The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics

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Introduction

Are human beings naturally good or evil? Are we naturally drawn to virtue or to vice? Is it natural for us to do the right thing, or must we resist something in our nature in order to do what is right? Call this the Human Nature Question.

Most of us have asked the Human Nature Question at one time or another. Sometimes it's other people's behavior that prompts us to ask it. Sometimes it's our own.

We may ask the Question when we hear of monstrous acts – of torture, genocide, slaughter. How could people do such things to each other? Is such behavior rooted in something natural to human beings, or is it a perversion of what we naturally are? We may ask the Question when we hear of acts of great generosity and self-sacrifice. Are people who do such things shining examples of the basic goodness of human beings, or can their acts be explained by factors less flattering to humanity? We may ask the Question when we scrutinize our own relatively normal conduct and motivation. What leads us to act in the ways we do? Is it something we should be proud of or something that is not at all to our credit?

Our answer to the Question will greatly influence our view of ourselves and others, and it can play a leading role in our conception of morality, of what it means to live as we ought. It should come as no surprise, therefore, to find that responses to the Question have been central to accounts of morality and human nature throughout the ages, from ancient Greek moral philosophy to medieval Christian theology to modern European political theory to contemporary sociobiology.

In this study, I examine how the Human Nature Question shaped moral thought in Great Britain in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In Part One, I describe the Negative Answer (i.e., human nature is basically evil) of the English Calvinists and the Positive Answer (i.e., human nature is basically good) of the Cambridge Platonists. In Part Two, I explore the Positive Answer of the third Earl of Shaftesbury. In Part Three, I explore the

Positive Answer of Francis Hutcheson. And in Part Four, I explain how David Hume undermined the Question and thus cleared the way for a "science" of morality and human nature "built on a foundation almost entirely new" (THN Introduction 6).

By focusing on the Human Nature Question, I believe, we will gain a particularly clear view of some of the most important features of the changing philosophical landscape of the early modern period. Such a focus will elucidate the rise of religious liberty and the increased use of empirical observation in accounts of morality and human nature. It will reveal a Copernican Revolution in moral philosophy, a shift from thinking of morality as a standard against which human nature as a whole can be measured to thinking of morality as itself a part of human nature.

And, perhaps most significantly, it will help explain the birth of modern secular ethics – of ethical thought that is entirely independent of religious and theological commitment. In 1600, almost all English-speaking moral philosophy was completely embedded in a Christian framework. But by 1700, some philosophers had begun to develop moral positions that, while still fundamentally theistic, lacked any distinctively Christian elements. And by 1750, still other philosophers had begun to advance accounts of morality that were disengaged not only from Christianity but also from belief in God. This transition was one of the most momentous in the history of European ideas, and an explanation of how it occurred will uncover the roots of contemporary secular positions on the origins of morality as well as the roots of some of the deepest worries about those positions.

I should make it clear, however, that this study does not constitute anything like a comprehensive map of the entire territory of early modern moral philosophy. My goal is to chart a path that allows for a detailed examination of some of the most significant landmarks of ethical thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But there are other landmarks, equally significant, that this path does not offer a close view of. So while I say a lot about the Cambridge Platonists, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Hume, I say relatively little about other philosophers – Hobbes, Locke, Clarke, Bayle, Toland, Butler (the list is very incomplete) – who were just as important.[1] I have done this because I think the works I do discuss form an illustratively coherent story line, and I did not think I could do an adequate job of also handling those other works within the confines of a single book.[2]

Discussion of primary, historical sources occupies almost all of my main text. There are many valuable secondary sources on this material, but I have placed my discussion of them in the endnotes. I followed this procedure not because I think the recent scholarship unworthwhile but because I found it difficult to include discussion of it in the main text and still present a readable version of the philosophical story I was trying to tell.

Some of the chapters are descendants of previously published articles of mine. Parts of Chapters 1 and 5 derive from "The Religious Rationalism of

Benjamin Whichcote," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 27 (1999): 271–300. Parts of Chapter 4 derive from "Rationalism, Sentimentalism, and Ralph Cudworth," *Hume Studies* 30 (2004): 149–82. Parts of Chapter 9 derive from "Shaftesbury's Two Accounts of the Reason to Be Virtuous," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38 (2000): 529–48. Parts of Chapter 14 derive from "Nature and Association in the Moral Theory of Francis Hutcheson," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 12 (1995): 281–301. Parts of Chapter 15 derive from "A Philosopher in His Closet: Reflexivity and Justification in Hume's Moral Theory," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 26 (1996): 231–56. Parts of Chapter 17 derive from "Fantastick Associations and Addictive General Rules: A Fundamental Difference between Hume and Hutcheson," *Hume Studies* 22 (1996): 23–48. And parts of chapter 18 derive from "Hume's Progressive View of Human Nature," *Hume Studies* 26 (2000): 529–48.

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PART ONE

WHICHCOTE AND CUDWORTH

1

The Negative Answer of English Calvinism

Ralph Cudworth was born in 1617 in Somerset, England. His father, also named Ralph, was "a man of genius and learning" who was rector of the parish and chaplain to the king (Birch vii). Most importantly for our purposes, the elder Cudworth was a devout Calvinist. Describing the Calvinism of Cudworth's father is the goal of this chapter.[1]

A defining feature of the English Calvinism the elder Cudworth preached and practiced was an ardent belief in the sinfulness of all humans. According to this Calvinist view, humans had originally been created pure and good but through original sin had fallen to the depths of degradation. As a result, each and every human is now corrupt through and through. The corruption of the Fall, moreover, was so complete, afflicting as it did all of our faculties, that we now lack even the ability to do anything to improve our degenerate state. Human sinfulness is inherent and ineradicable. All people deserve eternal damnation in hell. And when the elder Cudworth spoke of hell, he would have done so in vivid and horrifying terms – as an actual place of the most extreme, never-ending torment.

The English Calvinists did not believe that everyone would go to hell. They thought that God had predetermined that some few people – the elect – would be saved. But the vast majority would be damned. And, crucially, even the elect did not *deserve* salvation. They just happened to be lucky enough to win, as though in a lottery, God's undeserved grace. Sin suffused the soul of the elect and reprobate alike.

The elder Cudworth's belief in the inherent and ineradicable sinfulness of humanity constitutes a perfectly clear Negative Answer to the Human Nature Question. All human beings, on this Calvinist view, are ineluctably drawn toward evil, wickedness, and vice. So to the question of whether humans are basically good, the elder Cudworth and his Calvinist fellows would have responded with a resounding No.

To grasp fully the depth and intensity of this Negative Answer, we need to go beyond a bare statement of its propositional content. We need to appreciate how the belief in inherent and ineradicable sin would have saturated the daily lives of English Calvinist families, creating in children such as young Ralph Cudworth an intimate and constant awareness of their own corruption.

We can sketch a picture of how the Negative Answer would have colored Cudworth's upbringing by looking to the writings of William Perkins, the most influential Calvinist thinker in England at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Cudworth's father was a close follower of Perkins, editing a number of his works and publishing a supplement to one of his biblical commentaries, and Perkins handpicked the elder Cudworth to be his successor as minister of St. Andrews' Church in Cambridge. It seems safe to assume, therefore, that young Ralph Cudworth would have grown up in a household governed by the principles Perkins espoused.

A work of Perkins that offers a clear view of how Calvinist principles would have been instilled in a seventeenth-century English household is his catechism, "Foundation of Christian Religion Gathered into Six Principles," which young children such as Ralph would have been made to memorize and recite. The catechism begins with the question "What doest thou believe concerning God?", to which the child responds, innocuously enough, "There is one God, creator and governor of all things, distinguished into the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost" (Perkins 146). Immediately after that innocuous exchange, however, the Negative Answer, in full Calvinist armor, comes charging onto the scene. For the second question is "What doest thou believe concerning man and concerning thine own self?" And to this the child must answer, "All men are wholly corrupted with sin through Adam's fall and so are become slaves of Satan and guilty of eternal damnation" (Perkins 146). The child is then made to elaborate on the complete corruption of his soul, explaining that he "is by nature dead in sin as a loathsome carrion, or as a dead corpse [that] lieth rotting and stinking in the grave, having in him the seed of all sins" (Perkins 150). Corruption and sin, the child must continue, is in "every part of both body and soul, like as a leprosy that runneth from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot" (Perkins 151). And just in case the message has still not gotten through, the child is then made to show "how every part is corrupted with sin" by repeating the following:

> First, in the mind there is nothing but ignorance and blindness concerning heavenly matters. Secondly, the conscience is defiled, being always either benumbed with sin, or else turmoiled with inward accusations and terrors. Thirdly, the will of man only willeth and lusteth after evil. Fourthly, the affections of the heart, as love, joy, hope, desire, etc., are moved and stirred to that which is evil to embrace it, and they are never stirred unto that which is good unless it be to eschew it. Lastly, the members of the body are the instruments and tools of the mind for the execution of sin. (Perkins 151)

But the catechism doesn't leave matters there. It goes on to ask the child, "What hurt comes to man by his sin?" And the child must respond by reciting the various parts of the "curse of God" to which all humans are "continually subject" because of their sinfulness (Perkins 151–2). The curse of God the child is made to describe consists of pains in this life and damnation in the next. The pains of this life include all the unpleasant, unfortunate, and tragic events that can afflict a person – disaster, disease, and the death of loved ones. The catechism thus impresses on the child the idea that everything bad that happens to him is warranted punishment for his sin. The catechism also impresses on the child the horrors of "eternal perdition and destruction in hell-fire." Indeed, the final part of the catechism – the last bit the child must recite, the bit that will echo in his mind when the lesson is complete – is the following description of the three things that await all reprobates:

> [F]irst, a perpetual separation from God's presence; secondly, fellowship with the devil and his angels; thirdly, an horrible pang and torment both of body and soul arising of the feeling of the whole wrath of God, poured forth on the wicked for ever, world without end; and if the pain of one tooth for one day be so great, endless shall be the pain of the whole man, body and soul for ever. (Perkins 167)

The catechism does also explain that some people will reach heaven. These heaven-bound people will, of course, accept Jesus Christ as their savior. But even acceptance of Christ is inextricably linked to an intimate and constant awareness of corruption. For the catechism teaches the child that he can have real faith in Christ only after he has fully embraced the sharp sorrow of his own sin. Only if the child's inner being becomes so "touched with a lively feeling of God's displeasure" that he "utterly despairs of salvation in regard of anything in himself" and acknowledges that what he actually deserves is "shame and confusion eternally" – only then can he truly appreciate the nature of Christ's sacrifice (Perkins 157).

So the English Calvinists emphasized the importance of an internal sense of sin. They insisted that the essence of Christianity – the essence of true acceptance of Christ – involved not merely agreement with statements of Calvinist doctrine, but also a vital and fulsome *feeling* of one's own corruption. This emphasis on an internal sense or feeling will be highly significant in our later discussion. For we will see that while Whichcote and Cudworth eventually repudiated the Calvinist belief in inherent and ineradicable sinfulness, they always remained firmly committed to the notion that what is most important to religion and morality is an individual's internal state of mind.

Unfortunately, most people (according to the English Calvinists) do not cultivate in themselves the proper internal state. They perform the requisite external actions, going to church, reciting their prayers, taking the sacraments, and refraining from "gross and palpable sins" (Perkins 286).

And they think that these activities are sufficient to put themselves in "God's favor." But they are actually dreadfully mistaken. For true repentance involves something much more difficult than simply going through the proper outward motions. It involves taking to heart the full nature of one's own sinfulness.

The very fact that most people are sanguine about the state of their soul is (according to the English Calvinists) conclusive evidence of the superficiality of their own self-survey. For the soul of each of us is a "sea of corruption," and if someone doesn't see his own sin, that merely means he isn't looking hard enough. But how can we find all the sin within ourselves? How can we be sure that we have adequately condemned all the myriad things within ourselves for which condemnation is so justly warranted? It isn't easy. In fact, Perkins tells us, it's the "hardest thing in the world." And those who think it is easy – those who think they've managed to find all the sin within themselves without too much trouble – have undoubtedly failed to do so.

What one must do is search within one's soul for every single spot of sin. And one must find and claim it all – every grand evil and small infraction, as well as every sinful thought, even if it did not issue in an external act. One must

> search narrowly, as a man would do for a piece of gold or a precious jewel which is lost in a great house, or as a man may search for gold in a mine of the earth and but very little gold ore. Hence we may learn that in true repentance and conversion we must not search so only as only to find gross and palpable sins of our lives, but so as we may find those sins which the world accounts lesser sins and espy our secret faults and privy corruptions. Some corruptions seem more near akin to our nature and therein men hope to be excused when they forsake many other greater sins. But a true penitent sinner must search for such so as a good magistrate searcheth for a lurking traitor which is conveyed into some close and secret corner: and he must ransack his heart for such corruption as wherein his heart takes special delight and must think that no sin can be so small but it is too great to be spared and that every sin great or little must be searched for, as being all traitors to God's majesty. (Perkins 286–7)

Perkins is instructing us to view all our motives with suspicion, if not outright hostility. For he takes it as an undeniable given that sin lurks within our soul. And the sin within our soul is crafty. It uses camouflage and misdirection to trick us into thinking we have found it all when in fact some still remains concealed. But we must find it all, for he who "breaks but one of the commandments of God, though it be but once in all his lifetime, and that only in one thought, is subject to and in danger of eternal damnation thereby" (Perkins 157). Indeed, our good works themselves may be tools used by Satan to lull us into a false sense of security. Thus, since God "will find in the best works we do more matter of damnation than salvation," we "must rather condemn ourselves for our good works than look to be justified before God thereby" (Perkins 159).

So we must engage in constant self-examination, continually “ransacking” our heart. This obsessive internal scrutiny will never succeed in locating all the sin in our soul, let alone rooting it all out. But if we perform this self-inquisition with proper zeal, and if we are lucky, we may find within ourselves elements of God’s grace (Perkins 159).

Now no one can ever merit salvation; Perkins is clear about that. Everyone’s soul is a “sea of corruption.” But God decided to bestow His grace on some people anyway. Why did God elect the people He did and damn the rest? It is impossible for us to know. God’s reasons are not for us to understand. We do know, however, that whatever God decided, He decided before the moment of Creation. For we know that every event that ever takes place has been predetermined by God.

The religion of Cudworth’s father thus consisted of two central notions: a Negative Answer that proclaimed that everyone is fundamentally evil, corrupt, and sinful, and a fatalism that proclaimed that everyone’s eternal fate has been forever sealed. Coupled to those two notions was a vividly literal conception of hell and a never-ending exhortation to engage in obsessive fault-finding self-scrutiny. It must all have loomed over the heads of young children like the sword of Damocles.

2

Whichcote and Cudworth's Positive Answer

The elder Cudworth died in 1624, when Ralph was seven. His mother remarried to a man named John Stoughton, who was also a committed Calvinist. Dr. Stoughton took charge of young Ralph's education, and did so with "great care," making sure that by the time Ralph was thirteen "he was as well grounded in school learning as any boy of his age that went to University" (Birch viii). When he was fifteen, Cudworth was sent to Emmanuel College in Cambridge, where Stoughton himself had gone and was well connected.

This choice of college is significant. Emmanuel had been founded in 1584 by an early English Calvinist named Walter Mildmay with the express intention of preparing young men for the ministry. And by the time Cudworth arrived in 1632, the college had earned a reputation as the prime training ground for Calvinist preachers. Clearly, Stoughton's idea was to groom Cudworth to don the mantle that Perkins had worn and then passed to Cudworth's father. Ralph was a brilliant young man of impeccable background – just the person to carry forward the godly message of English Calvinism.

But it didn't happen. Although Cudworth remained politically and socially associated with the Calvinists for years to come, he quickly became one of the leading lights of a philosophical movement that was diametrically opposed to Calvinism's fundamental tenets. It was a movement based on a firm and abiding belief in the natural goodness of human beings – in an unabashedly Positive Answer to the Human Nature Question, one that would have had William Perkins and the elder Ralph Cudworth spinning in their graves. Describing the origins and shape of this Positive Answer is the goal of the present chapter.

A. "Govern Thyself from *Within*"

In addition to Cudworth, the anti-Calvinist movement at Cambridge included Henry More, who was three years older than Cudworth, and

John Smith, who was a year younger. But the leader of the movement was Benjamin Whichcote, who was in his mid-twenties and already a Fellow of Emmanuel when More, Cudworth, and Smith arrived at Cambridge as teenagers.[1] This Whichcote was an exceptional person, and an understanding of his life and thought will help us to create a full picture of the development of the Positive Answer in seventeenth-century England.

Whichcote's early education was dominated by the writings of Perkins, and he was sent to Emmanuel when he was seventeen, clear indications that he, like Cudworth, had had a Calvinist upbringing. His primary tutor at Emmanuel was Anthony Tuckney, a prominent Calvinist who would have been the perfect choice to guide Whichcote to a career as a Calvinist preacher. But Whichcote rejected Tuckney's Negative Answer, and that inevitably led to his rejecting other defining features of Calvinism as well.[2]

Whichcote believed that human nature was basically good. This belief was not without antecedents in seventeenth-century England. Dissident and radical religious groups had for decades been advancing various versions of the Positive Answer, and a number of independent thinkers of the 1630s (dubbed the "Great Tew Circle") proposed ideas somewhat similar to Whichcote's.[3] It is possible, as well, that when he had been a student in the 1620s Whichcote had encountered tutors at Cambridge who were inclining away from the Calvinist emphasis on the sinfulness of man.[4] But the nature of Whichcote's belief in the goodness of human nature was new. And it seems likely that Whichcote's answer grew to a large extent out of his own temperament.

Whichcote was consistently portrayed as extraordinarily calm and kind, "a man of rare temper; very mild and obliging," who "was hardly ever seen to be transported with anger" (Aphorisms xxxi and xxix). He was also portrayed as being an exceedingly considerate and respectful conversationalist and interlocutor, one who would always listen carefully to what others had to say, no matter how contrary to his own views their statements may have seemed. "Never passionate, never peremptory: so far from imposing upon others, that he was rather apt to yield: And though he had a most profound and well-poised judgment; yet was he, of all men I ever knew, the most patient to hear others differ from him; and the most easy to be convinced, when good reason was offered; and, which is seldom seen, more apt to be favourable to another man's reason, than to his own" (Aphorisms xxviii–xxix). It seems that almost everyone who knew Whichcote liked and respected him. And Whichcote seems to have sincerely liked and respected almost everyone he knew.

At least as important, Whichcote seemed to have sincerely liked and respected himself. In one of his aphorisms, he says, "To Enjoy a man's *self*, is the greatest Good in the world; the Serenity and Composure of the mind is *Happiness* within" (Aphorisms 576), and all the evidence suggests that Whichcote was happy with himself, that he knew firsthand the importance of "Self-Enjoyment" (Aphorisms 278 and 280). Whichcote is also consistently portrayed as possessing real self-confidence. “Patient to hear others differ from him” he might have been, but he wasn’t wishy-washy or a pushover (Aphorisms xxviii). When he thought he was right, he would remain true to his principles in the face of even the most powerful opposition, showing a willingness to defend his position “against the whole world.” He was secure enough both to question his own beliefs whenever anyone raised reasonable doubts about them, and, when he was satisfied with his own reasoning, to stand up for his beliefs no matter who questioned them.

Now as we’ve already noted, Whichcote was raised on the Calvinism of William Perkins. So he would have been instructed to scrutinize his heart and soul to find the sinfulness that lay therein. It seems likely, however, that when Whichcote looked within himself, he did not find the wickedness Perkins insisted would be there. What he likely found instead was a self that was fundamentally decent – a self that simply did not resemble the corrupt picture of human beings that was the core of Perkins’s Negative Answer – and he was not willing to accede to the Perkinsian claim that his favorable self-impression was actually born of self-deceptive sinfulness. All the biographical descriptions we have, in any event, suggest that Whichcote refused to adopt a Perkinsian self-assessment, and his aphorisms explicitly maintain that it is possible for a person to be justifiably satisfied with his own survey. To appreciate the significance of this feature of Whichcote’s thought, it will be helpful to situate it within the broader arc of larger developments in the history of moral philosophy.

