Middlesex University Research Repository:
an open access repository of
Middlesex University research

http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk

Politics, Theology, and Cambridge Platonism:
The Trinity and Ethical Community in the thought of
Ralph Cudworth

A thesis submitted to Middlesex University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Benjamin Huw Carter

School of Arts

Middlesex University

August 2004

Liberty is not a Deformity, but a Perfection.

Benjamin Whichcote, *Moral and Religious Aphorisms*, 686.

Abstract

This thesis is an examination of the influence of theological ideas on the development of liberal political philosophy in the seventeenth century. The basis of this account will be a detailed examination of the ethical and political ideas in the published and unpublished writings of the Cambridge Platonist, Ralph Cudworth. As the reputation of the Cambridge Platonists as other-worldly thinkers is well established in intellectual history, this thesis, in rejecting this common view, will examine how this image of the Cambridge Platonists came to prevail. I will argue that, when the Cambridge Platonists are viewed within their philosophical, theological and historical context, their thought contains a powerful critique of contemporary theological and political ideas. By a detailed analysis of Cudworth's theology, in particular his Trinitarianism, I will argue that Cudworth creates a sophisticated defence of political society based on the moral self-determination and political responsibility of the individual. Cudworth's defence of the political realm is defined by his belief in the democratic revelation made to all men, in the form of reason, through the active power of a Neoplatonically understood Trinity. Cudworth allows for a political society (what I term an *ethical community*), in which the individual must make the most of his God-given potential, and in which the eternal and immutable truths in the intellect of God, and not the will of the sovereign, underpin the legitimacy and efficacy of that society. Cudworth's thought, far from being the apolitical system it is often assumed to be, provided ethical and political arguments which were, I argue, very influential on the late-seventeenth century debates for toleration and comprehension, and in particular the role played

by the Latitudinarian divines in those debates. What we find in Cudworth's thought

is a defence of the self-determining power of the individual which is defined by, and

grows directly out of, a Trinitarian understanding of reality. This thesis will

therefore show the way in which liberal political principles can be identified as

growing positively out of the theological debates of the late-seventeenth century.

Acknowledgments

Contents

Abbreviations

FM   British Library Additional Manuscripts, 4978-4983, *Ralph Cudworth Freewill Manuscripts.*

EIM   Ralph Cudworth, *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Reality*, edited by Sarah Hutton (CUP, Cambridge, 1996).

Enneads   Plotinus, *The Enneads*, translated by A.H. Armstrong (Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1967-1988).

First Sermon   Ralph Cudworth, *A Sermon Preached before the House of Commons, March 31st 1647*, in *The Cambridge Platonists*, edited by C.A. Patrides (Edward Arnold, London, 1969).

Institutes   Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols, translated by Henry Beveridge (James Clark & Co., London, 1962).

Letters   Benjamin Whichcote and Anthony Tuckney, 'Eight Letters of Dr Anthony Tuckney and Benjamin Whichcote,' in *Moral and Religious Aphorisms*, edited by Samuel Salter (London, 1753).

Leviathan   Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, edited by C.B. MacPherson (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968).

Second Sermon   Ralph Cudworth, *A Sermon Preached to the Honourable Society of Lincolnes-Inne* (London, 1664).

TISU   Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe: The First Part; Wherein, All the Reason and Philosophy of Atheism is Confuted; and Its Impossibility Demonstrated* (London, 1678).

TFW   Ralph Cudworth, *A Treatise on Freewill*, in *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Reality*, edited by Sarah Hutton (CUP, Cambridge, 1996).

General Introduction

This thesis will seek to identify and explore the political arguments in the thought of

Ralph Cudworth. I am not the first person to identify political arguments in

Cudworth's writing,[1] however this thesis is the first full-length study to examine

how Cudworth's political ideas develop from within his Christian Neoplatonic

world view. For this reason I believe that this thesis is an important addition to

scholarship. Beyond the specific questions concerning the Cambridge Platonists this

thesis will also attempt to broaden our understanding of the nature and form of

political debate in the seventeenth century. That this political element within the

thought of the Cambridge Platonists has not been identified in great detail before is

not, I believe, because these ideas are particularly difficult to find. Rather, it is

because they are presented in a form that, to our modern eyes, is explicitly

theological. Modern scholarship has often been unwilling, or unable, to recognise

political arguments that develop out of such explicitly theological premises. Of

course, the relationship between theology and politics has been recognised before,

but this has traditionally been seen either as a negative relationship, i.e. modern

political ideas growing in inverse proportion to the power and influence of religion

within a society; or as an intellectual basis and legitimisation of a specific political

structure, e.g. the use of the established church to legitimise the form and 'apostolic'

---

[1] G.R. Cragg, *From Puritans to the Age of Reason: A study of changes in Religious thought within the Church of England, 1600-1700* (CUP, Cambridge, 1950), p.60; G.R. Cragg, ed. *The Cambridge Platonists*, (OUP, Oxford, 1968), especially 'On Political Sovereignty,' pp.347-365; Sarah Hutton, 'Liberty and Self-determination: Ethics Power and Action in Ralph Cudworth,' in *Del necessario al possibile. Determinismo e Liberta nel penserio Anglo-Olandese de XVII seculo*, ed. L. Simonutti (Angeli, 2001), pp.81-97; G.A.J. Rogers, 'The Other-worldly philosophers and the real world: The Cambridge Platonists, Theology and Politics,' in *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context: Politics, Metaphysics & Religion*, ed. G.A.J. Rogers, et al. (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1997), pp.3-15; and G.A.J. Rogers, 'More, Locke, and the Issue of Liberty,' in *Henry More (1614-1687) Tercentenary Studies*, ed. Sarah Hutton (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1991), pp.189-199.

right of a specific monarch. This thesis will therefore outline arguments in which political ideas develop directly out of traditional theological principles, in particular the doctrine of the Trinity.

As Cudworth, and the Cambridge Platonists in general, have never traditionally been associated with the political debates and upheavals of the seventeenth century, this thesis will seek to overcome many of the prevailing assumptions about them. This revision of the accepted reputation of the Cambridge Platonists is the subject of the first chapter of this thesis. In this I will argue that for a fuller understanding of Cudworth's thought we have to overcome two main obstacles at the outset. Firstly, one has to reject many assumptions of the other-worldly nature of the Cambridge Platonists. I will argue that this reading has relied on an interpretation of their 'mystical' Neoplatonism, which is in reality alien to their use of Neoplatonic thought. Secondly, I will argue that to appreciate the political nature of the thought of Cudworth one must take a broader view of the nature and form of political debate in the seventeenth century than the one currently accepted. In particular, I will argue that political arguments can be identified not simply in overtly political discussions, but also in more broadly theological discussions over how God acts within the world.

Cudworth's political arguments are based on two key premises. The first is Cudworth's use and defence of an *intellectualist*, against a *voluntarist* understanding of God. Chapters Two and Three explore not only the philosophical form of this debate, but also how these differing understandings of the working of the mind of God underpinned the theological arguments from which the Cambridge Platonists first developed. Nowhere is this influence more clearly seen than in Benjamin

Whichcote's correspondence with Anthony Tuckney, a discussion of which forms

the opening to Chapter Three. These letters show that the intellectualism of the

Cambridge Platonists was defined from the outset as a reaction to the voluntarism

implicit in the orthodox Calvinism espoused by Tuckney. This reaction is made

more interesting in that it occurs from within the boundaries of the Puritanism that

is traditionally seen to be synonymous with the orthodox Calvinism of the early- to

mid-seventeenth century. The Cambridge Platonists therefore create from the

outset a specific response to the theological and political upheavals of the time. This

response will then be explored through an examination of Cudworth's earliest

writings, in which we can recognise the beginnings of Cudworth's Trinitarianism

and theory of *ethical community*.

The second premise that underpins Cudworth's political ideas is his

doctrine of the Trinity. This is discussed at length in Chapter Four. Cudworth's

Trinitarianism, which is identifiable in his early writings, develops directly out of the

intellectualism that underpins his theology. This is most clearly identifiable in

Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, which I argue is essentially a

Christian apology for the Trinity. Central to this Trinitarianism is a belief in the

active and perceptive power of the divine as reason which man is able to appreciate

through the revelation of Christ as the second person of the Trinity. Cudworth

argues that knowledge of this active power implicit in the divine is available to all

men through the exercise of their reason. The universal and democratic nature of

this revelation to man through reason is the principle that underpins all of

Cudworth's political thought.

Once the Trinitarianism implicit in all Cudworth's philosophy is established, it is then possible to understand the form and implications of Cudworth's ethical and political thought. As I argue at the end of Chapter Four, Cudworth's Trinitarianism allows us to understand Cudworth's continual attacks on Atheism, and the thought of Thomas Hobbes in particular, as a perverted understanding of the created, and therefore political world. It also allows Cudworth, as I argue in Chapter Five, to undermine the determinism that is implicit in the voluntarism of Calvinism and Hobbism. These arguments, which are found in Cudworth's unpublished freewill manuscripts, use his intellectualism to refute what he sees as the illogical causal assumptions that underpin the determinism of Calvinism in particular. In place of this determinism, Cudworth presents us with a defence of freewill that places man's freewill within an infinite web of possible future events. This allows Cudworth to present a broad understanding of the providential power of God, while at the same time allowing man the freedom and choice to act freely within the world.

The final two chapters of this thesis are an examination of how this intellectualist and Trinitarian structure was used by Cudworth to create explicitly political arguments, and then how these arguments influenced later thinkers, in particular the Latitudinarians. In Chapter Six I argue that at the heart of Cudworth's political ideas lies the need for man to know and appreciate the absolute moral and ethical norms implicit in his intellectualism. Cudworth therefore unites the ethical implications of his intellectualism with his arguments for freewill, to create a belief in political society that is based on the common acceptance and understanding of absolute moral truths held within the mind of the divine. In suggesting this

structure, Cudworth assumes three things. Firstly, he assumes that each member of the community is equally able to gain access to, and through his reason understand, these absolute truths. Secondly, Cudworth argues that man is drawn to these truths by the knowledge that his eventual judgment and salvation will depend on how effectively he chooses good over evil in his lifetime. Thirdly, Cudworth assumes that for this to be an effective ethical and political structure, men must acknowledge their equality, through their shared rationality, with others within the political society. Cudworth therefore argues that man is, because of the Trinitarian principle that underpins all creation, implicitly drawn into an ethical community with other men.

The principles of political self-determination implicit in Cudworth's thought were, I believe, a powerful influence on the development of the arguments for liberal individualism that we can identify in the political debates of the late seventeenth century. Nowhere is this more evident than in the influence of Cudworth on the theological and political arguments of the Latitudinarians. In Chapter Seven I show how, by identifying Cudworth's influence on the thought of John Tillotson and Edward Fowler in particular, we can see the manner in which Cudworth's Trinitarianism influenced the Latitudinarians in the debates for toleration and comprehension that dominated the final decades of the seventeenth century. Neither Fowler nor Tillotson defend the Trinity as the inviolable mystery that legitimises the Established Church, as argued by high-churchmen and countered by their anti-Trinitarian republican critics. Instead, both men defend the Trinity on the terms outlined by Cudworth, as the principle that defines the humanity and moral responsibility of the individual. Fowler in particular uses this

philosophical assumption to then defend a version of political society where legitimacy is created by the collective assent of all its members, an argument which echoes Cudworth's uses of the same argument in his *Treatise on Eternal and Immutable Morality*.

We can find in Cudworth's thought, and that of those he directly influenced, a sophisticated defence of political society legitimised by the collective will and understanding of its members. This political society is based on the mutual recognition of the self-determining power implicit in all men. The theoretical basis of this theory is the Platonised Trinity that Cudworth advocates so forcefully as the *Intellectual System of the Universe*. By making this link, this thesis will not only show how political ideas have developed naturally out of theological premises, but also, I believe, the importance of Cudworth and certain forms of theological belief for the creation of liberal political philosophy.

Chapter I – De-Mythologising the Cambridge Platonists

I.1. Introduction

The explicit political statement made by Ralph Cudworth in his *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, that '*Religion*...is a necessary Vinculum of *Civil Society*,'[1] does not sit easily with the common conception of Cudworth and the Cambridge Platonists.[2] The Cambridge Platonists are traditionally viewed as being consciously detached from the 'bitter antagonisms of the Great Rebellion and the Restoration.'[3] They were, tradition would have it, apolitical in the most political of times, looking backwards philosophically to the ancient agora when the great leaps forward of the new science were being made, and, crucially, self-consciously theological in a less theological age. As Frederick Copleston puts it, 'The Cambridge Platonists...were not in sympathy with the prevailing philosophical and religious movements of their country and time.'[4] Even for their own champions they are viewed as something of an anomaly, Frederick Powicke claiming in 1929 that their work cannot be viewed as 'anything more than a rich quarry to which the occasional student has been indebted for apt quotations and curious references.'[5]

For a group so roundly and commonly dismissed, the Cambridge Platonists have shown remarkable staying power. They continue to attract academic interest

---

[1] *TISU*, p.697.

[2] The thought of Ralph Cudworth is the central theme of this thesis. This chapter, however, is concerned primarily with understanding the perception and interpretation of Cudworth and the Cambridge Platonists by previous commentators. As these thinkers have almost entirely conceived the Cambridge Platonists as a unified group, I believe it is acceptable to talk collectively of the Cambridge Platonists at this stage before discussing Cudworth's thought more specifically in later chapters.

[3] W.R.Inge, 'Introduction,' in Benjamin Whichcote, *Moral and Religious Aphorisms* (Elkin Mathews & Marrot, London, 1930), pp.iii-x, p.iv.

[4] Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 9 vols. (Burns and Oates, London, 1946-1975), V:63.

[5] Frederick J. Powicke, *The Cambridge Platonists: A Study* (J.M. Dent & Son, London, 1929), p.116.

and have been part of, if not central to, developments in the growing contextual understanding of the scientific and philosophical developments of the seventeenth century, a development I will discuss in more detail later. However, in the field of political theory the Cambridge Platonists remain beyond the pale. The common assumption of the Cambridge Platonists, as other-worldly thinkers unconcerned with the upheavals of their day, has stuck fast. Yet the quote from Cudworth above suggests that the political arena was not an area that the Cambridge Platonists either rejected or rose above. Is there then a hidden political dimension to the Cambridge Platonists that has not yet been fully uncovered? I believe there is. The contention of this thesis is that not only were the Cambridge Platonists involved with the political arguments of their day, but that they played an important role in the development of the liberal, tolerant, latitudinarian tradition that heavily influenced the development of political liberalism.

The problem when seeking to rediscover this political dimension is: how can we recover these political arguments from within a theological and philosophical world view so far removed from our own? The purpose of this chapter is to suggest how we might go about attempting such an endeavour. This will be attempted in two ways. The first section of this chapter will examine the ways in which the common view of the Cambridge Platonists as otherworldly and a philosophical irrelevance came about. This will involve, firstly, an examination of nineteenth century interpretations of their philosophical and theological positions. Secondly, I will examine the way in which traditional histories of philosophy have marginalised the Cambridge Platonists as a means to the end of a broader philosophical argument. The second part of this chapter will examine whether more contextually-

minded methodologies in both the history of science and the history of political thought can help in establishing an historically informed understanding of the political arguments of the Cambridge Platonists.

I will argue that in traditional histories of philosophy and in some modern contextual approaches to intellectual history the Cambridge Platonists have not been allowed to speak on their own terms. Instead these modern approaches by the methods they employ simply confirm the partial view of the Cambridge Platonists that developed through the nineteenth century. Consequently, I shall argue that these approaches have served to mythologise the Cambridge Platonists as 'other-worldly' thinkers. Therefore it is necessary, in a thesis which aims to interpret the political philosophy of the Cambridge Platonists, to de-mythologise our understanding of the Cambridge Platonists at the outset. This, I will argue, is possible if one brings to the study of the history of political thought some of the methodological advances made in recent years in the history of science. Only once this process has been carried out will it be possible to understand the Cambridge Platonists as actively involved in, and influential on, the political arguments of their day. It will then be possible to understand the influence the Cambridge Platonists had on the developments in the tolerant liberal politics that we first see appearing in the late-seventeenth century.

I.2. Creating the Myth

Interpretations of the Cambridge Platonists have inevitably concentrated on two

related factors: the Platonic tradition and their theology. What will be argued in this

section is that chiefly nineteenth century interpretations of the nature of the

Neoplatonism and theology attributed to the Cambridge Platonists rely on versions

of these categories that the Cambridge Platonists would not have recognised. These

interpretations projected back onto the Cambridge Platonists the prejudices of their

own day. This has allowed commentators to mythologise the Cambridge Platonists

as mystical, ivory-towered and other-worldly thinkers divorced from contemporary

conflicts and troubles.

In this section I will examine how these prejudices came to be projected

onto the Cambridge Platonists. Firstly, I will examine the manner in which

nineteenth century interpretations of Platonic philosophy affected the interpretation

of the Cambridge Platonists. In particular, I will examine the distinction between

the pure Platonic tradition and the Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato which was

first identified in the late eighteenth century. By examining the interpretations of

Neoplatonic thought of Thomas Taylor and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, I will show

how the commonly held conception of Neoplatonism as implicitly mystical and

other-worldly came about. Then I will argue that because of this nineteenth century

distinction (between the Platonic and Neoplatonic tradition), thinkers within the

Neoplatonic tradition, in particular Plotinus, continue to be interpreted as more

mystical than philosophical. This mystical interpretation, I will argue, both

misinterprets the transcendent elements within Plotinus' thought and, as a

consequence, continues to lead to misinterpretations of the other thinkers within the Neoplatonic tradition, such as the Cambridge Platonists.

Secondly, I shall show the way in which nineteenth century interpretations of the Cambridge Platonists, in particular John Tulloch's *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in England in the Seventeenth Century*, moved the Cambridge Platonists into the relative orthodoxy of the tolerant, liberal Anglican tradition. Tulloch's interpretation distanced the Cambridge Platonists from the nineteenth century perception of the philosophical excesses of Neoplatonism. As a consequence, the Cambridge Platonists came to be interpreted as exclusively *theological* thinkers. Such an interpretation moved the Cambridge Platonists into direct opposition to the supposed *secular* nature of the mainstream of seventeenth century society. Both these philosophical and theological interpretations of the Cambridge Platonists rely on distinctions that would have been alien to the Cambridge Platonists. Just as the Cambridge Platonists would have rejected a philosophical distinction between the Platonic and Neoplatonic, so they would not have recognised a bifurcation of society into the sacred and the profane. Both these readings have therefore done much to mythologise the Cambridge Platonists and limit the historical understanding of their thought.

I.2.i. Neoplatonism

Many of the philosophical assumptions concerning the Neoplatonic tradition can be traced to the reactions and interpretations placed on such philosophy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The dominant interpretation of Platonic

thought for the previous 1,500 years was what we now recognise as the Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato. This reading of Plato stresses, in particular, the theological and transcendent elements and themes within Plato's thought. The most important figure in the Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato was Plotinus. It was through the overtly theological writings of Plotinus and his followers that the Neoplatonic tradition came into contact with, and intertwined with, Christianity, forming the synthesis of Christian-Platonism within which the Cambridge Platonists worked. This synthesis was solidified by suggestions by Christian Platonic philosophers, including the Cambridge Platonists, that one can find anticipations of Christian doctrine, in particular the doctrine of the Trinity, within Platonic philosophy. This synthesis began to unravel during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when certain thinkers began to distinguish Plato's thought from the interpretations placed upon it by later, Neoplatonic thinkers. This process involved the teasing apart of the Platonic, Neoplatonic and Christian influences which had gone to make up the Christian-Platonic orthodoxy of the previous 1,500 years.[6] Many of the problems we now face when dealing with Neoplatonic philosophers such as the Cambridge Platonists can be traced to this intellectual and philosophical project. Through the systematic destruction of the Christian-Platonic synthesis during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, philosophers who had worked within the Christian Platonic tradition, including the Cambridge Platonists, came to be discredited and their philosophic importance downplayed. The common conclusion created by this purification of the Platonic blood line was that the newly recognised Neoplatonic tradition was not true philosophy but essentially a form of mystical thought.

---

[6] By far the best and most accessible account of the Neoplatonic tradition is E.N. Tigerstedt's *The Decline and Fall of the Neoplatonic Interpretation of Plato* (Societas Scientiarum Fennica, Helsinki, 1974).

Consequently, it is only possible to understand the political and 'worldly' nature of the Cambridge Platonists if we first understand how the commonly accepted view of Neoplatonism as 'mystical' and un-philosophical came about.

It is widely thought that the emphasis on the authentic Plato, as opposed to the Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato, came with Schleiermacher's nineteenth century translations and introductions to Plato's dialogues.[7] However it is possible to see this interpretation stretching further back to attempts in eighteenth century Germany to remove Platonic influences from Christian thought. The most influential of these attempts was Brucker's *Critical History of Philosophy from the First beginnings of the World to our Times*. In this work Brucker sought to show the distance that there was between the reality of Platonic thought and the Neoplatonic perversion of Plato's philosophy. By doing this, Brucker aimed to show how great the distance was between the authentic Plato and the doctrines of the Christian Church.[8] This interpretation entailed criticism of philosophers who had sought to emphasise the relationship between the Christian and Platonic traditions, in particular the Florentine and Cambridge Platonists.[9] Brucker's analysis became the benchmark to which later interpretations of the Platonic tradition would return.

Despite the success of Brucker's analysis on the continent, both his and Schleiermacher's criticisms of the Neoplatonic tradition were little known in Britain

---

[7] Schleieremacher's critique of Neoplatonism did not appear in Britain until William Dobson's translation of Schleiermacher's edition in 1831, see Frank M.Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1981), pp.370-1.

[8] Tigerstedt, *Decline and Fall*, pp.58-61.

[9] A powerful influence on Brucker's history was his colleague Johann Mosheim who translated the *TISU* in its entirety into Latin as *Systema intellectuale huius universi* (Jena, 1733). In his footnotes to Cudworth's *System*, Mosheim constantly criticised Cudworth's uncritical use of all the Platonic tradition. For Mosheim's influence on Brucker see Sarah Hutton, 'Classicism and Baroque – A Note on Mosheim's footnotes to Cudworth's *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*,' in *Johann Lorenz Mosheim: Theolgie in spannhugsfeld von Philosophie, Philologie und Geschicte 1693-1755*, ed. Martin Muslow (Harrassowitz, Weisbaden, 1997), pp.211-27, p.225.

at the beginning of the nineteenth century.[10] This should not be a surprise, as British

thought had remained largely indifferent to the Platonic tradition throughout the

eighteenth century. A Platonic resurgence began in British thought with the rise of

Romantic thought at the beginning of the nineteenth century.[11] Firstly through the

Neoplatonism of Thomas Taylor, and secondly the Romantic Platonism of

Coleridge, a particular understanding of the Platonic tradition developed within

British thought, which, if not following Brucker's analysis, certainly mirrored it by

stressing the difference that existed between Neoplatonism and authentic

Platonism. The introduction of this distinction allowed the common prejudice

against the philosophical validity of Neoplatonic thought to develop.

It is not clear whether Thomas Taylor was aware of Brucker's attacks on

Neoplatonism. It is, however, interesting to compare both men's approaches to

Platonic philosophy. Taylor, like Brucker, wished to separate the Christian

influences and assumptions from Platonic thought. But Taylor's motive in doing

this was the direct opposite to Brucker's. Brucker was seeking to recreate the

'authenticity' of Christianity, whereas Taylor's desire was to recreate the

'authenticity' of a Neoplatonic Platonism, a tradition which, in Taylor's opinion, had

been perverted by Christianity. Taylor therefore criticises the corrupting Christian

influence of 'Pseudo-Platonists' such as the Cambridge Platonists.[12] Taylor, through

his translations of Plato, gives a distinctly Neoplatonic gloss to the dialogues. This

---

[10] Brucker was, however, cited in Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 7 vols (Methuen, London, 1905), II:336, n.12&13, first published in 1781. This reference is in relation to the links between Platonism and Christianity within the early Church; one of the other sources quoted is Cudworth. In making this comparison Gibbon does not, however, appear to adopt Brucker's explicit distinctions between Platonic and Neoplatonic thought.
[11] John H. Muirhead's *The Platonic Tradition in Anglo Saxon Philosophy: Studies in the History of Idealism in England and America* (George Allen & Unwin, London, 1931), only examines the relatively obscure figures John Norris and Arthur Collier from the eighteenth century.
[12] George Mills Harper, *The Neoplatonism of William Blake* (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1961), p.11.

pure Neoplatonism leads Taylor to re-emphasise the hidden nature of the

Neoplatonic doctrines he found in the dialogues. In doing this, Taylor emphasises

the deliberate obscurity of Plato. As George Harper has commented, 'One of

Taylor's often reiterated dogmas…was that the ancients, Plato in particular,

intentionally veiled their sublimest doctrines in obscurity.'[13] There is, therefore, in

this de-Christianised Neoplatonism a belief that the 'truth' of Plato's philosophy can

only be earned by the most deserving of disciples.

It was through criticisms of Taylor's self-consciously pagan Neoplatonism

that the distinction of Neoplatonism as weak thinking, which we first encountered

in Brucker, entered English thought. In an 1809 review of Taylor's translations in

The Edinburgh Review, James Mill used Brucker's argument to denounce

Neoplatonists as 'the *Charlatans* of Ancient philosophy.'[14] What Taylor's

Neoplatonism did was stigmatise the Neoplatonic reading of Plato as at best

mystical and at worst poor philosophy. Consequently, Neoplatonism was

increasingly perceived as a philosophical cul-de-sac. For example, J.S. Mill, following

his father's influence, was scathing in his criticism of Neoplatonism, describing it as

'an aftergrowth of late date and little intrinsic value…a hybrid product of Greek and

Oriental speculation, and its place in history is by the side of Gnosticism.'[15]

The common thread of nineteenth century thinking was that, although

Platonism had its place, the rigours of modern life and society were met more

adequately by Aristotelian philosophy. W.B.Yeats' poem *Among School Children*, from

nearly 100 years later, betrays the pervasiveness of this distinction:

---

[13] Ibid., p.48.
[14] Quoted in Tigerstedt, *Decline and Fall*, p.63; see also Turner, *Greek Heritage*, p.371.
[15] J.S. Mill, *Dissertations and Discussions: Political, Philosophical and Historical*, 4 vols (Longmans, Green, Reader & Dyer, London, 1854-1875), III:276.

Plato thought nature but a spume that plays

Upon a ghostly paradigm of things;

Solider Aristotle played the taws

Upon the bottom of a king of kings;[16]

This distinction was enforced by two other factors which have, by implication,

played against the Cambridge Platonists: firstly, Coleridge's assertion of a natural

distinction between the two schools of thought, that '[e]very man is born an

Aristotelian, or a Platonist;'[17] secondly, the manner in which this distinction was

perceived to exist in the Aristotelian and Platonic natures of Oxford and Cambridge

respectively. Arguably a large element of Cambridge University's Platonic reputation

was due to the Cambridge Platonists. Because of the nineteenth century

interpretation of Platonism discussed above, Cambridge came to be interpreted as

the home of esoteric arts. In contrast the Aristotelian University of Oxford became

synonymous with rigorous scientific learning. A comment by Gladstone is indicative

of this belief:

The merit of Plato's philosophy is in a quasi-spiritual and highly imaginative

element that runs through it; Aristotle deals in a most sharp, searching and

faithful analysis of the facts of human life and human nature. All the reasons

---

[16] W.B.Yeats, *Collected Poems of W.B.Yeats,* (MacMillan, London, 1933) p.244.
[17] Coleridge, 'Specimens of table talk,' 2 July, 1830, quoted in David Newsome, *Two Classes of Men, Platonism and English Romantic Thought,* (John Murray, London, 1974).

that have bound Aristotle so wonderfully to Oxford should, I think,

recommend him to you.[18]

Coleridge, a Cambridge educated Platonist himself, did much to restore

something of the rigorous, practical nature of Platonic thought. He achieved this by

removing from Platonism some of the excesses of Neoplatonism which, if not

caused by Taylor's Neoplatonism, was certainly exacerbated by it. Coleridge,

although influenced and supportive of the Cambridge Platonists, criticises them in

the same manner that Mosheim had a century before.[19] Coleridge questions the

Cambridge Platonists' uncritical use of the Platonic tradition, famously describing

them as not so much Platonists, but 'more truly Plotinists.' Coleridge argues that the

Cambridge Platonists, by confusing 'Plotinism with Platonism,' claimed to find

anticipations of Christianity in Greek Philosophy that are not there.[20]

The overtly mystical reading of Neoplatonism created by the nineteenth

century interpretations of the Platonic tradition continues today, nowhere more

clearly than in interpretations of the thought of Plotinus. Evidence for the seeming

mysticism of Plotinus' thought would not seem difficult to find. Plotinus' own

death-bed claim that he had in his life sought 'to bring the divine in man to the

divine in all,' would seem to contain in it the philosophical vagueness indicative of

much mystical thought.[21] Within Plotinus' thought this supposed mysticism is also

identifiable by his constant illusions to the corrupting power of the material world

---

[18] Ibid., p.74.
[19] For Coleridge's relationship to the Cambridge Platonists see Douglas Hedley, *Coleridge, Philosophy and Religion: Aids to Reflection and the Mirror of the Spirit* (CUP, Cambridge, 2000), in particular chapter one.
[20] S.T.Coleridge, *Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Roberta Florence Brinkly (Duke University Press, Durham N.C., 1955), p.366.
[21] A.H.Armstrong, 'Plotinus' in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek & Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A.H.Armstrong (CUP, Cambridge, 1967), pp.195-268, p.222.

and the free principles found in the immaterial.[22] His influence on Christian mystics such as Meister Eckhart, John of the Cross and Jacob Boehme, has led to interpretations of Plotinus' asceticism that increasingly separates his thought from the practical implications of ethics and politics.[23]

The metaphysical themes in the writings of Plotinus are undeniable. The problem is not the existence of such themes, but how one defines and understands these themes of transcendence in a coherent philosophical form, rather than in terms of a shapeless mysticism. The general problem is that the central assertion of Plotinus' thought, that the transcendent realm of intellect and ideas is more 'real' than the material world, can at first appear to be hostile to ethical questions and indifferent to the dictates of philosophical reasoning.[24] English language interpretations of philosophical systems that deal with notions of transcendence, such as the philosophy of Plotinus, have a tendency to subsume several of the conflicting implications of this transcendence under the catch-all term of 'mystical.' Although this interpretation of the mysticism of Plotinus' thought is not incorrect, the term mystical is, I believe, too broad. Consequently, like, and perhaps largely because of, the nineteenth century interpretations of Neoplatonism, mysticism within the thought of a certain thinker has become synonymous with a lack of philosophical rigour. This interpretation of the un-philosophical nature of mystical thought is a peculiarly Anglophone phenomenon. W.R. Inge has argued that this is the fault of terminology. Inge argues that English lacks the more subtle linguistic distinctions that might allow us to account for the different forms that mysticism

---

[22] *Enneads*, 3.1.8, 6.8.6.
[23] W.R.Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, 2 vols (Longman, Green and Co., London, 1918), II:142; Dominic J. O'Meara, *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993), p.106.
[24] John Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, (CUP, Cambridge, 1967), p.213.

can take within philosophy. By contrast, Inge argues that German, for instance, can

deal with mystical themes more easily because of its distinction between the higher

and lower forms of mysticism as 'Mystick' and 'Mysticimus.'[25] This linguistic

distinction, however, betrays a deeper cultural and philosophical divergence. In the

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the dominant trends in English philosophy

were empirical and utilitarian, and so were traditionally hostile to the transcendence

found in the Neoplatonic tradition. German philosophy at the same time proved

much more receptive to the transcendent aspects of much mediaeval mystical

thought, much of which owed a conscious debt to the thought of Plotinus.

Therefore it would be un-controversial, although perhaps a little simplistic, to argue

that there is an acceptance of the philosophical validity of ideas of the transcendent

in German Idealism that one would never find in the empirical British philosophy

of the same period.[26]

The task then is not to deny the transcendent themes in Plotinus but to

recognise the philosophical rigour with which he deploys the traditional mystical

forms of transcendence and participation. Such an approach is lost if Plotinus, and

as a consequence the Neoplatonic tradition, is simply glossed over as 'mysticism.'

The purpose of life, Plotinus argues, is to enter into a philosophical contemplation

that brings man into a state of full participation with the divine, and consequently

into the realm of moral perfection.[27] There is an undeniable hostility in much of

---

[25] Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, I:1. For a more detailed discussion on the language and philosophical form of Mysticism see Rist, *Plotinus*, p.214; R.C. Zaehner, *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane. An Inquiry into some Varieties of Praeternatural Experience* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1957).
[26] The obvious exceptions to this crude distinction are Bishop Berkeley and Coleridge. For the influence of mysticism on German idealist thought see Ernst Benz, *The Mystical Sources of German Romantic Philosophy*, trans Blair Reynolds and Eunice M. Paul (Pickwick Publications, Allinson Park, PA., 1983), and Robert Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (CUP, Cambridge, 1972).
[27] Armstrong, 'Plotinus,' p.227.

Plotinus' writings to the material world,[28] but it would be wrong to see this hostility as an ascetic rejection of, and indifference to the material. The material world plays a crucial role in Plotinus' thought. Firstly, it exists within the overarching intellect of the divine as part of one unified creation. The divine 'soul,' as Plotinus terms it, touches every part of creation, and so intimations of the divine can be found, if only in a diminished form, in all parts of creation. As Plotinus argues,

> It is not true that the earth is adorned with all plants and every sort of animal, and the power of soul has reached to the sea, but all the air and ether and the whole heaven is without a share of soul; but up there are all good souls, giving life to the stars and to the well-ordered everlasting circuit of the heaven, which in imitations of Intellect wisely circles round the same centre for ever; for it seeks nothing outside itself. Everything in me seeks after the Good, but each attains it in proportion to its own power.[29]

Through this contemplation of the material world, Plotinus argues that man is able to understand that the perfection of the divine should not be sought in the lesser forms of the created world, but in the purer forms of the intellectual realm. The introspection that is such a central feature of Plotinus' thought involves an engagement with the material world. Plotinus is not hostile to the material world in principle; rather, he is hostile to the corrupting influence of the material world on the ability of the soul of man to participate in the divine. Plotinus' idea of introspection and rejection of the material is therefore a critique of sense-perception

---

[28] See for instance, *Enneads*, 3.1.8.
[29] Ibid., 3.2.3.

in favour of the higher intellectual ideals of the mind.[30] For Plotinus, the moral

quest of man necessarily involves an introspection and turning away from the

material, but only *through* an engagement with the material world.

In this way, Plotinus' philosophical notion of introspection is far removed

from the poetic and hypnotic mysticism usually attributed to the excesses of the

Neoplatonic tradition.[31] Plotinus' principle of introspection, which has been

described as an 'ethics of escape,'[32] can easily be interpreted as a conscious rejection

of the ethical and political dilemmas of the material world. This, however, is not the

intention of Plotinus' theory. Introspection is used by Plotinus to move one away

from the lower, baser principle of the material world and closer to the purer, higher

principles that he believes are implicit in all creation. This principle of ethical

separation over ascetic indifference is a central principle for understanding the

ethical thought of Cudworth. Introspection, Plotinus argues, does not turn man

from the world, but rather makes him a fuller participant in that world. 'What then

is the nobly good man?' Plotinus asks. His answer is an affirmation of the ethical

virtues of introspection: '[he] is the man who acts by his better part…for intellect is

active in the good man.'[33]

There is obviously a great difference between the Plato we now know from

the dialogues and the interpretation of Plato that developed through the

Neoplatonic tradition. That being said, just because this distinction has been made,

it should not render the Neoplatonic tradition, which after all was until the

Renaissance the accepted interpretation of Platonic thought, philosophically

---

[30] Ibid., 3.4.2.
[31] Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, II:153.
[32] O'Meara, *Plotinus*, p.108.
[33] *Enneads*, 3.4.6.

21

redundant. As I have argued, if one is able to understand the principle of transcendence within Neoplatonism not in mystical but in philosophical terms, it is then possible to come to a deeper understanding of the ethical and political elements in Neoplatonic thought and the philosophy of the Cambridge Platonists in particular.

I.2.ii. The Theological Interpretation

From the late nineteenth century, with the publication of John Tulloch's monumental work of 1872, *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in England in the Seventeenth century*, through to Frederick Powicke's *The Cambridge Platonists – A Study* in 1929, the emphasis moved from viewing the Cambridge Platonists as philosophers to seeing them as a self-consciously 'theological' school of thought. In these works, the Cambridge Platonists are interpreted as being primarily concerned with matters of religious practice, belief and meaning. As I shall show, this reading moves the Cambridge Platonists away from the realities of the seventeenth century to what is perceived to be the higher pursuits of the theologian. As with the Neoplatonic reading, this does the Cambridge Platonists a disservice as it imposes on them an intellectual distinction that was alien to them. Just as the Cambridge Platonists would be unaware of the distinctions of Platonic and Neoplatonic as understood in the nineteenth century, so they would reject the separation of secular and theological that the theological readings of Tulloch and others assume.

In examining this theological interpretation of the Cambridge Platonists, I shall concentrate on Tulloch's work. Although others follow this line, in particular

Powicke and Rufus M. Jones, in *Spiritual Reformers of the 16th & 17th centuries*, they are all consciously indebted to Tulloch's work and analysis.[34] Tulloch's reading of the Cambridge Platonists is much more sympathetic and subtle than simply to deny any philosophical influence or form to their argument. He argues that the eclectic nature of their thought was largely due to the 'theological dogmatism and narrowness of their time.'[35] This method, Tulloch argues, was used by the Cambridge Platonists to create a unity between philosophy and religion that would create an 'indestructible basis of reason and higher humanity.'[36] In doing this the Cambridge Platonists were replying to and appreciating the developments of the new philosophy of their day.[37] However, their use of this new philosophy was to create a synthesis that was exclusively religious in its form: 'Without exception the Cambridge latitudinarian divines may be termed religious philosophers.'[38]

This would not seem to be a contentious fact when interpreting the Cambridge Platonists. However, if one examines the way in which Tulloch defines the nature of this religious thought, a view of the Cambridge Platonists emerges of men who were becoming separated from an increasingly secularised, political age. Tulloch blames little of this on the Cambridge Platonists, but more on the spirit of the age. As Tulloch argues, 'They enjoyed the vague repute of thinkers in a frivolous and ignorant age.'[39]

Again, this interpretation relies on Tulloch imposing his own agenda on the Cambridge Platonists. Tulloch's work was written against the backdrop of

---

[34] Rufus M. Jones, *The Spiritual Reformers of the 16th & 17th centuries* (London, MacMillan, 1928) p.305, Powicke, *The Cambridge Platonists*, pp.v, vii.
[35] John Tulloch, *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in England in the Seventeenth century*, 2 vols (William Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh, 1872), II:13.
[36] Ibid., II:11,13.
[37] Ibid., II:8, 24.
[38] Ibid., II:13, 200.
[39] Ibid., II:38.

Gladstone's threatened reforms of the established Church.[40] In this context,

Tulloch's work can be interpreted as a defence of the peculiarities of the established,

Anglican Church. Tulloch finds the Anglican virtues of moderation and toleration in

the rational liberal divines of the seventeenth century, in particular the Cambridge

Platonists. Tulloch, however, continually stresses that these liberal virtues can only

exist within the confines and structures of the Church. To remove this structure

would be to remove the form in which these liberal, tolerant virtues had been able

to grow and flourish.[41] The Cambridge Platonists are therefore criticised for failing

to defend the structures of the Church at one of its hours of greatest need, for the

'fatal practical timidity on the part of men who yet did so much to advance the

cause of liberty.'[42] Cudworth's thought in particular, which contains little in the way

of ecclesial theology, is criticised for not speaking up for 'liberal church interests' in

their time. The erastian agenda that Tulloch imposed on the Cambridge Platonists

has done as much as the eclectic Neoplatonism of the early nineteenth century to

perpetuate the image of the Cambridge Platonists as other-worldly thinkers divorced

from their own time.

As has been shown, both the Neoplatonic and theological interpretations of

the Cambridge Platonists rely on distinctions that would have been unknown to

them. Nevertheless these interpretations have acted to mythologise the Cambridge

Platonists as thinkers not only divorced from, but in some cases actively hostile to,

the political and social upheavals of their day. Consequently, it is common to see the

Cambridge Platonists accused of 'standing aside' from the controversies of the

---

[40] Richard Kroll, 'Introduction,' in *Philosophy, Science and Religion in England 1640-1700*, ed. Richard Kroll, Richard Ashcraft & Perez Zagorin (Cambridge, CUP, 1992), pp1-28, p.5.
[41] Ibid., pp.5-7.
[42] Tulloch, *Rational Theology*, II:214.

seventeenth century.[43] Any attempt to understand the influence and impact of the Cambridge Platonists on the ethical and political arguments of their day must first scrape through the veneer placed upon them by these later Neoplatonic and Theological interpretations. In fact the particular world-view of the Cambridge Platonists was adopted to counter the limits and other-worldliness they encountered around them. The Cambridge Platonists hold that both the logical philosophy of Aristotelian Scholasticism and the theology of strict Calvinism in their own ways reject and belittle the created world. The task of philosophy is, in the eyes of the Cambridge Platonists, to engage with the created world and to understand the nature and form of the divine. This 'participation' in the divine not only teaches men how to act towards God, but how to act towards other men as well. It is a theology that not only appreciates the created world but also one that sees participating in it as a vital central act. As Cudworth preached to the House of Commons in 1644, 'Inke and paper can never make us Christians, can never beget a new nature, a living principle within us: can never form Christ, or any true notions of spirituall things in our hearts.'[44] Crucially for the Cambridge Platonists, and Cudworth in particular, this participation is not simply an act of personal devotion, but an invocation to make the active Christ-like principle touch every facet of life. Consequently implicit within this principle of participation is an implicitly political dimension.

---

[43] Inge, 'Introduction,' p.iii.
[44] *First Sermon*, p.92.

I.2.iii. Histories of Philosophy

In the twentieth century there was a move back to understanding the Cambridge Platonists as part of the flow and development of European philosophy. The most influential of these studies were Arthur J. Lovejoy's short essay 'Kant and the English Platonists' and Ernst Cassirer's *The Platonic Renaissance in England*. Although arguing from different positions and to different conclusions, both of these interpretations share one common theme: how did the Cambridge Platonists help in the development and formation of the Enlightenment? Both examine the central theme of reason and rationality within the thought of the Cambridge Platonists. Accordingly both interpret the Cambridge Platonists as part of a philosophical movement that necessarily led to the Enlightenment rationality. The thought of the Cambridge Platonists becomes intrinsically wound up in a wider discussion of the development of European philosophy. The Cambridge Platonists in both these cases do not become philosophers in their own right but philosophers playing a part on 'one stage of this journey.'[45]

One of the first attempts to assess the philosophical influence of the Cambridge Platonists came with Arthur J. Lovejoy's contribution to William James' *Festschrift*, 'Kant and the English Platonists.'[46] The basic premise of this paper is that the Cambridge Platonists, and Ralph Cudworth in particular, in some way

---

[45] Ernst Cassirer, *The Platonic Renaissance in England*, trans James, P. Pettegrove (Thomas Nelson & Son, London, 1953), p.202.

[46] Coleridge, *Seventeenth century*, p.109; Arthur J. Lovejoy, 'Kant and the English Platonists,' in *Essays Philosophical and Psychological: In honour of William James by his colleagues at Columbia University*, (Longmans, Green & Co. New York, 1908), pp.263-302. Lovejoy employs the term 'English Platonists' instead of 'Cambridge Platonists' as he claims the ideas of early idealism found in seventeenth century English Platonism were not exclusive to those who had attended Cambridge University. However it is fair to say that the leading actors in Lovejoy's analysis were the Cambridge Platonists and Cudworth in particular. So for the sake of this analysis it would seem to be justified to see the two terms as synonymous.

anticipated the ethical thought of Kant. Although the similarities with Kant's

thought were noted by Coleridge, this theory was not fully expounded until this

point. Lovejoy claims that the inspiration for the arguments in his paper came from

a suggestion made by William James in his lectures on Pragmatism.[47] Lovejoy

expands this relationship by arguing that the Pragmatism of James and the thought

of the English Platonists all belong to a tradition of philosophy exemplified by

Kant's 'primacy of practical reason.'[48] Lovejoy's analysis works by the direct

comparison of the philosophical arguments of the English Platonists and Kant. The

first major claim made by Lovejoy is that Kant's idealist reaction to the empiricism

of Hume was 'entirely analogous' to Cudworth's reaction to the thought of

Hobbes.[49] The major result of this reaction for Lovejoy is that Cudworth, in the

TISU, foreshadows Kant's Copernican revolution by arguing that objects gain their

form because of the nature of the mind's mode of cognition of those objects, not by

the mind's cognition conforming to the nature of the object.[50]

This form of argument is consistent with the methodological theories we

find in Lovejoy's seminal work, *The Great Chain of Being*. Lovejoy argues that the

history of philosophy should be understood as the examination and understanding

of various 'unit ideas.' These 'unit ideas' represent the recurrence of various

attempts by different cultures at different times to deal with certain perennial

philosophical problems. As such, these 'unit ideas' are understood by Lovejoy as the

enunciation of principles by all the major European philosophers.[51] The obvious

example of this with regard to Lovejoy's analysis of the Cambridge Platonists is that

---

[47] Ibid., p.265.
[48] Ibid., p.266.
[49] Ibid., p.272; Stephen Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought': 1640-1740* (CUP, Cambridge, 1995), p.109.
[50] Lovejoy, 'Kant and the English Platonists' pp.271, 274.
[51] Arthur J. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Harper & Row, New York, 1960), pp.4-5, 14.

the reaction to Hobbes was analogous to Kant's reaction to Hume. The Cambridge

Platonists are therefore interpreted as taking and developing certain 'unit ideas' and

returning them to the great 'canon' of philosophical ideas. Such ideas could then be

taken on by later philosophers, and eventually Kant, and be developed into those

ideas that we recognise today. This approach to the history of philosophy remained

dominant throughout most of the twentieth century. According to this

interpretation, philosophers were understood not to be working in relation to their

surroundings and times, but were treated as part of a higher trans-historical debate

of the great 'unit ideas'. In Lovejoy's terms a philosopher is not judged on their own

terms, but on whether or not they successfully develop and pass on a particular

trans-historical philosophical principle to future generations. The assessment of

philosophical importance therefore becomes not one of historical judgment but

philosophical analysis.

This teleological understanding of the history of philosophy appears,

although in a much more refined manner, in Cassirer's *The Platonic Renaissance in

England*. Although Lovejoy's essay had appeared in 1908, Cassirer's book, along

with Muirhead's *Platonic tradition in Anglo-Saxon philosophy*, was the first lengthy study

since Tulloch's significantly to re-interpret the role and significance of the

Cambridge Platonists. The coincidence of both books appearing in the early 1930s

(1932 and 1931 respectively) meant that they had no influence on each other's

formation.[52] Although the arguments of the two works are very different in nature,

both authors again present the Cambridge Platonists as involved in a wider

historical project. I will concentrate on Cassirer's work, which is both the more

---

[52] Cassirer acknowledges Muirhead's work, but admits that he had no time to consult it before the publication of his own work, see Cassirer, *Platonic Renaissance*, p.5.

comprehensive of the works and still the most complete survey of the work of the Cambridge Platonists available.

At the opening of his work Cassirer is very clear in his criticism of the readings of the Cambridge Platonists to that point in time:

> Tulloch's theological orientation has been retained since his time…and consequently, not even the most recent English publications have superseded Tulloch's results either in content or in principle.[53]

Cassirer is therefore clear in his criticism of the limited perspective this theological reading has placed on the Cambridge Platonists. This being said, Cassirer does not ignore the centrality of theology to the broader philosophical output of the Cambridge Platonists. Cassirer places the Cambridge Platonists in the perennial debate over freewill and determinism. In a long chapter, broadly titled 'The significance of Cambridge Platonism in the general history of religion,' Cassirer argues that the central theological debate since the early Church has been over the extent of human agency and freewill in the face of divine providence. The arch-determinism of Augustine, in which man's post-lapsarian self could not be saved except by the direct intervention of divine grace, had swept away all opposing explanations.[54] Cassirer argues that it was not until the growth of Platonic thought in the Renaissance that a suitable alternative to Augustine's determinism was suggested. This was, Cassirer argues, through the Platonism of the Florentine Renaissance, which argued for the divine form of love as 'Eros,' discoverable by all

---

[53] Ibid., p.5.
[54] Ibid., p.95.

in the world in the form of beauty. There was, Cassirer continues, in this Florentine

world view not an irreversible schism between man and God, but participation with

the divine in the world through 'intellectual love.' This argument allowed man to

seek salvation and reconciliation with God through his free actions. Cassirer

believes that this argument was the first successful attack on Augustinian

determinism. [55] The Cambridge Platonists are therefore interpreted in this argument

as defenders of 'intellectual love' as a basis for human agency against the

determinism of high Calvinism. Instead of promoting the poverty of man in the face

of the divine, Cassirer argues that the Cambridge Platonists asserted 'the will of man

and the creation of the world…[as] revelations of one and the same principle of

creative love.' [56]

It is, Cassirer argues, because of their place within this theological tradition

of Platonic 'love' that Cambridge Platonists attempted to bridge the gap between

theology and philosophy.[57] Cassirer is clear in making this link between the

philosophical arguments of the Cambridge Platonists and their theological heritage.

He does, however, go on to argue that it is because of their use of Platonic

arguments that they became consciously separated from their surroundings. Not

only does Cassirer argue that the Cambridge Platonists separated themselves from

the prevalent 'spirit of Puritanism' but he also asserts that this led to a separation

from the philosophical corollary of the Puritan spirit, empiricism. Therefore

Cassirer argues that the relationship of the Cambridge Platonists to the issues of

their day was, because of their Platonism, entirely negative in form.[58]

---

[55] Ibid., pp.102-3, 106.
[56] Ibid., p.124.
[57] Ibid., p.124.
[58] Ibid., pp.4, 157, 159.

The manner in which Cassirer appears to play down the philosophical

significance of the Cambridge Platonists as a group in their own right can be

explained by the structure of the argument that Cassirer employs. The underlying

influence in Cassirer's work, as with other histories of philosophy that he wrote

during the 1930s, is to explain the 'philosophical spirit of the modern world.' In this

sense there is an implicit teleology in Cassirer's account of the history of

philosophy, seeking as he does to present what he terms a 'phenomenology of the

philosophical spirit.'[59] In Cassirer's case, this journey leads to an appreciation of the

Enlightenment tradition of freedom, which he sees beginning in Luther and finding

its zenith in Kant.[60] Cassirer is keen to stress that this was not an exclusively

German, but rather a comprehensively European tradition. Therefore it is important

for Cassirer's wider argument to highlight those places within the history of

philosophy where 'the liberal humanitarian ideals of individuals within society

possessing inalienable rights' had occurred, however obscure or seemingly

irrelevant.[61] In that sense the value of the Cambridge Platonists was not their

philosophy as such, but their part in the flow of philosophical ideas that helped to

create modern liberal enlightened values. Cassirer's wider project becomes easier to

understand when he is understood as a liberal Jewish intellectual, living and working

in the heightened tensions of 1930s Germany. In the face of the growing

intolerance and anti-Semitism of his day Cassirer's constant desire was to encourage

---

[59] Donald Philip Verene, 'Introduction,' in Ernst Cassirier, *Symbol, Myth and Culture: Essays and Lectures of Ernst Cassirier 1935-1945*, ed. Donald Philip Verene (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1979), pp.1-45, p.19.
[60] Cassirer, *Platonic Renaissance*, p.85.
[61] David R. Lipton, *Ernst Cassirer: The Dilemma of a Liberal Intellectual in Germany 1914-33* (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1978), p.159.

the German people to 'live up to the high standard of their philosophical

tradition.'[62]

For Cassirer, it is not of central importance to recognise the relationship

between the Cambridge Platonists and the philosophy of their own day, instead they

should be recognised as players in a historical game that was still being played out.

The historical role of the Cambridge Platonists for Cassirer can be summed up in a

few sentences from the conclusion to his work:

> The Cambridge School is merely one stage of this journey, and the thinkers
>
> of this school play only a modest role in this great intellectual process of
>
> development. But it is their undisputed achievement that they did not let the
>
> torch they bore go out; and that, in spite of all opposition of contemporary
>
> philosophy and all attacks of theological dogmatism, they preserved a
>
> nucleus of genuine ancient philosophical tradition, and passed it
>
> uncontaminated to the centuries to come.[63]

Philosophically it would seem that they should be celebrated for their tenacity, a

tenacity that allowed others, in this case Shaftsbury and the aesthetic ideals that

inspired the German Enlightenment, to fulfil the philosophical potential that the

Cambridge Platonists were unable to fulfil. Even for those influenced by the

Cambridge Platonists they remained a historical anomaly; for Cassirer, they were

members of a 'forgotten world,' and would remain only of 'scholarly interest' at

best.[64]

---

[62] Ibid., p.167.
[63] Cassirer, *Platonic Renaissance*, p.202.
[64] Ibid., p.200.

32

We can still detect something of the teleological method found in Lovejoy and Cassirer in some recent studies on the Cambridge Platonists. Stephen Darwall in his book *The British Moralists and the internal 'ought'* and Frederick Beiser in his *The Sovereignty of Reason* both give accounts of the Cambridge Platonists that paint them as useful but essentially marginal figures in the development of European philosophy. In doing this, both books follow views we have already encountered in Lovejoy and Cassirer respectively. Both essentially argue that the thought of the Cambridge Platonists served to create the conclusions of the Enlightenment.

Darwall's work, primarily concerned with ethical theory, adopts much of Lovejoy's analysis and approach. Cudworth is therefore described as discovering 'the path that led to Kant's view of morality as "laws of freedom."'[65] Darwall's argument paints Cudworth as a prophet for Kantian ethical thought, attributing to him the knowledge and acceptance of the Kantian distinctions between pure and practical reason. Cudworth is therefore credited by Darwall with the Kantian insight that 'ethics is possible only if pure reason can be practical.'[66] Accordingly, Darwall argues that Cudworth's thought contains within it 'the seeds of some of the most important and profound ideas in modern moral philosophy.'[67] Cudworth's role in Darwall's work is therefore to prepare the path for Kant. By projecting back Kantian ethical distinctions onto Cudworth's thought, Darwall would appear to be falling into the trap created by Lovejoy's belief in 'unit-ideas' and perennial questions. By viewing the Cambridge Platonists through a Kantian perspective, Darwall creates a false image of the Cambridge Platonists. They cease to be

---

[65] Darwall, *British Moralists*, p.325.
[66] Ibid., p.322, also p.17.
[67] Ibid., p.117.

historical figures in their own right and become interpreted as thinkers preparing the philosophical way for Kant.

Frederick Beiser's work follows more closely the argument we encountered in Cassirer, primarily linking the philosophical development of the Cambridge Platonists to the wider theological debates they were engaged in. In particular, Beiser argues that the centrality of reason within the philosophy of the Cambridge Platonists was used to counter the theological dogmatism of Calvinist nominalism and its secularised counter-part, the materialism of Thomas Hobbes. In both cases, Beiser argues that the Cambridge Platonists employ reason as 'the voice of conscience, the guide to salvation, the badge of Christian liberty, and the sign of grace.'[68] This, again, is not a controversial conclusion taken on its own. However, as with Cassirer, this conclusion is used and related to a wider desire to tell the story of the development of reason and rationality through the Enlightenment, a theme that runs through all of Beiser's work. In the case of the Cambridge Platonists, they are understood as preparing the way for the secularism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They are congratulated for introducing and developing a philosophical account of reason, but attacked for confusing that rationality with questions of faith. The Cambridge Platonists are therefore criticised for failing to possess the requisite secular rationality of their successors. This failure comes, Beiser concludes, because the Cambridge Platonists can never overcome the problem of revelation by reason alone.[69]

Beiser's history, like Cassirer's, can be read as a defence of the Enlightenment project. Besier's declared desire is to defend what he sees as the

---

[68] Frederick C. Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason: The defence of Rationality in the Early English Enlightenment* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996), p.140.
[69] Ibid., p.183.

philosophical virtues of the Enlightenment. His motivation is, however, not the real

political threat that Cassirer faced but, more specifically, what he views as the

academic, post-modern attack on the virtues of rationality.[70] The ideals of the

Enlightenment are not 'lazy dogmas,' Beiser argues, but 'hard won conclusions'

worth defending.[71] Beiser defends his project by making the methodological claim

that one must possess the historian's eye for detail and the philosopher's critical

obligation towards truth.

In all the accounts above the Cambridge Platonists have been used to a

lesser or greater extent as stepping stones on the way to a greater theory. When they

are dealt with individually, they are criticised for failing to have the insight or good

sense of philosophers of later generations. In making these criticisms, all the above

accounts have attributed the alleged philosophical weakness of the Cambridge

Platonists to their supposed mysticism and other-worldliness. These criticisms fail in

two ways. Firstly, they simply adopt uncritically many of the prejudices about

theology and Neoplatonism created by the nineteenth century readings of the

Cambridge Platonists. Secondly, they seek to criticise the thought of the Cambridge

Platonists in terms of the standards of today. Such accounts have inevitably

misinterpreted the philosophy of the Cambridge Platonists. The task of the

intellectual historian of the Cambridge Platonists is not to judge their ideas against

the criteria and values of contemporary philosophical thinking; instead the

intellectual historian must allow the ideas of the past, however eclectic their sources

and influence, to speak in their own terms.

---

[70] Ibid., p.ix.
[71] Ibid., p.ix.

I.3. Methods of interpretation – the role of context

How then can the historian of ideas approach the Cambridge Platonists in such a way as to allow them to speak on their own terms? The main means of approach to this task in intellectual history in recent years has been to approach the historical context within which a particular philosopher worked with much greater understanding and sympathy. The task becomes a desire less to understand the *worth* of a particular philosophy by our standards and more to understand its *task* on its own terms. To use Collingwood's useful short hand, one must analyse not only what a historical figure is saying, but what questions they are attempting to answer.[72]

The Cambridge Platonists have certainly benefited from this new trend in recent years. Several recent volumes of essays have sought to understand the Cambridge Platonists more clearly within their own context.[73] These contextually aware readings have brought about a broader understanding of the relationship between the Cambridge Platonists and their historical context, and also allowed us to appreciate more fully their influence on the development of scientific, ethical and religious thought in the seventeenth century. The question is, can this new contextual approach bring us to a closer understanding of the Cambridge Platonists as involved in the specific political controversies of their day?

In this section I shall approach this question in two ways. Firstly, I will examine the way in which recent developments in the history of science have helped transform our understanding of the Cambridge Platonists. Secondly, I will

---

[72] R.G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (OUP, Oxford, 1939), p.31.
[73] In particular see: *Philosophy, Science, and Religion*, ed. Richard Kroll, et al.; *Henry More (1614-1687) – Tercentenary Studies*, ed. Sarah Hutton (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1991); *The Cambridge Platonists*, ed. Rogers et al.

examine the contextual methodology employed by the historians of political

thought of the Cambridge school of historians, in particular J.G.A. Pocock and

Quentin Skinner. In this analysis I will argue that the Cambridge school of

historians' concentration on 'available languages' as the key to contextual

understanding can never give us the breadth of understanding needed to appreciate

a philosophical and political position that is so rooted in theological belief. Instead,

they present the student of intellectual history with a methodological structure that

presents a modern idea of the 'political.' This modern idea shows little appreciation

of the depth and breadth of religious belief that exists within the thought of the

Cambridge Platonists.

I.3.i. The History of Science

Theological influences have become more and more important in interpretations of

seventeenth century thought within the history of science. It is true to say that the

Whiggishness betrayed by traditions in the history of philosophy we have already

examined have always existed within the history of science.[74] With regard to

religious belief, the tendency has been to see it as implicitly antagonistic towards

scientific development. The historical story of science has therefore been

interpreted as the need for science to purify itself of the unscientific nature of

superstitious religious belief. The continued existence of this tendency can be seen

clearly in A. Rupert Hall's 1990 work on Henry More's relationship to the scientific

revolution. In this work Hall argues that there is some value to be gained from

examining those parts of the history of science that are not simply the 'positive

---

[74] John Henry, *The Scientific Revolution and the Origins of Modern Science* (Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2002).

achievements.'[75] More, therefore, is of interest not because of any particular

scientific excellence, but because he exemplified those things that 'good' positive

science reacted against. By treating More's theology as antagonistic towards true

science Hall is able to portray the Cambridge Platonists as bit-part players, an

analysis that shares much with the analyses adopted by teleological historians of

philosophy. Hall's conclusion, that 'More's blatant spiritualism and his credulity with

respects to ghosts and witches tainted his later metaphysical writings and put him

outside the scientific pale,' is characteristic.[76] Hall's approach therefore relies on an

assumption that 'good' scientific thinking is opposition to the 'mystical' conclusions

that necessarily come from a theological world view such as that advocated by

More.[77]

There has in recent years been a reaction against this Whiggish approach to

the history of science. John Henry has argued against seeing science as a thing in

opposition to, and naturally antagonistic to religion. Instead, he argues, we should

take a much more inclusive approach to the understanding of the way in which

religious belief influenced scientific enquiry. In this way the nature of a particular

thinker's religious belief is not seen as in conflict with that part of his work which

we can now recognise as 'scientific'. Rather, religious belief becomes an active

---

[75] A. Rupert Hall, *Henry More* (Cambridge, CUP, 1990), p.243; see also Hall's 'Henry More and the Scientific Revolution' in *Henry More*, ed. Hutton, pp.37-54.

[76] Hall, *Henry More*, p.262.

[77] Ibid. p.54. Something of this 'Whiggish' approach to the History of Science can be found in Brian Vickers' attacks on Frances Yates' work on the magical traditions of the Renaissance. Yates, most famously in her book *Giordono Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1964), argues that modern ideas of science grew in part out of Renaissance interests in the occult and magic. Vickers, particularly in his introduction to his edited collection *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance* (CUP, Cambridge, 1984), attacks Yates for confusing the occult and non-occult traditions. Vickers, like Hall in his criticisms of Henry More, attempts to argue that there are two discernible traditions in the history of science. The interest of the occult is therefore that it highlights the correct 'mentalities' of the non-occult tradition, which Vickers argues more accurately foreshadowed modern science, see pp.6-17 especially.

influence on the intellectual process that historians seek to understand.[78] In Henry's

approach there is not simply a broader acceptance of religious belief as an influence

– this can be found in 'Whiggish' historians of science such as Hall – rather, there is

in Henry's work an acceptance of the need to judge and reconstruct not only the

arguments but also the central terms of enquiry. This inclusive approach means that

the intellectual historian must reconstruct not only the scientific arguments of a

thinker, but also what the notion of 'science' meant to that thinker in the first place.

Therefore the history of science should not impose onto the past its own

understanding of what 'science' is and then only consider those thinkers that

conform to that form. The scientific revolution, Henry argues, is not a revolution in

employing a pre-existing form of a science, but a broad intellectual movement from

which our modern idea of science first appeared.[79] To examine scientific

exploration during this period involves with it an acceptance of how thinkers of that

time related their scientific enquiry to other intellectual interests, such as religious

belief.

A good example of this approach is Henry's paper on More's disagreement

with Robert Boyle.[80] In this controversy Boyle criticises More's use of some of his

scientific findings to justify the existence of Spirit, a claim that, as we shall see later,

was important to More's own political beliefs. Traditionally this disagreement has

been viewed as a strange anomaly between two friends. Henry, however, by arguing

from the theological uses being made of these findings by More and Boyle, argues

persuasively that this disagreement is not simply a scientific disagreement. Instead it

---

[78] John Henry, *Scientific Revolution*, p.86.
[79] Ibid., p.5.
[80] John Henry, 'Henry More versus Robert Boyle: The Spirit of Nature and the Nature of Providence,' in *Henry More*, ed. Hutton, pp.56-67.

highlights the fundamental differences between More's intellectualist and Boyle's voluntarist understandings of God. Henry, therefore, is able to show that this dispute was not simply a professional one as previously thought, but a broader intellectual debate in which science is used to describe and define God's ordering of creation.

I.3.ii. The History of Political Thought

This concentration on the value of contextual analysis in the understanding of philosophy within history is central to the approach of J.G.A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner. Pocock and Skinner are now recognised as founding and formulating the key methodological arguments of the Cambridge school of history. The central philosophical claim of this approach is that all words, all utterances, are implicitly actions. Therefore the role of the historian is to understand the nature of the languages which these utterances were acting in, through and against. In Pocock's case, this insight comes from the reflection on historical practice;[81] in the case of Skinner this methodology is presented more as a manifesto of intent. The central philosophical claim of Skinner's methodology is that philosophy is in essence and should be understood as 'linguistic performance.' Skinner, in particular, draws explicitly on J.L. Austin's speech-act theory to claim that someone in performing these words is also performing a political action. Using this linguistic framework, he argues that authorial intention can be understood by examining the relationship of a

---

[81] Iain Hampsher-Monk, 'The history of political thought and the political history of thought,' in *The History of Political Thought in National Context*, ed. Dario Castiglione and Iain Hampsher-Monk (CUP, Cambridge, 2001), pp.159-74, p.163. The best example of this is J.G.A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and Feudal Law: A study of English Historical thought in the Seventeenth Century*, (CUP, Cambridge, 1957).

philosophical text to the various languages available in a given context. The specific

task of the historian is then to understand how the 'abstracted' ideas of the thinker

related to and *play* against the linguistic context within which he is writing.[82]

Intention, therefore, is not a private internal thing, but exists within the

'conventional repertoire of meaning within which meaning could be framed.'[83] The

first and best example of this method is Pocock's *The Ancient Constitution and the*

Feudal Law. In this work, Pocock analyses the way in which legal and political

change came about in early modern England through the conflict of the languages

employed by different legal traditions.[84] By limiting the task of the historian to the

understanding of the linguistic relationship of ideas to the context, Pocock attempts

to avoid the 'constant tendency' in the history of ideas to come to philosophical

rather than historical conclusions.

