith and Probability' (*EHU* 4.3.6). In his treatment of the soul, Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* was Locke's prime source in establishing 'how far our knowledge does reach'. The fundamental point Locke sought to make was identical to Cicero's own in that work: 'we ought not to be over-confident in any thing, for we are often influenced by some cleverly-drawn conclusion, we waver and change our opinion even in questions that are comparatively clear: much more in this question, for it has an element of obscurity'.⁸⁰ Immortality could not seriously be doubted; immateriality, however, demanded precisely such doubt.

In responding publicly to Stillingfleet's criticisms, and privately to Tyrell's admonitions, Locke denounced the tendency of Christians only to believe what could be established on the basis of philosophy. Locke demanded to know if nothing would 'passe with you in Religion and Morality but what you can demonstrate?'⁸¹ In many respects, Tyrell's criticisms reflect how Locke was hoist by his own petard. In responding to Hobbes it was Locke who had introduced the language of mathematical demonstration into moral and religious subjects. Yet as Tyrell and Thomas Burnet observed, Locke failed to demonstrate moral obligation (the existence of a perfectly good deity and a future state) upon these foundations.⁸² It is for this reason that Dunn's claim that Locke was a 'tragic thinker' possesses the tincture of truth.⁸³ Yet what is most striking, and insufficiently remarked upon, is the extent to which Locke was willing (as, he felt, his contemporaries were not) to lay such

⁸⁰ *Tusculan Disputations*, 1.32.78. Locke's agosticism on the question of how to reconcile the complex ideas of man's free will with God's omnipotence and omniscience was similarly cast as an example of how an excessive emphasis on philosophical reasoning led to complete scepticism on truths that no reasonable man could doubt, even as he lacked the mediating ideas necessary to understand the relationship between them. This incapacity on man's part was no barrier to true faith— indeed, it defined it. Locke noted that 'I am as fully persuaded of both as of any truths I most firmly assent to': Locke to Molyneux, 20 Jan. 1693, in *Correspondence of Locke*, iv, pp. 623-8.

⁸¹ Locke to Tyrell, 4 Aug. 1690, in *Correspondence of Locke*, iv, pp. 110-13.

⁸² See Thomas Burnet, *Second Remarks upon an Essay concerning Humane Understanding* (London, 1697), esp. p. 24.

⁸³ Dunn, *John Locke*, p. vii.

weight on intellectual honesty. This was a consequence of his profound conviction that reason (philosophical enquiry) ought to be pushed as far as it could go, but no further. The combination of *De Natura Deorum* and Ecclesiastes on the title-page to the *Essay* suggested as much. Knowledge (derived from men's natural faculties) and revelation (the Scriptures) were two means furnished by God to allow His creatures to understand their duties under natural law. To give too much to the former was to detract from the meaning and significance of the latter.⁸⁴

There is every reason to suggest that, had he been able, Locke would have provided an account of moral obligation, and a more precise definition of the content of the moral law, that relied more on 'knowledge' and less on 'faith'.⁸⁵ Yet on Locke's reading, Cicero's great merit was that he had been willing to accept the limits of philosophy when it came to the question of moral obligation. He had, as a consequence, largely restricted himself to moral motivation (the *utile*). The most disturbing feature of Locke's moral theory from the perspective of his contemporaries, as will be seen in the chapters to follow, was precisely that he refused to conceal what he identified as being the strict limitations of philosophy. If it could not establish with demonstrable certainty the existence of a future state, this sceptical insight was itself revelatory. It indicated that important truths— which, in his earlier writings, Locke intimated might be demonstrated with certainty— had only been revealed in full by Christ. In his later writings, Locke appealed with increasing frequency (and even more explicitly) to Cicero's authority as well as to that of the Gospels to establish precisely this point.

⁸⁴ For discussion of Locke's willingness to engage with sceptical arguments in the 'humanized piety of the *Essay*', and its contrast to the dogmatism of Newtonian physico-theology as developed by Samuel Clarke and his followers, see Young, *Religion and Enlightenment*, pp. 97-8.

⁸⁵ As indicated by the fact that 'Of Ethick in General' breaks off at precisely the point at which Locke moved to define those duties that were morally obligatory with greater precision. On this, see Harris, *Mind of Locke*, pp. 268-89.

To Stillingfleet, Locke admitted the Ciceronian origins of his agnosticism on the nature of the soul. Cicero had ‘examined all the arguments his vast reading and great parts could furnish him with’. Yet he remained ‘so far from being certain, so far from any thought he had, or could prove it, that he over and over again professes his ignorance and doubt of it’. Having examined these arguments, Cicero was content only to exclude the two gross elements of earth and water from the soul’s nature: ‘so far he is clear and positive: but beyond this he is uncertain; beyond this he could not get’.⁸⁶ Stillingfleet’s subsequent claim that Cicero had broadly endorsed the metaphysical arguments in favour of immateriality furnished by his ‘Master’, Plato, in *Phaedo* was quite mistaken. ‘Cicero’, Locke replied, ‘was willing to believe the soul immortal, but when he sought in the nature of the soul itself something to establish this his belief into a certainty of it, he found himself at a loss’.⁸⁷ Plato’s faith in his ‘all-sufficient reason’, as Cicero noted, led him to assert the pre-existence as well as immortality of the soul. This was a claim that precluded the possibility of Creation, the Day of Judgment, and a future state.⁸⁸ Metaphysical arguments led to true atheism. Physical arguments (an analogy with the natural world) encouraged, as Epicurean materialists showed, a denial of immortality and even of a God possessed of moral attributes who governed the world.

It is little wonder, then, that Locke implied that the question of immateriality was, at best, an irrelevance. By casting the debate within a classical historiographical framework, Locke played the part of Cicero to Hobbes’ Epicurus and Stillingfleet’s Plato. The Platonists’ arguments in favour of the doctrine, and the Epicureans’ critical responses, simply indicated how an excessive faith in human reason could lead men into the most profound error.

⁸⁶ Here Locke is paraphrasing Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 1.9.17: ‘further than likelihood as I see it I cannot get... Certainty will be for those who say such things can be known and who claim wisdom for themselves’.

⁸⁷ *Second Reply*, p. 489. Locke’s agnosticism on the nature of the soul is emphasised by Michael R. Ayers, but again no mention is made of *Tusculan Disputations* as providing a model (and an intellectual resource) for Locke’s own treatment of the issue: ‘Mechanism, Superaddition and the Proofs of God’s Existence in Locke’s *Essay*’, *Philosophical Review*, 90:2 (Apr. 1981), pp. 210-51.

⁸⁸ *Second Reply*, p. 488.

Cicero's position, in sharp contrast to that of Plato or Epicurus, was according to Locke in perfect harmony with the Gospels. Cicero revealed how far men's natural faculties could reach. Recognising their limits, he would as a consequence have comprehended the divine nature of the truths taught by Christ:

So unmoveable is that truth delivered by the spirit of truth, that though the light of nature gave [Cicero] some obscure glimmering, some uncertain hopes of a future state; yet human reason could attain no clearness, no certainty about it, but that it was "JESUS CHRIST alone who brought life and immortality to light through the gospel". Though we are now told, that to own the inability of natural reason to bring immortality to light, or, which passes for the same, to own principles upon which the immateriality of the soul (and, as it is urged, consequently its immortality) cannot be demonstratively proved; does lessen the belief in this article of revelation, which JESUS CHRIST alone has brought to light, and which consequently the scripture assures us is established and made certain only by revelation.⁸⁹

It was the Gospels alone that showed men how they might achieve relief from their incessant desires and attain the tranquillity so craved by the heathen philosophers, by strengthening the one desire that ought to trump all others—the 'chief end' of salvation in a world to come.

By admitting the inability of philosophy conclusively to demonstrate man's end, academic scepticism identified a conceptual space that the Christian revelation had filled. It was for this reason that, on Locke's reading, Cicero would have recognised the divine nature of Christ's moral and soteriological teachings. The case was quite different with the dogmatic late Hellenistic sects, who claimed to have identified man's end on the basis of autonomous reason. Yet the negligible social influence exercised by these sects in heathen society had ensured that the majority of men had not followed them into error. Consequently, had the common man turned to the Gospels, he would have recognised the extent to which Christ's moral teachings enlarged upon and explained the ideas of moral good that he had developed naturally through his unimpeded pursuit of happiness in society. In 'Christian

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 489 (Locke cites 2 Tim. 1:10).

commonwealths' in which 'Care is taken to propagate Truth', this harmony had been disturbed (*EHU* 4.20.4). All men now faced a 'struggle' to cast off the 'uneasy and tyrannical yoke' imposed by false philosophy, something not true in heathen societies even though they had not enjoyed the light provided by the Gospel.⁹⁰

Locke's little-noted emphasis on how the three 'Laws' had only been subverted in a Christian world sheds light on two aspects of his thought. The first is the curious combination in Locke's epistemological writings of a pedagogical demand that men '*examine their own Tenets*' with a profound pessimism as to the likelihood of them doing so (*EHU* 1.3.25).⁹¹ As Locke stressed, custom and the opinions of one's neighbours shaped men's ideas of happiness and the good. In the heathen world this had encouraged mutual fellowship and a degree of moral consensus prior to the instantiation of political authority. Because moral codes developed naturally on account of their public utility, there was no conflict between the ideas of the good entertained in society and the true precepts of the law of nature. The useful and the true, and the explanatory and the normative, were in perfect harmony. This had ceased to be the case in a Christian age. There was now a tension between the ideas of the good taught in society, and moral truth. There is, consequently, a similar tension between the explanatory and the normative in Locke's attempt to explain to the individual why he ought to follow the advice Locke offered. This is reflected in his profoundly Ciceronian programme for reform, which taught the individual how he might recover a degree of cognitive freedom and liberate himself from the false ideas that had been imposed on his mind from infancy. He ought to do so because Christ demanded it of him, and he would be punished if he did not. Only if he did so, however, would he assent to the truth of the Scriptures in the first place, choose to follow Christ, recognise his duties

⁹⁰ *Letter concerning Toleration*, p. 430.

⁹¹ On which, see Corneanu, *Regimens of the Mind*, pp. 141-68.

(including to search for truth), and comprehend the penalty for failing to do so (eternal damnation).

The subversion of the three laws ensured that the individual who desired 'Truth' rather than 'Triumph' had to be willing to incur— as Locke himself well knew— the opprobrium of his neighbours and the displeasure of political and religious authorities. Few men, as Locke observed, were able to 'live in Society, under the constant Dislike, and ill Opinion of his Familiars' (*EHU* 2.28.12). 'The world' as presently constituted, Locke noted, 'is apt to cast great blame on those who have an indifferency for opinions, especially in religion'.⁹² Yet 'the surest and safest way' for the individual to pursue truth 'is to have no opinion at all till he has examined [a question] and that without the least regard to the opinions or Systems of other men about it'. The individual in the modern age was not allowed to 'see what he himself can, sincerely searching after truth, find out'.⁹³ There were regrettably few illiterate plough-men in Christian commonwealths. Locke explored this theme in a new chapter added to the fourth edition (1700) of the *Essay*, entitled 'Of the Association of Ideas' (*EHU* 2.23).⁹⁴ Locke also composed *Of the Conduct of the Understanding* in c.1697, which was similarly intended for inclusion in the *Essay* but was published posthumously.⁹⁵ Both explained how false connections between ideas had been foisted upon men's minds in infancy, and obstructed their reason and senses working together in harmony. In the *Essay* and the *Conduct*, Locke endeavoured to show individuals how to perform the act that he had himself carried out on a grander scale in the *Essay*. That is, how to remove the 'Rubbish' that now lay in their way to knowledge.

⁹² *Conduct of the Understanding*, p. 348.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 382.

⁹⁴ On which, see John P. Wright, 'Association, Madness, and the Measures of Probability in Locke and Hume', in C. Fox (ed.), *Psychology and Literature in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1987), pp. 103-28.

⁹⁵ For the most thorough discussion of the *Conduct*, which includes a new, critical edition of the text, see Paul Schuurman, 'Of the Conduct of the Understanding' (Univ. of Keele Ph.D. thesis, 2000).

Locke's programme for reform in effect showed men how they might become academic sceptics. In the *Academica*, Cicero observed how academic sceptics were 'more free and untrammelled in that we possess our power of judgement uncurtailed, and are bound by no compulsion to support all the dogmas laid down for us almost as edicts by certain masters'.⁹⁶ Locke similarly exhorted his reader to cultivate a 'love of Truth' and 'indifferency' for the opinions of others. 'This', Locke warned, 'I own is no easy thing to do; but I am not inquiring the easy way to opinion, but the right way to truth; which they must follow who will deal fairly with their own understandings and their own souls'.⁹⁷ Locke now argued that 'we are endowed with a power to suspend any particular desire, and keep it from determining the *will*, and engaging us in action' (*EHU* 2.21.50). Locke declared, in terms that were unmistakably Ciceronian, that this ability to 'hold our *wills* undetermined, till we have *examin'd* the good and evil of what we desire' allowed for 'reason unbiased [to] give its judgment' (*EHU* 2.21.53). 'This', Locke now claimed, 'seems to be the source of all liberty; in this seems to consist that, which is (as I think improperly) call'd *Free will*' (*EHU* 2.21.47).

Only by performing this act, Locke suggested, did men become self-conscious moral agents. Here Locke echoed Cicero's claim that it was by cultivating the passion for truth that men truly embraced what made them human, and led 'a blessed life'.⁹⁸ By means of their sense and reason once more working in harmony, Locke argued, they would arrive at knowledge of the natural law, the precepts and sanctions of which they would then find explained in the clearest terms in the Gospels. This would lead to a 'consciousness' of the conformity or otherwise of their actions in respect of this law, and ensure that they governed their conduct as they ought through a recognition of their true end (salvation). It was in this 'consciousness' that, Locke now argued, 'personal identity' inhered. The individual accepted

⁹⁶ *Academica*, 2.3.8; above, pp. 51-2.

⁹⁷ *Conduct of the Understanding*, p. 384.

⁹⁸ *De Officiis*, 1.13.

his accountability for his 'present and past Actions' by recognising the existence, precepts and sanctions of a law to which he was beholden as God's creature (*EHU* 2.27.10). This law had ceased to be in perfect harmony with either the 'Civil Law' or, more pressingly, the 'Law of Reputation'. Men's prevalent concern for the opinions of others, which had once proved so beneficial, now informed Locke's unmistakable pessimism regarding his prospects of success in exhorting men in a Christian age to labour for truth.

Locke's conviction that the three 'Laws' had been subverted in a Christian age also sheds light on a second, distinctive feature of his mature thought. This is his notorious exclusion of atheists from toleration.⁹⁹ Locke nowhere claimed that only theistic heathens had abided by the laws regulating society. An ignorance of a theistic deity and future state in the heathen world had not prevented 'innocent pagans' from being 'strict observers of the rules of equity and of the law of nature', or from respecting 'the laws of the[ir] society'.¹⁰⁰ Society had been possible— indeed, it had in many respects thrived— in the absence of true religious and moral knowledge. Moral motivation and obligation were, in this regard, separable. Tiberius' understanding of the role and scope of political authority was far greater than that of Constantine or his Christian successors. Cicero's discussion of men's moral duties, which excluded any treatment of moral obligation, was in many respects unsurpassed. Most heathens had failed dismally to employ their natural faculties as they ought. Yet with the exception of the dogmatic philosophical sects, they had not actively embraced error. They might still be brought by the cultivation of their faculties and the reading of the Gospels to recognise the true nature and origin of those duties which they nonetheless performed on account of their utility.

⁹⁹ 'Essay concerning Toleration', p. 188; *Letter concerning Toleration*, p. 426.

¹⁰⁰ *Letter concerning Toleration*, pp. 416-17.

The same could not be said, however, regarding speculative atheists willing to reject theism *a priori*, even after Christ's dispensation.¹⁰¹ To profess such active unbelief was for Locke to deny the very existence of a natural law, which he erected upon the basis of a theistic (but not specifically Christian) natural theology.¹⁰² The heathens were polytheists on account of their failure to employ their reason in religious questions, not as a result of their having done so.¹⁰³ They were, in other words, ignorant rather than erroneous. Speculative atheists, no less than those theologians who reduced Christianity to an incomprehensible system of metaphysics, interfered with the natural harmony between the senses and reason, and between the insights of nature and those of revelation. Both set them quite disastrously in some degree of opposition. As Locke reflected in his draft constitution for the colony of Carolina (1669), both actively prevented innocent atheists from 'having an opportunity of acquainting themselves with the truth and reasonableness of [Christ's] doctrines' and evaluating them according to their own natural lights.¹⁰⁴ Seen in this way, Locke's insight regarding men's natural moral potential underpinned his theory of toleration and distinctively secular account of political authority. It enriched both with a force that far exceeded the rather anodyne claim, endorsed by Christians of almost all persuasions, that belief could not be coerced.¹⁰⁵ It also informed the limits Locke set to who, and what, ought to be tolerated. Coercion in the case of speculative atheists was both necessary and entirely legitimate. In the *Essay*, Locke noted that it was only a concern for the sanctions of civil law

¹⁰¹ On Locke's distinction, nowhere expressed explicitly in these terms, between innocent and speculative atheism, see J.K. Numao, 'Locke on Atheism', *History of Political Thought*, 34:2 (Summer 2013), pp. 252-72. Numao makes no mention of Locke's frequent discussion of the heathen world, which nonetheless lends further support to the interpretation he offers.

¹⁰² Harris, 'Free Worship and Toleration'.

¹⁰³ See above, p. 70 n. 37.

¹⁰⁴ 'The Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina' (1669), in *Political Writings*, p. 229.

¹⁰⁵ The importance of Locke's assessment of men's moral potential for his theory of toleration is emphasised by Stanton, 'Politics and Theology of Toleration'; and Harris, 'Free Worship and Toleration'. A considerably greater number of commentators have argued, however, that Locke's defence of toleration was essentially predicated upon the irrationality of coercion: see, by way of example, Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality*, pp. 208-11; and Susan Mendus, 'Locke: Toleration, Morality and Rationality', in J.P. Horton & S. Mendus (eds.), *John Locke "A Letter on Toleration" in Focus* (London, 1991), pp. 147-62.

and the law of reputation that (happily) prevented a far greater number of men from openly professing their unbelief (*EHU*, 1.4.9).

Even as he sought to liberate the individual from external imposition, Locke's conception of rights imposed a burdensome duty of accountability and agency on that individual. It was a liberty to perform the duties enshrined in a law of nature (including to worship God publicly) as he judged fit and proper. It was a liberty, that is, to embrace self-consciousness, and to take accountability for one's actions before God. It was not a liberty from those duties, which on Locke's account the speculative atheist desired. This distinctly Pelagian combination of rights and duties was enshrined in the eirenic paraphrase offered by Locke of Romans 14.23: 'But he that is in doubt and balanceth is *self condemned*, if he eat; because he doth it without a full perswasion of the lawfulness of it. For whatever a man doth, which he is not fully perswaded *in his own mind* to be lawful, is sin.'¹⁰⁶ All men had to be at liberty to recognise their duties under natural law, and to perform them as they saw fit. Those who denied the existence of the divine author of that law, and the duties He imposed, could hardly possess a right to liberty defined in these terms. Locke's vision of the relationship between morality, justice and religion was not merely consistent with an exclusion of atheists from toleration. It demanded it.

Locke's distrust of philosophy (and of public philosophers) was profound. This has been underplayed or ignored by historians rather more eager to present Locke as the apologist for a secular world order and an ethics founded upon reason. At the heart of Locke's philosophical endeavours was the attempt to re-establish what he presented as the delicate equilibrium between knowledge and faith. To do so was also to illustrate the equally delicate harmony between worldly utility and normative truth. Cicero's philosophical writings were of fundamental importance in Locke's efforts to articulate and defend this rather precarious

¹⁰⁶ *Paraphrase and Notes*, ii, p. 596 (italics added).

mid-point between the ‘cautious and zealous’. In response to Molyneux’s repeated requests that he compose a ‘Book of Offices or Moral Philosophy’, Locke replied that there was no need.¹⁰⁷ As Locke’s educational writings suggested, if one desired to know how far reason alone could proceed in moral enquiries, one need look no further than *De Officiis*. This was precisely the work that Molyneux was exhorting Locke to update.¹⁰⁸ It was this ill-founded dissatisfaction with Cicero’s admittedly inconclusive and limited insights regarding moral obligation, and with the methodology of academic scepticism that informed it, which had led to such ‘*rubbish*’ being placed in men’s way to both knowledge and Christ.

On Locke’s reading, Cicero had in the final analysis explained (and rhetorically advocated) the moral virtues on account of their temporal utility and agreeableness. It was Christ alone who had explained to men, in terms all could understand, why the precepts of the law described by Cicero were both moral and obligatory, and why it was in their greatest interest to adhere to that law. It was Christ, then, who had furnished men with an understanding of the *honestum* and *summum bonum*, not philosophy. This was something that Cicero’s academic scepticism would have led him to acknowledge. Precisely because Christ had no interest in ‘*the teaching of Men Philosophy*’, the truths he revealed could hardly be— and did not need to be— defended dogmatically upon that basis. Locke’s account of moral obligation, such as it was, undoubtedly placed a far greater emphasis on faith than he had initially envisaged in his lectures on the law of nature. Ultimately, Locke concluded that the relationship between utility and truth was only to be resolved by the individual in faith. All men were fallible, and all would be held accountable for their actions by God. Better, then, to risk falling into error on the basis of one’s own sincere quest for principles by which to live, than to subordinate

¹⁰⁷ Locke, *Correspondence*, v, pp. 569-70 (Molyneux to Locke, 14 Mar. 1696); v, pp. 593-6 (Locke to Molyneux, 30 Mar. 1696). Molyneux made repeated requests for a treatise demonstrating morals, as ‘no Age ever required it more than Ours’: *ibid.*, iv, pp. 507-509 (27 Aug. 1692); iv, pp. 729-30 (16 Sep. 1693); v, pp. 253-5 (15 Jan. 1695).

¹⁰⁸ ‘Some Thoughts concerning Reading and Study’, pp. 399-400. See too Locke’s advice to Carey Mordaunt, Countess of Peterborough, of Sept/ Oct 1697, in *Educational Writings*, pp. 393-6.

one's fallible reason to that of another and thereby renounce as guides natural revelation (reason) and Christ (the sole authority worthy of faith). As will be seen in the following chapter, Locke's pupil Shaftesbury was painfully aware of the depth of his tutor's contempt for philosophy, on account of the role he considered it to have played in interrupting men's moral and religious formation and leading them away from Christ. Shaftesbury was also profoundly perturbed, as were a great many others, by Locke's deeply troubling treatment of the question of moral obligation.

Shaftesbury is a complex figure in the intellectual history of eighteenth-century Britain. He can easily appear as an anachronism, contemptuous or ignorant of the advances in learning underway in the age in which he lived. In the original index to the second edition of his *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1714), 'Metaphysicks' is followed by 'necessary Knowledg of nothing knowable or known'. Under 'Philosophers' are the entries 'See CLOWN', and 'Moral philosophers of a modern sort, more ignorant and corrupt than the mere Vulgar'.¹ One seeks an entry for 'Newton, Isaac' in vain; and whilst Bacon had the honour of being cited by Shaftesbury (once), it was only to establish that he had been fortunate to have 'escap'd being call'd an ATHEIST' by his contemporaries, an oversight Shaftesbury was eager to remedy.² Rather than trouble himself with the productions of a modern age whose philosophy he considered to be 'rotten', Shaftesbury unabashedly proclaimed his preference for the Stoic moralists of classical antiquity. In his *General Dictionary* (1739), Thomas Birch noted that Shaftesbury 'carried always with him' the 'moral works of Xenophon, Horace, the Commentaries and Enchiridion of Epictetus as published by Arrian, and Marcus Antoninus'.³

Shaftesbury's classicism has been portrayed in various ways, most of which have been dismissive of his profundity as a philosopher. Ernst Cassirer, for example, argued that Shaftesbury's classicism reflected an 'aloofness from his own time', and a lack of interest in

¹ Shaftesbury's original index can be found in *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. D. Den Uyl (3 vols., Indianapolis, 2001), iii, pp. 253-92. Three scholarly editions of *Characteristicks* have recently been published, but the Liberty Fund edition presents the text in the format closest to that in which eighteenth-century readers would have encountered it. For a discussion of the respective merits of the various editions, see Michael B. Prince, 'Editing Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks*', *Essays in Criticism*, 54:1 (Jan. 2004), pp. 38-59. The Liberty Fund text, used here, is based on the third edition of 1732.

² *Miscellany II*, in *ibid.*, iii, p. 45.

³ *A General Dictionary, Historical and Critical* (10 vols., London, 1734-41), ix (1739), p. 186 n. Q. Much of the content for the entry on Shaftesbury was provided by his son (the fourth earl) and his nephew James Harris, which explains the sympathetic account it provides. On this, see Isabel Rivers, 'Biographical Dictionaries and their Uses from Bayle to Chalmers', in *idem* (ed.), *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England: New Essays* (London, 2001), pp. 161-2.

‘the problems affecting his era, or [in] the intellectual and practical decisions’ it sought to formulate.⁴ David Raphael portrays Shaftesbury as the founder of the ‘moral sense’ school, yet argues that he was unable to develop his insights systematically. One finds in Shaftesbury’s writings ‘no coherent view... about moral theory in general’. That task was left to abler philosophers such as Francis Hutcheson and Adam Smith.⁵ Meanwhile Raphael, following Smith, regards the *Inquiry concerning Virtue or Merit* (1699) as Shaftesbury’s sole significant contribution to the field.⁶ Scholars in other disciplines have, however, increasingly recognised the value of placing Shaftesbury in his proper historical context, presenting (in explicit contrast to Cassirer) a thinker keenly engaged with contemporary political, cultural and literary currents. Yet in so doing, they have tended to downplay the interpretative importance of Shaftesbury’s profound classicism for an understanding of his philosophical objectives, and to neglect the substantive content of that philosophy itself. Laurence Klein argues that Shaftesbury possessed a ‘self-consciously modern outlook’, and that his classicism was entirely subordinated to his ‘cultural politics’.⁷ Michael Prince has questioned Klein’s interpretation but abandoned the context of antiquity altogether, whilst accepting that in the case of Shaftesbury one cannot speak of a ‘coherent philosophical output’. Prince’s interpretation once again rests on a low estimation of Shaftesbury’s place in the history of philosophy. Shaftesbury’s lack of depth in reasoning was, however, offset by his willingness to play with language and form; and it is here that he is of greatest scholarly interest.⁸

⁴ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. F.C.A. Koelln & J.P. Pettegrove (Princeton, 1951), p. 313.

⁵ Raphael, *Moral Sense*, p. 17.

⁶ The following anthologies include extracts from the *Inquiry*: L.A. Selby-Bigge (ed.), *British Moralists* (2 vols., Oxford, 1897), i, pp. 1-66; D.D. Raphael (ed.), *British Moralists, 1650-1800* (2 vols., Oxford, 1969), i, pp. 195-223; and J.B. Schneewind (ed.), *British Moralists from Montaigne to Kant* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1990), ii, pp. 488-500.

⁷ Klein, *Culture of Politeness*, pp. 1, 20-21, 47.

⁸ Prince, *Philosophical Dialogue*, pp. 23-73.

This chapter makes a case for taking Shaftesbury seriously as a highly original thinker who sought to explore questions in and about philosophy that were of urgent contemporary interest. This alone explains why the great and good of the European republic of letters felt compelled to respond to Shaftesbury, and even, in the case of Smith, found it necessary to resort to *ad hominem* attacks.⁹ In developing this case, two prevailing assumptions need to be challenged. The first is that Shaftesbury's attempt to reformulate and vindicate Stoic moral philosophy was a reactionary enterprise. The second is that Shaftesbury was an inattentive, incapable, or even 'erroneous reader' of Locke. William Spellman's claim that Shaftesbury's 'disagreement with Locke was significant, but only in the context of his failure, shared by so many others in the seventeenth century, to understand Locke's position on the origins of universal morality' needs revising.¹⁰ Shaftesbury's classicism finds its most important context, and his vindication of Stoicism its contemporary significance, in Locke's distinctive treatment of classical moral philosophy. Precisely because scholars have paid scant attention to the latter, they have failed to comprehend the novelty and importance of the former.

More clearly than Locke's other critics, Shaftesbury saw his moral theory as an attempt to cross-examine and transcend the neo-Stoic and Augustinian-Epicurean accounts of man and God as they had developed within a Christian intellectual world. Shaftesbury sought to expose the futility of any such endeavour. He also attempted to explain why Locke's distinctly heterodox Christian belief had led him to harmonise moral motivation and obligation by forging a synthesis between two irreconcilable philosophical visions of self and the world (the Stoic and the Epicurean). Ultimately Shaftesbury found his answer to this question in the Scriptures themselves. Christians were compelled to emphasise God's power

⁹ Smith was scathingly critical of Shaftesbury, whom he considered to be 'of no great depth in Reasoning', something reflected in his inability to engage in abstract thought of the kind demanded by metaphysics: *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres*, ed. J.C. Boyce & A.S. Skinner (Oxford, 1983), pp. 57-8, 142. For discussion of Smith's treatment of Shaftesbury, see Douglas Den Uyl, 'Das Shaftesbury Problem', and the responses by James Otteson and Ryan Patrick Hanley, in *The Adam Smith Review*, 6, ed. F. Forman-Barzilai (Abingdon, 2011), pp. 209-31.

¹⁰ Spellman, *Locke and Depravity*, p. 201.

above His goodness because the God of Abraham and Isaac (made flesh in Christ) was obnoxious to men's natural sense of what was morally good. Here the relative lack of scholarly interest in the content of Shaftesbury's philosophical thought has resulted in misunderstanding, encapsulated in Klein's claim that Shaftesbury 'talked little of Jesus and assigned him no role except that of moral exemplar'.¹¹ The fundamental point Shaftesbury developed, one that intentionally struck at the foundations of Locke's moral theory and Christian apologetic, was that Christ could *not* play this role. The conduct and teaching of Christ and the Apostles was, Shaftesbury argued, fundamentally antithetical to, rather than consistent with, men's moral sentiments. To erect Christ as the paragon of moral excellence necessarily subverted the appreciation of truth and harmony in moral actions to which men's natural faculties led them.

As Locke himself had argued, the only grounds for sound belief in revealed Christianity were essentially moral. The evidence provided by miracles and prophecy, and the historical testimony of the Fathers, was of secondary importance, in that it alone could not lead a man to faith. Precisely because Shaftesbury denied the moral excellence of Christianity, this line of reasoning led him to emphasise that the only ground upon which Christianity might be defended was pragmatic. Christianity was, *de facto*, the established religion; but it was far from clear why any reasonable man would believe sincerely in the doctrines it taught. Shaftesbury was, however, in full agreement with Locke on two counts. Classical moral philosophy was essentially dualistic, divided between Stoic and Epicurean traditions; and the moral and religious insights of each were irreconcilable with the other, and both with Christian belief. Yet where Locke found in Ciceronian academic scepticism an alternative philosophy capable of reconciling natural law with Christian moral theology, Shaftesbury

¹¹ Klein, *Culture of Politeness*, p. 158. See, too, James Harris's claim that, for Shaftesbury, 'true' Christianity had been corrupted by Reformed (Augustinian) theology, which similarly underplays the extent of Shaftesbury's hostility towards the moral teachings of Christ: 'The Place of the Ancients', p. 2.

denied the possibility of any such reconciliation. In a letter of 1706 to Locke's French translator, Pierre Coste, Shaftesbury claimed to draw from Horace the following insight into classical moral philosophy (and the shift to the present tense in the final sentence is significant):

Nor were there, indeed, any more than two real distinct philosophies, the one derived from Socrates, and passing into the old Academic, the Peripatetic, and Stoic; the other derived in reality from Democritus, and passing into the Cyrenaic and Epicurean. *For as that mere sceptic, and new Academic, it had no certain precepts, and so was an exercise or sophistry rather than a philosophy.* The first, therefore, of these two philosophies recommended action, concernment in civil affairs, religion. The second derided all, and advised inaction and retreat, and with good reason. For the first maintained that society, right and wrong was founded in Nature, and Nature had a meaning, and was herself, that is to say in her wits, well governed and administered by a simple and perfect intelligence. The second again derided this, and made Providence and Dame Nature not so sensible as a dotting woman. The first, therefore, of these philosophies is to be called the civil, social, Theistic; the second, the contrary.¹²

It was also to Horace's writings that Shaftesbury turned in order to develop the contention that was fundamental to his repudiation of Lockean epistemology and moral theory.¹³ Horace, along with all the disciples of the 'severe philosophy' (Stoicism), had brought 'passion... under the head of opinion'.¹⁴ It was men's 'temper', 'fancies' or 'affections' that governed their 'opinions' and 'principles'. Crucially, this was as true in matters of religion as in those of morality. Unless the individual was able to interrogate his 'fancies' and subordinate them to the 'magisterial' authority of reason, he must lead 'a life distracted, incoherent, full of irresolution, repentance and self-disapprobation'.¹⁵ Such an individual would lack any stable sense of 'self', unable to acquire the constancy of temper upon which

¹² Shaftesbury to Pierre Coste, 1 Oct. 1706, in *The Life, Unpublished Letters and Philosophical Regimen of Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury*, ed. B. Rand (New York, 1900; repr. London, 1992), p. 359 (italics added). For Shaftesbury's influence on Coste's subsequent rejection of Locke's moral theory as 'Hobbist', see James Dybikowski, "'Aspers'd and Blacken'd': Pierre Coste's Critique of Locke's Moral Theory", *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 23 (2004-2007), pp. 1-23.

¹³ For the highly idiosyncratic and personal nature of Shaftesbury's reading of Horace, whom he saw to have begun as a Stoic, converted to Epicureanism under the influence of Maecenas' court and gradually (and finally) re-converted to Stoicism, see Frank Stack, *Pope and Horace: Studies in Imitation* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 1-17, 116-22, 150-53, 222-7, 245-51.

¹⁴ *Sensus Communis, an Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour* (1709), in *Characteristics*, i, [Part] 3. [Sect] 1, p. 65 n.

¹⁵ *Miscellany V*, in *ibid.*, iii, pp. 185-6.

depended ‘that uniformity of opinion which is necessary to hold us to one will and preserve us in the same mind from one day to another’. Philosophy was for Shaftesbury ‘severe’ precisely because it required men ‘to be thus magisterial with ourselves, thus strict over our imaginations and with all the airs of a real pedagogue to be solicitously taken up in the sour care and tutorage of so many boyish fancies, unlucky appetites and desires, which are perpetually playing truant and need correction’.¹⁶ Unless one subordinated one’s recalcitrant ‘fancies’ to reason, one would remain always captive to them, and transported to inherently unstable joy or despair by the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. One’s ideas concerning the deity, moreover, would reflect this continual flux. God would at one moment be immanent and the object of the keenest love (enthusiasm), but at the next utterly transcendent and worthy only of fear (superstition). Locke’s willingness to erect an account of moral motivation on the basis of a hedonic psychology denied man’s capacity for rational self-command, and with it any possibility of establishing theistic belief upon stable foundations.

Insofar as Shaftesbury endorsed a concept of ‘moral sense’ it must be understood in this light, as the universal desire of men for a happiness defined as a stable sense of self that could only result from ‘the order or symmetry of this inward part’.¹⁷ It was, ultimately, on the basis of a shared desire for happiness, rather than any cosmological arguments or deductive reasoning, that Shaftesbury constructed his defence of natural sociability and men’s inherently virtuous nature. It was also for this reason that he increasingly relied upon what appears to modern philosophers to be a weak analogy between aesthetic taste and morality. Men’s inherent attraction to order and harmony in external representations of

¹⁶ *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author* (1710), in *ibid.*, i, [Pt.] 1. [Sect.] 2, p. 116.

¹⁷ *An Inquiry concerning Virtue or Merit* (1699), in *ibid.*, ii, [Bk.] 2. [Pt.] 1. [Sect.] 2, p. 48: references to the *Inquiry* will be given, in this format, in brackets in the text. On the concept of the ‘moral sense’ in Shaftesbury, see Robert Voitle, ‘Shaftesbury’s Moral Sense’, *Studies in Philology*, 52:1 (Jan. 1955), pp. 17-38; Darwall, *British Moralists and the Internal ‘Ought’*, pp. 176-206; and Michael B. Prince, ‘Mimetic Virtue. On Shaftesbury’s Moral Sense’, *Aufklärung*, 22 (2010), pp. 59-76.

mind reflected their profound desire for such order within.¹⁸ Shaftesbury repeatedly encouraged his reader to engage in 'inward converse', advocating the 'art or science' of soliloquy which, he claimed, had been perfected by the Stoic moralists. This 'brutal' exercise in 'self-dissection' required a detachment from rather than involvement in society, since 'company is an extreme provocative to fancy and, like a hotbed in gardening, is apt to make our imaginations sprout too fast'.¹⁹

Shaftesbury repeatedly expressed his frustration with those 'polite' gentlemen who were incapable of spending 'two or three hours together, on mere PHILOSOPHY and MORALS'.²⁰ 'Who', Shaftesbury asked rhetorically, 'is so just to himself as to recall his fancy from the power of fashion and education to that of reason?'²¹ It was to appeal to gentlemen in a profoundly unphilosophical age, Shaftesbury repeatedly claimed, that he was forced to resort to a multiplicity of literary forms in *Characteristics*. The analogy of aesthetic taste, Shaftesbury confessed, was intended to 'serve instead as an agreeable vehicle for the moral potion, which by itself is become mere *physic* and loathsome to mankind, so as to require a little sweetening to help it down'.²² In his concern for self-actualization and self-mastery, and his emphasis on the arduous 'pains and application' that this demanded from the individual, Shaftesbury was entirely at one with Locke. Yet for Shaftesbury it was only philosophy that allowed man to recognise and live according to his chief end, not the Christian moral theology contained in the Gospels. The role of philosophy was to allow the individual to attain a stable sense of self-worth. Shaftesbury explored this at length in notebooks crammed with citations from Aurelius and Epictetus (the *Askēmata*): 'How goes the world?— No matter; but how go I?

¹⁸ On which, see Carey, *Contesting Diversity*, pp. 98-149; Dabney Townsend, 'From Shaftesbury to Kant: the Development of the Concept of Aesthetic Experience', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 48:2 (Apr.-June 1987), pp. 287-306; and Timothy M. Costelloe, *The British Aesthetic Tradition from Shaftesbury to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge, 2013), which was, however, published too late to be considered in this thesis.

¹⁹ *Soliloquy*, 1.1, p. 100.

²⁰ *Miscellany V*, p. 176.

²¹ *Miscellany III*, p. 114.

²² Shaftesbury to Coste, 25 July 1712, in *Life, Letters*, pp. 503-504.

This is a matter, and the only matter. This is of concern. This mine, and at my peril.— How do I govern? The world?— No. But how do I govern MYSELF?— How do matters stand with me?²³ In his distinctly Stoic conception of *apatheia* and contentment as residing in apathy towards external fortune, including one's reputation in the eyes of others, Shaftesbury's account of the path to virtue and happiness was directly opposed to that furnished by Locke.

The 'two real distinct philosophies' identified by Horace had sought to provide men with a '*Vitae Dux*' (guide to life) and a 'regimen' that encouraged the suppression of those affections considered to impede men's acquisition of self-mastery and constancy.²⁴ Here it is important to note, as historians have largely failed to do, that in his writings those considered true disciples of Epicureanism— 'honest Epicurus' himself, Lucretius, and Bayle— were treated with considerable sympathy by Shaftesbury.²⁵ Epicurus had not denied that men were naturally possessed of 'social affections'. On the contrary, it was because men's love of society and concern for the good of others were so strong that he considered them to be so dangerous. It was only in a Christian world that natural sociability and the 'social affections' had been denied altogether, and only with Locke that a moral theory had been constructed upon these foundations. In Locke's hands, philosophy had been denied its role as queen of the sciences, and stripped of its fundamental purpose— 'to correct manners and regulate lives'.²⁶ Instead men were reduced to necessitous brutes continually moved by an uneasiness caused by a desire for external objects, from which relief might only be found

²³ Published in *ibid.*, 'Political Affairs', p. 102. Klein dismisses the *Askēmata* as the product of an 'existential crisis' from which Shaftesbury supposedly emerged in the 1700s, which steadfastly ignores his continual (if studiously elliptical) advocacy of 'the severe philosophy' and his repeated self-description as a 'formalist' or 'dogmatist'. For a still valuable corrective, see E.A. Tiffany, 'Shaftesbury as a Stoic', *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 38:3 (Sep. 1923), pp. 642-84.

²⁴ The claim that philosophy could alone furnish men with a '*Vitae Dux*' is found in *Soliloquy*, 3.1, p. 184, and immediately precedes a concerted assault on Lockean epistemology.

²⁵ See, for example, Klein's claim that Shaftesbury saw Hobbes as an 'Epicurean revivalist': *Culture of Politeness*, pp. 60-69. It is more accurate to say that he considered Hobbes' philosophy as a grievously perverted form of true Epicureanism.

²⁶ *Miscellany III*, p. 114.

in the uncertain hope of salvation. The philosopher no longer 'contemplated the man, *as a real man and as a human agent*, but as a watch or common machine'.²⁷ For Shaftesbury if empirical natural philosophy reduced the world to 'atoms and chance', Lockean epistemology posited an 'atomism of the mind'.²⁸ Both Bacon and Locke had sought to combine a distinctly Epicurean (atomistic) account of man and nature with the continued defence of religion, whereas Epicurus himself had recognised fully that the sole argument for a divine intelligence was to be found in man's good nature and the providential order of the universe. It was for this reason that Epicurus, a 'fair reasoner', had raised 'his deities aloft in the imaginary spaces and, setting them apart out of the universe and nature of things, makes nothing of them beyond a word'.²⁹ Here Shaftesbury's willingness to 'answer for [Locke's] Sincerity as a most zealous *Christian* and Believer' reads less like a defence of Locke's character than as an explanation of why he saw fit to push beyond philosophical ground shared in antiquity by all wise men (Stoics as well as Epicureans).³⁰

i. 'The Leading Principle of our Lives': Self-Mastery and the Quest for the *Summum Bonum*

Shaftesbury's reluctance in his published writings to make public the profound nature of his philosophical disagreement with one he considered to be his 'friend and foster-father' partly explains why commentators have not dwelt on the significance and depth of the division between the two men.³¹ Shaftesbury's reticence owed more to their personal ties than to any temperamental aversion to philosophical conflict, as his contemptuous treatment of Bacon suggests. Shaftesbury's grandfather had tasked Locke with the supervision of Lord Ashley's education, and his choice of tutor (Elizabeth Birch) ensured that the youth acquired an early

²⁷ *Soliloquy*, 3.1, p. 181.

²⁸ The phrase 'atomism of the mind' is taken from Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: the Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 167.

²⁹ *The Moralists, a Philosophical Rhapsody* (1709), in *Characteristics*, ii, [Pt] 2. [Sect] 3, p. 151.

³⁰ Shaftesbury to Michael Ainsworth, 3 June 1709, in *Several Letters Written by a Noble Lord to a Young Man at the University* (London, 1716), pp. 38-42.

³¹ Shaftesbury to Jean Le Clerc, 8 Feb. 1705, in *Life, Letters*, p. 332.

proficiency in Latin and Greek (he was fluent in both by the age of eleven).³² Moreover from an early age it seems that Locke discussed philosophical questions directly with Ashley: ‘you... conferr’d with me upon Subjects as though you were really better for not being alone’.³³ As a consequence of his residual affection for Locke, he ‘ever concealed my differences’ from ‘my old tutor and governor’.³⁴ The only explicit reference to Locke in his published works is a positive one.³⁵ Nonetheless it is clear from Shaftesbury’s correspondence that, by 1694 at the latest, he recognised those differences to be fundamental.

In the sole letter in which Shaftesbury discussed, in rambling terms, his own philosophical ideas with Locke, written in 1694, he noted that ‘what I count True Learning, and all that wee can profitt by, is to know ourselves’. Unless it showed men how they might be ‘Honester or Better Creatures’ philosophy was both useless and pernicious. All too many modern philosophers, like the ancient sophists denounced by Socrates, were ‘curiose in what signify’d nothing’. Their philosophy ‘gives a Man no help in the persuance of what he has learnt to bee his Duty; Assists him not in the Government of the Irrationall and Brutall Part of himself; which neither makes him more truly satisfy’d with what God does in the World (for that is *Loving God*) nor more Sociable more Honest or more Just, by removing of those Passions which hee has allways to Struggle with, that he may preserve himself so’.³⁶ In an entry from 1699 in the *Askēmata*, later reproduced verbatim in *Soliloquy* (1710), it is made clear that Shaftesbury considered a philosophy that occupied itself with ‘the formation of ideas, their comparisons, agreement and disagreement’ as a peculiarly modern form of

³² See the ‘Life’ of the third earl, composed by his son the fourth earl, in *ibid.*, p. xix.

³³ Lord Ashley to Locke, 3 Mar. 1692, in *Correspondence of Locke*, iv, pp. 403-405; and *Life, Letters*, pp. 288-9. Shaftesbury’s claim is supported by a letter of 31 July 1689, which refers to their discussion of the subject of the immateriality of the soul: *Correspondence of Locke*, iii, pp. 666-71.

³⁴ Shaftesbury to General James Stanhope, 7 Nov. 1709, in *Life, Letters*, p. 416.

³⁵ *The Moralists*, 2.4, p. 161 n.

³⁶ Ashley to Locke, 29 Sept. 1694, in *Correspondence of Locke*, v, pp. 150-54.

sophistry.³⁷ Concerned solely with men's 'opinions' or 'principles', it failed to recognise that these were themselves dictated by men's 'TASTE, or *Relish* in the Concerns of *Life*' (in other words, their estimations of where happiness was to be found), and was consequently 'wasted Labour'.³⁸

In a previous letter to Locke of 1694, Shaftesbury alluded to a project upon which he was engaged, but which he refused to show Locke or to publish 'in such a Turn of an Age and Time as this present one'. His thoughts, he felt, would be dismissed as 'either too ridiculously Absurd, or too odiously true'.³⁹ He referred to *An Inquiry concerning Virtue and Merit*, which was finally published (perhaps against his wishes) in 1699, and later incorporated with largely stylistic revisions into *Characteristics* (1711).⁴⁰ This work can be read not merely as a direct response to Locke's *Essay*, but more specifically to the second edition published in 1694.⁴¹ This contention is supported by Shaftesbury's focus on two specific questions, which were raised in highly distinctive fashion by Locke in 1694. The first concerned the central place of 'uneasiness' in Locke's hedonic account of human action, of both thought and deed. This was directly confronted, and refuted, by Shaftesbury: "To love and be kind; to have social and natural Affection, Complacency and Good-will, is to feel immediate Satisfaction and genuine Content. 'Tis in it-self *original Joy*, depending on no

³⁷ 'Philosophy', in *Life, Letters*, p. 267; *Soliloquy*, 3.1, pp. 184-5.

³⁸ *Miscellany III*, p. 109.

³⁹ Shaftesbury to Locke, 8 Sept. 1694, in *Correspondence of Locke*, v, pp. 123-5; *Life, Letters*, pp. 296-9.

⁴⁰ In the *Characteristics* of 1711, Shaftesbury suggested the *Inquiry* was published in 1699 as 'an unshapen foetus or false birth' (*Miscellany V*, p. 419), and the fourth earl claimed that Toland had it printed without its author's consent (*Life, Letters*, p. xxiii). This is questionable, not least since Shaftesbury encouraged Pierre Desmaizeaux to translate the work into French in 1701: see Robert Voitle, *The Third Earl of Shaftesbury, 1671-1713* (London, 1984), pp. 133-5; Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, ii, pp. 100-101; and *General Dictionary*, ix, p. 180. A.O. Aldridge, 'Two Versions of Shaftesbury's *Inquiry concerning Virtue*', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 13:2 (Feb. 1950), pp. 207-14, compares the two editions.

⁴¹ Voitle similarly dates the *Inquiry* to 1694 on the basis of Shaftesbury's letters to Locke, and reads it primarily as a response to the *Essay* but makes no mention of the important revisions Locke made to his second edition: *Third Earl of Shaftesbury*, pp. 59-70. Klein ignores Voitle's suggestion and dates the work to the late 1690s, without providing any substantiation for his claim: *Culture of Politeness*, pp. 48-9. Birch suggested that a 'rough draft' of the work was sketched even earlier, 'when he was but twenty years of age' (c.1691), a suggestion which is not implausible even as there is no other corroborating evidence: *General Dictionary*, ix, p. 180.

preceding Pain or Uneasiness; and producing nothing beside Satisfaction merely' (*I* 2.2.3, 96). The second concerned the centrality of a future state in Locke's theory of moral obligation. The fundamental objective of the *Inquiry* was to expose the chimerical nature of any attempt to establish what Spellman refers to as 'the origins of universal morality' in the uncertain 'hope' of reward in a future state.⁴² In this regard Shaftesbury argued that the distinction Locke drew between moral motivation and obligation was untenable. 'There can be nothing more fatal to virtue', Shaftesbury declared, 'than the weak and uncertain belief in a future reward and punishment. For the stress being laid wholly here, if this foundation come to fail, there is no further prop or security to men's morals. And thus virtue is supplanted and betrayed' (*I* 1.3.3, 39-40).

By proposing to consider 'virtue' and 'religion' separately, which were 'generally presum'd inseparable Companions', Shaftesbury sought to uncover the fundamental error at the heart of Locke's moral theory (*I* 1.1.1, 163). Establishing that men's 'opinions' or 'principles' were dependent upon their 'desires', Shaftesbury proceeded to argue that only if the latter were to some degree fixed might men be able to entertain a steady belief in both a divine intelligence and *perhaps* the prospect of a future state.⁴³ Philosophy, in other words, must necessarily precede theology. It alone could lead men to recognise the capacity of an intelligent mind to establish a harmony and order within themselves and (by analogy) in the universe as a whole. Here Shaftesbury identified two antithetical cosmologies, which gave rise to contrasting estimations of what it was for a man to live according to his nature—the central question of philosophy. 'In the Whole of Things (or in the Universe)', Shaftesbury contended, 'either all is according to a good Order, and the most agreeable to a general

⁴² Spellman, *Locke and Depravity*, p. 201.

⁴³ In due course Shaftesbury would make it clear that he did not consider immortality to be taught by true (Socratic) philosophy: see below, p. 125. It is likely that he had reached this conclusion—with the assistance of his Stoic guides like Aurelius—by 1694. This is suggested by his comments on the subject in his exchange with Locke, referred to above, p. 110 n. 33.

Interest: *or* there is that which is otherwise, and might possibly have been better constituted, more wisely contriv'd, and with more advantage to the general Interests of Beings, or of the Whole'. If one considered the universe to be in any sense 'defective', one could hardly sustain the idea of 'a designing Principle or Mind', or locate man's 'End' and happiness 'in Nature'. One would instead be compelled to consider man in lowlier terms, rather than as a 'Part' of a coherent larger 'Whole' (*I* 1.1.2, 5-6).

Shaftesbury identified the 'perfect THEIST' as the individual who 'at all Seasons, and on all Occasions' was able to support the 'Belief of a supreme Wisdom'. The 'perfect ATHEIST' was similarly able to 'think always consistently' on the question, but reached the opposite conclusion regarding order and design, and consequently dismissed the notion of an intelligent ordering mind altogether. In setting out these diametrically opposed ideal standpoints, Shaftesbury re-established the irreconcilable division between Stoicism and Epicureanism that he later discussed in his letter to Coste. Shaftesbury provided an '*Oeconomy of the Passions*' which vindicated both the Stoic and Epicurean sage. Shaftesbury argued that there were two 'sorts' of 'Affections' natural to man. These were the 'social', which led him to exert himself within society; and the 'selfish' or 'private', which ensured that he did not lose sight of what was required for his immediate self-preservation. These two types of 'Affection' could potentially pull in different directions, and a man's view of happiness and his true interest varied according to the strength of each. As such, it was entirely valid to ask which ought to be preferred, and to seek to suppress those that led him away from what he thereby identified as being his 'true *Scope* or *End*'. As Shaftesbury would later note in *Sensus Communis* (1709), a work which developed many of the arguments propounded in the *Inquiry*, 'tis is the height of Wisdom, no doubt, to be rightly *selfish*'. The question remained as to where one's true interest lay.⁴⁴ Until this was established, as Shaftesbury was at pains to

⁴⁴ *Sensus Communis*, 3.3, p. 76.

emphasise, the individual remained in a liminal state. He experienced ‘the frequent Successions of alternate Hatred and Love, Aversion and Inclination’, which ‘must of necessity create continual Disturbance and Disgust’ (*I* 2.2.1, 64).

Only the ‘two real distinct philosophies’ that were espoused by the ‘perfect THEIST’ and the ‘perfect ATHEIST’ provided rules by which to establish that constancy of temper which could lead a man to a stable sense of self and to a just conformity between his principles and his conduct. Shaftesbury emphasised this point in *Sensus Communis*:

For in this we shou’d all agree, that Happiness was to be pursu’d, and in fact was always sought after: but whether found in *following Nature* and giving way to *common Affection*; or in suppressing it, and turning every Passion towards *private Advantage*, a narrow *Self-end*, or the Preservation of *mere Life*; this wou’d be the matter in debate between us. The Question wou’d not be, “Who *lov’d* himself, or Who *not*”; but “Who *lov’d* and serv’d himself the *rightest*, and after the truest manner”.⁴⁵

At the outset of the *Inquiry*, Shaftesbury proposed to address the question of ‘whether it be a true Saying, *That it is impossible for an Atheist to be virtuous, or share any real degree of Honesty or Merit*’ (*I* 1.1.1, 4). This question had been raised in characteristically provocative fashion by Bayle, an acquaintance of Locke and later Shaftesbury, in his *Pensées Diverses*. Locke had responded forcefully in the negative in his discussion of speculative (as opposed to ignorant) atheism.⁴⁶ Shaftesbury occupied a position much closer to Bayle’s, arguing that men’s conduct depended on their affections rather than their professed speculative principles. The ‘perfect ATHEIST’ had a stable sense of self. Even as he was incapable of ‘Virtue’, his constancy of temper ensured that he remained the same man from one moment to the next, an essential prerequisite for friendship and mutual trust. Shaftesbury conceded that he could not be relied upon to the same degree as the ‘perfect THEIST’, however. He would eventually discover that his attempt to suppress his ‘social’ affections was futile, and be

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Shaftesbury would appear to have made Bayle’s acquaintance during his first retreat in Rotterdam in 1698-9: Voitle, *Third Earl of Shaftesbury*, pp. 86-91. On Locke’s distinction between ignorant and speculative atheism, see above, pp. 95-7.

thrown back into a maelstrom of melancholic bitterness and resentment (*I* 2.2.1, 74-5). Nonetheless he did not positively advocate principles or practices that were destructive of human society. True Epicurean philosophy advocated 'a stedly and deliberate Pursuit of the most narrowly confin'd *Self-interest*'. It necessarily led the individual to withdraw from society, but there was no reason why it would lead him actively to seek to disrupt it (*I* 2.1.1, 46). As Shaftesbury noted, 'when Men are *easy* in themselves, they let others remain so; and can readily comply with what seems *plausible*, and is thought conducing to *the Quiet* or *good Correspondence* of mankind'.⁴⁷

Only the 'perfect THEIST' (the Stoic sage) was capable of truly virtuous action in Shaftesbury's austere account. His virtue was clearly not a consequence of his theism, rather the opposite. His recognition that his true 'End' and happiness were to be realised in society (interpreted in the broadest terms as 'mankind') was not the consequence of 'dry reasoning'. Shaftesbury made notably little effort to defend his cosmic optimism on the grounds of 'right reason'— a term that scarcely appears in his writings— or his belief in a divine intelligence on the argument from design. Here he departed significantly from his Stoic guides.⁴⁸ Instead it was to sentiment that Shaftesbury appealed in an account that was radically subjectivist in intent. Shaftesbury exhorted his reader to 'Converse *with himself*'. If he did so, he would recognise that all enjoyment came from a settled temper free of bitterness, and that this could only be acquired if he reconciled himself to providence (meaning external fortune) and learnt to despise those external 'things' that were not in his 'power'.⁴⁹ Through this process of self-examination, he would be led to affirm that 'there is no State of outward

⁴⁷ *Miscellany II*, p. 68.