In the first part of the eighteenth century, a number of philosophers began to place at the center of their moral views the importance of being able to “bear one’s own survey.” Their idea was that persons should conduct themselves so that when they look at their own reasons for action, they are content with what they see. The Third Earl of Shaftesbury (as we will see in Chapter 9) said that we ought to be virtuous because only a person of virtue can possess “a Mind or Reason well compos’d, quiet, easy within it-self, and such as can freely bear its own Inspection and Review” (Virtue or Merit 66). Francis Hutcheson (as we will see in Chapter 14) argued that a virtuous person will be in perfect internal harmony. Joseph Butler believed that virtue enables us to attain “sincere self-enjoyment and home satisfaction” (Butler 180). And David Hume maintained that honesty is what produces “inward peace of mind, consciousness of integrity [and] a satisfactory review of our own conduct” (Second Enquiry 156). This idea of being able to bear one’s own survey continued to exert a powerful influence on moral theory throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, and it continues to have great resonance with many people today. Many people continue to believe that one of the most important reasons to do what is right is that it will enable one to look oneself in the eye, to live with oneself, to respect oneself.

But while the importance of being able to bear one's own survey is an idea with a long forward stretch, its backward reach is even longer. Socrates expressed the idea through the *Apology*, and his life and death are an object lesson in how to embody it. And in the *Republic* Plato drew a clear link between morality and being able to bear one's own survey, contending that the just person is the one who "harmonizes" with himself and "is his own friend," while the unjust person is the one who suffers "turmoil" and has "a kind of civil war" within himself (Plato 119–21).

The idea that a good person will be satisfied with his own character was, however, conspicuously absent in the period leading up to Whichcote. There was no talk among seventeenth-century English Calvinists of seeking to have all one's parts "harmonize" with each other, or of one's mind being "easy with itself," or of being one's "own friend." The line of thought that placed great importance on self-respect and being able to bear one's own survey – found in Socrates, Plato, Shaftesbury, Butler, Hume, and numerous contemporary thinkers – suffered a break.

What broke it was the belief that humanity is inherently and ineluctably sinful – a belief vivified by the Christian doctrine of the Fall of Man in general, and the Calvinists' extreme interpretation of this doctrine in particular. This belief, which is what I am calling the Negative Answer, implies that our soul will always harbor corruption and sin. Those people who are completely pleased with their own characters must, therefore, be profoundly misguided, either unaware of their own sinfulness or (what is worse) so far gone that awareness of their own sin no longer upsets them. We should not, consequently, seek to be in complete harmony with ourselves nor to be friends with all of our aspects. Our goal, rather, should be to gain a full awareness of the sinfulness of our nature and to feel a real hatred of it. It is not internal harmony the Calvinists extol, but a kind of constant internal warfare between our higher and lower aspects.

Whichcote was a turning point – back toward Plato and forward toward Shaftesbury and other modern champions of self-respect. It's not that Whichcote was unaware of the inward turmoil of the sinner. He speaks often of the great misery and "perpetual Disquiet" of "self-condemnation" (Aphorisms 391 and 394). But Whichcote, like Plato and Shaftesbury, believed that people who were constantly condemning themselves were doing something wrong. We condemn ourselves when we do things that "we cannot own," when we "cannot approve [our] own actions" (Aphorisms 391). It is, however, possible for us to live in a way that does allow us to "own" and "approve" our own actions. Such a way of life, one that includes enjoyment of our own character, is what religion truly consists of. "Religion doth lay the Foundation of mental Peace, Satisfaction, and Content" (Aphorisms 949). It gives us "*Serenity* of *Mind*, and Calmness of Thought" (Aphorisms 280) and makes our life "all of a piece" (Aphorisms 1113). The Calvinist goal of constant self-condemnation is terribly misguided. You can live a life of "innocency," "truth of conscience," and "self-justification" (Aphorisms 391 and 202); you can be happy with yourself. And it is just such a life that you ought to lead. As Whichcote rhetorically asks, "Why should one deal roughly with his Bosom-Friend, the Sense of his Mind; which, if in Peace, is his Solace in all Solitaries?" (Aphorisms 1092).

"Govern thyself from *within*," Whichcote tells us (Aphorisms 178). And he continually insists on being "true to" oneself, on respecting one's own "integrity," on conducting oneself in a manner that will allow one to maintain "reverence" for oneself. He insists on such things because he thinks that humans are basically good, and that if we would just follow our true nature we would live as we should. "For such a nature as the nature of man is, intellectual nature, it gives a law to itself, and carries a law with it, and is made with the law, and the law is in its own bowels, and is never extirpated while it continues in being: the law of reason is inherent to human nature" (Whichcote iv.434; cf. iii.21). All humans have and always will have within themselves the law of how to live, and they need only follow the principles of their own soul to achieve righteousness. This is as clear a statement of an anti-Calvinist Positive Answer that one could ever hope to find. And in making this statement, Whichcote both revived the Platonic idea that one's goal ought to be to live in harmony with oneself and launched a self-respect and integrity-based view of morality that is still in full sail today.

But although Whichcote's Positive Answer is clearly anti-Calvinist, his Calvinist upbringing undoubtedly helped set him on the path to his view of human nature. For the English Calvinists elevated to central importance the activity of self-scrutiny. As we saw in our discussion of Perkins, the Calvinists exhorted everyone to search his soul "narrowly, as a man would do for a piece of gold or a precious jewel which is lost in a great house, or as a man may search for gold in a mine of the earth." Whichcote learned well this Calvinist lesson of looking within. Throughout his life, he never strayed from the idea that the essence of religion and morality lay within each individual – that true religion and morality grow out of inward examination. But when Whichcote looked within himself, he found not the intractable sin the Calvinists claimed must be there but the possibility of real goodness. Whichcote obeyed the Calvinist demand to examine his own soul, but what he encountered looked less like the fallen Adam and more like God's original creation – less like Perkins and more like Socrates.

All the biographical accounts also suggest that Whichcote's view of others mirrored his sanguine view of himself. (Whichcote himself said that one's opinion of others, and of God, inevitably reflects one's view of oneself [Aphorisms 163, 388, and 716].) He thought almost everyone had good intentions and the potential for wisdom. So he listened thoughtfully to what others had to say, seeming really to believe that there was just as much chance that he could learn from someone else as there was that someone else could learn from him. This willingness to listen and learn from others is well expressed in a number of Whichcote's aphorisms, as for instance when he says, "Man, as a *sociable* Creature, is made for Converse with those that are his Equals; to Receive *from* them, and to Communicate *to* them; to *Be* the Better for them, and to *Make* them the Better for him" (Aphorisms 678).

Whichcote's speaking style attests to this respectful attitude toward others' intellectual ability. His sermonizing was relatively plain and unshowy, lacking the flowery similes and thunderous attacks common to other preachers of his day. He said things straightforwardly, and his tone was conversational, giving people the impression that he was speaking *with* them, not *at* them. All of this fits well with Whichcote's optimistic view of human nature. Everyone, Whichcote believed, is able to understand everything of moral and religious importance. So clear, calm, and respectful discussion is the appropriate method for instruction. One does not need to browbeat people to get them to do what's right or scare them out of their wits. Indeed, if people acquiesce to one's message only because of the bombastic force of one's rhetoric, then one has done little more than engage in spiritual bribery, blackmail, or bullying. One has not brought about real understanding. And (as we will see in the rest of this chapter) real understanding – not mere acquiescence – is the core of true religion and morality.

Whichcote's clear and straightforward delivery made his preaching much beloved at Cambridge, where he delivered the Sunday sermons at Trinity Church for nearly twenty years, and his effectiveness as a public speaker must have been greatly enhanced by his uncanny ability to express his ideas in a simple, concise, memorable manner (Roberts 1968, 2). One indication of this talent is the fact that posthumously published collections of aphorisms culled from Whichcote's sermons remained enormously popular in England for over 100 years.

All of these qualities – his psychological astuteness and intellectual generosity, his strength of conviction and confidence in the intentions and abilities of others, his willingness to consider others' ideas, his pleasant conversation, his knack for coining the quotable phrase, his friendliness and sincerity – must have made Whichcote a spectacularly effective teacher. It's unsurprising, therefore, that he developed such a devoted following among his students at Cambridge in the 1630s, Ralph Cudworth among them. At the time, moreover, a Cambridge tutor was charged not only with academic instruction but also with the moral and religious edification of his tutees, many of whom were expected to become ministers themselves and thus eventually to bring to future congregations moral and religious edification of their own. Formation of character was as much a tutor's job as improvement of intellect. We should also keep in mind that Cudworth and his other friends were in their mid-teens when they arrived at Cambridge. They were not independent adults who had come simply to attend classes, but adolescents for whom college was an all-around formative experience.

Whichcote would thus have been more than just a professor to them. He would have been mentor, advisor, minister, and father figure all at once.

B. "The Spirit of a Man Is the Candle of the Lord"

Under Whichcote's influence, Cudworth and his friends came to reject the Negative Answer that had been at the center of their Calvinist upbringing. They became convinced that human beings were basically good – that if a person followed the principles of his nature he would live in accord with true morality and religion. And they all set out together, guided by their shared commitment to the Positive Answer, to forge a new moral and religious path.

It must have been an exhilarating time for Cudworth and the others. All of them had been brought up in strict households dominated by Calvinist ideas of sin and corruption, and it's easy to imagine that they had all chafed under the ponderous Calvinist discipline. Now they were away from home for the first time, and who should they encounter but Benjamin Whichcote, a charismatic and encouraging teacher who had himself shrugged off the heavy Calvinist baggage of his upbringing. The young men were also becoming friends with each other, and the touchstone for their friendship was their mutual engagement with the issues Whichcote raised. Their friendship thus animated their religious and moral thinking, while at the same time their thoughts animated their friendship. In such heady circumstances, ideas can intoxicate. The fact that the other students at Emmanuel and the older tutors stuck to Calvinist dogma probably only added to the thrill of their joint intellectual enterprise. They were a special group, united by belief in the Positive Answer and rejection of the dour surrounding orthodoxy. Let me outline some of their most distinctive ideas now.[5]

One of the most fundamental beliefs to which Whichcote, Cudworth, More, and Smith were committed was a deeply theistic conception of the Positive Answer. Every human being is basically good, they believed, because every human soul is God-like. As Whichcote put it, "Reverence God in *thyself*: for God is *more* in the *Mind* of Man, than in any part of this world besides; for we (and we *only* here) are made after the image of God" (Aphorisms 798). Or as Whichcote put it elsewhere, "He that hath no Reverence for *himself*, and his own Nature hath no Reverence for God" (Aphorisms 255). This theistic conception of the Positive Answer is best summed up by the claim, explicit in the work of Whichcote, Cudworth, and their friends, that human nature is *deiform*, or God-like.[6]

Whichcote and Cudworth's deiformity claim reveals plainly their rejection of English Calvinism. For while the Calvinists insisted on the difference between God and man, Whichcote and Cudworth insisted on the similarity.[7] While the essence of the Calvinists' religion was an awareness of one's sinfulness, the essence of the religion of Whichcote and Cudworth was an awareness of one's capacity to be God-like.

Their rejection of Calvinism is clearly evident in the use Whichcote and Cudworth made of Psalms 20:27: "The spirit of a man is the candle of the Lord." Cassirer calls this verse "the motto of the Cambridge movement" (Cassirer 1953, 40), and with good reason: they quoted it throughout their writings and sermons, and their interpretation of it captures well the spirit of their Positive Answer. To appreciate the novelty and boldness of their interpretation of Psalms 20:27, we need only to set it against the backdrop of the mainstream Protestant reading.

On the mainstream Protestant reading, "The spirit of a man is the candle of the Lord" was intended to focus our attention on the *difference* between humans and God. We are, on this understanding, supposed to compare a candle's weak and flickering, uncertain flame to the brilliance of the sun, source of all light. In making this comparison, we come to realize how profoundly inadequate a candle really is – how insufficient its dim light would be in guiding us through a world of darkness. And just as a candle suffers in comparison to the sun, so too does our "spirit" suffer in comparison to God. Imagine yourself completely lost in the dead of a pitch black night, and consider how ill-equipped you would be to find your way home if you had only a candle to help you navigate. You are, according to the mainstream Protestant interpretation of Psalms 20:27, just as ill-equipped to find the path of righteousness when you rely only on the resources within your own soul.

This emphasis on the *difference* between God and humans is well exemplified by Nathanael Culverwell's exposition of the verse.[8] Culverwell, who was also at Emmanuel in the 1630s, maintained that the candle is "but a brief and compendious flame, shut up, and imprison'd in a narrow compasse. How farre distant is it from the beauty of a Starre? How farre from the brightnesse of a Sun? . . . God never intended that a creature should rest satisfied with its own candle-light, but that it should run to the fountain of light, and sunne it self in the presence of its God" (Patrides 1970, 11). The point was put even more sharply by Francis Quarles, a popular Puritan writer of the period, who wrote, "Let Phylosophy not be asham'd to be confuted, nor Logick blush to be confounded; What thou canst not comprehend, beleeve; and what thou canst beleeve, admire; So shall thy Ignorance be satisfied in thy Faith, and thy doubts swallowed up with wonders; The best way to see day-light is to put out thy Candle" (Patrides 1970, 11). To Quarles's mind, looking to one's own soul for guidance was irreligious and counterproductive. Real guidance must come from without, from the external light of God.

Whichcote and Cudworth, in contrast, insisted that we can and must look to our souls for real guidance. ("Govern thyself from *within*.") And John Smith, another of Whichcote's students and one of Cudworth's good friends, maintained that true religion is "an *inward Nature* that conteins all the laws and measures of its motion within it self. A Good man finds not his Religion *without* him, but as a living Principle *within* him" (Patrides 1970, 159). But such confidence in the guidance of each person's own soul requires an interpretation of Psalms 20:27 very different from that of Culverwell and Quarles. It requires that we read the verse as intending to focus our attention on the *similarity* between God and humans.

The deiformity claim thus turns the traditional Protestant reading of the candle metaphor on its head. Instead of emphasizing the dimness of a candle, Whichcote and the others focused attention on the fact that the light of a candle is the very same stuff as the light of the sun. There is, of course, a great *quantitative* difference between a candle and the sun (the sun is a lot bigger). *Qualitatively*, however, the two are the same: they both emit the light that enables us to see (see Aphorisms 262). Thus, according to this reading, Psalms 20:27 is telling us that just as the flame of a candle is essentially identical to the fire of the sun, so too the spirit of each of us is fundamentally God-like. Also crucial to the imagery of the verse is the idea that a candle has to be lit by someone. But whose candle is our spirit? The Lord's. The Lord, then, is the one who has ignited our spirit, and in so doing He has placed in us the very same light-giving stuff of which He Himself is constituted.

So as the four Cambridge friends saw it, the lesson of Psalms 20:27 is that each of us has within himself a spark of the divine, something that is literally a piece of God. And to ignore that divine spark within is to disrespect both oneself and one's Creator. For it is God who has placed inside each of us a divine guide, and it is just as wrong to reject that internal guidance of His as it is to reject the guidance of the scriptures He has given us. As Whichcote put it in what could have been a direct rebuttal of Quarles's injunction "to put out thy candle," "God hath set up two lights to enlighten us in our way: the light of reason which is the light of his creation; and the light of Scripture, which is after-revelation from him. Let us make use of these two lights and suffer neither to be put out" (Aphorisms 109).

C. "I Was Not Able to Ascribe to God Those Dreadful Decrees"

Each of us, then, is deiform or God-like. But what is God like? What is His nature? What are His attributes? Whichcote notes that one's answer to this question will depend on one's own character. "Every one attributes to *God*, what he finds in *Himself*," he tells us (Aphorisms 388). As we might have expected, consequently, Whichcote's God was kinder, gentler, and calmer than the God of his Calvinist forbears. Indeed, Whichcote and Cudworth thought that almost all the errors of the Calvinists were rooted in one particular belief they held about God – namely, that God arbitrarily decided before the moment of creation that certain humans would eventually suffer eternal damnation.

That God determined before the moment of creation every event that would ever take place is the doctrine of predestination, which is central to Calvinist thinkers. And the belief that God decided before creation who would eventually be damned – which is known as "supralapsarianism" – is a consequence the Calvinists explicitly drew from predestination. We have, however, not yet explained why Whichcote and Cudworth attributed to the Calvinists the idea that God's decision to damn certain people was *arbitrary*. Let us address this point now.

The arbitrariness of God's decision follows in part from a Calvinist idea that is closely related to predestinarianism and supralapsarianism: namely, a voluntarist conception of God. According to voluntarism, prior to God's act of creation nothing existed. There was no material world, no numbers, no geometric entities – and no morality. Then (according to voluntarism) God willed everything into existence, creating through that act of will the material world, numbers, geometry, morality, and everything else.

Voluntarism is closely related to predestinarianism and supralapsarianism in that they all grow directly out of an emphasis on the omnipotent will of God. Just as the Calvinists believed that God's omnipotence implied that it was He who determined the occurrence of every event, so too they believed that His omnipotence implied that He created morality. To hold that there were standards of right and wrong that existed prior to God's creations – that is, that there were standards of morality that God did not create – was as repugnant to the Calvinist conception of God's omnipotence as it was to hold that there were events that God did not control or material things He could not alter.

The combination of voluntarism and supralapsarianism implies the arbitrariness of God's decision to damn certain humans because it implies that that decision was unguided by any sort of moral consideration. According to this view, morality – and all the considerations we think of as moral reasons – did not exist before God made His decision, for God created morality at the same time that He determined that certain people should suffer eternal torment. So the determination that certain people should suffer was made by His will alone, by a will completely unfettered by any prior constraints or moral requirements, by a will that was arbitrary in an etymologically strict sense.

Whichcote and Cudworth contested this view of God in two different ways.[9] They argued, first, that voluntarism hollowed out the goodness of God. This point can be put in strictly logical terms. In order for God's will to be good in a significant or non-tautological sense, there must be some independent standard of goodness against which God's will can be measured. It is substantially meaningful to say that God does what is good only if the standard of goodness has an existence independent of God's will. But on the voluntarist view, God's actions create goodness. His will brings the moral standard into existence. So on the voluntarist view, before God acted there was no moral standard at all. It thus becomes tautological – or empty – to say that God's will is good, in that goodness is determined entirely by God's will itself.

But that logical point was not Whichcote and Cudworth's only objection to the Calvinist conception of God. They also claimed that it would have been *wrong* for God to condemn people to eternal torment before they had ever been born. Whichcote and Cudworth held that it would have been *immoral* for God to have created a world in which people were predestined to sin and damnation. As Cudworth explained in a letter he wrote late in life describing the development of his thought in the 1630s, "I was not able to ascribe to God those dreadful decrees, which he inevitably condemned innocent men out of arbitrariousness to guilt and sin, for which they are to atone by everlasting torture. . . . And from that time on a very large number of men at our university, influenced by the evidence of this one truth, have gone over to the camp of the Remonstrants" (Cassirer 1953, 79; cf. 122–3). Whichcote made the same point when he claimed that it was "Blasphemy" to say that God had "determined" humans "to Sin or Misery" before they came "into Being" (Aphorisms 811).

Whichcote and Cudworth based their claim that it would be "blasphemous" and "dreadful" to attribute the predetermination of damnation to God on a moral principle, sometimes called the "*ought-implies-can*" principle, that tells us that all the things one *ought* to do also have to be things that one *can* do. Their idea was that it would be *wrong* for God to predetermine damnation of His creatures because it would constitute His punishing people for things outside of their control. As Whichcote explained, "If Sin were *Necessary*, it could not be Avoided; if Duty were *Impossible*, it could not be done: This would be an *Answer* to God Himself; an Answer to the Indictment, that might be brought against us at the Last day" (Aphorisms 532).

