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WOMEN WRITERS, RELIGIOUS RHETORIC, AND THE ORIGINS OF SENSIBILITY IN
ENGLAND, 1660-1754

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This dissertation examines how various debates within English Christianity shaped the feminist arguments of women writers of the long eighteenth century and the impact these women writers had on the mid-century sentimental novel. By analyzing the complex relationships between religion and feminism, this dissertation traces a tradition of female-authored theological discourse and argues that the most powerful feminist arguments of the period arose within specific theological contexts. My introduction considers the role religion played in shaping women's writing of the long eighteenth century and connects the theological writing of the women analyzed in this study to mid-century discourses of sensibility. I examine the work of Damaris Masham and Mary Collyer, two writers who frame the central issues of this study. In Chapter One I explore the anti-clerical writings of seventeenth-century Quaker Margaret Fell, whose arguments for women's spiritual equality arise out of her attacks on the oppressive Restoration Anglican establishment. In the latter half of the chapter, I examine the heated responses to radical Quaker women in the early eighteenth century to demonstrate how arguments about the role of women in Christianity proved crucial both to the philosophy of John Locke and to attempts to downplay the more radical aspects of Quaker doctrine. Chapter Two analyzes Mary Astell's hostile responses to various strains of deism, especially her response to the third Earl of Shaftesbury, and argues that her High Church Anglican attacks on the often misogynist and socially exclusionary rhetoric of deist writers constitute a crucial aspect of her feminism. Chapter Three examines two distinct periods in the career of Catharine Trotter. The first section argues that Trotter's witty appropriation of seventeenth-century Anglican anti-Catholic polemic allows her to argue for her own religious and intellectual independence, and the second section demonstrates the importance of her synthesis of competing strands of British

moral philosophy to mid-century sensibility. Chapter Four argues that the good-natured Christian benevolence of the protagonist of Sarah Fielding's *David Simple* both critiques various irreligious philosophical systems Fielding viewed as harmful to women and supports an ungendered and non-doctrinal Christianity amenable to her feminism. The latter section of the chapter demonstrates how Fielding's co-authored experimental novel *The Cry* enacts the anxieties earlier women writers like Astell express about emerging secularization. This study demonstrates the vital significance of religious debate to the feminist positions of women writers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. It also illustrates how central these women were to the literature of sensibility of the mid eighteenth century.

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Introduction

This dissertation analyzes the feminist dimensions of women's religious writing between the Restoration and the mid eighteenth century. Arguing for the significance of women's religious texts in the discourses of eighteenth-century sensibility, this project examines Margaret Fell, Aphra Behn, Damaris Masham, Mary Astell, Catharine Trotter, Mary Collyer, and Sarah Fielding, writers who legitimized different modes of resistance to political and religious authority. In appropriating traditional religious rhetoric for their own ends, these writers challenged the masculinist presuppositions of Christian theology and English society during the period. They did so not simply to advance feminist arguments, but because, in their eyes, Christianity offered the only foundational support for women against an often predatory culture. In this respect, their religious writings complicate narratives that tend to equate women's self-consciousness with an anti-religious 'Radical Enlightenment' or with other accounts of secularization.

This project examines a wide range of texts produced by women writers of the period, and the latter chapters link women's religious and philosophical works to the emergence of the sentimental novel, especially through the work of Sarah Fielding. Fielding and Mary Collyer are important pioneers of sentimental fiction, and often their work is more concerned with philosophical speculation than narrative action. This dissertation situates both writers within the narrative of Christian feminism that preoccupied women writers during the period and that cuts across political and epistemological lines. This introduction, along with critically and historically situating the project's argument, also ends by briefly analyzing two of these women writers, Damaris Masham and Collyer. The work of Masham in the late seventeenth century and the

work of Collyer in the mid eighteenth century frame the central issues of this study, including the importance of theological debate to both the feminism of these writers and the rise of sensibility.

In an essay on Masham, Jacqueline Broad highlights the various pitfalls that affect scholars who study early modern women philosophers. As she notes, although it is crucial to incorporate these women writers into the canon by demonstrating “that they participated in the great intellectual debates of their time, and that they were perceptive critics of their famous male contemporaries,” this approach – which she memorably labels as the “add women and stir method” – is often “somewhat limited” because it can ignore historical contexts and less famous writers and thinkers.¹ Moreover, according to Broad, “if we interpret women’s writings as that of ‘surrogate men’ ... then we may lose sight of the subtle divergences in *women’s* thought” even though “some of the most original and modern contributions from early modern writers ... are their derivations of *feminist* ideas from the philosophies of their male contemporaries.”² Broad is certainly accurate that some scholarship is too eager to subordinate women writers to their more famous male contemporaries. Many of the ideas that modern scholars would label as feminist from writers like Astell, Trotter, and Fielding arose from their discursive interactions with male philosophers and writers, although her labeling of these ideas as “derivations” is perhaps too strong. This dissertation, an analysis of the ways in which women writers articulated feminist arguments using the material of early modern English Christian theology, builds on Broad’s observation. Beginning with the work of Fell in the 1660s and concluding with the philosophical fiction of Fielding in the 1740s and 1750s, this study examines how early modern women writers took advantage of theological debate to argue for a variety of increased roles for women in both

¹ Jacqueline Broad, “Adversaries or Allies? Occasional Thoughts on the Masham-Astell Exchange,” *Eighteenth-Century Thought* 1 (2003): 127. See also Broad, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

² Broad, “Adversaries,” 127.

the church and English society, and how their writings contributed to the sentimental novel in the mid eighteenth century. It does so through a close investigation of these writers' philosophical and religious texts, many of which have been undeservedly neglected in favor of drama, poetry and fiction.

Enlightenment Trajectories

Although latitudinarian women writers like Masham and Trotter published complex theological works that synthesized and modified the philosophies of Locke, Samuel Clarke and others, they have been relatively ignored in scholarly discussions of the period. Several recent works, however, have begun to trace a genealogy of women, religion, and feminism of the Enlightenment. Karen O'Brien's *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain* provides a welcome corrective to earlier studies of feminism that overemphasized Tory opponents of Whiggish notions of civil government like Astell and Behn. As O'Brien suggests, much of this overemphasis derives from Carole Pateman's influential account in her 1988 *The Sexual Contract: Aspects of Patriarchal Liberalism* of the ways that liberal ideas of government, derived from Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, prohibit women from the political sphere.³ In contrast, O'Brien offers a much more nuanced study of the continuities and disagreements between women writing from "different Christian epistemologies."⁴ She focuses on the ways women writers crafted feminist arguments from within a Whiggish Anglican tradition, arguing "that Whiggism, in its political and established religious forms, was not ... inherently antipathetic to arguments promoting the status and rights of women, and that it was in fact, in the

³ See Karen O'Brien, *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 8-9.

⁴ O'Brien, *Women*, 44.

longer run, the medium in which such arguments most flourished.”⁵ Although she largely examines what she terms “Anglican Whig feminism,” she is cognizant of avoiding “framing a Whiggish narrative,” and demonstrates, like Broad and other scholars such as Rachel Weil, the similarities between competing religious and political traditions.⁶ Focusing on Masham and Trotter in the early eighteenth century, O’Brien shapes a persuasive narrative that places Trotter between Masham and the mid-century Bluestockings, Catharine Talbot, Elizabeth Carter, and Elizabeth Montagu. As useful as O’Brien’s study is, she has little to say about the contributions of seventeenth-century dissenting women, and she does not mention Quakers. Moreover, her large-scale examination obscures some of the important shifts in the thought of writers like Trotter; she has little discussion of Trotter’s Catholicism before 1707, for example, which I discuss in Chapter Three.

In contrast to O’Brien’s wide-ranging study of women and the Enlightenment, Sarah Apetrei’s recent *Women, Feminism and Religion in Early Enlightenment England* offers a focused and penetrating account of the seventeenth and early-eighteenth-century origins of feminism. Apetrei examines the period from 1680 to 1710, and especially the explosion of feminist texts published in the 1690s. She argues “that the impulse for moral reform and the apocalyptic fervour which surrounded the Williamite Revolution acted as a catalyst [for the emergence of feminism in England], stimulating unprecedented numbers of women to intervene in debates about religion, marriage and education.”⁷ Unlike O’Brien, Apetrei devotes equal time to Anglican writers like Astell and sectarians like Jane Lead. Indeed, Apetrei argues that much

⁵ O’Brien, *Women*, 36.

⁶ O’Brien, *Women*, 35, 9. See Rachel Weil, *Political Passions: Gender, the Family and Political Argument in England, 1680-1714* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

⁷ Sarah Apetrei, *Women, Feminism and Religion in Early Enlightenment England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 9.

modern scholarship “reinforces ... an artificial dichotomy between humanist traditions and the literature of radical spiritualism.”⁸ Consequently, she argues, scholars “have tended to accept the intellectual segregation imposed by seventeenth-century commentators on enthusiasm and rationalism, and favoured the conclusion that the two feminist types grew out of totally different soil.”⁹ Apetrei traces the many continuities in thought between these two “feminist types,” focusing the first half of her study almost exclusively on Astell and the latter half on Quaker, Philadelphian, and other visionary women. Her examination of feminist religious writing from such a diverse group of women writers demonstrates their enormous contribution to both feminism and Enlightenment thought. Because the period she studies is so narrow, Apetrei is able to tease out the complex theological influences and contributions of the writers she examines; however, because of her narrow focus and the attention she devotes to Astell, there is little discussion of latitudinarian women writers like Masham and Trotter in her study.

Efforts to trace the aspects of the Enlightenment that inaugurated feminist thought lead inevitably to debates about the impact of Cartesianism – as well as the role of the so-called ‘Radical Enlightenment’ – on emerging feminism. Citing François Poulain de la Barre’s remarkable Cartesian feminist texts of the 1670s, Jonathan Israel maintains that “Cartesianism ... produced the first systematic theory arguing for the equality of women.”¹⁰ Israel, however, also demonstrates how Cartesianism could be used to argue against ideas of female equality, and posits that “only monist systems could supply criteria capable of consistently underpinning a

⁸ Apetrei, *Women*, 20.

⁹ Apetrei, *Women*, 34.

¹⁰ Jonathan Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 572. See also Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

comprehensive doctrine of female equality.”¹¹ As he does with the majority of his arguments for the role of a ‘Radical Enlightenment,’ Israel looks to the influence of Spinoza: “Spinozism in particular could combine criticism of tradition, conventional morality and existing structures of authority with the independent critical thinking urged by Cartesianism, in such a manner as to ground a more balanced female equality.”¹² While rightly pointing out the limits of Cartesian influences on emergent feminism, Israel’s broad category of “female equality” is somewhat problematic. Women writers of the period argued for a wide range of political and religious positions, not all of which fit easily under an expansive “equality,” and because Israel focuses almost exclusively on male writers, he does not consider the impact of Cartesianism on English women writers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. These women, while amenable to Cartesian ideas of reason divorced from gendered assumptions of feminine weakness, were skeptical of the emancipatory power of his dualism and any ideas tainted by Spinoza and other radical writers. Jacqueline Broad analyzes the influence of Cartesian philosophy on Astell, Masham, Trotter and others, and argues against earlier “interpretive literature on early modern women [that] credits Cartesianism with providing both the inspiration and the subject matter for their intellectual writings.”¹³ Instead, she argues that these women “find inspiration in the new Cartesian conception of reason, but they are also critical of other aspects of Cartesian philosophy – particularly its metaphysical doctrines.”¹⁴ Indeed, what this dissertation demonstrates is that what an emphasis on the role played by Descartes and his more radical followers on nascent feminism obscures is the central place of Christianity. As Apetrei observes, “Descartes remains ... the main backdrop to intellectual feminism in the late

¹¹ Israel, *Enlightenment*, 576.

¹² Israel, *Enlightenment*, 576.

¹³ Broad, *Women Philosophers*, 5.

¹⁴ Broad, *Women Philosophers*, 12.

seventeenth-century,” and as a result, “religious arguments which many women used in their defences are sometimes presented as digressions, as apologetic commodities which were necessary but essentially marginal.”¹⁵ Apetrei is correct that religious arguments, far from being “marginal,” were instead the most essential component of the feminism of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Moreover, it was their participation in intricate and complex theological debates that motivated these women writers to articulate feminist positions, and these religious arguments provided the foundation for their feminism.

Latitudinarian Feminism and Literature of Sensibility

In her analysis, O’Brien emphasizes how important ideas of Christian benevolence were to women writers of the early Enlightenment. Rejecting Calvinist ideas of fundamental human depravity, Trotter, for example, believed that men and women were instinctually benevolent, and that this benevolence motivated humans toward affective social bonds and against atomistic notions of selfish individualism.¹⁶ O’Brien argues that most of the women she locates in her narrative of an Anglican Whig Feminism “came to understand benevolence neither as a delusion of egotism nor as a potential distraction from the duty to love God, but as the main business of a virtuous, socially purposeful life,” and that “the word benevolence ... came to endow the moral agency of women with public significance.”¹⁷ Natural benevolence also became the lynchpin of literature of sensibility, especially as it arose in the 1740s from two female pioneers, Mary Collyer and Sarah Fielding. Theological debate, especially about the proper role of benevolence in Christianity, was the most significant motivating factor for the literature of sensibility as it was inaugurated by Fielding and Collyer. In her study of sensibility, Janet Todd regards benevolence

¹⁵ Apetrei, *Women*, 36.

¹⁶ O’Brien, *Women*, 38.

¹⁷ O’Brien, *Women*, 39.

as a critical term of “sentimental doctrine,” as does R.F. Brissenden.¹⁸ The motivating idea, then, for arguably both the most important strain of feminism and one of the central literary phenomenons of the eighteenth century was the same: an active social benevolence, partly drawn from latitudinarian Anglicanism and British moral philosophy.

Although it affected many areas of British culture in the mid to late eighteenth century, sensibility was chiefly shaped by literary works.¹⁹ There is some degree of scholarly disagreement about the use and interchangeability of the terms ‘sensibility’ and ‘sentiment’ or ‘sentimental literature.’ Todd notes that in literary criticism the two terms often seem to be synonymous, but she makes a slight distinction between them, noting that a “‘sentiment’ is a moral reflection, a rational opinion usually about the rights and wrongs of human conduct; the early eighteenth-century novel of sentiment is characterized by such generalized reflections.”²⁰ As a consequence, Todd argues that the “novel of sentiment of the 1740s and 1750s praises a generous heart and often delays the narrative to philosophize about benevolence; the novel of sensibility, increasingly written from the 1760s onwards, differs slightly in emphasis since it

¹⁸ Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986), 5; R.F. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade* (London: Macmillan, 1974). On the other hand, citing Hume’s “uneven use of ‘benevolence,’” John Mullan disagrees with the emphasis placed on “ideologies of benevolence” by “those who have sought to connect the discourses of moral philosophy with those of narrative fiction in this period,” and instead argues that “much of what is called ‘sentimental’ fiction actually depicts benevolence as a limited and exceptional propensity.” *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 39-40. As he acknowledges, however, there is an important distinction between Hume’s more secular understanding of benevolence and those who relied on Christianity to naturalize benevolence: “The absence of religious reference from Hume’s accounts of fellow-feeling precludes the kind of naturalization of benevolence to be found in the work of some of his contemporaries” (40). Moreover, Mullan’s account of benevolence in fiction is limited to only a few canonical works (144-6).

¹⁹ Todd, *Sensibility*, 4.

²⁰ Todd, *Sensibility*, 7.

honours above all the capacity for refined feeling.”²¹ As useful as Todd’s distinction is, in practice it is hard to place. Sensibility was a diffuse cultural phenomenon, and, as Todd writes, the “sentimental text is necessarily fragmented.”²² The result of this fragmentation is that locating meaningful differences between sentiment and sensibility based on appeals to rational reflection on the one hand and instinctual affective response on the other are problematic. More recent studies of the eighteenth-century novel continue to use the terms more or less synonymously. In her recent study of eighteenth-century fiction, Patricia Meyer Spacks uses both synonymously, writing, “[f]or several decades, the sentimental novel, or novel of sensibility, flourished in England (as well as on the Continent).”²³

In his classic study of sensibility, G.J. Barker-Benfield interrogates the idea of a “Cult of Sensibility,” and argues that “[i]f sensibility was a form of religion, the evidence suggests it was overwhelmingly a religion of women.”²⁴ Barker-Benfield is of course using the term ‘religion’ loosely, but, as his study demonstrates, sensibility was largely concerned with reconsidering the role of women in English society with the larger goal of reforming male behavior: “Women’s minds, bodies, and domestic spaces were [sensibility’s] sanctums ... where it could be consolidated and developed into self-consciousness and authoritative convention, before issuing outward in demands for heterosocial politeness and, eventually, reform.”²⁵ Sensibility thus partook of the same reforming energies that Apetrei demonstrates stimulated women’s religiously motivated feminist interventions in the late seventeenth century. Barker-Benfield

²¹ Todd, *Sensibility*, 8.

²² Todd, *Sensibility*, 104.

²³ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Novel Beginnings: Experiments in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 127.

²⁴ G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 262.

²⁵ Barker-Benfield, *Culture*, 262-3.

briefly discusses Astell, but does not mention the philosophical writing of Trotter or Masham, nor does he discuss Sarah Fielding, who shaped the form of sentimental literature. Although he notes that Astell “attacked Shaftesbury,” while talking about the relationship of her rejection of Lockean epistemology and embrace of Platonism to her feminism, he argues that the “linking of sensationalism to male appetite is one clue in understanding the appeal of Cambridge Platonism and its derivatives in the ensuing sentimental culture of women, including its embrace of Shaftesbury and romanticism.”²⁶ While he is correct about Astell’s emphasis on Platonism, it is not at all clear that women associated with sensibility embraced Shaftesbury; indeed, Astell’s last work was a fervent attack on Shaftesbury, and Trotter and Fielding both rejected Shaftesburian philosophy because of its irreligious associations. Likewise, several of the Bluestockings were very ambivalent about Shaftesbury.²⁷ Although Shaftesbury’s *Characteristicks* is recognized as one of the crucial texts undergirding sensibility, particularly as an influence on Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith, it was rarely uncritically accepted by women writers because of its supposed anti-Christian character.

Both Fielding and Collyer pioneered the sentimental novel by establishing perhaps its most important characteristic, the so-called ‘Man of Feeling.’ As he is manifested in fiction from the 1740s to the 1770s, the man of feeling practiced many of the ideals important to ideologies of sensibility. In his study of the ‘Good-Natured Man’ in literature of the long eighteenth century,

²⁶ Barker-Benfield, *Culture*, 194, 195.

²⁷ In a letter to Catherine Talbot in 1744, Elizabeth Carter writes of Shaftesbury that he “surely ... had some as wrong and dangerous [principles] as ever mingled their ill influence with a fine genius.” Carter responds in the following letter, that she “perfectly forgive[s] ... any censure on my Lord Shaftesbury, for one half of his works I never read, and the other half I have forgot.” See *A Series of Letters Between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catharine Talbot, From the Year 1741 to 1770*, ed. Montagu Pennington, 4 vols. (London: 1809), 1:79 and 1:82. For a consideration of Shaftesbury’s influence on the mid-century Bluestockings, see O’Brien, *Women*, 56-67.

John K. Sheriff incorporates the Man of Feeling into his larger category of the Good-Natured Man. Arguing for a direct influence among theology, philosophy, and literature, Sheriff writes:

The Good-Natured Man character type is both the product and the device of those ministers, philosophers, and artists who reevaluated human nature and tried to restore or preserve belief in the value of moral goodness by giving it a basis in nature. The characteristics and qualities of the Good-Natured Man were first defined by the Latitudinarian divines. Then Shaftesbury demonstrated that, theoretically, if all these characteristics were embodied in one person, that person would live happily and harmoniously with his own physical, psychological, and spiritual nature, with his society, and with the natural universe. The writers of belles lettres brought the Good-Natured Man to life as a character, placed him in society, and recorded his joy, conflicts, successes, and failures.²⁸

Sheriff traces The Good-Natured Man to its origins in both latitudinarian Anglicanism and moral philosophy derived in large part from Shaftesbury.²⁹ His background discussion, however, has no mention of women philosophers or theologians, and he spends almost no time analyzing the fiction of Fielding and Collyer (Collyer does not even appear in the index). Sheriff's omissions are problematic, because, as Gerard A. Barker argues, "[i]n [Sarah Fielding's] *David Simple* and its sequel, *Volume the Last* (1753), we can, in fact, see the beginning of the complex impact benevolence and sensibility, ideals embodied in the Man of Feeling, were destined to have on the novel," and that "[t]ogether with Lucius Manley, the hero of Mary Collyer's *Felicia to Charlotte* (1744), David Simple shares the distinction of being one of the two earliest examples of the Man

²⁸ John K. Sheriff, *The Good-Natured Man: The Evolution of a Moral Ideal, 1660-1800* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1982), x-xi.