Pocock and Skinner's linguistic and contextual methodology has proven

particularly effective in the realm of political thought. Their work has dramatically

broadened the horizons of the history of political thought. They have successfully

shown how political debates and arguments were articulated within linguistic and

historical contexts, not grand historical dialogues where major figures debated with

their eminent predecessors. In this way Pocock and Skinner have successfully

removed the discipline of political thought from the realm of the 'great ideas'

argued over by the 'great thinkers.' Instead, they have placed historical political

---

[82] J.G.A. Pocock, 'The History of Political Thought: A Methodological Enquiry,' in *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, Second Series, ed. Peter Laslett and W.G. Runcimann (Blackwell, Oxford, 1967), pp.183-202, p.187, also Hampsher-Monk, 'History of political thought' pp.161-3.
[83] Ibid., p.164. On the use of Austin by the Cambridge School of historians, see: Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,' in *History and Theory*, VII - No.1 (1969), pp.3-53, p.46, and John Dunn, 'The Identity of the History of Ideas,' in *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, Fourth Series, ed. Peter Laslett, W.G.Runcimann, Quentin Skinner, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1972), pp.158-73, p.167.
[84] Pocock, *Ancient Constitution*, p.15.

thought firmly in the context within which they were written. The practical

implication of this approach is that the remit of the historian of ideas is thrown

wider than the traditional canon of philosophical texts. Now the task is to examine a

much broader collection of contemporary texts to recreate successfully the linguistic

context of the day.[85]

Despite the obvious advances made by the Cambridge school of historians,

doubts must remain over whether this method can do justice to all kinds of

intellectual arguments from the past, particularly those that discuss and rely upon

religious beliefs to be coherent. Something of their approach can be gleaned from

Skinner's 'Reply to my critics.' In the first section of this extended essay Skinner

deals explicitly with what he terms 'rational and irrational beliefs.' The question he

wishes to answer is: how do we deal with beliefs that seem irrational to us? He

begins this analysis by arguing that in no way should the historian seek to make

claims about the ideas he is studying. Rather the question should be firstly, is the

belief system being encountered rational within context? Secondly (if it is not

rational within that context) why is that 'irrational belief' being claimed and for what

reason?[86] The key then is not to understand what the beliefs *are* but what they *do*

---

[85] Hampsher-Monk, 'History of political thought,' p.166. The classic example of how this new methodology brought about a complete change in the understanding of the historical nature of a thinker was Peter Laslett's introduction to his edition of Locke's *Two Treatises on Government*. In this he successfully argues that Locke's intention was not to write a treatise defending and promoting ideals of *Liberty* attacked by Thomas Hobbes, as the traditional 'great books' reading of the history would have it. Rather Locke's work was a specific justification for revolutionary actions against the possibility of absolutism threatened by the reign of the Catholic James II and justified by Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha*. Peter Laslett, 'Introduction' in John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (CUP, Cambridge, 1960) pp.67-79.
[86] Quentin Skinner, 'A Reply to my Critics,' in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his critics*, ed. James Tully (Polity, Cambridge, 1988), pp.231-88, p.242. The antipathy of the Cambridge school of historians to religious arguments in the history of philosophy has recently been noted by David Wootton in his review of Quentin Skinner's new collection *Vision of Politics*, 3 vols (CUP, Cambridge, 2002) in *The Time Literary Supplement*, March 14, 2003, p.8. The obvious exception to this antipathy is Pocock's work on Hobbes' religion, in particular his essay 'Time, History and Eschatology in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes,' in *Politics, language and time: essays on political thought and history* (London, Methuen, 1972), pp.148-201.

within the argument of the philosopher being studied. Skinner claims that 'the golden rule is that, however bizarre the beliefs we are studying may seem to be, we must try to make the agents who accepted them appear…to be as rational as possible.'[87] This being said, the strictures that exist within this method mean that Skinner's approach also requires a leap of historical imagination as to the level and profundity of such belief, which many applications of this method have lacked.

When dealing with seventeenth century thought, a period when, as Justin Champion has argued, '[i]ssues of theological belief and religious duty permeated almost every facet of…life,'[88] an understanding of religious issues and their implications is essential, but for all its claims towards context and intentionality, the methodology of the Cambridge school of historians remains an exclusively 'secular idiom.'[89] The secular nature of almost all their work has led to two results. Firstly, they have tended to study only those thinkers whose concerns have been most clearly political in this modern linguistic sense. The obvious example of this is the concentration of much of the literature of the Cambridge historians, and Skinner in particular, on Thomas Hobbes and those thinkers that have had the 'good taste of … allegiance to the way of the future.'[90] Secondly they have been unable, or unwilling, to engage with those thinkers whose implicitly theological systems have fallen outside the scope of their method. This is highlighted when we examine the extent to which the Cambridge Platonists have been studied by Cambridge school

[87] Skinner, 'Reply,' p.246.
[88] J.A.I. Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and its Enemies – 1660-1740* (CUP, Cambridge, 1992), p.6.
[89] Ibid., p.5.
[90] Dunn, *The political thought of John Locke: A Historical Account of the Argument of the Two Treatises of Government* (CUP, Cambridge, 1969), p.259. C.D. Tarleton has recently pointed to the implicitly modern reading of Hobbes created by Skinner in particular. 'The weakness of the Cambridge style of intellectual history has always been, of course, that the meaning it could allow us to give to a text within its historical setting utterly depended on how we first characterized the prominent and therefore determining features of that context.' C.D. Tarlton, 'The Despotical Doctrine of Hobbes, Part I: The Liberalization of *Leviathan*,' *History of Political Thought* XXII:4 (2001), pp.587-615, p.612.

historians, which is little if at all. For a methodology so consciously focused on context, this would appear to be strange for two reasons. Firstly, it is odd that Hobbes' first, most consistent and fiercest critics, the Cambridge Platonists, have not been given more attention. Secondly, for a group so consciously aware of the need to understand the use of language in philosophy, it seems strange that they have not studied the Cambridge Platonists as the first philosophers consistently to write philosophy in the English language. These examples indicate the limitations of the Cambridge approach. The Cambridge school of historian have, in many ways, revolutionised the study of intellectual history, but this method has only been applied in a limited way. Those limits have been defined by a modern understanding of the political, one which has more to do with the belief systems of the twentieth rather than the seventeenth century.

I.4. Conclusion

For all the advances made by the Cambridge school of historians, it seems clear that if one is to come to an understanding of the political nature of the Cambridge Platonists a broader understanding of what the political meant to them is required. In the words of Charles Taylor, we need to 'confront our language of explanation with the self-understanding of our subjects.'[91] There would, it seems to me, be much more to offer the intellectual historian in the recent approaches of some histories of science than is offered by the linguistic model suggested by Skinner and Pocock. In the methodology employed by John Henry, 'science' is interpreted as developing out of the broader concerns of natural theology and metaphysics.

---

[91] Charles Taylor, 'The hermeneutics of conflict,' in *Meaning and Context*, ed. Tully, pp.218-30, p.228.

44

Scientific understanding for the seventeenth century intellectuals became another way of appreciating the work of the divine in creation.[92] We can bring something of this approach to the understanding of the political in the thought of the Cambridge Platonists. We need to understand the political in the seventeenth century understanding of the practical workings of the divine in creation. Using this approach it is possible to understand the political statements made by the Cambridge Platonists in two ways. Firstly, we can decipher their explicit political statements as not simply utterances, but as arguments relating to every part of their philosophy. We can therefore understand Henry More's assertion 'they say nothing so true in Politicks, "No Bishop, no King;" as this in Metaphysicks, *No Spirit, no God,*'[93] in two ways. In the first instance, it can be viewed as an utterance that proclaims More's Royalist sympathies; it also shows the way that More, and the other Cambridge Platonists, view the political as implicitly related to their broader metaphysical concerns. Political distinctions, as part of creation, implicitly hold theological corollaries. The reverse of this argument leads us to the second mode of understanding. This is that what we see as the explicitly theological concerns of the Cambridge Platonists relate directly to the political arguments of the day. For instance, the Cambridge Platonists do not simply reject arguments of Thomas Hobbes for his heretical materialism alone. They also reject them for the political errors that his theological heresy entails. The theological arguments of the Cambridge Platonists are driven by a desire to protect and assert what they believe to be the correct way in which man participates with the divine in all parts of creation. Therefore they reject those politicians who used religion as a means to an

---

[92] Henry, *Scientific Revolition*, p.96.
[93] Henry More, *An Antidote against Atheism or, An Appeal to the Naturall Faculties of the Minde of Man, Whether there be not a God,* in *A Collection of Philosophical Writings* (London, 1662), p.142.

end (seemingly the only use for religion in political arguments if one follows the

Cambridge School of historians). As Benjamin Whichcote pithily complains,

'[a]mong *Politicians*, the Esteem of Religion is profitable: the Principles of it are

troublesome.'[94] Theological concerns necessarily lead to practical political

arguments. For Cudworth, it was not only theologically ridiculous for Hobbes and

others to create '*Religion* [as a] *Figment of Politicians*,' it was also politically untenable to

create a political system where the ultimate arbiter of all human actions, God, is not

'the very foundation of all *Civil Society*.'[95]

Using this method it is possible to come to a broader and fuller

understanding of the Cambridge Platonists as thinkers that were interested and

actively involved in the political controversies of their day. They may not have

created an explicit political manifesto in the forms of Hobbes or Locke; they did,

however, consistently defend a conception of man's freewill that carries with it both

an obligation to the divine and also ethical and political obligations towards their

fellow men. For this reason they form an important bridge between the theological

and the political, creating from their deeply held theological convictions political

arguments for toleration and liberalism, which I will argue were of central

importance to the political debates at the end of the seventeenth century, in

particular through the Cambridge Platonists relationship to, and influence on, the

Latitudinarians. It is only possible to unlock and recreate this political element

within the philosophy of the Cambridge Platonists if the profundity of the

theological arguments they employ are understood and respected. Within

intellectual history theological belief, more than any other factor, seems to be a

---

[94] Whichcote, *Aphorisms*, no.1081.
[95] *TISU*, p.697.

stumbling block in the recreation of the philosophies of the past. But some thinkers

in the past, whether we like it or not, believed in God. If, therefore, intellectual

history is going to recreate successfully these pasts, then only by respecting and

understanding the theological beliefs of thinkers such as the Cambridge Platonists

can this ambitious aim ever be achieved.

Chapter II – The Making of the Cambridge Platonists

II.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the theological, philosophical, historical
and political contexts that influenced the intellectual development of Cambridge
Platonism. This survey will be broken into two sections. The first will concentrate
on the theological and philosophical contexts from which the Cambridge Platonists
first developed. In particular I will examine the differing *voluntarist* and *intellectualist*
understandings of the divine that existed within seventeenth century theological
debate. This framework allows us to explain and understand the philosophical basis
of determinism and the theories of predestination that informed the theology of
Calvin and, more importantly, his followers. Of Calvin's followers I will concentrate
on the thinking of Theodore Beza in particular, as it was his influence that turned
the implicit voluntarism of Calvin's thought into the dogmatic *Calvinist* system that
profoundly influenced the theological make-up of early-seventeenth century
England. The thought of Beza is of particular importance for two reasons. Firstly,
Beza codified a system of theology that placed the predestined will of the divine at
its heart, and therefore made, what Cudworth terms, divine determinism the basic
theological assumption of orthodox Calvinist theology. Secondly, he did this by the
use of scholastic theology, to create what has come to be known as Protestant
Scholasticism. Included in this section will be a discussion of the thought of
Thomas Hobbes. This may seem an undue diversion at this point; however, the
Cambridge Platonists, as some of Hobbes' earliest and most vehement critics,

attacked Hobbes' thought for being the logical extreme of the voluntarism that they

first encountered in Calvinism. Some commentators have argued that the attacks on

Hobbes' voluntarism were a mask for their attacks on Calvinism. As we shall see

later, particularly in Chapter Five, this was not the case. It is, however, correct to see

the Cambridge Platonists as recognising in Hobbes the philosophical errors they

initially encountered in Calvinism writ large. These theological and philosophical

influences are of especial importance when trying to understand the political ideas

within the thought of Cudworth in particular. These contexts allow us to

understand the nature, but also the strength, of the theories of determinism against

which the Cambridge Platonists reacted when formulating their theories of freewill.

By contrasting the thought of the Cambridge Platonists with the strict ethical

legalism of voluntarism, we will be able to understand with more clarity the

assertion, implicit within the thought of the Cambridge Platonists, that Christian

faith was a necessarily creative, active principle. As John Smith argued in his *Selected*

Discourses:

> [t]o seek our divinity merely in books and writing, is to seeke the living
>
> among the dead: we do but in vain seek God many times in these, where his
>
> truth too often is not so much enshrined as entombed: no; *intra te quaere*
>
> *Deum*, seek for God within thine own soul;[1]

Following this more abstract theological survey, the second section of this

chapter will examine the ways in which these conflicting theological traditions were

employed within seventeenth century Cambridge. Firstly, this will be done through a

---

[1] John Smith, *Selected Discourses* (London, 1821), p.5.

survey of the theological and educational forms found in seventeenth century Cambridge. Secondly this section will examine the differing theological and political controversies that dominated Cambridge during this period, from the Arminian debates of the 1590s, through the Laudian reforms of the 1620s and 1630s to the influence of the Westminster Assembly and the Purge of the Earl of Manchester in 1644. In this survey I will clarify the differences that existed between the overlapping but individually recognisable concerns of Puritanism, Calvinism and anti-Laudianism on the one hand, and anti-Calvinism, Arminianism and Laudianism on the other. Through this survey I will be able to achieve two things. Firstly, I will show the way in which the theological and philosophical arguments outlined in the first section of the chapter were deployed within the historical and political context. Secondly, I will clarify the peculiar position that the Cambridge Platonists held within this context as Puritan adversaries of William Laud's reforms whilst at the same time maintaining an intellectual opposition to the Calvinism implicit within much contemporary Puritanism. The puritan anti-Calvinism that we find in the Cambridge Platonists is, I will argue, of central importance when, in the final chapters of this thesis, we come to understand the Cambridge Platonists relationship to, and influence on, the political debates of the later seventeenth century.

II.2. Theological and Philosophical Context

II.2.i. Voluntarism and Calvinism

The simplest way to describe the reaction of the Cambridge Platonists to orthodox

Calvinism is as an intellectualist response to the voluntarism implicit in Calvin's

thought. One should define these terms at the outset. This debate is best described

through reference to Plato's dialogue *The Euthyphro*. In this dialogue, Socrates asks

what the nature of holiness is: 'Is what is holy holy because the gods approve it, or

do they approve it because it is holy?' Socrates decides on the latter position over

the former, arguing that we always choose things because of their intrinsic worth,

rather than through some arbitrary choice.[2] Plato was, of course, not engaged in the

later debate over intellectualism and voluntarism, however his distinction helps one

define the difference between these two theological and philosophical positions.

Voluntarism follows the first definition, that worth (holiness in Plato's example), is

solely defined by the power and will of the divine. Intellectualism, by contrast,

stresses the constancy of the divine by the correspondence of the divine will at all

times to the eternal exemplars of truth and holiness.

At its heart Calvin's theology relies on a voluntarist understanding of the

divine. Understood on these terms, Calvin's thought merely continues the debates

over voluntarism and intellectualism that dominated mediaeval theology.[3] The most

important influence on the voluntarism of Calvin's theology comes from his use of

---

[2] Plato, *Euthyphro*, trans Lane Cooper, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1961), 9e-10e.
[3] Alister E. McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1987), pp.84-86.

the thought of William of Ockham.[4] Ockham's thought is driven by his desire to

stress at all times the omnipotence and overriding liberty of the God in all things.

Ockham sets about this task through a discussion of epistemology. Ockham rejects

the belief that objects can be understood by their correspondence to an individual

essence or form. To do this, Ockham argues, is to reduce God to a metaphor for

reason and denies that God could, if he so chooses, act outside the logical

parameters of the human intellect; in short, God makes the sky blue not because of

a pre-existing notion of 'blueness' but because he chose for the sky to be blue.

Consequently, for voluntarists such as Ockham, so powerful was the will of the

divine that it would be perfectly possible for God to make the sky green if he so

chose. Objects therefore cannot be understood by their correspondence to universal

truths or forms. The consequence of this is that God becomes known primarily

though the power and revelation of his acts, and not through the logical deduction

of his nature. Voluntarist theology, therefore, limits man's knowledge to those

things that could only be understood by their immediate appearance, and not in

comparison with intellectualist thought, through their correspondence to real

entities or forms. Consequently, any belief that objects could be understood by their

relationship to *a priori* principles is rejected by voluntarists because such an assertion

would deny that the world is entirely contingent on the will and liberty of the divine.

The ethical implications of these distinctions are very important. In

intellectualist theology it is possible for man to deduce moral and ethical worth by

their correspondence to pre-existing, and rationally discoverable, moral norms. This

---

[4] The best survey of the mediaeval influences on the development of Calvin's thought is McGrath, *Intellectual Origins*, see chapter three especially. For accounts of Calvin's intellectual development and thought see, Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1990); Michael Mullet, *Calvin* (Routledge, London, 1989); François Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of his Religious Thought* (Collins, London, 1963).

means that man, through his own actions, can earn merit from God for moral action. The classic version of this intellectualist ethics comes in Aquinas. In the *Summa Theologica* Aquinas argues, with the help of Aristotle, that there exists a pre-existent principle of justice to which men can aspire. Merit can therefore be judged, and consequently reward apportioned, by man's success in achieving justice and virtue. This relies on two assumptions: firstly, that man has freewill and consequently is able to act in a manner that conforms to the eternal divine principle of justice; and secondly, that the principles of justice remain constant within the intellect of the divine.[5]

Voluntarist theology rejects this intellectualist position because it diminishes the omnipotence of God's power and freedom. For his voluntarist critics, Aquinas' intellectualist ethics simply reduce the divine to the status of the judge in a supernatural virtue-contest. By contrast, the overriding desire of voluntarist theology is to stress the omnipotence and liberty of the divine. In the field of ethics, this can only be achieved if one de-couples the notion of divine merit from a knowable principle of justice. Consequently, merit cannot be defined by its correspondence to justice, like a voluntarist understanding of justice, rather it is entirely dependent on the will of God.[6] This ethical argument found a powerful theological ally in the anti-Pelagian writings of Augustine. The combination of anti-Pelagianism and voluntarism went to make up the *via moderna Augustiniana*, which became a powerful theoretical influence on Calvin's thought. Augustine argues that at 'the Fall,' man, who had originally been under the control of God, came under the control of the Devil. Since man's fall had been brought about by man's original

---

[5] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II.114.Art.1.
[6] McGrath, *Intellectual Origins*, p.84.

53

sinful act, man could only be redeemed through an equally sinful act being carried

out on God. The trial and death of Christ was that injustice, and it was only through

the extraordinary sacrifice of God on behalf of man that man's salvation is brought

about.[7] Therefore man's redemption is entirely reliant on the power, freedom and

extraordinary grace of the divine. Consequently man is completely incapable of

bringing about anything of his own salvation. For voluntarist theology, because all

action within the world must be governed and directed by the extraordinary power

of divine grace, the means of man's salvation is in the power and arbitrary gift of the

divine alone. However, if this is the case then logically all actions, even those that

are sinful and evil, must also find their source in the will of the divine. Because of

the stress on the will of the divine within voluntarist ethics, all things within the

world, including evil, can only be explained as part of the extraordinary will of the

divine. It is the supposed arbitrary nature of the divine suggested by voluntarism,

and highlighted by the issue of theodicy, that forms the main means of attack on

voluntarism by its intellectualist opponents such as Cambridge Platonists.

When we look at the thought of John Calvin, these voluntarist themes are

best understood through the epistemological discussion of man's knowledge of the

divine, which opens the first book of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Calvin does

recognise that man can, to a limited extent, have knowledge of the divine though his

own mind. When man through his reason comprehends the divine Calvin argues

that he can only contemplate his utter insignificance in comparison to the divine.

Man's reason therefore implicitly leads him to the 'terror and the fear of death.'[8]

Consequently, although there is a limited negative understanding of God by man,

---

[7] A.P. Marthinich, *The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics* (CUP, Cambridge, 1992), p.267.
[8] *Institutes*, I.i.1, I.i.3.

man's fallen nature will always bring him to pride and evil in the face of God. As

Calvin so graphically puts it:

> Let it stand, therefore, as an indubitable truth, which no engines can shake,
> that the mind of man is so entirely alienated from the righteousness of God
> that he cannot conceive, desire, or design anything but what is wicked,
> distorted, foul, impure, and iniquitous; that his heart is so thoroughly
> envenomed by sin, that it can breathe out nothing but corruption and
> rottedness; that if some men occasionally make show of goodness, their
> mind is ever interwoven with hypocrisy and deceit, their soul inwardly
> bound with the fetters of wickedness.[9]

God remains the sole and only source of righteousness. Calvin stresses the implicit

sinfulness of man by adopting Augustine's dictum that 'in Adam all died;' that the

guilt of 'the Fall,' the rejection of the righteousness of God, is carried hereditarily

and federally by all men. The fact that time passes does not diminish the fact that

that the original sin of Adam is something that all are liable for and live with the

consequences of.[10] In this way Calvin mirrors the voluntarist ethics of the *via*

moderna Augustiniana by removing from man any possibility of earning merit from

God through freely willed human action. The source of merit is in the divine alone.

The clearest example of this in Calvin's theology is in his interpretation of the merit

gained by Christ's sacrifice. Calvin argues that man can in no way gain any merit

from God because there is nothing that man possesses that God could possibly be

---

[9] Ibid., II.v.19.
[10] Ibid., II.i.

55

indebted to. Instead, in the example of Christ we have the clearest example of the predestined and unmetered nature of God's grace. The source of redemption through Christ is not through aspirations towards the actions of Christ, but by the extraordinary power of God's grace alone:

> The free favour of God is as fitly opposed to our works as is the obedience
>
> of Christ, both in their order: for Christ could not merit anything save by
>
> the good pleasure of God...the merit of Christ depends entirely on the
>
> grace of God.[11]

Within the context of this study, two important consequences come from Calvin's voluntarist system. First is the emphasis Calvin places on scripture. As we have already seen, Calvin following a voluntarist line refuses to believe that there is anything in the mind of man that can comprehend anything but the awesome presence of God; anything more than that becomes perverted by the fallen nature of the human mind. Knowledge of God cannot come by the application of the human mind to the form of God's creation in the world. Such is the nature of the human mind that this understanding would be fatally limited and inevitably perverted:

> For no sooner do we, from a survey of the world, obtain some slight
>
> knowledge of Deity, than we pass by the true God, and set up in his stead
>
> the dream and phantom of our own brain, drawing away the praise of

---

[11] Ibid., II.xvii.1.

justice, wisdom, and goodness from the fountain-head, and transferring out to some other quarter.[12]

For Calvin, man can only come to knowledge of the divine when God has chosen to make himself comprehensible to the minds of men. The chief means of this is through the words of scripture. In scripture God reduces himself and 'accommodates' to a form that is comprehensible to the human mind. Revelation therefore comes in a form understandable and digestible by the human mind. An example of this, Calvin argues, is Christ's use of parables, reducing God's message to the medium of human metaphors. Revelation is, for Calvin, in the words of Alister McGrath, the ultimate 'act of divine condescension.'[13] The words of scripture are then beyond human interpretation or criticism because they have been preserved in their present form through the power of divine providence rather than human care.

The second consequence of Calvin's voluntarism is the selective and unknown nature of God's grace. Calvin's theory of predestination, which again owes much to Augustine, was to become the most controversial aspect of Calvin's theology. Calvin argues that scripture has taught us that God's covenant was not preached equally to all men. The consequence of this is that salvation only comes to those whom God has elected to save. Therefore whether or not man will be saved or damned is already known to God's mind. There is nothing man can actively do to change the decision of God, consequently the fate of man is, for Calvin, preordained by the will of God.[14] In Calvin's theology, predestination is simply the

---

[12] Ibid., I.v.5.
[13] McGrath, *Life*, pp.130-2.
[14] *Institutes*, III.xxi.

57

logical consequence of his voluntarist doctrine of God. However, as we shall go on

to see, the doctrine of predestination became the central building block of the

Calvinist orthodoxy of thinkers that succeeded Calvin's thought after his death.

II.2.ii. Protestant Scholasticism and Arminianism

The nature of grace and predestination within Calvin's thought became the most

contentious issue when Calvin's thought came to be developed into a unified system

by his followers after his death. Chief in this development was Theodore Beza

whose thought had a more profound effect than Calvin's on the development of the

English Calvinism that the Cambridge Platonists were ultimately going to react

against. Thomas Jackson, a precursor of the Cambridge Platonists, commented that

Calvin's thought and that of his followers had been put 'into a worse and more

dangerous sense than they themselves meant them in, or their followers in the

Churches wherein they lived did interpret them.'[15] Although Jackson sees this

perversion to have affected the thought of both Calvin and Beza, it is possible to

recognize within Beza's thought a fundamental shift in the theological emphasis of

orthodox Calvinism from that espoused by Calvin in the *Institutes*. In particular,

Beza introduces into Calvinist thought the strict logical form of Scholasticism. It is

the combination of Scholastic logic with theological voluntarism that underpins the

strict nature of the Calvinism that the Cambridge Platonists encountered in

Cambridge in the seventeenth century.

The use of scholastic thought within the Protestant tradition would seem,

on first examination, to be strange. Both Luther and Calvin are highly critical of the

---

[15] Thomas Jackson, *The Works of Thomas Jackson, D.D.* 12 vols (OUP, Oxford, 1844), IX:24.

manner in which scholastic thought had perverted and corrupted Christianity within Roman Catholicism.[16] However what we encounter in Beza's thought is the conversion of the analytical and inductive reasoning of Calvin's Biblical theology to the synthetic and deductive theology advocated by Beza. In Calvin's thought, the starting point of theology is always the religious experience of man. Beza turns the basic premise of Calvinism on its head by making the starting point of Calvinist thought the doctrine of God. Beza's doctrine of God still maintains the extreme voluntarism that one finds in Calvin. However, where in Calvin this apophaticism develops from man's acceptance, through experience, of his fallibility and fallen nature in the face of the magnificence of the divine, within Beza's thought the voluntarist understanding is taken to be an *a priori* assumption.[17] In this way one can detect a clear movement from the Christocentric theology Calvin to the stricter Theocentric thought of Beza.[18] Beza places his doctrine of God at the heart of his theological system. This change in emphasis is also marked by a change in theological method. Beza, in contrast to Calvin, bases his *a priori* assertion of the nature and form of the divine on the dictates of scholastic logic, rather than on Calvin's use of Biblical proof.[19] As a consequence, the Theocentric system developed by Beza has come to be known as Protestant Scholasticism. Brian Armstrong has identified four major tendencies within Protestant Scholasticism. The first of these is recognition of religious truth through the deductive, syllogistic reasoning. Second, because God is the source of this deductive reasoning, such

---

[16] John Patrick Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism in Vermigli's doctrine of Man and Grace*, (Brill, Leiden, 1976), p.6.
[17] Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyrant Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth century France* (University of Wisconisn Press, Madison, 1969), p.136; John S. Bray, *Theodore Beza's Doctrine of Predestination* (B. De Graaf, Nieuwkoop, 1975), p.119.
[18] McGrath, *Intellectual Origins*, p.192.
[19] Bray, *Beza's Doctrine of Predestination*, pp.121-2; Peter White, *Predestination, policy and polemic: Conflict and consensus in the English Church from the Reformation to the Civil War* (CUP, Cambridge, 1992), p.25.

reasoning carries with it the power and validity of revelation. Thirdly, as scripture is the unified account of divine truth, man can gain access to the truth of religion and measure orthodoxy by the use of syllogistic reasoning within the scriptures. Fourthly, Protestant Scholasticism relies upon a powerful abstract and metaphysical understanding of the doctrine of God, especially over the formation of the will of God.[20]

This final point is crucial in understanding the development of both the theological and ethical implications of Protestant Scholasticism, in particular its understanding of the doctrine of predestination. Beza's starting point is the doctrine of God, not, as in Calvin, the experience of man. Therefore within Beza's system all theological explanations have to begin with the doctrine of God, and implicitly the manifestation of the will of God, the doctrine of predestination. Predestination is therefore promoted by Beza to the central means by which God's nature was manifested to men. Predestination is no longer a logical consequence of the divine grace, as in Calvin, but central to the doctrine of God. By making predestination central to his doctrine of God, Beza mirrors the theological structure of Aquinas rather than Calvin.[21] In Beza's theocentric theological system, predestination becomes the logical starting point of all theological discussion. The ethical consequence of this is that the judgment of man through the predestined will of God is ordered more by the dictates of scholastic reasoning than by Biblical evidence. The clearest example of this is the clear distinction made by Beza, and other Protestant Scholastics, between the supra-lapsarian and infra-lapsarian nature of salvation, whether salvation is preordained before or after 'the Fall' of Adam.

---

[20] Armstrong, *Amyrant Heresy*, p.32.
[21] Ibid., pp.40-1. Compare *Institutes*, III.21, with Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1a.19.

Starting from the assumption that Christ died to save only the elect, Beza argues that logically it is contradictory to his doctrine of God to say that God would make a decision on the membership of the elect which was contingent on the temporal act of 'the Fall.' For Beza it is a matter of logic, not Biblical proof, that God elected the saved from eternity rather than making this decision as a consequence of 'the Fall.'[22] Beza's argument, in this crucial area of Calvinist doctrine, is asserted not because of Biblical exegesis, but because it mirrors more accurately the logic of the scholasticism that underpins all his theology.

A second, ethical, implication of Protestant Scholasticism was the development of what R.T.Kendall has termed 'experimental predestination.' This theory argues that, because the elect are known from eternity, the use of the correct form of deductive, syllogistic, reasoning can confirm or deny man's membership of the elect. Kendall argues that Beza's thought seeks to use the moral law as a means of giving man knowledge that he is one of God's elect. Beza argues that if man's election has been preordained, then even in his fallen state the saved individual, through his ability to act in a moral and pious way, can gain knowledge of his membership of the elect. This practical knowledge of membership of the saved is based on a use of 2 Pt.1:10: 'therefore, brethren, be the more zealous to confirm your call and election, for if you do this you will never fail.' This form of reasoning relies on a syllogistic proof to confirm man's membership of the elect. This so-called practical syllogism argues that sanctification can be verified using the following reasoning: everyone who believes is a child of God; I believe, therefore I am a child of God and as a consequence a member of the elect.[23] What we find,

---

[22] Armstrong, *Amyraut Heresy*, pp.137-8.
[23] Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism* (OUP, Oxford, 1979), pp.8, 71.

therefore, in the ethical arguments of the Protestant Scholastics is a reversal of the roles of justification and sanctification from what we find in Calvin's writings. Where Calvin argues that man cannot truly repent until he is assured of God's grace, in Beza's thought that assurance can be delayed until knowledge of the effects are known and so the actions of this life can have an effect on man's knowledge that he has a true saving faith.[24]

The main opposition to the Protestant Scholasticism of orthodox Calvinism came from the thought of one of Beza's pupils, Jacobus Arminius. Arminius undermined the central tenet of Protestant scholasticism by asserting that it is not possible to argue that Christ died solely for the elect. In doing this he undermines the implicit voluntarism of Beza's thought.[25] Arminius does not reject the doctrine of predestination, in fact his thought carries with it a very strong doctrine of predestination. However, in contrast to Beza, Arminius makes predestination subordinate to creation and 'the Fall.'[26] Consequently, Arminius argues that Christ died for all, but God saves only those who have the moral fortitude to believe. Christ therefore acts as mediator not for the preordained with no regard for their action, but for the elect because they chose to 'repent and believe.' Although Arminius' thought is consistent with the belief that salvation is only open to those who have been preordained to be saved, it also implies that the power of grace can be resisted or accepted by volition. Human action, for Arminius, becomes integral to the process of salvation.[27] Arminius' thought rejects the purity of Calvinist justification by faith alone in favour of a two-fold justification of grace and human

---

[24] Ibid., p.35.
[25] Ibid., p.149.
[26] White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic*, p.31.
[27] Kendall, *Calvin*, p.142.

action. The difference between the thought of Arminius and the orthodox

Calvinism of Beza is that, whereas orthodox Calvinists argue that believers

persevere in moral piety because they are elect, Arminius argues that God elects

only those whom he foresees will remain in the life of moral piety.[28] To the modern

reader, these differences may only seem to be based on subtle semantic differences.

However within Calvinist theology of the early-seventeenth century Arminius' claim

that man through his own action could choose to resist or accept the power of grace

was a heretical claim, which would come to dominate seventeenth century

theological debate.

II.2.iii. Voluntarist Theology and Thomas Hobbes

A discussion of Thomas Hobbes at this point might appear to be a digression from

the central theme of this chapter. I believe, however, that in relation to the

Cambridge Platonists it is important to understand the thought of Thomas Hobbes

as essentially growing out of the voluntarism implicit within the orthodox Calvinism

of the early-seventeenth century. This voluntarism is not the only influence on the

development of Hobbes' work, although it is an influence on Hobbes' work that has

been overlooked by many. The Cambridge Platonists, and Cudworth in particular,

approach Hobbes in the first instance as an extreme proponent of the voluntarism

that they encountered and opposed in orthodox Calvinism. As A.P.Martnich has

pointed out, Hobbes' first critics all came from Arminian, or at least anti-Calvinist

thinkers, most notably Clarendon, Bramhall and, of course, the Cambridge

Platonists. Many of the early critiques of Hobbes were explicit in their equating of

---

[28] Ibid., p.145.

Hobbes to Calvinism. Thomas Pierce, who would later become Dean of Salisbury, claimed in 1658 that 'Mr Hobbs…is as able a *Calvinist* (as to these points) as their party hath lately had.'[29] The voluntarist element in Hobbes' thought remained central to criticisms of his thought into the early eighteenth century. Leibniz, for instance, utilised the dilemma of *The Euthyphro* in his criticism of Hobbes' ethical theory.[30]

The source of the voluntarism in Hobbes' thought comes from his use and, to an extent, secularisation of the salvific structure of Calvinist thought. Hobbes certainly grew up within the strict Calvinist orthodoxy. His father, although not the most pious of men, was an ordained minister who followed the Calvinist orthodoxy of the Elizabethan and Jacobean Church. Hobbes also received an orthodox Calvinist education as an undergraduate at Magdalen Hall, Oxford.[31] Hobbes in his own writings expressed an admiration for Calvin and other Calvinist writers, most notably William Perkins.[32] Despite these biographical influences, the nature and extent of Hobbes' religious belief remains an extremely contentious issue. The problem in interpreting Hobbes' religious belief comes, I believe, as a consequence of the extreme negative theology that runs through all of Hobbes' thought. This position is, I would argue, directly comparable to the voluntarism we have already encountered in Calvinism. Much of this ambiguity comes from Hobbes' professed belief that philosophy should not seek to discuss the nature of God, as Hobbes clearly states: 'We ought not to dispute of God's nature, he is no fit subject of our

[29] Thomas Pierce, *Αὐτοκαταχρισις, or Self-Condemnation*, (London, 1658) p.138.
[30] See Goldie, Mark, 'The Reception of Hobbes,' in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450-1700*, ed. J.H.Burns, with the assistance of Mark Goldie (CUP, Cambridge, 1991), pp.589-615.The fullest discussion of Hobbes' relationship to voluntarist theology is Noel Malcolm, 'Thomas Hobbes and Voluntarist Theology' (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1982).
[31] Martinich, *Two Gods*, p.64; Martinich, *Hobbes: A Biography* (CUP, Cambridge, 1999), pp.1-18.
[32] Thomas Hobbes, 'Of Liberty and Necessity,' in *Hobbes and Bramhall on Liberty and Necessity*, ed. Vere Chappell (CUP, Cambridge, 1999), pp.70, 80. Also see Martinich, *Two Gods*, p.3.

philosophy.'[33] Much time and effort has been spent discussing the sincerity of

Hobbes' religious faith, this quote being often used by those who wish to deny

Hobbes a sincere religious belief. However, it could just as well, in the light of the

Calvinist orthodoxy of the day, be read as following the extreme negative theology

that we have already encountered in Calvinism. In a similar vein to Calvin, Hobbes

argues that all the human mind can know of God is that he exists, '[f]or there is but

one Name to signifie our Conception of his Nature, and that is, I AM: and but one

Name of his relation to us, and that is *God*.'[34] Hobbes argues that it is not for

humans to conceive of God, only to honour him.[35] As J.G.A. Pocock has argued,

'Hobbes's God is one of whom we can know by reason only that he must exist and

must be all-powerful. His nature is incomprehensible, and anything we say about it

is no more than language designed to honour his power.'[36] The ethical consequence

of a system built on such an extreme apophatic premise is that man is, in

comparison to the divine, totally helpless and corrupt. Hobbes' extremely

pessimistic view of human nature is therefore not simply a useful rhetorical tool to

justify absolutism and the rule of the Leviathan, it is also the political working out of

the fallen state of man that we have already encountered in Calvinist voluntarism.

Hobbes also follows Calvin in arguing that redemption and salvation is

found exclusively through the will of God.[37] The means by which this is achieved is

where Hobbes primarily differs from Calvin. Where Calvin argues that the will of

God can only be known by man through his accommodation to mankind in

scripture, Hobbes argues that God's will is mediated to man through the correct

---

[33] Hobbes 'Of Liberty and Necessity', p.42.
[34] *Leviathan*, p.403.
[35] Ibid., p.99.
[36] Pocock, 'Time, History, and Eschatology,' p.185.
[37] Martinich, *Two Gods*, p.67.

form of civil sovereign.[38] Despite this difference in form, both Calvin and Hobbes

maintain the voluntarist ethical structure that justice is formed by the action of will,

not by its correspondence to a pre-existing notion of justice. Consequently justice is,

for Hobbes, created exclusively by the will of the sovereign. This claim is then given

theological credence, Hobbes believes, by his argument that the sovereign is the true

heir of the kingship of Christ. The Leviathan therefore becomes for Hobbes the

image and mirror of the kingship of Christ. Although Hobbes' argument in this

respect differs from that of Calvin, his interpretation of the person of Christ still

remains loyal to Calvinism. Hobbes interprets the office of Christ as three-fold:

Redeemer, Pastor and Eternal King. This three-fold distinction follows Calvin's

interpretation of Christ as Prophet, King and Priest.[39] For Hobbes, the most

important of these was the office of 'Eternal King.' Hobbes argues that the only

source of God's law can be through one sovereign, '[o]ut of which we may

conclude, that whosoever in a Christian Common-wealth holdeth the place of

Moses, is the sole Messenger of God, and Interpreter of his Commandments.'[40]

Once this relationship is established, the voluntarist nature of Hobbes' ethical

theory becomes clear. Salvation is only available to those who adhere to the will of

the sovereign, who is, for Hobbes, the only arbiter of God's will: 'All that is

NECESSARY *to Salvation*, is contained in two Vertues, *Faith in Christ*, and *Obedience*

to Laws.'[41] Sin is therefore synonymous in Hobbes' eyes with the breaking of the

laws ordained by the civil sovereign, which is 'not only showing contempt of the

legislator, but also the will of God.'[42] Consequently law is, for Hobbes, not

---

[38] *Leviathan*, p.415.
[39] Ibid., p.512; *Institutes*, II.xv, also see Martinich, *Two Gods*, p.294.
[40] *Leviathan*, p.504.
[41] Ibid., p.610.
[42] Ibid., p.335.

dependent on a pre-existent notion of justice. Rather, Hobbes' voluntarism is clearest when he argues that justice is created by the will and power of the sovereign alone, as the conduit for the will of God.

II.3. Historical and Political Context

II.3.i. Calvinism and anti-Calvinism in seventeenth century Cambridge

The purpose of this second section is to show the way in which the theological and philosophical theories outlined above came to influence and drive the theological, social and political context within which the Cambridge Platonists developed. In particular I will examine the manner in which these debates manifested themselves in Cambridge University during the first half of the seventeenth century. I will argue that, although the Calvinist orthodoxy of Protestant Scholasticism was always a strong influence, it was not so dominant that we have to see Cambridge Platonism as developing out of Calvinist hegemony. It is true to say that Calvinism was the dominant theological form of the English Church in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. Peter White has argued that the doctrine of predestination, often used as the litmus test of Calvinist orthodoxy, was uniformly accepted in the parishes of early-seventeenth century England. White, however, does admit that debates over predestination remained highly contentious within the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.[43] It is within this Calvinist/ anti-Calvinist debate, which existed within the confines of the Universities if not in the country at large, that

---

[43] White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic*, p.309.

Cambridge Platonism first became defined as a characteristic theological and

philosophical position.

The power of the Calvinist orthodoxy of the late Elizabethan and Jacobean

Church is perhaps best shown through the success and popularity of the writings of

the Cambridge theologian William Perkins. Perkins, a fellow of Christ's College, was

not the most original of thinkers. His major strength was as a conduit for the

transmission of the ideas of Protestant scholasticism, and particularly Beza's

thought, into England.[44] Perkins was able to introduce to England, through works

like *A Golden Chaine*, Beza's theories of supra-lapsarian predestination and assurance

for the faithful through the reasoning of the practical syllogism.[45] It is in Perkins'

thought that we find the most explicit uses of syllogistic reasoning to confirm the

membership to the elect. Through the practical syllogism Perkins argues that man is

able to both give witness to the spirit and, by inference, attain knowledge of

sanctification. This second claim, which mirrors very closely that which we have

already encountered in Beza, is based on the assumption that man can never know

the 'first cause' of election, but, through the correct form of reasoning, could

appreciate himself as one of the elect.[46]

It is no surprise to see Perkins as the most vociferous defender of Calvinism

during this period. In particular he vigorously attacked both Arminius and any

suggestions of Arminianism within the English Church. The most famous example

of this opposition came in Cambridge in the 1590s, a debate which started the

Calvinist/anti-Calvinist debate from which Cambridge Platonism first emerged fifty

[44] I. Breward, 'The Importance of Perkins,' in *The Journal of Religious History*, 4:2 (1966), pp.113-28, p.115.
[45] Dewey D. Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525-1695* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1982), p.60; Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, pp.54-5.
[46] Kendall, *Calvin*, p.71.

years later.[47] In a University sermon preached in 1595, William Barrat, the then

chaplain of Gonville and Caius College, vehemently attacked the strict Calvinism

being taught by some in Cambridge at the time and, by association, Perkins as its

chief advocate. The chief influence on the sermon was probably the French

Protestant Peter Baro who was then the Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity.

Although publicly professing to the Calvinist orthodoxy Baro is thought to have

held Arminian views in private. Baro also opposed the scholastic philosophy upon

which the strict Calvinism of the time rested.[48] The opposition to Barrat's sermon

was led by Perkins.[49] So fierce was this opposition that Barrat was forced to recant

his sermon. However, the controversy did not end within the confine of the

University. The profession of anti-Calvinist sentiment within Cambridge led the

then Archbishop of Canterbury, John Whitgift, to intervene to settle the doctrinal

problems aroused by this controversy. The subsequent 'Lambeth Articles',

published in November 1595, are the clearest statement of English Calvinist

orthodoxy.[50] These state clearly that 'God has predestined some men to life, and

reprobated some to death.' The moving force of this election is not the

'perseverance…of good works, or of anything innate in the person of the

predestined, but only the will and pleasure of God.' Crucially for this survey, the

Lambeth Articles conclude with the statement that '[i]t is not in the will or the

power of each and every man to be saved.'[51] The immediate effect of these articles

---

[47] This point is made most clearly by H.C. Porter in his book *Reformation and Reaction in Tudor Cambridge* (CUP, Cambridge, 1958), where he concludes his work on the debates of the 1590s with a discussion of the Whichcote/Tuckney debate under the chapter title of 'The Candle of the Lord,' pp.416-29.
[48] Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, p.67.
[49] Breward, 'The importance of Perkins,' p.120.
[50] Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of Arminianism, c.1590-1640* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1987). p.5
[51] The best full-length discussion of this controversy is Porter, *Reformation and Reaction*. It is from this work, pp.365-6, that the translations of the Lambeth Articles are taken. Also see, Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p.29-31.

was simply to fire a warning shot across the bows of thinkers such as Barrat and Baro who tried to deny the Calvinist orthodoxy of the day. The long term effect of the articles was to codify and maintain a strong anti-Arminian theme within the English Church that remained largely undisturbed till the 1620s.

In this way the Lambeth Articles can be seen as a precursor to the most systematic attack on the Arminian threat to Calvinist orthodoxy at the Synod of Dort (1618-19). Called finally to settle the divisions in the Reformed Church in the Low Countries, the conclusions of the Synod follow very closely the theological position advocated by the Lambeth Articles. The presence of an official English delegation to the Synod only went to confirm the opposition there was within the established English Church to anti-Calvinist and, in particular, Arminian thought. The conclusions of the Synod were summed up in the now famous TULIP mnemonic. This summarised Calvinist teaching in five central points: total depravity of human nature, unconditional election of the individual, limited atonement of Christ's passion, irresistible grace of God, and perseverance of the elect.[52] The conclusions of the Synod were not ever adopted as canon law within England. It is, however, fair to see the conclusions of the Synod as mirroring the Calvinist orthodoxy of the English Church at the time. That being said, it did not silence Arminianism and anti-Calvinism either on the continent or in England.[53]

---

[52] McGrath, *Life*, p.217; Kendall, *Calvin*, p.150.
[53] Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, pp.104-5.

University as a whole, as analogous with Calvinism. As already stated, the religious

orthodoxy of Cambridge at the time was broadly Calvinist, but to equate that with

the extreme Calvinism of later figures, such as Anthony Tuckney, is to misread the

nature of Puritan belief within Cambridge at the time. Puritanism has become one

of the great 'catch-all' definitions of religious history and, as a consequence, exact

definition is very difficult. Puritanism was, at least until the 1620s, a term used to

describe members of the Church of England (which was broadly although not

dogmatically Calvinist) that wished to see greater Protestant reforms of liturgy and

organisation. In this sense the debates of the 1590s may have been anti-Calvinist,

but they did not seek to undermine the Puritan orthodoxy of the day. It was mainly

with the growing ascendancy of Laudianism through the 1620s and 1630s that the

term became used as a term of abuse, when it was used to define those who

opposed Laud's reforms generally, and those who followed Calvinist doctrine in

particular.[57] Emmanuel was therefore a great home to Puritanism understood in a

more general sense. In this sense it is possible to see the Cambridge Platonists

within Puritan Emmanuel. In fact two of the college's great masters from this

period, Lawrence Chaderton and Richard Holdsworth, can be understood as

Puritans who sought to distance themselves from the deterministic excesses of the

Calvinism of their time.[58] Holdsworth as master actively discouraged his

undergraduates from using Calvin as their sole and certainly first source of Biblical

interpretation.[59] That is not to say that some of those educated in Emmanuel at the

time did not follow this extreme Calvinism. It is however incorrect to view the

---

[57] Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, pp.7-8.
[58] Sarah Bendell, Christopher Brooke & Patrick Collinson, *A History of Emmanuel College, Cambridge*, (Boydell, Woodbridge, 1999), pp.177, 224.
[59] Emmanuel College MS 48, fol.40.

72

Cambridge Platonists as developing their position in complete opposition to the prevailing theology of their college.

What is certain is that Emmanuel was the Puritan heart of Cambridge University at the time. This Puritanism was best seen in the non-conformity of religious observance within the college. During the reign of James I, Emmanuel was criticised for failure to have surplices worn in Chapel and to use the Book of Common Prayer. Most importantly, looking forward to Laud's reforms in the University, communion was taken sitting around a table, passing the sacraments from man to man. The Chapel, which is now the Old Library in the college, was orientated north/south and remained unconsecrated. The statutes of the college also had within them the missionary zeal characteristic of the Puritanism of Cambridge at the time. These statutes said that no fellow could serve more that 10 years before taking a parish. The ruling theology of Emmanuel was, one can say, Puritan in form, broadly but not exclusively Calvinist in theology, and imbued with a missionary zeal.[60] The main beneficiaries of this zeal were the Eastern counties and Essex, which by the early-seventeenth century had become, theologically, satellites of Emmanuel.[61]

The form that education took in Emmanuel at the time followed the traditions of the scholastic curriculum dating back to the mediaeval foundation of the college and University. The importance of the scholastic form of this education was given extra weight because of the importance Scholastic philosophy played in underpinning the Calvinist orthodoxy of the day. The overriding impression one gets from the nature of the Scholastic curriculum was the strict and rigid form it

---

[60] Bendell et al., *Emmanuel College* p.16.
[61] Ibid., p.189.

took not only in style but also in content. In Cambridge the form of education was governed by the student's tutor. Each student was allotted a tutor by the master of the college on entry, and that tutor watched every part of that student's education, from teaching to accommodation and the managing of finances.[62] The relationship was much more that of school-master and pupil. Milton complained later of having been whipped by his tutor as an undergraduate in Cambridge.[63] The ages of student at matriculation could vary wildly. Tuckney for instance matriculated when he was fourteen, John Locke, at Christ Church Oxford, when he was twenty-one.[64] Lectures were held in the Old Schools, between the Senate House and Clare College, often very early in the morning. The rest of the day was then spent covering the rigorous scholastic education.

One of the best sources for the nature and form of this education is Richard Holdsworth's *Directions for a Student of the University*. It is not possible to see this as a direct transcript of a student education at the time. Firstly, by splitting the day in two and having parallel classes in philosophy in the mornings and history and language in the afternoons, the *Directions* suggest a form that differed from the traditional style of organising the curriculum.[65] Added to this is the confusion that has arisen over the precise date of the authorship of the *Directions*. In the Emmanuel College version, which was presented as a public book written out by a professional scribe, the author recommends books that were published after Holdsworth was ejected from the Mastership of Emmanuel in 1644. It is, however, known that even whilst he was exiled in London Holdsworth continued to take an active interest in

---

[62] For a full account of the role of the tutor see H.F.Fletcher, *The Intellectual Development of John Milton*, 2 vols. (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1961), volume II.
[63] Maurice Cranston, *John Locke: A Biography* (OUP, Oxford, 1985), p.30.
[64] *Letters*, p.i; Cranston, *John Locke*, p. 29.
[65] Emmanuel College MS 48, fols.7-13; Bendell et al., *Emmanuel College*, p.74.

college and University affairs through the 1640s.[66] It is therefore possible to

interpret the *Directions* not as an authentic account of the nature of an undergraduate

education, as H.F.Fletcher has done, but as an idealised account of the form that

that education might take.

Viewing the *Directions* with this caveat in mind, it is of interest to see the

dominance that Aristotle played in this education. It is possible to interpret the

philosophical education that Holdsworth suggests for the four years of study as a

preparation for the study of Aristotle's *Logic* at the end of it. All this strict education

was based around the scholastic belief in the deductive nature of knowledge. The

truth could be found by placing reality against several prescribed forms of syllogistic

reasoning.[67] The final form that this education took was in the disputations. These

were public examinations in which students had to defend or attack a set position

using the forms of Aristotelian/Scholastic reasoning taught to them in the previous

four years. Holdsworth was very keen to stress the importance of these disputations.

They were not only needed to gain the degree, but would show publicly later the

worth of the University after these students entered public life:

> Without those you will be bafeled in your disputes, digraced & vilified in
>
> Public examinations, laughed at in speeches & Declamations you will never
>
> dare so appear in any act of credit in the University.[68]

[66] John A. Trentmann, 'The Authorship of *Directions for a Student of the Universitie*' in *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, VII:2 (1978) pp.170-83. p.180.
[67] William T. Costello, *The Scholastic Curriculum at Early Seventeenth century Cambridge* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1958), pp.14-5.
[68] Emmanuel College, MS.48, fol.22.

II.3.iii. Laudianism and Arminianism in Cambridge in the 1620s and 1630s

As has already been mentioned, despite the various Arminian controversies of the late-sixteenth century, the English Church remained in a broadly Calvinist form until the 1620s; any residual Arminianism was limited, particularly in Cambridge, with the Royal approval of, although not official acceptance of, the final ruling of the Synod of Dort.[69] Despite this political move there remained, as we have seen, a clear anti-Calvinist seam in English theological thought, particularly within the Universities, through the early-seventeenth century. This opposition manifested itself in two different, but often confused camps. The first was in the theological Arminianism which first found a voice in Barrat and Baro in the 1590s. The second is the anti-Calvinist reforms to Church practice driven by William Laud. These Laudian reforms are often termed 'Arminian' because they were anti-Calvinist in form. However, it is wrong to make the two terms synonymous. Particularly in reference to the Cambridge Platonists, it is important to stress how in Cambridge at the time they opposed Laud's reforms, keeping true to their Puritan heritage but, at the same time, distancing themselves from the theological excesses of many of the Puritan contemporaries.[70]

Laud is often referred to as an Arminian. It is, however, wrong to see Laud's Arminianism as growing directly from the Dutch Arminianism which was defeated and subsequently persecuted following the ruling of the Synod of Dort. As we have already seen sympathy was shown to the theology of the Arminians in England in the 1590s. Although James I's sympathy to Calvinism did place Calvinism in the

---

[69] Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p.45.
[70] Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (Viking Press, New York, 1977), pp.268-77.

76

ascendancy in the early years of the seventeenth century, particularly in positions of

Church government, a residual English anti-Calvinism remained. T.M. Parker has

argued that in English thought one can find a tradition of anti-Calvinism which is

allied to, but not based entirely on, Arminian theology. Parker sees this tradition

growing from an increase in patristic scholarship in English Universities in the late-

sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. The earliest exponent of this was

Lancelot Andrewes who, on his death in 1626, Laud described as 'the great light of

the Christian world.'[71] This interest in patristics can also be found in other anti-

Calvinist thinkers of the time such as Thomas Jackson and William Buckeridge,

both of whom found favour under the patronage of Laud.[72] There was some cross

fertilisation of ideas between the Dutch and the English Calvinists. John Hales, later

of the Great Tew circle, is said to have 'bade John Calvin goodnight' whilst

observing the debates at the Synod of Dort. However, it is possible to see that, in

Parker's words, 'English Arminianism was parallel to Armianism proper, not its

product; it was not created by Arminius, nor did it follow him in detail.'[73]

Even though Laud's own anti-Calvinism did not follow exactly the Arminian

teachings of which he was accused, that does not mean that there was no

theological sincerity within his thought. In the past it has been popular to suggest

that Laud's piety was a front for his political ambition. For instance, Hugh Trevor-

Roper's influential account of Laud's life sees Laud's reforms as politically

motivated by the wishes of Charles I and not by doctrinal conflicts with the

---

[71] Quoted in Nicholas Tyacke, 'Archbishop Laud,' in *The Early Stuart Church, 1603-1642*, ed. Kenneth Finchman (MacMillan, Basingstoke, 1993), pp.51-69, p.62.
[72] For Thomas Jackson see Sarah Hutton, 'Thomas Jackson, Oxford Platonist, and William Twisse, Aristotelian,' in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 39 (1978) pp.635-52, pp.638, 641. For William Buckeridge see Tyacke, 'Archbishop Laud,' p.56.
[73] T.Parker, 'Arminianism & Laudianism in seventeenth century England,' in *Studies in Church History Vol.1*, ed. C.W. Dugmore & Charles Duggan (Nelson, London, 1964), pp.20-34, pp.29-30.

Calvinist orthodoxy.[74] However, it is possible to find in Laud's early career a clear

opposition to the determinism of Calvinism. Whilst at Oxford Laud had developed

a clear defence of freewill, the interior nature of righteousness and the certainty of

salvation.[75] In his doctoral thesis of 1608 Laud argues that only a bishop can confer

holy orders. Laud was supported in Oxford by the Platonic philosopher Thomas

Jackson. Jackson was an anti-Calvinist who believed that Christ died sufficiently for

all without limitation. The clear anti-Calvinism of both men led them to be branded

Pelagian and brought them into conflict with the University authorities. It does

seem that both men were aware of, and prepared to take, the risks that their

theological views brought.[76]

Where Laud's anti-Calvinism differs from the Dutch Arminians is his

concentration on the sacraments as the means by which grace is transferred. This

sacramental argument had been used against Calvinism by early Arminians. An

English example of this argument was by Richard 'Dutch' Thompson who argued in

the 1590s that the universal nature of baptism, which was a central sacrament within

the Church of England, invalidated the Calvinist defence of predestination.[77] Laud

concentrated on the sacrament of the Eucharist. This emphasis on the sacramental

was peculiar to the English anti-Calvinism of Laud. Many of his later hated reforms

– altars moved to the east-end, use of communion rails etc. – had to do with the

veneration and sacerdotal nature of communion within Laud's anti-Calvinistic

theological system. As Nicholas Tyacke argues, 'It was no accident that during the

Arminian ascendancy altars and fonts came to dominate Church interiors, for the

---

[74] For a critique or Trevor-Roper's biography of Laud see, Tyacke, 'Archbishop Laud,' pp.51-3.
[75] Tyacke, 'Arminisim and English Culture', in *Britain and the Netherlands, Vol.7 - Church & State since the Reformation.* ed. A.C.Duke & C.A.Tamse, (Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1981) pp.94-117, p.96.
[76] Tyacke, 'Arminisim,' pp.97, 104; Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p.71.
[77] Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p.36.

two were logically connected, sacramental grace replacing the grace of predestination.[78] What is clear, therefore, is that Laud's anti-Calvinism was sincere as, but different in its form from, the anti-Calvinism of the Dutch Arminians. The difference between the two is shown by a comment made by the Calvinist Robert Baille in the 1640s. Baille criticises the English form of Arminianism for a tendency to Popery, whereas the Dutch form tended to the Socinian. Baille criticises, on one hand, the sacramental nature of Laudianism and, on the other, the theoretical and intellectual theology that one finds in the Remonstrants. Such a distinction naturally places the Cambridge Platonists closer, in anti-Calvinist sentiments, to the latter than the former.[79]

During the 1620s and 1630s there was a gradual and then systematic attack on the Puritan and, therefore, Calvinist traditions of Cambridge. Although there was, as we have seen, a heated debate between Calvinists and anti-Calvinists from the end of the sixteenth century, this was the first time one of the camps had tried to remove the other completely from the field of conflict. With the ascendancy of Laud a systematic attack on those theologically opposed to him began. Laud was not able to exert direct influence over Cambridge, as he was in Oxford. As Chancellor from 1630, Laud wielded considerable influence over the theological form of Oxford University, and his tenure as Chancellor led to a considerable rise in Laudian anti-Calvinism from 1630. Laud's influence within Cambridge was, however, limited because he had no direct influence over the running of the University as he had in Oxford. Laud's influence in Cambridge was primarily exercised through intermediaries. The first of these intermediaries came in 1626

---

[78] Ibid., p.176.
[79] Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, p.224.

with the contentious election of the Duke of Buckingham, the King's favourite and

Laud's close ally in Court, as Chancellor. This led to a systematic muzzling of

Puritan interests within the University. Cambridge effectively fell under direct Royal

control. Although these attacks abated with the murder of Buckingham, other

factors added to the indirect Laudian attacks on Puritanism within Cambridge. The

first of these came with the dissolution and extended absence of Parliaments from

1629. Without Parliament, which had traditionally been supportive of Puritanism,

there was no effective political check on the reforming zeal of Charles I and Laud.[80]

The second influence came from Laud's powers as Bishop of London. This

position gave him an effective veto on the nature and content of books published in

London. As a consequence, there was an enormous growth in pro-Laud literature.

This was also helped by the Laudian influence on the production of books through

the University presses in Oxford and Cambridge.[81] This influence was also

maintained by the active Royal influence on the election of college heads. The most

obvious, and historically ironic, case of this Royal influence was the failed attempt

to have Richard Holdsworth elected Master of St John's College in 1633.

Holdsworth's election, which had been overwhelming amongst the fellowship of the

college, was opposed and overturned by Royal command; the reason was

Holdsworth's Puritan, and consequently anti-Laudian sympathies. The irony is that

in the early 1640s Holdsworth was to become, as Vice-Chancellor and Master of

Emmanuel, one of the King's most vociferous defenders against the claims of

Parliament. Holdsworth was eventually stripped of his status, imprisoned and

eventually exiled from Cambridge because of his desire to see a limited Episcopal

---

[80] Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, pp.49-51; Twigg, *University of Cambridge*, pp.20-26.
[81] Ibid., p.31.

settlement and continued loyalty to the King.[82] Despite this influence, some colleges

and churches within Cambridge were able to resist Laud's reforms, most notably

Emmanuel and Sidney Sussex Colleges, both of which were accused by Laud of

being 'nurseries of Puritanism.'[83]

What is of interest in all these reforms is that the Cambridge Platonists seem

to have always remained connected to institutions that opposed, or at least resisted,

Laud's reforms, most notably as students and fellows of Emmanuel but also by their

connection with Holy Trinity Church. Holy Trinity was a centre of Puritanism in the

City of Cambridge and often brought the displeasure of Laud.[84] Whichcote was

appointed to the Sunday lectureship at Holy Trinity in 1636 at the height of Laud's

influence in Cambridge. It is impossible to verify whether Whichcote's appointment

was made with or without the blessing of the Laudians within Cambridge. It is

possible to surmise, however, that Whichcote's conciliatory style may have been a

nod to the dominance of the Laudians in Cambridge at the time. It may not be

possible to go as far as Nicholas Tyacke in arguing that 'Calvinism had been

silenced' in Cambridge by 1632.[85] It is, however, possible to see the Puritans, who

included strict Calvinists, as very much on the defensive during this period.

Although the Cambridge Platonists were not doctrinally Calvinist, their Puritan

sympathies, especially in the face of Laud's reforms, placed them together with the

strict Calvinists in opposing Laud during this period.

---

[82] Ibid., pp.26-7.
[83] Ibid., p.38.
[84] Ibid., p.30.
[85] Tyacke, 'Archbishop Laud' p.69. For a direct rejection of Tyacke's assertion see White, *Predestination, policy and polemic*, p.306.

II.3.iv. Cambridge in the 1640s: The Westminster Assembly and the Earl of Manchester's Purge

Any hope of Laud continuing his reforms within Cambridge was greatly diminished by the King calling Parliament for the first time in 12 years. The calling of the Short and then the Long Parliaments hastened the growing political crisis in England, which eventually drew the country into civil war. What is of interest to this survey is not the nature of that political crisis, but the theological form that Parliament's opposition to the King took. In particular, I will examine the manner in which the opposition of Parliament, to the King, and consequently Laud, profoundly affected the theological make-up of Cambridge during this period. Because the opposition to Laud was driven by the wishes of Parliament, its theological form was more explicitly Calvinist, matching the Calvinism of the country at large, rather than matching the greater theological diversity that was peculiar to the Puritanism of the Universities. Therefore we find in the reforms of the 1640s a Calvinist zeal that, although existent within Cambridge at the time, was certainly not found in the same concentration as it was in the Long Parliament.