⁴⁸ A point noted by Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 249-59. On the changing valences of the concept of 'right reason' in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, see John Spurr, "'Rational Religion" in Restoration England', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 49:4 (Oct.-Dec. 1988), pp. 563-85.

⁴⁹ A point emphasised by Epictetus, *Encheiridion*, trans. N.P. White (Indianapolis, 1983), pp. 1 (§1), 19 (§19), in passages repeatedly cited by Shaftesbury in the *Askēmata* (see, for example, 'Natural Affection', pp. 7-8; 'Good and Ill', p. 57). Shaftesbury's concept of providence is, like that of Aurelius, considerably closer to Machiavelli's *fortuna* than to Locke's Christianised and teleological concept.

Prosperity, or flowing Fortune, where *Inclination* and *Desire* are always satisfy'd, *Fancy* and *Humour* pleas'd' (*I* 2.2.1, 66). Rather than experiencing excessive joy or melancholy due to external circumstances, Shaftesbury argued that the individual would recognise that all that matters is what passes within. He would discover with a degree of 'Evidence as great as that which is found in Numbers, or Mathematicks'— here Shaftesbury aped Locke's terminology— that it is in the pleasures of the mind rather than the senses that the greatest and most constant contentment is to be found (*I*, 'Conclusion', 99). The mind took pleasure in order, harmony and ease (*apatheia*); and this could only be achieved through the (temperate) exercise of those social affections which lead a man to 'love and serve' (the Shaftesbury family motto). The just philosopher would act virtuously because he recognised that it was in his nature to do so; because his greatest interest lay in realising his true nature, in this higher sense virtue and interest were united. In Shaftesbury's reformulation of core Stoic arguments, it was the arduous attempt to understand one's true end that led one both to acquiesce with what appeared to be an unjust external world of men ('providence'), and to recognise and worship a perfectly wise and benevolent divine being. 'Perfect THEISM' was the final and inevitable consequence of this search for contentment. The 'divine Passion' to which this gave rise further strengthened the love of order and harmony that the virtuous man had already attained within (*I* 1.3.3, 43).

Leslie Stephen's claim that Shaftesbury possessed an 'easy optimism' in his theodicy and vision of human nature requires qualification.⁵⁰ It was made clear in the *Inquiry*, and even more so in the *Askēmata*, that both the 'perfect THEIST' and the 'perfect ATHEIST' were ideal types. It was quite possible that no such sages had ever lived.⁵¹ 'Vice and virtue', Shaftesbury noted, 'are found variously mix'd and alternately prevalent in the several

⁵⁰ Leslie Stephen, *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, 2nd edn (2 vols., London, 1881), ii, pp. 18-33.

⁵¹ The conception of the sage as enshrining an idealised life of virtue to which to aspire, but which it was possible no man had (or could have) attained, was a conventional Stoic claim: see Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, pp. 56-9.

Characters of Mankind', and '*it is as hard to find a Man wholly Ill, as wholly Good*' (I 1.2.4, 22-3). Although all men possessed a 'favourable Inclination' towards virtue, its realisation depended upon 'a use of Reason, sufficient to secure a right application of the Affections' (I 1.2.3, 20). Very few men could be truly virtuous or genuine theists. Almost all would 'come short of that sound and well-establish'd Reason, which alone can constitute a *just Affection*, a uniform and steady *Will* and *Resolution*' (I 1.2.4, 22). The constant flux most men experienced between 'Love and Hatred, Aversion and Inclination' was reflected in their ideas of a deity (or deities). Most were 'DAEMONISTS', possessed of an idea of divinity that was less than perfectly good (I 1.1.2, 5-8). For this reason, in matters of worship, '*all Moralists*, worthy of any Name' (meaning the Stoics) had 'prescrib'd Restraint, press'd *Moderation*, and, to all TYRO's in Philosophy forbid the forward Use of Admiration, Rapture or Extasy'.⁵² Since novices in philosophy lacked a stable and constant idea of the good, they might end up admiring a being that was as capricious and arbitrary as the succession of fancies they experienced within. The '*Moderation*' of Stoic moralists discouraged the erection of false models for admiration.

This, for Shaftesbury, was evidently not true in a Christian age. He identified a third 'sort' of affections, the 'unnatural', which could lead men against both the interest of mankind and self-interest. Such 'unnatural' affections were artificially inculcated through custom and education in societies where false and pernicious ideas in religion prevailed. 'Honest Epicurus' had in no sense cultivated these. He did not deny the 'social' affections even if he considered them to impede men's quest for contentment, and his 'fair reasoning' saw him banish the gods altogether. As Shaftesbury continually noted in the *Askēmata*, drawing from Aurelius: 'Either atoms or Deity. No medium. That multiplicity or this simplicity. No

⁵² *Miscellany II*, p. 24.

compromise— anarchy, or monarchy'.⁵³ The 'perfect ATHEIST' was capable of a 'real degree of Honesty or Merit' because he was able to attain a 'real degree' of tranquillity and self-mastery. His was a philosophically-tenable position, and Epicureanism a 'real distinct' philosophy. The inculcation of a religion erected on a 'medium' between 'atoms or Deity', however, compelled men to remain in a continual state of unease and self-disapprobation. Shaftesbury drew upon Plutarch's *On Superstition*— a favourite text for freethinkers— to make this point:

*The Atheist believes there is no Deity; the Religionist, or superstitious Believer, wishes there were none. If he believes, 'tis against his Will: mistrust he dares not, nor call his Thought in question. But cou'd he with Security, at once, through off that oppressive Fear, which like the Rock of TANTALUS impends, and presses over him, he wou'd with equal Joy spurn his enslaving Thought, and embrace the Atheist's State and Opinion as his happiest Deliverance. Atheists are free of Superstition, but the Superstitious are ever willing Atheists, tho' impotent in their Thought, and unable to believe of the Divine Being as they gladly wou'd.*⁵⁴

This 'corrupt Religion, or SUPERSTITION' was alone able to impose 'many things the most horridly unnatural and inhuman' as 'excellent, good, and laudable *in themselves*' (I 1.3.2, 27). Shaftesbury's prime example was 'misanthropy', defined as 'the immediate Opposite to that noble Affection, which, in ancient Language, was term'd *Hospitality*, viz., extensive Love of Mankind, and Relief of Strangers' (I 2.2.3, 95). This profoundly 'unnatural' affection resulted from the erection and imposition on men's minds of a model for admiration who exhibited such a quality. Although obnoxious to men's natural sense of what was good, 'just and equitable', through 'Art and strong Endeavour, with long Practice and Meditation' a 'second Nature' could be created which obliterated the original (I 1.3.1, 25). Men were naturally predisposed to the passion of 'Admiration' for that which was greater than themselves. The 'divine Passion' of the 'perfect THEIST' was so beneficial because it was directed towards a 'true Model and Example of the most exact Justice, and highest Goodness and Worth' (I 1.3.2, 29). However:

⁵³ 'Life', in *Life, Letters*, p. 254; citing Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. M. Hammond & D. Clay (London, 2006), 4.3.2n, 6.4n.

⁵⁴ *Miscellany II*, p. 78 n. For freethinking appeals to Plutarch, see Champion, *Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken*, p. 215 n. 50.

If there be a Religion which teaches the Adoration and Love of a GOD, whose Character it is to be captious, and of high resentment, subject to Wrath and Anger, furious, revengeful; and revenging himself, when offended, on others than those who gave the Offence: and if there be added to the Character of this GOD, a fraudulent Disposition, encouraging Deceit and Treachery amongst Men; favourable to a few, tho' for slight causes, and cruel to the rest: 'tis evident that such a Religion as this being strongly enforce'd, must of necessity raise even an Approbation and Respect towards the Vices of this kind, and breed a suitable Disposition, a capricious, partial, revengeful, and deceitful Temper. (*I*, 1.3.2, 28)

Shaftesbury alluded here to Calvinist theology, the doctrine of the Fall and Adam's imputed sin, in which 'one Person were decreed to suffer for another's fault' (*I* 1.3.2, 29).

Smith argued that it was Shaftesbury's 'Puritan' education that gave his philosophy 'a different turn', and the *Askēmata* offers support for this interpretation.⁵⁵ In his claim that devotional exercises could 'be of ill consequence and even fatal' to virtue, Shaftesbury reflected on his own concerted struggle to expurgate all remnants of his religious education:

Consider the age, vulgar religion, how thou hast been bred, and what impressions yet remaining of that sordid, shameful, nauseous idea of Deity... and what a wretched effect this has within... Therefore if thou wouldst praise, worship and adore aright, wait till other habits are confirmed and until other ideas of a certain kind are worn off, as they will be when the whole scope of life is changed; aims, aversions, inclinings and declining reversed, transferred; the whole thought, mind, purpose, will, differently modelled, new. Then it is that thou mayest soundly, unaffectedly and safely sing those hymns to God which the divine man mentions.⁵⁶

'The divine man' was Epictetus, and as the *Askēmata* testifies it was to his writings as well as those of Aurelius that Shaftesbury turned in order to find those exemplars worthy of just admiration and to model himself anew. Shaftesbury's rejection of the strongly Augustinian concept of divine grace as the *sine qua non* for the virtuous life placed him firmly within the mainstream of liberal Restoration Anglicanism (and alongside Locke).⁵⁷ Yet in the *Inquiry* the

⁵⁵ Smith, *LRBL*, pp. 57-8.

⁵⁶ 'Deity', in *Life, Letters*, p. 24. The moral necessity of purifying oneself of one's recalcitrant passions and inclinings before engaging in acts of worship was emphasised by Aurelius and Epictetus, but also by Seneca, *Natural Questions*, 2.59.

⁵⁷ The widely-shared hostility to Puritan theology—and nonconformity—within Restoration Anglicanism is emphasised by Spurr, "Latitudinarianism" and the Restoration Church', pp. 61-82.

thrust of Shaftesbury's argument carried him considerably further. Shaftesbury argued that the opinions of one's neighbours, the civil laws, and even the doctrine of a future state (Locke's 'three laws') might potentially instruct men 'in a Virtue, which afterwards they practice upon other grounds, and without thinking of a Penalty or Bribe'. The gallows and threat of eternal damnation were, however regrettably, necessary for the unphilosophical 'Vulgar' (the vast majority of mankind), who were incapable of leading a life according to reason. They encouraged men to 'discipline' their wayward affections, even if this was not a consequence of reasoning on their true happiness, because 'it is *Example* which chiefly influences Mankind, and forms the Character and Disposition of a People' (I 1.3.3, 37). Yet the question to which this led was where the most perfect examples were ultimately to be found. It is clear that for Shaftesbury the answer was unequivocally not the Christian scriptures:

And thus it appears, that where a real Devotion and hearty Worship is paid to a supreme Being, who in his *History* or Character is represented otherwise than as really and truly just and good; there must ensue a Loss of Rectitude, a Disturbance of Thought, and a Corruption of Temper and Manners in the Believer. (I, 1.3.2, 29: italics added)

In *Soliloquy* (1710), Shaftesbury made this point even more strongly by noting that 'such are mere *human Hearts*; that they can hardly find the least Sympathy with that only one which had the Character of being after *the Pattern* of the ALMIGHTY's'. As a result 'there is a certain perverse Humanity in us, which inwardly resists the Divine Commission, tho ever so plainly reveal'd'.⁵⁸ 'That only one', clearly enough, was Christ. Here Shaftesbury was undercutting the fundamental contention made by Locke in the *Reasonableness of Christianity*: that the divinity of Christ was attested by the moral excellence of his ministry and doctrines. Shaftesbury fully accepted that 'GOODNESS is the only Pledg of *Truth*', and that this goodness had to be measured according to men's ideas of moral excellence as there could be

⁵⁸ *Soliloquy*, 3.3, p. 220.

no other standard.⁵⁹ Yet, as will be discussed in what follows, Shaftesbury was clear that the Scriptures (including Christ's ministry and teachings as reported in the Gospels) were quite incapable of providing any such pledge. The relationship between natural law and Christian moral theology was antagonistic, rather than harmonious as in Locke's account. For Shaftesbury, all revealed religions (not least Christianity) were impositions and subverted virtue. Their most 'corrupt' professors, such as Hobbes and Locke, merely served to reveal this fact most clearly.

ii. 'Atheisticall or Enthusiasticall': Power and Goodness in Christian Apologetic

In *A Letter concerning Enthusiasm* (1708), Shaftesbury defended his claim that religions ought not to be excluded from the 'test' of ridicule on the basis that 'whatever Humour has got the start, if it be unnatural, it cannot hold; and *the Ridicule*, if ill-plac'd at first, will certainly fall at last where it deserves'.⁶⁰ To substantiate this claim, advanced throughout *Characteristics*, that 'Nature will not be mock'd', Shaftesbury turned to the example of Socrates.⁶¹ When submitted to the base raillery of Aristophanes in *The Cloud*, 'the divinest Man who had ever appear'd in the Heathen World' was content to play along, a sure indication that 'there was no Imposture either in his Character or Opinions'.⁶² The 'Ridicule', as a consequence, fell where it deserved— on Aristophanes. This held true for all 'the well-deserving Antients'. The 'truth and reason' of their productions rendered them resistant to mockery. It followed that they 'will have always a strong Party among the Wise and Learned of every Age'.⁶³ It was for this reason that the early Church Fathers had eventually met with scorn and contempt in their attempts to discredit them. Their raillery was returned on them with

⁵⁹ *Moralists*, 2.5, p. 188.

⁶⁰ *A Letter concerning Enthusiasm* (1708), in *Characteristics*, i, [Sect] II, p. 7.

⁶¹ *Soliloquy*, 3.3, p. 218.

⁶² *Letter concerning Enthusiasm*, III, p. 17.

⁶³ *Soliloquy*, 2.3, p. 166.

interest, showing the *'ill Policy* as well as *Barbarity* of this *Zealot-Enmity* against the Works of the Antients'.⁶⁴

For Shaftesbury, the contention that 'Nature will not be mock'd' was synonymous with the claim that 'the Works of the Antients' were impervious to raillery: 'a Hand happily form'd on Nature and the Antients' was one and the same thing.⁶⁵ Shaftesbury went to considerable lengths to show that the Socratic tradition in philosophy and the Homeric in poetry were entirely indigenous to 'the politest of all Nations... that is, classical Greece'.⁶⁶ 'Every noble study and science' in Greece, Shaftesbury emphasised, was *'self-form'd*, wrought out of Nature, and drawn from the necessary Operation and Course of things, working, as it were, of their own accord, and proper nature'.⁶⁷ The arts and sciences were able to develop 'naturally' in Greece due to a combination of political liberty and artistic emulation. They were 'free communities, made by consent and voluntary association'; and to win an audience, artists were required to charm the ear and appeal to the heart. Emulation was encouraged between communities that were independent but connected by shared trade, language and culture. Homer was the *'grand poetick SIRE'*, and Socrates the *'philosophical PATRIARCH'*, 'the greatest of *Philosophers*, the very Founder of Philosophy it-self'.⁶⁸ The 'vulgar Religion' of ancient Greece originated from the 'miraculous Narrations' of the former. In his fables Homer drew his characters after 'the *Moral Rule*', and they were reflective of 'the justest *Moral Truths*, and exhibitiv of the best Doctrine and Instruction in Life and Manners'. It was for this (moral) reason that 'the wise and better Sort' respected the 'vulgar Religion', even if they interpreted its narrations allegorically. It encouraged men to

⁶⁴ *Miscellany V*, p. 146 n.

⁶⁵ *Soliloquy*, 3.3, p. 209.

⁶⁶ *Miscellany V*, p. 141. For Shaftesbury's idealised portrayal of classical Greece, see Klein, *Culture of Politeness*, pp. 199-206.

⁶⁷ *Miscellany III*, p. 86.

⁶⁸ *Soliloquy*, 2.2, p. 158; *Miscellany V*, p. 149.

discipline their affections through the fabulous stories it relayed.⁶⁹ Unlike in Locke's account, the pagan religion for Shaftesbury played a moral purpose in reforming men's sentiments. Meanwhile it was from Socratic origins that the various branches or formal variations of philosophy were developed, not least the comic (with Antisthenes and Diogenes), the sublime and poetic (culminating with Plato), and the methodical and analytic (with Aristotle).⁷⁰

The 'civil, social, Theistic' philosophy was entirely 'natural' in another sense, a point Shaftesbury developed most fully in his draft of a projected 'History of Socrates' (also entitled 'Chartae Socraticae').⁷¹ Shaftesbury began work on this manuscript during his first retreat in Rotterdam in 1698-9, and returned to it sporadically over the following decade.⁷² Shaftesbury recognised his project to be difficult for two, related reasons. The first was due to the nature of the sources upon which any account of Socrates' life and teachings had to be constructed. As Shaftesbury would later note in *Characteristics*, Socrates was similar to Christ, the 'divine philosopher' and 'the divine author and founder of our religion', in that neither were writers.⁷³ They left it to others to compose a written record of their character and words. In the case of Socrates, the most thorough and contemporaneous accounts were provided by Xenophon and Plato, but their reports differed in important respects and the question arose as to how (or whether) they might be reconciled. Scholars of classical

⁶⁹ *Miscellany V*, p. 159 n.

⁷⁰ *Soliloquy*, 2.2, pp. 157-60. Here Shaftesbury was clearly working within the doxographical tradition established by Diogenes Laertius in his *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, as noted by Klein, *Culture of Politeness*, p. 43 n. 45. Nonetheless Shaftesbury judged Diogenes harshly, perhaps on account of his praise of Epicurus and the sceptics: in the 'Chartae Socraticae', Shaftesbury condemned him as 'an uncorrect Writer of no Judgment [speak more modestly]...' (CS 15).

⁷¹ The National Archives [NA] 30/24/27/14.

⁷² The only concerted, though superficial, discussion of the work is to be found in Klein, *Culture of Politeness*, pp. 107-11. It has now been published, with a useful introduction, as Volume V of Series II of *Standard Edition: Complete Works, Selected Letters and Posthumous Writings*, ed. W. Benda, C. Jackson-Holzberg, F.A. Uelhein & E. Wolff (Stuttgart, 2008). This edition is not widely available, however, and page references (given in brackets in the text) are to the original in the NA.

⁷³ *Miscellany V*, pp. 149-50. A comparison between Christ and Socrates was a staple of freethinking assaults on Christian doctrines and institutions. Charles Blount and Matthew Tindal, for example, both compared Christ's crucifixion unfavourably with the suicides of Cato and Socrates: Justin Champion, *Republican Learning: John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture* (Manchester, 2003), pp. 156-8.

reception consider what has been termed ‘the Socratic Problem’ to have arisen only with Brucker and Mosheim from the mid-eighteenth century, but Shaftesbury intended to confront it directly.⁷⁴ The second difficulty concerned the highly controversial nature of the fundamental message Shaftesbury intended to convey in the work. This was that as ‘the Antients excel us in Policy & Government so in the knowledg of this sort (viz. morals) they were not less happily knowing’. Two notes were added in the margin: ‘speak modestly’, and ‘take care of the Objection. viz. the Morall of the Gospell’ (CS 59). Here as elsewhere, and in sharp contrast to Locke, Shaftesbury’s claim was that the moral law revealed in the Gospels had contributed nothing to, indeed it had positively contradicted, the ‘moral science’ established by the Socratic philosophers by means of reason alone. This was the crux of the argument Shaftesbury intended to develop in the ‘Chartae Socraticae’. It was aimed squarely at Locke’s attempt to render ‘virtue’ synonymous with Christian ‘duty’, and to present the Gospels as alone providing men with a guide to life.

For Shaftesbury the most important of the many differences between Plato and Xenophon concerned the explanation each offered of the ‘daemonic sign’ (ποταρπητικός). This was an inner voice Socrates claimed to hear when he was about to make a mistake.⁷⁵ Plato’s interpretation, most especially in *Phaedo*, implied that Socrates’ character and teachings owed much to ‘Divine inspiration & [the] infusion of Goodness’ (CS 74-5). It was this Platonic presentation of Socrates upon which Theophilus Gale drew in *The Court of the Gentiles* (1669-78), asserting that ‘Socrates had very Metaphysic contemplations of Divine Mysteries’. In accordance with his central thesis, Gale then proceeded to argue that his distinctly proto-

⁷⁴ Mario Montuori, *De Socrate Iuste Damnato: the Rise of the Socratic Problem in the Eighteenth Century* (Amsterdam, 1981), pp. 9-25; Ian Macgregor Morris, ‘The Refutation of Democracy? Socrates in the Enlightenment’, in M. Trapp (ed.), *Socrates from Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 209-28; and James W. Hulse, *The Reputation of Socrates: the Afterlife of a Gadfly* (New York, 1995), pp. 87-121. Only Hulse discusses Shaftesbury but seems to have been unaware of the ‘Chartae Socraticae’, which explains why he follows Cassirer in interpreting him as dedicated ‘to explaining the work of the Cambridge Platonists’ and remaining ‘firmly within the Christian tradition’ (p. 95).

⁷⁵ On which, see Anthony A. Long, ‘How Does Socrates’ Divine Sign Communicate with Him?’, in S. Ahbel-Rappe & R. Kamtekar (eds.), *A Companion to Socrates* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 63-74.

Christian theism, and that of Plato, derived 'originally from the *Jewish* Church' (that is, from the Mosaic revelation).⁷⁶ Henry More and Thomas Stanley similarly presented Socrates as a believer in the immortality of the soul on the basis of the account provided by Plato, and later by Plutarch and Lactantius.⁷⁷ It was this suggestion that Socrates considered himself to be divinely inspired, and that it was his sincere belief in a future state of rewards and punishments that reconciled him to his death, that Shaftesbury was anxious to repudiate. In this regard Shaftesbury's preference for Xenophon was overwhelming, and his contempt for Plato unmistakable. 'Plato recedes from Truth', Shaftesbury argued, 'chiefly & almost wholly in this alone in drawing Socrates into Metaphisicall & Theological Notions' (CS 40). Yet as his repeated self-cautions illustrate, Shaftesbury recognised the need to tread carefully: 'Socrates, unmoveably following whatever he thought ποτρεπτικός, which plainly was Reason [speak modestly however]...' (CS 134). Socrates would have endorsed 'the Definition of Virtue as a Science', one deducible only by 'those Philosophers amongst the rest who know Necessity, the Nature of Evill, Providence particular & General' (CS 74-5; 52-3). Socrates had accomplished this 'Science' on the basis of reason alone, as had Shaftesbury in the *Inquiry*. There was nothing 'supernaturall' about his understanding of morality or religion. Meanwhile:

If we could assert this of Socrates viz: that he thus strenuously maintained the Immortality of the Soul we should be glad as honouring our Hero: but truth will not permitt (as has been at length discours'd above) and we had rather he should suffer than violate truth [take care of appearance of irony]. (CS 48)

Socrates, evidently enough, was no believer in immortality, and was quite able to establish an account of moral obligation that had no need for the doctrine of a future state. This was precisely the position Shaftesbury sought to vindicate against Locke. This point is related to

⁷⁶ Theophilus Gale, *The Court of the Gentiles* (Oxford, 1669-78), Part II (1670), p. 217.

⁷⁷ Henry More, *Enchiridion Ethicum* (London, 1668), [Bk.] III, [Ch.] 10, [Para.] 5; Thomas Stanley, *The History of Philosophy* [1655-62], 4th edn (London, 1743), [Part] III, pp. 113-15.

Shaftesbury's presentation of the Socratic tradition as entirely '*self-formed*' in two distinct senses. First, it owed nothing to other traditions, and here Shaftesbury was especially concerned to emphasise its autonomy from learning as it had developed in the 'motherland of superstition', Egypt.⁷⁸ In his 'Metaphysicall & Theological Notions', conversely, Plato 'drew from Chaldea Egypt Pythagoras &c.', and it was for this reason that his account of Socrates was largely to be considered a 'fiction' (CS 66). Only in these nations was the doctrine of a future state incorporated into their distinctly metaphysical moral philosophizing, not in Greece.⁷⁹ In a series of long footnotes in the *Miscellanies* that constituted the third volume of *Characteristics*, Shaftesbury drew from the antiquarian scholarship of Sir John Marsham and John Spencer to establish the origins of Hebraic learning and the Judeo-Christian tradition in Egyptian superstition. In this regard, he sought to reverse the thesis developed by Gale, Locke's antagonist Stillingfleet, Cudworth, Pierre-Daniel Huet and Newton that heathen polytheism represented the corruption of purer Hebraic ideas concerning God's unity and providence.⁸⁰ Yet where Toland's hermetic interests saw him similarly assert the historical primacy of Egypt in order to lionise the tolerant civil religion he found in the *prisca sapientia*, Shaftesbury's purpose was quite different.⁸¹ For Shaftesbury, a tolerant ethical theism could only be established on Socratic (and Homeric) foundations that were entirely separate from, and in conflict with, the mystical 'wisdom' of Syria, Egypt and Mosaic Israel. This leads to the second sense in which the Socratic tradition was '*self-formed*'. It literally grew out of reflections on the self, and on

⁷⁸ 'Thus GREECE, tho she *exported* Arts to other Nations, had properly for her share no *Import* of the kind': *Miscellany III*, p. 86.

⁷⁹ A claim considered by William Warburton at length in his *Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated* (1738-41): see below, pp. 179-81.

⁸⁰ On this, see John Gascoigne, "'The Wisdom of the Egyptians'" and the Secularisation of History in the Age of Newton', in S. Gaukroger (ed.), *The Uses of Antiquity: the Scientific Revolution and the Classical Tradition* (Dordrecht, 1991), pp. 171-212; Richard H. Popkin, 'The Crisis of Polytheism and the Answers of Vossius, Cudworth and Newton', in J.E. Force & R.H. Popkin (eds.), *Essays on the Context, Nature and Influence of Isaac Newton's Theology* (Dordrecht, 1990), pp. 9-25; and Richard Sergeantson, 'David Hume's *Natural History of Religion* (1757) and the End of Modern Eusebianism', in S. Mortimer & J. Robertson (eds.), *The Intellectual Consequences of Religious Heterodoxy, 1600-1750* (Leiden, 2012), pp. 267-96.

⁸¹ On Toland, see Champion, *Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken*, pp. 99-169; idem, *Republican Learning*, pp. 165-89; and Humberto Garcia, *Islam and the English Enlightenment 1670-1840* (Baltimore, 2012), pp. 1-29.

the true source of happiness as lying within in constancy and order of mind. This was enshrined in the citation from Persius' *Satires* that appeared on the title-page of *Soliloquy*: 'No need to inquire outside yourself'. For Shaftesbury this served to endorse the claim that the individual had no need for infused grace or external guidance, and would find no moral assistance in the Scriptures and ought not to seek it there. In this sense the 'Chartae Socraticae' reinforced the absolute division between moral philosophy and Christian moral theology drawn in the *Inquiry*.

In the 'Chartae Socraticae', Shaftesbury sought to appeal to 'those that are neither Enthusiasts nor Atheisticall'. 'Enthusiasts' drew upon Plato to emphasise the need for 'inspiration' and an 'infusion of goodness' for the perfection of virtue. They found in the notions of the 'sublime philosopher' a means of establishing the truth of Christianity upon the metaphysical foundations provided by heathen learning (*CS* 74).⁸² Ultimately, such 'enthusiasts' developed an Aristotelian-Thomist account of grace: it super-added the theological virtues (faith, hope and charity) to those cardinal virtues that man was able to identify and cultivate through his own efforts. As the example of hospitality showed, for Shaftesbury it was the purveyors of Socratic philosophy who had understood the true foundations of an extensive (universal) love of mankind. Christianity had by contrast introduced an 'unnatural' affection of 'misanthropy' quite unknown to the heathen philosophers. In this regard, far from enlarging upon or completing the natural law, the Christian revelation had actively subverted it. Shaftesbury was also at pains to deny the claims of neo-Epicurean 'Atheists' such as Bacon that Socrates was a sceptic 'of an

⁸² Shaftesbury's hostility to Plato's 'Metaphysicall and Theologicall Notions', a consequence of his antipathy towards the ethical teachings of Christian theology more generally, calls into question his supposed sympathy with the Cambridge Platonists. For accounts that present Shaftesbury as endorsing a neo-Platonic form of Christian apologetic, see especially Ernst Cassirer, *The Platonic Renaissance in England*, trans. J.P. Pettegrove (London, 1953), pp. 157-202; and Michael B. Gill, 'From Cambridge Platonism to Scottish Sentimentalism', *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, 8:1 (Mar. 2010), pp. 13-32.

ostentatious Nature’, who was content to leave ‘all Things in Doubt and Uncertainty’.⁸³ Such an interpretation suggested that men were indelibly sinful and as incapable of certainty in moral matters as in religious. This conformed to a voluntaristic theology and account of grace that owed much to Augustine. In contrast, Shaftesbury emphasised that Socrates was really a dogmatist in his philosophy, even as he shunned the ‘Dogmatick style’ in sharing his wisdom with those of lesser capacity than himself (*CS* 52). Socrates had no need to look outside of himself to a future state in order to reconcile himself to providence (and death), or indeed to exhort others to lead a life of virtue.

In passages scattered throughout *Characteristics*, and especially in the *Miscellanies*, Shaftesbury provided a history of Christianity that sought to explain why its professors invariably veered between ‘Enthusiasm’ and ‘Atheism’. Shaftesbury provocatively emphasised that, had it not been either injudiciously persecuted or (conversely) imposed by the civil magistrate, Christianity could not have established itself so widely. Julian, a ‘generous and mild Emperor’, received his education from both heathen and Christian teachers and, as Shaftesbury noted with heavy irony, ‘very unfortunately’ chose to adhere ‘to the ancient Religion of his Country and Forefathers’. All he found in Christianity was an invitation to inhumanity through the subversion of men’s natural affections; it had ‘*so little regard... to true Piety, so little Obedience to our Laws and Constitutions; however humane and tolerating*’.⁸⁴ On the one hand, this reflected the particular species of Christianity preached by self-interested clerics. Here Shaftesbury’s historical account of the malignant effects of ‘priestcraft’ as a ‘trade’ that had developed in Syria, Egypt, Israel and subsequently Christian Rome was almost identical to the narratives provided by contemporary freethinkers such as Walter Moyle and Charles

⁸³ Francis Bacon, ‘Of Vain Glory’, and ‘Of the Discredits of Learning’, in *Lord Bacon’s Essays, or Counsels Moral and Civil* (2 vols., London, 1720), i, p. 330; ii, pp. 60-61.

⁸⁴ *Miscellany II*, p. 55 n.

Blount.⁸⁵ On the other hand, in Shaftesbury's account those convinced of the truth of revealed Christianity were to some degree forced to emphasise God's power over his goodness precisely because the Scriptures, including the Gospels, did not conform to the 'divine and moral Truths' established by Socratic philosophy.

In this regard, from its very inception Christianity was of necessity a 'political' religion. Unlike Grecian polytheism, it won men over by appealing to their base appetites rather than by alluding to higher moral truths. Whereas the Grecian mythological religion encouraged men to discipline their wayward 'fancies', and was in this respect entirely consistent with the pedagogical dictates of true philosophy, with Christianity the opposite was the case. For Locke, with Christ moral philosophy and divinity were finally united. For Shaftesbury, Christianity was the natural and necessary enemy of true philosophy, which it sought systematically to obliterate. Here Shaftesbury diverged from many contemporary freethinkers, who drew from Locke to argue that gospel Christianity was entirely consistent with (and therefore reducible to) the moral insights of true philosophy (right reason).⁸⁶ This is indicated by Shaftesbury's mockery of *sola scriptura* Protestantism, and his pointed expressions of admiration for the 'political model' of Christianity developed by the Papacy. The Roman Church, Shaftesbury argued, sought to provide a religion that satisfied both 'Enthusiasts' and 'Atheists'. Rome simultaneously emphasised God's goodness and His power. It tolerated the mysticism of mendicant orders that established faith on the (neo-Platonic) basis of 'contemplation and divine love'. Yet its own authority and hierarchical ecclesiology relied upon the (Augustinian) claim to mediate between irretrievably sinful men and their jealous and capricious God. The 'ROMAN-Christian, and once *Catholick* Church', Shaftesbury noted, 'knew how to make advantage from both the high Speculations of

⁸⁵ A point emphasised by Champion, *Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken*, pp. 210-19.

⁸⁶ On the distinction between the vocabularies of natural law ('right reason') favoured by freethinkers like Toland and Shaftesbury's ethical theory, see Laurent Jaffro, 'Toland and the Moral Teaching of the Gospel', in R. Savage (ed.), *Philosophy and Religion in Enlightenment Britain* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 77-89.

Philosophy, and *the grossest Ideas of vulgar Ignorance*.⁸⁷ It found much to value in the philosophy of Plato, Sextus and Epicurus but, given the cause it sought to defend, nothing at all in the moral teachings of the Socratics.

Sola scriptura Protestantism, however, claimed to find in the moral teachings of the Scriptures all the evidence required to establish the divine origins of Christianity. Here Shaftesbury again contrasted the Scriptures to the miraculous fables of ancient Greece. The latter were (rightfully) considered to be in some sense sacred on account of their entire conformity with nature and ‘all divine and moral Truth’. Only ‘Enthusiasts’ would make this claim for the Scriptures. They were ‘multifarious, voluminous and of the most difficult interpretation’ and, more importantly, they contradicted men’s natural moral sentiments. Only by abandoning the objective standard of moral goodness and deformity found within one’s breast and most fully articulated by the Socratic philosophers might the Scriptures be considered to express ‘the justest *Moral Truths*’. It was for this reason that Shaftesbury argued that ‘mere *human Hearts*’ would, if uncorrupted, resist ‘the Divine Commission’. Only ‘Enthusiasts and Fanatics’ would ignore this internal guide in favour of such an arbitrary and obnoxious standard of moral excellence. Given that the Scriptures lent themselves to an infinity of interpretations, to follow them was effectively to abandon moral rules and to embrace those notions of the good suggested by one’s own ‘aerial *Fancy*, or heated *Imagination*’, or those presented by self-interested clerics.⁸⁸

The disastrous effects of such enthusiasm, and its ability to portray the most unnatural practices and affections as the height of goodness and piety, had been revealed ‘during the Times of the late great Troubles’ (the Civil War).⁸⁹ Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, Shaftesbury noted sardonically, ought to be read as the work of a ‘mere political writer’. Hobbes attempted to

⁸⁷ *Miscellany II*, pp. 57-9.

⁸⁸ *Miscellany V*, pp. 141-5.

⁸⁹ Referred to in this manner by Shaftesbury in his preface to *Select Sermons of Dr. Whichcot: in Two Parts* (London, 1698), A8r.

introduce a 'general scepticism' to wean men away from placing trust in antinomian enthusiasts propagating specious notions of liberty and popular government.⁹⁰ Hobbes might be considered as 'a martyr for our deliverance'; a 'good sociable man' himself, he nonetheless painted the most execrable picture of human nature.⁹¹ In his system of 'Political Christianity', Hobbes had attempted to re-establish the balance lost at the Reformation between the Christian God's goodness and immanence, and his power and transcendence. Responding to the excessive claims for the former, Hobbes had uniformly emphasised the latter.⁹²

Shaftesbury remarked that the various Protestant churches now rested their authority on what he termed a 'more generous Foundation' than that of the moral excellence of the Scriptures. They had turned once more to the historical testimony of the Fathers and the early Councils. Shaftesbury made it clear that a 'nicely critical historical faith' was in practice untenable; the weight of evidence spoke strongly against the credibility of such 'ancient facts or persons'.⁹³ Be that as it may, for Shaftesbury this movement towards regarding the sacred sources as merely historical documents was an indication of the gradual improvement that had taken place in Protestant nations, and especially in England, 'the *latest barbarous*, the *last civiliz'd* or *polish'd* People of EUROPE'.⁹⁴ The model of true barbarism was, for Shaftesbury, provided by 'Eastern Religionists' and the Islamic clergy. They established their religion, as misguided *sola scriptura* Protestants had all too recently sought to do in England, solely on 'a *Book*' (the Koran) which they claimed was 'not only perfect, but *inimitable*'. A 'real Man of Letters, and a just Critick' would have little trouble exposing this claim as specious. In order to defend such a contention, they had extinguished 'all true Learning, Science and the politer

⁹⁰ *Sensus Communis*, 2.1, pp. 56-7; *Moralists*, 2.3, pp. 153-4.

⁹¹ *Moralists*, 2.4, pp. 179-80.

⁹² *Select Sermons*, A4r; *Sensus Communis*, 2.1, p. 57.

⁹³ *Miscellany II*, pp. 45-7.

⁹⁴ *Miscellany III*, p. 93.

Arts' and, most notably, banished 'the ancient Authors and Languages'. It was the 'moral science' to be found in the poetry and philosophy of the ancients that most exposed the Koran— as it did the Christian scriptures and Fathers— as profoundly deficient both in style and (moral) doctrine. A similarly 'barbaric' enmity against ancient learning had been indulged by the early Christians. This illustrated that 'they had no very high Idea of the *holy Scriptures*, when they supposed them such Losers by a *Comparison*'.⁹⁵ Shaftesbury's underlying point, however, was that the early Fathers had been quite correct in this judgement.

Shaftesbury expressed an optimism that 'there is a mighty light which spreads over the world', and with the establishment of peace in Europe 'it is impossible but letters and knowledge must advance in greater proportion than ever'.⁹⁶ For Shaftesbury, this advance in learning was enshrined in, and dependent upon, the revitalisation of classical moral philosophy. This was causally related to the increasing tendency to look to the Scriptures solely to attest to 'the *principle Facts* concerning the Authority of Revelation', rather than as the foundation of all moral truth.⁹⁷ Men might now once more be freed to look to 'Nature and the Antients' for 'the justest *Moral Truths*' and 'the best Doctrine and Instruction in Life and Manners' (the '*Vitae Dux*'). The greatest impediment to this second Renaissance was Lockean philosophy. Here the distinction Shaftesbury drew between Hobbes and Locke was significant. Hobbes was a pragmatist, a 'mere political Writer'. Faced with 'Fanatics and Enthusiasts' preaching a perverted form of divine love and a specious notion of political liberty, he had composed an account of morality and religion that was intended as a necessary antidote. He was neither a divine nor a moralist. Given that antinomians found in their superficial reading of classical philosophy a means of defending their ruinous political and religious tenets, Hobbes had found it expedient to advocate 'the Extirpation of antient

⁹⁵ *Miscellany V*, pp. 143-4, 147.

⁹⁶ Shaftesbury to Le Clerc, 6 Mar. 1706, in *Life, Letters*, pp. 352-4.

⁹⁷ *Miscellany V*, pp. 144-5, 159 n.

Literature' altogether 'in favour of his Leviathan-Hypothesis, and new Philosophy'.⁹⁸ This was, from Shaftesbury's perspective, a necessary step for Hobbes to take in developing his argument. The philosophy of the Socratics could sanction neither Hobbes' base depiction of human nature, nor the justification of political authority that followed from it— his primary objective. Nor could it support a defence of religion, however pragmatic and insincere, upon the grounds of fear and disorder rather than love and providence.

It was Locke, whose moral theology Shaftesbury considered to have developed in part as a response to Hobbes, who represented by far the greater danger. 'I have learnt', Shaftesbury declared in *Sensus Communis*, 'that Virtue is never such a Sufferer, by being *contested*, as by being *betray'd*. My Fear is not so much from its witty *Antagonists*, who give it Exercise, and put it on its Defense, as from its tender *Nurses*, who are apt to over-lay it, and kill it, with Excess of Care and Cherishing'.⁹⁹ Hobbes had already been referred to as 'an able and witty Philosopher of our Nation'. He had, for Shaftesbury, contested virtue for his own (political) reasons, but not betrayed it.¹⁰⁰ It was Locke who had claimed the title of philosopher, and professed to defend the sacred causes of virtue and religion from Hobbes' superficial barbs. Yet, for Shaftesbury, Locke's primary concern as a 'zealous *Christian* and Believer' had been to justify the moral teachings of the Scriptures as 'not only perfect, but *inimitable*'. His conviction that the Scriptures were 'exhibitive of the best Doctrine and Instruction in Life and Manners' would have been obliterated had he 'known but ever so little of antiquity, or been tolerably learned in the state of philosophy with the ancients'.¹⁰¹ Here it is significant that Shaftesbury scarcely mentioned Cicero in his writings, and largely excluded him from his genealogy of an otherwise capacious Socratic tradition.¹⁰² There is every indication that

⁹⁸ *Sensus Communis*, 2.1, p. 56 n.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.3, p. 61.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.1, p. 56.

¹⁰¹ Shaftesbury to Stanhope, 7 Nov. 1709, in *Life, Letters*, pp. 413-17.

¹⁰² This is set in some form of relief when the writings of those distinctly neo-Stoic freethinkers frequently coupled with Shaftesbury— such as Toland and Tindal— are considered. Both revered Cicero as the ideal

Shaftesbury considered Cicero to have been a mere doxographer who had crudely summarised, but scarcely understood, the two philosophical traditions he described, and between which he professed to mediate for purely rhetorical purposes. This was strongly implied in Shaftesbury's denunciation of the '*mere sceptic, and New Academic*'—the sect to which Cicero professed his allegiance—in his letter to Coste in 1706. Had Locke turned to the true (Stoic) sources of classical wisdom, he would necessarily have distinguished clearly between philosophy and natural law, and revealed (Christian) moral theology. This was a separation which, for Shaftesbury, represented the *sine qua non* for the advancement of 'letters' and (moral) 'knowledge'. Instead Locke sought, by any means possible, to render them inseparable; and it followed that he 'made great alterations on these points where, though a *divine* may waver, a *philosopher*, I think, never can'. The 'great points' to which Shaftesbury referred were 'liberty and necessity', which he regarded as 'the test and touchstone of a genius in philosophy'.¹⁰³

Only the 'two real distinct philosophies' had provided durable definitions of these. Man's 'liberty' lay in striving to live according to his nature and 'true *Scope and End*', thereby attaining respite from the continual 'unease' caused by his mutinous 'fancies'. For the Stoic, this demanded that he acquiesce with the workings of an orderly providential universe, and love mankind. For the Epicurean it required that he abandon all ideas of design and order in the universe, and with it any notion of God or objective moral truth. The 'credulous Mr. LOCKE' sought to synthesise elements of the two by combining a hedonic psychology with a defence of morality and religion. For Shaftesbury, he sought to reconcile 'Atoms' with 'God'. It followed that men 'have scarce heard of what it is to combat with their Appetites

Stoic, whose writings provided the clearest definition of an immutable natural law accessible to man by means of 'right reason' (a concept similarly disregarded by Shaftesbury). For discussion, see below, pp. 194-5.

¹⁰³ Shaftesbury to Stanhope, 7 Nov. 1709, in *Life, Letters*, pp. 413-17. On this, see Robert Toole, 'The Concepts of Freedom and Necessity in Shaftesbury's Philosophy', *Studia Leibnitiana*, 9:2 (1977), pp. 190-211.

and Senses... they rather raise and advance them by all possible Means, without Fear of adding Fuel to their inflam'd Desires, in a Heart, which can never burn towards GOD, till those other Fires are extinct'.¹⁰⁴ Establishing the origins of universal morality (natural law) in an external law (moral theology), Locke signally failed to 'examine himself and consider his natural passions'. The 'unnatural' affection of 'misanthropy', commended by the capricious God of Abraham and Isaac, was instead made 'natural' to all men.¹⁰⁵

On this basis Locke proclaimed that 'Experience and our Catechism teaches us all'. To substantiate such a base portrayal of human nature, it was to the depictions of degenerate and barbarous nations provided by 'Modern *Wonder-Writers*' that he turned. In so doing, Locke 'gave up an Argument for the *Deity*, which CICERO (tho' a profess'd *Sceptick*) would not explode'.¹⁰⁶ Even Cicero had recognised that a belief in the existence of a providential order and an acknowledgment of man's natural 'SENSE of inward Proportion and Regularity of Affection' provided the sole grounds for theistic faith. Yet on Shaftesbury's interpretation, as Bacon had destroyed the former, so Locke had obliterated the latter.¹⁰⁷ In looking to Christianity and a future state to explain man's true end, Locke had exploded what both the Stoics and Epicureans had recognised to be the sole argument for theism and universal morality. Locke's moral theology represented, for Shaftesbury, a profoundly misled attempt to establish his 'daemonism' (Christian belief) on philosophical foundations:

'Tis this must render Revelation probable, and secure that first step to it, the Belief of a Deity and Providence. A Providence must be prov'd from what we see in the Order in things present. We must contend for Order; and in this part chiefly, where Virtue is concern'd. All must not be refer'd to a *Hereafter*. For a disorder'd State, in which all present Care of Things is given up, Vice uncontroul'd, and Virtue neglected, represents

¹⁰⁴ Shaftesbury to Ainsworth, 19 Nov. 1707, in *Several Letters*, p. 12.

¹⁰⁵ *Miscellany IV*, pp. 128-38.

¹⁰⁶ Shaftesbury to Ainsworth, 3 June 1709, in *Several Letters*, pp. 39-41.

¹⁰⁷ *Miscellany IV*, pp. 128-38.

the very *Chaos*, and reduces us to the belov'd Atoms, Chance, and Confusion of the Atheists.¹⁰⁸

The interpretation of his philosophy, and the reading of his classicism, provided in this chapter raises serious questions of Klein's presentation of Shaftesbury as an apologist for the ideal of a gentlemanly coffee-house sociability suitable to a commercial, urbanised and defiantly 'Whig' modernity. The primary objective of Shaftesbury's philosophy was to vindicate a Socratic moral tradition that was presented as uncompromisingly hostile to revealed Christianity. This imposed onerous demands upon the individual who would be virtuous and live according to his true nature. Its anti-Christian animus, meanwhile, presented a very real challenge for those philosophers, such as Francis Hutcheson, who subsequently turned to Shaftesbury in an attempt to re-establish a synthesis between a Stoic moral theory and a moderate and reasonable Christianity.¹⁰⁹ In his highly self-conscious attempt to reformulate philosophy as 'an agreeable vehicle for the moral potion', Shaftesbury cast a profoundly contemptuous verdict on the unphilosophical age in which providence had seen fit to place him. Shaftesbury's aristocratic moral theory appealed to the individual who was able to 'recall his fancy from the power of fashion and education to that of reason'.¹¹⁰

In the modern world no less than the ancient, virtue was confined to those few who were able and willing to recognise their true happiness as rational beings as residing in disinterested virtue, and to refer all moral actions to this ultimate end. Notwithstanding his 'high airs of scepticism', Shaftesbury repeatedly emphasised that he was 'at bottom a real dogmatist'. His writings, as he pointed out in the *Miscellanies*, showed 'plainly that he has his private opinion, belief or faith, as strong as any devotee or religionist of them all'.¹¹¹ His

¹⁰⁸ *Moralists*, 2.3, pp. 156-7.

¹⁰⁹ See below, pp. 294-5.

¹¹⁰ *Miscellany III*, p. 114.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

sacred texts, however, were the 'moral works of Xenophon, Horace, the Commentaries and Enchiridion of Epictetus as published by Arrian, and Marcus Antoninus', not those of the Judeo-Christian tradition. These fundamental features of Shaftesbury's philosophy, largely overlooked by modern commentators, were readily apparent to his most acute contemporary critic, Mandeville. It is to Mandeville's writings, not those of Shaftesbury, that one must turn to find an apology for a polite, commercial modern age. This was an apology erected upon explicitly Epicurean philosophical foundations.

4 ‘Did this Man spring out of the Earth, I wonder, or did he drop from the Sky?’
Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733)

If Shaftesbury denied Locke’s ‘unnatural and monstrous’ synthesis between natural law and Christian moral theology, and between what he identified as the Stoic and Epicurean traditions, then Mandeville did likewise but from an opposite perspective. To all intents and purposes, Mandeville denied entirely the significance of natural religion: ‘all true Religion must be reveal’d, and could not have come into the World without Miracle’.¹ Mandeville asserted that by their own natural lights men were no more capable of discerning an immutable standard of moral than of aesthetic truth, an analogy he drew as a consequence of reading Shaftesbury’s ethical theory. ‘It is manifest then’, Mandeville claimed, ‘that the hunting after this *Pulchrum & Honestum* is not much better than a Wild-Goose-Chace’.² As with their religious duties, the moral demands made of men by their Creator were revealed rather than discovered. They were also antithetical to the pursuit of happiness and prosperity in this life. Given that the development of society and morality was driven by men’s pursuit of this-worldly desires, revealed no less than natural religion was stripped of any meaningful explanatory role in describing this process. Locke’s endeavour to show how a hedonic psychology might be reconciled with men’s capacity to live in accordance with an immutable moral law was futile. The ‘uneasiness’ caused by their desires ineluctably led men away from God’s commandments and into sin and concupiscence. It was upon these foundations that society had become established.

Mandeville was a Dutch émigré and physician. In his earliest publications, including *The Fable of the Bees* (1714), he conveyed to an Anglophone readership the insights regarding moral psychology that had been developed by Jansenists in France and within the Huguenot

¹ *The Fable of the Bees Part II* (1729), in *The Fable of the Bees*, ed. F.B. Kaye (2 vols., 1924; repr., Indianapolis, 1988), ii, pp. 220-21. All references to the *Fable* (1714) and *Part II* (which constitutes the second volume) will be to this edition.

² ‘A Search into the Nature of Society’ (1723), in *ibid.*, i, p. 332.

émigré community in the Low Countries, and began to explore their implications for an understanding of the development of modern commercial society. Mandeville's first work was a translation of Jean de La Fontaine's fables (1703).³ The *Grumbling Hive* (1705), a 423-line verse fable and the kernel out of which the *Fable* grew, owed a considerable debt to François de La Rochefoucauld.⁴ These works appeared to little acclaim at precisely the time that Shaftesbury was mining ancient Stoic sources in order to respond to Hobbes, Locke, and those moralists of a 'yet inferior kind' whom he presented as perverting Epicurus' teachings. 'The revivers of this philosophy in latter days', Shaftesbury argued, used the 'play of words' to reduce crudely all the springs of human action to self-interest and self-love.⁵ One target of Shaftesbury's 'Chartae Socraticae', indeed, was 'the Modern French: who have abandon'd vertue, and set themselves against all these Good men as Socrates Cato & c' (*CS* 100). In *Characteristics*, La Rochefoucauld was placed at their head.⁶

Mandeville is a central figure in the recent literature on the transmission and development of the Augustinian-Epicurean tradition in eighteenth-century Europe. Once considered primarily as a satirist, the importance of what John Robertson calls Mandeville's 'deeper philosophical commitments' has been recovered.⁷ As E.J. Hundert argues, Mandeville provided 'a highly articulated, conceptually challenging, science of man' which could not be ignored by those near-contemporaries— such as Hume, Smith and Jean-Jacques Rousseau— who sought to explain human sociability and the development of commercial society.⁸ Yet even though the *Fable* might be considered, in an Anglophone context, 'the most provocative work of moral theorising since Hobbes's *Leviathan*', when placed within a

³ *Some Fables After the Easie and Familiar Method of Monsieur de la Fontaine* (London, 1703).

⁴ *The Grumbling Hive: or, Knaves Turn'd Honest* (London, 1705).

⁵ *Sensus Communis*, 3.3, pp. 54-5.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, p. 269.

⁸ Hundert, *The Enlightenment's Fable*, pp. 13-14.

broader European setting it appears highly derivative.⁹ Even its notorious subtitle— ‘private vices, publick benefits’— merely echoed the epigraph to La Rochefoucauld’s *Moral Maxims*, which proclaimed that ‘our Vertues are oftentimes in Reality no better than Vices in disguise’.¹⁰ Shaftesbury would have found little in the *Fable* that was novel.

In this respect, William Warburton’s characteristically vindictive verdict in 1727 that ‘the *Fable of the Bees* is but the *Tap-droppings* of *Hobbes* and *Rochefoucault’s* unnatural *Beverage*’ carries some truth.¹¹ In the work Mandeville’s satirical barbs were largely directed at Joseph Addison and Richard Steele’s rather superficial synthesis of Stoicism and Christianity in their ‘polite’ moralising.¹² The *Fable* was indeed provocative, and intentionally so, but hardly philosophically systematic, original or compelling. It was in *Part II* of the work (1729), and the later *Origin of Honour* (1732), that Mandeville moved decisively beyond La Rochefoucauld’s satirical pose and Bayle’s deeply contemptuous Augustinian outlook on commercial society. He instead sought to provide a systematic historical explanation, and celebration, of how societies had developed as a means of meeting men’s ever-proliferating needs and wants.¹³ It is unsurprising that Smith referred to ‘the second volume of the *Fable*

⁹ Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, p. 266. For the derivative nature of Mandeville’s moral theorising when placed within this context, see Thomas A. Horne, *The Social Thought of Bernard Mandeville: Virtue and Commerce in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1978), Ch. 2. See, too, Irwin Primer’s suggestion that Mandeville was a ‘cultural middleman’: *Free Thoughts on Religion, the Church, and National Happiness* (London, 1720; repr. with intro. by I. Primer, London, 2001), p. iii.

¹⁰ François de La Rochefoucauld, *Moral Maxims and Reflections* (London, 1694), p. 1. Another obvious resource was Jacques Esprit’s *La Fausseté des Vertus Humaines* (1678), which was translated into English as *Discourses on the Deceitfulness of Humane Vertues* (London, 1706).

¹¹ William Warburton, *A Critical and Philosophical Enquiry into the Causes of Prodiges and Miracles, as Related by Historians* (London, 1727), p. 31.

¹² For Mandeville’s hostility towards Addison, Steele, and the societies for the reformation of manners which had proliferated in England following the revolution of 1688-9, see Horne, *Social Thought of Mandeville*, Ch. 1. Mandeville’s contributions to the *Female Tatler* between 1709-10 provided weekly satirical commentary on the latest editions of Steele’s *Tatler*, and have now been collected and reprinted: M.M. Goldsmith (ed.), *By a Society of Ladies: Essays in the Female Tatler* (Bristol, 1999). Although first published in 1711, the most commercially successful edition of Shaftesbury’s *Characteristics* was that of 1714, and there is no indication that Mandeville had read Shaftesbury until after the composition of the original *Fable*.

¹³ Mandeville’s unmistakable departure from Bayle in this regard is noted by Edward D. James, ‘Faith, Sincerity and Morality: Mandeville and Bayle’, in I. Primer (ed.), *Mandeville Studies: New Explorations in the Art and Thought of Dr. Bernard Mandeville* (The Hague, 1975), pp. 43-65. It is also noted by Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, pp. 270-80; and Hundert, *Enlightenment’s Fable*, pp. 65-6.

of the Bees' as Mandeville's most important contribution to the 'science of man'.¹⁴ If Warburton had felt able to dismiss the *Fable* out of hand, the greater force and coherence of Mandeville's mature 'System of Ethicks' was reflected in Warburton's own appropriation of many of its insights in his later *Divine Legation of Moses* (1738-41).¹⁵

It will be argued that the greater originality and more systematic tendency of Mandeville's later writings owed much to his explicit attempt to respond directly to Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury provided, where Addison and Steele did not, a fully articulated ethical theory founded upon non-Christian premises. From the *Free Thoughts on Religion* (1720) and 'A Search into the Nature of Society' (1723) onwards, Shaftesbury was a constant presence in Mandeville's writings. Indeed, both *Part II* and the *Origin of Honour* were composed as dialogues between a defender of Shaftesbury's 'Social System' (Horatio), and a proponent of Mandeville's own 'System of Deformity' (Cleomenes). Mandeville repeatedly informed his reader that 'you never saw two Authors who seem to have wrote with more different Views'. He emphasised that the significance of his own exposition could only be grasped if it were read alongside *Characteristics*.¹⁶ Mandeville was in no doubt that Shaftesbury's account of natural human sociability, and his conflation of happiness and virtue, represented a reformulation of Stoic philosophy. Mandeville also recognised the anti-Christian animus of Shaftesbury's writings. Shaftesbury, in contrast to the polite moralising of the *Spectator* and *Tatler*, endeavoured to effect a divorce between Stoic and Christian moral and religious teaching, 'with Design of establishing Heathen Virtue on the Ruins of Christianity'.¹⁷

¹⁴ Adam Smith, 'A Letter to the Authors', *Edinburgh Review*, 2 (Edinburgh, 1755; rep. London, 1818), pp. 129-30.

¹⁵ For Warburton, see below, pp. 179-81.

¹⁶ *Part II*, pp. 353-6.

¹⁷ *Part II*, p. 357. The important differences between Shaftesbury's philosophy and Spectatorial politeness, elided by Klein, are well brought out by Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, & Community 1762 to 1830* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 45-8.