There are several notable features of Whichcote and Cudworth's ought-implies-can objection to Calvinism. First of all, this objection is distinct from the strictly logical objection to voluntarism. The logical objection, which holds that voluntarism hollows out God's goodness, doesn't tell us that the Calvinists are wrong to say that their conception of God implies that He is good; it tells us, rather, that on the Calvinist conception, God's goodness is merely tautological. But the ought-implies-can objection holds that the Calvinist conception of God is *inconsistent* with moral goodness. It implies that the Calvinist conception of God must be *false*, since that conception implies the absurdity that God, who is perfectly moral, has acted immorally.

Secondly, the ought-implies-can objection reveals Whichcote and Cudworth's willingness to limit God's power in order to affirm a particular view of morality. Not even the power of God, according to this objection, can alter the eternal and immutable standards of morality, for those standards are prior even to God's act of creation. Morality is a necessary feature of reality, and so God's will must "Answer" to morality, not the other way around.

Thirdly, the ought-implies-can objection shows that Whichcote and Cudworth placed their own moral convictions at the origin of (or prior to) their conception of religion. Theology, as they saw it, had to conform to their idea of morality, not the other way around. For it seemed to them absolutely clear that it was wrong to condemn people for things they could not have avoided. And they therefore concluded that God could never have decreed such a condemnation. The fact that this conclusion flew in the face of the central doctrines of Calvinism did not seem to bother them at all. When faced with the choice between their own moral judgment and the religion of their parents, tutors, and fellow students, they chose their own moral judgment seemingly without hesitation. Finally, then, the ought-implies-can objection reveals Whichcote and Cudworth's breath-taking self-confidence. (I'm not sure whether their being in their teens and twenties when they first developed this line of thought makes their self-confidence more startling or less so.)

The Calvinists of the day surely would have told Whichcote and Cudworth not to place so much trust in their own moral judgment. Just because something seems immoral to you, the Calvinists would have counseled, does not mean it really is so. For the human mind is wholly corrupt and will thus inevitably produce a distorted picture of reality. Moreover, the Calvinists would have continued, to maintain that God Himself must be restrained by one's own idea of morality is to denigrate Him by denying His omnipotence and to arrogate to oneself God-like knowledge of good and evil. It is to commit the original sin of pride, for which Adam was expelled from Paradise and Satan condemned to Hell.

But Whichcote and Cudworth brushed off the accusation that they lowered God by elevating themselves. It seemed clear to them that predestined damnation was wrong, and that for them was sufficient ground on which to build a new theology. Far from denigrating God, such confidence in their own moral judgment, as Whichcote and Cudworth saw it, was positively reverential, as the mind of man is a candle of the Lord. What was denigrating to God, from Whichcote and Cudworth's point of view, was to contradict one's own moral judgment. For that moral judgment, coming as it does from within one's deiform mind, is none other than the voice of God Himself.

The root idea of Calvinism was the Fall of Man. So for Calvinists, the sin of pride always loomed large, a constant danger. But the thought of Whichcote and Cudworth grew out of a radically different idea, namely, that all humans are deiform, made by God in the image of God. For Whichcote and Cudworth, self-respect merged with respect for God, and worries about the sin of pride withered and fell away.

D. Cambridge Platonism

So opposition to the voluntarist views of the Calvinists was a cornerstone of Whichcote and Cudworth's philosophy, a building block they laid very early in their intellectual lives. They did not claim, however, that these anti-voluntarist ideas were original to them. They claimed, rather, that these ideas came right out of Plato's *Euthyphro* (see Cudworth, Commons 384). And it wasn't just their anti-voluntarism that Whichcote and Cudworth attributed to Plato. They traced almost all of their philosophical positions to one Platonic text or another. Cudworth, in particular, would at times have you believe that virtually every element of his philosophy is simply an explication of something that can be found in Plato's dialogues. Indeed, the influence of Plato on Whichcote, Cudworth, More, and Smith was so conspicuous and profound that the four friends eventually came to be known collectively as the Cambridge Platonists.

Plato was the perfect ally in the battle against the Calvinists, for his philosophy was a wonderful representation of the Positive Answer. Of course, Plato did not think that every human being is virtuous; there are plenty of dishonorable characters in his dialogues. He did believe, however, that a human being can achieve real knowledge and goodness, that human nature is not ineluctably benighted but capable of finding its way to full sunlight.

We have already mentioned two aspects of Plato's thought that are in line with the anti-Calvinist Positive Answer: the anti-voluntarism of the *Euthyphro* and the claim in the *Republic* that it is possible for a human to "harmonize" with himself, to be "his own friend" or bear his own survey. Later in the *Republic*, Plato draws this second claim out more fully, developing a metaphysically elevated view of the human ability to grasp the Form of the Good. The *Meno*, with its story of the slave boy and its doctrine of recollection, is another example of Plato's confidence in the human ability to get things right. And the *Symposium*'s speeches, at least as the Cambridge Platonists interpreted them, reveal the heights of true spiritual love to which human beings can aspire.

But nothing in Plato's works made a bigger impression on the Cambridge Platonists than the character of Socrates himself. For the Socrates of the *Apology*, the *Crito*, and the *Phaedo* is a person of complete virtue and happiness, someone who does what's right and does it cheerfully. There is no conflict within the soul of Socrates. He is self-content. And that is not because he is ignorant of his true nature but rather because he knows himself fully. He also has confidence in the human ability to think things through, which shapes his entire life's project of speaking plainly with people about how they should live. Socrates is the embodiment of the Positive Answer. When you consider, as well, that it was Whichcote who introduced Socrates – Whichcote, whose character resemblance to Socrates his three students must have noted – it's not too difficult to imagine the attraction for Cudworth, More, and Smith.

That attraction might have been enhanced by the attitude of the other tutors and students. For while Whichcote and Cudworth were avidly embracing Plato, most of the rest of Emmanuel was keeping him at arm's length. It would be overstating matters to say that Plato was forbidden reading at Emmanuel, but he was certainly thought of as having no business at the core of one's thought. The Cambridge Platonists' overt allegiance to Plato thus helped them forge their philosophical identity not only in the positive sense of defining their own positions but also in the negative sense of distinguishing them from others. So to appreciate fully the "Platonist" part of the Cambridge Platonist label, we need to understand why a close connection to Plato was something the others at Emmanuel resisted.

The Cambridge Platonists' penchant for tracing their views back to earlier thinkers did not on its own set them apart from their contemporaries. It was common practice in seventeenth-century England to attribute one's ideas to the writings of past masters. Intellectual heritage was generally taken to be more important than originality of thought. Indeed, many of the religious and political battles of the day can be cast as disputes over the legitimacy of conflicting claims on the legacy of a common religious or political ancestor.

Most of the English intellectuals of the 1630s claimed as their antecedents the pillars of Christianity in general and Protestantism in particular. They were thus keen to establish an unbroken line between their ideas and the thought of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Perkins, and the like. There was no place for Plato in this hall of saints. For Plato, writing in Athens in the fifth century B.C., did not know of Christ and did not have God's scriptures. He was, as one Cambridge tutor of the time put it, one of the "Wretched Heathens" consigned to Hell (Patrides 1970, 96). And such a person could offer no guidance for Christians.

This dim view of Plato and the other pre-Christian philosophers follows directly from the mainstream Protestant version of the Negative Answer. If human nature is wholly corrupt, then we must not trust advice that comes solely from the human mind. We need instead to look to the scriptures, which have been given to us precisely because we are ill-equipped to find the right path on our own. But because he did not have the benefit of Christ or scripture, Plato did have to rely entirely on his own mind. We should be wary, consequently, of placing our confidence in his philosophy. And we should certainly keep his views in their place, which is decidedly below that of the Christian fathers.

Conversely, the Cambridge Platonists' embrace of Plato fits perfectly with their Positive Answer. The human mind, on the Cambridge Platonist view, is God-like, the Candle of the Lord – and that means every human mind, Christian or heathen. We are, therefore, just as likely to learn something from a heathen as from a Christian. All humans come equipped to discover real and important truths, whether they have had the benefit of scripture or not.

With this context in mind, we can now see that the Cambridge Platonists' habit of quoting Plato was controversial, even distinct from the content of any of those quotations. The act of Plato quotation in and of itself – not to speak of the conspicuous absence of quotations from Calvin and Perkins – implied a rejection of the Calvinist view that human nature is wholly corrupt.

This anti-Calvinist message wasn't lost on the other students and tutors at Emmanuel. In an exchange of letters, Anthony Tuckney, Whichcote's former tutor, expressed concern about Whichcote's study of the heathen philosophers and downright alarm at their presence in Whichcote's sermons. He urged Whichcote to abandon "philosophy" (a term for the non-Christian thought of Plato and the other Greeks) and concentrate exclusively on scripture instead. Whichcote's response indicates clearly his belief that a lack of scriptural knowledge does not disqualify one from providing real and important guidance. He wrote:

> The time I have spent in philosophers I have no cause to repent of, and the use I have made of them I dare not disown. I heartily thank God for what I have found in them; neither have I, upon this occasion, one jot less loved the Scriptures. I find the philosophers that I have read good, so far as they go; and it makes me secretly blush before God when I find either my head, heart or life challenged by them, which I must confess I have often found. I have sometimes publicly declared what points of religion I have found excellently held forth by them; and I have never found them enemies to the faith of the Gospel. (Cragg 1968, 44)

E. Heaven and Hell

Whichcote and Cudworth's theology and conception of human nature also led them to develop a new understanding of heaven and hell. In opposition to the prevailing Calvinist approach, Whichcote and Cudworth argued that ministers ought not to describe heaven as "a place of rest and content" and hell as "a place of *fire and brimstone, weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth*" (Whichcote II 196–7). Indeed, ministers ought not to emphasize the idea that heaven and hell are *places* at all. For what is most important about heaven and hell is that they are *states of mind* that follow necessarily from our awareness of the rightness or wrongness of our own conduct. The essential feature of heaven is not any externally bestowed benefit but rather the consciousness of having lived in a God-like fashion. And the essential feature of hell is not the external torment of being placed in a lake of fire but the internal torment of knowing that one has done wrong – not the "misery and harm" that "proceed from *abroad*," but the bite of self-condemnation that "arise[s] from *within*."

The internal mental states that follow from one's awareness of one's own conduct are so important to Whichcote and Cudworth that they even go so far as to suggest that God Himself cannot bring unhappiness to a person who is aware of his own goodness nor bring happiness to a person who is aware of his own evil. Thus Whichcote says that even if "omnipotence itself should load me with all burdens, if I am innocent within, I shall be able to bear it," while an "unregenerate" person "cannot be happy" even if (*per impossible*) he is "in heaven" (Whichcote III 86). And Cudworth maintains that "nothing without us can make us either happy or miserable; nothing can either defile us, or hurt us, but goeth out from us, what springeth and bubbleth up out of our own hearts" (Commons 403).

So real happiness and unhappiness, for Whichcote and Cudworth, arise from one's own view of oneself – whether or not one can bear one's own survey – and that cannot be altered by any external force, no matter how powerful. This idea, which is rooted in the Socratic dictum that "a good man cannot be harmed either in life or in death," receives full expression in the following passage from one of Whichcote's sermons:

> All misery arises out of ourselves. It is a most gross mistake; and men are of dull and stupid spirits, who think that that state which we call *hell* is *an incommodious place* only, and that God by his sovereignty throws men therein: for hell arises *out of a man's self*; and hell's fewel is *the guilt of a man's conscience*. And it is impossible that any should be *so* miserable as hell makes a man, and as there a man is miserable; but by his own condemning himself: and on the other side, when they think that heaven arises from any *place*, or any nearness to God or angels; this is not principally so: but it lies in a *refined temper*, in an *internal reconciliation to the nature of God, and to the rule of righteousness*. So that both hell and heaven have their foundation *within* men. (Whichcote II 139–40)[10]

Each person has within himself all the resources necessary to achieve salvation. Indeed, salvation is not a reward for good behavior but rather the state of mind we possess when we conduct ourselves as we ought.

Whichcote and Cudworth make it clear, moreover, that we can experience the states of mind that constitute heaven and hell in this world, not merely in the afterlife. They are, as Whichcote explains, states that are "present" to us here and now, "things that we are well acquainted with in this world."[11] Or as Cudworth puts it when criticizing the concentration on painted pictures of a paradisiacal heaven:

> Nay, we do but deceive ourselves with names. Hell is nothing but the orb of sin and wickedness, or else that hemisphere of darkness in which all evil moves; and Heaven is the opposite hemisphere of light, or else, if you please, the bright orb of truth, holiness and goodness; and we do actually in this life instate ourselves in the possession of one or other of them. (Commons 394)

So while the Calvinists thundered on about blissful and tormented afterlives, Whichcote and Cudworth spoke of developing a righteous character here and now. Whichcote and Cudworth believed, moreover, that every person can successfully develop a righteous character, that every person can become truly God-like. As a result, according to Whichcote and Cudworth, every person has the wherewithal to free himself entirely from the fear of hell. The most important aspect of heaven is, moreover, within each person's power to achieve, within each person's immediate grasp. This conception of heaven and hell could not be further – in letter or spirit – from the Calvinists' Negative Answer.

Whichcote and Cudworth's conception of heaven and hell as present states of mind also constitutes a significant moment in the history of modern moral philosophy. For it lays the groundwork for a view of morality according to which the *reason* certain conduct is right (or the conduct's moral *justification*) and one's *motivation* for conducting oneself in that way are essentially connected to each other. This point can be obscured if we describe Whichcote and Cudworth's view as one according to which we experience a heavenly mental state when we act righteously, for that locution can give the impression that the heavenly mental state is distinct from the righteous conduct itself; it can give the impression that the mental state is something that flows in only after the righteous conduct has been completed and done with. But the real point Whichcote and Cudworth are trying to make is that righteousness consists of a particular kind of "temper" or state of mind and that to possess that temper or state of mind is to be as happy as one can possibly be. For Whichcote and Cudworth, no substantive distinction can be drawn between righteousness and a heavenly state of mind: they are two ways of describing a single thing.

The connection Whichcote and Cudworth drew between justification and motivation stands out clearly when contrasted with the Calvinist picture of heaven and hell. If we repent fully, according to the Calvinists, we may go to heaven after our death. And the hope of heaven, plus the fear of hell, are strong motivations to repent. Indeed, the Calvinists' great emphasis on vivid descriptions of heavenly bliss and hellish torments indicates their belief that the prospects of heaven and hell are the primary motivators of religion. But the reason repentance is warranted – the justification of the demand that each of us repent – is our sinfulness. And our sinfulness is something that cannot be equated to heaven. The difference between the repentance Calvinism requires and the heavenly reward that motivates the Calvinists to repent becomes obvious when we realize that those in the Calvinist heaven must not be spending eternity engaging in obsessive self-scrutiny of their own sinfulness.

In drawing tightly together the justification of and motivation for righteousness, Whichcote and Cudworth helped pave the way for what came to be known in the twentieth century as an "internalist" conception of morality.[12] Because the term has been subjected to so much intense philosophical debate, it's difficult to say precisely what "internalism" is. It is, however, easy enough to see the ways in which Whichcote and Cudworth's thought is much more internally oriented than the Calvinist views against which they set themselves.

First of all, Whichcote and Cudworth believed that all persons have within their own souls sufficient motivation to conduct themselves righteously, whereas Calvinism implied that the prospect of externally imposed reward and punishment (i.e., heaven and hell as *places*) was a necessary motivating tool. Secondly, Whichcote and Cudworth believed that all persons have within their own souls the ability to discern right from wrong, whereas Calvinism implied that people need the externally bestowed scriptures to determine what they ought to do. And thirdly, Whichcote and Cudworth believed that all persons have within their own souls the wherewithal to become truly righteous and thus achieve salvation, whereas Calvinism implied that one could never make oneself truly deserving of salvation and was thus always dependent on externally administered grace.

We should be careful, however, not to equate Whichcote and Cudworth too closely to twentieth-century moral internalists. For Whichcote and Cudworth gave God a role that distinguishes them from most twentieth-century internalists in a crucial way.

The Calvinists had drawn an ironclad distinction between wretched humanity and perfect God. God could not be found within the human soul because the human soul was wholly corrupt. God, therefore, had to come from without; He had to be external to the sinful human soul. Whichcote and Cudworth, in contrast, brought God into every human soul. They believed that there was a sense in which God is present within each of us, a sense in which a reconciliation with God is equivalent to a reconciliation with oneself. That is why we should look within – because within each of us is present God Himself.

This understanding of the relationship between God and humans is fundamental to the internal orientation of Whichcote and Cudworth's philosophy. But it also makes it difficult to place their philosophy into the internalist–externalist taxonomy of recent philosophical debate. For while Whichcote and Cudworth wanted to locate God within each human mind, they also had to hold on to the idea of God as an external entity. Even for Whichcote and Cudworth, God could not be identical to the human mind; it had to be possible for God to exist while humans did not. How Cudworth developed this view – in which God is both internal to and independent of the human mind – is something we will examine in Chapter 4. The point I want to make here is that such a view (however the details are worked out) is not going to fit easily into either the internalist or externalist camp. For central to Whichcote and Cudworth's overall philosophy is a conception of God that bridges the internal and the external, and it's difficult to find room for such an entity within recent meta-ethical debates.

3

Whichcote and Cudworth on Religious Liberty

In the preceding chapter, I cast the thought of Whichcote and Cudworth as a reaction against the Calvinism of their families and fellow students and tutors at Emmanuel. But the goal of this chapter is to explain Whichcote and Cudworth's crucial role in the development of religious liberty. And to do this, we need to situate them in a broader context, amid the political and religious upheavals of mid-seventeenth-century England as a whole. In Section A, I fill in some of this background. In B, I sketch the main points of Whichcote and Cudworth's views on religious liberty and how Whichcote embodied those views during the civil war in the 1650s. And in C, I look at arguments for religious liberty Cudworth gave in 1647.

A. Religion and State in Mid-Seventeenth-Century England

In the 1630s and early 1640s, there were numerous disputes between the king and Parliament that erupted into civil war in 1642. The English Calvinists were squarely on the Parliamentary side of this conflict, and Whichcote and Cudworth were generally associated with the Parliamentary cause as well. Part of the reason for this association was social. Whichcote and Cudworth came from Calvinist families and they attended a Calvinist college. And while they were certainly opposed to the Calvinists' religious doctrines, there is no indication of personal hostility between them and their families and colleagues. The evidence suggests, rather, that Whichcote and Cudworth remained very close to the people with whom they grew up and studied. As profound as Whichcote and Cudworth's disagreement with Calvinism was, it remained a disagreement among friends. And in determining associations during the civil war, such cultural factors could be as influential as ideology.

From a certain perspective, moreover, Whichcote and Cudworth were intellectually closer to the Calvinists' endorsement of the Parliamentary side than to the ideology of the Royalists. The key similarity between Whichcote and Cudworth and the Calvinists was an emphasis on the individual.

Whichcote and Cudworth had, of course, a very different conception of human nature, but they agreed with the Calvinists that all matters of ultimate religious importance originated within each person – whether that involved awareness of sin and repentance, as the Calvinists maintained, or self-respect and internal harmony, as Whichcote and Cudworth argued. In line with this emphasis on the individual, they all also credited conscience, which allowed for personal judgment in a manner that could be used to justify resistance to the king.

Whichcote and Cudworth were never partisans, however. Though associated with members of the Parliamentary cause, they never explicitly advocated for one side or the other of the civil war. Instead, they argued for tolerance and liberty, a position at odds not only with the Royalists but also with many within the Parliamentarian camp.

Because the ideals of religious freedom are so entrenched in our own society, it's easy for us to overlook the boldness and significance of Whichcote and Cudworth's call for religious liberty. There can be no question, however, that theirs was very much a minority position in the 1640s. Religious disagreements were roiling the country, but most people on all sides agreed that there had to be a single enforceable state religion for all Englishmen. The battles were over which form the state religion should take. Most people did not seriously consider the idea that the state should allow individuals the latitude to make their own religious decisions. As Conrad Russell has pointed out, "The word 'religion,' both by common usage and by prevailing etymology, meant first and foremost rules which were to be enforced" (Russell 1990, 63). So while "religion" tends to call to our minds something private and personal, most seventeenth-century Englishmen would have taken the word to refer to something that was essentially a public duty. Seventeenth-century England, as Russell explains, was "a society with a code of values and a political system which were only designed to be workable with one" religion (Russell 1990, 63).

