

**“Modern Infidels,” “Conscientious Fools,” and the *Douglas* Affair: The Orthodox Rhetoric of Conscience in the Scottish Enlightenment**

The *Douglas* affair refers to the controversy surrounding the performance of John Home’s play *Douglas* in Edinburgh in December 1756. The affair still features prominently in studies of eighteenth-century Scotland, not least due to the historical significance of the figures who were embroiled in it.

On the side opposing the performance of *Douglas*, were orthodox Calvinists, including John Witherspoon: an orthodox clergyman who would go on to become the only cleric to sign the American Declaration of Independence, and the President of what is now Princeton University.

The side supporting *Douglas* consisted of individuals who remain some of the most famous people associated with eighteenth-century Scotland, including: Hugh Blair (later Professor of Rhetoric, University of Edinburgh); Alexander Carlyle (later Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland); Adam Ferguson (later Professor of Moral Philosophy, University of Edinburgh); the judge, philosopher, and historian, Lord Kames (Henry Home); the historian William Robertson (later Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and Principal of the University of Edinburgh); and, the philosopher, David Hume. Each of these played an active role in promoting *Douglas*: Hume dedicated his *Four Dissertations* (London: 1757) to John Home; Carlyle and Ferguson wrote tracts defending *Douglas* from orthodox Calvinist criticism; Robertson, Carlyle and Blair provided Home with textual revisions to drafts of *Douglas*; and, Kames, along with each of the figures mentioned above, took part in rehearsals for the play.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See: Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), 74-92) [*Church and University*]; Adrienne Scullion, “The Eighteenth Century” in *A History of Scottish Theatre*, ed. Bill Findlay (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1998), 80-136; Ernest C. Mossner, *The Forgotten Hume*

Of course, the *Douglas* affair receives attention in modern scholarship, not simply as a result of the people embroiled in it, but because of what was supposed to be at issue during the controversy.

Orthodox Calvinists were appalled that *Douglas* was both written by a clergyman and supported by clergymen. Home, along with Robertson, Carlyle, Ferguson, and Blair were not just members of Scotland's literati, but also leading members of the Moderate party within the Scottish church (Kirk). Moreover, these Moderate clergymen were promoting a stage-play at a time when the theatre was banned in Scotland due to the influence of Calvinism. For the orthodox, the Moderates' support of the theatre, contrary to both the law and traditions of Scottish Calvinist society, demonstrated that they were "modern infidels" who preferred that which was modern and secular over that which was traditional and Christian. Consequently, they attempted to have the author of *Douglas*, as well as his supporters, censured by the Kirk.<sup>2</sup>

As a result of the orthodox reaction against *Douglas*, scholars have often cited the affair in support of the view that the Scottish Enlightenment consisted of a rivalry between two groups in eighteenth-century Scotland, who also represented two rival groups within the Kirk.<sup>3</sup> On one side, were the literati, who were either clerical members of the Moderate party or lay figures (such as Kames, Hume, and Adam Smith) who supported, and enjoyed the support of, that party. Hume, for example, described the Moderate party as "my friends."<sup>4</sup> On the other side, were orthodox Calvinists, who were members of the "Popular" party: a party which opposed the Moderates within the Kirk, and who criticised the work of both lay and clerical

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(New York, NY: AMS Press, 1967), 38-66 [*Forgotten Hume*] and *The Life of David Hume*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 356-369 [*Life of Hume*].

<sup>2</sup> See: Mossner, *Life of Hume*, 360-364; Sher, *Church and University*, 78-86; John R. McIntosh, *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland: The Popular Party, 1740-1800* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1998), 87-89 [*Church and Theology*].

<sup>3</sup> As well as the works cited below, for a review of this approach in Scottish Enlightenment scholarship, see: David Allan, *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 1-13 [*Virtue, Learning*]; Thomas Ahnert, *The Moral Culture of the Scottish Enlightenment, 1690-1805* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 1-16.

<sup>4</sup> David Hume, "Letter to Allan Ramsey," cited by Mossner, *Life of Hume*, 343.

literati. For example, prior to the *Douglas* affair members of the Popular party attempted to have both Hume and Kames censured by the Kirk for their philosophical writings.<sup>5</sup>

Looked at from the perspective of two warring factions, the *Douglas* affair emerges in scholarship as a skirmish within a wider battle central to the Scottish Enlightenment itself: the battle between the “enlightened” Moderates and the “conservative” Popular party. It has been described as “the moderate literati’s first act of open opposition to Kirk traditionalism;”<sup>6</sup> within which the Moderates supported a series of “enlightened” ideals against traditionalist orthodox Calvinism:

the *Douglas* affair...established that the future direction of the Church of Scotland and of Scottish society as a whole would be toward cultural and intellectual freedom, religious moderation, and respect for...all branches of the arts and sciences. It signified...the triumph of the Moderate ideal of a polite ministry leading Scotland down the path to enlightenment.<sup>7</sup>

In the above, Sher equates “Moderate,” “literati,” and “enlightenment,” and makes particular ideals characteristic of what it means to be in the category “enlightened Moderate literati.” These include: commitment to cultural, intellectual, and religious “freedom” and “moderation;” support for “polite” literature and learning; and “respect” for “all branches of the arts and sciences.” And, of course, when “the values of progress, politeness, toleration”<sup>8</sup> are the values of Scottish moderatism and the Scottish Enlightenment, then the antithesis to “enlightened Moderate literati” becomes that of “orthodox or Popular conservative.” As a result, the orthodox Calvinists who opposed *Douglas* and its Moderate supporters can be

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<sup>5</sup> See: Mossner, *Life of Hume*, 336-355; Lisa A. Freeman, *Antitheatricality and the Body Politic* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 162-169 [*Antitheatricality*]; Sher, *Church and University*, 65-74; McIntosh, *Church and Theology*, 17-18; 69-73.

<sup>6</sup> Fania Oz-Salzberger, *Translating the Enlightenment: Scottish Civic Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 96.

<sup>7</sup> Sher, *Church and University*, 86.

<sup>8</sup> Ronnie Young, “‘Sympathetick Curiosity’: Drama, Moral Thought, and the Science of Human Nature” in *The Scottish Enlightenment and Literary Culture*, eds. Ralph McLean, Ronnie Young and Kenneth Simpson (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2016), 115-136 [“Sympathetick Curiosity”].

described as “bigots,”<sup>9</sup> whose “religious” “prejudice” and “narrow-mindedness,”<sup>10</sup> along with their “pessimistic view of human nature,”<sup>11</sup> blocked “the path to Enlightenment.”

Increasingly, however, contemporary scholarship highlights problems with viewing the Scottish Enlightenment era in general, and the *Douglas* affair in particular, in terms of a rivalry between enlightened Moderate literati and orthodox conservatives. For example, it has been pointed out that the Popular party were the largest party in eighteenth-century Scotland, and that it was not a “party” in the modern political sense. It opposed the 1711 Patronage Act supported by the Moderates, which restored the landed gentry’s right to appoint church ministers. Members of the Popular party favoured some form of “popular” vote to select church ministers (hence the party’s name). Although everyone who identified as “Popular” opposed the Patronage Act (and the Moderate party for supporting it), there was a great diversity of opinion within such a large “party” on other theological and cultural matters<sup>12</sup> – in the same way that there was diversity amongst those who identified as “Whig” throughout the eighteenth-century.

The Popular party’s size and diversity limits the extent to which it is possible to speak in terms of a single Popular or orthodox viewpoint, absolutely opposed to everything the enlightened Moderate literati stood for, except on the issue of church patronage. And, even then it is not the case that all members of the Popular party agreed on the form selecting church ministers should take.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the separation between Moderate and Popular over the issue of patronage has been used to question what it means to think of the former as enlightened and the latter as conservative.

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<sup>9</sup> Mossner, *Life of Hume*, 361.

<sup>10</sup> Mossner, *Forgotten David*, 45-46.

<sup>11</sup> Jennifer A. Herdt, *Religion and Faction in Hume’s Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 89.

<sup>12</sup> See: McIntosh, *Church and Theology*, 19-91; Sher, *Church and University*, 16-18; 47-52.

<sup>13</sup> See: McIntosh, *Church and Theology*, 92-103; 126-136; Sher, *Church and University*, 48-49.

Support for the Patronage Act betrays what scholars have identified as a Burkean conservatism within moderatism, which insists that a social and ecclesiastical hierarchy, with an elite at its top, is the best means of ensuring the progress and stability of both church and state.<sup>14</sup> When the “enlightened” value of tolerance is presented as a hallmark of Moderate progressiveness in opposition to “bigoted” Popular intolerance and traditionalism we must remember that it was not just the orthodox who attempted to censure their opponents. For example, the Moderates successfully expelled the orthodox minister, Andrew Gillespie of Inverkeithing, from the Kirk (see Part I, Section 1 below), because he refused to support the Patronage Act.

John McIntosh, Daniel Howe and, in particular, Thomas Ahnert<sup>15</sup> have pointed to other ways in which both the orthodox and the Moderates confound the categories enlightened Moderate literati and Popular conservative. Contrary “to what is commonly assumed,” in “some respects the orthodox were even more ‘rationalist’ than the Moderates.”<sup>16</sup> If a “positive and comprehensive view of natural religion” is a mark of being enlightened, then the orthodox appear to be more enlightened than the Moderates: “orthodox Calvinist theorists were in fact generally far more confident of the capacity of human reason to arrive at various religious truths.”<sup>17</sup> And, just as the orthodox were more “optimistic,” and the Moderates less “confident,”

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<sup>14</sup> Martin Fitzpatrick, “The Enlightenment, Politics and Providence: Some Scottish and English Comparisons” in K. Haakonssen (ed.), *Enlightenment and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 64-74 [“Politics and Providence”]; John Dwyer, “The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Moderate Divines” in J. Dwyer, R.A. Mason, and A. Murdoch (eds), *New Perspectives in the Politics and Culture of Early Modern Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1982), 308-315 [New Perspectives]; Ian D.L. Clark, “From Protest to Reaction: The Moderate Regime in the Church of Scotland, 1752-1805” in N.T. Phillipson and R. Mitchison (eds), *Scotland in the Age of Improvement* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), 208-224 [“Moderate Regime”]; Sher, *Church and University*, 53-54; 187-192; 262-263.

<sup>15</sup> McIntosh, *Church and Theology*, 34-40; Daniel W. Howe, “John Witherspoon and the Transatlantic Enlightenment” in *The Atlantic Enlightenment*, eds. Susan Manning and Francis D. Cogliano (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 61-79 [“Transatlantic University”]; Ahnert, *Moral Culture*, 95-121 and “Clergymen as Polite Philosophers: Douglas and the Conflict between Moderates and Orthodox in the Scottish Enlightenment,” *Intellectual History Review* vol.18, no.3 (2008), 375-383.

<sup>16</sup> Ahnert, *Moral Culture*, 94; 93.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 93; 94.

about human reason than “what is commonly assumed,”<sup>18</sup> so are the Moderates more theologically conservative. Adam Smith’s “invisible hand” is the most famous example of a wider commitment to the law of “unintended consequences” amongst the literati. Here, human beings contribute to God’s providential scheme for the universe, not by choosing their actions on the basis of a rational consideration of consequences, but by acting instrumentally on the basis of such God-given natural affections as sociability and self-love. It is the literati, not the orthodox, that appear to be the inheritors of a “conservative” Calvinist providential determinism and anti-rationalism.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, contemporary scholarship indicates how orthodox and literati viewpoints are too diverse and complex to be summarised under such categories as “enlightened” and “conservative.” Recent discussion of the *Douglas* affair also points to the difficulty of characterising that controversy as a disagreement between enlightenment progressivism and orthodox conservatism. Orthodox opposition to *Douglas* arose, not from a blind commitment to the traditions of Scottish Calvinism, but because the Moderate and Popular parties had different understandings of the role of reason in moral and religious questions;<sup>20</sup> rival political economies, as well as ecclesiastical polities;<sup>21</sup> and opposing pictures of what it meant to be a patriotic Scot after the 1707 Act of Union.<sup>22</sup>

This article agrees with current scholarship that a range of issues – not least differences over rationalism and church patronage – informed orthodox opposition to *Douglas*. However,

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>19</sup> See: Allan, *Virtue, Learning*, 127-128; 204-218; Ahnert, *Moral Culture*, 86-93; Sher, *Church and University*, 43-44; 73; Colin Kidd, “Subscription, the Scottish Enlightenment, and the Moderate Interpretation of History,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol.55, no.3 (July 2004), 502-519.