The significance of Mandeville's determination from 1720 to respond to Shaftesbury has been seriously underplayed by recent commentators.¹⁸ Mandeville recognised that Shaftesbury's '*Social System*' was philosophically demanding, even if it was mistaken. This was indicated by Mandeville's response, published shortly before his death, to George Berkeley's assault on himself and Shaftesbury in *Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher* (1732). Here Mandeville emphasised that, irrespective of their differences, he took the 'Three large Volumes' of *Characteristics* quite seriously as a work of philosophy, as should Berkeley. Mandeville noted that:

I differ from My Lord *Shaftesbury* entirely, as to the Certainty of the *Pulchrum & Honestum*, abstract from Mode and Custom: I do the same about the Origins of Society, and many other Things, especially the Reasons why Man is a Sociable Creature, beyond other Animals. I am fully persuaded, His Lordship was in the Wrong in these Things; but this does not blind my Understanding so far, as not to see, that he is a very fine Author, and a much better Writer than my self, or you either.¹⁹

In order to expose Shaftesbury's supposed errors, Mandeville constructed a non-religious ethical system that was 'diametrically opposite' to Shaftesbury's, but simultaneously emphasised 'how small the difference is between us'.²⁰ Both placed the question of the relationship between the *officium* and *finis* at the centre of their enquiries. Virtue was defined by Mandeville, as it was by Shaftesbury, as inhering in a disinterestedness which demanded the individual's 'Conquest of his own Passions out of a *Rational* Ambition of being good'. Both agreed that 'Passions may do Good by chance, but there can be no Merit but in the Conquest of them'.²¹ For Mandeville, however, neither Locke's Christian nor Shaftesbury's

¹⁸ Hundert argues that Mandeville's adoption of Shaftesbury as his antagonist merely reflected the popularity of *Characteristics* in the 1720s— had the *Spectator* or *Tatler* continued to possess the fashionable currency they had enjoyed in the previous decade, Mandeville would have continued to arraign Addison and Steele: *Enlightenment's Fable*, p. 10. As many historians have noted, however, there is no reason at all to think that the remarkable popularity of these journals declined in the 1720s.

¹⁹ *A Letter to Dion, Occasion'd by his Book, call'd Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher* (London, 1732; repr. with intro by J. Viner, LA, 1953), pp. 47-8. This was Mandeville's final published work.

²⁰ *Part II*, pp. 44, 56.

²¹ *Fable*, 'An Enquiry into the Origin of Moral Virtue' (1714), p. 49 (italics added); and 'Remark C', p. 74. All the 'Remarks' date from 1714 unless otherwise indicated. See, too, 'An Essay on Charity, and Charity-Schools' (1723), in *ibid.*, p. 260.

Stoic reconciliation between the *utile* and the *honestum* could be justified. Nor could it explain why most men in modern commercial society found their interest to lie in the practice of the social virtues. Neither Locke's future state nor Shaftesbury's philosophical identification of man's true end, furthermore, could explain why they *ought* to do so. Moral motivation and obligation were only to be explained by the transformation of the human personality within society. This was a process that saw men become increasingly interdependent.²² It reached its zenith with a totally new law ignored by Locke, one that was reliant upon neither an external legislator nor external sanctions: that of 'Honour'. It was by means of 'Honour' that Mandeville ultimately met the objective he set in *Part II*, of demonstrating that:

There are no good Offices or Duties, either to others or ourselves, that *Cicero* has spoke of, nor any Instances of Benevolence, Humanity, or other Social Virtue, that Lord *Shaftesbury* has hinted at, but a Man of good Sense and Knowledge may learn to practise them from no better Principle than Vain-glory, if it be strong enough to subdue and keep under all other Passions, that may thwart and interfere with his Design.²³

The challenge Mandeville faced in 1729 was to explain how what he variously referred to as 'Vain-glory', 'pride', or 'self-liking' had been sufficiently strengthened in most men to exercise sovereignty over all their other passions. This alone ensured that they found their 'End' in the voluntary practice of the social virtues which, Mandeville maintained, most men did in polite commercial societies characterised by mutual exchange and interdependency. What is remarkable about the explanation Mandeville offered was that the accounts of moral obligation provided by Shaftesbury and Locke were presented as two, successive historical stages in the history of the cultivation of pride. Mandeville's radical anti-eudaimonism set him apart even from those whose works he initially drew upon most heavily. Nicole had intimated that some degree of reconciliation might be possible between 'honnêteté humaine' and 'honnêteté parfait'. Bayle had similarly sought to isolate morality from his sceptical

²² Mandeville's insight that, in society, men became more rather than less dependent on one another was taken in a quite different direction by Rousseau in his critique of commercial society. For Rousseau's distinctly Stoic aversion to men's increasing interdependence, see Brooke, *Philosophic Pride*, pp. 181-202.

²³ *Part II*, p. 65.

insights by arguing that even if true ideas of God were obliterated by the Fall, those regarding moral good and ill were not.²⁴ La Rochefoucauld retained the distinctly Aristotelian-Stoic concept of a true species of natural virtue that might be—and ought to be—loved for its own sake.²⁵ In Mandeville's philosophy, any such reconciliation between acquired (interested) and true (disinterested) virtue was dismissed altogether. Moral distinctions were instead presented both as artificial, and as unequivocally discountenanced by the sole, immutable standard of truth (the Christian scriptures).

The 'System of Ethicks' offered by Mandeville was descriptive, lacking even the faintest traces of pedagogical intent. To be sure, Mandeville retained the Augustinian distinction between the *officium* and *finis*, but took it to the point of satire. If Jacques Esprit was correct to claim that 'one who is Mild, Peaceable, Indulgent, Good and Officious, is not truly Virtuous, if he be so to get Men's Love, and not to obey God's Commands', then Mandeville illustrated that 'true' virtue had no place in moral or political philosophy.²⁶ To the 'anatomist' who peeled back 'the smooth white skin that so beautifully covers' the social no less than the physical body, it was evident that in the absence of efficacious grace—which there were almost no traces in the world—'Men's Inclinations can only be subdued by Passions of greater Violence'.²⁷ All moral philosophy could offer was an aetiology of human behaviour and misrecognition: that is, a psychological analysis of moral motivation, alongside an explanation of why men misinterpreted the motives that drove their own actions as well as those of others. Only the Epicurean sage, viewing human nature with

²⁴ For discussion, and many quotations from Bayle's works illustrating this theme in his thought, see Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle*, ii (*Heterodoxie et Rigorisme*), pp. 257-89.

²⁵ For the Aristotelian-Stoic dimension of La Rochefoucauld's moral thinking, see Moriarty, *Disguised Vices*, pp. 374-9; and Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*, pp. 265-7.

²⁶ Esprit, *Deceitfulness of Humane Vertues*, 'Preface', A5r. Moriarty, *Disguised Vices*, pp. 277-316, provides the most thorough treatment of Esprit's thought.

²⁷ *Fable*, 'Preface', pp. 1-2; 'Remark L', p. 118; 'Search into Society', pp. 333-4. The only individuals in Mandeville's account who had subdued their passions without indulging other appetites were, revealingly, Epicurus and Anaxagoras, who on his scheme must have been preternaturally assisted: *ibid.*, 'Remark O', p. 118 (Epicurus); *Part II*, pp. 114-16 (Anaxagoras). In any event, Mandeville noted that men in the state of innocence (the regenerate), lacking the capacity to sin, could not meaningfully be deemed virtuous: *Free Thoughts*, p. 14.

ironic detachment, could appreciate how men had by their 'Indefatigable Desire of Meliorating our Condition' entirely transformed themselves into actors on a social stage.²⁸

The fundamental message underpinning Mandeville's account of mankind's passage from rudeness to refinement was '*fabricando fabri fimus*' (by making we become makers).²⁹

i. *The Fable of the Bees Part II* (1729)

In the preface to *Part II*, Mandeville justified presenting the work as a continuation of the *Fable* on the grounds that '*I have not alter'd the Subject*'. His interest remained that of '*enquiring into the Nature of Man and Society*'.³⁰ As historians have noted, however, Mandeville's approach in the work was quite different.³¹ He was concerned to explain rather than to expose satirically how one fundamental principle, which in 1714 had been termed 'pride' but was now reconceptualised as 'self-liking', lay behind the transformation of 'Wretched Man' into the sociable and polite creature he had become. In this regard, Mandeville's approach in this work was avowedly historical in a manner not true of his earlier writings. Mandeville's claim in 1714 that it was essential to be 'able well to distinguish between good Qualities and Virtues' remained at the structural heart of *Part II*. This was a distinction identical to that drawn by Locke between 'virtue and vice' and 'sin and duty'; but Mandeville employed it to quite different ends than had Locke.³² 'When we pronounce Actions good or evil', Mandeville declared, 'we only regard the Hurt or Benefit the Society receives from them'.³³ There could be no reconciliation between human moral codes ('good Qualities') and God's commands ('Virtues'). The former, devised on the basis of their temporal utility, 'have

²⁸ Ibid., 'Remark V', p. 245. The importance of the theme of the *theatrum mundi* in Mandeville's writings is well brought out by Hundert, *Enlightenment's Fable*, pp. 140-51.

²⁹ *Part II*, p. 188.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 23.

³¹ Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, p. 270; Hundert, *Enlightenment's Fable*, pp. 48-54.

³² See above, Ch. 2.

³³ *Fable*, 'Remark V', p. 244.

nothing to do with Virtue or Religion’, because ‘instead of extinguishing, they rather inflame the Passions’.³⁴

In 1714 Mandeville argued that these moral codes had been devised *ex nihilo* by the self-interested politician and haughty Stoic philosopher. He made no attempt to explore (as had Locke) how they had developed naturally as men gathered together in pursuit of shared ends. In their untaught state, as Hobbes had shown, ‘fear’ was ‘the only useful Passion that Man is possess’d of towards the Peace and Quiet of Society’. It led men to accept the authority of an arbiter who might secure them from the violence of others.³⁵ Yet fear no more than ‘Force alone’ could render men sociable, or encourage them to labour in the public rather than their private interest. A society in which a concern for self-preservation prevailed would be impoverished, impolite and incapable of defending itself from external aggressors.³⁶ It was for this reason that pride or self-love was so crucial. This was defined by Mandeville as the ‘vast Esteem we have for ourselves’, a self-estimation that far exceeded one’s actual worth.³⁷ No pleasure was greater, and none more tangible, than ‘the Raptures we enjoy in the Thoughts of being liked’, and finding that our self-estimation was supported by others. No pain was more acute than that caused by pride’s antonym, shame. It was ‘in these two Passions’, Mandeville argued, ‘in which the Seeds of most Virtues are contained’.³⁸ This explained why the sanctions of praise and blame, as Nicole had emphasised and Locke had taken in a rather different direction, were such powerful inducements.

The bulk of the *Fable* of 1714 was constituted by a series of alphabetically-ordered remarks on the *Grumbling Hive*. The *Hive* emphasised how in a thriving commercial society such as England most men were possessed of exorbitant pride and the enlarged desires to which it

³⁴ Ibid., ‘Remark C’, p. 79.

³⁵ Ibid., ‘Remark R’, p. 206.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 209.

³⁷ Ibid., ‘Remark C’, p. 67.

³⁸ Ibid. Mandeville’s reference to ‘Virtue’ here indicates how he regularly elided his own distinction between ‘the good Qualities and Virtues’ in his writings.

gave rise. In the explanation he offered as to how this had come about, most notably in the ‘Origin of Moral Virtue’ (1714), Mandeville intimated that the key role had been played by the ‘Ambitious’ few in the ancient world— would-be political leaders and professed philosophers— in whom pride had already conquered fear. It was in political society, then, that the passion of pride was awoken in the multitude by the skilful manipulation of their passions by the politician and moralist.³⁹ This made men ‘tractable’ (a favourite term of Mandeville’s) and governable as, when strengthened, pride could trump fear and the narrow self-interest it expressed. The politician and moralist denominated those actions and qualities as ‘virtuous’ that suited their personal interest as the leaders of society (martial courage, heroism). In Mandeville’s ingenious but reductive account, the magistrate and moralist had joined forces to divide society into ‘two Classes’— the few (themselves) and the multitude. They claimed to be ‘lofty high-spirited Creatures’ who were ‘free from sordid Selfishness’ and lived according to reason, whilst the multitude were shamed by their representation as odious animals held captive by their base appetites. It was by this means that shame was stimulated in a greater number of men, who were thereby incited to perform those self-denying actions deemed praiseworthy. Mandeville argued that ‘this was (or at least might have been) the manner after which Savage Man was broke’.⁴⁰ ‘The Moral Virtues’, he concluded in a memorable turn of phrase, ‘are the Political Offspring which Flattery begot upon Pride’.⁴¹

The literary form adopted by Mandeville in *Part II*— the dialogue— reflected his concern in his later writings to challenge directly the moral theory provided by Shaftesbury. In reviving this classical philosophical form in *The Moralists*, Shaftesbury had used it as a vehicle to advance the Stoic definition of happiness as only to be found in the virtuous life against

³⁹ Ibid., ‘Remark R’, p. 206.

⁴⁰ Ibid., ‘Origin of Moral Virtue’, p. 46.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 51.

broadly Epicurean objections. Mandeville, however, relocated the scene of the discussion from the rural Arcadian groves of the classical imagination to a defiantly modern, commercial and urban setting. He also reversed the outcome of the dialogue. In explaining how polite commercial sociability had come about, something Shaftesbury had failed to do, it was the Epicurean arguments of Mandeville's interlocutor (Cleomenes), rather than those of the admirer of Shaftesbury (Horatio), that were presented as furnishing men with the Socratic ideal of self-knowledge.

Cleomenes commented to Horatio that although their systems were 'diametrically opposite', there was but a 'small' difference between them.⁴² This reveals just how closely and perceptively Mandeville read Shaftesbury. He had four primary areas of agreement in mind. First, they shared the same fundamental, austere definition of 'virtue'. Shaftesbury, no less than Mandeville, argued that those who acted well merely on account of a 'favourable inclination' were 'cheaply virtuous'.⁴³ Failing to govern their conduct as a consequence of a rational pursuit of the good, their actions lacked all merit. This distinction, Mandeville argued, had been dangerously elided by 'that curious Metaphysician', Hutcheson, in his criticisms of the *Fable*, supposedly in defence of '*the principles of the Late Earl of Shaftesbury*'. These were principles, Mandeville suggested, which he had evidently failed to understand.⁴⁴ Second, Shaftesbury accepted that only the philosophical few were capable of true virtue. Mandeville's point was that there was a very 'small' difference between this claim, and his own that none were capable of such conduct. Third, Shaftesbury had sought to explain moral motivation and obligation 'abstract from Religion', as did Mandeville.⁴⁵ Consequently, in the former's hands— unlike in Addison or Steele's— Stoic moral philosophy and

⁴² *Part II*, pp. 44, 56.

⁴³ *Inquiry concerning Virtue*, 2.4, pp. 176-7.

⁴⁴ *Part II*, p. 345. Mandeville was responding to Hutcheson's *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue... in which the Principles of the late Earl of Shaftesbury are Explain'd and Defended, against the Author of the Fable of the Bees* (London, 1725).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

Christian moral theology had not merely been separated, but presented as antagonistic. The Stoic's philosophical theism was irreconcilable with Christianity, something Mandeville endorsed fully.

By shifting the scene of the discussion to an avowedly modern and commercial setting, Mandeville raised the pressing question which, he claimed, Shaftesbury had steadfastly ignored. In modern, polite society, most men practised the 'good Qualities' (*officium*). What reason, then, was there to think that the 'wise' did so on different principles to the 'vulgar'? The Epicurean Cleomenes, no less than the Stoic Horatio, derived pleasure from social intercourse, polite exchange and the performance of Cicero's 'good Offices or Duties'. Both were contented members of the 'Beau Monde'.⁴⁶ Cleomenes was able to show, as Horatio was not, that they both acted upon the same principles, which had nothing whatsoever to do with philosophy. Both Cleomenes and Horatio, meanwhile, raised important criticisms of the explanations offered of moral motivation and obligation in *Characteristics* and the *Fable* respectively. This led Mandeville in *Part II* onto new ground, and to conjecture how his Stoic antagonist might have responded.⁴⁷

The most pressing weakness identified by Horatio concerned the deliberately provocative and highly reductive account offered by Mandeville in the *Fable* regarding the origins of moral virtue. 'I can't help observing', Horatio noted, 'that when human Understanding serves your Purpose to solve any thing, it is always ready and full-grown; but at other times, Knowledge and Reasoning are the Work of Time, and Men are not capable of thinking

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 62.

⁴⁷ Most notably in the final (sixth) dialogue, in which philosophical theories concerning the origins of the universe were discussed and the biblical account of Creation defended by Cleomenes. This was a subject studiously ignored by Shaftesbury himself. Horatio, however, is made to defend the doctrines of the eternal, self-perpetuating whole (the 'To Nav') and the universal conflagration in terms paraphrasing Shaftesbury's favourite moralist, Aurelius, which his antagonist proceeds to decry as '*Spinosism* in Epitome': *ibid.*, pp. 311-13.

justly, 'till after many Generations'.⁴⁸ At times in the *Fable* human reason appeared instrumental, as in the presentation of the 'skilful Politician' and moralist as possessed of quite remarkable foresight. At others it was purely procedural, and the development of society driven by men's pre-rational impulse to improve their natural condition.⁴⁹

In addressing this shortcoming, Mandeville conceded that the analogy drawn between men and bees did not work fully. Even though a thriving commercial society and the beehive appeared alike, to the extent that all individuals were willing to work for the public good, the former had a history and the latter did not. The honey produced by the first bees was no less perfect than that furnished by the most recent. In the case of bees, 'the Laws of Nature are fix'd and unalterable: In all her Orders and Regulations there is a Stability no where to be met with in Things of human Contrivance and Approbation'.⁵⁰ The behaviour of bees was entirely 'natural'. 'Man', however, 'naturally will not do, as he would be done by', and all men were 'bad, that are not taught to be good'.⁵¹ Given this difference, a better analogy to draw was between man in the state of nature and the grape. It could not meaningfully be said that within grapes there was wine, any more than that within man there was sociability, or that the realisation of these qualities represented the attainment of their true natures.⁵² Both society and fermentation were the consequence of mankind's inexhaustible industry and inventiveness in finding the means to improve their condition. This was an achievement entirely ignored by Shaftesbury, since 'what you call Natural, is evidently Artificial, and belongs to Education'.⁵³ Here Mandeville's Epicureanism stood in absolute contrast to his Augustinianism. God had, of course, given man the base ingredients to become the creature

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

⁴⁹ This was a criticism levelled at Mandeville's *Fable* by, amongst others, Hutcheson: on which, see Hundert, *Enlightenment's Fable*, pp. 78-82.

⁵⁰ *Part II*, pp. 187-9.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 270-71.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 189-90.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

he now was; His revealed will, however, declared that He would punish them for having done so.

In explaining how ‘Men become sociable, by living together in Society’, Mandeville’s revision of his treatment of pride and shame was significant.⁵⁴ In 1714 Mandeville had argued that these were discrete passions. He now claimed that they were two manifestations of one ‘frailty’ natural to man— that of ‘self-liking’— which led him to entertain the ‘superlative Wish’ to have others reinforce his inflated self-estimation.⁵⁵ Self-liking militated against self-knowledge, explaining why the increasingly socialised individual ‘should be ignorant of his own Heart, and the Motives he acts from’.⁵⁶ Mandeville repeatedly emphasised that, if man in his natural state witnessed the conduct of individuals in developed commercial societies, he would assuredly consider them to have been bewitched by an evil power. How else might he explain why they so willingly and unthinkingly sacrificed their greatest interest— the preservation of life and limb, and their ‘Ease and Security’— in the quest for the imaginary rewards of flattery and inessential material possessions?⁵⁷ This was even more perplexing, Mandeville argued, given that revealed Christianity simply enjoined men to remain in that natural state, and not to seek relief from the earthly torture to which their Creator had seen fit (for His own unimpeachable purposes) to condemn them. Self-liking, then, was truly ‘the Sorcerer, that is able to divert all other Passions from their natural Objects, and make a rational Creature ashamed of what is most agreeable to his Inclination as well as his Duty’.⁵⁸ It was also the sole source of happiness for mankind, furnishing them with their wishes and hopes and inuring them to despair. ‘No Man’, Mandeville argued, ‘can resolve upon Suicide,

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-4, 129-32.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-4.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 95-6.

whilst Self-liking lasts', whereas in its absence death might well seem preferable to the abject struggle for self-preservation.⁵⁹

Fundamental to this depiction of man's struggles in his natural state was the reality of natural as well as moral evil. This, as Mandeville noted at length in the 'Search into the Origins of Society' in the second edition of the *Fable* (1723), was something Shaftesbury's Stoicism had led him to deny. Man in nature was surrounded by 'a thousand Mischiefs', and 'every thing is Evil, which Art and Experience have not taught us to turn into a Blessing'.⁶⁰ Rather than 'skilful Politicians' and moralists playing the leading role in man's 'Victory' over the natural world and his own untaught nature, in *Part II* Mandeville emphasised that this could be explained only by 'human Industry and Application, by the uninterrupted Labour, and joint Experience of many Ages'. The gross error to which all too many philosophers had succumbed was to 'ascribe to the Excellency of Man's Genius, and the Depth of his Penetration, what is in Reality owing to length of Time, and the Experience of many Generations, all of them very little differing from one another in natural Parts and Sagacity'.⁶¹ In his natural state, men's 'Thoughts' were never 'at Liberty to rove beyond the first Necessities of Life'.⁶² Self-liking was piqued once men came to recognise, through hunting, their superiority over the beasts which initially they feared (as reflected in heathen fables recounting the slaying of terrifying mythical creatures), but later learnt how to kill or tame.⁶³ Once aroused—and only at this point—self-liking and the desire to have others submit to one's sense of superiority led to the war of all against all described by Hobbes.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 137-8. Mandeville's claim here contradicted his discussion of Cato in the *Fable*, whose suicide, he argued, was the consequence of his tyrannical pride and the 'superlative Envy he bore to the Glory, the real Greatness and Personal Merit of *Caesar*': 'Search into Society', pp. 335-6.

⁶⁰ 'Search into Society', p. 345.

⁶¹ *Part II*, pp. 140-43.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 228-33.

⁶⁴ Theoretically, Mandeville argued, men could have continued in their relatively peaceful, pre-political state, living in family units and herding together only to repel animals, for generations. In practice, however, they were unlikely to have done so for any prolonged period of time: *ibid.*, pp. 201-204.

This was a state devastating to every man, who had already acquired a sense of property by associating his ‘Self’ with what he considered to be the fruits of his labour— whether the land he had worked, or the children he had produced. The only escape from such a state was found ‘when human Creatures once submit to Government’.⁶⁵ Mandeville’s account of the origins of property followed Locke closely, and explicitly. His debt to Lockean epistemology— which Shaftesbury had condemned as mere sophistry— was also considerable in the more naturalistic account of the development of society he offered from 1729. The mind, Mandeville argued, was initially a ‘*Charte Blanche*’, entirely dependent upon the data of sense-experience. Men’s intellectual faculties were passive. The action of thinking consisted, as Locke had shown, in the ‘*hunting after, joyning, separating, changing, and compounding of ideas*’, and the facility with which men did so increased exponentially within society.⁶⁶ The rightful use of the faculty of thought lay in its capacity to assist men to procure most efficiently what had already been identified as desirable by their passions. Given that the desire for the approval of others was the strongest of all, ‘*reason*’ consisted primarily in ‘*the Management of Self-liking*’.⁶⁷ Free will was a chimera, invented by Stoic and Christian moralists to inculcate a sense of shame in men. Here as elsewhere, Mandeville drew heavily from the naturalistic elements within Locke’s philosophy whilst discarding the framework of a divine teleology into which they had been placed by Locke.⁶⁸ In reality, men’s will was governed by their desires, even if they found genuine pleasure in fulfilling them and subsequently took great pride in having done so. This led individuals to conceive

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 225-30, 138-9. This submission, Mandeville suggested, might have been the consequence either of a form of contract (consent) or, more likely, force; but the question was, for him, evidently of limited interest: *ibid.*, pp. 266-71.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 164-70.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 174-5.

⁶⁸ Mandeville was far from alone in doing so, as the example of Collins in Chapter 5 attests. On this selective appropriation of ‘Epicurean’ elements within Locke’s thought, see Catherine Wilson, ‘Epicureanism in Early Modern Philosophy’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism*, ed. J. Warren (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 266-86.

of themselves as self-directing rational agents, and represented ‘a violent Principle of innate Folly’.⁶⁹

All the improvements made by men in their emergence from their timorous natural state could only be accounted for upon the principle of self-liking. This informed Mandeville’s account of the origins and development of language. The cultivation of this faculty occurred as men sought to express their inflated self-esteem, and to persuade others to ‘give Credit to what the speaking Persons would have them believe’.⁷⁰ It was a tool of manipulation, not the means to communicate truth.⁷¹ One area in which men would seek to express their superiority was in their claims to have knowledge of an invisible power in the universe, which all their fellow men both acknowledged and feared. Mandeville’s explanation of the origins of religion was explicitly Epicurean. Precisely because men in their natural state were surrounded by very real evils, so ‘Fear is the Passion, that first gives them an Opportunity of entertaining some glimmering Notions of an invisible Power’.⁷² Whatever caused pain to man could become the object of reverence, including inanimate objects such as stones.⁷³ It was for this reason, Mandeville argued, that ‘there is nothing so high or remote in the Firmament, nor so low, or abject upon Earth; but some Men have worship’d it, or made it one way or other the Object of their Superstition’.⁷⁴ Seeking to win the admiration of others, men would regale them with ‘willful Lies’, claiming to have seen or heard this power and know how it might be placated.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ *Part II*, pp. 225-30.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 289. Mandeville’s naturalistic, and profoundly original, account of the origins and evolution of language as a tool of manipulation runs from pp. 285-303. La Rochefoucauld similarly treated of language as a tool of manipulation, and politeness as the product of pride’s conquest over vanity: see Moriarty, *Disguised Vices*, pp. 328-32.

⁷¹ On which, see Hundert, *Enlightenment’s Fable*, Ch. 2.

⁷² *Part II*, p. 208.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 209-10.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 276-7.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 211-14.

The Epicurean maxim that ‘Fear made a God’ was nevertheless reductive and misleading, for two reasons.⁷⁶ First, as ‘Mr *Locke*’ had shown, the idea of ‘God’ was complex. It could only have emerged once men’s ‘Faculty of Thinking’ had developed. This took place in society over time with the acquisition of language and the accumulation and ordering of the data of observation and experience. Second, this Epicurean maxim implied, as Locke himself argued, that a curiosity regarding the nature of invisible power would terminate in theism (‘a God’). Here Mandeville once more employed Locke’s own reasoning against him. Mandeville denied any necessary correlation between men’s attempts to satisfy their natural belief in invisible power in the universe, and ‘true’ theistic ideas of God that were affirmed subsequently by the Christian dispensations. There were many things, as Locke had shown, ‘which are commonly esteem’d to be eternal Truths’ and assumed to be the consequence of reasoning and philosophy, but which had in fact remained concealed to mankind without divine assistance. Reasoning on invisible power, in the absence of revelation, could lead men to myriad ideas of god(s), and to any number of theories as to the conduct demanded of men if this power were to be placated. All had claims to be considered ‘reasonable’.⁷⁷

Mandeville conceded that men would eventually be led to entertain theistic ideas of God as a perfectly good and wise being who took an especial interest in mankind. Yet he maintained that reason played a negligible role in this process. In so doing, he eviscerated the philosophical foundations of Shaftesbury’s (and Horatio’s) providential theism, most clearly expounded in the *Inquiry*. Mandeville argued that if, in their writings on religion, the Epicureans revealed themselves to be superstitious, then the Stoics and Platonists had been genuine atheists. There was nothing to choose between ‘Atheism’ and ‘Superstition’, since

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 276-7.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 210. It was for this reason that, in *Free Thoughts*, Mandeville emphasised that there were no grounds upon which to consider the heathen philosophers, any more than the credulous vulgar, to have been insincere in their superstition.

both were ‘of the same Origin’— an ‘Ignorance of the Divine Essence’.⁷⁸ One expressed the sovereignty of pride, the other the tyranny of fear. Mandeville rehearsed Shaftesbury’s attempt to establish the existence of providence and a perfectly good deity on the basis of philosophical arguments regarding a harmonious natural and moral order. Such a vision of the natural world, and of human nature, was itself the consequence of self-liking. It expressed the proud man’s ‘superlative Wish’ to find his estimation of himself as a rational, sociable being superior to all other creatures reinforced. The theism that resulted was, as a consequence, a form of self-idolatry. In equating philosophical theism with self-worship, Mandeville was at one with Jansenist moralists such as Esprit and, indeed, Augustine. ‘It is owing to the Principle of Pride we are born with’, Mandeville declared, ‘and the high Value we all, for the Sake of one, have for our Species, that Men imagine the whole Universe to be principally made for their use; and this Errour makes them commit a thousand Extravagancies, and have pitiful and most unworthy Notions of God and his Works’.⁷⁹ It was inevitable that this idea that men were uniquely favoured by one omniscient and perfectly good deity would gather currency as societies developed, precisely because this process saw self-liking strengthened. Much the same was true for the doctrine of immortality taught by the Stoics and Platonists.⁸⁰

Far from leading men to reconcile themselves to providence, Shaftesbury’s depiction of human nature and the natural world forced them to chafe against it. Here Mandeville cited Lucretius’ exclamation: ‘Oh minds of man so weak! Oh hearts so blind!’⁸¹ The great

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 311-13.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 243.

⁸⁰ Immortality was ‘a Truth broach’d long before Christianity’, and could not have ‘found such a general Reception in human Capacities as it has, had it not been a pleasing one, that extoll’d and was a Compliment to the whole Species’: *Fable*, ‘Remark T’ (1723), p. 230. Christian soteriology, however, was in Mandeville’s eyes hardly flattering to human nature; and here as elsewhere, Mandeville emphasised how the apparent similarities between Stoic philosophy and Christianity were entirely superficial.

⁸¹ *Part II*, p. 253; citing *De Rerum Natura*, trans. M.F. Smith (Indianapolis, 2001), 2.14. For the claim that Mandeville only turned directly to original Epicurean texts, rather than relying on Bayle’s presentation of

advantage of Epicurus' atomistic account of the creation, Mandeville argued, was that it complemented his fundamental insight that 'all Actions in Nature, abstractly consider'd, are equally indifferent', and that 'every thing is easy to the Deity'.⁸² Horatio was forced to concede that he wished that human nature and the origins of society were other than they actually were. Natural affection, Horatio argued, would surely have provided a more stable foundation for both society and morality than self-liking. Reformulating the fundamental moral of the *Hive*, Cleomenes explored what the consequences of this would have been. Had God privileged man above all other creatures, there would have been no wars, disease or untimely deaths. The result would have been overpopulation and famine. This would have forced a perfectly good— but evidently far from omniscient— deity to intervene further in earthly affairs, thereby suggesting the laws He had established at the Creation were inadequate. Shaftesbury's '*Social System*' reduced the infinite wisdom of God to the paltry and contingent insights garnered by man through experience and observation.⁸³

That God had a particular plan for mankind, and that the existence of evil in the world in no sense called His justice or power into question, could never have been established on the basis of philosophy, which suggested something quite different. Here Mandeville repeated many points he had made in the *Free Thoughts*, a work heavily indebted to Bayle. In the absence of revelation, the problem of reconciling the existence of evil with that of a perfectly good deity was intractable. Only the Manichean heresy of two, co-eternal principles in the universe (one good, the other evil) could answer the Epicurean theory that God took no interest in human affairs. In doing so, however, it challenged God's omnipotence in a

Epicureanism, in the 1720s (that is, when responding to Shaftesbury), see C. Wong, 'Mandeville, Bayle, and Epicurus', *Notes & Queries*, 31:3 (Sep. 1984), p. 394.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 252.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 255-6.

way that Epicureanism did not.⁸⁴ From Mandeville's perspective in *Part II*, the crucial feature of Epicurus' account of the creation of the universe— which he nonetheless dismissed as 'monstrous and extravagant'— was that it allowed for man to be seen as he actually was in nature, not as he wished to be.⁸⁵ Mandeville defended a literal interpretation of the story of Creation found in Genesis because, he claimed, it was more plausible than Epicurus' 'fortuitous Jumble of Atoms'. Yet it was similarly consistent with the portrayal of human nature provided by Mandeville himself on the basis of *a posteriori* observation of men's conduct in the practical affairs of life. Cleomenes argued that the biblical account of the confusion of tongues at Babel, the preternatural state of innocence, and Adam's predestined sin were all to be taken entirely literally. They touched upon questions that philosophy could not address. The answers they provided were nevertheless entirely consistent with just reasoning on the depraved nature of man and origins of society. In this regard, revealed Christianity was eminently credible.⁸⁶

Mandeville similarly appropriated and inverted Shaftesbury's axiomatic claim that philosophy might identify the beautiful. Theocles' 'philosophical enthusiasm' in *The Moralists* was entirely legitimate, but misdirected. Neither the natural world nor human nature was harmonious or beautiful. What was resplendent and glorious was the artificial world created by men as a consequence of their unceasing endeavour to triumph over the inherent disorder and evils found in both. This point was emphasised continually by Mandeville, and accentuated the degree to which he departed from Bayle's profound contempt for societies erected upon vice. Cleomenes revealed to Horatio how 'a most beautiful Superstructure may be rais'd upon a rotten and despicable Foundation', and 'such a clear and beautiful Stream

⁸⁴ *Free Thoughts*, pp. 93-5. In his editorial introduction and notes, Primer emphasises the extent to which Mandeville drew from Bayle's *Dictionary* in this work. Robertson suggests Mandeville's debt to Bayle was even greater than Primer allows: *Case for the Enlightenment*, pp. 261-6.

⁸⁵ *Part II*, pp. 309-10.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 198-200, 264-5, 308-309 (creation); 205-206 (language); 235-6 (Paradise and the Fall).

could flow from so mean and muddy a Spring as an excessive 'Thirst after Praise'.⁸⁷ Nothing was more astonishing than how men had learnt, through art and education, to conceal their self-liking and to flatter that of others, and received ever greater pleasure in proportion to their success in doing so. This had led to a 'polite' modern society in which all 'labour for one Interest': the pursuit of temporal happiness, which for men in whom self-liking was sovereign was entirely dependent upon securing the admiration of others. At the outset of *Part II*, Cleomenes the 'anatomist' was contrasted with Horatio the 'painter', with the latter extolling 'the Dignity of the Subject' and 'the Excellency of our Species'. Over the course of the work, this distinction was entirely collapsed. Horatio was forced to concede to Cleomenes that 'you are a good Painter', who had truly uncovered the beautiful.⁸⁸

In *Part II* the role of the 'skilful Politician' and perspicacious moralist was, in comparison to the *Fable*, downplayed. It was the 'Work of Ages' to understand human nature and 'the true Use of the Passions'. The most important of them— shame— was 'so general, and so early discover'd in all human Creatures, that no Nation can be so stupid, as to be long without observing and making use of it accordingly'.⁸⁹ As with all human arts, that of government proceeded in fits and starts, with revolutions and rebuilding, before stability was acquired and men's passions indulged in a manner that benefited society as a whole. Increasingly the means had been found to allow men to indulge those passions entirely whilst concealing them artfully, the height of 'politeness', the origins of which Mandeville professed to have explained in *Part II*. No nation, Mandeville noted, was more polite than England, where men had perfected the use of language as a tool of manipulation. This stood in sharp contrast to ancient Greece and Rome, where men had openly praised themselves, and others, in a manner that would cause acute embarrassment in the social clubs frequented by Horatio and

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 63-4, 74.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 234.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 319-20, 145.

Cleomenes. This represented the apotheosis of pride, and indicated how it had established its sovereignty over all the other passions: *'the more dextrous, by this Means, Men grew in concealing the outward Signs, and every Symptom of Pride, the more entirely they became enslaved by it within'*.⁹⁰ Their success in dissembling the true motives of their actions before others was matched only by their capacity for self-delusion.

In *Part II*, as in the original *Fable*, Christianity played no role in explaining how men had become sociable creatures. Mandeville's narrative of the development of society jumped from the establishment of political authority and moral virtue in the heathen world, to the influence of commerce in perpetuating men's interdependency in the modern age. In part, this reflected his determination to provide a 'System of Ethicks' entirely independent of religion. In *Part II*, Mandeville offered an account of moral motivation which challenged directly the theories furnished by Locke and Shaftesbury. Yet Locke's moral theology and Shaftesbury's Stoic moral theory claimed to provide what Mandeville still had not. This was an account of moral obligation, which could explain why men considered themselves duty-bound to behave in certain ways not merely in front of others, but also in private. In addressing this question in his final major work, Mandeville turned to 'Honour'. In *Part II* honour was described as an unwritten law, the moral duties of which were, in modern societies, 'wrote and engraved in every one's breast'.⁹¹ In the *Fable*, Mandeville had described it as species of moral virtue, which had nothing whatsoever to do with religion and was 'an Invention of Moralists and Politicians'.⁹² There he argued that the man of honour was his own legislator, judge and jury. His moral conduct did not depend upon an external law, or the threat of external sanctions. Mandeville noted in 1714 that at the start of the previous

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-4. This was a deliberately provocative, and revealing, inversion of Romans 2.14, which had been paraphrased by Locke in the *Treatises*. For Mandeville it was the law of honour, founded on the principle of pride, rather than a natural law established on that of charity and humility, which appeared 'natural' to man in his polite and sociable modern guise.

⁹² *Fable*, 'Remark R', pp. 198-223.

century, ‘the Principle of Honour... was melted over again, and brought to a new Standard’.⁹³ In explaining the origins of honour, Mandeville now suggested that not merely Christianity, but the bastardised species of it that Shaftesbury so detested, had played a crucial role in the transformation of man in society from a brute animal to a self-legislating moral agent. The principle of honour, Mandeville now argued, forged an irreparable breach between the world of classical antiquity which Shaftesbury so admired, and the modern world that Mandeville considered him (with justification) to hold in such contempt.

ii. *An Enquiry into the Origin of Honour* (1732)

The *Origin of Honour* contains a further four dialogues between Cleomenes and Horatio, and Mandeville expected his reader to be acquainted with what had passed between the characters in *Part II*.⁹⁴ In the first dialogue, Mandeville identified a devastating weakness at the heart of Shaftesbury’s ethical theory. Given that Shaftesbury had confined ‘Virtue’ to the philosophical few, he had required an alternative principle to explain why the mass of mankind felt obligated to adhere to moral rules. As Mandeville noted, Shaftesbury had argued that a professed concern for external sanctions— whether in this life or the next— exercised no influence over the virtuous man’s conduct. Locke and Hobbes’ ‘mercenary’ account of moral obligation, for Shaftesbury, revealed them as true ‘Man-Haters’. It was for this reason that Shaftesbury had ‘made a Jest of all reveal’d Religion, especially the Christian’. Yet, as Horatio was made to confess, in his moral theory Shaftesbury had reverted to the claim that ‘it is evident, that if it was not for the Fear of an After-Reckoning, some Men would be so wicked, that there would be no living with them’.⁹⁵ ‘Among the vulgar’, the fear of the gallows in tandem with that of God’s wrath performed what

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 218-19.

⁹⁴ *Origin of Honour*, p. xi, where Mandeville draws attention to the continuity between the works. Mandeville also repeatedly referred his reader to passages in the *Fable* and *Part II*: see, for example, pp. 2, 11-12, 21-2, 53-4.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18. It is Horatio, Shaftesbury’s interlocutor, who presents the argument concerning the utility of the doctrine of a future state. This is drawn, quite faithfully, from the *Inquiry concerning Virtue*, 1.3.3, p. 37.

philosophy could not.⁹⁶ In returning to this principle (fear) to explain the moral conduct of almost all of mankind, Mandeville argued, the ‘Painter’ of human nature revealed that he entertained a ‘worse Opinion of his Species, than ever the Author of the *Fable of the Bees* appears to have had yet’. Endeavouring to redeem the philosophical few from Hobbes and Locke, he had sacrificed ‘the Generality of Mankind’.⁹⁷

Mandeville conceded that in the ancient world ‘fear’ and ‘virtue’ had run along quite separate tracks. The vast majority of mankind, in whom self-liking was weak, remained in thrall to two fears: the fear of death, and of an invisible power. The fear of death was, of all those passions strongest in man in his untaught state, ‘the most violent and stubborn, and consequently the hardest to be conquer’d’. Insofar as it could be overcome, this represented a true ‘Conquest over our selves’.⁹⁸ ‘The Fear of an invisible Cause is universal’ and, like that of death, to ‘conquer [it] is more difficult than is easily imagin’d’.⁹⁹ Once again, Mandeville argued that only extravagant pride could perform this role. Pride was ‘able to stifle the loudest Calls of Nature, and with a high Hand triumphs over all the other Appetites and Inclinations’.¹⁰⁰

The distinction drawn between atheism and superstition in *Part II* was developed in the *Origin of Honour*. The proud few in the heathen world— most notably the Stoic philosophers— had succeeded in overcoming the fear of divine power. They reduced God’s will to their own, and attributed to him the same active virtues which, owing to their pride, they believed that they possessed themselves— reason, justice, and benevolence. In the heathen world, and to a lesser extent in the modern, this extravagant degree of pride was confined to those few of particular constitutions, socio-economic backgrounds and an

⁹⁶ Shaftesbury, *Miscellany III*, pp. 412-14.

⁹⁷ *Origin of Honour*, p. 196.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. iv-vi.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 186-7.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 58-9.

extensive liberal education.¹⁰¹ It was for this reason, Mandeville argued, that ‘there are no *Atheists* among the Common People’.¹⁰² The moral virtues taught by the ancient philosophers as duties enshrined in an immutable law of nature sought to attain the fundamental objective of inculcating a sufficient degree of pride or shame that men’s fear of death was allayed.¹⁰³ This love of ‘Virtue’, however, had largely remained confined to the few. It was the fear of an invisible power that was employed by politicians to inspire courage and bravery in the mass of mankind, something necessary if they were to take up arms in defence of the *patria*.

In *Origin of Honour*, Mandeville’s main objective was to explain how this apparently intractable chasm between the proud and philosophical few and the pusillanimous and ignorant multitude had been closed since classical times. In short, he showed how most men had become proud atheists like the Stoic. Seemingly paradoxically, Mandeville attributed a key causal role to Christianity in this development. *Part II* reveals how Mandeville drew from Locke’s epistemology and theory of property in a strikingly original manner. The *Origin of Honour* indicates that Mandeville read Locke’s problematic theory of moral obligation in a similarly idiosyncratic fashion, in order to reach conclusions very different to Locke.

In commercial societies the lives of almost all men were defined by the quest for material objects identified as desirable not by men’s fear, but rather by their ambition, envy and avarice. The principle of moral virtue, as Shaftesbury had been anxious to emphasise, could not explain how this had occurred. The Christianisation of Europe and the introduction of moral theology, Mandeville argued, represented a crucial stage in the triumph of all men,

¹⁰¹ It is noteworthy that one of Shaftesbury’s heroes— Epictetus— who was an impoverished slave with no material possessions, nowhere appears in Mandeville’s writings. He instead focused on those (Cato, Seneca) of high social standing and wealth.

¹⁰² *Origin of Honour*, pp. 187-9.

¹⁰³ This was the central point repeated by Mandeville in his account of the etymology of ‘moral virtue’ in the preface to the *Origin of Honour*.

rather than merely the few, over their untaught nature. In the first dialogue, Cleomenes noted that:

The wisest Moralists, before [Christ's] Time, had laid the greatest Stress on the Reasonableness of their Precepts; and appeal'd to Human Understanding for the Truth of their Opinions. But the Gospels, soaring beyond the Reach of Reason, teaches us many Things, which no Moralist could ever have known, unless they had been reveal'd to him... To love Virtue for the Beauty of it, and curb one's Appetites because it is most reasonable to do so, are very good Things in Theory; but whoever understands our Nature, and consults the Practice of Human Creatures, would sooner expect from them, that they should abstain from Vice, for Fear of Punishment, and do good, in Hopes of being rewarded for it... To bear with Inconveniencies, Pain, and Sorrow, in Hopes of being eternally Happy, and refuse the Enjoyments of Pleasure, for Fear of being Miserable for ever, are more justifiable to Reason, and more consonant to good Sense, than it is to do it for Nothing.¹⁰⁴

As would have been apparent to well-read contemporaries, here Mandeville closely followed Locke's distinctive account of the moral significance of the Christian revelation, in the *Essay* and the *Reasonableness of Christianity*. Locke argued that Stoic accounts of the *summum bonum* could not explain why most men recognised their obligation to a moral law. They depended upon 'the long, and sometimes intricate deductions of Reason', which 'the greatest part of Mankind have neither leisure to weigh; nor, for want of Education and Use, skill to judge of'. Locke concluded that 'these incoherent apophthegms of Philosophers, and wise Men; however excellent in themselves, and well intended by them; could never make a Morality, whereof the World could be convinced, could never rise up to the force of a Law that Mankind could with certainty depend on'. The moral dictates of the Gospel, delivered by Christ in the clearest terms and disseminated by 'ignorant, but inspired Fishermen' (the Apostles), were suited to all men's capacities. 'As soon as they are heard and considered', Locke argued, 'they are found to be agreeable to Reason; and such as can by no means be contradicted'.¹⁰⁵ In the *Essay*, Locke emphasised that the future state furnished sanctions

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 29-32.

¹⁰⁵ *Reasonableness of Christianity*, pp. 195-6.

which made it in hedonic man's interest to live according to the moral law, rather than merely appealing to human reason.

For Mandeville, the consequences of the Christian revelation were very different to those envisaged by Locke. The doctrine of a future state was indeed compelling to the Christian believer. In demanding that men subdue their passions with a reason that was quite incapable of the task, however, Christianity struck 'at the very Fundamentals of Human Nature'.¹⁰⁶ Mandeville noted that 'nothing can affect us forcibly but what strikes the Senses, or such Things which we are conscious of within'. As Locke had conceded, the 'Light of Nature' might be sufficient to explain the existence of divine power— although for Mandeville it could establish nothing regarding its nature or attributes, a question Locke had done notably little to resolve— but the doctrine of a future state was only brought to light by Christ. It followed, Mandeville argued, that men could not consider salvation to be an essential part of their happiness (hard though they might try), and their 'Longing after it cannot be very strong'. It was clear that 'how various and unreasonable soever our Wishes may be, and how enormous the Multiplicity of our Desires, they terminate in Life, and all the Objects of them are on this Side of the Grave'.¹⁰⁷ No man possessed Locke's 'power' to hold their '*wills* undetermined'; and no man's 'reason unbiased' could, in practice, lead them to prefer the end of salvation above that of worldly advancement.¹⁰⁸ Moral theology could play no explanatory role when it came to moral motivation and obligation.

The unique feature of Christianity, as Locke had emphasised so forcefully, was that it united what in a heathen world had remained entirely divorced: divinity and morality. Rather than appealing, as had the 'skilful Politician' and moralist, to men's reason (or pride) to enjoin self-denial, it played upon those fears of death and of invisible power in which religion

¹⁰⁶ *Origin of Honour*, pp. 99-100.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-8.

¹⁰⁸ See above, pp. 92-5.

originated. This was crucial, since it was axiomatic to Mandeville's account of the art of government that 'you can make no Multitudes believe contrary to what they feel, or what contradicts a Passion inherent in their Nature'. 'If you humour that Passion, and allow it to be just,' however, 'you may regulate it as you please'.¹⁰⁹ Christianity appealed to a passion that was stronger than all others for almost all men— fear— rather than one that remained, in the classical world, confined to the very few— pride. Mandeville was at pains to emphasise that 'as to Faith and Theology', the vast majority of men in Christian countries were sincere in their belief, even as 'there are very few sincere and real Christians in their Lives and Conversation'.¹¹⁰ These Christian believers were only too aware that they were incapable of adhering to what Mandeville claimed (in sharp contrast to Locke) was the manifestly austere and ascetic moral law laid down by Christ. This caused them to experience profound 'unease' given the prospect of eternal damnation, and stimulated the passion of shame.

As Mandeville pithily noted, 'that the Gospel requires a literal Mortification of the Flesh, and other hard Tasks from us, is the very Basis which the Pope's Exchequer is built upon'. The 'wise Architects of the Church of *Rome*', Mandeville declared, 'were thoroughly skilled in Human Nature'.¹¹¹ Superstition had not been invented, as Horatio suggested in good Shaftesburian fashion, by 'designing Priests, and other Imposters', since 'unless Fools actually had Frailties, Knaves could not make Use of them'.¹¹² Rather Christ's revelation revealed to those who would govern mankind just how productively men's natural fear could be manipulated, and how this might serve to stimulate shame and 'render them more and more tractable'.¹¹³ The credulous multitude would go to any lengths to allay the fears

¹⁰⁹ *Origin of Honour*, p. 28.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-82.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 108-109.

¹¹² *Part II*, pp. 209-10.

¹¹³ *Origin of Honour*, pp. 40-41.

they experienced on account of their inevitable incapacity to live as Christ demanded. Christian ministers, particularly the Jesuits, the ‘easiest Casuists’, were only too willing to provide them with such relief.¹¹⁴ From the moment Christianity had been ‘made National’, Mandeville argued, it had been subverted, and given human nature the case could hardly have been otherwise.¹¹⁵ Priests, no less than their votaries, were motivated by the pursuit of temporal rather than eternal happiness. They secured their power and riches by claiming—as had their pagan predecessors—to mediate between men and God. By this means they acquired an authority over the superstitious multitude that was incalculably greater than that attained by the heathen politician or moralist. Seeking to advance their own corporate interest, they engrafted moral distinctions onto the passion of shame— what was praiseworthy, and what blameable—that all too frequently militated against the prosperity and cohesion of temporal societies.

Mandeville had discussed at length the persecution, bloodshed and inhumanity that had resulted from priestcraft in his *Free Thoughts* of 1720, and had drawn liberally from Shaftesbury’s *Characteristics* in order to do so. Yet as Mandeville made clear, to an unreconstructed Stoic like Shaftesbury, not only the perverted form of Christianity preached by opportunistic priests but gospel Christianity itself necessarily appeared abhorrent and unnatural. It was for this reason that Shaftesbury had justified subjecting the Scriptures themselves to ‘Ridicule’, something for which he was reprimanded by Mandeville in *Free Thoughts* as in his later works.¹¹⁶ The Scriptures, as Mandeville emphasised in *Part II*,

¹¹⁴ *Free Thoughts*, pp. 24-5.

¹¹⁵ *Origin of Honour*, pp. 32-4.

¹¹⁶ In a frankly bizarre interpretation, Primer claims that the *Free Thoughts* reflected Mandeville’s early reverence for Shaftesbury, and that it would require the assistance of ‘professional psychologists’ to explain why he turned against him from 1723: ‘Mandeville and Shaftesbury: Some Facts and Problems’, in *Mandeville Studies*, pp. 126-41. In his editorial notes to *Free Thoughts*, meanwhile, Primer fails to identify Shaftesbury as Mandeville’s (very obvious) target in the final paragraph of the work, in which he noted that ‘Religion, and whatever is sacred, can never be the proper Object of Ridicule’ (*Free Thoughts*, p. 196). An identical statement regarding the misuse of ridicule can be found in *Part II*, pp. 52-3. Hundert similarly suggests that Mandeville and Shaftesbury’s views in religion were indistinguishable: *Enlightenment’s Fable*, p. 10.

presented an image of man as he indeed was in his natural state: weak, timorous, and a slave to his passions, especially fear. This vision of human nature was abhorrent to those heathen moralists and politicians in whom pride was strong, as was the presentation of God as a being who was utterly transcendent and whose will was inscrutable. The Stoic and Christian philosophies were antithetical, even though they shared the superficial similarity of endorsing theism. The foundational principle of Stoicism, pride, was unequivocally denounced by Christianity. It was impossible that these proud men— few in number, but politically and socially dominant in their societies— could have believed in revealed Christianity.

This, Mandeville now argued, presented the Church of Rome with a genuine obstacle to the attainment of its objective— temporal authority; and human ingenuity was never so boundless as when faced with such impediments. Rome needed to find an ‘equivalent’ that might convince those men ‘of Bravery and Virtue’, who could not be won over by playing on a fear that they had subdued, that it was in their interest to labour for the Church. The principle of honour, one ‘the Ancients knew nothing of’, provided them with this means: it ‘seems to have been an Invention to influence Men, whom Religion had no Power over’.¹¹⁷ ‘Honour’ had, of course, been a part of the heathen lexicon, but it had been considered— as it was by Mandeville in 1714— as merely one of the moral virtues.¹¹⁸ Recognising how, in men of extravagant pride, a concern for God was all too easily ‘jostled out by others, more nearly relating to himself’, the ‘skilful Rulers’ in Christian Rome were ‘tempted to try if Man could not be made an Object of Reverence to himself’.¹¹⁹ This newer notion of honour bore no relation to either civil or divine law, but rather played upon the ‘Principle of Sovereignty’ possessed by men, which led them to consider themselves to be superior to all others.

¹¹⁷ *Origin of Honour*, pp. 14-15.

¹¹⁸ It was treated at length by Mandeville in this light in *Fable*, ‘Remark R’.

¹¹⁹ *Origin of Honour*, p. 39.

Honour was ‘an Idol, by Human Contrivance, rais’d upon the Basis of Human Pride’. It perpetuated the tendency of the proud individual— exhibited by the providential theism of the Stoic— to subordinate the divine will to his own flattering vision of both himself and the natural world.¹²⁰

As a principle, honour was ‘diametrically opposite’ to Christianity, and ‘the regulations themselves, by which Men of Honour were to walk, were openly Anti-Christian’.¹²¹ Rome artfully concealed this fact by making ‘Men stupidly believe, that the Height of Pride is not inconsistent with the greatest Humility’.¹²² This was an attempted reconciliation between ‘honnêteté humaine’ and ‘honnêteté parfait’ which Mandeville ridiculed more stridently than had Nicole. In order to win over the proud, the Papacy flattered them by offering ‘Badges of Honour’ and glorious sounding titles that even men of sense found intoxicating. Rome encouraged men to give full vent to those appetites which had been prescribed both by the ‘moral Virtue’ of the heathens and by the Gospel. By this means the greatest and bravest men— that is, those statesmen and noblemen whose pride was already greater than their fear of death or God— wielded their swords and spilt blood in the cause of Rome. ‘What contemptible Baubles’, Mandeville exclaimed, ‘has that Holy Toy-Shop put off in the Face of the Sun for the richest Merchandize! She has bribed the most Selfish and penetrating Statesmen with empty Sounds, and Titles without Meaning. The most resolute Warriors She has forced to desist from their Purposes, and do her dirty Work against their own Interest’.¹²³ It was the great achievement of ‘that Master-Piece of Human Policy, the Church of Rome’, Mandeville suggested, to have managed to convince both the proud and atheistic few and the fearful and superstitious multitude that their greatest happiness was to be found

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp. 64-6.

¹²¹ Ibid., pp. 76-7, 73.

¹²² Ibid., pp. 46-7.

¹²³ Ibid., pp. 49-50.

in labouring for its interest. This was precisely the point made, in similarly satirical manner but to a quite different end, by Shaftesbury in *Characteristics*.¹²⁴

If the principle of honour had its origins in medieval Rome, it had subsequently become detached from these moorings. The perverted form of Christianity peddled by Rome had brought chivalry into existence, with unanticipated long-term benefits. This was an interest in chivalry as a key causal factor in the development of European polite, commercial society from its feudal roots similarly evidenced by Hume in the early 1730s.¹²⁵ A culture in which status was reflected by specious titles, finery of attire and a complaisant manner was cultivated throughout the courts of Gothic Europe. The practice of duelling grew out of the trial by combat, enshrining the man of honour's right— notwithstanding the objections of both divine law and the civil magistrate— to secure reparations for slights he perceived himself to have suffered at the hands of others.¹²⁶ Princes quickly recognised the remarkable consequences of flattering the boundless self-esteem of their leading subjects. Rather than challenge the principle of honour, prudent princes such as Henry IV of France codified it in a manner that served the interests of the nation at large.¹²⁷ The gallows, to say nothing of eternal damnation, were of little concern to the man of honour. Far more intolerable was the punishment of begging for another's pardon on one's knees. Honour compelled the individual to conceal his passions with art and wit, rather than to suppress them. This made honour more attractive to, and attainable by, all men than was 'Virtue' in either its Stoic or Christian form, and 'as the Principle of Honour came to be very useful, the Notions of it, by

¹²⁴ See above, pp. 128-30.