²⁹ Sheriff, *Good-Natured*, 1-18.

of Feeling in English fiction.”³⁰ Moreover, as this dissertation demonstrates, both Fielding and Collyer were influenced by latitudinarian thought, and well versed in Locke and Shaftesbury. Later studies of religion and eighteenth-century literature perpetuate Sheriff’s exclusions. Patrick Müller’s more recent study of latitudinarianism and eighteenth-century literature, for example, likewise has no consideration of either women philosophers or novelists.³¹

Chapter Summaries

This dissertation begins by analyzing women and the Religious Society of Friends in Chapter One. I first consider Margaret Fell, the so called “Mother of Quakerism,” and argue that her sectarian anti-clericalism forms the basis of her feminism. Fell’s arguments for women’s right to preach arise out of her theological attacks on the Restoration Anglican establishment that oppressed and imprisoned her and almost all of the Quaker leadership in the 1660s. Fell is an early example of a woman writer able to intervene in meaningful ways in specific theological controversies to advocate for the rights of women. I situate Fell’s arguments for women’s role in her religion in the context of other Quaker writers, both male and female, who made related arguments in the face of often extreme oppression. I then turn to a Society of Friends’ pamphlet debate in the early eighteenth century both to demonstrate the importance of Locke to the Friends and to show how women formed the largest obstacle to Quaker attempts to normalize their doctrine to the Church of England. By the early eighteenth century, Quakers had lost much of the sectarian fervor that characterized their writings after the Restoration, and although this loss did not necessarily lessen their theological commitments, it did result in divergences in their thought about how to incorporate many of their earlier more radical stances. One surprising

³⁰ Gerard A. Barker, “*David Simple: The Novel of Sensibility in Embryo*” *Modern Language Studies* 12, no. 2 (1982): 69.

³¹ Patrick Müller, *Latitudinarianism and Didacticism in Eighteenth-Century Literature: Moral Theology in Fielding, Sterne, and Goldsmith* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009).

manifestation of this phenomenon is their reliance on Locke, the representative of a rational and restrained latitudinarian Anglicanism, in their attempts to better situate themselves in English culture. This chapter also analyzes Astell's brief, but tantalizing, acknowledgment of the influence of dissenting women. Although Astell and other Anglican women writers like Masham and Trotter seldom mention the feminist path blazed by Fell after the Restoration, I argue that Fell initiates the method of using theological debate to argue for an enlarged role for women in English society. Moreover, I demonstrate that although some of her claims are characterized by the apocalyptic and millenarian rhetoric employed by her dissenting contemporaries, most of her arguments in favor of women anticipate those made by Astell, Masham, and Trotter.

Chapter Two scrutinizes Mary Astell's attacks on various deist ideologies and argues that these critiques formed an essential part of her feminist understanding of High Church Anglicanism. Astell's longest and arguably most important work, her 1705 *The Christian Religion*, was primarily motivated by an anonymously published radical pamphlet, *A Lady's Religion*, which argued that Christianity should be simple enough to be understood by women. From their earliest manifestations, arguments for deism invoked claims about women's weaker reason and supposed inability to understand complex Christian theology. I argue that Astell's recognition of the misogynistic foundation of deistic arguments was one of the most important motivations for her Tory High Church feminism. Her attacks on deism form the core of two of her most important works in the first decade of the eighteenth century. In addition to her 1705 *The Christian Religion*, she also attacked the deism of Shaftesbury in her last published work, *Bart'lemy Fair* (1709). Throughout her work, Astell advances the powerful argument that Christianity is the greatest moral and sociopolitical support for English women. Astell's rejection of deism complicates narratives of secularization that see deism as one of the most crucial

eighteenth-century stages on the way to modernity and doctrines of women's equality. Astell did not equate the gradual lessening of the Bible's authority in the eighteenth century with an enlargement of women's rights; on the contrary, she argued that only the Bible properly interpreted could adequately sustain feminist arguments.

Chapter Three examines two distinct periods in the philosophical career of Catharine Trotter: her conversion from Catholicism to Anglicanism in 1707 and her later moral philosophy. Like Fell, Astell, and Masham, Trotter's engagement in detailed theological debate gave her the opportunity to advocate for her own interpretations of Christianity agreeable with her feminist positions. In particular, her conversion to latitudinarian Anglicanism opened a space for her to articulate her own rational understanding of religion, amenable to her feminism. Her conversion was also bound up with her attempts to ward off the sexual advances of the zealous Anglican, Thomas Burnet. Trotter (whose married name after 1708 was Cockburn) also wrote several important works of moral philosophy from the 1720s to the 1740s. The latter half of this chapter situates her moral thought in relation to Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. Trotter's moral philosophy influenced other mid-century writers, both male and female, and her writings were seen as important enough to merit a collected works published by Thomas Birch in 1751.

This dissertation concludes with an examination of several of Sarah Fielding's novels. Chapter Four begins by demonstrating the importance of a theologically minimalist Christianity to both *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744) and its sequel *Volume the Last* (1753). This chapter also looks at Fielding's theological relationships to her brother Henry and her friend Samuel Richardson, and in doing so establishes her as an essential pioneer of literature of sensibility. The latter half of this chapter analyzes her 1754 experimental novel *The Cry*, likely co-written with Jane Collier. Cylynda, the antagonist of the novel, experiments with many

different philosophical systems, including Shaftesburianism, before she ultimately settles on Christianity. Unlike Collyer, Fielding is hostile to Shaftesbury, and this chapter argues that *The Cry* should be understood as largely a criticism of the effects of his and other supposedly non-Christian philosophies on women. In the novel Fielding enacts fictionally exactly the dangers that deism supposedly posed for women that Astell warned about earlier in the century. Both *David Simple* and *The Cry* demonstrate the complex connections among philosophy, theology, and fiction in the mid eighteenth century, and how women writers were able to use the theological work of earlier writers to help inaugurate the Culture of Sensibility and to argue for the rights of women.

I close this introduction by briefly considering the work of Masham and Collyer, two writers who frame the central issues of this dissertation. Damaris Masham's latitudinarian attack on Malebranche in her 1696 *Discourse* gives her the opportunity to argue that complex theological schemes pose great dangers to English women because they obscure the 'reasonable' Christianity and 'plain' understandings of the Bible that act as their largest support. As Chapter Three shows, Trotter, in particular, articulated similar sentiments. In her 1744 novel *Felicia to Charlotte* and its 1750 sequel, Mary Collyer fuses aspects of Shaftesbury, Locke, and latitudinarian Anglicanism to create an alternative to the licentious and predatory males of the Restoration theater and early eighteenth-century amatory fiction. Collyer's fiction helped establish the parameters of sentimental literature while also demonstrating the importance of an exceptionally liberal Christianity to eighteenth-century feminism.

As both Masham and Collyer argue, these seemingly arcane religious debates have real-world force for women writers and their readers. Both writers are not simply arguing a group of abstruse theological points; they are emphasizing the crucial impact theological discourse has in

everyday life for women, Masham philosophically and Collyer fictionally. I turn, then, in this introduction to two examples of how women argued for feminist positions through religion and religious discourse.

Damaris Masham, Religion, and Early Modern Feminism

In her 1696 *A Discourse Concerning the Love of God*, Damaris Masham – the daughter of the famous Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth and the close friend of John Locke – argues against those who “carry their Zeal for the Doctrinal Part of Religion so far, that they seem to lay little Stress on the Performance of those Vertues recommended by our Saviour Christ.”³² For Masham, as for many liberal Anglicans, “the chief Aim of Christianity” is “a good Life,” a religiously motivated way of living virtuously and benevolently that dogmatic religious-philosophical systems obscure and hinder.³³ Masham’s text evinces several tropes typical of latitudinarian Anglicanism of the Restoration and early eighteenth century. Indeed, as Patricia Springborg points out, Masham’s contention that “a good Life” is the primary aim of Christianity is “quintessentially Latitudinarian.”³⁴ Like other liberal Anglicans, Masham carefully situates her argument in opposition to superstitious Catholicism and fanatical non-conformity. In doing so, she rebuts characteristic straw-man criticisms of the Church of England and conflates Anglicanism with morality:

Whatever Reproaches have been made by the Romanists on the one hand, of the Want of Books of Devotion in the Church of *England*; or by the Dissenters on the other, of a dead and lifeless Way of Preaching; I think it may be affirm’d, That there cannot, anywhere, be found so good a Collection of Discourses upon Moral Subjects, as might be made of

³² Damaris Masham, *A Discourse Concerning the Love of God* (London: 1696), 2.

³³ Masham, *Discourse*, 2.

³⁴ Patricia Springborg, *Mary Astell: Theorist of Freedom from Domination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 69.

English Sermons, and other Treatises of that Nature, written by the Divines of our Church.³⁵

Masham, like many of her contemporaries, saw the Church of England as occupying a reasonable, common-sense middle-ground that stressed virtuous behavior and rejected abstruse theological speculation, tyrannical authoritarianism, and enthusiastic emotional excess. She cites Edward Stillingfleet, the Bishop of Worcester, in support of her argument, a writer often taken to be the epitome of Anglican ‘common-sense’ theology, who argues “*If once an unintelligible Way of Practical Religion becomes the Standard of Devotion, no Men of Sense and Reason will ever set themselves about it; but leave it to be understood by mad Men, and practis’d by Fools.*”³⁶

Although her arguments against abstract philosophical speculations at the beginning of her *Discourse* are typical of liberal Anglicanism, for Masham, as a woman theologian, the stakes for embracing a ‘common-sense’ theology are even higher, as she recognizes later in her text.

Masham’s *Discourse* is chiefly an attack on the occasionalist metaphysics of the French philosopher Nicolas Malebranche and his Anglican disciple John Norris, and to a lesser extent Norris’s correspondent, Mary Astell.³⁷ Masham argues that occasionalism, which maintains both

³⁵ Masham, *Discourse*, 1.

³⁶ Masham, *Discourse*, 6. The title of Stillingfleet’s modern biography by Robert Todd Carroll is *The Common-Sense Philosophy of Religion of Bishop Edward Stillingfleet 1635-1699* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975). I discuss Stillingfleet in greater detail in Chapter Three.

³⁷ Scholars disagree on the extent to which Masham’s *Discourse* is a response to Astell. Responding to earlier claims by Patricia Springborg and others that Masham had Astell in her sights, James Buickerood writes that this “interpretation suffers from crippling deficiencies of evidence, argument, knowledge of the context in which the work was written and published, as well as a lack of appreciation for the breadth of Masham’s knowledge and reading” in his introduction to *The Philosophical Works of Damaris, Lady Masham*, ed. James G. Buickerood (Bristol: Thoemmes Continuum, 2004), xvi-xvii. Springborg responds to Buickerood’s arguments by conceding that he is “right, that Masham’s philosophical concerns relate more to Norris than to Astell – and specifically to Norris’s Malebranchist assumptions,” but also maintains that, to some extent, “the salient fact is that Astell, who tended to be paranoid about the reception of her works ... [read] Masham’s *Discourse* as a personal attack” in Springborg,

that God can be the only true object of our love and that God is the ultimate cause of all of our sensations, is heretical and dangerous, especially when being irresponsibly “Preached to a Country Congregation” by Norris, an Anglican clergyman.³⁸ Perhaps even worse for Masham, by promoting the ideas of the French Malebranche, Norris is introducing heterodox Catholic ideas into the Church of England. She writes that Norris’s contention “That God is the only proper Object of our Love” leads him to the preposterous idea “that every Act that carries our Desires towards the Creature is sinful: Which Opinion if receiv’d, and follow’d, must necessarily bring in the like unintelligible Way of Practical Religion, which the Bishop of *Worcester* [Stillingfleet] has justly censured in the Church of *Rome*.”³⁹ For Masham, as for latitudinarians like Stillingfleet, “Practical Religion” was of the greatest importance because it promoted the importance of the sociability of humankind to morality and virtue. Catholic superstition, on the other hand, led to a perilous withdrawal from society: “those in the Church of *Rome*; Who having a better Relish of Religion, than to be satisfied with one consisting of nothing but idle, superstitious, and pompous Shows, have betaken themselves to ... [a] Life of Contemplation.”⁴⁰ For Masham, mystical contemplation was directly opposed to proper Christian sociability: She argues that those who suppose “the Persecution of a Christian State to consist in Contemplation” assume “the Duties of a social Life (for which ‘tis plain Mankind were intended) to be low Matters.”⁴¹ Accordingly, Masham ends her *Discourse* by attacking “Monasteries, and Religious Houses” and those who would completely withdraw from the world for religious reasons by

Mary Astell, 69, 71. Although its composition predates her 1694 *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, Astell’s second published work was the correspondence between her and Norris on the subject of occasionalism, published as *Letters Concerning the Love of God* in 1695.

³⁸ Masham, *Discourse*, 80.

³⁹ Masham, *Discourse*, 9.

⁴⁰ Masham, *Discourse*, 3.

⁴¹ Masham, *Discourse*, 4.

arguing “whatever Vices they might part with ... they must necessarily oppose thereby, one great end that they were sent into the World for, viz. of doing good.”⁴² Masham highlights a key component of latitudinarian Anglicanism – the identification of Christianity with an active, benevolent morality; indeed, the central argument of her text is that theological systems (often suspected of originating from Catholic sources) unmoored from ‘plain’ readings of Scripture result inevitably in immorality and vice. Masham’s argument demonstrates how latitudinarian anti-Catholicism led to an emphasis on sociable benevolence at the expense of dogmatic theology, often deemed to be Popish.

Masham’s text is representative of many of the ideological debates that occurred in English Christianity in the long eighteenth century. Crucially, these arguments often involve gender politics, a fact usually ignored in critical discussions of the period. Masham’s contention “that many who find Christianity a very Reasonable Religion in the Scriptures, would think it a very unaccountable one in a System” has particularly important consequences for women.⁴³ As she translates and cites in her text, Malebranche’s argument that “the Desire we have to the Creature” is sinful leads him to conclude that women’s bodies are the foundations of sin. Masham writes that his “account how *Adam’s* Posterity came to be infected” with this desire at the expense of loving God is “*By reason of the Union that Children have with their Mother,*” and astutely observes that this infection “was not from *Adam*, as is commonly taught, but from *Eve*,” a shifting of the burden of original sin from Adam’s transgression to Eve’s female body.⁴⁴ For Masham, Malebranche’s occasionalist philosophy is dangerous because through nothing “but a Chain of Consequences ... depending upon the Supposition of *our seeing all things in God,*” the

⁴² Masham, *Discourse*, 125-6.

⁴³ Masham, *Discourse*, 71-2.

⁴⁴ Masham, *Discourse*, 74.

ultimate cause of human sinfulness is laid at the feet of female biology.⁴⁵ Even worse for Masham is the implication that women are incapable of escaping this predicament, rendering their relationship to God moot simply because of their anatomy: She writes, “this no holiness of the Mother can hinder.”⁴⁶ Masham emphasizes that the negative effects of Malebranche’s unique form of biological determinism primarily doom women. She wryly observes that “There seems to be some things in this Hypothesis very unintelligible” and argues “that it has Consequences intolerable to be admitted.”⁴⁷ The orthodox Christian understanding of original sin thus becomes crucial to her feminism. There is a certain level of irony here because many seventeenth-century women writers like Margaret Fell, Aemilia Lanyer, and Rachel Speght defended women against misogynist attacks on their gender by writers relying primarily on Eve’s role in Adam’s corruption in the Garden of Eden. The foundation of Masham’s complaints against Malebranche and his followers is her contention that “Christianity ... is a rational Religion, and needs no Inventions of Men to support it”; this assertion demands that, on some level, Christianity as “rational” is theoretically able to be understood by all regardless of rank or gender and is thus free from patriarchal assumptions.⁴⁸ Masham foregrounds the argument for women’s rationality in her second work, *Occasional Thoughts in Reference to a Vertuous or Christian Life* from 1705, and the importance of ‘reasonable’ Christianity to women was also made by Astell, Trotter, and others.

Masham is so troubled by Malebranche’s stance on original sin that she again attacks it near the end of her *Discourse*. She argues that his contention “that we come into the World utterly incapable to please God ... not through any fault of our own, but for *Eve’s*” is

⁴⁵ Masham, *Discourse*, 76.

⁴⁶ Masham, *Discourse*, 75.

⁴⁷ Masham, *Discourse*, 76.

⁴⁸ Masham, *Discourse*, 78.

unscriptural: “Concerning [Eve’s] Transgression any ways influencing her Posterity, the Scripture yet makes no mention at all.”⁴⁹ Masham highlights what is one of the most essential arguments made by women writers attacking misogynist ideologies in the eighteenth century: properly interpreted, the Bible supports women against the patriarchal assumptions of wider European culture. In Masham’s case this means soliciting support for her arguments by associating Malebranche’s anti-feminism with Popish superstition. ‘Reasonable’ Christianity and ‘plain’ understandings of scripture both become, in different degrees and manifestations, the cornerstones of the feminist arguments made by Masham, Astell, Trotter, and other women theologians of the Restoration and early eighteenth century.

Mary Collyer, Religion, and Sensibility

The critical neglect of Mary Collyer’s 1744 epistolary novel *Felicia to Charlotte* and its 1750 sequel is indicative both of how overwhelming the influence of canonical works like *Pamela* and *Tom Jones* have been on understandings of mid-eighteenth-century fiction, and how modern genre categories can obscure the permeable boundaries between eighteenth-century fiction and philosophy. Until recently, Sarah Fielding shared the same critical fate as Collyer, and Jerry C. Beasley’s comment in his 1982 *Novels of the 1740s* is representative of older critical attitudes toward non-canonical mid-eighteenth-century fiction. Beasley writes that “*Pamela*, *Joseph Andrews*, *Jonathan Wild*, *Clarissa*, *Roderick Random*, and *Tom Jones* came out simultaneously with a great crowd of lesser works, of a remarkable variety. Most of these forgotten books are worthless, and deservedly neglected.”⁵⁰ *Felicia to Charlotte*, however, was not forgotten in its time, as Beasley himself points out.⁵¹ In a favorable review of the sequel, *The*

⁴⁹ Masham, *Discourse*, 108.

⁵⁰ Jerry C. Beasley, *Novels of the 1740s* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1982), xii.

⁵¹ Beasley, *Novels*, 169.

Monthly Review from January 1750 claims that “The first volume of these letters was published about four years ago, and met with so favourable a reception from the public, as not only to occasion a new edition in a short time, but to encourage the ingenious author to publish a second volume.”⁵² However, the review also condescendingly writes, “we forbear entering into more particulars concerning a work that is more peculiarly calculated for the ladies than the majority of our readers.”⁵³ The misogynistic dismissal by *The Monthly Review* is puzzling because *Felicia to Charlotte* is certainly no less “calculated for the ladies” than Richardson’s fiction; moreover, Collyer’s novel and its sequel are concerned with many of the complex theological and philosophical currents of the early eighteenth century.

Both Sarah Fielding and Mary Collyer could be included in Karen O’Brien’s narrative of Anglican Whig Feminism, yet her study has very little discussion of eighteenth-century fiction. Her book is representative of the overemphasis by modern scholars on the after-the-fact division between eighteenth-century fiction and philosophy. I analyze Fielding’s religiously motivated feminism and its implications for mid-century sensibility in Chapter Four, but a brief examination of Collyer’s fiction here will serve to show how closely linked women’s religiously motivated feminism and literature of sensibility were in the eighteenth century. O’Brien observes how Trotter acted as a philosophical connection between Masham and the mid-century Bluestockings; Collyer bridged the two in similar ways. Susan Staves argues that *Felicia to Charlotte* “is a novel of ideas, linking some of the aspirations of writers like Astell and others ... to those of the later bluestockings and aiming to reimagine the amatory novel as the novel of

⁵² *The Monthly Review*, vol. 2, (January 1750), 229.

⁵³ *The Monthly Review*, vol. 2, (January 1750), 229.

sensibility.”⁵⁴ Although her formulation “aspirations of ... Astell” is unspecific, Staves is right to point out the overlap between women philosophers of the early eighteenth century and Collyer’s fiction. Collyer establishes a Christianized Shaftesburian benevolent ethic as the foundation of her feminism in the novel.⁵⁵

Despite the chauvinistic dismissal by *The Monthly Review*, *Felicia to Charlotte* appealed to the Bluestockings not because it was “peculiarly calculated for the ladies,” but precisely because of its philosophical character. In the year of the work’s publication, Elizabeth Carter asked Catharine Talbot (immediately after suggesting that people “are a much better set of beings than some moralists, from a partial view, think proper to represent them”) if she has “seen ... Letters from Felicia to Charlotte.”⁵⁶ Because of its epistolary structure, the novel invites the protagonist Felicia to examine at length the moral logic that, she conjectures, undergirds the motivations and actions of the other characters; at one point she claims she “can moralize like

⁵⁴ Susan Staves, *A Literary History of Women’s Writing in Britain, 1660-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 237.

⁵⁵ Part of the Collyer’s embrace of sensibility was no doubt derived from Marivaux. Her 1742 translation of Marivaux’s *Marianne* as *The Virtuous Orphan* was very influential in the eighteenth century and was the translation in which the majority of English readers encountered the novel. However, Beasley’s claim that the “sentimentalism” of *Felicia to Charlotte* “probably came directly from Marivaux” is overstated (172). As William McBurney and Michael Shugrue demonstrate in their introduction to Collyer’s translation of *Marianne*, she altered the novel’s sentimentalism in significant ways, and was inspired by a number of writers. See the introduction to Marivaux, *The Virtuous Orphan Or, The Life of Marianne Countess of ******, trans. Mary Collyer, eds. William McBurney and Michael Shugrue (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965).