<sup>20</sup> See footnote 15.

<sup>21</sup> Freeman, *Antitheatricality*, 147-188 and “The Cultural Politics of Antitheatricality: The Case of John Home’s ‘Douglas’,” *The Eighteenth Century*, vol.43, no.3 (Fall 2002), 210-235 [“Cultural Politics”].

<sup>22</sup> Yoon Sun Lee, “Giants in the North: *Douglas*, the Scottish Enlightenment, and Scott’s *Redgauntlet*,” *Studies in Romanticism*, vol.40, no.1 (Spring 2001), 109-122; Philip Connell, “British Identities and the Politics of Ancient Poetry in Later Eighteenth-Century England,” *The Historical Journal*, vol.49, no.1 (March 2006), 161-192.

it goes beyond current scholarship by highlighting how orthodox opposition to the literati over such issues as rationalism and church patronage was made through a rhetoric of conscience, employed both during, and prior to, the *Douglas* affair. By orthodox rhetoric of conscience, I mean the rhetorical contrast orthodox writers made between themselves as ethical rationalists who propounded a theory of rational conscience and the literati as sentimentalists who propounded an affective theory of the moral sense. It was through the rhetoric of conscience that orthodox writers made their central criticism of the literati: their preference for “moral sense” over “conscience” exposed the fact that they were anti-rationalist, elitist, and irreligious “modern infidels.”

At the same time, the orthodox rhetoric of conscience had another purpose: it deliberately subverted the categories “enlightened Moderate literati” and “Popular conservative.” Orthodox rhetoric contrasted the literati as “modern infidels,” who developed their “new” theory of an affective moral sense, with the orthodox as “conscientious fools,” who propounded their “old-fashioned” theory of rational conscience. Through such rhetoric, orthodox writers were deliberately promoting the “enlightened Moderate literati” versus “Popular conservative” paradigm. The literati were self-conscious participants in an “enlightened age:” they chose moral sense over conscience, precisely because they had advanced beyond the orthodox in modern learning and social status. Meanwhile, the orthodox preference for conscience over moral sense demonstrated that they were outdated religious conservatives: their commitment to conscience was their commitment to the traditional Scottish Calvinism that contemporary polite society ridiculed as old-fashioned.

However, the orthodox used their rhetoric of conscience to promote the “enlightened Moderate literati” verses “Popular conservative” paradigm, only so that same rhetoric could subvert it. Orthodox writers ironically described themselves as bigoted and unenlightened Calvinistic fools in order to destabilise the association of “modern” and “enlightened.”

According to orthodox rhetoric, it was precisely because the literati were “modern” that they “conservatively” promoted the rights and privileges of the elite members of polite society over those of ordinary people. By contrast, it was because the orthodox “foolishly” and “conservatively” clung to their old-fashioned belief in conscience, that they had an enlightened optimism in the power of human reason and supported the popular election of church ministers.

Drawing out the orthodox rhetoric of conscience, adds to our understanding of the *Douglas* affair: it helps to place that affair in the context of orthodox rationalism, and opposition to the Patronage Act, along with their deliberate subversion of such categories as “enlightened” and “conservative.” It also explains why such orthodox writers as Witherspoon appealed to Sir Isaac Newton’s friend and defender against Gottfried Leibniz: Samuel Clarke.

Clarke is rarely referenced in current studies of eighteenth-century Scottish Calvinism.<sup>23</sup> It is unsurprising, therefore, that Witherspoon’s appeal to Clarke in the build-up to the *Douglas* affair has not been noticed elsewhere. When Clarke is mentioned in current studies, the references are brief and clarificatory, following Witherspoon’s later discussion of Clarke in his posthumously published “Lectures on Moral Philosophy”<sup>24</sup> (delivered as part of Witherspoon’s Moral Philosophy course at Princeton). Witherspoon’s later “reference to Dr Samuel Clarke” in the “Lectures” has been called “most surprising,” demonstrating that he had “come to see...[such] views as less challenging to his own.”<sup>25</sup>

J.W. McGinty’s expression of “surprise” is consistent with the enlightened Moderate literati verses Popular conservative paradigm. As Gideon Mailer notes, “scholars have

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<sup>23</sup> See: Gideon Mailer, *John Witherspoon’s American Revolution* (Chapter Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017) [*American Revolution*]; Howe, “Transatlantic Enlightenment”; Young, “Sympathetick Curiosity”; Freeman, *Antitheatricality* and “Cultural Politics;” Jeffry H. Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic* (Notre Dame, IA: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

<sup>24</sup> See: L. Gordon Tait, *The Piety of John Witherspoon: Pew, Pulpit and Public Forum* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2001), 199 [*Piety of Witherspoon*]; Ahnert, *Moral Culture*, 55; 115; McIntosh, *Church and Theology*, 169; J. Walter McGinty, “An Animated Son of Liberty:” *A Life of John Witherspoon* (Bury St Edmunds: Arena Books, 2012), 124-126 [*Life of Witherspoon*].

<sup>25</sup> McGinty, *Life of Witherspoon*, 124.



described... [Witherspoon's] career as Janus-faced."<sup>26</sup> the orthodox Calvinist of Scotland, was not the same as the university president of America. The former criticised the religious liberty and tolerance the latter would go on to endorse by signing the Declaration of Independence. For McGinty, L.G. Tait, Mark Noll, Jonathan Israel and, in particular, Douglas Sloan, the later Witherspoon "Innocently – or perhaps consciously...was beginning to feel the effects of the Scottish Enlightenment."<sup>27</sup> That is, the revised position of the later Witherspoon is best explained in terms of his own personal paradigm shift, from conservative to enlightened. And, it is that same personal paradigm shift that explains his favourable discussion of Clarke in his American lectures.

Clarke was an Anglican clergyman, who was celebrated in the eighteenth-century by such luminaries as Queen Caroline, Joseph Butler, Adam Smith, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Voltaire.<sup>28</sup> As a close friend of Sir Isaac Newton, he translated his *Optics*, and defended Newtonianism in the *Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, which is still widely studied today. Clarke was also a rationalist, who became associated, through his Boyle Lectures, with an *a priori* demonstration for the existence of God, and his insistence that all human beings immediately and self-evidently perceive moral truth with our reason in the same way that we "see" that  $2+2=4$ . Moreover, although Clarke developed his rationalist ethics and natural theology in explicit opposition to deism, he was himself often regarded as religiously heterodox. The church authorities in England attempted to have him censured for Arianism,

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<sup>26</sup> Mailer, *American Revolution*, 179.

<sup>27</sup> Tait, *Piety of Witherspoon*, 28; Mark A. Noll, "The Irony of the Enlightenment for Presbyterians in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic*, vol.5, no.2 (Summer, 1985), 149-175; Douglas Sloan, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press Columbia University, 1971); Jonathan Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights, 1750-1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 468.

<sup>28</sup> See, respectively: J.P. Ferguson, *Dr. Samuel Clarke* (Kington, The Roundwood Press, 1976), 106; 209; 222-224; Joseph Butler, "The Butler-Clarke Correspondence, 1713-1717" in J.H. Bernard (ed.), *The Works of Bishop Butler* (London: Macmillan, 1900), vol.1, 311-339; footnote 30 below; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education* (London: Penguin, 1991), 269; *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, ed. H.G. Alexander (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1956), xi-xii; xli [*Leibniz-Clarke*].

while his followers emphasised latitudinarianism to the extent that they argued for greater tolerance of Protestant dissenters.<sup>29</sup>

Clarke's associations with an optimistic natural theology, Newtonianism, and tolerant latitudinarianism mean that he represents the values commonly associated with the enlightened Moderate literati as opposed to Popular conservatives.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, in the first edition of the literati's short-lived literary journal, the *Edinburgh Review*, Adam Smith mentions Clarke, along with John Locke, Lord Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, and Joseph Butler, as one of "The original and inventive genius[es] of the English" who have advanced philosophy.<sup>31</sup> No wonder McGinty considers Witherspoon's reference to Clarke as part of his supposed personal paradigm shift, or "broadening outlook."<sup>32</sup> As Noll points out, Clarke's "Anglican vision" was distinctive in eighteenth-century America, as in eighteenth-century Britain, for its "anti-Calvinism" and "respect for the new science of the eighteenth-century."<sup>33</sup> If Clarke's values are closely aligned with those of the enlightened Moderate literati, then it was only as Witherspoon became more enlightened and less orthodox that his opposition to the literati could give way to his endorsement of Clarke.

In this article, Witherspoon's appeal to Clarke in his American "Lectures" is not "surprising," because Witherspoon, and other orthodox writers, had already appealed to Clarke in the build-up to the *Douglas* affair. More than this, it will be argued that the appeal to Clarke is a feature of the orthodox rhetoric of conscience: it was an aspect of their rationalism and opposition to the Patronage Act, and another way in which they deliberately subverted the

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<sup>29</sup> See: John Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 115-141; R.K. Webb, "The Emergence of Rational Dissent" in *Enlightenment and Religion*, 12-41; Robert Ingram, *Reformation Without End* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 44-57; 86-88

<sup>30</sup> See: McIntosh, *Church and Theology*, 9; 21.

<sup>31</sup> Adam Smith, "A Letter to the Authors of the *Edinburgh Review*", *Edinburgh Review*, no.1 (Edinburgh: 1756) in W. P. D. Wightman and J. C. Bryce (eds), *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, 6 Vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), vol.3, 250. For the history of the literati's *Edinburgh Review*, see: Sher, *Church and University*, 68-72.

<sup>32</sup> McGinty, *Life of Witherspoon*, 125.

<sup>33</sup> Mark A. Noll, *America's God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 121.

categories “enlightened” and “conservative.” For Witherspoon and other members of the Popular party, the appeal to Clarke (along with, for example William Shakespeare and Joseph Addison) demonstrated that the orthodox were themselves schooled in the polite literature of the “enlightened age.” It also allowed them to represent the literati as less enlightened than themselves by suggesting that the literati were more parochial: while the orthodox appealed to figures like Clarke and Addison, known throughout the enlightened world, the literati took their ideas from works which were only celebrated in Scotland. Although the appeal to Clarke, like the orthodox rhetoric of conscience, has been neglected, an appreciation of both clarifies what was at issue during the *Douglas* affair, where this included orthodox attempts to distinguish themselves from the literati as rationalist anti-elitists whose Calvinism and traditionalism were consistent with “enlightenment,” if that term was properly conceived.

Part I below looks at the orthodox rhetoric of conscience as it appeared during opposition to *Douglas* (Section 1) and in the controversy over church patronage (Section 2). In Section 1, the key figures are Witherspoon and Lord Dreghorn (John Maclaurin), as they were the leading orthodox pamphleteers against *Douglas*. In Section 2 the key figures are Witherspoon, the lead-author of the so-called “Popular manifesto” on the issue of patronage, and an orthodox imitator of Witherspoon, Andrew Moir. While the discussion focuses on these three figures, references are also made to other orthodox authors and pamphlets.<sup>34</sup>

Part II examines Witherspoon’s appeal to Clarke, and places it in the context of the orthodox rhetoric of conscience employed during, and in the build up to, the *Douglas* affair. Again, while Witherspoon is the focus of discussion, other orthodox writers who appealed to Clarke are also referenced.

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<sup>34</sup> Assuming each anonymous pamphlet is written by a different author, this article references twenty-four works by (up to) sixteen orthodox writers.