B. Whichcote and Cudworth's "Spirit of Religion"

The belief in the necessity of a single enforceable state religion fueled fierce disputes in the 1640s about the particulars of churchly procedure. People battled over questions such as: How much of the Sunday service should be devoted to sermonizing and how much to worship and prayer? Should there be an altar, and if so, should it be raised? Should organ music be allowed in church? Should there be images in the stained glass? Where should the communion table be placed, at the east end of the church or in the middle? Should the sacrament be given with wafers or "common bread"?

Whichcote and Cudworth thought this was all tragically much ado about next to nothing. The forms of Sunday service, they thought, were not essential to "*the state of religion*" itself, but merely dispensable tools that were useful for some people at some times and not useful for other people at other times. Each individual, Whichcote and Cudworth argued, should be given the freedom to decide for him- or herself whether or not to use any of these tools. If one person's religious spirit is roused by organ music, stained glass representations of Christ's travails, and an ornate altar with rails, then that person should be allowed to attend a church with those features. If another person finds such things distracting or offensive, then he or she should be allowed to attend a bare wooden church free of ornamentation and organ.

The one course of action that was wrong, according to Whichcote and Cudworth, was to force people to practice religion in ways they would not freely have chosen. It was intolerance of different forms of religion that was contrary to religion, not any of the forms themselves. For the essence or ultimate end of religion is peaceful love of one's neighbor. Intolerant divisiveness about forms of service thus amounted to a sacrifice of the end of religion for the sake of that which was merely instrumental. As Whichcote put it, "Religion, which is a Bond of *Union*, ought not to be a Ground of Division: but is in an unnatural use, when it doth disunite. Men cannot *differ*, by *true* Religion; because it is true Religion to *agree*. The Spirit of Religion is a Reconciling Spirit" (Aphorisms 712). Or as he explained elsewhere, "The more *False* any one is in his Religion, the more *Fierce* and furious in Maintaining it; the more Mistaken, the more Imposing. . . . The longest Sword, the strongest Lungs, the most Voices, are false measures of *Truth*" (Aphorisms 499–500).

This call for liberty of worship – it is worth emphasizing again – was the furthest thing from a bromide in the 1640s. Most Englishmen at the time thought it an exceedingly dangerous idea, one that would lead to moral turpitude, social chaos, and eternal damnation. But Whichcote and Cudworth stuck to their guns, continuing to insist on tolerance even as the forces of intolerance grew more and more belligerent.

We can gain a sense of Whichcote's personal commitment to religious liberty by looking at how he conducted himself in 1644, when the parliamentary commissioners offered him the provostship of King's College, Cambridge.[1] The previous provost had been Samuel Collins, but Collins was associated with the Royalists, and so when the civil war began, the parliamentary commissioners had him dismissed. Whichcote respected Collins and was disturbed that university positions were being determined by partisanship. As a result, Whichcote seriously considered turning down the commissioners, despite the prestige and importance of the provostship. In the end, he accepted the position, mainly because he believed his duty to the university required him to work for its betterment. But he said he would take the job only if a certain condition was met: His stipend as provost had to be paid in full to the ousted Collins. Moreover, Whichcote took the position while still refusing to sign the Parliamentary Covenant, a document pledging allegiance to the Parliamentary cause. Now according to the law Parliament passed in 1644, anyone failing to sign the covenant would be barred from holding any governmental or university position. But Whichcote was made provost nonetheless, and his stipend was duly paid to Collins. Parliament's willingness to allow Whichcote this latitude must have been due in part to his stature as a teacher, administrator, and minister. And it must also have been due to his well-earned reputation for nonpartisanship. Whichcote's advocacy for Collins and his refusal to sign the covenant must have been interpreted, that is, as further evidence of his being above the fray, and not as evidence of his harboring any secret partisan sympathies.

C. Cudworth's 1647 Sermons

Cudworth's commitment to religious tolerance was just as manifest as Whichcote's. This commitment became especially clear in 1647, when Cudworth delivered two electrifyingly brilliant sermons, one to the House of Commons and the other to the Society of Lincolnes Inn. These sermons were truly remarkable performances – rhetorically, politically, philosophically – and must be counted among the greatest neglected masterpieces of seventeenth-century English thought.

According to Cudworth's 1647 sermons, the biggest problem of the age was confusion about what was essential to religion, with many people concentrating all their energies on what wasn't essential and neglecting the things that were. Crucially, Cudworth's sermons supported neither the Parliamentary nor the Royalist side. His overriding message was that both sides were missing the point. Each had been fighting to instate its own conception of religion and eradicate the other, but the things that separated the different conceptions were all inessential, religiously peripheral at best, while the hostility of each side to the other violated the essence of religion.

At the very beginning of the dedication of his sermon to the House of Commons, Cudworth made clear his intention to criticize those who believed that the religious differences of the day were worth fighting over. The purpose of his sermon, he started out by saying, "was not to contend for this or that opinion, but only to persuade men to the life of Christ," without which "those many opinions about religion, that are everywhere so eagerly contended for on all sides . . . are but so many shadows fighting with one another" (Commons 370). Cudworth went on to caution those who would

> please themselves only in the violent opposing of other men's superstitions, according to the genius of the present times, without substituting in the room of them an inward principle of sport and life in their own souls. For 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. (Commons 371)

This was a remarkable thing for Cudworth to say. For within Commons at the time there were many people who *had* contended for this or that opinion – people who *had* pulled down idols in churches and quarreled with painted glass. Now Cudworth did leave open the possibility that some members of the contending parties had within their hearts the inward principle of Christ. But he just barely left that possibility open. He came very close, that is, to asserting that all those actively engaged on one side or the other of the conflict were guilty of idolatry in their soul. And he made this statement to the House of Commons itself – in a lion's den of religious contention.

In his sermon at Lincolnes, Cudworth was equally clear in his criticisms of both sides of the raging religious disputes. There were some, he said, who contended that particular kinds of observance of the Sabbath and the Sacrament were essential to religion, and they were willing to fight for the cause of requiring them. And there were others who contended that such observances were superstitious, and they were willing to fight for the cause of eradicating them. But the fact was that it was essential neither to require such observances nor to eradicate them. One person could be truly religious while practicing them, while another person could be truly religious while not practicing them. Such things were indifferent, neither bad nor good. The one wrong reaction to such things was to take either their requirement or their eradication to be essential to religion (see Lincolnes 59–60).

The philosophical basis of Cudworth's call for religious liberty will stand out more clearly when placed against the justification many seventeenth-century Englishmen would have given for the enforcement of a single state religion. A large part of this justification would have rested on the widely accepted idea that creating properly religious citizens was an essential role of government. Rulers had as their charge the welfare of their subjects. And nothing was more important to the subjects' welfare than the state of their souls, which determined their eternal fate. Rulers were obligated, therefore, to do everything in their power to put their subjects on the right spiritual track – which meant that rulers were obligated to enforce religion. According to this way of thinking, a ruler who did not try to promote the spiritual welfare of his subjects by enforcing religion would be as remiss in his duties as a ruler who did nothing to defend his country against foreign invasion or as a parent who neglected to care for the safety of his child.

Underlying this justification for the enforcement of religion were two assumptions. The first assumption was that enforcement was necessary to ensure that people did the right thing. The second assumption was that people's spiritual welfare was well served when they were forced to do the right thing. The belief that religion had to be enforced involved, in other words, the idea that people would not perform the actions required by religion if the magistrate did not threaten them with punishment for nonperformance and the idea that people who performed certain actions in order to avoid the magistrate's punishment were doing what religion required. Cudworth thought both of these ideas were profoundly mistaken.

He thought the first idea was mistaken because it was grounded in the belief that human nature is basically corrupt. It implies that people do not have within themselves proper motivation to do what is right and that the external threats of the magistrate are therefore necessary. Take away the threat of punishment, according to this way of thinking, and people's natural tendency to sin will inevitably lead them to all manner of transgressions. But Cudworth believed that human beings are naturally drawn toward the good, and that all of us do have within ourselves proper motivation to do what is right. That is not to say that everyone *will* always do the right thing – the Positive Answer doesn't have to be *that* positive – but rather that everyone has the internal resources to do it. And the best way to get people to use their internal resources is by reasonable discussion and calm persuasion, not by the threat of punishment.

Cudworth thought the second idea underlying the enforcement of religion – that people who performed certain actions in order to avoid the magistrate's punishment were doing what religion required – was mistaken because it was grounded in the belief that religion consists of external actions, regardless of the motivation behind them. It implies that someone who performs certain actions because he fears punishment if he does not is doing what religion requires. But religion, Cudworth maintained, essentially consists of an internal state of mind, and that state of mind is something that the fear of punishment can never produce.

Another way of putting the problem with the second idea is this: if things are as bad as the Negative Answer says they are, then external enforcement isn't really going to do any good. For all external enforcement can do is make people perform certain acts rather than others. It cannot change a person's character or disposition. The fear of punishment may, for instance, make some people attend church on a Sunday instead of carousing. But so long as they are attending church only because they fear punishment if they do not, they are still motivated by narrow, irreligious "self-will." And people with such motivation are just as far from being truly religious when they are in a church as when they are outside of it.

Cudworth's basic point is that religion consists of one's internal state – of the kind of person one is – and forcing someone to perform external acts won't change this internal state. That which is essential to religion is inside each person and thus out of the magistrate's reach. As Cudworth put it in his Lincolnes sermon, "For the true Gospel-Righteousness, which Christ came to set up in the world, doth not consist merely in outward Works, whether Ceremonial or Moral, done by our own Natural power in our Unregenerate state, but in an inward Life and Spirit wrought by God" (Lincolnes 31). Or as he put it in his sermon to the House of Commons, "The *Law of the Letter* without us sets us in a condition of a little more liberty, by restraining us from many outward acts of sin; but yet it doth not disenthral us from the power of sin in our hearts" (Commons 405).

Cudworth's conception of heaven and hell underscores the futility of trying to enforce religion. As we have seen, Cudworth believed that heaven and hell are not primarily places at which one arrives after death but states of mind that arise from one's character. Now a person with a narrow, irreligious character can be forced to perform certain actions. But if he performs those actions only because he fears punishment, his character will still be irreligious, and hell-bound he will remain. The magistrate cannot save your soul any more than he can make you fall in love. As Cudworth explains,

> I do not therefore mean by holiness, the mere performance of outward duties of religion, coldly acted over as a task; nor our habitual prayings, hearings, fastings, multiplied one upon another (though these be all good, as subservient to an higher end); but I mean an inward soul and principle of divine life, that spiriteth all these; that enliveneth and quickeneth, the dead carcass of all our outward performances whatsoever. . . . [I urge] an inward self-moving principle living in our Hearts. (Commons 403)

In his 1647 sermons, then, Cudworth argued that the essence of religion consists of a certain kind of internal spirit, disposition, temper, or character. And he also maintained that a person with this spirit or character will not necessarily perform any particular rituals nor necessarily refrain from any particular rituals. Rituals in general, because they are outward acts that can be aligned to virtually any character, are religiously indifferent. There's nothing intrinsically right or wrong about them. If some people find that rituals help them cultivate a truly religious spirit, they should go ahead and engage in them. If other people find that rituals are a hindrance, they should refrain. Whatever works. The only wrong position to take is that either ritual or non-ritual is religiously essential. Because while having a righteous character is consistent with both ritual and non-ritual, having an unrighteous character is consistent with both of those things as well. It is, moreover, certainly unrighteous to enforce either ritual or non-ritual when that involves violating what *is* essential to religion, which is God's commandment of love (Commons 371). So Cudworth argued. And so he argued in the middle of a civil war fueled by disagreement over religious ritual.

Religious tolerance has won a decisive enough victory in Britain and the United States that it might require some effort for us to imagine living in a society governed by the principles of a one-religion state. Whichcote and Cudworth are as responsible for that victory as anyone. We've looked at how Cudworth's public sermons worked to win people over to a conception of religion that allowed for – indeed, required – individual liberty of worship. But Whichcote and Cudworth exerted just as much influence through their teaching at Cambridge, where they had as colleagues and students a number of the men who would spearhead the Latitudinarian movement (i.e., the movement to give individuals latitude to decide for themselves how to worship) that helped effect real change in the Church of England in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.[2] There is, as well, a direct line of intellectual descent from Whichcote and Cudworth to John Locke, whose calls for tolerance and liberty helped pave the way for the Toleration Act of 1690 and influenced greatly the U.S. Constitution.[3]

4

Rationalism, Sentimentalism, and Ralph Cudworth

Whichcote and Cudworth's role in the development of religious liberty was pivotal to Enlightenment thought. But Cudworth (and, to a lesser extent, Whichcote) was instrumental to the development of another highly influential line of thought as well: moral rationalism.

Moral rationalism is the view that morality originates in reason alone.[1] It is often contrasted with moral sentimentalism, which is the view that the origin of morality lies at least partly in (non-rational) sentiment. The eighteenth century saw pitched philosophical battles between rationalists and sentimentalists, and the issue continues to fuel debates among philosophers today.

The eighteenth-century rationalists took Cudworth to be one of their champions and the sentimentalists of the period agreed, placing Cudworth squarely in the opposing camp (see Price 20 and Hume's Second Enquiry 93). This view of Cudworth was further solidified in 1897, when Selby-Bigge published an influential two-volume collection of the writings of the British moralists. In his preface, Selby-Bigge explained that the first volume contained the writings of moral sentimentalists and the second volume the writings of moral rationalists. Cudworth appeared in the second – the rationalist – volume (see Selby-Bigge 1897/1964, xxxii). Since many twentieth-century philosophers knew Cudworth and numerous other British moralists primarily through Selby-Bigge's collection, it is understandable that they came to think both that the most important distinction in early modern British moral philosophy was between rationalism and sentimentalism and that Cudworth was one of the rationalists.

Selby-Bigge's characterization is not entirely off-base. Eighteenth-century thinkers such as Hutcheson, Balguy, Hume, and Price did devote a great deal of philosophical energy to the question of whether morality originates in reason alone or at least partly in sentiment. And the work of Cudworth's that was most familiar to both eighteenth- and twentieth-century philosophers was the *Treatise concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, which is, as we will see, a thoroughly rationalist text.

But the sermons Cudworth gave in 1647 paint a different picture, one that offers at least as much succor to sentimentalists as to rationalists. For in the sermons, Cudworth exalted an aspect of the soul that seems to share at least as much with what eighteenth- and twentieth-century philosophers thought of as sentiment as with what they thought of as reason.[2]

Part of the explanation for Cudworth's not fitting squarely into the rationalist or sentimentalist camp is that at the time he was writing the distinction had not yet been sharply formulated. But Cudworth also vacillated. In certain works, he seemed to want to emphasize the role passion must play in the righteous life and to suggest that rationality is less important. In other works, he insisted that rationality is essential and seemed to imply that passion is dispensable. But however that may be, I think it is clear that Cudworth anticipated some of the most crucial aspects of both sentimentalism and rationalism, and an examination of his views can shed valuable light on that later debate.

Perhaps most importantly, we can look to Cudworth to find the deepest common ground between the later rationalists and sentimentalists. For while Cudworth might have vacillated between proto-sentimentalist and rationalist positions, he always remained firmly and clearly committed to the idea that to live righteously is to act in accord with principles internal to one's own constitution. He always remained firmly and clearly opposed to the idea that to live righteously one had to depend on the assistance of some external force. And with Cudworth's goal of showing that morality originates in principles internal to each individual – with his goal of affirming the Positive Answer – the later rationalists and sentimentalists would all agree. An examination of Cudworth can thus help us to see that the dispute between rationalists and sentimentalists was a relatively mild disagreement among thinkers allied on the same side of the Human Nature Question.

In Section A of this chapter, I describe the conception of morality implied by the two sermons Cudworth gave in 1647. In B, I describe the conception of morality implied by Cudworth's posthumously published *Eternal and Immutable Morality* and how it differs – at least in emphasis, if not in substance – from that of the sermons. And in C, I explain why Cudworth expounded these two positions and what lies in common beneath them.

A. The Proto-Sentimentalism of the 1647 Sermons

In his sermons, as we've seen, Cudworth was concerned to distinguish between what is essential to religion and what is inessential. What is crucial for our purposes in this chapter is that he said in the sermons that the essence of religion lies in the "heart" and not in the "head" (Commons 378).

This heart-based religion Cudworth argues for in the sermons consists entirely of the "law of love" (Commons 404). This "law" is not an external command but an internal spirit of action, a "kindling" and "warming" principle of the heart (Commons 387) that "enliveneth and quickeneth . . . all our outward performances" (Commons 403). To be truly religious, Cudworth tells us, is not to be in mere "outward conformity to God's commandments" (Commons 404) but to have a certain kind of motivation or character, a certain kind of "temper and constitution of the soul" (Commons 380). It is not simply to perform particular actions but for one's heart to be in the right place.

Throughout the sermons, Cudworth repeatedly contrasts the essential "inward" spirit of religion with relatively unimportant "outward" observances (Commons 378). In the category of religiously peripheral outward things, Cudworth places specific churchly procedures and modes of worship, such as "habitual prayings, hearings, fastings" (Commons 403) and all other "*Rites* and *Ceremonies*" (Lincolnes 59). As we saw in Chapter 3, Cudworth acknowledges that these "external observances" (Lincolnes 60) may help influence the hearts of some people and thus may "be good, as subservient to a higher end" (Commons 403). But he believes that in themselves they are "*Indifferent*" (Lincolnes 59), there being "no intrinsecal Goodness at all in them" (Lincolnes 42).

In the category of peripheral outward things Cudworth also places theologically sophisticated doctrinal matters, such as the "infinite problems" concerning Christ's "divinity, humanity, union of both together, and what not" (Commons 373). Such "systems and bodies of divinity" may be "useful in a subordinate way," but on their own they cannot make one into a "true Christian" (Commons 374). They concern only "dry speculations" and the "dead skeleton of opinions" (Commons 380), while true Christianity consists of character, motivation, a spirit of action.

> [T]he knowledge of Christ doth not consist merely in a few barren notions, in a form of certain dry and sapless opinions. . . . Christ came not to possess our brains only with some cold opinions that send down nothing but a freezing and benumbing influence upon our hearts. Christ was vitae magister, not scholae; and he is the best Christian whose heart beats with the truest pulse towards heaven, not he whose head spinneth out the finest cobwebs. (Commons 378)

Here Cudworth is attacking scholasticism, and this is not the only place in the sermons where he does so.[3] In another passage he says, "Many of the more learned, if they can but wrangle and dispute about Christ, imagine themselves to be grown great proficients in the School of Christ" (Commons 374). And elsewhere he ridicules those who believe one needs "many school distinctions, to come to a right understanding" of Christ (Commons 379). The scholastics, Cudworth argues, made skill at syllogistic reasoning the "*alpha* and *omega* of their religion" (Commons 380). But one person can be an outstanding practitioner of the forms of scholastic disputation and yet lack all love for his fellow man, while another person can be ignorant of all the rules of Aristotelian logic and yet possess a truly Christian spirit. What scholasticism places great value on is neither necessary nor sufficient for true religion (Commons 375, 379).

So Cudworth claims that "rites and ceremonies," doctrinal "beliefs," and scholastic "speculations" are religiously inessential, and he justifies this claim by pointing out that such things have no necessary connection to the motivating spirit of one's actions.[4] Such things occupy the head and not the heart, but it is only the heart that is essential to true religion.[5] Attention to such things is, in fact, likely to be counterproductive, producing "*a bitter Zeal*" (Lincolnes 61) that draws one away from the true spirit of religion. Cudworth thus attacks "the distemper of our times," which works "to scare and frighten men only with opinions and make them only solicitous about the entertaining of this and that speculation, which will not render them anything the better in their lives, or the liker unto God" (Commons 379). Or as he puts it in another gibe at scholasticism, "Christ came not into the world to fill our heads with mere speculations; to kindle a fire of wrangling and contentious dispute amongst us and to warm our spirits against one another with nothing but angry and peevish debates, whilst in the meantime our hearts remain all ice within towards God and have not the least spark of true heavenly fire to melt and thaw them" (Commons 378).