⁵⁶ *A Series of Letters Between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catharine Talbot*, ed. Montagu Pennington, 4 vols. (London: 1809), 1:74-5. Beasley notes that the novel “gained the notice of a select group of bluestockings, including Mary Wortley Montagu and Richardson’s friends Miss Catherine Talbot and Miss Elizabeth Carter” (169). In a 1761 letter to Mary Wortley Montagu, Elizabeth Carter writes, “I am glad that Miss Talbot recommends Mrs. Collier; I believe I know very well who she is. She formerly wrote some Letters from Felicia to Charlotte. I was a little acquainted with her, before she was married, but have never seen her but once since. I never heard any thing to her disadvantage, and writing for the support of her family is a laudable employment.” See *Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter to Mrs. Montagu, Between the Years 1755 and 1800*, ed. Montagu Pennington, 3 vols. (London: 1817), 1:151-2.

any philosopher or divine.”⁵⁷ The title page also emphasizes the novel’s philosophical character, and its overt didacticism: “Containing A Series of the most interesting Events, interspersed with Moral Reflections; chiefly tending to prove, that the *Seeds* of Virtue are implanted in the Mind of every Reasonable Being.” The full title of the novel suggests how fluid the boundaries were between philosophy and fiction: by explicitly attempting to “prove” a moral proposition, the title page of *Felicia to Charlotte* announces its philosophical character.

Although the characters in both the novel and its sequel approvingly discuss Locke, the belief in a moral sense or faculty (“Seeds of Virtue ... implanted in the Mind”) seems directly opposed to his empiricism, and much closer to Shaftesbury’s and his disciple Frances Hutcheson’s shifting ideas of an innate moral sense. Indeed, Locke’s rejection of innate ideas in the *Essay* would seem to preclude an instinctive moral sense.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the relationship between Locke’s philosophy and notions of innate virtue tended to be complicated. Hutcheson especially struggled with how his ideas of an innate moral faculty could fit within Locke’s scheme. Isabel Rivers writes that “[u]nlike Shaftesbury, Hutcheson was ambivalent in his attitude to Locke, and this ambivalence was to produce some curious contortions. On the one hand he wished to associate himself with the fashionable Lockean epistemology,” but he also “thought that dangerous use had been made of arguments from Locke with the effect of undermining discussion of the foundation of morals.”⁵⁹ Shaftesbury, for his part, had earlier

⁵⁷ Mary Collyer, *Letters from Felicia to Charlotte: Containing A Series of the most interesting Events, interspersed with Moral Reflections; chiefly tending to prove, that the Seeds of Virtue are implanted in the Mind of Every Reasonable Being*, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (London: 1755), 1:87.

⁵⁸ Norman Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards’s Moral Thought and its British Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 125.

⁵⁹ Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780, vol. II Shaftesbury to Hume* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 208. For an extended discussion of British conceptions of the moral faculty, see Rivers,

cited Locke's friend Jean Le Clerk in a note in his *Miscellaneous Reflections* included in *Characteristicks* on the relationship of virtue to innatism:

For although, strictly speaking, there are no ideas fixed by nature in our minds, still, no one could deny that there are faculties of our minds which nature has so disposed that as soon as we have the use of reason, we begin in some way to distinguish truth from falsehood, bad from good. The appearance of truth is always pleasing to us, while that of falsehood is displeasing; we indeed prefer what is honest to what is dishonest, because of seeds implanted in us, which finally emerge into the light when we are able to reason, and bear the better fruit as our reasoning improves.⁶⁰

The relationship, then, between ideas of innate virtue ("seeds implanted in us") motivating a moral faculty and Locke's epistemology was complex and shifting in the first half of the eighteenth century. This ambiguity is reflected in Collyer's *Felicia to Charlotte* and its sequel.

Collyer was evidently well-versed in both Shaftesbury and Hutcheson's conceptions of an innate moral faculty. Lucius, Felicia's benevolent love interest, claims that "The moral sense ... is ... that distinguishing faculty of the mind which makes us *feel*, – sensibly and strongly *feel*, – the harmony and discord of actions. It is the *touch*, the *ear* of the soul; while reason is the *eye* to regulate the exertions of this sympathetic faculty."⁶¹ Collyer's understanding of the moral sense as an instinctual and pre-rational judgment of the good is similar to Hutcheson's: "we have a *moral Sense* or Determination of our Mind, to *approve* every *kind Affection* either in ourselves or others, and all publickly useful Actions which we imagine flow from such Affection, without

Reason, chap. 3. Rivers also writes that Hutcheson's moral sense does not "suppose innate ideas" (207).

⁶⁰ Qtd. in Rivers, *Reason*, 126.

⁶¹ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 1:101.

our having a view to our *private Happiness*, in our Approbation of these Actions.”⁶² It is precisely because Lucius voices these moral sentiments that he is the hero of Collyer’s novel.

Both Hutcheson and (especially) Shaftesbury received a great deal of criticism for the presumed heterodoxy of their views. Although critics have mentioned Collyer’s debt to Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, they have struggled to integrate this aspect of her novel with its explicit Christianity. Staves writes that “Lucius ... aligns himself with the arguments of Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury ... and Francis Hutcheson,” but does not explore this connection at any length, only noting that they were “heirs to the Cambridge Platonists” and that “many theologically orthodox contemporaries considered the moral philosophies of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Hume guilty of the Pelagian heresy.”⁶³ Beasley writes, “[t]o the orthodoxy of Christian heroism, the story clearly engrafts modified Shaftesburian deism” and “attacks all formalist theologies, offering instead a ‘religion of nature.’”⁶⁴ Beasley is right to emphasize Collyer’s apparent disdain for theological systems; however, it is unclear from what “orthodoxy” the protagonists of the novel derive their “Christian heroism.”

Although both Beasley and Staves point out the influence of Shaftesbury on Collyer, it is striking that neither he nor Hutcheson is named explicitly in either *Felicia to Charlotte* or its sequel, despite the novel’s numerous references to Locke and citations of much less well-known moral philosophers like Henry Coventry. I mentioned above the ambivalent and outright negative reactions to Shaftesbury by eighteenth-century women philosophers, even while they were sympathetic to his moral philosophy. Trotter, as I discuss in Chapter Three, agrees with Shaftesbury’s conception of humankind as naturally virtuous and sociable, yet cannot get past his

⁶² Qtd. in Rivers, *Reason*, 206.

⁶³ Staves, *Women’s Writing*, 238, 239.

⁶⁴ Beasley, *Novels*, 171.

supposed deism. The belief that Shaftesbury's emphasis on natural affections and a moral sense was tainted by his attacks on Christian orthodoxy was widespread in the first half of the eighteenth century. Rivers writes that "later Christian moralists who were indebted to Shaftesbury tended to play down that debt and to concentrate on clarifying and developing the implications of his thought."⁶⁵ Collyer seems to be writing in this vein; her *Felicia to Charlotte* appropriates Shaftesburian philosophy and overtly Christianizes it as a way to embrace its implications for human virtue while simultaneously (partly) emptying it of its irreligious character. Moreover, her embrace of this Christianized Shaftesburian moral philosophy allows her to craft a feminist sensibility for her heroine and love interest directly opposed (in her eyes) to that in amatory fiction.

The sexual desire expressed by both Lucius and Felicia, like David Simple, is strikingly un-licentious. Although their conspicuously un-sexualized behavior can seem risible to a modern reader, characters like Lucius and David Simple are a reaction against the rakes and libertines of the Restoration theater and amatory fiction. In contrast to good looks, wit, and gallantry, it is the correctness of his philosophical and theological opinions and his benevolence that draws Felicia to Lucius. After hearing Lucius romantically rhapsodize on the pleasures of nature, Felicia "formed a most amiable idea of [his] person ... though [she] had never seen him."⁶⁶ Deliberately eschewing an understanding of passion that relies on Lucius's looks, she writes to her correspondent Charlotte that, "I shall forbear giving a description of his person, till I can give you that of his mind, and that must not be till I know him better."⁶⁷ Lucius, for his part, refuses to flatter Felicia, as Charlotte – a more typical eighteenth-century female character – seemingly

⁶⁵ Rivers, *Reason*, 154.

⁶⁶ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 1:12.

⁶⁷ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 1:13.

expects. Instead of showering Felicia with the expected “transcendent excellencies” and “infinite perfections” – flattery she deems “sublime nonsense” – Lucius impresses her with long philosophical speeches on the wonders of nature and God: he “is too good a christian to deify his mistress, and has too good an opinion of [Felicia] to think [she] should be pleased with such senseless homages.”⁶⁸ Felicia likens overindulgent male flattery to heresy, and maintains that women should be courted by appeals to their understanding instead of “senseless” adulation. Lucius is contrasted to Felicia’s other love interest, the gallant but somewhat preposterous, though ultimately harmless, Mellifont, who “attack’d [her] vanity with incessant praises.”⁶⁹ Unlike Lucius, Mellifont “took [Felicia] for some deity.”⁷⁰ Mellifont’s “life and gaiety” offers a contrast to the philosophical sensibility of Lucius, though Collyer strips him of any malevolence and ultimately he marries Felicia’s good-natured cousin, Amelia.⁷¹

The only overtly malicious character in the novel is Prudilla, an older woman whose hypocritical moralizing and manifest sexual desire are both ridiculous and repugnant to Felicia and her companions. Because of Prudilla’s aggressive sexual desire for Lucius, surprisingly in the sequel it is revealed that she seduced him in his sleep before his marriage, resulting in her pregnancy and ultimately a step-child for Felicia. Prudilla stands in stark contrast to Felicia’s straightforward intellectual virtue. Apart from her hyperbolic moralizing, what especially raises the ire in Felicia and her companions, however, is Prudilla’s unconcealed Calvinism. Upon their first meeting, “Prudilla began with a severe censure upon the weakness and depravity of human nature,” and she later duplicitously attempts to flatter Felicia by telling her that she “give[s] such

⁶⁸ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 1:69.

⁶⁹ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 1:129.

⁷⁰ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 1:128.

⁷¹ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 1:129.

early proofs of ... being one of the elect.”⁷² Her Calvinism prompts Lucius to express his Shaftesburian conceptions of a benevolent deity and an innate moral sense. In several places in both volumes of *Felicia to Charlotte*, Lucius’s theological scheme explicitly echoes Shaftesbury’s: God is “the universal parent, the friend of mankind, the patron of virtue, the most amiable, the most kind, and benevolent being in the universe.”⁷³ Lucius’s language is similar to Shaftesbury in his *Letter Concerning Enthusiasm*, a text that, although intentionally ambiguous, was notorious for its profane character, and Prudilla likewise accuses Lucius’s “strange opinions” of not being “orthodox” because he seems not to “believe original sin.”⁷⁴ Collyer evinces an evident anxiety with her novel’s Shaftesburian Christianity, and she reinforces its worth by suggesting that what often passes for orthodox Christianity conflicts with both nature and reason: Felicia and her friends have a conversation in which “the errors of christians sanctified by the venerable name of orthodoxy, were proved inconsistent with reason, with all our ideas of moral beauty and natural harmony.”⁷⁵ Orthodoxy signifies not correct religious opinion, but instead reinforces those errors of Christianity that cannot be reconciled with “the generous, the friendly religion of the Bible.”⁷⁶

Prudilla’s Calvinism is not only indicative of her poor judgment and bad character; it leads to her downfall. While near death in the sequel, Prudilla relates the circumstances of her previous misdeeds, especially her deceitful seduction of Lucius. She decided to “give way to her passion” because she “flatter’d herself, that, as she had such proof of her being one of the elect, it was impossible she should ever be a cast-away”; as a result, she “drank iniquity like water” and

⁷² Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 1:28, 1:228.

⁷³ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 2:59.

⁷⁴ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 1:38.

⁷⁵ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 1:196.

⁷⁶ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 1:198.

went “from one crime to another.”⁷⁷ Prudilla’s sexual depravity is a consequence of her convenient Antinomian understanding of herself as incapable of immoral actions. Collyer suggests that a benevolent understanding of God and morality is thus necessary to protect women from corrupting temptations: “religion, when rais’d upon false principles, had an influence in corrupting her heart.”⁷⁸ Prudilla’s self-deceptive and fraudulent nature can be traced directly to her Calvinistic emphasis on God’s judgment at the expense of benevolence for others: “Censoriousness, inhumanity, and the indulgence of every selfish passion, are the natural consequences of her sentiments of religion; a religion, which, respecting only God, regards every duty to man as low and contemptible.”⁷⁹ Astell, Trotter, and Masham, like Collyer, all attacked Calvinism on similar grounds: in their view, it tended to promote an inattention to both worldly concerns and morality, effects that disproportionately affected women.

In contrast to Prudilla’s essentially straw-man Calvinism, Felicia and her companions tout a radically latitudinarian Protestantism verging on deism.⁸⁰ Both Shaftesbury and liberal Anglicans advocated toleration and religious liberty. In his *Letter*, Shaftesbury sarcastically rejects “*Uniformity of Opinion*” as “a hopeful Project.”⁸¹ Lucius also attacks forced attempts at uniformity. One of the most significant episodes in the second volume of the novel involves the discovery of a disguised Catholic. Lucius and Felicia confront Dorothea, one of their servants,

⁷⁷ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 2:148.

⁷⁸ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 2:148.

⁷⁹ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 2:154.

⁸⁰ Citing especially the Shaftesburian additions to her translation of Marivaux’s *Marianne*, McBurney and Shugrue claim that Collyer “was unquestionably a deist” (xxi). However, in my view, Collyer is indicative of the difficulty of defining eighteenth-century deism and of the large overlap deistic ideas had with liberal Protestantism. Indeed, High Church writers like Astell saw little difference between latitudinarians like Locke and more radical deistic writers like John Toland. This overlap and the difficulty of pinning down eighteenth-century deism are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two.

⁸¹ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Philip Ayres, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 1:15.

after discovering in her room a “crucifix set with diamonds, and a chaplet of pearls, and a mass book in Latin and English.”⁸² Their initial anger at Dorothea, however, comes because they suspect her of theft, and not because of her Catholicism. Under questioning, Dorothea reveals that she is actually the daughter of a baronet, forced to flee because her “religious liberties were invaded.”⁸³ Refusing to listen to arguments against Catholicism and to read the Bible for herself, she was ultimately forced by her father to “receive [the] addresses” of “a zealous churchman” who “seldom spoke of any thing but religion.”⁸⁴ Fleeing before her forced marriage, Dorothea, “by performing what she thought [her] duty ... incurred a father’s displeasure.”⁸⁵ Dorothea’s forced conversion and forced marriage go hand in hand; sexual persecution is religious persecution.

Dorothea’s situation gives Collyer the opportunity to illustrate at length the benefits of an expansive religious toleration. Dorothea fully expects Lucius and Felicia to act as her father has once her Catholicism is revealed: “Yet as I am a Roman, you will, probably, join with my father, and, while you preach to me of persecution and prejudice, sufficiently shew, like him, that you are capable of both.”⁸⁶ To her surprise, however, Lucius claims he is “an enemy to persecution, and to every attempt to force the conscience,” and that “[a] true protestant, from principle, hates all religious tyranny.”⁸⁷ In addition to yoking Protestantism with toleration, he also claims that his “is the religion of common sense,” returning to the understanding of liberal Anglicanism as a

⁸² Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 2:224.

⁸³ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 2:234.

⁸⁴ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 2:235.

⁸⁵ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 2:234.

⁸⁶ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 2:238.

⁸⁷ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 2:239.

middle-ground between two equally stifling and fanatical extremes, in this case Calvinism and Catholicism.⁸⁸

When Dorothea is initially reunited with her father, he rants against her Catholicism: he “talked in favour of charity, with the rage of a bigot” and spoke “with all the intemperate heat, and enthusiasm of party.”⁸⁹ He also “swore and preached in one breath, and uttered his sentiments with the positive assurance of a jesuit.”⁹⁰ Despite being an Anglican, in his rage against his daughter’s religion, Dorothea’s father – with his simultaneous “enthusiasm” and Jesuitical false assurance – performs in ways nearer to the two extremes against which latitudinarianism tended to define itself. Once his “passion had subsided,” however, he is open to Lucius’s latitudinarian arguments in favor of toleration.⁹¹ It is only in his anger that he acted contrary to how an English Protestant country squire should behave.

Lucius’s arguments for toleration are a curious fusion of Locke and Shaftesbury. He argues that “religious liberty” is “the birthright of every reasonable being” and quotes from Locke’s *Letter Concerning Toleration*, calling it “of more value than a Peruvian mine.”⁹² Lucius’s high praise of Locke’s *Letter* is somewhat ironic, because Locke famously, though implicitly, follows previous writers like Milton in refusing toleration to Catholics, because their church “is so constituted that all who enter it *ipso facto* pass into the allegiance and service of another prince.”⁹³ Lucius’s denunciation of religious persecution, however, sounds much closer to Shaftesbury than Locke:

⁸⁸ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 2:240.

⁸⁹ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 2:250.

⁹⁰ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 2:251.

⁹¹ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 2:252.

⁹² Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 2:257.

⁹³ John Locke, *Epistola de Tolerantia A Letter on Toleration*, trans. J.W. Gough, ed. Raymond Klibansky (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 133.

He ... represented persecution as arraigning the infinite sagacity of the sovereign creator of all things, who, to make room for heaven-born charity, had wisely given such a variety of tastes, degrees of capacity and understanding, to the mind of man, from whence result the love of truth, and the test of every kind and benevolent affection. Uniformity of sentiment ... is, I find, in his opinion, no more desirable, than the dull uniform prospect of a smooth, and wide-stretched, plain.⁹⁴

Lucius emphasizes God's benevolence at the expense of specific theological doctrines, an emphasis made greater by his description of God as a "sovereign creator." Under Lucius's scheme, toleration is not only acceptable, but is in fact an essential aspect of the divine character. In contrast to other "systems of religion," the foundation of Christianity is its emphasis on reasoned inquiry.⁹⁵ According to Lucius, "the impossibility of discovering truth from error, where no enquiry was made, [is] as great in the zealot of Rome and London, as in that of Turkey, or Siam."⁹⁶ Again, Catholics and dissenters are linked, this time with non-Christians. All are opposed to the reasoned inquiry that will lead naturally to a radically non-doctrinal Christianity founded on an expansive toleration. Ironically, in places Lucius's language is close to that of seventeenth-century sectarians because of his refusal to draw a distinction between Anglican and Catholic persecution, which, "whether in Papist or Protestant, is a tempest raised by the breath of hell."⁹⁷

Before her exposure Dorothea claimed that she was scared to use her "own shallow reason" because "it might contradict the infallible doctrines" of her faith; but she vows to be a

⁹⁴ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 2:257.

⁹⁵ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 2:259.

⁹⁶ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 2:260.

⁹⁷ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 2:259.

Catholic “upon rational principles” after her acceptance by Lucius and his companions.⁹⁸

Predictably, however, after a month, Felicia learns “that what severity and restraint could not do, mildness and freedom have accomplished; that the amiable Dorothea is already a Protestant.”⁹⁹

After her ‘rational’ examination of Christianity, Dorothea’s conversion to an extremely broad latitudinarian Protestantism is inevitable. Both the restraints she placed on her own reason and the persecution by her father kept her Catholic; once these are removed, she quickly converts. Moreover, her conversion frees her to be pursued by Mr. Smith, a family friend who “hopes for the happiness of speedily possessing the lovely convert.”¹⁰⁰ The end of Dorothea’s story mirrors the beginning with the threat of forced marriage and sexual violence removed; in both cases, however, her religious conversion is inextricably linked to her sexuality.

Dorothea’s fictional religious travails have similarities to Catharine Trotter’s, as I discuss in Chapter Three. Thomas Burnet’s epistolary pursuit of Trotter as a marriage partner hinged on convincing her to abandon her Catholicism, and her eventual conversion was to a broadly latitudinarian Christianity, although Burnet’s advances were unsuccessful. Despite sometimes very different political and epistemological commitments, Christianity forms the basis of the feminism of the women analyzed in this study – and their arguments often cut across ideological lines. Although their interpretations of Christianity are radically different, both Margaret Fell and Mary Astell, for example, neutralized Pauline restrictions on their gender in similar ways. Astell, Masham, Trotter, and later women theologians drew inspiration from Quaker women and other female sectaries in the seventeenth century, even if their explicit acknowledgments to them were rare. In different ways, Astell, Masham, Trotter, Collyer, Fielding and later Bluestockings were

⁹⁸ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 2:260.

⁹⁹ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 2:261-2.

¹⁰⁰ Collyer, *Felicia to Charlotte*, 2:262.

also very much motivated by Locke and the large number of responses to his work that arose in the first decades of the eighteenth century. As I discuss in Chapter One, Locke surpassed even Quaker authorities in early eighteenth-century debates about the role of women in Quakerism. Quaker interest in Locke, and vice versa, is one demonstration of the rich cross currents in early eighteenth-century English Christianity.

Chapter 1: Margaret Fell, Quaker Women, and Enlightenment

In her essay on agency and eighteenth-century Quaker women, Phyllis Mack writes that “[b]y the 1730s Quakerism had evolved from a movement of radical visionaries into a community of respectable citizens.”¹⁰¹ The standard historical explanation of this change “is derived from a meta-narrative of secularization, whereby more retrograde Quakers lapsed into a contemplative spirituality called ‘quietism,’ while more progressive Quakers became capitalists and activists who were largely indifferent to religion.”¹⁰² While acknowledging that this “secularization argument is a powerful one,” Mack counters this view by noting that the most ‘progressive’ Quakers in the eighteenth-century “were also the ones most deeply engaged in the quest for spiritual enlightenment.”¹⁰³ Likewise, according to Mack, “[t]hose women who were most ardent in advocating educational reform and campaigning for independent women’s meetings were also those who sought a stricter religious discipline and a greater reliance on the Bible.”¹⁰⁴ In other words, as Mack points out, for Quakers, worldly concerns were inseparable from religious concerns, even if their advocacy for secular reform was later foregrounded by scholars. As an alternative explanation Mack suggests that “the apparent quiescence of 18th century Quakers masked an internal struggle to integrate their Puritan and mystical religious heritage with their own Enlightenment values.”¹⁰⁵ She calls attention to the critically neglected but crucial importance of eighteenth-century internal Quaker debate as the Religious Society of Friends struggled to align its once radical theology with emerging Enlightenment sensibilities,

¹⁰¹ Phyllis Mack, “Religion, Feminism, and the Problem of Agency: Reflections on Eighteenth-Century Quakerism” in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, eds. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 443.