¹²⁵ 'David Hume's "An Historical Essay on Chivalry and Modern Honour"', ed. & intro. E.C. Mossner, *Modern Philology*, 45:1 (Aug. 1947), pp. 54-60. Mossner dated this manuscript to Hume's student days, on no evidence whatsoever. M.A. Stewart has suggested, in contrast, that it was composed in the period 1730-34, at precisely the time when Hume became disenchanted with Stoic philosophy and Shaftesbury (see below, pp. 227-8): 'The Dating of Hume's Manuscripts', in P. Wood (ed.), *The Scottish Enlightenment: Essays in Reinterpretation* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 267-76. It is quite possible that Hume's interest was piqued by a reading of Mandeville's work (published 1732), but there is no solid evidence to support the contention.

¹²⁶ *Origin of Honour*, pp. 49-52.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-67.

Degrees, were industriously spread among the Multitude'.¹²⁸ Honour, Mandeville asserted, 'is more skilfully adapted to our inward Make', since 'Men are better paid for their Adherence to Honour, than they are for their Adherence to Virtue: The First requires less Self-denial; and the Rewards they receive for that Little are not imaginary but real and palpable'.¹²⁹

Every individual could aspire to imitate the man of honour in his manners and material possessions, and increasingly did so as his self-esteem increased and his fear diminished. The Reformation and its (continuing) aftermath, Mandeville argued, played a critical role in this democratisation of the principle of honour. Mandeville did not bother to conceal his contempt for Luther and Calvin. They may well have been pious and sincere, but they were (unlike the Roman clergy) entirely ignorant of human nature. Decrying the moral laxity of the Roman clergy, and denouncing the manner in which they emphasised external pomp and ritual over inner reformation, they had exposed the arts employed by Rome. They once more revealed the gulf that separated the *officium* from the *finis*, and cupidity from charity. In so doing, they 'exposed the Frauds of their Adversaries, without considering the Hardships and Difficulties, which such a Discovery would entail upon their Successors'.¹³⁰ Whereas the Roman clergy continued to emphasise the rigorous nature of Christ's moral law, they were also insightful enough to understand that no man could live such a perfect, spiritual existence, themselves included. It was for this reason that they had continued to endorse external rituals—contrary to Christ's explicit commands—that were identical to those of their pagan predecessors, and to suggest disingenuously that by these means individuals might atone for their inescapable sinfulness.

¹²⁸ Ibid., pp. 51-2.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 42.

¹³⁰ A large section of the second dialogue discussed the Reformation in these terms, and the discussion in this paragraph and the one to follow summarises Mandeville's arguments there. See, especially, *ibid.*, pp. 96-7, 111-27 (citation from p. 127).

Luther and Calvin denied the Protestant clergy these 'Frauds', and it followed that their successors were incapable of concealing their own inability to live a truly Christian life. In many Protestant nations, Mandeville argued, this had resulted in the Christian ministry giving up its pretensions to apostolic succession and superior virtue. This had not occurred in England. The Anglican Church retained its Catholic pretensions even after the Civil War, but had lost the arts employed by Rome to defend them. Consequently, in order to legitimate their claims to follow Christ they did what Rome (and even the Jesuits) had not. The 'Philosophizing Divine, or polite Preacher' diluted the moral content of Christianity, and largely ceased to play upon the fear and shame of the vulgar.¹³¹ Even Cromwell's supposedly austere Puritan army, Mandeville argued, fought so valiantly on account of the pride flattered by preachers and officers in its rank and file, not due to superior piety. Dressing them in the same apparel as their officers, but at a fraction of the cost, they had inculcated the rules of honour, not those of religion, in those under their command.¹³²

The Reformation and (continuing) schisms experienced in England had discredited the clergy and ushered in a 'modern' form of honour. This demanded 'the Height of Politeness' as reflected in one's conversation, carriage and possessions. The cunning Cromwell, presented by Mandeville as the sole example of a perfect '*Atheist*' whose pride had utterly conquered any sentiments of religion, would have to perfect the art of dancing, rather than the affectation of austere piety, were he to win the admiration of his followers in the modern day.¹³³ The role played by the Stoic moralist in a heathen age and 'the Holy Toy-Shop' and Christian preacher up until the seventeenth century was now performed by the 'Social Toyman' (the merchant). He possessed the manners required to flatter the rich and powerful

¹³¹ Ibid., pp. 75-6.

¹³² Ibid., pp. 134-5. Samuel Johnson later offered a remarkably similar account of how imitation and pride had underpinned the bravery and discipline of the rank and file in Cromwell's army: 'The Bravery of the English Common Soldiers', in *Samuel Johnson*, ed. D.J. Greene (Oxford, 1984), pp. 549-50.

¹³³ Ibid., pp. 166, 232.

and the means to meet their material desires, whilst he stimulated self-liking in the poor by employing their labour and furnishing them with the wages which allowed them to aspire to emulate their social superiors.¹³⁴ The ‘Invention of Money’, like that of honour, ‘seems to me to be a thing more skilfully adapted to the whole Bent of our Nature, than any other human Contrivance’. It encouraged aspiration amongst all ranks of men, leading them to wish, and pretend, to be what they were by nature not.¹³⁵ In making this point, Mandeville once again inverted the interpretation offered by Locke in the *Treatises*. Far from the artifice of money finding authorisation in God’s commandment to cultivate the earth, it led men entirely to deny their concupiscence and dependence upon God.¹³⁶ This act of deception—of others, but also of oneself—was most graphically displayed by the popularity of heraldry, which was ‘of all the Arts and Sciences... the most effectual to stir up and excite in Men the Passion of Self-liking, on the smallest Foundation’.¹³⁷ The *Origin of Honour* served to explain how ‘the Principle of Honour in the beginning of the last Century was melted over again, and brought to a new Standard’.¹³⁸ There was no longer, and for the first time in human history, any distinction between the ‘wise’ and the ‘vulgar’. All now acted upon the principle of self-liking. All men now shared the ‘superlative Wish’ and ‘golden Dream’, originally the preserve of the haughty Stoic philosopher, to have their excessive self-estimation flattered by others, and recognised the remarkable pleasure that resulted from such mutual complaisance.

This gave all individuals a genuine stake in society. The principle of honour allowed Mandeville to explain what, he claimed, neither Stoic philosophy nor Christian moral theology could. This was men’s sense of moral obligation, which developed not despite but

¹³⁴ *Part II*, pp. 52-3.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 352-5.

¹³⁶ See above, p. 77.

¹³⁷ *Origin of Honour*, pp. 94-5.

¹³⁸ *Fable*, ‘Remark R’, p. 218.

because of the indisputable fact that ‘every Body may find, that he loves himself better than he does others’.¹³⁹ This transformation of the human personality within society was man’s own, greatest achievement—the end product of his incessant quest to improve his condition and to transcend the evils of the natural and moral world. Cleomenes dismissed Horatio’s claim that he ‘ought to exempt and preserve [honour] from being ridicul’d’ on unimpeachably Shaftesburian grounds. Honour was artificial and, as *Characteristics* emphasised, whatever was not ‘natural’ was the just object of ridicule.¹⁴⁰ In contrast, Shaftesbury’s treatment of revealed Christianity was sorely misguided, but eminently comprehensible. The Scriptures presented man as he was by nature, not as he wished to be. It was for this reason that Shaftesbury, and a great many others in England’s thriving *beau monde*, found the Scriptures so abhorrent. As Horatio exclaimed when faced by Cleomenes’ unrelenting exposition of the true origins of society, ‘I can’t endure to see so much of my own Nakedness’.¹⁴¹ Irrespective of their truth, which Cleomenes continued to assert, the *Origin of Honour* indicated that the Scriptures were irrelevant to an understanding of men’s practical conduct in modern life. They were also increasingly found to be incredible by the modern, socialised individual who did not recognise the pusillanimous vision of human nature they presented.

Man had created a world for himself, and a sense of his ‘self’ within that world, that was entirely illusory. It was, however, the sole source of all the pleasure he experienced and the stimulus for all the industry he expended. This process was driven by the increasingly predominant passion of self-liking, leading to self-worship. It could not be understood, as Locke had argued, within the framework provided by a Christian divine teleology, because it represented the entire rejection of a dependence on God’s will as revealed to His creatures

¹³⁹ *Free Thoughts*, pp. 253-5.

¹⁴⁰ *Origin of Honour*, pp. 90-91.

¹⁴¹ *Part II*, pp. 108-109.

in the Scriptures. Just as the modern, polite individual would consider it an unpardonable affront were a neighbour to cast doubt on the authenticity of the fraudulent heraldic genealogy he had purchased, so almost all men in polite society could not stomach reminders of their true origins and nature as a species. Mandeville suggested that, as self-liking became further strengthened by education, commerce and the flattery of ‘philosophizing Divines’, this act of self-deception might become absolute. This was the remarkable consequence of the principle of honour. The individual could contract such a strong ‘Aversion to every Thing that is dishonourable’ that, even in private, he would hold himself in contempt were he to transgress the laws by which he lived, and of which he was the judge and executioner.¹⁴²

Locke had argued that divine law was of such importance because it governed men’s conduct at every moment, in public and in private. True Christians recognised God’s ability to ‘see Men in the Dark’.¹⁴³ Locke’s rather prurient interest in men’s private conduct, and his anxiety regarding their capacity for hypocrisy, was denounced by Shaftesbury, for whom (as for his Stoic guides) the unity of self from one moment to the next was of utmost importance. In *Sensus Communis*, Shaftesbury constructed a mini-dialogue between an unmistakably Lockean character and a Stoic man of virtue. The former raises the question of whether the virtuous man would behave identically ‘if it were in the dark’. The latter responds with disgust: ‘Honour myself I never could while I had no better a sense of what *in reality* I owed myself, and what became me as a human creature’.¹⁴⁴ In *Origin of Honour* Mandeville agreed with Locke that, in theory, ‘a good Christian is all of a Piece; his Life is uniform’. He continued that ‘it is very plain, that there are few sincere Christians’, by which he meant none. In the absence of efficacious grace, no man could live a truly Christian life,

¹⁴² *Origin of Honour*, pp. 86-8.

¹⁴³ *EHU*, 3.1.6, p. 69.

¹⁴⁴ *Sensus Communis*, pp. 57-9.

and (as Bayle had shown) his practice diverged widely from his professed speculative precepts.¹⁴⁵ The principle of honour, which represented pride's triumph over men's other passions, could— as Shaftesbury unwittingly showed— potentially allow for precisely such uniformity between principle and practice at all times. This, however, was the victory of pride and not of philosophy. For the man of honour, contrary to Shaftesbury's incessant fears, 'Self is never forgot'. It was for this reason that the principle of honour (self-idolatry) was so powerful.¹⁴⁶

In his remarkable attempt to respond to Shaftesbury's '*Social System*' on 'diametrically opposite' principles, Mandeville produced the purest rendition of an unmistakably Epicurean moral theory, one almost entirely detached from its moorings in Augustinian Christianity. Indeed, there is a discernibly utopian dimension to Mandeville's mature philosophical thought. 'Honour' as a principle was 'artificial', and diametrically opposite to Christianity. It could achieve for unregenerate mankind what Christianity might for the regenerate— it saw men in the dark, and allowed for a uniformity of 'self' at all times. That 'self' was emphatically social. As honour increasingly governed the conduct of all men in commercial society the need for civil law, instantiated as the necessary means to curb man's natural lawlessness, increasingly diminished. The individual became his own legislator. Henry IV's codification of the rules of honour showed how this process ought to be encouraged by the prudent magistrate. With commerce and trade, men's self-liking and acquisitive personality were perpetuated. The politician (still less the moralist) was increasingly redundant: 'the whole Machine may be made to play of itself, with as little Skill, as is required to wind up a Clock'.¹⁴⁷ The gallows, along with the threat of eternal punishment, were progressively less necessary. A social and moral 'conscience'— that is, an obligatory

¹⁴⁵ *Origin of Honour*, pp. 80-81.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 135-6.

¹⁴⁷ *Part II*, pp. 322-3.

moral law the sanctions of which were internal and irresistible— was created where none had existed previously.

From a different perspective, Mandeville reinforced Shaftesbury's claim that the middle ground Locke had sought to occupy between the Stoic and Epicurean traditions, and between human natural and positive law and Christian moral theology, was utterly untenable. Whether in doing so Mandeville was, like Shaftesbury, led outside of Christian belief is a moot point. When pushed by Horatio to justify his belief in revelation, having decimated all arguments from natural religion, Cleomenes' response was that he believed 'because I can't help it'.¹⁴⁸ If men required a touchstone for moral and religious truth, and indeed for an authentic (pre-social) 'self', then it was only to be found in a literal (hyper-Augustinian) reading of the Scriptures.¹⁴⁹ These portrayed man as he was in nature. It was their quest for happiness in this life, and their identification of the best means to attain it (the *utile*), which could alone explain mankind's development from the most unsociable, lazy and selfish of animals to the most interdependent and industrious. Quite where this left the Christian believer was, Mandeville continually emphasised, not his concern. It was a question for the individual, rather than for the politician or philosopher.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 309.

¹⁴⁹ The phrase 'hyper-Augustinian' has been coined by Taylor, who largely employs it with reference to the French Jansenists: *Sources of the Self*, p. 246 and passim.

The decades following Mandeville's death saw the publication in England of two extraordinary works by ordained Anglican ministers. The first was Warburton's *Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated* (1738-41); the second, Middleton's *Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers* (1749). The contemporary fame (or notoriety) these iconoclastic works secured for their authors is reflected in the fact that they are the only two writers mentioned by name by Hume in his brief autobiographical sketch, 'My Own Life' (1776).¹ The ambition—let alone the heterodoxy—of these works provides an indication of how grave the challenge posed by the attempts of Shaftesbury and Mandeville to provide a non-Christian system of ethics was considered to be to the conventional foundations upon which Christianity was defended. Warburton and Middleton both took that challenge very seriously indeed. It comes as no surprise that the attempt to reconsider the relationship between reason and faith came from within Christianity—as it had in Locke's initial, deeply troubling treatment of the question. Both Middleton and Warburton entered, in the latter's words, into 'the very *Penetralia* of Antiquity' in order to uncover 'the State and Condition of the *human Mind*, before Revelation'.² What had philosophy furnished by way of moral and religious knowledge, and how had Christ's revelation affirmed, enlarged upon or undermined what had been discovered?

In confronting this pressing question, Warburton dismissed entirely the value of heathen philosophy.³ He endorsed Shaftesbury's interpretation of ancient philosophy as split into two exclusive traditions—the Stoic and the Epicurean—and argued that the metaphysical

¹ David Hume 'My Own Life' (1776), in *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary* ed. E.F. Miller (Indianapolis, 1985), pp. xxxi-xli.

² William Warburton, *The Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated, on the Principles of a Religious Deist* (2 vols., London, 1738-41), i, pp. 414-15.

³ For recent discussions of Warburton's *Divine Legation*, see Young, *Religion and Enlightenment*, Ch. 5; Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, v, pp. 219-37; Robert G. Ingram, 'William Warburton, Divine Action, and Enlightened Christianity', in W. Gibson & R.G. Ingram (eds.), *Religious Identities in Britain, 1660-1832* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 97-117; and Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, pp. 280-83.

assumptions of both contradicted revealed truth. Both led to atheism. Epicureanism, as Shaftesbury argued, reduced all to atoms and chance, and precluded the possibility of an intelligent and just creating deity who took an interest in human life. Bayle and Mandeville furnished Warburton with his main arguments against the Stoic vision of an immanent deity, whose will and justice they made identical with their own. Warburton dismissed academic scepticism, as had Shaftesbury, as ‘*an exercise or sophistry rather than a philosophy*’: Cicero was not, therefore, an exception to be salvaged from the wreckage. In contrast to both Shaftesbury and Mandeville, Warburton argued that the doctrine of a future state had been publicly taught in the heathen world on account of its observable social and moral utility. Civil society could not cohere without the promise of eternal rewards.⁴ It was because the doctrine had *not* been taught in Mosaic Israel that ‘demonstrated’ that the Jews enjoyed God’s particular providence. Yet prior to revelation no philosopher had believed in the doctrine, with the exception of Socrates. Christ’s dispensation had transformed human understanding, consigning the absurd moral and religious philosophies of the speculative heathens to the dustbin. At the heart of Warburton’s paradoxical syllogism was the claim that Christianity was nonetheless eminently ‘reasonable’, even if it had not appeared so to the later heathen philosophers. This had only, and for all time, been established with Newton’s demonstration of the laws of motion and the necessity of a first (immaterial) cause of the universe.⁵ This had confirmed on the basis of philosophy what had only previously been established on that of revelation: the providential harmony that existed between observable worldly utility (enshrined in moral codes and positive law) and objective truth (moral theology). This, Warburton argued, was a relationship that had been entirely

⁴ This was also the guiding theme of Warburton’s earlier work: *The Alliance between Church and State: or, the Necessity and Equity of an Established Religion and a Test-Law Demonstrated* (London, 1736). For the highly ‘personal and idiosyncratic’ nature of Warburton’s defence of the establishment in church and state, see Stephen Taylor, ‘William Warburton and the Alliance of Church and State’, *Ecclesiastical History*, 43:2 (1992), pp. 271-86.

⁵ Warburton repeatedly praised his friend Andrew Baxter’s *Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul* (London, 1733) for developing precisely this argument regarding the seminal importance of Newton.

misunderstood by the heathen philosophers as by their modern acolytes, among whom Warburton included almost all Christian apologists with the notable exception of Locke.

At the time that Warburton began honing the arguments of the *Divine Legation*, in 1736, he initiated a friendship with Middleton, largely conducted by means of a voluminous correspondence.⁶ Middleton was then drafting his *History of the Life of Cicero*, which would eventually be published in the same year as the second volume of the *Divine Legation* (1741). Both writers recognised ‘the Life of Tully & the Divine Legation’ to be confronting many of the same questions, and Warburton expressed his hope to Philip Doddridge that they ‘may be always read together’.⁷ The *Life* has, however, been read quite differently by modern commentators. It secured the subscriptions of the great and the good in Walpolean England, and was an unapologetic panegyric to the heathen philosopher. The rigorous standards of source criticism so ably deployed by Middleton in his unstinting critical assault on the sacred sources attesting to the post-apostolic miracles in his *Free Inquiry*, as in his earlier contributions to theological debate, appeared to have deserted him. Stephen and Trevor-Roper, who found in Middleton the pioneer of a modern, secular historical approach, were at a loss to explain why he, in the words of Thomas Babington Macaulay, condescended to compose ‘a lying legend of St. Tully’, deifying ‘the most eloquent and accomplished trimmer’ to be found in the annals of history.⁸ In order to explain this obvious exception to the rule that everything Middleton wrote was ‘provocative, scholarly— and right’, Trevor-Roper

⁶ Warburton also visited Middleton in Cambridge on at least three occasions (in April 1736, May 1738, and July 1740), as recorded by Warburton’s expressions of gratitude. The most thorough account of the relationship between Warburton and Middleton remains that of John Selby Watson, *The Life of William Warburton, D.D.: Lord Bishop of Gloucester from 1760-1779; with Remarks on his Works* (London, 1863), pp. 258-63, 369-73.

⁷ Warburton to Middleton, 29 Apr. 1741, in British Library [BL] Egerton 1953, f. 51; Warburton to Doddridge, ?Mar. 1741, in *The Correspondence and Diary of Philip Doddridge*, ed. J.D. Humphreys (5 vols., London, 1829-31), iv, p. 13.

⁸ Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Critical and Historical Essays Contributed to the Edinburgh Review* (London, 1877), p. 348. The comments on Middleton appeared in a review, in July 1837, of Basil Montagu’s *The Works of Francis Bacon, Lord Chancellor of England* (16 vols., London, 1825-34).

endorsed two allegations levelled at the work by far from disinterested contemporaries.⁹ The first, and more credible accusation, was that the *Life* was an opportunistic attempt by Middleton to salvage his orthodox credentials and to secure political patronage. On this reading, it was primarily a political intervention, defending the pragmatic policies of Walpole's ministry from the attacks levelled by the political opposition.¹⁰ The second, which has since been disproved, was that it was plagiarised from an obscure seventeenth-century work.¹¹ Despite Middleton having spent more than a decade composing and then defending the *Life*, Trevor-Roper argued that he had little intellectual investment in it.¹² It followed that it could shed negligible light on Middleton's intentions in the *Free Inquiry*.

There is good textual evidence to support an interpretation of the *Life* within the context against which Warburton evidently read it, at Middleton's invitation and with his approval. This context has been reconstructed in the previous chapters. Middleton, in contrast to the pugilistic Warburton, scarcely mentioned either Shaftesbury or Mandeville in his published

⁹ Hugh R. Trevor-Roper, 'From Deism to History: Conyers Middleton', in *History and the Enlightenment*, ed. J. Robertson (London, 2010), p. 92; Stephen, *English Thought*, ii, pp. 253-74. Fittingly, Trevor-Roper's essay was initially delivered at Cambridge in 1982 as the Leslie Stephen Lecture.

¹⁰ William Guthrie opined that Middleton was 'a writer as tame in Politics as he is bold in Religion', whilst Tobias Smollett's Tory-leaning *Critical Review* accused him of culling 'the fairest flowers of Tully's rhetoric to compose a garland for the temples of a minister' (Walpole): Guthrie, *Cicero's Epistles to Atticus* (2 vols., London, 1752), ii, p. vi; *Critical Review*, XVI (1763), pp. 401-402; 'Oxford Scholar', *The Death of M—n in the Life of Cicero. Being a Proper Criticism on that Marvellous Performance* (London, 1741), makes much the same case. A similar interpretation of the work is offered by Reed Browning, *The Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs* (London, 1982), pp. 35-66, 210-56; and Addison Ward, 'The Tory View of Roman History', *Studies in English Literature*, 4:3 (Summer 1964), pp. 413-56.

¹¹ In the 1780s, Samuel Parr and Joseph Wharton accused Middleton of plagiarising William Bellenden's *De Tribus Luminibus Romanorum* (1633): on which, see Joseph Levine, 'Et tu Brute? History and Forgery in Eighteenth-Century England', in M. Harris & R. Myers (eds.), *Fakes and Frauds: Varieties of Deception in Print and Manuscript* (Winchester, 1989), pp. 71-97. Although Middleton owned Bellenden's work, M.L. Clarke has established that Middleton's borrowings were slight, and the form and style of his work very different: 'Conyers Middleton's Alleged Plagiarism', *Notes & Queries*, 30:1 (Feb. 1983), pp. 44-6. Stephen ignored the *Life* altogether in *English Thought*, but endorsed the allegations of plagiarism in his ODNB entry on Middleton of 1894.

¹² Middleton subsequently published two works that were intended to defend the interpretation he offered in the *Life*: *The Epistles of M.T. Cicero to M. Brutus, and of Brutus to Cicero* (London, 1743); and *A Treatise on the Roman Senate* (London, 1747). Both were reprinted in *The Miscellaneous Works of the Late Reverend and Learned Conyers Middleton, D.D.* (4 vols., London, 1752), iv, pp. 247-437; iii, pp. 379-471.

writings, however.¹³ His explicit intention was to distinguish ‘the clear Dictates of God from the vain Conceits & Deductions of Men’, and thereby to reconcile ‘the Gospel with the Dictates of right Reason, the Revealed with the Natural Law’. This was a reconciliation that Middleton, not unreasonably, considered both Shaftesbury and Mandeville to have deemed impossible.¹⁴ The writings of Cicero were of central importance to Middleton’s earlier works of Christian apologetic, which mined many of the same themes that would be taken further in the *Free Inquiry*— a point largely ignored by Trevor-Roper and Stephen.¹⁵ Middleton and Warburton’s friendship, meanwhile, did not survive the publication of the two works in 1741, which revealed just how different, indeed contradictory, were their attempts to reconsider the relationship between natural law and moral theology. Middleton, unlike Warburton, was entirely unwilling to sacrifice ancient philosophy in the cause of defending revelation, which he argued was self-defeating. Unless the moral doctrines delivered by Christ could be shown to be consistent with the insights gleaned by those who had endeavoured the hardest to understand human life, then the individual, try as he might, would be incapable of believing Christianity to be of divine origin or adopting it as a guide.

Middleton nonetheless agreed with Warburton that the dogmatic philosophies of the Stoics and Epicureans had failed to provide a sufficient guide to life. This was not to say that philosophy could not play this role. The *Life* was, in fact, not simply a panegyric to Cicero. It was a vindication of a very particular philosophy— academic scepticism. As Warburton

¹³ Warburton’s pugilistic tendencies are well brought out by Arthur W. Evans in an otherwise sympathetic treatment of his subject: *Warburton and the Warburtonians: a Study in some Eighteenth-Century Controversies* (London, 1932).

¹⁴ ‘Apology for my Writings’ (unpublished; c.1746), transcribed by Thomas Birch: BL Additional Manuscripts [Add. MS] 4478b (Birch Papers), ff. 26-45 (on f. 40r). The only mention of Mandeville in Middleton’s published works is to be found in *The History of the Life of Marcus Tullius Cicero* (2 vols., London, 1741), ii, pp. 501-502, whilst Shaftesbury was studiously ignored. Both Shaftesbury and Mandeville were, however, repeatedly discussed by Middleton in his private correspondence.

¹⁵ Cicero was also, as contemporaries recognised, of seminal importance in Middleton’s cultivation of a prose style that was accepted even by his critics to be peerless. Thomas Gray noted how Middleton had acquired the ‘elegance’ of his ‘flowing diction’ from ‘great attention to & study of the writings of Cicero’: Norton Nicholls, ‘Reminiscences of Gray, 18 November 1805’, in P. Toynbee & L. Whibley (eds.), *The Correspondence of Thomas Gray: 1766–1771* (3 vols., Oxford, 1935), iii, pp. 1288-1304.

recognised, their differences could be distilled into one fundamental point: 'his account of the Academic Sect and Tully's sentiments are opposed to mine'.¹⁶ As had Locke half a century before, Middleton found in Cicero's eclecticism the means to explain the error of those who placed their faith in the sufficiency of philosophy, or who demanded an absolute and uncritical subscription to the literal truth of revelation. This, Middleton argued, reflected a general failure to comprehend the true importance of philosophy as an open-ended activity that defined human existence, and of religious faith as the only reasonable outcome of this continuing search for meaning and truth in human life.

Although making no claim to the title of philosopher, Middleton did profess to be a very particular type of Protestant Christian, which demanded that one philosophize. It was not to the writings of Locke that Middleton turned in order to make the troubling case that only Ciceronian academic scepticism could provide the foundations for genuine Christian belief.¹⁷ He drew instead, as several historians have recently recognised, from a distinctly irenic tradition within Christian humanism, most notably enshrined in the writings of Desiderius Erasmus and William Chillingworth.¹⁸ The importance of this European tradition was influentially explored by Trevor-Roper, which makes it all the more curious that he was subsequently so keen, against all the evidence, to exclude Middleton from it.¹⁹ As had Erasmus, Middleton emphasised the continuity between the heathen and Christian worlds, and suggested that revelation had altered very little. Those few Christians willing to examine their own faith faced essentially the same doubts experienced by Cicero. It was precisely these doubts which orthodoxies of all stripes acted to deny. Yet it was only on the grounds

¹⁶ Warburton to Doddridge, ?Mar. 1741, in *Correspondence of Doddridge*, iv, p. 13.

¹⁷ Although Middleton owned both the *Essay* and the *Letters* on toleration, he made no mention of Locke in his published works until the 1747 *Introductory Discourse*: see below, p. 212.

¹⁸ Young, 'Historical Consequences of Heterodoxy'; Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, v, pp. 219-37; and Robert G. Ingram, "'The Weight of Historical Evidence': Conyers Middleton and the Eighteenth-Century Miracles Debate', in R.D. Cornwall & W. Gibson (eds.), *Religion, Politics and Dissent: Essays in Honour of James E. Bradley* (Farnham, 2010), pp. 85-109.

¹⁹ Trevor-Roper, 'Religious Origins of the Enlightenment'; and idem, 'Great Tew Circle'.

of doubt, and a just recognition of the limits of reason to establish truths in morality and religion, that the individual might find something of value in the teachings of the Gospels. Ciceronian academic scepticism was an eclectic philosophy practised, as Middleton emphasised, by almost no others in the late Hellenistic period and few in the modern. In his claim that this philosophy alone provided the moral insights upon which Christ's philosophy enlarged, Middleton took the Erasmian tradition to its furthest limits. Almost none were capable of enduring the doubts and uncertainties of true sceptical philosophy, and establishing natural religion on its rightful foundations. It followed that a similarly minute number had recognised the moral significance of the Christian revelation and been true followers of Christ.

i. *A Letter from Rome (1729)*

In contrast to Warburton, Middleton's apologetic writings were written in a self-consciously personal idiom and presented in a style that permitted an intimacy between author and reader. Middleton intended his writings to act as a catalyst in 'opening Men's Minds, & disposing them to examine things, & to think for themselves, & to search into the Grounds of their Duty, their chief Happiness & End, for which they were formed'.²⁰ His early decades as student, fellow and University librarian at Trinity College, Cambridge were crucial in shaping his views on this head, just as Warburton's lack of formal education and relative intellectual isolation in Newark informed the decidedly bookish nature of his learning.²¹

²⁰ 'Apology', ff. 26-45.

²¹ Warburton was an autodidact *par excellence*, the son of a small-town attorney whose formal education extended no further than the local grammar school: see Evans, *Warburton*, pp. 1-15; and Hurd's prefatory 'Discourse' to *The Works of the Right Reverend William Warburton, Lord Bishop of Gloucester* (7 vols., London, 1788), i, Sect. I. The most thorough account of Middleton's years at Cambridge is provided by Trevor-Roper, 'Conyers Middleton', who discusses his early skirmishes with Richard Bentley, Master of Trinity, which have necessarily been excluded here.

Thinking for oneself was emphasised by Middleton, he later reflected, because ‘I had but little acquaintance with it in early life’.²²

Middleton’s youthful views in politics and ecclesiology endorse John Gascoigne’s interpretation of Cambridge as, by 1688, having been transformed under the influence of William Sancroft from a seedbed of Puritanism and political radicalism to a citadel of the Restoration church and state.²³ A proctor’s report from 1710, relating a disturbance at the Rose Tavern, places Middleton in the company of the University’s Tory MPs, Dixie Windsor and Arthur Annesley (later earl of Anglesey), drinking loudly to Sacheverell’s health.²⁴ From the 1730s, Middleton reflected on his ‘former sins of credulity’ with regret, and on the non-juring principles he had imbibed with distaste: ‘Those principles I could never digest, from the time, when I began to think & judge for myself, & they gave me the first disgust, to what was then sanctified by the title of orthodoxy: nor has the authority of those ancient Fathers, from whom they are derived, altered my opinion of them: nor can any authority indeed ever persuade me, to receive as sacred & divine, what my sense & reason declare to be absurd & superstitious’.²⁵

Middleton’s first published work of note can be read as distinctly autobiographical. The full title of the work gives fair warning of the central thesis it conveyed: *A Letter from Rome, Shewing an Exact Conformity between Popery and Paganism: or the Religion of the Present Romans, Derived from that of their Heathen Ancestors* (1729).²⁶ Middleton claimed that the work was drawn from a series of letters written from Rome to an intimate friend in England. Whilst he

²² Middleton to John, Lord Hervey, 31 Jan. 1734, in Suffolk Record Office [SRO] 941/47/7 (Hervey Papers).

²³ John Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of Enlightenment: Science, Religion and Politics from the Restoration to the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1989).

²⁴ The report can be found in the Heberden Papers: BL Add. MS 32459, f. 12.

²⁵ Middleton to Birch, 19 Nov. 1747, in BL Add. MS 4314b, f. 24.

²⁶ In *Miscellaneous Works*, iii, pp. 1-132. This includes the Prefatory Discourse and Postscript, added to the second (1741) edition; but the original (1729) body of the work remained identical between editions. References to the *Letter* will be made in brackets in the text.

travelled to Italy, in 1723-4, no such letters survive (LR, 61).²⁷ Middleton adopted the guise of the polite Protestant traveller, whose interest lay in ‘the genuine Remains and *venerable Reliques of Pagan Rome*; the *authentick Monuments of Antiquity*’, rather than in ‘the fopperies and ridiculous ceremonies of the *present Religion* of the place’ (LR, 66-9).²⁸ Middleton professed to realise, however, that it was the latter which provided unmediated access to the lost world of classical antiquity: ‘As oft as I was present at any religious exercise in *their Churches*, it was more natural, to fancy myself looking on at some *solemn act of idolatry in old Rome*, than assisting at a worship, instituted on the principles, and formed upon the plan of Christianity’ (LR, 69).

Incense, candles, relics and a superstitious belief in the daily intercession of myriad saints all appeared to have been incorporated wholesale into Christian practice from heathen polytheism. The absurd miracle stories concocted by opportunistic priests also built upon tropes found in the writings of the heathen philosophers, with two important differences. First, forged Christian miracles, unlike the ancient, undermined rather than encouraged the social virtues and industry. They were used to justify articles of belief that were too absurd even for the pagans, who would certainly have balked at the concept of eating their gods (LR, 94).²⁹ Second, even the wisest in Catholic societies believed, or were compelled to claim to believe, that such stories and articles of faith were literally true, in contrast to the mockery of the superstitions of the vulgar to be found in Ovid, Cicero and ‘many of the wisest Heathens’ (LR, 83).

²⁷ Middleton’s correspondence with his Italian acquaintances, commencing in 1725, is in the Heberden Papers: BL Add. MS 32457.

²⁸ There is no reason to doubt this claim. Middleton travelled to Rome with Lord Coleraine, the vice-president of the Society of Antiquaries, of which a number of his friends as a young Fellow at Cambridge (notably Anglesey and Edward, earl of Oxford) were also founding members: Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: the Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London, 2004), pp. 81-118. The ‘grand tour’ was, of course, the final stage in the humanistic education of Protestant gentlemen: Jeremy Black, *Italy and the Grand Tour* (London, 2003).

²⁹ Although not cited, Middleton here paraphrased Cicero’s *De Natura Deorum*, 3.16.41: ‘do you suppose that anybody can be so insane as to believe that the food he eats is a god?’

At first glance the *Letter* was a highly conventional work, as Middleton emphasised (LR, 61). It appeared to fit within a well-established tradition of Protestant apologetic originating with Martin Luther. In an English context, this had recently been exploited by Addison in his enormously popular *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* (1705).³⁰ For this reason Robert Ingram suggests that it was ‘unobjectionable stuff in an age given over to strident anti-popery’.³¹ This is a questionable judgement. Addison’s *Remarks* compared the superstition and slavery of modern Italy with the liberty and enlightened Protestantism enjoyed in England. The tenor of Middleton’s *Letter* notably lacked any such triumphalism or complacency.³² Middleton intimated that, from its inception, Christianity had become corrupted by the superstitions of polytheism. It was in this vein that he judged the account of ‘the *source and origin* of the *Popish Ceremonies*’ provided by ‘many of *our Divines*’ to be unsatisfactory. Here Middleton alluded to the orthodox interpretation of corruptions as only sneaking into the purity of Christian worship during the Middle Ages, and supposedly expunged at the Reformation (LR, 69). Middleton cited St. Paul in accepting that some degree of accommodation with the superstitions of a populace who considered their fortunes to be inextricably tied to the placating of numerous deities, now reconstituted as Christian saints, had been necessary as primitive Christians sought to convert the gentiles (LR, 87-9). Due to a combination of the impurity of their own theism and an increasing appreciation of how superstition allowed them to gain temporal authority, however, the Church Fathers and those priests who claimed to derive their authority from them had increasingly enshrined fundamental features of polytheism within their definitions of Christian orthodoxy.

³⁰ On Addison’s *Remarks*, see Donald R. Johnson, ‘Addison in Italy’, *Modern Language Studies*, 6:1 (Spring 1976), pp. 32-6. Middleton drew from Addison frequently: see, for example, Middleton’s citation of Addison’s scorn for the ‘*authentic miracles of Italy*’ as ‘*the most bungling tricks, that he had ever seen*’ (LR, 110). This tradition had a longer afterlife than might be imagined: Clare Haynes, “‘A Trial for the Patience of Reason?’ Grand Tourists and Anti-Catholicism after 1745’, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 33:2 (June 2010), pp. 195-208.

³¹ Ingram, ‘Weight of Historical Evidence’, p. 100. Ingram’s claim receives a degree of support from the laudatory review the work received in *The Present State of the Republick of Letters*, 3 (June 1729), pp. 420-38.

³² The polemical and political intent of Addison’s account did not go unnoticed, as Johnson caustically remarked that it ‘might have been written at home’: *The Lives of the English Poets*, ed. G.B. Hill (3 vols., Oxford, 1905), ii, p. 87.

Rather than looking to Luther's *Theses* or to Addison, the *Letter from Rome* contains distinctive ambiguities that reveal Middleton's debt to two other sources: Erasmus's *Dialogus Ciceronianus* (1528), and Chillingworth's *Religion of Protestants* (1638). In Middleton's later writings, his sympathy for these authors and these particular works is abundantly attested. It is no surprise that Middleton found it easy to identify with Chillingworth. A staunch monarchist and zealous Laudian in his youth, he had been converted not merely to Catholicism but to the Society of Jesus. Middleton later maintained that this was an entirely rational move should one seek to base one's faith on a continuity of tradition, and the teachings of an authoritative church supported by the evidence of miracles.³³ Chillingworth, however, returned from Rome a 'confirm'd Protestant' but a sceptical Anglican. He recognised that the Scriptures, rather than one true church which may never have existed, provided the sole guide to salvation. Chillingworth subsequently refused to subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles (largely on account of the first, which endorsed the Athanasian Creed) until sufficiently assured that they were intended merely to secure order and decorum not to compel belief.³⁴ Middleton's *Letter* deliberately invited his reader to take a similar, metaphorical voyage to Rome, and to question the foundations upon which he built his own faith.³⁵

³³ Locke similarly recommended Chillingworth's defence of his confessional manoeuvrings in the *Religion of Protestants* as the model of right reasoning. 'The constant reading of *Chillingworth*,... by his example will teach both perspicuity, and the way of Right Reasoning better than any Book I know': 'Mr Locke's Extempore Advice &c.', in *Some Thoughts concerning Education*, p. 321. For details of Chillingworth's eventful life, see Robert R. Orr, *Reason and Authority: the Thought of William Chillingworth* (London, 1967).

³⁴ 'An Account of What Moved the Author to Turn Papist, with his Own Confutation of the Arguments that Perswaded him Thereto', in *The Works of William Chillingworth*, 7th edn (London, 1719), pp. 39-41.

³⁵ The metaphor of travelling with 'indifference', in search of a city never to be found, recurs in Chillingworth's writings. Speaking of himself, he noted in a famous passage that he knew of a man who was 'a moderate Protestant' but 'turn'd a Papist'. However 'the same man afterwards upon a better consideration, became a doubting Papist, and of a doubting Papist, a confirm'd Protestant. And yet this man thinks himself no more to blame for all these changes than a Travailer, who using all his diligence to find the right way to some remote City, where he never had been, (as the party I speak of had never been in Heaven,) yet did mistake it, and after finde his error, and amend it': *The Religion of Protestants a Safe Way to Salvation* (Oxford, 1638; repr. Merston, 1972), pp. 301-304.

Middleton's suggestion that conniving, self-interested priests had cultivated the superstitions of the vulgar might seem to align him with the freethinking critique of 'priestcraft' developed not least by Shaftesbury and Mandeville. More compelling is the fact that Middleton's sojourn in Rome coincided with the publication of Pietro Giannone's *Istoria Civile del Regno di Napoli* (1723). This work saw its author mercilessly hounded by the forces of Catholic orthodoxy, eventually dying (after a long confinement) in a Savoyard prison in 1748. An English translation of this work was published in 1729, the same year as the *Letter from Rome*, and Middleton's name appears on the list of subscribers.³⁶ Giannone emphasised the importance of applying the same critical standards to the sources of ecclesiastical as of civil history. This was a notable feature of Middleton's own practice, and informed his later claim that 'the History of the Gospel, I hope may be true, though the History of the Church be fabulous'.³⁷ This, however, cut both ways. It was Middleton's criticism not solely of the 'orthodox' who uncritically accepted the supposedly sacred sources of ecclesiastical history, but also of polite Protestants who drew in a similarly uncritical manner from the literary remains of classical antiquity, that gives the *Letter* its peculiarly ambivalent quality.

In his 'Preface', Middleton emphasised that those Catholic individuals whose acquaintance he had made on his travels were, to a man, civil, polite and learned (*LR*, 62). It was a prejudice ingrained from education and custom that led them to accept the absurd impostures of their national religion, rather than stupidity. Yet the Protestant tourist, mocking the ridiculous prejudices of the Catholic, was himself blinkered in his uncritical

³⁶ Middleton's library contains James Ogilvie's 1729 edition of Giannone's work: *A Catalogue of the Entire Library of the Reverend Conyers Middleton, D.D.* (London, 1751), entry 87, p. 16. The list of subscribers to *The Civil History of the Kingdom of Naples* (2 vols., London, 1729) contains the entry 'Conyers Middleton, D.D. Principal Library-keeper to the University of Cambridge'. Middleton read and wrote Italian fluently, which supports the contention that he might have read Giannone in the original in 1723-4: see the letters from the mid-1720s to Italian correspondents in BL Add. MS 32457. On Giannone, and specifically on Ogilvie's edition, see Hugh R. Trevor-Roper, 'Pietro Giannone and Great Britain', in *History and the Enlightenment*, pp. 34-53.

³⁷ *A Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers, which are Supposed to have Subsisted in the Christian Church, from the Earliest Ages through Several Successive Centuries* (1749), in *Miscellaneous Works*, i, p. 131.

reverence for the literary bequest of the heathen philosophers and historians. Middleton immediately questioned whether the prejudice of the Protestant was qualitatively different from that of his antagonist. Classical histories, ‘by the early prejudice of being the first knowledge that we acquire, as well as the delight, which they give, in describing the lives and manners of the greatest men, who ever lived, gain so much upon our riper age, as to exclude too often other more useful and necessary studies’ (LR, 66-7). Here Middleton struck an unmistakably Erasmian chord, to achieve a distinctly Chillingworthian end. Most ‘moderate Protestants’ had scarcely considered their religious beliefs, or why they professed to follow Christ, any more than had Catholics.

In the dedicatory epistles to his enormously popular editions of Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations* and *De Officiis*, Erasmus continually emphasised how his classical scholarship was merely a means to ‘escape from my books’. It was a chance to ‘pause for two or three days in my other projects, in which I’m doing what I can to advance evangelism’, which was the true vocation and calling of a Christian.³⁸ In the *Dialogus Ciceronianus*, Erasmus excoriated those Italian humanists who were ‘Christians only in name’. Though they had ‘Jesus on [their] lips... it’s Jupiter Optimus Maximus and Romulus that [they] have in [their] hearts’. In biting satirical fashion, Erasmus drew attention to the continuity that he saw as so evident between the ceremonies he witnessed in Pope Julius II’s Rome, and those reported in the pages of classical (heathen) authors.³⁹ Erasmus’s reverence for Cicero’s writings was unbounded. It was predicated, however, upon the conviction that Cicero (unlike his modern,

³⁸ Erasmus’s dedicatory epistles are translated and reprinted in J. Martindale (ed.), *English Humanism, Wyatt to Cowley* (London, 1985), pp. 123-5 (*De Officiis*), 126-9 (*Tusculan Disputations*).

³⁹ Erasmus, *Dialogus Ciceronianus* (1528), in *The Collected Works of Erasmus* (86 vols., Toronto, 1974-93), xxviii, ed. A.H.T. Levi (1986), pp. 323-448 (on pp. 394-5). For the context in which Erasmus composed the work, see the editor’s introduction, pp. 323-36; and the introduction to *Ciceronian Controversies*, ed. J. Dellaneva & trans. B. Duvick (Harvard, 2007), pp. vii-xxxvi. For Erasmus’s posthumous influence, see Bruce Mansfield, *Phoenix of his Age: Interpretations of Erasmus, c.1550-1750* (Toronto, 1979); and idem, *Interpretations of Erasmus, c.1750-1920: Man on his Own* (Toronto, 1992). For more specific discussion of Chillingworth and Erasmus’s importance to the ‘anti-dogmatic’ tradition of religious liberalism in England, see Young, *Religion and Enlightenment*, pp. 22-4.

supposedly Christian acolytes) would have recognised clearly how Christ's teachings affirmed and enlarged upon the limited insights he had gleaned by means of philosophy alone. Indeed, 'if he had studied the philosophy of Christ, he would, I think, have been numbered with those who are now honoured as saints'.⁴⁰

Cicero was unique, Erasmus argued, because he had seen through the errors of the dogmatic Stoics and Epicureans, who claimed to explain fully man's true end. For Erasmus, Cicero was emphatically an academic sceptic, not a dogmatic Stoic as his scholastic Italian interlocutors suggested. This was of great consequence, and explained why his philosophy chimed so perfectly with that revealed by Christ. Academic sceptics were 'the least assuming of philosophers', recognising that 'human affairs are so complex and obscure that nothing can be known for certain'. Erasmus contrasted their humility with the pride, vanity and dogmatism of the Stoics.⁴¹ Erasmus alluded to the passage in *Tusculan Disputations* (1.2.4) which, it was suggested in Chapter 1, was of such consequence for Locke's consideration of the relationship between natural and revealed law from 1663-4.⁴² Cicero, unlike the dogmatic sects by which he was surrounded, had managed to 'put his precepts into practice in his own life'. Philosophy had for him, unlike for almost all others, provided a guide to life.⁴³ Indeed, Cicero set an example of virtue which all too few Christians, despite enjoying the light provided by the Gospel, had matched. Cicero's belief in 'the immortality of the soul and on the different destinies or rewards that await men in the afterlife', which Erasmus did not doubt, was (in the absence of revelation) established solely on the basis of probability, faith and hope. It was upon such foundations, Erasmus averred, that Christ had built his church.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 445.

⁴¹ Erasmus, *Praise of Folly* (1511), ed. A.H.T. Levi (London, 1971), pp. 70-71.

⁴² See above, pp. 50-51.

⁴³ Erasmus, 'Dedicatory Epistle' to *Tusculan Disputations*, p. 126.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 127.

Whilst there is no compelling evidence that Locke read Erasmus closely in the 1660s—albeit his presentation of Cicero in his subsequent works was almost identical—it is clear from Middleton’s published as well as private papers that his admiration for Cicero was mediated through Erasmus. In Middleton’s hands it again became clear how a reading of Cicero as an eclectic philosopher permitted a distinctive, determinedly heterodox answer to the question at the very heart of contemporary theological and philosophical debate after Locke. This regarded the relationship between the useful and the true, and of how (or whether) these might be reconciled.

ii. *A Letter to Waterland and the Defences (1731-33)*

If the heterodox implications of Middleton’s *Letter from Rome* were largely concealed beneath its conventional veneer, the same was not true of his *Letter to Waterland* (1731). This work placed a black mark against Middleton’s name, precluding the possibility of further preferment within the Church. It represented a decidedly idiosyncratic intervention in a debate between freethinkers and their orthodox opponents in England, in which Cicero was a fiercely contested figure. The immediate stimulus for Middleton’s composition of the work was the intemperate reply offered by the ultra-orthodox Daniel Waterland to Matthew Tindal’s *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (1730). Tindal expertly exploited the tensions inherent within the Newtonian brand of religious apologetic that had been developed in England primarily in response to Hobbes, most notably by those who delivered the Boyle lectures.⁴⁵

The Master of Middleton’s Cambridge College, Richard Bentley, had been the first such lecturer, in 1692; and he had further advanced his assault upon Hobbesian materialism in his response to Collins’ *Discourse of Freethinking* (1713). Collins challenged the tendency of the

⁴⁵ On which, see Peter Harrison, ‘Newtonian Science, Miracles, and the Laws of Nature’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 56:4 (Oct. 1995), pp. 531-54.

orthodox to draw from Cicero and Locke in order to defend their metaphysical arguments in support of the fundamental tenets of Christian belief, especially the immateriality of the soul and a future state. Collins presented Cicero as a thoroughgoing religious sceptic, and appropriated him and Locke in support of his own distinctly Hobbesian arguments in favour of materialism. Collins' point, echoing Bayle, was that the Christian scheme of satisfaction and redemption could not have entered '*into the wisest Man's imagination*' prior to revelation.⁴⁶ With characteristic hauteur, Bentley replied that Collins' '*Atheistical Sect*' was 'unqualified to understand one single Page of *Cicero*'. Bentley argued that Cicero's professed allegiance to the New Academy was largely superficial. Whilst it compelled him to analyse critically the doctrines of the various sects in religious as in moral subjects, Cicero 'dogmatizes himself on the most fundamental points in both. 'He declares', Bentley argued, 'for the Being and Providence of God, for the Immortality of the Soul, [and] for every Point that approaches to Christianity'.⁴⁷

If Collins turned to Cicero to question the reasonableness of the Christian revelation, then others of more neo-Stoic proclivities like Tindal did so to question its necessity. Tindal purported to accept the distinctly latitudinarian premises of apologists like Bentley and especially his successor as Boyle lecturer, Samuel Clarke.⁴⁸ Clarke argued that the being and attributes of God, and the existence of a future state, were 'strictly demonstrable to any unprejudiced Mind from the most uncontestable principles of Reason'.⁴⁹ By means of the

⁴⁶ Anthony Collins, *A Discourse of Free-Thinking, Occasion'd by the Rise and Growth of a Sect Call'd FREE-THINKERS* (London, 1713), esp. pp. 136-41. Collins argued that Locke favoured materialism in his defence of Henry Dodwell from the criticisms levelled at him by Clarke: see *A Letter to the Learned Mr. Dodwell* (London, 1707), and Collins' subsequent defences of the work. For the Collins-Clarke exchange, see James O'Higgins, *Anthony Collins: the Man and his Works* (The Hague, 1970), pp. 69-76.

⁴⁷ Richard Bentley, *Remarks upon a Late Discourse of Free-Thinking* (London, 1713), pp. 69-82.

⁴⁸ For Tindal, see Stephen Lalor, *Matthew Tindal, Freethinker: an Eighteenth-Century Assault on Religion* (London, 2006). An excellent discussion of Tindal's highly self-conscious engagement with 'latitudinarian' strands within Restoration Anglican apologetic, and the difficulty of gauging his sincerity or otherwise in doing so, is provided by Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment*, ii, pp. 76-83.

⁴⁹ Samuel Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God* (London, 1705), p. 14. This was the published version of Clarke's Boyle lectures delivered in 1704. His 1705 lecture series was published as *A Discourse concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion* (London, 1706).

right use of their faculties, men were able to discern the ‘eternal fitnesses’ of things in the natural and moral order. They thereby could acquire demonstrable knowledge of both the moral law and the foundation of their moral obligation as God’s created beings. In order to vindicate his thesis, Clarke drew upon the famous passage from Cicero’s *De Republica* (3.22) that had been preserved by Lactantius. If, Tindal enquired, Cicero had indeed been able ‘easily’ to deduce the law of nature in its entirety, and if that law ‘*can neither be wholly abrogated, nor repealed in any part of it, nor changed*’, surely it followed that Christ could have done no more than reaffirm it?⁵⁰ If so, then Christianity was more or less reducible to the ‘right reason’ cultivated by the Stoics (whose ethical theory Tindal, like Toland, considered Cicero to share), and the Gospel represented nothing more than the ‘*Republication of the Religion of Nature*’. It could contain nothing ‘mysterious’ or inaccessible to human reason, and all claims to the contrary were the noxious consequence of centuries of priestcraft and superstition.⁵¹

All this was too much to bear for Anglicans of strongly Calvinist persuasions like Waterland, for whom the historical evidence attesting to the divine origins of the Christian revelation required little support from the philosophical doctrines of the blinkered and ignorant heathen philosophers.⁵² Waterland was every bit as hostile to Clarke’s Arianism, made explicit in his *Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity* (1712), as he was to Tindal’s freethinking. Revelation provided what reason could not: that is, certain truths in morality as in religion, and a definition of man’s true end. It was Waterland’s intemperate response to Tindal, which

⁵⁰ I cite Clarke’s translation of *De Republica*, 3.22: *Unchangeable Obligations*, p. 104.

⁵¹ Matthew Tindal, *Christianity as Old as the Creation: or, the Gospel, a Republication of the Religion of Nature* (London, 1730; repr. London, 1995), esp. Ch. XIV. Toland’s most explosive work was entitled *Christianity not Mysterious: or, a Treatise Shewing that there is Nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason, nor Above It* (London, 1696), which drew selectively on Lockean epistemology to make its case. On Tindal and Toland’s interpretations of Cicero, see Fox, *Cicero’s Philosophy of History*, pp. 274-303.

⁵² On whom, see Robert T. Holtby, *Daniel Waterland, 1683–1740: a Study in Eighteenth Century Orthodoxy* (Carlisle, 1966). This case was made even more forcefully by nonconformists of a mystical bent such as the Hutchinsonian George Horne, who was deeply hostile to Newtonian apologetic and dismissed all the classical philosophers as ‘wretches... who were ignorant of everything worth knowing’: *The Theology and Philosophy in Cicero’s Somnium Scipionis, Explained* (London, 1751), p. 4. For Waterland’s anxiety regarding the Arianism inherent in Newtonian physico-theology, and its consideration alongside the rather different criticisms of Clarke generated (not least in Cambridge) from both Lockean and mystical perspectives, see Young, *Religion and Enlightenment*, pp. 33-8, 100-163.

furnished a literal interpretation of the biblical account of the Fall, Flood and confusion of tongues at Babel, that drew Middleton into publishing his response, he later recognised, rather ‘too eagerly or rashly’.⁵³ In essence, Middleton argued that Ciceronian academic scepticism undermined the premises upon which both Tindal and Waterland had constructed their arguments.

Middleton began by vindicating Tindal’s essential premise that natural law and revealed religion could be separated. It was only by doing so that *religio* might be divorced from *superstitio*.⁵⁴ Natural law had evidently been sufficient for ‘many by its sole influence [to] attain to such an exalted degree of virtue as few or none have ever since arrived at’, and was still able to provide a ‘more rational rule of life and manners’ to freethinkers in modern idolatrous or Islamic countries (*LW*, 138).⁵⁵ Meanwhile, it alone provided Protestants with the criteria by which the claims of revelation were to be assessed, and the meaning of the Scriptures interpreted. The question remained, however, as to what could be established on the basis of reason alone, and what it would make of the biblical narrative of the Fall. Here Cicero’s authority was inviolable:

But since in a question of this nature, both *your reason* and *mine* may possibly be suspected, as if *prejudiced by education, influenced by custom, or biased* perhaps by *some interest* in favour of *established opinions*; I shall appeal to an authority, which cannot be charged either with prejudice or partiality, with favouring or detracting from the life of *Moses*; one of the *greatest Masters of Reason* that *Antiquity* ever produced, I mean *Cicero*, whose sentiments declared in some cases, nearly allied to the present, may serve to inform us what *unprejudiced Reason* would determine upon the *literal history of man’s fall*. (*LW*, 147-8)

⁵³ Daniel Waterland, *Scripture Vindicated: in Answer to a Book Intituled, Christianity as Old as the Creation* (Cambridge, 1731); Middleton to Oxford, 24 Jan. 1732, in BL Add. MS 70410, f. 20.

⁵⁴ The willingness of an eighteenth-century author to separate natural and revealed religion, M.A. Stewart has argued, indicated ‘at best, a deist agenda’: ‘Religion and Rational Theology’, in A. Broadie (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 45. Yet as has been seen, the questions surrounding moral obligation from Hobbes onwards to an extent demanded some such theoretical separation.

⁵⁵ Middleton, *A Letter to Dr. Waterland: Containing Some Remarks on his Vindication of Scripture: In Answer to a Book, Intituled, Christianity as Old as the Creation* (London, 1731), in *Miscellaneous Works*, ii, pp. 137-77: page references are given in brackets in the text.