Cudworth's rebuke to those battling over "*Ceremonial Observations*" and "systems and bodies of divinity" goes hand in hand with his conspicuous ecumenicalism. What is both necessary and sufficient for true religion, according to Cudworth, is an "inward principle" that is compatible with virtually any interpretation of Christianity. At times, Cudworth even suggests the Pelagian view that possession of this inward principle is compatible with a complete lack of distinctly Christian beliefs, as for instance when he claims that one who "endeavors really . . . to comply with that truth in his life which his conscience is convinced of, is nearer a Christian, though he never heard of Christ, than he that believes all the vulgar articles of the Christian faith and plainly denieth Christ in his life" (Commons 378).[6]

Now what is particularly relevant to the purpose of asking about Cudworth's relationship to the later dispute between rationalists and sentimentalists is that the sermons' emphasis on the internal motivational aspect of religion also leads him to dismiss the religious importance of propositional knowledge in general. Over and over again, he says that it is wrong to focus our religious energies on "speculations," "beliefs," "notions," "knowledge," "understanding," and other denizens of the "brain" and "head." For none of these things "kindles," "warms," "enlivens," or "quickens" the "heart," and within the heart lies the essence of religion. Propositional knowledge – knowledge that can be gained through discursive rational thought – is neither necessary nor sufficient for the "divine temper and constitution of the soul" that is the heart of true religion (Commons 380; cf. 403–4, 406–7).

> [T]here is a soul and spirit of divine truths that could never yet be congealed into ink, that could never be blotted upon paper; which [is] able to dwell or lodge nowhere but in a spiritual being, in a living thing, because itself is nothing but a life and spirit. Neither can it, where indeed it is, express itself sufficiently in words and sounds, but it will best declare and speak itself in actions. . . . Words are nothing but the dead resemblances and pictures of those truths which live and breathe in actions; and "the kingdom of God (as the apostle speaketh) consisteth not in word," but in life and power. (Commons, 389–90)

The essence of religion is "a living principle in us" that cannot be captured by language (Commons 374). It is something that lies beyond the reach of discursive rational thought. "[W]ords and syllables, which are but dead things, cannot possibly convey the living notions of heavenly truths to us. The secret mysteries of a divine life . . . cannot be written or spoken, language and expressions cannot reach them" (Commons 374–5).

In the sermons, then, Cudworth elevates "heart" over "head" in a manner that leads him to marginalize propositional knowledge and discursive thought, claiming that in matters of religion such knowledge and thought can play a merely peripheral, nonessential role at best.[7] Indeed, the sermons at times come close to an outright condemnation of those whose primary focus is on rational thought, contending that such people are liable to lose touch with the essence of religion by concentrating on matters that are neither necessary nor sufficient. But this is hardly what we would expect from a philosopher known as a rationalist. The sermons seem to be, rather, the work of someone who wants to insulate the essence of religion from the workings of the rational faculty.

Cudworth's embrace of *mystery* in the sermon before the House of Commons also suggests a desire to keep rationality at arm's length. In that sermon, Cudworth repeatedly contends that the essence of religion is a "great mystery" and that all true Christians are "so many mystical Christs" (Commons 387, 390; cf. 375, 380). Cudworth also places mystery at the heart of religion in his 1642 sermon "The Union of Christ and the Church; in a Shadow," where he endorses the view (which he attributes to Plato) that there is contained "some Mysticall meaning concerning the Nature of Divine Love," by which a man might "recover himselfe, and so by degrees work up himself again unto God, and be made perfectly one with him" (Union 23). The incompatibility between these endorsements of mystery and a robust confidence in the faculty of rationality stands out clearly when we attend to the word "mystery" itself. The original Greek meaning of "mystery" – of which Cudworth would have been aware – is a secret religious ceremony, closed to the public, open only to initiates.[8] And while that sense of the word was not what Cudworth intended, he must have had in mind the sense that evolved from it, which is (according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*) "a doctrine of faith involving difficulties which human reason is incapable of solving" or "a matter unexplained or inexplicable; something beyond human knowledge or comprehension." By ushering mystery into religion's essential inner sanctum, Cudworth seems to be showing discursive rational thought the door.

B. The Rationalism of *Eternal and Immutable Morality*

In contrast to the 1647 sermons, *Eternal and Immutable Morality*, which Cudworth probably wrote in the early to middle 1660s, demands to be interpreted as a rationalist tract. This is not simply because EIM elevates to supreme importance something that is labeled "reason," but because of the way that EIM conceives of both what is labeled "reason" and the concept of morality.

Cudworth tells us in the first chapter of EIM that its goal is to show that if morality exists at all, it must exist *necessarily* (16). EIM seeks to establish that morality will be real if and only if the moral categories – of good and evil, just and unjust, virtuous and vicious – are as "eternal and immutable" as the categories of logic and mathematics. So if what we think of as morality turns out to be based on merely contingent facts, then (according to EIM) we will have to conclude that morality doesn't exist. We will have to conclude that our moral terms don't refer to anything real at all, that everything we think of as morally significant is actually an illusion, a sham. Let us call this the "necessity of morals thesis."[9]

The necessity of morals thesis is a metaphysical claim. But Cudworth draws from it the epistemological implication that we will have reason to trust our moral ideas (we will have reason to think our moral ideas track moral reality) only if those ideas originate in reason alone. For it is reason and reason alone that comprehends necessary truth (EIM 134, 137). Reason is that which discerns what is "necessary, firm, immutable, and adamantine" (EIM 137). It is the "power in the soul" that comprehends "that which absolutely IS and IS NOT" (EIM 134). If, in contrast, our moral ideas turn out to originate in something other than reason alone, then we will lack grounds for thinking that they accurately depict reality.

Cudworth's belief that our moral ideas can be trustworthy only if they originate in reason alone is part of a general epistemological position he holds. The general position is that something constitutes knowledge or science if and only if it is known to be necessarily true. This is an all-or-nothing epistemology in that it tells us that any belief that falls short of necessary understanding does not qualify as knowledge at all. All knowledge consists of necessary understanding, while beliefs we cannot be sure are necessarily true are all equally "whiffling," on an epistemic par with the most sottish of superstitions.

This is a very high epistemological standard – too high, most contemporary philosophers would say. Our understanding of mathematics and logic may be of the type EIM longs for, but that doesn't mean (most contemporary philosophers would say) that anything that falls short of that understanding is fit for the epistemological scrap heap. There are other standards that may also be perfectly acceptable, even if they aren't as high as mathematical and logical understanding. Most of what is now called science, in fact – physics, chemistry, biology – we do not understand in the way we understand math and logic. But we do not feel compelled to say that because we cannot grasp the logical necessity of the principles of, say, biology, the study of biology is a complete sham. Indeed, most contemporary meta-ethicists think they would completely vindicate moral realism if they could show that our moral judgments can achieve the epistemological status of physics, chemistry, and biology. Very few, if any, contemporary moral realists are still pining for a moral theory that looks like math and logic. But what typically passes for moral realism today would not have been good enough for the Cudworth of EIM. To constitute knowledge, according to EIM, our grasp of morality has to be of the same type as our understanding of math and logic. Nothing less will do.

Cudworth was not alone in subscribing to this high epistemological standard. Many other seventeenth-century philosophers also held that beliefs truly deserving the status of knowledge had to involve an understanding of the necessity of what was believed. Many other seventeenth-century philosophers held that our understanding of the natural world – if that understanding was ever to be worthy of the name of "science" – would eventually be based on laws that we would see are necessary in the same way math and logic are. A putative science that lacked such laws would be incomplete at best. So from the perspective of this seventeenth-century conception of knowledge, to show that morality is on an epistemic par with systems of logically non-necessary inductive generalizations would not be to do morality any favors, as non-necessary inductive generalizations would not have qualified as science at all.

The epistemological implication Cudworth draws from the necessity of morals thesis is central to EIM's argument against his two greatest foes: Hobbes and the English Calvinist voluntarists. As Cudworth construes them, Hobbes and the voluntarists both maintain that our moral duties originate in the commands of a being with great power – in the case of Hobbes it is the sovereign, in the case of the voluntarists it is God.[10] But this powerful being does not issue the commands he does for reasons we can fully understand. We could not, through the use of reason alone, have predicted what the commander would command. We require the commander's dicta, either in the form of proclamations and decrees or in the form of scripture. Moreover, our reasons for obeying the commands are not the same as the commander's reasons for issuing them. The normative force of the commands depends on their being commands and does not issue entirely from their being things we understand to be necessarily true. Indeed, as Cudworth construes them, the Hobbesian and the voluntarist imply that our ultimate reason for obeying the commands necessarily involves our thinking that we will be punished by the commander if we do not. But such fearful obedience bears no resemblance to the purely rational understanding that must undergird what Cudworth takes to be a real and justified commitment to morality.

The epistemological implication Cudworth draws from the necessity of morals thesis is also central to his rejection of the view (which he associated with Protagoras) that morality originates in sensation. One's own sensations are not the same as the commands of another. In EIM, however, Cudworth argues that one's sensations are crucially like voluntarist and Hobbesian commands in that they defy understanding. Just as it is impossible for us to discover fully intelligible reasons for the commands the voluntarist God or the Hobbesian sovereign issues (at least insofar as Cudworth interprets voluntarism and Hobbesianism), so too is it impossible for us to discover fully intelligible reasons for the sensations we experience. Our sensations are things that just happen to us. We experience them as mere occurrences, brute facts. We might be able to correlate some of these experiences with others of them, but we cannot understand *why* they occur. Our awareness of them always remains on the same plane, as it were, on the surface (EIM 58).

Of course, Cudworth did not know of the sentimentalist moral theories that would later be expounded by Hutcheson and Hume. I believe it's pretty clear, though, that the arguments of EIM imply that moral sentiments, or the deliverances of a moral sense, are just as impenetrable to our understanding as mere sensations and arbitrary commands. EIM implies that sentiments are things we experience as just happening to us, brute facts, not ideas we can understand. According to EIM, therefore, sentiments cannot ground the reality of morals, nor can they be the source of moral distinctions that we can have adequate reason to accept.

So Cudworth uses the necessity of morals thesis and its epistemological implication as a battering ram against voluntarism, Hobbesianism, and the view that morality and moral judgment depend on sensation. But Cudworth also explores the positive or constructive side of the thesis and its epistemological implication, explaining what would have to be true in order for us to have knowledge of morality, as well as explaining what a science of morals would look like. Let us look at those positive aspects now.

As we've seen, Cudworth believes that to have knowledge of something is to understand that it is necessarily so. And to have such an understanding, we must comprehend the essential nature of a thing (EIM 62). Cudworth also maintains that we can never comprehend the essential nature of things that exist outside of our minds, for we can only experience such external things' effect on us, not how they are in and of themselves (EIM 57–60).

That is why sensation can never produce knowledge – because “sense itself is but the passive perception of some individual material forms, but to know or understand, is actively to comprehend a thing by some abstract, free and universal reasonings” (EIM 58).

What, then, can we know? What essential natures can we comprehend? We can know and comprehend only what is “written within” our minds (EIM 60). If we have any knowledge – if there is anything whose essential nature we comprehend – it must be of what is internal to us. As Cudworth puts it, “[T]he primary and immediate objects of intellection and knowledge, are not things existing without the mind, but ideas of the mind itself actively exerted, that is the intelligible reasons of things” (EIM 76). All that we can ever know is our own innate ideas.

Because Cudworth believes that we can have knowledge only of innate ideas and not of things that impress on us from without, it is vitally important for him to prove that innate ideas exist, that the empiricist view of the human soul as carte blanche is mistaken. For if the empiricists are right and we do not possess innate ideas, then Cudworth would have to conclude that it is impossible for us to have knowledge of anything at all.

What does Cudworth have in mind when he speaks of an innate idea? He provides numerous examples, and it is not always clear if there are any coherent organizing principles controlling his disparate lists. But the examples that come up time and time again are: “*Nihil potest esse et non esse eodem tempore* [Nothing can be and not be at the same time],” “*Aequalia addita aequalibus efficiunt aequalia* [Equals added to equals make equals],” and “*Nihil nulla est affectio* [No effect results from nothing].”[11] And the example that he uses most frequently by far – the one that plays the leading, if not the sole, role in his arguments for innatism – comes right out of Euclid: “the geometrical theorem concerning a triangle; that it hath three angles equal to two right angles” (EIM 118). Each of these ideas is a “universal axiomatical truth” (EIM 118) or “scientifical theorem or proposition” (EIM 122). Each of them we know to be necessarily true. And each of them, Cudworth argues throughout Books III and IV of EIM, must have originated not in external sensation but in the active vigor of the mind itself.

It is, however, very difficult to see how the spirit of religion Cudworth glorifies in the sermons would fit into EIM’s list of innate ideas. For in the sermons, Cudworth tells us that the spirit of religion cannot be “congealed into ink” nor “blotted upon paper.” It cannot be expressed in “words and syllables” nor “written or spoken.” The spirit is something that “language and expressions cannot reach.” But the theorems and propositions on EIM’s list of innate ideas congeal into ink and blot onto paper very well. Words and syllables seem custom-made for their expression. Most of them even have their own Latin names.

Cudworth argues, moreover, that the innate ideas have a *universal* or *public* nature, and this suggests another difficulty in trying to assimilate EIM’s innate ideas and the sermons' spirit of religion. To see this we must first trace Cudworth's account of this feature of innate ideas.

Cudworth believes that even though innate ideas "exist only in the mind" (EIM 125), they are nonetheless "exactly the same" for everyone (EIM 131). And when he says that these ideas are "exactly the same" for everyone, he does not mean merely that the ideas have the same content, but rather that each person's rational faculty has as its object the same *public* things.

Cudworth's argument for the public nature of innate ideas starts from the claim that the objects of reason are "fixed and immutable" (EIM 122). We all realize, for instance, that the essence of a triangle has always been and will always be exactly the same. This follows from the necessity of the essential characteristics of a triangle. But our particular individual minds are not fixed and immutable in the way that the essence of a triangle is. For there was a time before our particular individual minds ever existed, and yet there never was a time when the essence a triangle did not exist (EIM 127). There are, as well, times when we "do not actually think of" the essential features of a triangle, and yet the essential features still exist at all times nonetheless, possessing "a constant and never-failing entity . . . whether our particular minds think of them or not" (EIM 127). But these truths are purely intelligible, and as such can exist only within a mind. They "are things that cannot exist alone," for as they are nothing but "modifications of mind" they must always inhere in some intellect (EIM 128).

So the objects of reason have an eternal and immutable existence, and those objects can exist only within a mind. But all of our particular created minds are temporal and mutable. We must conclude, therefore, that there is some other mind that is eternal and immutable and that is forever and always thinking of all the objects of reason. This mind, of course, is none other than God. As Cudworth explains:

> Now the plain meaning of all this is nothing else, but that there is an eternal wisdom and knowledge in the world, necessarily existing which was never made, and can never cease to be or be destroyed. Or, which is all one, that there is an infinite eternal mind necessarily existing, and that actually comprehends himself, the possibility of all things, and the verities clinging to them. In a word, that there is a God, or an omnipotent and omniscient Being, necessarily existing, who therefore cannot destroy his own being or nature, that is, his infinite power and wisdom. (EIM 128)

All the objects of reason exist always in the mind of God. And when we exercise our rational faculty, we gain access to those objects. Each of us, moreover, gains access to the very same objects, for each of us, through the use of reason, participates with the mind of God itself. God's mind is the public arena in which the rational thought of everyone is conducted. As Cudworth writes:

> Moreover, from hence also it comes to pass that truths, though they be never so many several and distant minds apprehending them, yet they are not broken, multiplied,

> or diversified thereby, but that they are one and the same individual truths in them all. So that it is but one truth and knowledge that is in all the understandings in the world. Just as when a thousand eyes look upon the sun at once, they all see the same individual object. Or as when a great crowd or throng of people hear one and the same orator speaking to them all, it is one and the same voice, that is in the several ears of all those several auditors. So in like manner, when innumerable created understandings direct themselves to the contemplation of the same universal and immutable truths, they do all of them but as it were listen to one and the same original voice of the eternal wisdom that is never silent. . . . (EIM 131–2)

So Cudworth holds that when we truly understand something – when we have real knowledge – we participate with the mind of God. This is a very significant idea for several reasons.

First of all, it points toward a deep explanation of the epistemological implication Cudworth draws from the necessity of morals thesis. The epistemological implication, recall, is that we have knowledge or a science of something only if we understand why it is necessarily so. The seventeenth-century philosophers who held this epistemological position seemed to believe that the mind of God knows almost no contingency. God's understanding of the most important things, these philosophers believed, is perfect, and to understand something perfectly is to understand why it *has* to be the way it is. It follows, then, that if we are participating with the mind of God, our understanding will be perfect too. So if our knowledge is God-like, and if God-like knowledge consists of necessary understanding, our beliefs can constitute knowledge only if they too impart necessary understanding.[12] This is why math and logic are, for many seventeenth-century philosophers, such apt models for science – because our understanding of the fundamental mathematical and logical principles is so full and complete that God Himself cannot improve on it. EIM explains as clearly as any seventeenth-century work this idea that to do math and logic – or, indeed, truly to understand anything at all – is to become one with the mind of God. This is a position – rooted in a Positive Answer based on the deiformity of the human mind – that unites epistemology and religion, a position according to which the exercise of rationality is nothing less than a sacrament, a way truly to partake of the Divine.

Cudworth's claim that whenever we attain true understanding we participate with the mind of God is also significant because it allows him to draw the conclusion that when we attain true understanding we participate with the minds of one another. Cudworth is thus able to provide an account of the universal or public nature of reason. He is able to explain how rationality enables us to understand each other's thought, how we are able to "confer and discourse together . . . presently perceiving one another's meaning" (EIM 131). Everyone is able to comprehend Euclid's theorems and discuss them with others, no matter where or when he or she lives. But this would be impossible unless everyone had in mind the same geometric ideas, unless all of us geometers were truly of one mind. As Cudworth puts it:

> Whereas it is plain that the subject of this theorem [that a triangle has three angles equal to two right angles] is such a thing as every geometrician, though in never such distant places and times, hath the very same always ready at his hand, without the least imaginable difference. And they all pronounce concerning the same thing. (EIM 118)

So reason is universal or public in that its objects are the same for everyone. These objects are publicly accessible intellectual items that everyone can simultaneously apprehend. And "whenever any theoretical proposition is rightly understood by any one particular mind whatsoever, and wheresoever it be, the truth of it is no private thing, nor relative to that particular mind only" (EIM 137).

Now that we have a picture of Cudworth's commitment in EIM to the public nature of the innate ideas that would enable us to attain moral knowledge, let us return to the question of how EIM's account relates to the 1647 sermons. Recall that in the sermons Cudworth repeatedly insists that the spirit of religion is a mystery, that there is something irreducibly mysterious about Christ's kindling of our hearts. But the most natural interpretation of the claim that something is mysterious is that the thing is *not* publicly accessible. A mystery is typically something about which all people *cannot* "confer and discourse" together. So once again, EIM and the 1647 sermons seem, at least prima facie, to imply different positions on the nature of morality. This problem becomes sharper, moreover, when we look closely at the kind of moral theory for which EIM was intended to pave the way.[13]

It might seem that EIM isn't much concerned with morality, its title notwithstanding, as the bulk of the book consists of epistemological arguments for the existence of innate ideas. But these epistemological arguments are clearly tied to a conception of what a proper moral theory would look like, and it's easy enough to infer the latter from the former.