¹⁰² Mack, “Religion,” 444.

¹⁰³ Mack, “Religion,” 444.

¹⁰⁴ Mack, “Religion,” 444.

¹⁰⁵ Mack, “Religion,” 445.

and she highlights the uneasy way that narratives of secularization fit with this transition of the Friends from visionary Civil War sect of the 1650s to respectable bourgeois citizens of eighteenth-century England. By the early eighteenth century Daniel Defoe characterized Quakers as upright citizens in much of his fiction, but provided little if any discussion of their theology or doctrine. The unnamed Quaker woman of Defoe's *Roxana* becomes the ethical foil for the protagonist's depravity in the latter half of the text, but the distinguishing marks of her religion are not theological but external, such as her use of "thee" and "thou" and her plain clothing. Early modern stereotypes of Quakerism demonstrate why traditional secularization narratives are so tempting: Locke and other early critics condemned Quakers' reliance on the supposedly unreasonable and enthusiastic inner light for spiritual guidance, but, by the first few decades of the eighteenth century, this stereotype had mostly given way to discussions of Quakers' upright characters and different manners of speaking and dress.

This conflict between unruliness and respectability was present from the earliest days of the Religious Society of Friends in the 1650s and 60s. The trajectory of a gradual conservatism taking root throughout the latter half of the seventeenth century is common in studies of Quakerism, and arguably the most important aspect of this steady recession of Quaker radicalism involves women. The establishment of separate women's meetings and the more disciplined publication of tracts fundamentally altered Quaker women's experience of their religion as the seventeenth century progressed. Yet, despite a more clearly defined theology and a more patriarchal church hierarchy in the early eighteenth century, internal debates about the proper role of both women and inspiration in Quaker doctrine continued raging. In the eighteenth century there was also a continued demand for writings by Quaker women. The most important Quaker publisher of the era Tace Sowle published an important collection of Margaret Fell's

writings in 1710, an edition of Elizabeth Stirredge's journal in 1711, and the report of Katherine Evans and Sarah Cheevers of their imprisonment in Malta by the Inquisition in the 1660s in 1715. As Paul Salzman notes, "even during the later, sober period of Quaker development, testimonies that were still visionary and quite apocalyptic could be accommodated."¹⁰⁶ As late as 1801, the Quaker William Rawes defended the right of women to preach in his *The Gospel Ministry of Women, Under the Christian Dispensation, Defended from Scripture, and from the Writings of John Locke, Josiah Martin, &c.* As the title suggests, Rawes relies for support on the writings of Locke and a Quaker pamphlet dispute from the second decade of the eighteenth century between Josiah Martin and Benjamin Coole.

Quaker debates about both the proper role of inspiration and the proper role of women were bound together, and these debates directly contributed to emerging Enlightenment philosophy: Locke's distaste for Quaker theology motivated what has come to be seen as a crucial text of Enlightenment sensibility, his negative portrayal of enthusiasm in the *Essay*. The first section of this chapter contextualizes the writings of the most famous Quaker woman, Margaret Fell, in the debates about women that occurred in the Religious Society of Friends between the 1650s and 1670s, and demonstrates how she appropriated anticlerical discourse to make a political argument in favor of the religious authority of woman. The second section discusses responses to women and charismatic inspiration in early eighteenth-century Quakerism by both Locke and other Quakers, and argues that representations of unruly Quaker women played a vital role in attempts to normalize Society ideology with Anglicanism.

"Both Papists and Protestants": Margaret Fell, the Defense of Women Preachers, and Anticlerical Discourse

¹⁰⁶ Paul Salzman, *Reading Early Modern Women's Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 124.

The most influential Quaker woman writer of the seventeenth century was Margaret Fell.¹⁰⁷ Fell's 1666 *Womens Speaking Justified* has long stood as a paradigmatic text of early modern proto-feminism despite its relative brevity, her large output of other theological tracts from the 1650s to the 1670s, and the fact that it was written during a time when the Religious Society of Friends was responding to extreme oppression. Although Fell's arguments for the religious authority of women have sometimes been divorced from their sectarian context by modern critics, they derive their force from her cogent and thoughtful attacks on the oppressive Restoration Anglican establishment. Fell couches her calls for female religious authority in anticlerical rhetoric that in many ways anticipates the arguments of the later generation of women theologians: Astell, Trotter, and Masham.

On 11 January 1664 a young Quaker woman, likely Margaret Fell's sixteen year old daughter Mary, confronted King Charles in the presence of Samuel Pepys. Pepys writes:

This morning I stood by the King, arguing with a pretty Quaker woman that delivered to him a desire of hers in writing. The King showed her Sir J Minnes, as a man fittest for her quaking religion, saying that his beard was the stiffest thing about him. And again merrily said, looking upon the length of her paper, that if all she desired was of that length, she might lose her desires. She modestly saying nothing till he begun seriously to discourse with her, arguing the truth of his spirit against hers. She replying still with these words, "O King!" and she thou'd him all along.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Fell has two biographies and one recent book-length study of her theology. See Isabel Ross, *Margaret Fell: Mother of Quakerism* (London: Longmans Green, 1949); Bonnelyn Young Kunze, *Margaret Fell and the Rise of Quakerism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); and Sally Bruyneel, *Margaret Fell and the End of Time: The Theology of the Mother of Quakerism* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010).

¹⁰⁸ *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, eds. Robert Latham and William Matthews, 11 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 5:12. On Mary Fell as likely the "young Quaker woman,"

The King's coarse sexual joking to the young Mary Fell demonstrates how easily it was for masculine political and religious authority to dismiss women by sexualizing them. However, the incident also suggests how traditional stereotypes of religious women such as silence and modesty (which were repeatedly said by Anglican authorities to be threatened by unruly Quaker women) could act as a method of resistance: after Fell "modestly" remains silent in the face of the King's crude humor, he is forced to respond to her religious arguments and "seriously ... discourse with her." The passage is especially striking for a modern reader because Mary Fell's mother Margaret was imprisoned in Lancaster Castle for almost four years shortly after this encounter. It was from prison that Margaret Fell wrote her most famous text, *Womens Speaking Justified*.

Both Pepys's anecdote about Mary Fell and Mary Astell's later representation of her Tory Anglicanism as "a Plain, Honest Matron" (discussed below) reveal the importance of early modern women claiming and refashioning for themselves the tropes of modesty and piety associated with religious women in masculine discourse. These tropes are particularly evident in the "Testimony" from Margaret Fell's children that begins the extensive 1710 collection of her writings.¹⁰⁹ Downplaying the more belligerent aspects of their doctrine in order to avoid aggravating authorities was important to the Friends as a whole after 1660. The persecution of Quakers during the early days of the Restoration was intense, and by 1672 George Fox had organized a sophisticated review and censorship apparatus of Quaker texts primarily run through

see Rosemary Foxton, *'Hear the Word of the Lord': A Critical and Biographical Study of Quaker Women's Writing 1650-1700* (Melbourne: The Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand, 1994), 22.

¹⁰⁹ This collection is *A Brief Collection of Remarkable Passages and Occurrences Relating to the Birth, Education, Life, Conversion, Travels, Services, and Deep Sufferings of that Ancient, Eminent, and Faithful Servant of the Lord, Margaret Fell* (London: 1710). Despite being called a "Brief Collection," the text runs to over 535 pages.

the Second-day's Morning Meeting in order to avoid harassment by Restoration authorities.¹¹⁰ The largest effect of this centralized control over Quaker publication was a new uniformity of message. As N.H. Keeble writes, the Second-days's Morning Meeting, "was less to circumvent the law than to ensure the integrity of the Quaker message."¹¹¹ Although this self-censorship was crucial in allowing the Quakers to continue to function and avoid the fate of several other nonconformist sects, Paula McDowell points out that it also led to "the decline of a movement with the potential to effect radical social change into the respectable quietism of the eighteenth century."¹¹² As McDowell suggests, the transformation of Quaker print culture from its radical beginnings in the 1650s and 1660s to its strictly controlled output after 1672 largely contributed to eighteenth-century English society's more worldly understanding of the Society of Friends. Yet Quaker censorship also created an important opening for women to shape Quaker thought. The official printer of Quaker texts after 1691 was a woman, Tace Sowle, who took over the business from her father Andrew Sowle. McDowell argues that "the occasional willingness of the Friends to leave publishing matters to Tace Sowle's judgment is remarkable," and it is clear that her control over all aspects of Quaker print culture after 1691 was widespread.¹¹³ Importantly, as McDowell points out, Sowle used this influence to publish nonconformist women. Her first recommendation upon taking over the business in 1691 was for the publication of the works of Elizabeth Bathurst, and the press printed over one hundred works by women

¹¹⁰ Paula McDowell, "Tace and Andrew Sowle," in *The British Literary Book Trade 1474-1700*, eds. James K. Bracken and Joel Silver (Detroit: Gale, 1996), 252.

¹¹¹ N.H. Keeble, *The Restoration: England in the 1660s* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 154.

¹¹² McDowell, "Tace and Andrew Sowle," 252.

¹¹³ McDowell, "Tace and Andrew Sowle," 254, 256. There is little written about Tace Sowle and her influence on the Society of Friends. See also McDowell's *The Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics, and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace 1678-1730* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

authors, including Fell's 1710 collected works.¹¹⁴ The publication of Fell's works came during a time when Sowle's press was consolidating the history of the Friends and publishing biographies and accounts of its early days. The enormously influential works of George Fox were published in three parts between 1694 and 1706, and in 1701 the first part of *Piety Promoted, in a Collection of Dying Sayings of Many of the People Called Quakers*, a compilation of early Quaker biographies, was published.¹¹⁵ Fell died in 1702, and Sowle and other Quakers obviously viewed her works as essential to the Quaker canon, particularly after the recent publication of her second husband Fox's works.

Fell's 1710 *Brief Collection* was released while the next generation of women religious writers like Astell and Trotter were establishing different grounds for women's religious authority, and its release was probably the high water mark of Fell's influence. As Salzman observes, this substantial republication of Fell's writings "certainly increased her visibility in the early eighteenth century" and also "mark[s] out the most significant moment for Fell's writing, as it was not reprinted in either the eighteenth century or the nineteenth."¹¹⁶ Although the majority of Fell's writings were published between the 1650s and the 1670s, at least partly because of Sowle's influence, they were still being read and discussed well into the early eighteenth century, part of a larger project of the Friends in the early eighteenth century of reconsidering their origins and mainstreaming their views.

In the opening paragraph to her collected works, Fell's children testify to her "Holy Life, and Pious Conversation"; she was a "loving Mother" who did "educate and instruct her Children

¹¹⁴ McDowell, "Tace and Andrew Sowle," 256.

¹¹⁵ McDowell, "Tace and Andrew Sowle," 254-6.

¹¹⁶ Salzman, *Reading*, 129.

in the Nurture and Fear of the Lord.”¹¹⁷ Like Thomas Birch in his 1751 introduction to Catharine Trotter’s collected works (discussed in Chapter Three), Fell’s children ignore the argumentative side of her writings by constructing her as a virtuous and pious exemplar; their testimony obscures the spirited and confrontational nature of both Fell’s activities – she interrupted Anglican services and spent long stretches in prison – and writings.¹¹⁸ Discursively constructing both themselves and their beliefs as moral, pious, and rational was a critical move for Fell’s children and other Quakers. Claiming this ground was particularly crucial for Fell who had to overcome being stereotyped as a fanatic from both misogynist and anti-Quaker writers. In 1684, Fell even received mild criticism from within the Quaker community for her supposed lack of attention to the domestic sphere when William Penn’s wife Gulielma complained in a letter to her, “if thou foundest a clearness and freedom in the Lord it would be happy thou wert nearer thy dear husband and children but that I leave the Lord’s ordering and thy freedom.”¹¹⁹ Fell’s activities drew complaints from all quarters.

Fell is most well-known for her 1666 tract, *Womens Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed of by the Scriptures*, written while she was a prisoner in Lancaster Castle and reissued essentially unchanged except for a “Postscript” the following year. Although she is never cited directly, it is clear that her text influenced a defense of women’s preaching written by her eventual second husband, the Quaker leader George Fox, and she was well-known by almost all

¹¹⁷ *Brief Collection*, no page number.

¹¹⁸ A similar phenomenon is at work in Margaret Ezell’s discussion of the ways in which George Ballard’s 1752 *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* endorsed a particular conception of the learned, virtuous lady and excluded more controversial writers like Aphra Behn. *Writing Women’s Literary History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

¹¹⁹ Qtd. in Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 348.

influential Friends in the latter half of the seventeenth century.¹²⁰ *Womens Speaking Justified* was reprinted in the 1710 collected edition of her work, although without the short but important 1667 Postscript. Although there were several tracts published by Quakers – both male and female – in the 1650s defending the right of women to preach, this does not mean, as Salzman asserts, that “there was nothing new in Fell’s defence of women’s speech.”¹²¹ In particular, Quaker defenses of women’s speaking in the 1650s were less systematic than Fell’s 1666 *Womens Speaking Justified*, which relied on extended scriptural exegeses as its primary support.

The early Quaker Richard Farnworth writes in 1655, “the Woman or wisdom of the Flesh is forbidden to speak in the Church, that is, of the things of God, for that which is flesh is flesh, and the natural man knows not the things of God.”¹²² It is the “carnal minded man” who claims “that a Woman (or the female kind) ought not to speak in the Church.”¹²³ Farnworth’s radical differentiation between literal women (“the female kind”) and the metaphorical “Woman” as used in the scriptures not only promotes women’s authority but also supports an anticlerical agenda by valorizing inspired utterances by both men and women. For Farnworth, “the Scriptures need not an Orthodox Key, for Holy men of God as they were moved they spoke them forth *by the Holy Ghost*.”¹²⁴ Reading against orthodox interpretations of scripture was the critical first move of Quakers in defending the authority of women to speak. In a tract published the same year as Farnworth’s, Priscilla Cotton and Mary Cole use a metaphorical sense of “women”

¹²⁰ See David J. Latt’s introduction to *Womens Speaking Justified* by Margaret Fell, Augustan Reprint Society Publication Number 194, 1979, xiin12.

¹²¹ Salzman, *Reading*, 126.

¹²² Richard Farnworth, *A Woman Forbidden to Speak in the Church, The grounds examined, the Mystery opened, the Truth cleared, and the ignorance both of Priests and People discovered* (London: 1655), 3.

¹²³ Farnworth, *A Woman Forbidden*, 3.

¹²⁴ Farnworth, *A Woman Forbidden*, 5.

to rectify an apparent contradiction in Corinthians, and in doing so they eliminate Paul's prohibitions against women:

thou tellest the People, Women must not speak in a Church, whereas it is not spoke onely of a Female, for we are all one both male and female in Christ Jesus, but it's weakness that is the woman by the Scriptures forbidden, for else thou putttest the Scriptures at a difference in themselves, as still its thy practice out of thy ignorance; for the Scriptures do say, that all the Church may prophesie one by one, and that women were in the Church, as well as men, do thou judge; and the Scripture saith, that a woman may not prophesie with her head uncovered.¹²⁵

Cole and Cotton's text imaginatively deals with scriptural contradictions by arguing – like Farnworth and later George Keith – that certain parts of Paul's Epistles must be read metaphorically. As Hilary Hinds observes, "this is an assertion that the Scriptures themselves *require* such metaphorical readings in order to make certain texts agree with other texts of the Bible."¹²⁶ Cole and Cotton exploit scriptural inconsistencies to limit Pauline prohibitions against women. This scriptural contradiction was also exploited fifty years later by both Locke and Josiah Martin to open a small space for women in the church, as discussed in the following section. Neither, however, would have accepted an interpretation so divorced from the literal sense of the language, and it is notable that neither Martin nor his antagonist Benjamin Coole mention either Cole and Cotton, Farnworth, or Keith.

¹²⁵ Priscilla Cotton and Mary Cole, *To the Priests and People of England, we discharge our consciences, and give them warning* (1655), 6-7. For a useful extended reading of this tract, see Hilary Hinds, *God's Englishwoman: Seventeenth-Century Radical Sectarian Writing and Feminist Criticism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), chap. 7. Hinds, however, does not discuss the important similarities between Cole and Cotton's argument and Farnworth's.

¹²⁶ Hinds, *God's Englishwoman*, 197.

The purpose of Farnworth's and Cole and Cotton's defenses of women's authority was to attack the clergy and political establishment. This was also Margaret Fell's larger purpose in her 1666 *Womens Speaking Justified*, but, for Fell, writing after the Restoration, an attack on the political authorities was a different proposition than it had been for those writing in the 1650s. As Richard L. Greaves documents, the persecution of Quakers in the 1660s was intense.¹²⁷ By the enforcement of the Quaker Act and the Clarendon Code, thousands of Quakers were imprisoned in the 1660s. Although following Fox's pacifism the Society of Friends in the 1660s was overwhelmingly peaceful, authorities still feared and distrusted them. In a 1670 letter to William Pople, for example, Andrew Marvell reports that at the trial of William Penn and William Mead, husband of Fell's daughter Sarah and co-author of the testimony that opens her 1710 collected works, "The Jury not finding them guilty, as the Recorder and Mayor would have had them, they were kept without Meat and Drink some three Days."¹²⁸ As a prominent Quaker leader, Fell was especially susceptible to persecution. Her 1664 arrest was part of an (unsuccessful) attempt to rein in the Quakers by arresting their leadership.¹²⁹ Her relatively elevated social status proved useful to the early Quakers, but she was still jailed several times.

Fell's 1666 *Womens Speaking Justified* was reissued less than a year later and "annexed" onto the end of her much longer anticlerical work, *A Touch-Stone, or, A Perfect Tryal by the Scriptures, of all the Priests, Bishops, and Ministers*. *Womens Speaking Justified* should be read in the context of this longer piece and its sustained critique against professional clergy of all types. Anticlericalism of course has long been recognized as one of the crucial components of

¹²⁷ See esp. Richard L. Greaves, *Enemies Under his Feet: Radicals and Nonconformists in Britain, 1664-1677* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 134-42.

¹²⁸ Andrew Marvell, *The Poems and Letters of Andrew Marvell. Volume II: Letters*, ed. H.M. Margoliouth, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 318.

¹²⁹ Greaves, *Enemies*, 137.

the push toward secularism and Enlightenment. The potential corruption inherent in religion as a profession was a particularly inviting vulnerability for critics of the Church of England to exploit. As Donald Spaeth writes in discussing the post-Restoration Church, “The clergy were denounced ... for their use of religion for their own private aggrandizement, turning religion into a trade.”¹³⁰ Although most studies of English anticlericalism focus on critiques made by freethinkers and liberal Whigs, Fell and other Quakers made similar charges against the clergy. Fell, in particular, found anticlerical rhetoric to be a powerful ally in arguments for women’s spiritual equality. Indeed, anticlerical rhetoric was the basis of her radical claims for the authority and spiritual equality of women.

The full title, *Womens Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed of by the Scriptures, All such as speak by the Spirit and Power of the Lord Jesus*, suggests both how biblically based Fell’s argument is and how she emphasizes the distinction between those women speaking under the influence of the holy spirit and those who are not. Surprisingly, Fell largely avoids any of the radically metaphorical readings of scripture advocated by Farnworth and Cole and Cotton. As George Keith’s *The Woman-Preacher of Samaria* demonstrates (discussed below), this metaphorical mode of argumentation was still in vogue in the 1670s, but Fell’s account is based primarily on straightforward readings of the Bible; however, it is often cast, like earlier Quaker tracts, in visionary and apocalyptic rhetoric.

This often jarring juxtaposition of ‘enthusiastic’ and ‘reasoned’ rhetoric that characterizes her writing, and the ahistorical privilege often given *Womens Speaking Justified* because of its

¹³⁰ Donald A. Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger: Parsons and Parishioners, 1660-1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 16. On anticlericalism of the period, see also Mark Goldie, “Priestcraft and the birth of Whiggism,” in *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, eds. Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 209-31; and J.A.I. Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and its Enemies, 1660-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

focus on gender has resulted in a wide range of critical responses to Fell. In his early but influential study of Quakerism, William Braithwaite claimed that Fell's "writings, as a rule, have little force: it is as a mother in her home, and as a mother in Israel, that she holds her unique place."¹³¹ If early historians ignored or downplayed Fell's writings in the history of the Friends, later critics have been eager to embrace the feminist or proto-feminist implications of her work; however, early feminist readings tend to ignore the larger historical and political contexts of her writing, and consequently to see her as either too revolutionary or too conservative. Margaret Olofson Thickett, for example, finds Fell's *Womens Speaking Justified* to be more politically effective than Astell's Preface to *Reflections* because Astell ultimately "allows male interpretations of Scripture and of women to remain authoritative," while Fell is "able to begin, at least, to wrest the interpretation of Scripture, and therefore of women, from patriarchal control."¹³² Elaine Hobby, on the other hand, comparing *Womens Speaking Justified* to Cotton and Cole's tract and other Quaker works from the 1650s, finds it to be "careful and conservative" and argues that Fell's "judicious, rational presentation of Bible verses which counter Paul's injunction to silence has none of the ecstatic fervour of Cotton and Cole."¹³³ Christine Trevett likewise writes that the text "lacks the charm and wit that we find in some other writings by women Friends."¹³⁴ More recent scholarship on Fell has yielded a more historically nuanced view of her work. Kate Peters persuasively argues that Fell's writing "can be seen ... as part of

¹³¹ William C. Braithwaite, *The Second Period of Quakerism*, 2nd ed., prepared by Henry J. Cadbury (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961). Braithwaite's book was originally published in 1919.