Middleton turned to Cicero's mockery in *De Divinatione* (2.68) of Alexander's dream, in which a serpent appeared and spoke to him. He used this to argue that Cicero would have interpreted the story of the Fall allegorically, teaching the importance of striving to establish reason's sovereignty over the passions (*LW*, 149). To do otherwise was to suggest that God was vindictive and cruel in foreseeing but not preventing Adam's transgression, and in resting content to 'trample on [man] when he is *fallen*' by imputing his sin to his descendants. In *De Officiis*, Middleton continued, Cicero had shown that God could not be moved by such base passions; whilst in *De Divinatione* Cicero had further argued that He would do nothing in vain, such as create an earthly paradise which was 'like a *Theatrical Scene* changed in an instant'. To interpret the biblical account of the Fall literally, as Waterland (and Mandeville) demanded, was to portray God as '*barbarous and unnatural*', and to contradict entirely 'the known *attributes and perfections of the Deity*' (*LW*, 147-9). The same was true, Middleton argued, for the story of the confusion of tongues in Genesis. Taken literally, this portrayed man as more pathetic even than brute beasts, which by means of their 'natural Appetites' would have been led to disperse at Babel. Tellingly, Middleton argued he had only seen men painted in such odious colours once before. This was on the frontispiece to Hobbes' *Leviathan*, where they were 'all *clustered up together into one gigantic Figure*, as if resolved and prepared in that collected form to combat heaven itself' (*LW*, 163).⁵⁶

Both Cicero and 'one of the greatest men who ever lived, *Erasmus*' supported Middleton's claim that the Scriptures 'must be interpreted agreeably to the *reason and nature of things*, and the *common good of society*' (*LW*, 142).⁵⁷ There were, moreover, good historical reasons to read much of the Old Testament, and especially the Pentateuch, allegorically. If the *Letter from*

⁵⁶ On the iconography of *Leviathan*, see Noel Malcolm, 'The Title Page of *Leviathan*, Seen in a Curious Perspective', in idem, *Aspects of Hobbes* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 200-228.

⁵⁷ *Some Remarks on a Reply to the Defence of the Letter to Dr. Waterland* (1732), in *Miscellaneous Works*, ii, pp. 286-7. Middleton similarly drew heavily from Erasmus in developing a naturalistic interpretation of the origins of language in an unpublished MS: 'An Essay on the Gift of Tongues', in *ibid.*, ii, pp. 94-6.

Rome emphasised the continuity between pagan and Christian Rome, now it was the historical relationship between Egypt and Mosaic Israel upon which Middleton trained his sights. Middleton drew, as had Shaftesbury, from the antiquarian scholarship of Marsham and Spencer to argue that Hebraic learning betrayed the influence of the superstitious Egyptians, a consequence of their long captivity (*LW*, 153-5).⁵⁸ All the historical evidence (including the Scriptures) attested to the flourishing of the arts and sciences in Egypt. It also pointed to their absence among the unsociable and barbaric Hebrews.⁵⁹ Here Newton had been quite misled in his studies on biblical chronology. Newton's authority in natural philosophy gave him none in history unless, unbeknownst to Middleton, he had 'invented a *new Telescope*, to pry into remote and dark Antiquity with more Accuracy than had been practicable before'.⁶⁰

The miraculous stories contained in the Old Testament betrayed the 'wholly *mystical and symbolical*' learning in things '*sacred and divine*' of the Israelites. The purpose of these stories, like the fables of ancient polytheism upon which they drew, was primarily moral and political. Indeed Josephus implied—and here Middleton strenuously professed merely to reconstruct his true sense, not to endorse it—that Moses' claim to be divinely inspired had been designed to serve a beneficial moral and political purpose, as indeed it had for '*Minos and the other old Lawgivers of Greece*'.⁶¹ Here Middleton was cutting it very fine indeed in suggesting that this in no sense challenged the credibility of the Old Testament as the revealed word of God. It merely showed that the Scriptures had to be interpreted with care, and not in the '*absolute and unlimited sense*' demanded by Waterland (*LW*, 154). Middleton

⁵⁸ See above, p. 126, and the references provided there to the secondary literature on the contemporary debate on this subject.

⁵⁹ One source for Middleton's claims here was, inevitably, Cicero, whose contempt for the intolerant religion of the Jews, and their lack of learning and civility, was later noted in the *Life of Cicero*, i, pp. 301-303. Middleton further describes them as a foreign faction in the Republic, undermining its unity, at ii, pp. 249-56.

⁶⁰ *A Defence of the Letter to Dr. Waterland* (1731), in *Miscellaneous Works*, ii, pp. 233-4.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

strongly implied that it was the moral excellence of Moses' laws that ultimately attested to their origins as 'divine', but that Moses might have formulated them on the basis of his profound understanding of human nature and the natural law (ie. without direct communication from God).⁶²

It was for this reason that it was ridiculous to interpret the Scriptures in a manner that directly contravened natural law and offended men's ideas of what was morally good. This was, Middleton argued, 'destructive of that good, for which all Religion was given; turning the best thing in the world into the worst; a Revelation from heaven, into a doctrine harmful and pernicious to mankind'.⁶³ Contradicting natural law, it also removed the sole foundation upon which a belief in revelation might be established. If a miraculous story in the Scriptures manifestly contravened the insights, especially in morality, drawn from reason and presented most perfectly by Cicero, no amount of historical testimony or other evidence would be sufficient to establish its truth and divine origins. This was where Waterland's apologetic approach was, according to Middleton, so perverse:

You tell us, that the *modest way* of opposing a *Revelation*, pretending to be *divine*, is not to examine the *internal* merit of its doctrines, but the *external evidence* of the fact: but this is certainly losing time, and beginning at the wrong end; since 'tis allowed on all hands, that if *any narration* can be shewn to be *false*; any *doctrine irrational* or *immoral*; 'tis not all the *external evidence in the world* that can or ought to convince us, that *such a doctrine* comes from *God* (LW, 164).⁶⁴

This claim would later underpin Middleton's attack, in the *Free Inquiry*, on the credibility of the historical testimony used to defend the post-apostolic miracles.

⁶² In this regard, Middleton's 'defence' of the Old Testament is, in fact, very similar to that furnished by Mandeville in *Part II*, pp. 215-19.

⁶³ *Remarks on some Observations, Addressed to the Author of the Letter to Dr. Waterland* (1733), in *Miscellaneous Works*, ii, p. 311. The *Observations* were composed by Philip Williams, the Orator and Senior Fellow at St. John's, Cambridge.

⁶⁴ Middleton referred to a passage in Waterland's *Vindication*, p. 64.

Waterland demanded an implicit faith established upon Tertullian's 'good old principle *credo quia impossibile*', which banished reason and made God utterly transcendent, capricious and terrifying (*LW*, 146). Only faith and divine grace, and not works, might save; and as the Augustinian interpretation of Romans 14.23 suggested, 'the very attempt & act of doing [good] has the nature of Sin'.⁶⁵ Middleton found such extreme Augustinianism repugnant. He noted in a missive to John, Lord Hervey that 'I am not one of those rigid Casuists, who think that our Appetites were planted in us merely to be cross'd & mortified; but am perswaded, that they may all be freely gratified; & were given us for the very purpose; as the instruments of happiness & pleasure to us'.⁶⁶ Tindal was quite correct to suggest that this species of Christianity 'is not onely *useless*, but *mischievous*', since Waterland prioritised an external conformity on profoundly mysterious doctrinal points, such as the Trinity, over internal conviction and moral conduct (*LW*, 166). Waterland's principles, Middleton indicated, were also to blame for the persecution and bloodshed that so marred Christian history, suggesting that men were able to believe as they chose and that error could not, as a consequence, be innocent.⁶⁷

Cicero also provided Middleton with powerful arguments against Tindal's distinctly neo-Stoic belief that '*a wiseman has a sufficiency of all things within himself*'.⁶⁸ If Waterland's deity was utterly transcendent, Tindal's was immanent. If the former depreciated the capacity of human reason excessively, the latter raised it far too high and dissolved the divine law and will in natural law and human reason. Cicero, 'a constant Follower of the *Academy* in his real Judgment', provided the *via media* that Middleton suggested furnished the means to settle

⁶⁵ 'Apology', f. 44r, where Middleton noted how he had never been able to comprehend this nexus, taught by both Papist and Protestant divines, between faith and grace: 'My mind is of that sluggish, gross, & gouching kind, that it is not capable of soaring or raising itself beyond the narrow Bounds of Sense & Reason, & so attached to thinking of this World, that it cannot amuse itself with fanciful Inventions & Speculations not grounded on facts & realities'.

⁶⁶ Middleton to Hervey, 31 July 1733, in SRO 941/47/7.

⁶⁷ *Remarks on Some Observations*, pp. 302-303.

⁶⁸ This was the maxim drawn from Persius' *Satires* that was chosen by Shaftesbury for the title-page of *Sensus Communis*: see above, p. 127.

‘Christianity on its true and natural foundation’ (natural law, and human nature, properly understood).⁶⁹ This was because ‘it was the peculiar character and distinction of the Academy, *Nullum Jujicium interponere*; to deliver *nothing dogmatically*, to declare *no judgment* of its own; to follow onely the *probable*; and beat down every thing advanced as *certain* or *self-evident*’.⁷⁰

Although Middleton was considerably more sympathetic to Tindal (and Shaftesbury)⁷¹, who at least attempted to search for truths in religion and morality for themselves, they were nonetheless as dogmatic and erroneous as neo-Epicureans such as Waterland. Cicero had shown, Middleton argued, how reason was insufficient as ‘*a Guide to Life*’ for almost all men, and it was for precisely that reason that religion had been ‘*invented*’. Religious belief was considered by Cicero to be ‘the *voice of Nature*, disclaiming [reason] as a *Guide*’. Tindal’s endeavour to establish a civil theology on the basis of reason alone—decrying as *superstitio* everything that did not ‘satisfy his *supreme and perfect Reason*’—would be as disastrous in practice as it was misconceived in theory (*LW*, 167-72). All nations had religions; and as Middleton would later reflect, ‘there may be something good in all Religions’ so long as they had been permitted to develop historically according to the dictates of public utility.⁷² They provided what philosophy alone could not—‘*a rational and well-formed system of Morality*’. As Middleton noted, almost all religions in all ages made ‘the pretence of a *Divine Original*, and a *Revelation from Heaven*’. None had been formed ‘upon the *plan of Nature*’, as Tindal suggested true religion ought to be (*LW*, 167; 171).

⁶⁹ *Defence of the Letter*, pp. 183, 186.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁷¹ Middleton and Warburton debated at some length the legitimacy of Shaftesbury’s mockery of Locke’s dying claim to Collins that the world was ‘a scene of Vanity’, and philosophy worthless: Locke to Collins, 23 Aug. 1704, in *Correspondence of Locke*, viii, pp. 417-19 (Locke died on 18 Oct.). For Warburton, this represented the height of piety; for Middleton, the renunciation of true faith: Middleton to Warburton, 23 Feb. 1738, in BL Add. MS 32457, ff. 126-7; Warburton to Middleton, 1 Mar. 1738, in BL Egerton MS 1953, ff. 24-5. They were debating a passage in which Warburton defended Locke from Shaftesbury and Collins in the *Divine Legation*, i, pp. xxii-xxiv.

⁷² ‘Apology’, f. 29r.

Middleton deliberately undercut a central assumption of freethinkers of neo-Stoic proclivities: that, if not misled by priests, all men of a genuinely philosophical bent would share the same (pure) ideas of God, His attributes and their moral duties and, in fact, that all truly wise men throughout history had done so. Here Middleton was paraphrasing the passage in *Tusculan Disputations* (1.2.4) that had been alighted upon by both Erasmus and Locke.⁷³ To be sure, in the late Hellenistic period all wise men had recognised the absurdity, philosophically speaking, of the national religion. ‘Men of philosophic & inquisitive Minds’, Middleton noted, ‘were perpetually employed in searching & pointing out a quite different Rule & Guide of Life’ to that provided by a polytheistic religion in which none believed on the basis of reason. However reason had reached no consensus on what that alternative rule might be. The dogmatic sects had spent their time ‘fighting pro Aris & Focis’ in defence of their subjective definitions of the *summum bonum*. All, as a consequence, endorsed an ancestral national religion, which had developed according to its observable public utility. The cardinal error of modern freethinkers was to claim that a particular ‘System of Heathen Morality’ (the Stoics’) could serve ‘as a Rule of Life & Manners [for] the Nation’.⁷⁴

Cicero had no such confidence in man’s ‘*infallible Reason*’. It was here that Tindal and, indeed, Clarke had fallen into error, defined by Middleton as ‘enthusiasm’: ‘if all the *designs of God were as discoverable to man, as man’s are to God*, he might well say, *where’s the distinction?*’ (LW, 175).⁷⁵ In denying that revelation could transcend human reason, Tindal had pushed past the ‘probable, the reasonable or the true’ with which men in religion and morality had to rest content. He thereby ignored both Cicero (a proxy for unprejudiced reason) and God

⁷³ See above, pp. 50-51, 192.

⁷⁴ ‘Apology’, f. 36r.

⁷⁵ On the peculiarly English concern with ‘enthusiasm’ (the reduction of the divine to the human mind), see especially J.G.A. Pocock, ‘Enthusiasm: the Antiself of Enlightenment’, in L.E. Klein & A.J. La Vopa (eds.), *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650-1850* (San Marino, CA, 1998), pp. 7-28, along with the other essays in that volume; idem, ‘Post-Puritan England and the Problem of the Enlightenment’, in P. Zagorin (ed.), *Culture and Politics from Puritanism to the Enlightenment* (Berkeley CA, 1980), pp. 91-112; and Brian Young, ‘Newtonianism and the Enthusiasm of Enlightenment’, *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science*, 35:3 (Sep. 2004), pp. 645-63.

(revelation), who were united on this point (*LW*, 174-5). Cicero ridiculed the attempts of the Stoics to justify the public religion on the basis of philosophy. He defended it, instead, on account of its public utility. According to Middleton, for Cicero there was no tension between utility and truth, because Cicero did not claim to have identified the latter with dogmatic certainty. In direct contrast to Warburton's later interpretation in the *Divine Legation*, Middleton's Cicero had by no means endorsed the fallacy of 'double doctrine', teaching as 'true' to the vulgar whatever was found useful in practice, whilst presenting the 'wise' with genuine truths drawn from his speculative philosophical researches.⁷⁶ Insofar as the national religion served to 'promote *publick peace* and the *good of society*', it was in a very real sense divine. It was one means by which God led men towards the performance of their duties to one another even as very few— indeed, perhaps only Cicero— had understood why they ought to do so (*LW*, 170).

Waterland's acolyte, Zachary Pearce, accepted Middleton's claim that Cicero could act as a proxy for '*unprejudiced Reason*'.⁷⁷ However, he challenged Middleton's interpretation of Cicero. Pearce alleged that his antagonist 'can't distinguish [Cicero's] Notions from the very Contrary'. It was clear that Cicero endorsed the Stoic, Balbus' arguments in *De Natura Deorum* and elsewhere, not those of the sceptic, Cotta. The story of Alexander's dream in *De Divinatione* was irrelevant. Had Cicero read of a serpent '*actually speaking and talking*' in 'the Gravest and most Ancient of Historians' (Moses), Cicero would most certainly have

⁷⁶ This was the central theme of Book II of the first volume of the *Divine Legation*. The theory of double doctrine was expounded and endorsed by Toland in his discussion of the distinction between the exoteric and esoteric teaching of the ancient philosophers. The former was 'open and public, accommodated to popular prejudices and the RELIGIONS establish'd by Law; the other private and secret, wherein, to the few capable and discrete, was taught the real TRUTH stript of all disguises': 'Clidophorus; or of the Exoteric and Esoteric Philosophy', in *Tetradymus* (London, 1720), pp. 86-125 (on p. 86). Toland's reverence for Cicero as a proponent of double doctrine was most clearly expressed in *Cicero Illustratus* (1712), in *A Collection of Several Pieces of Mr. John Toland* (2 vols., London, 1726), i, pp. 324-89.

⁷⁷ Waterland's involvement in the preparation of Pearce's pamphlets is attested by their correspondence, in E. Churton (ed.), *A Supplement to Waterland's Works: Fourteen Letters from Daniel Waterland to Zachary Pearce* (Oxford, 1868), pp. 5-29.

accepted it as true, irrespective of how improbable or miraculous it appeared.⁷⁸ The same applied to the biblical account of the origins of language. In reading Cicero as a sceptic, Pearce argued that Middleton had fallen into the same error as Collins, and had done so with much the same objective—to undermine all religion, not merely revealed. In this respect Pearce claimed the support of Bentley for his interpretation.⁷⁹

iii. *The History of the Life of Cicero* (1741)

The importance attached to interpretations of Cicero in the controversy stimulated by the *Letter to Waterland* provides a context against which to read Middleton's iconoclastic *Life*. When Middleton's authorship of the *Letter* became common knowledge in 1732-3, he lost the support of his Tory patron, the earl of Oxford. From this date he forged a close relationship with the strongly anti-clerical Walpolean Whig minister and courtier, John, Lord Hervey.⁸⁰ Hervey energetically supported Middleton's proposal to write what he presumed would be a political history of the decline of the late Roman republic, which would illustrate the dangers of the Clodius-style rabble-rousing of the political opposition.⁸¹ Upon the publication of Middleton's unrestrained panegyric to Cicero (complete with a fawning dedicatory epistle to his patron), Hervey confessed to friends that he was baffled and embarrassed in equal measure.⁸² Hervey repeatedly dissuaded Middleton from engaging in

⁷⁸ Zachary Pearce, *A Reply to the Letter to Dr. Waterland* (London, 1731), pp. 8-13.

⁷⁹ Idem, *A Reply to the Defence of the Letter to Dr. Waterland* (London, 1732), pp. 7-9. In response, Middleton claimed that he had heard from a mutual friend in Cambridge that Bentley had, until discovering the identity of its author, broadly agreed with the interpretation of Cicero provided in the *Letter: Some Remarks on a Reply*, p. 252.

⁸⁰ On Hervey and his friendship with Middleton, see Robert Halsband, *Lord Hervey: Eighteenth-Century Courtier* (Oxford, 1973).

⁸¹ The central theme of Hervey's own *Ancient and Modern Liberty, Stated and Compar'd* (London, 1734) was that the republican rhetoric of the *Craftsman* was anachronistic and dangerous: true liberty had been unknown to the ancients, and only established in England from 1688. One of Walpole's hired penmen (William Arnall) had, meanwhile, composed precisely such a work with this intention in mind: *Clodius and Cicero: with Other Examples and Reasonings, in Defence of Just Measures against Faction and Obloquy, Suited to the Present Conjecture* (London, 1727). Middleton paid lip-service to this request, noting that 'though the title of it carries nothing more than the History of CICERO's Life, yet it might be properly enough called, the History of CICERO's Times': *Life of Cicero*, i, p. xix.

⁸² See the letters cited by Halsband, *Lord Hervey*, pp. 270-71, in which Hervey noted how Middleton had obstinately ignored his repeated recommendations that he tone down his inexplicable partiality for Cicero.

theological controversy, which he considered pointless. There was, in reality, ‘little Difference’ between ‘the private and Secret Opinion of all men of understanding and Knowledge, on great Theological Points’, and he quoted a classical philosopher— Tacitus— in support of this contention.⁸³ Middleton dissented from this view in the strongest terms as, he claimed, had ‘the best and wisest of the Heathens in their writings on the Subject’.⁸⁴ Hervey evidently envisaged classical history to be unrelated to theological controversy. Middleton, he gradually came to realise, did not.

Middleton’s primary objective in the *Life* was to show how Cicero’s academic scepticism had, unlike Stoicism or Epicureanism, provided him with a ‘Rule for Living’ in an age when one’s choice of philosophical sect carried momentous practical and political consequences. This had largely ceased to be true, Middleton observed, in modern polities, which were able to cohere even with knaves at the helm. Middleton noted that the decision in Rome to change one’s philosophical sect was ‘equivalent in effect to a change of Religion with us’, with the significant difference that religious principles were of little practical consequence. This was why Cicero’s friendship with men of differing philosophical principles exposed the absurdity of Christians’ persecution of others ‘for differences of opinion, which, for the most part, are merely speculative, and without any influence on life, or the good or happiness of civil Society’.⁸⁵ Middleton’s work allowed him to raise the question which had been central to his intervention in the debates between Clarke, Tindal and Waterland. Middleton asked which of the ‘three sects, which at this time chiefly engrossed the philosophical part of Rome..., was the best adapted to promote the good of society’ (the

⁸³ Hervey to Middleton, 21 Nov. 1734, in SRO 941/47/4, f. 470. Hervey quoted Tacitus in the following letter, as a response to Middleton’s testy reply: f. 471 (26 Nov. 1734). The classicising bent of Hervey’s pronounced anticlericalism is reflected in his *Memoirs of the Reign of George the Second*, ed. J.W. Croker (2 vols., London, 1848). Hervey’s studious avoidance of theological subjects in his own (published) writings is noted by Browning, *Court Whigs*, pp. 35-66.

⁸⁴ Middleton to Hervey, 21 Nov. 1734, in SRO 941/47/7.

⁸⁵ *Life of Cicero*, ii, p. 10.

Stoic, Epicurean or academic sceptic).⁸⁶ It was Middleton's determination to make the case for an entire consistency between Cicero's academic precepts and practice— precisely what Erasmus, a presiding presence in the work, emphasised— that gave the *Life* the appearance of panegyric.

Middleton repeatedly stressed the absurdity of 'stoical principles, and their inconsistency with common life'.⁸⁷ Cato's philosophical principles were self-defeating, since 'falsely measuring all duty by the absurd rigor of the *Stoical* rule, he was generally disappointed of the end, which he sought by it, the happiness both of his private and public life'.⁸⁸ Cicero 'did not pretend to be a *Stoic*, nor aspire to the character of a *Hero*'. It was for this reason that he did not labour to conceal his despondency in exile, and why he was capable of true friendship and sympathy with others.⁸⁹ Cicero rejected Epicureanism because it similarly demanded that individuals behave in ways that were profoundly unnatural. Atticus upbraided Cicero for his affection towards his daughter, Tullia, and for his inconsolable grief at her death, in the belief that such passions precluded the quest for *ataraxia* and should be subdued. When his own daughter Attica was born, however, he was quite incapable of practising what he had preached.⁹⁰ A similar concern to avoid all risk of disappointment prevented Atticus from entering public life at a time when Rome, and his closest friend, Cicero, desperately needed the assistance of her wisest citizens. Although professing opposite philosophies, both Atticus and Cato 'by their mistaken notions of virtue, drawn from the principles of their philosophy, were made useless in a manner to their country'.⁹¹

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, ii, p. 564. Here I strongly disagree with Peter N. Miller, who suggests that Middleton's interpretation of Cicero was identical to Clarke's: *Defining the Common Good: Empire, Religion and Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 91-2.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, i, p. 77. See, too, ii, pp. 120-2 (Pompey); i, p. 273 (Cato); ii, pp. 226-7, 471-3 (Brutus).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, ii, pp. 162-3.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, i, pp. 361-2.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, ii, pp. 301-302.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, ii, pp. 564-7.

The entire work was structured around Middleton's discussion in Section XII of Cicero's moral and religious philosophy. Middleton's correspondence with Warburton in 1736 indicates how important he considered the interpretation he offered there to be to his overall argument; and the conclusions he intended to draw were already largely in place by this time.⁹² His concern to perfect this chapter, however, meant he was still labouring on it in 1741, something that delayed the publication of the work, much to Hervey's chagrin.⁹³ Significantly, and unlike all the other sections, he did not send it to his patron for critical comment—which he nonetheless steadfastly ignored—prior to publication. Drawing extensively from Erasmus, Middleton made it clear that the signal importance of Cicero's academic scepticism, for his public as well as private conduct, lay precisely in the fact that he made no claim to have identified the *summum bonum* or *honestum* on the basis of philosophical certainty. This ensured that in all matters he was guided by his observations on what, in practice, contributed to human happiness in this life: that is, by the *utile*. He did not, unlike the dogmatic Stoics and Epicureans, exhort others to adhere to a set of speculative principles that forced them to suppress their natural affections. Nor did he govern Rome with *a priori* objectives, such as those attributed by Montesquieu to Roman statesmen in his recently-published *Considérations sur les Causes de la Grandeur des Romains et de leur Décadence* (1734), a work lauded by Hervey and held in contempt by Middleton.⁹⁴ For Middleton it was not design that had underpinned the Roman 'grandeur', but necessity. Cicero had, as a consequence, adopted utility, drawn from empirical observation, rather than speculative

⁹² Middleton's rejection of the interpretation of Cicero that Warburton would later include verbatim in the *Divine Legation* was accompanied by a long dissertation on Cicero's private sentiments and principles, which is almost identical to his claims in Section XII: Middleton to Warburton, 11 Sep. 1736, in *Miscellaneous Works*, iii, pp. 459-68.

⁹³ Middleton to Hervey, 24 Sept. 1740, in SRO 941/47/7. For Hervey's frustration, see Halsband, *Lord Hervey*, p. 266.

⁹⁴ The Herveys cultivated Montesquieu's friendship during his stay in London in 1729-31, and it was to Lady Hervey whom he first made mention of the *Considérations* in Sep. 1733: *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. A. Masson (3 vols., Paris, 1950-55), iii, #237. On this, see Halsband, *Lord Hervey*, p. 159; and Robert Shackleton, *Montesquieu. A Critical Biography* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 117-45. For Hervey's enthusiastic review of the work, see Hervey to Middleton, 1 July 1734, in SRO 941/47/4, ff. 461-4; and Hervey to Stephen Fox, in *ibid.*, ff. 472-80 (18 Dec. 1734), ff. 488-94 (10 Feb. 1735). For Middleton's critical response, see his letter to Hervey of 15 July 1734, in SRO 941/47/7.

maxims as his guide. It was the failure of others to do likewise that had led to Rome's 'Décadence'.

'CICERO', Middleton argued, 'chose the middle way between the obstinacy of CATO, and the indolence of ATTICUS: he preferred always the readiest road to what was right, if it lay open to him; if not, took the next, that seemed likely to bring him to the same end; and in politics, as in morality, when he could not arrive at the true, contented himself with the probable'.⁹⁵ In speculative questions, the Stoics were '*the bigots or enthusiasts in philosophy*', whose theories were drawn from 'the refinements of the schools'. Cicero's insights were discerned from 'nature, and social life', and from concerted self-examination. In religious questions the Stoics embraced augury as of divine institution, something mocked by Cicero, for whom the national religion was 'merely political, and of human invention', even as it served a 'divine' purpose. Whereas 'ease and luxury' attracted men to Epicureanism, it was pride that drew them to Stoicism, which claimed to establish the nature of the soul on the basis of certainty. Cicero, in contrast, deduced the probability of a future state from the remarkable powers of the mind, from men's '*ardent thirst for immortality*', and from '*the will of God, manifested in his works*'. The moral significance of Cicero's belief or otherwise in a future state was, however, marginalised by Middleton. A thirst for the merited applause of posterity, secured by furthering the happiness of mankind in this world, was indistinguishable from a concern regarding the judgement of a deity whose justice could hardly be thought to disapprove of a life spent in pursuit of such a laudable objective. It was for this reason that Middleton strenuously defended the undeniable 'Vanity' expressed by Cicero in his writings, something routinely attacked by subsequent critics of the *Life*.⁹⁶ Middleton, unlike Warburton, claimed that Cicero had identified the origins of the law of

⁹⁵ *Life of Cicero*, ii, pp. 564-7.

⁹⁶ See, for example, Colley Cibber's eccentric (but comparatively polite and restrained) response to the work, in which Cicero was repeatedly upbraided for his excessive self-regard: *The Character and Conduct of Cicero, Considered, from the History of his Life, by the Reverend Dr. Middleton* (2 vols., London, 1747).

nature in the will of God. Prior to Christ, no-one had expounded the duties imposed by that law more clearly than had Cicero:

This was the law, which is mentioned by St. PAUL, to be taught *by nature, and written on the hearts of the Gentiles*, to guide them through that state of ignorance and darkness, of which they themselves complained, till they should be blessed with a more perfect revelation of the divine will: and this scheme of it professed by CICERO was certainly the most complete, that the *Gentile* world had ever been acquainted with; the utmost effort, that human nature could make, towards attaining it's proper end; of that supreme good, for which the Creator had designed it, upon the contemplation of which sublime truths, as delivered by a Heathen, ERASMUS could not help persuading himself, *that the breast, from which they flowed, must needs have been inspired by the Deity*.⁹⁷

In the *Letter to Waterland*, Middleton had dismissed the Augustinian interpretation of Romans 14.23. Here he endorsed a distinctly Pelagian reading of Romans 2.14-16, suggesting that a heathen had been able to recognise the moral law in its full extent. If Erasmus 'could not help persuading himself' that this was the consequence of the infusion of divine grace, Middleton was able to resist drawing any such conclusion. Cicero had explained men's duties in *De Officiis*, 'a work admired by all succeeding ages, as the most perfect system of Heathen morality, and the noblest effort and specimen, of what *mere reason* could do towards guiding man through life with innocence and happiness'.⁹⁸ Following Socrates, Cicero 'banished *Physics out of Philosophy*'. Instead of quibbling over the nature of the soul, Cicero focused on 'questions of morality; of more immediate use and importance to the happiness of man; concerning the true notions of *virtue and vice, and the natural difference of good and ill*'. Yet he willingly confessed that philosophy itself could not establish the *honestum* with certainty. In this regard academic scepticism represented 'the first step towards preparing men for the reception of truth, or what came nearest to it, probability'.⁹⁹ Cicero, Middleton suggested, was almost unique in submitting to the labour and existential doubts demanded if the individual were to acquire a just if imperfect understanding of his moral duties. Cicero's faith

⁹⁷ *Life of Cicero*, ii, pp. 559-60; citing Erasmus, 'Dedicatory Epistle' to *De Officiis*, p. 125.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, ii, p. 327 (the emphasis is Middleton's own).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, ii, pp. 535-7.

in God's goodness and justice (and perhaps even His existence), Middleton emphasised, was precisely that. It was merely a 'hope', not an 'assurance', and 'he sometimes doubted, of what he generally believed'. This showed, Middleton concluded, that

The most exalted state of human reason is so far from superseding the use, that it demonstrates the benefits of a *more exalted revelation*; for though the *natural law*, in the perfection, to which it was carried by CICERO, might serve for a sufficient guide to the few, such as himself, of enlarged minds and happy dispositions... it was not discoverable even to those few, without great pains and study; and could not produce in them at last any thing more than a hope, never a full persuasion; whilst the greatest part of mankind, even of the virtuous and inquisitive, lived *without the knowledge of a God, or the expectation of a futurity*.¹⁰⁰

However Middleton's publication of a second edition of the *Letter from Rome* in 1741, shortly after that of the *Life*, reinforced the message that revelation itself had in many respects scarcely altered this situation. A new postscript made explicit the subversive nature of the central argument of the *Letter*. Middleton emphasised that if his thesis had been 'attended to, as it ought', Christians at Lambeth would find no more grounds to be complacent than those at Rome.¹⁰¹ No sooner had the Gospel message been delivered than it was subverted, and the divine origins of Christianity no longer recognised and defended on their true, and sole foundation: the moral excellence of the *philosophia Christi*. Middleton suggested that only one particular philosophy— academic scepticism— was able to lead to those truths subsequently affirmed by Christ, but that this was a philosophy that proved too demanding for all save the very few. This, after all, was the unambiguous message of the panegyric to Cicero in the *Life*, in which Middleton found little to praise in any other heathen philosopher except Socrates. This was an approach to philosophy 'of all others the most rational and modest, and the best adapted to the discovery of truth: whose particular character it was, to encourage inquiry; to sift every question to the bottom; to try the force of every argument,

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, ii, p. 562 & n. X.

¹⁰¹ *Letter from Rome*, 'Postscript' (1741), in *Miscellaneous Works*, iii, p. 132.

till it had found it's real moment, or the precise quantity of it's weight'.¹⁰² The true Christian, Middleton suggested, had first to be an academic sceptic. Only then might he distinguish between the word of God and that of man, and discern the harmony between the natural and revealed law.

Yet Middleton's own highly self-conscious heterodoxy, and his sufferings at the hands of the orthodox, was presented in a manner that suggested that he was (like Cicero, Erasmus and Chillingworth) the exception that proved the rule that most were neither true philosophers nor followers of Christ. In Middleton's hands, Erasmian Christian humanism was pushed to its sceptical limits. Philosophy, in the absence of revelation, could provide a guide to life; it alone could assess the claims of revelation. Yet it is far from clear that, for Middleton, there was much more of value to be found in the Gospels than there was in Cicero's philosophical writings. Man's greatest happiness and true end, salvation, remained largely as it had been for Cicero—a question of faith. If a future state existed, the terms of salvation could hardly compel men to ignore the dictates of morality and the pursuit of temporal happiness, as Cicero had recognised. Meanwhile a desire for the applause of posterity, rather than a concern regarding eternal sanctions, had been sufficient to motivate Cicero to set an unrivalled example of virtuous living. In this sense there was no conflict between utility and truth, and no need to establish the latter on more concrete grounds than those of faith and hope. This was where Middleton decisively parted company from Warburton. As Middleton put it with characteristic pithiness, 'while my academic Complexion leaves me groveling perhaps in the mire of Doubt, or pursuing the faint Track of Probability, your more sanguin Spirits, like the greater Mysteries, make you at once an *Autoptes*, and admit you to the joyous Regions of clear Day and Intuition'.¹⁰³

¹⁰² *Life of Cicero*, ii, pp. 542-3.

¹⁰³ Middleton to Warburton, 23 Feb. 1738, in BL Add. MS 32457, ff. 126-7.

iv. *A Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers* (1749)

With the exception of Warburton and Birch—the prolific editor who published the collected writings of similarly eirenic figures such as Chillingworth and Catharine Cockburn, and who had himself journeyed through the Christian faith from his Quaker roots to become an Anglican minister—it is clear that few of Middleton’s contemporaries grasped his underlying objectives in the *Life*.¹⁰⁴ The publication of Middleton’s *Free Inquiry* in 1749 made these considerably less opaque. At the heart of Middleton’s interpretation was a theme that had run through the writings of Locke, Shaftesbury and Mandeville, who had drawn very different conclusions from it. This was the unique nature of England’s experience of the Reformation.

Middleton explicitly presented the *Free Inquiry* as a continuation of Chillingworth’s work; his aim was to ‘fix the religion of Protestants on its proper basis’. That basis, for Middleton even more than for Locke, was emphatically moral. In the *Free Inquiry*, Middleton plausibly claimed that Locke’s *Letters on Toleration* supported the interpretation he offered.¹⁰⁵ In order to establish a standard by which to distinguish ‘the clear Dictates of God from the vain Conceits & Deductions of Men’, one had to take the Gospels themselves as the touchstone.¹⁰⁶ The miracles worked sparingly by Christ and the Apostles had, Middleton argued, not been intended to awe spectators by dazzling their senses and perplexing their reason (unlike those of paganism). Instead, they drew attention to the moral virtues

¹⁰⁴ Birch was the author of a largely positive review of the *Life* published in *The History of the Works of the Learned* (Feb. 1741, pp. 152-60; Apr. 1741, pp. 239-49). Birch’s authorship is confirmed by the fact that the original draft of the review can be found among his literary papers: BL Add. MS 4257, ff. 1-28. Birch’s only quibble was that Cicero’s apparent support of Balbus the Stoic at the end of *De Natura Deorum* rather muddled waters presented as translucent by Middleton. Birch was a friend and correspondent of Middleton’s, and assisted him in procuring sources for the *Free Inquiry* (Middleton to Birch, 15 Dec. 1748, in BL Add. MS 4478b, f. 27). Birch’s edition of Chillingworth’s works (the tenth), perhaps not insignificantly, was published in 1742. He has received remarkably little historical attention, but see David Philip Miller’s *ODNB* entry (<http://ezproxy.ouls.ox.ac.uk :2117/view/article/2436>, accessed 9 Feb. 2012).

¹⁰⁵ Middleton suggested, however disingenuously, that the similarity of their views only came to his attention after he had formulated his own arguments: *Free Inquiry*, ‘Preface’, pp. iv-v.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Apology’, f. 40r.

preached by Christ to his disciples prior to his ascension, exhorting them to convert the gentiles by the example they set of virtuous living.¹⁰⁷ Those virtues were of manifest benefit to the temporal happiness of mankind. As a consequence, miracles were to be judged solely by the internal and moral rather than the external evidence attesting to them, a contention first advanced by Middleton in his *Letter to Waterland* two decades earlier. They had to serve ‘an end so great, so important, and so universally beneficial, as to be highly worthy of the interposition of the Deity’.¹⁰⁸ Meanwhile Christ’s promise of salvation to those who followed him furnished them with a further explanation of why the natural law was obligatory, something the Stoics and Epicureans had misunderstood, and Cicero had not sought to provide.

For Middleton, however, the claim that the moral teachings of the Gospel provided the sole standard against which to assess the credibility of miracles was, in effect, no different to saying that God could hardly command men to contradict the duties enshrined in *De Officiis*. As has been suggested, for Middleton it was the harmony between the moral philosophy of Cicero and that of Christ which alone could attest to the fact that Christ was divine in mission, even if not in substance (what Cicero would have made of the doctrine of the Trinity was nowhere discussed). In the *Vindication of the Free Inquiry*, composed shortly before his death, Middleton made this point explicitly. Once again citing the key passage from *De Republica* (3.22), Middleton emphasised that it was by means of ‘sense and reason’ that Cicero had discovered the ‘universal Law or rule of conduct of man; the source of all his knowledge; the test of all truth; by which all subsequent revelations, which are supposed to have been given by God in any other manner, must be tried and cannot be received as divine, any further than as they are found to tally and coincide with this original standard’.

¹⁰⁷ *Free Inquiry*, ‘Preface’, pp. xix-xx.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. lxiv. That miracles were to be judged by the beneficial (moral) ends they served was a central claim advanced by Locke in his ‘Discourse of Miracles’ (c. 1702), which was published in King’s edition of his *Works* in 1706. See Locke, *Religious Writings*, pp. 44-50.

Middleton recognised that ‘our Doctors, perhaps, will look with horror on all this, as rank Deism; but let them call it what they please, I shall ever avow and defend it, as the fundamental, essential and vital part of true religion, and what the Gospel itself must adopt, as its best foundation and support’.¹⁰⁹ Those who, like Mandeville, presented God’s commands as crossing men’s ‘innocent Pleasures’— found in friendship, the mutual exchange of good offices, and the collective pursuit of temporal happiness— built upon the asceticism of the ‘crack-brain’d’, ‘mad’ and ‘enthusiastic’ monks of the fourth and fifth centuries, for whose piety Constantine had proclaimed his reverence. ‘I look upon the whole institution of monkery’, Middleton declared, ‘from what age or Saint soever it drew it’s origin, to be contrary not only to the principles of the Gospel, but to the interests of all civil society, and the chief source of all the corruptions, which have ever infested the Christian Church’.¹¹⁰

Middleton made the distinction between the history of the Gospel and that of the Church absolute. The miracles reported in the former advanced the universal temporal happiness of mankind, and were primarily concerned with moral conduct. Those reported in the writings of the credulous Fathers, in contrast, testified to the truth of particular speculative doctrines, and forwarded the interest of a specific group of men. The full implications of the *Letter from Rome* were drawn out in the *Free Inquiry*. Christianity had been corrupted from the moment it became established, and the essence of true Protestantism lay in its return to the Gospels as the sole guide to salvation. The threat which orthodox Anglican divines considered freethinkers like Tindal to pose was, as a consequence, entirely illusory. From the earliest reported post-apostolic miracles onwards, the credible was inextricably blended with the absurd. Middleton ran through the Fathers from Justin Martyr and Irenaeus onwards to expose their lack of judgement and the inconvenient fact that they reported miracles that

¹⁰⁹ *A Vindication of the Free Inquiry...* (c.1750), in *Miscellaneous Works*, i, pp. 294-7.

¹¹⁰ *Free Inquiry*, pp. 143-4.

attested to doctrines now considered by both Rome and Lambeth to be heretical (not least millenarianism).¹¹¹

The Reformation, the principles of which were most clearly expounded by Chillingworth, ought to have ensured that the systemic unreliability of the Fathers and early Councils was of no meaningful consequence for the Protestant. Tindal and his friends could expose the severe limitations of the sources of ecclesiastical history— and explore the disastrous consequences of Rome’s subversion of the moral teachings of the Gospel— without challenging the true foundations of Christian belief.¹¹² The unique character of the Reformation in England, however, made the rather superficial writings of sceptics and deists appear devastating. This was because orthodoxy in England encouraged the individual to ‘hang, as it were, between the two religions’: Catholicism, established upon tradition and the evidence of post-apostolic miracles; and Protestantism, founded upon the moral excellence of the Gospels. With scarcely concealed relish, Middleton sought to expose the erroneous foundations upon which Chillingworth’s ‘moderate Protestants’ built and defended their faith.¹¹³

In England, the fundamentally Erastian foundations of a church established by law— the rituals and mysterious doctrines of which were intended solely to ensure order and decorum— jostled with the Popish claims of its bishops to apostolic succession. This was, ultimately, a consequence of the fact that Henry VIII had embraced the Reformation as a matter of political expediency, not personal conviction. His objective had been ‘to banish rather the power, than the religion of the Pope, out of his realm’. Whereas Elizabeth had hoped gradually to ‘moderate the prejudices of the Popish Clergy’, James I— ‘a mere School-Divine, fond of theological disputes’— had supported their cause. This return to

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-7; 60-61.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, ‘Postscript’, pp. xciv-xcv.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, ‘Preface’, p. lxxvi.

Popish principles had reached its zenith under Charles I and Laud. It was for this reason that Chillingworth had followed those principles through to their logical conclusion and taken up his short-lived residence at the Jesuit seminary at Douai. The splits within the Church had, of course, become devastatingly apparent during the Civil War; but, after the Restoration, the *status quo ante* had broadly been re-established.¹¹⁴ Those who sought to defend the Thirty-Nine Articles did so once again on the basis of their truth rather than their utility, as the example of Waterland illustrated. Athanasius's 'monstrous stories' of his battles with the Devil, and his inspired vision regarding the Trinity reported by Gregory, were 'too trifling to deserve any regard'. Yet for their own purposes, Christian apologists like Waterland considered a declaration of faith in these fictions to be of greater importance than an attempt to adhere to the moral dictates of the Gospel.¹¹⁵

Middleton made his position devastatingly clear. If one accepted a single miracle supposedly performed after the age of the Apostles, one had to accept them all, as well as those reported by Livy and other heathen historians. 'We have no other part left', Middleton declared, 'but either to admit them all, or reject all; for otherwise, [we] can never be thought to act consistently'. The historical testimony of Justin Martyr and Iranaeus, the earliest of the Fathers, was for a number of reasons far less compelling than that of the Jansenists who reported miracles performed at the tomb of the Abbé de Paris in the 1720s.¹¹⁶ Human nature remained ever the same; and the means employed to acquire authority over men, captivating their reason and appealing to the senses, were similarly identical. This tactic had recommended itself to clerics more than any other group of men. Their shared interest was strong, and frequently contradicted that of legislators and of civil societies. 'Tho' this may

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. lxix-lxxiii.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 119-20. Here Middleton repeated many of the arguments developed in his MS 'Letter to the Reverend Dr Waterland on the Subject of Certain Principles Advanced in his Last Book Called *The Importance of the Doctrine of the Trinity*' (1734), which Hervey convinced him not to publish: BL Add. MS 32459, ff. 52-97.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 180-84.

sound harsh in the ears of many', Middleton noted, 'it will not appear strange to those, who have given any attention to the history of mankind; which will always suggest this sad reflection; that the greatest zealots in religion; or the leaders of sects or parties, whatever purity or principles they pretend to, have seldom scrupled to make use of a commodious lie, for the advancement, of what they call the truth'.¹¹⁷ This demanded that the judgement and intentions of religious writers be subjected to a more, rather than less, rigorous standard of criticism, since unlike profane historians they had an overwhelming motive to deceive. 'Should we be asked', Middleton informed his reader, '*will ye not believe a most holy Bishop, in a fact attested by his own senses?* the answer is clear and short: *the fact is not credible*'.¹¹⁸ To evaluate critically those stories of supernatural visions and occurrences that so characterised the works of religious writers was, Middleton emphasised, not to call the credibility of history itself into question, but rather to redeem it from the abuses it had suffered. This insinuation played on misguided fears regarding the consequences of historical scepticism, and was made by the orthodox in both Rome and Lambeth for their own purposes.¹¹⁹

The final position adopted by Middleton in the *Free Inquiry* seemed to many contemporaries, not least Warburton, to be indistinguishable from that of freethinkers like Tindal, who presented Christianity as merely '*the republication of the religion of nature*'. As this chapter has suggested, Middleton's *Life* rather complicates this picture. In many respects, Middleton's attempt to reconcile natural and revealed law was considerably more troubling. It was certainly more nuanced. For Middleton, gospel Christianity reinforced a moral law that Cicero had, perhaps uniquely, established on the basis of a continual observation of those qualities in individuals that, in the practical affairs of life, advanced their own happiness and

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 67.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 123.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 175. It had a much longer heritage, however, as Middleton was well aware. Quintus (a Stoic), in Cicero's *De Divinatione*, argued that to deny the credibility of the historical testimony regarding divination and immediate inspiration was to call into doubt 'the entire record of history', something Cicero denied (1.19.38).

that of their fellow man. True gospel Christianity, if adopted as a guide to life, would be historically invisible. It merely reinforced those natural affections which the dogmatic Stoic and Epicurean philosophies exhorted individuals to subdue, and false religion entirely inverted. Cicero's moral philosophy, and his religious beliefs, were founded upon probability, not certainty; on the *utile*, not the *honestum*. This had been sufficient for Cicero. Any greater certainty was resolved into a question of faith, and Middleton strongly suggested that Christ's revelation had not altered this. Whereas Locke laid great emphasis on how revelation enlarged exponentially upon the insights of philosophy, replacing a hope of salvation in a world to come with a full persuasion, in Middleton's hands the Gospels were to an extent dissolved into *De Officiis*. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, for Middleton, Cicero's philosophy and that of Christ were equally divine, but that the former took precedence. Only by first submitting to the pains and application demanded by academic scepticism— that is, by philosophizing properly— might the value of the Gospels be identified. Its meaning and significance were, however, to all intents and purposes confined within parameters established by Cicero.

Although Hume scholarship has, in recent decades, tended towards a more interdisciplinary methodological approach—teasing out the relationship between Hume's works, rather than focusing exclusively on Book I of the *Treatise*—the importance he attached to Cicero's philosophical writings across them all has received relatively little concerted attention.¹ Yet it is highly significant when considering a question which has preoccupied recent Hume scholars, that of whether Hume should be considered to have worked broadly within the Epicurean or Stoic tradition.² There is little doubt that Hume's hedonic psychology, valorisation of pride, and treatment of moral distinctions and justice as conventional seemed to many contemporaries in Scotland, not least Hutcheson, to be Epicurean in provenance. Hume was certainly more willing than were his fellow Scots to engage seriously with the writings of Hobbes, Bayle and Mandeville, whose egoistic moral theories—and their concomitant implications for natural theology—Hutcheson and others endeavoured to expel from Scottish intellectual life.³ Epicurean insights were taken seriously in England,

¹ Fortunately, few scholars remain wedded to the once-conventional view, articulated by Bertrand Russell, that 'what is important and novel in [Hume's] doctrines is in the first book [of the *Treatise*], to which I shall confine myself: *A History of Western Philosophy*, 2nd edn (London, 2004), p. 601. The most concerted treatments of Hume's intellectual debt to Cicero in his non-religious writings have nonetheless focused on his epistemology: see Buckle, 'British Sceptical Realism'; and John P. Wright, 'Hume's Academic Scepticism: a Reappraisal of his Philosophy of Human Understanding', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 16:3 (Sep. 1986), pp. 407-35. Peter Jones has emphasised the importance of Cicero for Hume's moral theory, but has considered this primarily within a French rather than a British context: *Hume's Sentiments: their Ciceronian and French Context* (Edinburgh, 1982).

² For broadly Epicurean interpretations of Hume, see especially Moore, 'Hume and Hutcheson'; and Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, Ch. 6. For a restatement of Hume's proximity to Hutcheson's neo-Stoic moral realism, see Norton, 'Hume and Hutcheson: the Question of Influence'; and, for critical response, see Moore's 'The Eclectic Stoic, the Mitigated Skeptic'. For an interpretation that indicates Hume's independence from both traditions, see James A. Harris, 'The Epicurean in Hume', in *Epicurus in the Enlightenment*, pp. 161-81; and idem, 'Hume's Four Essays on Happiness and their Place in the Move from Morals to Politics', in *New Essays on Hume*, pp. 223-35.

³ For Hutcheson's deep hostility to the egoism of Hobbes, Mandeville and to a lesser extent Pufendorf, see Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, pp. 283-9; and James Moore, 'The Two Systems of Francis Hutcheson: on the Origins of the Scottish Enlightenment', in M.A. Stewart (ed.), *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 37-59. Hume's pivotal role in directing the course of subsequent philosophical enquiry in Scotland, a number of scholars have observed, owes much to his emphasis on the need to take Augustinian-Epicurean insights seriously, something those who sought to respond to him were forced to recognise: Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, passim; and Nicholas Phillipson, *Adam Smith: an Enlightened Life* (London, 2010), pp. 60-71.

however; and, as Hume's genealogy of the 'science of man' suggested, it was with this primarily English debate that Hume was preoccupied.⁴ Hume increasingly abandoned any attempt to conceal his contempt for the moral and religious philosophy of the Stoics, or indeed for their modern interlocutors such as Shaftesbury. This set him apart from the mainstream of moral philosophy in eighteenth-century Scotland, which was characterised by the attempt to forge a synthesis between a moderate Presbyterianism and a Stoic ethics.⁵ This partly explains why Hume was obstructed in his attempts to secure a Chair at Edinburgh (1745) and Glasgow (1751).⁶ Hume repeatedly articulated his divergence from his contemporaries with reference to the 'different sects or systems' of the late Hellenistic period. Yet it was with Ciceronian academic scepticism that he identified his philosophy.⁷

Hume was acutely conscious of the need to place his methodological and theoretical approach within the broader context of a historiography of philosophical practice.⁸ The manner in which he did so altered, in significant but little remarked upon ways, between the *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40) and what would later be titled the two *Enquiries*— the *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding* (1748) and the *Enquiry concerning the Principles*

⁴ Hume was also primarily concerned regarding the reception of his writings in England, which was the guiding theme of 'My Own Life'. See, too, Hume to Henry Home, 12 June 1739, in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J.Y.T. Greig (2 vols., Oxford, 1932), i, pp. 30-31. The success of the *Essays, Moral and Political* (1741-2) in England led Hume to hope that they might 'bring forward the rest of my philosophy' there: Hume to Home, 13 June 1742, in *Letters*, i, pp. 7-10.

⁵ For the Stoic character of eighteenth-century Scottish moral philosophy, see Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: the Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1985); Paul B. Wood, *The Aberdeen Enlightenment: the Arts Curriculum in the Eighteenth Century* (Aberdeen, 1993); and M.A. Stewart, 'The Stoic Legacy in the Early Scottish Enlightenment', in *Atoms, Pneuma, and Tranquillity*, pp. 273-96. For general discussion, see Harris, 'The Place of the Ancients'.

⁶ On Hume's candidacy, see Roger Emerson, 'The "Affair" at Edinburgh and the "Project" at Glasgow: the Politics of Hume's Attempts to Become a Professor', in *Hume's Connexions*, pp. 1-22; and M.A. Stewart, *The Kirk and the Infidel* (Lancaster, 1995). Hume suspected that Hutcheson had played a central role in blocking his candidacy in 1745: Hume to William Mure, 4 Aug. 1744, in *Letters*, i, pp. 55-9. M.A. Stewart & James Moore suggest that Hume was correct in this suspicion: 'William Smith (1698-1741) and the Dissenters' Book Trade', *The Bulletin of the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland*, 22 (1993), pp. 20-27.

⁷ For two examples, see Hume to [James Balfour], 15 Mar. 1753, in *Letters*, i, p. 173; and the 'Dedication' (to John Home), in *Four Dissertations* (London, 1757), p. ii.

⁸ A point explored productively by Livingston, *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium*, passim.

of *Morals* (1751).⁹ In the *Treatise* Hume set up his argument within what appears, when viewed through the prism of the later *Enquiries*, to be an ecumenical framework. He identified his 'attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects' with 'some late philosophers in *England*' who had 'begun to put the science of man on a new footing'— 'Mr. *Locke*, my Lord *Shaftesbury*, Dr. *Mandeville*, Mr. *Hutcheson*, Dr. *Butler*, &c.' (*T*, 'Introduction', 5 & n. 1).¹⁰ Hume drew a causal link between this new approach to the study of human nature and the rediscovery of the insights of classical moral philosophy, recently reclaimed from its subordination to Christian moral theology. Hume's treatment of the passions and morality in Books II and III was set up in relation to a debate concerning the origin of moral distinctions in either reason or sentiment. Hume intimated that on this point the scientists of human nature and the ancient moralists were broadly as one. The former 'enter into the same way of thinking' regarding moral good and ill as 'the ancient moralists in particular', and in this respect Hume suggested he was in good company (*T* 3.3.4: 4).

In the *Enquiries*, the terms of the debate examined by Hume were presented rather differently. This is especially true of Hume's exposition of his moral theory in the *Principles of Morals*, the work of which he was most proud.¹¹ Hume now presented that theory primarily as an intervention in the debate within the 'science of man' between those who held the foundation of morals to be in either self-love or natural benevolence. Hume explicitly set up this debate with reference to the methodological and theoretical divisions between the Epicureans and Stoics in the late Hellenistic period, both of whom had nonetheless largely

⁹ The most thorough discussion of the change in the structure of Hume's theory of human nature between these works is to be found in Cumming, *Human Nature and History*, i, pp. 188-231; and Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, ii, pp. 288-308. The title of the *Philosophical Essays* was only altered to that of *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* from the 1758 edition of the *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*.

¹⁰ *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. D.F. Norton & M.J. Norton (2 vols., Oxford, 2007): Hume's text is in the second volume. References are provided in brackets in the text, as above, and (where appropriate) in the following format: [Book] 1. [Part] 1. [Section] 1: [Paragraph] 1.

¹¹ See 'My Own Life', p. xxxiv; and Hume to the Abbé Le Blanc, 5 Nov. 1755, in *Letters*, i, p. 227.

located the origins of morals in sentiment. In this regard, the *Enquiries* drew attention to the intractable divisions between both the ‘ancient moralists’ and the pioneers of the ‘science of man’. Here is it worth noting— as many commentators have failed to do— that Hume did not associate Locke’s moral philosophy with the ‘abstract theory of morals’ developed by Clarke, William Wollaston and Cudworth, which ‘excludes all sentiment, and pretends to found every thing on reason’.¹² Hume read Locke (as had Newton and Shaftesbury) as an ‘EPICUREAN or HOBBIIST’, who concluded that ‘no passion is, or can be, disinterested’, and that all apparently benevolent action stemmed ultimately from the principle of self-love (*EPM*, 22 n. 12; 91).¹³

In presenting his predecessors in the ‘science of man’ as the modern interlocutors of Epicureanism and Stoicism, Hume now articulated his divergence from them with reference to this classical historiographical framework. In the *Philosophical Essays*, Hume distinguished far more clearly than in the *Treatise* between two, distinct species of sceptical philosophy: the Pyrrhonian, identified with Sextus, and the Academic, associated with Cicero. ‘PYRRHONISM’, Hume declared, could not be refuted by either the ‘STOIC or EPICUREAN’, the only two philosophies whose principles were intended to ‘have an effect on conduct and behaviour’— that is, to provide a guide to life independent of custom. Sextus’ own presentation of Pyrrhonism as the means to acquire tranquillity, however, was as misplaced and unnatural as the Stoic’s *apatheia* or the Epicurean’s *ataraxia*. No man could, in practice, ‘look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another’ and thereby

¹² This challenges the suggestion that Locke was an anomaly in Hume’s genealogy of the science of man. Norman Kemp-Smith, by way of example, argues that ‘with the one exception of Locke, who sought to develop a rationalist ethics, and who is included for quite other reasons, these writers, it may be noted, agree in finding a basis for morals in the specific economy of the human soul’: *The Philosophy of David Hume. A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines* (London, 1941), p. 24. For a near-identical statement, see John L. Mackie, *Hume’s Moral Theory* (London, 1980), pp. 1-6. Mackie’s discussion of Hume’s supposed predecessors draws directly from that found in Raphael’s anthology, *British Moralists, 1650-1800*, which, skipping from Hobbes to Shaftesbury, bypasses Locke altogether.