Within both the Short and Long Parliaments there was not a great desire to bring about, to borrow a phrase of the time, root and branch reforms of the Universities. Over half the MPs in the new Parliament had been educated in the two Universities, compared to only about a quarter of MPs from Parliaments earlier in the seventeenth century. Among this new group of University educated MPs was the new MP for Cambridge, and former land agent of Emmanuel College, Oliver Cromwell. There was, however, a desire within Parliament to remove from the

Universities the excesses of Royal control within the University.[86] This was brought

about in two ways. The first was to attack Royal demands placed on the

Universities, the clearest example of this being the repeal of James I's proclamation

of 1616. The proclamation was in itself not highly contentious, demanding that all

graduates affirm Royal supremacy over the Church, support the Book of Common

Prayer and uphold the thirty-nine articles. The complaint was rather that the

proclamation had been imposed without the consent of Parliament and was

therefore 'against the law and libertie of the subject, and ought not to be pressed

upon any students or graduates whatsoever.'[87] The second form of attack was the

systematic dismantling, sometimes literally, of the Laudian reforms forced on the

University during the 1630s. This process was driven by a report commissioned by

Parliament and given by William Dowsing on the state of religious practice in the

University. In this report Dowsing criticised the extent of Laudian reforms,

ceremony and decoration within the University. He did, however, single out the

Puritan credentials of Corpus Christi, St Catharine's, and Emmanuel Colleges as

well as Holy Trinity Church.[88]

The beginning of the Civil War in 1642 naturally had a profound effect on

not only the nature of the University but also the religious outlook and form of the

University. War naturally brought about a drop in student numbers, the main source

of income for many of the colleges. In addition the strategic importance of

Cambridge led to a constant military presence within the city, with many soldiers

being billeted on the colleges. Some colleges were even used to house prisoners

from the Royalist army. Added to this was a general town and gown split in support

---

[86] Twigg, *University of Cambridge*, p.42; Bendell et al, *Emmanuel College*, pp.240-2.
[87] Twigg, *University of Cambridge*, p.47.
[88] Ibid., p.49; Bendell et al, *A History of Emmanuel College*, p.207.

for Parliament and the King respectively. The army of the Eastern Association, under the leadership of the Earl of Manchester and Oliver Cromwell came to dominate the city and university. Cromwell was instrumental in foiling the attempts of several colleges to support the King by intercepting consignments of college plate being sent to help fund the King's war effort in Oxford. The growing influence of the Army on the running of the university was highlighted by the hostility shown by certain members of the army to the Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity presenting his termly Latin lecture as set down in statute. The cause of this opposition was not the content of the lecture, but that the lecture was to be given in the language of Roman Catholicism.[89]

The main influence on the theological form of Cambridge came with the formation of the Westminster Assembly in 1643. The Assembly was called by Parliament 'for the vindicating and clearing of the Doctrine of the Church of England from all false Calumities and Aspersions.'[90] It met for the first time on 1 July, 1643. The divines chosen to sit in the Assembly were all chosen to defend and support the strict Calvinist interests of Parliament. Chastened by 12 years of personal rule and imposed religious reform, Parliament was determined not simply to root out, but to crush all Laudian sentiment within the country. Its two explicit aims were to root out all vestiges of Laud's reforms and to bring about a new reformed Presbyterian settlement within the English Church. The Westminster Assembly, by representing those in Parliament and the country who had been most clearly targeted by Laud's reforms, presented in opposition to Laud the most unified statement on Calvinist doctrine put forward in England during the seventeenth

---

[89] Twigg, *University of Cambridge*, pp.66-83.
[90] Quoted in Kendall, *Calvin*, p.167.

century. The Assembly was, therefore, explicitly chosen from divines who could be trusted by Parliament to follow a strict Calvinist unity. In this way they followed very closely the Protestant Scholasticism that lay behind this Calvinist orthodoxy. Any suggestions of anti-Calvinism were avoided by the simple tactic of omitting any divines from the Assembly who did not share the strict Calvinist sympathies of Parliament. It is in this complicated and convoluted political and theological context that the orthodox Calvinism, against which the Cambridge Platonists are traditionally seen to have developed, emerges. As we have seen, strict Calvinism did not dominate the education of the Cambridge Platonists. There had always existed since the 1590s a level of debate within Cambridge over theological issues, in particular predestination. The strength of the Calvinism that we will encounter in Tuckney's letters to Whichcote betrays not so much the Calvinist unity of Cambridge during the early seventeenth century, but is rather a symptom of the strength of the Calvinist reaction to the Laudian reforms of the 1630s.[91]

The strength of this reaction was shown in the ruthless purge of the University by the Parliamentary visitation of the Earl of Manchester in February 1644. Manchester's Purge, as it has come to be known, fundamentally changed the theological make-up of Cambridge University. The Earl of Manchester, by the imposition of the Scottish inspired 'Solemn League and Covenant', ruthlessly targeted those academics who opposed the Parliamentary cause of the time, either in religious form or political conviction. This oath bound those who took it to the establishment of a Presbyterian Church settlement in England in the form advocated by the Westminster Divines. The severity of Manchester's Purge is

---

[91] For an interpretation that places the Cambridge Platonists within an exclusively Calvinist world see Tulloch, *Rational Theology*, II:11-13.

summed up in a letter by William Sancroft the younger to the then imprisoned

Master of Emmanuel, Richard Holdsworth. Describing the purge, Sancroft wrote

that the Earl of Manchester had 'beheaded whole colleges at a blow; nay, whole

Universities and whole Churches too.'[92] The severity of Manchester's Purge can be

explained by two factors. Firstly, on a practical level, Manchester needed to carry

out his purge before the beginning of the spring campaigning season. For this

reason Manchester concentrated mainly on the heads of houses rather than the

general fellowship of the colleges. The appointment of the latter he left to the

discretion of the Westminster Assembly. The second reason was political. As the

King's capital was Oxford, Parliament needed to enforce its will on the Cambridge

in a symbolic way. The Parliamentary purge of Oxford three years later, although as

severe, was not nearly as swift and brutal as that carried out in Cambridge in 1644.

Manchester's main tactic was not to attack the University as a single entity

but to single out individuals within colleges, especially the heads. This was designed

to break whatever unified resolve and resistance to the claims of Parliament that

there might have been in the University. Manchester was therefore able to assert his

authority in the most visible manner possible. The only limit on Manchester's power

was that those whom he chose to replace various heads of houses had to be

approved by the Westminster Divines. Manchester's Purge was in the final

reckoning just as brutal as Sancroft describes above. Somewhere in the region of

212 fellows were ejected; 180 of them had taken their degrees between 1629-40,

during the height of Laud's influence of the University.[93] By the end of 1644 ten

new heads of colleges were imposed by Manchester. Seven of these replacements

---

[92] Quoted in Twigg, *University of Cambridge*, p.97.
[93] Ibid., pp.88-97.

came from Emmanuel, and of the ten, nine were already members of the

Westminster Assembly. All of these replacements were given their positions directly

by the Westminster Assembly and the majority followed the moderate Presbyterian

and orthodox Calvinist credentials of the Assembly and the Commons.[94] The

exceptions to this were the appointment in 1645 of Cudworth to Clare Hall and

Whichcote to King's. These appointments were not, as is commonly attributed in

biographies, in the main sweep of Manchester's Purge. Neither Cudworth nor

Whichcote were the first choices for their positions. Neither did they share any

obvious affinity with the Calvinist orthodoxy of their Westminster Divine colleagues

appointed to the headships of colleges before them. Perhaps they were, as second

choices, last minute appointments needed to fill positions, as the religious and

political tide was moving away from the Westminster Assembly in 1645-6.[95] Perhaps

their puritan inclinations outshone a hidden anti-Calvinism which did not emerge

until later. This second point seems unlikely considering that Cudworth is known to

have shown anti-Calvinist sentiments in his B.D. examination only a year before.[96]

What is clear however is that neither Whichcote nor Cudworth seem to have been

particularly happy with the nature of their appointments. Whichcote shared half his

salary with his predecessor at King's, Samuel Collins, and went to great lengths to

ensure that Collins' children were provided for on Collins' death.[97] Cudworth did

not take an active role in matters at Clare Hall and did not take up residence there.[98]

---

[94] Ibid., p.103.
[95] Ibid., p.104.
[96] 'Memoirs of Ralph Cudworth D.D., Author of The Intellectual System', *The Present State of the Republic of Letters for January 1736*, XVII (London, 1736), pp.24-38, p.27; John Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth: An Interpretation*, (CUP, Cambridge, 1951) p.11.
[97] *Letters*, pp.xvii-xix; Bendell et al, *Emmanuel College*, p.247.
[98] John Pierce, *Biographical Register of Christ's College 1505-1905 and of the earlier foundation, God's House, 1448-1505*, 2 vols (CUP, Cambridge, 1913), I:466.

The Cambridge Platonists can therefore be seen to be placed in a peculiar position within Cambridge during this period. Through the promotion of Whichcote and Cudworth and the continued presence of other Cambridge Platonists in college fellowships during this period, it would seem that the Cambridge Platonists were at least in step with, if not in league with, the theological zeitgeist. However, through this period the Cambridge Platonists became the leading critics of the strict 'Protestant Scholastic' Calvinism that lay at the heart of the reforms of the Westminster Assembly. It is in this context, as Puritan anti-Calvinists, that we first encounter the moderate theology of the Cambridge Platonists most famously in Cudworth's *Sermon Preached before the House of Commons* of 1647 and Whichcote's correspondence with Anthony Tuckney from 1651. The next chapter will therefore trace the beginnings of Cudworth's and Whichcote's theological and philosophical systems in light of the contexts which have been outlined in this chapter.

Chapter III – The beginnings of Cambridge Platonism – the Whichcote/Tuckney debate and Cudworth's early writings

III.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to show, through an examination of the thought of Benjamin Whichcote and Ralph Cudworth, the manner in which Cambridge Platonism initially developed against the theological, philosophical and political contexts outlined in the previous chapter. As we have seen, there were many conflicting theological influences in Cambridge in the early- to mid- seventeenth century. However, by the mid 1640s, as a consequence of the Earl of Manchester's purge, the most important of these contexts was the orthodox Calvinism of the Westminster Assembly. This chapter will examine in detail the famous correspondence between Benjamin Whichcote and his former tutor, Anthony Tuckney. Although the main task of this thesis is an examination of the thought of Ralph Cudworth, I believe that an examination of Whichcote's thought is important here for two reasons. Firstly, as the debate between Whichcote and Tuckney is both one of the earliest and fullest defences of Cambridge Platonism, it allows us to see how Whichcote, as the founder of Cambridge Platonism, reacted explicitly against the voluntarist form of orthodox Calvinism. Although, as we shall see, we can find this reaction in Cudworth's work, particularly his early writings, the initial reaction against Calvinism is never as explicit as it is in Whichcote's letters. Consequently this chapter will begin by outlining Tuckney's response, stressing in particular its correspondence to the Calvinist orthodoxy of the day. This will also show how

Tuckney's criticism of Whichcote centred on his use of reason within the realm of religion. Tuckney believes this to be dangerous for two reasons. Firstly, by the use of Platonism, Tuckney believes Whichcote is introducing foreign, pagan influences into and watering down Christianity. Secondly, Tuckney argues that Whichcote's use of reason, which grew from his Platonism, opens the door to the anti-Calvinism of Arminianism and the anti-Trinitarianism of Arianism and Socinianism. The second reason for examining Whichcote's responses to Tuckney is that they show clearly the manner in which Platonic, and particularly Plotinian themes were deployed to mount an intellectualist response to the voluntarism of Calvinism. Before examining Whichcote's specific answers to Tuckney, this chapter will therefore examine the sources of Whichcote's Platonic philosophy. With this Platonic influence in mind it will then be possible to show how Whichcote links the principle of God's wisdom and justice with the overflowing rationality of an intellectualist, Platonic God. Reason, because it is the defining principle of God in creation, becomes, Whichcote argues, the recognisable form of God's grace and goodness. Reason becomes the means by which man can draw himself to the justice and goodness of the divine. Whichcote argues that this is possible if reason is understood as the defining principle of not only God but, more specifically, the mediating principle of Christ. The grace by which man is saved therefore changes in Whichcote's thinking from the extraordinary, inexplicable, and arguably arbitrary grace of Calvinist predestination, to the rationally discernible saving grace of Platonically understood Christianity.

It is with these themes in mind that we can then turn our attention to Cudworth's early writings. These writings not only follow the thought of Whichcote

in form and style, but also take the central themes of reason and grace mediated through the person of Christ to set up in these writings the central themes that continue into Cudworth's mature and more philosophically minded writings. Cudworth uses the theological and philosophical principles we find in Whichcote to show how man can, through his reason, come to God through his actions in the created world. It is, I will argue, Cudworth's desire to come to an understanding of how man can most effectively live in the light of Christ within creation that drives all his thought. This desire becomes most clearly manifested in Cudworth's wish to form within the created world, what I will term, an *ethical community*. That is not simply the moral life, but a society through which man can achieve his Christ-like potential within the created world.

The task of theology for both Whichcote and Cudworth is to explain and establish the Christian life in reality. Calvinism fails, they argue, because its voluntarism and doctrine of supra-lapsarian predestination rendered the created world redundant and therefore the creation of a viable ethical community impossible. To create the ethical community on earth both Whichcote and Cudworth argue that man must understand not only his relationship to the divine, but also how man can come to appreciate this relationship through the divine principle of reason that exists in all reality. The constant stress on reason as the means of man's participation with God becomes the *leitmotif* of Cambridge Platonic thought; the means by which man can fulfil his obligation to both love God and his neighbour. It is through this Christocentric theological system that we find in the writings of Whichcote and Cudworth that we also first encounter the Trinitarian principles that dominate Cudworth's later writings.

III.2. The Whichcote/Tuckney debate

III.2.i. Tuckney's attack

Anthony Tuckney was Whichcote's former tutor at Emmanuel and at the time of

the correspondence, in 1651, was Master of Emmanuel. It has been common to

view this correspondence as showing the form of the Calvinist orthodoxy that the

Cambridge Platonists experienced at Emmanuel, particularly from their initial

tutors. As we saw in the previous chapter, it is not, however, possible to assume a

blanket of Calvinist orthodoxy in Emmanuel or in Cambridge as a whole during the

early decades of the seventeenth century. Tuckney was certainly a central figure of

the Westminster Assembly and of the Calvinist orthodoxy of the Westminster

Assembly that dominated the theological climate of Cambridge after 1644. For this

reason, Tuckney's criticisms are indicative of the voluntarist nature of Calvinism

that the Cambridge Platonists attack.

Tuckney's own life is representative of the changing fortunes of orthodox

Calvinism in Cambridge during the early- to mid- seventeenth century that were

examined in the previous chapter. Tuckney matriculated at the age of fourteen in

1613. On his graduation from his M.A. he left Cambridge to serve the Earl of

Lincoln. Tuckney later returned as a fellow of Emmanuel. In 1626 he took

Whichcote as a student but left the following year to take up the appointment of

vicar of Boston, Lincolnshire. Tuckney's direct influence on Whichcote may have

been important, as Tuckney often suggests in his letters, but it was nonetheless

limited to one year. Tuckney was then absent from Cambridge during the 1630s and

the Laudian attacks on Puritanism in Cambridge. Tuckney only returned to the University when the Earl of Manchester's purge placed him in the Mastership of Emmanuel in 1644.[1] Even then his effective return was delayed by the ongoing debates of the Westminster Assembly. His appointment to Emmanuel was made with some reluctance by the Westminster Assembly. As a leading member of the Assembly – Tuckney headed one of the main doctrinal committees of the Assembly – the other members of the Assembly were reluctant to lose his expertise.[2] The Assembly only consented to his appointment on the understanding that his role in the Assembly would take precedence. Consequently, Tuckney only took up residence in Cambridge, and took an active role in Cambridge events, at the effective end of the Westminster Assembly in early 1648. Despite these absences Tuckney's arguments are, nevertheless, indicative of the Calvinist nature of Cambridge during the 1640s and 1650s.[3]

Central to Tuckney's attack is his continual stress on the infinite distance he believes exists between the extraordinary grace of God and the faculties of fallen man. It is unsurprising to see Tuckney's criticisms of Whichcote centre on Whichcote's characteristic defence of the faculty of reason, taken from Proverbs 20:27 'the Spirit of man is the candle of the Lord.' Staying true to his orthodox Calvinism, Tuckney believes that the human mind is capable of coming to a very basic appreciation of God. However, as we have already seen in Calvin, this can only ever be negative in form. Using the guise of a wise and caring friend, Tuckney suggests to Whichcote that he would be wiser basing his theology on questions of

---

[1] *Letters*, pp.i-iv.

[2] Bendell et al, *Emmanuel College*, pp.245.

[3] Ibid., pp.245-6; Twigg, *University of Cambridge*, p.112.

faith rather than reason. Tuckney argues, as a good Calvinist, that human reason can never come anywhere near an appreciation of the divine:

> Where Faith is, there is a renewall of God's image; in knowledge, as well as holiness and righteousness and there a *liberum arbitrium ad bonum spirituale* is in parte renewed, as well as a *recta ratio*; and a beleefe of that, to which reason cannot reach.[4]

Religious belief must come in the uncorrupted forms of faith and scripture. Although in acting by faith, Tuckney argues, man's reason also acted, this was *recta ratio* – right reason. Right reason does not subvert faith into corrupt human faculty, Tuckney argues, but deduces the supremacy of faith over human reason.[5] Right reason therefore teaches man to suspend his own human, rational faculties and allows man to experience the divine through scripture in an uncorrupted form without secondary interpretation. Tuckney acknowledges that scripture has been used by heretical sects, but this is through their over-interpretation of those texts. Only by extracting the unnecessary mediation of human reason from religion is it possible for man to come to the full truth of God's message. Teachings of 'truth and love' such as the Sermon on the Mount, Tuckney argues, cannot simply be learnt as ethical formulas recoverable by reason, they are only coherent as the teaching of grace mediated to man through the words of scripture.[6] The vital role that scripture plays in accommodating God's word to man is fatally limited by the use of reason. Reason can never explain the mysteries of Christianity, such as the

---

[4] *Letters*, p.94.
[5] Ibid., pp.21, 66.
[6] Ibid., pp.80-93.

Incarnation or the Trinity. Consequently those thinkers who use reason as a

theological tool are drawn with increasing inevitability into heresy. This is shown by

the desire of heretical groups such as Arminians, Socinians and Catholics who, in

Tuckney's view, seek to diminish the divine to the role of a secondary principle

behind their primary aim of justifying human freewill.[7] At the final reckoning

Tuckney prefers to hold to his extreme fideism, and the criticism that that might

have brought him, rather than diminish the form and nature of the divine:

> I had rather, by reason of my adaering to the truth, that CALVINE
>
> maintained; men shoulde call mee a Calvinist: than by reason of eyther and
>
> indifference, or by propending to somthing that Socinians, or Arminians
>
> hold; men, though unjustlie and in sinfullie should besmeare mee with their
>
> appellation.[8]

Tuckney's vehement attack on the power and virtues of human reason

provides us with interesting insights, not only into Tuckney's thought but also the

wider theological context in which this debate was written. In Tuckney's account of

human reason we can clearly see the influence of the Protestant Scholasticism

implicit in his orthodox Calvinism. Tuckney's letters do not contain any of the clear

syllogistic logic that we earlier encountered in Beza and Perkins. Tuckney's account,

however, does rely on the distinctions between the knowledge of the actions of

God's mind and the execution of those actions. The former, for Protestant

Scholasticism, can never be known by the mind of man; the latter however, can be

---

[7] Ibid., pp.2,89.
[8] Ibid., p.79.

known if the correct form of reasoning is applied. It is this philosophical distinction

that allows Protestant Scholasticism to reconcile its strict supra-lapsarianism with

the ethical theories of experimental predestination.[9] Tuckney's criticisms of

Whichcote centre on Tuckney's belief that Whichcote's continual stress on reason

means that Whichcote is attempting the impossible task of knowing the mind of

God. For Tuckney the voluntaristic account of the greatness of the will and wisdom

of God can never be penetrated by the mind of man. The only reasonable action is

for the mind to be led, by faith, to know the grace of God. Citing 1 Cor. 1:20,

Tuckney argues that at the final analysis all human attempts to know the mind of

God are essentially folly: 'Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the

debater of the age? Has God not made foolish the wisdom of the world?'

Tuckney is sure that Whichcote's errors have their source in Whichcote's

over-reliance on both anti-Calvinist and pagan texts. Whichcote, Tuckney believes,

has been exposed to these at Emmanuel after he had left Tuckney's tutelage. These

errors, Tuckney argues, are at the base of Whichcote's heterodoxy and their sources

were clear:

> Some are readie to think; that your great authors, you steere your course by,
>
> are DR FIELD, DR. JACKSON, DR. HAMMOND; all three very learned
>
> men; the middle sufficiently obscure; and both hee and the last, I must
>
> needs think, too *corrupt*.[10]

---

[9] Bray, *Beza's Doctrine of Predestination*, p.129
[10] *Letters*, p.38.

All three authors cited by Tuckney were leading figures in the established Church,

that had been so comprehensively defeated by the time of Tuckney's letters in 1651.

Tuckney in this quote, therefore, criticises Whichcote's reliance on, in Tuckney's

eyes, the discredited thinking of the established Church of England. Richard Field

was the closest to the Calvinism of Tuckney, but he had retreated from the extremes

of Calvinist doctrine in the early-seventeenth century.[11] Henry Hammond acted as a

chaplain to Charles I and was extremely critical of the liturgical reforms made by the

Westminster Assembly of which Tuckney was such a central figure. Hammond has

also been described as the 'intellectual heir' to the moderate theology of the Great

Tew circle, and Falkland and Chillingworth in particular.[12] Thomas Jackson is, as we

shall go on to see, the most interesting of the three divines cited by Tuckney.

Jackson followed the moderate religious beliefs of Field and Hammond. He was

also, with Hammond and Field, an Oxford based thinker and, in Tuckney's view, a

dangerous influence because of his Arminianism. Jackson, however, stands apart

from Hammond and Field because of his use of Platonic thought in his writings.

Tuckney believes that these corrupting influences had allowed the introduction of

non-Christian sources into Whichcote's theology. Some of these were learnt from

Jackson, but others, Tuckney feared, learnt from his contemporaries. As Tuckney

continues to Whichcote:

> Whilest you were fellow here [Emmanual], you were cast into the companie
>
> of very learned and ingenious men; who, I fear, at least some of them,

[11] Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, pp.13-14, 60-1.
[12] Horton Davis, *Worship and Theology in England: From Andrewes to Baxter and Fox, 1603-1690*
(Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1975), pp.344-5; Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Catholics, Anglicans and
Puritans* (Seeker & Warburg, London, 1987), pp.215-27.

studyed other authors, more than scriptures; and PLATO and his schollars, above others:[13]

Tuckney believes that it is through Whichcote's use and respect of Pagan and mostly Platonic sources that heretical principles entered his theology. In particular the use of these theories diminishes the exclusive nature of Christ's saving grace. By placing so much respect in ancient, pagan, philosophers Tuckney argues that Whichcote is fatally down playing the exclusive truth of the Gospel:

> Those … Philosophers, and other Heathens, made fairer candidates for Heaven; than the scriptures seeme to allowe of: and They, in their virtues, preferred before Christians, overtaken with weaknesses – A kinde of a Moral Divinitie minted; onlie with a little tincture of Christ added: nay, a Platonique faith united to God.[14]

Tuckney sees in Whichcote's 'Platonique faith' something incompatible with his own understanding of God. He complains that Whichcote's undue respect for the ability and faculties of men are too easily being used as a screen for heresy. Chief of these heresies in Tuckney's mind was the heresy of anti-Trinitarianism. His accusations of heresy centre on two linked factors in Whichcote writings: first his Platonism, which can lead to Arianism, and second his use of reason, which opens the door to Socinianism. In Tuckney's attacks we encounter for the first time the accusations of anti-Trinitarian heresy which were laid at the door of the Cambridge

---

[13] *Letters*, p.38.
[14] Ibid., p.39.

Platonists with increasing regularity through the remaining decades of the seventeenth century.

The fear that Platonism necessarily leads to anti-Trinitarianism is most clearly highlighted by Calvin's dispute with Michael Servetus. Servetus was born in Aragorn in 1511 and now is best remembered for his observations concerning the operation of the heart.[15] It was, however, his theological writings that brought him into direct conflict with Calvin and, at the behest of Calvin, saw him executed as a heretic.[16] Servetus, in several treatises on Christian doctrine, argues that the teaching of Christ had been falsified by the Church fathers, the Roman Church and latterly the reformers. Of these many falsifications the greatest was the Trinity. In place of the metaphysical complications of the doctrine of the Trinity, Servetus argues that God is a single principle who had revealed himself to man through a gradual revelation.[17] This gradual revelation of the one true God had, Servetus argues, come to be confused within Christian theology as the Trinity. Rather than be confused with complicated metaphysics Servetus argues that God should be understood as the ideal of reason which, in the words of François Wendel, is 'the primordial idea which comprehends and sums up the essence of all things.'[18] The philosophical source of these theories is Neoplatonic philosophy. Through the use of Neoplatonism Servetus is able to doubt the Trinity on philosophical as well as theological grounds. The most obvious form of this is Servetus' use of Neoplatonic emanation to explain his theory of the progressive revelation of God. The revelation of Christ is therefore not as part of the unified form of the divine, but as the most

---

[15] Wendel, *Calvin*, pp.93-4.
[16] For a full discussion of Calvin's dispute with Servetus see Ibid., pp.93-9.
[17] Jerome Friedman, *Michael Servetus: A Case study in Total Heresy* (Librairie Droz S.A., Geneva, 1978), p.46.
[18] Wendel, *Calvin*, pp.93-4.

important of these divine emanations. Servetus uses Neoplatonism to assert Christ

as a created being, not as part of the Trinity. Calvin violently attacked Servetus' anti-

Trinitarianism. It is not clear whether Calvin believed that Servetus' heresy was

direct consequence of his Neoplatonism; however, the existence of a Neoplatonic

influence on his theories shows how Neoplatonism could be used to pervert

accepted Christian doctrines. This interpretation of the relationship between

Platonism and Christianity was used in the 1680s by Theophilus Gale who argues

that it was the mixture of Platonic philosophy with Christianity that lead inevitably

to the anti-Trinitarian heresy of Arianism.[19] Accusations of the heretical nature of

Platonic philosophy on the doctrine of the Trinity also help explain the lengths,

which we shall see in the next chapter, to which Cudworth went, in his *True*

Intellectual System of the Universe, to defend a Platonised doctrine of the Trinity.

Although attacking Whichcote's Platonism, Tuckney's major accusation of

heresy centres more generally on Whichcote's use of the faculty of reason. Central

to Tuckney's criticism is the belief that Whichcote's use of reason would lead him

into the other great seventeenth century anti-Trinitarian heresy, Socinianism. The

founder of Socinianism was the Italian theologian Faustus Socinius. Reacting to the

strictures of high Calvinism in the late-sixteenth century Socinius had sought to

examine the Bible with the rigorous rationality of the humanist renaissance.[20] This

method caused Socinius to doubt and refute many of the great mysteries of the

Church, most importantly the doctrine of the Trinity. What was revolutionary about

Socinius' anti-Trinitarianism is his rejection of not only the Trinity, but also the pre-

---

[19] Sarah Hutton, 'The Neoplatonic Roots of Arianism – Ralph Cudworth and Theophilus Gale,' in *Socinianism and its Role in the Culture of XVI-th to XVIII-th Centuries*, ed. L.Szczucki (PWN-Polish Scientific Publishers, Warsaw, 1983), pp.139-45; D.W.Dockrill, 'The Authority of the Fathers in the Great Trinitarian Debates of the Sixteen-Nineties,' in *Studia Patristica*, XVIII.4, (Peeters Press, Leuven, 1990), pp.335-47.
[20] H. John McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford, OUP, 1951), p.4

existent divinity of Christ. Christ, in Socinius' eyes, is a human who was ordained

with divine powers (*divinitas*). This did not make him equal with, or part of God

(*deitas*).[21] In this way the Socinian heresy differs from other anti-Trinitarian heresies

as it made Christ a creation in time, not the first creation of eternity as in the Arian

heresy. Even in the theological melting pot of the Interregnum anti-Trinitarianism,

in whatever form it took, was punishable by death.[22] Such was the reliance of

'reason' in Socinian thought that for the Calvinist orthodoxy any theological method

that advocated and championed the use of reason opened itself up to the dangers of

Socinian heresy. John Edwards, during this period, states, in a manner reminiscent

of Tuckney's criticisms of Whichcote, that if 'right reason is [taken to be] the rule of

faith…We are to believe the Scriptures, and the doctrine of the Trinity…so far as

we see them agreeable to reason, and no further.'[23] The implicit association of

reason and rationality with the Socinian heresy helps explain Tuckney's continual

accusations of heresy against Whichcote. At one point in the correspondence

Tuckney accuses Whichcote, because of his use of reason, of walking in Socinian

'footsteppes.' At another point Tuckney goes even further by attacking Whichcote's

claim that 'Truth is Truth, whatsoever speaks itt: and will readily agree with Papists,

Socinian, or anie; so farre as he asserts itt: because it is not His, but God's.' This,

Tuckney claims, must be false because the truth gained through reason by the

Socinian must be bogus because truth cannot exist when the divinity of Christ is

doubted.[24]

---

[21] Ibid., p.13.

[22] In May 1648 the Blasphemy Ordinance made the denial of the Trinity or that Scripture was the word of God an offence punishable by death. Although passed, this law proved impossible to enforce. See Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1991), p.187.

[23] Ibid.

[24] The quote from Whichcote is Tuckney quoting Whichcote's second letter back at himself. The quote does not appear in the published version of Whichcote's second letter. As no manuscripts of

It is, Tuckney argues, always the Arminans and Socinians who call for liberty of conscience to hide their 'wildest and foulest extravagances.'[25] For Tuckney the human mind can never gain access to the mysteries of the divine. Those who seek to include an element of reason into theology are heretical, because their use of reason implicitly suggests that man can know something of the will and power of God and mysteries, such as the Trinity, that only God can know. In this sense Tuckney's criticisms of Whichcote are completely in keeping with the voluntarism of the Calvinist orthodoxy of the day. Whichcote's reply to Tuckney's criticisms employs a Platonic intellectualism which is philosophically irreconcilable with Tuckney's Calvinist voluntarism. It is in this break from the Calvinist orthodoxy that we first encounter the intellectualism at the heart of the Cambridge Platonic system which Whichcote founded.

III.2.ii. Benjamin Whichcote and Platonism in the seventeenth century

Benjamin Whichcote was born in Stoke, Shropshire in 1609 and matriculated as a student at Emmanuel in 1626 where he was initially tutored by Anthony Tuckney. He was elected to a fellowship in 1633 and appointed to the Sunday afternoon lectureship at Holy Trinity Church in 1636. Following his appointment as the Provost of King's by the Earl of Manchester, Whichcote acted as Vice-Chancellor in 1650-51, the year that his debate with Tuckney took place. He was removed from the Provostship of King's in 1660 by Royal order but, by accepting the Act of Uniformity, was appointed to St Anne's, Blackfriars. Later he was presented the

---

the letters are available it is difficult to know whether this is a direct quotation or an embellishment on Tuckney's part, see *Letters*, p.85.

[25] Ibid., p.31.

parish of St Lawrence Jewry in 1668. Despite his physical separation from Cambridge, Whichcote always maintained a close affinity to Cambridge and in particular a close personal friendship with Ralph Cudworth, at whose house Whichcote died during a visit to Cambridge in 1683.[26]

Perhaps because of Whichcote's geographical separation from Cambridge after 1660 it has become increasingly common for commentators to downplay and even deny a (Cambridge) Platonic element in his writings. Within Whichcote's surviving work, posthumously collected sermons and aphorisms, one does not find the vast Platonic erudition that we find in Cudworth or More. Jon Parkin, in his recent work on Richard Cumberland, has argued that Whichcote was more a practical rational divine in the mould of the Latitudinarians than a 'cloistered' and esoteric thinker like Cudworth or More. Parkin argues that this is typified by his more common use of Aristotle than Plato in his sermons. This interpretation would seem strange for two reasons. Firstly, contemporary accounts never doubted Whichcote's use of Platonic theology. Confirming the assumptions of Tuckney's attack, Gilbert Burnet, in his *History of my own time*, comments that it was Whichcote who had first encouraged the study of Plato and Plotinus in Cambridge.[27] Secondly, the anti-Platonic reading of Whichcote relies too heavily on the surface, linguistic form of Whichcote's thought, examining whom he quotes, not how he uses them. It is true that Aristotle and many other non-Platonic philosophers are quoted by the Cambridge Platonists. The Cambridge Platonists' use of these philosophers, however, has to be understood within the assumption of a broader Platonic

---

[26] C.A.Patrides, ed. *The Cambridge Platonists*, p.xxix. The closeness of Whichcote and Cudworth's friendship is shown by Whichcote acting as security for Ralph Cudworth's youngest son Charles Cudworth's transit to work in India. *Christ's College MS.77*, 'Letter of John C. Whitebrook to John Peile, May 26th 1902.'

[27] Gilburt Burnet, *History of My own time*, 2 vols, ed. Osmund Airy (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1897-1900), I.331.

framework.[28] Therefore to call Whichcote an Aristotelian first, as Parkin does, is to completely miss the profound Platonic form of his intellectualist theology, which is seen so clearly in his responses to Tuckney. This form of interpretation also fails because it too readily accepts the belief, outlined in Chapter One, that Aristotelianism and Platonism are implicitly opposed philosophies. This form of thinking has been used by those interpreters who saw the Platonic renaissance in England as springing out of a vacuum of Aristotelian scholasticism.[29] Therefore, before we can examine in detail the Platonic nature of Whichcote's response to Tuckney we must first examine the sources of Whichcote's Platonism within the context of seventeenth century thought.

Although Aristotelian Scholasticism was the dominant philosophical and pedagogical system of the seventeenth century, it is incorrect to think of Plato as alien to the seventeenth century. It is true that Platonic sources were far less common in England than in other countries on the continent. Only two Platonic texts, a Greek edition of the *Menexenus* and the pseudo-Platonic *Axiochus*, had been published in England by the beginning of the seventeenth century.[30] There had always been, however, since the sixteenth century writings of Erasmus, Jean Colet and Thomas More, a tradition of Platonic humanism within England. This was evident in the humanist foundations of St John's and Christ's Colleges in Cambridge, and Corpus Christi College, Oxford. However, even in these foundations Plato remained an optional, not compulsory element of the

---

[28] Jon Parkin, *Science, Religion and Politics in Restoration England: Richard Cumberland's 'De Legibus Naturae'* (Boydell, Woodbridge, 1999) pp.76-7. Something of Parkin's linguistic interpretation of Whichcote can be explained, I would venture, by Parkin's use of the method of the Cambridge school of historians, and Skinner in particular, within his work.

[29] See for instance Cassirier, *Platonic Renaissance*, p.44.

[30] Sarah Hutton, 'Plato in the Tudor Academies' in *Sir Thomas Gresham and Gresham College: Studies in the Intellectual history of London in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*, ed. Francis Ames-Lewis (Ashgate, Aldershot, 1999), pp.106-124, p.107.

curriculum.[31] The prevalence of the study of Aristotle did not mean that there was necessarily no place for the study of Plato. As was shown in Chapter One there has, since the nineteenth century, been a clear distinction made between the practical virtues of Aristotle next to the esoteric learning of Plato. However in the seventeenth century both thinkers were not seen as polar opposites, but as part of the same tradition of wisdom and learning. Just because Aristotelian thought held the ascendancy does not mean that there was no place for Platonic philosophy.[32] It is possible to find in some thinkers who are traditionally seen to be part of a scholastic academic orthodoxy of the time a healthy respect for Plato's thought. One of the best examples of this is Richard Holdsworth's *Praelectiones Theologicae*. Holdsworth, whom we have previously encountered advocating the importance of Aristotle in his *Directions for a Student of the University*, was a product of the humanism of St John's College, Cambridge. He first gave the *Praelectiones Theologicae* as lectures while he was Professor of Divinity at Gresham College in the 1630s. The *Praelectiones Theologicae* were published posthumously in 1661 by Holdsworth's nephew Richard Pearson, as an attempt to resurrect Holdsworth's reputation after the Civil War. In these lectures references to Plato are frequent, using the common Neoplatonic epithet of '*divininissimus Plato*.'[33] There are also other sources of Platonism within seventeenth century scholarship. There are over thirty instances of holdings of Plato in college libraries and private book collections in seventeenth century Cambridge. There were also other Neoplatonic sources in Cambridge collections in the

---

[31] Ibid., pp.109-110.
[32] Charles B. Schmitt, *Aristotle and the Renaissance* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge M.A. 1983), pp. 91-3, 103; Hutton, 'Plato in the Tudor Academies,' p.109.
[33] Richard Holdsworth, *Praelectiones Theologicae*, ed. Richard Pearson (London, 1661) p.359. See also pp.57, 107, 203; also Hutton, 'Plato in the Tudor Academies,' p.123

seventeenth century, including an edition of Plotinus in Andrew Perne's vast book

collection that found its way into Peterhouse library after his death in 1589.[34]

Far from being anathema to seventeenth century thought, there are also

examples of the explicit use of Platonic thought in the writings of philosophers and

theologians in the early-seventeenth century. Both Thomas Hobbes and Francis

Bacon made references to Plato in their writings. These references are not

necessarily complementary, however, they are in a form that assumes the reader

already has knowledge of Plato's work.[35] A more positive use of Platonic philosophy

can be found in the writings of scholars educated in the humanist foundations

mentioned above. At St John's in Cambridge Everard Digby used a wide range of

sources from both the Aristotelian and Platonic traditions. Crucially he had not only

a knowledge of Plato, but also the Neoplatonic thought of, amongst others,

Plotinus, Proclus and Iamblichus. His thought was consciously indebted to the

Florentine Platonism of Ficino and Pico.[36]

Perhaps the most important advocate of Platonism in the early-seventeenth

century was Thomas Jackson, whom we have already encountered as an ally of

William Laud and in Tuckney as an alleged source of Whichcote's errors. Jackson,

born in 1579, was a student and later fellow of Corpus Christi College, Oxford.

After a period as Vicar in Newcastle-upon-Tyne he was elected, under the

sponsorship of Laud, as President of Corpus Christi, a position he held from 1630

till his death in 1640. In the early-seventeenth century the originality of Jackson's

mind was marked by the manner in which he almost completely rejected the

---

[34] E.S.Leedham-Green, *Books in Cambridge Inventories*, 2 vols (Cambridge, CUP, 1986) I:448, 625-6, 629, II:419.
[35] See in particular Hobbes' references to Plato's *Republic* at the conclusion to book two of *Leviathan*, p.407
[36] Hutton, 'Plato in the Tudor Academies,' p.113

dominant Protestant scholasticism that dominated early-seventeenth century theology.[37] His liberal approach to the predestination debates already mentioned also placed him firmly in opposition to orthodox Calvinism. Jackson argues that Calvinist determinism, far from stressing the limitlessness nature of the will of God, actually limits the nature of the divine. To say that God is limited to a preordained chain of events is to deny that God can also know not only the necessary consequences but also the contingent consequences of all actions. Human agency therefore, far from limiting divine power, actually feeds into the infinite power of the divine by accounting for the infinite capacity of the will of God:

> So far is freedom of choice or contingency from being incompatible with the immutability of God's will, that without this infinite variety of choice or freedom of thought in man and angels, we cannot rightly conceive him to be as infinitely wise as his decree is immutable.[38]

Such is the infinite nature of the divine that all creatures, even 'the worm or gnat,' participate in God's infinite wisdom and goodness. At the source of creation lies the goodness of God that continually replenishes the created realm with this goodness like a fountain.[39] Jackson's theology therefore relies on Platonic imagery and distinctions. He also believes that there is an almost providential closeness between Christianity and Platonism. In his voluminous writings Jackson often sites the 'Divine' philosophy of Plato and Plotinus. Jackson also cites the myth of the 'Attic

---

[37] White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic*, pp.256-9. On Jackson's rejection of Scholasticism see Jackson, *Works*, V:99.
[38] Ibid., V:90.
[39] Ibid., IV:404, V:60-2.

107

Moses' and the dissemination of revealed truth through ancient theology – the *prisca theologia* – as possible sources for the seeming closeness of Christianity and Platonism.[40] Jackson even goes so far as to argue that pagan Platonism written after the birth of Christ, in particular the thought of Plotinus, might have been influenced by the revealed truth of Christianity. In the case of Plotinus, Jackson argues that Plotinus, perhaps through contact with the works of Origen, had 'set forth stolen fragments of the food of life with the Platonical sauce.'[41] On theological issues Jackson particularly stresses that both Platonism and Christianity believe in the immortality of the soul and also that this immortality is contingent on actions in life. This final point naturally put Jackson in stark opposition to his Calvinist contemporaries and he seems to have been happy to accept the Arminian implications of his thought.[42]

There are clear biographical links between Jackson and the Cambridge Platonists. Jackson was friendly with Henry More's tutor Joseph Mede, who is often placed on the edge of the Cambridge Platonists, and Jackson later published his correspondence with Henry More. Jackson's Platonism does differ from that of the Cambridge Platonists. In particular, his thought is based much more explicitly in the doctrines of the Church. This is shown by the fact that his works, although containing great Platonic learning, were primarily concerned with doctrinal Christian issues, rather than the more wide ranging philosophical questions dealt with by More and Cudworth. Jackson also cautions against the dangers of too heavy a reliance on ancient wisdom, favouring primarily the revealed truth of Christianity. Jackson does, however, share many affinities, both philologically and philosophically

---

[40] Ibid., I:115, IV:404, V:27, VII:243.
[41] Ibid., IV:404.
[42] White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic*, p.256.

with the Cambridge Platonists. As we shall see in Chapter Five his defence of

freewill in particular foreshadowed many of the arguments that we will encounter in

Cudworth's freewill manuscripts. Jackson's theology, therefore, along with the

thought of lesser figures such as Everard Digby, shows that there existed in the

early-seventeenth century a small, yet significant tradition of Platonic thought in

England from which the Cambridge Platonists would later flower. [43]

III.2.iii. Whichcote's response to Tuckney

As has been shown above, by reacting to the voluntarist determinism represented by

Tuckney and the theology of the Westminster Divines, the Cambridge Platonists

can be understood as a continuation of the Calvinist/anti-Calvinist debates which

had occurred in Cambridge since the 1590s. What makes Whichcote's duel with

Tuckney stand out from these previous anti-Calvinist controversies is his

unflinching advocacy for the dignity of man's rationality. Even Thomas Jackson was

guarded in his respect for the faculty of reason. Jackson does stress that reason is

given, by God, to help man in the interpretation of scripture. However, reason is

not the only guide and is certainly inferior to faith as the surest guide to religion. As

Jackson argues, '*recta ratio* be not the rule of faith, nor any competent judge of divine

mysteries.'[44] Whichcote's continual stress on the rationality of both man and God

sought to reform the common understanding of man's relationship to the divine by

placing man within an intellectualist conception of the divine. This central claim,

which comes directly from Whichcote's appeals to, and use of, the Platonic

---

[43] Sarah Hutton, 'Thomas Jackson,' pp.636-646.
[44] See Jackson, *Works*, IX:18,44,146.

tradition, allows him to consistently and coherently attack the voluntarist basis of the Calvinist orthodoxy.[45]

Whichcote in his replies to Tuckney continually stresses that his main aim has always been to defend the dignity of the Christian religion. In this way he wishes to defend Christianity from the extreme positions that it was driven to by the determinism of Calvinist orthodoxy. In particular Whichcote wishes to distance Christianity from accusations of the arbitrariness of God. Whichcote, therefore, always seeks to understand God in intellectualist terms, as the principle and exemplar of justice. As Whichcote stated to Tuckney in his second letter:

> I do without scruple beleeve what God hath reveled, and as he hath reveled; because God is infinite in knowledge, infallible in truth, and necessarily good: whence He cannot *deficere*, or declare *contra vertitem facto, rationem rei*; or, in matters of his own voluntary determination, otherwise than as He hath resolved them:[46]

If God cannot act other than by his revealed goodness then man can by his actions become reconciled to the known and immutable principles of the divine. Whichcote argues that this reconciliation is possible through the faculty of reason. That is not, Whichcote argues, because reason is a human faculty, but because it is the principle that links man to God. Whichcote, at the end of his final reply to Tuckney, wearily complains that Tuckney's continual attack on his use of the faculty of reason

---

[45] Cassirer directly attributes the success of the Florentine and Cambridge Platonists' theological system in breaking the Augustine 'strangle-hold' over arguments for freewill and determinism, which he believes even Aquinas failed to break, to their use and respect for the Platonic tradition. See Cassirer, *Platonic Renaissance*, p.104.
[46] *Letters*, p.43.

misunderstands the manner within which he is using reason. Whichcote argues that '[t]hose who mistake the Means for the End, may be reproved; without prejudice to the Means.'[47] What this comment shows is that Whichcote does not see reason as the end of religion, as Tuckney continually accuses him, but merely the means given by God for man to begin to understand religion. In this way reason is a divinely given faculty, closely related to the idea of grace in the mind of Whichcote, that exists *within* an understanding of the divine:

> the work of grace and favour towards us and upon us; our being restored to righteousness, goodness and truth; and our being reconciled to God, so as we may truly find the kingdom God within us.[48]

Tuckney's response therefore fails for Whichcote because, by disposing of reason as an end in itself, it also disposed of reason as a means to the appreciation of a higher goal. This positive understanding of the human faculty of reason was central to Whichcote's intellectualist position.

To understand the way in which Whichcote believes one can equate reason with an understanding of the divine one must turn to the Neoplatonic tradition Whichcote draws from, in particular the thought of Plotinus. When describing the nature of the divine in *Ennead* 6.8 Plotinus suggests that,

---

[47] Ibid., p.129.
[48] Ibid., p.16.

111

[the One] is then without dimensions, one rational principle for all things, one number and one that is greater and more powerful that what has come into being, and there is nothing greater or better than him.[49]

The divine is therefore the ultimate principle in the universe. As the ultimate principle in the universe Plotinus argues that the divine can only be understood through reason, as the divine is the sole source of the rationality that pervades and orders all creation. The imprint of the divine is therefore found, through reason, in all creation. This ordering was not by the arbitrary will of the divine, instead creation is in a reasoned manner because of the implicit rationality of the divine intellect. As Plotinus put it, '[t]he ordering of the universe, then, corresponds with Intellect in such a way that it exists without rational planning.'[50] Creation, therefore, is a unified rational principle emanating from the intellect of the divine. As all parts of creation are inextricably linked to the intellect of the divine, all parts of creation can, to a limited extent, seek a participation in the divine.[51] All actions in creation are then, implicitly, a participation in the divine. As Plotinus put it:

The first part of soul, then, that which is above and always filled and illuminated by the reality of above, remains There; but another part, participating by the first participation of the participant goes forth, for soul goes forth always, life from life; for actuality reaches everywhere, and there is not point where it fails.[52]

---

[49] *Enneads*, 6.8.17.
[50] Ibid., 3.2.14.
[51] Ibid., 3.2.3.
[52] Ibid., 3.8.5.

112

Although this participation is not consistently strong in all parts of creation, it is present in all parts of the created realm. Man, as part of this created realm, is not only part of the divine intellect but man also has, through his reason, the means to appreciate, or participate, in this divine creation. This places man in a unique position within creation because he can, by his own volition and through the use of his reason, bring himself closer to the divine. He could choose not to use his reason to bring himself into participation within the divine. The implications of the assumed power of human agency in this system and Whichcote's acceptance of this Plotinian schema clearly placed him at odds with the determinism of orthodox Calvinism. The implications of this argument for freewill will be discussed in Chapter Five. At this stage it is enough to show the way in which Whichcote believes man can, through his own volition, come to know and participate in the divine. The principle of reason links man directly to the intellect of the divine.

This Plotinian step is found implicitly in all Whichcote's writings. Reason is, for Whichcote, the means by which man not only raises himself to the divine, but also the divine principles in the world. In this way reason acts as a reflection of Christ in the world. Through reason, Whichcote states to Tuckney, 'Christ is able to be acknowledged, as the principle of grace *in* us.' Christ, Whichcote argues, acts in two ways for man. Firstly, he allows man to distinguish the 'new man from the old.' Secondly, he is the advocate and means of reconciliation between God and man.[53] By making this explicit link between the faculty of reason and the divine person of Christ, a claim that relies entirely on his Platonism to be coherent, Whichcote believes he is able to overcome any claims that his use of reason led him to

---

[53] *Letters*, pp.13-4.

Socinianism. In fact so preposterous does Whichcote believe this claim to be that he believes that it would be as well to call him a 'Papist, or Mahometan; Pagan, or Atheist' as a Socinian.[54]

Reason becomes the principle in all men that brings man towards God. As Whichcote concludes his correspondence with Tuckney:

> Now that Christ is more known and freelie professed, let him also be inwardlie felt, and secretlie understood; as a principle of divine life within us, as well as a saviour without us.[55]

Through this rationality Whichcote argues that man can develop the Christ-like potential that he believes exists in all men. This is described by Whichcote by the metaphor of 'the Candle of the Lord.' When understood in its Plotinian context 'the Candle of the Lord' helps to clarify Whichcote's response to Tuckney's criticisms. If God's justice was defined by his will, as Tuckney argues, then there is no way of understanding or appreciating the nature of this justice, except through the dictates of divine fiat. However, if the divine is seen as the principle of justice then man can gain access to the implicit notion of this justice in the world. If that notion of justice can also be linked to a principle of reason, as in the Plotinian schema outlined above, then, Whichcote argues, reason can be seen as part of the intellectual revelation of the divine. So in answer to Tuckney's criticism, Whichcote is sure to show that 'the Candle of the Lord' is not a shallow principle, but a profound symbol that speaks of the divine in the world.[56] Reason, therefore, can show man the nature

---

[54] Ibid., p.53.
[55] Ibid., p.126.
[56] Ibid., p.112.

of the divine in all parts of creation and teach man to recognise the wisdom, justice

and love of God through creation. Knowledge of the source of man's rationality can

allow man to appreciate that the religious inclination within man is not something

that has to be proven by exterior actions but is the thing which, through reason,

defines man's very being. As Whichcote states in his sermon on *The Use of Reason in*

Matters of Religion, '[i]f Reason did not apprehend God; Religion could not be

learn'd.'[57]

It is, however, important at this point to qualify the nature of this argument

for reason in Whichcote's thought. Reason, as already stated, is promoted to a

higher position in Whichcote's thought than by any of his close contemporaries or

predecessors. To do this Whichcote equates reason with the revelation and

covenant of the divine. That is not to say that reason is superior in Whichcote's eye

to the traditional forms of biblical revelation, whatever implications Tuckney draws

from Whichcote's use of reason.[58] Reason is, for Whichcote, always placed *within* the

revelation of the divine, placing reason on an equal plane with biblical revelation.

Whichcote argues that reason is never opposed by revelation, but only further

reinforced by the evidence of biblical revelation, because revelation and reason have

the same source in the intellect of the divine. Reason can therefore, Whichcote

argues, never oppose faith. Consequently, as Whichcote pithily commented, he is

able to dismiss all things that are contrary to reason, as an act of faith.[59]

---

[57] Benjamin Whichcote, 'The Use of Reason in Matters of Religion,' in C.A.Patrides ed. *The Cambridge Platonists*, p.47; also see *Letters*, p.44. It is interesting to compare the different uses of the metaphor of light within Whichcote's thought and that of Calvinism. Where Whichcote always equates light, the Candle of the Lord, with the intellectual principle of the divine, Calvinism always equates it with the word of God, the divine principle accommodated for the mind of man. See Robert A. Greene, 'Whichcote, the Candle of the Lord, and Syderesis,' in *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, 52:4 (1991), pp.617-44, p.621.
[58] *Letters*, p.70.
[59] Ibid., pp.102-3, 44.

This final claim brings the second qualification one must put on the principle of reason within Whichcote's thought. Reason is not for Whichcote a pure principle of deductive proof, rather it is the practical means by which man can come closer to the divine.[60] To see reason without this practical aspect is, for Whichcote, to confuse it, as Tuckney had done, for an end in itself. Reason can only be effective in bringing man closer to the divine if it is used actively in creation. In this way the comparison in Whichcote's thought between the active principle of reason and Christ as the active principle within the divine is instructive. It is, Whichcote argues, a conceit in men to believe that they could be reconciled to God without themselves becoming more God-like. It is only through the practical use of this rational faculty that man can, in Whichcote's eyes, come closer to the divine.[61] This practical understanding also has a consequent implication in that it creates a surer and firmer faith in man. If man is able to come to the divine through his own actions he is able to be satisfied about the truth of God in his own mind.[62] Consequently Whichcote argues that, although 'the Candle of the Lord' remains the 'talismanic endorsement of the dignity of man,'[63] man still remains in a fallen state. Therefore this candle-light can never be equal to the bright, burning intellect of the deity, but only a dim reflection of it. It is, however, this faculty that Whichcote believes God has placed in man to discover the truth of the divine. If its light is sometimes dimmed or only perceived 'through a glass darkly,' it still remains as a reflection of the light of Christ and consequently the means by which man can reconcile himself to the divine. Human reason is, Whichcote argues, not identical to the active divine principle, but

---

[60] On this point it is interesting to note the contrast that existed between the inductive reasoning which typified Calvin's theological style and the deductive reasoning or Beza and his Protestant Scholastic followers. See Armstrong, *Amyrant Heresy*, p.136.
[61] *Letters*, p.14.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Greene, 'Whichcote,' p.618.

is drawn directly from it. It is this Christocentric aspect in Whichcote's defence of reason which, as we shall come on to see, prepares the ground for the more explicitly Logocentric Trinitarianism of Cudworth's later thought.

III.3. Cudworth's early writings

Ralph Cudworth was born in Aller, Somerset in 1617, son of Ralph Cudworth the elder, who was a graduate of Emmanuel College.[64] The elder Ralph Cudworth, before taking the post of vicar of Aller in 1616, had been vicar of St Andrew's Church, Cambridge and was at some point a chaplain to James I. He also achieved limited recognition as the author of a supplement to William Perkin's commentary of the Epistle to the Galatians.[65] The author of the 'Memoirs *of* Ralph Cudworth D.D. *Author of* The Intellectual System,' written in 1736, comments that Cudworth's father 'wanted neither for Genius or Learning [but] he had not Ambition of appearing in Public as a Writer.' Cudworth's father died in 1624 and therefore would only have had a limited influence on Cudworth's early development. Cudworth's mother, who remains unnamed in all accounts of Cudworth's life, remarried a Dr Stoughton. Stoughton, like the elder Cudworth, was a fellow of Emmanuel and is credited with encouraging Cudworth's early potential and his

---

[64] The most often quoted source for the life of Ralph Cudworth is Thomas Birch's 'An account of the Life and writings of R. Cudworth D.D.' which prefaced the 1743 edition of the *TISU*. However this source, which has been assumed to be the earliest account of Cudworth's life, is itself based in large part on an anonymous account of Cudworth's life published in 1736. The 'Memoirs *of* Ralph Cudworth D.D. *Author of* The Intellectual System,' appeared in the January 1736 edition of the journal *The Present State of the Republic of Letters*. This appears to be the source of many of the claims, some of which are erroneous, which appear in Birch's account. It is, however, factually correct on the majority of the details of Cudworth's life.
[65] Ralph Cudworth, the elder, *A Commentarie or Exposition, upon the first Chapters of the Epistle to the Galatians: penned by ... Mr. W. Perkins. Now published for the benefit of the Church, and continued with a supplement upon the sixt chapter, by Rafe Cudworth.* (Cambridge, 1604).

eventual matriculation to Emmanuel in 1632.[66] Cudworth's progress once in

Cambridge was rapid. As a pupil of Whichcote he took his B.A. in 1635 and his

M.A. in 1639, 'with unusual Applause.'[67] Following Cudworth's M.A. he followed

his father and step-father into a fellowship at Emmanuel. At Emmanuel Cudworth

stood out as an unusually successful and popular tutor, having at one point 28

pupils, which was, so the author of the 'Memoir' comments, so rare as not to have

been remembered in living memory at Emmanuel.

Cudworth was appointed to the Mastership of Clare Hall in 1645. In the

same year Cudworth was also elected to the Regius Professorship of Hebrew, and in

1651 Cudworth was made a D.D. 'without the least difficulty and with a deserved

Approbation.'[68] During this period Cudworth appears to have begun to drift from

the University. In his capacity as Regius Professor of Hebrew he lectured on the

plan and structure of the Temple of Jerusalem. He did not, however, settle into his

position at Clare and never became actively involved in the running of the college.

The author of the 'Memoir' suggests that a shortage of funds nearly forced

Cudworth to resign from the University in the early 1650s. His financial situation

may have been helped by his appointment, in succession to Whichcote, to the living

of North Cadbury in 1650, that carried with it the not inconsiderable income of

£300 per annum.[69] What almost certainly brought Cudworth financial security was

his marriage in 1654 to Damaris Andrews, the widow of one Thomas Andrews.

This marriage brought with it not only financial security but also three step-children.

---

[66] The Author of the 'Memoir' does, however, state that Cudworth's mother had at one point been a Nurse to Prince Henry, the eldest son of James I. 'Memoirs' p.24.
[67] Ibid., pp.24-5.
[68] Ibid., p.28.
[69] Ibid., pp.27, 29.

Cudworth's wife then had three more children, John, Damaris and Charles.[70]

Although Charles Cudworth died in 1683 in India, contrary to the claim made in

both the 'Memoir' and Birch's 'Life,' Cudworth's eldest son John survived

Cudworth, as did his daughter Damaris.[71] In the same year as his marriage

Cudworth was able to consolidate his position in the University by his election to

the Mastership of Christ's College.[72] The appointment protected Cudworth's career

in two ways. Firstly, as Cudworth was elected to this position by the Mastership of

the college he immediately held more legitimacy in the University than he had as the

Earl of Manchester's appointee at Clare Hall. Secondly, at Christ's he came under

the influence and patronage of Heneage Finch, who later, as Lord Chancellor, was

the Dedicatee of the *True Intellectual System of the Universe*. These two factors almost

certainly helped Cudworth remain in his position at Christ's when many of his

fellow heads of houses, most notably Whichcote at Kings, Worthington at Jesus and

Tuckney at Emmanuel, were ejected at the Restoration.

Late in life Cudworth, in a letter to the Dutch Remonstrant Peter van

Limborch, stated that he had been brought up on a diet of Calvinism from an early

age. He does, however, not say when he began to depart from this strict Calvinist

position.[73] If this movement away from Calvinism did begin prior to his

matriculation, it would certainly have been hastened by the teaching and influence

of Whichcote. In fact Whichcote's liberal theological position and also his respect

---

[70] Cudworth's wealth from his marriage is shown by the extensive properties, mostly in Suffolk, outlined in his will which he left to his wife and subsequently his eldest son John. Christ's College MS.77, *Will of Ralph Cudworth D.D., Master of Christ's* and *Will of Damaris Cudworth*. In addition to his own children Cudworth cared for his three step-children, namely Thomas and Richard Andrews and Damaris Abney (nee Andrews). For a rough Cudworth family tree see Christ's College MS.77.

[71] 'Memoirs,' p.29; Birch, 'Life,' p.9.

[72] John Worthington, *The Diary and Correspondence of Dr John Worthington*, 3 vols, ed. James Crossley & Richard Copley Christie, *The Chetham Society*, vols. 13, 43, 114, (1847-1886), I:52; CUL.MS, Mm.5.45, *Notes on the Masters of God's House & Christ's College*, fol.59.

[73] Powicke, *Cambridge Platonists*, p.111.

for classical and, in particular, Platonic thought are identifiable in Cudworth's

earliest writings. In these early publications Cudworth can be seen adopting an

intellectualist opposition to the voluntarism of Calvinism very similar to that we

have already encountered in Whichcote. Although Cudworth's early writings lack

the heavy erudition of his later work, his earliest publications – *A Discourse concerning*

the true notion of the Lord's supper and *The Union of Christ and the Church in a shadow*, both

published in 1642 – both deal with theological issues with the mix of historical and

philosophical analysis which is central to the style and argument of the *TISU*. Even

before these works were published Cudworth, in his B.D. disputations, put forward

principles of eternal and immutable morality that were to become one of the

recurring themes of his writings.[74] With these writings Cudworth also published two

sermons. The first and most famous being his *Sermon Preached before the House of*

Commons of 1647, (described as the *First Sermon*) the second, his *Sermon Preached to the*

Honourable Society of Lincolnes-Inne from 1664 (described as the *Second Sermon*). These

published writings are interesting for two reasons. Firstly, they are Cudworth's only

published works until the publication of his monumental *TISU* in 1678 when

Cudworth was 61. Secondly, we can find in them the beginnings of the ideas that

find their intellectual maturity in Cudworth's later published and unpublished

writings.

---

[74] The subject of Cudworth's B.D. disputations, mentioned in a previous chapter, were: firstly, 'The Nature and Reason of Things are eternal and indivisible and that there is an immutable Difference between Good and Evil,' and secondly, 'That there exist incorporeal substance that are naturally immortal.' These disputations were printed in the 1670 edition of Cudworth's *Discourse on the True Nature of the Lord's Supper*. The author of the 'Memoir' comments of Cudworth's B.D. disputations that, '[f]rom whence it also appears, that this profound Metaphysician was then revolving in his spacious Mind, and carefully examining those different and important Questions, which he discussed with such Copiousness and Subtlety in his *Intellectual System* and other of this invaluable works are yet (unhappily) in Manuscript.' Cudworth's early use of the intellectualist arguments for an eternal and immutable basis to morality are also commented on by Tulloch, *Rational Theology*, II:29, 202-3; and by Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth*, p.11.

In these early writings we find Cudworth beginning to examine the themes that dominate his mature thought. In all these publications Cudworth continually returns to the central Christian theme of how can men live in the image of Christ. In all of Cudworth's writings this theme is dealt with in two linked ways. Firstly, beginning with the principle of the divine, Cudworth continually seeks to explain how man fits into the overarching principle of divine creation. In particular he asks how man can be defined in relation to God as Trinity. Secondly, taking the life of man as his starting point, Cudworth seeks to understand how man's humanity and relationships to other men can be defined within this overarching Trinitarian metaphysical system. In particular Cudworth, like Whichcote, seeks to link the duty of man to live the life and image of Christ with the obligation of man to achieve this within a viable human and, what I have termed, ethical community.

In his early writings Cudworth follows Whichcote's Christocentric criticisms of the prevailing theological orthodoxy of mid-seventeenth century England. We can see these criticisms most clearly in Cudworth's *First Sermon*. In style this sermon follows Whichcote in the moderate theological position it takes. Cudworth attacks Calvinism and Scholasticism, which are those areas of thought that are central to Whichcote's letters to Tuckney. It is therefore interesting at this point to compare Cudworth's *First Sermon* to Whichcote's *Letters* to show the unity of their theological position and, in particular, the intellectualist philosophical position that both men shared. Cudworth's *First Sermon* was a remarkably brave piece of public oratory. Cudworth was, at the time, the 29 year old Master of Clare Hall. In his sermon he not only attacks the prevailing theological mood of the day, which he identifies as the voluntarist theology of the Westminster Assembly, but also the divisive use to

which religion had been put to tear the country apart through the extraordinary middle years of the 1640s. Cudworth links these two issues with a general attack on the dangers of what he terms 'self-love.' Although this is never clearly defined by Cudworth in the *First Sermon* it is clear that, by implication, Cudworth understands self-love in two ways. Firstly, it is the selfish, egotistical acts of man following his base emotions over the higher principles of morality. Secondly, and more importantly for the context of Cudworth's *First Sermon*, he uses self-love to attack the stale, legalistic interpretations of religion that made religion not something which reformed man, but something that merely confirmed man's own self-image and prejudices. Such a self-serving understanding of religion, Cudworth argues, fails to understand that man is, by his very creation, actively involved in the nature and reality of the divine. The most influential of this religious legalism is for Cudworth, like Whichcote, the limited form of Scholastic reasoning. At the very beginning of the *First Sermon* Cudworth attacks those who write about religion as 'but a little *Book-craft*, a mere *paper-skill*.'[75] Cudworth argues that such thinkers fail because their bookish approach to theology can never bring man into a true participatory relationship with the divine. This scholasticism which was central to orthodox Calvinism, creates in Cudworth's view, a prescriptive and legalistic ethical system that implicitly fails to appreciate the living, active nature of the divine's presence in the world. As Cudworth states, '[i]nke and paper can never make us Christians, can never beget a new nature, a living principle within us: can never form Christ, or any true notions of spirituall things in our hearts.'[76] Cudworth is dismissive of those who believe that knowledge or experience of salvation could ever be achieved by such

---

[75] *First Sermon*, p.91.
[76] Ibid., p.92.

means. It is, Cudworth argues, ridiculous 'to perswade our selves that we are

certainly elected to everlasting happiness: before we see the image of God, in

rightousnesse and true holinesse, shaped in our hearts.'[77]

The final clause of this quotation shows the implicit intellectualism that runs

through Cudworth's argument. The arguments of Scholasticism and Calvinism fail

in Cudworth's mind because they fail to understand that man is, by nature, shaped

by the righteousness, holiness, and intellect of the divine. Man's relationship to God

cannot be defined by the complications of Scholastic logic but through the

recognition of the divine principle in all men: 'Surely, the way to heaven that Christ

hath taught us, is plain and easie, if we have but honest hearts: we need not many

Criticismes, many School-distinctions, to come to a right understanding of it.'[78] As

in Whichcote's writings, Cudworth equates this interior principle with the principle

of Christ known through the rationality implicit within men. This intellectualism is

brought out explicitly by Cudworth later in the *First Sermon*. Here, citing Plato's

argument from the *Euthyphro*, Cudworth links God's love not to arbitrary action, but

to God's recognition of his goodness in the essential nature of man.[79] Comparing

Plato's argument with the 1 Jn. 4:10,[80] Cudworth links the nature of man, the

incarnation and the salvation of man to this central, intellectually understood,

principle of divine love. For this reason Cudworth argues the principles of true

theology are found, as the example of Christ taught man, in actions rather than in

mere words. So Cudworth argues:

---

[77] Ibid., p.94.
[78] Ibid., p.96.
[79] Ibid., p.102.
[80] 'In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the expiation of our sins.'