Cudworth's ultimate goal, he tells us in the first chapter of EIM, is to show that we can and do have moral knowledge. In order to show this, he first has to explain what knowledge is, for moral knowledge is one part of knowledge in general. He then goes on to argue that to know something is to understand the necessity of it. He also argues that we can understand the necessity only of what is internal to our own minds, and that as a result, we can have knowledge only if we possess innate ideas. It then becomes necessary for Cudworth to establish that innate ideas do in fact exist in the human mind. And the example of geometry is supposed to establish that. But this still leaves a crucial job undone. For although the example of geometry shows that we can have knowledge (that our minds are not completely incapable of knowing, as they would be if they were blank slates), it does not show that we have knowledge of morality. The fact that our geometric ideas pass epistemic muster does not on its own imply that our moral ideas do.

Cudworth himself makes it clear that EIM leaves undone this job of establishing that our moral ideas are objects of knowledge. That job, he says in the final chapter of EIM, is something that he "shall show afterwards" (EIM 145). EIM has shown that since persons do have some innate ideas of necessary truths arising from within their own souls (as the example of geometry proves), it is possible for them to have knowledge. But showing this general fact about the human soul is only prefatory work to the more specific task of showing that our moral ideas are actually objects of knowledge. EIM disposes of one preliminary objection to the claim that we have moral knowledge, the objection being that we are incapable of having any kind of knowledge at all. But EIM does not positively establish that we do have moral knowledge itself. As Cudworth puts it (once again in the final chapter of EIM):

> Wherefore since the nature of morality cannot be understood, without some knowledge of the nature of the soul, I thought it seasonable and requisite here to take this occasion offered and *to prepare the way to our following discourse* by showing in general that the soul is not a mere passive and receptive thing, which hath no innate active principle of its own, because upon this hypothesis there could be no such thing as morality. (EIM 145; italics added)

So Cudworth sees EIM as prolegomena to a work that will explain "the nature of morality." EIM demonstrates that "if there be anything at all good or evil, just or unjust, there must of necessity be something naturally and immutably good and just," while the discourse to follow EIM will "show what this natural, immutable, and eternal justice is, with the branches and species of it" (EIM 16).

What will this later work look like? What kind of "discourse" will explain "the nature of morality" and show "the branches and species of it"? It's hard to say for sure. Cudworth's voluminous unpublished manuscripts suggest various pictures, and it seems that many more of his manuscripts – including "a discourse concerning Moral Good and Evil" or "Natural Ethicks" – have been lost (see Birch xiii). But the arguments in EIM give us very strong reason to believe that the sequel would have been a moral geometry that starts from self-evident moral axioms and moves on to demonstrations of specific moral duties. EIM implies that the way to establish that we have moral knowledge is to explain clearly and distinctly what our moral ideas are and to show that they are just as clear and certain as geometry. A work that produces a theory such as this would establish the science of morality in the same way that Euclid's principles established the science of geometry.

This idea that a true moral theory will resemble Euclidean geometric theory is evident in Samuel Clarke, John Balguy, and Book IV of John Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (see Raphael 1991, 192–209, 399, 159) Most relevant to our discussion of Cudworth, however, is that both

Benjamin Whichcote and Henry More – Cudworth's closest friends and philosophical comrades – were also both proponents of the geometric model of moral philosophy.

Whichcote develops his system of morality in several related sermons. He begins from the claim that all of morality is grounded in the self-evident principle that actions should be "fit and just" or "fair and equal." Whichcote does not spend much time explaining this principle of fitness, probably because he thinks of it as so obvious and fundamental that it neither needs nor admits of explanation. He does provide some glosses, though, maintaining in a couple of places that the principle of fitness "consists in this; the congruity and proportion between the action of an agent and his object. He acts morally that doth observe the proportion of an action to its object; that is, he doth terminate a due action upon its proper object" (Whichcote II 236). In a similar vein, Whichcote says that all moral actions are instances of "*giv[ing] every one their own*" (Whichcote II 52).

Whichcote does not leave matters at this very general level of fitness, however. He goes on to derive from that general principle specific rules of conduct, formulating "demonstration[s] in morals, that [are] as clear and as satisfactory as any demonstration in the mathematicks" (Whichcote IV 307). The first things he derives are four general tenets. They are:

> 1. To reverence and acknowledge the deity. 2. To live in love, and bear good will towards one another. 3. To deal justly, equally and fairly in all our transactions and dealings each with other. 4. To use moderation and government of ourselves, in respect of the necessaries and conveniences of this state. (Whichcote IV 351)

From these four tenets, Whichcote proceeds to demonstrate three general classes of duties: Godliness, or duties to God (from 1); Righteousness, or duties to others (from 2 and 3); and Sobriety, or duties to self (from 4) (Whichcote I 383–4). Whichcote claims to show how these duties imply particular rules that dictate how one ought to conduct oneself in matters of worship, speech, contracts, diet, and the running of a household, including instructions on how parents are to treat their children, husbands their wives, masters their servants, and men their dogs and horses (Whichcote I 253–5, II 218–19, IV 351–61).

More develops his moral system in the *Enchiridion Ethicum*, which was published in 1668.[14] He begins by presenting twenty-three "Moral Noemata" or "Noema's" (More 21). These Noemas, More tells us, fill the same role in the study of morality that "first undeniable Axioms" fill in "Mathematical Demonstrations" (More 20). They are "[a]xioms . . . into which almost all the Reasons of Morality may be reduced" (More 20) or self-evident general moral propositions from which specific moral duties may be derived. The Noemas consist of definitions of good and evil (Noemas I and II), descriptions of the degrees of which good and evil admit (Noemas III, IV, VII, VIII, IX), methods for maximizing the ratio of good to evil (Noemas V, VI, X, XI, XII, XIII, XVIII, XIX), various statements of the Golden Rule (Noemas XIV, XV, XVI), and basic ethical claims ("'Tis good to obey the Magistrate in things indifferent" [Noema XX], "'Tis better to obey God than Men" [Noema XXI]).

After presenting his Moral Noemas, More goes on to derive from them extensive lists of duties and virtues, such as those of justice (More 112–25), prudence, sincerity, patience (More 98–108), temperance, and fortitude (More 133). More attempts to bring these derivations down to very specific levels (just as Whichcote had done), claiming, for instance, to have established the particular duties that are owed to magistrates, different family members, and private men who are equals (More 123–5). More makes it clear, moreover, that in deriving these duties he takes himself to be conducting a moral science that is analogous to geometry (More 81), one that consists of demonstrations of eternal and immutable ethical truths (More 115).

The moral system of More's *Enchiridion* fits perfectly with the epistemology of EIM. The Moral Noemas at the foundation of that system are purported to have the same status as the innate ideas Cudworth presents as the foundation of other branches of knowledge. And the demonstrations that proceed from More's Noemas purport to have the same structure as the proofs of geometry, which is Cudworth's paradigm for a science.

In addition to the philosophical confluence of Cudworth's EIM and More's *Enchiridion Ethicum*, there is extratextual evidence that More's ethical system is just the kind of thing Cudworth himself planned to produce. The extratextual evidence consists of several letters from Cudworth and More to John Worthington (all the relevant parts of which are quoted in Birch xiii–xv). They describe a quarrel that took place between Cudworth and More in 1664–5. Cudworth says in the first letter that a year previously he had begun a discourse on "Good and Evil, or Natural Ethicks," and that More had strongly urged him to complete and publish the work. But eight months later, to his dismay, Cudworth learned that More himself "had begun a discourse on the same argument," a discourse that More called his *Enchiridion Ethicum.* Cudworth talked with More about the matter, showing, as More put it, "disgust, &c." and contending "that if I [More] persisted in the resolution of publishing my book he [Cudworth] would desist in his." Out of deference to Cudworth, More agreed to "desist, and throw his into a corner," although he was not happy about it, as he had by this time finished "all but a chapter." Unfortunately, Cudworth did not publish his discourse promptly, although he had told More that "he had most of it then ready to send up to be licensed that week." And so, a few months later, More went ahead and proceeded to publish his book, even though he realized that doing so could very well "disgust Dr. Cudworth, whom I am very loath any way to grieve." Of course, we can't be sure of the reason for Cudworth's disgust (nor can we know whether his discourse on natural ethics, which has since been lost, really was ready to be "set to the press," as he told More). But it seems to me that the best explanation of Cudworth's reaction is that he thought that the *Enchiridion* would steal his thunder – that by publishing the *Enchiridion*, More would gain credit for ideas that actually belonged to Cudworth. The fact that Whichcote *also* presented a view of morality modeled on geometry makes the idea that EIM coheres with a geometric model of morality more likely still.[15]

So I think there are very strong philosophical, textual, and historical reasons for taking Whichcote's ethical demonstrations and More's *Enchiridion* to be the logical extensions of EIM.[16] But if I am right in thinking that in EIM Cudworth is arguing for a conception of moral knowledge modeled on Euclidean geometry, then we are faced with yet another difficulty in bringing into a single harmonious whole EIM and the 1647 sermons. For while the moral geometry for which EIM paves the way is essentially discursive, propositional, and public, the spirit of religion the sermons insist on is essentially intuitive, inexpressible, and mysterious. EIM's raison d'être is to show that morality is a branch of knowledge or "theoretical truth" (EIM 141). But the sermons come very close to dismissing the religious importance of theoretical knowledge altogether.[17]

C. The Civil War and Cudworth's Philosophical Development

It seems to me unlikely that Cudworth failed to notice the difference between EIM and the 1647 sermons. The sermons return again and again to mystery, love, and the heart without ever bringing comparisons to geometric theorems into the picture. EIM returns again and again to geometric theorems and barely mentions mystery, love, or the heart. The rhetoric of the sermons pushes rational thought to the wings, while the terminology of EIM gives it the starring role. A full account of Cudworth's thought must explain these differences.

Such an explanation should, I believe, take account of the historical events that occurred between 1647, when Cudworth delivered the sermons, and the 1660s, when he wrote EIM. My description of these historical events is very brief, but I think that even a sketchy historical picture will help to shed light on the differences between the 1647 sermons and EIM.

The English Civil War began in the summer of 1642. The Royalist and Parliamentary forces battled on and off until 1645, when the Parliamentary forces won several decisive victories, leading to the surrender of King Charles's forces in the spring of 1646. Charles would in the end never reach a peace settlement with Parliament, but Cudworth could not have known that when he was giving his sermons in early 1647. The second half of 1646 and the first few months of 1647 were hardly tranquil times, but Cudworth would have had reason to believe that the worst of the civil strife was over. He would have had reason to believe that the moderate factions within Parliament would, before too long, win the day and establish a peaceful, stable society.

But in late May and early June 1647 – just two months after Cudworth gave his sermon to the House of Commons – events took a drastic turn. Extremist elements within the New Model Army (which had been fighting on the Parliamentary side) severed their relationship with the moderate factions in Parliament and began to make increasingly bellicose demands. In August 1647, the radicalized army occupied Westminster and the City of London. In the spring and summer of 1648, there was a resumption of violent military conflict. In December, the army purged Parliament of all those who might have sought a peace settlement with the king. And in January 1649, Charles was tried, convicted, and beheaded. In retrospect, the months in which Cudworth delivered his sermons might have seemed to him not entirely dissimilar to how September 10, 2001, currently seems to many New Yorkers.

Cudworth's sermons made it clear that he was in favor of a peaceful settlement and greatly opposed to continued fighting. The violent turn of events from 1647 to 1649 must have horrified him. He must also have been horrified by many of the radical religious and political movements that threatened the social order in the 1650s – movements that were in some cases associated with the extremist elements that had spurred the New Model Army toward the violent second phase of the Civil War. I cannot present a detailed picture of these radical movements, but a very brief account of three of them will, I hope, give some indication of the times during which Cudworth's philosophy was evolving.

One of the most politically subversive movements was that of the True Levellers, or Diggers, the most influential of whom was Gerrard Winstanley. Winstanley and his followers (who were probably connected to the radical elements of the New Model Army who instigated the violence of 1647–9) were radical egalitarians who sought to abolish the institution of property and eliminate all class distinctions and hierarchy. Their egalitarian goals included demolishing the traditional structure of the universities by opening them up to all citizens and stripping them of their "emphasis on the classics and divinity" in favor of a concentration "on vocational and scientific subjects" (Coward 1994, 243). Winstanley identified his radical Digger program, which came to him in a vision he had while in a trance, with the spirit of Christ and saw the overthrowing of conventional society as his religious duty, the way to lead all humans to regain the righteousness that had been lost by the Fall. Winstanley said that his Digger program was in accord with reason, but he equated reason not with the discursive geometric rationality of EIM but with an intuitive feeling of love for all humanity, echoing the non-discursive "law of love" Cudworth endorsed in the sermons.

Winstanley's radical egalitarianism certainly disturbed men of property. But even more alarming were the Ranters, who took belief in the deiformity of human nature to a bizarre extreme (see Hill 1972, 163–8). The Ranters (or perhaps merely the hostile characterization of them, which might have been all that people like Cudworth would ever have known) insisted that they possessed an internal natural light that was the spirit of Christ infusing their hearts. The Ranters then drew the conclusion that since they themselves were in a sense God, it was impossible for them to commit sin, regardless of the outward actions they performed. They thus saw no need to respect civil laws or societal restrictions of any kind. To prove their belief in their own divinity and their disdain for mere outward conformity, the Ranters performed (or so it was said) all manner of egregious acts, engaging in public blasphemy, cursing, nudity, and fornication.

The Quakers were less violent than the True Levellers and generally better behaved than the Ranters (although Nayler's re-enactment of Christ's entry into Jerusalem, which consisted of his riding into Bristol on an ass with women strewing palm leaves before him, was considered just as blasphemous as anything the Ranters did). But the Quakers were lumped together with the other dangerous radicals of the 1650s nonetheless, and not without reason (Coward 1994, 241–2). For they too had powerful egalitarian tendencies, as evidenced by their refusal to remove their hats in the presence of superiors and their aggressive use of the familiar "thou." And they too elevated personal conscience above civil law. Quakers listened to the "spirit within" first and foremost, and they made it clear that if that internal spirit pointed toward a course of action forbidden by the magistrate, they would disobey the magistrate and follow the spirit.

Now what's important for our purposes is that there were crucial aspects of the thought of the True Levellers, Ranters, and Quakers that would have been perfectly at home within Cudworth's sermons of 1647. Indeed, their language was at times virtually indistinguishable from Cudworth's. They all exalted the "inner spirit," the "inner light" and "Christ within" while condemning those who overvalued the "dead letter." They all trumpeted the importance of the "law of love" and contrasted it with a fixation on "external observances." And these statements were not platitudinous boilerplate dicta but the bold expression of provocative ideas that signaled the speakers' rejection of central beliefs of mainstream society. It is, consequently, very unlikely that Cudworth failed to notice the similarity between his language in the sermons and the rhetoric of these radical groups.

But while Cudworth's sermons give us very good reason for thinking that in 1647 he would have sympathized with some aspects of enthusiasm, there is no reason to think he would have embraced the radicalism of the 1650s that the True Levellers, Ranters, and Quakers exemplified. An early advocate of religious liberty though he was, Cudworth gives no indication that he would have condoned extremist threats to law and order. Christopher Hill has said that "the early months of 1649 had been a terrifying time for the men of property" (Hill 1972, 88), and it seems very likely that Cudworth had been just as scared as the other members of his class. The wish of the radicals to turn the world "upside down" was not something Cudworth shared. Indeed, he goes out of his way in EIM to explain how his anti-voluntarist view of morality is consistent with a real moral obligation to obey the civil authorities, who must be granted "lawful authority of commanding" so that they may preserve "political order amongst men" (EIM 20).[18]

What is crucial to realize, however, is that it would have been understandable if someone drew a connection between the threat to "political order" posed by the radicals and the heart-based, enthusiastically inclined view of religion Cudworth espoused in his 1647 sermons. For the radicals revealed how a passionate emphasis on the "inner light" can quite easily lead to a disregard for civil authority and a breakdown of societal coherence. This is because the inner light is self-justifying in a very robust sense of the term. It's self-justifying, first of all, in that it is the spirit of God, and thus inherently of a higher authority than the word of any merely civil power. And it's also self-justifying in that it justifies only to a self – only to the person to whom the light appears. As it is beyond the reach of written and spoken language, the inner light is inescapably mystical and private. Its message cannot be the subject of discourse and discussion, but must remain locked within the heart of the individual recipient. The inner light transcends – and subverts – all public justification.

In his sermons of 1647, Cudworth endorsed the mystical inner light and seemed willing to accept some of the enthusiastic features that it implied. But there's every reason to think that he rejected the subversive activities that could reasonably have been associated with these ideas in the 1650s. So what was Cudworth to do?

One possible response was the Hobbesian one. Hobbes took the violence and disorder of the Civil War to be clear evidence of the dangerous selfishness of human nature. Left to their own devices, Hobbesians believed, human beings will inevitably come into conflict, as their basic natural motives are incompatible with a safe, harmonious coexistence. Rampant individual judgment is a recipe for disaster, as the rebellion and enthusiastic lawlessness of the late 1640s and early 1650s plainly revealed. The Hobbesian solution is thus to take judgment away from each individual and give it to an absolute sovereign, who will force everyone to live lawfully by meting out the severest punishment for those who don't. The only way to prevent people from coming into violent conflict, according to Hobbesians, is to place them all under an external power.

It's highly significant that Cudworth did not take this route. He witnessed firsthand the kind of lawlessness Hobbesians took to be their best evidence. But he refused nonetheless to take judgment away from the individual. He continued to insist that righteous conduct can and must be grounded in principles internal to every person. He continued to insist that all people have within themselves all the resources necessary to live as they ought. In short, he continued to insist on the goodness of human nature even in the face of the kind of violent conflict that drives many toward the idea that human nature is fundamentally corrupt.

How did he do it? How did Cudworth distinguish himself from the radicals, whose absolute faith in the inner light bore a striking resemblance to his 1647 insistence on the inward heart of religion, without falling into the authoritarianism of Hobbes? How could he continue to insist that ultimate justification must come from within without condoning heart-felt rebellion? How could he maintain his Positive Answer while distancing himself from the disorderly enthusiasts?

Cudworth managed all this by shifting the seat of righteousness without moving it outside the individual. The shift he effected was from the mystical passions of the sermons to the geometric rationality of EIM: from the heart to the head. This shift solved the problem because rationality, as Cudworth conceived of it, is a faculty that is perfectly suited to lead people to agree and live harmoniously with each other. This is because for individuals to think rationally is for them literally to think with other people. It is for them to comprehend the very same ideas that other people are comprehending – to "confer and discourse together . . . presently perceiving one another's meaning" (EIM 131). By moving from the spirit of love to universal rationality, Cudworth found a way to maintain an inward criterion of righteousness while also holding that all true justification must be publicly accessible. He found a way to abandon a dangerous faith in self-justifying inner light while continuing to affirm his commitment to individual judgment and the Positive Answer.

Cudworth's shift from the heart to the head also set the template for much of the rationalist moral theory that was to come in the eighteenth century and beyond.[19] Future rationalists followed Cudworth in seeking to ground morality in something that was both internal and public – in something that would enable all people to make moral judgments for themselves and yet to make them in a way that would necessarily lead them to make the same moral judgment as every other rational being. Rationalists would also follow Cudworth in endorsing a restricted view of the goodness of human nature, one that placed great confidence in humans' rational capacities while also harboring deep suspicions about the lawlessness of the passions.

5

The Emergence of Non-Christian Ethics

In the past two chapters, we've charted the role played by Whichcote and Cudworth's Positive Answer in the development of religious liberty and moral rationalism. We will now see that their version of the Positive Answer was instrumental to another intellectual development as well – a development at least as momentous as the other two. But unlike religious liberty and moral rationalism, this third development was something to which Whichcote and Cudworth may have contributed unintentionally. Indeed, this third development was something that Whichcote almost certainly would have preferred to squelch. Cudworth's attitude may have been more ambivalent.

The third development was the disengagement of moral philosophy from Christian Protestantism. Theological commitments remained always at the center of Whichcote and Cudworth's view of morality and human nature. But their Positive Answer proved to be incompatible with the conception of Christianity that had defined the mainstream of seventeenth-century English thought. So as Whichcote and Cudworth's Positive Answer gained philosophical ground, the mainstream Christian view began to recede.