¹³ *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), ed. T.L. Beauchamp (Oxford, 1998): references to page number are provided in brackets in the text, as above.

suspend his judgement, as all men had to ‘act and reason and *believe*’ (EHU, 119).¹⁴ Pyrrhonian scepticism, developed most fully in the modern age by Berkeley, was nonetheless valuable to the extent that it could act as a solvent to the fundamental premises upon which the dogmatic Epicurean and Stoic philosophies were erected.¹⁵ If Pyrrhonism was purely destructive, academic scepticism was constructive, able to explain why men in practice formed judgements of good and ill, true and false. It was with this tradition that Hume unambiguously aligned his own sceptical philosophy.¹⁶

By explicitly drawing out the discrepancies between the scientists of human nature, and emphasising their classical lineage, Hume intimated that their moral theories were scarcely ‘scientific’ at all. To apply the Baconian experimental method to moral subjects, reasoning from the particular to the general and from effects to causes, demanded not simply a return to a pagan treatment of morals. It required, Hume now suggested, a methodological approach unique to academic scepticism.¹⁷ The empirical moral philosopher confined his enquiry to the question of recognition— how men identified particular qualities (in themselves and others) as morally estimable or opprobrious, and why they did so— rather than asking whether they were correct in these judgements.¹⁸ The modern philosopher who perpetuated the ‘cant of the STOICS and CYNICS concerning *virtue*’ lionised certain qualities

¹⁴ *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, ed. T.L. Beauchamp (Oxford, 2000): reference to page number are provided in brackets in the text. Note Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, trans. J. Annas & J. Barnes (Cambridge, 1994), p. 61: ‘those who profess to belong to the Academy make use of the plausible in their lives, whilst we follow laws and customs and natural feelings, and so live without holding any opinions’.

¹⁵ Hume considered Berkeley’s writings to ‘form the best lessons of scepticism, which are to be found either among the ancient or modern philosophers, BAYLE not excepted’, but to be of no practical consequence whatsoever, since ‘*they admit of no answer and produce no conviction*’, unlike academic scepticism: *EPM*, p. 116 n. 32.

¹⁶ In Essay IV of the *Philosophical Essays*, the ‘Sceptical Doubts’ raised regarding the ‘Operations of the Understanding’ are broadly Pyrrhonian; the ‘Sceptical Solution of these Doubts’ (Essay V) rests on academic insights regarding the sufficiency of probability and the power of custom. The final Essay (XII)—‘Of the Academic or Sceptical Philosophy’— makes this point quite clear.

¹⁷ For attempts to calibrate the extent of Hume’s interest in and understanding of Newtonian science, see James E. Force, ‘Hume’s Interest in Newton and Science’, *Hume Studies*, 13 (1987), pp. 166-216; and Michael Barfoot, ‘Hume and the Culture of Science in the Early Eighteenth Century’, in *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 151-90.

¹⁸ A point properly emphasised by Annette Baier, *Postures of the Mind: Essays on the Mind and Morals* (London, 1985), p. 257.

and actions as praiseworthy in themselves: right-thinking men (meaning the philosopher) applauded them, and all ought to do so (*EPM*, 53). The modern ‘EPICUREAN’, in comparison, offered an aetiology of misrecognition, explaining why the socialised individual mistook as praiseworthy conduct and qualities (their own, and others’) that found their origins in self-love, and therefore ought to incite condemnation.

In the *Principles of Morals*, Hume indicated how modern moral debate had followed a similar dynamic to that in the late Hellenistic world. The ‘cant’ of the Stoics regarding virtue, and their ‘magnificent pretensions and slender performances, bred a disgust in mankind’. This incited antagonists such as Lucian—who was, ‘in other respects, a very moral writer’—to speak of virtue with pronounced ‘symptoms of spleen and irony’.¹⁹ Hume argued that modern panegyrists of human nature in Britain had outdone even their Stoic ancestors, and modern day Lucians had responded accordingly:

In this kingdom, such continued ostentation, of late years, has prevailed among men in *active* life with regard to *public spirit*, and among those in *speculative* with regard to *benevolence*; and so many false pretensions to each have been, no doubt, detected, that men of the world are apt, without any bad intention, to discover a sullen incredulity on the head of those moral endowments, and even sometimes absolutely to deny their existence and reality. (*EPM*, 53)

Steele’s Bickerstaff and Viscount Bolingbroke’s disinterested patriot no less than Shaftesbury and Hutcheson’s naturally sociable and benevolent philosophical individual had, on Hume’s interpretation, incited Mandeville’s wilfully satirical presentation of all men as positively ‘bad, that are not taught to be good’.²⁰

In placing his moral theory in relation to the Stoic and Epicurean traditions in the *Principles of Morals*, Hume also advertised the extent to which he followed Cicero’s philosophical writings

¹⁹ Earlier in the *Enquiry*, Hume had similarly noted that Polybius, ‘one of the gravest and most judicious, as well as most moral writers of antiquity’, had deduced ‘morals from self-love, or a regard to private interest’, which was ‘an obvious thought’ but nonetheless discountenanced by ‘the voice of nature and experience’: *EPM*, p. 35.

²⁰ *Fable Part II*, pp. 270-71; above, p. 151.

on the subject. 'CICERO', Hume declared in uncharacteristically oracular fashion, 'in a dispute, which is chiefly verbal, must, on account of the author, carry an authority, from which there can be no appeal' (*EPM*, 106 n. 72).²¹ In the *Treatise* Hume suggested that his treatment of morality found support in the writings of all of the 'ancient moralists', whose 'judgment is not perverted by a strict adherence to a system' (*T* 3.3.4: 4). Now *only* Cicero furnished an example of an individual who was unwilling 'to fetter his moral sentiments by narrow systems' (*EPM* 106 n. 72). Hume's greater willingness to emphasise his own philosophical iconoclasm thus found support from, and a precedent in, Cicero's eclecticism. Those disputes identified as 'chiefly verbal' by Hume lay at the very heart of the debates between those now denominated by Hume as neo-Epicureans and neo-Stoics. Chief among these was 'the vulgar dispute concerning the *degrees* of benevolence or self-love, which prevail in human nature'— a clear nod to Shaftesbury, Mandeville and Hutcheson. This gave rise to 'vain' and 'merely verbal' debates regarding the signification of 'the word, *natural*', Shaftesbury's definition of which had been entirely inverted by Mandeville (*EPM*, 98; 99 n. 64). If men were 'naturally' selfish, then 'justice, order, fidelity, property, [and] society', and the 'moral distinctions' that prevailed in particular communities, 'were, at first, invented, and afterwards encouraged, by the art of politicians, in order to render men tractable, and subdue their natural ferocity and selfishness' (*EPM*, 34). If, conversely, benevolence were predominant in human nature, then men were led 'naturally' into society and compelled to adhere to universal (and immutable) rules of justice and morality by 'the force of instinct', just as all birds of the same species 'build their nests alike' (*EPM*, 45-6; 26).

This raised the question of the historical relationship between natural and positive law, which had similarly stimulated a 'merely verbal' dispute. Those neo-Stoics seeking to

²¹ This comment appeared in a section entitled 'Of Some Verbal Disputes', which was originally Part I of Section VI in the first edition of the *EPM*, but from 1764 was inserted as an appendix. Rivers notes how Hume here 'breath-takingly attributes a quasi-scriptural status' to Cicero's philosophical writings: *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, ii, p. 299.

establish the precedence, both in order and importance, of natural law endorsed ‘the *poetical* fiction of the *golden age*’, as had Plato. There was similarly a classical precedent for ‘the *philosophical* fiction of the *state of nature*’ indulged by neo-Epicureans like Hobbes, who argued that positive law had brought moral distinctions into existence and rendered them obligatory (*EPM*, 17 n. 11). Three further ‘verbal’ disputes were consequent on these visions of human nature. The first was whether ‘*pride*’ or ‘self-love’ was ‘good or bad’ (*EPM*, 103 n. 66). The second concerned the definition of ‘virtue’, and whether only those actions motivated by men’s disinterested benevolence (or charity) were entitled to comprehension ‘under that honourable appellation’ (*EPM*, 106). The third, denominated ‘merely verbal’ by a dying Hume in a paragraph added to the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* in 1776, concerned the dispute between ‘dogmatists’ and ‘sceptics’ regarding the divine nature and attributes (*DNR* XII: 93).²² In treating all of these highly contentious points, as will be seen, Hume claimed to draw from Cicero’s incontestable authority.

Hume’s famous claim that the *Treatise* ‘fell *dead-born from the Press*’ indicates the extent of his shock at the reception of the work, which shaped the subsequent trajectory of his career and writings.²³ In defending his candidacy for Edinburgh in 1745, Hume continued to argue that his moral theory ‘concur[s] with all the antient Moralists’, and indeed with those who had repudiated the ‘abstract theory of morals’ presented most notably by ‘*Clark and Wollaston*’.²⁴ Yet even as he wrote these words, the *Philosophical Essays*, scathingly critical of Stoic philosophy, were at an advanced stage in their composition. Hume emphasised that, in the later *Enquiries*, his fundamental philosophical ‘principles’ remained the same as in the *Treatise*, albeit they were expounded more expeditiously. There is little reason seriously to challenge

²² *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion and Other Writings*, ed. D. Coleman (Cambridge, 2007): references are provided, to chapter and page number, in brackets in the text. M.A. Stewart considers Hume’s late addition to the *Dialogues* as his ‘dying testament to posterity’: ‘The Dating of Hume’s Manuscripts’, p. 303.

²³ ‘My Own Life’, p. xxxiv. On this, see M.A. Stewart, ‘Two Species of Philosophy: The Historical Significance of the First *Enquiry*’, in P. Millican (ed.), *Reading Hume on Human Understanding: Essays on the First Enquiry* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 67-95.

²⁴ *A Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend in Edinburgh* (1745), in *Treatise*, i, pp. 429-30.

this claim.²⁵ Instead, the evidence we have regarding Hume's early intellectual development indicates that a more discerning critical evaluation of both ancient and modern philosophy than that implied in the apparently ecumenical *Treatise* stimulated Hume's philosophical enquiries from the late 1720s.²⁶ That is to say, Cicero's philosophical writings were as central to the *Treatise* as they were to the *Enquiries*, even though Hume sought to downplay his divergence from his predecessors in the 'science of man' in the former work for prudential reasons.

In a letter to an unidentified physician of 1734, Hume suggested the prolonged depressive episode he had suffered from 1729 furnished him with one key insight, which strongly influenced the direction of his philosophical endeavours. Hume's early correspondence, dating from the mid-1720s, indicates that he initially found much of value in Stoic moral philosophy— and perhaps in Shaftesbury's *Characteristics*, a copy of which Hume had procured by 1726.²⁷ Yet the inability of Stoic exercises to dispel his melancholy, Hume suggested, indicated to him how 'peevisish' were their 'Reflections on the Vanity of the World & of all humane Glory'. This encouraged a more general scepticism regarding the value of classical moral philosophy:

I found that the moral Philosophy transmitted to us by Antiquity, labor'd under the same Inconvenience that has been found in their natural Philosophy, of being entirely Hypothetical, & depending more upon Invention than Experience. Every one consulted his Fancy in erecting Schemes of Virtue & of Happiness, without regarding human Nature, upon which every moral Conclusion must depend. This therefore I resolved to make my principal Study, & the Source from which I wou'd derive every Truth in Criticism as well as Morality.

²⁵ In 'My Own Life', Hume judged that the failure of the *Treatise* 'had proceeded more from the manner, rather than the matter' of the work, and declared that he had 'cast... that work anew' in the *Enquiries*: p. xxxv. Similarly Hume noted to Gilbert Elliot that in the *Philosophical Essays*, 'the philosophical Principles' were the same as those of the *Treatise*, but 'by shortening & simplifying the Questions, I really render them much more complete': Mar./Apr. 1751, in *Letters*, i, p. 158.

²⁶ On which, see M.A. Stewart, 'Hume's Intellectual Development, 1711-1752', in M. Frasca-Spada & P.J.E. Kail (eds.), *Impressions of Hume* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 11-58.

²⁷ In a letter to Michael Ramsay of 4 July 1727, Hume noted how he sought the 'Greatness and Elevation of Soul... only to be found in Study & Contemplation', and to this end 'I wisely practice my Rules; which prescribe to check our Appetite': *Letters*, i, pp. 9-11. The unmistakably Stoic resonance of these passages is noted by Stewart, 'Intellectual Development', p. 28.

The definitions of man's end furnished by the Epicureans and Stoics, established upon ungrounded hypotheses regarding human nature, continued to inform contemporary moral philosophy. It was for this reason that Hume's ambition was aroused. He experienced 'a certain Boldness of Temper, growing in me, which was not enclin'd to submit to any Authority in these Subjects, but which led me to seek out some *new Medium*, by which Truth might be establisht'.²⁸ In a similar vein, Hume did not exclude the pioneers of the 'science of man' from his observation in the *Treatise* that 'moral philosophy is in the same condition as natural, with regard to astronomy before the time of *Copernicus*' (*T* 2.1.4: 30). This sensitivity to the manner in which the errors of the ancients permeated the philosophy of the moderns was not confined to moral inquiries. Crucially, it extended into the domain of natural theology, which was 'in some measure dependent on the science of MAN' (*T*, 'Introduction', 4). This was indicated in a letter to Gilbert Elliot of 1751, which accompanied an early draft of the *Dialogues*. This letter shows how Hume's thoroughgoing critical re-evaluation of classical philosophy from 1729, and of a modern philosophy heavily indebted to it, led to a profound questioning of the philosophical foundations of religious belief.²⁹

As was seen in Chapter 1, a broadly similar insight regarding the relationship between classical and modern moral and religious philosophy had been fundamental to Locke's intellectual development from the 1660s. In the *Abstract* of the *Treatise*, Hume made clear the extent to which he drew from Locke's *Essay* in developing his '*new Medium*', on three points in particular. Hume's reading of Locke was, however, a critical one. First, Hume noted that 'if any thing can intitle the author to so glorious a name as that of an *inventor*, 'tis the use he makes of the principle of the association of ideas', a 'use' fundamentally different to Locke's

²⁸ Hume to ?, 1734, in *Letters*, i, pp. 12-18 (italics added). There is little evidence regarding the identity of the physician in question; Greig thought it was George Cheyne, whereas E.C. Mossner suggested John Arbuthnot: *The Life of David Hume*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1980), pp. 84-5. It is not known whether the letter was even sent.

²⁹ Hume noted that he had only recently 'burn'd an old Manuscript Book, wrote before I was twenty [c.1729]; which contain'd, Page after Page, the gradual Progress of my Thoughts' on religion: Hume to Gilbert Elliot, 10 Mar. 1751, in *ibid.*, i, p. 154.

own.³⁰ The second was the ‘very new and remarkable’ treatment he offered of ‘probabilities, and those other measures of evidence on which life and action entirely depend, and which are our guides even in most of our philosophical speculations’— the implications of which, Hume declared, Locke had failed to explore systematically. The third, and most important for Hume’s criticism of both the Epicurean and Stoic moral traditions, was Locke’s distinction between ideas of sensation and reflection. In his (laudable) concern to repudiate the doctrine of innate ideas, Locke had failed to recognise that ‘our stronger perceptions or impressions are innate, and that natural affection, love of virtue, resentment, and all the other passions, arise immediately from nature’, and were ‘a kind of natural instinct’.³¹

For Locke, the association of ideas provided a means of explaining why men confused unverifiable beliefs imposed upon their minds from their infancy with knowledge properly so-called. For Hume, it explained how all such knowledge as it took shape in the course of common life ought to be conceived of as a species of belief.³² In contrast to Locke, Hume denied that opinion based in probability was as grounded in reason and the understanding as demonstrative knowledge. Reason was marginalised in Hume’s explanation of the transition made by the mind from the existence of one object to that of another.³³ The third point regarding men’s natural instincts was crucial for Hume’s critique of the moral theory of the ‘EPICUREAN or HOBBIIST’, who denied that men possessed passions that might potentially be ‘disinterested’. It was also fundamental for Hume’s expulsion of piety from the catalogue of the virtues, and entire separation of human natural and positive law (morality and justice) from moral theology. Men’s moral responses were dependent upon an affective psychology

³⁰ See above, p. 93; and Wright, ‘Association, Madness, and the Measures of Probability’.

³¹ *An Abstract of a Book Lately Published...* (1740), in *Treatise*, i, pp. 416, 408-409. The *Abstract* was published anonymously, and perhaps intended for inclusion as a review of the *Treatise* in the *Bibliothèque Raisonnée des Ouvrages des Savans de l’Europe*: on this, see Stewart & Moore, ‘William Smith and the Dissenters’ Book Trade’.

³² On which, see James A. Harris, ‘A Compleat Chain of Reasoning: Hume’s Project in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Books One and Two’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 109 (2009), pp. 129-48.

³³ David Owen, ‘Hume’s Doubts about Probable Reasoning: was Locke the Target?’, in *Hume’s Connexions*, pp. 140-59 (Owen concludes that he was).

specific to their species, and a deity could serve no explanatory function in describing their operation. If Hume credited Locke with providing insights that were both novel and important, he intimated that Locke himself had failed to explore their consequences fully.

As one of his achievements, Hume broadcast that he had ironed out certain irregularities and tensions he had discovered in Locke's writings. In the *Philosophical Essays*, Hume remarked that 'ambiguity and circumlocution seems to run through that philosopher's reasonings' (EHU, 16 n. 1). In his treatment of power, agency, the will and personal identity— all subjects considered by Locke at greater length from 1694 in response to accusations of 'Hobbism'— Locke had remained in thrall to 'vulgar' assumptions regarding the ability of the mind to identify an 'active principle' in nature (T 1.3.14).³⁴ For Hume the case was clear: 'objects have no discernible connexion together; nor is it from any other principle but custom operating upon the imagination, that we can draw any inference from the appearance of one to the existence of another' (T 1.3.8: 12). In exposing these ideas as inferences drawn naturally by the imagination or 'fancy', and corresponding to no particular impressions, Hume paraphrased precisely that passage from *De Natura Deorum* that had adorned the title-page of Locke's *Essay*. He did so in order to emphasise how Locke had succumbed to the malaise he had himself identified: 'For what can be imagin'd more tormenting, than to seek with eagerness, what for ever flies us; and seek for it in a place, where 'tis impossible it can ever exist?' (T 1.4.3: 9)³⁵ As Hume would make clearer in the *Philosophical Essays*, these were disputes that had once more 'hitherto turned merely upon words' and were 'meerly verbal'. By considering them to be of importance Locke had departed from Cicero, whom Hume appropriated as an authority vindicating his own

³⁴ Hume's concern to 'correct Locke's errors' on these points is noted by Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, ii, pp. 243-4, 290-91.

³⁵ See above, p. 72. Hume did not present this as a quote, or provide a reference to Cicero; and the allusion has been missed by the Nortons. This passage from *De Natura Deorum* was also employed as an epigraph by Collins in his *Discourse of Free-Thinking* (1713).

marginalisation of such questions as of no consequence for an understanding of human life (*EHU*, 63).³⁶

In arguing that Locke had been betrayed by his close engagement with the ‘schoolmen’ into ignoring man’s natural instincts, Hume repeated an accusation made by Shaftesbury (*EHU*, 16 n. 1).³⁷ Hume’s presentation of Locke’s philosophy as ambiguous or even contradictory similarly endorsed a charge levelled at Locke by his one-time pupil. Shaftesbury considered Locke to have drawn selectively from the mutually antagonistic Stoic and Epicurean traditions, and to have forged an ‘unnatural and monstrous’ misalliance between them. Hume’s objective, however, was very different from Shaftesbury’s. Hume agreed with Locke that neither Stoicism nor Epicureanism could provide a guide to life. Pyrrhonism undercut the hypothetical visions of man and the world upon which both were established. Hume made this point with rhetorical force in ‘Of Scepticism regarding the Senses’, where he considered ‘the system of double existence’ (*T* 1.4.2). This was the means employed by certain philosophers to reconcile the sceptical insights provided by philosophy with men’s ‘natural tendency’ to believe in the testimony of the senses and imagination regarding the continued existence of the ‘self’ and the external world. The former suggested chaos and disorder, whereas the latter implied a unity and harmony. To attempt to reconcile them was, as Shaftesbury suggested, indeed ‘monstrous’:

This philosophical system, therefore, is the monstrous offspring of two principles, which are contrary to each other, which are both at once embrac’d by the mind, and which are unable mutually to destroy each other. [...] Nature is obstinate, and will not quit the field, however strongly attack’d by reason; and at the same time reason is so clear in the point, that there is no possibility of disguising her. Not being able to reconcile these two enemies, we endeavour to set ourselves at ease as much as possible, by successively granting to each whatever it demands (*T* 1.4.2: 52).

³⁶ Here Hume referred specifically to the question of free will.

³⁷ Shaftesbury considered Locke’s denial of natural affection to be a consequence of his (laudable) endeavour to refute ‘the Gibberish of the Schools’: Shaftesbury to Ainsworth, 3 June 1709, in *Several Letters*, pp. 39-41.

If Locke stood accused of evading the full force of the Pyrrhonian challenge, Hume intimated that Shaftesbury had ignored it altogether. There was a ‘direct and total opposition betwixt our reason and our senses; or more properly speaking, betwixt those conclusions we form from cause and effect, and those that persuade us of the continu’d and independent existence of body’ (*T* 1.4.4: 15). This conflict was real and intractable, and had to be confronted by the philosopher: ‘How then shall we adjust those principles together? Which of them shall we prefer? Or in case we prefer neither of them, but successively assent to both, as is usual among philosophers, with what confidence can we afterwards usurp that glorious title, when we thus knowingly embrace a manifest contradiction?’ (*T* 1.4.7: 4)³⁸ It seems highly probable that Hume had Shaftesbury in mind when referring to those ‘men of bright fancies’ whose solution was to abandon ‘refin’d or elaborate reasoning’ altogether in favour of the ‘illusions of the imagination’. This was an antipathy towards ‘metaphysics’ expressed by Shaftesbury on almost every page of *Characteristics*.³⁹ Those who knowingly embraced such wilful ignorance, Hume suggested, ‘may in this respect be compar’d to those angels, whom the scripture represents as covering their eyes with their wings’ (*T* 1.4.7: 6). Shaftesbury’s *Moralists* illustrated how ‘a great genius may be influenced by these seemingly trivial principles of the imagination, as well as the mere vulgar’ (*T* 1.4.6: 6 n.).

Crucially, Hume entirely denied what Locke had endeavoured to defend: that moral theology, unlike either Stoic or Epicurean philosophy, could provide a criterion (God’s intentions for man) by which to establish the normative truth of the judgments made by

³⁸ For the rhetorical dimension of Hume’s discussion of this ‘contradiction’— one to an extent experienced only by the philosopher, rather than in everyday life by the ‘honest gentlemen’ in whose company his Pyrrhonian doubts lost all force (*T* 1.4.7)— see Don Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume’s Philosophy* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 215-22.

³⁹ For an account that similarly suggests that Shaftesbury was Hume’s primary target here, see Kenneth P. Winkler, “‘All is Revolution in Us’: Personal Identity in Shaftesbury and Hume”, *Hume Studies*, 26:1 (Apr. 2000), pp. 3-40. Hume’s contempt for those who had made it fashionable to ‘reject every thing that requires any considerable degree of attention to be comprehended’ was restated at the outset of Book III (*T* 3.1.1: 1); and this was the central question considered by Hume in Essay I of the *Philosophical Essays* (“Of the Different Species of Philosophy”).

men in the course of common life. Had Hume included in the *Treatise*, as he probably first intended, the concerted discussion of miracles, providence and a future state that later appeared in the *Philosophical Essays*, this point would have been made more forcefully.⁴⁰ Even in the 'castrated' form in which it was published, the *Treatise* made the argument clearly enough that the question of God's will and a concern for future sanctions had no place in true moral philosophy, which was concerned with explanation rather than normative justification. 'A future state', Hume declared, 'is so far remov'd from our comprehension, and we have so obscure an idea of the manner, in which we shall exist after the dissolution of the body, that all the reasons we can invent, however strong in themselves, and however much assisted by education, are never able with slow investigations to surmount this difficulty, or bestow a sufficient authority and force on the idea' (*T* 1.3.9: 13). Hume denied entirely that God could or should play an explanatory role in moral enquiries, and expressed his regret that all too few philosophers had grasped this fundamental point:

In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason shou'd be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it. (*T* 3.1.1: 27)

Moral theology, and especially the doctrine of a future state, furnished Locke with the means to reconcile the explanatory and the normative. Moral codes and positive law developed as

⁴⁰ In a letter to Henry Home, dated 2 Dec. 1737, Hume regretted that he was engaged in 'castrating my work, that is, cutting off its nobler parts' before sending it to Joseph Butler, and he enclosed 'some *Reasonings concerning Miracles*, which I once thought of publishing with the rest, but which I am afraid will give too much offence, as the world is disposed at present': *Letters*, i, pp. 23-5. M.A. Stewart declares that, in 'Of Miracles', Hume's 'project is, in effect, to make Locke consistent': 'Hume's Historical View of Miracles', in *Hume's Connexions*, p. 183. Stephen Buckle similarly emphasises how the incorporation of Essays X and XI of the *Philosophical Essays* into the *Treatise* would have indicated far more clearly to Hume's contemporary reader the extent to which the work ought to be read as a critical response to Locke's *Essay*: 'Marvels, Miracles, and Mundane Order: Hume's Critique of Religion in *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 79:1 (Mar. 2001), pp. 1-31.

hedonic man pursued happiness in society; but his desires themselves disclosed truths regarding his purpose and end as God's creature that had subsequently been revealed in full. In the *Treatise*, Hume banished the *bonestum* altogether, and found in Cicero's philosophical writings a powerful means of articulating why it was necessary to do so. Hume made this point most compellingly in his response, in 1739, to Hutcheson's criticisms of a draft of Book III.⁴¹ Here Hume emphasised— as had Locke— the centrality of public utility in shaping the moral distinctions and rules of justice that developed as men lived together in society. The philosopher could explain how this had occurred. He could not, however, draw from this any determinate conclusions regarding man's purpose or end, and thereby declare particular moral codes or practices to accord with or diverge from what was true or 'natural'. Any moral system that claimed to lead men pedagogically into the path of true virtue necessarily presupposed the existence of criteria by which to establish man's ultimate end. Hutcheson's concern regarding Hume's lack of 'Warmth in the Cause of Virtue' elided this distinction between description and prescription. Hume made precisely this point in responding to Hutcheson, noting that his own ethical theory remained 'founded on final Causes; which is a consideration, that appears to me pretty uncertain & unphilosophical. For pray, what is the End of Man? Is he created for Happiness or for Virtue? For this Life or the next? For himself or for his Maker?'⁴²

To justify his position, Hume invited Hutcheson to review both *De Officiis* and Book IV of *De Finibus*. Hume's claim that he took his 'Catalogue of Virtues' from *De Officiis*, and had this work 'in my Eye in all my Reasonings', was significant. In that work Cicero discussed virtue and the rules of justice almost exclusively in terms of their agreeableness and utility, both to

⁴¹ On this exchange, see especially Moore, 'Utility and Humanity'.

⁴² Hume to Hutcheson, 17 Sept. 1739, in *Letters*, i, p. 33. On Hume's critique of the teleological dimension of Hutcheson's moral theory, see James Moore, 'The Social Background of Hume's "Science of Human Nature"', in N. Capaldi, D.F. Norton & W.L. Robison (eds.), *McGill Hume Studies* (San Diego, 1976), pp. 23-41.

oneself and others. The reference to *De Finibus*, meanwhile, alluded to how the definition of man's true end furnished by the Stoic, Cato, had in Book IV been refuted by the academic sceptic (Cicero himself). This was an interpretation of the work, and of Cicero's philosophical objectives within it, with which Hutcheson disagreed strongly.⁴³ Taken together, Hume argued, Cicero's works provided what Stoic moral theory could not— an account of men's motives to morality and justice. Cicero demonstrated, Hume argued, 'that to every virtuous Action there must be a Motive or impelling Passion distinct from the Virtue, & that Virtue can never be the sole Motive to any Action'.⁴⁴ The Stoic's austere restriction of virtue to those actions performed disinterestedly for their own sake, reaffirmed by Hutcheson as by Shaftesbury, was inadequate. Meanwhile to invoke God as the creator, preserver and moral legislator of the universe, and the true object of man's gratitude and love, in order to vindicate an account of man's ultimate end was entirely mistaken. Since morality 'is determined merely by Sentiment, it regards only human Nature & human Life', as it was dependent on man's affective psychology which, in all likelihood, the deity did not share.⁴⁵

This insight was crucial since it freed Hume to explore the origins of morality and positive law with no reference whatsoever to moral theology, or indeed to any normative standard of ethical judgement.⁴⁶ It underpinned Hume's declaration that 'The distinction of moral good and evil is founded on the pleasure or pain, which results from the view of any sentiment, or character; and as that pleasure or pain cannot be unknown to the person who feels it, it

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 34-5. On Hutcheson's very different presentation of Cicero's 'fundamental doctrine of morals' as that of the Stoic, see below, pp. 293-4.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Hume to Hutcheson, 16 Mar. 1740, in *Letters*, i, pp. 38-40. What Hume termed 'the momentous consequences' of this insight for the 'religious hypothesis' are discussed in Ch. 7, below.

⁴⁶ The importance of Hume's relegation of piety from the catalogue of the virtues is discussed by Terence Penelhum, *Themes in Hume. The Self, the Will, Religion* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 177-203.

follows, that there is just so much vice or virtue in any character, as any one places in it, and that 'tis impossible in this particular we can ever be mistaken' (*T* 3.2.8: 8).⁴⁷

Hume's unequivocal confinement of morality to human life and concomitant denial that a deity was the just object of gratitude—which marked a seminal departure from Locke's moral theory, concerned above all to relate God's will to the content of the natural law—was erected upon Ciceronian foundations.⁴⁸ Hume's response to Hutcheson invites this interpretation. His letter to William Mure of 1743, in which he returned to the question of piety and its relationship to morality, confirms it. Here Hume noted that men were naturally attuned to experience 'love and gratitude for whatever is benevolent and beneficial'. This reinforced Cicero's claim in *De Officiis* that 'when we think people possess these virtues, we are compelled *by nature* to love them'.⁴⁹ Although a deity might possess 'these attributes in the highest perfection', Hume continued, it was nonetheless the case that 'he is not the natural object of any passion or affection'. Hume observed that even a 'remote ancestor, who has left us estates and honours' was sufficiently 'unknown to us' as to fail to stimulate any considerable affection or gratitude. This being so, how could any affection be felt towards 'an invisible infinite spirit' that was utterly incomprehensible to man?⁵⁰

The example of the remote ancestor was lifted, without acknowledgement, from Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*.⁵¹ In that work the academic sceptic, Cotta, pronounced both justice and morality to be 'the offspring of human society and of the commonwealth of man'.⁵² Cotta continued that 'the divine bestowal of reason upon man is not in itself an act of beneficence,

⁴⁷ Hume's logic here was identical to Locke's in his claim that when it came to sources of pleasure or pain in *this* life, men's judgement was infallible and 'the apparent and real good are, in this case, always the same': see above, p. 63.

⁴⁸ For the weight placed by Locke on the claim that the deity was the natural object of gratitude, on account of His creation, preservation and wise direction of the world, see Harris, *Mind of Locke*, pp. 63-4, 81-4.

⁴⁹ *De Officiis*, 2.32 (italics added).

⁵⁰ Hume to Mure, 30 June 1743, in *Letters*, i, p. 50.

⁵¹ The example of the remote ancestor is discussed at length by Holden, who nonetheless misses the Ciceronian heritage of the comparison: *Spectres of False Divinity*, pp. 65-7.

⁵² *De Natura Deorum*, 3.15.38.

like the bequest of an estate'. The latter act stimulated a degree of affection and gratitude towards one's benefactor, whereas men experienced no such sentiments with regard to any deity.⁵³ Meanwhile, Cotta observed, 'our virtue is a just ground for others' praise and a right reason for our own pride, and this would not be so if the gift of virtue came to us from a god and not from ourselves'.⁵⁴ The conclusion to be drawn from this, Hume informed Mure, was that piety and religious devotion were both unnatural and potentially corrupting of men's affective responses. 'A man, therefore, may have his heart perfectly well disposed towards every proper and natural object of affection, friends, benefactors, country, children, etc., and yet from this circumstance of the invisibility and incomprehensibility of the deity may feel no affection towards him'.⁵⁵ This, Hume suggested, was exactly how it should be. Only enthusiasts and fanatics would demand that men's hearts burn with a love of God.

Cicero's claim that it was precisely because virtue was confined to human life that it stimulated pride in the individual and elicited the approval of observers lay at the heart of Hume's radically reconceptualised definition of virtue. So, too, did the contention that both justice and morality were of human invention, and developed in tandem according to the continually-fluctuating dictates of public convenience. In the *Principles of Morals*, Hume made this intellectual debt emphatically clear. Cicero's refusal to 'fetter his moral sentiments by narrow systems' saw him include all qualities which were useful or agreeable either to oneself or to others in his 'Catalogue of Virtues'— precisely the division employed by Hume in his treatment of the subject (*EPM*, 106 n. 72). Cicero banished the question of normative truth from moral philosophy. As a consequence, he sought to explain rather than to judge the moral distinctions that developed in the course of common life. In the *Treatise*, Hume flatly denied that there 'is a real right or wrong; that is, a real distinction in morals, independent of

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 3.28.71.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.36.87.

⁵⁵ Hume to Mure, 30 June 1743, in *Letters*, i, p. 50.

these judgments' (*T* 3.1.1: 14). In the *Principles of Morals*, Hume confined himself, as had Cicero, to the useful and agreeable: 'whatever is valuable in any kind so naturally classes itself under the division of *useful* or *agreeable*, the *utile* or the *dulce*, that it is not easy to imagine, why we should ever seek farther' (*EPM*, 72).

Hume noted that Cicero 'supposes it certain' that 'there was once a time when neither natural nor civil law had yet been defined'. Hume cited a lengthy passage from *Pro Sextus* to illustrate how Cicero explained how both had emerged only when necessity drove men to join together in society and eventually to establish rules of justice (*EPM*, 17 n. 11). In contrast to the neo-Epicurean, Cicero's identification of the origins of moral distinctions and justice in human convention had not led him to deny that a natural 'affection of humanity' was 'common to all mankind', or to present moral precepts as the invention of politicians. This was because the academic sceptic was able to provide 'a natural, unforced interpretation of the phenomena of human life'. Academic scepticism revealed how 'systems and hypotheses have perverted our natural understanding', most disastrously when 'explaining the origin of moral good and evil' (*EPM*, 54; 72; 34). This led Cicero to confine his inquiries to the 'is' rather than the 'ought'. It ensured that Cicero had not pushed so far as to trace the origins of the bonds that held society together to the manipulation of self-love by the artful politician, or to innate qualities in human nature that instinctively and inevitably led men as it did birds to form societies and to adhere to the immutable precepts of natural law. Once again, Hume's approach mirrored Cicero's own. 'It is needless to push our researches so far as to ask, why we have humanity or a fellow-feeling with others', Hume declared. It was sufficient 'if it be allowed, what surely, without the greatest absurdity, cannot be disputed, that there is some benevolence, however small, infused in our bosom; some spark of friendship for human kind; some particle of the dove, kneaded into our frame, along with the elements of the wolf and serpent' (*EPM*, 38 n. 19; 74).

It was the Ciceronian banishment of the *honestum* that permitted the moral philosopher to establish ‘a medium amidst all these extremes’ regarding natural human goodness or depravity, and to transcend the ‘merely verbal’ disputes over the ‘natural’ or ‘artificial’ origins of society, justice and moral distinctions (*EPM*, 16). This also informed Cicero’s willingness to attribute a central role to men’s pride and ‘love of fame’ in shaping their moral universe. Pride, Hume emphasised against ‘the gloomy, hair-brained enthusiast’ who denounced it entirely as cupidity, was in itself ‘indifferent, and may be either good or bad, according as it is well or ill founded’ (*EPM*, 73; 103 n. 66). Ciceronian academic scepticism rejected the specious ‘distinction betwixt voluntary and involuntary’ action drawn by moral philosophers in a Christian age— of both neo-Stoic and Augustinian-Epicurean persuasions— in order to define as ‘virtuous’ only those qualities and actions which were performed in conscious reference to their ‘true’ end (*T* 2.3.2: 2; 3.3.4: 4). The link forged by Mandeville between a denial of free will and man’s inherent concupiscence was entirely rejected by Hume. It depended upon a ‘monkish’ (ascetic) definition of virtue. This presupposed knowledge concerning man’s end which (for reasons explored in Chapter 7) revelation no less than reason was incapable of providing.⁵⁶

Hume conveyed what he took to be the fundamental conclusion to be drawn from *De Finibus* in three key places in his writings. These were the famous (and clearly rhetorical) crisis of scepticism in the final section of Book I of the *Treatise*; Essays IV and V of the *Philosophical Essays*; and the four essays on happiness (‘The Epicurean’, ‘The Stoic’, ‘The Platonist’ and ‘The Sceptic’) in the *Essays, Moral and Political* (1741).⁵⁷ That conclusion was

⁵⁶ The degree to which Hume’s treatment of pride made Mandeville’s appear simplistic is discussed by Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, pp. 289-96; and Hundert, *Enlightenment’s Fable*, pp. 82-6. For more detailed discussion of Hume’s highly distinctive treatment of ‘liberty’ and ‘necessity’— which Shaftesbury considered to be ‘the test and touchstone of a genius in philosophy’ (above, p. 134)— see James A. Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity: the Free Will Debate in Eighteenth-Century British Philosophy* (Oxford, 2005), Ch. 3.

⁵⁷ This interpretation of the nature of Hume’s scepticism as remaining constant in all of these works, rather than shifting from that of the Pyrrhonian (in the *Treatise*) to the academic (in the *Philosophical Essays*), is broadly supported in the following studies: M.A. Box, *The Suasive Art of David Hume* (Princeton, 1990), pp.

that ‘Tis not... reason, which is the guide of life, but custom’.⁵⁸ In the *Letter from a Gentleman* (1745), Hume defended the sceptical conclusion to Book I of the *Treatise* as ‘a mere Philosophical Amusement, or Trial of *Wit* or *Subtlety*’, intended to demonstrate the absurdity of attempting to establish ‘ultimate principles’ in philosophy. Hume appealed to the authority of ‘*Socrates* the wisest and most religious of the *Greek* Philosophers, as well as *Cicero* among the *Romans*, who both of them carried their Philosophical Doubts to the highest Degree of Scepticism’, whilst they recognised that such extravagant scepticism ‘by destroying *every Thing*, really affects *nothing*’.⁵⁹ It simply revealed how ‘very refin’d reflections have little or no influence upon us’. Upon re-entering common life, Hume professed to discover that it was ‘my natural propensity, and the course of my animal spirits and passions’ which governed his actions and sentiments, not the ‘cold, and strain’d, and ridiculous’ insights gleaned from philosophy (*T* 1.4.7: 9).

If ‘custom’ provided men with a ‘guide to life’, it developed according to what was found useful to societies in the specific socio-historical contexts in which they took shape. In this regard, Hume was most interested in the implications of what Locke had termed the ‘Law of *Reputation*’. That is, how men’s moral sentiments developed naturally within society on the basis of utility, were shaped by a concern for the approval of others, and contained an irreducibly communitarian component. In famously introducing his own ‘ought’, Hume passed an evaluative judgement which strongly suggested, as had Locke (albeit inconsistently), that if reason were confined to its rightful office— that of evaluating the efficacy of the various means available to attain ends identified by the passions— men would be led to all the happiness of which they were capable. ‘Reason is’ Hume declared,

97-8; Miriam McCormick, ‘A Change in Manner: Hume’s Scepticism in the *Treatise* and the First *Enquiry*’, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 29:3 (Sep. 1999), pp. 421-47; Livingston, *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium*, passim; and Harris, ‘A Compleat Chain of Reasoning’.

⁵⁸ *Abstract*, p. 411.

⁵⁹ *Letter from a Gentleman*, p. 426.

‘and ought only to be the slave of the passions’ (*T* 2.3.3: 4).⁶⁰ In the explanation offered in the *Treatise* of how men’s estimations of their interests became harmonised within society, Hume focused upon the indirect passions natural to man— pride and humility, love and hatred— which he considered Locke to have overlooked in his concern with innate ideas.⁶¹

Hume was concerned with one passion above all: pride. Those men ‘accustom’d to the style of the schools and pulpit’, Hume anticipated, would no doubt be surprised by his claim that virtue could excite pride, or indeed vice arouse humility. These pairs were all too frequently presented, as by Mandeville, as opposites (*T* 2.1.7: 8). Here Hume’s inveterate hostility to ‘celibacy, fasting, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude, and the whole train of monkish virtues’ peddled by ‘the gloomy, hair-brained enthusiast’ found expression. This placed ‘the *selfish* and the *social* sentiments or dispositions’ in diametrical opposition (*EPM*, 73; 81).⁶² Such Christian ‘virtues’ were neither useful nor agreeable to oneself or to others. As a consequence they naturally aroused sentiments of disapprobation in men in the course of common life, and were more properly deemed vices. In further exploring this point in the *Principles of Morals*, Hume emphasised that Cicero’s aversion to ‘narrow systems’ would have ensured a similar hostility to the claim that ‘no qualities were to be admitted as *virtues*, or acknowledged to be a part of *personal merit*, but what were recommended by the *Whole Duty of Man*’ (*EPM*, 106 n. 72).⁶³

⁶⁰ It was, Hume continued, fortunate that reason was not dominant, since ‘Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger’.

⁶¹ For Hume’s distinctive treatment of the indirect passions, see Eugenio Lecaldano, ‘The Passions, Character, and the Self in Hume’, *Hume Studies*, 28:2 (Nov. 2002), pp. 175-94; Rachel Cohon, ‘Hume’s Indirect Passions’, in E.S. Radcliffe (ed.), *A Companion to Hume* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 159-84; and Annette C. Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume’s Treatise* (London, 1991), pp. 129-51. The order in which Hume treated of the passions in the *Treatise*—beginning with the ‘indirect’, before treating cursorily of the ‘direct’ at the end of the Book— was later reversed in *A Dissertation on the Passions* (1757), which was nonetheless largely a highly abbreviated recasting of Book II.

⁶² Hume upbraided ‘religious declaimers’ on precisely this point, if in more restrained fashion, at *T* 3.3.2: 13. For rather unsympathetic discussion, see William Davie, ‘Hume on Monkish Virtue’, *Hume Studies*, 25: 1-2 (Apr.-Nov. 1999), pp. 139-54.

⁶³ Here Hume referred, as he had in making the same point to Hutcheson in 1739, to Richard Allestree’s *The Whole Duty of Man Laid Down in a Plain and Familiar Way for the Use of All, but Especially the Meanest Reader*

Hume drew upon Cicero's philosophical writings to emphasise that pride was in itself neither good nor evil. Yet it was nonetheless Hume's own causal principle that was set centre-stage in the explanation he offered. Certain qualities or possessions had the capacity to arouse pride in the individual if they were considered 'related to self', or alternatively to stimulate love and esteem if associated with others to whom that individual conceived himself to be related (whether by blood, geographical proximity or social status) (*T* 2.1.2; 2.2.1). Our 'love' for others was indelibly associated with pride (self-love); and 'benevolence'—our active desire for the happiness of another—was conjoined to love (even as it by no means always accompanied it) 'by the original constitution of the mind' (*T* 2.2.6: 6). Qualities or possessions did not stimulate 'pride' or 'love' on account of their inherent properties. It was 'taste' that determined their worth, and this was shaped by 'custom and practice', which had 'settled the just value of every thing' (*T* 2.1.6: 9). 'The most obvious and remarkable property' of both pride and its antonym, shame, 'is the vast variety of *subjects*, on which they may be placed', which to a great degree was influenced by 'the opinions and sentiments of others' (*T* 2.1.2: 5). If one possessed those things or qualities considered by others to be valuable, one experienced the pleasure associated with pride. In this sense men's notions of what was pleasurable (or painful) altered significantly and quite naturally within society. It was precisely this malleability of indirect passions innate to human nature that permitted Hume to explain, in a more sophisticated manner than Locke, how a sense of common interest had developed among men within society prior to the instantiation of political authority.

(London, 1714), in which men were encouraged pedagogically 'to behave themselves so in this world that they may be happy for ever in the next'—that is, to practice the 'monkish virtues' ('Preface', A3). For the significance and popularity of the *Whole Duty*, see Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, i, pp. 18-23.

A further innate property of human nature was crucial in the account Hume offered: sympathy.⁶⁴ It is worth recalling that Locke had emphasised in the *Second Treatise* how ‘the mutual influence, sympathy, and connexion’ between individuals altered their ideas in society of what was estimable or opprobrious. It was for this reason, Locke had argued, that the ‘Law of *Reputation*’ (itself guided by utility) allowed societies to cohere even in the absence of political authority.⁶⁵ In the *Essay* (and, still less, the *Treatises*), Locke had not provided a compelling psychological and sociological account of how this process occurred, a deficiency rectified by Hume. It is also significant that, in the *Principles of Morals*, Hume rendered the principle of ‘sympathy’ synonymous with ‘humanity’. *Humanitas* was a prevalent concept in Cicero’s philosophical writings, one that encouraged a distinctly rhetorical treatment of the interplay between men’s sentiments within society (*EPM*, 45-6).⁶⁶ As had Locke, Hume introduced the concept of sympathy for the first time in his discussion of men’s ‘love of fame’: ‘Our reputation, our character, our name are considerations of vast weight and importance; and even the other causes of pride; virtue, beauty and riches; have little influence, when not seconded by the opinions and sentiments of others’. Even ‘men of the greatest judgment and understanding’, Hume argued, ‘find it very difficult to follow their own reason or inclination, in opposition to that of their friends and daily companions’ (*T* 2.1.11: 1-2). Here Hume echoed Locke’s claim that it was ‘a Burthen too heavy for humane Sufferance’ to ‘live in Society, under the constant Dislike, and ill Opinion of his Familiars, and those he converses with’.⁶⁷

Sympathy allowed Hume to explain this phenomenon, and to demonstrate how pride—possessed by all men in their untaught state, rather than confined to the few as for

⁶⁴ For concise discussion of Hume’s concept, see Páll S. Árdal, *Passion and Value in Hume’s Treatise* (Edinburgh, 1966), pp. 152-6; and Kate Abramson, ‘Sympathy and Hume’s Spectator-Centred Theory of Virtue’, in *Companion to Hume*, pp. 240-56.

⁶⁵ *Two Treatises*, II, §212; above, p. 78.

⁶⁶ The Ciceronian provenance of *humanitas*, and the significance of Hume’s later preference for this term in the *Enquiry*, is discussed by Moore, ‘Utility and Humanity’.

⁶⁷ Locke, *EHU*, 2.28.12; above, p. 61.

Mandeville— encouraged sociability and the development of moral norms without the need for the skilful politician or moralist. No quality of human nature was more remarkable ‘both in itself and in its consequences’ than sympathy. It allowed individuals ‘to receive by communication’ the ‘inclinations and sentiments’ of others, ‘however different from, or even contrary to our own’. The stronger the resemblance between oneself and another, whether on the basis of shared ‘manners, or character, or country, or language’, the greater one’s propensity to sympathise with them, and to convert their feelings into impressions that were as vivid as if they were our own. It was to the principle of sympathy, Hume argued, ‘that we ought to ascribe the great uniformity we may observe in the humours and turn of thinking of those of the same nation’, not least regarding ideas of virtue and vice.⁶⁸ Sympathy enlivened the indirect passions, and thereby heightened the degree of pleasure or pain they caused. Since sympathy depended upon the sentiments of others, this made man an inescapably social— if not naturally sociable— animal (*T* 2.1.11). Hume noted that even if ‘all the powers and elements of nature conspire to serve and obey one man’, he would ‘still be miserable, till you give him some one person at least, with whom he may share his happiness, and whose esteem and friendship he may enjoy’ (*T* 2.2.5: 15). Sympathy (or humanity) was that ‘particle of the dove, kneaded into our frame’ which, in the *Principles of Morals*, Hume argued could alone provide ‘the foundation of any general system and established theory of blame or approbation’, but the existence of which had been denied entirely by theorists of self-love (*EPM*, 74).

It was true, Hume noted, that in man’s pre-political state, sympathy— and, as a consequence, love and benevolence— were strictly limited in their scope to those considered most closely related to oneself. It followed that Hutcheson was quite misled to

⁶⁸ Locke had made much the same point in arguing that even as the moral distinctions encouraged by the ‘Law of Reputation’ differed between societies, these variations could nonetheless be understood according to one foundational, general principle: public convenience. See above, p. 61.

consider a 'moral sense' any more than a 'public sense' to be a natural faculty in man's frame, encouraging an extended benevolence to mankind at large—a point Mandeville had made in dismissing the arguments of 'that curious Metaphysician' (*T* 3.2.1: 11-12).⁶⁹ It was confined to their families and offspring, the product of the natural attraction that existed (as in the animal kingdom) between the sexes.⁷⁰ Yet Hume was careful to note that in the 'infancy of society', when there were sufficient resources to cater for men's highly limited desires and needs, government had not been necessary, but what Hume termed the 'artificial virtues' of justice and fidelity had. A sense of common interest, reinforced by sympathy, led men to formulate unspoken conventions regarding the security and transference of possessions and the performance of promises, which in small communities were recognised visibly to advance the self-interest of every individual (*T* 3.2.7-8). In this regard a sense of common interest, and obligation to abide by general rules, preceded the instantiation of political authority.

The origins of government lay in quarrels between societies, not amongst men within one society. 'Foreign war to a society without government necessarily produces civil war', Hume noted, as it revealed the tenuous nature of the foundations upon which mutual trust had been established in the absence of political authority (*T* 3.2.8: 1). The threat of foreign aggressors let loose men's tendency to pursue those objects that satisfied their own basic desires as well as those of the few whose happiness they considered to be essential to their own. This was 'directly destructive of society' (*T* 3.2.2: 12). Here Hume echoed Shaftesbury's claim that it was precisely because men's natural affection towards others was so strong that, when not enlarged in its scope, it led men to form factions and sects (starting

⁶⁹ For Mandeville's verdict on Hutcheson, see above, p. 149.

⁷⁰ The naturalism of Hume's account of the development of human society, emphasising the role of the 'innate' indirect passions over that of reason, was reinforced by the concluding sections to the first two parts of Book II: *T* 2.1.12 ('Of the Pride and Humility of Animals'), and *T* 2.2.12 ('Of the Love and Hatred of Animals'). Cicero, in *De Officiis*, made much the same point regarding these 'impulses', which were identical in men and beasts: see above, p. 42.

with the nuclear family) that placed specific interests above the general and militated against the common good.⁷¹ Hume endorsed Shaftesbury's mockery of the Epicurean ideal of *ataraxia*, which demanded that this natural affection be suppressed. Shaftesbury's Stoic reconciliation of the useful and the true was, however, misconceived. Hume ridiculed the idea that the virtuous man was 'happily directed by right reason' to expand his vision and identify his own interest with that of the 'Universal good, or the interest of the world in general, [which] is a kind of remote philosophical object'.⁷² This privileged individual autonomy over social relations, which for Hume created rather than threatened the individual's moral character, integrity and selflessness and alone imposed restraints on men's destructive tendencies.⁷³ In this respect the philosophy of 'EPICUREAN, and other STOICS' was 'only a more refined system of selfishness' than that offered by Epicurus, by means of which we 'reason ourselves out of all virtue, as well as social enjoyment' (*EHU*, 35).

It was the instability, not (as for Hobbes) the non-existence, of the unspoken general rules regarding justice and property established in pre-political society which led men to recognise the utility of political authority. The 'artificial virtues', especially fidelity, provided the foundations for government and for the obligation to obey. Without men's innate 'humanity', those virtues themselves could never have come into being. In their pre-political state, men had been able to 'taste... the sweets of society and mutual assistance'; and government itself could not have emerged unless men had already been led quite naturally to experience the advantages of some degree of mutual co-operation (*T* 3.2.8: 8). Hume nonetheless emphasised, as had Cicero, that were men's innate sympathy not severely

⁷¹ Shaftesbury, *Inquiry*, 2.2.1, pp. 214-15. For discussion of Hume's concern regarding the moral consequences of factions, in modern politics as in philosophy and religion, see Jennifer A. Herdt, *Faction and Religion in Hume's Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1997).

⁷² Shaftesbury, *Sensus Communis*, 3.3, p. 52: this was the Stoic ideal of the *cosmopolis*. See *EPM*, p. 91, where Hume echoed Shaftesbury in emphasising that the true 'EPICUREAN' did not deny the existence of social affections, even as he demanded that they be suppressed. In denying their existence altogether, modern Lucians had (like modern Stoics) pushed beyond their classical ancestors.

⁷³ Cumming notes how for Hume moral restraint was no longer rational self-restraint, or indeed self-restraint at all, but rather social restraint: *Human Nature and History*, ii, pp. 165-6.

limited in his natural state, political society and the rules of justice would not have been required.⁷⁴ It was a 'certain' proposition that '*'tis only from the selfishness and confin'd generosity of man, along with the scanty provisions nature has made for his wants, that justice derives its origins*'. The necessity for an artifice such as justice, and for a means to enforce it, was apparent to men 'upon the least reflection'. It was inconceivable that they could have remained in their 'savage state' for any 'considerable time' (*T* 3.2.2: 13-18).

If interest provided men with a 'natural obligation' to the 'artificial virtues', it was sympathy and the 'particle of the dove' that allowed Hume to explain psychologically how that sense of obligation became moralized. This led men to experience the uneasiness caused by contraventions of those general rules which had developed gradually according to an emergent (but innate) 'sense of a common interest', even when— as in larger political societies— the individual was not the immediate sufferer of acts of injustice. As Hume noted, '*self-interest* is the original motive to the *establishment* of justice: But a *sympathy* with *public* interest is the source of the *moral* approbation, which attends that virtue' (*T* 3.2.2: 24). In returning to this point in the *Principles of Morals*, Hume noted how Cicero's 'natural, unforced interpretation' of the phenomena of human life had led him to locate the origins of morality in men's shared humanity. Cicero nonetheless accepted the conventional foundations (and historically-conditioned and contingent nature) of both moral distinctions (natural law) and the rules of justice (positive law) (*EPM*, 54; 17 n. 11).

This point that had been missed, Hume argued, by 'certain writers on morals, who seem to have employ'd their utmost efforts to extirpate all sense of virtue from among mankind' (*T* 3.2.2: 25). This had led some, and here Hume alluded to Mandeville, to represent 'all moral distinctions as the effect of artifice and education, when skilful politicians endeavour'd to

⁷⁴ For discussion of Hume's conventional account of justice and his treatment of the 'artificial' virtues, see Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, pp. 296-302; and Hardin, *David Hume: Moral and Political Theorist*, pp. 27-48, 71-6, 81-104.

restrain the turbulent passions of men, and make them operate to the public good, by the notions of honour and shame' (*T* 3.3.1: 11). To be sure, education in the rhetoric of praise and blame in society served to 'extend the natural sentiments beyond their original bounds; but still nature must furnish the materials, and give us some notion of moral distinctions' (*T* 3.2.2: 25).⁷⁵ It was men's developing sense of their shared interest that underpinned the promises they made in society to adhere to the 'general rules' of justice. These rules, like those regarding political succession, evolved on the basis of what was found to be useful. They did not represent the rational discovery of an immutable standard of truth—something which, Hume suggested, neo-Epicurean philosophers deserved praise for having recognised, even as they had drawn excessive conclusions from this insight (*T* 3.3.1: 11).⁷⁶ It was custom which settled these rules which, if examined purely on the basis of reason (as, disastrously, they had been during the Civil War), appeared to be entirely arbitrary. It was habit and experience alone that led men to regard the observation of them as necessary for the peace of society and for the pursuit of the objects of their desires. Over time, the 'utility' of these artificial conventions and rules became ever more apparent to men; as it did, they '*naturally*' came to take pleasure in adhering to them. This ensured that the *utile* and the *dulce* developed in perfect harmony. It was this alteration in men's sentiments within political society, Hume argued, that led them to consider the general rules of justice to be morally binding (*T* 2.3.5; 3.2.7: 11).