The Gospel, that new Law which Christ delivered to the world, it is not merely a *Letter* without us, but a *quickening Spirit* within us. Cold Theorems and Maximes, dry and jejune Disputes, lean syllogistical reasonings, could never yet of themselves beget the least glympse of true heavenly light, the least sap of saving knowledge in any heart.[81]

Distinctions learnt from philosophy are important, but only as a means to confirm the truth already revealed to man in the example of Christ. As Cudworth argues in his *Second Sermon*, such philosophical distinctions are 'thin and subtile to vulgar apprehensions.'[82] The example that man had to understand in the example of Christ was that he did not create a stale, legalistic example, but an inner principle for the transformation of man.[83]

Cudworth's belief that Christ is a living and active principle comes out, if only in a subtle form, in Cudworth's *Discourse on the true nature of the Lord's Supper.* In this short work Cudworth seeks to reject Roman Catholic teaching on the true nature of the Eucharist.[84] Using examples from both pagan and Jewish thought Cudworth argues – against the Catholic belief in transubstantiation – that the Eucharist is not a sacrifice itself but a feast upon a sacrifice. Cudworth argues that in taking the Eucharist, the communicants are partaking in the Sacrifice made for man by Christ. This participatory relationship with the sacrifice of Christ assumes two factors. Firstly it draws on Platonic distinctions of 'forms' for the nature of the Eucharist. Cudworth argues, that the Eucharist is not a sacrifice in itself, rejecting

---

[81] *First Sermon*, p.92.
[82] *Second Sermon*, p.196.
[83] Ibid. p.222.
[84] It is interesting to note, with an eye on the tolerance implicit within all of Cudworth's writings, that in a time of virulent anti-Catholicism this work is the most explicit attack we find in all of Cudworth's writings on the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

the Catholic belief that the host truly becomes the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist. Rather, Cudworth argues, the Eucharist is a reflection of the *form* of the sacrifice of Christ. This argument allows Cudworth to make a second point. Just as Platonic forms relate to an eternal archetype, so the Eucharist relates, Cudworth argues, to the eternal and ongoing sacrifice of Christ.[85] The 'Federal rite' of the Eucharist not only confirms the eternal and active presence of Christ, but also, where 'God's meal, was a 'Federal Rite' between God and those that partake of them, and Signified that there was a Covenant of Friendship between him and them.'[86]

Unlike the prevailing Calvinist belief that the sacrifice of Christ merely confirms the poverty and sinfulness of man and consequently man's total reliance on the immeasurable, and essentially arbitrary, nature of God's grace, Cudworth argues that the sacrifice of Christ unites God and man in common cause.[87] Christ becomes not the symbol of the vast divide that exists between God and man but the mediating principle between the lower state of man and the perfection of the divine. This principle of Christ as mediator comes out most clearly in Cudworth's *Second Sermon*:

> And this is an unspeakable Consolation that the Christian Religion affords us, and a most gracious Condescension of the All-wise God; That forasmuch as we that dwell in these houses…are so far removed from the pure and abstracted Deity, and so infinitely disproportioned unto it, that there should be such a contrivance as this set on foot, that we should have

---

[85] Ralph Cudworth, *Discourse on the True Nature of the Lord's Supper* (London, 1670), p.75.
[86] Ibid., p.86.
[87] *Institutes*, II.xvii.1.

125

one of our own Flesh and Bloud, that was in all things tempted like unto us, and had experience of all our difficulties, and calamities, who demonstrated his infinite love to us in laying down his life for us, and therefore we cannot doubt but have a most tender sympathy and fellow feeling with us in all our infirmities.[88]

In this quote Cudworth opens up the problem of anti-Trintarianism of which we have already seen Tuckney accuse Whichcote and which would continue to dog Cudworth's later writings. Cudworth's thought relies on Christ as the mediating and defining principle in all creation. Cudworth, however, in trying to establish the person of Christ as mediating and active principle comes close to suggesting that Christ is a created, not co-eternal, principle. The manner in which Cudworth explains the principle of Christ as both an active principle which is co-eternal with the Father is a central theme of Cudworth's defence of the Trinity in the *TISU*. Taking into account this theological issue, Cudworth is clear in how he views the place of Christ to man; in Christ man sees '*with an open face…as in a Glass the Glory of the Lord* nakedly represented to us, being *changed into the same image from glory to glory*.'[89] The eternal principle of Christ becomes, for Cudworth, the spirit of a new life infused in the soul of man through faith.[90]

In his early writings Cudworth removes himself from external questions of Church order and liturgical form that dominated theological debate in the early decades of the seventeenth century. Alluding to the religious and political upheavals of the 1640s, Cudworth argues in this Preface to his *First Sermon*,

---

[88] *Second Sermon*, pp.200-1.
[89] Ibid., p.202.
[90] Ibid., p.224.

126

I fear many of us, that pull down idols in Churches, may set them up in our hearts: and whilst we quarrel with painted glass, make no scruple at all of entertaining many foul lusts in our souls, and committing continual idolatry with them.[91]

Cudworth's inner reformation was not to turn men from the legalism of outward signs to the inner legalism of religious zealots and enthusiasm, but to emancipate man from both the external and internal dictates of arbitrary ethical legalism altogether. Implicit in Cudworth's argument is that in the recognition of the active principle in oneself, the individual comes to recognise that principle within others. It is the mutual self-recognition of the Christ-like potential in all men that draws men together. This process of mutual self-recognition provides the building blocks from which Cudworth creates the second of his recurring themes, the ethical community.

In his *Second Sermon* Cudworth goes some way to explaining how this community might be recognised and formed. In this sermon Cudworth, using suggestively political language, lists the three levels to describe how man can ascend to a true participation in the divine. The first level, where Cudworth describes man as 'sin's freemen,' is the life driven and defined by *'Carnal Liberty*, or Licentiousness.'[92] This position, Cudworth claims, is taken by 'Epicureans, Antinomians and Enthusiasts.' The second level, that Cudworth terms as 'the bondsman to the law and sin,' is the position mistakenly taken by many who claim to live the religious life. Men in this position believe that the highest perfection of

---

[91] Cudworth, 'Preface' to *A Sermon Preached before the Honourable The House of Commons, On March 31st, 1647: Being a day of Public Humiliation* (London, 1647), p.38.
[92] *Second Sermon*, pp.241, 239.

the Christian life is to exist within a legalistic relationship in the world, whether this be following the rulings of organised religion or the internal dictates of moral piety. Cudworth argues that in this second position men fail to appreciate the active and living principle of Christ, seeing the *forms* of religion as more important than the *role* of religion.[93] The true religious life can be found, Cudworth argues, by turning away from both the external and internal dictates of arbitrary codes and laws, to a true participation with the living principle of Christ. To become, what Cudworth terms, one of 'God's freemen' man has to accept the active principle of Christ over the passive acceptance of proscribed arbitrary codes.[94]

By calling for an inner reformation Cudworth is not advocating the supremacy of personal faith over the rules of organised religion. Such a position, Cudworth argues leads to dangers of antinomianism. The confidence of personal belief alone can never fulfil the obligation of man to live the full Christian life. As Cudworth argues, personal conviction cannot alone lead to Christ, 'no more than mere words can clothe a naked man's Back, or feed a hungry Man's Belly.'[95] For Cudworth the life of 'God's freemen' implicitly assumes the active membership of an ethical community in the world. It is difficult to ascertain exactly what form Cudworth deemed this ethical community should take. At times he discusses the ethical community in terms of 'Church.' It would be incorrect to view Cudworth's use of 'Church' as advocacy for strict ecclesiastical structures. Cudworth appears instead to use the term 'Church' to describe a universal, catholic and corporate

---

[93] It is interesting to note here that in the *Second Sermon*, dated 1664, Cudworth makes an explicit distinction between the failings of Epicureanism, which Cudworth equated with Hobbism, and the theistic determinism of Calvinism. Although, as has already been noted, Cudworth recognises in both the failings of voluntarism, he does make an explicit distinction between the two. This distinction is of great importance when we come to consider Cudworth's view of freewill in more detail in Chapter Five.

[94] Ibid., pp.241-4, 217.

[95] Ibid., p.214.

body. In his *Second Sermon*, preached in early 1664 when the level and extent of

comprehension and toleration within the Church was a particularly live issue,

Cudworth calls for the Church to be the union of all reformed beliefs, as otherwise

the reformed Church would be 'pulled into complete confusion and ruin by infinite

sects and divisions.'[96] This view of the broad nature of the Church is backed up by a

letter to the Dutch Remonstrant, Peter van Limborch, in 1674, in which he calls for

the Church of England to be 'a Noah's ark' of comprehension, in which all

reformed religious groups, Calvinists, Remonstrants and even Socinians could live

together.[97] For Cudworth the exact structure of the Church was of secondary

importance to the role it played within the Christian life. As Cudworth argues in

FM.4983, 'I would understand ye temple to be a type of the universal society of

Christians, ye true temple of God.'[98]

It is this catholic notion of the comprehension of all free-thinking Christians

which is at the heart of Cudworth's belief in ethical community. The Church, or

ethical community, was both the structure through which man came to know God,

as well as the earthly fulfilment of man's participatory relationship with the divine.

In his 1642 publication *The Union of Christ and the Church in a Shadow* Cudworth, in a

work examining the sacrament of marriage, defines marriage as a metaphor of the

relationship between the Church and Christ. In marriage Cudworth argues that as

women are wedded to men by marriage so the Church is wedded to Christ. As the

woman submits herself totally to man in marriage, so the Church submits itself

totally to Christ. Crucially, however, Cudworth argues that this is not a one-way

---

[96] Ibid., p.255.
[97] Letter from Cudworth to Limborch, 16 March, 1674, quoted in Hutton, 'Liberty and Self-determination,' pp.82-3.
[98] *FM*.4978, fol.20.

relationship, for in marriage as man promised to honour his wife, so Christ honours his Church with his body, through his sacrifice.[99] A Church created out of the membership of God's freemen is unified through its shared experience of the principle of Christ, understood fully as an active principle, playing within the hearts of all men. So as marriage can be broken by the licentious desire of adultery, so the Church – the human community – can be broken by the sinful lusts of men. The unity of the ethical community is therefore controlled by the inner reformation of man. The desire to live in the light of Christ, by the means of inner reformation, and the fulfilment of this through the creation of an ethical community are inseparable in Cudworth's mind. The seeming paradox that an internal action can confirm an external community runs through all Cudworth's work and in part explains how this political aspect that runs through all Cudworth's work is so difficult to account for. The ethical community for Cudworth is a reflection of the divinity of Christ, consequently man's individual appreciation of the divinity through his participation in the divine image leads to a collective, even democratic, recognition of this participation in other men. The unity of men through Christ by reason is, therefore, Cudworth argues, not only confirmed but solidified by the ethical actions of men in the world. As Cudworth argues in *FM*.4983, 'ye Love of God is too weak a principle to conquer sin ye great duty of Xian law is to love God *and love men*.'[100] The creation of the ethical community is the central purpose of life. Through it, Cudworth argues, men collectively create the means through which all men can fulfil their participatory relationship with God.

---

[99] Ralph Cudworth, *The Union of Christ and the Church in a Shadow* (London, 1642), pp.4-6.
[100] *FM*.4978, fol.100 – my emphasis.

Within his early writings we can already see the manner in which Cudworth implicitly links his Christocentric doctrine of God implicitly to the political principles of the ethical community. The linking principle between these two is reason, reason which emanates down to man through Christ, and reason which brings man into a participatory relationship with the divine. By the use of this active rational principle Cudworth makes the means through which man comes to know God in the world an implicitly ethical and political principle. For Cudworth all actions should be judged as part of man's participation within the Christ-like image of the divine. Therefore, in Cudworth's mind, the political is understood as an essential manifestation of the theological. In this fully participatory nature Cudworth argues, man emancipates himself from the dangers of self-love that typified the stale, legalistic relationship found in the ethical teachings of Calvinism. The breadth of the ethical community is therefore not defined by doctrinal or liturgical principles, but by the collective acceptance that all men must individually participate with the divine. The breadth and latitude of Cudworth's ethical community is based entirely on his doctrine of God. Membership of the ethical community assumes the acceptance of the intellectualist principle of God that we encountered in Whichcote's replies to Tuckney. The emancipation of man from strictures of legalism can only come, Cudworth argues, if man completely accepts that all creation is defined by the overflowing love of the divine. The seeming paradoxical nature of this relationship is not lost on Cudworth. At one point in the *First Sermon* he comments that 'Love is at once a Freedome from all Law, a State of purest Liberty, and yet a Law too, of the most constraining and indispensable Necessity.'[101]

---

[101] *First Sermon*, p.124. The importance of this paradox in Cudworth has been noted by C.A.Patrides, see Ibid. n.88.

One can unlock the political nature of Cudworth's thought by understanding the way in which Cudworth asserts the social and political nature of man, in particular man's freewill and personal responsibility, as not being anathema to, but logically contingent on, the strict understanding of God's love. This principle of divine love is understood and mediated to man in these early writings in the Christocentric principle of reason. In this way Cudworth, in these writings, follows the theological path set by Whichcote. What we will encounter in the remaining chapters of this thesis is the manner in which Cudworth converts this Christocentric theological principle into a philosophically minded, Logocentric, system of moral responsibility, ethical self-determination and political obligation: a comprehensive understanding of the created realm which, at its heart, is defined by the Trinity as *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*.

Chapter IV – Cudworth's Doctrine of the Trinity – the True Intellectual System of the Universe

IV.1. Introduction

Ralph Cudworth's incomplete *True Intellectual System of the Universe* [1] dominates his intellectual reputation. Cudworth is remembered, and largely judged, by the style and form of the first and only published volume of his *Intellectual System*. Cudworth's seeming relish in continually attacking the many forms and guises of atheism means that Cudworth is praised for penetrating 'the very darkest reaches of Antiquity to strip Atheism of all its Disguises & and drag up the lurking Monster to conviction.' [2] Such was the power and quality of the learning in the *TISU* that John Locke, in his *Some Thoughts concerning Education*, suggests that:

> He that would look further back, and acquaint himself with the several Opinions of the Ancients, may consult Dr. *Cudworth's Intellectual System*; wherein that very learned Author hath with such Accurateness and Judgement collected and explained the Opinions of the Greek Philosophers, that what Principles they built on, and what were the chief *Hypotheses*, that divided them, is better to be seen in him, than any where else that I know. [3]

---

[1] To differentiate between the first and only published volume of the *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, and the whole project which was never completed by Cudworth, I will term the published volume as *TISU* and the entire project as Cudworth's *Intellectual System*.
[2] British Library Add.MSS 2497, *Miscellaneous Papers of Thomas Birch*, fol.93.
[3] John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, ed. John W. & Jean S. Yolton (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989), p.248.

The weight of learning in the *TISU* has, however, also been grist to the mill for many of Cudworth's greatest critics. John Turner, one of Cudworth's first critics, saw *TISU* as, 'instead of being, as it calls itself, an *Universe*, is a *Chaos* of crude and indigested *Notions*; and *Abyss* of bottomless *Vanity* and *Ostentations*.'[4] This form of criticism was continued into the twentieth century where the formless and unsystematic nature of much of Cudworth's argument was judged to be 'intolerably verbose' and 'monstrously obese.'[5]

Ernst Cassirer was correct in pointing out that Cudworth's style did differ from the clarity offered by more *modern* seventeenth century philosophers such as Bacon, Hobbes, Descartes and Montaigne. However the style and form of the *TISU* should not diminish its importance and impact as a philosophical work. Cudworth was remembered as much for being a philosopher, as he was for encyclopaedic style.[6] If the *TISU* is placed in the context of Cudworth's other writings, especially his early writings mentioned in the previous chapter, the philosophical coherence of the *TISU* comes into sharper focus. If one works through the vast learning and often wearisome diversions that Cudworth takes into ancient and Pagan theology one finds that the *TISU* is an extremely sophisticated defence of the doctrine of the Trinity. Linking this insight back to what we have already observed in Cudworth's early writings we can see the *TISU* as a long and detailed philosophical apology for the intellectual and metaphysical principle that underpins all creation. For Cudworth the Trinity, correctly understood, is *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*. It is on

---

[4] John Turner, *A Discourse concerning the Messias ... To which is prefixed a large Preface asserting and explaining the Doctrine of the Blessed Trinity against the late writer of the Intellectual System* (London, 1685), p.xxi.

[5] Quoted in Samuel Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan: Seventeenth-century reaction to the materialism and moral philosophy of Thomas Hobbes* (CUP, Cambridge, 1962), p.96.

[6] For praise of Cudworth the philosopher see for instance David Hume, *Enquireies concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L.A.Selby-Bigge & P.H.Niddich (Clarendon Press, OUP, 1975), p.73. Also see, Hutton 'Classicism and Baroque,' pp.211-2.

this often overlooked Trinitarian aspect of the *TISU* that this chapter will concentrate.

As already stated, because the *TISU* dominates Cudworth's reputation, it is important first to account for the genesis and writing of the *TISU*. This is particularly important because the *TISU* was published in 1678 many years after the early publications described in the previous chapter. That being said, I will argue that even though the style Cudworth uses in the *TISU* changes markedly from the Whichcotian and Christocentric nature of his early writings, the central arguments Cudworth deploys remain the same. The *TISU* can be understood as the metaphysical preparation for the ethical and political implications of his later unpublished writings. In particular I will argue that the active power of the second person of the Trinity, the *Logos*, which is the characteristic theme of Cudworth's Trinitarianism, is the principle through which Cudworth's ethical principles must be understood. Because Cudworth's Logocentric defence of the Trinity is so important to all Cudworth's writings I will examine in detail how Cudworth philosophically justifies the doctrine of the Trinity on these terms. In particular I will show the manner in which Cudworth accounts for the active nature of the *Logos* by an examination of his use of Plotinian distinctions in his critique of Descartes' ontological proof. By highlighting the Neoplatonic basis of Cudworth's account of the Trinity I will be able to explain not only the form of argument he employs in the *TISU* but also account for, through his 'Cabalistic' understanding of the Trinity, some of the vast and often repetitive erudition that characterises the *TISU*. I will then show the way in which the philosophical arguments for the Trinity found in ancient theology, and Neoplatonism in particular, are understood by Cudworth to

135

be merely a preparation for, and confirmation of, the incarnation of Christ. The Trinity understood in its true Christian form is, Cudworth argues, the defining principle of all creation. For this reason he believes all creation is explicable in light of this conception of Trinitarianism. To show how Cudworth argues this to be the case I will conclude this chapter by examining how he believes that by overcoming the errors of atheism – the putative task of the *TISU* – one cannot only confirm the theistic basis of reality, but also confirm the Trinitarian form of creation.

IV.2. The form and conception of the *TISU*

The interpretation of the *TISU* as a continuation of Cudworth's ongoing intellectual project is confirmed if we examine the genesis of the project which was to become the *TISU*. In the preface to the *TISU* he states that the *TISU* began life as a work on liberty and necessity. He then states that he began to realise that before he could attempt this he needed to undermine and confute all those atheistic, or theologically incorrect arguments that made the idea of morality and distributive justice logically ridiculous.[7] Cudworth's initial desire when beginning work on the *TISU* was to refute those arguments that he believes would undermine the possibility of a viable system of morality; in Cudworth's words, those arguments that make '*a* Day of Judgement, *ridiculous*.' By his own admission, the *TISU* began life as a work that underpins his belief in the ethical community, a theme that we encounter in his early writings.

It would, at first sight, appear to be strange to compare Cudworth's early writings with the *TISU*, firstly because of the differing styles of both sets of work

---

[7] *TISU*, p.iii.

and secondly because of the great gap that there was between Cudworth's early publications in the 1640s and the publication of the *TISU* in 1678. The only exception to this being the publication of his *Second Sermon* in 1664, a work that Cudworth was himself not satisfied with.[8] Something of this gap can be explained by a combination of his idiosyncratic working habits and the external machinations which hampered his ability to produce work. Cudworth's *Intellectual System* probably began life in his stated desire to produce a work on ethics in the early 1660s. In fact Cudworth, in letters to Worthington, suggested that his work on ethics would be a deeper and fuller account of the ideas we encountered in the *Second Sermon*. Cudworth, in beginning this project, was attempting to place into a more philosophical form the ideas of ethical community and the Christian life which appear in his earlier writings. It was this project which brought about his now famous dispute with Henry More over the writing and publication of More's *Enchiridion ethicum* in 1666.

Cudworth claimed, in a letter dated January 1664/5, that he had begun work on what he termed his 'Metaphysical Ethics…above a year ago,' and was 'struck into amaze' by the discovery that More, 'whom I have been entire friend to,' was also working on an intellectualist ethics. Cudworth claimed that More was perfectly aware that he had been working on this project, which had begun as sermons he had preached in the college chapel. More, writing in his defence to Worthington in May of the same year, claimed that he had intended to publish his work after Cudworth had published his.[9]

---

[8] Worthington, *Diary*, II:141.
[9] Ibid., I:157-60, 172.

The vehemence of Cudworth's reaction is, on the surface, surprising. It is, however, possible to argue that there was more involved in this reaction than an academic spat over claims to intellectual property. At the Restoration, although Cudworth was quickly confirmed in his position as Master of Christ's by the King, there was still great opposition to his remaining at Christ's.[10] In letters to John Worthington, who had not shared Cudworth's fortune in maintaining his position in Cambridge, Cudworth discusses at some length both his political problems at Christ's at the time and how to thank those who had supported his position. In particular, he was searching for some means of thanking Archbishop Sheldon, to whom he owed his 'living and station.' The problem, Cudworth claimed, was that he had little or nothing to publish; this was the reason why his *Second Sermon* was published at this time, even though he was dissatisfied with it.[11] Following this initial discussion Cudworth again claims in late 1664 that there would be growth of 'a new mischief,' against him in the college, possibly orchestrated by Bishop Henchman of Salisbury.[12] To counter this new threat he then suggests that he could publish a work on natural ethics, with a dedication to Sheldon. Such a work would, one imagines, have been of greater intellectual worth and political weight to Cudworth that the *Second Sermon*, also it would have been a more suitable means of acknowledging his debt to Sheldon.[13] It is in the context of his difficulties at Christ's

---

[10] Ibid., I:203.

[11] Ibid., II:135.

[12] Cudworth's suspicion that opposition to his place at Cambridge was being orchestrated by Bishop Henchman is confirmed by a letter from Henchman to Richard Love dated 17 October, 1660 which is held in the Tanner manuscripts of the Bodleian Library. In this Henchman states that 'Dr Cudworth brought Clare-Hall into a ruinous condition, and then I have cause to feare that [he] may do that like at Christ College.' Henchman goes on to argue that the failures of a head of a college are based not on his economic management of a college which, he argues, can be delegated to a bursar, but on the moral leadership that the Master gives to the college. Therefore Henchman's criticisms of Cudworth are not for his inexperience during his time at Clare, but because Cudworth's Churchmanship was not in tune with the newly restored Anglican Church of which Henchman was a leading member. See Tanner MS.49, fol.32.

[13] Worthington, *Diary*, II:141-2.

in the mid 1660s that we should read his altercation with More. Cudworth's clear

anger at More was not that he was publishing on a similar area – this had never been

a problem, nor would it remain a problem for the Cambridge Platonists. Rather, I

would argue, he feared that More, by publishing such a similar work, would destroy

his initiative. The publication of More's work removed from Cudworth the chance

to repay the debt to those on whose influence Cudworth relied. If this interpretation

is correct one may then imagine Cudworth's increased anger when he discovered

More's intention to dedicate his ethical work to Sheldon, especially as Cudworth had

already informed Sheldon of his intention to publish a work dedicated to him.[14]

These political machinations explain something of the slowness in

Cudworth's working habits. However, the length and style of the *TISU* can also be

explained by Cudworth's own idiosyncratic methods, methods that continually

frustrated Cudworth's friends and colleagues. He was, by all accounts, a very slow

reluctant writer. Throughout the 1660s many of Cudworth's friends and colleagues

were encouraging him to publish his works, most notably his unpublished writings

on the prophesies of the Book of Daniel. These had been publicly praised by Henry

More in the preface to his 1660 work, *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of*

Godliness.[15] These writings, that are in part held in manuscript in the British Library,

were also commented on favourably by Samuel Hartlib in a letter to John

Worthington in 1661. As late as 1664 Worthington was still encouraging Cudworth

to publish his work on Daniel and in 1668, in a letter to Henry More, Worthington

claims to have made an offer to Cudworth to help edit these writings on Daniel, to

---

[14] Ibid., II:162, 166.
[15] Henry More, *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness*, (London, 1660) p.xxxvi.

which he had not received a reply.[16]At many points through their letters John

Worthington attempts to persuade Cudworth to publish during the 1660s. In a letter

to Henry More in 1669 Worthington, almost wearily, hopes that recent works on

prophetic scripture will finally 'draw out Dr Cudworth's [work] perhaps.'[17]

Cudworth's inability to produce a work on ethics in the mid-1660s can, therefore,

be accounted for as much by his procrastination, as by the political difficulties he

was suffering or duplicity that Cudworth claimed to see in More.

Cudworth, in the preface to the *TISU*, also gives his own explanation for the

length it took to produce such a volume. Although the work had begun as a work

on ethics, the aims of the work had changed through the process of composition.

This change had come about, he claims, because he had come to realise that the

arguments needed to create an ethical community – 'For Natural Justice *and*

Morality, *Founded in the* Deity; *For* Liberty *from* Necessity, and a Distributive Justice *of*

Rewards *and* Punishments *in the world*[18] – relied on him first dealing with the

metaphysical issues that underpinned his project. The need to create a coherent

philosophical structure from which the ethical community could develop helps to

explain the proposed structure of the entire *Intellectual System* which he outlined in

the preface to the *TISU*. The first task is, Cudworth argues, to refute all forms of

determinism that '*Serve The* Design of Atheism, *and Undermine* Christianity, *and all*

Religion.'[19] His work defending the virtue of the ethical community, which grew

from his early writings, slowly developed into his planned three volume work,

beginning with an attack on atheism, through an intellectualist ethics, defining the

---

[16] Worthington, *Diary*, II:68, 140, Worthington in the same letter says that he offered to help
Cudworth edit his writings on Hobbes which may have been an early draft of the *TISU*.
[17] Worthington, *Diary* II:303.
[18] *TISU*, p.v.
[19] Ibid., p.iii.

principles by which moral good and evil could be known, and concluding with a

defence of Liberty against necessity, the central building block of the ethical

community.[20]

IV.3. Cudworth's doctrine of the Trinity

IV.3.i. From 'The One' to the Trinity

In Cudworth' thought God is the central term of reference. All parts of creation, all

actions within the world are defined by and through the principle of the divine.

What I will argue is that it is only if God is understood in the Trinitarian form that

Cudworth defends in the *TISU* that all the implications of God's divinity, and man's

relationship and obligation to that divinity can be fully understood. It was possible,

Cudworth argues, to account for the existence of a divine principle in all parts of

creation. However, he asserts, it is only through understanding the divine in terms

of Trinity – as a relational unity of intellectual, comprehending, and creative

principles – that the true fecundity of the divine presence can be appreciated.

Through this understanding Cudworth argues that man is able to not only

appreciate the power of the divine more fruitfully, but also understand his place

within this divinely ordained reality more profoundly. Consequently the Trinity is,

for him, the defining principle of the Universe. Not only does the Trinity explain

the nature of the divine, it also explains how the divine relates to and informs every

facet of creation. In this sense Cudworth's Trinitarianism is important on two

fronts. Firstly, it allows him to account for the existence of an active divine principle

---

[20] Ibid., pp.v-vi.

in all parts of creation, bringing the mundane, physical world within the compass of the understanding of the divine. Secondly, it makes every part of man's existence reliant on his relationship to and appreciation of God in this Trinitarian form. In this way he believes that the divine, understood in his true Trinitarian form, informs every part of human existence. Therefore human agency, moral action and political obligation in his thought cannot be fully understood unless his Trinitarianism is first appreciated.

Cudworth's Trinitarianism is entirely reliant on his intellectualist theological position. As stated at the end of the previous chapter, it is a seeming paradox in his thought that the latitude and tolerance it exhibits is reliant on the total acceptance of a very particular understanding of the divine. As Sarah Hutton has argued, 'Cudworth's liberal theology entails a conception of God, the fixity of which might appear to belie the latitude of his religious views.'[21] This latitude relies on the active divine principle that develops out of his strict, intellectualist theological starting point. The intellectualism that we earlier detected in his sermons exists to an even greater extent in the *TISU*. As Cudworth argues at one point in the *TISU*, 'God's *Will* is *Ruled* by his *Justice*, and not his *Justice Ruled* by his *Will*; and therefore God himself cannot *command*, what is in its own nature *Unjust*.'[22] For Cudworth, God's will is not the arbitrary instrument of voluntarist theology, but a faculty in the divine, that is synonymous with the eternal principle of justice which defines God. This claim is the central building block of Cudworth's intellectual theological system. The success of his system therefore relies entirely on his ability to coherently defend this strict intellectualist doctrine of God.

---

[21] Sarah Hutton, 'Ralph Cudworth: God, Mind, and Nature,' *Religion, Reason and Nature in Early Modern Europe*, ed, Robert Crocker (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 2001), pp.61-76, p.62.
[22] *TISU*, p.897.

Traditional Calvinism, exemplified by Tuckney's criticisms of Whichcote, always argued that intellectualism tended towards anti-Trinitarianism. Tuckney attacks Whichcote's intellectualism because Whichcote's suggestion that reason can allow man to know something of the divine always, in Tuckney's mind, denies the supremacy of the will and power of the divine. For Tuckney's voluntarism, the intellectualism of Whichcote and the other Cambridge Platonists implicitly seeks to deny the omnipotence of divine God's will and inevitably leads to heresy because it believes man can understand the inexplicable. The clearest example of this is Tuckney's constant allusions to Whichcote's anti-Trinitarianism. Tuckney believes that the Trinity can, in essence, only be understood as an inviolable mystery created by the will of God alone. Man can never understand the Trinity; he can only accept it as a matter of faith. Cudworth, and the other Cambridge Platonists, reacted against this position because they feared that the continual Calvinist stress on the Trinity as an inexplicable mystery would eventually lead to the destruction of the Trinity by the means of rational deduction. Cudworth, in the *TISU*, therefore not only seeks to account for the triune nature of the divine, but to do this in such a manner that allows the Trinity to be rationally verifiable.[23] He attempts to overcome the dangers of the Calvinist mystery of the Trinity by asserting his intellectualism from the outset. The problem that this approach creates is how to move from this appreciation of God as a single principle of wisdom and justice to an understanding of the divine as three separate, but co-eternal persons.

---

[23] D.W.Dockrill, 'The Fathers and the Theology of the Cambridge Platonists,' *Studia Patristica*, XVII:1 (1982), pp.427-439, p.428.

As already mentioned, Cudworth's starting point when describing God is always to stress divine omnipotence in terms of the intellectual principle of love. As he argues in the *TISU*:

> *God is a Being Absolutely Perfect, Unmade or Self-originates, and Necessarily Existing, that hath an Infinite Fecundity in him, and Virtually Conteins all things; as also an Infinite Benignity or Overflowing Love, Uninvidiously displaying and communicating it self; together with an Impartial Rectitude, or Nature of Justice.*[24]

For Cudworth the wisdom and love of God is the defining principle of all creation. From this belief he argues that is possible to move from the single, intellectual principle of the divine to an understanding of the Trinity. He believes it is possible to understand the implicit Trinitarianism of God if one examines and dissects how it is that we explain the existence of God in the first instance. In the *TISU* he approaches this problem by means of a critique of Descartes' proof of the existence of God from *a priori* principles alone: Descartes' ontological proof. This proof is found most clearly in the fifth mediation of his *Meditations on First Philosophy*.[25] In his fifth meditation Descartes argues that one can, without recourse to other external stimuli, conceive of the existence of God. By recognising the divine by intellectual means alone Descartes argues forcefully not only that God could exist but that God necessarily exists. He defends this claim by asserting that if God exists he must, by definition, be perfect. The intellectual conception of a perfect principle cannot,

---

[24] *TISU*, p.207.
[25] The term 'the ontological proof' was not one used by Descartes, or by Anselm of Canterbury the founder of this argument. It was coined by Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, to describe a proof of the existence of God from a priori principles alone. See John Cottingham, *A Descartes Dictionary* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1993), p.137. For an excellent overview of the ontological proof see, Jonathan Barnes, *The Ontological Argument* (MacMillan, London, 1972).

however, simply be created from nothing in the imperfect mind of man because it is impossible for the imperfect human mind to create something that is perfect, something which is superior to itself. Consequently the only source of this perfect idea must be a perfect being that has independent existence from the mind of man. As only God can be perfect it necessarily follows, Descartes argues, that God exists.[26]

Cudworth, in essence, accepts the starting premise of Descartes' proof, that the existence of God can be inferred from intellectual principle alone. What Cudworth rejects in Descartes' fifth meditation is not the argument used but the methodological assumptions Descartes makes to justify his conclusion. It is possible, Cudworth argues, to account for not only the existence of the divine but also the form the divine takes as Trinity if Descartes' methodological failures can be overcome. Cudworth's criticism of Descartes initially follows the criticisms of Descartes' earliest critics, Gassendi and Arnauld, by pointing to the essential circularity of the argument that Descartes employs. For Cudworth the circularity in Descartes' argument is a direct result of Descartes' use of sceptical reason in his proof. Such a sceptical method necessarily brings human faculties into doubt. However, the knowledge of the existence of God is, in ontological terms, founded exclusively on the supposition of his faculties, faculties which in Cartesian terms, because of our sceptical reason, can only thought to be reliable if the existence of God is assumed. As Cudworth puts it:

---

[26] René Descartes, *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, 2 vols, trans Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T.Ross (CUP, Cambridge, 1967), I:181-4.

For to say, that the *Truth* of our *Understanding Faculties*, is put out of all

Doubt and Question, as soon as ever we are assures of the *Existence of a God*

Essentially Good, who therefore cannot deceive; whilst this Existence of

God, is in the mean time it self no otherwise proved than by our

Understanding Faculties...this I say is plainly to move round in a *Circle*; and to

prove nothing at all.[27]

The weakness in Descartes' argument comes, Cudworth argues, from his reduction

of reason into a sceptical form. By arguing that reason can doubt the existence of all

things, Cudworth argues that Descartes can only effectively make claims with

certainty if the divine is first presupposed. As a consequence, the existence of God

cannot be known with any certainty because this conclusion is based on a method

which itself relies on God to create that certainty. Cudworth argues that Descartes'

proof relies on the '[*f*]*irmness* and *Solidity*, of such *Thin* and *Subtle Cobwebs*.'[28]

Cudworth's solution to this dilemma is to re-examine the means by which

the initial assertion of the existence of God is made. Descartes comes to his

conclusion by using his reason to doubt all other possible explanations, leaving the

existence of God to be the only possible conclusion. In his argument the necessary

existence of God is not verified because of a positive conclusion, but because after a

process of sceptical deduction God remains as the only possible explanation.

Cudworth takes issue with this approach because by using this form of argument

Descartes is implicitly assuming that the faculty of reason could, in principle, deny

[27] *TISU*, p.717, also see John Redwood, *Reason, Ridicule and Religion: The Age of Enlightenment in England, 1660-1750* (Thames and Hudson, London, 1976), p.55; M. Baldi, 'Cudworth versus Descartes: Platonism et sens commun dans la critique de *Meditations*,' in *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context*, ed G.A.J. Rogers et al, (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1997), pp.173-183, p.174.
[28] *TISU*, p.725.

everything, even the existence of God. What is needed, Cudworth argues, is not simply an *a priori* assertion of God's existence, but a confirmation that the means by which that supposition is made, reason, is itself drawn directly from the divine. Such an argument is outlined in Descartes' ontological proof, but is impossible to verify as the form of reason that Descartes employs is sceptical in form. The reasoning faculty Cudworth believes man uses to acknowledge the existence of God is, therefore, not Descartes' sceptical human reason; rather it is a faculty that has its source in the divine. By relating directly the means by which we come to know the existence of God directly to the essential principle of the divine, Cudworth introduces the Plotinian distinction between the founding principle of divine *intellect* and the reasoned, perceptive principle of divine *understanding*. It is this distinction that defines Cudworth's defence of the implicitly Trinitarian form of the divine.

Before the distinction between the intellect and understanding of the divine can be defined we first need to show how Cudworth argues that man's rationality is not simply a human faculty, but a principle that is drawn implicitly from God. Cudworth defends the divine source of reason by drawing on Plato's argument for the pre-existence of knowledge from *Meno*. In this dialogue Socrates argues that by showing that a mathematical principle can be drawn out of the mind of an uneducated slave-boy, one can establish the existence of pre-existing intellectual principles.[29] This premise relies on one key philosophical principle, that of the non-inferiority of causes; that something cannot be caused by something that is inferior in nature to it. Using this argument Cudworth argues that the ability of man to

---

[29] Plato, *Meno*, trans W.K.C. Guthrie in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1961), 81b-86b. This theory within the *Meno* also led Plato to assert the pre-existence not simply of intellectual principle, but also the pre-existence of the soul. Although Cudworth accepts the former claim, he rejects the latter. Cudworth's view on the pre-existence of the soul will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Six where Cudworth's epistemological ideas will be examined.

know of God through reason proves the sources of those ideas in the rational

principle of the divine:

> The Humane Mind therefore hath a *Power* of framing *Ideas* and *Conceptions*,
>
> not only of what Actually Is, but also of things which never were, nor
>
> perhaps will be, they being only *Possible* to be. But when from out *Conceptions*,
>
> we conclude of something, that though they are Not, yet they are Possible to
>
> be; since nothing that Is not, can be *Possible* to be, unless there be something
>
> Actually in Being, which hath sufficient Power to produce it; we do
>
> Implicitly suppose, the *Existence* of a *God* or *Omnipotent Being* thereby, which
>
> can make whatsoever is *Conceivable*, though it yet be not, to Exist.[30]

The rational powers of the human mind, therefore, are drawn directly from the

superior intellectual principles that place these principles in the mind of man in the

first instance. The only logical source of these principles is, Cudworth believes, the

intellect of the divine. It is because of the divine source of man's rationality that

Cudworth believes it is possible for man to appreciate the intellectual '*Paradigm* or

Platform, according to which this *Sensible World* was made.'[31] The ability of man to

know of God's existence by man's reason is therefore confirmed, Cudworth argues,

by the recognition that the rational means of understanding must have its source in

the intellect of the divine. He argues that man, by recognising that reason has its

source in the divine, can first verify the existence of God, something which he

believes Descartes' method unable to do. More importantly, however, he also argues

---

[30] *TISU*, p.732.
[31] Ibid., p.734.

that the recognition of the divine form of reason tells man not only of the existence of God, but also the Trinitarian form that the divine takes.

This first step in comprehending the Trinitarian form of the divine comes, Cudworth argues, with the assumption that the divine, as a perfect being, does not require knowledge of himself. Therefore the rational principle by which man recognises and confirms the existence of the divine must, Cudworth argues, be derivative from the founding principle of the divine. It is this distinction, between the intellectual form of the divine and the understanding of that divine principle, that lies at the heart of Cudworth's Trinitarianism.[32] We can find this separation between the founding intellectual principle of the divine and the means of understanding and contemplating the divine in Plotinus. In *Ennead* III.8, 'On the nature and contemplation of the one,' Plotinus makes the distinction between the intellect of 'the One' and the means of participating in that intellect. Essentially that distinction is between the still source of all creation, 'the One,' and the active principle of participation. Plotinus uses the metaphor of the divine as a spring or fountain to show how the active principles which come from it differ from the still source of this action:

> think of a spring which has no other origin, but gives the whole of itself to
> rivers, and is not used up by the rivers but remains of itself at rest, but the
> rivers that rise from it, before each of them flows in a different direction,
> remain for a while all together, though each of them knows, in a way, the
> direction in which it is going to let the stream flow; or of the life of a huge

---

[32] Ibid., p.204.

plant, which goes through the whole of it while the origin remains and is not dispersed over the whole since it is, as it were, firmly settled in the root.[33]

This action does not diminish 'the One,' which is an inexhaustible source. In turn it draws all things to 'the One' and reinforces the power and integrity of 'the One.' 'For all things…are not an origin, but they came from an origin, and this is no more all things, or one of them.'[34]

Cudworth uses this Plotinian distinction between intellect and understanding in the divine to begin his explanation of the Trinity. Cudworth argues that the active principle of understanding, that which brings man to a recognition of the divine in the first instance, must, logically, be a secondary principle to the single intellectual principle of the divine. This distinction, Cudworth argues, exists logically because mind and understanding must be viewed in terms of multiplicity and therefore has to be secondary to the united principle of the One. For man to appreciate the intellect of the divine, the means of that appreciation, knowledge and understanding cannot be the highest good in itself, but must be drawn from and reliant upon on a single principle prior to it.[35] As Cudworth states:

> Now whatever this Chiefest Good be, which is a Perfection Superiour to
>
> Knowledge and Understanding; that Philosopher resolves that it must needs
>
> be First and Principally in God who is therefore called by him,…*The very Idea*
>
> *and Essence of Good.*[36]

---

[33] *Enneads*, 3.8.10.
[34] Ibid., 3.8.9.
[35] *TISU*, p.584-5.
[36] Ibid., p.204.

Cudworth argues that this appreciation of the difference between intellect and

understanding is not corrosive of the idea of one true God, or derivative from it.

Descartes' ontological proof of the existence of God fails, he argues, not because

his method is incorrect but because Descartes fails to appreciate that the reason that

tells him of God's existence has its source in the divine. It is the existence of this

rational principle of understanding, uniting all creation to the divine, that becomes

the key term that Cudworth uses to assert the Trinity as the true, united form of

God.[37]

This reflective, rational principle in the divine plays the same role in

Cudworth's thought as the doctrine of accommodation does in Calvinist thought, as

both explain how man, through the actions of grace, can come to an appreciation of

the divine. This comparison also shows the fundamental difference between

Cudworth's thought and Calvinism. Calvin argues that God can only be known to

man in a form that God makes available to man, in both the extraordinary and

inexplicable revelation of Christ and the words of scripture. By contrast, Cudworth

argues that man comes to know the divine through the principle of reason which in

---

[37] It should be noted here that Cudworth's Trinitarianism is defined entirely by his explanation of the relationship of the first person to the second, in Plotinian terms between intellect and understanding, in Christian terms, between the Father and the Son. Because of this concentration the third term of the Trinity, the Spirit, is largely overlooked by Cudworth. He is explicit in rejecting those theories, particularly Pagan Trinitarian systems, that seek to make the third hypostasis a distant derivation of the divine principle, [Ibid., pp.373,545,550,593]. When the third person is described in any detail it is in terms of its co-essentiality with the first and second person. In this sense, Cudworth is keen to show how the philosophical understanding of the third person corresponds with the creedal explanation of the filioque form of the procession of the third person, that is 'proceeding from the Father *and* the Son', [Ibid., pp.559]. Beyond these discussions Cudworth never deals explicitly with the nature or form of the third person of the Trinity. This is certainly a structural weakness within his argument. This omission, however, can be explained if one reads the essential truth of the Trinity coming from the co-eternal unity of the intellect of the divine with the active and perceptive power of the divine. This active power of the divine is generally described by Cudworth by reference to the second person, the *Logos*. The third person is therefore best understood, within Cudworth's argument, as being intimately involved with this active, divine principle. Cudworth is, however, not explicit in explaining the form of the third person of the Trinity beyond stressing its co-essentiality with the second person within active, understanding, principle [Ibid., pp.579,586].

151

unfolding the nature of the divine to the mind of man, also unifies man to the

divine by the same principle. So where Calvinist accommodation stresses the

distance between God and man, Cudworth's intellectualist theology makes man an

active participant in the divine principle.

IV.3.ii. 'The Cabala of the Trinity'

Cudworth's belief in the existence of a divinely inspired rational thread within

creation allows us to understand a key element of Cudworth's method. By arguing

that the true form of God can be found in all elements of creation, Cudworth

argues that anyone who lives within that creation can know, if only in a hidden

form, something of the truth of the divine. This means that, although the truth of

God is confirmed and consummated in the revelation of Christ, something of the

truth of God's existence was known and available to the pre-Christian pagan world.

The best example of this, Cudworth argues, is St Paul's sermon from the Areopagus

to the unknown God.[38] This recognition by Paul of the essential monotheism in

Hellenistic religion shows for Cudworth that pagan religion, far from being

anathema to Christianity, could hold a kernel of truth in it, even if it was

worshipped and understood in an incorrect form. This belief in the existence of a

seam of revealed truth, which runs through all reality, places the *TISU* as one of the

last great works of the *prisca theologia*.[39] Cudworth explains this position neatly, if

---

[38] Ibid., pp.474-5, see Acts.17:16-34.

[39] The tradition of the *prisca theologia* has its roots in the early Church where the alleged writings of 'ancient theologians,' such as Hermes Trismegistus, Zoroaster and Orpheus, Pythagoras and Plato and writings attributed to Moses, Noah and even Adam, were used to convert the pagans. [See: D.P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Duckworth, London, 1972). pp.1-2; D.W. Dockrill, 'The heritage of Patristic Platonism in Seventeenth-century English Philosophical Theology,' in *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context*, ed. Rogers, et al., pp.55-77.] Much of the often frustrating content of the *TISU* can be

seemingly paradoxically, at the beginning of his *Discourse* when he argues, '[a]ll great

Errours have ever been intermingled with some Truth.'[40] Cudworth's desire to make

this point exhaustively explains much of the heavy erudition of *TISU*. Cudworth

catalogues countless forms of pagan religion and gods to confirm that all theological

systems have, in essence, relied on an intellectually understood divine principle.[41]

Because this divine principle was discernible by reason, Cudworth believes he is able

to account for the seeming corollaries between Christian and Pagan theology as

examples where Pagan thinkers, through their reason, had unwittingly seen

---

explained by Cudworth's use of the *prisca theologia*. Writers working within the *prisca theologia* argue that all existing theological and philosophical traditions are, to a lesser or greater extent, a preparation for the authentic revelation of Christ. Many of the texts central to the tradition of the *Prisca theologia* came to be recognised as Christian forgeries. The two best examples of this are the writings of the Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Hermes Trismegistus. The texts attributed to Hermes Trismegistus were proved to be forgeries by Issac Casaubon in 1614 [Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, pp.398-400]. Francis Yates has argued that Casuabon's discovery, as much through the method of analysis he employed as through his conclusion, marked one of the great water-sheds between the Renaissance and the early-modern. Certainly the limited use of the *prisca theologia* by Cudworth and the other Cambridge Platonists after Casaubon's writings is one of the factors that had caused them, as Cassirer states, to appear to be viewed as out of keeping with the thought of their contemporaries. Cudworth did accept Casaubon's theories on the falsity of the Hermetic texts. However, while accepting the Hermetic texts to have been Christian forgeries, Cudworth does argue that these forgeries might have been based, in some small part, on true Hermetic sources [*TISU*, pp.287, 713-4]. Despite this coded acceptance of something of the Hermetic tradition, Cudworth always backs up his claims with additional references to less dubious sources, usually references to more traditional Neoplatonic and Patristic sources [Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, pp.427-430]. Even though Cudworth is not as uncritical in his uses of these sources as many of his forbears, the manner with which he analyses these ideas places him firmly in a tradition of renaissance humanism. In the preface to the *TISU* Cudworth make the explicit claim that, because of the scriptural nature of revelation, his work will be one that appeals to 'Philology and Antiquity' [*TISU*, p.xvii]. We have already seen the manner in which Cudworth's style appeals to antiquity, however, it is the philological form of Cudworth's argument that does the most to underpin his philosophical style. Cudworth, as a participant in the *prisca theologia*, assumes there to be a unified philosophical system within the world. Cudworth also assumes that this unified system relies on a single, common philosophical vocabulary. By understanding this assumption one can see the way in which much of the heavy burden of quotation and reference within the *TISU* becomes simply lists of occasions where a thinker has deployed a term next to another thinker's use of that term, or a similar term. This philological style is in stark contrast to the critical analysis of language that underpinned Casaubon's critiques of Hermetic texts, a contrast which is stressed in Mosheim's later criticisms of Cudworth's style [Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, p.400; Hutton, 'Classicism and Baroque' pp.225-6]. However, once the nature and necessity for Cudworth, of the weighty erudition that runs throughout the *TISU* is understood, it is possible to find in it the essence and basis of Cudworth's intellectualist philosophical system.

[40] Cudworth, *Discourse*, p.1.

[41] It is using this argument that Cudworth explains away the problem of a seeming polytheism suggested by Socrates' last words, where Socrates asks for a Cock to be sacrificed to Asculapius to mark his death. Cudworth argues that firstly, the creation myth in *Timaeus* relied on, at its heart, single creative principle. Secondly that Socrates dying wish was recognition of merely a lesser deity, derived from the one. Plato's polytheism, Cudworth argues, was, therefore, derived not from conscience, as his monotheism was asserted in the *Timaeus*, but was a political gesture not to anger the theological orthodoxy of the Athenian establishment. See *TISU* pp.398-402.

something of the true form of God; a form that is fully realised through the

revelation of Christ.

As a consequence, Cudworth argues that it is worthwhile studying Pagan

thought because those elements which 'followed the free *Sentiments* and Dictates of

their own Minds,' could provide metaphysical insights that not only clarified

Christian teaching, but gave it historical and philosophical verification.[42] In the

TISU Cudworth is particularly keen to show those Pagan traditions which had

anticipated something of the Trinitarian form of the divine. Cudworth argues that

the initial distinction between the intellect and understanding of the divine was a

central insight of Neoplatonic philosophy. Cudworth also argues that this insight is

found, if in a hidden form, in many other ancient Pagan philosophical systems.

Many of these traditions are able to move beyond the recognition of intellect and

understanding to posit a third attribute within the divine. Through the inter-

relationship between the intellect and understanding of the divine a third principle

of active, perceptive power is understood. This three-fold nature becomes, for

Cudworth, the essential structure that informs Trinitarian thought in Pagan theology

and Platonism in particular. Following this schema, Cudworth identifies Trinities in

Egyptian and Roman theology.[43] Such is the power of this tradition in pagan and

even Jewish thought that he argues that Trinitarianism can be understood as one of

the central tenets of the Cabala.[44] It is in the supposed Trinities of the Cabala that

---

[42] Ibid., p.627.

[43] Ibid., pp.328, 453, 491.

[44] The tradition of the Cabala is similar to, but not synonymous with, the *prisca theologia*. Cabalism is an ancient strand of Jewish mystical thought based on the belief that there exists in all reality a hidden truth about the divine. However, unlike the *prisca theologia*, it does not see its necessary conclusion in divine revelation of Christ. Rather, at its heart, was a belief that there exists one unified truth which, once understood, will unify religion, philosophy and nature together. These truths can be uncovered, as in the *prisca theologia*, by theological and philosophical means. Therefore, at its heart lies the texts of the Old Testament which, Cabalism believes, can, when understood correctly, unlock the hidden truth of the Universe. This form of exegesis takes the form of textual analysis and also used forms of analysis to decode messages hidden within religious texts, such as the Old Testament

154

Cudworth found the most authentic anticipations of the Christian tradition.[45]

Cudworth's defence of the Trinity utilises his belief that central truths about the nature of reality, in particular the Trinity, have always been identifiable in differing forms throughout history. Cudworth's use of the term 'the Cabala of the Trinity,'[46] is particularly instructive for our understanding of the Trinity in his thought. The Trinity is 'Cabalistic,' not because it is found exclusively in the Jewish mystical Cabala. Rather, the Trinitarian God can be understood as 'Cabalistic' in Cudworth's thought because it acts as the term through which all elements of creation can be unified with the divine. The Trinity can therefore be detected, in a hidden form, in all parts of creation. Although the true Trinity was found in Christ, intimations of the Trinity can be detected through much of the theology and philosophy of the ancient world.

Cudworth believes that, outside the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Cabala of the Trinity is found in its fullest form in the Platonic tradition, i.e. the Neoplatonic, which he calls the 'Platonic Trinity.' He views this as incomplete compared to the Christian Trinity, but finds in the philosophical distinctions that allow for it the most coherent explanation of the Trinitarian form of the divine. Cudworth's

---

and the Torah. Linked to this is a belief that these methods can be transferred to the study of nature to achieve, through the occult practices of magic and alchemy, the purified and true essence of nature [Alison P. Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth-Century: The Life and thought of Francis van Helmont (1614-1698)*, (Brill, Leiden, 1999) pp.137-49; Peter G. Sobol, 'The Cabala,' in *The History of Science and Religion in the Western Tradition: An Encyclopaedia*, ed. Gary B. Ferngren (Garland, New York, 2000), pp.553-55]. Many of the Cambridge Platonists came into contact with the tradition of the Cabala. Cudworth encountered the Cabala through his role as Regius Professor of Hebrew but did not engage with it as much as Henry More, who was brought into contact with Cabalism through his friendship with Anne Conway [see Alison P. Coudert, 'Henry More, the Kabbalah, and the Quakers,' in *Philosophy, Science and Religion in England, 1640-1700*, ed. Kroll et al, pp.31-67, pp.31-8. For More's changing relationship to Cabalism, especially through his close association with Anne Conway see Sarah Hutton, *Anne Conway* (CUP, Cambridge, 2004), and David S. Katz, 'Henry More and the Jews' in *Henry More*, ed. Hutton, pp.173-88, pp.174-8].
[45] *TISU*, pp.546, 557. 570. This claim must be tempered by the knowledge that many of these Cabalistic sources, in particular the Orphic and Hermetic traditions, were almost certainly Christian forgeries. See above.
[46] Ibid., p.552.

defence of the Trinity along Platonic grounds also carries with it a second motive.

By explicitly basing his defence of the Trinity in Platonic thought Cudworth places

himself between two opposing theological criticisms of Platonic philosophy. The

first, from orthodox Christian theology, is that Platonism inevitably leads to the

anti-Trinitarian heresy of Arianism.[47] We have already encountered this criticism of

Platonism in Calvin's persecution of Servetus, discussed in the previous chapter.

The second, and directly contrasting criticism of Platonism, came from the growing

Socinian tradition that claims that the Trinity is a theological perversion of the truth

of the new covenant brought about by the dangerous mixing of Christianity with

Hellenistic thought.[48] To counter this first accusation Cudworth defends the

Platonic Trinity from the suggestion that it errs towards Arianism by stressing the

philosophical coherence of the true Platonic Trinity. However, to counter the

Socinian claims that the Trinity is a Hellenistic perversion, Cudworth argues that the

Platonic Trinity is theoretically coherent but philosophically corruptible. This caveat

allows Cudworth to argue that the Trinity is explicable in Platonic terms, but only

fully manifested in the revelation of Christ. This final claim leads to problems in the

examination of Cudworth's Trinitarianism because, as Sarah Hutton has argued, 'it

relies heavily on the very Platonists on whose accounts of the trinity he casts

doubt.'[49]

 With this qualification in mind, it is worthwhile examining how, for

Cudworth, the Platonic Trinity both anticipates and differs from the Christian

Trinity. Cudworth is clear that it is the Platonic Trinity which is the most

---

[47] Hutton, 'Neoplatonic roots of Arianism,' p.143; Maurice Wiles, *The Archetypal Heresy: Arianism through the Centuries* (OUP, Oxford, 1996), p.66.
[48] McLachlan, *Socinianism*, pp.8-20.
[49] Hutton, 'Neoplatonic roots of Arianism,' pp.140-1; Dockrill, 'Authority of the Fathers,' p.340.

sophisticated of the Pagan systems in this respect.[50] It is not, Cudworth claims,

because the Platonic system is peculiar in having a Trinitarian structure; such a

system is a logical part of true monotheism for Cudworth. Rather it is that, although

taking an adulterated path, Platonism is based on the same theological and

philosophical tradition as Christianity. As Cudworth argues:

> This is therefore that *Platonic Trinity*, which we oppose to the *Christian*, not as
>
> if *Plato's* own *Trinity* in the very Essential Constitutions thereof, were quite a
>
> Different Thing from the *Christian*; itself in all probability having been first
>
> derived from a *Divine* or *Mosaick Cabala*.[51]

For this reason the Platonic Trinity describes with more depth and subtlety than any

other pagan source the complex relationship between the different persons of the

Trinity, and is to be respected above all the others. In particular, unlike other

monotheistic traditions, the Platonic tradition comes closest to the Christian in

appreciating the immediacy of the relationship between the first and second persons

of the Trinity.[52]

The central strength of the Platonic Trinity is that it best explains this inter-

relationship between the different persons of the Trinity. In particular, Cudworth

argues that it gives the fullest philosophical explanation for the consubstantial

nature of the Trinity. In this way the Platonic influence on, especially, many of the

Nicene Fathers is not to separate the persons of the Trinity but to firmly establish

---

[50] *TISU* p.558.
[51] Ibid., p.557.
[52] Ibid., pp.407-8.

the relational unity at the heart of the Trinity.[53] It is not the radical transcendence of

the Platonic 'One' which Cudworth wishes to defend. Rather, Cudworth takes from

Platonism the fusion between the intellectual principle of the divine and the

understanding means by which God is known as the principle components of the

Trinitarian form of the divine.[54]

Despite these philosophical strengths, Cudworth still maintains that in

fundamental areas the Platonic Trinity is corrupt.[55] This corruption is, Cudworth

argues, found in the means of explaining the relationships between the different

persons of the Trinity. Although in its purest form Cudworth believes the Platonic

Trinity had understood the relational unity at the heart of the Trinity, because this is

built on philosophical suppositions, rather than the confidence given by the

revelation of the historical person of Jesus Christ, such a system was open to

corruption. In particular, by stressing too vigorously the supreme nature of the first

person, the second and third persons become diminished by association. So

Cudworth states:

> if it be considered in *Visibles*, then will the *Second Hypostasis*, be resembled to
>
> the *Image* of a *Face* in a Glass, and the *Third* to the *Image* of that *Image*
>
> Reflected in another Glass, which depend upon the *Original Face*, and have a
>
> *Gradual Abatement* of the vigour thereof.[56]

---

[53] Ibid., p.579.
[54] Hedley, 'The Platonick Trinity', p.260.
[55] *TISU*, p.558.
[56] Ibid., p.581.

So, Cudworth suggests, there is in some Platonic philosophy a danger of destroying the great strength of the Platonic Trinity, namely the relational unity of the persons of the Trinity, by concentrating too clearly on the first person above the others. By alluding to St Paul's metaphor of man's appreciation of God only 'through a glass darkly,' Cudworth here seems to suggest that this dangerous tendency in the thought of some Platonists diminishes not only the second and third persons of the Trinity, but also the integrity of their theology. As he vehemently argues:

> Shall we say that the *First Hypostasis* or *Person*, in the *Platonic Trinity*, (if not the *Christian* also) is...*Senseless* and *Irrational*, and altogether devoid of *Mind* and *Understanding?* Or would not this be to introduce a certain kind of *Mysterious Atheism* and under pretence of Magnifying and Advancing the Supreme Deity, Monstrously to Degrade the Same?[57]

For Cudworth there are two logical dangers created by the corruptions of pseudo-Platonic thinkers. Firstly, they undermined the relational unity of the Trinity, making the separation of intellect and understanding merely the first step in a hierarchy of Gods, thus opening the door to Polytheism.[58] Secondly, and more dangerously, such readings suggest that the second and third persons rather than being manifestations of the divine are, in fact, separate, created creatures. So Cudworth argues:

> Wherefore we conclude, that this ancient *Cabala of the Trinity*, was *Depraved* and *Adulterated* by those Platonists and Pythagoreans, who made either the

---

[57] Ibid., p.585.
[58] Ibid., p.570.

World itself, or else…*an Informing Soul of the World*, to be the *Third Hypostasis*

thereof, they Mingling *Created* and *Uncreated Beings* together, in that which

themselves notwithstanding call a *Trinity* of *Causes* and of *Principles*.[59]

Cudworth argues that it is these pseudo-Platonic theories, rather than the true

Platonic Trinity, that gave birth to the tritheistic heresy of Sabbelianism and the

Unitarian heresy of Arianism. Cudworth does not indicate clearly which thinkers are

to blame for this decline in the Platonic tradition. Certainly Cudworth sees this as an

adulteration made after Plato and places the blame at the feet of, what he loosely

describes as, 'Juniour Platonists.' He does at one point suggest that the chief culprits

might have been Proclus and Iamblichus. This claim is, however, undermined by

Cudworth's earlier use of Proclus and Iamblichus to defend the integrity of the true

Platonic Trinity.[60]

Despite his criticisms of Platonism Cudworth still defends the Platonic

Trinity. In particular, praises the true Platonic Trinity because, although imperfect, it

created the philosophical ground by which the true manifestation of the Trinity, in

the incarnation of Christ, could be fully and best understood by man. For this

reason Cudworth believes he is able to bring the Platonic Trinity into a Cabalistic

understanding of the Trinity. The true Platonic Trinity, firstly, allowed the spread of

the truth of Christianity to pagan peoples, as suggested by St Paul's sermon on the

Areopagus:

---

[59] Ibid., p.552.
[60] Ibid., p.625. On Proclus compare, for instance, p.626 & 557.

> Wherefore we cannot but take notice here of a Wonderful Providence of
> Almighty God, that this Doctrine of a Trinity of Divine *Hypostases*, should
> find such admittance and Entertainment in the Pagan World, and be
> received by the wisest of all their Philosophers, before the time of
> Christianity; thereby to prepare a more easie way for the Reception of
> Christianity amongst the Learned Pagans.[61]

The importance of the Cabala of the Trinity is therefore, for Cudworth, to allow
Christianity to understand more fully, and exist more fruitfully within, the
providential plan of the divine.

IV.3.iii. The Christian Trinity

Cudworth, in his attempts to defend the Platonic interpretation of the Trinity, links
the Platonic and Christian Trinities through their shared heritage in, what Cudworth
termed, the 'Mosaic Cabala.' The shared heritage of the traditions comes, Cudworth
argues, from the influence of Jewish and Egyptian theology on Hellenistic
metaphysics. Despite this influence, Cudworth believes that the Hellenistic form of
this tradition inevitably became corrupt. The clarity and coherence of the Platonic
tradition is identifiable in the thinking of Plato and Plotinus, but in later
Neoplatonic thinkers the tradition became perverted. Cudworth asserts that one
finds the authentic culmination of the 'Mosaic Cabala' not in the Platonic tradition
but in the revelation of Christ as *Logos*. To defend the Christian Trinity from the
Socinian accusation that the Trinity was an Hellenistic perversion Cudworth argues

---

[61] Ibid., p.625.

that the Christian Trinity can be found entirely within Scripture which is 'the only

true Rule and Measure of this *Divine Cabala* of the *Trinity*.'[62] The Unitarian and

Tritheistic perversions of the Trinity are therefore, Cudworth believes, caused by

the perversion of the authentic Cabala of the Trinity. This corruption is most clearly

seen in Cudworth's criticisms of the pseudo-Platonists. For this reason Cudworth

argues that the Christian Trinity treads a middle path between the Arian and

Sabbelian. The excesses of Arianism and Sabbelianism are only solved by the

revelation of the new covenant which brought into the light the hidden, cabalistic

understanding of the triune nature of the divine.[63] This, Cudworth argues, is the

form of metaphysical deduction which was carried out by the Nicene fathers, 'who

not withstanding made not *Plato* but the Scripture, together with Reason deducing

natural Consequences there from, their Foundation.'[64] The Church fathers used

Platonic thought not to pervert scripture, but to confirm its revelation. For this

reason Cudworth believes that the Christian Trinity is a more authentic

understanding of the intellectual form of the divine. In this way he asserts that the

revelation of Christ perfectly unlocks the implicitly rational form of the divine, and

is, therefore, by implication, more reasonable than the pure interpretation of the

Trinity. Consequently Cudworth is able to argue that:

> the *Christian Trinity* though there be very much of *Mystery* in it, yet is there
>
> nothing at all of *plain Contradiction* to the Undoubted Principles of human

---

[62] Ibid., p.550.
[63] Ibid., p.555.
[64] Ibid., p.579.

Reason, that is, of *Impossibility* to be found therein,...[it is]...much more agreeable to Reason, than that *Platonick* or *Pseudo-Platonick Trinity.*[65]

Cudworth argues that what the revelation of Christ gives the Christian Trinity, which is lacking in the Platonic Trinity, is a pure understanding of the active principle within the divine being reflective on the principle of the first person and also existing, un-created, with the first person. His interpretation of this peculiar Christian relationship rests heavily on his understanding of the prologue to the Gospel of John, in particular the various clauses defining the *Logos*. Crucially, he argues that St John the Apostle gave the firm assurance of Christ as existing in the form of the Godhead from eternity; 'the λογοξ or *Word* be said to have been, *With God* (this is *God* the *Father*) and also itself to *Be God* (that is not a *Creature*) yet is it no where called *Another* or *Second God.*'[66] In the person of Christ Cudworth finds the concrete affirmation of the philosophical principle of understanding which is only suggested by the Platonic Trinity. Cudworth, again drawing on John's Gospel, affirms this point by arguing that, 'the word was made flesh, *we look upon this Word even in Flesh as God.*'[67]

Despite Cudworth's desire to account philosophically for the united and uncreated nature of the Trinity within scripture, his Trinitarianism never conclusively explains the co-eternity of the *Logos* of the Trinity with the *Father*. The belief always remains, despite his many protestations to the contrary, that the second person exists not simply as an emanation from the first person, but as a created by-product of the first person. This suggestion led many of Cudworth's

---

[65] Ibid., p.560.
[66] Ibid., p.550.
[67] Ibid., p.631.

earliest critics to accuse him of pseudo-Arianism.[68] The problem of the

'subordination' of the second person to the first is a recurring problem in all his

thought. This problem is evident in his early writings. Cudworth, through all his

work, argues for the active nature of the divine. In his *First Sermon* this is evident

when he states of Christ, *'God was therefore incarnated and made man, that he might Deifie*

us, that is…make us *partakers of the Divine nature.'*[69] In his *Second Sermon* he puts more

detail into this assertion. Throughout the *Second Sermon* Christ is understood by

Cudworth to be acting as mediator between man and God, the principle by which

God is represented to man. In this sermon we already find Cudworth arguing that

this mediating role of Christ exists in the Plotinian division of the source of the

Trinity, in the intellect of the *Father* and the understanding of the divine in the

person of Christ as *Logos*. His explanation of this relationship between the first and

second persons brings him close to suggestions of anti-Trinitarianism. Christ is, in

his language, a being that is 'hypostatically united to the Divinity,' however, the

mediating nature of the kingdom of Christ made it logically and historically

subsequent to the *Father*. Cudworth, by stressing the mediating power of the Christ,

appears to imply that Christ was created by the Father, thus opening Cudworth up

to accusations of anti-Trinitarianism.[70]

In the *TISU*, Cudworth's argument for the relationship of the first and

second persons of the Trinity remains the same as he asserts in the *Second Sermon*.