**Part I, Section 1 – The *Douglas* Affair**

For John Witherspoon and Lord Dreghorn's uncle – the influential Popular theologian, John Maclaurin – conscience is a God-given rational faculty that grants all human beings the “natural” capacity to appreciate the essential difference between right and wrong.<sup>35</sup> It is also God's “deputy” and “vicegerent,” an “inward court” and “tribunal,” which “denounces” our sin, as not just wrong in itself, but as “breaches of the law of God.”<sup>36</sup> Following Calvin,<sup>37</sup> for these orthodox theologians, it is the human possession of conscience which signifies the difference between human beings *qua* rational creatures made in the image of God from the rest of “brute” creation. Conscience enables us to know God's will, and to know the consequences of obeying and disobeying God's will in the life to come. Conscience also enables us to satisfy God's will, by giving us the capacity to act according to the objective moral law willed by God, raising us above sensitive creatures who act merely on the basis of natural instinct. It is in conscience that we begin to experience the normative claim of objective moral truth as part of a desire to love, and to be loved by, God by being true to ourselves as rational creatures made in his image.<sup>38</sup>

However, for Witherspoon and Maclaurin (again in line with Calvin)<sup>39</sup> our encounter, in conscience, with moral truth and divine judgement is simultaneously our encounter with sinfulness. As Mailer points out, orthodox conscience did not mean that human beings possessed innate moral knowledge.<sup>40</sup> Although Witherspoon “may say with St Paul” that all

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<sup>35</sup> See: John Maclaurin, *Sermons and Essays. By the late Reverend Mr. John M'Laurin. One of the Ministers of Glasgow*, 2nd edn (London: 1772), 60-61 [*Sermons*]; John Witherspoon, *The Works of John Witherspoon, D.D., L.L.D., late President of the College at Princeton, New Jersey*, 3 vols (Philadelphia, PA: 1800), vol.1, 101; 292; 296; 328; vol.2, 487 [*Works*].

<sup>36</sup> See: Maclaurin, *Sermons*, 258; 362; Witherspoon, *Works*, vol.1, 101; 109; vol.2, 306; 608

<sup>37</sup> See: John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. H. Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 1.15.2; 2.2.12; 2.2.17; 2.2.22; 2.8.1 [*Institutes*].

<sup>38</sup> See: Maclaurin, *Sermons*, 58-59; 338; 392-393; 397; 445; Witherspoon, *Works*, vol.1, 101; 464; 485; 560; vol.2, 177

<sup>39</sup> See: Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.24-25; 2.7.11; 2.2.27; 2.8.1.

<sup>40</sup> Mailer, *American Revolution*, 33-36.

human beings have the moral law “*written in their hearts*” (Romans 2.15) in “natural conscience,” that “natural” knowledge of right and wrong means “there is as much light remaining with us since the fall, as to shew, that we are out of the way, but not to bring us back to it again.”<sup>41</sup> “Natural conscience” allows even “comparatively blind”<sup>42</sup> fallen creatures to recognise the essential difference between right and wrong, but it also “declare[s]” each individual “corrupt.”<sup>43</sup> Natural conscience is reflective self-awareness of weakness and sinfulness: our own guilty conscience warns us that we can never “perfectly” fulfil the moral law, and that, even if we could, we could never do enough to earn or to explain God’s love for us as insignificant and fallen sinners.<sup>44</sup> In order to function effectively, therefore, “natural conscience” must be “in some measure awakened by” grace.<sup>45</sup> Our “awakened conscience” tells us that a commitment to moral duty is not possible or sufficient without God’s gracious forgiveness and love and our own regeneration in faith. Of course, conscience “awakened” into the Christian faith does not become infallible or passive. “It is very certain that natural conscience, when awakened by the word of God, will both restrain from sin, and excite to duty,” just as it “denounces vengeance against the breaches of the law of God.”<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, just as genuine “regeneration” requires the experience of grace and painstaking commitment to conscience “awakened by the word of God,” it is faith and unmerited grace which reassure us that God loves us and will reward some of us in a life to come.<sup>47</sup> Without “divine mercy” and “the promised strength of divine grace” as a “salve” to “the reproaches” of our “wounded conscience,” we would not have the strength to resist temptation, and to tread the narrow road of moral duty; we would instead be “over-borne by the strength of corruption” that “vitiates the

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<sup>41</sup> Witherspoon, *Works*, vol.2, 306.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.1, 328.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.2, 306.

<sup>44</sup> See: Maclaurin, *Sermons*, 338; Witherspoon, *Works*, vol.1, 118; 197; 243; 468; 475; 485; vol.2, 526

<sup>45</sup> Witherspoon, *Works*, vol.1, 118.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 101

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-101.

peace of...[our] minds” as “the guilt of sin lays hold of the conscience, and its power is both felt and lamented.”<sup>48</sup>

For the orthodox, conscience had a series of positive connotations. It was the Kirk’s traditional Calvinist language, which emphasised the relation between faith and morality, while crediting individuals with the ability to experience God’s judgement, and to know the moral law, on the basis of a God-given natural faculty. The orthodox rhetoric of conscience, employed during the *Douglas* affair, emphasised these positive connotations of conscience, and contrasted them with the supposedly negative connotations of a moral sense.

Thus, in one of Dreghorn’s parodies of *Douglas – The Philosopher’s Opera* (Edinburgh: 1757) – Satan visits Scotland to attend the first performance of *Douglas*, because he has heard it is a play written by the clergyman Mr Jacky (John Home), and supported by other clergymen. Satan observes that his previous attempts to gain influence in Scotland were thwarted by “ministers” who “made conscience (as the phrase was in those days) of doing their duty.”<sup>49</sup> However, that old “phrase” “conscience” has now passed away; Satan finds that the clergy are devoted to “new books” by “Mr Genius” (a parody of Hume), whom “Mr Mask” (a parody of Carlyle) describes as our “one author of note.”<sup>50</sup> Mr Mask also introduces Satan to “Mr Moral Sense” (a parody of Francis Hutcheson), whom he describes as “another,” with Mr Genius, “who has a great many disciples.”<sup>51</sup>

Hutcheson, sometimes known as the “father of the Scottish Enlightenment,”<sup>52</sup> was, of course, a leading figure in eighteenth-century Scottish society, associated with the literati and the “moderate” cause. Although he had died ten years before *Douglas*, his philosophical works

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, vol.2, 526; 493.

<sup>49</sup> Lord Dreghorn (John Maclaurin), *The Philosopher’s Opera* (Edinburgh: 1757), 9 [*Opera*].

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>52</sup> T.D. Campbell, “Francis Hutcheson: ‘Father’ of the Scottish Enlightenment”, in R.H. Campbell and A.S. Skinner (eds), *The Origins and Nature of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1982), 167-185.

and teaching as Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow were a leading influence on the literati embroiled in that affair. Hutcheson was also a minister of the Kirk who gave his nuanced support for the Patronage Act in a way which “articulated the attitudes of the emerging moderate interest in the church.”<sup>53</sup>

The rhetorical value of “Mr Moral Sense” for Dreghorn is, then, multi-layered. By making the exaggerated claim that all of the literati were “disciples” of Hutcheson and Hume he is able to claim that they are interested in “new books” and ideas at the cost of that which is “old.”<sup>54</sup> The Moderate Scottish clergy use the term moral sense instead of conscience in the same way that they now follow Hutcheson and Hume rather than making “conscience (as the phrase was in those days) of doing their duty”.<sup>55</sup>

Of course, the phrase “made conscience...of doing their duty”<sup>56</sup> suggests the further rhetorical value of contrasting conscience with moral sense. As indicated above, the orthodox viewed conscience as a rational faculty through which we are aware of both the moral law and the judgement of God. However, Hutcheson and Hume had developed their respective sentimentalist theories of a moral sense in explicit opposition to ethical rationalism, not least Samuel Clarke’s. In Hume’s famous *is/ought* passage, Clarkean ethical rationalism is almost certainly one of the “the vulgar systems of morality” targeted for making the mistake of drawing an *ought* from an *is*, and for failing to appreciate that “the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceived by reason.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Fitzpatrick, “Politics and Providence,” 74.

<sup>54</sup> Dreghorn, *Opera*, 13; 4.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>56</sup> Lord Dreghorn (John Maclaurin), *The Philosopher’s Opera* (Edinburgh: 1757), 9 [*Opera*].

<sup>57</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, eds David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.1.2.27 [*Treatise*]. For Hutcheson’s identification of an *is/ought* gap, in stated opposition to Clarke, see, for example: Francis Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, ed. A. Garrett (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2002), 142; 180 [*Essay*], where the latter reference also includes the parallel to Hume’s more famous remark: “’Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger” (*Treatise*, 2.3.3.6).

According to Clarke, “*Iniquity* is the very same in *Action*, as *Falsity* or *Contradiction* in *Theory*.”<sup>58</sup> It is “*Absurd*” to admit that  $2+3=5$  and to deny that  $5=2+3$  in the same way that it is “*Unreasonable*” to deny the Golden Rule, and to claim that I should not treat another person how I would expect them to treat me.<sup>59</sup> For Hutcheson and Hume, Clarke’s analogy between mathematics and morals is simply a disanalogy. The “cool assent of the understanding”<sup>60</sup> might explain why we assent to the *is* truth of the principle of non-contradiction; however, that “cool assent” cannot supply the premise for the normative claim that we *ought* to act with equity. Clarke not only jumps from “it is reasonable to act with equity” to “we ought to act with equity,” he is unable to explain the human experience of normativity itself. As Hutcheson put it, our theoretical reason may tell us that “an hundred stones is greater than one” in the same way that it tell us “an hundred Felicities is a greater Sum than one Felicity.”<sup>61</sup> However, reason alone cannot explain our interest in piling together stones or felicities. Similarly, reason cannot explain why we differentiate, morally speaking, between helping as many people as possible gain felicities and building “*Heaps*” of stones.<sup>62</sup> According to Hutcheson and Hume, instead of Clarke’s “vulgar” ethical rationalism, moral philosophy must posit: (i) an antecedent natural affection for benevolence; and (ii) a “moral sense” that approves of benevolent action. (i) explains why we are motivated to perform actions that help others and (ii) explains why we approve of such actions as *moral* acts.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Samuel Clarke, *A Discourse Concerning the Being and Attributes of God, the Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Religion*, 10th edn (London: 1767), part 2, 54 [Discourse].

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Hume, *Treatise*, I.I.136.

<sup>61</sup> Hutcheson, *Essay*, 142.

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

<sup>63</sup> See, for example: Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue in Two Treatises*, rvsd edn, ed. W. Leidhold (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2008), I.I.xv; II.I; II.VII.i [Inquiry]; *Essay*, 9; 136; 142; 158; 179; David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* in *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, with P.H. Nidditch, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), V.II.183; IX.I.221; I.I.136 and *Treatise*, 2.3.3.4; 3.1.2.1; 3.1.2.27.



In criticising Clarkean ethical rationalism, neither Hutcheson or Hume denied reason a (at least instrumental) role in ethical decision-making; nor is their theory of a moral sense necessarily incompatible with moral objectivism,<sup>64</sup> or, in Hutcheson's case at least, a rational theory of conscience.<sup>65</sup> Nonetheless, both had argued for sentimentalism with language which alarmed their orthodox opponents. For example, their claim that virtue "consists in Benevolence"<sup>66</sup> suggested that right and wrong consist solely in utility, with Hutcheson apparently even coining the now familiar utilitarian mantra: "the greatest Happiness for the greatest Numbers."<sup>67</sup> Hutcheson compared our "moral sense" with our "Sense of Beauty,"<sup>68</sup> while Hume famously contended that "reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of, the passions."<sup>69</sup> Both made happiness the measure of right and wrong, and the passion for happiness the motivational ground for moral conduct. In doing so, they relativised happiness (and so morality) to each individual's desire for whatever they find beautiful or pleasurable. At least, that is the accusation Dreghorn used the rhetoric of conscience to make.

In *The Philosopher's Opera*, Mr Moral Sense, consistent with Hutcheson's emphasis upon benevolence, repeatedly utters "how I love all and every one of you!"<sup>70</sup> However, it is also the case that Mr Moral Sense has "an unbounded benevolence" for "wine" and uses that

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<sup>64</sup> See: William Frankena, "Hutcheson's Moral Sense Theory," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol.16, no.3 (June, 1955), 356-375; Kenneth Wrinkler, "Hutcheson's Alleged Realism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol.23, no.2 (April, 1985), 179-194; David Fate Norton, "Hutcheson's Moral Realism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol.23, no.3 (July, 1985), 397-418; Pauline Westerman, "Hume and the Natural Lawyers: A Change of Landscape" in M.A. Stewart and J.P. Wright (eds), *Hume and Hume's Connexions* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 83-104; Knud Haakonssen, "Natural Law and Moral Realism: The Scottish Synthesis" in M.A. Stewart (ed.), *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 61-85 and *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 63-75.