¹³² Margaret Olofson Thickett, "This was a Woman that taught': Feminist Scriptural Exegesis in the Seventeenth Century," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 21 (1991): 157.

¹³³ Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing 1649-88* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 45.

¹³⁴ Christine Trevett, *Women and Quakerism in the 17th Century* (York: The Ebor Press, 1991), 54.

an attempt by the Quaker leadership to normalize and legitimate the potentially disruptive public preaching of women in the Quaker movement.”¹³⁵ While the rhetorical instability in Fell’s text troubled early critics eager to embrace either her secular rationality or her sectarian fervor, more recent criticism has argued that the binary between rationality and enthusiasm itself should be reconceived. Teresa Feroli argues that *Womens Speaking Justified* “appears to be the work of a masterful polemicist who skillfully alternates between rationality and enthusiasm to suit her purposes.”¹³⁶ Salzman likewise observes that Fell’s tract relies on both “very sombre and judicial prose” and “visionary statements.”¹³⁷ Sally Bruyneel has very recently read Fell’s work in the context of seventeenth-century Quaker theology and argues that “*Women’s Speaking Justified* represents the fruition of long reflection within the context of the larger Quaker movement and its eschatological fervor, prophetic ministry, and spiritual leadership by women among the Friends.”¹³⁸ Bruyneel rightly foregrounds Fell’s sectarian concerns and highlights the way the text legitimizes both earlier Quaker tracts and the proselytizing of Quaker women in the 1650s and 60s.

What is perhaps most striking about Fell’s writing in the 1660s is her lack of discussion of the inner light or related Quaker theological principles. In her study of seventeenth-century Quaker women, Catherine Wilcox persuasively argues that scholars often make too much of Quaker doctrine of the inner light, and that to see Quakerism as a homogenous ideology during

¹³⁵ Kate Peters, *Print Culture and the Early Quakers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 131.

¹³⁶ Teresa Feroli, *Political Speaking Justified: Women Prophets and the English Revolution* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2006), 151.

¹³⁷ Salzman, *Reading*, 127.

¹³⁸ Bruyneel, *Margaret Fell*, 148.

the course of the seventeenth century is a mistake.¹³⁹ Locke's stereotype of Quaker theology (discussed in the following section) was largely an out of date straw man by the time he made it in 1700, and ironically, as Wilcox suggests, modern scholars have often followed Locke and other Enlightenment critics in summarizing Quaker doctrine in simplistic terms. This heterogeneity in Quaker ideology partly reveals why Fell's tract is relatively free of the apocalyptic rhetoric some expect. Bruyneel complicates Wilcox's thesis by arguing, like several of the recent scholars discussed above, that Fell was aware of her discursive contexts and deftly shifted her rhetoric in ways appropriate for her intended audience.¹⁴⁰ I largely agree that Fell was an exceedingly capable writer who was able to appropriate different modes of theological rhetoric to suit her needs; however, Fell was shaped by the sectarian contexts in which she operated, and much of her rhetoric is similar to contemporaneous sectarian writing. In particular, *Womens Speaking Justified* was written primarily as an anticlerical attack on religious authority from an imprisoned author, and the text has many similarities with other nonconformist anticlerical works. Fell's response to the oppressive Restoration regime, however, further inspired her to argue for the improvement of the political situation of women.

As noted earlier, the 1667 revised second edition of *Womens Speaking Justified* was "annexed" to Fell's longest theological work, *A Touch-Stone, or, A Perfect Tryal by the Scriptures, of all the Priests, Bishops, and Ministers*, placing the text in a distinct anticlerical context, although this is rarely noted when *Womens Speaking Justified* is discussed or

¹³⁹ Catherine M. Wilcox, *Theology and Women's Ministry in Seventeenth-Century English Quakerism: Handmaids of the Lord* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), 7-8.

¹⁴⁰ Bruyneel, *Margaret Fell*, 153.

excerpted.¹⁴¹ Although *A Touch-Stone* was published in 1667, a year after the first edition of *Womens Speaking Justified*, both were composed in 1666, along with several other pieces.¹⁴² Because the second edition of *Women's Speaking Justified* was published with *A Touch-Stone*, it is likely Fell saw the two as complementary, and she almost certainly formulated the similar arguments of each near the same time. Fell, like other Quakers, argues at length in *A Touch-Stone* that the professional clergy act as fraudulent gatekeepers and that all true preaching is done by inspiration, not by institutionalized authority: “the Ministers they make are by Men, and of Men.”¹⁴³ Much of the policing by orthodox authority is done through misleading and unnecessary teaching, contrary to the background of the first apostles: “*Timothy* did not go to *Cambridge* nor *Oxford*.”¹⁴⁴ Although she argues that these educated clergy “have not the Inspiration of the Almighty, and Motion of the Spirit of the Lord God,” sentiments in line with mainstream Quaker doctrine, this criticism is particularly acute for Fell who, as a woman, could not attend Oxford and Cambridge.¹⁴⁵ What is especially striking is how she repeatedly compares the Anglican establishment to the worst abuses of Continental Catholicism, frequently employing the phrase “both Papists and Protestants” for rhetorical effect.¹⁴⁶ To Fell, the Catholic Inquisition and the oppressive Anglican hierarchy are no different: “both *Papists* and *Protestants*; one

¹⁴¹ See, for example, the excerpt of the second edition of *Womens Speaking Justified* included in Moira Ferguson, ed., *First Feminists: British Women Writers 1578-1799* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) 114-27.

¹⁴² The “Chronology of Margaret Fell’s Life” in Appendix Fifteen of Ross’s biography lists 1666 as the year of composition of *Women’s Speaking Justified* and September 1666 as the date when *A Touch-Stone* was written. Fell also wrote *Epistle to Charles II* and *Standard of the Lord Revealed* in 1666 (410). Ross’s biography is also representative of the neglect that many of Fell’s theological texts have received. Ross writes that neither *A Touch-Stone* nor *Standard of the Lord Revealed* “has much permanent interest” (202).

¹⁴³ Margaret Fell, *A Touch-Stone: Or, A Tryal by the Scriptures, of the Priests, Bishops, and Ministers, &c.* in *A Brief Collection* (London: 1710), 368.

¹⁴⁴ Fell, *A Touch-Stone*, 372.

¹⁴⁵ Fell, *A Touch-Stone*, 372.

¹⁴⁶ Fell, *A Touch-Stone*, 404.

striving with Inquisitions and Racks, and Tortures; the other striving and Terrifying poor People, with their Courts, and Chancellors, and Prisons.”¹⁴⁷ Fell’s conflation of Protestant and Catholic serves to highlight the role that all Quaker believers, whether male or female or rich or poor, played in propagating doctrine in a religious system with no ordered hierarchy. As an alternative to these oppressive clergy and the corrupt church, Fell offers the Samaritan Woman of John 4, to whom Jesus “published and declared” that “the Worship of God performed in the Spirit, and in the Truth” was proper.¹⁴⁸ She highlights the fact that Jesus declared to a woman the proper way to worship, a way that the English clergy “of Men” get disastrously wrong. The anticlerical arguments made by Fell in *A Touch-Stone* legitimate women as equal members of the true Christian church and solidify her position as a theologian. Anticlerical discourse works equally well for Fell within the framework of explicit arguments for women’s authority in *Womens Speaking Justified*.

Fell begins *Womens Speaking Justified* by acknowledging “the ground” of the “Objection” by “the Clergy, or Ministers, and others, against Womens speaking in the Church,” the statements in 1 Corinthians 14:34-5 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12, but contends “they wrong the Apostles intentions,” and quickly pivots to more favorable scriptural passages.¹⁴⁹ Citing Genesis, Fell argues that “God joyns [male and female] together in his own Image, and makes no such distinctions and differences as men do; for though they be weak, he is strong.”¹⁵⁰ She denigrates the exegetical strategies of masculine clerical authority while arguing that what they deem as weak, God sees as a strength. She supplements this claim by citing Corinthians, thus maintaining

¹⁴⁷ Fell, *A Touch-Stone*, 411.

¹⁴⁸ Fell, *A Touch-Stone*, 455.

¹⁴⁹ Margaret Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed by the Scriptures, All Such as Speak by the Spirit and Power of the Lord Jesus* (London: 1667), 3.

¹⁵⁰ Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, 3.

that the Bible is a uniform narrative from beginning to end and implying that by relying on just the few prohibitions against women in the Epistles, religious authorities are reading scripture against its proper “course and order.”¹⁵¹ Fell’s primary argumentative strategy early in the text is to turn misogynistic assumptions of the weakness inherent in women into a strength. Because in Genesis, God “hath put enmity between the Woman and the Serpent” she maintains that “if the Seed of the Woman speak not, the Seed of the Serpent speaks.”¹⁵² Fell’s reading of scripture does not just promote the prophecy of Quaker women, but asserts that Anglican authorities who “speak against the Woman” are aligned with Satan.¹⁵³ The disparagement of female prophets is a particularly appalling manifestation of the irreligion of orthodox clergy in Fell’s eyes, but it is of a piece with the litany of complaints about their flawed and inauthentic understanding of scripture and God that she makes in *A Touch-Stone* and other works.

Although Fell does not go as far as other Quakers in arguing for a radically metaphorical understanding of the word “woman,” she does divorce the term from its simplistic and derogatory meaning. While Farnworth and Cole and Cotton maintained that “woman” should be read as a “weakness” to be avoided, Fell urges those “despisers of the weakness of Women” to acknowledge that “Christ Jesus ... makes use of the weak.”¹⁵⁴ Misogynistic assumptions by orthodox religious authorities about the supposed weakness of women are heretical for Fell because biblically, any supposed weakness of women is a strength. Fell points out that the word “woman” has a multiplicity of referents in the Bible, and to cling stubbornly to only one is a mistake: “the Lord is pleased, when he mentions his Church, to call her by the name of Woman,”

¹⁵¹ Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, 3.

¹⁵² Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, 4.

¹⁵³ Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, 4.

¹⁵⁴ Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, 7.

then “those that speak against the woman speaking, speak against the Church of Christ.”¹⁵⁵ Just as she does in *A Touch-Stone*, Fell argues that religious authorities misuse the word “church,” but, in this text, she implies that women constitute a core component of the true church: “Those that speak against ... the Spirit of the Lord speaking in a woman, simply, by reason of her Sex, or because she is a Woman, not regarding the Seed, and Spirit, and Power that speaks in her; such speak against Christ, and his Church.”¹⁵⁶ Likewise, she also uses the example of the “Woman of *Samaria*” of John 4 in *Womens Speaking Justified*, but emphasizes her gender: Jesus “was pleased to preach the Everlasting Gospel to her” which “is more than ever he said in plain words to Man or Woman (that we read of) before he suffered.”¹⁵⁷ The anticlerical arguments that Fell makes in *A Touch-Stone* are also used in *Womens Speaking Justified*, but they foreground gender. The rhetoric of the text serves both to attack an oppressive and disciplinary Anglican establishment and to undermine mainstream objections to restricted political and cultural roles for women.

Fell fills the first seven pages of the text with an abundance of scriptural references of positive portrayals of women before she returns to Paul’s explicit exclusion of women in 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2. She encourages those reading 1 Corinthians 14 to “see the end and drift of the Apostle,” arguing that the people Paul addressed were “in confusion” and noting that “the Man is commanded to keep silence as well as the woman, when they are in confusion and out of order.”¹⁵⁸ For Fell, those in confusion were “under the Law,” both men and women, and Paul’s prohibitions applies to them and not to those, like the Quakers, “that have the Everlasting Gospel to preach, and upon whom the Promise of the Lord is fulfilled, and his Spirit

¹⁵⁵ Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, 4, 5.

¹⁵⁶ Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, 5.

¹⁵⁷ Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, 5.

¹⁵⁸ Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, 8.

poured upon them according to his word.”¹⁵⁹ Although Fell separates women into those who “have the Power and Spirit of the Lord” and those who do not, she does the same for men, maintaining that the distinctions God makes essentially ignore gender; instead, God separates those who, like her fellow Quakers, are authorized to speak from those who are aligned with Satan.¹⁶⁰ Those who oppress the Society of Friends are unable to interpret scripture properly, and one of the most egregious manifestations of this hermeneutical failure is the repression of women: “how are the men of this Generation blinded, that bring these Scriptures, and pervert the Apostles Words, and corrupt his intent in speaking of them.”¹⁶¹ Fell supports her extended interpretation of scripture by shifting to visionary rhetoric which gives her arguments in favor of women a divine mandate: the interpretive strategies of clerical authorities are not only wrong but motivated by Satan. In making this argument she implicitly disputes any meaningful difference between the Church of England and Catholicism, recasting the standard Anglican narrative of the Reformation as an escape from centuries of darkness by applying it to Anglicans themselves. It is Fell and her fellow Quakers, not Protestants more generally, who are the true path out of apostasy. Fell writes:

But all this opposing and gainsaying of Womens Speaking, hath risen out of the bottomless Pit, and spirit of Darkness that hath spoken for these many hundred years together in this night of Apostacy, since the Revelations have ceased and been hid, and so that spirit hath limited and bound all up within its bond and compass, and so would suffer none to speak, but such as that spirit of Darkness, approved of, Man or Woman.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, 8-9.

¹⁶⁰ Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, 9.

¹⁶¹ Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, 10.

¹⁶² Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, 10.

The oppression of women is just one symptom of the Satanically-inspired clerical abuse of Christianity. Those led by the “spirit of Darkness” have prohibited all who they have not wanted to speak, regardless of gender. Gender does not matter if one is on the side of the light.

Fell ends the central section of *Womens Speaking Justified* by arguing that “the Lord Jesus hath manifested himself and his Power, without respect to Persons” and that the scriptural prohibitions against women, “which have been such a stumbling block” are the false interpretations of “the ministers of Darkness.”¹⁶³ However, she evidently felt that her apocalyptic arguments against 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 were insufficient because she added “A *Further Addition in Answer to the Objection concerning Women keeping silent in the Church*” to the end of the text. “A Further Addition” is a more straightforward attack on orthodox clerical practices and interpretation, and in it she synthesizes her more visionary discourse with literal interpretations of scripture. She observes that, read plainly, 1 Corinthians 14:35 – which exhorts women to learn from their husbands – cannot be about women in general, because, “If you tie this to all outward Women, then there were many Women ... which had no Husbands.”¹⁶⁴ It is not scripture, but “blind Priests” who “will not permit holy Women to speak.”¹⁶⁵ Again emphasizing that the distinction God makes is not between man and woman but between good and evil, Fell urges religious authorities “to make a distinction what sort of Women are forbidden to speak, such as were under the Law, who were not come to Christ, nor to the Spirit of Prophesie.”¹⁶⁶ Instead of dividing people by gender, the church should divide those who have “come to Christ” from those who have not.

¹⁶³ Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, 12.

¹⁶⁴ Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, 13.

¹⁶⁵ Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, 13.

¹⁶⁶ Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, 13.

Much of Fell's critique of the Anglican clergy in *A Touch-Stone* centers on their interpretive practices and the application of these practices to their sermonizing. She objects to the common clerical preaching practice of "taking a part or portion of Scripture for a Text, and adding thereto their own Inventions, which they study out of their own Brain; and also bringing other Authors, who have done the like, many of them not Christians but Heathens."¹⁶⁷ In their uninspired sermonizing, the professional clergy depart from Scripture, and thus propagate false doctrine. In *Womens Speaking Justified*, Fell applies similar anticlerical rhetoric to her arguments for women's religious authority. Fell describes both Elizabeth's exhortation to Mary and Mary's song from Luke 1:39-56 as a "Sermon," and notes the incorporation of this portion of scripture in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer: "Are you not here beholding to the Woman for her Sermon, to use her words to put into your Common Prayer? and yet you forbid Womens Speaking."¹⁶⁸ Fell argues that "these two women prophesied of Christ, and Preached better then all the Blind Priests did in that Age, and better then this Age also, who are beholding to women to make use of their words."¹⁶⁹ Not only does the Anglican establishment silently appropriate the "preaching" of women, but the learned sermons of the Anglican clergy are inferior to inspired Quaker prophecy. Fell's anticlerical discourse accommodates radical arguments about the role of women in "true" Christianity. For further support, Fell assembles a large list of instances of women speaking in scripture and argues that orthodox masculine preachers "make a trade of ... womens words."¹⁷⁰ Her complaints in *Womens Speaking Justified* are similar to those she makes in *A Touch-Stone* about the professionalization of the Anglican establishment, but she also maintains that not only are the clergy corrupting Christianity, but they are doing it at the expense

¹⁶⁷ Fell, *A Touch-Stone*, 375.

¹⁶⁸ Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, 14.

¹⁶⁹ Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, 14.

¹⁷⁰ Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, 15.

of the true preaching of Holy women and men. For Fell, “in this True Church, Sons and Daughters do Prophesie” and “Women labour in the Gospel.”¹⁷¹

Surprisingly, Fell’s critiques of the irreligious preaching practices of the orthodox clergy anticipate those made by Whigs like Richard Steele who famously wonders why “the Heathen struts, and the Christian sneaks in our Imagination” in his 1701 *The Christian Hero*.¹⁷² Although the application of her arguments to the political situation of women was unique, Fell’s *Womens Speaking Justified* shares many concerns with more conventional Anglican works. The text is a fusion of well-reasoned scriptural exegesis and visionary rhetoric, and, apart from its customary Quaker and sectarian rhetoric, it arguably has more in common with the feminist religious writings of Astell and other early eighteenth-century women writers than it does with many of the Quaker texts from the 1650s. Although arguments about women’s role in Quaker doctrine invariably revolved around debates about the role of charismatic inspiration in Christianity – as the debate between Martin and Coole reveals – when Fell defended her own prophetic voice, she principally did so through restrained and cogent interpretations of scripture. Her visionary rhetoric served to give her scriptural hermeneutic a divine legitimacy, a legitimacy Martin ironically replaces fifty years later with the authority of Locke. When the next generation of women religious writers sought to legitimize their religious voice, they too like Martin eschewed apocalyptic rhetoric in favor of the support of famous masculine authorities like Locke and John Norris; yet, ultimately each argued that, read correctly, the Bible supported a religious role for women, and consequently they needed the liberty to interpret scripture free from clerical interference.

¹⁷¹ Fell, *Womens Speaking Justified*, 17.

¹⁷² Richard Steele, *The Christian Hero*, ed. Rae Blanchard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), 15.

“Opposite and contradictory Lights”: John Locke, “Enthusiastic” Women, and The Religious Society of Friends

Arguably the most crucial tract on women’s right to preach after *Womens Speaking Justified* was George Keith’s 1674 *The Woman-Preacher of Samaria*.¹⁷³ Crucially, the text’s argument is framed by strident anticlerical rhetoric. For Keith, all who deny the right of women to preach are “Men-Preachers, of a *Man-made Ministry*, in the three Nations; whether Conformists, or Nonconformists.”¹⁷⁴ These ministers falsely assert that “There should not be Women Preachers” because women “should keep them to the affairs within the House.”¹⁷⁵ What makes Keith’s text so radical is that he centers his attack on the misogynistic assumptions about women’s domestic duties that more orthodox religious ideology used to justify women’s subordinate role. In contrast to these wrong-headed ministers, Keith, like Fell, invokes the example of the Woman of Samaria who – as John 4:5-42 relates – after a discussion with Jesus, converted Samaritans to his cause, and who Keith claims is a “Woman-Preacher.” In a manner that anticipates the disagreement between Coole and Martin over Locke’s *Paraphrase* forty years later (discussed below), Keith’s text reveals how much of the debate about women’s role in the Quaker community relied on parsing exact definitions of preaching. Keith presents an extended contrast between the Woman of Samaria (and by extension Quaker women), untainted by “the University,” and “the Ministers” of “both Conformists and Non-Conformists,” who, as

¹⁷³ On Keith, see J.S. Chamberlain, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., s.v. “Keith, George”; and Ethyn Williams Kirby, *George Keith (1638-1716)* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1942).

¹⁷⁴ George Keith, *The Woman-Preacher of Samaria; A Better Preacher, and more Sufficiently Qualified to Preach than any of the Men-Preachers of the Man-made-Ministry in these Three Nations* (1674), 1.

¹⁷⁵ Keith, *Woman-Preacher*, 1.

“Scholars,” replace true piety with “Natural Arts and Sciences.”¹⁷⁶ Keith’s division of preachers not into the traditional categories of Anglican and dissenter, but into those of charismatic and educated but uninspired constructs women as ideal promulgators of Christianity because of their exclusion from university. Keith makes evident the stakes involved for women in debates about the appropriate role of charismatic utterances within the church. The text also reveals why Locke’s denigration of enthusiasm prompted such fervent responses several decades later.