In this chapter, I explain the conflict between the mainstream Christianity of seventeenth-century England and Whichcote and Cudworth's Positive Answer. In Section A, I give a general overview of the conflict. In B, I explain how the conflict manifested itself in Whichcote's sermons and his (determined but ultimately failed) attempts to resolve it. In C, I explain how the conflict manifested itself in the work of Cudworth and his (less determined but equally failed) attempts to resolve it.

A. Cambridge Platonism and Seventeenth-Century English Protestantism

Essential to mainstream seventeenth-century English Protestantism was the idea that a person could achieve salvation only if he or she accepted that

Christ died for his or her sins. To be a Christian, on this view, was to believe that salvation would have been impossible without the sacrifice of Christ, and that heaven is open only to those who acknowledge the indispensability of Christ's sacrifice.

It's easy to see how the mainstream view fits with a Negative Answer. For the mainstream view is built on the idea that all human beings are sinful in a way that they themselves cannot overcome. That is why the help of an external agent (Christ) is necessary: he does for us what we could never have done for ourselves. This also goes a long way toward explaining why the Calvinists thought it so important to stress the great sinfulness of humanity. To their minds, the more extreme the denigration of human nature, the greater the glory of Christ's sacrifice.

The Positive Answer, in contrast, maintains that human nature is basically good. That does not mean that adherents of the Positive Answer have to deny that people ever sin. But it does mean that they will deny that sin is a necessary, defining feature of humanity. Adherents of the Positive Answer will hold that people have within themselves the capacity to overcome sin – that righteousness is internally accessible to all human beings. But the more one emphasizes this internal capacity for righteousness, the harder it becomes to explain the indispensability of Christ's sacrifice. As human nature rises up the scale of goodness, the need for Christ to come to earth diminishes.

The issue can be put in terms of *mediation* (which is, as we see in the next section, how Whichcote often put it). Adherents of the kind of Negative Answer central to seventeenth-century English Protestantism believed that there is a vast moral distance between God and humans. So vast is this distance – so far removed from the perfection of God are sinful human beings – that no human can ever hope to traverse it by himself. No human can ever hope to bring about his own unity with God because every human's ineluctable sinfulness always places him apart from God. So if we are to be reconciled to God, the reconciliation must be effected by a *mediator*. A mediator (i.e., Christ) must bridge the distance between God's perfection and humans' sinfulness. Adherents of the Positive Answer central to Cambridge Platonism, in contrast, believed that humans have within themselves the capacity to become righteous. But if humans have within themselves the ability to become righteous – if they can traverse the moral distance between themselves and God – then the mediator's role becomes less important. If through our own efforts we can become one with God, then the bridging function of Christ's mediation loses its indispensability.

Specific aspects of Whichcote and Cudworth's thought made it particularly difficult for them to accommodate the idea that Christ's sacrifice was indispensable for human salvation. Consider, for instance, their view that heaven and hell are essentially not places at all but mental states, or the consciousness of one's own virtue and vice. This conception of heaven and hell was not peripheral to Whichcote and Cudworth's thought but followed directly from the anti-voluntarism at the core of their philosophy. Their anti-voluntarism implied that the natures of righteousness and unrighteousness are necessary features of reality that God himself cannot alter. It is, according to Whichcote and Cudworth's anti-voluntarism, just as impossible to separate heavenly happiness from righteousness and hellish misery from unrighteousness as it is to separate oddness from the number 7. But it's very difficult to see how this deeply rooted conception of heaven and hell leaves any role for Christ's mediation to play. For if a person is righteous, then Christ's mediation is not needed, as it is logically impossible for someone to be righteous and not experience heaven. And if a person is unrighteous, then Christ's mediation will not do any good, as it is logically impossible for someone to be unrighteous and not experience hell.

Consider, as well, Whichcote and Cudworth's profound opposition to the Calvinist doctrines of predestination and supralapsarianism, according to which everyone except the elect is doomed before the time of his or her birth to eternal damnation. As we saw in Chapter 2, opposition to this idea was the fundamental starting point for the development of Cambridge Platonism as a whole. The Cambridge Platonists rejected predestination and supralapsarianism because they thought those doctrines had the absurd implication that God was guilty of the injustice of condemning people for something they could not avoid. But now consider people who lived before the sacrifice of Christ. It was, of course, impossible for them to accept that Christ died for their sins. So if God would never condemn people for failing to do something it was impossible for them to do, God would not have condemned the people who lived before Christ for failing to accept that Christ died for their sins. Whichcote and Cudworth's most basic idea of God's moral nature implies that it must have been possible for those who lived before Christ to achieve salvation. But if that is so, then Christ's sacrifice cannot be indispensable.

Whichcote and Cudworth's reverence for the pre-Christian Greek philosophers only ratchets up the problem. Whichcote and Cudworth gave every indication that they thought that Socrates and Plato achieved the pinnacle of righteousness. They showed no inclination to sign on to the mainstream Protestant idea that the pagan philosophers must have ended up in hell. But if pagans can avoid hell, then, once again, it's hard to see why Christ had to suffer.

The root cause of the difficulty is Whichcote and Cudworth's belief in the deiformity of human nature. Every human, they believed, has within himself or herself the capacity to become God-like. The resources for salvation are internally accessible to all, as Whichcote and Cudworth's conception of heaven as an internal mental state makes perfectly clear. And Whichcote and Cudworth believed this to be a necessary truth about all human beings. They took deiformity to be an essential feature of human nature. As Whichcote put it, God's law is "inherent to human nature" (Whichcote IV 434). The principles of righteousness are so much a part of humans' "intellectual nature" that it is as impossible for a person to lack them "as it is impossible for the water to be without its natural quality that belongs to it, or the sun without light, or fire without heat" (Whichcote II 59). But since these are claims about the essence of human nature, about its necessary features, they imply that the resources for salvation must be internal to all human beings, before Christ as well as after.

Whichcote says that the "business of religion" is to "imitate and resemble" God (Whichcote I 32; cf. I 311), and that through such imitation and resemblance we will become "partakers of the divine nature" (Whichcote I 54). But if we can succeed through our imitation and resemblance in partaking of the divine nature – and Whichcote's rendering of the deiformity claim implies that we can succeed at this – why are the mediating efforts of Christ necessary for a reconciliation with God?

B. Whichcote's Positive Answer and the Need for Christ

Whichcote struggled mightily with this problem.[1] We have already seen that he was committed at the deepest level to the Positive Answer. But he also explicitly endorsed the mainstream Protestant view that humans could achieve salvation only by accepting that Christ died for their sins. "For," as he says, "there is no other way of acceptance with God for fallen man, but through Christ; by Christ only we are recommended" (Whichcote II 293). Whichcote goes on to say that those who do not accept Christ will "be punished, in the lake of fire and brimstone, which burns for ever," availing himself of the traditional hellish imagery that he almost always otherwise eschewed (Whichcote II 293). At times, moreover, Whichcote maintained that "Christ is not only of convenience, but down-right necessity. If a man could have come to God in another way, the son of God needed not to have died" (Whichcote II 301). And he also maintained that it was impossible to know of Christ's sacrifice before it happened – that the revelation of the Gospel was necessary for us to learn of and accept Christ. The "*use* we are to make of *Christ*," as he puts it, is a "matter, which otherwise than by revelation, could never have been known. . . . A man might have thought thousands of years, and never have thought of this way" (Whichcote II 285–6).[2]

Whichcote certainly tried to reconcile the mainstream view of Christ's sacrifice with his more heterodox Positive Answer. At various points in his sermons, he stretches, pulls, squashes, and shoves his ideas in the attempt to bring them all together into a coherent whole. In the end, however, the Positive Answer simply refuses to cohere with the "down-right necessity" of Christ's sacrifice, and Whichcote is left holding disparate and contradictory pieces.

One manifestation of Whichcote's inability to bring his ideas into coherence is his contradictory views of the principle of ought-implies-can. The principle of ought-implies-can, as we saw in Chapter 2, holds that people can be legitimately blamed for failing to do something only if it was possible for them to do it – or, put another way, that it is wrong to punish people for doing things if it was impossible for them not to. Here is Whichcote's perfectly clear application of this principle to the will of God:

> [T]he word of God . . . tells us, That *if the wicked man turns from his wickedness, and doth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.* Neither let any man say, that these words signify no more, than if one should say to an impotent man, remove this mountain, and thou shalt have such or such a reward: or to bid a man to comprehend the ocean in the hollow of his hand, and it shall so or so be done unto him. These are ludicrous ways of speaking: and such as must not be put upon God, nor in any case attributed unto him. God doth not mock and derive his poor creatures, when he doth invite them to him. This were to reproach one that were impotent, to bid him come to him, when as he knew he could not stir a step. (Whichcote I 205–6)

Whichcote's ought-implies-can principle implies that people cannot be punished for not accepting Christ if acceptance of Christ was impossible for them. And this is an implication that Whichcote himself explicitly draws, maintaining that we can expect to see "*Socrates* and *Plato* received into heaven" and "that ignorance doth greatly excuse, and therefore . . . where men have never heard and are without the pale of the church, we leave them to God's mercy, and exclude them not" (Whichcote I 40). Whichcote is telling us that people who lived before the time of Christ or in regions in which the news of Christ has not yet arrived cannot be blamed for not going to God through Christ, for they could not have known of Christ. For them, the requirements of morality constitute all of religion. And so if they lived moral lives (as Whichcote thought Socrates and Plato had done), they will have been saved, even though they were not Christians.

Elsewhere, however, Whichcote asserts that the path to salvation must go through Christ. "For there is no other way of acceptance with God for fallen man, but through Christ; by Christ only we are recommended" (Whichcote II 294; cf. II 297). At the very same time that he asserts the "down-right necessity" of Christ, moreover, Whichcote also maintains that knowledge of Christ is impossible without the "gospel-revelation" (Whichcote II 301; cf. II 285–6, 176). Whichcote emphasizes the necessity of the gospel-revelation when he tells us that even the "wisest of the men among the philosophers" did not understand that Christ was the only way to God and that these wise philosophers thus made the "mistake" of trying to go to God through some other mediator (Whichcote II 302).

But since it was impossible for the wise philosophers to avoid this mistake, it's hard to see how an advocate of the ought-implies-can principle can conceive of it as involving any culpability. More specifically, it's hard to see how an endorsement of the ought-implies-can principle can be compatible with the idea that an unavoidable mistake had to be corrected before anyone could achieve salvation. And yet, Whichcote does contend that the sacrifice of Christ was absolutely essential, asserting that if "man could have come to God in another way, the son of God needed not to have died" (Whichcote II 301; cf. II 314). In short, Whichcote claims both that it was impossible for people before the time of Christ to go to God through Christ and that people can be saved only by going through Christ: a conjunction in flat contradiction to his application of the ought-implies-can principle to the will of God.

Another manifestation of Whichcote's inability to bring his ideas into coherence is his changing position on the Fall of Man. When he is expounding the Positive Answer, Whichcote soft-pedals the Fall nearly to the point of inaudibility, telling us that we are all "God-like" and thus capable of participating directly with the divine mind here and now, in this world. Heaven, Whichcote tells us, consists of "an *internal reconciliation to the nature of God, and to the rule of righteousness*" (Whichcote III 140), and this heavenly state is something we can be "acquainted with in this world," something we can "lay title to now" (Whichcote II 156–7). But when he is explaining the need to accept Christ, Whichcote strikes a very different chord, hammering away at human sinfulness in language that would be at home in one of Perkins's sermons. "[W]e are all under an universal forfeiture," he says; "we have prejudiced the interest we have in God as our creator; we cannot have confidence in the relation to God as the original of our being, because we have given him offense; we have forfeited our happiness, by consenting to iniquity; we have worsted our faculties, and marred our spirits" (Whichcote II 305). It's rather hard to see, however, how Whichcote can bring into harmony such expressions of ineluctable sinfulness and his optimistic statements about our capacity to attain an internal reconciliation with God. For Whichcote says in numerous places that all of our duties fall into one of two categories: the moral part of religion (which constitutes nineteen-twentieths of religion) and the acceptance of Christ (the last twentieth, which Whichcote calls "the instituted part of religion"). Now the reason we need to accept Christ is that we are sinful, and so our sinfulness cannot consist simply of our failure to accept Christ. The duty of accepting Christ presupposes prior sinfulness. Whichcote must hold, then, that this prior sinfulness consists of a failure to live up to the moral part of religion, as he has told us that morality constitutes all the duties of religion besides the duty of accepting Christ. Whichcote often says, however, that many people (Socrates and Plato among them) have succeeded in realizing their moral duty. But if the need to accept Christ presupposes immorality, and if Whichcote thinks people can and do conduct themselves morally, how can he make the Perkinsian statements of ineluctable sin and the need for Christ?

The underlying problem here is Whichcote's religious rationalism. Whichcote argues throughout his sermons that something can be essential to religion – and thus necessary for salvation – only if it is rational. And when Whichcote says that the essence of religion is rational, he means that it consists only of things that are as demonstrably certain as the most fundamental of mathematical truths; this is a religious version of the epistemological implication of the necessity of morals thesis that we discussed in Chapter 4. As Whichcote puts it, religion concerns only matters that are "clear," "intelligible," and "self-evident" to us. If something does not have "pure reason to commend itself . . . to our judgments and to our faculties," then, according to Whichcote, acceptance of it cannot be necessary for our salvation (Whichcote I 71).

Whichcote repeatedly uses the idea that only demonstrably certain things are essential to religion to argue against the importance of various things that other people took to be necessary for salvation. He argues, for instance, that the rituals and trappings of organized religion must be inessential because they are "doubtful and uncertain" (Whichcote IV 117), while the essentials of religion are "clear, and plain" to all "good men" (Whichcote II 2). He also maintains that it is not essential to believe what the Bible says about "matters of *ancient records*, the history of former times," "matters of deep *philosophy*, as also matters of *philology*" and "matters of *prophecy*" (Whichcote I 179). Whichcote is not saying that what the Bible tells us about these matters is false. His point, rather, is that the Bible's claims about these things "do not belong to the business of religion" because they are not "perspicuous" to us; we cannot "fully understand" them; they are not demonstrably certain (Whichcote I 179–80).

The idea that religion consists only of what is demonstrably certain is, as well, demanded by the deiformity claim that is the cornerstone of Whichcote's Positive Answer. The deiformity claim holds that when we fully exercise our rational faculties we become God-like – that through our religious understanding we become one with the mind of God. But of the truths of religion God possesses absolute certainty. If, therefore, our religious understanding is literally divine, it must involve certainty of the very highest order. And such certainty, for Whichcote, is the certainty of mathematical demonstration. Now the deiformity claim should not be pushed too far. Human rationality has limitations that the reason of God does not have. But Whichcote believes that these limitations restrict only the *quantity* of things humans can understand, not the *quality* of understanding humans can achieve. There are some things that God fully understands that we do not. But there are also some things that we do fully understand, and our understanding of such things is just the same – just as clear, just as full – as God's. It is those things, for Whichcote, and those things alone, that constitute the essence of religion. Anything we cannot completely comprehend we are not required to believe.[3]

But how can Whichcote combine this unalloyed rationalism with his claim that acceptance of Christ's sacrifice requires the gospel-revelation? How can he consistently maintain both that all the essentials of religion are self-evident to us and that the essential belief in Christ is a "matter, which otherwise than by revelation, could never have been known"? How can the same person who said that "we are as capable of religion, as we are of reason" (Whichcote I 37) also say that Christianity "is a matter of supernatural revelation: here you cannot convince men by reason, which is the only way to deal with men in other matters. And so the apostle hath told us: because these are the results of God's will, therefore it follows that they are only knowable by God's revelation to them"? (Whichcote I 176).

Here's another way of putting the problem. When stressing the rationality of religion, Whichcote maintains that all the essentials of religion can be discerned through the use of a priori reason alone. When affirming the truth of Christianity, Whichcote maintains that it is essential that we believe that Christ died for our sins. But the sacrifice of Christ was an event, something that occurred at a specific place and time. And belief in the occurrence of an event cannot be arrived at through the use of a priori reason alone. We need the assistance of the gospel-revelation for that.

The problem begins to look even worse when Whichcote tries to explain why it was impossible for pre-Christians to know that God would send Christ as a mediator. It was impossible, he says, because the decision to send Christ was God's "secret." Unlike the "materials of *natural knowledge,*" Whichcote tells us, the distinctly Christian aspects of religion are "the resolutions of the divine will, and only knowable by God's voluntary revelation and discovery; and to this purpose the bible is God's instrument in the world; and concerning these no man can know, but by revelation from God. Secrets of *men* none knows, but he to whom he will reveal them; so of *God*" (Whichcote III 167). Or as he puts it when describing the distinctly Christian aspects of religion and distinguishing them from the "natural" aspects that even the heathens know, "[T]he mysteries of religion were the secrets of [God's] will before they were revealed, but after they are told us, they cease to be mysteries" (Whichcote II 290).

This talk of God's "secret" makes matters worse for Whichcote because a secret is typically the sort of thing on which reason cannot find purchase. A typical secret (and if God's secret is "mysterious" and "unknowable," then it is typical in this way) is something we can learn only if we are told. We cannot discover it through the use of demonstrable reason alone. It seems, then, that if God's decision to send Christ was a secret (or one of the "mysteries of religion"), then it would have been something for which God had no reason we can discern. But to attribute to God an incomprehensible decision – and to make our acceptance of that decision an essential aspect of religion – would seem to violate the most fundamental commitment of Whichcote's rationalism. For it would seem to place at the essential core of religion a matter that we cannot figure out on our own, while the starting point for Whichcote's rationalism is that religion comprises only those things that we can fully understand through the use of our rational faculty alone. There seems to be, in other words, a sharp incompatibility between Whichcote's claim that our salvation depends on our belief in a revealed secret and his claim that God does not require belief in anything that is not discernible by reason alone.

Whichcote was aware of this problem. He realized that there was a serious difficulty in making religion completely rational and also including in it a secret knowable only through revelation. His solution was to claim that while this secret of God's was unknowable before revelation, it became completely understandable after revelation – that while we could not have discerned the nature of Christ's sacrifice before God revealed it, it became utterly rational and completely obvious to us once He had. As he explains:

> And though some men do pretend that religion is not intelligible, they dishonour God very much; for that which God hath now revealed, is as plain and as intelligible as any other matter: the mysteries of religion were the secrets of his will before they were revealed, but after they are told us, they cease to be mysteries. And it is no more a mystery that God (in and through Christ) will pardon sin to all that repent if they have done amiss, than it is a mystery that a man that is rational and intelligent ought to live soberly, righteously and godly: and I do understand it as well that I ought to repent and believe the gospel, as I understand that I ought to love and fear God. All religion is now intelligible: the moral part of it was intelligible from the creation: that which was pure revelation by the gospel, is intelligible ever since, and not a mystery. Therefore we be-fool ourselves to talk that religion is not knowable, and we cannot understand it: for understand it we may, if we will; for if it be revealed, it is made intelligible; if not intelligible, it is not revealed. (Whichcote IV 290–1)

Whichcote wants to maintain that the Christian part of religion is now just as intelligible to us as the natural part of religion, and that we only needed to be told about the former in order to realize it. This idea is far from clear, but perhaps what Whichcote has in mind is that the relationship between the Christian part of religion and our understanding is the same as the relationship between a successful mathematical proof and a mathematician who understands the proof but was unable to formulate it by himself. The mathematician accepts the proof not simply because someone else tells him to or because it was printed in a book but because he himself realizes that it must be correct – because he himself fully understands it. Still, the proof had to be told or printed for the mathematician to come to that understanding. In the same way, the defining feature of Christianity is now as certain to us as the most fundamental principles of natural religion, and that is why we should accept it. Still, we could not have figured out that principle entirely by ourselves, even if it's the case that we know it to be necessarily true as soon as we are told of it.

Does this conception of God's secret succeed in reconciling Whichcote's rationalism and the "down-right necessity" of Christ? I don't think so. For the secret has to have two characteristics that seem awfully hard to combine. First, the secret has to be such that humans, no matter how brilliant, could never have discovered it on their own. And second, the secret has to be such that every human, no matter how dim, can immediately understand its rational necessity upon hearing it for the first time. But if the secret is so self-evident now (if it is as obvious to everyone as 2 + 2 = 4), it seems implausible to say that it was impossible for anyone to discover it on his own before. And if it was really impossible for anyone to discover the secret on his own before, it seems implausible to say that its intelligibility is immediately self-evident to everybody now.