However the form the argument takes changes. This change comes about, I would

argue, to counter accusations that the Christocentric argument of the *Second Sermon*

is anti-Trinitarian. In the light of Cudworth's *Second Sermon* G.R.Cragg's assertion

[68] Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy*, p.68. Also see Turner, *Discourse*.
[69] *First Sermon*, p.101.
[70] *Second Sermon*, pp.199-202.

that, 'to Cudworth the Incarnation signifies not so much the word made flesh in an

historical sense as the eternal incarnation of the Logos,'[71] would appear to be only

partly correct. Certainly in the *TISU* we find the Trinity discussed almost exclusively

in Logocentric terms. Cudworth takes this line in the *TISU*, I believe, to move

himself away from the theological problems of describing the Trinity using the

historical person of Christ, to a philosophical discussion over the relationship of the

Logos to the founding principle of the *Father*. This move from a Christocentric to a

Logocentric Trinitarianism in Cudworth's thought does not, however, lead to a

change in the emphasis in his writings. In all his writings, he is consistent in his

belief that the Trinity can only truly be appreciated if the second person is

understood correctly.

It appears that Cudworth, while writing the *TISU*, was perfectly aware that

his description of the active nature of the Trinity would open him up to accusations

of anti-Trinitarianism. Consequently, in the *TISU*, we find him going to great

lengths to argue that the Platonic interpretation of the Trinity, far from leading to

Arianisim, in fact presents the most effective means of defeating the Arian heresy.

He argues that Arianism is based on a perversion of Trinitarian theology similar to

those Trinitarian errors suggested by the pseudo-Platonists. He cites the councils of

Nicaea, in 325 A.D., and Constantinople, in 381 A.D., in his defence of the true

Christian-Platonic interpretation of the Trinity. He believes that these councils,

which had been called to refute the claims of Arianism, solved this dispute through

the use of Platonic metaphysics.[72] Cudworth asserts that the Nicene formulation of

---

[71] G.R.Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason: A Study of changes in Religious thought within the Church of England, 1660-1700* (CUP, Cambridge, 1950), p.56.
[72] *TISU*, pp.604-5, 623. For a detailed account of all the fourth-century creedal councils see the Appendix to Rob Illiffe's paper, 'Prosecuting Athanasius: Protestant Forensics and the Mirrors of Persecution,' in *Newton and Newtonianism: New Studies*, ed. James E. Force and Sarah Hutton (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 2004), pp.113-154.

the *Logos* being of 'one substance with the father,' is essentially a Platonic

formulation which allows the Nicene fathers to explain how there could be, within

the Trinity, differing persons which are both independent creations from eternity

and also part of a consubstantial Godhead.[73] He argues that the Fathers, particularly

Athanasius, were able to describe the consubstantiality of the Trinity through use of

the term *Homoousian*. The *Homoousian* argument for consubstantiality is calling for,

'not a *sameness* of singular and Numerical, but of Common or *universal Essence* only;

that is, the *Generical* or *specifical Essence of the Godhead*; that the *son* was not a *Creature*

but truly and properly *God*.'[74] This definition, which allows for both multiplicity in

nature and a singularity in form, is, Cudworth argues, essentially Platonic in nature.

By making this distinction between the form and numerical nature of God,

Cudworth believes orthodox, credal, Christianity establishes an active principle of

the *Logos* which exists co-eternally with the *Father* as part of the self-reflective nature

of the divine. On these terms Cudworth contrasts what he deems to be the true

Homoousian form of the Trinity with the *Monoousian* (or singular essence) and

Heteroousian (or multiple essences) found in the theological perversions of Arianism

and Sabbelianism respectively.[75] Cudworth's defence of the Trinity therefore

deploys Platonic terms not only to explain the doctrine of the Trinity but also to

directly undermine the arguments of anti-Trinitarian heresies.

Cudworth's argument, far from distancing his Trinitarianism from Unitarian

heresies, opened him up to renewed accusations of heterodoxy. The first, and most

vehement of these attacks, came in John Turner's 1685 work *A Discourse concerning*

the Messias. In this work Turner directly attacks the central claim of Cudworth's

---

[73] *TISU*, p.596.
[74] Ibid., p.608.
[75] Ibid.,p.611-2.

Trinitarianism, that his *Homoousian* explanation of the divine can explain both the

unity and multiplicity of the divine at the same time. Turner argues that it is

impossible to place onto the term *Homoousian* the distinction of number but not of

form. Rather, Turner argues, Cudworth's Trinitarianism describes three Gods of no

purpose or grounding. Consequently, the theological weaknesses of Cudworth's

argument make Arianism the logical consequence of the Platonic system Cudworth

champions. Cudworth's system therefore allows, 'a fair passage for *Arianism* to enter

in, and take possession of the minds of his Readers.'[76] Turner argues that

Cudworth's system does not defend the Trinity, rather '*the Learned Doctours* hath

rendered it, instead of explaining the *Trinity*, perfectly destroys it.'[77]

Cudworth is clearly aware of the theological criticisms that his peculiar

brand of Trintarianism creates. However, despite the possibility of these criticisms,

Cudworth pursues this argument because it allows him to argue forcefully for a

system in which the active nature of the divine is central. In the *TISU* this argument

develops into a comprehensive metaphysical system within which the active

principle of the *Logos* acts as the fulcrum, mediating between man and God. This

argument is founded on Cudworth's strict intellectualist interpretation of the divine.

As we shall go on to see, it is this active understanding of the *Logos* which defines

the arguments for moral self-determination and human agency which lie at the heart

of Cudworth's ethical and political thought. Such is his desire to create an effective

ethical community that he appears to have been willing to make certain sacrifices in

terms of orthodoxy for this to be the case. He describes the Trinity, as Turner

alleges, 'in such terms of latitude,'[78] precisely because his active understanding of

---

[76] Turner, *Discourse*, p.xxvii.
[77] Ibid., p.xxix.
[78] Ibid., p.lxxxi.

God creates the theological and philosophical basis from which the religious and

political latitude which he wishes to create within human society could develop.

IV.4. Cudworth and the form of the created realm – Cudworth's attack on atheism

The lasting influence of the *TISU* comes from its arguments against atheism.

Thomas Wise, one of Cudworth's keenest eighteenth century disciples, described

the *TISU* as 'the vastest magazine of reasoning and learning that ever singly

appeared against Atheism.'[79] However, so vast are these attacks by Cudworth that

they can, at times, mask the Trinitarian argument at the heart of the *TISU*. The

TISU should not be understood as an encyclopaedic account of atheism but as part

of Cudworth's defence of the Trinity as the defining principle of the created world.

Consequently like all aspects of his thought, Cudworth's attacks on atheism defend

and confirm his Trinitarian understanding of creation. For this reason these attacks

are implicitly political because atheism denies the existence of the divine in the

world.[80] Cudworth believes he must overcome atheism at the outset of his *Intellectual

System* precisely because atheism undermines man's ability to create an ethical

community. It is only when these atheistic arguments are dispatched, Cudworth

argues, that the correct intellectual understanding of the creation, in which the

active principle of the *Logos* is the defining principle, can be effectively asserted.

---

[79] Quoted in Birch, 'Life', p.23.
[80] This view of atheism as a perversion from the norm is very well described by the title of Henry More's *An Antidote to Atheism*. The implication being that the correct, Trinitarian form of theism can correct and cure the woes and errors created by Atheism. See the first chapter of Charles Taliaferro's forthcoming *Evidence and Faith: Philosophy and religion since the seventeenth-century* (CUP, Cambridge, Forthcoming).

For Cudworth atheism is not simply a failure to accept the existence of the divine, it is a refusal to accept the role of God as the sole determining and judging factor in the world.[81] In the *TISU* Cudworth identifies three forms of atheism to attack. The first is 'Absolute Atheism,' typified by the revival in Epicurean philosophy by Thomas Hobbes.[82] The second is what he terms 'Immoral Theism,' which allows for religion but no understanding of natural justice. The third is a form of Theism which, although it allowed for God and natural justice, does not allow for this to be achieved through liberty from necessity. These final two can be subsumed into Cudworth's general critique of theistic determinism, which Cudworth recognises chiefly in the determinism of Stoic theology, and latterly in Calvinism.[83] In the *TISU* Cudworth predominantly concerns himself with the first of these three forms of atheism, 'Absolute Atheism.' Cudworth reserves most of his criticisms of 'Immoral Atheism' for his unpublished writings on freewill and human agency which will be examined in the next chapter of this thesis. 'Immoral Atheism,' in Cudworth's view, does not undermine the founding divine principle in the world rather it undermines the belief that men can act as independent and equal moral actors in a divinely ordained world.

The purpose of Cudworth's attacks on 'Absolute Atheism' in the *TISU* is to discredit any arguments which suggest that the world is founded on anything other than theistic principles. In the *TISU,* Cudworth attempts to overcome those arguments that oppose his conception of the Trinity by showing that 'Atheist' arguments in reality conform, at the most fundamental level, to the metaphysical

---

[81] Redwood, *Reason, Ridicule and Religion*, p.30.
[82] Although Cudworth never names Hobbes in the *TISU* his criticisms of Epicurius and Democitus are clearly thinly veiled criticisms of Hobbes' philosophy and so it will be assumed that an attack on either of these two is implicitly an attack on Hobbes.
[83] *TISU* p.iv.

position that he champions. As we have already seen Cudworth, throughout the

TISU, constantly defends the doctrine of the Trinity. Consequently it is possible to

understand Cudworth's criticisms of atheism as not only arguments to justify his

theism, but also arguments that confirm his active, Trinitarian conception of the

divine. In the *TISU* Cudworth mainly concentrates his attacks on thinkers that he

defines as 'atomical fatalists.'[84] Cudworth accuses these thinkers of believing that the

universe was created by merely the random motion of atoms. The world, and all

that was in it, is, in essence, the sum of parts of a cosmic random motion. Cudworth

rejects this view out of hand because, he argues, atomic fatalists remove the

possibility that there is a guiding, incorporeal principle within the world. Cudworth

argues that these thinkers assert matter, or 'extended bulk,' as the founding principle

of the Universe. The world could, therefore, only be understood in terms of the

mechanical relations of one body to another.

Cudworth sees this philosophy as a perversion of the ancient and

respectable theistic tradition of atomic philosophy founded by the Phoenician

philosopher Moschus. Far from being implicitly atheistic, he believes that the true

atomism of Moschus is founded on, and logically reliant upon, theism. It is this

form of atomism which Cudworth believes influenced Hellenistic thought, in

particular Pythagoras, and from there the writings of Plato and Aristotle.[85]

Cudworth argues that this tradition, in its correct, theological form had been

resurrected in Cartesianism.[86] This form of atomism is, he argues, an acceptable

means of understanding the world. Firstly because it accepts that, using the logical

---

[84] Cudworth uses the term 'fatalist' where modern philosophical vernacular would use 'determinist'.
In this thesis both terms will be assumed to mean the same thing with reference to Cudworth's
thought and will therefore be used interchangeably.
[85] *TISU* pp.3-18.
[86] Ibid., p.174, Cudworth also makes this observation in *EIM*, p.151; *FM*.4979, fol.144; *FM*.4980,
fol.221.

dictum *'De nihilo Nihil, in Nihilum Nil posse reverti'* – nothing can come from nothing

or go to nothing – there must be an original intellectual principle which causes and

forms the motion that is observable atomically in the world.[87] Cudworth uses in his

defence of the theistic basis of atomism the argument of the non-inferiority of the

cause which we encountered in his proof of the existence of God. The observation

that creation is structured in this manner allows us, Cudworth argues, *'loudly to*

declare, that the World was made by God.'[88]

Cudworth argues that the atomical atheism of the Epicureans at its source

perverts the central dictum of atomism by suggesting, not that nothing could come

from nothing, but that 'nothing [materially] could be raised from nothing or reduced

to nothing.' Consequently Cudworth accuses these thinkers of making matter, or

'bulk' the founding principle of all creation. He argues:

> And indeed it was really one and the self-same Form of Atheism, which
>
> both these entertained, they derived all things alike, from *Dead* and *Stupid*
>
> *Matter Fortuitously Moved,* the Difference between them being only this, that
>
> they managed it two different ways; *Anaximander* in the way of *Qualities* and
>
> *Forms,* which is the more Vulgar and Obvious kind of Atheism; but
>
> *Democritus* in the way of *Atoms* and *Figures,* which seems to be a more learned
>
> kind of Atheism.[89]

By making matter the only substance within creation, Cudworth argues that

atomical atheists have removed the first cause from the world and in this way

---

[87] *TISU,* p.30.
[88] Ibid., p.197.
[89] Ibid., p.130.

171

removed the philosophical understanding of God from creation.[90] By this logic all

of creation is derived from chance, or what Cudworth terms 'fortuitous motion.'

The basic premise of this argument, he states, removes the necessity of God from

creation and therefore denies the central philosophical premise of his thought, that

God's intellect is the defining principle of creation.[91]

Although there exists in many of these atomical atheists a residual theism

this is, Cudworth argues, merely a poor mask for atheism. God is used by these

thinkers in two ways, both of which lead to atheism. Firstly, some of these

materialist philosophers suggest that a purely materialist understanding of the world

is acceptable because God's perfection and freedom cannot be limited by the

mundane matters of the world. Material atomism is used by these thinkers as a

means of explaining the organisation of the world without recourse to the divine. So

Cudworth argues, Epicurus had sought to free God from '*Benefits and Employments*,

and doing nothing at all.'[92] This conception of the divine is an impossibility for

Cudworth because it would mean denying the divine as the defining principle of all

reality. This form of atheism, he thinks, can easily be dispatched by the observation

of the surrounding world. It is, he argues, nonsense to assert that the entire world

can be understood as simply the actions of local, mechanical motion because if

nothing comes from nothing, then logically there must be a primary principle which

was the source of this motion. Genuine atomism recognises this principle to be

God. Cudworth argues, therefore, that it is only possible to explain the organisation

of an atomistic universe if an active intellectual principle is understood to exist prior

to passive matter. Things of beauty in the world, using his example, a silver cup, are

---

[90] *FM*.4979, fol.153.b; *FM*.4980, fol.252.
[91] *TISU*, pp.61, 75.
[92] Ibid., p.64.

not made by the random movement of the atoms in silver. Rather these mundane, passive atoms are moved and influenced by the active principle of the workman to mould the silver into the cup. Such is the form and nature of the world that it is impossible to understand the form of passive corporeal objects without the influence of an active, incorporeal substance on them. In this way the whole world can be understood in this framework of the influence of active incorporeal principles on passive matter.[93] The logical impossibility of this material atheist argument, for Cudworth, makes the belief in an incorporeal divine power acting prior to the material world the only logical explanation. Reason tells us that this Epicurean atheism is incorrect because the world cannot be controlled by material principles alone, but by 'the Attributes of another kind of Substance distinct from Body.'[94] Atheistic systems can be discounted because, Cudworth argues, they reject the existence and superiority of incorporeal intellectual principles, making them.[95] Through his critique of the premises of atheism he is able to create an explanation of the created world which implicitly assumes not only the presence of the divine, but also the active influence of God in it. In his proof of the existence of God this active, forming principle cannot be found directly in the intellect of the divine. Instead it must be found in the principle of understanding which defines the second hypostasis of the Trinity. As with his proof of the existence of God, Cudworth's attack on atheism therefore not only confirms the existence of God, it also acts as a means by which man can implicitly know the active Trinitarian form of the divine.

The second form of abuse to the idea of God made by mechanical atheists is the way in which God is deployed merely as a means of hiding the reality of their

---

[93] Ibid., p.28.
[94] Ibid., p.50.
[95] Ibid., p.417.

atheism. This argument is central to Cudworth's attack on the philosophy of Hobbes. He argues that theology is used by Hobbes as a veneer of respectability, allowing him to 'walk abroad in the masquerade of theism.' God, instead of being the source and principle of goodness and love within the world becomes a political principle justifying acts which were anathema to the implicit goodness and wisdom of the divine. So Cudworth argues that, in Hobbes' thought, God is:

> a meer *Figment* or *Invention* of *Politicians*, to promote their own Ends, and keep men in Obedience and Subjection under them, then would they doubtless have so framed and contrived it, as that it should have been every way *Flexible* and *Compliant*: namely by perswading the world, that whatsoever was Commanded by themselves, was agreeable to the *Divine Will*, and whatever was Forbidden by their Laws, was displeasing to God Almighty, and would be punished by him:[96]

The above quote shows clearly the voluntarism which Cudworth identifies in Hobbes' thought. Cudworth argues that the principle of God is only used in Hobbes' thought to legitimise the arbitrary and absolutist state he is advocating. This form of state fails for two reasons. Firstly, as already stated, it is built on a false, and even feigned, conception of the divine. Secondly, Cudworth argues that Hobbes, by defining society by the arbitrary dictates of the sovereign alone, is undermining the central purpose of political society, the creation of an effective ethical community. Consequently Cudworth argues that Hobbes only believes in a God who rules over the world,

---

[96] Ibid., p.698.

no otherwise, than by and in these Civil Sovereigns, as his Vicegerents; and

the only *Prophets* and *Interpreters* of his will to men. So that the *Civil Law* of

every *Country*, and the *Arbitrary Will of Sovereigns*, should be acknowledged to

be the only *Measure* of *Just* and Unjust (these being nothing *Naturally* such)

the only *Rule of Conscience and Religion*. For from Religion thus modelled, *Civil*

Sovereigns might think to have and *Absolute Power*, or an *Infinite Right*, of Doing

or Commanding whatsoever they pleased, without exception, *nothing* being

Unlawful to them, and their Subjects being always *Obliged, in Conscience*,

without the least Scruple to Obey.[97]

Hobbes' thought, Cudworth argues, completely de-couples man from any notion of

individual moral responsibility by placing the arbitrary figure of the civil sovereign

between the justice of God's wisdom and man's ability to discover that individually.

Cudworth, by rejecting Hobbes' voluntarist conception of the political nature of

man, implicitly argues that the political nature of man is not an artificial creation,

but something that flows unmediated from the divine principle in creation.

The contrast between Cudworth and Hobbes on this matter is typified by

their differing views on the creation of the political realm. Hobbes, in this area,

follows much of the style and form of republican writers during the middle years of

the seventeenth century. Writers such as John Milton and James Harrington alluded

to the Old Testament creation story, and in particular creation as the imposition of

---

[97] Ibid., p.698, Cudworth here is clearly alluding to the arguments used by Hobbes in *Leviathan* where the political legitimacy of the civil sovereign is equated to the legitimacy God gave Old Testament Kings to be his representatives on earth. For instance see, 'Again, he is to be King then, no otherwise than as subordinate, or Vicesegerent of God the Father, as Moses was in the wildernesse; and as the High Priests were before the reign of Saul: and as the Kings were after it.', *Leviathan*, p.518.

order on chaos, as a metaphor for the imposition that would be brought about by

the imposition of order by the Godly republic on the chaos of the inter-regnum.[98]

We can identify this political metaphor, although in a less explicitly 'republican'

form, in Hobbes' assertion that civil society developed out of the natural chaos of

state of nature.[99] In contrast, we find Cudworth explicitly rejecting the idea of

creation as the imposition of order on chaos. The idea of there being chaos would,

after all, deny that the intellect and wisdom of God was the eternal founding

principle of all creation. In the *TISU* Cudworth deploys the idea of chaos as a foil

for his own version of creation as part of the perpetual out-flowing love of the

divine. In all these cases the idea of a chaotic world was contrasted with the true,

reasoned principle of divine love in creation. Just as the chaotic nature of atomical

atheism cannot create beauty in the world, neither can it create a politically just

society.[100] Political justice and order in society are, for Cudworth, not brought about

by the imposition of a single will on society, as in Hobbes, rather it grows naturally,

a collective understanding of the reasoned form and structure of society. By

rejecting Hobbes' mechanical explanation for the order of the world, Cudworth

implicitly suggests that man's political position is understood not by force, but by

the consensual appreciation of the divine principle in creation. This participatory

relationship lies at the heart of the political principles in Cudworth's writings. The

key to this political relationship between man and God is the rational and active

nature of God understood as Trinity.

---

[98] David Norbrook, *Writing in the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics, 1627-1660* (CUP, Cambridge, 1999) pp.330, 400, 470-2.
[99] *Leviathan*, pp.183-201.
[100] *TISU*, pp.79-80, 121-2.

In the *TISU* we can clearly identify Cudworth's recurring themes of the

Christian life and the ethical community which we have already encountered in his

early work. What he creates in the *TISU* is a philosophical structure within which

man's relationship to the divine in creation is defined. Cudworth intended to use

this philosophical and metaphysical groundwork of the *TISU* to develop a

philosophically coherent account of these principles in the remaining volumes of

the *TISU*. These volumes were, however, never completed in a publishable form.

The *TISU* creates the metaphysical framework within which Cudworth can begin to

explain principles such as human agency, moral responsibility and political

obligation. This structure relies at all times on the active principle of the divine for it

to survive and flourish. What we will examine in the next two chapters of this thesis

is how Cudworth develops these principles, particularly on human agency and

ethical responsibility, in his unpublished writings.

Chapter V – Providence, freewill and human agency

V.1. Introduction

This purpose of this chapter is to show how Cudworth develops his theory of freewill and human agency from within the Trinitarian metaphysical structure he defends in the *TISU*. The main sources of these arguments in Cudworth's writings are his unpublished manuscripts on freewill which are now held in the additional manuscript collection of the British Library. The manuscripts were probably work in progress, never intended for the eyes of more than a handful of Cudworth's closest intellectual allies. That being said, they shed light on the principles of human agency that Cudworth hints at in his published writings and assumes in his ethical and political thought. They were probably written after the *TISU*, sometime during the 1670s and even 1680s.[1] The manuscripts can, in part, be read as initial sketches for the third part of his projected *Intellectual System*. They are, however, also effected by contemporary debates, in particular the well known freewill debate between Bishop Bramhall and Thomas Hobbes. Cudworth's manuscripts, although acknowledging those debates, were not written in answer to that debate. Rather they should be viewed as Cudworth's contribution to the wider seventeenth century debate on freewill of which the Hobbes/Bramhall debate was also part.[2] Consequently in these disorganised and often rambling manuscripts we can begin to put flesh on the bones of the moral and political systems which Cudworth only

---

[1] See Appendix on the dating and ordering of Cudworth's freewill manuscripts.
[2] On Cudworth on Hobbes and Bramhall see: *FM.4979*, fols148,148b,152; *FM.4980*, fols160,199, 274, 276. On the Hobbes/ Bramhall debate see *Hobbes and Bramhall on Liberty and Necessity*, ed. Vere Chappell (CUP, Cambridge, 1999).

begins to hint at in the *TISU*. In particular the manuscripts, when read in the

context of Cudworth's Trinitarian system, present the reader with a powerful

defence of human agency as existing in this overarching Trinitarian structure.

Central to these manuscripts is the belief that God is not a passive or

passionate being, but the constant intellectual thread that exists throughout all

reality. The wisdom of the divine is confirmed, Cudworth argues, in the person of

Christ. Christ as the principle of the *Logos* acts as the mediating factor between man

and God; he is at the same time co-eternal with the divine and in sympathy with all

things within creation. The active principle of the *Logos* brings man into a full

participation with the divine as the source of all creation.[3]

The central question Cudworth attempts to answer in these manuscripts is

how the omnipotence of Cudworth's active Trinitarian God can be reconciled with

the existence of human liberty. If, as Cudworth argues in the *TISU*, God is active in

all parts of creation, how can man ever be said to be able to act freely? As was

shown in the previous chapter, Cudworth's attack on materialist atheism in the

TISU centres on his belief that there is a single defining power in the world, God.

To assert the principle of human agency into the divinely controlled world would

therefore appear to undermine the omnipotence of God. This is certainly the view

taken by the voluntarism of Calvinism and Hobbism, where the existence of freewill

is denied precisely because the very existence of freewill undermines the ultimate

will of God, in the case of the Calvinists, and the Civil Sovereign, in Hobbes.

Cudworth, in contrast, argues that these voluntarist conceptions of the divine do

not glorify the image of God, but rather limit God by defining God within the

parameters of mere will alone, a definition which Cudworth argues is more human

---

[3] *FM.4979*, fol.140.

179

than divine in form. Cudworth turns to the Platonic tradition to give an account of God's relationship with the world, within which Cudworth believes human agency not only exists, but confirms the omnipotence and providential care of the divine. Cudworth, in his manuscripts, argues that human freewill does not limit the divine, rather its very existence is a sign of the broadness and magnificence of the multifaceted wisdom of the divine. Human agency therefore becomes in Cudworth's theory a principle that confirms not only man's humanity, but is also a means of confirming the fecundity of the divine.

In his manuscripts, therefore, Cudworth's attacks centre on those arguments that deny the existence of human agency. In particular, Cudworth attacks the differing deterministic systems of Hobbism and Calvinism. Although for Cudworth these systems essentially fail because of their voluntarism, it is important to note the manner in which Cudworth differentiates between the material determinism of Hobbes and the divine determinism of Calvinism. The former can be discounted on the same terms that Cudworth attacks material atheism in the *TISU*. Divine determinism however, because it accepts but misinterprets the existence of a divine presence in the world has to be analysed with more care and attention. It is with Cudworth's distinctions between the determinism of Hobbes and Calvin that this chapter begins. After this discussion I will show the manner in which Cudworth builds his theory of providence and human agency out of his criticism of divine determinism. Although this is chiefly an attack on Calvinism, I will argue that just as Cudworth attacks Hobbes through his attacks on Epicureanism, so he attacks Calvinism as a resurrection of the determinism of Stoic 'Fate.' By making this link Cudworth is able to argue that just as Platonism can overcome the philosophical

errors of Stoicism, so a Platonically understood Trinitarian Christianity can overcome the errors of Calvinism. I will then go on to show how Cudworth develops his theories of providence and human agency, in particular his theory of the plastic nature of reality and the self-determining power of the soul, by overcoming misconceptions over these principles in Stoic thought. By the use of Platonic distinctions in these areas Cudworth argues that the providence of God should not be understood as one causal chain of necessity. In such a system, Cudworth argues, God is bound to the limited human conception of what defines power and action. Instead, Cudworth argues that God does not see what is to come as a single causal chain, but can comprehend the infinite contingent possibilities available within all created reality. Cudworth still believes that there is a regulative principle in the mundane world; this is Cudworth's idea of the plastic nature of reality. Although this principle exists, he argues that it is precisely because man can recognise himself as not being determined by these mundane, plastic regulatory principles that he is able to confirm his own human agency. He, therefore, believes that the life of man is not determined by the pre-existent will of the divine but instead exists in a middle realm above the regulatory principles of the mundane world. The principle of human agency is defined by Cudworth as man's self-conscious recognition of his place above the mundane power of the plastic realm. The distinction comes, he argues, from the intellectual power within all men, a power which has its source in the active power of the *Logos*. Cudworth creates his system of human agency by taking the principles of Stoic philosophy and infusing them with his own Trinitarian metaphysical system. It is through this Platonic reformation of divine determinism that his theory of human agency, and

consequently his theories of moral responsibility and ethical self-determination, develop. These principles of moral self-determination, I will argue at the conclusion of this chapter, define man in two ways. Firstly, Cudworth believes that man's freewill intimately connects him to the created realm, therefore rejecting the Scholastic belief in freewill as indifference. Secondly, the acceptance of the fallibility of man's self-determining power, which Cudworth accounts for through a discussion on the nature of evil, shows how man is morally responsible for his actions in the created realm.

V.2. Cudworth's attack on determinism: Calvin and Hobbes

In his work, *The Sovereignty of Reason*, Frederick Beiser argues that Cudworth's critique of Hobbes is synonymous with his criticisms of Calvinism. Beiser asks rhetorically, '[w]hat, indeed, was the God of Hobbes but the God of Calvin spelt out in material terms?'[4] There is certainly something in this assertion. Cudworth interprets Hobbes' thought as following the voluntarism that he also identifies in Calvinism; and many of the arguments which Cudworth deploys so deftly against Hobbes, in particular his defence of the eternal and immutable nature of morality, exist in his thought before he could have read Hobbes' work. However, we have also seen, in Cudworth's distinction in his *Second Sermon* between 'Sin's freeman' and 'God's bondsman,' that there exists, for Cudworth, a difference between the ethical implications of the Hobbist and Calvinist systems. For Cudworth the difference between the systems lies in the different sources from which Hobbist and Calvinist determinism initially grows. Where Hobbes could be discounted as failing to

---

[4] Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason*, pp.147-8.

recognise the existence of the divine, Calvinism had to be criticised for

misinterpreting the nature and form of God. Before Cudworth's criticism of

Calvinism is examined in detail it is first necessary to show how Cudworth, in the

manuscripts, discounts Hobbes' denial of freewill.

The attack on Hobbes that we encounter in the manuscripts differs very

little from those used by Cudworth against Hobbes and other 'material atheists' in

the *TISU*. If there is a difference between the *TISU* and the manuscripts it is a

change in emphasis. In the *TISU* Cudworth concentrates on the logical absurdities

of the Hobbist account of the created universe. In the manuscripts Cudworth uses

the same arguments that he uses against Hobbist materialism to reject Hobbes'

denial of freewill. Cudworth goes about this task, as in the *TISU*, by attacking what

he sees as the contradictions implicit in Hobbes' materialism. Hobbes argues that

reality can only be explained by the competing physical forces in the world. Freewill

is, therefore, denied by Hobbes because man was always necessarily determined by

the external physical forces that played against him. Freedom can, therefore, only

ever be understood, in Hobbist terms, as the absence of an external physical

impediment.[5] Although man can refuse to follow this external impediment, so

strong are these external forces that the basic human emotions of men would

necessarily lead to him following these external forces. To justify this position

Hobbes' used his famous example of the man in the sinking boat:

---

[5] *Leviathan*, p.189; also see Hobbes *Of Liberty and Necessity*, p.38.

[f]eare and Liberty are consistent; as when a man throweth his goods into

the Sea for *feare* the ship should sink, he doth it nevertheless very willingly,

and may refuse to doe it if he will:[6]

One could, Hobbes argues, pay lip service to the idea of freewill; however, so strong

are the external determining factors in the world that this freewill can never exist in

any tangible or effective form. Cudworth argues that man, in Hobbes' system, is

only defined by his relationship to the external world. Because of the physical

imperative in Hobbes' argument, Cudworth argues that Hobbes creates two levels

to his argument for necessity over freewill. Firstly, Hobbes asserts the crude notion

of random physical motion that we have already examined. Secondly, because this

material reality was the only one that Hobbes allows, the physical imperative of his

materialism is transformed by Hobbes into a philosophical system of necessary

certainty.[7] Such an argument, Cudworth argues, diminishes God as redundant in the

world and diminishes man, making him nothing more than the sum of the external

causes acting upon him.[8] Returning to the terminology of Cudworth's *Second Sermon*,

this is the realm of 'Sin's freeman.' According to Cudworth the only reality open to

the Hobbist man are the hedonistic temptations of the physical world. This system,

Cudworth argues can be discounted on two grounds. Firstly, as with his criticisms in

the *TISU*, Hobbes' materialism makes inanimate, material form the founding

principle of reality. This Cudworth believes to be nonsense as it contradicts the law

of the non-inferiority of causes.[9] Linked to this is Cudworth's second criticism,

---

[6] *Leviathan*, p.286.
[7] *FM.4980*, fol.274.
[8] Ibid., fol.224.
[9] *FM.4982*, fol.51.

which is that it is not only impossible to account for the existence of the world, but also impossible for man to have an intellectual comprehension of the existence of a world which is, in Cudworth's terms, created by 'the stupid coincidence of matter.'[10] Implicit in both these arguments is Cudworth's assumption that intellectual forces are superior, and therefore prior to, material causes. Consequently, Cudworth argues that not only is it impossible to account for the form and nature of the world in material terms alone, but that it is contradictory to make an intellectual interpretation of the world which denies the existence of the incorporeal, intellectual substance that allows one to come to that conclusion. Hobbist determinism can, therefore, be dismissed as a further perversion of a fundamentally flawed philosophical system. Now we have seen the manner within which Cudworth discounts the determinism of Hobbist materialism we can turn our attention to the more important argument of the manuscripts, Cudworth's attack on the divine determinism of Calvinism.

The difference, Cudworth argues, between Calvin and Hobbes comes not in the form the determinism takes, or the ends it brings about, but the initial source of that determinism. Cudworth asserts, in the second section of *FM*.4982, that the material determinism of Hobbes has no 'decrees' at all, in contrast to the divine determinism of Calvinism which is entirely dependent on divine 'decrees.' The difference, therefore, is that Hobbist determinism is defined by random external physical forces, whereas Calvinist determinism is defined by the internal decrees of the divine.[11] Hobbes can, therefore, be discounted, in Cudworth's mind, because of the logical absurdities in his argument. Calvinism and divine determinism in all its

---

[10] *FM*.4979, fol.187.
[11] *FM*.4982, II.fol.63.

forms, by contrast, is a more acute problem for Cudworth. Calvinism grasps the

essential truth of reality, that God is the animating and active force in the Universe.

However, instead of allowing the divine to exist as the all-encompassing intellect,

Cudworth believes that divine determinists limit God to the form of an arbitrary

being, driven by passion and power. Cudworth accepts the starting premise of

divine determinism, that God is the sole defining principle in the world. The failure

of divine determinism, therefore, is not to ignore God as the defining principle of

creation, but fail to appreciate the power and breadth of God's intellect within every

part of creation. Such errors, Cudworth argues, are not a specific fault of Calvinism,

but a recurring problem in all religion.[12] By making this claim Cudworth argues that

the problems that one encounters in the determinism of Calvinism mirrors the

determinism found in Stoicism. As with Cudworth's comparison of Epicurianism

and Hobbism, Cudworth uses the ancient Stoic system as a foil for his criticisms of

contemporary Calvinism. This comparison is alluded to in the preface to the *TISU*

where Cudworth argues, 'Divine Fate *hath not onely been formerly asserted by the* Stoicks,

but also of late by divers Modern Writers.'[13] The comparison between the determinism

of both Stoicism and Calvinism is made more explicitly by Cudworth in his freewill

manuscripts. Cudworth argues in *FM.4982* that Calvinism and Stoicism present a

version of a divine determinism which can be differentiated from the material

determinism of Hobbes.[14] Both Calvinism and Stoicism, Cudworth argues, are

defined by their dependence on the existence of positive divine decrees in all parts

of creation. These divine decrees exist in Calvinism through the will and power of

God as understood in voluntarist terms. In Stoicism the direct divine presence is

---

[12] *FM.4979*, fol.72.
[13] *TISU*, p.iv.
[14] *FM.4982*, II.fol.60; also see *FM.4980*, fol.313.

found in the physical principles of *pneuma*. Stoic thought believes that the created

world is defined and controlled by four divinely imbued physical principles of

pneuma. These were earth, water, wind and fire. All things in creation were

modifications of these basic principles and each of these in turn was defined by it

relationship to fire, which was the greatest of these *pnuema*.[15] Cudworth sees the

direct presence of God in these physical principles in Stoicism as a corollary to the

direct influence of the will and power of God in Calvinism. In both divinely

determined systems the presence of the divine directly determines every facet of

creation. Man, as part of that creation, is, as a consequence, necessarily determined

in all things. Man within this determined system becomes 'God's bondsman,' as

Cudworth puts it in his *Second Sermon*.

Given Calvin's own hostility to Stoicism, particularly in his writings against

Seneca, Cudworth's comparison between Stoicism and Calvinism would appear to

be an odd claim to make. However, Cudworth's comparison was not without

precedent. Calvin was directly criticised for resurrecting Stoic 'Fate' in his teachings

on predestination in his *Institutes*. Calvin was so angered by this accusation that he

added a section to a later edition of his *Institutes* to answer this criticism.[16] Cudworth

is clearly aware of Calvin's assertion and notes Calvin's addition to the *Institutes*

(I.xvi.8) in the section from *FM*.4982 where he most clearly makes the comparison

between Stoicism and Calvinism.[17] Cudworth notes that Calvin does not reject the

---

[15] Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods,* trans P.G.Walsh (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997), p.54; Robert B.Todd, 'Stoicism,' in *The History of Science and Religion in the Western Tradition: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Gary B.Ferngren (Garland, New York, 2000), pp.132-33.

[16] *Institutes*, I.xvi.8; Wendel, *Calvin*, pp.28-34. For an overview of the place of Stoic philosophy within seventeenth century Europe see, Sarah Hutton, 'Platonism, Stoicism and Scepticism and Classical Imitation,' in *A Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*, ed. Michael Hattaway, (Blackwell, Oxford, 2000), pp.44-57, especially pp.53-6. For a more general introduction to the relationship between Stoicism and Christianity see Marcia L.Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages,* 2 vols (Brill, Leiden, 1985).

[17] *FM*.4982, II.fol.63b.

starting premise of Stoicism, that God was the defining principle of all creation, rather Calvin argues that Stoic 'Fate' was in reality an incomplete description of the divine influence on the created realm. As Calvin argues:

> For we do not with the Stoics imagine a necessity consisting of a perpetual chain of causes, and a kind of involved series contained in nature, but we hold that God is the disposer and ruler of all things, – that from the remotest eternity, according to his own wisdom, he decreed what he was to do, and now by his power executes what he decreed.[18]

Calvin argues that where Stoicism makes the divine the defining causal principle in the created world, in reality God's power and will is directly present at every point of creation. Calvin does not reject Stoicism as incorrect, rather he criticises it for being incomplete. This same criticism of Stoicism is found in Augustine. Calvin in fact begins his discussion on Stoic 'Fate' in the *Institutes* by noting the allusions made by some between Augustine's theories and Stoic 'Fate.' The relationship between Augustine's thought and Stoicism comes out most clearly in the *City of God* where Augustine criticises Cicero's use of Stoicism. In chapters eight and nine of book five of the *City of God*, Augustine criticises the manner in which Cicero, in attempting to defend the existence of freewill, denies the absolute foreknowledge of the divine. Cicero's argument, in denying the true form of the divine in favour of a human faculty is, Augustine argues, patently 'madness.'[19] Augustine argues that Cicero is, in reality, perverting the basis of the Stoic arguments that Cicero claims to be

---

[18] *Institutes*, I.xvi.8.
[19] Augustine, *City of God*, trans Henry Bettenson (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1984), V.8. (p.190.)

188

defending. In answer to Cicero, Augustine argues that God must have

foreknowledge of all things. Although the true Stoic argument is not perfect,

Augustine argues, it is closer to the truth than Cicero's perverted Stoicism because

true Stoicism implicitly accepts than God not only has foreknowledge of all things,

but is the essential cause of all actions in the world.[20] Augustine, like Calvin,

therefore recognises in Stoic 'Fate' something of the truth which both of them

believe is only truly fulfilled in their systems of divine foreknowledge and pre-

determinism.

Because of the arguments made by both Calvin and Augustine with regards

to Stoic 'Fate,' Cudworth believes he is justified in linking the determinism of

Stoicism with the Christian determinism of Augustine, and Calvin in particular.[21]

Both Stoicism and Calvinism, he believes, argue that God is the source of all things

and as a consequence that God has a direct power and control over all actions in the

world. Because of this, both systems, Cudworth argues, assert that within creation

there is a necessary chain of causal motion which has been preordained by the

divine. In Stoicism this is manifested in the principle of 'Fate,' in Calvinism through

the doctrine of providence. The consequence of this causal argument is that

everything within creation, both good and ill, must have been determined positively

by the mind of the divine. Consequently, for Cudworth, the God of Stoicism and

Calvinism is corrupt because the preordaining power attributed to the divine makes

God the author of evil. The only saving grace for Stoicism, Cudworth argues, is that

the torments of the Stoic only occur in life, for the Calvinist they continued through

---

[20] Ibid., V.8 (p.193); Colish, *Stoic Tradition*, II:231.
[21] Cudworth, in *FM*.4982, differentiates between the determinism of Augustine, which allows a small amount of latitude for freewill, and Calvinism which follows the same pattern, but allows no room for freewill at all, fols 70b-71.

into eternity.[22] Despite this difference, the determinism of both systems makes each

equally damned in Cudworth's mind.

There is, for Cudworth, a threefold problem highlighted by the theistic

determinism. Firstly, and most importantly, it degrades God. Cudworth believes that

Calvinists, in particular, by defining God in terms of will and power seek to

understand and describe God in what are essentially human terms. This

anthropomorphic position, Cudworth argues, is responsible for the voluntarist

accounts of the divine discussed in greater length in Chapter Two. To define God in

terms of power and will is, he believes, to define God in the manner that humans

judge themselves. Instead, he argues that God should be defined in terms of

goodness and wisdom, which in their purest form always remain beyond the grasp

of humans, but which are still recognisable by man through his reason.[23] Secondly,

divine fatalists degrade men by making them merely chattels for the will of God. By

making man determined in all things Cudworth argues that men are viewed as little

more than 'little devils,' unable to have anything more than a mechanical, and

consequently involuntary, relationship to the world.[24] Thirdly, the voluntarism of

divine determinists creates the positive existence of evil which, Cudworth argues,

completely undermines the basis of morality. If God is the author of evil, by virtue

of his all-powerful will, then morality cannot exist because the equitable judgement

by God of all men on death, what Cudworth terms 'distributive justice,'[25] could not

occur. Such is the power of this determinism that man cannot be expected to make

---

[22] *FM*.4980, fol.314.
[23] *FM*.4979, fol.91; *FM*.4980, fols.193, 297.
[24] Ibid., fol.139.
[25] *TISU*, pp.v-vi.

even the most mundane decisions, let alone take any level of moral responsibility.

As Cudworth bluntly argues in *FM*.4980:

> This is ye very condition of those y^t hypocrtically pretending ye Fall of Adam
>
> & originall Sin & ye inability of depraved nature to any supernaturall Good
>
> ye confessing of wch alone they think to be a propitiatory Sacrifice & highly
>
> gratefull to ye Allmighty in ye meantime slothfully neglect to use y^t Power w^{ch}
>
> really they have, wch is all one in this blunt language of the ye Stoick, as if a
>
> man having hands should not use y^m to blow or wipe his nose but sit still
>
> expecting y^t God by miracles should do that office for him.[26]

The voluntarist understanding of the divine which is implicit in Cudworth's

criticisms of divine determinism is anathema to Cudworth. Such an understanding

of the divine not only degrades God and man but makes an equitable system of

ethics impossible. As Cudworth argues:

> For we say agn y^t if God be nothing but Arbitrary Self-will indetermined by
>
> any immutable [form] of Justice & holinesse, he is all ye worst y^t is or can be
>
> in ye Devill armed wth irresistable power or omnipotence & this is to
>
> confound Heaven & Earth & Hell togethr, Good & Evill, Holinesse &
>
> wickednesse or wch is all one to destroy all morality & differences of Good
>
> & Evill, by making ye nature of God devoid of all Morality.

---

[26] Ibid., fol.38.

For an equitable system of morality to exist for Cudworth the specific moral norms, which are only found in the wisdom and intellect of the divine, must be identifiable freely by all men. For this to be possible Cudworth's system of morality assumes that human agency exists. This is impossible whilst human agency is restricted by the narrow view of humanity in creation built on the limiting foundations of divine determinism.

Cudworth is in agreement with divine determinism in believing God to be active in an essentially atomistic world. The problem for Cudworth is, therefore, how one can account for human agency from within his own atomistic cosmological system. He solves this dilemma by redrawing traditional Calvinist and Stoic conceptions of providence and Fate within a broader Neoplatonic framework., taking many of the philosophical forms and much of the terminology of Stoic philosophy and Platonising them. In doing this he removes the implicit determinism which fatally limits Stoic principles of moral responsibility and in turn, places these ideas of moral responsibility within a broader, Neoplatonic, understanding of divine action and providence. Such a process makes it possible, Cudworth believes, to account for the latitude of human agency and moral responsibility from within the all-encompassing, providential wisdom of the divine.

V.3. Cudworth's use of Stoicism

Cudworth's approach to the philosophy of Stoicism at times seems contradictory. On the one hand, Stoicism is often dismissed as a limited and weak philosophical system. Stoicism is described by Cudworth at one point as the work of 'pittyfull

philosophastors.'[27] On the other hand, Stoic thought provides Cudworth,

particularly in the field of human agency and moral responsibility, with some of his

most important philosophical structures and terminology. In understanding how he

believes he is able to reconcile these seemingly contradictory positions we gain

insight into the philosophical and theological method which Cudworth employs in

his manuscripts. For Cudworth the positive principles of Stoicism are never

accepted in their entirety. Rather he takes them and re-forms and animates them by

the use of Platonic metaphysical structures. Cudworth's re-forming of Stoicism can

therefore be compared with his desire to reform determinist Christian thought with

the dynamism of Platonism. Cudworth attempts to remove the strictures and

legalism he believes are implicit in divine determinism through the use of his

Platonism. Cudworth argues that through such a process it is possible to create a

broader and stronger understanding of man's relationship with the divine in

creation.

Despite Cudworth's open hostility to Stoicism, his positive use of Stoic

principles is not surprising when we consider two points. Firstly, Cudworth, because

of the syncretic nature of his philosophical method, was open to using other

philosophical systems, even if they were flawed in some form or other. Secondly,

there has always been a close relationship between Stoicism and Neoplatonic

philosophy.[28] Both systems share a view of reality based on the principle of one

divine being. Also, in Stoicism we find philosophical structures, such as the triad of

reality – ideal, mathematical, sensible – which mirror closely the trinities of

Neoplatonism. Crucially, both believe philosophy and theology to be one and the

---

[27] Ibid., fol.202.
[28] P.Merlan, 'Greek Philosophy from Plato to Plotinus,' in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A.H. Armstrong (CUP, Cambridge, 1970), pp.14-132, pp.129-132.

same truth, as Iamblichus said, 'both systems believe in the identity of the cosmic soul with the soul in us.'[29] The theological continuities and differences between Stoicism and Neoplatonism are shown clearly in Cicero's *The Nature of Gods*. In this work Cicero describes a discourse between three eminent theologians: Vellius, an Epicurean, Balbus, a Stoic, and Cotta, an Academic. When outlining the theological position of Stoicism, Cicero, through the character of Balbus, stresses that the defining principle of God in the world is his reason. This is proved, Balbus argues, by the fact that our reason tells us what we know and perceive within the world, therefore it must be a principle which is prior to the natural world. As this was the principle which was prior, and therefore superior to the world, it must be the principle by which God was known. As Balbus argues, '[n]ow if there is nothing better than reason and wisdom, these qualities must exist in that which we concede is best of all.'[30] As a consequence, Balbus argues that all things in reality are interconnected by this divine nature and reason. In contrast to the stark atomism of Epicureanism, Stoicism teaches that the world should be understood not as a clashing world of independent forces, but as a continuum.[31] It is in the explanation of this form and nature of this continuum that Stoicism and Neoplatonism differ. At the heart of Stoic cosmology lies the divine material principle, or *pneuma*. This *pneuma* is also termed *hegmonikon* by Balbus, meaning that these principles not only create the physical reality of the world, but also act as the ruling principles of the world which nothing else can overshadow.[32] In Stoicism all actions are determined by their relationship to these physical principles. The major theological distinction

---

[29] Quoted in Ibid., p.131.
[30] Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods*, pp.17, 54.
[31] D.W.Hamlyn, *The Penguin History of Philosophy* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1987), p.80.
[32] Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods*, p.57 also see n.29 p.176.

between Neoplatonism and Stoicism is therefore that creation was controlled by incorporeal intellectual principles in Neoplatonism, where for Stoicism the world was controlled by the physical attributes of the *pnuema*. There is, therefore, in much Neoplatonism the implicit suggestion that Stoic cosmology leads to the dangers of Pantheism. Plotinus, in particular, distanced himself from Stoicism by arguing that only the intellectual power, not the physical presence, of the divine can be identified in the created universe. Following this line Cudworth, in *FM.4979*, argues that Stoicism can, in some ways be defined as an essentially materialist system.[33] This difference between the divine as Neoplatonic intellectual power and Stoic material presence is of vital importance to our understanding of Cudworth's theory of plastic nature.

Despite these metaphysical problems it is the continuities between Stoicism and Neoplatonism that help to explain why Stoicism became influential on the early Church. Unlike Epicureanism, but like Neoplatonism, Stoicism teaches that the divine is actively involved in the world. It was also possible to use Stoicism in conjunction with the monotheism of the Semitic tradition because Stoicism is defined by the single principle of the divine, even if it was realised in the form of physical principles. This is the interpretation of Stoicism that we have already encountered in Augustine and Calvin's limited recognition of Stoic thought. In relation to Christianity whatever Stoicism, because of its materialism, may lose to Neoplatonism in the form of metaphysical coherence, it more than makes up for with its ethical teaching. The strong ethical stress in Stoicism, rather than the metaphysical concerns of Neoplatonism, helps explain why Stoicism was viewed by many in the early Church as the primary form of pagan knowledge that needed to

---

[33] *FM.4979*, fol.144.

be countered.[34] That being said, many of the ethical teachings of Stoicism became intermingled with early Christian teaching. So much so that forgeries of Stoic writings which stress its compatibility with Christianity became commonplace in the early Church. Perhaps the most famous and influential of these was the claimed correspondence between Seneca and St Paul. So widespread was the belief in these forgeries that it was even believed by many that Seneca had been converted to Christianity by St Paul. Although Erasmus was later able to prove that this correspondence was a forgery, it does highlight the close relationship that existed between Stoicism and Christianity.[35]

Cudworth would have been more than aware of the ethical arguments in Stoicism that made it so compatible to certain forms of Christianity. The conflict comes for Cudworth not in the form of the ethical arguments suggested. These are of central importance to Cudworth's own ethical theory. Instead the conflict comes in the impossibility, as Cudworth sees it, of reconciling principles of moral responsibility to a cosmological system entirely controlled by the material principle of *pnuema*. Cudworth's reaction to Stoicism follows the Church Fathers who rejected Stoic pantheism and determinism; choosing the Neoplatonic God of providential care over the Stoic God of immanent material force.[36] As a consequence Cudworth believes Stoicism, because of its theological assumptions, to be fundamentally flawed. In this sense Cudworth's criticisms of Stoicism highlight a central principle of all Cudworth's thought, that ethical principles must be consistent with the metaphysical principles upon which they are built.

---

[34] Colish, *Stoic Tradition*, I:2.
[35] Ibid., I:5, II:16.
[36] Henry Chadwick, 'Philo and the Beginnings of Christian Thought,' in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A.H.Armstrong, pp.137-92, p.186.

Cudworth is certainly not alone in noting the discrepancy between the ethical and cosmological arguments of Stoicism. One explanation for this discrepancy is that it is ethical problems, not fundamental philosophical distinctions, which are central to Stoicism. Therefore in Stoicism philosophical distinctions are always subordinated to the needs of an effective ethical system.[37] Another explanation given is that a level of moral responsibility is understandable in Stoicism if a distinction between the nature of causes is made. This distinction comes out most clearly in the thought of Chrysippus who made the distinction between 'antecedent' and 'determining' causes. The former cannot be controlled, the latter, which are informed by the former but remain changeable, can be. Chrysippus famously describes this distinction through the example of the movement of a cylinder down a hill. The cylinder is antecedently determined to roll down the hill, however, man is able, through his free choice, to control whether or not the cylinder rolls down hill in the first place.[38] This distinction allows Stoicism to argue that in a world determined by 'antecedent' causes, man has the power to 'determine' some of these causes. It is by use of this determining power that the strong Stoic tradition of ethical self-determination develops. The clearest ethical example of this comes through the Stoic defence of suicide. Stoic ethical theory argues that all men are antecedently determined to die, however, to a large extent the determining cause of this death is largely in the control of the individual moral actor. Suicide can, therefore, be explained as the acceptable act of a moral actor: a clear case where the actor controls the determining cause, whilst still fulfilling the antecedent cause.[39]

---

[37] Merlan, 'Greek Philosophy from Plato to Plotinus,' p.125
[38] Cicero, De Fato, trans H.Rackham (Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1960), p.239; Colish, Stoic Tradition, I:35.
[39] F.H.Sandbach, The Stoics (Chatto and Windus, London, 1975), p.102; J.M.Rist, Stoic Philosophy (CUP, Cambridge, 1969), p.130. Also see Charlotte Stough, 'Stoic Determinism and Moral Responsibility,' in The Stoics, ed. J.M.Rist (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978), pp.203-232.

Stoicism therefore teaches, within the confines of its determinism, a strong tradition of moral self-sufficiency and self-mastery. It is these principles which exist, stripped of their Stoic foundations, so prominently in Cudworth's ethical thought. The problem Cudworth faces is how to explain this theory of ethical self-determination in his theistic system. As has already been stated, for Cudworth morality can only exist if there is distributive justice brought about by the judgement of freely-willed actions. This is, Cudworth believes, impossible from within the entirety of the Stoic system, as the moral responsibility taught by Stoicism is not based on choice action but on a moral asceticism where ethical virtue is found in merely assenting to the predetermined ends of a materially determined cosmos.

Cudworth begins his criticism of Stoicism by attacking the principles of *pnuema* which underpin Stoic cosmology. Cudworth argues that by asserting the physical principle of *pneuma* as the defining term of the universe Stoicism pulls the divine down into the material world. This, Cudworth believes, leads to two linked problems. Firstly it degrades the divine and secondly it makes all actions not only pre-determined, but physically pre-determined by the will of the divine. To overcome this problem Cudworth asserts, using Plotinus' argument outlined above, that although creation was unified by the intellect of God, it is not the direct presence, but the reflected power of God.[40] It is this reflected power, rather than a direct physical presence, which makes all things naturally identify with, and draw themselves toward, the divine. At the source of this Plotinian structure is a belief in divine action understood as the divine artist. On one occasion Plotinus uses this metaphor to describe the world as a stage with humans acting the drama written by the heavenly poet. In another metaphor Plotinus describes God as the musician:

---

[40] *FM*.4980, fol.151; TISU, p.464.

Of course, the play brings the conflicting elements into a kind of

harmonious concordance, by composing the complete story of the persons

in conflict; but in the universe the battle of conflicting elements springs

from a single rational principle; so that it would be better for one to

compare it to the melody which results from conflicting sounds, and one

will then enquire why there are the conflicting sounds in the rational

proportions [of musical scales]. If, then, the laws of rational proportions

make high and low notes and come together into a unity – being the

proportional laws of melody they come together into the melody itself,

which is another greater law of proportion.[41]

This metaphor is drawn from Plato's *Laws*, book ten, where the 'Athenian' describes

the creation as the artistic product which was necessarily secondary to the intellect

of the artist.[42] The world, with all its conflicting factors, is brought into harmony by

the 'artistic' form of God's providential wisdom. Cudworth draws heavily on this

metaphor when he describes the overarching providence of the divine. The divine

art, as Cudworth sees it, is the 'unbodied reason of the divine.' In that way it

touched the world, but became mixed with matter or, as Cudworth put it, '*Fuddled* in

it.'[43] The Platonic divine artist is directly comparable to the intellect of the

Trinitarian God in Cudworth's thought. Reality is touched in all parts by the divine

art of the intellect of God, but not controlled directly or materially by it. Plotinus

---

[41] *Enneads*, 3.2.16.
[42] Plato, *Laws*, trans. A.E.Taylor, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1961), 892.b.
[43] *TISU*, p.155(2).

understood the role of the omniscient God to his creation as that of the 'generalship of providence'; judging and guiding all actions in the world, but not determining them absolutely.[44] Providence is understood in Plotinian terms not as a chain of necessarily causal relationships, but as the constant process by which all parts of reality naturally seek after the divine: 'Everything in me seeks after the Good, but each attains it in proportion to its own power.'[45]

Following this Plotinian approach, Cudworth argues that creation is best understood, not as a unified whole or necessarily determined causal necessity, but as a scale of being with the divine at its head and mundane matter at the base. As Cudworth argues in *FM*.4980:

> Creation is a scale or ladder in wch are all degrees of being possible one
>
> below another, ye lowest of all wch is matter & Body So y^t there is a negative
>
> defect in all things but God but no positive defect pravity or vitiosity in any
>
> thing as it comes out of Gods hands in any nature y^t is no absurdity or
>
> Contradiction.[46]

By the use of this scale of being Cudworth is able to contrast this Neoplatonic cosmology with the material cosmology of Stoicism, which describes the world in terms of the direct physical influence of divine principle on creation. The Neoplatonic scale of being, in contrast to divine determinism, allows man to appreciate the intellectual influence of the divine on all parts of creation, whilst

[44] *Enneads*, 3.3.2.
[45] *Enneads*, 3.2.3.
[46] *FM*.4980 fol.151; *FM*.4970, fols 5,14,88. See also Sarah Hutton, 'Cudworth, Boethius and the Scale of Nature,' *The Cambridge Platonists*, ed. G.A.J. Rogers, et al, pp.93-100.

allowing elements of that creation, in particular men, a level of autonomy from the direct actions of the divine.

At the base of this scale of being exists what Cudworth termed the 'Plastic Nature of Reality.' Above this 'plastic' realm it is possible to move within this scale of being up towards the divine, or down towards the mundane. It is in this middle ground that Cudworth argues human freewill exists. For this to be the case we must understand that Cudworth's notion of higher and lower principles not as a crude duality between the body and soul, or the corporeal and incorporeal. Rather Cudworth follows Plotinus' duality of higher and lower selves.[47] Man therefore resides not in a conflicting world of material and immaterial forces, but in a realm where he is free to choose between the higher principles of the divine or the lower principles of the mundane. Merging the Platonic and the Christian, Cudworth argues that 'the Fall' has made man susceptible to the temptations of base, mundane principles. 'The Fall' is, however, not the irrevocable schism of original sin that we find in Calvinism. Rather man can, through discipline and his freewill, move upwards toward the divine. As Cudworth argues in *FM*.4980:

> This is ye true attempt of ye original of Sin y^t it is neither caused by God nor by any positive substantiall principle, but ye possibility thereof preceeds only from y^t imperfection & defectibility of Creatures, but actual cause of it is never any other y^n ye rationall Creature itself, not putting forth y^t executive

---

[47] 'In fact the substrate to the free principle is the rational form, and that which has come into existence from the rational form and exists according to it, so that the matter will not be dominant and the formation come second,' *Enneads*, 3.3.4.

power wch it hath towards ye higher principle in its nature but by sluggish

remission & relaxation, sinking down into ye lower.[48]

Man is a fallible creature, however, he is able to improve himself within this scale of

being. The providence of God is, therefore, for Cudworth, found in the infinite

possibilities which are suggested, or as Cudworth put it, 'woven into' this divinely

ordained scale of being.[49]

V.4. The Plastic Nature of Reality

At the base of this scale of being are the regulatory principles of the world. This is

the realm controlled by Cudworth's 'Plastic Nature.' The 'Digression on the Plastic

Nature of Reality' – which forms the forms the final section of chapter three of the

TISU – is posited by Cudworth to explain the recurring forms and structures of the

natural world. Plastic Nature is, as Sarah Hutton has clearly stated, the 'ignorant

instrument of a knowing and wise providence, a regulatory principle governing

operation of the natural world.'[50] Cudworth uses Plastic Nature to explain the

existence of mundane and recurring events in the world.[51] These plastic principles

provide, for Cudworth, the foundations of the created realm. By explaining how

these principles are drawn from the intellectual power of the divine, rather than the

immediate presence of the divine, Cudworth believes he is able to undermine the

starting premise of divine determinism. By utilising the difference between the

---

[48] *FM*.4980, fol.147.
[49] *FM*.4981, fol.24; *FM*.4982, III, fol.66.
[50] Sarah Hutton, 'Aristotle and the Cambridge Platonists: the Case of Cudworth,' in
Philosophy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Conversations with Aristotle, ed. C.T. Blackwell and S.
Kusukawa (Ashgate, London, 2000) pp. 337-49, pp.342-3.
[51] *TISU*, pp.147, 151-3.

intellectual power of God and the immediate presence of the divine Cudworth

argues that it is possible to explain the recurring events in the created world whilst

at the same time allowing a level of creation which is not controlled and defined

directly by the hand of God. It is in this level of creation that Cudworth believes

human agency and freewill exist.

In the 'Digression on the Plastic Nature of Reality,' Cudworth continually

defines God through the Platonic metaphor of the divine craftsman outlined above.

God, in Cudworth's cosmology, is not the idle observer but the active principle

defining all parts of reality. Cudworth uses this example to further distance himself

from mechanical atheists who claimed the world was created by the fortuitous and

random motion of matter. As Cudworth pithily states:

> the *Material* and *Mechanical* are altogether *Unphilosophical*, the same *Aristotle*
>
> ingeniously exposes the Ridiculousness of this Pretence after this manner;
>
> telling us, That it is just as if a Carpenter, Joyner or Carver should give this
>
> accompt, as the only Satisfactory, of any Artificial Fabrick or Piece of
>
> Carved Imagery...*that because the Instruments, Axes and Hatchets, Plains and*
>
> *Chissels, happened to fall so and so upon the Timber, cutting here and there, that therefore*
>
> *it was hallow in one place, and plain in another, and the like, and by that means the*
>
> *whole came to be of such a Form.* For is it no altogether as Absurd and
>
> Ridiculous, for men to undertake to give an accompt of the Formation and
>
> Organization of the Bodies of Animals by mere Fortuitous Mechanism.[52]

---

[52] Ibid., pp.148-9.

Cudworth, by this analogy and attack on material atheism, implicitly makes God the

source of all creation. This is, however, God not as the immediate force and pre-

determined principle, but the intellectual power that informs all creation. Cudworth

therefore believes that 'Plastic Nature,' correctly understood, shows how God

defines and determines the natural form of creation but is not intimately involved

with every mundane facet of that creation. He argues that the failure of divine

determinists is not that they reject the existence of a divine determining principle in

the world, as material atheists do. Rather it is that they believe this active regulative

power to be the highest power in the world, where in reality, Cudworth argues, it is

the lowest and basest.[53] The clearest example of this is in Stoicism's insistence on

physical, rather than incorporeal, intellectual principles defining reality. For this

reason Cudworth, in the 'Digression,' describes divine determinists as 'Cosmo-

plastic atheists.'[54] By identifying the philosophical errors of divine determinism

Cudworth believes it is possible to include this mundane determining principle in

his own system, without falling into the error of absolute determinism. He therefore

uses these Stoic principles, removing them from the excesses of their determinism,

to develop an account of the active role of the divine in creation.[55]

J.E. Saveson has argued that the plastic principle in Cudworth's thought is

synonymous with the third hypostasis of the Neoplatonic Trinity. Saveson states

that the plastic principle 'is taken persistently from the third hypostasis of the Neo-

Platonists; it is the vital and organizing force in Nature.'[56] This assertion would seem

---

[53] Ibid., pp.172-3.
[54] Ibid., p.146.
[55] Ibid., p.147.
[56] J.E.Saveson, 'Differing Reactions to Descartes among the Cambridge Platonists,' in *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, 21 (1960), pp.560-67, p.561.

to be only partially correct. Cudworth is clear that the Plastic principle is not itself
divine, arguing at one point that:

> though it be a thing that acts for *Ends Artificially*, and which may be also
> called the *Divine Art*, and the *Fate* of the *Corporeal World*, yet for all that it is
> neither *God*, nor *Goddess*, but a Low and Imperfect Creature.[57]

Cudworth argues that the error within divine determinism is not the failure to
recognise the plastic principle in nature, but to make plastic nature synonymous
with the divine. To do such a thing would be to confuse the individual workman
with the intellect behind the entire building project, or the instrument as the source
of the harmonies which are in fact brought about by the skill of the musician.[58]
Plastic nature must remain, Cudworth argues, a lower principle, always reliant for its
existence on the higher principles of the divine:

> For the *Plastic Life of Nature* is but the mere *Umbrage* of *Intellectuality*, a faint
> and shadowy *Imitation* of *Mind* and *Understanding*, upon which it doth
> Essentially depend, as the Shadow upon the Body, the image in the Glass
> upon the Face, or the Eccho upon the Original Voice. So that if there had
> been no *Perfect Mind* or *Intellect* in the World, there could no more have been
> any *Plastick Nature* in it, that could be an *Image in the Glass* without a face, or
> an Eccho without the *Original Voice*.[59]

---

[57] *TISU*, p.162.
[58] Ibid., p.155.
[59] Ibid., p.172.

As the mindless vassal of the divine intellect, the plastic nature in reality contains no self-consciousness of itself.[60]

Saveson's claim would therefore not appear to be backed up in Cudworth's writing. However, Saveson does point to an important Trinitarian aspect implicit in Cudworth's theory of plastic nature. Cudworth argues that plastic nature, because it is mundane, has no consciousness of itself. Man, Cudworth argues, is able to distinguish himself from the mundane, regulatory plastic principles of creation precisely because he is conscious of the existence of these principles. Consequently because man is conscious of the plastic element in reality man cannot, by implication, be solely driven and determined by this slavish plastic nature. It is from this assertion that Cudworth develops his definition of human agency. Plastic powers are, by definition, un-self-conscious, therefore man's ability to self-consciously recognise the plastic principles in the world acts as an implicit confirmation of the self-conscious power of man. By this confirmation man is placed above the slavish realm of the mundane and consequently above the teleological, pre-determined world of plastic nature. Cudworth, therefore, uses his theory of plastic nature as a means to an end. It allows him to account for the regulatory principles in the world (for example: that grass grows, the sun shines, apples fall to the ground etc.), but it leaves enough latitude for him to argue that above this mundane level exist the powers of human agency which are an essential part of Cudworth's moral theory. Human agency is, therefore, defined by Cudworth as man's recognition of his own self-consciousness. The argument that Cudworth uses to define human agency as man's self-conscious recognition of himself mirrors Cudworth's explanation of man's appreciation of the Trinitarian form of the divine.

---

[60] Ibid., p.173.