It is a “gross blindness and darkness,” Keith writes, to deny “immediate revelation” as orthodox ministers do.¹⁷⁷ He again argues that orthodox misogynist attacks on women by the clergy lack the charity of those who listened to the Woman of Samaria; they did not tell her that she was “Ignorant and unlearned” and urge her to “Go home to [her] wheel ... as men commodly now say to Women Friends.”¹⁷⁸ Keith adapts Quaker anticlerical rhetoric to make a radical argument about the suitability and superiority of women preachers over their orthodox male peers. Keith addresses the prohibitions against women acting in the church in Corinthians and Timothy in a short postscript. He concedes Paul’s prohibitions against the authority of women, but, citing the authority of the Church Fathers Bernard and Augustine, argues that “women” in Paul should not be read as literal women, but instead as a metaphor for “*the flesh*”: “not onely *Bernard* ... but *Augustine* ... doth by the *woman* understand *the flesh*, and by *her Children*, he doth understand *good works*.”¹⁷⁹ Although a similar argument for a sweeping metaphorical reading of Paul’s prohibitions against women was made by earlier Quakers, Keith observes that he is using orthodox methods of scholarship against orthodox theology and argues that despite the learning of the professional clergy, Quakers “have the Ancient Fathers more on [their]

¹⁷⁶ Keith, *Woman-Preacher*, 3,4.

¹⁷⁷ Keith, *Woman-Preacher*, 4,5.

¹⁷⁸ Keith, *Woman-Preacher*, 7, 8.

¹⁷⁹ Keith, *Woman-Preacher*, 19.

side.”¹⁸⁰ All orthodox traditions allow some amount of female participation in church, and he undercuts those who hold that there is a crucial scriptural distinction between preaching and speaking by observing that 1 Corinthians 14:34 reads, “*Let your women keep silence in the Churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak,*” and thus “the Apostle useth this general word (*to speak*).”¹⁸¹ Keith’s argument for allowing inspired women to speak goes so far as to suggest that traditional domestic hierarchies can be overturned: “if the Spirit of the Lord Command or move a godly and Spiritually Learned Woman to speak, in this case she is the Lords, more than her Husbands, and she is to speak, yea, though the Husband should forbid her, for *she ought rather to obey God than Men.*”¹⁸² Keith legitimates precisely what orthodox authorities feared might happen if women were granted religious authority – the overturning of settled hierarchies.¹⁸³

The debate about Quaker women in the early eighteenth century centered on this concern with female propriety and the appropriate religious role for women, a debate that directly concerned John Locke. The text that motivated Mary Astell to write her famous Preface to the

¹⁸⁰ Keith, *Woman-Preacher*, 18.

¹⁸¹ Keith, *Woman-Preacher*, 20.

¹⁸² Keith, *Woman-Preacher*, 24.

¹⁸³ This is arguably the most radical position by Keith in his text. As Latt writes, citing Keith’s text as an example, “To the seventeenth century perhaps the most disturbing and radical of all the ideas associated with [George] Fox’s insistence that women are equal to men in the Spirit was the notion, that should a woman find herself married to a man who had not yet found the Truth, she could leave him if he would not be convinced” (xiin14). Some aspects of Keith’s argument, however, are more conservative, such as when he grants fewer liberties than he does to men to uninspired women in the church: “an unlearned man may be permitted to ask a Question in the Church, which is not permitted unto a Woman, nor is it needful, for she may ask her Husband at home” (24). This dichotomy between those women under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and those not anticipates Locke’s argument in his *Paraphrase*, but Keith is much more far reaching in his conclusions than Locke is. Although Keith’s tract is an example of Quaker doctrine becoming more conservative in certain ways in the decades after the 1650s, Elaine Hobby’s argument that Keith tries “rigorously to control the circumstances in which [female prophecy] is permissible” in his text is too strong and fails to appreciate how radical Keith is. See Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity*, 45.

third edition of her *Reflections on Marriage*, John Locke's *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, was published posthumously between 1704-7. While not as conservative as earlier scriptural commentators, Locke largely limits women's role in religious life. He paraphrases and comments on Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans and Ephesians. In his explanatory commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, Locke provides a lengthy discussion of the religious role of women, particularly in the church. He also discusses the role of women in the church in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. Locke's prohibitions in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 11 are so striking that Mark Goldie argues that they "constitute the starkest endorsement in any of his writings of women's natural inferiority."¹⁸⁴

The discussion of women's role in the church in the Epistles was notoriously difficult to interpret. Locke himself concedes that 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is "as difficult a passage as most in St Pauls Epistles."¹⁸⁵ Arguments about the Epistles' views on women centered on what terms like "church" denote, and one of Locke's central concerns is properly interpreting what "praying" and "prophesying" represent in the Epistles. He argues that both are "the doing some peculiar action in the assembly whilst the rest of the congregation only assisted."¹⁸⁶ According to Locke, "Prophesying as St Paul tells us" was "only when such speaking was a spiritual gift performed by the immediate and extraordinary motion of the holy ghost," and "that the spirit of god and the gift of prophesie should be powerd out upon women as well as men in the time of the gospel is plain" from scripture.¹⁸⁷ Locke admits that the seemingly clear scriptural

¹⁸⁴ Mark Goldie, "Mary Astell and John Locke," in *Mary Astell: Reason, Gender, Faith*, eds. William Kolbrener and Michal Michelson (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2007), 82.

¹⁸⁵ John Locke, *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians*, ed. Arthur W. Wainwright, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 1:220.

¹⁸⁶ Locke, *Paraphrase*, 1:120.

¹⁸⁷ Locke, *Paraphrase*, 1:221.

prohibitions against women speaking in church in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12 might seem to argue against his interpretation and he grants that Christianity forbids any “kind of equality” between the sexes; however, he also maintains that “this subordination which god for orders sake had instituted in the world hindered not but that by the supernatural gifts of the spirit he might make use of the weaker sex to any extraordinary function when ever he thought fit.”¹⁸⁸ While allowing him awkwardly to synthesize incongruent – and quite possibly differently authored – parts of scripture, Locke’s reading also divides Christianity along the competing lines of reasoned order and fanatical disorder, a long-established method of denigrating threats to political and religious orthodoxy

For Locke, immediate supernatural actions or utterances – what he and others often pejoratively labeled “enthusiasm” – could not subvert God’s natural order which necessitated women’s “natural subjection to the men.”¹⁸⁹ While women (and men) very rarely may be moved by the Holy Spirit according to Locke – and in his reading of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 he seems to be almost exclusively talking about women and men “in the time of the gospel” – women’s “assume[ing] the personages of Doctors, or speak[ing] ... as teachers” can never be legitimated because they may create “the appearance of superiority.”¹⁹⁰ He makes this dichotomy between charismatic utterances and reasoned discourse explicit in his brief remarks on 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 when he argues that the injunction for women to keep silent in the churches applies “only to reasoning and purely voluntary discourse, but suppose a liberty left women to speak where they had an immediate impulse and revelation from the spirit of god.”¹⁹¹ Significantly, Locke cites “for orders sake” as God’s justification for the subordination of the sexes, which

¹⁸⁸ Locke, *Paraphrase*, 1:222.

¹⁸⁹ Locke, *Paraphrase*, 1:222.

¹⁹⁰ Locke, *Paraphrase*, 1:221.

¹⁹¹ Locke, *Paraphrase*, 1:245.

even women moved by the Holy Spirit may not usurp. Locke's reductive validation of God's "natural" subjection of women to the need for "order" is of a piece with the gradual transformation of Christian devotion to a more generalized personal morality that many scholars have identified as one of the foremost secularizing effects of the Enlightenment.

Charles Taylor observes that "from the Cambridge Platonists through Tillotson to Locke and the eighteenth century" Western Christianity becomes "less concerned with sin as a condition ... and more with sin as wrong behaviour," and "[t]his morality ... was cast in terms of the modern notion of order."¹⁹² Correct personal conduct was one aspect of God's all-encompassing providential order, and from the Restoration onward this usually entailed a rejection of any behavior that could be construed as fanaticism or enthusiasm. Although accusations of disorder by religious orthodoxy were present even in the Bible itself, this method of attack became especially gendered in the seventeenth century. The supposedly reasonless faith and subsequent religious disorder increasingly cast aside in favor of a more secular, "reasonable" Christianity was regularly associated with women. As Patricia Crawford argues, after the Restoration, "[i]ncreasingly, faith and reason were seen to be in binary opposition, as female and male always had been" and "[b]elief was for women, reason for men."¹⁹³ For Locke in his *Paraphrase*, a woman "reasoning" was outside God's design and potentially threatened the moral order. Even in the extraordinarily uncommon situation of a woman's being moved by God to speak, she is still to be associated with enthusiasm. Masculine anxiety about dissenting women (especially Quaker) preachers motivated much of the gendered division of English Christianity that began during the Interregnum and continued into the early eighteenth century. Clement

¹⁹² Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 225.

¹⁹³ Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England 1500-1720* (London: Routledge, 1993), 204.

Hawes argues that “the somewhat more egalitarian cultural space that female prophets were able to negotiate within the enthusiastic constellation made enthusiasm itself vulnerable to misogynist attacks.”¹⁹⁴ Although Locke in his *Paraphrase* does allow a small space for women to participate in the church, it is only through occasional charismatic utterances, utterances which he famously denigrated just a few years earlier in the fourth edition of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. As we shall see, early eighteenth-century Quakers were anxious about this tension in the thought of Locke between his later editions of the *Essay* and his *Paraphrase* because they viewed him as a potential ally.

Throughout his life, Locke held a negative opinion of “enthusiasm.” In the 1700 fourth edition of his *Essay* one of the added chapters was an attack on enthusiasm entitled “Of Enthusiasm,” although he had written on the subject as early as 1682. He was motivated to do so by his reading of John Smith’s *Select Discourses* (1660) and his epistolary conversations with Damaris Masham.¹⁹⁵ For Locke, enthusiasm is based on the same faulty circular logic as Catholic claims of infallibility (discussed in Chapter Three). Locke says his purpose is “to examine a little soberly this internal Light,” (a jab at Quaker theology of the inner light), and he argues that “this Light, they are so dazled with, is nothing, but an *ignis fatuus* that leads them continually round in this Circle. *It is a Revelation, because they firmly believe it, and they believe*

¹⁹⁴ Clement Hawes, *Mania and Literary Style: The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 179.

¹⁹⁵ For Locke’s 1682 short unpublished essay on “Enthusiasm,” see John Locke, *Political Essays*, ed. Mark Goldie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 289-91. The first paragraph of this essay is the same as letter 696 to Damaris Masham in the second volume of *The Correspondence of John Locke*, ed. E.S. De Beer, 8 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976). See also letters 684, 687, 688, and 699, all to Damaris Masham. Importantly, Locke’s unpublished 1682 essay has no mention of an internal light, something that seems very much to inform his distaste of enthusiasm in the 1700 addition on enthusiasm to the *Essay*.

it, because it is a Revelation.”¹⁹⁶ Locke’s attempt to establish a moderate Christianity based on reason that avoided both dissenting ‘enthusiasm’ and Roman Catholic ‘superstition’ was part of a long history, especially among Anglican divines and writers, with Jonathan Swift’s *A Tale of a Tub* being a prominent example.¹⁹⁷ In *The Spectator* 201 in 1711, for example, Addison claims that dissenting enthusiasm and Catholic superstition are two sides of the same irrational coin and neither has the “strong steady masculine Piety” presumably held by the Anglican Church.¹⁹⁸ For his part, Locke argues that enthusiasm “takes away both Reason and Revelation, and substitutes in the room of it, the ungrounded Fancies of a Man’s own Brain, and assumes them for a Foundation both of Opinion and Conduct.”¹⁹⁹ According to Locke, “If they say they know it to be true, because it is a *Revelation* from GOD, the reason is good: but then it will be demanded, how they know it to be a Revelation from GOD.”²⁰⁰ Just as he does with claims for papal infallibility, Locke considers Quaker reliance on an inner light to be tautological and lack the proper grounding in “reason” that a tolerant, liberal Anglicanism exhibits.

Despite Jordana Rosenberg’s claim that Locke’s “distaste for enthusiasm ... stands to this day as the archetypal Enlightenment overturning of religious superstition,” the particular type of “enthusiasm” Locke had in his sights was not all dissenting Protestantism, but specifically

¹⁹⁶ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), IV.XIX.10.

¹⁹⁷ Swift, in the 1710 fifth edition explicitly citing “*Quakers who suffer their Women to preach and pray*,” writes that enthusiasts’ “Inspirations were owing to certain subterraneous *Effluviiums of Wind*” and that women were “better disposed for the Admission of those Oracular *Gusts*, as entring and passing up thro’ a Receptacle of greater Capacity” in *A Tale of a Tub &c*, eds. A.C. Guthkelch and D. Nichol Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 157. On *A Tale of a Tub* and enthusiasm, see especially Hawes, *Mania and Literary Style*, chap. 4.

¹⁹⁸ *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), II: 290.

¹⁹⁹ Locke, *Essay*, IV.XIX.3.

²⁰⁰ Locke, *Essay*, IV, XIX, 11.

Quakerism.²⁰¹ Although this section of his *Essay* was not added until 1700, throughout his life Locke considered Quakers “mad folk” and famously complained of the lack of reason he observed during the Interregnum by claiming “we are all Quakers.”²⁰² Apart from epistemological concerns, Locke also had political reasons for disliking Quakers. In April of 1687, James II issued his first Declaration of Indulgence which suspended the penal laws in England. Although many dissenters and liberal Anglicans were in favor of its sentiments, there was widespread suspicion of James’ Catholic motivations and of his exercising his prerogative to accomplish it. Writing to Locke in exile on the Continent, James Tyrrell reports that the Declaration “gives so generall a satisfaction that more are displeas’d at the manner of doing it then at the thing it self,” and notes that he “find[s] few but the high Chur: E: men highly displeas’d.”²⁰³ Opinion quickly changed, however, and James’ order that all Church of England clergy read his April 1688 second Declaration of Indulgence sparked widespread outrage. Following the first Declaration powerful Quakers like William Penn and Robert Barclay embraced James and defended him.²⁰⁴ In an August 1687 letter to Locke, Tyrrell sarcastically calls Penn Locke’s “Friend” and says that he “is a great favourite at Court.”²⁰⁵ Initially, like Penn, many dissenters and others embraced James, but this enthusiasm quickly cooled as they grew suspicious of both his motivations and the means by which he granted toleration: “Whigs

²⁰¹ Jordana Rosenberg, *Critical Enthusiasm: Capital Accumulation and the Transformation of Religious Passion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 36. On Quakers as the target of Locke’s attack on enthusiasm in the *Essay* see Roger Woolhouse, *Locke: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 418.

²⁰² Woolhouse, *Locke*, 418.

²⁰³ James Tyrrell to Locke, 6 May 1687 in *The Correspondence of John Locke*, ed. E.S. De Beer, 8 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 3: letter no. 932.

²⁰⁴ Steve Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 199.

²⁰⁵ James Tyrrell to Locke, 29 August 1687 in *The Correspondence of John Locke*, ed. E.S. De Beer, 8 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 3: letter no. 957.

and Dissenters largely concluded that James was offering religious liberty in exchange for surrendering civil liberty.”²⁰⁶ Crucially, although James lost the support of most dissenters, including many Quakers, Penn and those loyal to him largely continued to support James’ policies. Furthermore, after the Revolution Penn was involved in Jacobitism along with some other Quakers.²⁰⁷ This of course put Penn – the most prominent Quaker of his era – at odds with Locke and other enthusiastic Whig supporters of the Revolution.

Locke thus had strong epistemological, theological, and, especially after the Revolution, political reasons to dislike the Religious Society of Friends. Yet, like his opinions on Catholicism (discussed in Chapter Three), Locke made clear distinctions between public Quakerism and the private belief of individual members of the Society of Friends. During his time on the Continent, he was influenced by his close friend, the Rotterdam Quaker Benjamin Furly. John Marshall observes that although Locke “spent the 1650s questioning the anarchic tendencies” of Quakers and “suggested that Quakers may need to be suppressed in the first three of his four drafts of his 1667 ‘Essay on Toleration,’” he ultimately removed this passage in the final draft.²⁰⁸ Moreover, the vicious persecution of Quakers before 1689 and the desperate Quaker pamphlet literature this abuse created provided important ammunition for Locke’s arguments for toleration against Jonas Proast in the 1690s.²⁰⁹

Locke’s dislike of fanaticism also has important implications for understanding his writings on religion in the 1690s and 1700s, including his *Paraphrase*. Marshall argues that the “model of Lockean conversation” that was “strongly celebrated in the eighteenth century ...

²⁰⁶ Pincus, *1688*, 208.

²⁰⁷ Pincus, *1688*, 204, 289.

²⁰⁸ John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture: Religious Intolerance and Arguments for Religious Toleration in Early Modern and ‘Early Enlightenment’ Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 116-17.

²⁰⁹ Marshall, *John Locke*, 115-16.

stressed ‘civility’ and ‘politeness,’ the prevention of dispute by stopping discussion which demonstrated ‘warmth’ on the part of participants, and the maintenance of charity,” evident in both Locke’s *Reasonableness of Christianity*, its *Vindications*, and *Paraphrase*.²¹⁰ For Locke, Marshall maintains, this ethos entailed “a deliberate *silence*” on contentious theological issues, “a policy associated with toleration and civility as it allowed variant views to be inscribed at those points where Locke was silent.”²¹¹ Although in keeping with his latitudinarian disposition he strove to avoid theological controversy in the 1690s and early 1700s – and critics like Stillingfleet and Thomas Burnet claimed Locke’s silences as evidence of heresy – his inclusion of an attack on Quaker theology in the 1700 fourth edition of his *Essay* and his explicit claims of women’s subservient inferiority under the Law of Nature in his *Paraphrase* demonstrate the limits of civility for Locke and his latitudinarian circle. Tories often pointed out inconsistencies in Whig arguments for politeness and toleration. Astell, as I discuss in Chapter Two, argues in 1709 that the Third Earl of Shaftesbury’s supposed arguments for order and civility in religion are not applied fairly and exclude those groups he finds distasteful.

Locke’s readings of Paul’s Epistles in his *Paraphrase* were considerably influential throughout the eighteenth century. Despite his claims that women were prohibited from “reasoning and voluntary discourse” in the church and “were not to assume the personage of Doctors,” Locke had no problem with individual women theologians, even the Catholic Catharine Trotter. Locke’s close friend Damaris Masham was the author of several sophisticated theological pieces, and, as discussed in Chapter Three, Locke wrote to Trotter in 1702 thanking her for her 1700 defense of his *Essay* and praising “the strength and clearness of [her]

²¹⁰ Marshall, *John Locke*, 518.

²¹¹ Marshall, *John Locke*, 518.

reasoning.”²¹² Given Locke’s multi-layered views on women and religion, it is not surprising that women writers viewed him differently. Astell spent the Preface to the 1706 third edition of her *Reflections* sarcastically attacking the “Ingenious Paraphrast who pleads so much for the *Natural Subjection* of Women.”²¹³ On the other hand, Trotter enthusiastically looked forward to getting a copy of Locke’s *Paraphrase*; writing to Thomas Burnet of Kemnay in 1705, she declares “I am very desirous to meet with a book, which yet I have only heard of, *A Commentary upon some of the Epistles*, I think, *St. Paul’s*, written by Mr. *Locke*, which I am the more curious to see, because I imagine he would not write on such a subject, if he did not treat of it in some peculiar way.”²¹⁴ There is no extant record of her response to the text, but it is likely she read it, and given her robust support of Locke well into the 1720s, she either ignored his prohibitions against women or was not bothered by them.

Despite his rhetoric against Quaker theology, Friends held Locke in high esteem throughout the eighteenth century, especially with regard to their controversial practice of allowing women preachers. Although by the early eighteenth century women preachers were divisive even within the Society of Friends, women preachers also provided a convenient way for Anglicans to criticize Quaker theology, as Swift’s *A Tale of a Tub* demonstrates: linking Quaker “enthusiasm” to women made Quaker beliefs easier to disparage. Because their support of women preachers was one of their central vulnerabilities, it is not surprising that segments of the Society of Friends sought to limit the practice. Between 1715 and 1716 a short and relatively

²¹² Locke to Catharine Trotter, later Mrs. Cockburn, 30 Dec. 1702 in *The Correspondence of John Locke*, ed. E.S. De Beer, 8 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 7: letter no. 3234.

²¹³ Mary Astell, *Reflections upon Marriage*, in *Political Writings*, ed. Patricia Springborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 12.

²¹⁴ Mrs. Trotter to Mr. Burnet, 7 July 1705, in *The Works of Mrs. Catharine Cockburn, Theological, Moral, Dramatic, and Poetical*, 2 vols. (London: 1751), 2:189 [pagination replicated].

civil pamphlet battle broke out between two Quakers, Josiah Martin and Benjamin Coole, over the issue of women preachers. Surprisingly, both relied on differing interpretations of Locke's *Paraphrase* as the central support of their arguments.²¹⁵ Coole, a Bristol Quaker preacher, began the dispute by attempting to restrict the role of women within the Society of Friends with his text *Some Brief Observations on the Paraphrase and Notes of the Judicious John Locke: Relating to the Women's Exercising their Spiritual Gifts in the Church* in 1715. Martin responded in 1716 with *A Letter to the Author of Some Brief Observations on the Paraphrase and Notes of the Judicious John Locke*, and took particular issue with Coole's narrow interpretation of Locke's understanding of what "prophesying" and "praying" entailed.