In the *Principles of Morals*, Hume expressed his surprise that so few philosophers had been willing to admit the principle of utility into their 'systems of ethics'. Hume attributed this oversight to the prevailing concern (in the late Hellenistic world no less than the modern) to respond to those who deduced morals wholly from 'self-love, or a regard to private interest'

⁷⁵ For discussion, see Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, ii, pp. 296-8.

⁷⁶ The rules determining property, considered as a species of causation, were discussed at *T* 3.2.3; those regarding legitimate political authority were most fully explored at *T* 3.2.10.

(*EPM*, 34). Yet Hume declared that it was the principle of public utility alone that could explain why the 'social virtues' were so esteemed by men, and why moral codes diverged from place to place, since 'every thing, which contributes to the happiness of society, recommends itself directly to our approbation and good will' (*EPM*, 38). Hume considered it self-evident that 'public utility is the *sole* origin of justice, and that reflections on the beneficial consequences of this virtue are the *sole* foundation of its merit' (*EPM*, 13). Justice might be 'artificial' in the strict sense that its origins lay in convention. Yet it was entirely 'natural' insofar as it provided the necessary means of removing those obstructions that lay in the way of men's pre-reflective pursuit of happiness. Political authority permitted a degree of stability and trust in the performance of promises that was lacking in its absence. By formulating general laws, it gradually encouraged the expansion of men's sympathy and moral sentiments beyond the partial and limited confines in which they had previously operated (*T* 3.2.6: 6).

Natural and positive law, then, developed in tandem and were inseparable. In Hume's hands both virtue and natural law theories were rendered entirely functional, and grounded in human nature as it revealed itself in the context of social interaction. The content of both was directed ultimately by what was found to be useful and agreeable in practice, and could only be judged against this continually-fluctuating standard.⁷⁷ It was simply an undeniable fact, Hume argued, that every man loved himself more than others. This only carried negative moral connotations if set against an idea of man's ultimate end that philosophy was quite unable to ascertain (or revelation to provide). It was for this reason that Hume dismissed contemporary debates regarding what qualities in human nature were 'entitled to the denomination of *virtue*' as a question for '*grammarians*' (*T* 3.3.4: 4). The abiding concern shared by Mandeville as much as by Shaftesbury and Hutcheson to distinguish between the

⁷⁷ A point made forcefully by Hardin, *David Hume*, pp. 20-22, 27-8.

officium and *finis*, prudence and virtue, interested and disinterested motives for conduct was pithily dismissed by Hume as an inconsequential dispute over words. The scientist of human nature confined his enquiries to an exploration of those qualities— in oneself, and in others— which did in fact stimulate the sentiments of moral approval or disapproval, and explored why they did so. In developing this case, Hume explicitly adopted Cicero's *De Officiis* as his guide.

Public utility or 'convenience' had occupied a central place in determining the content of Locke's 'Law of *Reputation*'. Locke had similarly drawn heavily from Cicero to make this point, and to deny that the moral codes that developed within particular societies reflected the rational identification of normative precepts. Yet Locke's esteem for Cicero was ultimately predicated on the extent to which, by confining himself to the *utile*, his moral philosophy created a conceptual space for the delivery of moral truth by revelation. In this regard in Locke the 'is' and the 'ought', the explanatory and the normative, did indeed converge within the framework of God's intentions for His created beings. Moral codes and justice developed naturally according to public utility, but because this was God's design for mankind it followed that they 'ought' always to do so. In Hume, the 'ought' was dropped altogether, and an explanation of the origins and development of society furnished that was considerably more faithful to Cicero's naturalism in *De Officiis*.

Hume's confidence in the mechanisms of social reproduction— education, custom and the beneficial consequences of the growth of commerce— was much firmer than Locke's. Hume's scepticism regarding the need for, or ability of, philosophy to play a public pedagogical role was proportionately even greater.⁷⁸ The threat of antinomianism, and the attempts of the Ranters and their ilk to turn the world upside down, remained very real from

⁷⁸ On which, see John Dunn, 'From Applied Theology to Social Analysis: the Break between John Locke and the Scottish Enlightenment', in *Wealth and Virtue*, pp. 132-3.

Locke's perspective. Hume's moral theory indicates the fact that by the mid-eighteenth century it was the tendency to formulate political no less than religious argument on the grounds of speculative philosophy that was felt to pose the greater threat to civil peace.⁷⁹ Locke considered it of the greatest importance to show that there was a rational and objective standard (natural law) against which the respective claims of conscience and the civil magistrate could be judged. Hume laboured the opposite point. No such standard existed, and to fail to recognise this was bad politics and worse philosophy. To claim otherwise disturbed the delicate bonds of affection, opinion and mutual interest—conditioned historically by a developing sense of public convenience—upon which all consensus ultimately depended. This insight informed Hume's distinctive intervention in contemporary disputes regarding the origins of political obligation, and scope of political authority, between Whigs and Tories in his political writings from the *Essays* of 1741-2 onwards.⁸⁰ Such disputes, Hume argued, were merely verbal. It was as absurd to reject the legitimacy of political authority on the basis of the transgression of supposedly normative natural laws (Lockean contract theory) as it was to defend that authority at all times by dissolving natural law into the civil (the doctrine of 'passive obedience') (*T* 3.2.8). Political obligation, Hume argued, rested psychologically on non-rational deference (affection) and rationally on utility (for which there was no determinate standard). It was for this reason that the true philosopher confined himself to the *utile* and *dulce*, and banished the *honestum*. This

⁷⁹ Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London, 1972). In 'Of Parties in General' (1741), Hume distinguished between political factions based on 'affection' and 'interest': the former explicable by means of men's natural deference to authority (the sentiments, as informed by custom and habit); the latter, by means of men's reflections on utility. This division was entirely natural. Hume, however, was concerned by the modern phenomenon of 'parties from *principle*, especially abstract speculative principle', as the zeal they inspired was restrained neither by natural sentiment nor reflections on public (or even private) utility: *Essays*, pp. 54-63. This reflected the forced intrusion of the *honestum*, which lessened the beneficial influence of the *utile* and *dulce*, into the public square.

⁸⁰ For Hume's political philosophy, see especially Duncan Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge, 1975).

was something the academic sceptic was able to comprehend but not the Stoic nor the Epicurean.⁸¹

In the conclusion to Book III of the *Treatise*, Hume claimed to have provided a definitive and naturalistic answer to the question that had vexed those who had pioneered the ‘science of man’— that of the origins of men’s sense of moral obligation, and its relationship to public utility (*T* 3.3.6: 6). Hume’s theory of the sentiments explained how a sense of mutual interest and moral obligation developed quite naturally among Hobbes’ initially necessitous and self-interested men without the need for an external legislator (whether human or divine). A ‘system of ethics’ that drew exclusively from either the Stoic or Epicurean tradition (or haphazardly from both) could not explain this in a manner that was consistently naturalistic and empirical, and conformable with men’s observed conduct in the common affairs of life. The *Treatise* strongly suggests that Hume had Shaftesbury and Mandeville in mind as the leading modern representatives of these traditions. As he intimated to Hutcheson, Hume’s account nevertheless also mediated between the excesses of Grotius’ intellectualism and Pufendorf’s voluntarism in their respective natural law theories.⁸² The *Treatise* indicates that Hume considered Locke to stand apart from these traditions in important respects, but to have failed to develop his insights fully. Men neither were inherently bad nor good, unfit nor made for society. The standard by which they judged one another was of their own creation, and had nothing to say regarding ultimate principles or indeed the nature and attributes of a deity. A tradition of academic scepticism, identified with Cicero, provided the conceptual tools to transcend the debate between neo-Stoics and

⁸¹ Hume’s presentation of Locke’s contract theory and treatment of promises was notably simplistic and crude, and remained so in ‘Of the Original Contract’ (1748), in *Essays*, pp. 465-87. This might suggest that Hume drew from the presentation of Locke’s political theory to be found in the writings of Gershom Carmichael, who selectively misinterpreted it in a number of regards and was, in turn, drawn upon heavily by Hutcheson: James Moore & Michael Silverthorne, ‘Gershom Carmichael and the Natural Jurisprudence Tradition in Eighteenth-Century Scotland’, in *Wealth and Virtue*, pp. 73-88.

⁸² Hume to Hutcheson, 17 Sept. 1739, in *Letters*, i, pp. 32-5. On this, see Pauline C. Westerman, ‘Hume and the Natural Lawyers: a Change of Landscape’, in *Hume’s Connexions*, pp. 83-104.

neo-Epicureans, and to explain the origins of morality, justice and human sociability. It was for this reason that Hume's moral 'science' had to be erected upon a foundation 'almost entirely new' (*T*, 'Introduction', 6).

Hume made few mentions of religion in the *Treatise*. This silence indicates the resolutely secular nature of Hume's 'science of man'. In this regard, and as his criticisms of Locke suggest, Hume divorced a tradition of academic scepticism from its associations with Christianity, as had Shaftesbury for the Stoic and Mandeville for the Epicurean tradition. Hume's emphasis on the justified 'merit of pride or esteem' when 'well-regulated', and high valuation of magnanimity and a love of fame— 'virtues' decried by 'many religious declaimers' as 'purely pagan and natural'— indicates the degree to which his own moral theory was explicitly 'pagan' (*T* 3.2.2: 13). This underpinned Hume's interest in religious belief as a social and psychological phenomenon that interfered with, rather than reinforced, still less superadded to, the motives to morality and justice.

In the *Dialogues* the philosophical theist, Cleanthes, noted that ‘Locke seems to have been the first Christian, who ventured openly to assert, that *faith* was nothing but a species of *reason*, that religion was only a branch of philosophy’ (DNR I: 14). In the *Philosophical Essays* Hume had endorsed Locke’s insight, declaring that religion ‘is nothing but a species of philosophy’ (EHU, 109). In both the *Dialogues* and the *Natural History of Religion* (1757), this claim was supported by a well-known maxim drawn from Bacon’s ‘Of Atheism’ (1597): ‘a little philosophy inclineth a man’s mind to atheism; but depth in philosophy bringeth men’s minds about to religion’ (NHR VI: 52-3; DNR I: 15).¹ In the *Treatise*, Hume declared that Locke’s introduction (as the pioneer of the ‘science of man’) of the Baconian way of discovery into moral subjects— reasoning, in contradistinction to the scholastic logician, from the particular to the general and from effects to causes— had real implications for ‘*natural religion*’ (T, ‘Introduction’, 4).² As discussed in the previous chapter, Hume suggested that his predecessors in the study of the ‘science of man’ had failed to explore fully the implications of this new methodological and theoretical philosophical approach for an understanding of morality. The same was true when it came to its ‘momentous consequences’ for the question of religious belief.³

The *Dialogues* reflected how the ‘philosophical theist’ in the modern age, to some extent as a consequence of Locke’s damning indictment of scholasticism, had ceased to turn to metaphysics in order to defend religion. The cosmological argument, recently expounded by the proponents of the ‘abstract theory of morals’ such as Clarke, was presented in the work by Demea, Hume’s rather unconvincing caricature of the dogmatic orthodox Calvinist

¹ *The Natural History of Religion*, ed. T.L. Beauchamp (Oxford, 2007): references to section and page number are given in brackets in the text. The citation was drawn from Francis Bacon, ‘Of Atheism’ [1597], in *Essays, Moral, Economical and Political* (London, 1798), p. 75.

² See above, p. 228.

³ Hume to Hutcheson, 16 Mar. 1740, in *Letters*, i, pp. 38-40.

divine (*EPM*, 22 n. 12).⁴ That Demea left the dialogue at the close of Section XI cleared the way for a more constructive discussion in Section XII between the two characters who articulated the divergences within the ‘science of man’: the ‘careless’ sceptic, Philo, who propounded many of the arguments against natural religion developed by theorists of self-love working within the Augustinian-Epicurean tradition; and Cleanthes, who sought to erect theism upon the foundations of natural human sociability and benevolence. The tenuous accommodation reached by these characters in Demea’s absence owed much to Philo’s confession that his ‘careless scepticism’ was largely rhetorical. The Pyrrhonian arguments he had presented, Philo admitted, were of no practical consequence since, like Bayle’s, ‘they admit of no answer and produce no conviction’ (*EPM*, 116 n. 32). As had Hume in Essay XII of the *Philosophical Essays*—entitled ‘Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy’—Philo recognised the highly limited potential of ‘*excessive* scepticism’ to be ‘beneficial to society’. Its importance lay in deflating the dogmatic claims of others, most notably the ‘STOIC or EPICUREAN’, who ‘displays principles’ which aimed to ‘have an effect on conduct and behaviour’ (*EPM*, 119). The academic sceptic recognised that ‘to whatever length anyone may push his speculative principles of scepticism, he must act, I own, and live, and converse like other men’ (*DNR* I: 10).

Two points can be made regarding the *Dialogues*, a notoriously complex work which has lent itself to myriad interpretations, as no doubt was Hume’s intention.⁵ Firstly, along with the *Natural History* it placed the history of Christian apologetic within the broader historiographical framework of the continuation of Stoic and Epicurean themes in western philosophical thought. It explored how attempts had been made to reconcile both

⁴ Demea presented the argument in Section IX, and met opposition from Cleanthes that was every bit as strident as that offered by the sceptical Philo.

⁵ For a concise and perceptive critical review, albeit one now in need of updating, of the literature on Hume’s philosophy of religion, which has primarily focused on the *Dialogues*, see M.A. Stewart, ‘Hume’s Philosophy of Religion’, *Philosophical Books* 37:3-4 (Jul.-Oct. 1996), pp. 145-54, 225-35.

philosophies with a specifically Christian theism. From its inception Christianity had turned to philosophy, but had reached no agreement as to which philosophy most helpfully served its ends. As Hume explained, Augustine and the early Fathers found in the depreciation of men's natural moral powers by Pyrrhonian sceptics, and in the hedonic psychology of the Epicureans, a means of resisting the cavils of pagan philosophers (not least the Stoics) by emphasising the need for revelation and grace. Once these enemies had been vanquished, however, scholastic Christian apologists sought to argue that revelation was not only necessary but reasonable, and turned to Aristotelian philosophy to establish its cardinal tenets on metaphysical foundations. At the Reformation, this synthesis had been torn asunder, and war waged (by both the pen and sword) by those whose antagonistic theologies of grace enshrined visions of men's natural moral powers that found support in the writings of either the Epicureans and Pyrrhonians, or the Stoics and Platonists. In modern England, Hume noted sardonically, 'our sagacious divines have changed their whole system of philosophy, and talk the language of *Stoics*, *Platonists*, and *Peripatetics*'— a shift further encouraged by 'the ill use, which *Bayle* and other libertines made of the philosophical scepticism of the *Fathers*' (DNR I: 15-16). In dismissing the dispute between 'sceptics' and 'dogmatists' on the question of man's ability to develop true knowledge regarding God's nature, attributes and intentions for His created beings as 'merely verbal', Hume declared his independence from both the neo-Epicurean and neo-Stoic traditions (as he had in his moral philosophy) (DNR XII: 93).

The second point regarding the *Dialogues* is that, as the structure of the work made clear, Locke was not the first to argue that 'religion was only a branch of philosophy'. He was, instead, the first Christian to do so. The *Dialogues* were modelled closely on Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*, a point evident to Hume's well-read contemporaries and recognised by

modern scholars.⁶ In his work Cicero had begun from first principles. He challenged his Stoic and Epicurean friends (Balbus and Velleius) to convince him ‘of this fundamental tenet of the divine existence, not as an article of faith merely but as an ascertained fact’.⁷ Unless they were able to do so, all subsequent debate regarding the deity’s supposed nature and attributes was nothing more than a ‘verbal’ discrepancy.⁸ Both Balbus and Velleius were reluctant to begin with the question of the bare existence of the deity. It was for this reason that Cicero’s academic interlocutor, Cotta, accused them of lacking ‘the courage... to deny that the gods exist’.⁹ As Hume indicated in the *Principles of Morals*, the signal merit of Cicero’s eclectic philosophical approach was that he refused to fetter his inquiries by an adherence to any ‘narrow system’ (*EPM*, 106 n. 72). In the *Dialogues* one such ‘narrow system’ was ‘theism’— that is, the belief in one, perfectly good, just, and wise deity who was the preserver and conductor of the universe. A second was Christianity which, as Hume illustrated, added further claims to a theistic religious hypothesis that in the hands of the Stoics and Platonists had rendered God immanent in the universe, thereby excluding the possibility that He was its Creator or would reward or punish men in an afterlife. Revealed Christianity, by contrast, presented a God who was transcendent. He was the first cause of all, who had at various historical junctures suspended or overturned the general physical laws of the universe (through his miracles) and the ordinary operation of human nature (through his grace) for his own particular purposes.

In his writings on religion Hume adopted much the same posture as, on his reading, had Cicero. Even though the existence of a first cause had to be called into question, it could not seriously be denied by any right-thinking individual. Yet to move beyond this to assign

⁶ See especially John V. Price, ‘Sceptics in Cicero and Hume’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 25:1 (Jan.-Mar. 1964), pp. 97-106; Christine Battersby, ‘The *Dialogues* as Original Imitation: Cicero and the Nature of Hume’s Skepticism’, in *McGill Hume Studies*, pp. 239-52; and Peter S. Fosl, ‘Doubt and Divinity: Cicero’s Influence on Hume’s Religious Skepticism’, *Hume Studies*, 20 (1994), pp. 103-20.

⁷ *De Natura Deorum*, 1.22.61.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.7.16.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.31.87.

particular attributes to this first cause— as the theist and, to an even greater degree, the Christian theist sought to do— was unwarranted. It corrupted moral no less than religious philosophy. For Hume, it will be argued, *all* theistic religions as they had formed themselves in the world were demonstrably false, and positively contradicted the insights furnished by true philosophy. This was because they assigned qualities to the deity that were considered to constitute an essential part of personal merit.¹⁰ In this regard Cicero's fundamental insight, explored by Hume in his moral theory, was that justice and morality were 'the offspring of human society and of the commonwealth of man'. Both developed as men pursued their happiness in society, and were dependent upon an affective psychology specific to the human species.¹¹ To envisage the first cause as a being whose character was capable of moral evaluation (whether positive or negative) was a form of superstitious anthropomorphism. To expect men to experience the same affective responses in religion as they did when interacting with one another in the course of common life was, as Hume indicated to Mure in 1743, both unreasonable and potentially disastrous.

Cicero emphasised, as did Hume, the disparity between the questionable and slim foundations of religious belief in reason, and its prevalence as a seemingly ineradicable psychological and sociological phenomenon in the world. In its latter form, Cicero had argued that religion had to be subordinated to the demands of temporal happiness, morality and justice. It was of paramount importance that the rites and rituals of this public religion, as Cicero had argued against the Stoics (represented by Quintus) in *De Divinatione*, not be defended as true in themselves. That is, it had to be rendered a purely civil religion. As Hume explained in the *Natural History*, as a scriptural religion Christianity was resistant, unlike pagan polytheism, to any such accommodation. In his positive denial of the truth-claims of the religious hypothesis (in its Stoic and Christian forms), and his equally un-

¹⁰ On which see Holden, *Spectres of False Divinity*, passim.

¹¹ *De Natura Deorum*, 3.15.38; above, p. 237.

Lockean preference for a national church subordinated entirely to the authority of a secular state, Hume's treatment of religion drew powerfully from subversive insights furnished by Cicero's philosophical writings.

i. Hume's two definitions of 'true' religion

In writings on the subject composed largely in the period 1748-54, Hume offered two, separate definitions of 'true' religion, which he distinguished from the 'false' and corrupted forms that had prevailed in the world.¹² The first was almost identical to that found in Middleton's writings. Indeed, in defending this conception of 'true' religion from his critics— not least Montesquieu— Hume appealed to Middleton's authority.¹³ In a passage initially intended as a preface for the second volume of the *History of Great Britain* (1757) but eventually included in abbreviated form as a footnote, Hume denied that he had reduced all religion to its 'false' species— enthusiasm and superstition— in his treatment of the Reformation in the first volume.¹⁴ Here Hume noted that 'the proper office of religion is to reform men's lives, to purify their hearts, to enforce all moral duties, and to secure obedience to the laws and the civil magistrate'.¹⁵ Hume had Cleanthes repeat this passage,

¹² For recent discussion of this point, see Don Garrett, 'What's True about Hume's "True Religion"?', *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, 10:2 (Sep. 2012), pp. 199-220.

¹³ Hume mentioned Middleton as adopting a similar approach in two letters: to John Clephane, 18 Feb. 1755, printed by J.C.A. Gaskin, 'Hume's Attenuated Deism', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 65:2 (Jan. 1983), pp. 172-3; and to William Strahan, 22 Mar. 1755, published by Heiner Klemme, "'And Time Does Justice to All the World": Ein Unveröffentlicher Brief von David Hume an William Strahan', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 29:4 (Oct. 1991), pp. 657-64. In a letter of 19 May 1749 (New Style), Montesquieu expressed his concern that 'vous maltraitez un peu l'ordre ecclésiastique (sic)' in 'Of National Characters' (1748). Hume evidently responded, recommending Middleton, on 15 July (not extant, O.S.); and Montesquieu's reply was dated 3 Sept. (N.S.). Montesquieu informed Hume that 'la réputation du Mr le docteur Middleton est certainement venue jusqu'à nous... et j'espère bien me procurer l'avantage de lire les ouvrages dont vous me parlez. Je sçais que Dr du Midleton est un homme éminent': National Library of Scotland [NLS] MS 23156, ff. 47-8. Both of Montesquieu's letters were published by John Hill Burton, *Life and Correspondence of David Hume* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1846), i, Appendix B, pp. 456-7. It is noteworthy that Montesquieu refers to Middleton's 'ouvrages' in the plural, raising the possibility that Hume had read— and recommended— more of his works than simply the *Free Inquiry*. In any event, given that the *Free Inquiry* was only published in December 1748, it is clear that Hume read it with interest shortly after its publication.

¹⁴ Here it is likely that Hume was responding directly to Daniel Macqueen's criticisms of the first volume: *Letters on Mr. Hume's History of Great Britain* (Edinburgh, 1756). The full preface is reprinted by Mossner, *Life of Hume*, pp. 306-307.

¹⁵ This footnote only appeared in the original edition of the work, and consequently does not feature in Todd's edition (see below, p. 281 n. 69): *The History of Great Britain. Vol. II.* (London, 1757), p. 449 n. The

almost verbatim, in the *Dialogues*, where he noted that 'as its operation is silent, and only enforces the motives of morality and justice, it is in danger of being overlooked, and confounded with these other motives' (*DNR* XII: 95). It followed that 'the adulterate species of [religion] alone, which inflames faction, animates sedition, and prompts rebellion, distinguishes itself on the open theatre of the world', and 'the historian, therefore, has scarce occasion to mention any other kind of religion; and he may retain the highest regard for true piety, even while he exposes all the abuses of the false'.¹⁶

This definition of 'true' religion built upon two themes that were central to Middleton's work. 'True' Christianity as a public, institutional religion had never been practised. If it were, it would be historically invisible as silently reinforcing the codes of morality and bonds of community that developed quite naturally on account of their utility to individuals and society. This marginalised the doctrinal content of Christianity, and dissolved its moral precepts into the 'Catalogue of Virtues' presented by Cicero in *De Officiis*. As was Middleton, Hume was scathingly critical of both the systemically unreliable ecclesiastical historians, who had an overwhelming motive to deceive, and the clerical order, who found their collective interest to lie in a subversion of the bonds of community in the name of revealed truth. The unreliability of the testimony of ecclesiastical historians was considered at greatest length by Hume in 'Of Miracles', the second edition of which drew directly from Middleton's work.¹⁷ Hume's distrust of the clerical order was disclosed throughout the *History*, but was most

first two volumes of the work (on the Stuarts) were published under the title *The History of Great Britain*; they would eventually be incorporated as the final volumes (V and VI) of the *History of England* from 1762. This passage appears in identical form in the MS of Hume's intended preface.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Hume drew from Middleton's discussion of the miracles performed on the tomb of the Abbé de Paris in the 1720s (see above, p. 216). Compare *EHU*, pp. 93-4 & n. 25; with Middleton, *Free Inquiry*, pp. 181-3. On Hume's amendments, see David Wootton, 'Hume's "Of Miracles": Probability and Irreligion', in *Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 191-229.

concisely distilled in his remarkably vindictive remarks in a footnote to ‘Of National Characters’ (1748), which scandalised Montesquieu.¹⁸

The second definition of ‘true’ religion offered by Hume was most clearly expressed by Philo in the *Dialogues*. This was a ‘philosophic’ or ‘rational’ theism, attainable by means of a careful, disinterested and courageous philosophical enquiry that called the very existence of god(s) into question.¹⁹ As Hume made clear in the essay that followed ‘Of Miracles’ in the *Philosophical Essays*—initially entitled ‘Of the Practical Consequences of Natural Religion’—this was a step which the Epicurean no less than the Stoic was unwilling to take. At the end of the essay it was Hume, rather than his Epicurean, ‘sceptical’ friend, who moved to query the existence of a first cause (*EHU*, 110-11). In his reading notes, which date from the period of the publication of the *Treatise*, Hume drew from Cicero’s *De Natura Deorum* to show how this reticence had led the Stoics and Epicureans into rival forms of atheism. Under the heading ‘Philosophy’ there appears the following note:

(12.) Three kinds of Atheists according to some. 1. Who deny the Existence of a God. Such as Diagoras, Theodorus. 2. Who deny a Providence, Such as the Epicureans and the Ionic Sect. 3. Who deny the Freewill of the Deity, Such as Aristotle, the Stoics. &c.²⁰

Hume made a similar point in his letter to Mure of 1743, where he added that the third group of atheists ‘assert, that [god] is influenced by prayers or sacrifices’—an aspect of Stoic theology mercilessly ridiculed by Cicero in *De Divinatione*.²¹ Cicero dismissed both popular mythologies and Stoic theology alike as ‘more like the dreams of madmen than the

¹⁸ ‘Of National Characters’ (1748), in *Essays*, p. 199 n. 3. Hume added further material to this passage in the first edition of the *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* (1753-4).

¹⁹ In a letter to Strahan composed shortly before his death, in which he exerted pressure on his publisher to ensure that the *Dialogues* saw the light of day, Hume noted that his writings were characterised by ‘Care, Accuracy, Labour, Disinterestedness and Courage’: Hume to Strahan, 8 June 1776, in *Letters*, i, p. 239. One manifestation of ‘courage’, identified by Cicero in *De Natura Deorum*, was to dare to deny the existence of god(s).

²⁰ Hume’s notes were transcribed faithfully, if reordered and misdated, by Ernest C. Mossner, ‘Hume’s Early Memoranda: the Complete Text’, *Journal for the History of Ideas*, 9:4 (Dec. 1948), pp. 492-518 (on p. 501). For a more accurate discussion, see Stewart, ‘The Dating of Hume’s Manuscripts’, pp. 276-88.

²¹ Hume to Mure, 30 June 1743, in *Letters*, i, p. 50.

considered opinions of philosophers'.²² Hume's concluding remark in the *Natural History* that the 'religious principles, which have, in fact, appeared in the world' resembled 'sick men's dreams' echoed Cicero (*NHR* XV: 86). So too did his contemptuous dismissal of the 'religious superstition' and 'philosophical enthusiasm' of the Stoics (*NHR* XII: 74). As Hume's reading notes and subsequent critique of philosophical theology confirm, he found much in Bayle's writings that was of use in his attack on Stoic theology, as had Mandeville. The evidence of the moral as well as physical world undermined Shaftesbury's (and Cleanthes') Stoic optimism that good predominated over ill, and consequently challenged the claim that this provided evidence to support a vision of God as perfectly benevolent.²³ As Hume made clear in a recently discovered manuscript fragment on evil, probably composed in the late 1730s, the Epicurean had much the better of this argument. If anything regarding God's attributes could be deduced from the balance of good and evil in the world, then the weight of the evidence pointed to Epicurus' denial of providence and claim that the deity took no interest at all in human life.²⁴

Yet as Thomas Holden emphasises, the debate regarding God's moral attributes, and of how they might be reconciled with His power, was systematically marginalised by Hume as 'entirely verbal' (*DNR* XII: 94 n. B).²⁵ Here, as already noted, Hume followed Cicero closely, a point missed by Holden.²⁶ Cicero presented the Epicurean no less than the Stoic religious hypothesis as projecting onto the deity those qualities which they deemed essential to human happiness. For the Epicureans the *ataraxia* enjoyed by the deity, as by the sage, was

²² *De Natura Deorum*, 1.16.42.

²³ For discussion of Hume's reading of Bayle (attested not least by the 'Early Memoranda'), see Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, pp. 289-316. Note, too, Cleanthes' Shaftesburian claim that 'the only method of supporting divine benevolence (and it is what I willingly embrace) is to deny absolutely the misery and wickedness of man', and Philo's warning that by adopting this position 'you have put the controversy upon a most dangerous issue': *DNR* X: pp. 75-6.

²⁴ This manuscript has been published by M.A. Stewart, 'An Early Fragment on Evil', in *Hume's Connexions*, pp. 160-70.

²⁵ Holden, *Spectres of False Divinity*, pp. 145-80.

²⁶ See above, p. 258.

characterized by self-interested indolence and an ‘entire exemption from all duties’, including a concern for human life.²⁷ For the Stoics, the deity enjoyed their idealized *apatheia*— in the divine nature, reason and the active virtues (most especially benevolence, justice and wisdom) were realised fully.²⁸ Both these visions of man’s true happiness were viewed as inherently subjective by Cicero, as by Hume; and they said much about philosophical pride, but rather less about the divine nature.

Cotta argued that reason was the name given to man’s ability to proceed ‘from the known to the obscure’. Since all was known to the deity, it made little sense to consider him to be an intelligent being.²⁹ In any case, man’s reason all too frequently led him to act viciously. Only for the very few (the sage) was reason a blessing rather than a curse, and in this sense it could hardly be considered as evidence of man’s providential design, or of God’s goodness. To argue otherwise was to suggest that God concerned himself solely with the few (the elect) rather than humanity at large.³⁰ As for God’s supposed justice, this was clearly disproved by the evidence of everyday life. In practice, the good man frequently suffered and the bad man thrived. To suggest, as did the Stoics, that the crimes of the latter would be visited upon his (innocent) descendants would be ‘a remarkable instance of divine justice!’³¹ These insights could be employed powerfully against Puritan soteriology, as they were by Hume (*NHR* XIII: 79 n. 87). There was no evidence to suggest, Cotta concluded, that God concerned himself with humanity as a whole, let alone with specific nations or, even less probably, with particular individuals.³² This point was extended forcefully in *De Divinatione*, where the Stoic emphasis on the importance of divine action in human affairs as evidence for the existence of the deity was challenged, and indeed the claim made that it was possible

²⁷ *De Natura Deorum*, 1.20.53; 1.43.121.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.31.79.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.28.71.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 3.27-8.

³² *Ibid.*, 3.38.90.

that no breaches of the law of nature had ever occurred.³³ As Cotta observed, this presented a dilemma. A deity stripped of all moral attributes could not be the object of piety or reverence, and 'religion' as conventionally understood would be destroyed. Yet there were no compelling arguments to establish the benevolence, justice, wisdom or intelligence of a first cause, in which Cotta professed to believe solely on the basis of the harmonious order he discerned in the world.³⁴

In a footnote to 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences' (1742), Hume remarked that in *De Natura Deorum*, Cicero had observed the 'true spirit of dialogue'. Cicero maintained 'a tolerable equity' among his speakers, unlike in *De Finibus* where he treated the Stoic, Cato, with unpardonable contempt. In the former work, 'CICERO, being a great sceptic in matters of religion' was 'unwilling to determine any thing on that head among the different sects of philosophy'. This might seem to suggest that, on Hume's reading, Cicero had something decisive to say regarding the origins of men's motives to morality and justice, but nothing at all when it came to the 'inexplicable mystery' of theology (*NHR* XV: 87). Several commentators have presented Hume as similarly agnostic on the question of the nature and attributes of God.³⁵ Yet Hume actually says something quite different: 'it would have been an impropriety for so great a genius as himself, had he spoke, *not* to have said something decisive on the subject, and have carried every thing before him, as he always does on other occasions'.³⁶ On Hume's reading, *De Natura Deorum* did have something decisive to say—namely, that it was quite impossible to assign any moral attributes to a first cause, and that to do so was a form of superstitious anthropomorphism. Yet Cicero was

³³ *De Divinatione*, 1.6.10 (for the Stoic nexus between divine action and the existence of the deity); 2.21.48 (for the claim that, even if such breaches had occurred, they could not be shown to be caused by God).

³⁴ *De Natura Deorum*, 3.8-15.

³⁵ For the most influential statement, see James Noxon, 'Hume's Agnosticism', *Philosophical Review*, 73:2 (Apr. 1964), pp. 248-61.

³⁶ 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences' (1742), in *Essays*, p. 623 n. H (*italics added*). This note was withdrawn from all editions from 1768. It is misinterpreted by Price, 'Cicero and Hume', who suggests that Hume made precisely the opposite point (that Cicero always declared his opinion in such matters). For a more accurate reading, see Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, ii, p. 251.

unwilling to make this clear, aware of its consequences for religion as conventionally conceived. If God could not meaningfully be considered as benevolent or concerned with human affairs, Cicero asked,

What ground have we for rendering any sort of worship, honour or prayer to the immortal gods? Piety however, like the rest of the virtues, cannot exist in mere outward show and pretence; and, with piety, reverence and religion must likewise disappear. And when these are gone, life soon becomes a welter of disorder and confusion; and in all probability the disappearance of piety towards the gods will entail the disappearance of loyalty and social union among men as well, and of justice itself, the queen of the virtues.³⁷

Hume's moral theory banished piety from the 'Catalogue of Virtues', and thereby showed that Cicero's reticence on this point was unfounded. Civil religion, for Hume, was necessary to mitigate the worst consequences of vulgar superstition. It played no role in strengthening men's motives to morality and justice. Here the most important structural difference between *De Natura Deorum* and Hume's *Dialogues* is revealing. In the former, it was Cicero who bore witness to the debate between the academic sceptic, Stoic and Epicurean. Consequently it was Cicero who judged, against all the evidence, that it was the Stoic whose discourse 'approximated more nearly to a semblance of the truth'.³⁸ In the latter, the dialogue was reported by Pamphilus, a student of the Stoic (Cleanthes) 'in the early season of life', who was convinced from the outset that religion provided 'the surest foundation of morality, the firmest support of society, and the only principle which ought never to be a moment absent from our thoughts and meditations' (*DNR* 5).³⁹ As a result, the naïve

³⁷ *De Natura Deorum* 1.2.3-4.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.40.95. This was nonetheless called into question in *De Divinatione*, which was presented as a continuation of *De Natura Deorum*, structured as a dialogue between Cicero and his brother Quintus, and in which Cicero both defended and extended Cotta's arguments in the former work.

³⁹ Pamphilus is mentioned in *De Natura Deorum* as a student of Plato's, and as a rare example of a philosopher whom Epicurus had actually bothered reading: 1.26.72. Cleanthes, meanwhile, was discussed by Cicero as a pupil of Zeno's, whose desire to 'combat hedonism' (the Epicureans) saw him erroneously attempt to defend religion on arguments incapable of supporting such weight. In Cleanthes' writings, Cicero noted, 'the god whom we apprehend by our intelligence, and desire to make correspond with a mental concept as a seal tallies with its impression, has utterly and entirely vanished': 1.14.37. Shaftesbury and Hutcheson's philosophical theism, to which Cleanthes' bears more than a passing resemblance, was of course similarly forged in an attempt to 'combat hedonism'.

Pamphilus' preference, at the end of the work, for Cleanthes' discourse hardly comes as a surprise. In no sense need it challenge the implication that Hume endorsed fully Philo's conclusion that the furthest reason could go in natural theology was to establish the highly 'ambiguous' proposition that '*the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence*'. This was a proposition, Philo emphasised, that 'affords no inference that affects human life, or can be the source of any action or forbearance'; and 'the analogy, imperfect as it is, can be carried no farther than to the human intelligence; and cannot be transferred, with any appearance of probability, to the other qualities of the mind' (*DNR* XII: 101-102). This definition of rational 'theism' positively denied that any moral attributes could be accorded to a first cause— not merely that such attributes could not be known. A deity conceived in these terms could hardly be the object of piety or reverence.

There is a discernible tension, then, between Philo's definition of 'true' religion, and that offered by Cleanthes and apparently endorsed by Hume himself in the *History*. Cleanthes' comment that, because true religion 'enforces the motives of morality and justice, it is in danger of being overlooked, and confounded with these other motives' must be read as thoroughly ironic. In his fully secular moral theory Hume provided what Cicero had only invited— an account of the origins of morality and justice that explicitly denied any positive role for religion. Hume indicated, however, that his willingness to go further than had Cicero reflected the fact that, in a Christian age, this had become imperative. Theology had sought the assistance of speculative philosophy in order to establish its claims, something that had not occurred to the same extent in the ancient world. 'In later times', Hume argued, 'philosophy of all kinds, especially ethics, have been more closely united with theology than ever they were observed to be among the Heathens'. This had 'warped from their natural course' the 'unbiassed sentiments of the mind' and corrupted all 'reasoning' (*EPM*, 108-109).

Here Hume struck upon a theme laboured by Locke— the entire separation of philosophy and divinity in the heathen world. For Locke, this ensured that almost no philosopher— with the possible exception of Cicero— had correctly comprehended the true grounds of moral obligation in the will of God. For Hume, it was the union of religion and morality in a Christian world (and in Christian soteriology itself) that had corrupted moral reasoning. Christianity suggested a subordination of human natural and positive law to moral theology that Hume was anxious to deny. In classical antiquity, Hume noted, the philosopher and the priest ‘seem... to have made a fair partition of mankind between them; the former claiming all the learned and wise, the latter possessing all the vulgar and illiterate’ (*EHU*, 101).⁴⁰ The sects of philosophy presented their disciples with demanding moral rules by which to live, which were supposedly formulated on the basis of autonomous reason but which were in fact both hypothetical and unnatural. This Cicero had recognised. It was for this reason that he had treated his Stoic and Epicurean antagonists with such contempt in *De Finibus*. The polytheistic national religion, in contrast, did not seek to challenge men’s sentiments regarding morality and justice as they developed naturally within society largely on account of their experienced utility and agreeableness. As a consequence, Cicero could rest content to mock the dogmatic sects by which he was surrounded whilst acquiescing in the popular religion, safe in the knowledge that the errors of both presented no obstacle to men’s pursuit of happiness in society.⁴¹

This point was developed by Hume in his discussion of Cicero in the *Natural History*, a work composed at much the same time as the *Dialogues*.⁴² Warburton argued plausibly that Hume’s

⁴⁰ Locke had made this point in distinctive fashion with reference to *De Natura Deorum* (see above, pp. 69-70); and it is perfectly possible that Hume drew from the same source.

⁴¹ That Cicero did not seriously believe the national Roman religion to be true was indicated by the distinction drawn by Hume between Cicero’s willingness ‘to appear a devout religionist’, and the ‘much more sincere... devotion’ of Pompey, a figure whose superstitious ‘regard to auguries, dreams, and prophesies’ had been emphasised by Middleton in the *Life of Cicero*: *NHR* XII: p. 71.

⁴² The *Natural History* was probably composed at the same time as, or shortly after, Hume’s initial draft of the *Dialogues* (that is, at Ninewells in c.1749-51). In a letter to his publisher, Andrew Millar, of 12 June 1755,

'contradictory' and 'paradoxical' presentation of Cicero in the *Natural History* provided a means of exposing the literary devices used artfully to conceal the irreligious subtext.⁴³ The passage of the work to which Warburton drew his reader's attention ran as follows:

If ever there was a nation or a time in which the public religion lost all authority over mankind, we might expect, that infidelity in ROME, during the CICERONIAN age, would openly have erected its throne, and that CICERO himself, in every speech and action, would have been its most declared abettor. But, it appears, that, whatever sceptical liberties that great man might use, in his writings or in philosophical conversation; he yet avoided, in the common conduct of life, the imputation of deism and profaneness. Even in his own family, and to his wife, TERENCE, whom he highly trusted, he was willing to appear a devout religionist. (*NHR* XII: 71)

Hume considered this point to be of sufficient importance to repeat it a few pages later (*NHR* XII: 75). Hume's purpose in making this claim was two-fold. First, in the late Hellenistic world, religion had been subordinated to the demands of morality and justice. Cicero could consequently submit to it even though he exposed the error of the Stoics, who mistakenly sought to justify it 'with the weapon of reason'.⁴⁴ Second, Hume illustrated the error of assuming that 'because a system of religion has made no deep impression on the minds of a people, it must therefore have been positively rejected by all men of sense', and 'opposite principles' established by 'argument and reasoning' (*NHR* XII: 73). On the contrary, Cicero had supported the traditional Roman religion precisely because it 'hung loose upon the minds of men', contained no moral component, and was largely justified on the basis of custom and tradition rather than reason. Even if heathen polytheism was

Hume noted that it was one of 'four short Dissertations, which I have kept some Years by me': *Letters*, i, p. 223.

⁴³ Warburton, *Remarks on Mr. David Hume's Essay on the Natural History of Religion* (London, 1757), 'Remark XIII', pp. 49-50. Warburton's criticisms of Hume's presentation of Cicero were almost identical to the objections he raised to Middleton's *Life*. For more recent discussions of the literary devices employed by Hume to render his meaning suitably opaque, see David Berman, 'David Hume and the Suppression of "Atheism"', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 21:3 (July 1983), pp. 375-87; James Fiesner, 'Hume's Concealed Attack on Religion and its Early Critics', *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 20 (1995), pp. 431-49; Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, ii, pp. 264-81; and Paul Russell, *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise: Skepticism, Naturalism, and Irreligion* (Oxford, 2005), *passim*.

⁴⁴ *De Natura Deorum*, 3.4.10.

absurd, as a variant of civil religion it was largely benign and free of obvious contradiction. This was the best that could be hoped for in a national religion (*NHR* XII: 75).

Hume disingenuously suggested that Christianity was similarly morally benign and free of contradiction, unlike ‘vulgar’ theism (*NHR* VI: 55). Yet here Hume’s irony was at its most biting. Hume initially intended to publish the *Natural History* alongside two other essays—‘Of the Immortality of the Soul’, and ‘Of Suicide’—that struck at the heart of Christian theology. These essays revealed how its soteriological and moral teachings necessarily corrupted, unlike heathen polytheism, men’s motives to morality and justice.⁴⁵ With the assistance of false philosophy, Christianity flattered men’s ‘irregular’ and potentially destructive passions, not least hope and fear. Academic scepticism, in contrast, ‘by flattering no irregular passion, it gains few partizans: By opposing so many vices and follies, it raises to itself abundance of enemies, who stigmatize it as libertine, profane, and irreligious’ (*EHU*, 35-6). The academic sceptic was alone able to attain the *apatheia* or *ataraxia* desired by all who practised philosophy.⁴⁶ Only he might enjoy the ‘manly, steady virtue, which either preserves us from disastrous, melancholy accidents, or teaches us to bear them’, and consequently experience the ‘calm sun-shine of the mind’ in which ‘spectres of false divinity never make their appearance’ (*NHR* XIV: 84). It was academic scepticism, not Epicureanism, Stoicism or the Gospels, that provided a guide to life. The academic sceptic alone was willing to rest content with the bare possibility of a first cause, and to accept that this question ought to be of no consequence for the moral life or human happiness.

⁴⁵ The subversive nature of these two essays is succinctly reflected by William Smellie’s later observation that, in ‘the sophistry of the reasoning’ and the ‘poison they contain’, they threatened to exercise far more ‘injurious effects... on society’ than either the *Natural History* or the *Dialogues: Literary and Characteristical Lives of John Gregory M.D., Henry Home, Lord Kames, David Hume Esq., and Adam Smith L.L.D.* (Edinburgh, 1800), p. 207. For further discussion of these essays, see below, pp. 287-90.

⁴⁶ Note Cicero’s assertion that, for all his claims to the contrary, Epicurus was more racked by fear (not least of the gods) than any other philosopher: *De Natura Deorum*, 1.30.85.

As Cicero had emphasised in *De Natura Deorum*, few were capable of true philosophy, and the history of religion as it had developed in the world owed almost nothing to the insights it had provided. For Hume, the best that might be hoped was that public religions might once again be rendered benign and subservient to the dictates of morality and justice. This demanded an unremittingly Erastian settlement in church and state.⁴⁷ It was Hume's pessimism that any greater advance might be possible that permitted him (and Philo) broadly to accept the definition of 'true religion' furnished by Cleanthes. Hume nonetheless emphasised, to those with ears to hear, that the 'motives' to morality and justice and to religion were entirely discrete, and ought to be recognised as such by philosophers and statesmen alike.

ii. 'Sceptical principles' and the history of (false) religion

In the 'Introduction' to the *Natural History*, Hume distinguished once more between the 'foundation' of religion in reason, and its 'origin' in human nature. Hume declared that, 'happily', the former could not be doubted: 'The whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author; and no rational enquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine Theism and Religion' (*NHR*, 'Introduction': 33). This claim, however, was rendered instantly problematic by Hume's opening salvo in Section I, the ambiguity caused by which substantiates Hume's claim to his publisher, Andrew Millar, that he had 'polished' the essay carefully prior to sending it to him.⁴⁸ 'It is a matter of fact incontestable,' Hume argued, 'that about 1700 years ago all

⁴⁷ This explains a curious footnote that appeared in 'Of Superstition and Enthusiasm' (1741), where Hume distinguished between 'Priests' and 'Clergymen'. The former were to be despised as 'Pretenders to Power and Dominion, and to a superior Sanctity of Character, *distinct from Virtue and good Morals*'. Clergymen 'who are set apart by the Laws', however, might prevent the continual tendency of Christianity to subvert morality and justice, and it followed that 'there is no Rank of Men to be more respected': *Essays*, pp. 617-19 (this note was dropped from 1760). In the *History*, Hume similarly argued that an ecclesiastical establishment of salaried clergy was 'advantageous to the political interests of society': *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, ed. W.B. Todd (6 vols., Indianapolis, 1983), iii, pp. 135-6.

⁴⁸ Hume to Millar, 12 June 1755, in *Letters*, i, p. 223.

mankind were polytheists. The doubtful and sceptical principles of a few philosophers, or the theism, and that too not entirely pure, of one or two nations, form no objection worth regarding' (*NHR* I: 34).

This raised several challenges to contemporary Christian apologists as well as deists of various stripes, as was Hume's aim.⁴⁹ If, as most of Hume's readers would have contended, Christian theism was 'pure', this statement had a number of implications. First, it denied that the central tenets of revealed Christianity had been anticipated by the Stoic, Platonic or Peripatetic philosophers. In referring to those 'few' sceptical philosophers who had embraced 'genuine' theism, Hume made it clear that he did not have them in mind.⁵⁰ This undermined the apologetic strategies of those, such as Cudworth and Clarke, who defended the reasonableness of Christianity by arguing that it enlarged upon the insights gleaned on the basis of reason by the Stoics and Platonists in particular. Second, Hume's mention of the impure theism of 'one or two nations' struck at the heart of Warburton's attempt to isolate sacred from profane history. If Christianity were pure, it must have been erected upon quite different principles to the religion of the superstitious Jews. Third, Hume denied what Shaftesbury had laboured to establish: that a pure theism, irreconcilable with Christianity, could be discovered in the writings of (especially) Epictetus and Aurelius, whom Hume mentioned by name as worshipping 'angels and fairies' (*NHR* IV: 48).⁵¹ Fourth, it contemptuously dismissed the claims of freethinkers such as Toland and Bolingbroke that the absurd exoteric mythological religions of ancient Egypt and Syria concealed a pure,

⁴⁹ The *Natural History*, in comparison with the *Dialogues*, has received relatively little historical attention, at least in part because unlike the more purely 'philosophical' *Dialogues* it demands contextual treatment. This is indicated by Michael Malherbe's claim that 'we cannot help feeling at a loss to determine Hume's real intentions and to precisely evaluate the *Natural History*'s general import': 'Hume's *Natural History of Religion*', *Hume Studies*, 21:2 (Nov. 1995), p. 255. This point is noted by Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, p. 309 n. 94.

⁵⁰ Hume emphasised that there were 'no marks, no symptoms of any more perfect religion' in antiquity, aside from those sceptical principles of the 'few philosophers' (*NHR* I: p. 34).

⁵¹ Another obvious target here was Hutcheson, who from 1742 had embarked upon the translation of a number of the works of ancient Stoic moralists (with James Moore), beginning with Aurelius' *Meditations*. On this venture, see Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment*, ii, pp. 185-7; and below, pp. 294-5. Note Cotta's similar accusation that the Stoics worshipped nymphs and fairies: *De Natura Deorum*, 3.17.43.

esoteric and theistic core (the *prisca sapientia*) that was subsequently corrupted by Christianity.⁵²

On all of these points, Hume was in accord with Middleton.⁵³ This was particularly the case when it came to his claim that a 'few' sceptical philosophers had established 'genuine Theism' on its true foundations (reason), since the primary example offered by Hume was Cicero. Indeed, no less than in the *Dialogues*, Hume's debt to Cicero in the work was considerable. In both structure and content it resembles *De Divinatione*, which was presented as a continuation of *De Natura Deorum*, and in which Cicero spoke in his own voice. As had Middleton, Hume emphasised that the religion of the Jews was almost identical to that of the Egyptians, even as he felt no obligation to develop this point with reference to impeccably Christian authorities (Marsham and Spencer).⁵⁴ Both were species of superstition, and originated in 'human nature'. Furthermore, Middleton had similarly argued that the theologies of the dogmatic late Hellenistic sects were established upon principles diametrically opposite to those of true theism. Middleton emphasised the consequences of this insight for those who sought to defend Christianity on such ill-advised foundations.

Hume, however, departed from Middleton in a crucial respect. For Middleton, Christianity as practised in the world was indeed false, yet Christianity itself was not. The Gospels were, instead, corrupted from their very inception. Hume paid lip-service to this claim when he noted that in its uncorrupted form, Christianity was free from the contradictions and

⁵² On which, see Sergeantson, 'End of Modern Eusebianism', whose claim that the *Natural History* was primarily intended as a response to Bolingbroke's *Works* falls down on chronological grounds alone. The *Works* were only published by David Mallet in 1753-4, after Hume had in all likelihood completed a draft of the *Natural History*. It also ignores Hume's sincere contempt for, and lack of interest in, Bolingbroke's *Works*, as attested by his letter to the Abbé Le Blanc of 24 Oct. 1754: 'The Clergy are enrag'd against him; but they have no Reason. Were they never attack'd by more forcible Weapons than his, they might for ever keep Possession of their Authority' (*Letters*, i, pp. 206-209).

⁵³ Pocock briefly discusses the *Natural History* in relation to Middleton's thought: *Barbarism and Religion*, v, p. 243.

⁵⁴ Hume instead cited heathen authors to illustrate the 'strange' fact that they evidently considered any differences between the Egyptian religion, 'though so absurd', and the Jewish to be 'too frivolous to deserve any attention': *NHR* XII: p. 69 n. 58. This freed Hume, in the main body of the text, to ridicule Egyptian superstition at length, with obvious implications for Judaism (and any religion that built upon it).

morally pernicious tendencies that marked ‘vulgar’ theism (*NHR* VI: 55). This apparent concession was sufficiently plausible for some readers— not least the anonymous reviewer in the *Literary Magazine*— to consider Hume as a friend to Christianity, if of distinctly ‘*Latitudinarian* sentiments’.⁵⁵ Yet Warburton was much closer to the mark in claiming that Hume’s objective was to show ‘that that Religion which *all mankind* follow... is nothing but *Superstition and Fanaticism*, having *its origin in human Nature*; that is, in the imagination and passions only’.⁵⁶ As Warburton recognised, Hume dissolved Christianity into the broader study of the natural history of religions, of which, he strongly implied, it was merely the most pernicious and unreasonable species. To be sure, Hume exercised considerable caution in making this point regarding Christianity. Yet it emerges clearly enough from reading the *Natural History* alongside the *Dialogues*, *Essays* and *History of England* (1754-62).

Hume argued that if theism were founded upon ‘some obvious and invincible argument’, it could never subsequently have been lost. In so doing, Hume denied that polytheism represented the corruption of an initial, ‘pure’ theism— whether passed down by Adam and the Patriarchs, or discerned by the earliest men in a golden age through ‘reasoning from the frame of nature’ (*NHR* I: 35-6). Hume’s account of the origins of religious belief was, as Robertson notes, avowedly Epicurean, and broadly similar to that offered by Mandeville.⁵⁷ At the origin of society man was a ‘barbarous and necessitous animal’, plagued by ‘the incessant hopes and fears, which actuate the human mind’ (*NHR* I: 35; II: 38). It was ‘in this disordered scene, with eyes still more disordered and astonished, that they see the first obscure traces of divinity’ (*NHR* II: 39). The transition from polytheism to theism that eventually took place had not involved an alternation of ‘principles’ (that is, the triumph of reason). Theism of the sort envisaged by Christians and many deists alike— a God with

⁵⁵ *Literary Magazine*, 2 (Dec. 1757), p. 36.

⁵⁶ Warburton, *Remarks*, ‘Remark I’, p. 14.

⁵⁷ Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, pp. 308-16.

moral attributes providentially governing the universe— had never been established on the basis of an 'invincible argument'.⁵⁸ This position was entirely consistent with the stringent limits set to natural theology by Philo in the *Dialogues*. Instead, this philosophically-unjustifiable tendency to attribute human qualities (wisdom, benevolence, justice) to a deity needed to be explained psychologically.

In arguing this, Hume put Stoicism squarely in the dock. Polytheism, Hume suggested, was regular and subject to general principles. Ignorant of universal causes and incapable of pushing past the present appearance of things, uninstructed man attributed the immediate (and myriad) causes of happiness and, more frequently, misery to invisible powers in nature. As it was the melancholy rather than agreeable passions by which men were 'thrown on their knees', so these were in turn projected onto the deities they sought to placate (jealousy, anger, vengeance). It was impossible that men could have ascribed the origin and fabric of the world to such imperfect beings (*NHR* III: 42). The Stoic 'theologers', meanwhile, remained in thrall to vulgar superstition in considering god, as well as man, to be subject to fate and destiny, and to spring from a shared source. He was, it followed, immanent in the universe. It was for this reason that Hume declared, 'I can scarcely allow the principles even of MARCUS AURELIUS, PLUTARCH, and some other STOICS and ACADEMICS, though much more refined than the pagan superstition, to be worthy of the honourable appellation of *theism*'. Indeed, in failing to conceptualise god as the first cause of all, they were true atheists (*NHR* IV: 48). The Stoic established his perfectly benevolent being on principles directly opposite to those of 'good reasoners'. Rather than discerning the divine existence from the harmonious order of the world, he established it on the subjective basis of the good he experienced, which he attributed to a providence further evidenced by prodigies

⁵⁸ That is, the definition of 'genuine theism' offered by Cleanthes, 'which represents us as the workmanship of a being perfectly good, wise, and powerful; who created us for happiness, and who, having implanted in us immeasurable desires of good, will prolong our existence to all eternity' (*DNR* XII: p. 99).

and miracles. As Cicero had emphasised in *De Natura Deorum*, the Stoic thereby fell into two gross errors. First, it was the argument from the balance of good or evil in the world that caused ‘the chief difficulties in admitting a supreme intelligence’, as Bayle had illustrated with such zeal. Second, God’s direct involvement in the world (particular providence) ran directly contrary to the sole argument for a possibly intelligent first cause. That is, the argument from the regularity and order of the natural and moral worlds, attested by the constant operation of general laws identified by the philosopher in both (*NHR* VI: 52).