<sup>65</sup> See: J.D. Bishop, "Moral Motivation and the Development of Francis Hutcheson's Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol.57, no.2 (April, 1996), 277-295; Daniel Carey, "Francis Hutcheson's Philosophy and the Scottish Enlightenment: Reception, Reputation, and Legacy" in A. Garrett and J.A. Harris (eds), *Scottish Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century*, vol.1 (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015), 36-76; Aaron Garrett, "Moral Philosophy: Practical and Speculative" in Garrett and Harris (eds), *op.cit.*, 77-129; J.D. Filonowicz, *Fellow-Feeling and the Moral Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)

<sup>66</sup> Hutcheson, *Essay*, I.IV.v; see, for example: Hume, *Enquiry*, V.II.183-184.

<sup>67</sup> Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, II.III.viii.

<sup>68</sup> Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, I.I.xv.

<sup>69</sup> Hume, *Treatise*, 3.1.2.27; 2.3.3.4.

<sup>70</sup> Dreghorn, *Opera*, 14.

to explain the fact that he is permanently inebriated.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, upon seeing “Moll” the kitchen maid, he declares “I will lie with her,” and attempts to force his advances upon her, with the justification, “My instinct prompts me to lie with her.”<sup>72</sup> However, even Satan is offended by such conduct, and intercedes declaring, “I’ll teach your instinct better manners.”<sup>73</sup>

Mr Genius (or Hume) is also pleased to act upon instinct rather than making “conscience” of his “duty.” In portraying Mr Genius’ licentiousness, Dreghorn highlights another layer of the orthodox rhetoric of conscience: in preferring Hutcheson’s and Hume’s new moral sense over old-fashioned Calvinist conscience, the literati have not just turned their back on an ethical realist conception of the moral law, but on Christianity.

Thus, Satan is delighted by the influence of Hume in Scotland, and “drinks to his health,” because he is aware that “new books” are “commonly my very good friends.”<sup>74</sup> Indeed, he has read Hume’s books “with great delight,” because they support suicide, deny God’s existence and a future state, and maintain there is no difference “twixt right and wrong but what custom has introduced.”<sup>75</sup> And, just as Satan recognises “How much am I obliged to” Hume for his influence in Scotland, another character, “Mrs Presbytery” (in other words, the Kirk itself), declares her love for him. In doing so, she complains of her “first husband” “Mr *John Calvin*.” He had brought up Mrs Presbytery’s “sons” to have a “starch”, “stiff”, and “ridiculously grave” “manner,” whereas now, under the influence of Hume “they have put off

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

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

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 13; 15. For the claim that the Moderate clergy’s support for *Douglas* was the inevitable consequence of their support for Hume, who argued for the “lawfulness of suicide” and the “mortality of the soul,” see also: [anon], *The Usefulness of the Edinburgh Theatre Seriously Considered. With a proposal for rendering it more beneficial* (Edinburgh: 1757), 5 [*Usefulness of the Theatre*]; John Haldane, *The Players Scourge: or a detection of the horrid prophanity [sic] and impiety of stage-plays, and their wicked supporters; and especially of the nine prophane pagan priests, who were present at acting the tragedy of Douglas* (Edinburgh: 1757), 3 [*Players Scourge*].

the *old* man entirely,” “they swear, they drink, they whore so handsomely... I scarce know them to be my own children.”<sup>76</sup>

Ministers who “made conscience (as the phrase was in those days) of doing their duty”<sup>77</sup> are “starch” and “stiff,”<sup>78</sup> and enemies of Satan. They rigidly and “ridiculously”<sup>79</sup> believe that certain things are always wrong to do, and that wrongdoing will be punished in a future life. However, in the Kirk under the Moderates, ministers no longer need to be concerned with such things: Mr Genius tells them that there is no future judgement to worry about, and Mr Moral Sense assures them that right and wrong can be relativised to individual desire. Consequently, they are able to welcome Satan into Scotland.<sup>80</sup>

#### “Modern Infidels”

Like Dreghorn, Witherspoon employed the rhetoric of conscience during the *Douglas* affair:

As the growth or decay of vegetable nature is often so gradual as to be insensible; so in the moral world, verbal alterations, which are counted as nothing, do often introduce real changes, which are firmly established before their approach is so much as suspected... Should we everywhere put virtue for holiness, honour, *or even moral sense for conscience*, improvement of the heart for sanctification, the opposition between such things and theatrical entertainments would not appear half so sensible.<sup>81</sup>

His rhetoric of conscience, like Dreghorn’s, makes the exaggerated claim that the literati, as a group, adopted the Hutchesonian and Humean sentimentalist theory of an affective moral sense. And, again like Dreghorn, it does so in order to make the preference for moral sense

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<sup>76</sup> Dreghorn, *Opera*, 5 (my italics).

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

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> For the theme of Satan being welcomed into Scotland as a result of the Moderate clergy’s support of *Douglas*, see also: [anon], *The Apostle to the Theatre His Garland. An excellent new song, to the tune of, De’il stick the minister* (Edinburgh: 1757), 2-3 [Garland]; Haldane, *Players Scourge*, 1-8; [anon], *The Infernal Council. An Excellent New Ballad. To the Tune of, The Devils Were Brawling, &c.* (Edinburgh: 1757).

<sup>81</sup> John Witherspoon, *Serious Enquiry into the Nature and Effects of the Stage* (Glasgow: 1757), 7 (my italics) [*Serious Enquiry*].

over conscience indicative of a hedonistic and secularising worldliness underpinning moderatism itself.

We have already seen why Witherspoon should insist that the literati's preference for "moral sense" over "conscience" is more than a mere "verbal alteration."<sup>82</sup> For him, conscience was part of our awareness that: "All real Christians are, and account themselves pilgrims and strangers on the earth, set their affections on things above, and have their conversation in heaven."<sup>83</sup> Conscience reminds human beings that our true happiness lies beyond this world, along the narrow path of Christian duty; a journey which requires regeneration in faith and grace, as well as recognition of the objective moral law, and the experience of God's judgement, provided in our own conscience.

As the Christian ethical appreciation of "holiness" and "sanctification" are inextricably associated with conscience, the literati's exchange of "conscience" for "moral sense" demonstrates that the literati are "modern infidels," who prefer "new" ideas (like moral sense) from "modern essays," rather than those (like conscience) which are to be found in "Scripture" and the Church "fathers."<sup>84</sup> However, their preference for moral sense over conscience has still further significance. The literati are "modern infidels," because, in prioritising that which is modern and profane over that which is traditional and religious, they make "virtue," "honour," and "improvement"<sup>85</sup> worldly, rather than Christian ethical, ideals. To live a moral life no longer requires, as Witherspoon described it elsewhere, "regeneration, repentance, conversion, or call it what you will...a very great change from the state in which every man comes into the world."<sup>86</sup> Instead, the literati's sentimentalism suggests that we simply indulge that which we come into the world with, and that which is aimed at the things of this world: our natural, fallen

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 17; 7.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>86</sup> Witherspoon, *Works*, vol.1, 94.

passions. As a result, they not only deny the religious dimensions of the moral life, but encourage immorality by making passion and instinct the guide of human conduct rather than reason and conscience.

Part of Witherspoon's objection to *Douglas* was that "worldly" sources of entertainment, like the theatre, undermine the human capacity to marshal our affections towards a "higher end" under the "higher," "rational powers" of our nature.<sup>87</sup> Instead, they inflame "fallen" passions to such an extent that they "fatigue the mind" and so put "the voice of natural conscience, that is, the voice of God in them" to "sleep."<sup>88</sup> In such a state, we behave more like animals than rational creatures: we not only act at random, according to how our affections are tempted by various material goods, but pursue those goods as though they could bring us ultimate satisfaction as human beings.<sup>89</sup>

Thus, Witherspoon suggested that the literati's support for the theatre, and its pernicious consequences, was the inevitable result of the literati adopting the secularising and hedonistic sentimentalism of Hutcheson and Hume; the same sentimentalism which had encouraged them to "everywhere put...moral sense for conscience"<sup>90</sup> in the first place. The literati's sentimentalism ignores the fact that human passions are fallen, and so will seek worldly pleasure without the guidance of reason and conscience, and the support of faith and grace.

Of course, like Dreghorn, Witherspoon's rhetoric of conscience has a still further layer: the literati's commitment to a sentimentalist moral sense, as opposed to rational conscience, not only encourages worldliness and immorality, but springs from the worldliness and immorality of the literati themselves. They have adopted Hutcheson's and Hume's sentimentalism, celebrated modern expressions like moral sense, and worldly entertainments

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<sup>87</sup> Witherspoon, *Serious Enquiry*, 53. See also: 14-15; 41, fn.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 19; 40; 14.

<sup>89</sup> See: *ibid.*, 18-20; 43; 50-51.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

like *Douglas*, because they are, “unwilling to think that even their duty as Christians should constrain them to be at odds with the delicacies of life, or the polite and fashionable pleasures of the age.”<sup>91</sup> Instead, the literati use their sentimentalist moral sense to justify acting howsoever their fallen passions happen to lead them, “according to the principles of *modern* relaxed morality.”<sup>92</sup> The preference for moral sense over conscience betrayed the fact that the sentimentalism underpinning the former was motivated by “that *friendship of the world*, which is enmity with God.”<sup>93</sup> Consequently, it was as the literati supported the worldly entertainment of *Douglas*, and “everywhere put...moral sense for conscience,”<sup>94</sup> that they encouraged “indulging sensual gratifications,”<sup>95</sup> leading to the “decay”<sup>96</sup> of the Kirk and Scottish society as whole: “If Scotch clergymen may, with impunity, not only write plays, but go to see them acted here...the religion and manners of this country are entirely changed.”<sup>97</sup>

### Part I, Section 2 – The Controversy Over Patronage

During the *Douglas* affair, Witherspoon and Dreghorn both employed the rhetoric of conscience to contrast an orthodox commitment to making “conscience...of doing their duty”<sup>98</sup> with the acolytes of Mr Moral Sense and Mr Genius amongst the literati. The latter were “modern infidels” who preferred new books and ideas (especially Hutcheson’s and Hume’s) to traditional Christian books and ideas (especially Calvin’s). They denied that which Witherspoon and Dreghorn regarded as fundamental aspects of Calvinist Christian ethics, inextricably associated with conscience, including the experience of divine judgement, moral objectivism, the awareness of fallenness, and the need for faith and grace.

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>97</sup> Dreghorn, *Opera*, iv.

<sup>98</sup> Lord Dreghorn (John Maclaurin), *The Philosopher’s Opera* (Edinburgh: 1757), 9 [*Opera*].

Another prominent way in which they drew attention to the literati's worldliness and immortality was to represent them as social climbers. Unlike a traditional Scottish Calvinist minister, they gave up their Christian ethical ideals and neglected their parishes in order to pursue the power, prestige, and "filthy lucre" of fashionable gentlemen.<sup>99</sup>

The criticism of the literati here is twofold. They followed Mr Moral Sense and Mr Genius, and reduced right and wrong to whatever "custom authorises and fashion justifies,"<sup>100</sup> because it was fashionable to think in that way. The literati's worldly and gentlemanly ambition meant that they would support whatever was the prevailing fashion in ideas, as in clothes, because they are captivated by "the shining thoughts that are applauded in the world by men of taste."<sup>101</sup> At the same time, they insisted that "there is no difference 'twixt right and wrong but what custom has introduced,"<sup>102</sup> not only because it was fashionable to do so, but because in doing so they were establishing themselves within the elite group that decides what is fashionable and so moral. Thus, according to Witherspoon and Dreghorn, the literati were not only "entirely" changing, but seeking to take control over, "the religion and manners of" Scotland.<sup>103</sup>

Here, orthodox criticisms during the *Douglas* affair carried on a theme running throughout Popular opposition to Moderate support for the Patronage Act. For the orthodox, Moderate support for *Douglas* meant that they were aligning themselves with the fashionable and aristocratic tastes of polite society, because they aspired to be a part of it. Likewise, in their

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<sup>99</sup> Lord Dreghorn, *The Deposition, or Fatal Miscarriage: A Tragedy* (Edinburgh: 1757), 11 [*Deposition*]. See also: [anon], *The Immorality of Stage-Plays in General, and of The Tragedy called Douglas, in Particular* (Edinburgh: 1757), 19-24 [*Immorality of Stage-Plays*]; *Admonition and Exhortation by the Reverend Presbytery of Edinburgh to All Within Their Bounds* (Edinburgh: 1757), 1-2; John Haldane, *Players Scourge*, 3-4 and *The Second Part of The Players Scourge Exhibited to the World* (Edinburgh: 1758), 1-15 [*Players Scourge II*]; A.B., *Douglas, a Tragedy, Weighed in the Balances, and Found Wanting* (Edinburgh: 1757), 1-19 [*Found Wanting*]; [anon], *The Second Part of the Apostle to the Theatre His Garland* (Edinburgh, 1757), 3-4).