Coole's comparatively conservative rhetoric originated in his attempts to defend Quaker practice in the face of orthodox criticism. By the early eighteenth century, segments of the Society of Friends were distancing themselves from both enthusiastic utterances and women preachers leading some more radical Friends to escape Quaker discipline by joining other religious movements more closely aligned with their earlier charismatic practices. Early in the eighteenth century, several Quaker women and men joined the radical French Huguenot sect in London, the Camisards.²¹⁶ Coole identified with the segment of the Society that sought to align Quakerism more closely with Anglicanism. Ten years before he became embroiled in his argument with Martin, he wrote a short anonymous piece in support of various doctrines of the

²¹⁵ This important debate has little modern commentary. See Mark Goldie's introduction to Josiah Martin, *A Letter to the Author of Some Brief Observations on the Paraphrase and Notes of the Judicious John Locke, Relating to the Women's Exercising their Spiritual Gifts in the Church* in *The Reception of Locke's Politics: From the 1690s to the 1830s*, ed. Mark Goldie, 6 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999), 5:130; and Peter A. Huff, "John Locke and the Prophecy of Quaker Women," *Quaker History* 86, no. 2 (1997): 26-40.

²¹⁶ See Appendix 1 of Hillel Schwartz, *The French Prophets: The History of a Millenarian Group in Eighteenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). The Camisards are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two.

Society of Friends, *A Letter from a Gentleman in the City to his Kinsman in the Country, Concerning the Quakers*, which purports to be a letter from a sympathetic Anglican to an Anglican relative skeptical of Quakers.²¹⁷ Coole's text demonstrates both the Friends' reliance on Locke and the divisiveness of women preachers. He appeals to Locke's support of toleration and wishes his antagonist the "Universal Charity as dwelt in [Locke] at his last Moments; when he said he was *In perfect Charity with all Men, and in a Sincere Communion with the Church of Christ, by what Names soever it might be Distinguished.*"²¹⁸ In relying on Locke's latitudinarian ideals, Coole attempts to bring Quaker doctrine under the umbrella of Anglicanism. He maintains that accusations of Quaker "Mad Enthusiasm" are overstated and are simply criticisms of Friends' "distinguishing Garb and Dialect," when in fact, "their Plainness is a check to the extream Gaudy Fops that swarm in City and Country" who "Mortgage their Estates" to buy "a Perruke."²¹⁹ In the guise of a sympathetic Anglican, Coole attempts to make Quaker doctrine palatable to an Anglican audience; but in doing so, he carefully polices any radicalism that threatens to sever Quaker practice from Anglicanism. Although he labors to normalize much of Quaker doctrine with the Church of England, he is unable to do so with women preachers. While he attempts to diminish the common orthodox complaint that what distinguishes Quakers is enthusiasm originating in the "Petticoat-Fathers" who "thump the Gallery" by observing that

²¹⁷ For Benjamin Coole as the author, see Joseph Smith, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Friends' Books*, 2 vols. (London: 1867), 1:450. The genre of "A Letter to a Friend" was popular in the period. Swift observes in 1710 that while perusing titles in the booksellers, he does "not find any which holds so general a Vogue, as that of *A Letter to a Friend*," in *A Discourse concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit. In a Letter to a Friend. A Fragment in A Tale of a Tub &c.*, eds. A. C. Guthkelch and D. Nichol Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 262. The most famous example is of course *A Letter from a Person of Quality to his Friend in the Country* (1675), a foundational and controversial work of Whig doctrine.

²¹⁸ Benjamin Coole, *A Letter from a Gentleman in the City to his Kinsman in the Country, Concerning the Quakers* (London: 1705), 35.

²¹⁹ Coole, *A Letter*, 8, 33.

men are also capable of “Impertinent Rattles,” he is unwilling fully to support women preachers.²²⁰ Women preachers provided an uncomfortable reminder of Quaker radical otherness which had to be downplayed by Coole. He writes that “Their Extream Indulgence towards their Women, who Ramble about the Country, when they ought to be at Home, according to the 1 *Tim.* 5. 14. is an Argument that their Rules of Fellowship or Discipline are not yet well digested.”²²¹ Coole portrays women preachers not as integral to Quaker doctrine, but instead as outliers; they cannot be used to denigrate Quakerism because they already are an embarrassment to the Society itself. He continues in this vein, foreshadowing the debate he will have with Martin ten years later:

I have Learn’d from some of their Female Advocates, that there are a sort of People amongst them, that seem to differ from the main Body or Society, about these Women-Preachers, since they think ‘em preferable to the Men; not only in point of the Charming Eloquence of some, and Jingles of others, but also in point of Authority, since they look upon ‘em to be pointed out by the Royal Prophet, in the 68th *Psalms*, and 11th *verse*, which some Learned Expositors have rendred to the Feminine Gender. But at the same time, they should consider the force of an undisputed Text, and that is, *Isa.* 3. 12.²²²

Coole inaccurately labels those who support female preachers within the Society of Friends as essentially separatists, and raises the issue that vexed Locke about women in the church – their supposed authority over men. He dismisses out of hand the rhetorical reasons given for women preachers, and – relying on verses not normally brought into the debate over women in the

²²⁰ Coole, *A Letter*, 4.

²²¹ Coole, *A Letter*, 14.

²²² Coole, *A Letter*, 14-15. Notably the title page of Martin’s last word in the pamphlet war between him and Coole, “carried an ancient Montanist gloss on Psalm 68:11: ‘Great is the army of the women publishers’.” See Goldie’s edition of Martin’s *A Letter*, 130.

church – organizes scripture into those texts which need “Learned Expositors” (which may provide support for women preachers if improperly interpreted) and those which are “undisputed” (which supposedly unequivocally forbid women any kind of religious authority).

Ten years later, Coole found Locke an important ally in his attempts to normalize Quaker doctrine by limiting the role of women. As Huff observes, more than half of Coole’s *Brief Observations* was made up of direct quotations from Locke’s reading of 1 Corinthians 11.²²³ By calling Locke “Judicious” in the full title of his text, Coole also demonstrates the high esteem in which he held him: Locke, following Molyneux, had employed the term throughout his *Second Treatise of Government* to express his debt to Richard Hooker.²²⁴ Relying on Locke’s authority, Coole maintained in *Brief Observations* that a restricted ministry of Quaker women was allowed but not any kind of teaching or preaching.²²⁵ Coole’s text was popular enough to go into a second edition in 1716 and to provoke a response from his fellow Quaker, Josiah Martin.

Like Coole, Martin also relies on Locke’s *Paraphrase* as his primary source; indeed, both astonishingly rely much more on Locke for support than scripture. Crucially, Martin is aware of the potential inconsistency in Locke’s stance towards Friends and enthusiasm, and unexpectedly attributes the supposed change in his position between his denigration of enthusiasm in the *Essay* and seeming acceptance of charismatic utterances in his *Paraphrase* directly to the influence of women preachers. He notes that he heard from “a *Person of known Probity*” that Locke was “so affected” with the testimony of a Quaker woman that he said “*That something Divine and*

²²³ Huff, “John Locke,” 27.

²²⁴ See for example, John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 270.

²²⁵ Huff, “John Locke,” 27.

Extraordinary attended the Preaching of that Woman.”²²⁶ Martin concludes that, “considering [Locke’s] Sentiments” in his *Paraphrase* are “so different from his former Writings, especially that Chapter on *Enthusiasm*, in his *Treatise of Human Understanding*,” it must be that “this Woman occasioned much of” Locke’s supposedly liberal understanding of women in the church in his *Paraphrase*.²²⁷ Such was the importance and influence of women preachers to Quaker theology for Martin that they supposedly could alter Locke’s philosophical and theological positions. Although Coole dismisses Martin as naïve, and suggests that he has been imposed upon by “designing People” to believe such a “Legendary Story,” Martin’s argument here – which ends his text – demonstrates both that Locke’s 1700 attack on Quaker theology troubled influential Friends and that women preachers were seen as essential to that theology.²²⁸

Apart from his reading of Locke, Martin marshals both scriptural and empirical evidence in his defense of women preachers. Among other parts of scripture, he discusses “*The Woman of Samaria*” from John 4 – as discussed above, a popular text in seventeenth-century Quaker defenses of women – and also cites both William Tyndale and Martin Luther. He argues that “History furnishes us with large Accounts of *Women*, who have excel’d in Divine and Moral Vertues: *Women* who have shewn great Capacities for Learning and Science, and who have discharg’d with great Conduct and Magnanimity, the highest Functions in Civil Life.”²²⁹ His

²²⁶ Josiah Martin, *A Letter to the Author of Some Brief Observations on the Paraphrase and Notes of the Judicious John Locke, Relating to the Womens Exercising their Spiritual Gifts in the Church* (London: 1716), 32.

²²⁷ Martin, *A Letter*, 32.

²²⁸ Benjamin Coole, *Reflections on A Letter to the Author of Some Brief Observations on the Paraphrase and Notes of the Judicious John Lock, &c* (London: 1717), 66, 68. Goldie, in his footnotes to his edition of Martin’s *A Letter* speculates that Martin’s claim here likely motivated the spurious letter from Locke to the Quaker Rebecca Collier on the right of women to preach (142n7). On this spurious letter, see *The Correspondence of John Locke*, ed. E.S. DeBeer 8 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 5:718.

²²⁹ Martin, *A Letter*, 29.

arguments about the important role women have played in secular history echo those made by Astell and Trotter. Significantly, he also echoes the anticlerical rhetoric used by an earlier generation of Quaker women authors, especially Margaret Fell. Martin argues that clerical unscrupulousness is ultimately to blame for the restrictions placed on women in the church. “Women were deprived of the Priviledge of *Propheying* or *Preaching* in the Church,” Martin writes, when “primitive Christianity began to be lost amongst its Professors.”²³⁰ According to Martin, “Priests . . . mistook the Design of the Christian Religion . . . which was to propagate *Peace on Earth, and Good Will to all Men*, and made it to consist almost entirely in Speculative Doctrine, in dry and empty Forms, and in Ceremonies which have no Manner or Tendency to the good of Mankind.”²³¹ As I argued earlier in this chapter, anticlerical rhetoric was the most important way that earlier Quaker writers like Margaret Fell advanced political arguments in favor of women, and this strategy also drew heavily upon the deep well of anti-Anglican “priestcraft” arguments produced by both dissenters and skeptics in the seventeenth century. Although he relies on an apocryphal story of Locke’s being influenced by a woman preacher, notably Martin does not cite or even mention any Quaker women writers himself in his defense.

Although Margaret Fell and other Quaker women wrote defenses of women’s religious authority in the second half of the seventeenth century, few writers, Quaker or otherwise, mention or cite them. The women writers in the generation that followed Fell do not mention her, and indeed offer little explicit mention of the feminist traditions carved out by her generation of Quaker women; however, despite the lack of explicit references, it is almost certain that Astell, Trotter and others were influenced by Quaker women authors. Although Astell in her Preface criticizes Locke’s arguments for the natural subjection of women in his *Paraphrase* she does not

²³⁰ Martin, *A Letter*, 30.

²³¹ Martin, *A Letter*, 30.

mention his limited support for women's charismatic utterances, suggesting that she regarded this liberty granted by Locke as frivolous. On the one hand, this is unsurprising coming from someone as hostile to dissent as the Tory Astell was; yet, in her only explicit discussion of dissenting women, she is unable to dismiss the power accumulated by these women in the past half century. She was, as Melinda Zook points out, almost certainly aware of the numbers of female-authored texts written by Quakers for sale in the London bookstalls.²³² In the "Prefatory Discourse" to her *Moderation Truly Stated*, Astell argues that "Religion [the Church of England] is a Plain, Honest Matron" who cannot compete with "Liberty of Conscience" because she "uses a little Art, goes Finer, has the better Address and more plausible Eloquence," and as a result, "Dame Religion ... is almost tore to pieces in the Croud."²³³ Astell represents Christianity – both Anglican and dissenting – as feminine and denigrates dissent by sexualizing it, implicitly suggesting that its attractiveness to adherents is due in part to the seductiveness of its women. She follows this with an extended satirical dialogue between the Tory John a Nokes and the Whig William a Styles in which Nokes argues that "*the Young and the Handsome, the Witty and the Gay, the Intriguing and Politick Ladies are all on the Factious Side, and only the Old and the Ugly, the Praying and the Women of Thought, are on the other.*"²³⁴ Although Astell later criticizes aspects of Nokes's arguments through "*a Lady in the Company*," she again associates "*Women of Thought*" with the Church of England and dismisses dissenting women by eroticizing

²³² Melinda Zook, "Religious Nonconformity and the Problem of Dissent in the Works of Aphra Behn and Mary Astell" in *Mary Astell: Reason, Gender, Faith*, eds. William Kolbrener and Michal Michelson (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 109n43.

²³³ Mary Astell, *Moderation Truly Stated: Or, A Review of a Late Pamphlet, Entitul'd, Moderation a Vertue* (London: 1704), xli. There is relatively little discussion of this text, likely because there is no modern edition. See Ruth Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell: An Early English Feminist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 202-3; Feroli, *Political Speaking Justified*, 202-6; and Zook, "Religious Nonconformity," 107, 110-11.

²³⁴ Astell, *Moderation*, li.

them.²³⁵ However, despite this sexualized dismissal, her attitude toward dissenting women was ultimately ambiguous. Styles notes that dissenters include “not a few of the Female Sex” as well as numerous artisans: “*these Tradesmen are mostly employ’d by the Female Sex, and if the Ladies should put themselves in the Head of these Multitudes, what a formidable Insurrection would it make!*”²³⁶ Despite her hostility to dissent, Astell acknowledges the power dissenting women could potentially utilize. Moreover, as Nokes observes, “*Dissenters ... have had great Influence over the Female, ever since St. Paul wrote to Timothy.*”²³⁷ With this crucial claim – notably placed in the mouth of a supposed enemy, a Whig – Astell downplays the impact of the strict limits on female authority given in 1 Timothy by blaming dissenters from the orthodox tradition inaugurated by Paul for female misbehavior. She links contemporary dissenters to these early rebels from the Pauline tradition, thus marking the Church of England as the heir to a Pauline orthodoxy amenable to feminine authority. Astell’s rhetorical strategy here of linking Pauline proscriptions as condemning unruly women rather than all women was one employed by Quakers as well. Astell, while not explicitly invoking any specific Quaker or dissenting woman, seems to recognize the authority carved out by these nonconformist women writers of the previous century even while she continues to denigrate dissent as a whole.

²³⁵ Astell, *Moderation*, lii.

²³⁶ Astell, *Moderation*, xlix.

²³⁷ Astell, *Moderation*, lv.

Chapter 2: Mary Astell, Gender, and Deism

Deism is often identified as a crucial stage in the progress toward modernity in traditional narratives of secularism. In *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor asks, “how did an exclusive humanism become a live option for large numbers of people?”²³⁸ According to Taylor, this “genesis comes through an intermediate stage, which is often referred to as ‘Deism.’”²³⁹ Because deism often functioned as a floating signifier of opprobrium in the long eighteenth century, precise definitions of the term are difficult to pin down. Although it is often viewed as a middle-ground between widespread religious belief and widespread secular unbelief in discussions of an emergent Western secularism in the eighteenth century, deism was in fact a heterogeneous group of contested beliefs, values, and assumptions. In his recent study of English deism of the long eighteenth century, Wayne Hudson calls attention to the varied and multi-layered nature of English deists’ writings and argues that “the way they presented themselves and deployed ideas and materials is best explained in terms of institutions, political conditions and discursive practices, not by reference to a single world view or philosophy.”²⁴⁰ By thinking of these deist writers as advancing skeptical arguments that lead inevitably to a secularized public sphere, some scholars tend to obscure the wide-ranging and multi-faceted nature of deistic arguments, as

²³⁸ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 221. For criticism and discussion of Taylor’s views, see the recently published volume edited by Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen and Craig Calhoun, *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

²³⁹ Taylor, *Secular*, 221.

²⁴⁰ Wayne Hudson, *The English Deists: Studies in Early Enlightenment* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009), 18. Hudson is arguing in particular against Jonathan Israel’s representation of English deism. Hudson writes that although “Israel’s outstanding contribution to the study of the Enlightenment has expanded our understanding of it” his “account of the Enlightenment ... tends to teleology and underplays the role of religious motivations in the emergence of modern politics, science and culture in Western European countries” (18-19). See Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) and Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

well as the slippage in rhetoric between skepticism and liberal, but mostly orthodox, manifestations of Anglicanism. Indeed, as Hudson argues, deist writers “advanced Christian arguments directed to all readers, but also hinted at more radical possibilities which more philosophically minded readers might like to consider.”²⁴¹ However, of course, “more philosophically minded readers” in the early eighteenth century would necessarily include a gender and class component; those who were able to discern clearly the multi-layered and subtle skepticism inherent in deist writings would be those with the ability and leisure to work through the abstruse theological and historical arguments put forth by these writers in order to identify what David Berman calls “the art of theological lying.”²⁴²

Although they do not play a significant role in Charles Taylor’s study, the third Earl of Shaftesbury and John Toland are often identified as crucial proponents of belief systems that fall under the heading of deism; in particular Toland’s pantheistic naturalism and Shaftesbury’s arguments for the deity as an impersonal, aestheticized representation of the good are frequently placed into broad definitions of eighteenth-century deism. For example, in his influential study of Shaftesbury, Lawrence Klein writes that Shaftesbury is “well known as a deist of a strongly anti-ecclesiastical bent.”²⁴³ While Mary Astell is usually recognized as a critic of Locke, she was arguably a much more forceful critic of Shaftesbury and, to a lesser extent, Toland.²⁴⁴ Although

²⁴¹ Hudson, 20-1.

²⁴² David Berman, “Disclaimers as Offence Mechanisms in Charles Blount and John Toland” in *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, eds. Michael Hunter and David Wooton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 255. On the rhetoric employed by English deists, see also James A. Herrick, *The Radical Rhetoric of the English Deists: The Discourse of Skepticism, 1680-1750* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997).

²⁴³ Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994),

1.

²⁴⁴ The scholarship on Astell’s engagement with Locke is numerous. In several works, Patricia Springborg has charted Astell’s criticisms of Locke. For an overview, see Springborg, “Mary

Astell's relationship with Locke dominates critical conversations, Sarah Apetrei has recently argued that "John Toland ... must now be numbered among her interlocutors, together with the Deist movement in general."²⁴⁵ With her critiques of both Toland and thinkers associated with him like William Stephens, and Shaftesbury, Astell defended the High Church Anglicanism that was central to her feminist project against these skeptical challenges to Christian orthodoxy. In her spirited attacks on various strains of deism, Astell critiqued these important ideological foundations of secularism during the period of their emergence and argued against the exclusionary rhetoric often employed by deist thinkers. By examining Astell's witty critiques of deist writers' gender politics, this chapter argues both that Astell's responses to deism are important for understanding her feminism and that a more careful look at what eighteenth-century ideologies of secularism excluded is necessary. Paradoxically for the modern reader, Astell (like Fielding, discussed in Chapter Four) effectively divorces her feminism from deism and an emergent secular modernity by demonstrating that skeptical arguments often exclude the voices of women, and that – read properly – the Bible provides a more robust defense of women's equality than any secular discourse.

Astell's Tory feminist arguments against deism complicate Jonathan Israel's contention that the Spinozan "Radical Enlightenment" exclusively charted the path toward modern ideas of gender equality. In particular, Israel's assertion that "only monist systems could supply criteria

Astell and John Locke," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature 1650-1740*, ed. Steven N. Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 276-306. See also E. Derek Taylor, "Mary Astell's Ironic Assault on John Locke's Theory of Thinking Matter," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62, no. 3 (2001): 505-22. For an argument that Astell was less antagonistic toward Locke than Springborg and others have argued for, see Mark Goldie, "Mary Astell and John Locke," in *Mary Astell: Reason, Gender, Faith*, eds. William Kolbrener and Michal Michelson (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 63-86.

²⁴⁵ Sarah Apetrei, *Women, Feminism and Religion in Early Enlightenment England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 123.

capable of consistently underpinning a comprehensive doctrine of female equality” seems too simple in light of Astell’s arguments against Shaftesbury and Toland.²⁴⁶ Although Toland advanced radical arguments about women’s role in Christian history, as I shall discuss later in this chapter, he did not do so to argue for an expanded societal role for women, but instead to undermine Scriptural authority. In Astell’s view this secularizing of Scripture did not offer more freedom for women; instead, the desacralizing of Christianity by radical writers undermined what was, to her, the central role the Bible played in advancing both the sectarian and secular interests of women in English society.

From Astell’s point of view, there was little difference between latitudinarianism and deism; for her, the former acted as simply a stop on the slippery slope to the latter. Indeed, Astell was particularly perceptive in her assault on the supposed toleration of liberal Whigs and latitudinarian Anglicans. In numerous pieces, but especially in her three works from 1704 attacking occasional conformity, Astell pointed out how intolerant liberal Anglicanism really was.²⁴⁷ She also criticized the politically convenient use of anti-Catholic rhetoric by latitudinarian Anglicans. She was quick to point out the similarities between Locke’s latitudinarian arguments in *Reasonableness of Christianity* and more radical texts. Astell was not alone in linking Locke to more radical writers.²⁴⁸ The High Churchman Humfrey Michel, for

²⁴⁶ Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, 576.