As shown in the previous chapter, Cudworth argues that man appreciates the reflective power of the divine by appreciating the difference between the intellect of the divine and understanding as the means of that appreciation. The means of understanding, he argues, allows man to appreciate not only the existence of God, but through the means of understanding, the reflective Trinitarian nature of that divine being. In the case of plastic nature, man, by his self-consciousness, is able to recognise himself as existing above the mundane, determined plastic level. Implicit in this recognition for Cudworth is an acceptance that this self-conscious power has its source in something more than the mundane. That source, just as with understanding in the defence of the Trinity, is the active, intellectual power of the divine.

V.5. Human Agency and Moveable Providence

The reflexive human powers of self-perception and self-determination, which define Cudworth's moral philosophy, exist above mundane plastic nature. Man's recognition of his human agency comes through his self-conscious recognition of a faculty that exists above the mundane, a recognition which has its source in man's participation in, and understanding of, the intellectual principle of the divine. In Cudworth's thought the realisation of the power of human agency is defined by the active intellectual and, consequently, the Trinitarian form of the divine. By defining human agency in terms of man's intellectual relationship to the divine Cudworth is able to argue that human agency can exist in such a way that does not diminish the providential wisdom of God. This claim requires Cudworth not only to define

man's existence solely through the intellectual principles outlined above, but also to redefine the nature of divine providence from the form which it is assumed to take in systems of divine determinism. Cudworth, by doing this, rejects the notion that all creation is controlled by a fixed providential system such as that which merely controls the plastic nature. Such a providential plan would not, Cudworth argues, allow for the latitude within which human agency could effectively exist. Instead, Cudworth argues that above the mundane plastic realm creation is defined by the infinite breadth of the divine intellect. Creation is not fixed by a single line of necessary causation defined narrowly in terms of the will of the divine. Instead God's vast intellect can comprehend all the multiple possibilities existent in creation. Human agency in this realm of, what Cudworth terms 'moveable providence,' does not limit the idea of the divine, as thought by divine determinists, but helps to confirm the breadth of Cudworth's intellectualist God.

The principle of moveable providence, which is only found in any great detail in Cudworth's manuscripts, relies upon Cudworth first removing the assumptions of causality and necessity that he believes have allowed deterministic systems to gain purchase. For Cudworth the central problem of deterministic systems is that they rely on the false assumption that because an action can be understood to have been necessarily caused by a previous act, that that necessary cause was predetermined to be that cause. The proof of this predestined form of determinism, Cudworth argues, relies entirely upon a retrospective judgment. If the use of hindsight is removed all that can be known is that that every action must necessarily be caused by a sufficient act. What cannot be said is that the

retrospectively recognised cause was necessarily the predetermined cause. As

Cudworth puts it in *FM*.4980:

> The necessity of a disjunctive contradictory proposition is so absolute y^t y^e
>
> same thing should either be or not be, no more y^n it could make it possible
>
> y^t it should both be or not be together Infinite power could no more make it
>
> possible y^t Adam should neither eat nor not eat of ye forbidden fruit y^n y^t he
>
> should both eat & not eat of it [or that it] is necessary y^t Cato shall kill
>
> himself in Africa or not kill himself, But it is not, therefore necessary y^t he
>
> should necessarily kill himself, or necessarily not kill himself, & therefore it
>
> is a childish illogical argumentation If it be not necessary it shall rain
>
> tomorrow y^t then it must be necessary it shall not rain for neither of y^m
>
> might come to passe necessarily but contingently, onely ye whole is
>
> necessary y^t one or other of y^m should come to passe necessarily or
>
> contingently, it matters not w^{ch}; Here therefore The Author did not observe
>
> ye difference between these two affirmations Tis necessary y^t one or other of
>
> ye two should come to passe & this That one or other of y^m must needs
>
> come to passe necessarily.[61]

Cudworth terms his understanding of possible future actions which were logical, but

not predetermined as necessary causal relationships, the 'disjunctive logical

necessity.' This idea Cudworth describes in *FM*.4979 in the following manner:

---

[61] *FM*.4980, fol.266. It is interesting to note also that the examples used in this quote, of Adam's 'Fall' and Cato's suicide, are suggestive of the implicit link that Cudworth believes there to be between Calvinism and Stoicism. Both systems ethical arguments being recognisable in these examples. Calvinism through the doctrine of original sin and Stoicism through the justification of suicide.

So y^t ye meaning of Disjunctive Logicall Necessity is this, not y^t if one of y^e

Contradictory terms doo not come to pass ye other will necessarily will come

to passe but if one of them doo not come to passe anyway (though it be

contingently unnecessarily) yet it will be necessary y^t ye other shall come to

passe some way or other though it may come to passe contigently for all y^t.[62]

Cudworth uses this principle to explain how acts above the realm of the plastic

nature can be mistaken as predetermined when they are merely retrospectively

recognised as being caused by a necessary, but not predetermined, effect.

The problem, however, remains for Cudworth to explain how such a system

of ambiguous future actions could exist in a framework controlled by an omniscient

God. Augustine criticises Cicero's attempt to solve this dilemma through the denial

of divine foreknowledge in all things. Cudworth's reply to this dilemma is the

obverse of Augustine's criticisms of Cicero. Instead of denying the existence of

divine foreknowledge, he argues that the principles of divine foreknowledge as held

by Augustine and Calvin are, in fact, too limiting and narrow. His argument here

returns to one of his central reasons for rejecting the divine determinism. When

attacking Stoicism and Calvinism Cudworth argues that to state that God can only

conceive of a single chain of causal relations running throughout creation is to limit

God. He believes that such a position reduces the intellect of God to the human

principles of will and power. Instead, Cudworth asserts, such is the awesome

intellect of the divine, that he cannot only foresee all necessary acts, but also all the

contingent possibilities that occur from that act. The divine intellect is, therefore,

---

[62] *FM.4979*, fols228-9.

not limited to the strictures of an Adamantine chain of predetermined certainty.

Rather the mind of God, as Cudworth puts it:

> doth infallably know all contingent & free actions though not antecedently
>
> by necessary causes wch would destroy the freedom & contingency, but yet
>
> Consequentially and by ways of Anticipation of Futurity. Soo y^t the object of
>
> this prescience is not causes antecedently producing such effects but it is y^e
>
> consequent truth & futurity y^t must needs fall within ye Comprehensiveness
>
> of ye Divine Understanding y^t Grasps & presents all futurity in it.[63]

Cudworth argues that the intellect of God is so vast that all possible 'futurity' is held

within it. Actions are, for him, not understood in terms of necessity but 'ambiguous

possibility.'[64] The infinite web of possibility created by this assertion is too vast for

the human mind to conceive, but not too great for the limitless power of the

wisdom of God. Man can act freely within the vast intellect of the divine because all

possible actions and contingencies of actions have been foreseen by God.

Providence, in this sense, is not a limited chain of cause and effect but the limitless

realm of possibility. Providence is not fixed but 'moveable' within this vast

intellectual structure.

---

[63] *FM*.4981, fol.50.
[64] *FM*.4979, fol.210. We can identify this principle of the breadth of God's providential plan in the Platonic thought of Cudworth's predecessor Thomas Jackson. As Jackson argues: 'So far is freedom of choice or contingency from being incompatible with the immutability of God's will, that without this infinite variety of choice or freedom of thought in man and angels, we cannot rightly conceive him to be as infinitely wise as his decree is immutable.' Jackson, *Works*, V:90.

V.6. Freewill, moral responsibility and evil

Cudworth uses this theory of 'moveable providence' as the ethical structure within which he is able to unify his two recurring themes of living the Christian life and the fulfilment of that life in the creation of the ethical community. To achieve this Cudworth takes the language and theories of moral responsibility originally found in Stoic thought and places them in the breadth of his theory of moveable providence. Cudworth argues throughout his manuscripts that if human agency is understood in these terms, it is possible to argue effectively for freewill without diminishing the providential power of God.

The starting point of this theory is the nature of human will. Human will is, for Cudworth, not a despotic power, as in Hobbes, or a fallible power, as in Calvinism, but open to change and suggestion from competing principles.[65] Consequently human will is, for Cudworth, a faculty that resides between these two extremes; it is 'an amphibious thing, between perfection and nature.'[66] The implication of this is two-fold. Firstly, Cudworth argues that there are elements of human action which are necessarily governed by the mundane, plastic, forces of nature (i.e. hunger, thirst, sleep, etc.). Secondly, above these mundane factors there exist malleable powers within human will through which man has the potential to improve himself by moving towards the divine principles of goodness and justice. It is in this latter area that Cudworth believes the human faculty of moral responsibility resides. The discerning power of the will in man is governed by man's reason. Through his reason man has the potential to rise above the mundane and,

---

[65] *FM*.4979, fols.116, 63; *FM*.4980, fol.38.
[66] *FM*.4980, fol.45; *TFIV*, p.184.

212

used correctly, man may move into participation with the divine. Man can therefore, Cudworth argues, use his reason to move towards the eternal divine principles of justice and wisdom. The fact that man has the potential to enter into this relationship of participation again confirms for Cudworth the Trinitarian form of the divine. The rational means that man employs to move towards and recognise the eternal truths of the divine must, Cudworth believes, be drawn from the same divine principle of understanding that allows man to know of God's existence and intellect in the first instance. Therefore the ethical potential of man is defined by man's implicit acceptance of not only the existence of God, but also God in his active Trinitarian form.[67]

Before Cudworth's theory of moral responsibility is explained it is, however, important to show how he understands the active faculties, of which the self-determining ethical faculty is only one. He distinguishes between those human actions that are defined by the mundane, plastic and regulatory principles in the world and those which are the self-determined and ethically accountable actions of man. Cudworth's starting point in this is the *Phaedrus* where Socrates defines the immortal part of the soul as that part which 'moves itself' – *to auto eauto kinouv*.[68] This self-moving principle, which Cudworth anglicised to 'autokinsey' in his manuscripts, is the self-moving principle which will be discussed at greater length later. Below this faculty man is still liable to the forces of external action at the most mundane level; these are defined by the regulatory principles of the plastic nature. In the manuscripts Cudworth contrasts the self-moving, auto-kinetic powers of man

---

[67] *FM.4980*, fol.37. In this section Cudworth explicitly links freewill to the principle of grace which, as we have seen Cudworth, and Whichcote before him, identify with the principle of reason mediated to man through the revelation of the second person of the Trinity.
[68] Hutton, 'Liberty, and Self-determination,' p.89.

with the externally moved, hetero-kinetic – 'heterokinsey' as Cudworth terms it –

forces which affect man. These hetero-kinetic forces – which Cudworth says man

has as much ability to resist as a tennis ball which is struck, or a weather-cock blown

by the wind – should not be described in terms of ethics or morality as Hobbes and

other mechanical fatalists have described them, because no equitable judgement can

be made over man's ability to control them.[69]

Included in this sub-ethical layer in Cudworth's thought are what Cudworth

terms 'Epoloustic' forces.[70] Epoloustic actions, Cudworth argues, are those actions

where there is an equal determination between two competing factors. This form of

choice made by man can have no blame or moral judgment attached to it. In these

cases Cudworth argues that man is naturally drawn to the choice of habit.

Epoloustic determinations therefore differ from hetero-kinetic determinations in

that man is determined internally, not externally. This distinction, along with

Cudworth's use of the idea of habit, would seem to make epoloustic determinations

comparable to the internal regulatory principles in man. Cudworth believes that

plastic nature is the internal, but mundane determining factor in all parts of creation,

existing below the level of ethical judgments. In the 'Digression on the Plastic

Nature of Reality,' Cudworth argues that one of the factors that proves the imprint

of the divine intellect on nature is the ability of humans to act from habit. The

example Cudworth gives is of a musician being able to play half-asleep, that is from

habit, not from conscious power. As Cudworth puts it:

---

[69] *FM.4980*, fol.176; *FM.4979*, fol.91.
[70] The term 'Epoloustic' only occurs within *FM.4978* and *FM.4980*, suggesting that *FM.4978* is
related to *FM.4980*. See appendix on the Cudworth's Freewill manuscripts.

> *Habits* do in like manner, *Gradually Evolve* themselves, in a long Train or
>
> Series of *Regular* and *Artificial Motions,* readily prompting the doing of them,
>
> without comprehending that *Art* and *Reason* by which they are directed.[71]

Cudworth accepts that man is in many areas of life determined by mundane internal

and external factors. Externally man can be pushed this way or that, by the hetero-

kinetic power of external forces. Internally man can be drawn to apples over

oranges simply through the epoloustic determination of habit. Neither of these

actions should, Cudworth argues, be judged in ethical terms because the

determination of such actions occurs in a sub-ethical level of natural

determination.[72] In essence Cudworth's use of hetero-kinetic and epoloustic

determination can be equated to his understanding of Hobbist and Calvinist

determination respectively. Cudworth believes that neither can effectively account

for ethical actions of man. This could only come through the self-determined

power, which Cudworth terms *autexious.*

Cudworth places the moral faculty of autokinsey above the two ethically

neutral faculties of epoloustic and hetero-kinetic power. For Cudworth autokinsey is

the characteristic power in human will that brings man up from the level of being

mere beast. Like the previous human faculties outlined by Cudworth, autokinsey

can only be viewed as logical if it is understood to be intimately involved with the

creation in which it exists. In making this assertion Cudworth rejects the view that

---

[71] *TISU,* p.157.

[72] As stated an epoloustic judgment is the morally neutral judgement of habit. If, however, using the example stated above, one of the fruits chosen by habit, for instance the oranges, were produced in morally reprehensible circumstance (perhaps in apartheid South Africa) then the choice would be an ethical rather than habitual, and therefore one on which man could be judged. This is because the ethical decision which judges the fruits on their origin and production is an intellectual decision which, within Cudworth's schema, resides above the habitual desire for an apple or orange.

freewill can be explained by the indifference of the will to the world around it, a

position found in the moral asceticism suggested by some Stoic ethical philosophy.

The problem of indifference is, for Cudworth, of more immediate relevance in

refuting the theory of freewill as indifference in Scholastic and Cartesian thought.[73]

Cudworth goes to great lengths to undermine this theory. The central problem with

indifference is, for Cudworth, that such a theory, by claiming to be indifferent to the

world within which it resides, can never judge the moral truths that exist implicitly

within that world. Indifference, as a moral theory, assumes that the starting principle

of the world was a blind will, without the use of reason. Such a theory completely

contradicts the central assertion of Cudworth's moral philosophy, that moral

judgments can be known because of man's implicit relationship with the intellect of

the divine, through reason. This can never be the case, Cudworth argues, if the

starting point is the indifferent mind as it denies that there is an active, self-guiding

power in the soul.[74]

· The terminology of this power as autokinsey is drawn from Plato.

Cudworth's understanding and use of it, however, owes much to Plotinus.

Cudworth argues that *autexious* power has three defining characteristics: it is an

internal power, it is active, and it is self-conscious.[75] The *autexious* power of man is

therefore, by its form, related to the Trinitarian form of the divine. Its source is in

the incorporeal divine principle which created the world, it was driven by the

understanding power of the *Logos* and defined by the active principle of the Spirit.

The principle of reason which, Cudworth asserts in the *TISU*, implicitly tells man of

---

[73] For freewill as indifference in Scholastic thought, in particular Ockham, see Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, III:101-3. For freewill as indifference in Descartes see, Descartes, *Works*, I:174-9, 234-6; Cottingham, *Descartes Dictionary*, pp.86-88; Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, IV:139-42.
[74] *FM*.4979, fols.6, 33.
[75] Ibid., fol.26; *FM*.4980, fols 47, 51.

the existence and form of God is, in the manuscripts, shown to have an essentially

ethical form. The active rational faculty that teaches man of the divine is also the

means by which man is drawn to and eventually judged by God. This self-

determining, self-moving power in man Cudworth equates with the *hegemonic* power

of Stoicism. For Cudworth, however, rather than being the material defining

principles of Stoicism, *hegemonic* powers are the inner, incorporeal powers peculiar to

the soul of man. In *Ennead* 6.8. Plotinus stresses that it is precisely because this

power is immaterial and internal that it could allow man to move towards the

divine. The exclusive power that *autexious*, or *hegemonic*, power has in the soul is what

draws man to God. This power is, however, not an end in itself. It is only a virtuous

power if it seeks and participates with the intellect of God. As Cudworth argues in

FM.4980:

> for Power is not Power without respect to Good freewill or self-power is
>
> nothing but a self-promoting Power to Good or Self-professing Power in y^e
>
> Same A free-willed Being is such a thing as hath a Power to adde something
>
> to its own Perfection.[76]

Cudworth attributes this higher principle in the soul of man to the grace of

God, showing clear affinities with Whichcote's assertion, outlined in Chapter Three,

that *recta ratio* was the working of grace. Cudworth argues that the grace of God, the

intellectual principles of the *Logos* in man, 'excites the free principle' in man.

Freewill, which is created by the action of this divine principle, is a form of divine

grace. The active principle of the divine, which is such a central part of Cudworth's

---

[76] *FM*.4980, fol.30.

Trinitarian doctrine of God, is found, as the grace of God, in the self-moving power

which defines Cudworth's conception of human agency.[77] Cudworth, by placing

divine grace next to the principle of freely willed action, is able to argue for freewill

in his providential system as the means by which men are equitably judged by the

distributive justice of God. As Cudworth stated in *FM*.4980:

> Besides all wch we Xtians believe y^t though God be not passionate & passive
>
> in himself y^t after some ages of the world past he humanized his nature in
>
> our Bl. Saviour Xt & So made it passive & passionate & moveable in him
>
> who was in all things like unto us & hath a Sympathy & fellow feeling wth
>
> our humane difficulties & infirmities ... wth us so y^t this moveable
>
> Providence may well be exercised by him imploying his Angells as Emisaries
>
> & Ministering Spirits every where & coming at last himself visibly to judge
>
> the world & render to every man according to his works.[78]

At all times Cudworth reminds his readers that this self-determining power in the

soul of man is not an end in itself but only the means by which the 'liberty,' which is

only found in the divine, can be found. Therefore despite its virtuous benefits,

autexious power is by definition fallible. It is through this principle that Cudworth

deals with the problem of evil.

Cudworth believes the systems of divine determinism, such as Stoicism and

Calvinism, fail because they cannot explain the source of evil except as a

consequence of the will of God. This is anathema to Cudworth. This being said,

---

[77] *FM*.4981, fol.79; *FM*.4979, fol.224.
[78] *FM*.4980, fol.218.

Cudworth, as a Christian philosopher, cannot discount or ignore the problem of evil. It is through his theories of ethical responsibility that he believes he is able to explain it. He equates the inner, self-determining power of man's soul with the grace and understanding of the divine. Although man is drawn to the divine, this remains a free choice; man can, if he so wills, reject the higher principle of his intellect and follow the baser principles of the body. It is in this rejection that Cudworth explains the principle of evil in the world. Following the interpretation of evil in Plotinus, Cudworth believes that evil is not a positive entity, but rather created by man's rejection, or privation, of the goodness implicit in God. As Plotinus argues in *Ennead* 3.2:

> The cause of the wrongs men do to one another might be their effort towards the Good; when they fail through their impotence to attain it, they turn against other men. But the wrongdoers pay the penalty, being corrupted in their souls by their works of wickedness, and are set in a lower place; for nothing can ever escape that which is ordained in the law of the All.[79]

Evil and wrongdoing therefore exist when man's will turns from the higher principles of justice and goodness to the capricious will of the lower self. When this occurs man, by rejecting the higher principles of understanding, implicitly rejects the providential power of God, the intellect of God.[80] Cudworth's argument here follows that of Plotinus in *Ennead* 3.2. where he argues:

---

[79] *Enneads*, 3.2.4.
[80] *Enneads*, 3.3.7.

Therefore one must 'escape' to the upper world, that we may not sink to the level of sense-perception by pursuing the images of sense, or to the level of the growth-principle by following the urge for generation and the 'gluttonous love of good and eating,' but may rise to the intelligible and intellect and God. Those, then, who guarded the man in them, become men again. Those who lived by sense alone become animals.[81]

Cudworth's self-determining power follows the Plotinian ethical structure of the 'ethics of escape' discussed in Chapter One. This is, however, not an ascetic rejection of the material world, rather it is an intellectual refusal to be controlled and defined by the material world alone.

Cudworth's defence of the rational powers and freedom of man carries with it the implicit possibility that man can willingly turn away from God. Consequently Cudworth argues that evil, rather than being a positive entity, is a by-product of freewill.[82] Evil occurs, Cudworth believes, not because the material world is, by definition, evil, or that God has positively commanded certain things to be evil. Rather man, by negating the implicit goods available to him through a rational participation with the divine, freely commits himself to the bondage and misery of evil. The potentiality and corruptibility which is implicit in man's 'amphibious' existence is why, Cudworth argues, all men will, in the end, be judged by the actions and choices of their freely-willed actions. The potential corrupting nature of freewill is, therefore, in Cudworth's thought, a necessary by-product of a system in which

---

[81] *Enneads*, 3.4.2.
[82] *FM*.4979, fol.33; *FM*.4980, fol.127; *FM*.4981, fol.28.

man could be at once defined by the providential plan of the divine and at the same time accountable for his actions. Despite the corruptibility of man Cudworth freely admits that man is able to turn, by his freewill, from evil to the virtues and liberty only found in the divine. Freewill is, for Cudworth, the means by which he could explain the equitable judgment of man in the compass of the providential plan of the divine. As he argues in *FM*.4980:

> And now we may make up an intire & perfect definition of this faculty of freewill y^t it is a power over ourselves & our own Actions belonging to Beings reduplicated upon ymselves wch is designed by God & Nature for Good y^t they may be able to promote ymselves to Good & preserve ymselves in ye same but being an imperfect and self-determinable power is by accident unavoidably lyable to this Inconvenience y^t by ye abuse of it we may be ye causes of our own Evill & Degeneration & therefore guilty of Sin So y^t according to ye different use or abuse of this power it qualifies men either for Comondation or Blame, Rewards or Punishment.[83]

Cudworth's understanding of man's ability to recognise moral norms, and how man should act on this knowledge, are the subject of the next chapter of this thesis.

---

[83] *FM*.4980, fols.91-2.

Chapter VI – Cudworth's political philosophy: The Ethical Community

VI.1. Introduction

In this chapter I will examine the way in which for Cudworth the metaphysical and ethical principles outlined in the previous chapters develop into a concrete political system. Cudworth's conception of political society, or ethical community as I describe it, cannot be found in any one particular work. Rather it is suggested and alluded to through all Cudworth's writings. His conception of ethical community exists as the clearest and most concrete example which he uses to explain his moral and ethical philosophy. As argued in the previous chapter, his ethical principles, particularly his theory of human agency, can only be fully understood as developments of his Trinitarian theological position. Likewise, I will argue, Cudworth's concrete ethical and political arguments should not be viewed in isolation, but are the practical realisation of the ethical and metaphysical principles outlined in previous chapters.

This chapter will begin with a discussion on how Cudworth develops his idea of individual moral responsibility through this writings on ethical epistemology. This will allow us to see the way in which his abstract principles of human agency, found in his manuscripts, develop into ethical and political principles. This discussion will necessarily concentrate on his posthumously published *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*. Using the practical principles outlined in this work it will then be possible to examine in greater detail the way in which he

defines his ethical epistemology as the theoretical groundwork from which the responsibility of the moral actor and obligation within the political community develops. What we find in Cudworth's thought is a subtle and complex understanding of the nature and form of the political community which grows naturally out of his Trinitarian conception of reality. Through an examination of arguments in Cudworth's published and unpublished works I shall argue that he develops a vision of political society which relies on the near democratic participation of its morally self-determined members. This vision of political society, I will argue, develops as a direct consequence of Cudworth's Trinitarian theology. He therefore develops a vision of the political realm from within his theological worldview. To show how he achieves this I will show, firstly, how Cudworth develops and expresses his theory of the ethical community as the defining form of the political realm. Secondly, I will show the way in which his understanding of the political can help us understand his own ambiguous place within the political upheavals of the seventeenth century. I will argue that not only is Cudworth's philosophy consistent with his own actions and behaviour, but also that these theories show him enunciating some of the central principles of the emerging features of liberal individualism.

VI.2. Cudworth's ethical epistemology: *The Eternal and Immutable Morality*

Ralph Cudworth's *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* was first published in 1731 in an edition prepared by Edward Chandler, Bishop of Lichfield and later Durham. As a work it holds a peculiar place in the history of philosophy.

Chandler's edition was prompted by the growth in debates on ethical rationalism in the eighteenth century. Consequently the *EIM* has often been viewed and interpreted out of its original context within these eighteenth century debates; the placing of selections from the *EIM* in L.A. Selby-Bigge's famous collection of *The British Moralists* being a case in point.[1] Because of the peculiarity of the publication of the *EIM*, of all Cudworth's works, it has been the most open to what one might generally call an a-historical interpretation. This problem has been dealt with in more detail in the Chapter One. It is, however, instructive to highlight at this point one particular case of this a-historical interpretation; the neo-Kantian reading of Cudworth. As in Cudworth's other writings, the central topic of discussion in the *EIM* is the active faculty of reason. As was shown in the last chapter, Cudworth always interprets reason as an active principle and, therefore, as implicitly ethical in character. However, as a consequence of this, various interpreters of Cudworth have argued that this principle anticipates something of Kant's principle of 'practical reason.' Consequently many discussions of Cudworth's ethical writings describe his theories by the misleading use of Kantian ethical distinctions and language. Frederick Beiser argues that Cudworth's epistemological thought was implicitly ethical, leading to reason being justified by Cudworth for its 'practical virtues.'[2] Stephen Darwall goes further by arguing that Cudworth's thought used the 'internalism of practical reason,' to reject the empirical thought of Hobbes and Cumberland, consequently, '[f]or Cudworth as for Kant, ethics is possible only if pure reason can be practical.'[3] These claims carry with them some truth but, as I

---

[1] *EIM*, p.xiv. L.A. Selby-Bigge, ed., *The British Moralists, being selections from Writers principally of the eighteenth century*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1897), pp.813-843.
[2] Beiser, *Sovereignty*, p.174.
[3] Darwall, *Bristish Moralists*, pp.109, 325.

have argued in the first chapter, to interpret Cudworth through this Kantian filter

clouds our ability to understand Cudworth's thought on its own terms. It is true to

say that reason was an implicitly active and practical principle for Cudworth.

However, to judge this on Kantian terms strips Cudworth's claims of their Platonic

and theological basis. Cudworth views reason as the principle in man that ties man

to the divine, consequently its active, ethical component exists because it is drawn

from the understanding principle in the divine. The source of this active

understanding principle is for Cudworth not in contrast to a principle of 'pure

reason' but an active, Logocentric, reflection of the founding intellectual principle of

the divine. The practical, ethical element in Cudworth's principle of reason is

derived directly from the Trinitarianism implicit in his thought. This Logocentric

understanding of reason is, therefore, the principle which not only tells man about

reality, but also the principle that activates and animates that reality. To strip

Cudworth's thought of its Trinitarian roots, as the above interpretations have done,

draws Cudworth into the world of theoretical ethical distinctions which he would

not have recognised. Placing the *EIM* within the broader structure of Cudworth's

thought I will be able to show more clearly the theological dimension and

implications of his arguments. In particular the *EIM*, like all his other works, exists

within a religious system with the Christian Platonic Trinity at the heart. Once this

context has been re-established, Cudworth's active principle of reason can be fully

understood as the means by which man comes to the full recognition of the justice

of the divine intellect in the world. What we encounter in the *EIM* is a description

of how men can come to know the absolute norms of divine justice in the world.

The ethical and political arguments which Cudworth asserts in the *EIM*, and in his

other writings, grow directly out of Cudworth's belief that the Trinity, correctly

understood, is the defining principle of all creation.[4]

Although the original version of the *EIM* was almost certainly circulated in

manuscript it is not known whether Cudworth ever intended to publish the work.[5]

From what we know of Cudworth's stated intentions we can, however, tentatively

place the work in the broader context of his published and unpublished works. In

terms of subject area the *EIM* can be related to Cudworth's planned second volume

of his *Intellectual System*, arguing, as it does, against the view of God as not '*meer*

Arbitrary Will Omnipotent, Decreeing, Doing, *and* Necessitating *all Actions*, Evil *as*

well as Good, *but* Essentially Moral, Good *and* Just.'[6] It may even have been based on

the initial ideas which Cudworth described as his 'Metaphysical Ethics' in letters to

John Worthington in the 1660s.[7] The title, *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable*

Morality, even relates the work back to Cudworth's M.A. disputations in 1639.[8] It is,

however, impossible to verify exactly when, and for what purpose, the *EIM* was

written as the original manuscript is now lost. What can be said for certain is that

the *EIM* is not a work on ethics as one might naturally understand it. It is, if

anything, an epistemological work attempting to explain the means by which things

can be known with certainty, the basis on which the specifics of the ethics could

then develop. In this sense it is a *prolegomenon* to an ethical work which Cudworth

failed to complete. That being said, certain ethical and political arguments are

discussed in the *EIM*. Also various ethical and political arguments in Cudworth's

---

[4] *TISU*, p.690.
[5] *EIM*, p.xiv.
[6] Ibid., p.v.
[7] Worthington, *Diary*, I:157.
[8] 'Memoirs,' p.27.

manuscripts, particularly his discussion of political oaths, rely upon assumptions and arguments put forward in the *EIM*.

In the *EIM* Cudworth employs the same apologetic technique he uses in the *TISU* to show not only that those theories which he rejects fail on their own terms but also the means by which they fail prove his theory to be correct. So close is that theory to that of the *TISU* that John Passmore argues that the *EIM* can effectively be understood as a set of footnotes to the *TISU*.[9] This claim is true to an extent. But there are some arguments within the *EIM*, in particular political arguments, which go beyond the careful line taken in the published *TISU*. It could be argued that Cudworth is willing to go further in these arguments in the *EIM* because it was a work that he never published himself. This being said, there are, in terms of style and argument many close affinities between the *EIM* and the *TISU*. Cudworth utilises many of the same arguments for certainty of ethical knowledge as he earlier used to prove the existence and nature of God in the *TISU*. He again utilises the tactic of justifying his position by arguing that the logical impossibility of the ideas of those thinkers he attacks leaves his explanation as the only possible alternative. These attacks mirror the *TISU* again by using ancient philosophical figures as thinly veiled versions of contemporary thinkers; most obviously, in the *EIM*, with Protagoras taking the place of Epicurus as the philosophical forbear of Thomas Hobbes.

Behind these attacks, as in all Cudworth's thought, lies an implicit confirmation of his Trinitarianism. At one point Cudworth gives a clear indication of this Trinitarianism through a diagrammatic description of the active form of the divine. The intellect and goodness of God is, Cudworth argues, the central point of

---

[9] Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth*, p.29.

an infinitely expanding circle. The radii extending from this central point are the

understanding and wisdom of God. The outer edge of this ever extending circle is

the will and action of God. Therefore the external workings of God in the world are

related directly to the infinite intellect and goodness of God by means of the

wisdom and understanding of God. This tri-partite organisation shows the manner

in which Cudworth uses his Trinitarian metaphysic to explain and define the divine

principle in the world.[10] In philosophical terms the *EIM* utilises the same theological

principles outlined at greater length by Cudworth in the *TISU*. Beyond these

philosophical similarities with the *TISU*, we also find in the *EIM* explicit ethical and

political claims which do not appear in the *TISU*. These claims are always made to

explain and verify the Trinitarian metaphysical system from within which all of

Cudworth's thought belongs exists. Before these ethical claims are examined it is

necessary to show how Cudworth, in the *EIM*, claims that the moral and ethical

certainty of the eternal and immutable truths of the universe can be found.

Cudworth argues all things in creation have their source in the intellect of

the divine. Ethical norms, therefore, exist within an epistemological structure which

allows man to know various aspects of creation with certainty. Accordingly

Cudworth begins his discussion of ethics with a general discussion of epistemology

as he believes that the key to an effective ethical community is the collective

certainty in, and acceptance of, the eternal and immutable principles of justice that

underpin all creation. Ethical truths exist, for Cudworth, not in simple abstract

legalistic forms; instead they are discernable in and through man's engagement with

the created world. As a consequence of this he begins his discussion on

epistemology with an analysis of exactly how it is that man engages with the created

---

[10] *EIM*, p.27.

world. This engagement, he believes, comes from an understanding and appreciation of how man interprets sense data. Cudworth does not believe that knowledge can be found through sensory perception alone. It is impossible, he argues, to see knowledge as being drawn from sense alone as knowledge and sensation are, by definition, opposing entities. Where knowledge is the inward action of the mind, sensation is the external activity of the body. As an external activity sense could only come about by the culmination of various combinations of local motion. Sense is, in Cudworth's words, the 'dull, confused, and stupid perception obtruded on the soul from without.'[11] As merely the sum of parts sense cannot be the sole source of knowledge because sense, by implication, lacks the discerning perceptive power required to create knowledge. Sense, as the understanding of local motion, by implication has no self-awareness. It cannot give any more understanding than its immediate locality.[12] Sense, as 'a drowsy and somnolent perception,' by definition lacks any of the perspective needed to create true knowledge.[13] In the *EIM* Cudworth argues that knowledge cannot be understood as the projection of external ideas on to the mind of man, as he states firmly at the beginning of the *EIM*, 'the soul is not a mere *tabula rasa.*'[14] Knowledge of the created world, in Cudworth's view, has to use a perspective and level of interpretation which is impossible to find in sense perception alone.

In the *EIM* Cudworth focuses his attack on the implicit fallibility of sense-perception in Hobbes. Cudworth argues that the logical absurdities implied by Hobbes' thought not only make Hobbist arguments untenable, but also make his

---

[11] Ibid., p.53.
[12] Ibid., p.91.
[13] Ibid., p.56.
[14] Ibid., p.7.

own the only possible explanation. As in *TISU*, Cudworth, in the *EIM*, relates

Hobbes' use of sense perception to ancient philosophical systems. In the *EIM*

Hobbes is compared to Protagoras. Cudworth argues that Protagoras starts from

the assumption that all things in the world are naturally in continual random

motion. The consequence of this is that all things in the world are relative to each

other. Therefore, he argues, Protagoras believes he can argue that there is nothing

constant or absolute in the world.[15] In this claim Cudworth identifies an implicit

paradox. By claiming that all things are relative, he argues that Protagoras, and

consequently Hobbes, is claiming that nothing is absolute in the world except for

the claim, made with absolute certitude by Protagoras, that all things are relative.[16] If

all things are known by sense perception alone, Cudworth argues, it is impossible to

make this claim. Therefore he argues that even in those who seek to base all things

on sense perception implicitly rely on a higher level of interpretation to make their

theories work. By identifying paradox, Cudworth argues that Protagoras and

Hobbes implicitly accept the supremacy of reason over sense.[17]

The implicit paradox in Hobbist thought allows Cudworth to reassert a

central premise of his philosophy, that intellectual activity is superior to and, by the

law of the non-inferiority of causes, logically prior to the material world. This claim

implies a dualism in Cudworth's thought that we have already encountered in his

proof of the existence of God and his arguments for human agency. John Passmore

has argued that Descartes is the source of this dualism in Cudworth's thought, going

to far as to argue that Descartes can be found in every 'nook and cranny' of

---

[15] Ibid., pp.4, 30.
[16] Ibid., p.65.
[17] Ibid., pp.47-8.

Cudworth's writing.[18] This claim, however, discounts too hastily Cudworth's

Christian-Platonic heritage. The distinction between the higher and lower principles

is not one original to the thought of Descartes. A form of dualism is, in fact,

implicit in most western theistic thought, of which Descartes is merely a part. An

examination of Cudworth's dualism shows not only the importance of Plotinian

distinctions in Cudworth's thought, but also the distance that exists between

Cudworth's thought and that of Descartes.

Cartesian dualism stresses the absolute distinction between the mind and the

body.[19] In contrast, Cudworth's dualism is based on the distinction between the

higher and lower principles in the mind.[20] As Cudworth argues in the *EIM*:

There are two kinds of perceptive powers in the soul, one below another:

the first is that which belongs to the inferior part of the soul, whereby it

sympathizes with the body…The second perceptive power is that of the

soul itself, or that superior, interior noetical part of it which is free from all

passion or sympathy.[21]

Cudworth's dualism places man in a broader position between animal sense and the

perfection of the divine. Ethical decisions in his thought follow the view, which we

encountered in his writings on freewill, that man can be drawn in either direction

towards the higher or lower principles in the created world. Cudworth's dualism,

---

[18] Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth*, p.11. For an account of Cudworth's use of and reaction to Cartesian philosophy also see Saveson, 'Differing Reactions to Descartes,' pp.560-67; Danton B.Sailor, 'Cudworth and Descartes,' in *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, 23 (1962), pp.133-40; Baldi, 'Cudworth versus Descartes'; Hutton, 'Ralph Cudworth: God, Mind, and Nature.'
[19] Descartes, *Works*, I:185-199, 223; Cottingham, *Descartes Dictionary*, pp.53-4.
[20] *EIM*, p.54; Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth*, pp.56-7; *Enneads* 3.3.4.
[21] *EIM*, p.113.

therefore, should be judged in the Neoplatonic framework within which he himself places it. In this sense his dualism owes much to his idea of man existing within a created realm, which is not defined by polar opposites but is part of the graduated scale or ladder of being which we have already encountered.

One of the consequences of this scale of being in Cudworth's thought is that he is more responsive to the influences of sense-perception than he would be, were he purely Cartesian. He is hostile to thinkers who claim that sense perception can act as an end in itself. However, when understood in conjunction with reason, He believes that sense can be used to lead man towards epistemological certitude. Because of the physical nature of man the soul and body 'mutually suffer from each other.'[22] The assertion that sensations could affect the workings of the mind distances Cudworth, by his own admission, from the thought of many Platonists.[23] He argues that the soul does not act indifferently from the body, but acts in natural sympathy with the body. To make this point Cudworth argues that there are effectively three different forms of knowledge that man can come to. The first is passion, the second internal sense, and the third external sense.[24] Of these three the first, passion, can be disregarded as a limited animalistic emotion. The remaining two show something of the complex relationship that Cudworth believed there to exist between the body and the soul. Internal sense, or what Cudworth also terms 'pure cognition,' is the form of pure understanding created solely by the working of the mind. External sense, or 'sensitive cognition,' involves the mixed labour of the mind and body. Because the mind is, to use the term from the *TISU*, 'fuddled'[25]

---

[22] Ibid., p.52.
[23] Ibid., p.51.
[24] Ibid., p.53.
[25] *TISU*, p.155(2).

with the body it can, in certain circumstances, be prompted and drawn to conclusions by external stimuli.[26] The source and knowledge of these judgements, are, for Cudworth, the eternal and immutable truths which have their source in the divine. The ability to gain access to these truths through the appreciation of mundane knowledge is merely another means by which the existence of these eternal and immutable truths can be proved.

In the cases of pure and sensitive cognition the defining principle is the intellect of man. The intellect acts as a determining principle in verifying information fed to it to determine the truth or otherwise of a particular claim. The means of verification is the comparison of received data to, what Cudworth terms, 'inward characters written within itself.'[27] Although the impetus for the creation of knowledge can come from external factors, the appreciation of knowledge is always an internal action, '[f]or knowledge is not a knock or thrust from without, but consisteth in the awakening and exciting of the inward active powers of the mind.'[28] This interplay between the mind and the external world means that Cudworth is able to reject Hobbist and Cartesian claims once again. The necessity of the intellect in the creation of knowledge allows Cudworth to dismiss Hobbist materialism, making the man superior to a brutish animal who is more than merely the sum of his external sensations.[29] Secondly the symbiotic relationship between the intellect and the body means that Cudworth is able to reject Descartes by arguing that it is possible to account for man as more than a mechanism.[30]

---

[26] *EIM*, p.52.
[27] Ibid., p.60.
[28] Ibid., p.60.
[29] Ibid., p.98.
[30] Ibid., p.85.

Cudworth's concentration on the internal power of the intellect over sensory perception in man means that in the *EIM* we encounter much the same reflexive language that we found in Cudworth's freewill manuscripts. At one point Cudworth describes knowledge as not "'the perception of things abroad without the mind", but the mind comprehending itself.'[31] On this point Cudworth's Platonism comes most clearly to the surface. Not only quoting Plotinus, Cudworth also cites Boethius on this point, commenting that:

> knowledge is not a passion from anything without the mind, but an active exertion of the inward strength, vigour, and power of the mind displaying itself from within, and the intelligible forms by which things are understood or known are not stamps or impressions passively printed upon the soul from without, but ideas vitally protended or actively exerted from within itself.[32]

It is Cudworth's Platonism that allows him to make the direct comparison between this internal principle and the principle of the divine. The internal, discerning principle of the mind is, by definition for him, incorporeal. In that way it is not only distinct from the corporeal reality of sensory perception, it is also directly related to the infinite and incorporeal principle of the intellect of the divine. The 'innate cognoscitive power' of the soul of man is drawn directly from, and judged by intellectual principles in the divine.[33] Knowledge, therefore, is the innate power of drawing intelligible conceptions from within the mind. Knowledge of the nature of

---

[31] Ibid., p.135.
[32] Ibid., pp.73-4.
[33] Ibid., p.75.

an external object, for instance, does not come from the implicit nature of that object: whether it is itself hard or soft, square or triangular, etc. Rather knowledge of its form comes from the mind's ability to recognise and compare the various combinations of local motion that make up that object to intellectual principles held within the mind. Only by this comparison to innate principles in the mind is man able to come to an effective knowledge of the object.

Epistemological certainty may be attained, for Cudworth, through the comparison and verification of a sensory perception with an eternal truth. Because this eternal truth has its source in the intellect of the divine it is not a surprise that he uses in this discussion in the *EIM* many of the same arguments he uses in his proof of the existence of God in the *TISU*. The clearest example of this is the way in which he uses the *Meno* in the *EIM* to account for the form and source of knowledge in the mind of man. Cudworth argues that in the material world a geometrically perfect triangle can never occur. Such is the imperfection of the created realm that a perfect triangle could not, he argues, be known by the experience of external phenomena. By contrast, Cudworth argues that the mind of man can conceive of a perfect three sided object the sum of whose three angles equal 180 degrees. The ability of man to recognise triangular objects in nature has a two-fold purpose for Cudworth. Firstly it shows the way in which man's intellect, rather than his sense perception, teaches man that the object is a triangle, as the imperfections of nature could never create the perfect geometrical form found in the mind. Secondly he argues, following his proof of the existence of God, that the perfection of this intellectual form proves the source of this idea in the mind of God. Consequently Cudworth argues that man's mind cannot create perfect

geometrical principles on its own. The only source for these perfect mathematical forms is, he argues, the intellect of the divine.[34]

The explicit Platonism in Cudworth's epistemology opens him to the accusation that his belief in the innate discerning power of the soul is a form of the Platonic theory of recollection. This accusation is particularly pertinent because of Cudworth's explicit use of the *Meno*, the clearest defence of the Platonic theory of recollection. This theory of recollection, or *anamnesis*, firstly places Cudworth in conflict with the arguments of empiricism, particularly after innatism had been so effectively attacked by John Locke in the second chapter of his *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly for Cudworth, suggestions that his epistemological theory is identical to that found in Plato leads to accusations that he implicitly holds to the un-Christian, but firmly Platonic, principle of the pre-existence of the soul.

As we have already seen, in the *Meno* Socrates argues that knowledge is not taught so much as drawn out from knowledge which pre-exists in the mind. The task of the teacher is not to give knowledge but to coax from the pupil the knowledge locked in the mind of the individual: 'knowledge will not come from teaching but from questions, he will recover it for himself.'[35] The assumption of Plato's theory is that the soul of man possesses this knowledge because of its pre-existence from its present, embodied form. In the *Meno* Socrates argues that the ability of the slave boy to grasp the basics of geometry merely through the questioning of the teacher is proof that this knowledge is held in the soul from eternity. In places Cudworth would seem to be in agreement with this idea of the

---

[34] Ibid., p.60.
[35] Plato, *Meno*, 85d.

immortal and eternal nature of the soul from which knowledge is known and drawn. However, because of his Christian heritage, Cudworth rejects the belief that knowledge is drawn from the eternal life of the soul because to accept this theory would mean accepting the pre-existence of the soul. Cudworth's colleague Henry More certainly accepted the pre-existence of the soul.[36] However, for Cudworth this belief is unacceptable as the perpetual creation of souls is a sign of the majesty of God. If souls pre-existed before they were joined with the body, Cudworth argues, God becomes merely a spectator after his initial work of creation is done. As Cudworth argues in the *TISU*:

> The effect of such a *Hypothesis* as this [the pre-existence of souls], to make men think, that there is no other God in the World but Blind and Dark Nature. God might also for other good and wise Ends, unknown to us, reserve to himself the continual exercise of this his creative power, in the successive Production of new Souls.[37]

Cudworth therefore rejects the theory of recollection as it would have necessitated his acceptance of the pre-existence of the soul.[38] In Cudworth's thought knowledge

---

[36] Henry More, 'The Præexistency of the SOUL,' in *Henry More: The Complete Poems*, Alexander B. Grosart, ed. (Georg Olms, Hildesheim, 1969), pp.119-128. See in particular p.119:
> For I would sing the Præexistency
> Of humane souls, and live once ore again
> By recollection and quick memory
> All what is past since we first we all began.
> But all to shallow be wits to scan
> So deep a point and mind to dull to clear
> So dark a matter; but Though, O more then man!
> Areade though sacred Soul or *Plotin* deare
> Tell what we mortals are, tell what of old we were.

[37] *TISU*, p.44.
[38] Dominic Scott, 'Reason, Recollection and the Cambridge Platonists,' in *Platonism and the English Imagination*, ed. Anna Baldwin and Sarah Hutton (CUP, Cambridge, 1994), pp.139-150, p.145.

is formed by the internal rational power of the mind participating in the intellect of

the divine, rather than through the recollection of locked away, pre-existing,

knowledge. The internal power of the mind for Cudworth is not a means of

accepting the pre-existence of the soul, but rather a means of confirming the

relationship between man's rational, understanding faculty and the intellectual

principle of the divine. The mind of man does not, in its internal working, recognise

its pre-existence as Henry More claims. Rather, Cudworth argues, the mind has a

'diaphanous power' which can recognise the intellectual forms within the created

world and recognises the source of these intellectual forms, in their purest and most

perfect form, as coming from the founding intellectual principle in the divine.[39]

Cudworth's epistemology recognises that knowledge exists for man when, in the

words of John Passmore, it is known exclusively 'in our mind.' Cudworth makes

knowledge reliant on the belief that the knower and known are identical. The

problem of certainty is, therefore, solved for Cudworth when knowledge is

comprehended and verified by the internal power of the mind.[40] By recognising that

these ideas exist in the intellect of the divine and also that the means of this

recognition is drawn from God, Cudworth again affirms his belief in the Trinitarian

form of the divine.

VI.3. Moral Certainty

As has already been stated, the *EIM* is itself not a work on ethics as such, but its

theories on epistemological certainty lay the building blocks for the creation of an

---

[39] *EIM*, p.77; Scott, 'Reason,' p.147.
[40] Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth*, pp.31-2.

ethical realm of self-determined individuals. Cudworth argues that just as mathematical principles can be proved to exist in a perfect form in the mind of men, so ethical principles can be known with the same mathematical certitude.[41] Such a claim naturally places Cudworth close to the claim of Benjamin Whichcote's aphorism that '[i]n *Morality*, we are sure as in Mathematics.'[42] As his use of the *Meno* shows, Cudworth believes that ethical principles can be known through the same process by which mathematical principles are known, by the intellect judging and understanding the form and nature of the created realm. Or, as Cudworth put it, 'they are all as it were ectypal prints...and derivative signatures...from one archetypal intellect, that is essentially the *rationes* of all things and all verities.'[43]

On the most practical level Cudworth argues that this can be shown by refuting the nominalist belief that ethical norms can be determined by the mere naming of things. This position, which Cudworth believes has been revived by Hobbes, can be shown by Hobbes' claim, from *De Corpore*, that '[t]here is nothing in the world...universal by names.'[44] Such a claim, Cudworth argues, fatally confuses the means for the ends. Words are an important means to transport and transfer knowledge. They are, however, only the means of transport. Just as a physical, external stimulus could remind the mind of some innate principle, so words on the page will bring out of the mind of man the 'inward anticipations of learning.'[45] Without the intellect of man to interpret or understand these words they might as well be little more than 'several scrawls of lines of ink drawn upon white paper.'[46] Ethical principles, therefore, cannot be created or rescinded with the stroke of the

---

[41] *EIM*, p.88.
[42] Whichcote, *Aphorisms*, 298.
[43] *EIM*, p.131.
[44] Ibid., p.116.
[45] Ibid., p.99.
[46] Ibid., p.99.

pen; they are, like all forms of knowledge, based on eternal and immutable ethical principles created by the intellect of the divine.

That is not to say that Cudworth believes that this way of knowing and understanding ethical principles is infallible. Errors can occur, but as with Cudworth's explanation of evil in his freewill manuscripts, this is not from any failing in the divine principles, but because of the fallibility of the mind of man.[47] However, if the mind is working correctly it is, Cudworth argues, 'clearly and mathematically demonstrable from what we have already proved that there is some eternal mind.'[48] Man, therefore, has to 'listen to one and the same original voice of the eternal voice which is never silent.'[49] The source of this voice is the intellect of God understood in the form of Trinity. Cudworth does not believe that the perceptive power which man uses to know the divine is found directly in the intellect of the divine. Rather, as Cudworth argues in the *EIM*, it is found in the second person, the *Logos*, which Cudworth describes in the *EIM* as 'the eternal and first-begotten offspring of the first original goodness, the fountain of all things.'[50] The Logocentric perceptive power which Cudworth outlines in the *EIM* is identical to the divine power of understanding which Cudworth argues for in the *TISU*. The *Logos* acts as the divinely ordained means by which man can come to know of the existence, form and nature of the divine in the world. Consequently Cudworth's ethical writings can be read, like his theological writings, as confirming his Trinitarianism. The source of ethical knowledge and the confirmation of that knowledge is defined by this Trinitarian conception of the divine.

---

[47] Ibid., p.136; Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth*, p.22.
[48] *EIM*, p.130.
[49] Ibid., p.132.
[50] Ibid., p.132.

240

As the principle of the divine intellect permeates every aspect of reality it necessarily becomes the means by which, according to Cudworth, an ethical community can be created. All ethical principles have their source in the intellect of the divine. Any man, as long as he attempts to understand these truths in the correct way, can come to the same conclusion as other members of the community. Cudworth argues that by asserting the unifying power of the divine intellect, his theory allows him to overcome the uncertainty created by Cartesian radical doubt and the arbitrariness created by Hobbist nominalism. So just as Cudworth argues that the written word can be understood because it stimulates intellectual principles in the reader, so it is possible for men to exist harmoniously in an ethical community because the members of that community 'partake of one and the same intellect.'[51]

Beyond these comments on the creation and maintenance of the ethical community there is very little in the *EIM* to suggest in what form Cudworth envisages this ethical community being constituted. However, in Cudworth's manuscripts there are some suggestions of the form that Cudworth believes the ethical community would take. It is clear from the *EIM* and from the desire to allow for 'Distributive *or* Retributive Justice' that Cudworth makes in the *TISU*, that this ethical community would be made up from independent, self-determining and, eventually, independently judged moral actors.[52] In this way Cudworth rejects the ethical legalism of contemporary Calvinism. Ethical legalism, like denials of freewill, implies, for Cudworth, that man could not be held personally responsible, or be individually judged, for his actions.[53]

---

[51] Ibid., p.131.
[52] *TISU*, p.v.
[53] Beiser, *Sovereignty*, p.163.

Cudworth's attack on ethical legalism can also be shown by his concentration on goodness over duty in his ethical writings. Although duty and obedience are important, it is more important for Cudworth that obedience is given freely for the action to carry any form of ethical validity.[54] From this position we can begin to place many of Cudworth's early attacks on the dangers of 'self-love,' found most clearly in his *First Sermon*, in a broader ethical and political framework. Self-love is such a problem for Cudworth precisely because he stresses the importance of the individual in his ethical theory. In a system such as Hobbes' the dangers of selfish egotism are, arguably, removed by the imposition of a strict, legalistic ethical code on all in civil society. However, Cudworth rejects this because such a system denies the importance of the individual in the ethical community. Cudworth, in this sense, makes a rod for his own back, asserting on the one hand the dangers implicit in the excesses of individualism, whilst trying to create an ethical system entirely based on the virtuous actions of individuals. There is, therefore, a constant danger in Cudworth's ethical thought of a descent into the hedonism of self-love. He appears to be aware of, and willing to risk, this danger. He is confident that the dangers of self-love can be defeated if the virtues and liberty which he believes can be found in the divine are asserted as the central aim of humanity. As he argues in his *First Sermon*:

> [h]appinesse is nothing but that inward sweet delight, that will arise from the
> Harmonious agreement between our wills and Gods will. There is nothing

---

[54] Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth*, pp.51, 68.

contrary to God in the whole world, nothing that fights against him but *Self will.*[55]

This release from selfishness allows man to discover the liberty which man can only find in the love of God. Following the dictates of Christ as the principle of the divine intellect means that man 'will not be put us in a State of Bondage, but of Perfect Liberty.'[56]

Cudworth's terminology here is interesting. Hobbes, for instance, makes no qualitative distinction between actions that are done by 'freedom' or those carried out through 'liberty.' Cudworth at times does, like Hobbes, use these terms interchangeably, discussing, for instance, both the 'freedom of the will' and the 'liberty of the will.' However, Cudworth at times, particularly within his manuscripts, makes a qualitative distinction between the actions of 'freedom,' and the state of 'liberty.' In this sense, for him, all men possess freewill. This allows men to aspire to become, in the terms of the *Second Sermon,* 'God's freeman.' Man's freewill is also a fallible faculty leading as it can to life as 'Sin's freeman.' The bondage which comes from the sinful life is a direct consequence of man's freedom, and consequently men are responsible for these sinful actions. 'Liberty,' by contrast, is used by Cudworth to describe both a faculty and a state. A state of 'liberty' in Cudworth's thought only occurs when man's virtuous action leads to pure communion with the divine. Cudworth therefore makes a particular linguistic distinction between the 'freedom' and 'free powers' which man possesses and the 'liberty' which he is attempting to achieve with those powers. For Cudworth all men

---

[55] *First Sermon,* p.98.
[56] Ibid., p.126.

243

are free, but only those who follow the higher principles of the mind can achieve liberty. As Cudworth argues in his *Treatise on Freewill*, 'he who has liberty has conquered himself.'[57]

In Cudworth's writings this distinction comes out clearly where he contrasts bondage and liberty as the opposing choices of man's free actions. In his manuscripts Cudworth describes this choice in terms of the political conflict that exists in 'the little-commonwealth of man.' This interesting turn of phrase very neatly describes Cudworth's ethical theory and his views on freewill. The 'little-commonwealth of man' is used by him to describe the form of ethical adjudication which exists in all men. Key to this decision is the reflective *autexious* power in the soul. Cudworth describes this self-reflective faculty as the 'soul-endoubled upon itself.' He believes that this *autexious* faculty in man is naturally fallible and open to error. But, as he argues in FM.4980, 'in ye little common-wealth of man's soul ye naturall Understanding & certain Knowledge is ye Law of Justice & Rule by wch it should be governed.'[58] Cudworth argues that, despite the possibility of failure, it is only through a society governed by self-determined moral actors that man is able to achieve the happiness and liberty which is found in the divine God.[59]

VI.4. The Political Oath – the practical basis of the ethical community.

Cudworth's vision of politics, like his ethical theory discussed above, is reliant upon and is a natural progression from his overarching Trinitarian intellectual system. Despite the efforts of some seventeenth century politicians and political theorists,

---

[57] *TFW*, p.167.
[58] *FM.4980*, fol.58.
[59] *FM.4979*, fols.10, 20.

the political realm is not, Cudworth argues, divorced from the theological basis of reality. Rather, the political is simply another manifestation of the divinely informed nature of reality. This reality is, as we have seen Cudworth argue throughout his writings, found in its fullest and truest form in the Trinity. For man the fullest manifestation of this divine is found, he argues, in the correct use of the faculty of freewill. He believes that the existence of eternal and immutable ethical norms can be recognised by man because of their basis in the intellect of the triune God. The same recognition is available, Cudworth argues, when man moves from ethical concerns to more broadly political principles. As Cudworth states in the *TISU*:

> there are yet other *Phaenomena*, no less *Real*, though not *Physiological*, which
>
> *Atheists* can no way *Salve*; as that of *Natural Justice*, and *Honesty*, Duty, and
>
> Obligation; the true Foundation both of *Ethicks* and *Politicks*; and
>
> the...*Liberty of Will*, properly so called.[60]

Freewill, when used correctly, lifts man from his baser emotions to the higher virtues of justice and equity, principles only found in the liberty of the divine. This is a common theme throughout all Cudworth's writings. There is, however, a political necessity implicit in his thought. He believes that man can, as a self-determined moral actor, learn and know the correct, ethically virtuous path to take in life. However this life is, he argues, futile if it remains a private concern. The ethical life implies for him the discarding of personal concerns and private interest for the greater good of the wider community. In the preface to his *First Sermon* Cudworth, perhaps a little sycophantically, suggests that the Members of the House of

---

[60] *TISU*, p.690.

Commons if they considered the public good, would 'reflect so much lustre and honour and honour back upon yourselves.'[61] We find the same argument in the *TISU*. In the concluding paragraph Cudworth calls for a society in which the good of the public always rises above the wants of the private individual.[62] It is in this political aspect in the mature writings of Cudworth, of civil society defined and controlled by the dictates of divine justice, that we find the fullest expression of Cudworth's belief in living the Christian life through the creation of an ethical community. This political theme of the ethical community as the completion of the Christian life follows the principles that we first encounter in Cudworth's early writings.[63]

Cudworth's intentions in this endeavour are clear, but in his published works there is very little to make one believe that these claims are little more than the idle wishes of a cloistered academic. To find the true implications of Cudworth's political utterances we therefore have to delve below the surface of not only these sections of his published works, but also sections of his manuscripts, to find exactly how Cudworth envisaged such an ethical community taking shape. The clearest indications of Cudworth's arguments on this front are through his discussions of the use of conscience and oaths in political matters. It is not a surprise to see Cudworth drawing on these examples in his writings. The codification of matters of conscience in oaths was a recurring political tool throughout the seventeenth century. As David Martin Jones argues, 'the oath…constituted a singular mechanism for attempting to secure an English *universitas*, a unified and

---

[61] Cudworth, 'Preface,' p.39.
[62] *TISU*, p.898.
[63] Ibid., pp.697,896.

246

incorporated English body politic.'[64] Oaths acted as political punctuation marks

through the political upheavals of the century, with nine different oaths being put

forward in Cudworth's lifetime, seven of which were put forward during the twenty

years between the outbreak of the Civil War and the Restoration.[65] Cudworth, as a

prominent member of University community, would have been required to take

many of these oaths. At the minimum he would have been required to take the

'Solemn League and Covenant' to keep his fellowship during the Earl of

Manchester's purge in 1645, and the oath of allegiance at the Restoration to keep his

place as Master of Christ's. It is not clear whether Cudworth was required to take

the oaths attached to the Clarendon Code but if he had, he would have had to

openly deny his previously taken 'Solemn League and Covenant.'[66] The use of these

oaths as political instruments opens up two readings of Cudworth's attitude to the

political. On the one hand, Cudworth's apparent willingness in acquiescing to the

changing political climate would seem to confirm the common view of Cudworth,

and the other Cambridge Platonists, as politically quietist. However, viewed in

conjunction with his writings on these issues, a much more subtle and politically

astute image of Cudworth is presented to the reader. Cudworth's use of the political

oath, when understood in the context of his arguments for freewill and moral

responsibility, shows how Cudworth believes it is possible to rise above the

contemporary political wrangling that accompanied these oaths. Cudworth instead

asserts the oath as a practical means by which the individual could show his ethical

responsibility and moral goodness in the political society.

---

[64] David Martin Jones, *Conscience and Allegiance in Seventeenth century England: The Political significance of Oaths and Engagements* (University of Rochester Press, Rochester, NY. 1999), p.15.
[65] Ibid., pp.115, 272-81.
[66] The Clarendon Code explicitly called on the taker to reject the 'Solemn League and Covenant,' see Ibid., p.280.

The clearest means of examining Cudworth's writings on this area is by a comparison with Hobbes' writings on the same issue.[67] Quentin Skinner argues that Hobbes' arguments for oaths and allegiance to political authority should be understood in the context of the 'Engagement Crisis' which immediately followed the execution of the King in 1649. Following the regicide there was a pressing need to legitimise the new political regime in a form that would make it more than simply the usurper to the authority of the King. One of the clearest defences for the new regime came in John Milton's 1650 *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*. In this Milton, as chief propagandist to the Commonwealth, defends the regicide in terms of natural law. The King had been lawfully executed, Milton argues, because Charles I was acting as a tyrant. The regicide was therefore the re-assertion of the natural right of men to limit the powers of government.[68] Milton's argument would, however, never create obligation to the new regime from those who believed that the King ruled by divine right. From this impasse developed a new form of argument for allegiance, where political allegiance was based solely on the *de facto* power of the regime. Allegiance was drawn not from philosophical or theological principles, but

---

[67] I have, in this thesis, attempted at all times to define Cudworth's thought on his own terms, not, as John Passmore argues, simply as a negative reaction to Hobbes' thought [Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth*, p.11]. However, because the explicit political arguments within Cudworth's thought are so scant it is tempting to define Cudworth's political arguments simply by showing the manner in which he negates the explicitly political arguments of Hobbes. Jon Parkin argues that many seventeenth century political arguments can be defined simply as reactions to Hobbes. Parkin argues that such was the importance of Hobbes to the political and moral problems of the day that to criticise Hobbes was to implicitly enter into the political debates of the time [Parkin, *Science, Religion and Politics*, p.223]. I would argue that, with regards to Cudworth, the obverse of this claim is, in fact, correct. Cudworth is political not because of his criticisms of Hobbes, rather, Cudworth's thought is by its very nature politically minded. As a consequence, Cudworth is drawn into political debate with Hobbes not simply because he disagrees with Hobbes on theological or philosophical principles, but precisely because the positive political element within his thought will inevitably lead him into conflict with Hobbes. Therefore I am examining Cudworth's defence of political oaths with reference to Hobbes, not because they are defined in reaction to Hobbes, but because Hobbes' argument creates for us the clearest political context within which we can understand the full implications of Cudworth's theory.
[68] Skinner, *Visions*, III:288; John Milton, *Political Writings*, ed. Martin Dzelzainis, (CUP, Cambridge, 1991), pp.9-10.

from the physical power of the regime to maintain and control the political order. The chief defenders of this *de facto* argument in England at the time were Anthony Ascham and Marchamont Nedham. Skinner argues that Hobbes, although at the time living in exile in France, was writing in the context of this debate. Although J.G.A.Pocock has argued that many of these *de facto* arguments drew on the Old Testament covenants of the power of the elected Kings of Israel, Skinner argues that the strength of the *de facto* argument was its 'secular' nature.[69] Hobbes argues, primarily in *Leviathan* published in England in 1651, that political obligation is defined entirely by the human emotion of fear which initially created political society. Obligation is defined by man's overriding human emotion of the fear of not being dragged back into the chaos of the state of nature. Oaths are therefore, Hobbes argues, not of central importance because the form of words in an oath cannot bind a man more surely to civil society than the bond already created by fear.[70] Although Skinner does not conclusively prove Hobbes' relationship to the Engagement crisis, we can recognise the way in which Hobbes' arguments would have been popular to those politicians wishing to legitimise a civil society created by the fall of an axe.[71]

---

[69] J.G.A.Pocock, *The Political Works of James Harrington* (CUP, Cambridge, 1977), p.36; Skinner, *Visions*, III:303. This divergence in interpretation of the *de facto* arguments used in the Engagement crisis highlights, I believe, the subtle differences between the methodologies of Pocock and Skinner. As I have extensively argued in Chapter One, both Pocock and Skinner rely upon a methodology which analyses the linguistic context within which a work was written. However, I also argue that Pocock comes to this methodology through a reflection on historical practice. Skinner asserts the philosophical premises of his methodology first and comes to historical practise second. Skinner, therefore, is much more systematic in the use of his language based interpretation than Pocock. It is not a surprise, I would argue, to see Skinner interpret this debate in secular terms because such a strict methodological premise, when applied strictly, fails, as I have argues in Chapter One, to appreciate the breadth and depth of theological belief in the seventeenth century. Because Pocock is not so restricted by a pre-existent method, he is, in contrast, willing to see more of the historical and, in this case, theological nuances of the *de facto* arguments of the Engagement crisis.
[70] *Leviathan*, pp.198, 201.
[71] Skinner, *Visions*, III:304.

From Cudworth's perspective there are two major failings of Hobbes' theory. Firstly, it diminishes the political power of the individual. Hobbes' theory does demand the twin obligations of the subject's obedience to the magistrate and the obligation of the magistrate to protect the individual. However, the individual's obligation is not created in the ethical realm of intellectual activity, but rather by the base human reaction of fear. Secondly, a system that bases obligation solely on the *de facto* power of the political authority undermines the ability to create a stable political community. This is because Cudworth believes that such a society would not be based on rationally verifiable principles of justice, but on who possess the largest sword.[72] At the heart of Cudworth's criticisms is his intellectualist belief that justice cannot be created by arbitrary power.[73] Political society can, therefore, never be asserted simply by the will of the sovereign but, as with all parts of creation, it must be understood as a manifestation of the intellect of the divine. Consequently Cudworth's political argument is always reliant on what he sees as the correct understanding of the principles that underpin political society. This argument comes out most clearly in Cudworth's manuscript FM.4980:

> they might have agreem[ts] & Lawes & a leviathan Commonwealth, but yn there could be no other obligation upon any to keep those lawes but only from there own private Utility of wch ymsleves were Judges, no obligation truly morall in y[t] wch would be called Injustice, ye breach of Lawes & Covenants.[74]

---

[72] Jones, *Conscience*, pp.153, 164.
[73] *TISU*, pp.103, 890.
[74] *FM.4980*, fol.9.