<sup>100</sup> Witherspoon, *Serious Enquiry*, 23.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>102</sup> Dreghorn, *Opera*, 13.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, iv.

support for the Patronage Act, the Moderates were portrayed as favouring the rights and privileges of aristocrats over those of ordinary people again because they aspired to be aristocratic themselves.

Importantly, for this article, it is not just the case that the controversies over patronage and *Douglas* shared the theme of aristocratic elitism; rather, in both the controversies over patronage and *Douglas*, the orthodox employed the rhetoric of conscience to criticise the Moderates for that aristocratic elitism.

### Patronage and “Liberty of Conscience”

Four years before *Douglas*, Witherspoon used the rhetoric of conscience in his controversial satire of Moderate clergymen: *Ecclesiastical Characteristics: Or, the Arcana of Church Policy* (Glasgow: 1753). In this work (and the Popular supporter Andrew Moir’s imitation of it), the Moderate position on patronage is consistent with the fact that a Moderate clergyman is “endeavour[ing] to acquire as great a degree of politeness in his carriage and behaviour, and to catch as much of the air and manner of a fine gentleman, as possibly he can.”<sup>104</sup> As a would-be gentlemen, a Moderate clergyman is bound to support patronage, because he has “hatred and abhorrence of the common people”<sup>105</sup> while he “endeavour[s] to please, those of high rank.”<sup>106</sup>

The Moderate preference for moral sense over conscience is a further manifestation of the fact that they seek, as aspiring gentlemen, to “be very unacceptable to the common

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<sup>104</sup> John Witherspoon, *Ecclesiastical Characteristics: or, The Arcana of Church Policy*, 4th edn (Glasgow: 1755), 36 [Arcana].

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.



people.”<sup>107</sup> “*The moral Sense*” is one of those “smooth and easy Terms”<sup>108</sup> of “the *fine arts*”<sup>109</sup> that was “*so harmoniously sung by*” the aristocratic “*lord Shaftsbury* [sic], and...so well licked into form and method, by the late immortal Mr. H[utcheson].”<sup>110</sup> The Moderate preference for moral sense over conscience demonstrates that they are *au fait* with the latest polite literature, and that they are on the side of the “governing” not the “governed,” “the masters” rather than “the servants.”<sup>111</sup> By exchanging traditional and biblical religious language for “modern discoveries”<sup>112</sup> (such as, conscience for moral sense), the Moderates are purposefully, and exclusively, gentrifying the religious ethos of Scotland, and making it “unintelligible”<sup>113</sup> to ordinary people. Now, moral and religious ideas – like the right of patronage – are the “peculiar” and “exclusive privilege” of the Moderates’ gentlemanly elite, unavailable to the “vulgar.”<sup>114</sup>

While the Moderate preference for moral sense over conscience symbolised the fact that they “despise the multitude,”<sup>115</sup> the orthodox commitment to conscience over the moral sense explained why “They please the people.”<sup>116</sup>

Witherspoon (and Moir) contrasted the Moderates as gentlemanly and fashionable proponents of the moral sense with the orthodox as “*conscientious Fools*.”<sup>117</sup> Like ordinary people, and “Conscience, upon which they pretend to act,” the orthodox are “stiff and inflexible,”<sup>118</sup> embarrassing to themselves and others in polite society due to their lack of

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>108</sup> Andrew Moir, *A Letter to the Author of the Ecclesiastick Characteristicks, or Arcana of Church Policy* (Glasgow: 1754), 9 [Letter].

<sup>109</sup> Witherspoon, *Arcana*, 22.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 22; 66.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv; Moir, *Letter*, 9.

<sup>118</sup> Witherspoon, *Arcana*, 66.

“grace and beauty.”<sup>119</sup> The orthodox, like “the bulk of mankind,” are “weak” and “narrow-minded people,” restrained by a “narrow conscience,” which prevents them from appreciating mere “*good-humoured vices*” and “*social pleasures*.”<sup>120</sup> Popular party supporters suffer from a “want of taste,”<sup>121</sup> not least because they “pretend a scruple of conscience at doing what appears to their disordered intellects to be what they call *sinful*.”<sup>122</sup> Both the orthodox and ordinary Scottish people are excluded from polite society, because their traditional Calvinism means that they are foolishly committed to a straightforward and inelegant belief in what the fashionable people regard as the “deluded Votaries” and “groundless Imaginations” that accompany “*Conscience*,” “*Hell, Damnation*, and the like.”<sup>123</sup>

However, as “conscientious fools,” the orthodox are not just like the ordinary people; they are committed to them. It is by foolishly and unfashionably holding to their belief in conscience that the Popular party refuse to make morality and religion the preserve of an aristocratic elite.

Witherspoon’s *Arcana* was written in the wake of “the Inverkeithing case,” when the orthodox clergymen, Andrew Gillespie, made a stand against patronage by refusing to accept the Moderate, Andrew Richardson, as minister for the vacant parish of Inverkeithing. Richardson had been appointed as the new clergymen by the patron of the parish, Captain Philip Anstruther. Not only was Gillespie expelled from his office, but when he appealed to the Kirk against his expulsion, the Moderate party produced their *Reasons of Dissent* (1752). This document, written under the lead-authorship of Robertson, became known as the

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>123</sup> Moir, *Letter*, 9.

“Moderate manifesto,” and successfully prevented any attempts to show leniency towards Gillespie within the Kirk.<sup>124</sup>

Crucially, in their *Reasons of Dissent*, the Moderates criticised “liberty of conscience” for allowing an individual, “sheltered under” “the name of conscience,” to acquire “at once a right of doing whatsoever is good in his own eyes.”<sup>125</sup> “Liberty of conscience” and “the right of private judgement” can easily become an excuse for an individual to undermine legitimate governing authority within the church or state by ignoring its laws. Civil and ecclesiastical authorities must inhibit liberty of conscience in order to preserve “public order” and to prevent “anarchy and confusion.”<sup>126</sup>

In response to the *Reasons of Dissent*, the Popular party produced their own “manifesto,” *Answers to the Reasons of Dissent* (1752), under the lead-authorship of Witherspoon. Here, the Popular party charged the Moderates with “pompous[ly]”<sup>127</sup> seeking, in God’s place, an “absolute dominion” over the minds of their “inferiors” in both spiritual and civic life.<sup>128</sup> The denial of “liberty of conscience” made “inferior” people answerable to their earthly “superiors” in moral and religious matters rather than to the “awful tribunal” of God.<sup>129</sup> Conscience, in “rational creatures of God,” is the capacity for “every man,” even social and ecclesiastic “inferiors,” to be “told” God’s will.<sup>130</sup> It is the responsibility of “every” Christian to be “*always acting with a conscientious regard to the will of God and Christ, according to his best views of it.*”<sup>131</sup> “Liberty of conscience,” in this sense, does not grant the individual “A

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<sup>124</sup> See: Sher, *Church and University*, 52-57; McIntosh, *Church and Theology*, 103-120; Mailer, *American Revolution*, 78-81; *Annals of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, for the Final Secession in 1739 to the Origin of the Relief in 1752* (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1838), 222-231 [*Annals*].

<sup>125</sup> *Reasons of Dissent from the judgement and resolution of the Commission, March 11, 1752*, in *Annals*, 234.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>127</sup> *Answers to the Reasons of Dissent from the Sentence of the Commission in the Case of Inverkeithing, March 11, 1752*, in *Annals*, 257.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 249-250; 252.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

right of doing whatever is good in his own eyes,” “in a lawless sense,” when (as with Dreghorn’s Mr Moral Sense and Mr Genius) our eyes are “darkened by irregular passions and appetites.”<sup>132</sup> Instead, liberty of conscience is “a right of doing what, upon serious attention and consideration, appears to him *good in the eyes of God and Christ*.”<sup>133</sup> Such “liberty of conscience” “is not only the right of *every reasonable creature* of God, and disciple of Christ, but it is his indispensable duty to exercise it,” free from the judgement and coercion of those, like the Moderates, who require their fellow Christians to be “putting out *his own eyes*, which God has given him, and *blindly following* the guidance of *other men*.”<sup>134</sup>

Witherspoon’s rhetorical contrast between conscience and moral sense in his *Arcana* followed the Popular defence of liberty of conscience in their 1752 “manifesto.” The literati are bound to prefer moral sense over conscience, because the latter threatens their aristocratic hierarchy by guaranteeing even the “inferior”<sup>135</sup> people the capacity for, and so right of, self-direction. The literati’s Hutchesonian and Humean moral sense may have made the belief in conscience and eternal punishment look ridiculous in modern polite society, but that is only because they want to deny that ordinary people are capable of their own autonomous experiences of moral and religious truth. On these terms, the orthodox are happy to be “conscientious fools:” their commitment to conscience is only made to look foolish by the sophisticated and oligarchical literati, who likewise wish to dismiss ordinary people as foolish and inferior, so that they might better justify governing over them. In this case, a foolish commitment to conscience is the best way of defending the rights and freedoms of ordinary people from the literati’s aristocratic oppression.

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

A “Cabal” of “Gentlemen”

The self-characterisation conscientious fools, as employed during the controversy over patronage, is consistent with the rhetoric of conscience during the *Douglas* affair, as discussed in Part I, Section 1.<sup>136</sup>

First, the orthodox are conscientious fools because their commitment to conscience over moral sense, and their opposition to such “fashionable diversions”<sup>137</sup> as the theatre, makes them look unrefined when compared with the literati. The Moderate acolytes of Mr Moral Sense and Mr Genius are fashionable, impious, and self-indulgent gentlemen, schooled in modern literature and learning. However, orthodox minsters, who make “conscience...of doing their duty,” are awkward and old-fashioned, the “stiff,” “starch,” and “ridiculously grave” adherents of an out-dated belief in moral duty, divine punishment, and conscience, “as the phrase was in those days.”<sup>138</sup> Here, the orthodox are represented both as those who have chosen “spiritual improvement” over “politeness” and a “fashionable education”,<sup>139</sup> and those who resemble ordinary people. Like “the bulk of mankind”,<sup>140</sup> orthodox Calvinists are “stiff and precise” “incapable of joining in polite conversation, being ignorant of the topics upon which it chiefly turns,” and possess a “rusticity of carriage, or narrowness of mind, than which nothing is more contemptible in the eyes of the rest of mankind.”<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Indeed, the Moderates’ successful denial of liberty of conscience in “the Inverkeithing case” was part of the reason why the orthodox continued their rhetorical contrast between conscience and moral sense during the *Douglas* affair: it was another opportunity to defend liberty of conscience (“as the phrase was in those days” (Dreghorn, *Opera*, 9)), while also accusing the Moderates of hypocrisy. The Moderates “expel” Gillespie “from our society,/Because he set his conscience ’gainst the law,” but now those same Moderates defend themselves from censure, avoiding the question: “And is there no law against the stage?” (Dreghorn, *Deposition*, 12). See also: John Witherspoon, *A Serious Apology for the Ecclesiastical Characteristics* (Edinburgh: 1763), 43-44; Haldane, *Players Scourge*, 7; [anon] *An Address to the Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale, Concerning Mr Home’s Tragedy and Hume’s Moral Essays* (Edinburgh: 1757), 5.

DETAIL: [Edinburgh ], [1757]. 5

<sup>137</sup> Witherspoon, *Serious Enquiry*, 66.

<sup>138</sup> Dreghorn, *Opera*, 5; 9.