Those ‘few’ sceptical philosophers in the heathen world who had begun to look to general laws as a means of explanation, rather than attributing all unknown causes to the workings of god(s), were roundly decried as atheists by their Stoic contemporaries. Hume mentioned Anaxagoras as the first ‘genuine’ theist, and the first to be denounced as an atheist. Here Hume followed Cicero closely, who in *De Natura Deorum* declared that Anaxagoras was the ‘first thinker to hold that the orderly disposition of the universe is designed and perfected by a rational mind’ (*NHR* IV: 47 n. 27).⁵⁹ As Cicero emphasised, this suggested that the attribution to the deity by the Stoics of the (active) moral virtues of benevolence, justice and power was base superstition, on a level with Epicurus’ more literal anthropomorphism. The ‘genuine’ theistic principles developed gradually by these ‘few’ philosophers, which represented the birth of science, challenged at every turn those of both the Stoics and Epicureans. Yet as Hume proceeded to discuss, it was the Stoic vision of the deity—a being who demanded piety and devotion from men, and intervened directly (or through intermediate agents) in human affairs—that was most in accordance with the ‘irrational and superstitious principles’ that led the vulgar to similarly raise one god above all others (*NHR* VI: 53).

⁵⁹ *De Natura Deorum*, 1.11.26.

Theistic religion as it had emerged in the world, Hume argued, owed nothing to reason and everything to 'the adulation and fears of the most vulgar superstition', as one deity came to be worshipped as a tyrannous ruler over all other lesser deities (*NHR* VI: 54). In a similar manner to earthly tyrants, it was assumed that such a deity might be placated only by the most servile flattery and praise. This terminated in the depiction of God as the first cause of all, thereby coinciding accidentally with the sole (and benign) principle of 'genuine' theism. 'Vulgar' theism immediately pushed past this foundational proposition, as men embraced 'the greatest absurdities and contradictions' in their attempts to heighten their adulation. Hume intimated that this transition from polytheism to theism was identical in Mosaic Israel and pagan Rome (*NHR* VI: 54). Hatred and fear, not admiration, underpinned vulgar theism as it had polytheism; yet all felt compelled to 'endeavour, by an affected ravishment and devotion, to ingratiate themselves with [god]'. They assented to the absurd descriptions of the deity as possessing the human virtues *ad infinitum* presented by the theologians. Yet this assent was 'merely verbal', since their 'idea of him, notwithstanding their pompous language, is still as poor and frivolous as ever' (*NHR* VII: 56).

Vulgar theism's appetite for contradiction and absurdity reached an unprecedented pitch once Christianity established itself as the national religion with Constantine. The sanctions of civil law enforced the codes of moral and devotional practice deemed worthy of a jealous and capricious deity by enthusiastic philosophers and self-interested priests.⁶⁰ Philosophical enthusiasms had been indulged by individuals in all ages, as the comparison between the 'extravagant philosophy' of Diogenes the Cynic and Pascal indicated (*EPM*, 122-3).⁶¹ Diogenes had, however, as with all dogmatic philosophers in antiquity, existed on the margins of civil society as the just object of contempt for all right-thinking men. The

⁶⁰ Hume made this point particularly strongly in 'Of Parties in General', pp. 61-2.

⁶¹ The analogy between the attempt of the Cynic and the 'Monk or Dervise' to separate himself from the rest of mankind, and to lead an entirely 'artificial' life, was first drawn in *T* 1.4.7: 13.

mortifying ‘monkish virtues’ of the Christian enthusiast like Pascal had been imposed as true and necessary on all individuals in a Christian age. There was a toxic contradiction between ‘the representations given to us by some later religions and our natural ideas of generosity, lenity, impartiality, and justice’, as God became truly ‘barbarous’ (*NHR* XIII: 79). Here Hume endorsed Shaftesbury’s description of Christianity as a species of ‘daemonism’. The worship of a being who was worthy only of hatred and contempt invariably corrupted men’s moral sentiments as they had developed quite naturally within society.⁶² Yet only the enthusiastic few were able to lead such ‘*artificial* lives’ of the mind. Superstition was infinitely more burdensome than was ‘virtue, when men are reconciled to it by ever so little practice’. Virtue was both useful and agreeable, whereas the opposite was true of superstition, most especially in its theistic form (*NHR* XIV: 82).

Hume emphasised, in both the *Natural History* and the *History of England*, how the attraction of ‘the sweets of society and mutual assistance’— which were discountenanced by ascetic Christianity— had at various times proved irresistible (*T* 3.2.8: 8). This was a seemingly natural process whereby the disagreeable passions stimulated by theistic religion were suppressed in society.⁶³ This explained the tendency of vulgar theism to ‘reflux’ back towards polytheism, a phenomenon discussed by Hume in Section VIII of the *Natural History*. This occurred because ‘the feeble apprehensions of men cannot be satisfied with conceiving their deity as a pure spirit and perfect intelligence’, no matter how energetically priests employed the ‘chisel and hammer’ in the attempt to ‘engrave theological tenets with any lasting impression’ on men’s minds (*NHR* VIII: 59; XII: 72). This allowed Hume to explain what Middleton had identified in the *Letter from Rome*: why so many features of

⁶² See above, pp. 117-21. Rivers notes that Hume’s account of daemonism might be indebted to Shaftesbury: *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, ii, p. 310 n. 326.

⁶³ On which, see Annette C. Baier, ‘Hume on Religion: Stopping the Ocean with a Bull-Rush?’, in J.J. MacIntosh & H.A. Meynell (eds.), *Faith, Scepticism, and Personal Identity. A Festschrift for Terence Penelhum* (Calgary, 1994), pp. 61-82.

heathen polytheism had increasingly been incorporated into Christianity.⁶⁴ The Catholic saints corresponded perfectly to the demi-gods of pagan mythology, but with a seminal difference that had been emphasised by Middleton: 'The place of HERCULES, THESEUS, HECTOR, ROMULUS, is now supplied by DOMINIC, FRANCIS, ANTHONY, and BENEDICT. Instead of the destruction of monsters, the subduing of tyrants, the defence of our native country; whippings and fastings, cowardice and humility, abject submission and slavish obedience, are become the means of obtaining celestial honours among mankind' (NHR X: 63).

Precisely because the god imposed on men's minds failed to exercise any lasting power over their sentiments, it was necessary to resort back to images, poetical fictions and theatrical rituals to appeal to the senses and imagination. For the vulgar, these images and saints rapidly became the sole objects of worship and the sum total of religion. This suited priests perfectly well, since it permitted them to exercise the social influence—mediating between god(s) and men—enjoyed by their heathen predecessors.⁶⁵ For Hume, unlike for either Locke or Middleton, this 'reflux' towards the 'easy' superstition of a purely '*traditional*', mythological and ritualistic rather than a philosophical, '*scriptural*' and moral religion was an unimpeachably good thing.⁶⁶ It encouraged a re-separation between what Christianity had amalgamated—religion and morality.

Hume alighted upon the Renaissance as a brief period when the social and philosophical benefits of a return to the Ciceronian division of labour between the moral philosopher, magistrate and priest (subordinated to the civil laws of the commonwealth) were fleetingly experienced. At this historical juncture, there was the promise of advances in the arts and

⁶⁴ See above, pp. 185-93.

⁶⁵ This was a point noted by Hume in the 'Memoranda'. 'No religion can maintain itself in vigour without many observances to be practiced on all occasions. Hence the priests are stricter upon these than moral duties without knowing the reason. There is a secret instinct of this kind': 'Early Memoranda', p. 503.

⁶⁶ A point emphasised by Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, ii, pp. 311-12.

sciences that might have far outstripped those of classical antiquity. Hume explored this theme in a number of works. In the *Philosophical Essays*, Hume noted how the ‘pertinacious bigotry’ of Christian philosophical theology had its origins in the diminution of the passion of the ‘love of truth’ in the late Hellenistic period (that is, Cicero’s age). Philosophers had gathered into dogmatic sects, claiming to have established exclusive, mutually antagonistic accounts of the man’s true end. This ‘bigotry’, which was ‘so fatal to philosophy, is really her offspring, who, after allying with superstition, separates himself entirely from the interest of his parent, and becomes her most inveterate enemy and persecutor’ (*EHU*, 100).

It was for this reason that, in ‘Arts and Sciences’, Hume emphasised the benefits of ‘interruptions in the periods of learning’— as well as those in ‘political governments and societies’— as they served the purpose of ‘breaking the progress of authority, and dethroning the tyrannical usurpers over human reason’.⁶⁷ In this case, Hume referred explicitly to the fall of the Roman Empire and the establishment of Christian superstition (underpinned by the dictatorship of Peripatetic philosophy) and barbarism throughout Europe. As men emerged from centuries of darkness with the ‘revival of learning’, the passion of the ‘love of truth’ was rekindled in those few whose constitutions led them to engage in philosophical enquiry. There had been little danger, Hume argued, that they would once again submit their reason to the authority of the bigoted sects of the Ciceronian age. As Hume noted, ‘upon the revival of learning, those sects of STOICS and EPICUREANS, PLATONISTS and PYTHAGORICIANS, could never regain any credit or authority; and, at the same time, by the example of their fall, kept men from submitting, with such blind deference, to those new sects, which have attempted to gain an ascendant over them’.⁶⁸ Rather than defending philosophical systems erected on ungrounded hypotheses, they were freed to consult nature and confine themselves ‘to common life, and to such subjects as fall

⁶⁷ ‘Arts and Sciences’, p. 123.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

under daily practice and experience; leaving the more sublime topics to the embellishment of poets and orators, or to the arts of priests and politicians' (*EHU*, 121). All philosophers might have become academic sceptics like Cicero.

The Renaissance was discussed in precisely these terms in both the *History of England* and the *Natural History*. In the former, Hume observed how, at this time, a 'few persons of a studious disposition' experienced 'a sceptical turn'. That is, they increasingly endorsed the 'doubtful and sceptical principles' of those 'few' philosophers who had begun to establish 'genuine' theism (a first cause) on its sole foundation (general laws) (*HE* III: 186-7).⁶⁹ In the *Natural History*, Hume observed that it was only at the Renaissance that a belief in myriad lesser deities, so central to both pagan mythology and Stoic theology, was finally recognised as a true atheism. Until this point, Europeans considered that 'all nature was full of other invisible powers; fairies, goblins, elves, sprights'. Hume slyly proceeded to suggest that Christianity as a religion would have been destroyed had the consequences of this sceptical reasoning, revived at the Renaissance, been explored fully. 'Our ancestors in EUROPE,' Hume noted, 'before the revival of letters, believed, *as we do at present*, that there was one supreme God, the author of nature, whose power, though in itself incontroulable, was yet often exerted by the interposition of his angels and subordinate ministers, who executed his sacred purposes' (*NHR* IV: 44, italics added). As Cicero indicated in *De Natura Deorum*, divine power, lesser deities, and a particular providence could hardly have withstood the enlightening rays of a true sceptical philosophy driven solely by the unimpeded 'love of truth'. The very core of Christianity as a scriptural religion directly contradicted true philosophy, and undermined the 'primary principles of genuine theism'— the belief in a first cause.

⁶⁹ *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, ed. W.B. Todd (6 vols., Indianapolis, 1983): references to volume and page number will be provided in brackets in the text. Todd takes the 1778 edition of the *History* as his copy-text.

This ‘sceptical turn’, then, had promised to recognise the stringent limits of natural theology identified by Cicero and, in the *Dialogues*, by Philo. Whilst the belief in a first cause might perhaps be justified, no further inferences for human life could be drawn from this insight. Popular religion would, inevitably, push past this foundational truth, and endorse absurd rituals and poetical myths regarding the deity. Yet at the Renaissance, philosophers and statesmen appeared to be on the verge of recognising these, as had Cicero, as necessary fictions. They were intended to indulge the vulgar tendency to superstition, but had to be subordinated to (and made consistent with) the demands of morality and justice. It was precisely this sceptical philosophy, Hume suggested, that began to be cultivated in Leo X’s court, which ‘had not been wanting a just sense of freedom’ as ‘upon the revival of letters, very generous and enlarged sentiments of religion prevailed throughout Italy’.⁷⁰ Leo’s own ‘familiarity with ancient literature’, allied to ‘a sound judgment, moderation, and temper’, ensured that he was ‘fully acquainted with the ridicule and falsity of the doctrines, which, as supreme Pontiff, he was obliged by his interest to promote’ (*HE* III: 138; 142). In his hands, popular religion was increasingly stripped of its doctrinal content: ‘the ancient religion, by giving its votaries something to do, freed them from the trouble of thinking’, and ‘began to diffuse a general elegance of taste, by uniting it with religion’ (*HE* III: 354). Superstition, then, was at this time becoming ‘so innocent and inoffensive’, as it had been in Cicero’s age.⁷¹ At this historical juncture, Hume continued, ‘it might have been hoped, that learning and knowledge, stealing in gradually, would have opened the eyes of men’, and further

⁷⁰ These sentiments were, however, not confined to Italy alone. Drawing from Herbert of Cherbury’s *Life* of Henry VIII, Hume noted how, in a speech to the Commons of 1529, an MP ‘infers, that the only religion obligatory on mankind is the belief in one supreme Being, the author of nature; and the necessity of morals, in order to obtain his favour and protection’ (*HE* III: pp. 186-7). This was precisely the conjunction—between a plain assent to the existence of God, and the practice of morality—mentioned by Hume in the letter to Mure of 1743, and endorsed by Cleanthes in the final section of the *Dialogues*. In the *History*, Hume proceeded to note how the recrudescence of theological controversy, however, ‘served effectually to banish for a long time all such obnoxious liberties’.

⁷¹ Hume’s description of the benign nature of superstition under Leo X, and its implications for the necessity of the Reformation, was profoundly criticised by, among others, Macqueen, *Letters on Hume’s History*, ‘Letter IV’.

'corrected such of the ecclesiastical abuses as were the grossest and most burthensome' (HGB: 98).⁷²

The Protestant Reformation explained why Hume discussed the Renaissance primarily with recourse to the conditional tense. It was for this reason that Hume's claim in 'Arts and Sciences' that the Renaissance ensured that philosophers did not once more divide into their sects, and retreat into their schools, was decidedly ambiguous. Hume no sooner claimed that the sciences were driven henceforth by the unimpeded 'love of truth', and established upon an empirical basis, than he denied it. First, in moving on to repudiate the vulgar Whig notion that learning and the rule of law could only thrive in free (republican) governments, Hume noted that such a claim might have been true in Longinus's day but certainly was not in modern Europe, given the phenomenon of the 'civilised monarchy'.⁷³ Experience and observation in the modern world exposed it as a dangerous fallacy. Second, 'Arts and Sciences' was immediately followed by the four essays on happiness ('The Epicurean', 'The Stoic', 'the Platonist' and 'The Sceptic'). These essays implied that a 'blind deference' to the 'different ideas of human life and of happiness' taught by the late Hellenistic sects had returned in recent centuries.⁷⁴ This had enslaved, moreover, a far greater number of men than had been the case in an ancient world in which philosophers had attracted only a few disciples to their schools. If the Renaissance had freed philosophy from the dictatorship of Aristotle, the Reformation had enslaved it to that of Epicurus, Zeno, Plato and Sextus. This,

⁷² The citation is drawn from Duncan Forbes' edition of the 1754 text, the only one in which it appeared: *The History of Great Britain: the Reigns of James I and Charles I* (Harmonsworth, 1970). In Todd's edition of the *History*, based on the 1778 text, this passage appears in the editor's foreword (HE I: p. xvi).

⁷³ This prejudice was, in 'Of Liberty and Despotism' (1741), attributed to Addison and Shaftesbury: *Essays*, p. 90 n. 6. In 'Arts and Sciences' (p. 125), however, it is associated with those who, 'in a high political rant', considered all absolute monarchies to be unregenerate tyrannies: here Hume has Locke in his sights. On this, see John Robertson, 'Universal Monarchy and the Liberties of Europe: David Hume's Critique of an English Whig Doctrine', in N. Phillipson & Q. Skinner (eds.), *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 349-74.

⁷⁴ 'The Epicurean' (1741), in *Essays*, p. 138 n. 1.

in turn, had corrupted the ‘science of man’, and prevented the ‘improvements... in natural religion’ that were ‘in some measure dependent’ upon its cultivation (*T*, ‘Introduction’, 4).

The unrealised promise of the Renaissance was also a guiding theme in Hume’s *History*. As it transpired, the ‘sharpness of the remedy’ proposed by Luther and Calvin— by which, as Hume pithily remarked, all ‘reasonable men’ were ‘somewhat alarmed’— ensured that this serene reformation of philosophy, religion and manners was rapidly perverted by ‘polemical science’ and ‘the controversies of theology’ (*HGB*: 97).⁷⁵ It followed that ‘the period, during which letters were cultivated in Italy, was so short as scarce to allow leisure for correcting this unadulterated relish’ (*HGB*: 247).⁷⁶ Rather than the philosophical principles of those ‘few persons of a studious disposition’, it was the self-interest, pragmatism and genuine superstition of priests and misguided magistrates that had driven the Reformation forward. This was especially true of England under Henry VIII whom, echoing Middleton, Hume presented as remaining attached to ‘the imagined purity of his speculative principles’ acquired as a youth from his favourite author, Thomas Aquinas (*HE* III: 222; 140).⁷⁷ Protestantism was the consequence of the natural reflux to theism that took place when a popular religion had too clearly returned to its polytheistic roots. This was indicated by Hume’s observation that an excessive reverence for the Virgin Mary was particularly obnoxious to the Reformers, who considered her to have usurped ‘many of the attributes of the Almighty’ (*NHR* VI: 54). The brief coincidence between the insights of sceptical philosophy and the arguments of the Reformers was precisely that; and as ‘reason played

⁷⁵ Hume repeatedly explored the opinions of ‘reasonable men’ or ‘men of sense and virtue’ in the *History*, without ever identifying those opinions with specific historical individuals. It provided him, instead, with a means of showing what the impartial and philosophical individual ought to have made (and the reader ought to make) of particular historical debates and events. On this, see Moritz Baumstark, ‘David Hume: the Making of a Philosophical Historian. A Reconsideration’ (Univ. of Edinburgh Ph.D. thesis, 2007), pp. 164–217.

⁷⁶ It was also too short, Hume suggested, for true sceptical principles to be developed fully in natural theology, hence why in the reign of Charles I men ‘fixed in a determined philosophical scepticism’ regarding religious matters were ‘then unknown’, and all were prey to the forces of superstition and enthusiasm (*HE* V: p. 572).

⁷⁷ See above, pp. 215–16.

[no] considerable share' in the unfolding of the Reformation, so it could not prevent it embracing once more the most manifest contradictions (*HE* III: 141). It followed that men's ideas of the deity remained established upon the same 'irrational and superstitious principles' as before. 'Popular theology' continued to draw from the false philosophy of the heathen sects in order to justify irregular passions that led men away from morality and justice (*NHR* VI: 53).

The consequences of this were described at length by Hume in his *History*.⁷⁸ Once established as a national religion, Protestantism inevitably veered once more towards polytheism in order to retain votaries who required more than a purely spiritual representation of the deity. This explained the ritualistic redirection of Anglicanism under Laud, who was treated by Hume with notable sympathy (*HE* V: 458-60).⁷⁹ This reflux, however, was met by flux, as enthusiastic dissenters once again emphasised the poverty of men's natural moral powers and the sovereignty of the deity over his earthly as well as spiritual kingdom. Not only the established, traditional religion but the rules of justice and morality that had developed historically on the basis of their utility were denounced as superstitious, with more than a tincture of plausibility (neither were founded on the basis of autonomous reason). As Locke himself observed, even those Protestant sects that had claimed to be the most rational and moderate, such as the Socinians, ended up embracing 'the most unintelligible sophisms'. 'A system becomes more absurd in the end', Hume declared, 'merely from its being reasonable and philosophical in the beginning' (*NHR* XI: 66).

For Hume, the very nature of Christianity as a species of vulgar theism made this inevitable, precisely because the deity it presented was possessed of human attributes (whether those

⁷⁸ On which, see Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*, pp. 210-46.

⁷⁹ On Hume's treatment of Laud, see Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, ii, pp. 214-15; and Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, ii, p. 316.

more conducive to the Stoic's *apatheia* or to the Epicurean's *ataraxia*.⁸⁰ It could not restrain itself to the sole principle of 'genuine' theism: 'The centre of unity of all men with relation to religion is, That there is a first cause. As you augment the propositions you find non-conformists, Atheists, Epicureans, idolators, those who maintain the extension, non-position, necessity of the first cause, etc.'⁸¹ All these debates were 'merely verbal'. Christianity simply perpetuated the tendency of philosophers to pass beyond 'reason and common sense' to embrace 'absurdity and contradiction', with consequences that were far more disastrous for human life than had been the case in the heathen world (*NHR* XI: 66). These consequences were discussed by Hume in his treatment of the Civil War in the *History*. Here the unintended but beneficial consequences of religious and philosophical enthusiasm in furthering the causes of political liberty, religious toleration and commercial sociability were explored in a manner not dissimilar to that provided by Mandeville.⁸²

Hume's endorsement of the Lockean claim that religion was nothing but a species of philosophy— something Mandeville, no less than Bayle, resolutely denied— must be taken seriously. Hume was not agnostic on the question of the divine attributes and nature, and had something far more powerful to say on the subject, as, he claimed, had Cicero. Bacon was quite correct to assert that 'a little philosophy inclineth a man's mind to atheism; but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to religion' (*DNR* I: 15; *NHR*, VI: 52-3). That 'depth', however, had been excavated in full by neither Locke nor Middleton. This was reflected in their continued defence of Christ's miracles, which, as Hume strongly implied in

⁸⁰ Livingston, consistent with his elision of the distinction (and tension) between Hume's two definitions of 'true' religion, considers this hostility to the Christian tradition as a failure on Hume's part, rather than integral to his entire philosophical project. For Livingston, Hume's 'appalling... historical provinciality' explains his 'failure to penetrate the biblical literature and rituals of popular theism and to ask whether, if purged of false philosophy, they could be bearers of truth': 'Hume's Conception of True Religion', in *Hume's Philosophy of Religion: the Sixth Montgomery Hester Seminar* (Winston-Salem, N.C., 1986), p. 70.

⁸¹ 'Early Memoranda', p. 501.

⁸² See Hume's comment (referring to the Reformation) that 'there followed from this Revolution many beneficial consequences; though perhaps neither foreseen nor intended by the persons who had the chief hand in conducting it': *HE* IV: pp. 119-20. For Mandeville's discussion— shot through with ironic asides— of the unanticipated benefits of the Reformation in *Origin of Honour*, see above, pp. 172-3.

'Of Miracles', were no more credible than those others which they had correctly dismissed as unworthy of rational assent. Meanwhile the 'religion' to which true philosophy led would hardly have been deemed worthy of the name by contemporaries. The very title chosen by Hume—the natural history of *religion*—might reflect this fact, when contrasted (for example) with John Trenchard's *The Natural History of Superstition* (1709).⁸³ All 'religion', when taken to imply piety to a deity (or deities) possessed of moral attributes and to demand a set of devotional practices, originated solely in 'human nature' and was symptomatic of emotional and cognitive underdevelopment.⁸⁴ All such 'religion' was pernicious; but when it adopted its theistic (and scriptural) form, and presented such a moral being as purely spiritual and utterly transcendent, the consequences for morality and justice were infinitely more disastrous.

In Hume's hands, then, a tradition of academic scepticism identified with Cicero carried very different implications for Christianity than it had for Locke or Middleton. The only point regarding natural theology upon which 'the science of man' could pronounce with certainty was a negative one. Men's moral sentiments, and the affective psychology by which they were produced, were confined entirely to human life. This unequivocally undercut any possible harmony between Ciceronian moral science and Christian moral theology. This point can be illustrated most succinctly by considering 'Of the Immortality of the Soul'. This essay was presented in short, sharp paragraphs, and reads like a digest of extracts drawn

⁸³ John Trenchard, *The Natural History of Superstition* (1709), in *A Collection of Tracts. By the Late John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon* (2 vols., London, 1751), i, pp. 387-415. For necessarily conjectural discussion of Hume's choice of title, see Malherbe, 'Hume's *Natural History*'; and Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, v, p. 242. Warburton was characteristically certain as to Hume's motives, and fairly acute: 'You ask, why he chuses to give it this title. Would not the *Moral History of Meteors* be full as sensible as the *Natural History of Religion*? Without doubt. Indeed had he given the history of what he himself would pass upon us for the only true Religion, namely, NATURALISM, or the belief of a God, the Creator and Physical Preserver, but not the moral Governor of the world, the title of *Natural* would have fitted it well, because all *Morality* is excluded from the Idea' (*Remarks*, 'Remark I', p. 9).

⁸⁴ On the physiological dimensions of Hume's depiction of both superstition and enthusiasm, see John Passmore, 'Enthusiasm, Fanaticism and David Hume', in P. Jones (ed.), *The 'Science of Man' in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh, 1989), pp. 85-107.

from Cicero's philosophical writings.⁸⁵ Hume began precisely where Locke had left off in defending his treatment of the subject from Stillingfleet's cavils, by citing 2 Timothy 1.10 (the doctrine was ultimately 'brought to light' by Christ). For Locke, however, the Gospels themselves were only credible insofar as they enlarged upon primarily moral truths identified by unassisted reason. To establish this point, Locke had drawn extensively from *Tusculan Disputations*.⁸⁶ The metaphysical arguments of the Stoics and Plato, endorsed by Stillingfleet, led to atheism in suggesting the pre-existence as well as the immortality of the soul. Physical arguments, meanwhile, played into the Epicurean's hands: all the evidence of the natural world pointed to the mortality of the soul. It was solely on the basis of moral arguments, Locke claimed, that the doctrine found support. This complemented Locke's more general apologetic strategy, which suggested that the excellence of Christ's moral teachings, providing what philosophy could not, attested to both their reasonableness and their necessity.

In the essay, Hume re-emphasised the importance of establishing religious principles on cognitive rather than affective grounds, since 'all doctrines are to be suspected, which are favoured by our passions'.⁸⁷ Hume was in no doubt that the doctrine of a future state originated in the 'hopes and fears' that actuated the human mind. The question remained as to whether it had a foundation in reason. As had Locke, Hume divided the evidence into three categories: metaphysical, physical, and moral. As had Locke, Hume paraphrased *Tusculan Disputations* almost verbatim in order to reject the metaphysical and physical arguments, and show that both led to atheism. When he came to consider the moral arguments upon which Locke had laid such weight— and which, Locke claimed to Stillingfleet, Cicero had endorsed— Hume drew from a source that Locke had studiously

⁸⁵ This point is missed entirely by commentators including J.C.A. Gaskin, who provides the most thorough discussion of the essay: *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke, 1988), pp. 166-82.

⁸⁶ See above, pp. 87-91.

⁸⁷ 'Of the Immortality of the Soul' (1777), in *Essays*, pp. 590-98 (on p. 598).

avoided in his discussion.⁸⁸ This was *De Natura Deorum*, the work in which Cotta had similarly challenged his antagonists to prove the principles they sought to defend on reason alone.⁸⁹ Hume's arguments to undermine the moral evidence in favour of the doctrine were identical to those employed by Cotta to refute Balbus. Moral arguments, both argued, were grounded on the fallacious assumption that God could be known to possess attributes—justice, goodness, benevolence, power—'beyond what he has exerted in this universe', but which 'according to *human* sentiments' were 'essential parts of personal merit'. This was to once again fall into the error of the Stoics and Epicureans, and 'suppose, that human sentiments have place in the deity', when the 'chief source of moral ideas', as with men's ideas regarding justice, 'is the reflection on the interests of *human* society'.⁹⁰

Human natural and positive law were guided solely by estimations of public utility—those qualities recognised as 'essential parts of personal merit' were useful and agreeable to men in this life—and could say nothing regarding a deity or a hereafter. This point, Hume suggested, could be established with a degree of probability that approached to certainty. Any hypothesis that contradicted it (moral theology) should be rejected by the rational individual as false. The absolute nature of this separation between the content of natural law (that is, those duties considered obligatory by men in society) and the Christian God's declared will—which Locke had sought to render inextricable—was further indicated in 'Of Suicide'.⁹¹ Most men were in fact possessed of the desire of self-preservation in a very great degree. To conceptualise this as an inviolable duty under natural law, to be enforced by the civil law and 'Law of *Reputation*', however, was as inhumane as it was chimerical. It

⁸⁸ This is not to suggest that Locke was Hume's sole target, not least since Butler had similarly defended the doctrine primarily on the basis of moral evidence: Paul Russell, 'Butler's "Future State" and Hume's "Guide to Life"', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 42:4 (Oct. 2004), pp. 425-48.

⁸⁹ Here Rivers' claim that Hume's intention in the *Dialogues* may have been 'to rescue Cicero from his Christian readers and restore him to scepticism' can be applied more broadly to a far greater number of Hume's writings: *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, ii, p. 277.

⁹⁰ 'Immortality of the Soul', pp. 592-6 (italics added).

⁹¹ 'Of Suicide' (1777), in *Essays*, pp. 577-89.

imposed an 'ought' where, in the case of most men (except the suicide), there was only an 'is'. Locke's error reflected the disastrous confusion that had taken place in the Christian world between human morality and justice, and religious belief.

At the heart of Locke's apologetic approach, and later Middleton's, was the claim that it was inconsistent to be a true theist— that is, to believe in a God possessed of the moral attributes of benevolence, wisdom and justice, and (perhaps) in a future state— and not to believe in Christianity. The Gospels provided what philosophy could not, a compelling account of moral obligation and evidence confirming God's goodness and justice. It was for this reason, both argued, that Cicero would have embraced Christianity. In showing how Ciceronian academic scepticism could explain moral obligation in entirely secular terms, this claim was not merely denied, but positively inverted. Hume's 'moral science', erected upon the 'sceptical principles' of the academic, demonstrated how moral judgements were confined to, as the product of, human society. Any religion that envisaged the deity as morally-evaluable was, as a consequence, demonstrably false. Cicero would assuredly have considered Christian belief to be indicative of psychological disorder, and morally pernicious in its consequences. Philo's parting advice to the youth Pamphilus in the *Dialogues* that 'to be a philosophical sceptic is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian' in no way suggested that academic scepticism (true philosophy) led to Christianity. Indeed, Philo was making precisely the opposite claim. The 'religious man' who wanted to 'do more than give a plain, philosophical assent to the proposition' offered by Philo regarding the possibility of a first cause entirely devoid of moral attributes had to 'fly to revealed truth with the greatest avidity' (*DNR XII*: 102). He had to embrace Pyrrhonian, not academic scepticism. His faith required the renunciation of his reason, because this form of theism entirely contradicted the insights reason provided. For Hume, both the Christian and the deist were true atheists, because their reasoning undercut the

argument attesting to a first cause (general laws, in the moral as well as natural world). They were also false philosophers. For the individual who genuinely desired the calm sunshine of a mind impervious to the spectres of false divinity, which alone ensured a manly, steady virtue, the religious hypothesis had to be repudiated entirely as false— as, Hume argued, it had been to all intents and purposes by Cicero.

Conclusion

Hume's contemporary critics, especially those in Scotland, recognised the importance of his interpretation of Cicero to his construction of his moral and religious philosophy. This point can be made more strongly. *All* of those in Scotland who responded to Hume's treatment of morality and justice— and its implications for the 'religious hypothesis'— directly challenged his interpretation of Cicero's philosophical writings. The first to do so was Hutcheson. Hutcheson's contribution to their correspondence does not survive. Its probable content, suggested by Hume's responses, is indicated by a passage in the dedicatory address to his *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria* (1742), a presentation copy of which was perused with discernible frustration by Hume.¹ The following was aimed unmistakably at the author of the recently-published *Treatise*:

*The design of Cicero's books de officiis, which are so very justly admired by all, has been mistaken inconsiderately by some very ingenious men, who speak of these books as intended for a complete system of morals or ethics. Whereas Cicero expressly declares, that the doctrine concerning virtue, and the supreme good, which is the principal part of ethics, is to be found elsewhere. Nay in his own books de finibus, and Tusculan questions, he had previously treated these subjects more copiously. And he tells us expressly, that in his book de officiis he follows the Stoics, and uses their way of treating this subject. Now 'tis well known that the Stoics made such a difference between virtue, which they counted the sole good, and the officia, or external duties of life, that they counted these duties among the things indifferent, neither morally good nor evil. The design then of these books de officiis is this; to shew how persons in higher stations, already well instructed in the fundamentals of moral philosophy, should so conduct themselves in life, that in perfect consistence with virtue they may obtain great interest, power, popularity, high offices and glory.*²

In his footnotes to this passage, Hutcheson referred his reader to Books I and III of *De Finibus* for Cicero's 'fundamental doctrine of morals'. In Book I the moral theory of the Epicurean, Torquatus, was criticised by means of distinctly Stoic arguments. In Book III, an

¹ For the significance of this work, see Richard B. Sher, 'Professors of Virtue: the Social History of the Edinburgh Moral Philosophy Chair in the Eighteenth Century', in *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 94-9. Thanking Hutcheson for the copy, Hume noted that 'it mortifies me so much to see a Person, who possesses more Candour & Penetration than any almost I know, condemn Reasonings, of which I imagine I see so strongly the Evidence', and here he referred in particular to the origins of justice in human convention: Hume to Hutcheson, 10 Jan. 1743, in *Letters*, i, pp. 47-8.

² I have cited the English translation of the work: Francis Hutcheson, *A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy* (2 vols., Glasgow, 1747), i, pp. vi-vii.

austerely Stoic account of virtue was furnished by Cato. From these sections of the work, Hutcheson concluded that although Cicero and his fellow Stoics discussed those offices ‘which might be performed both by the *wise* and the *unwise*... in the latter they allowed no virtue’.³ Virtue, for Hutcheson, appertained solely to those actions which, taken as a consequence of disinterested benevolence, contributed to the common good.⁴ This was an interpretation of Cicero’s philosophical commitments in *De Finibus* which, as both men recognised, contradicted Hume’s own. Hume drew Hutcheson’s attention instead to Cicero’s argument, in Book IV, that the *adiaphora* (‘things indifferent’) and virtue (*the sole good*) differed merely in degree, not in kind.⁵ It is not a coincidence that in the 1740s Hutcheson embarked (with James Moore) on a major venture with the Foulis publishing house in Glasgow, translating the most notable works of Stoic moral philosophy (commencing with Aurelius’ *Meditations*). His intention was two-fold.⁶ The first was to re-establish the categorical distinction forged by the Stoic moralists between the *utile* and the *honestum*, which Hume’s reconceptualisation of virtue entirely elided, and to appropriate Stoic arguments regarding the obligatory force of immutable moral precepts with his own concept of the innate faculty of the moral sense. The second was to emphasise the relationship between human natural and positive law and Christian moral theology. Hutcheson stressed the centrality of a belief in a future state in directing men towards a truly virtuous life. This move signalled Hutcheson’s increasing concern to distinguish his

³ Ibid., i, p. vi n.

⁴ For Hutcheson’s use of Stoic sources, see Christian Maurer, ‘Hutcheson’s Relation to Stoicism in the Light of his Moral Psychology’, and Thomas Ahnert, ‘Francis Hutcheson and the Heathen Moralists’, *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, 8 (2010), pp. 33-49, 51-62.

⁵ Hume to Hutcheson, 17 Sep. 1739, in *Letters*, i, p. 35.

⁶ On which, see Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment*, ii, pp. 185-7; and Ahnert, ‘Hutcheson and the Heathen Moralists’. For the Foulis publishing house, which was ‘created in the image of Francis Hutcheson’, see Richard B. Sher, *The Enlightenment & the Book: Scottish Authors & their Readers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland & America* (Chicago, 2006), pp. 66, 268-9.

Christianised Stoicism from Shaftesbury's distinctly problematic interpretation of Stoic ethics.⁷

Those in Scotland who followed Hutcheson in seeking to meet the challenge posed by Hume's sceptical banishment of the *bonestum* recognised that Hume had decisively illustrated the inadequacy of Hutcheson's own explanation of moral obligation. Hume showed that Mandeville's Epicurean moral psychology was not so easily dismissed. The tendency of Scottish moral theorists, most marked with the 'common sense' school of philosophy established by Thomas Reid, was to turn to the concept of an innate moral conscience which owed considerably more to Joseph Butler than to Hutcheson.⁸ This revived and reformulated a doctrine which Locke had endeavoured to undermine. Even Smith, who has been accorded the title of 'the perfect Humean' by his most recent biographer, was anxious to re-establish the distinction between a positive law which had its origins in convention and was guided by estimations of public utility, and a natural law which was immutable, eternal, and enshrined universal normative truths.⁹ In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Smith drew attention to the limitations of *De Officiis*. The moral duties outlined by Cicero in that work were 'laws of police, not of justice'. Cicero had concerned himself solely with prudence and the 'imperfect virtues', which were primarily enforced by men's concern to secure the good opinion of others. The 'laws of police' were indeed conventional, and guided by temporal utility. Those of 'justice', however, were immutable. Their precepts were discernible by reason, as Smith intended to explain in a later work which was never

⁷ A point also made in the *Short Introduction*, where Hutcheson was assisted by a laudatory preface composed by his disciple William Leechman. He emphasised Hutcheson's inspirational pedagogical style, which aimed (in sharp contrast to Hume's own) to 'excite a relish for virtue' and to teach students 'in the warmest manner... to rejoice above all things in the firm persuasion of the universal Providence and of a Being infinitely wise and good': pp. xxxi-xxxiv. For general discussion, see Simon Grote, 'Hutcheson's Divergence from Shaftesbury', *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, 4:2 (Sep. 2006), pp. 159-72; and James A. Harris, 'Religion in Hutcheson's Moral Philosophy', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 46:2 (Apr. 2008), pp. 205-22.

⁸ For this turn to Butler, see Harris, 'The Place of Ancient Philosophy', who notes that this shift has yet to receive adequate historical attention. Rivers, however, provides an insightful discussion: *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, ii, pp. 301-308.

⁹ Phillipson, *An Enlightened Life*, p. 71.

completed.¹⁰ Indeed, in his final revisions to the *TMS* in 1789-90, Smith strove to distinguish categorically between those ‘imperfect virtues’ (wealth, power) that did, in fact, secure other men’s admiration, and those that ought to secure the esteem of ‘the *impartial* spectator’ (wisdom and disinterestedness). The origins and sanctions of the ‘perfect’ duties Smith grounded ultimately in the ‘laws’ and concomitant rewards and punishments imposed by the ‘the all-seeing Judge of the world’.¹¹ Smith also added a substantial new section extolling the Stoic virtue of rational self-command (drawing heavily from Aurelius, Epictetus and a Stoicized Cicero), which he rendered synonymous with the virtuous man’s moral conscience. This was placed by Smith with the framework of a divine teleology that owed as much to a Stoic providential theism as it did to Christian orthodoxy.¹² This reflected Smith’s deep distrust of the pivotal role assigned to temporal utility and convention by Hume in his naturalistic account of the origins of morality, which was made most explicit (and its debt to Cicero most clearly expressed) in the *Principles of Morals*.¹³

Reid, meanwhile, drew heavily from Cicero’s rhetorical writings and, in contrast to Smith, from Shaftesbury’s *Sensus Communis*, in order to respond to Locke and Hume.¹⁴ Reid argued that, ‘though an Academic, [Cicero] was dogmatical’ in his moral theory, and had identified ‘*first principles, principles of common sense, common notions, self-evident truths*’ or ‘*axioms*’ in morality as

¹⁰ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), ed. D.D. Raphael & A.L. Macfie (Indianapolis, 1982), [Pt.] 7. [Sect.] 4. [Para.] 37. In the ‘Advertisement’ to the work, Smith promised to provide an account of the law of ‘justice’, and apparently composed a draft that was subsequently burnt (on his instruction) at his death: Knud Haakonssen, ‘What Might Properly Be Called Natural Jurisprudence?’ in R.H. Campbell & A. S. Skinner (eds.), *The Origins and Nature of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh, 1982), pp. 215-16. On the Stoic aspect of Smith’s moral thinking, see Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, ii, pp. 303-307; and the editors’ introduction to *TMS*, pp. 5-10. For a more sceptical Smith, whose use of ancient philosophical sources was notably eclectic and who was averse to the idea of providential order (whether in its Stoic or Christian form), see Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* (London, 2001), pp. 116-56.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.2.33.

¹² In effect, Smith rendered Stoic self-command and Christian charity synonymous, labelling both ‘the great precept of nature’. He arguing that *rational* self-command ‘is not only itself a great virtue, but from it all the other virtues seem to derive their principle lustre’: *ibid.*, 6.3.2.

¹³ On which, see Marie A. Martin, ‘Utility and Morality: Adam Smith’s Critique of Hume’, *Hume Studies*, 16 (1990), pp. 107-20.

¹⁴ For Smith’s inveterate antipathy towards Shaftesbury’s moral philosophy, see above, p. 103 n. 9. This reflected Smith’s distaste for Stoic *apatheia* as demanding ‘the insensibility of a coxcomb’, and his rejection of Stoicism’s treatment of moral evil as a necessary part of the universal order (*TMS*, 3.3.14; 1.2.3.5).

in religion.¹⁵ By this means Reid re-established the fundamental distinction between the *officium* and the *finis* to which they ought to be referred, which he argued Cicero as a Stoic had recognised fully. ‘What is in no degree voluntary’, Reid declared, ‘can neither deserve moral approbation nor blame’.¹⁶ In his thunderous criticism of Hume, James Beattie similarly recognised the importance of reclaiming Cicero for the moral theory of the Stoics. Cicero’s professed allegiance to the New Academy was for Beattie— as indeed for thinkers as far apart in their moral and religious viewpoints as Shaftesbury, Warburton and Bentley— not to be taken seriously:

Cicero seems to have been an Academic rather in name than in reality. And I am apt to think, from several passages in his works, that he made a choice of this denomination, in order to have a pretence for reasoning on either side of every question, and consequently an ampler field for a display of his rhetorical talents... Let it be observed also, that when the subject of his inquiry is of high importance, as in his books on moral duties, and on the nature of the gods, he follows the doctrine of the Dogmatists, particularly the Stoics; and asserts his moral and religious principles with a warmth and energy which prove him to have been in earnest.¹⁷

In contrast to Beattie, those of more sympathetic dispositions were willing to extend this charitable interpretation of Cicero’s scepticism to Hume himself after his death. Alexander Carlyle, for example, argued that Hume’s scepticism was, like Cicero’s, mere rhetorical game-playing, and not to be taken seriously. ‘I was one of those’, Carlyle claimed, ‘who never believed that David Hume’s sceptical principles laid fast hold on his mind, but thought that his books proceeded rather from affectation of superiority and pride of understanding and love of vainglory’.¹⁸ This tendency to relegate Hume’s scepticism to the

¹⁵ Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785), ed. D.R. Brookes (Edinburgh, 2002), [Sect.] 6. [Ch.] 2, pp. 452-3 (referring to *De Oratore*); 6.6, p. 500 (to *De Finibus*).

¹⁶ Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* (Edinburgh, 1788), [Essay] 5. [Ch.] 1, p. 370.

¹⁷ James Beattie, *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth* (Edinburgh, 1770), [Pt] 2. [Ch] 2. [Sect] 1, pp. 243-4. Beattie’s *Essay* was concerned with the question of truth in general. His correspondence reveals that he contemplated— but, like Smith, never produced— a continuation of the work dealing specifically with the question of moral truth, which Hume had made pressing. On this, see Richard B. Sher & Paul Wood, ‘Much Ado about Dugald: the Chequered Career of Dugald Stewart’s Letter to Sir William Forbes on James Beattie’s *Essay on Truth*’, *History of European Ideas*, 38:1 (Mar. 2012), p. 82 n. 38.

¹⁸ Alexander Carlyle, *The Autobiography of Alexander Carlyle of Inveresk, 1722-1805*, ed. J.H. Burton (Edinburgh, 1910; repr. Bristol, 1990), pp. 286-7. Henry Mackenzie similarly referred to ‘the infantile... simplicity of

margins, which allowed for the extent of his challenge to moral realism and a divine teleology to be underplayed or ignored, has in turn exercised a regrettable influence over much subsequent historical scholarship.¹⁹ This is reflected in the methodological approach of those scholars who have sought to impose a rigid distinction between Hume's sceptical metaphysics and his supposed moral realism.²⁰ Nicholas Phillipson has presented Hume as a 'practical moralist' who shared the fundamental objective of his fellow Scots to inculcate a civic virtue that was modelled on a combination of 'Ciceronian Stoicism and Addisonian sociability'.²¹ The presentation of Hume as an instrumental figure in stimulating a 'renewed interest in Cicero and Stoic morality in general' in Scotland, Phillipson suggests, makes Reid and Beattie's turn to Cicero to criticise Hume's excessive moral and religious scepticism deeply 'paradoxical'.²² Hume's philosophy undoubtedly did lead to a revival of interest in Cicero and the ethical theory of the Stoics in Scotland. Yet this activity was undertaken in order to refute the subversive interpretation of Cicero—and a historiography of moral and religious philosophy that was profoundly critical of both Stoicism and Christianity—presented in Hume's writings. It was his compatriots' refusal to engage seriously with the insights he provided that led to Hume's discernible discomfort in his homeland. It was Scotland that 'suits my Fortune best, & is the seat of my principal Friendships; but it is too narrow a Place for me, and it mortifies me that I sometimes hurt my Friends'.²³

David Hume', and trivialised the significance of his scepticism: 'An Account of the Life and Writings of John Home', in *The Works of John Home* (3 vols., Edinburgh, 1822), i, p. 14. Dugald Stewart likewise emphasised Hume's 'easy and affectionate pleasantries' over the seriousness of his philosophical convictions: 'An Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith LL.D', in *Biographical Memoirs of Adam Smith, LL.D., of William Robertson, D.D., and of Thomas Reid, D.D.* (Edinburgh, 1811), p. 54.

¹⁹ On which, see Michael Brown, 'Alexander Carlyle and the Shadows of Enlightenment', in B. Harris (ed.), *Scotland in the Age of the French Revolution* (Edinburgh, 2005), pp. 226-46.

²⁰ See, for example, David Fate Norton, *David Hume: Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician* (Princeton, 1982).

²¹ Nicholas Phillipson, 'Hume as Moralist: a Social Historian's Perspective', in S.C. Brown (ed.), *Philosophers of the Enlightenment* (Brighton, 1979), pp. 140-61; and idem, 'Politics, Politeness and the Anglicisation of Early Eighteenth-Century Scottish Culture', in R.A. Mason (ed.), *Scotland and England, 1286-1815* (Edinburgh, 1987), pp. 226-46.

²² Phillipson, 'Adam Smith as Civic Moralist', in *Wealth and Virtue*, pp. 179-202.

²³ Hume to Adam Smith, 28 July 1759, in *Letters*, i, p. 314.

This brief overview of the Scottish reception of Hume's works illustrates two points. The first is that the importance of Hume's interpretation of Cicero to his construction of many of his most disconcerting arguments was widely recognised by contemporary critics. It stimulated a sustained attempt to reclaim Cicero—and, in the hands of Carlyle, perhaps even Hume himself—for a broadly Stoic moral theory that could be rendered amenable to Christianity. A remarkably analogous pattern can be seen, as Chapters 2 and 5 showed, when considering the reception of Locke and Middleton's works, which similarly sparked concerted debate as to the significance and true meaning of Ciceronian moral and religious philosophy. At the same time that Hume was defending the *Treatise* from its Scottish critics, in England Cockburn was engaged in a systematic attempt to reclaim both Cicero and Locke for a Christian Stoic tradition, and thereby to elide the distinction between Locke and Clarke.²⁴ The reason why Cicero was such a contested figure in these debates is precisely because Locke, Middleton and Hume all explicitly presented his writings as not merely vindicating, but actively guiding their own treatments of the relationship between human natural and positive law and moral theology. As a result, the reception of their works provides further support for the interpretation of their thought offered in this study. This has aimed to recover a context in which to understand why they considered Cicero's philosophical writings to be so instructive (and subversive).

The second point illustrated by the responses of Hume's critics is that the most troubling insights furnished by Hume were almost entirely marginalised, trivialised, or ignored. Much the same fate had befallen Locke. It is for this reason that this study has not sought to argue that the rediscovery and development of a tradition of Ciceronian academic scepticism lies 'at the origins of modernity'—a claim made for the Epicurean and Stoic traditions by a

²⁴ Most notably in *Remarks on Some Writers in the Controversy concerning the Foundation of Moral Virtue and Moral Obligation* (London, 1743). For discussion, see Nuovo, *Christianity, Antiquity, and Enlightenment*, pp. 247-66.

number of commentators.²⁵ The markedly different insights drawn from this tradition of moral, political and religious theorising by Locke, Middleton and Hume were far too disconcerting (and perhaps too nuanced) to be widely accepted. This fate was anticipated by all three, who laid notable weight on their independence from the prevailing currents of contemporary thought (and, indeed, from the public institutions that shaped those currents). It was an eclectic methodological and theoretical philosophical approach which, as Cicero had been keen to stress, had always been (and would always be) practiced by the few and denounced by the many.

As a result, this study has made the more limited claim that, even if it was the Augustinian-Epicurean and neo-Stoic traditions that proved most influential in shaping modern moral, political and religious philosophy, their development in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was affected in significant ways by the distinctive challenges posed by an alternative tradition of academic scepticism. It may well be true, as Harris argues, that ‘the contemporary imagination... often thought in terms of polarities’— true and false, theist and atheist, Stoic and Epicurean. As we have seen, both Shaftesbury and Mandeville were determined to reconstruct a historiography of moral and religious philosophy in precisely these terms. Those who rediscovered and developed a tradition of academic scepticism did so in order to transcend such polarities in contemporary thought. They showed how men’s natural tendency to adopt the *pro* or *contra* on any given question led to sterile mud-slinging, and perplexed rather than elucidated those questions considered to be of greatest importance to human life. In so doing they contributed to contemporary debates in incisive ways, and questioned the conceptual terms in which they were conducted.²⁶

²⁵ See above, pp. 5-6.

²⁶ Harris, *Mind of Locke*, 139. Harris suggests that Locke’s construction of his arguments illustrates his point; this study has contended that Locke provides an exception which proves the general rule he seeks to establish.

While Locke, Middleton and Hume argued that very different conclusions had to be drawn from this philosophical approach, their writings share the common trait of emphasising the essential fragility of human life. It depended ultimately upon the precarious (and easily disrupted) bonds of love and respect that were naturally forged as men pursued their happiness in society. For Locke and to a lesser extent Middleton, a further sense of stability (for the individual) was to be found in a loving trust of God's divine purpose for and providential care of mankind (that is, faith), to which the development of moral, social and political consensus itself stood testament. For Hume, only man was the rightful object of trust, affection and faith, and society was man's greatest achievement. To detract attention from this fundamental humanistic insight was to weaken the bonds that held society together. The insight shared by all three that both morality and justice had developed according to continually-fluctuating estimations of temporal utility, for which there was no determinate standard, was profoundly unsettling. This insight appeared to contemporaries to leave too much to chance, accident, and (in the case of Locke) faith.

Even as Jeremy Bentham found in Hume's *Treatise* the inspiration for his discovery that 'the foundations of all *virtue* are laid in *utility*', his legal positivism rested ultimately upon the claim that the sources of temporal happiness could be established by the legislator or philosopher with scientific certainty.²⁷ This, for the academic sceptic, would have signalled a return to an unpardonable dogmatism, with the *utile* (the contingent and variable) once again mistaken for the *honestum*. It reflected the attempt of the philosopher to reclaim his title to guide mankind according to insights drawn with certainty from his own autonomous reason. Bentham's *Fragment on Government* (1776), indeed, began with a statement resonant with a Stoic-infused optimism about the transformative potential of philosophy in an enlightened

²⁷ Bentham later claimed that, upon reading of Book III of the *Treatise*, he 'felt as if the scales had fallen from my eyes': *A Fragment on Government* (1776), ed. J.H. Burns & H.L.A. Hart, intro. R. Harrison (Cambridge, 1988), p. 51 n. V.

age entertained by deists in Britain and many of the *philosophes* in France, but deeply distrusted by those who turned to Cicero to return philosophy to its strictly delimited confines.²⁸ The familial resemblance betrayed by the historiographies of moral and religious philosophy offered by Locke, Middleton and Hume—which find a shared origin in Cicero’s philosophical writings—illustrated why the practical consequences of such claims on behalf of the transformative potential of philosophy were potentially so pernicious.

This thesis has shown that a tradition of academic scepticism, identified closely with Cicero, underwent significant change during the century after c.1660. For Locke it furnished the means of re-establishing the harmony between human moral codes and justice, and moral theology. In Middleton’s hands it largely relegated moral theology to the realms of individual faith and suggested that it was of negligible practical consequence. For Hume, it provided decisive arguments in favour of the unequivocal banishment of moral theology—and, indeed, any normative standard of ethical judgment—from the study of human life. All could agree, nonetheless, that even as philosophy might explain many central aspects of human life, it could not justify them in normative terms. For Locke, such justification was provided by Moses’ and Christ’s revelation of God’s intentions for His created beings. For Hume, no such justification was possible or necessary.

The limited scope of this study has prevented the consideration of another subject, which emerged out of contemporary debates regarding human sociability. This was political economy, and the pursuit by individuals and societies of temporal happiness conceived of in material terms. As noted in the Introduction, recent commentators have forged a close link between the Augustinian-Epicurean tradition and the birth of the new science of political

²⁸ The opening sentence of the work ran as follows: ‘The age we live in is a busy age; in which knowledge is rapidly advancing towards perfection’ (*ibid.*, p. 3).

economy.²⁹ This link was partially recovered in Chapter 4. Neither Locke nor Hume countenanced civic humanist (and neo-Stoic) concerns regarding luxury as corrosive of the moral personality of the individual and damaging to the moral foundations of political bodies. This was a concern that continued to preoccupy Smith as it did Rousseau.³⁰ Yet given that both Locke and Hume's account of the origins of society differed markedly from that offered by the Epicurean tradition, it is worth asking how their respective defences of man's quest for material gain challenge the nexus forged by scholars between Epicureanism and political economy. Here Locke once more placed commerce and material improvement within the framework of a divine teleology, reflecting how men's desires accorded with biblical injunctions (to go forth and multiply, fill the earth and cultivate it).³¹ As in his moral theory, Hume dropped this theological framework altogether. Yet Hume emphasised the moral benefits of material growth in a manner quite different to Mandeville's earlier, satirical writings. Hume emphasised how commerce encouraged a further widening in the scope of men's natural sympathy and affection, the existence of which the neo-Epicurean (in contrast to the academic sceptic) denied altogether.³² As the interpretation of the *Origin of Honour* offered in Chapter 4 suggests, there is an undeniable convergence between Mandeville's later writings and Hume's economic and moral theory. Yet it is surely significant that Hume repeatedly turned to Cicero in order to deny any such convergence, and to draw attention to the different fundamental vision of human nature upon which his philosophy was based.

In concluding, it is worth noting that Locke's theory of natural human equality and toleration—and, indeed, his political theory more generally—lose a great deal or all of their

²⁹ See above, p. 7 n. 14.

³⁰ For concise discussion of the debate on luxury, see Istvan Hont, 'The Early Enlightenment Debate on Commerce and Luxury', in M. Goldie & R. Wokler (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 377-418. On the concerns of Rousseau and Smith, see Brooke, *Philosophic Pride*, pp. 181-202.

³¹ On which, see Harris, *Mind of Locke*, pp. 127-30.

³² The most insightful discussion of Hume's political economy is nonetheless to be found in a work that considers Hume broadly within the Epicurean tradition: Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, pp. 360-76.

force when stripped from their theistic framework.³³ Hume himself suggested as much. In rejecting moral theology as furnishing the philosopher with his ‘ought’, Hume refused to provide an alternative philosophical framework which could allow for such prescriptive guidance. The need to do so, without recourse to divine law or political authoritarianism, appeared considerably more pressing following Hume’s devastating intervention. It found its most willing and energetic volunteer in Kant. Kant’s responses, and all subsequent attempts to meet Hume’s challenge, arguably depend upon hypotheses that are questionable, and are inadequate for the causes they are intended to defend (such as universal human rights and toleration).³⁴ The objections directed by Locke and Hume at any attempt to establish man’s true end and purpose— the criterion for the ‘ought’— on the basis of autonomous reason may well remain devastating and largely insurmountable. If so, then the fundamentally constructive and profoundly humanistic aspect of academic scepticism retains its enlightening power and deep resonance. Mankind’s quest for happiness remains as it has always been: a complex, contingent and precarious process, dependent upon our recognition of our mutual interdependence and our shared humanity.

³³ A point emphasised forcefully by Dunn in a number of works, but see especially ‘What is Living and What is Dead’.

³⁴ A claim which underpins Jeremy Waldron’s declaration that Locke’s theory of natural human equality remains the most compelling and adequate yet offered (at least for those of (theistic) faith): *God, Locke, and Equality*, passim.

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