Cudworth, as in his ethical arguments, argues that the community is only bound together by a collective understanding of the absolute moral norms found in the divine. This is only achieved if all in that community learns to place aside their lower desires and move, through their freewill, to the higher principles of the divine. Interestingly Cudworth does not doubt that a Hobbist Civil Sovereign could create effective laws. Rather he argues that that principle of justice would have been arrived at though such a corrupt method as to make that society untenable. For instance, Cudworth argues, it is possible to imagine a polity governed by a Leviathan which would state that murder is unjust. Such a conclusion, Cudworth believes, is in keeping with eternal and immutable ethical norms. However, Cudworth argues that because the Leviathan's legitimacy in coming to this conclusion comes from his *de facto* power, he can only prohibit a man from killing another man through an equally destructive threat of force. The laws of the Leviathan therefore cannot bind men to them because they do not appeal to the higher, intellectual principles of justice which; through the individual verification of the members of that community, bind that community together. The vicious circle created by this Hobbesian logic, Cudworth argues, simply leads to the splintering of the society, not because the original law is wrong, but because the legitimacy of the law is based on a political justification that cannot morally bind man to it. He points out the implicit paradox he sees in Hobbes' use of private utility in the *TISU*:

> *Civil Obedience*, cannot be derived...from men's *Private Utility* onely, because every man being Judge of this for himself, it would then be Lawful for any subject, to Rebel against his Sovereign Prince and to Poyson or Stab him,

251

whensoever he could reasonably perswade himself, that it would tend to his own Advantage.[75]

Cudworth argues that Hobbes' argument therefore, in one move, both diminishes the dignity of man and undermines the foundation of the ethical community.

For Cudworth the foundation of any society must always be the wisdom and justice of the divine. Man, through his freewill, is presented by God the means by which this community can both be created and exist as a reflection of the intellect of the divine. Central to this community is, Cudworth argues, the correct understanding of the oath within the political society. In using this argument Cudworth follows the central seventeenth century belief, undermined by Hobbes' argument, that oaths form the basis of the political organisation of the state. So Cudworth argues in FM.4980:

> Promises, Pacts, Covenants, & Promisiory Oaths wch men take as a security to ymselves & firmly acquiesce in y^m wn they are made by vertuous persons wch are ye foundations of politicall societies.[76]

What lies behind the use of the oath, Cudworth argues, is the principle of freewill. As he goes on to say in FM.4980, 'Promises, Covenants & promisory Oaths would be Errant Nonsence if a man had no-more power over his future Actions y^n a weather-cock hath of standing North or South tomorrow.'[77] An oath can only ever carry any moral weight if man has freely entered into the oath and accepts that all

---

[75] *TISU*, p.698.
[76] *FM.4980*, fol.177
[77] *FM.4980*, fol.177.

oaths have been entered into willingly by the other members of that community.

The binding quality of an oath carries with it not only an obligation to keep a

promise to God, but also a recognition that this promise also requires man to keep

and maintain his obligations to the other members of the community. The central

building block of Cudworth's political principles, the oath, consequently carries with

it dual obligations to God and man. In doing so, it maintains Cudworth's central

ethical principle, already stated, that 'ye great duty of ye X^{ian} laws is to love God & to

love men.'[78]

VI.5. Political Obligation

Cudworth's argument for political obligation is a logical development of his ethical

theory. For this reason obligation is not created, as in the Hobbist state, through the

force and power of the civil sovereign, but through the participation of the

individually morally responsible individual in a divinely ordained reality. Cudworth's

theory of political obligation is, therefore, another facet of his overall philosophical

project. The founding principle of political obligation is, Cudworth argues, the

principle of justice implicit within his intellectualist principle of the divine. Man is

therefore obligated to the justice of God as the founding principle of reality. As he

argues in the *TISU*:

> The *Right* and *Authority* of God himself is Founded in *Justice*; and of this is
>
> the Civil Sovereignty also a certain *Participation*. It is not the meer *Creature* of

---

[78] *FM*.4983, fol.100.

the people, and of men's *Will*, and therefore *Annihilable* again by their *Wills* at pleasure; but hath a *Stamp* of *Divinity* upon it.[79]

Cudworth argues that political society grows naturally out of the intellectual principle of the divine in the world. It is not the creation of some compact founded on fear or necessity, but the practical means by which and through which man comes to fulfil his ability to live the ethically virtuous life. As the above quote shows, political society in his theory develops naturally out of the eternal principles of justice in the world. He completely rejects Hobbes' belief that political society is formed by the creation of an artificial body politic. In contrast, he argues that political society cannot be created, or man obligated to that society, through the artificial and violent commands of an absolute ruler. Rather, the just political society is based upon the ability of the individual political actor to understand the commands given as the natural and lawful commands of a just ruler. This confirmation is brought about by man recognising in just political commands not the command, but the implicit justice that lies behind those commands. As Cudworth comments in FM.4983, 'y^c: Lawgiver has power to inforce his laws with reasonable penalty, but no Lawgiver has just right to inforce his laws beyond equality and justice.'[80] The means of ensuring this obligation is created, he argues, from each individual's ability to use his reason to recognise the implicit justice, or otherwise, of a command.

There is an implicit weakness created by Cudworth's system. By making obligation dependent on the individual judgment of the justness or otherwise of a

---

[79] *TISU*, p.896.
[80] *FM.4983*, fol.22.

specific command, Cudworth opens himself up to accusations of political anti-

nomianism. Arguably political stability would be impossible in Cudworth's system,

because a man can, if he so chooses, refuse to obey any command that he believes

to be unjust. Cudworth appears to be aware of this problem. He addresses the

problem in two ways. Firstly he argues that, although natural justice is the founding

principle of political society, society cannot be so reflexive as to meet and judge

every situation with an appeal to natural justice. Consequently he argues that

principles of natural justice over time become codified into principles of 'positive

justice.' These principles of positive justice are freely commanded by the political

leader. The obligation to them is, however, not invested in the power of the

commander, but in the assumed natural justice of the command.[81] Secondly,

Cudworth further maintains the stability of political society by arguing that

obligation to the commands of positive justice should be followed not simply

because they follow natural justice, but because to follow legitimate political

authority is itself a command of natural justice. This argument for political

obedience as a natural good comes out most clearly in his final remarks in the *TISU*.

There he argues that:

> Conscience and religion oblige subjects actively to obey all the lawful
>
> commands of the civil sovereigns or legislative powers though contrary to
>
> their own private appetites, interest and utility; but when these same
>
> sovereign legislative powers command unlawful things conscience, though it

---

[81] *EIM*, p.21.

here obliges to 'obey God rather than man,' yet does it, not withstanding, oblige not to resist.[82]

Cudworth, in this published work, argues that even if the positive commands of the civil sovereign are deemed by the individual to be contrary to natural justice, the desire to resist is negated by the overriding obligation to the dictate of natural justice not to resist. Cudworth's arguments for political obligation do, however, vary from this strict line if we examine those occasions where Cudworth deals with the same issue in his unpublished writings. One could go so far as to argue that this final clause in the *TISU* is an attempt by Cudworth to allay any fears that the moderate theological and philosophical position advocated in the *TISU* would necessarily undermine the political *status quo*. This assertion would seem to be backed up when we compare this argument from the *TISU* with his use of the same arguments in the *EIM*. In the *EIM*, which was not published during Cudworth's lifetime, Cudworth presents a far more subtle argument for political obligation, within which he believes that in certain cases natural justice can, and should, lead to the resistance of the positive commands of an arbitrary ruler.

When dealing with the same issue of political obedience in the *EIM* Cudworth does not make non-resistance, as he does in the *TISU*, a dictate of natural justice. Instead he stresses that the overarching obligation in political society is that all political commands correspond to the dictates of natural justice. Positive commands remain, but only as pragmatic and, consequently, malleable principles. Man is, therefore, only obliged to follow positive commands if they still follow the dictates of natural justice. In Cudworth's terms, the covenant made by man to the

---

[82] *TISU*, p.899.

political community is not binding in itself. The covenant does not in itself create a new moral entity, rather new covenants are only modifications of man's existing obligation to the eternal and immutable dictates of natural justice. Cudworth does recognise that part of this obligation is to the person of the commander however, unlike in the *TISU* this is not a blind obedience, but an obligation that could be refused if the dictates of natural justice were circumvented by the commander. An obvious example of this would be that of the duty of the soldier to his superior officers. In war time, assuming the war is itself a *just* cause, a soldier is obliged to follow the orders of his superior officer. The soldier is following a positive command, such as attacking a village, which, because of the specific context of that positive command, follows the natural justice implicit in that struggle. However, if the same positive command to attack the same village is given in peacetime the soldier would be obliged to refuse to follow the positive command because at that point in time the positive command was running contrary to the dictates of natural justice. As Cudworth argues in the *EIM:*

> And it is not the mere will of the commander that makes these positive
> things to oblige or become due but the nature of things appears evidently
> from hence because it is not the volition of every one that obligeth, but of a
> person rightly qualified and invested with lawful authority. And the liberty
> of commanding is circumscribed within certain bounds and limits, so that if
> any commander go beyond the sphere and bounds that nature sets him,
> which are indifferent things, his commands will not at all oblige.[83]

---

[83] *EIM*, p.21.

Cudworth argues that when the positive commands of the commander move beyond the bounds of natural justice they no longer oblige man to follow them. He offers in the *EIM* a sophisticated defence for a limited right to resistance.

Cudworth argues that this occurrence would be impossible in a correctly formed political society. His ideal society is united by the collective realisation of the higher, collective virtues found in the divine. The unifying principle being, as in all his moral writings, the belief that the eternal and immutable principles of justice are available to all men through the use of their reason. Cudworth presents us with a belief in the ability of a society to understand the collective good which mirrors closely the principle of the 'General Will' from Rousseau's *Social Contract*. In the *Social Contract* Rousseau argues that a society which is correctly formed will naturally come to a collective understanding of what is good and just for that society. Collective judgement is Rousseau's 'General Will' which rises above the agglomeration of private interests which Rousseau termed the 'Will of All,' and sees the collective interests of the community as paramount.[84] Cudworth describes this collective political will when he says that:

> Wherefore *Conscience* also, is in it self not of a *Private* and *Partial*, but of a *Publick* and *Common Nature*; it representing *Divine Laws, Impartial Justice*, and *Equity*, and the *Good of the Whole*, when clashing with our own *Selfish Good*, and *Private Utility*. This is the only thing, that can *Naturally Consociate Mankind* together, lay a Foundation for *Bodies Politick*.[85]

---

[84] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans G.D.H.Cole (Everyman, London, 1913), pp.274-6.
[85] *TISU*, 898.

In Rousseau's case, the General Will gains its collective strength from the shared social and political experiences of the body politic. In Cudworth's case, the unifying principle is the existence of the eternal and immutable principle of justice found in the intellect of the divine. Cudworth's theory, similar to Rousseau's, relies on the existence of a society made up of autonomous moral actors to exist. Only in a society made up of morally autonomous, self-determined individuals can the collective principles of natural justice be known with certainty by all men. Cudworth's political principles when examined in detail present us with a powerful, almost democratic defence of the equality of all men as moral actors.

For Cudworth the only constant factors in political society are the principles of natural justice that underpin it. The organisation of that society could change as the political institutions of a society are, in Cudworth's mind, simply the pragmatic structures which ensure that the dictates of natural justice are fulfilled within a specific context. For instance, an aristocracy is to be respected, Cudworth argues, because it may, at a certain point in time present the most effective form of government, not because it personally holds any natural virtues in itself. As Cudworth argues pithily in FM.4983:

> Nothing does so crave ye esteem of a Nobleman to himself as ye sense of his honour or greatnesse; this he estemes naturall: but if he do go back, but to of 7 ages: he w^d see from how low a degree they are risen to ye condition they are in y^t they will see it is rather owing to ye industry or fortunes or to ye injustice of their ancestry they find they are the possesser of ye advantages.[86]

---

[86] *FM.4983*, fol.21.

Cudworth's desire to concentrate on the underlying principles of political society rather than the surface machinations also allow us to understand his supposed political quietism with more accuracy.

Far from eschewing the political realm, Cudworth creates a theological and philosophical system which places the obligations of the political realm as a central principle. For him, man's overriding obligation is to God's justice. Consequently one can argue that Cudworth was willing to move easily in his allegiance between different regimes in the middle decades of the seventeenth century because each were, in Cudworth's eyes, acceptable creators of positive justice, as long as they maintained the fundamental principles of natural justice. That is not to say that he submitted to political authority on principle, as he suggests in the *TISU*. Throughout the 1660s Cudworth was continually under attack from hostile parties, often those with influence in Court. Many of these attacks were precipitated by Cudworth's willingness to oppose the wishes of his superiors on points of principle. His personal stress on principle, over blind obedience and duty, comes out most clearly in his conflict with Ralph Widdrington during the 1660s. Widdrington was a fellow of Christ's from 1639 till his death in 1688. He was one of only three fellows of Christ's College, including Henry More, to survive Manchester's purge. In 1660 he was ejected from his fellowship by Cudworth for 'contumacy and neglect of statutes.'[87] Widdrington took his case directly to the King and appears to have used this to catalogue complaints against Cudworth, many of which alleged Cudworth's lax religious observance and discipline in the College. At one point Widdrington complains of the irregular practice in the Chapel and the lack of surplices.

---

[87] Peile, *Biographical Register*, I:421-2.

Cudworth's failings included, for Widdrington, a certain vanity in dress and his

closeness to the previous protectorate regime. As Widdrington claims:

> when the King and government are restored it no salve in Dr Cudworth to
>
> wear a velvet coat in the exchange among Merchants and Presbyterians and
>
> a cassock when he visits a bishop and both upon the same day. Well had the
>
> complainant been ye protectors chaplain or favorite or pensionary or
>
> advocate to break the laws and bring in the Jews had he preached to
>
> humour the rebels in a short cloak open sleeves and 36 dozen ribband at his
>
> knees.[88]

Although these accusations may seem trivial they show two things. Firstly, the

extent to which Cudworth was remembered in the years of the Restoration for his

close involvement with the Protectorate regime. Secondly, when compared with

Cudworth's own claims and defences over the same period, whilst remaining loyal

to the King, Cudworth never denies his links or relationship to the protectorate

regime. This is in stark contrast to Widdrington. Widdrington, like Cudworth,

prospered during the inter-regnum, being made public orator of the University in

1650. However, in his appeals to the King over his ejection, Widdrington

consciously distances himself from his promotions in the 1650s, claiming never to

have had anything to do with 'the usurper.'[89] This, Widdrington claims, was in stark

contrast to Cudworth who, Widdrington alleges, did:

---

[88] Cambridge University Library Manuscript, Mm.5.45, *Notes on the Master's of God's House and Christ's College*, fol.15.
[89] On taking the Engagement in 1650 Widdrington became public orator and Professor of Greek, Peile, *Biographical Register.* I:422; CUL.MS.Mm.5.24.fol.20.

zealously adhere to the usurper whilst he lived....and in a profane
lamentation worship him after he was dead did ye complainent style that
excreable villain 'our sun a man of wonders the great prince whose memory
is blessed' or after this the complaintent blaspheme and write Richard 'the
levin of all eyes' and 'a light risen up in darkness.'[90]

Despite Widdrington's protestations to the contrary, Cudworth appears to have
been an obedient, but not submissive subject of the King. On two occasions he
resisted Royal mandates for the election of fellows to Christ's, and, in opposing
Widdrington, angered many of Widdrington's supporters in Court, including
Widdrington's brother, Sir Thomas Widdrington, at that time a member of the
council of state.[91] Widdrington was eventually re-instated to his fellowship in 1661
by the King's bench. What the affair does show is, firstly, how Cudworth's own
actions were driven by principle rather than political pragmatism or quietism. At the
time of the Restoration, when Cudworth's own position was not secure, crossing
the brother of a councillor of the King does not seem to be actions of an 'other-
worldly' academic. Secondly it shows that although political authority was generally
to be obeyed, Cudworth did not believe that it should be followed for its own sake.

It is possible to compare Cudworth's attitude to changing political authority
to his earlier stated advocacy for comprehension in religious belief. Widdrington, in
his letters of complaint to the King, writes that Cudworth continually states:

---

[90] CUL.MS.Mm.5.24.fol.16.
[91] Peile, *Biographical Register.* I:466.

262

the old dear plea for liberty of conscience and for allowing every conceited

fellow to follow the light within and to do everything upon a principle of

acceptance as this is to men who desire a greater latitude to walk in than our

statute will permit.[92]

Widdrington explicitly attacks two of the central tenets of Cudworth's theory of

moral responsibility. Firstly, he attacks Cudworth's belief that the individual, 'every

conceited fellow,' is the best judge and arbiter of his own moral actions. Secondly,

Widdrington alludes to the 'latitude' or breadth of approach within which Cudworth

believes these ethical principles could exist. The ethical life for Cudworth does not,

as Widdrington argues, need to be limited and defined by structures or 'statute.'

Instead Cudworth believes the form of the ethical life can be changeable and

moveable as long as the central principles of the Christian life are maintained. In

Chapter Three we saw how Cudworth defined this community, in terms of Church

government, as a 'Noah's Ark' of comprehension, including all diverse threads of

the Christian religion within it. Cudworth argues that the same latitude in political

organisation and form could be countenanced as long as the central principle of

justice is maintained.

There is no evidence that Cudworth, in his writing, advocates the wholesale

reform of the political community as argued for by groups such as the Levellers.

However, what Cudworth does advocate is a reformation in the method by which

the legitimacy and sovereignty of a political society is defined. Political freedom is

created, he argues, by the collective appreciation of the divinely inspired principles

of justice in the world. Consequently man is only able to achieve the liberty found in

_____

[92] CUL.MS.Mm.5.24.fols14b-15.

the divine in a world defined and controlled by morally determined individuals. The

political community, he believes, has to be liberated from the legalism of statute and

fixed organisation as an end in itself. These forms and institutions must be

understood as the pragmatic constructs around which the fundamental, divinely

inspired, principles of justice and equity can be maintained. What we find in

Cudworth is a shift in the justification of political legitimacy away from the

traditional principle of self-preservation or divine fiat, to a legitimacy which is

entirely defined and maintained by the individual. Cudworth's argument for political

legitimacy and obligation relies on the self-conscious movement of man away from

the bounds of ethical legalism, to the position of individual moral responsibility. To

borrow the terminology from Cudworth's *Second Sermon,* political legitimacy is

created when man develops from 'God's bondsman' to 'God's freeman.' The course

of this legitimacy lies in the ability of the individual intellect to come to know with

certainty the justice of a political institution. The source and confirmation of this

legitimacy relies on the existence of human agency which is formed and confirmed

through Cudworth's belief in the active power of the triune God.

Chapter VII – The Cambridge Platonists and The Latitudinarians

VII.1. Introduction

The task of this thesis has been to reconstruct the political arguments of Ralph Cudworth. By stressing the Trinitarianism implicit in all Cudworth's thought I have been able to not only identify the political arguments in his thought, but also show the manner in which he develops a sophisticated defence of a political society created and maintained by the moral obligations of each individual in that society. Cudworth's Trinitarianism not only allows us to see this political aspect with more clarity, but also the manner in which he develops a comprehensive system of human agency, moral responsibility and freewill as the building blocks of an ethical community. As we saw in the last chapter, this allows us to understand Cudworth's own political outlook with more clarity. In addition, these political principles suggest that he may have been influential on the development of the liberal political principles which first found a voice in the late-seventeenth century. The task of this concluding chapter is to examine whether Cudworth's ideas, especially their Trinitarian aspect, carried any weight and influence beyond the borders of his published and unpublished writings.

To do this I will examine the thought of the Latitudinarians, and John Tillotson and Edward Fowler in particular, since I believe this group was most obviously influenced by Cudworth. I will argue that this political aspect of Cudworth's impact, particularly with reference to the Trinitarian debates of the late-seventeenth century, has been ignored because of the manner in which other

historians have chosen to interpret the political ramifications of these Trinitarian

debates. It is with an examination of this latter point that I will begin, discussing

what I shall term the neo-republican interpretation of the politics of the Trinitarian

debates. This neo-republican position, promoted most forcefully by J.C.D. Clark,

J.G.A. Pocock, and J.A.I. Champion argues that the political nature of the

Trinitarian debates is identifiable when this debate is seen as an anti-Trinitarian

critique of the Trinitarian and Christological nature of the ecclesial theology of the

established Church.[1] In this context Pocock and Champion argue that the anti-

Trinitarians develop a republican critique of the confessional nature of English

society. Their calls for a new republican civic humanism, Pocock and Champion

argue, helped begin the dismantling of the *ancien regime* in England, and also

provided the key political argument of the Enlightenment. I will not challenge this

argument. Rather I will call into question whether the theological and political

context drawn by this neo-republican interpretation provides the only context

within which we can interpret the political consequences of the Trinitarian debates

of the late-seventeenth century. I will argue, taking a lead from Cudworth, that we

can find a middle position between the high-Churchmanship and the anti-

Trinitarian republicanism suggested by this neo-republican reading. This, what I will

term, proto-liberal argument defines the Trinity not in ecclesial and sacerdotal

terms, but stresses the importance of the Trinity in understanding the moral

responsibility of the individual in society. In this way I will interpret the political

implications of the Trinitarian debates not simply by reference to the institutional

---

[1] These arguments are found most clearly in the following works by these authors: J.C.D. Clark, *English Society 1682-1832: Ideology, social structure and political practice during the ancien regime* (CUP, Cambridge, 1985); J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion Vol.1: The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1734-1764* (CUP, Cambridge, 1999); J.G.A. Pocock, 'Within the Margins: the definitions of orthodoxy,' in *The Margins of Orthodoxy; Heterodox Writing and Cultural Response, 1660-1750*, ed. Roger D. Lund (CUP, Cambridge, 1995), pp.33-53; and Champion, *Pillars of Priestcraft*.

justifications of the Trinity, as the neo-republican interpretation does, but also examine the manner in which the Trinity, as a key term in the intellectual make-up of seventeenth century England, was invoked during this period to express and define some of the key political principles of liberalism. This proto-liberalism is found, I will argue, most clearly in the thought and political actions of the Latitudinarians. I will argue that, contrary to claims of much recent scholarship, the Latitudinarians should be interpreted as developing directly out of philosophical and theological positions first suggested by the Cambridge Platonists. This is most marked in defences of the Trinity written by Edward Fowler and John Tillotson, both of which owe great debt to Cudworth. I will then examine the manner in which Fowler and Tillotson use the Trinity as the theological underpinning of their arguments for religious toleration and comprehension. By doing this I will argue that Cudworth's thought creates the basis out of which the Latitudinarians developed concrete political arguments, particularly through their various attempts to draft a bill for religious toleration and comprehension in the 1680s. Implicit in these arguments are the principles of moral self-determination and ethical community, themes which are central to Cudworth's own thought, and principles which provide the basis for the political theory of liberalism.

VII.2. Politics and the Trinity: The neo-republican account of the anti-Trinitarian debates of the late-seventeenth century

Reconstructing the influence of religion on the development of political principles is a complex process. There is little doubt that religion and religious conflict has

played a major role on the development of the modern world. Until recently this influence has, however, been broadly interpreted negatively. The classic example of this is what has come to be known as the Whig interpretation of history. Whig historicism argues that during the seventeenth century in particular the superstitions of religion were discarded in favour of rational, scientific secularism. This growing secularism allowed for the freedom of thought and expression from which modern, enlightened, principles developed. In the opening chapter we encountered something of this Whiggishness in the treatments of the Cambridge Platonists by, amongst others, Ernst Cassirer and Arthur Lovejoy. Another secular analysis of the early-modern period, the Marxist interpretation of history, argues that it was during this period that the bourgeois capitalist class first developed. Consequently the English Civil War became for historians, such as Christopher Hill and C.B. MacPherson, the necessary bourgeois revolution of Marxist historical analysis.[2] Both the Whig and Marxist interpretations rely on the crude equation according to which the level of modernity in a society is inversely proportional to the amount of religion in that society. Thinkers such as the Cambridge Platonists, because of their conscious theism, sit very much on the un-modern side of this divide.

In reaction to these interpretations there has been an increased emphasis on the more subtle and important role that religion has played as a context in which the ideas of modernity first developed. As part of this process there has been an increased concentration by historians on the importance of religion in every facet of the early-modern period. If not the first, certainly the most provocative exponent of this revisionist analysis has been J.C.D. Clark. In his *English Society 1682-1832*,

---

[2] For instance see Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*; C.B.MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (OUP, Oxford, 1962).

Clark stresses the profound theological and confessional nature of the English state

well into the eighteenth century.[3] Clark continually stresses the importance of

religion to English and British society through the 'long eighteenth century.' By

doing this he rejects the belief, implicit in Whig and Marxian analyses, that

modernity developed during this period through the removal of the superstitions of

religion from various parts of society. Contradicting the assumptions of Whig

historicism, he argues that the radical ideas which grew out of the early-modern

period were not marked by their secularism, but in fact by their religious basis. The

radical ideas of this period should not be understood through their rejection of

religion. Rather, he argues, radical ideas during this period can be identified as an

heterodox religious reaction to the orthodox Christian assumptions of the English

confessional state. Nowhere is this heterodox reaction so marked, Clark argues, as

in the political implications of the rejections of the doctrine of the Trinity by

Socinians, Arians and Deists.[4] The problem one finds with Clark's provocative

thesis is that while overturning many of the easy assumptions of Whig historicism, it

paradoxically accepts, in part, one of the key premises of Whig historicism; that

orthodox theism is anathema to modernity.[5] Clark, by stressing the religious basis of

---

[3] Clark, *English Society*, see especially pp.1-7.
[4] Ibid., p.277. This analysis is also used by Pocock and Champion. See Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, p.27; Pocock, 'Within the Margins'p.36; Champion, *Pillars of Priestcraft*, p.101.
[5] Clark states that eighteenth century society 'had three essential characteristics: it was Anglican, it was aristocratic, and it was monarchical. Gentlemen, the Church of England, and the Crown commanded an intellectual and social hegemony.' [Clark, *English Society*, p.7]. Another example of an intellectual history, this time of the seventeenth century, which argues that the religion within a thinkers thought makes it implicitly unmodern and impossibly far off is John Dunn's influential account of Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*. In that Dunn famously argues that 'I simply cannot conceive of constructing an analysis of any issue in contemporary political theory around the affirmation or negation of anything Locke says about political matters.' [Dunn, *John Locke*, p.x.] Dunn has, in recent years, attempted to modify his claim that there is nothing 'living' in the thought of John Locke, [John Dunn, 'What is Living and What is Dead in the Political Theory of John Locke,' in *Interpreting Political Responsibility: Essays 1981-1989* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1990), pp.9-25]. However as Iain Hampsher-Monk has rightly pointed out, although Dunn attempts to salvage something from Locke's thought, Dunn, because of his implacable belief that religion is anathema to the principles of the modern world, still interprets Locke's political ideas as divorced from modern liberal principles [Hampsher-Monk, 'History of political thought, pp.167-8].

England in the early-modern period as the key factor that separates it from the modern world, implicitly accepts the teleological assumption of Whig historicism: that the orthodox tenets of religion have to be removed for modernity to exist.[6] Such a Whig assumption has severely hampered our understanding of the Cambridge Platonists. Clark's thesis, for all its attempts to understand the subtleties of religion, only understands orthodox theism within the institutional constructs of the established Church. This was, of course, one of the main forms that this orthodox theism took during this period. However, by choosing this interpretation I believe Clark's argument relies on an extremely two-dimensional analysis of the nature of orthodox Trinitarian theism during this period. As I shall argue, it is possible to find 'modern' ideas in this period developing not simply from heterodox positions, as Clark believes, but also from within an orthodox theistic position, an orthodox position that does not rely on the established institution of the Church for its coherence or validity.

Clark's thesis did not develop out of a vacuum. Although its provocative and polemical nature marks it out from the Whig histories that he argues against, Clark is conscious of the debt his thesis owes to those historians of the previous generation who first began to dismantle the assumptions of Whig historicism.[7] With respect to the political consequences of the doctrine of the Trinity, one can trace Clark's analysis back to Hugh Trevor-Roper's essay, 'The Religious Origins of the Enlightenment.'[8] In this essay Trevor-Roper does much to explode the myth that Calvinism provided the intellectual and social basis for progressive thinking during

---

[6] For a fuller discussion of the implicit paradox in revisionist histories of the early-modern period see John Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558-1689* (Longmans, Harlow, 2000), pp.6-10.

[7] Clark, *English Society*, pp.1-8.

[8] Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'The Religious Origins of the Enlightenment,' in *Religion, the Reformation and Social Change*, (MacMillan, London, 1967), pp.193-286.

the early modern period. By stressing the restrictive and conservative nature of

Calvinist societies during this period Trevor-Roper is able to argue that progressive

ideas during the seventeenth century developed out of what Edward Gibbon

describes as the 'secret reformation.'[9] Gibbon argues that since the reformation

there has existed in the reformed tradition a liberal element not restricted by the

confines of doctrine. The intellectual heart of this tradition, Gibbon argues, is the

humanism of Erasmus. This humanism led to a 'spirit of freedom and moderation.'

Gibbon goes on to name the chief members of this liberal Erasmian tradition as,

'the Arminianism of Holland, Grotius, Limborch, and Le Clerc; and in England

Chillingworth, the Latitudinarians of Cambridge…, Tillotson, Clarke, Hoadley.'[10]

Trevor-Roper uses Gibbon's analysis to argue that the traditions of the

Enlightenment developed from this humanist free-thinking tradition.[11] Using the

colloquial, rather than theological interpretation of the term, Trevor-Roper stresses

the 'Socinian' nature of this freethinking tradition. In particular he argues that use of

reason, particularly in the field of biblical scholarship allowed for the effective

rejection of the structures of Calvinism and space for the development of the

intellectual trends that led to the Enlightenment.[12]

J.G.A. Pocock in particular has taken issue with elements of Trevor-Roper's

assertion that English Enlightened principles developed in a general way out of a

humanist free-thinking tradition in England. [13] Pocock and also J.A.I. Champion, in

---

[9] Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, VI:128.
[10] Ibid., VI:128, n.45.
[11] This free-thinking humanist tradition is again confirmed by the eighteenth century thinker Anthony Clarke who described a free-thinking tradition of Erasmus, Grotius, Chillingworth, Herbert, Wilkins, Whichcote, Cudworth, More, Tillotson, and Locke. Cited in Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace and, Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780*, 2 vols (CUP, Cambridge, 1991&2000), II.p.24.
[12] Trevor-Roper, 'Religious Origins,' pp.206-220.
[13] See in particular J.G.A. Pocock, 'Post-Puritan England and the Problem of the Enlightenment,' in *Culture and Politics: From Puritanism to the Enlightenment*, ed. Perez Zagorin (University of California

contrast to Trevor-Roper's colloquial use of 'Socinian,' argue that the Enlightened principles of late-seventeenth century English thought are found in the theological Socinianism of the anti-Trinitarian debates. This analysis shares the assumption of Clark's work that radical ideas during this period existed in the form of a heterodox, but still religiously inspired, reaction to the orthodoxy of the established Church. The political implications of the Trinitarian debates of the late-seventeenth century are therefore defined in this neo-republican interpretation by the radical reaction to the institutional and authoritarian form of the established Church. Both Pocock and Champion argue that the Socinian attacks on the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity helped to develop a republican civic humanism which was a mark of the Enlightenment.[14] This neo-republican interpretation of the anti-Trinitarian debates does not, I believe, present us with a full account of the political implications of the Trinitarian debates during this period. Although one must concede that this neo-republican reaction to the orthodoxy of the established Church occurred during this period, it was not, I would argue, the only political argument identifiable in the Trinitarian debates of the late-seventeenth century. The neo-republican interpretation rests on the assumption that the Trinity was used in the established Church solely as a means of maintaining the Apostolic and *jure divino* legitimacy of the episcopacy and hereditary monarchy. Pocock in particular argues that after the Restoration the Church gained political legitimacy from the assertion that it was the authentic body of Christ on earth. The sacerdotal and Apostolic nature of the Church meant that redemption was only found in the orthodoxy of the Church.[15]

Press, Berkeley, 1980), pp.91-111, p.93. Compare with Trevor-Roper, 'Religious Origins,' pp.217-220.
[14] Champion, *Pillars of Priestcraft*, p.278.
[15] Ibid., p.118.

272

The Church's established, Erastian form in turn gave legitimacy and authority to the re-established monarchy. The short hand recognition of this theological-political union being the rallying cry (popular with polemicists on both sides of the argument), 'No Bishop. No King!'[16] The means of attacking the established English confessional state during this period was, for the neo-republican analysis, to undermine the theological basis of the Church's authority: the doctrine of the Trinity. Socinian and later Deist thinkers were able to utilise the biblical exegesis created by Erasmian humanism to cast doubt on the divinity of Christ. If the divinity of Christ could be undermined, then the whole theological-political structure could be brought down. Clark, Pocock, and Champion argue that it is in this form of radical thinking that the great steps forward to modernity, hinted at by Gibbon, were made in early-modern England.[17]

It is not my intention to dispute this neo-republican interpretation of the anti-Trinitarian debates of the late-seventeenth century as there is much in it which I believe is correct. Rather I will argue that there is space in this interpretation to account for those thinkers, such as the Cambridge Platonists and the Latitudinarians, mentioned by Gibbon, but who fall outside the boundaries created by this neo-republican analysis. In particular, I will argue that a fuller account of the political nature of the doctrine of the Trinity, such as that which we have encountered in Cudworth's thought, allows us to understand a theologically coherent, moderate tradition that existed in English thought during this period. This proto-liberal interpretation of the political implications of the Trinity is, arguably, more influential on English thought than the neo-republican tradition. The neo-

---

[16] Pocock, 'Within the margins,' pp.40-47.
[17] Clark, *English Society*, p.282.

republican analysis of these debates is limited in my view by its reliance on a structural and institutional account of the established Church during the late-seventeenth century. Consequently it argues that during this period a belief in the Trinity became synonymous with an acceptance of the Apostolic and sacerdotal form of the Church. This strict high-Church position was certainly maintained in the immediate aftermath of the Restoration. The strict Erastianism of the re-established Church can be found in the great opposition there was during the reign of Charles II to comprehension and toleration in the. Church. This opposition was typified in the collection of laws that have come to be known as 'The Clarendon Code.'[18] This Erastian consensus was, however, broken down by the Revolution of 1688. With the ascension to the throne of William and Mary it became increasingly difficult for the Church to maintain the belief that it provided the *jure divino* legitimisation for a monarchy which had gained the crown in far from divinely inspired terms. Pocock argues that it was this conflict between the *jure divino* claims of the established Church and the *de facto* nature of the Williamite settlement which allowed for the neo-republican attacks outlined above to gain such purchase. As if to mirror the radical nature of the anti-Trinitarian, republican position, this conflict created a group of high-Church clerics who refused to accept that the Church could legitimise the *de facto* nature of the Williamite settlement. These Tory 'non-jurors' establish for Pocock the polar opposites to the anti-Trinitarian republicanism facing it in this debate. As a consequence of the polarisation of this debate, Pocock argues that middle position of those who remained loyal to the Church after the Glorious Revolution became increasingly pragmatic and conservative as it attempted to

---

[18] On the conflict in the established Church on questions of comprehension and uniformity during the reign of Charles II see Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration*, pp.167-182.

reconcile the *jure divino* right of the Church with the *de facto* power of the Williamite

settlement. Those maintaining this middle position therefore came under attack

from both sides. The non-juror high-Churchmen attacked the legitimacy of the

established Williamite Church. The neo-republicans exploited this seeming

illegitimacy to continue their attacks on the political role of the Church and the

corrupt nature of the authority of 'priestcraft.'[19]

The implication of the neo-republican analysis is that because of the

theological and political paradoxes present in this middle position such a position

lacked, by definition, a metaphysical core. As a consequence Pocock, in particular,

argues that the apostolic and prophetic core of the Church becomes reduced by

these thinkers to merely a source of rational moralism.[20] This neo-republican

analysis, because it only understands the theological principles of this period within

the confines of the institutional structures of the established Church, is unable to

allow there to be a coherent theological basis to this middle position. I would argue

that the political conflicts brought about by the Glorious Revolution did not

polarise the debate in terms of the doctrine of the Trinity, leaving a pragmatic,

theologically wishy-washy, rump left in the middle.[21] Rather the political and

theological fall-out created by the Glorious Revolution splintered, rather than

polarised, the intellectual debates over the political implications of the doctrine of

the Trinity. This splintering brought to the surface a moderate seam of thought now

known as Latitudinarianism within which the Cambridge Platonists played a

defining role. This group define the Trinity not as a bulwark of the apostolic Church

but as a rational principle that defines human agency and moral self-determination.

---

[19] Pocock, 'Post-Puritan England,' pp.100-5.
[20] Ibid., pp.100-1.
[21] Pocock, 'Within the margins,' p.40.

The Trinity is used by these thinkers to underpin the moral responsibilities of the

individual in society, a society that the Latitudinarians believed was best founded on

the principles of a unified and tolerant Church community.

VII.3. The Latitudinarians and the doctrine of the Trinity

To establish the coherence of this Latitudinarian response to the Trinitarian debates

of the late-seventeenth century, it is first necessary account for the membership of

this Latitudinarian group. The term Latitudinarian is generally used to describe a

collection of London based, liberal, Anglican divines who found preferment

following the Glorious Revolution.[22] Chief amongst their number were John

Tillotson, Edward Stillingfleet, Simon Patrick, Edward Fowler and Gibert Burnett.

However, as Gibbon's survey of the 'secret reformation' shows, the Cambridge

Platonists were also known by the sobriquet Latitudinarian. In fact the term

Latitudinarian was first coined in the 1660s in Cambridge as a term of abuse against

the Cambridge Platonists.[23] It has, however, been common in recent scholarship to

---

[22] The classic account of the life and work of many of the Latitudinarians comes in Gilbert Burnet's *History of My own Time*. This was expanded in 1902 by H.C.Foxcroft's edition of many of Burnet's diaries and notebooks as *A supplement to Burnet's History of My own Time*. In recent years there has been growth in studies specifically on the Latitudinarians. Chief amongst these has been Louis G. Locke's 1954 study, *Tillotson: A Study in Seventeenth century Literature*. More general surveys have included: Barbara Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth century England: A Study of the Relationship between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law and Literature*, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1983); W.M.Spellman's *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England, 1660-1770*; Isabel River's excellent two volume *Reason, Grace and Sentiment*; and various essays John Spurr, chiefly, "'Rational Religion" in Restoration England' in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 49 (1988), pp.563-585, and, "'Latitudinarianism" and the Restoration Church' in *The Historical Journal*, 31 (1988), pp.61-82, also essays in Kroll et al. ed., *Philosophy, Science and Religion in England, 1640-1700*.

[23] Although I will argue in this chapter that the Cambridge Platonists and the Latitudinarians should only be considered as different generations of the same liberal theological and philosophical movement, for the sake of clarity I will use the traditional descriptions of the two groups to avoid confusion. It is, however, interesting to note at this point that the term 'Latitudinarian' was first coined in Cambridge in the 1660s. In a letter to Anne Conway, Henry More complains that in Cambridge during the 1660s those who opposed the Cambridge Platonists would 'Push hard at the Latitude men as they call them, some in their pulipitts call them sons of Belial, others make the Devill a Latitudinarian,' [Anne Conway, *The Conway Letters: The Correspondence of Anne Conway*,

ignore or down play the relationship between the Cambridge Platonists and the Latitudinarians, painting the Cambridge Platonists as ivory-towered academics in contrast to the metropolitan worldliness of the Latitudinarians. Barbara Shapiro's definition is indicative of this view. 'Their lives were spent rather differently,' Shapiro points out:

> the Platonists preferring the retired scholarly life to the hurly burly of an active city pulpit, or efforts to gain the high ecclesiastical posts which could enable them to pursue actively their moderate policies. It was Wilkins, William Lloyd, Sprat, Stillingfleet, Tillotson, and Gilbert Burnet, not the Platonists, who became deans, bishops, and arch-bishops.[24]

Next to the practical Churchmanship of the Latitudinarians, the Cambridge Platonists' philosophical theology has been read as a luxury ill-suited to the practicalities of seventeenth century England. As W.M. Spellman argues, 'the speculation of the cloister and the college were ill-suited to the demands of the busy urban parish.' The obverse of this view is that the Latitudinarians are seen as intellectually thin. Popular in their time but lacking the rigour and power of the Cambridge Platonists. Spellman again argues that the Latitudinarians, compared to the Cambridge Platonists, 'seem to be without ...spiritual commitment or

---

Viscountess Conway, Henry More and their Friends 1642-1684, ed. Marjorie Nicolson, revised by Sarah Hutton (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992), p.243].
[24] Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, p.107. It is more likely that the ecclesiastical preferment the Cambridge Platonists received was as much to do with the theological-political make-up of Restoration England as with any conscious desire on the part of the Cambridge Platonists to distance themselves from the realities of the seventeenth century. All the main Cambridge Platonists accepted the act of Uniformity. This allowed Whichcote to take up his various livings in London after 1660, also both Cudworth and More were also Prebendaries of Gloucester Cathedral. However preferment beyond this most likely limited because of the perception, by the hierarchy of the Restoration Church, of the Cambridge Platonists as willing accomplices with the Protectorate.

otherworldly direction, often emerging as little more than complacent heralds of

religious rationalism and tepid moralism.'[25]

This clear separation assumed by some recent commentators is at odds with

the contemporary assessment of the relationship between the two groups. Although

there are obvious differences in style between the Cambridge Platonists and the

Latitudinarians, the closeness of the relationship between the Cambridge Platonists

and the Latitudinarians is difficult to deny. Many of the latter school were educated

by the Cambridge Platonists at Cambridge. The obvious examples being Simon

Patrick, who came under the influence of John Smith whilst a student at Queens,'

and John Tillotson who was a student and later fellow of Clare Hall under

Cudworth. The Latitudinarians can also be interpreted as developing from a

tradition of anti-Calvinist Puritanism which, as we saw in Chapter Two,

characterises the development of the Cambridge Platonists.[26] In fact Isabel Rivers

attributes the general antipathy of the Latitudinarians towards Calvinism to the

influence of the Cambridge Platonists on the education and intellectual

development of many of the Latitudinarians.[27] This pedagogical debt is shown by

the fact that Simon Patrick preached the sermon at the funeral of John Smith and

Tillotson fulfilled the same task at the funerals of both John Worthington and

Benjamin Whichcote. Perhaps most tellingly, the earliest defences of the Cambridge

Platonists, as 'men of latitude' were published by members of the later group. Chief

[25] Spellman, *Latitudinarians*, pp.116 & 2. Also see John Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of the Enlightenment: Science, religion, and politics from the Restoration to the French Revolution* (CUP, Cambridge, 1989), p.42.
[26] A polemical pamphlet published in 1706 titled *An Historical Account of Comprehension and Toleration. From the Old PURITAN to the New LATITUDINARIAN; with their continues projects and Designs, in opposition to our more Orthodox Establishment*, makes this link explicitly. This pamphlet is also of interest in that it describes this tradition as passing directly from the Cambridge Platonists to the Latitudinarians, and from Cudworth and Tillotson in particular, pp.42-61.
[27] Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, I:30. Also see, Locke, *Tillotson*, p.18; Mark Goldie and John Spurr, 'Politics and the Restoration Parish: Edward Fowler and the Struggle for St Giles Cripplegate' in *English Historical Review* (1994), pp.572-96, p.582.

amongst these defences are Edward Fowler's *The Principles and Practices of Certain Moderate Divines of the Church of England (greatly mis-understood) Truly Represented and Defended*, and Simon Patrick's *A brief account of the New Sect of Latitude-men together with some reflections upon the New Philosophy*.[28] This link is made more explicit by Joseph Glanvill, a disciple of Henry More, in his account of the fictional 'University of Cupri,' a thinly veiled allusion to Cambridge of the time. In this he describes a gallery of portraits of the luminaries of 'Cupri Univeristy.' Glanvill describes by the use of anagrams 'Cupri-Cosmits' which included both members of the Cambridge Platonists and the Latitudinarians. Making no distinction between the two groups, Glanvill includes in his roll-call of the 'Cupri-Cosmits,' Cudworth, Whichcote, Patrick, George Rust, Smith, More, and Stillingfleet.[29] Other recent commentators have been more willing to follow the accepted line of members of the group by noting the obvious links between the Cambridge Platonists and the Latitudinarians. Moving beyond the obvious distinctions of style and geography G.R. Cragg argues that, 'Stillingfleet, Tillotson, Patrick, Fowler and Burnet…might modify the teachings of the Platonists, but the imprint of the older men was upon them to the end.'[30] This imprint is nowhere found more clearly, I believe, than in the theological

---

[28] Edward Fowler, *The Principles and Practices of Certain Moderate Divines of the Church of England (greatly mis-understood) Truly Represented and Defended* (London, 1670); S.[imon] P.[atrick], *A brief account of the New Sect of Latitude-men together with some reflections upon the New Philosophy*, (London, 1662). This latter text was only published under the initials S.P. although it is widely accepted to be from the hand of Simon Patrick. John Gascoigne has argued that Patrick published this defence of the Latitudinarianism of the liberal Cambridge Divines, of which he was one at the time, after he was denied the Presidency of Queens' [Gascoigne, *Cambridge*, pp.35,41]. John Spurr has cast doubt on the accepted belief that Patrick was the author of this tract [see Spurr, '"Latitudinarianism"' p.70].

[29] Jackson I. Cope, '"The Cupri-Cosmits": Glanvill on Latitudinarian anti-Enthusiasm' in *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, XVII:3 (1954), pp.269-86, pp.273-85

[30] Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason*, p.60. The quote continues, 'In ethics, the Cambridge Platonists established a tradition which determined the character of English moral philosophy for a century and a half. In political theory they interpreted the idea of sovereignty in a way which Locke expanded, popularized, and established as the ruling principle in English political thought. But the Cambridge Platonists are not important simply because of the nature and extent of their influence. They represent as profound a restatement of Christianity as English theology has produced, and their unswerving conviction of the grandeur and scope of the divine activity gives to their writing a dignity and a persuasive power which neither the changes of fashion nor the passage of time have obscured.'

and ethical understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity in the writings of the

Latitudinarians. This is most clearly visible in works on the Trinity written by two of

the leading Latitudinarians: Edward Fowler's *Certain Propositions By which the Doctrine*

of the Trinity is so Explained, first published in 1694, and John Tillotson's *Sermons*

Concerning the Divinity and Incarnation of our Blessed Saviour which were written in the

early 1680s but published in 1693. If we place these two accounts of the Trinity in

the context of the political implications of the anti-Trinitarian debates of the late-

seventeenth century we can see the Latitudinarians take a coherent middle position

within this debate, a position that has its intellectual basis in Cudworth's doctrine of

the Trinity.

What is of particular interest in both these works is the manner in which

Fowler and Tillotson define the Trinity in a way which places them between the

opposing Socinian and high-Church accounts of the Trinity. Tillotson, in particular,

published his *Sermons* as a direct riposte to high-Church critics who believed that his

reliance on reason in his thought made him tend towards Socinianism. Implicit in

these high-Church criticisms, which Fowler also faced, was the belief that the

Apostolic nature of the Church could only be maintained with a sound doctrine of

the Trinity at its heart. In this context both Fowler and Tillotson's replies are

interesting for two reasons. Firstly their defences of the Trinity, to borrow Richard

Aaron's phrase from another context, 'breathe with the spirit of a Cudworth.'[31] Both

betray a debt to Cudworth's Platonic and Logocentric account of the Trinity which,

as we have already seen, is the central term of Cudworth's moral and political

thought. Secondly, both Fowler and Tillotson consciously avoid defining the Trinity

as the theological basis of the *jure divino* legitimacy of the established Church. These

---

[31] Richard Aaron, *John Locke* (OUP, Oxford, 1971), p.27.

influential divines use the Trinity in a manner which falls outside the theological-political context of the Trinitarian debates suggested by the neo-republican interpretation of historians like Pocock.[32] What Fowler and Tillotson present instead in these works is an intellectually coherent middle position in which the Trinity is the Cudworthian principle by which man knows not only his own moral individualism, but also the moral and political responsibilities of that individualism within the broader community.

Edward Fowler is in the minority of the Latitudinarians in that he was not educated at Cambridge. Instead he received his education at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, the former college of Thomas Jackson. Despite this, Fowler appears to have quickly fallen under the influence of the Cambridge Platonists. As we have already seen, his 1670 work, *The Principles and Practices of Certain Moderate Divines of the Church of England*, was one of the first public defences of the Cambridge Platonists as Latitudinarians. He also benefited from the patronage of Henry More, becoming a Canon of Gloucester Cathedral in 1676 when More resigned his place on the Cathedral Chapter in Fowler's favour. Fowler was also close to the Cudworth family. Fowler was, with John Locke and Edward Clark, one of the executor's of the will of Cudworth's wife Damaris. He was also a beneficiary of that will, receiving from Mrs Cudworth a 'broad mirror' which had belonged to Henry More and a share with the other executors of the remainder of her estate once her eldest son, John Cudworth, had received £350.[33]

---

[32] Tillotson's position outside neo-republican context of the Trinitarian debates in and out of the established Church is confirmed by the posthumous criticisms of Tillotson by the non-juror Charles Leslie in his *The Charge of Socinianism Against Dr Tillotson considered, In Examination of Some Sermons He has lately Published on purpose to clear himself from the Imputation…By a True Son of the Church* (Edinburgh, 1695).

[33] Christ's College MS.77, *The Will of Damaris Cudworth.*

Fowler's *Propositions* take the form of 28 arguments by which he believes one

can account for the Trinity on the rational grounds as given by the Nicene Fathers.

In this endeavour Fowler recognises explicitly his debt to Cudworth.[34] In this way

this work should not be viewed as an original work, but as a pamphlet which

outlined simply the rational defence of the Trinity defined by Cudworth's *TISU*.

Fowler's *Propositions* are primarily aimed at defending this definition of the Trinity

against accusations, one imagines, similar to those made by Turner in his *Discourse*

Concerning the Messias, that such a Platonic and rational defence of the Trinity

inevitably leads to Socinianism. For this reason Fowler concentrates his attack on

what he perceives to be the misplaced belief that the rational explanation of the

second person being rationally subordinate to the first person of the Trinity

necessarily means that the second person is created. This, Fowler argues, is a

deliberate misinterpretation of the Trinity by Arians and Socinians. Fowler argues

that the relationship of the second person to the first is that of a necessary

emanation. This Neoplatonic definition, which we have already encountered in

Cudworth, is enough, Fowler believes, to dispute the belief that 'there was at least a

Moment of Time when the Son was not; and that He is a Creature.'[35] Fowler again

alludes directly to an argument Cudworth uses in the *TISU* arguments when he

defines this emanation using the metaphor of the relationship of the light to the sun.

Fowler argues:

> *Light* doth exist by necessary *Emanation* from the *Sun*, and therefore the *Sun*

---

[34] Edward Fowler, *Certain Propositions By which the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity Is so Explained, According to the Ancient Fathers as to speak it not Contradictory to Natural Reason.* (London, 1719), no.28.
[35] Ibid., no.21.

was not before the light which proceeds from thence in Order of *Time*, though it be in Order of *Nature* before it.[36]

Fowler uses this metaphor to define the Trinity as a substantive unity, which still maintains a distinction in the persons of the Trinity. This definition again follows Cudworth's controversial *Homoousian* understanding of the consubstantial nature of the Trinity.[37]

Fowler's defence, primarily because of its form, shows us little more than the presence of Cudworth's Trinitarianism in Fowler's thought. Despite this, Fowler's *Propositions* are of interest for two reasons. Firstly, they show the clear power and respect with which Cudworth's arguments for the Trinity were held after his death in 1688. Secondly, it shows the manner in which Cudworth's rational defence of the Trinity was deployed to express a form of Trinitarianism which not only refutes Socinianism, but also denies the high-Church, apostolic definition of the Trinity. In this manner we can see in Fowler's *Propositions* a defence of the Trinity which falls outside that suggested by the neo-republican interpretation.

In the same year that Fowler's *Propositions* appeared, Tillotson, at the time Archbishop of Canterbury, published his *Sermons Concerning The Divinity and Incarnation of our Blessed Saviour*. Tillotson published these sermons to refute anti-Trinitarian accusations made against him.[38] The *Sermons* were originally preached during two successive Christmastides in 1679 and 1680 at St Lawrence Jewry where Whichcote was minister. Tillotson's defence of the Trinity, like Fowler's, betrays an

---

[36] Ibid., no.18, compare with *TISU*, p.595, '*Both the Father and the Son is God: But he as it were an Exuberant Fountain, this as a Stream derived from him: He like to the Sun, This like a Ray extended from the Sun.*'

[37] Fowler, *Certain Propositions*, no.22.

[38] Locke, *Tillotson*, p.93.

283

intellectual debt to the Cudworth and the *TISU* in particular. Tillotson's *Sermons* also

allow us to see more clearly than is shown in Fowler's *Propositions* how the

Latitudinarians develop their characteristic moral and ethical teachings out of their

Cudworthian Trinitarian position. Tillotson's intellectual debt to Cudworth is

matched by the high personal regard with which each held the other. As previously

mentioned Tillotson was a student and later fellow of Clare Hall whilst Cudworth

was Master there in the 1640s and 1650s. In 1664 Cudworth preached and later

published a sermon given at Lincoln's Inn whilst Tillotson was chaplain there. In

the same year Cudworth, during his dispute with Henry More as described in

Chapter Four, asks John Worthington in a letter to seek Tillotson's advice on how

Cudworth could best publicly acknowledge his debt to Archbishop Sheldon.[39] Also

Cudworth was, late in life, complementary about Tillotson's work on devotion.[40]

This respect was reciprocated by Tillotson, in his sermon at Benjamin Whichcote's

funeral in 1684, where he described his former Master as the 'ancient and

learned...Dr Cudworth.'[41]

Tillotson's *Sermons* take the form of an exegesis of the clauses of the

prologue to John's Gospel. To overcome accusations of anti-Trinitarianism he

continually stresses the existence of the second person of the Trinity, the *Logos*,

from eternity. The eternal nature of the *Logos* places it, he argues, within the unified

understanding of the triune Godhead. To explain the complicated relationship of

the *Logos* to the first person of the Trinity, the *Father*, Tillotson relies on the

---

[39] Worthington, *Diary*, II:142.
[40] *FM.4983*, fol.104.
[41] John Tillotson, *The Works of the Most Reverend Dr John Tillotson, Late Archbishop of Canterbury: Containing Fifty Four Sermons and Discourses, on several Occasions. Together with the Rule of Faith* (London, 1696), p.268.

Neoplatonic metaphor of the first person as an emanating fountain. He defines the

relationship of the *Logos* to the *Father* in the following terms:

> The *Evangelist*, adds … *the same was in the beginning with God,* that is though the
>
> *Word* was truly and really God, yet was not *God the Father,* who is the
>
> Fountain of the Deity, but an Emanation from him, the only begotten Son
>
> of God from all eternity *with him.*[42]

The Neoplatonic nature of this emanation is further reinforced by Tillotson's

interpretation of the *Logos* not merely in the form of the person of Christ but as the

principle of reason.[43] The *Logos,* Tillotson argues, is not simply a guiding principle,

but also the creative principle in the world. This creative nature implicit in the *Logos*

allows Tillotson to distance himself from criticisms of Socinianism by arguing that

the *Logos* as a creative principle cannot itself be a creature.[44] Tillotson's

interpretation of the eternal nature of the *Logos* follows almost exactly that which we

find in Cudworth. The *Logos* fulfils the role of the active and creative principle in the

divine, manifesting and reflecting the intellectual source of the divine. Tillotson's

separation between the intellectual source of the divine and the perceptive and

creative nature of the *Logos* follows Cudworth's Plotinian distinction between

intellect and understanding in the divine.

Tillotson, like Cudworth, finds historical credence for the *Logos* as the

creative principle in the world from the ancient theology of the Jewish Cabala and

---

[42] John Tilltoson, *Sermons Concerning the Divinity and Incarnation of our Blessed Saviour* (London, 1693) p.23.
[43] Ibid. p.24.
[44] Ibid. p.38.

Platonic tradition. Tillotson argues that in both traditions the *Logos* is used to describe the efficient cause in the world. So Tillotson argues:

> And so likewise *Philo* the *Jew* calls him *by whom God made the World, the Word of God,* and *the son of God.* And *Plato* probably had the same notion from the *Jews* which made *Amelius,* the *Platonist,* when he read the beginnings of *St Johns* Gospel to say, *this* Babarian *agrees with Plato, making the* Word *in the order of the Principles;* meaning that he made the *Word* the *Principle* or efficient Cause of the World, as *Plato* has done.[45]

Tillotson therefore follows the *prisca theologia,* which is so prevalent in the *TISU,* by arguing that ancient wisdom was ultimately fulfilled in the Gospel revelation of Christ as *Logos.*[46]

Tillotson, although recognising these Cabalistic and Pagan sources, does not rely on them as heavily as Cudworth. Tillotson prefers instead to base his interpretation primarily on the revealed truth of Christianity. Tillotson argues that without this revealed truth the ancient knowledge of the *Logos* as a creative principle can only descend into 'fancies and conceits.' The central failure of the '*Jewish Cabalists* and the *Schools* of *Pythogoras* and *Plato*' was that they lacked the correct structure within which to interpret the *Logos* as both God and creator.[47] Without the revealed truth of Christ as *Logos* they simply revert to a 'confused *Genealogy* of Deities.'[48] The purpose of John's prologue is, for Tillotson, to refute and deny pagan

---

[45] Ibid., p.9.
[46] *TISU,* p.557.
[47] Tillotson, *Sermons,* p.12.
[48] Ibid., p.12.

interpretations of *Logos*, replacing them with the full revealed truth of Christ as *Logos*. As Tillotson puts it in his first sermon:

> the *Evangelist* shows that all this fanciful *Genealogy* of *Divine Emanation* ...was a mere conceit and imagination: and that all those glorious Titles did really meet in the *Messias* which is the *Word*, and who before his Incarnation was from all eternity *with God*, partaker of his Divine Nature and Glory.[49]

The vehemence of Tillotson's criticism of pagan thought would, as already stated, appear to distance him from Cudworth. Tillotson in this sense relies much more on biblical proofs in his sermons than Cudworth who, as we have seen, bases much of his defence of the Trinity on the specific claims of Plato and Plotinus.[50]

Despite his attacks on the validity of pagan and ancient theology, Tillotson maintains a Neoplatonic structure for not only the eternal creation of the *Logos* but also the internal structure of the Trinity. Tillotson, like Cudworth and Fowler, uses the metaphor of the sun and the rays of light from the sun to explain the relationship of the *Logos* to the *Father*. He argues the *Logos* is 'God by participation of the Divine Nature and Happiness together with the *Father*, and by way of derivation from this as the light from the Sun.' This quote, is, he argues, the 'best and fittest that can be given' for the mystery of the Trinity.[51] Tillotson, again like Fowler, uses this metaphor to distinguish between the unified substance of the Trinity and the distinct persons of the Trinity. Here, as with Fowler, he follows Cudworth's contentious interpretation of the *Homoousian* form of the triune God.

---

[49] Ibid., p.16.
[50] *TISU*, p.550, compare with Tillotson, *Sermons*, p.125.
[51] Tillotson, *Sermons*, p.36, also see *TISU*, p.595.

This interpretation for the relationship of the *Logos* to the *Father* allows Tillotson to, as he says, 'describe to us that which is commonly called the *Divine* and so any thing I could ever see properly enough, *the distinction of person* in the Deity.[52]

Tillotson's concentration on the biblical proofs of the Trinity in a Neoplatonic framework allows him to counter the threats and accusation of Socinianism made against him. He argues that the characteristic rational biblical exegesis of Socinianism, by concentrating on the words alone, fails to appreciate the full meaning and truth of scripture. For this reason he derides Socinian opponents of the Trinity for claiming they have reason on their side. As with Cudworth's defence of the Trinity, Tillotson argues that Socinians cannot claim to have reason on their side if they propagate a theory which undermines the Trinitarian God as the source of that reason.[53] The incompressibility of the Trinity to human reason should not allow man to undermine the implicit and infinite rationality of the Trinity.[54]

Tillotson's concentration of the correct, rational, appreciation of the Trinity did not remove accusations of Socinianism made against him. As we saw in Chapter Three, Socinianism had long been used as a shorthand for those who brought too much of the principle of reason into theological debate. This was certainly the case with the non-juror Charles Leslie who continued to accuse Tillotson of Socinianism after his death in 1695. Perhaps alluding to the Platonism of Tillotson's defence, Leslie argues, 'he does not really believe it; tho' he endeavours with all his Art, to cast a Mist before the Reader's Eyes, in other Expressions, which to some might

---

[52] Tillotson, *Sermons*, p.23.
[53] Ibid., pp.115-8.
[54] Ibid., p.162. Tillotson's argument here mirrors Cudworth's assertions in the *TISU* that the Christian Trinity, 'though a mystery,' is still more reasonable in form than any other explanation of the Trinitarian form of the divine, *TISU*, p.560.

seem Testament, as *Arius* and his followers did.'[55] It is not a surprise to find Leslie,

as a non-juror, criticising Tillotson's supposed Socinianism as undermining the

authority and legitimacy of the Church. Leslie's high-Church response to Tillotson

fits the neo-republican interpretation of high-Church Trinitarianism outlined above.

However, like Fowler, Tillotson never attacks Socinianism and anti-Trinitarianism

for undermining the legitimacy of the Church. Consequently we find in Tillotson

and Fowler's Trinitarianism an appreciation of the Trinity made from in the

established Church which does not fit the structure suggested by the neo-republican

interpretation. As we have seen, Tillotson relies on, what he argues is, the authentic

reason of the Trinity to provide the most effective means of undermining the

dangers of Socinianism. It is in the use of this argument that he and Fowler present

a third position which falls outside the neo-republican interpretation. This third

position, as Tillotson goes onto conclude in the fourth of his sermons, places the

end of the Trinity not in the apostolic legitimisation of the established Church, but

in the moral responsibility of the individual.

For Tillotson the end of the Trinity always resides in the practical and moral

code that it teaches man. The Trinity, he argues, is the fulfilment of redemption of

man and reconciliation of God to man.[56] The *Logos* is a principle of inward

reformation which leads to outward change. He states in his fourth sermon, '[a]ll

that He hath done for us *without us* will avail us nothing, unless we be *inwardly*

transformed and *renewed in the spirit of our minds:* unless we become *new creatures*'[57] Far

from being a 'complacent herald of…tepid moralism,'[58] both Fowler and Tillotson

---

[55] [Charles Leslie], *The Charge of Socinianism Against Dr Tillotson considered. In Examination of Some Sermons He has lately Published on purpose to clear Himself from that Imputation…By a True Son of the Church* (Edinburgh, 1695), p.1.
[56] Tillotson, *Sermons*, pp.47, 181.
[57] Ibid., p.217.
[58] Spellman, *Latitudinarians*, p. 2

present sophisticated defences of the Trinity which have their basis in Cudworth's

thought. Tillotson, more than Fowler, then shows how the practical teachings for

which the Latitudinarians are remembered develop directly from this Cudworthian

understanding of the Trinity. This inward transformation carries with it a basic

assumption that the rewards of the transforming power of the Trinity brings with it

the demands of service towards God. This is, however, as with Cudworth, not to

take the form of an inward looking asceticism, but through an active, tolerant and

humble outward life. Tillotson argues that man cannot mirror God in the form of

divinity or miracles, but can resemble the ethically driven life 'Innocencey, Humility,

Meekness and Patience.'[59]

It is possible, as we shall see below, to establish this link between the Trinity

and teachings on moral and political responsibility in Fowler's other writings. In this

way it is possible to see how both Tillotson and Fowler, as leading figures in the

late-seventeenth century Church, teach that the Trinity brings man to an inward

moral reformation, a theory that mirrors Cudworth's own belief in the moral

responsibility of man. The Latitudinarians' continual instance on the moral nature

of Christianity has led many, as already stated, to down play the intellectual and

theological core of their thought. However, if we place the Latitudinarians together

with the Cambridge Platonists we can identify a theological core to their moral and

ethical rationalism. This moral rationalism is explicable in the Latitudinarians if we

understand that for them all activity is implicitly ethical. The actions of grace are

therefore synonymous with virtue.[60] This elision between activity and grace is

explicable when all life is understood, in Platonic terms, as the participatory activity

---

[59] Tillotson, *Sermons*, p.233.
[60] Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment*, I:74-5.

290

of man in all parts of a divinely ordained creation. Therefore by restating the

intellectual roots of the Latitudinarians in the theology of the Cambridge Platonists

one can identify an intellectual coherence which underpins the active and practical

nature of Latitudinarian teaching.