<sup>139</sup> Witherspoon, *Serious Enquiry*, 65-66.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

Second, the literati's support for *Douglas*, and preference for moral sense over conscience, demonstrated their disdain, as aspiring gentlemen, for ordinary people. Just as the moral sense was only understood by those fortunate, and "enlightened,"<sup>142</sup> enough to be schooled in fashionable polite literature, the theatre was an entertainment reserved for "those in higher life, and more affluent circumstances than the bulk of mankind."<sup>143</sup> By defending modern forms of sophisticated entertainment, and invoking fashionable terms from "modern philosophers"<sup>144</sup> and aristocrats, the Moderates not only made orthodox Calvinism look old-fashioned and foolish, they also demonstrated their gentlemanly distaste for that which is "common" and "ordinary."<sup>145</sup> If "there is no more in morals than" the literati's moral sense *qua* "a certain taste and sense of beauty and elegance,"<sup>146</sup> then morality and religion are not only "confined to the duties of social life," but the marks of a moral and religious life are simply those of aristocratic "polished luxury,"<sup>147</sup> unavailable to ordinary people.

Moreover, during the *Douglas* affair, as in the controversy over patronage, orthodox rhetoric made the literati's preference for moral sense over conscience symptomatic of their desire to make morality and religion inaccessible to ordinary people, in order that they might exercise control over them.

In 1754, the Select Society, an exclusive debating club, was founded in Edinburgh, and included amongst its members such Moderate church ministers as Robertson and Ferguson, as well as such lay philosophers as Hume and Smith.

The fact that the Moderate party sought to signify their own privileged status, by referring to themselves as "select," helped to support orthodox accusations that the Moderates

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<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

aspired to gentlemanly status, set apart from the ordinary person. It also furthered the Popular contention that the Moderates, in seeking to be fashionable gentlemen, sought to exercise their own entitled sense of power over the people of Scotland. The Moderates not only followed what was fashionable when they exchanged conscience for moral sense and supported the theatre; they sought to be the arbitrators of fashion:

Some years ago, a few gentlemen in this town assumed the character of being the only judges in all points of literature; they were and still are styled *geniuses*, and lately erected what they called a *select society*, which usurps a kind of aristocratical government over all men and matters of learning.<sup>148</sup>

Within orthodox rhetoric, therefore, the literati's preference for moral sense over conscience was symptomatic of the same impulse which saw them support the Patronage Act and *Douglas*: their desire to dominate the ordinary people as an aristocratic and intellectual elite, who were making a grab for power over Scottish society as a "cabal" of "gentlemen."<sup>149</sup>

Meanwhile, the orthodox preference for conscience over moral sense was presented as symptomatic of the same impulse which saw them oppose the Patronage Act and *Douglas*: their desire to protect Scottish society from the "dictatorial" "authority" of a "club of gentlemen," who were seeking to "usurp" the religious, moral, and cultural life of Scotland, by controlling church patronage, as well as "learning" and "manners."<sup>150</sup>

## Part II – The Orthodox Appeal to Samuel Clarke

The orthodox rhetoric of conscience contrasts moral sense with conscience as a means of contrasting the literati as "modern infidels" with the orthodox as "conscientious fools." As modern infidels, the literati ignore the religious traditions and "*inclinations of the common*

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<sup>148</sup> Lord Dreghorn, *Apology for the Writers against the Tragedy of Douglas, With Some Remarks on that Play* (Edinburgh: 1757), 4 [Apology].

<sup>149</sup> Dreghorn, *Opera*, iv.

<sup>150</sup> Dreghorn, *Apology*, 4; *Opera*, iv.

people”<sup>151</sup> of Scotland, in order that they may have power over Scottish society, as fashionable gentlemen celebrated in the polite world of profane literature. As conscientious fools, the orthodox preserve the religious traditions of Scotland; in doing so, they serve, and represent, the religious needs and “*inclinations of the common people*,” and thereby protect Scottish society from the pernicious consequences of secularisation and aristocratic elitism.

On the one hand, orthodox rhetoric contains a contrast familiar from Scottish Enlightenment scholarship: the contrast between the categories enlightened Moderate literati and Popular conservative. Witherspoon explicitly described the literati as “enlightened,” “tolerant,” “modern,” “infidel,” “philosophers,” in contrast with the orthodox as “narrow-minded, bigotted [sic], uncharitable,” “inflexible,” “zealots”.<sup>152</sup>

On the other hand, the orthodox rhetoric was intended to destabilise such terms. The self-description conscientious fools is ironic: by foolishly and conservatively adhering to their old-fashioned belief in conscience it is the orthodox who best manifest the ideals of a supposedly “enlightened age,”<sup>153</sup> supporting liberty of conscience, and the freedom of ordinary people from aristocratic oppression.

The next section examines another aspect of the rhetoric of conscience employed during, and prior to, the *Douglas* affair: the appeal to Samuel Clarke. Witherspoon’s appeal to Clarke was an aspect of his rhetoric of conscience, which included distinguishing the orthodox as conscientious fools from the literati as modern infidels. The appeal to Clarke by Witherspoon, and other orthodox writers, was another way in which they used their rhetoric of conscience to contest such categories as “enlightened” and “conservative.”

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<sup>151</sup> Witherspoon, *Arcana*, 47.

<sup>152</sup> See: Witherspoon, *Serious Enquiry*, 69; 36-37; *Arcana*, 18; 25.

<sup>153</sup> Witherspoon, *Serious Enquiry*, 69.



Samuel Clarke: Conscientious Fool

In his *Arcana*, Witherspoon does not explicitly call Clarke a conscientious fool, but he portrays him as one. Like the Scottish Calvinists, and the ordinary people they represent, it was once possible to speak “honourably” of Clarke and his opinions; but now, with Scottish learning and manners under the influence of the literati, even students at “university” are “wise” enough not to do so.<sup>154</sup> As a result, the literati not only single out “Dr. Samuel Clark [sic]” for “derision,” they do so because he is a “numscull [sic]...wholly ignorant of the moral sense.”<sup>155</sup>

Clarke is a conscientious fool because, like the orthodox, he does not support the moral sense, and is, as such, an unfashionable figure open to “derision” by the new and enlightened “men of taste:”

[the Moderate literati] desire it to be remembered, that the present fashionable scheme of moral philosophy is much improved in comparison of that which prevailed sometime ago...[because] Virtue does not now consist in *acting agreeably to the nature of things*, as Dr. Clarke affirms...<sup>156</sup>

In this quotation, Witherspoon is alluding to the most famous feature of Clarke’s ethical rationalism: his use of the analogies of sight and mathematics. He is also alluding to the fact that Hutcheson and Hume had explicitly criticised Clarke for his use of that analogy. Thus, in the above quotation, “fashionable” has a threefold connotation:

(1) Clarke is unfashionable because he is out of favour with the prevailing taste, where that prevailing taste is determined by the domineering literati. In rejecting Clarke, the literati are “improving” (that is, overthrowing) the past, and thereby demonstrating their aristocratic power over ethics and culture.

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<sup>154</sup> Witherspoon, *Arcana*, 42, fn.

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

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

(2) Clarke is unfashionable because he does not think that it is possible to reduce right and wrong to fashion: “Eternal moral Obligations...[are] in perpetual Force, merely from their own Nature, and the abstract Reason of Things.”<sup>157</sup> According to Clarke, moral truths are analogous with mathematical truths because they are both truths determined by the law of reason itself. Just as no will, whether human or divine, can make  $2+2=5$ , so no will can make it right to harm an innocent person. These are unchangeable truths determined by “the nature of things and the reason of the case,” and are, as such, built into the fabric of reality itself.<sup>158</sup>

For Witherspoon, the Hutchesonian and Humean rejection of Clarke parallels their preference for moral sense over conscience, just as the orthodox appeal to Clarke parallels their preference for conscience over moral sense.

In dismissing Clarke’s ethical rationalism, Hutcheson and Hume, and their literati “disciples,” deny the objective nature of moral truth. As a result, they pretend that all they need to do to be moral is to indulge their passions and affections, while simultaneously relativising morality to whatever they egotistically deem to be tasteful and fashionable. Thus, Witherspoon remarks sarcastically, it is a “pity...that the moral sense was not started a little earlier,” so that such ethical rationalists as “Grotius” could have avoided the “gross” “blunder” of representing “moral virtue” as “stiff and rigid,” rather than “yielding as water...[and] easily...beaten into what shape you please.”<sup>159</sup>

By contrast, in appealing to Clarke, the orthodox stressed their commitment to objective moral truth as part of their belief in rational conscience:

Conscience, upon which they pretend to act, is, of all things, the most stiff and inflexible; and cannot, by any art, be moulded into another shape than that which it naturally bears: whereas

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<sup>157</sup> Clarke, *Discourse*, part 2, 90-91.

<sup>158</sup> See: Clarke, *Discourse*, part 1, 106-119; part 2, 34; 43; 50-76.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

the whole principles of moderation are most gentle and ductile, and may be applied to almost all purposes imaginable.<sup>160</sup>

In the controversies over patronage and *Douglas*, we have seen how orthodox rhetoric repeatedly characterised the Popular party, their “common” supporters, and their rational theory of conscience as “stiff,” “precise,” “starch,” “inflexible,” “narrow,” “rigid.” In Witherspoon’s *Arcana*, ethical rationalists like Grotius, and by implication Clarke, are described in the same terms: their commitment to “the *eternal...and immutable laws of morality*”<sup>161</sup> means that they are just as uncompromising, as “stiff and rigid”,<sup>162</sup> about moral duty. Moreover, Clarke is stiff and rigid in another rhetorical sense. Like the orthodox and their ordinary supporters, he is open to the “derision” of polite society, because he is unschooled in contemporary literature and learning: a “numscull...wholly ignorant of the moral sense.”<sup>163</sup>

(3) Clarke is unfashionable because his ethical rationalism guarantees all human beings, not just fashionable social elites, access to moral truth. Clarke’s use of the analogy between mathematical and moral truth included his use of the analogy of sight. Human beings *qua* rational creatures immediately and self-evidently “see” or intuit the answer to basic problems in mathematics, in the same way that we immediately and self-evidently “see” basic moral truths. It is “by the natural and necessary Perception of his own Mind and Conscience” that “every man...clearly discerns [the] essential Difference between Good and Evil.”<sup>164</sup> As Clarke famously put it, such moral truths as the golden rule:

are so notoriously plain and self-evident, that nothing but the extremest [sic] Stupidity of Mind...can possibly make any Man entertain the least Doubt concerning them. For a Man endued with Reason, to deny the Truth of these Things; is the very same Thing...as if a Man that understands Geometry...should...perversely contend that the Whole is not equal to all its Parts...<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Witherspoon, *Arcana*, 66.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 54; 42, fn.

<sup>164</sup> Samuel Clarke, *Sermons by Samuel Clarke, D.D., in Eleven Volumes*, 7th edn (London: 1749), II.VI, 77.

<sup>165</sup> Clarke, *Discourse*, part 2, 31-32.

Clarke's ethical rationalism maintained that moral truth is an objective universal standard, not just applicable in all times and places, but knowable by all human beings in all times and places. It is unsurprising, therefore, that Witherspoon should have appealed explicitly to Clarke in his *Arcana*, in the same way that he employed the Clarkean analogy with sight in the *Answers to the Reasons of Dissent* published two years earlier (see above). The appeal to Clarke is consistent with the orthodox defence of the "right" to "liberty of conscience," on the basis that, as "reasonable creatures," all human beings have the God-given capacity to "see" moral and religious truth with their own "eyes."<sup>166</sup>

Indeed, appreciating (1)-(3) above, explains why Witherspoon (and other orthodox writers) appealed to Clarke, while describing the literati as committed followers of Leibniz.<sup>167</sup>

In the *Clarke-Leibniz Correspondence*, Clarke had objected to Leibniz's principle of sufficient reason for replacing "liberty" of will with "universal necessity and fate." If human beings must always act in accordance with a "reason sufficient" then that reason becomes the irresistible cause of the subsequent action, not the free choice of the agent themselves. As a result, individuals are no longer "free agents," with our own "self-motive principle" and "power of acting;" instead, all individuals behave mechanically: when the "reason, or principle" is heavier on one side, the human being moves accordingly and automatically, like "weights" in a "balance."<sup>168</sup>

Clarke was the defender of liberty against Leibniz. And, as we have seen above, the orthodox cast themselves in the same role against the literati. No wonder that the orthodox

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<sup>166</sup> *Answers to the Reasons of Dissent*, 253.