Moreover, even if the analogy with the mathematical proof does open up conceptual space for the idea that a thing can be unknown to us one moment and then completely self-evident to us the next, Whichcote would still have a big problem trying to explain why the specifics of Christ's sacrifice are self-evident. For it's not enough for Whichcote simply to say that it's possible that something we didn't know before could be self-evident to us now. What Whichcote has to show is that we now have purely rational reasons to believe in Christ's sacrifice – that while the testimony of the Bible helped us to learn about it, our current belief in Christ's sacrifice can be completely supported by purely rational considerations. But Whichcote himself doesn't even seem to believe that, at least not when he says that Christianity "is a matter of supernatural revelation: here you cannot convince men by reason, which is the only way to deal with men in other matters" (Whichcote I 176).

And even if that problem can be solved, there is yet another. If it really was impossible for anyone to learn of Christ's sacrifice without the benefit of revelation, then people before Christ cannot be blamed for not accepting Christ. But if Christ's sacrifice is self-evident to us now that we have revelation, we *can* be blamed for not accepting Christ. The obligation of religion thus seems to have undergone a change: something that is necessary for salvation now was not necessary for salvation in the past. That such a change occurred is something that Whichcote himself allows in a few passages (Whichcote III 166–7, IV 289–90). He says, for instance, that "as the secrets of a man are known only to the man himself, till he doth reveal them; so the secrets of God are known only to God, till God reveal them, and till then we are not charged with them; for negative infidelity damns no man" (Whichcote I 169). His allowing religious obligation to change, however, is tantamount to Whichcote's taking a hatchet to both his rationalism *and* his Christianity. For the existence of changing obligations topples the basic rationalist idea of religion's being eternal and immutable, turning religious obligations into things that are relative to a person's position in space and time (see Aphorisms 1107). And the fact that pre-Christians could achieve salvation ("negative infidelity damns no man") topples the basic Christian idea that Christ had to die before anyone could be saved (see Whichcote II 301).

In the end, Whichcote simply cannot reconcile his rationalism with his Christianity, and frankly, it's somewhat painful to watch him try. It's worth noting, however, that there are a few passages in which he seems to quietly withdraw from a commitment to the distinctively Christian aspects of religion, suggesting that natural morality alone, without the added aspects of the gospel-revelation, is sufficient for true religion. “For these [moral principles],” as he says at one point, “do import the *fullest imitation of God*, and the exactest *participation* of the divine nature: for by these we are made partakers of the divine nature. And to resemble God in these [moral] perfections . . . is to partake of it. *This* is the gospel obtaining in effect; and in the ultimate issue, this is to have *Christ formed in us*; and the gospel in its final accomplishment” (Whichcote II 61). Because this statement makes mention of “Christ formed in us,” it may initially appear to be consistent with a strict belief in the absolute need to accept Christ’s sacrifice. But close attention to the passage reveals that Whichcote is talking about moral principles that he believes to be entirely accessible to all humans, pagan as well as Christian. And if these principles are both accessible to pagans and sufficient for the “fullest imitation of God,” then it seems as though a person without any knowledge of Christ’s sacrifice can achieve the “exactest participation of the divine nature.” It seems as though the ultimate goal of Christianity can be achieved even without the benefit of the gospel-revelation.

In a couple of sermons, moreover, Whichcote suggests a view according to which Christ’s sacrifice was very helpful but not absolutely indispensable. On this view, Christ did not make possible a unity with God that was impossible before. What Christ did, rather, is provide *assurance* that this unity is possible. He assuaged our doubts. As Whichcote puts it, “As for those that lived before Christ, and out of the pale of the church visible, they did imagine that infinite goodness was placable, and would be reconciled in some way or other; but to be *assured* of it, as we are, that they could not be” (Whichcote II 136–7). And again: “We indeed have extraordinary assurance [of the choice points of religion]; because we have gospel-revelation, they are certain to us christians: but they were but of hope, and fair persuasions, and belief, to the philosophers, who had no scripture. Yet many of them wrote excellently upon these subjects; they *hoped* all these were true: but we are *satisfied* and *assured*” (Whichcote II 239). Whichcote suggests here that all humans have had within themselves at all times a nature that made it possible for them to become one with God. But until the gospel-revelation, they found it difficult to be absolutely sure that this was so. The gospel didn’t change our situation vis-à-vis God and salvation so much as provide assurance that that situation wasn’t as bad as we’d feared and could be as good as we’d hoped.

On this view, Christ’s taking human form did not open a way to God that had not existed before, but rather revealed that human nature is itself compatible with the nature of God. The story of Christ is useful because it makes clear to all of us what we are (and always have been) capable of (see Aphorisms 1104). And what is importantly true about Christianity is its affirmation of the intrinsic goodness of human nature. This view of Christianity would have been antithetical to Whichcote’s Calvinists forebears, and it must be said that Whichcote himself often shies away from it, opting instead to endorse the absolute need for mediation between perfect God and fallen man. But ultimately it is only this view of Christ as helpful but not indispensable that fits with Whichcote's Positive Answer.

How aware was Whichcote of the irresolvable conflict between his Positive Answer and his endorsement of the mainstream Protestant view of Christ's sacrifice? I honestly don't know. He may very well have thought that the conflict was completely resolvable – that, for instance, there was no particular difficulty in saying that the requirements of religion changed after Christ's sacrifice, and that God's secret was indiscernible to everyone before the gospel-revelation and self-evident to everyone afterward. Then again, he may have known that things were not so easily resolved but refrained from saying so because of his circumstances.

Between 1626 and 1660, Whichcote held a number of increasingly important posts at Cambridge: tutor and fellow of Emmanuel College, provost of King's College, and eventually vice-chancellor of the university. He was ousted from Cambridge at the time of the Restoration but landed on his feet, being appointed minister of St. Anne's Blackfriars Church in London in 1662 and holding several prestigious positions thereafter. And throughout his life – right up to his death in 1683, in Cambridge while visiting his one-time student and long-time friend Cudworth – one constant feature of Whichcote's career was sermonizing. It's sermons – many of them given in the nonacademic setting of the London churches – that made Whichcote an immensely popular figure outside the confines of the university, and it's sermons that are the source for most of what we know of Whichcote's thought. But Whichcote's goal in giving sermons was to reach his audience, and to reach them from the pulpit. It would have been inappropriate for Whichcote, in his position as minister, to explore in detail the possible non-Christian implications of a rationalist belief in the goodness of human nature. His duty as minister was to edify and uplift, and to do so in a Christian context. It should come as no surprise, consequently, that he didn't ever say clearly that his Positive Answer undermined mainstream English Protestantism.

C. Cudworth's Positive Answer and the Need for Christ

When Cudworth gave sermons, he too worked hard to reconcile his Positive Answer with the mainstream view of the indispensability of Christ's sacrifice.[4] This effort is most apparent in Cudworth's 1647 sermon at Lincolnes-Inn, in which he tries to explain how Christ made it possible for humans to gain "victory over sin " (Lincolnes 14–15).

Now it turns out that in the Lincolnes-Inn sermon Cudworth finds it much easier to say what Christ *didn't* do for humans than to say what He did. What Christ *didn't* do, Cudworth tells us, was effect human salvation simply through the act of His sacrifice. For the act of Christ's sacrifice is "external" to each human's spirit (Lincolnes 15, 19); it's something that someone else did. And we cannot be made worthy of salvation by someone else's actions any more than "a Sick man should be made Whole by another's imputed Health" (Lincolnes 21). "Imputed righteousness" – or the idea that the righteous act of someone else will gain for us a "victory over sin" – is a "phantastical and imaginary" notion (Lincolnes 22). So long as our spirit remains sinful, the righteousness of someone else (even Christ) can never save us. Salvation will come only to those who are themselves "inwardly quickened and Sanctified" by a righteous spirit (Lincolnes 27) – only to those with "Real Inward Righteousness" (Lincolnes 25). We will be saved if and only if the spirit of righteousness is "In us" – if and only if righteousness is "inherent" in our character (Lincolnes 26). But the "*Good Thoughts* and *Vertuous Dispositions*" that constitute a righteous spirit cannot be "POURED and BLOWN *into men* by God" (Lincolnes 32). They must originate not in "a mere *External Force* acting upon the Soul" but in an "*Innate Principle*" (Lincolnes 37). True righteousness can come only from "the Soul's acting from an inward Spring and Principle of its own Intellectual nature, not be a mere outward Impulse, like a Boat that is tugged on by Oars or driven by a strong blast of Wind" (Lincolnes 37).

So Cudworth argues in the Lincolnes-Inn sermon that salvation must come from within; that righteousness can originate only in an internal active principle of one's own nature; that no external force, not even Christ, can make a person righteous and thus worthy of salvation. But his insistence on "Inward Righteousness" – and his corresponding disdain for "Imputed righteousness" – makes it very difficult for him to explain how Christ's sacrifice made it possible for us to gain a "victory over sin" that we could not have gained before. His insistence on inward righteousness seems to imply that every human being has within himself the necessary and sufficient means for salvation, and that the actions of another (even Christ) are neither necessary nor sufficient.

At one point, Cudworth trots out a version of the "assurance" account we saw in Whichcote, according to which Christ's sacrifice did not create a path to God that did not exist before but merely assured us that the path we are already traveling can get us where we want to go. "The reasons of Philosophy," Cudworth says at that point, demonstratively "prove the *Soul's Immortality*" (Lincolnes 5). But "vulgar apprehensions" lead some people to doubt their immortality nonetheless (Lincolnes 5). Christ's resurrection thus serves the purpose of giving assurance to "Vulgar minds" (who cannot properly attend to "Philosophical Reasons and Demonstrations") that indeed they can survive their own deaths (Lincolnes 6). It's clear, however, that Cudworth does not think that this assurance account captures the full importance of Christ's sacrifice (Lincolnes 51–2). Cudworth wants to explain "the Necessity of Christ's Meritorious and Propitiatory Sacrifice for the Remission of Sins" (Lincolnes 21). And he doesn't think that that "Necessity" is captured simply by the idea that Christ's sacrifice gave assurance to the weak-minded of what had always been plainly discernible to the philosophically astute.

Cudworth's official position in the Lincolnes-Inn sermon is that while our "*Active*" participation is necessary for salvation, it is not sufficient (Lincolnes 40). Also necessary (according to his official position) is "a Divine Operation" working upon us, "so that in a certain sense we may be said to be *Passive*" as well (Lincolnes 40). Cudworth uses an agricultural metaphor to illustrate this idea, pointing out that vegetables cannot grow without the "Spirit of God in Nature," but that it is also necessary that "the Husbandman plow the Ground and sow the Seed" to prepare the way for "the Spirit of God in Nature" to do its work (Lincolnes 40–1). "In like manner," he continues, "unless we *plow up the Fallow-ground of our hearts and sow to our selves in Righteousness* (as the Prophet speaks) by our earnest endeavours; we cannot expect that the Divine Spirit of Grace will showr down that Heavenly increase upon us" (Lincolnes 41). The problem with this official position is that the necessity of God's grace just doesn't fit with anything else Cudworth says about "Real Inward Righteousness." The externality and passivity of this need clash with the insistence on internality and activity that underlies everything else he says in the Lincolnes-Inn sermon. The image of having to wait for a "Heavenly showr" appears to be pasted in from someone else's sermon.

The fundamental problem is this. In the Lincolnes-Inn sermon, Cudworth deploys the full force of his formidable rhetorical and philosophical skills to establish that one's eternal state depends entirely on one's internal constitution. It is, he argues, equally impossible for God to refuse salvation to a righteous person and for Him to grant salvation to an unrighteous one, for salvation follows necessarily from righteousness and damnation follows necessarily from unrighteousness (Lincolnes 21). Cudworth's conception of heaven and hell implies, in fact, that salvation simply *is* the consciousness of one's own righteousness and damnation simply *is* the consciousness of one's own unrighteousness. God, then, has no choice as to whether to grant us salvation or mete out damnation, as salvation and damnation are essentially just our own states of mind. To claim that God does have a choice – to claim that salvation and damnation depend on God's will – is to side with the voluntarists in a manner that would turn "*Righteousness* and *Holiness*" into "mere Phantastical and Imaginary things" (Lincolnes 21). So if righteousness is a real thing at all, it must be sufficient for salvation. Righteousness cannot, moreover, be "poured or blown into men by God"; it must come entirely from within. How, then, can the shower of God's grace (in the form of Christ's sacrifice) find any necessary role to play? Why isn't righteousness both entirely within one's control and all one needs to achieve reconciliation with God?

Cudworth's sermon before the House of Commons doesn't do any better at answering that question. Cudworth maintains there that salvation depends on both an internal principle and the spirit of Christ. But he never explains how salvation can follow necessarily from something internal to each person *and* require that another party (namely, Christ) perform an action. What Cudworth says is that the essence of Christianity must remain ineluctably "mystical" – that Christ's spirit working within us is ultimately a "mystery" (Commons 375, 380, 387, 390). In saying that Christ's role in our salvation is a mystery, however, Cudworth is in effect saying simply that he can't explain it.

So in his sermons Cudworth doesn't do any better than Whichcote at dealing with the conflict between his Positive Answer and the mainstream view of Christ's sacrifice. But unlike Whichcote, Cudworth produced a copious amount of philosophical writing never intended for sermons. Perhaps Cudworth's greater philosophical production is due in part to the fact that he managed to keep his academic position at Cambridge after the Restoration. But what was probably a bigger factor was that Cudworth was simply more philosophically inclined than Whichcote. Cudworth was a grand systematizer, someone driven to discover the origins and implications of every idea and to bring all of them together into a single coherent whole. He stated that his philosophical goal was to describe the "true intellectual system of the universe," and this project was every bit as ambitious as it sounds. He could never have fit all his thinking into audience-friendly, stand-alone Sunday sermons, and his philosophical writing cannot be broken down (as were Whichcote's sermons) into hundreds of bite-sized aphorisms.

Cudworth published volume 1 of his *True Intellectual System* in 1678. It was a mammoth work purporting to contain conclusive proof of God's existence and an exhaustive refutation of all forms of atheism. It is very likely that Cudworth conceived of his *Eternal and Immutable Morality* and his *Treatise of Freewill* as additional parts of his "intellectual system," but only the first volume was published during his lifetime. *Eternal and Immutable Morality* came out in 1731 and *Freewill* in 1838.

Why didn't Cudworth publish these other works? One reason may have been the reception of the *True Intellectual System*, which some people bizarrely mistook to be a piece of surreptitious atheism. The ludicrous charge was that Cudworth did not actually intend to refute all the arguments against God's existence but rather gathered them all together to compile a covert atheistic sourcebook. Another reason may have been Cudworth's obsessive concern to chart every historical influence, track down every logical consequence, and address every counterargument. Cudworth may have been one of those perfectionists whose compulsion for comprehensiveness makes it almost impossible for them to decide that a work is finally complete and ready for publication.

Sarah Hutton also points out, however, that it "is not beyond the bounds of possibility that a combination of native caution along with political and ecclesiastical factors served to exacerbate his painstaking and prolix manner of argument, and thereby delay publication" (EIM xiii). I believe that Hutton's suggestion is very plausible, and that one of the aspects of Cudworth's thought that he may have deemed it prudent to keep under wraps was the difficulty of finding within his system a necessary role for the sacrifice of Christ. The *True Intellectual System*, for instance, contains a brief discussion of the Christian Trinity, but the vast majority of the work consists of theistic arguments that would fit perfectly well into a pre-Christian worldview. The God for which Cudworth argues has no overt connection to the story of the gospel. The proofs of His existence are supposed to be purely rational, completely independent of revelation.

The *Treatise of Freewill* would have been even less palatable to mainstream Protestants. In that work, Cudworth argues that humans are able to determine themselves, that they have "self-power" or "liberty of will" (EIM 175). He explicitly compares this feature of human nature to God's ability to be a self-mover and self-actor (EIM 198). Each of us, he says, has a "self-forming and self-framing power, by which every man is self-made, into what he is" (EIM 178). Now this position on free will is in direct conflict with the predestinarianism central to much of seventeenth-century English Protestantism (EIM 204–7). But rather than hide from this implication, Cudworth openly embraces it. Indeed, he says that if predestination were true, it would "destroy the reality of moral good and evil, virtue and vice, and make them nothing but mere names or mockeries" (EIM 205).

Cudworth is also aware that many of his contemporaries would object that his position on "liberty of will is inconsistent with Divine grace and will necessarily infer Pelagianism" (EIM 208). Pelagianism is the view that an emphasis on the doctrine of original sin is a mistake, that human nature is inherently good, and that all people have the ability to "initiate the process of salvation by their own efforts, without the aid of Divine Grace" (EIM 160). Pelagianism thus constitutes a Positive Answer, and it also explicitly includes the idea that humans' free will and goodness make it possible for them to achieve salvation on their own, without the benefit of Christ's sacrifice and the gospel-revelation. It's easy to see why seventeenth-century English Protestantism branded Pelagianism heretical and why it would have been very dangerous for a seventeenth-century thinker to be associated with it. It's also easy to see why Cudworth's contemporaries might have thought that his view of free will would lead to the Pelagian heresy.

So what does Cudworth do in *Freewill* to distinguish his view from Pelagianism?[5] The truth is: not very much. He addresses the issue, but he does so only in two paragraphs of the penultimate chapter. And both paragraphs are woefully lacking in philosophical reasoning, in stark contrast to the closely argued character of the rest of Cudworth's work in his treatises.

In one paragraph, he repeats the Lincolnes-Inn claim that our active participation is a necessary condition of our salvation but is not sufficient. "The use of their own freewill is required," he says, but the "endeavours and activity of freewill are insufficient without the addition and assistance of Divine grace" (EIM 208). But he doesn't even bother to give any philosophical reason for this claim. He backs it up simply by quoting unexplicated bits of scripture, a justificatory method completely at odds with his entire philosophical project and temperament.

The other paragraph of Cudworth's attempt to distance himself from Pelagianism is no better. He says there that his view doesn't collapse into Pelagianism because

> those angels which by their right use of liberty of will stood when others by the abuse of it fell, though by that same liberty of will they might still possibly continue without falling, yet for all that it would not be impossible for them to fall, unless they had aid and assistance of Divine grace to secure them from it. Wherefore it is commonly conceived that as, notwithstanding that liberty of will by which it is possible for them never to fall, they had need of Divine grace to secure them against a possibility of falling, and that they are now by Divine grace fixed and confirmed in such a state as that they can never fall. (EIM 208)

This passage has no philosophical merit whatsoever, and it's hard to imagine that Cudworth didn't realize it. Cudworth is simply repeating a tale about beings with free will who required divine grace, without even attempting to provide a rational basis for believing it. To see the anomalous nature of this passage, we have only to compare it to Cudworth's refutations in the same treatise of the Hobbesian and scholastic conceptions of will (EIM 197–200 and 168–75, respectively), for whether or not one agrees with those refutations, it is plainly apparent that their intellectual power is miles beyond the question-begging appeal to unfallen angels that constitutes Cudworth's attempt to distance himself from Pelagianism.

So in *Freewill*, Cudworth makes only a token gesture toward reconciling his position with the indispensability of Christ. But in EIM, he doesn't even bother to do that. EIM sets the high water mark for rationalist, theistic versions of the Positive Answer, and this is because EIM develops the most complete and uncompromising picture of how, through the use of reason, human minds can participate with the mind of God. But in that picture, Christ does not appear. Christianity is not mentioned even once. EIM tells us how we can become one with the mind of God through the use of reason alone. There is no need, on this account, for Christ to mediate between humans and God, because the rational faculty inside each human turns out to be a means of direct access to the mind of God itself. Indeed, the connection between human rationality and the divine mind is so close, on the account developed in EIM, that it's hard to see how there could be any room at all between them for the mediator Christ to occupy.