VII.4. A proto-liberal theology of Toleration

As we have seen, it is possible to identify the clear influence of Cudworth on the

intellectual development of the Latitudinarians. By way of conclusion I would like to

argue that this influence can be identified not only in the moral and religious

teachings of the Latitudinarians, but also in the explicit political actions of the

Latitudinarians in the final decades of the seventeenth century. In particular I

believe that if the philosophical and theological basis of the Latitudinarians is

recognised we can identify a deeper and more profound context within which to

understand the debates for religious toleration and comprehension that existed in

late-seventeenth century England. The Toleration Act of 1689 allowed for freedom

of religious expression only for those who conformed to the doctrine of the Trinity.

The existence of this clause in the Toleration Act has allowed some neo-republican

interpreters of this period to argue that the Trinitarianism of the Toleration Act

confirms the existence of the confessional form of the English state at the time. The

explicit denial of religious toleration to anti-Trinitarians and their continued

subjection to the penalties of Elizabethan and Jacobean law, is seen by the neo-

republican interpretation as a sign of the lengths to which the political establishment

would go to maintain the theological and political legitimisation of the English

confessional state.[61] The problem with this explanation is that the major movers in

the drafting and passing of the Toleration Act, the Latitudinarians, did not, as we

have seen, use the Trinity to defend the established Church in the apostolic terms

suggested by the neo-republican interpretation. In fact, as we shall go on to see, they

actively distanced themselves from the apostolic legitimisation of the Church.

Although a high-Church defence of the apostolic nature of the Church did exist,

this was not the motivating factor in the Latitudinarians' desire for an explicitly

Trinitarian form of toleration. Instead, I would argue that the Latitudinarians defend

the Trinity as a theological and philosophical justification of the morally responsible

individual. Not only did this use of the Trinity inform their views on

comprehension and toleration but it also informed their understanding of how

political legitimacy was created.

Many of the Latitudinarians were active in attempts to extend the

boundaries of the Church of England to other denominations. They wished to

create through comprehension not merely the toleration by law of certain moderate

sects but the acceptance of most Trinitarian denominations in the established

Church. For this reason the Latitudinarians believed that an established Church that

appealed to individual morality and faith over institutional and sacerdotal

justifications would be more effective in attracting dissenters who at the time

existed outside the established Church.[62] This concentration on moderation and the

individual has its source in the Cudworthian Trinitarianism we have already seen

advocated by Fowler and Tillotson. Moderation and tolerance towards dissenters is

clearly identifiable in the actions of many of the Latitudinarians. Tillotson, although

---

[61] Clark, *English Society*, p.283.
[62] Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment*, I:98.

292

often fierce in his attacks on Roman Catholicism, never criticised Trinitarian

dissenters in his sermons and Edward Fowler was highly censured for protecting

dissenters in his Parish of St Giles Cripplegate.[63] Something of Fowler's moderation

can be found in his 1670 *Principles*. Although stressing his obedience and conformity

to the Church of England, Fowler also states that he is open and accepting of non-

conformity.[64] One of Fowler's protagonists declares early on in the dialogue 'I

declare for my part, and I care not who knows it, that I love with my whole heart a

sober and peaceably minded Nonconformist, as much Conformist I am myself.'[65]

These liberal views drove the Latitudinarians to become principal movers in

the attempts to bring about tolerance and comprehension in the Church of England

in the final two decades of the seventeenth century. The major aim of the

Latitudinarians was to bring stability to the Church through wider comprehension in

the Church. Tillotson was active in the drafting of a bill for comprehension which

was presented to Parliament in 1681 by Daniel Finch, son of Heneage Finch,

dedicatee of Cudworth's *TISU*, and nephew of Anne, Viscountess Conway, friend,

pupil and correspondent of Henry More.[66] Although this bill failed this did not

prevent Tillotson, Patrick, Stillingfleet and Fowler continuing their efforts to bring

comprehension to the established Church. This was hampered by Court and Church

opposition to the principle of toleration through the final years of the reign of

Charles II and the brief reign of James II. However, new impetus was brought to

[63] Ibid., I:46; Goldie and Spurr, 'Politics and the Restoration Parish.'
[64] Fowler, *Principles*, pp.323. This is a defence of the episcopacy as the form of Church government. Fowlers claims to conformity never suggest, or draw on, the apostolic nature and defence of the established Church.
[65] Ibid., p.28.
[66] Roger Thomas, 'Comprehension and Indulgence,' in *From Uniformity to Unity*, ed. Geoffrey F.Nutall and Owen Chadwick (SPCK, London, 1962), pp.189-255; John Spurr, 'The Church of England, Comprehension and the Toleration Act of 1689,' in *English Historical Review*, 104, (1989), pp.927-46, p.936. The Finch family provided protection and support for both the Cambridge Platonists and the Latitudinarians, see, Gascoigne, *Cambridge*, pp.45-8. A full examination of the role and place of the Finch family in these debates is needed.

the claims for comprehension following the Revolution of 1688. The Toleration Act

which was eventually passed was effectively a codification of previous Royal

proclamations for indulgence (with the exception that Catholics remained excluded).

This process, in which many of the Latitudinarians were heavily involved, was

intended as the first part of a double-headed Parliamentary action which would have

seen comprehension introduced on the back of this initial Toleration Act. This

process was masterminded by Daniel Finch, by this point the Earl of Nottingham.

The bills, however, were drafted and brought forward through the efforts of the

Latitudinarians. The plan to introduce comprehension failed and the limited

religious freedom of the Toleration Act was the only concrete political achievement

of the political activities of the Latitudinarians.[67]

The failure of the Latitudinarians' plans for religious comprehension should

not diminish their importance in the political debates of the late-seventeenth

century, nor should it diminish their place in the development a of liberal, tolerant

tradition in English thought. At the heart of the proto-liberal arguments of the

Latitudinarians is belief in the moral integrity of the individual, a belief which is

founded on a Cudworthian interpretation of the Trinity. The development of this

principle of moral individualism through to explicit political arguments is found

most clearly in the writing of Edward Fowler. As we have seen, Fowler, in his

Propositions, clearly accepts Cudworth's Platonic defence of the Trinity. However,

because of the brevity of the *Propositions* we need to look deeper into Fowler's work

to how he uses the Trinity to define his theory of the moral and political integrity of

the individual. The explicit political implications of Fowler's Trinitarianism can be

identified in his *Principles*, where he argues that the priesthood of Christ is not given

---

[67] Thomas, 'Comprehension and Indulgence,' pp.233-53.

privately to his apostles but publicly to all men. Fowler therefore rejects one of the

central tenets of the sacerdotal justification for the authority of the established

Church, that the authority of the Church was created by the apostolic succession of

the Priesthood. Fowler believes that the priesthood of man was given to all

collectively. This is, of course, a teaching central to reformed Christianity and

therefore cannot be viewed as peculiar to the Latitudinarians or the Cambridge

Platonists.[68] However, if Fowler's claim is viewed in the light of his use of Cudworth

and in the political context of the Trinitarian debates of the time, we can interpret

Fowler's use of this central argument of the reformed tradition as a continuation of

Cudworth's belief in the active and divinely inspired rational faculty within all men.

This link to Cudworth is made even more explicitly by Fowler when, within his

Principles, he identifies the divine nature of this rational faculty through an allusion to

Cudworth's belief in the eternal and immutable nature of morality and the

intellectualist principles that they assume. As Fowler's interlocutor Theophillus

states:

> *There is an eternal Reason, why that which is good should be* so *and required, and why*
>
> *that which is evil should be* so *and forbidden; which depends not so much on the divine*
>
> will *as the divine* nature.[69]

Through the rational recognition of these principles, Fowler argues that man is able

to make his outward moral actions an expression of his inward reformation. Again

in a very Cudworthian manner, Fowler argues that, '[m]oral righteousness...

---

[68] Fowler, *Principles*, p.326.
[69] Ibid., pp.12-13.

consisteth in the Regulation of both the *outward* and *inward* man, according to the unchangeable Laws of righteousness.'[70] Fowler argues that the necessarily ethical nature of this inner reformation of man leads man, as in Cudworth, inevitably to a political position. Fowler acknowledges that the moderation that he is suggesting would be interpreted by many as undermining the authority of the Church and the King.[71] Despite these accusations, Fowler argues, like Cudworth, that a political community should be legitimised by the collective will of the members of that body politic. He, therefore, follows Cudworth in developing a proto-liberal account of the legitimisation of the political community, one that holds the priesthood of all believers as its founding principle. Fowler in his *Principles* creates a coherent political structure in which the ethical implications of man's individualism can be realised.

What we find in the proto-liberalism of the Cambridge Platonists and the Latitudinarians is a response to the political upheaval of the seventeenth century, which places man's relationship to God as Trinity at its heart. This proto-liberal response rejects both the Erastian defence of the Trinity of high-Churchmen and the republicanism implicit in the anti-Trintarianism of the time. The former argument, the Cambridge Platonists and the Latitudinarians argue, diminishes their belief that all men are the rightful heirs to the priesthood and divinity of Christ. They reject the latter argument because, by denying the divinity of Christ, anti-Trinitarianism denies the active rational principle which defines man's humanity in the world. The middle, proto-liberal position is therefore defined on both sides by its explanation of human agency and moral self-determined individualism as developing from within the doctrine of the Trinity. The Trinitarianism of the proto-

---

[70] Ibid., p.119.
[71] Ibid., p.332.

liberal position exemplified by the Cambridge Platonists and the Latitudinarians also suggests a more coherent context within which to understand the debates of toleration and comprehension. The proto-liberal response, with its concentration of the Trinity as defining human agency and moral responsibility characteristic of humanity, allows us to begin to understand why some dissenters were tolerated but only if they upheld the doctrine of the Trinity. Dissent was acceptable as long as the defining term of reality, the Trinity, was maintained. The proto-liberal position of the Cambridge Platonists and the Latitudinarians defines political legitimacy through consensual actions of individuals in society. Such an argument places them clearly at the forefront of arguments of liberal individualism. Liberal individualism was traditionally seen in Whig historicism as one of the great English contributions to the Enlightenment. As I argued at the beginning of this Chapter, it is no longer possible to accept the traditional Whig interpretation of the organic development of liberal individualism through the supposed decline in the power and influence of religion in the late-seventeenth century.[72] As Clark has shown, it is not possible to interpret the seventeenth or the eighteenth century in terms of a period in which was society gradually de-theologised. However, this does not mean, as Clark suggests, that this period, because of its theology, was implicitly conservative. I believe that it is possible to find in the writings of the Cambridge Platonists and the Latitudinarians a radical and forward looking account of political society which is based firmly in the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy. This perspective, I believe, suggests that is possible to give fuller account of the theological origins of English liberalism than has previously been shown. An account that would, I believe,

---

[72] The explicit link that exists between Latitudinarians and the political liberalism espoused by late-seventeenth century Whigs is clearly described by the anonymous author of *An Historical Account*, which states 'a *Whigg* is no other that a *Lay Latitudinarian.*' p.57.

necessarily place the metaphysical, ethical and political insights of Ralph Cudworth

at its heart.

General Conclusion

The thesis has provided the first comprehensive survey of the ethical and political ideas in the thought of Ralph Cudworth. This process has necessitated not only an examination of the explicit political arguments in Cudworth's writings, but also a revaluation of the nature of political arguments in seventeenth century thought. In particular I have shown how political arguments can develop directly out of theological principles, particularly in Cudworth's case out of his doctrine of the Trinity. These arguments, as described in the philosophy of Ralph Cudworth, show that orthodox theological principles influenced political debate in a positive manner. As I argue in the previous chapter it has been traditional, especially in the historiography of the late-seventeenth century, to view political ideas as developing against the theological orthodoxies and religious structures of the day. However, as this thesis has shown, we are able to appreciate a deeper understanding of seventeenth century political debate if we are willing to accept that seventeenth century political debate existed in forms and structures that differ from those we recognise today.

By exploring this relationship between the theological and the political in Cudworth's thought I have had to re-examine two important contexts which affect our understanding of the Cudworth's thought. The first of these contexts is the important question of why, in my view, the Cambridge Platonists have constantly been misinterpreted. This was the subject of the first chapter of this thesis. The second of these contexts, which help us understand Cudworth's thought, are the intellectual and historical contexts out of which the Cambridge Platonists

developed. Of these contexts, which I outline in Chapters Two and Three, the most

important is the complicated relationship that Cudworth, and the other Cambridge

Platonists, had as Puritans who rejected the voluntarism implicit within

contemporary Calvinism.

With these contexts in place I have been able to reconstruct the political

ideas in Cudworth's thought by showing how these ideas grew directly out of his

theological principles. The most important of these theological principles is

Cudworth's Doctrine of the Trinity which, I have shown, runs through all his

thought. Cudworth's Trinitarianism develops directly out of his intellectualism. The

Trinity explains not only the form of the divine, but also the means by which man

comes to know the principles of justice implicit in God. Key to this understanding

is the distinction that Cudworth makes between the intellect of the divine, as the

central principle of God, and the understanding of the divine, as the active principle

which tells man of the divine. Cudworth equates this active principle, which he takes

from Plotinus, with reason. Man therefore is able to move toward and appreciate

the justice of the divine through the use of his rational faculty.

The ability of man to choose to move freely towards the principles of justice

implicit in the divine lies at the heart of Cudworth's defence of freewill which was

the subject of the Chapter Six of this thesis. In his defence of freewill, which is

found in Cudworth's extensive unpublished manuscript collection, Cudworth places

man within a broad vision of the providential plan controlled by the intellect of

God. As this built on Cudworth's intellectualism Cudworth argues that he is able to

reject the determinism implicit in voluntarist systems, both theistic and mechanistic,

of causal effect. Instead Cudworth argues that the vastness of the mind of God can

conceive not only a necessary chain of future events, but all possible future events. Cudworth therefore defines human agency as the ability for man to determine his own path within this providential web of future possibility.

Cudworth's theory of man's ethical self-determination acts as the founding principle upon which his political ideas develop. In Chapter Six I argue that Cudworth develops this system by arguing that the perfect political society is one where all members of that society live by laws which they can all recognise through their reason as corresponding with the eternal and immutable truths defined by the mind of man. Cudworth's ethical community therefore creates a political society where the legitimacy of that community is defined collective recognition by all members of that community of the just laws that control that community. These laws are not controlled by the express will of a sovereign or magistrate, but maintained by the freely willed actions of all the members of that society. Cudworth argues therefore that political society is based upon the equality that all men have as creations of God, and the ability that all men possess, through their reason to recognise the justice implicit in the laws created by an ethical community. This structure is based on Cudworth's assertion that all are equal members of this community by virtue of the rationality that they all possess through the active and rational revelation of God as Trinity.

In Chapter Seven I show the way in which the political and ethical structure which Cudworth develops out of his doctrine of the Trinity influenced those who followed him. Most importantly I show the way in which the characteristic moral teachings of Latitudinarian divines, especially John Tillotson and Edward Fowler, rest on Trinitarian principles first espoused by Cudworth. Not only does this give

credence to the Latitudinarians who have traditionally been viewed as intellectually light-weight, but also creates a fuller understanding of the political and theological context of the comprehension and toleration debates in which the Latitudinarians played a central role. If the theological and Trinitarian context which lies behind these debates is fully understood it is possible, I believe, to recognise the thought of Ralph Cudworth as providing the theological and intellectual core to these early defences of ethical self-determination and liberal individualism.

Appendix – Cudworth's Freewill Manuscripts

A.1. Introduction

The purpose of this brief appendix is to describe the form, style, composition and age of Cudworth's freewill manuscripts. Cudworth's freewill manuscripts are recognised to be the British Library Additional Manuscripts 4978-4982. In this thesis I have also included *FM*.4983, which is traditionally titled 'On the Eternity of the Torments,' as part of this group because it deals, in brief comments made by Cudworth, with many of the issues dealt with in *FM*.4978-4982. Of this collection the manuscript which most obviously stands alone is *FM*.4978. It is the only one of the complete manuscripts to have been published, as *A Treatise of Freewill* in 1838 in an edition by John Allen. Of the remaining manuscripts by far the most substantial and complete manuscripts are *FM*.4979 and *FM*.4980 which both run to well over 250 folios each. *FM*.4981 contains two distinct sections. The first section covers the vast majority of the pages being a sustained attack on 'divine fatalism.' Added to the end of this volume is a summary chapter of his arguments on freewill of 11 folios in length. This has recently been published as 'On the Nature of Liberum Arbitrium' in an edition by J.L.Breteau which appears as an appendix to the 1997 collection, *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context*.[1] Finally *FM*.4982 is a collection of three shorter, and unrelated sections of manuscript which have been bound by the British Library into one volume.

---

[1] Ralph Cudworth, 'Additional Manuscript no.4981 (On the Nature of Liberum Arbitrium),' introduced by J.L.Breteau, in *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context*, ed. G.A.J. Rogers et al (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1997), pp.219-231.

To date the only comprehensive survey of these manuscripts appears as an appendix to John Passmore's *Ralph Cudworth – An Interpretation*. In this Passmore attempts to place the manuscripts into chronological order based on the differing handwriting styles within the manuscripts. This ordering is based on what Passmore describes as the 'natural assumption' that there was a steady and identifiable development in Cudworth's writing from a traditional Elizabethan 'secretary' hand, to a more modern 'Italian' or 'Italic' hand. In this analysis Passmore concentrates particularly in Cudworth's inconsistent use of the letters 'c' and 'e.' Using this method Passmore categorises the freewill manuscripts into four distinct groups:

Group 1: *FM*.4982 Bk.II, *FM*.4980 (old 'c' and 'e').

Group 2: *FM*.4982 Bk.III, *FM*.4979, *FM*.4981 (erratic 'c' and old 'e').

Group 3: *FM*.4978 (new 'c' and old 'e').

Group 4: *FM*.4982 Bk.I (new 'c' and erratic 'e')

Passmore's thesis is based on two assumptions. Firstly that Cudworth's handwriting style changed gradually and consistently over this time. This is possible, Passmore claims, if one compares Cudworth's letters with his manuscripts. Secondly, Passmore assumes that Cudworth used the same writing style in both his letters and his manuscripts.

Although this thesis is persuasive it does begin to fall-down upon examination. Passmore struggles to explain why Cudworth's hand will change between several types in one page. Passmore explains this by suggesting that Cudworth may have begun a passage in an older style halfway down a page and then

304

returned to the same sheet some years to fill in around this initial work in what Passmore judges to be a later hand.[2] Despite the peculiarities of Cudworth's working habits I believe that Passmore's explanation of how Cudworth wrote his manuscripts can be dismissed for four reasons. Firstly, if we are to believe Passmore's assertion that Cudworth began sections half way down a page at some point and then return to the manuscript some years later to complete the process, Cudworth was very consistent in this practice. There are, by my reckoning, very few sections of the freewill manuscripts which begin half way down a page with no text around it. In the most substantial manuscripts, that is *FM.4979* and *FM.4980*, Cudworth uses all the pages available to him. Secondly Passmore's theory cannot explain why Cudworth on occasions corrects and amends sections written in 'Italic' hand in what he judges to be the earlier 'secretary' hand. Thirdly, Passmore's theory cannot explain satisfactorily how and why Cudworth's hand often changes abruptly mid-sentence. Such changes would, I believe better explained by a change of stylus rather than by a baroque working habit.[3] Fourthly, as we shall come on to see, there are philosophical similarities between certain manuscripts, which are not held in others, which would appear to transcend the groupings suggested by Passmore's analysis. This is particularly the case with the obvious similarities which exist between *FM.4978* and *FM.4980*, which Passmore places in his Groups 1 and 3 respectively.

Although Passmore's analysis is instructive I think, for the reasons outlined above, it has to be viewed as flawed. I will below lay out the evidence for a more detailed analysis of Cudworth's freewill manuscripts. To do this I will examine not

---

[2] Passmore, *Cudworth*, p.108.
[3] See *FM.4979*, fol.194; *FM.4981* fols 51,79.

only the handwriting style, but also paper watermarks, Cudworth's references to published works, and the internal arguments of the manuscripts to establish a new chronology for Cudworth's freewill manuscripts.

A.2. Handwriting and Style

Although I do not hold to Passmore's handwriting thesis as a means of dating the manuscripts it is instructive to examine the differing styles of handwriting that Cudworth uses within the manuscripts to allow us to understand more fully the method Cudworth employed whilst composing his manuscripts. Cudworth's hand falls into three distinct styles: style [1] is a plain Italic script, style [2] is an angular secretary hand, and style [3] (which is almost exclusively in *FM*.4979) is a rounder secretary hand. It has been suggested that [3] is that of an amanuensis. However I would argue that all three hands are Cudworth's. Evidence for this comes in two forms. Firstly, there exists in more than one hand a common spelling inconsistency. Cudworth has a tendency at times to reverse the letters within a word on certain occasions. Two clear examples of this appear in *FM*.4979 where both [2] and [3] reverse the letters 'i' and 'n' within a word. On fol.16 Cudworth uses [3] to spell 'contingent,' 'contnigent,' then on fol.21 he uses [2] to spell 'in,' 'ni.' Secondly, the evidence linking the all three handwriting styles to Cudworth comes in the manner that the styles change abruptly within the text. As already stated, Passmore explains this as an idiosyncrasy in Cudworth's working method. However the fact that these styles often change mid-sentence would appear suggest a change in stylus, rather than a change in the time of composition or penman. Three examples of this are,

firstly, *FM*.4979 fol.194 where [3] changes to [1], second, again in *FM*.4979, fol.194, where [2] changes to [1] mid-sentence, and thirdly *FM*.4981 fol.47 where [1] changes to [2].

If we accept, as this evidence would seem to show, that all three hands are Cudworth's this gives us an insight into Cudworth's working methods. Generally speaking the manuscripts are written in long sections of continuous prose on the recto side of each sheet. This is almost always done in a single style, most commonly style [1]. These sections appear to have been written in long single sessions with Cudworth making little in terms of correction of amendment as he wrote. There are also, in contrast to Cudworth's published works, relatively few direct quotes, in stark contrast to the *TISU*. Following the writing of the manuscripts Cudworth then appears to have come back to the manuscripts at a later point to correct and amend his text. These amendments are generally written in style [2]. Cudworth marks the existing script with a mark, usually a capatalised letter of either the Roman or Greek alphabet. He then adds comments of extra information on the facing, verso page. The fact that Cudworth often mixes the symbols by which he mark amendments and alterations on the same page (i.e. in *FM*.4979 fols.47b-48 where Cudworth uses both Roman and Greek letters to mark amendments) suggests that Cudworth returned to and revised these manuscripts more than once.

A.3. Paper

Cudworth's manuscripts are written on three different sizes of paper bound into booklets of differing length. Most, that is *FM*.4980-4982 are written on sheets that are approximately 14.5" by 9',' *FM*.4979 is on 12" by 8" paper, and *FM*.4978 is on 9" by 7" paper. If we examine the watermarks of these manuscripts it is possible to give rough start dates after which the manuscripts were written. Although this is rather approximate and inexact, it does add to the picture of how and when Cudworth wrote the manuscripts. All the volumes, except *FM*.4982 which is a collection of 3 separate sections collated together by a later librarian, use the same water mark throughout the volume, consistent across the booklets that make up that volume. This would seem to back up my premise that the manuscripts were composed by Cudworth as single projects and not dipped in and out of as Passmore suggests. The approximate dates suggested by the watermarks are as follows. Both *FM*.4980 and the first section of *FM*.4982 use a coat of arms water mark which originates after 1680,[4] *FM*.4981 uses a fleur-de-lis water mark dating from after 1670,[5] and *FM*.4979 uses a 'foolscap' watermark dating from around 1671.[6]

A.4. Reference to published works and authors

Throughout the manuscripts Cudworth constantly refers to other authors, most notably and consistently, Thomas Hobbes. Cudworth does refer explicitly to the

---

[4] Edward Heawood, *Watermarks of the 17th and 18th Centuries* (The Paper Publications Society, Hilversum, 1950), no.678.
[5] Ibid., no.1785.
[6] Ibid., no.2003.

published debates between Hobbes and Bishop Bramhall, however, as the last of these, Bramhall's *Castigations of Mr Hobbes*, was published in 1658, this does not assist us in the accurate dating of the manuscripts. However if we examine not simply the publications that Cudworth refers to, but also the manner with which he refers to them, we are able to draw more definitive conclusions over the dating of Cudworth's manuscripts. The only manuscript this form of evidence is helpful with is *FM*.4979. Firstly in *FM*.4979 Cudworth describes Hobbes as 'the Late author of Necessity.'[7] This could be simply refer Hobbes as the resent author of works on necessity. However if it referred to the 'Late author' as the deceased author, then this would place this manuscript after Hobbes' death in 1679. Secondly Cudworth describes Hobbes' philosophy as making God a 'Leviathan or Behemoth.'[8] This mirrors Cudworth's style in the *TISU* where he says that the civil sovereign is 'no Leviathan.'[9] What places the composition of *FM*.4979 later than the composition of the *TISU* is the fact that Hobbes' work *Behemoth*, was not published until after Hobbes' death in 1679.

A.5. Internal comparisons

Although Cudworth's freewill manuscripts are generally seen as a single unit it is possible to differentiate between the different manuscripts. Although it is not possible to use these internal differences to suggest definitively which manuscripts were written first, by examining the manner with which specific arguments develop

---

[7] *FM*.4979, fol.125.
[8] Ibid., fol.149.
[9] *TISU* p.896.

within the manuscripts it is possible to surmise that some manuscripts develop and expand ideas suggested in a previous manuscript.

It is possible to tentatively link *FM.4979* with the first section of *FM.4981*. This link is made by Passmore who shows that the reference in *FM.4981* to a second chapter on divine prerogative is almost certainly to the second chapter of *FM.4979*.[10] This link would also appear to be logical as *FM.4981* and *FM.4979* deal broadly with the differing problems of divine and mechanical fatalism respectively. This group, which I shall describe as Group I, can be differentiated from the other manuscripts – in particular *FM.4980* – by the use of further internal evidence. Cudworth a more sophisticated philosophical vocabulary in 4980 than in Group I to describe human agency and moral faculties. The nature of these arguments within Cudworth's manuscripts has been discussed at length in Chapter Five. The main difference comes from Cudworth's additional use in *FM.4980* of the term 'epoloustic' in addition to the terms 'autokinsey' and 'heterokinsey,' which both appear in the manuscripts in Group I. The term 'epoloustic' also appears in *FM.4978*.

These two pieces of internal evidence would seem to suggest that *FM.4978* and *FM.4980* can be placed together as a group – what I will call Group II. This leaves the individual sections bound together in *FM.4982* unaccounted for by this grouping. Although Passmore suggests that the first section of *FM.4982* could be linked to Group I, there is nothing to link the other manuscripts bound together in *FM.4982* to the composition of the other, more substantial manuscripts.

---

[10] Passmore, *Cudworth*, p.111.

A.6. Conclusion

Passmore argues that some of these manuscripts 'were probably written before the appearance of the *True Intellectual System*, perhaps a good many years earlier.'[11] I believe that the evidence as outlined above shows this assertion to be incorrect. Although it would be naïve to think of the freewill manuscripts as being synonymous the suggested third section Cudworth's entire *Intellectual System*, it is possible, I believe, to show that the manuscripts were composed after the completion of the *TISU* in 1671. This would therefore substantiate claim I make in Chapter Five that the manuscripts should be read in the light of the philosophical and theological principles which Cudworth outlines in the *TISU*. It is, however, I believe not possible from the present evidence to order the manuscripts other than as two different groups of manuscripts which Cudworth worked on some time after 1671 and, in the case of Group II, after Hobbes' death in 1679.

That being said I would argue that Group I, on the balance of the evidence, would appear to be the fuller and more philosophically sophisticated account of freewill of the two groups of manuscripts outlined above. This is merely conjecture made on the rather flimsy evidence of the more complete forms of the manuscripts as works in their own right (in particular when *FM.4979* and *FM.4980* are directly compared.) If this conjecture is correct then that would push the production of Group I into the 1680s, after the composition of Group II. If this theory is correct then it is possible to suggest that *FM.4978* is an abridgment of the ideas of *FM.4980*. This then could have been used by Cudworth to either create interest for the later publication of *FM.4980*, or as a more manageable version of Cudworth's

---

[11] Ibid., p.112.

fullest account of what Cudworth entitles, *Libero Arbitrio*, which we find in

FM.4980.

Bibliography

1. Manuscripts Consulted

Cambridge: Cambridge University Library (CUL)
Mm.1.38: *Notes on the Expulsion and Recantation of Daniel Scargil.*
Mm.5.45: *Notes on the Masters of God's House and Christ's College.*

Cambridge: Christ's College
Box 77: *Notes on Ralph Cudworth including letters from John Cudworth Whitebrook to John Peile, Master of Christ's.*
John Mitchell, *Personalities of Christ's.*

Cambridge: Emmanuel College
Manuscript 48: *Directions for a Student of the University.*

London: British Library (BL)
Additional Manuscript, 4297: *Miscellaneous papers of Thomas Birch.*
Additional Manuscripts, 4978, 4979, 4980, 4981, 4982, 4983: *Cudworth's Freewill Maunscripts.*

Oxford: Bodleian Library
Tanner Manuscripts, 39, 44, 46, 49, 58, 92, 290.

2. Primary Sources

Anon., *An historical Account of Comprehension and Toleration. From the Old PURITAN to the new LATITUDINARIAN; with their continued projects and Designs, in opposition to our more orthodox Establishment* (London, 1706).

Anon., *Great and Good news for the Church of England, If they please to accept thereof: or the Latitudinarian Christians Most Humble Address and Advice To all the Imposing Clergy Men of the said church by What names or Titles soever Dignified or Distinguished* (London, 1688).

Aquinas, Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, 5 vols, translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Christian Classics, Westminster MD, 1981).

Augustine, *The City of God*, translated by Henry Bettenson (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1984).

Burnet, Gilbert, *A supplement to Burnet's History of my own time*, edited by H.C. Foxcroft (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1902).

   History of My own time, 2 vols, edited by Osmund Airy (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1897-1900).

Calvin, Jean, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols, translated by Henry Beveridge (James Clark & Co., London, 1962).

Cicero, *De Fato*, translated by H. Rackham (Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1960).

The Nature of the Gods, translated P.G. Walsh (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997).

Conway, Anne, *The Conway Letters: The Correspondence of Anne, Viscountess Conway, Henry More, and their friends, 1642-1684*, edited by Marjorie Nicolson, revised by Sarah Hutton (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992).

Cudworth, Ralph, 'Additional Manuscript no.4981' (On the Nature of Liberum Arbitrium) introduced by J.L. Breteau, in *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context*, edited by G.A.J. Rogers et al (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1997), pp.219-231.

A Discourse concerning the true notion of the Lord's supper (London, 1670).

A Sermon Preached before the House of Commons. March 31st 1647 in *The Cambridge Platonists*, edited by C.A. Patrides (Edward Arnold, London, 1969).

A Sermon Preached to the Honourable Society of Lincolnes-Inne (London, 1664).

A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Reality, edited by Edward Chandler (London, 1731).

A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Reality, edited by Sarah Hutton (CUP, Cambridge, 1996).

A Treatise on Freewill, edited by J. Allen (London, 1838).

A Treatise on Freewill in *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Reality*, edited by Sarah Hutton (CUP, Cambridge, 1996).

'Preface' to *A Sermon Preached before the Honourable The House of Commons, On March 31st, 1647: Being a day of Public Humiliation* (London, 1647).

Systema intellectuale huius universi, translated by Johann Lorenz Mosheim (Jena, 1733).

The True Intellectual System of the Universe: The First Part; Wherein, All the Reason and Philosophy of Atheism is Confuted; and Its Impossibility Demonstrated (London, 1678).

The Union of Christ and the Church in a shadow (London, 1642).

Cudworth the elder, Ralph, *A Commentarie or Exposition, upon the first Chapters of the Epistle to the Galatians: penned by ... Mr. W. Perkins. Now published for the benefit of the Church, and continued with a supplement upon the sixth chapter, by Rafe Cudworth* (Cambridge, 1604).

Culverwell, Nathaniel, *An Elegant and Learned Discourse on the Light of Nature*, edited by Robert A Green and Hugh MacCallum (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1971).

Descartes, René, *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, 2 vols, translated by Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross (CUP, Cambridge, 1967).

Fowler, Edward, *Certain Propositions By which the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity Is so Explained, According to the Ancient Fathers as to speak it not Contradictory to Natural Reason* (London, 1719).

> *The Principles and Practices, Of certain Moderate Divines of the Church of England. (greatly mis-understood) Truly Represented and Defended; Wherein (by the way) Some Controversies, of no mean importance, and succinctly discussed in A Free Discourse between to Intimate Friends* (London, 1670).

Gibbon, Edward, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 7 vols (Methuen & Co., London, 1906).

Hobbes, Thomas, *Behemoth or The Long Parliament*, edited by Ferdinand Tonnie (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1990).

> *Leviathan*, edited by C.B. MacPherson (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968).

> *Man and Citizen (De Homine and De Cive)*, edited and translated by Bernard Gert, Charles T.Wood, and T.S.K. Scott-Craig (Hackett, Indianapolis, 1991).

> 'Of Liberty and Necessity' in *Hobbes and Bramhall on Liberty and Necessity*, edited by Vere Chappell (CUP, Cambridge, 1999).

> 'The Question concerning Liberty and Necessity' in *Hobbes and Bramhall on Liberty and Necessity*, edited by Vere Chappell (CUP, Cambridge, 1999).

Holdsworth, Richard, *Praelectiones Theologicae*, edited by Richard Pearson (London, 1661).

Jackson, Thomas, *The Works of Thomas Jackson, D.D.* 12 vols (OUP, Oxford, 1844).

[Leslie, Charles], *The Charge of Socinianism Against Dr Tillotson considered. In Examination of Some Sermons He has lately Published on purpose to clear Himself from that Imputation...By a True Son of the Church* (Edinburgh, 1695).

Locke, John, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Peter H. Nidditch (OUP, Oxford, 1975).

> *Some Thoughts concerning Education*, edited by John W. and Jean Yolton (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989).

> *Two Treatises of Government*, edited by Peter Laslett (CUP, Cambridge, 1960).

> *Writings on Religion*, edited by Victor Nuovo (OUP, Oxford, 2002).

Milton, John, *Political Writings*, edited by Martin Dzelzanis (CUP, Cambridge, 1991).

More, Henry, *An Antidote to Atheism or, An Appeal to the Naturall Faculties of the Mind of Man, Whether there be not a God*, in *A Collection of Philosophical Writings* (London, 1662).

> *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness* (London, 1660).

> *The Complete Poems of Dr Henry More (1614-1687)*, edited by Alexander B. Grosart (Georg Olms, Hildesheim, 1969).

P[atrick], S[imon], *A brief account of the new sect of Latitude-men together with some reflections Upon the New Philosophy* (London, 1662).

Pierce, Thomas, *Αυτοχαταχρισις or Self-condemnation* (London, 1658).

Plato, *Crito*, translated by Hugh Tredinick, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1961).

> *Euthyphro*, translated by Lane Cooper, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1961).

> *Laws*, translated by A.E. Taylor, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1961).

> *Meno*, translated by W.K.C. Guthrie, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1961).

> *Phaedrus*, translated by R Hackworth, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1961).

> *Timaeus*, translated by Benjamin Jowett, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1961).

> *Theatetus*, translated by F.M. Cornford, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1961).

Plotinus, *The Enneads*, translated by A.H. Armstrong (Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1967-1988).

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *The Social Contract*, translated by G.D.H. Cole (J.M.Dent, London, 1993).

Smith, John, *Selected Discoursed* (London, 1821).

Tillotson, John, *Sermons Concerning the Divinity and Incarnation of our Blessed Saviour*
London, 1693).

> *The Works of the Most Reverend Dr John Tillotson, Late Archbishop of Canterbury:*
> *Containing Fifty Four Sermons and Discourses, on several Occasions. Together with the*
> *Rule of Faith* (London, 1696).

Turner, John, *A Discourse Concerning the Messia* ... *To which is prefixed a large preface,*
asserting and explaining the Doctrine of the Blessed Trinity against the Late writer of the
Intellectual System (London, 1685).

Whichcote, Benjamin, *Moral and Religious Aphorisms*, edited by W.R. Inge (Elkin
Mathews & Marrot, Ltd., London, 1930).

> 'The Manifestation of Christ and the Deification of Man,' in *The Cambridge*
> *Platonists*, edited by C.A. Patrides (Edward Arnold, London, 1967).

> 'The Unity of the Church maintained by sincere Christians,' in *The Cambridge*
> *Platonists*, edited by C.A. Patrides (Edward Arnold, London, 1967).

> 'The Use of Reason in the Matter of Religion,' in *The Cambridge Platonists*,
> edited by C.A. Patrides (Edward Arnold, London, 1967).

Whichcote, Benjamin, and Anthony Tuckney, 'Eight Letters of Dr Anthony
Tuckney and Benjamin Whichcote,' in *Moral and Religious Aphorisms*, edited
by Samuel Salter (London, 1753).

Worthington, John, *The Diary and Correspondence of Dr John Worthington*, edited by
James Crossely and Richard Copley Christie (The Chetham Society,
Manchester, 1847-1886).

3. Secondary Sources

Anon., 'Memoirs of Ralph Cudworth D.D.,' *Author of The Intellectual System,'* The
Present state of the Republic of Letters, XVII, January 1736, pp.24-38.

Aaron, Richard, *John Locke* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971).

Armstrong, A.H. ed., *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*
(CUP, Cambridge, 1967).

> 'Plotinus,' in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*,
> edited by A.H. Armstrong (CUP, Cambridge, 1967), pp.195-268.

Armstrong, Brian, *Calvinism and the Amyrant Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and*
Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France (University of Wisconsin Press,
Madison, 1969).

Ashcraft, Richard, 'Anti-clericism and authority in Lockean political thought,' in
The Margins of Orthodoxy: Heterodox Writing and Cultural Response, 1660-1750,
edited by Roger D. Lund (CUP, Cambridge, 1995), pp.73-96.

'Latitudinarianism and toleration: historical myth versus political history,' in
Philosophy, Science and Religion in England, 1640-1700 edited by Richard Kroll et
al. (CUP, Cambridge, 1992), pp.151-177.

Baldi, M, 'Cudworth versus Descartes: Platonism et sens commun dans la critique
de *Meditations*,' in *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context* edited by
G.A.J. Rogers et al (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1997), pp.173-83.

Barnes, Jonathan, *The Ontological Argument* (MacMillan London, 1972).

Beiser, Frederick C, *The Sovereignty of Reason: The defence of rationality in the early English
Enlightenment* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996).

Bendell, Sarah, Christopher Brooks, and Patrick Collinson, *A History of Emmanuel
College* (Boydell, Woodbridge, 1999).

Benz, Ernst, *The Mystical Sources of German Romantic Philosophy*, translated by Blair
Reynolds & Eunice M. Paul (Pickwick Publications, Allinson Park, PA,
1983).

Birch, Thomas, 'An Account of the Life and Writings of R. Cudworth D.D.,' in
Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (Richard Priestly,
London, 1820), first published in 1743, pp.2-37.

Bray, John, *Theodore Beza's Doctrine of Predestination* (B.De Graaf, Nieuwkoop, 1975).

Breward, I, 'The Importance of Perkins,' in *The Journal of Religious History* IV:2
(1966), pp.113-28.

Bush Jr, Sargent, Carl J Rasmusse, *The Library of Emmanuel College Cambridge, 1584-
1637* (CUP, Cambridge, 1986).

Cassirer, Ernst, *The Platonic Renaissance in England*, translated by James P. Pettegrove
(Thomas Nelson and Sons, London, 1953).

Chadwick, Henry, 'Philo and the beginnings of Christian thought,' in *The Cambridge
History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, edited by A.H. Armstrong
(CUP, Cambridge, 1967), pp137-92.

Champion, J.A.I., *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and its Enemies,
1670-1730* (CUP, Cambridge, 1992).

Clark, J.C.D., *The English Society 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political
Practice during the Ancien Regime* (CUP, Cambridge, 1985).

Coffey, John, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558-1689* (Longmans,
Harlow, 2000).

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Coleridge on the Seventeenth-Century*, edited by Roberta Florence (Duke University Press, Durham NC, 1955).

Colie, Rosalie L., *Light and Enlightenment : A Study of the Cambridge Platonists and the Dutch Arminians* (CUP, Cambridge, 1957).

Colish, Marcia L., *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, 2 vols (Brill, Leiden, 1985).

Collingwood, R.G., *An Autobiography* (OUP, Oxford, 1939).

Cope, Jackson I., "'The Cupri-Cosmits:" Glanvill on Latitudinarian Anti-Enthusiasm,' in *The Huntington Library Quarterly* XVII (1954), pp.269-86.

Copleston, Frederick, *A History of Philosophy*, 9 vols (Burns and Oates, London, 1946-1975).

Costello, William T., *The Scholastic Curriculum at Early Seventeenth-century Cambridge* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1958).

Cottingham, John, *A Descartes Dictionary* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1993).

    Descartes (Blackwell, Oxford, 1986).

    'Force, Motion, and Causality: More's critique of Descartes,' in *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context*, edited by G.A.J.Rogers, et al. (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1997), pp.159-71.

Coudert, Allison, 'Henry More, the Kabbalah, and the Quakers,' in *Philosophy Science Religion*, edited by Richard Kroll et al. (CUP, Cambridge, 1992), pp.31-67.

    The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth-century: The Life and thought of Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614-1698) (Brill, Leiden, 1999).

Cragg, G.R., *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason: A Study of the Changes in Religious Thought within the Church of England, 1660-1700* (CUP, Cambridge, 1950).

    ed. *The Cambridge Platonists* (OUP, Oxford, 1968).

    The Church and the Age of Reason, 1648-1789 (Hodder & Stoughton, Bristol, 1962).

Cranston, Maurice, *John Locke: A Biography* (OUP, Oxford, 1985).

Darwall, Stephen, *British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought': 1640-1740* (CUP, Cambridge, 1995).

Davenport, Paul Miles, *Moral Divinity with Tincture of Christ? An Interpretation of the Theology of Benjamin Whichcote, Founder of Cambridge Platonism* (H.Th. Peeters, Nimegen, 1972).

Davis, Horton, *Worship and Theology in England: From Andrewes to Baxter and Fox,
1603-1690* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1975).

Dixon, Philip, *Nice and Hot Disputes: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century*
(T&T Clark, London, 2003).

Dockrill, D.W., 'The Authority of the Fathers in the Great Trinitarian Debates of
the Sixteen Nineties,' in *Studia Patristica*, XVIII:4 (1990), pp.335-47

'The Fathers and the Theology of the Cambridge Platonists,' in *Studia
Patristica*, XVII:1 (1982). pp.427-39.

'The Heritage of Patristic Platonism in Seventeenth-Century English
Philosophical Theology,' in *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context*,
edited by G.A.J. Rogers et al. (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1997), pp.55-77.

Donelly S.J., John Patrick, *Calvinism and Scholasticism in Vermigi's doctrine of Man and
Grace* (Brill, Leiden, 1976).

Dunn, John, 'The Identity of the History of Ideas,' in *Philosophy, Politics, and Society,*
Fourth Series, edited by Peter Laslett, W.G. Runicimann, and Quentin
Skinner (Blackwell, Oxford, 1972), pp.158-73.

*The Political Thought of John Locke: A Historical Account of the Argument of the 'Two
Treatises of Government* (CUP, Cambridge, 1969).

'What is living and What is Dead in the Political Theory of John Locke,' in
Interpreting Political Responsibility: Essays 1981-1990 (Polity Press, Cambridge,
1990), pp.9-25.

Emilson, Eyjolfur Krajalar, *Plotinus and Sense Perception: A Philosophical Study* (CUP,
Cambridge, 1988).

Fletcher, H.F., *The Intellectual Development of John Milton*, 2 vols (University of Illinois
Press, Urbanna, 1961).

Friedman, Jerome, *Michael Servetus: A Case Study in Total Heresy* (Librairie Droz S.A.,
Geneva, 1978).

Gasccoigne, John, *Cambridge in the Age of the Enlightenment: Science, Religion, and Politics
From the Restoration to the French Revolution* (CUP, Cambridge, 1989).

Goldie, Mark, 'The Reception of Hobbes,' in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought,
1450-1700*, edited by J.H.Burns, with the assistance of Mark Goldie (CUP,
Cambridge, 1991), pp.589-615.

Goldie, Mark, and John Spurr, 'Politics and the Restoration Parish: Edward Fowler
and the Struggle for St Giles Cripplegate,' in *English Historical Review* (1994),
pp.572-596

Greene, Robert A., 'Whichcote, the Candle of the Lord, and Synderisis,' in *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, 52 (1991), pp.617-644.

Gysi, Lydia, *Platonism and Cartesianism in the Philosophy of Ralph Cudworth* (Herbert Lang, Bern, 1962).

Hall, A. Rupert, *Henry More* (CUP, Cambridge, 1990).

'Henry More and the Scientific Revolution,' in *Henry More (1614-1687) Tercentenary Studies*, edited by Sarah Hutton (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1991), p.37-54.

Hall, Roland, 'New Words and Antedatings from Cudworth's "Treatise on Freewill,"' in *Notes and Queries*, 205, (1960), pp.427-32.

'Cudworth: More New Words,' in *Notes and Queries*, 208, (1963), pp.313-14.

'Cudworth and his Contemporaries: New words and antedatings,' in *Notes and Queries*, 220, (1975), pp.313-14.

Hamlyn, D.W., *The Penguin History of Western Philosophy* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1987).

Hampsher-Monk, Iain, 'The History of Political Thought and the Political History of Thought,' in *The History of Political Thought in National Context*, edited by Dario Castiglione and Iain Hampsher-Monk (CUP, Cambridge, 2001), pp.159-74.

Harper, George, *The Neoplatonism of William Blake* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1961).

Harris, Ian, *The Mind of John Locke: A Study of Political Theory in its Intellectual Setting* (CUP, Cambridge, 1994).

Harrison, Peter, *'Religion' and Religions in the English Enlightenment* (CUP, Cambridge, 1990).

Heawood, Edward, *Watermarks of the 17th and 18th Centuries* (The Paper Publications Society, Hilversum, 1950).

Hedley, Douglas, *Coleridge, Philosophy and Religion: Aids to Reflection and the Mirror of the Spirit* (CUP, Cambridge 2000).

'The Platonick Trinity: Philology and Divinity in Cudworth's Philosophy of Religion,' in *Philogie und Erkenntis, Beitrage zu Begriff und Problem frühneauzeitlicher Philologie*, edited by Ralph Häfner (Max Neimeyer Veralg, Tübingen, 2001), pp.247-63.

Henry, John, 'Henry More versus Robert Boyle: The Spirit of Nature and the Nature of Providence,' in *Henry More (1614-1687): Tercentenary Studies*, edited Sarah Hutton (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1990), pp.56-69.

The Scientific Revolution and the Origins of Modern Science (Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2002).

Hill, Christopher, *Milton and the English Revolution* (Viking Press, New York, 1977).

The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1991).

Hutton, Sarah, *Anne Conway* (CUP, Cambridge, 2004).

'Aristotle and the Cambridge Platonists: the case of Cudworth,' in *Philosophy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Conversations with Aristotle*, edited by C.T. Blackwell and S. Kusukawa (Ashgate, London, 2000), pp.337-49.

'Classicism and Baroque - A Note on Mosheim's footnotes to Cudworth's The True Intellectual System of the Universe,' in *Johann Lorenz Mosheim: Theologie in sannhugsfeld von Philosophie, Philologie und Geschicte, 1693-1755*, edited by Martin Mulsow (Harrasovitz, Weisbaden, 1997), pp.211-27.

ed., *Henry More (1614-1687) Tercentenary Studies* (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1991).

'Liberty and Self-determination: Ethics Power and Action in Ralph Cudworth,' in *Del necessario al possible. Determinismo e Liberta nel penserio Anglo-Olandese de XVII seculo*, edited by L.Simonutti (Angeli, 2001), pp.81-97.

'Plato in the Tudor Academies,' in *Sir Thomas Gresham and Gresham College: Studies in the Intellectual History of London on the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, edited by Francis Ames-Lewis (Ashgate, Aldershot, 1999), pp.106-24.

'Platonism, Stoicism and Scepticism and Classical Imitation,' in *A Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*, edited by Michael Hattaway (OUP, Oxford, 2000), pp.44-57.

'Ralph Cudworth: God, Mind, and Nature,' in *Religion, Reason and Nature in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Robert Crocker (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 2001), pp.61-76.

'The Neoplatonic Roots of Arianism: Ralph Cudworth and Theophilus Gale,' in *Socinianism and its Role in the Culture of XVI-th to XVIII-th Centuries* edited by L. Szczucki and Z. Ogonowski (PWN - Polish Scientific Publisher, Warsaw, 1983), pp.139-45.

'Thomas Jackson, Oxford Platonist, and William Twisse,' in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 39 (1978), pp.635-52

Illiffe, Rob, 'Prosecuting Athanasius: Protestant Forensics and the Mirrors of Persecution,' in *Newton and Newtonianism: New Studies*, edited by James E. Force and Sarah Hutton (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 2004), pp.113-54.

Inge, W.R., 'Introduction,' to Benjamin Whichcote, *Moral and Religious Aphorisms*

(Elkin Matthews, London, 1930), pp.iii-x.

The Platonic Tradition in English Religious Thought (Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1926).

The Philosophy of Plotinus, 2 vols (Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1918).

Jayne, Sears, *Plato in Renaissance England* (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1995).

Jones, David Martin, *Conscience and Allegiance in Seventeenth-Century England: The Political Significance of Oaths and Engagements* (University of Rochester Press, Rochester, NY, 1999).

Jones, Rufus M., *Spiritual Reformers of the 16th and 17th Centuries* (Macmillan, London, 1928).

Katz, David S., 'Henry More and Jews,' in *Henry More (1614-1687): Tercentenary Studies*, edited by Sarah Hutton (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1991), pp.173-188.

Kendall, R.T., *Calvin and English Calvinism* (OUP, Oxford, 1979).

Kenny, Courtney, 'Cudworth's Manuscripts on Future Punishment,' in *The Theological Review*, 61 (April 1878), pp.267-280

Kroll, Richard, 'Introduction,' in *Philosophy, Science, and Religion in England, 1640-1700* edited by Richard Kroll, et al. (CUP Cambridge, 1992), pp.1-28.

Kroll, Richard, Richard Ashcraft and Perez Zagorin, *Philosophy, Science, and Religion in England, 1640-1700* (CUP, Cambridge, 1992).

Krook, D, 'The Recantation of Daniel Scargill,' in *Notes and Queries*, 198 (1953). pp.267-280.

Lake, Peter, 'The Laudian Style: Order, Uniformity and the Pursuit of the Beauty of Holiness in the 1630s,' in *The Early Stuart Church, 1603-1642*, edited by Kenneth Fincham (Macmillan, Oxford, 1993), pp.161-185.

Leedham-Greene, E.S., *Books in Cambridge Inventories*, 2 vols (CUP, Cambridge 1986).

Levine, Joseph M., 'Latitudinarians, Neoplatonists and the Ancient Wisdom,' in *Philosophy, Science and Religion in England, 1640-1700*, edited Richard Kroll, et al. (CUP, Cambridge, 1992), pp.85-108.

Linnell, C.L.S., 'Daniel Scargill, "A Penitent Hobbist,"' in *Church Quarterly Review*, 320 (1955), pp.256-65.

Lipton, David R., *Ernst Cassirer: The Dilemma of a Liberal Intellectual in Germany, 1914-33* (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1978).

Locke, Louis G., *Tillotson: A Study on Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Rosenkilde and

Bagger, Copenhagen, 1954).

Lovejoy, Arthur O., 'Kant and the English Platonists,' in *Essays Philosophical and Psychological: In honor of William James by his colleagues at Columbia University* (Longmans, Green and Co., New York, 1908), pp.263-302.

The Great Chain of Being (Harper Row, New York, 1960).

Maclear, James Fulton, 'Popular anticlericism in the Puritan Revolution,' in *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, XVII:4 (1956), pp.443-70

MacPherson, C.B., *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (OUP Oxford, 1962).

Malcolm, Noel, 'Thomas Hobbes and Voluntarist Theology' (PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1982).

Manning, Brian, 'The Levellers and Religion,' in *Radical Religion in the English Revolution*, edited by J.F.MacGregor and B Reay (OUP, Oxford, 1984), pp.65-90.

Marshall, John, *John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility* (CUP, Cambridge, 1994).

Martin, Raymond, and John Barresi, *Naturalization of the Soul: Self and Personal Identity In the Eighteenth-Century* (Routledge, London, 2000).

Martineau, James, *Types of Ethical Theory*, 2 vols (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1885).

Martinich, A.P., *Hobbes: A Biography* (CUP, Cambridge, 1999).

The Two Gods of Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Religion and Politics (CUP, Cambridge, 1992).

McAdoo, H.R., *The Spirit of Anglicanism: A Survey of Anglican Theological method in the Seventeenth century* (Adam and Charles Black, London, 1965).

McGrath, Alister E., *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1990).

Christian Theology: An Introduction (Blackwell, Oxford, 1997).

Reformation Thought: An Introduction (Blackwell, Oxford, 1993).

The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation (Blackwell, Oxford, 1987).

McLachlan, H. John, *Socinianism in the Seventeenth-Century England* (OUP, Oxford, 1951).

McNeill, John T., *The History and Character of Calvinism* (OUP, Oxford, 1954).

Merlan, P, 'Greek Philosophy from Plato to Plotinus,' in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, edited by A.H. Armstrong (CUP, Cambridge, 1970), pp.14-132.

Mill, J.S., *Dissertations and Discussions: Political, Philosophical, and Historical* 4.vols Longmans, Green, Reader, Dyer, London, 1854-1875).

Mintz, Samuel I., *The Hunting of Leviathan: Seventeenth-century Reactions to the Materialism Moral Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes* (CUP, Cambridge, 1962).

Muirhead, John H., *The Platonic Tradition in Anglo-Saxon Philosophy: Studies in the History of Idealism in England and America* (George Allen and Unwin, London, 1931).

Mullet, Michael, *Calvin* (Routledge, London, 1989).

Newsome, David, *Two Classes of Men: Platonism and English and Romantic Thought* (John Murray, London, 1974).

Nicolson, Marjorie, 'Christ's College and the Latitude-Men,' in *Modern Philology*, 27 (1929-1930), pp.35-53

Norbrook, David, *Writing in the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric, and Politics, 1627-1660* (CUP, Cambridge, 1999).

O'Meara, Dominic J., *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993).

Pacchi, Arigo, 'Hobbes and the Problem of God,' in *Perspectives of Thomas Hobbes*, edited by G.A.J. Rogers and Alan Ryan (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1988), pp.171-188.

Parker, T.M., '"Arminianism and Laudianism" in Seventeenth-century England' in *Studies in Church History*, vol.1, edited by C.W. Dugmore and Charles Duggan (Nelson, London, 1964), pp.20-34.

Parkin, Jon, 'Hobbismin the Later 1660s: Daniel Scargill and Samuel Parker,' in *The Historical Journal*, 42 (1999), pp.85-108

Science, Religion, and Politics in Restoration England: Richard Cumberland's De Legibus Naturae (Boydell, Woodbridge, 1999).

Passmore, John, *Ralph Cudworth: An Interpretation* (CUP, Cambridge, 1951).

'The Identity of the History of Philosophy,' in *The Historiography of the History of Philosophy, History and Theory*, Beiheft 5, (1965), pp.1-32.

Patrides, C.A. ed., *The Cambridge Platonists*, (Edward Arnold, London, 1967).

Paul, Robert S., *The Assembly of the Lord: Politics and Religion in the Westminster Assembly and the 'Grand Debate'* (T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1985).

Peile, John, *Biographical Register of Christ's College 1505-1905 and of the earlier foundation, God's house, 1448-1505* (CUP, Cambridge, 1913).

Pocock, J.G.A., *Barbarism and Religion: Volume One, The Enlightenment of Edward Gibbon, 1737-1764* (CUP, Cambridge, 1999).

'Post-Puritan England and the Problem of the Enlightenment,' in *Culture and Politics: From Puritanism to the Enlightenment*, edited by Perex Zagorin (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1980), pp91-111.

The Ancient Constitution and Feudal Law: A study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century (CUP, Cambridge, 1957).

'The History of Political Thought: A Methodological Enquiry,' in *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, Second Series, edited by Peter Laslett, W.G.Runcimann (Blackwell, Oxford, 1967), pp.183-202.

The Political Works of James Harrington (CUP, Cambridge, 1977).

'Time, History, and Eschatology,' *in Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1960), pp.148-201.

'Within the margins: The definitions of orthodoxy,' in *The Margins of Orthodoxy, Heterodox Writing and Cultural Response, 1660-1750*, edited by Roger D. Lund (CUP, Cambridge, 1995), pp.33-53.

Porter, H.C., *Reformation and Reaction in Tudor Cambridge* (CUP, Cambridge, 1958).

Powicke, Frederick J., *The Cambridge Platonists: A Study* (J.M.Dent and Sons, London, 1929).

Redwood, John, *Reason, Ridicule and Religion: The Age of Enlightenment in England, 1660-1750* (Thames and Hudson, London, 1976).

Rist, John, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (CUP, Cambridge, 1967).

Stoic Philosophy (CUP, Cambridge, 1969).

ed. *The Stoics* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978).

Rivers, Isabel, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England*, 2.vols (CUP, Cambridge, 1991-2000).

Rogers, G.A.J., 'Descartes and the English,' in *The Light of Nature: Essays in the History and Philosophy of Science presented to A.C.Crombie*, edited by J.D.North and J.J.Roche (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1985), pp.281-302.

'John Locke: conservative radical' *in The Margins of Orthodoxy: Heterodox Writing and Cultural Response, 1660-1750*, edited by Roger D. und (CUP, Cambridge, 1995), pp.97-116.

'Locke and the Latitude-men: Ignorance as a Ground of Toleration,' in *Philosophy, Science, and Religion in England, 1640-1700*, edited by Richard Kroll, et al. (CUP, Cambridge, 1992), pp.230-52.

'More, Locke, and the Issue of Liberty,' in *Henry More (1614-1687) Tercentenary Studies*, edited by Sarah Hutton (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1991), pp.189-99.

'The Other-worldly philosophers and the real world: The Cambridge Platonists, Theology and Politics,' in *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context: Politics, Metaphysics & Religion*, edited by G.A.J. Rogers, et al. (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1997), pp3-15.

Rogers, G.A.J., J.M.Vienne and Y-C Zarka eds, *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context – Politics, Metaphysics & Religion* (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1997).

Sailor, Danton B., 'Cudworth and Descartes,' in *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, 23 (1962), pp.133-140

Sandbach, F.H., *The Stoics* (Chatto and Windus, London, 1975).

Saveson, J.E., 'Differing Reactions to Descartes among the Cambridge Platonists,' in *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, 21 (1960), pp.560-567

Schmitt, Charles B., *Aristotle and the Renaissance* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1983).

Scott, Dominic, 'Reason, Recollection and the Cambridge Platonists,' in *Platonism and the English Imagination*, edited by Anna Baldwin and Sarah Hutton (CUP, Cambridge, 1994), pp.139-50.

Recollection and Experience: Plato's Theory of Learning and its Successors (CUP, Cambridge, 1995).

Sedley, David, 'Stoicism,' in *The Concise Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Routledge London, 2000).

Selby-Bigge, L.A., ed., *British Moralists*, 2.vols (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1897).

Shapiro, Barbara J., *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study of the Relationship between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law and Literature* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1983).

Skinner, Quentin, 'A Reply to my Critics,' in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics*, edited by James Tully (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1988), pp.231-88.

'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,' in *History and Theory*, VII:1 (1969), pp.3-53.

Visions of Politics, 3.vols. (CUP, Cambridge, 2002).

Sobol, Peter G., 'The Cabala,' in *The History of Science and Religion in the Western Tradition: An Encyclopaedia*, edited by Gary B. Ferngren (Garland, New York, 2000), p.553-55.

Spellman, W.M., *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England, 1660-1770* (University of Georgia Press, Athens GA, 1993).

Spurr, John, 'The Church of England, Comprehension and The Toleration Act of 1689,' in *English Historical Review* 104, (1989), pp.927-946.

"'Latituinarianism"' and the Restoration Church,' in *The Historical Journal*, 31 (1988), pp.61-82.

"'Rational Religion"' in Restoration England,' in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 49 (1988), pp.563-585.

Stough, Charlotte, 'Stoic Determinism and Moral Responsibility,' in *The Stoics*, edited by John Rist, (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978), pp.203-32.

Taliaferro, Charles, *Evidence and Faith: Philosophy and Religion since the Seventeenth-Century* (CUP, Cambridge, forthcoming).

'The Trinity and Natural Reason: Lessons from Cambridge Platonism,' in *The Holy Trinity*, edited by Melville Y. Stewart (Kluwer, Dordrecht, 2003), pp.167-78.

Taylor, Charles, 'The Hermeneutics of Conflict,' in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics*, edited by James Tully (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1988), pp.218-230.

Thomas, Roger, 'Comprehension and Indulgence,' in *From Uniformity to Unity* edited by Geoffrey F. Nuttall and Owen Chadwick (SPCK, London, 1962), pp.189-255.

Tigerstedt, E.N., *The Decline and Fall of the Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato* (Societas Scientiarum Fennica, Helsinki, 1974).

Todd, Richard, 'Stoicism,' in *The History of Science and Religion in the Western Tradition: An Encyclopaedia*, edited by Gary B. Ferngren (Garland, New York, 2000), p.132-33.

Trentmann, John A., 'The Authorship of "Directions for a Student in the Universitie,"' in *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, VII (1978), pp.170-83

Trevor-Roper, H.R., *Archbishop Laud, 1573-1645* (Macmillan, London, 1962).

Catholics, Anglicans, and Puritans (Seeker & Warburg, London, 1987).

'The Religious Origins of the Enlightenment,' in *Religion, the Reformation and*

Social Change (Macmillan, London, 1967), pp.193-236.

Tuck, Richard, 'The Contribution of History,' in *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*, edited by Robert E. Goodwin and Philip Petit (Blackwell, Oxford, 1993), pp.72-89.

Tucker, Robert C., *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (CUP, Cambridge, 1972).

Tulloch, John, *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy on England in the Seventeenth Century*, 2 vols (William Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh, 1874).

Turner, Frank M., *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1981).

Twigg, John, *The University of Cambridge and the English Revolution, 1625-1688* (Boydell Woodbridge, 1990).

Tyacke, Nicholas, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of Arminianism, c.1590-1640* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1987).

> 'Arminianism and English Culture,' in *Britain and the Netherlands, volume 7, Church and State since the Reformation*, edited by A.C.Duke and C.A.Tamse (Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1981), pp.94-117.

> 'Archbishop Laud,' in *The Early Stuart Church, 1603-1642*, edited by Kenneth Fincham (Macmillan, Oxford, 1993), pp.51-69.

Verene, Donald Philip, 'Introduction,' to Ernst Cassirer, *Symbol, Myth, and Culture: Essays and Lectures of Ernst Cassirer, 1935-1945*, edited by Donald Philip Verene (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1979), pp.1-45.

Vickers, Brian, 'Introduction,' to *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, edited by Brian Vickers (CUP, Cambridge, 1984), pp.1-55.

Walker, D.P., *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Duckworth, London, 1972).

Wallace Jr, Dewey D., *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525-1695* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1982).

Wendel, François, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of his Religious Thought*, translated by Philip Maireat (Collins, London, 1963).

White, Peter, *Predestination, Policy, and Polemic: Conflict and Consensus in the English Church from the Reformation to the Civil War* (CUP, Cambridge, 1992).

Wiles, Maurice, *Archetypal Heresy: Arianism through the Centuries* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996).

Wolterstorff, Nicholas, 'John Locke's Epistemological Piety: Reason is the Candle of the Lord,' in *Faith and Philosophy*, 1 (1984), pp.572-591

Yates, Francis A., *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1964).

Yeats,W.B., *Collected Poems of W.B.Yeats* (Macmillan, London, 1933).

Zaehner, R.C., *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane. An Inquiry into some Varieties of Praeternatural Experience* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1957).

II.3.ii. Emmanuel College and Puritan Cambridge in the early-seventeenth century

The anti-Calvinist debates of the 1590s should be understood as existing within the general Puritan outlook of Cambridge of the time. Such was the power of the Puritan tradition of Cambridge that many of the graduates of the University set out to the parishes with a missionary zeal to maintain the Puritanism they had experienced in Cambridge. Parishes were seen as 'the chief animating force for the spread of Puritanism among all classes.'[54] This meant that Cambridge, and also Oxford, were not separate from, but integrally involved with, the religious and political climate of the country. Control of the theological output of the University could also influence the nature of religious observance and political will within the country, so much so that Cambridge and Oxford were described as 'nurseries and foundations of our Church and commonwealth.'[55] Consequently, the control of colleges and internal University appointments became matters of national political interest. The headship of a college was a recognised stepping stone to higher religious and political office. It was common for there to be Royal interference in the elections of the heads of colleges.[56]

In Cambridge the most enthusiastically Puritan college was Emmanuel. Although fellows and graduates of Emmanuel were often sympathetic to Calvinist theology, it is a common mistake to see the Puritanism of Emmanuel, and the

---

[54] John Twigg, *The University of Cambridge and the English Revolution, 1625-1688*, (Boydell & Cambridge University Library, Woodbridge, 1990) p.15.

[55] Quoted in Ibid., p.3. In a similar vein Gilbert Burnet, who was, unusually for high ranking Anglican clergyman, not a graduate of the two English Universities, commented that, 'Oxford and Cambridge are two such vast bodies, in which the whole nation is so much concerned.' See Gilbert Burnet, *A supplement to Burnet's History of my own time*, ed. H.C. Foxcroft (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1902), p.214.

[56] Twigg, *The University of Cambridge* pp.7-8.