<sup>167</sup> See: Witherspoon, *Arcana*, 38; 41; 43; Moir, *Letter*, 8-9; George Anderson, *An Estimate of the Profit and Loss of Religion, Personally and Publicly Stated: Illustrated with References to Essays on Morality and Natural Religion* (Edinburgh: 1753), 45-53. Anderson's appeal to Clarke (and Leibniz), in a work written in explicit opposition to Kames' *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (Edinburgh: 1751), is noteworthy for being contemporaneous with Witherspoon's *Arcana*. It was also Anderson who led the orthodox attempts to have Hume and Kames censured by the Kirk (see footnote 5).

<sup>168</sup> *Leibniz-Clarke*, 45; 98-99

should imply that Clarke, like themselves, was a conscientious fool, while describing the literati as followers of Clarke's opponent, Leibniz. In doing so, orthodox rhetoric was once again making the literati's Hutchesonian and Humean rejection of Clarke the parallel of their preference for moral sense over conscience. The sentimentalist moral sense (of which Clarke was "wholly ignorant")<sup>169</sup> was criticised for reducing human agents to unthinking "brute" creatures. Without a Clarkean objective standard of right and wrong, known through rational conscience, to guide human behaviour, the literati's moral sense encourages human beings to act automatically and egoistically, driven by the "weights" of their fallen desires and instincts. Moreover, the sentimentalist moral sense helped the literati to gain ascendancy over ordinary people by denying them liberty of conscience. Without a Clarkean objective standard of right and wrong, known through rational conscience, the literati could argue, not only that right and wrong can be "beaten into any shape you please,"<sup>170</sup> but install themselves as the aristocratic elite who decides into which "shape" right and wrong are "beaten."

#### Clarke, Addison, and Shakespeare: The Subversion of "Enlightened" and "Conservative"

Of course, because Witherspoon portrayed Clarke as a conscientious fool – and used the self-designation conscientious fool to subvert such categories as enlightened and conservative – it follows that the appeal to Clarke was also part of that subversion. In this case, Witherspoon subverted such categories not only by using the unfashionable "numscull"<sup>171</sup> Clarke to show that the orthodox were, in actual fact, the enlightened defenders of liberty, but also to indicate that they were the enlightened readers of polite literature.

On the one hand, Clarke's ethical rationalism is as naive and out-dated as the Scottish Calvinism of orthodox conscientious fools. On the other hand, Clarke and the orthodox only

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<sup>169</sup> Witherspoon, *Arcana*, 42, fn.

<sup>170</sup> Witherspoon, *Arcana*, 54.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 42, fn.

appear to be foolish because “*the religion and manners of this country*” have been “*abandoned to*” a new “*club of gentlemen*,” who, in exercising their “aristocratical government” over Scotland, have left its “literature” and “learning” in a “*deplorable*” state.<sup>172</sup> With respect to the second point, it was of great rhetorical significance for Dreghorn that Hume not only criticised Clarke in his philosophical writings, but also, during the *Douglas* affair, spoke dismissively of William Shakespeare; while, at the same time, Carlyle spoke jokingly of Joseph Addison.

In 1757, Hume used the publication of his *Four Dissertations* to praise Home and to advertise *Douglas*. He dedicated his new work to “The Reverend Mr. Hume [sic], Author of *Douglas*, a Tragedy,” whom he praised as possessing “the true theatric [sic] genius of *Shakespear* [sic] and *Otway*, refined from the unhappy barbarism of one, and the licentiousness of the other.”<sup>173</sup>

In the same year, Carlyle wrote his own defence of the performance of *Douglas* in reaction to orthodox opposition: *An Argument to Prove that the Tragedy of Douglas Ought to be Publickly Burnt by the Hands of the Hangman* (Edinburgh: 1757). As the title suggests, Carlyle’s pamphlet was satirical in tone, and opened with the lines:

Joseph Addison, Esq; was certainly drunk, when he laid it down as a maxim, in one of his spectators [sic], “that a perfect tragedy is the noblest production of human nature.” His opinion, I know, but too universally prevails; and I am aware of the dangers that attend writing against received maxims.<sup>174</sup>

In response to these remarks, Dreghorn bemoaned:

*Shakespear* [sic] of late is so much decried...Addison, till those gentlemen appeared, was universally esteemed as the finest writer ever *England* produced [but]...If you believe them, there are ten errors in every page of his *Spectators*...They have taken so great pains to inculcate this doctrine, that now every boy at school, if you praise Mr *Addison*, will perk it in your face, and tell you, that he is not a *correct* writer.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Dreghorn, *Opera*, iv; *Apology*, 4.

<sup>173</sup> David Hume, *Four Dissertations* (London: 1757), v-vi.

<sup>174</sup> Alexander Carlyle, *An Argument to Prove that the Tragedy of Douglas Ought to be Publickly Burnt by the Hands of the Hangman* (Edinburgh: 1757), 3.

<sup>175</sup> Dreghorn, *Apology*, 4-5.

In the first place, we should note the similarity between Dreghorn's remarks on Addison and Shakespeare, and Witherspoon's on Clarke: Addison and Shakespeare, like Clarke, were once held in esteem in Scotland, but now, thanks to the influence of the literati, they are made to look so foolish and ridiculous even school-boys can dismiss them.

In the second place, we should note that Dreghorn's remarks about Addison are, of course, disingenuous. Hume may have spoken of Addison's essays as "agreeable *Triffling*"<sup>176</sup> in an often-cited private letter, but he, along with the rest of the literati, spoke of Addison in their published writings in glowing (though not uncritical) terms.<sup>177</sup> Famously, Hume even went so far as to predict that the works of Addison would outlive those of Locke.<sup>178</sup>

Despite Dreghorn's claim to the contrary, therefore, Scottish Enlightenment scholarship has long pointed to the literati's "cult of Addisonian politeness."<sup>179</sup> Addison's and Richard Steele's *The Guardian*, *The Tatler*, and, most importantly, *The Spectator*, were published in Scotland, where there was a preoccupation with "imitating the tone and manner of Addison and Steele."<sup>180</sup> Of course, "imitating" Addison and Steele had a dual signification: the literati not only aimed to imitate their style of writing, but its purpose. Addison's and Steele's Mr Spectator declared that his aim was to bring: "philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and in coffee-

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<sup>176</sup> David Hume, "To William Strahan, February 1772," Letter no.468, in J.Y.T. Greig (ed.), *The Letters of David Hume*, reissued (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), vol.2, 257 [Letters].

<sup>177</sup> See, for example: David Hume, 'Of Simplicity and Refinement in Writing' and 'Of the Standard of Taste' in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. E.F. Miller (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1987); Hutcheson, *Essay*, I.I; Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1760) in E.A and L.A. Bloom (eds), *Joseph Addison and Richard Steele: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1986); the appeals to Addison throughout Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, ed. P. Jones (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2005), 2 Vols; and compare Adam Smith's critical remarks in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 6th edn, V.i.7 in D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie (eds), *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, 6 Vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), Vo.I with Smith's praise of Addison in his unpublished university lectures: "Lecture 10," *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* in J.C. Bryce (ed), *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, 6 Vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), vol.4.

<sup>178</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* in L.A. Selby-Bigge, with P.H. Nidditch (eds), *op.cit.*, Section 1.4.

<sup>179</sup> Allan, *Virtue, Learning*, 6.

<sup>180</sup> David Daiches, *The Paradox of Scottish Culture: The Eighteenth-Century Experience* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 77 [Paradox of Scottish Culture].

houses.”<sup>181</sup> Introducing “ordinary people” to “polite” ideas bred “self-confidence:”<sup>182</sup> it gave people from all walks of life the sense of their own standing and respectability within modern society. At the same time, it encouraged all individuals to “cultivate moderation and restraint”<sup>183</sup> as a mark of their standing and respectability when dealing with each other. The literati, through their Select Society, writings, and positions within the Scottish universities and Kirk sought to advance Scottish manners and learning in the same way as Mr Spectator, where the aim was also a “polite” society, consisting of educated, decorous, and “public-spirited citizens.”<sup>184</sup> The hope for Addisonian politeness in both England and Scotland was that it “would actually help establish a new kind of society – peaceful, prosperous and pleasant.”<sup>185</sup>

Dreghorn, like modern scholarship, was aware of Addison’s popularity amongst the literati.<sup>186</sup> His disingenuousness about that popularity was an attempt to appropriate Addison from the literati, in a way that was alive to what David Daiches’ called “the paradox of Scottish culture” in the eighteenth-century:

[the literati] were in their way patriotic Scotsman...but they felt that the way for Scotsmen to demonstrate their national greatness was to avoid in their writing the language they naturally spoke and write a carefully composed English standard.<sup>187</sup>

For Daiches, the literati’s patriotism expressed itself in a desire to beat the English at their own game. The literati admitted that Englishmen had previously been preeminent in literature and

<sup>181</sup> *The Spectator*, no.10, Monday, March 12, in G.W. Greene (ed.), *The Works of Joseph Addison*, 6 Vols. (London: Routledge, 1887), vol.5, 42.

<sup>182</sup> Nicholas Phillipson, “Politics, Politeness and the Anglicisation of Early Eighteenth-Century Scottish Culture,” in R.A. Mason (ed.), *Scotland and England, 1286-1815* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1987), 233.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>184</sup> Peter Jones, “The Polite Academy and the Presbyterians, 1720-1770” in *New Perspectives*, 176.

<sup>185</sup> David Allan, *Scotland in the Eighteenth-Century: Union and Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 2002), 131

<sup>186</sup> Dreghorn writes: “Let the reader compare *Voltaire* and *Hume*, with *Shakespear* and *Addison*, and give preference to the former, if he can” “we contend, that he who likens this author to *Shakespear*, might as well (to use the words of a correct writer) compare a molehill to *Teneriffe* [sic]’ (*Apology*, 5; 7); an imitation of Hume’s essay “Of the Standard of Taste,” which was first published in *Four Dissertations*, the work that included the dedication to Home to which Dreghorn was objecting. Tellingly, Dreghorn is imitating a passage in which Hume praised Addison: “Whoever would assert an equality of genius and elegance betwixt *Ogilby* and *Milton*, or *Bunyan* and *Addison*, would be thought to defend no less an extravagance, than if he had maintained a molehill to be as high as *Teneriffe*...Though there may be found persons, who give the preference to the former authors; no one pays attention to such a taste; and we pronounce without scruple the sentiment of these pretended critics to be absurd and ridiculous” (*Four Dissertations* (London: 1757), 209-210).

<sup>187</sup> Daiches, *Paradox of Scottish Culture*, 22.



learning; however, they also described themselves as “revolutionary” figures who had broken with the past, and were creating a “new age” in literature and learning formed under their leadership from the self-declared “Athens of the North.”<sup>188</sup> As Hume put it:

Is it not strange that, at a time when we have lost our Princes, our Parliaments, our independent Government, even the Presence of our chief Nobility, are unhappy, in our Accent & Pronunciation, speak a very corrupt Dialect of the Tongue which we make use of; is it not strange, I say, that, in these Circumstances, we shou’d really be the People most distinguish’d for Literature in Europe?<sup>189</sup>

However, as Daiches, and other commentators,<sup>190</sup> have pointed out, Hume’s boast about Scottish preeminence is “paradoxical.”

First, if the literati’s achievement is the adoption of “English rights and manners”<sup>191</sup> above their “very corrupt Dialect,” in what sense is their achievement an “anglicisation” that undermines their own Scottish heritage? This question is made particularly pointed by the literati’s “demands” that to “become a member of the literary Establishment,” Robert Burns “should write a more conventional kind of poetry,” rather than in Scotch dialect.<sup>192</sup>

Second, if “the Athens of the North” rests on successful “anglicisation” it appears that Scots, like Hume in the above quotation, will always be concerned about their own “unhappy...Accent & Pronunciation:” the fear that they either cannot fully adopt the Addisonian language of politeness and learning, or that, even when they can, they will always be regarded as inferior to the English who already inhabit that language. Thus, it should be remembered that part of the reason why Hume supported *Douglas* as better than Shakespeare,

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<sup>188</sup> See footnote 190.

<sup>189</sup> Hume, “To Gilbert Elliot of Minto,” Letter no.135, in *Letters*, vol.1, 255.

<sup>190</sup> For both these “paradoxes,” and how they relate to the literati’s commitment to Addisonian politeness, fear of “Scotticisms,” and self-description as “radical” and “enlightened,” see, as well as the works cited immediately above and below: Kenneth Simpson, *The Protean Scot* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988); 2-9; 103; 180; Sher, *Church and University*, 108; 213-215; 255-261; William C. Lehman, *Henry Home, Lord Kames, and the Scottish Enlightenment* (Springer: Dordrecht, 1971), 48-57; Mossner, *Forgotten Hume*, 64-66 and *Life of Hume*, 370-406; Nicholas Phillipson, “Adam Smith as Civic Moralist” in I. Hont and M. Ignatieff (eds), *Wealth & Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 179-202.

<sup>191</sup> Allan, *Virtue, Learning*, 6.

<sup>192</sup> Daiches, *Paradox of Scottish Culture*, 10.

and why the literati worked so hard to have the play performed in Edinburgh, was that David Garrick had refused it for the London stage.<sup>193</sup> As Dreghorn mockingly put it, “Old *Shakspear* [sic], *Otway*, and the rest/Must fly the concert-hall:”

With DOUGLAS I to *London* went,  
And made no little racket;  
But booby *Garrick* and his crew  
Point-blank refus’d to act it.<sup>194</sup>

Dreghorn’s appropriation of Addison and defence of Shakespeare, like Witherspoon’s appeal to Clarke, were intended to play upon the above paradoxes and insecurities. If the literati’s claims to preeminence rested on their assimilation of, and improvement upon, Addisonian politeness, and what Adam Smith in 1756, with explicit reference to Clarke, called the “English genius,”<sup>195</sup> then their rejection of the “genius” of Shakespeare, Addison, and Clarke undermined their own claims to preeminence.

According to orthodox rhetoric, therefore, a regard for Shakespeare, Addison, and Clarke signalled the fact that Scotland was once, before the literati’s influence, appropriately invested in the enlightened world of polite literature. It valued the advances in ideas and learning made by such figures as Clarke and Addison, while remaining committed to that which was classic and timeless, as represented by Shakespeare (and, of course, Calvin). Now, Scotland is encouraged to think of itself as “enlightened” by its literati, who act “the beau and the scholar” and “boast” of their part in the “triumphs” “of this enlightened age,” which is “a revolution of knowledge and learning” over “the labours of our predecessors.”<sup>196</sup> However, the “revolution” has, in reality, only been effected by the literati’s powerful “aristocratical” and

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<sup>193</sup> See footnote 1.

<sup>194</sup> Lord Dreghorn, *The Stage or the Pulpit: A Sermon. Sung by the Reverend author of Douglas the first night he went to see his own play represented. To the tune of Gill Morice* (Edinburgh: c.1757), 3.

<sup>195</sup> See footnote 31.

<sup>196</sup> Witherspoon, *Arcana*, 69.

“dictatorial club,” whose “authority” makes the people of Scotland “afraid” to point out that their country’s new “knowledge and learning” is ill-informed and small-minded.<sup>197</sup>

For Witherspoon and Dreghorn, the literati have derided Clarke, Shakespeare, and Addison because they cannot understand them: they instead derive their ideas from “dictionaries, grammars, and spelling-books” designed for “every blockhead.”<sup>198</sup> The “modern,” and supposedly “enlightened,” ideas of the literati rest on “superficial knowledge” “acquire[d]..from Magazines, Reviews, and Dictionaries,” and “other helps to the slothful student.”<sup>199</sup> Indeed, the literati are so “slothful” and “blockhead[ed]” that their writings not only “borrow from modern printed poems,”<sup>200</sup> but from the old-fashioned authors they “deride:” the literati may well prefer “heathen” authors over the church “fathers” and “scripture,”<sup>201</sup> but they have taken their quotations of “antient [sic] heathen authors” second-hand, and already “translated,” from the Cambridge Platonist and ethical rationalist, Ralph Cudworth; and, if not from him, from “books, not above the size of an octavo.”<sup>202</sup>

For Witherspoon and Dreghorn, therefore, “the taste of the country is at an end,”<sup>203</sup> not because the literati emphasise “learning,” but because they lack learning: “Much study is a great enemy to politeness in men,”<sup>204</sup> so that: “*the taste of the country seems to be in a deplorable situation, being abandoned to a club of gentlemen, who are as unable as they are willing to direct it.*”<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Dreghorn, *Opera*, iv; *Apology*, 4.

<sup>198</sup> Dreghorn, *Apology*, 5.

<sup>199</sup> Witherspoon, *Serious Enquiry*, 69.

<sup>200</sup> Witherspoon, *Arcana*, 33.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 27; 40. See also: Haldane, *Players Scourge*, 1-8 and *Players Scourge II*, 1-15; A.B., *Found Wanting*, 6; 14-15; [anon], *Immortality of Stage-Plays*, 1-9.

<sup>202</sup> Witherspoon, *Arcana*, 41.

<sup>203</sup> Dreghorn, *Opera*, iv.

<sup>204</sup> Witherspoon, *Arcana*, 39.

<sup>205</sup> Dreghorn, *Opera*, iv. Similarly, in response to Adam Ferguson’s defence of Douglas (*The Morality of Stage-Plays Seriously Considered* (Edinburgh: 1757), Thomas Harper remarked: “he [Ferguson] seems more Master of Language, than of Logick, and to have studied more the Smoothness of his Stile, than the Truth of his Narrative, or the Force of his Arguments” (*Some Serious Remarks on a Late Pamphlet, entituled [sic], The*

Moreover, according to Witherspoon and Dreghorn, “*It is not only unnecessary for a Moderate man to have much learning, but he ought to be filled with a contempt of all kinds of learning.*”<sup>206</sup> Such “contempt” is manifested when they boast of themselves as “revolutionary” and preeminent in the “enlightened age”<sup>207</sup> within works “*by a set of men who owe their title of geniuses to the courtesy of Scotland alone.*”<sup>208</sup> The literati may well celebrate “Scots authors”<sup>209</sup> and “*our Scotch Shakespear*”<sup>210</sup> and reckon them superior to Addison, Clarke, and the real Shakespeare, but the former are new authors, who owe their present fame to the applause of their own country; meanwhile, the latter are classic authors, who owe their long-term and ongoing fame to the applause of the whole world. In this context, the literati’s denial that the literary merit of authors like Shakespeare “*May ne’er go out of fashion*”<sup>211</sup> is the parallel of their denial that Clarke’s objective moral truth is “settled for all ages:”<sup>212</sup> by “dictatorial[ly]” insulating Scottish society from objective standards, and longstanding traditions, in literature and morality the literati’s “cabal”<sup>213</sup> can engender a parochial and inward-looking society which is easier for them to control. So, much, then, for the “narrow-minded, bigotted, uncharitable”<sup>214</sup> orthodox: it is the literati who are “uncharitable” to their intellectual forebears, and who are “narrow-minded” and “bigotted” enough to dismiss thoughts and thinkers on the basis that they are not brand new, and come from beyond the Scottish border.

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*morality of stage-plays seriously considered. In a letter to a lady* (Edinburgh: 1757), 2). Likewise, the anonymous *Usefulness of the Theatre* (3-4) played upon the rhetoric of orthodox “stiffness” compared with Moderate superficiality: “May we not also flatter ourselves with the hopes, that our promising young clergy, freed at length from the trammels of Presbyterian stiffness, which have so long and so miserably cramped every sublimer [sic] genius of our church, will now set about the improvement of pulpit-eloquence, by transfusing the flowery-buskined rhetoric of the stage into the solemn harangues of the pulpit.”

<sup>206</sup> Witherspoon, *Arcana*, 38.

<sup>207</sup> Witherspoon, *Serious Enquiry*, 69.

<sup>208</sup> Dreghorn, *Opera*, iv.

<sup>209</sup> Witherspoon, *Arcana*, 42.

<sup>210</sup> [Anon], *Garland*, 1.

<sup>211</sup> Dreghorn, *Opera*, 20.

<sup>212</sup> Witherspoon, *Arcana*, 24.

<sup>213</sup> Dreghorn, *Opera*, iv; *Apology*, 4.

<sup>214</sup> See: Witherspoon, *Serious Enquiry*, 69; 36-37; *Arcana*, 18; 25.

Thus, Witherspoon's appeal to Clarke highlights how the orthodox self-designation conscientious fools was deliberately insincere, much like, in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, Uriah Heep's protestations that he is "ever so 'umble." It is also rhetorical inverted snobbery. For the orthodox, the literati are like the *nouveaux riche*.<sup>215</sup> they not only uncritically accept whatsoever happens to be fashionable but mistake their own parochial and garish tastes for that which is enlightened, and mock that which is truly classic and refined because they cannot understand it. The orthodox willingly accept that they are "conscientious fools" to such a "club of gentlemen." They cannot fathom why the literati exchange Clarke and Addison for Mr Genius, conscience for Mr Moral Sense, and Shakespeare for Mr Jacky and *Douglas*. However, it is by preferring such foolish and old-fashioned literature and learning that the orthodox are better judges of taste than the literati, even when it comes to the enlightened world of polite literature the literati have parochially claimed for themselves. On these terms, the orthodox are bound to be appear like "fools," but only because the entire world of modern learning is made to look foolish if Clarke, Shakespeare and Addison can be summarily dismissed.

### Conclusion

We have seen how Popular party supporters used the rhetoric of conscience during, and in the build up to, the *Douglas* affair to support their "melancholy view...of the state of religion

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<sup>215</sup> As Ian Clark points out, "the majority of the clergy of both [Moderate and Popular] parties was drawn from exactly the same strata of society, and...owed their livings to the same relatively small circle of landed proprietors, businessmen and government officers" ("Moderate Regime," 202). Like Kames, Dreghorn would become an ennobled Scottish advocate; he was also the son of the famous Scottish mathematician and Newtonian, Colin Maclaurin, FRS. Similarly, Witherspoon had been a student at the University of Edinburgh at the same time as Carlyle, Robertson, and Ferguson (Mailer, *American Revolution*, 92; Jeffrey R. Smitten, *The Life of William Robertson* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 100. It is unsurprising, therefore, that Witherspoon's and Dreghorn's rhetoric attempted to criticise their peers both for being both too "refined" and for not being refined enough.

among us at present...when God has been excluded from many moral systems, and the whole of virtue confined to the duties of social life.”<sup>216</sup>

On the one hand, the literati’s preference for moral sense over conscience revealed the fact that they were “modern infidels,” who sought the aristocratic power and worldly pleasures of fashionable gentlemen. As such, the preference for moral sense was both symbolic and symptomatic of a secularising, egoistic, and elitist attitude that underpinned the literati’s support for *Douglas*, the Patronage Act, and Hutchesonian and Humean sentimentalism.

On the other hand, the orthodox preference for conscience over moral sense revealed that they were “conscientious fools,” who prioritised the traditional duties and beliefs of ministers of the Scottish Kirk. As such, the preference for conscience was both symbolic and symptomatic of the orthodox commitment to Calvinism, moral objectivism, and the ordinary person’s right to freedom from aristocratic oppression.

In establishing the orthodox rhetoric of conscience, this article has drawn attention to, and explained, the orthodox appeal to Clarke as a feature of that rhetoric. In doing so, it resists the view that Witherspoon’s references to Clarke in his American “Lectures” are evidence of his increasingly enlightened, and less conservative, outlook: Witherspoon’s later appeal to Clarke, and support for liberty of conscience, were consistent with his orthodox rhetoric of conscience. As a result, this article supports recent attempts to resist the “enlightened Moderate literati” versus “Popular conservative” paradigm within Scottish Enlightenment studies. The orthodox rhetoric of conscience confirms the view that orthodox ethical rationalism and opposition to patronage makes the contrast between such categories as “enlightened” and “conservative” unstable in eighteenth-century Scotland. Indeed, this article suggests that the reason why contemporary scholarship has found such categories as “enlightened” and

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<sup>216</sup> Witherspoon, *Serious Enquiry*, 59.

“conservative” to be unstable is precisely because the orthodox used their rhetoric of conscience, including the appeal to Clarke, to subvert those categories at the time.