²⁴⁷ Astell is in agreement with several modern scholars on this point. Richard Ashcraft writes that toleration “was in its realization less the fulfillment of a tendency toward cultural rationalism than the product of deep-rooted fears and prejudices directed against Catholicism which, momentarily, produced a political alliance between Anglicans and dissenters in their common struggle against James II’s attempt to reclaim the throne following the Glorious Revolution” in “Latitudinarianism and toleration: historical myth versus political history,” in *Philosophy, Science, and Religion in England 1640-1700*, eds. Richard Kroll, Richard Ashcraft, and Perez Zagorin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 152.

²⁴⁸ The relationship of Toland to Locke’s ideas was a constant source of controversy. As Justin Champion notes, “to Locke’s horror and disgust,” in his attacks on him, Edward Stillingfleet

example, overtly associated “Topping *Toland*ers” with those “of the *Hobbian*, *Lockian*, and *Machiavilian* Stamp” in a 1701 sermon.²⁴⁹ Although Astell spent more time attacking radical writers like Shaftesbury, Toland, and William Stephens than she did Locke, to her they were all of a piece in threatening the cornerstone of her feminist theology, the sacred place of Christian Scripture.

Astell, Shaftesbury, and Ideologies of Sensibility

Astell had little good to say about popular fiction, especially with regard to women. In her 1694 *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest*, Astell writes that since “the *French Tongue* is understood by most Ladies” they should study “*Des Cartes*, *Malebranch* and others” instead of “reading idle *Novels* and *Romances*.”²⁵⁰ For Astell, popular fiction served as an impediment to the improvement of women because it prevented the theological edification that could be gained through a study of writers Astell saw as promoting correct understandings of Christianity. The moral didacticism that later women writers such as Sarah Fielding saw in domestic fiction Astell locates in philosophy. Although her only literary work was a small volume of unpublished poems presented to the nonjuring Archbishop of Canterbury William Sancroft upon her 1689 arrival in London, several scholars have analyzed the ways in which her theological and gender critiques influenced aspects of

“attempted to tar Locke’s work with Toland’s intellectual consequences” in Champion, *Republican Learning: John Toland and the crisis of Christian culture, 1696-1722* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 79.

²⁴⁹ Humfrey Michel, “Sanguis Carolinus Exclamans: Two Sermons More Impartially Arraigning the Horrid Murther of King Charles I (extract),” in *The Reception of Locke’s Politics*, ed. Mark Goldie, 6 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999), 1:359.

²⁵⁰ Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies: Parts I and II*, ed. Patricia Springborg (Peterborough: Broadview, 2002), 82-3. See also 63-4.

eighteenth-century literature.²⁵¹ As early as 1913, scholars have suggested that Astell served as a potential model for Richardson's *Clarissa Harlowe*.²⁵² More recently, Helen Thompson argues that Astell's "feminist physiology" elucidates the eighteenth-century domestic novel.²⁵³ If the primary – although certainly not only – links established by literary scholars between Astell and eighteenth-century fiction concern her influence on Richardson and the domestic novel, it is not surprising that scholars see her as an influence on the eighteenth-century ideology of sensibility.

In his study *The Culture of Sensibility*, G.J. Barker-Benfield examines Astell's Platonism and ambivalent attitudes towards an emergent consumer culture, arguing that the "linking of sensationalism to male appetite is one clue in understanding the appeal of Cambridge Platonism ... in the ensuing sentimental culture of women, including its embrace of Shaftesbury."²⁵⁴

Barker-Benfield notes that although Astell "attacked Shaftesbury" in print, she "in effect was on the same side in posing Cambridge Platonism against the dangers embodied in the writings of Locke."²⁵⁵ Although there were certainly affinities between Astell and Shaftesbury, particularly involving their critiques of Locke, Astell disliked aspects of Shaftesbury's philosophy so much that she devoted her last work, *Bart'lemy Fair or an Enquiry after Wit in which due Respect is*

²⁵¹ Mary Astell's poetry remains relatively unexamined. The text of Astell's unpublished poetry manuscript is reprinted in Ruth Perry's biography of Astell, Appendix D, 400-54. For a discussion of her poetry, see Ruth Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell: An Early English Feminist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 66-9; and Claire Pickard, "'Great in Humilitie': A Consideration of Mary Astell's Poetry," in *Mary Astell: Reason, Gender, Faith*, 115-26.

²⁵² A.H. Upham, "A Parallel for Richardson's *Clarissa*," *Modern Language Notes* 28 (1913): 103-5. See also Perry, *Celebrated*, 488n8 and E. Derek Taylor, *Reason and Religion in Clarissa: Samuel Richardson and 'the Famous Mr. Norris, of Bemerton'* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009). Taylor argues that Richardson scholars need to "recognize the intellectual and personal allegiance, both real and perceived, between Astell and [the philosopher John] Norris" (68).

²⁵³ Helen Thompson, *Ingenious Subjection: Compliance and Power in the Eighteenth-Century Domestic Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 20-1.

²⁵⁴ G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 195.

²⁵⁵ Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, 194.

had to a *Letter Concerning Enthusiasm*, to attacking it, although when Shaftesbury's *Letter Concerning Enthusiasm* was published in 1708 she was unsure of its author. Indeed, Astell viewed Shaftesbury as a far more dangerous enemy than she did Locke, whom she also praised several times.

In *Bart'lemy Fair*, Astell devotes considerable time to attacking what she saw as a dangerous emergent culture of Whiggish consumerism. As Barker-Benfield argues, "Writers of sentimental fiction shared with early feminists an ambivalent response to commercial capitalism"; as evidence he claims that Astell, despite her critiques, "by no means rejected consumerism," citing her immersion in the aristocratic world of Chelsea where she spent the final years of her life.²⁵⁶ Yet, in her published work, especially both editions of *Bart'lemy Fair*, Astell presents a scathing critique of consumer culture. If Shaftesbury is a crucial, or even the most crucial, influence on eighteenth-century ideologies of sensibility, then Astell's critiques of Shaftesbury deserve greater scrutiny. Moreover, her attacks on Shaftesbury and Whig ideology in *Bart'lemy Fair* primarily take the form of arguments about how to talk about Christianity and theology. These arguments about the proper way to "do" theology have an important bearing on the rest of Astell's work and about how we view her role in the genealogy of sensibility. Astell's attacks on Shaftesbury's flippant irreligion signal how crucial High Church Anglican orthodoxy was to her feminism.

In his study of the "Enlightenment Bible," Jonathan Sheehan argues that "for long centuries, the Bible had been a self-legitimizing text," but during the long eighteenth century, "biblical authority was reassigned to the world of human beings."²⁵⁷ According to Sheehan, "the

²⁵⁶ Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, 199, 197-8.

²⁵⁷ Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), xiv. For a discussion of the Bible and secularization

Enlightenment Bible became authoritative by virtue of its connection and relevance to human morality, aesthetics, and history”; rather than unquestioning faith, “culture would be the new rock atop which the legitimacy of the Bible was built.”²⁵⁸ Although Sheehan does not mention him, Shaftesbury treated the Bible and Christianity as merely one text and one belief system in an ever-expanding arena of competing ideas; his relativism evoked considerable consternation in Astell and other thinkers aligned with more orthodox understandings of religion. As Stanley Grean writes, “Shaftesbury is anxious to convince his reader that no book in human language should be placed in the privileged category of being above criticism.”²⁵⁹ Astell, in contrast, privileged the infallibility of the Bible, not only because of her commitment to Anglican orthodoxy, but because she (usually) viewed the Bible as an infallible defender of women. She writes in her 1706 Preface to the third edition of her *Reflections Upon Marriage* “that One Text for us, is more to be regarded than many against us.”²⁶⁰ For Astell, “Holy Scripture considers Women very differently from what they appear in the common Prejudices of Mankind.”²⁶¹ It was exactly this point about the privileged place of the Bible and High Church ideology in English society and its implications for women that, in part, provoked Astell to respond to Shaftesbury’s *Letter Concerning Enthusiasm*.

Apart from Shaftesbury’s attack on all of scripture, what also motivated Astell as a High Church Anglican was her ideological investment in defending the Church of England. Her three Tory tracts in 1704, her 1705 *The Christian Religion*, and her 1709 *Bart’lemy Fair* all serve as

throughout the early modern period, see especially Debora Kuller Shuger, *The Renaissance Bible: Scholarship, Sacrifice, Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

²⁵⁸ Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible*, xiv.

²⁵⁹ Stanley Grean, *Shaftesbury’s Philosophy of Religion and Ethics: A Study in Enthusiasm* (New York: Ohio University Press, 1967), 46.

²⁶⁰ Mary Astell, *Reflections upon Marriage*, in *Political Writings*, ed. Patricia Springborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 22.

²⁶¹ Astell, *Reflections*, 23.

defenses of High Church Anglicanism. Astell writes that she is “a Member of the Church of *England*, not because [she] was Born in *England*, and Educated by Conforming Parents,” but because the Church of England conforms to “the Doctrine and Precepts of Christianity” and is “free from the Corruptions of *Rome*, and the Imperfections of *Geneva*.”²⁶² According to Astell, without the Established Church, English Christianity descended into “Dissoluteness and Prophaneness”: when “those zealous Reformers” held sway in England during the Interregnum they “ridicul’d the Holy Sacrament of Baptism, by carrying their Horses to the Font” and made “the very Altar their Brothel.”²⁶³ A unified, hierarchical national church is essential for Astell because “Order, Decency, Unity, and Church Communion, tend to the *perfecting of the Saints*, [and] to the edifying of the *Body of Christ*.”²⁶⁴ Because “the Holy Ghost has made the Bishops *Overseers of the Flock*,” a Christian must “live in *constant Communion* with the Bishop.”²⁶⁵ For Astell, conforming to the Church of England is a Biblically mandated command: “separate Congregations among Natives” is unacceptable because “[t]he Doctrine of the Establish’d National Church” is “exactly agreeable” to the Bible.²⁶⁶ As a result, Astell writes that the “Christian Religion does no where allow Rebellion ... and he that bawls out the Liberty of Conscience and Loss of Religion to vindicate his Rebellion, has too much Atheism in him, to be a true Christian.”²⁶⁷ Astell’s response to Shaftesbury came at the end of a decade in which she zealously defended Tory High Church ideology. She viewed his anti-ecclesiastical and deistical

²⁶² Mary Astell, *The Christian Religion as Profess’d by a Daughter of the Church of England*, 2nd ed. (London: 1717), 6, 40.

²⁶³ Mary Astell, *An Impartial Inquiry into the Causes of Rebellion and Civil War*, in *Political Writings*, ed. Patricia Springborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 190.

²⁶⁴ Astell, *Christian*, 36.

²⁶⁵ Astell, *Christian*, 37.

²⁶⁶ Astell, *Christian*, 40.

²⁶⁷ Astell, *Inquiry*, 169.

attack on High Church Anglicanism as of a piece with those of her other Whig opponents in the first decade of the eighteenth century.

Shaftesbury's *Letter* was originally published in 1708, and was included in his three volume *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* in 1711. It originally was part of a private correspondence to Lord Somers, and was a response to the Camisard émigrés from France – Shaftesbury's "French Protestants" – a zealous Protestant sect that arose in France after Louis XIV rescinded the Edict of Nantes in 1685. Members of the sect fled to England around 1707.²⁶⁸ As Robert Voittle writes, the Camisards prophesied in public "in every possible antic manner – from trances, in languages unknown to the speaker, with all sorts of bodily contortions, even walking on hands," and also issued various proclamations about the end of the world and the destruction of London.²⁶⁹ It was this type of public religious "enthusiasm" exhibited by the Camisards and some English dissenting sects that provoked ridicule from urbane Whigs and resulted in Shaftesbury's attack on religion in his *Letter*.

The Camisards were active in England during another flare-up of discussion about the limits of English religious toleration, in this case the debate about occasional conformity. Occasional conformity was intended to evade the political limitations placed on nonconformists by allowing them to attend a Church of England service once a year to become eligible for public office. Several bills to restrict the practice were introduced in Parliament between 1702 and 1705 by the Tories, but none passed. This was a debate that Astell herself contributed to with her three

²⁶⁸ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Philip Ayres, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 1:19. For a discussion of the sect in London, see Hillel Schwartz, *The French Prophets: The History of a Millenarian Group in Eighteenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

²⁶⁹ Robert Voittle, *The Third Earl of Shaftesbury, 1671-1713* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 325. For the composition and reception of Shaftesbury's *Letter*, see 329-30 and chapter 2 of Grean, *Shaftesbury's Philosophy*, 19-36.

political tracts published in 1704. Shaftesbury takes the opportunity offered by the French Prophets to argue for a broad toleration in a unique way by maintaining “that provided we treat Religion with good manners, we can never use too much *good Humour*, or examine it with too much *Freedom* and *Familiarity*.”²⁷⁰ According to Shaftesbury, if religion “be genuine and sincere, it will not only stand the Proof, but thrive and gain Advantage from hence: if it be spurious, or mixt with any Imposture, it will be detected and expos’d.”²⁷¹ Despite his weak disclaimer about the importance of “good manners” for his project, Shaftesbury’s contention that one should examine religion with “*Freedom* and *Familiarity*” effectively desacralizes religious ideology and equates its truth value with its ability to withstand scrutiny in the public arena. Shaftesbury’s famous “Test of Ridicule” negates the self-legitimizing quality of revealed Christianity that believers like Astell saw as essential in favor of treating Christianity as one of many competing belief systems that are a part of English culture. For Shaftesbury, Christianity must be subsumed within a larger idea of a civil society if theological debates are not to end in disruptions of the social order. As Philip Ayres remarks, Shaftesbury’s “target ... is obviously not the French prophets but dogmatic Christianity in its ‘revealed’ aspects.”²⁷² Indeed, as Lawrence Klein observes, Shaftesbury’s criticism of enthusiasm “took a stock element of Anglican polemic and turned it against” High Church Anglicans.²⁷³ Astell obviously identified with High Church Anglicans and promoted the idea that Anglican theology essentially equated with reason. She also believed that Christianity outside of Anglicanism was outside of reason and thus can be tarred as enthusiasm. Astell, like Shaftesbury, had little sympathy for dissenting

²⁷⁰ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 1:21.

²⁷¹ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 1:21

²⁷² Philip Ayres, introduction to Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Philip Ayres, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 1:xix.

²⁷³ Klein, *Shaftesbury*, 167.

sects and what she saw as their disruptions to both social and godly order, as evidenced by her 1704 tracts which primarily targeted dissenters. However, Shaftesbury takes Astell's logic to, what is to her, an extreme and unwarranted conclusion, by implying that essentially all belief is a mode of enthusiasm.

Part of Shaftesbury's project is to promote classical values and ancient learning and place it in competition with what he sees as Anglicanism's reliance on ecclesiastical authority; there is an "affinity of spirit between the English cultural present and the classical past" for Shaftesbury, "for whom correct aesthetics go hand-in-hand with correct ethics and whose theistic philosophy conforms with the sentiments" of classical authors.²⁷⁴ In order to privilege classical learning, Shaftesbury attacks Anglican ecclesiology. Thus he complains that "we Christians ... will allow nothing to poor Heathens" who "must be Infidels in every sense" even though "a Reverend Christian Prelate" may "believe in *Fairys*" – an implicit, but clear, attack on Anglican authority.²⁷⁵ He explicitly draws parallels between ancient theology and current Christianity, noting that "*Muses*" were "essential in [the ancient's] System of Theology" and that because "*Revelation* ... evidently made so well for their Art" it was not "the Business of Poets in those days" to question it.²⁷⁶ By explicitly promoting theology's value as an aesthetic discourse at the expense of its status as the privileged means by which cultural and political questions are decided, Shaftesbury endorses what Sheehan describes as the secularizing project of the changing status of revealed religion in the long eighteenth century. Shaftesbury's promotion of the aesthetic utility of religion is only one of several ways he explicitly and implicitly attacks revealed religion.

²⁷⁴ Philip Ayres, *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 160-61.

²⁷⁵ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 1:9.

²⁷⁶ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 1:9.

Shaftesbury's arguments necessarily displace religion's sacred role in the English public sphere. He claims that where "any ... other Cause is powerful enough to restrain the *Freedom of Censure* in any part, it in effect destroys the Benefit of it in the whole," and "'Tis only in a free Nation, such as ours, that Imposture has no Privilege"; even "the Awfulness of a Church" cannot "give her Protection."²⁷⁷ Anglican ecclesiastical authority, suggests Shaftesbury, exists not to promote Christianity, but rather to shield it from proper ridicule. No "peculiar Custom or National Opinion," he argues, should be "exempted from Criticism."²⁷⁸ Since he argues that persecution would only play into the hands of dissenting sects, he ironically notes "how barbarous" it is that "we tolerating *English Men*" reject "the Honour of a Persecution" for the prophesying Camisards.²⁷⁹ In place of harassment, he famously proposes his "*Bart'lemy Fair Method*" whereby, like puppet shows at the Fair, supposedly disagreeable "Prophesying Enthusiasts" are made figures of mockery rather than martyrdom.²⁸⁰ More gallingly for his critics, Shaftesbury ironically extends his method from more easily mocked enthusiasts to Christians as a whole, claiming that had "the *Jews*" simply "taken the Fancy to act such Puppet-Shews," mocking Jesus and the apostles, "they might possible have done our Religion more Harm, than by all their other ways of Severity."²⁸¹ Although he acts the part of a concerned Christian, Shaftesbury's implication is clear: the central tenets of Christian faith – the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Divinity of the Son – are fair game for mockery. Moreover, for Shaftesbury in his *Letter*, the supposed Anglican monopoly on Christianity merely serves to protect it from warranted scrutiny.

²⁷⁷ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 1:10.

²⁷⁸ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 1:10.

²⁷⁹ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 1:19.

²⁸⁰ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 1:19, 1:20.

²⁸¹ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 1:20.

Shaftesbury's explicit promotion of other avenues to truth at the expense of reason and traditional Christian apologetics strikes at the very epistemological foundations that Astell and other theologians use to argue for the legitimacy of Christianity. Shaftesbury does not simply call into question the arguments of theologians; instead, through his ironic treatment of the traditional rhetoric of validating religious claims, he questions their method of establishing truth. For Shaftesbury, traditional Christian arguments are inadequate in themselves because they neither accord with reason nor do they properly take into account human emotion. He makes this clear when he dismisses Pascal's wager, a classic theological argument which relies on the threat of eternal punishment for its rhetorical strength: "our Reason ... will never rest thorowly satisf'd on such a Bottom," and, as a result, "we cannot but grow *worse* in our Religion, and entertain a *worse* Opinion still of a *Supreme* DEITY, whilst our Belief is founded on so injurious a Thought of him."²⁸² For Shaftesbury, a true examination of Christian truth claims requires not just the use of our reason, but also the proper frame of mind in pursuing the inquiry. Because Shaftesbury so greatly downplays traditional arguments from both Scripture and faith, as Astell and other critics contended, he reduces God to an ambiguous emanation of the human sense of the Good. Equating God with the Good was a standard theological move, but in the eyes of his critics Shaftesbury's reduction of God goes too far because of its overemphasis on aesthetic value.

In a passage that would have a lasting influence on the mid-eighteenth-century "good-natured man" of Henry Fielding and others, Shaftesbury writes:

This, my Lord, is the Security against all Superstition: To remember, that there is nothing in GOD but what is *Godlike*; and that he is either *not at all*, or *truly and perfectly Good*.

But when we are afraid to use our Reason freely, even on that very Question, "Whether

²⁸² Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 1:23.

He really *be*, or *not*,” we then actually presume him *bad*, and flatly contradict that pretended Character of Goodness and Greatness; whilst we discover this mistrust of his Temper, and fear his Anger and Resentment, in the case of this *Freedom* of INQUIRY.²⁸³

As Shaftesbury represents it, even questioning God’s existence should not be out of bounds because God’s essentially perfect and benevolent identity precludes his anger at the use of reason to determine the validity of religious truth claims. God’s perfectly good nature is incapable of anger at anyone’s searching after truth about the nature of divinity. Shaftesbury’s heavy-handed equation of God with goodness has important implications for his conception of how one uses reason to discover religious truths. Because God and goodness are linked so closely in Shaftesbury’s scheme, one is simply incapable of rejecting God’s existence through a disinterested search after truth. Thus, an atheist is not one who simply rejects Christian arguments but actually one whose nature will not allow him or her to accept the proper understanding of goodness: as Shaftesbury writes, “It is impossible that any besides an ill-natur’d Man can wish against the Being of a GOD” because “this is wishing against ... one’s private Good.”²⁸⁴ It is not then simply rational argumentation that proves the validity of religion but it is instead one’s nature; as a result of Shaftesbury’s deistic rhetoric, theological argumentation is explicitly removed from its status as a privileged discourse in favor of concern over the subjective orientation of one’s passions. It is humanity that sets the standard for God in Shaftesbury’s rhetoric, not the other way around: “’tis hard to imagine, what Honour can arise to *the* DEITY from the Praises of Creatures, who are unable to discern what is *Praise-worthy* ... in their own Kind.”²⁸⁵ The upshot of Shaftesbury’s scheme entails that “before we ascended in the

²⁸³ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 1:22.

²⁸⁴ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 1:23.

²⁸⁵ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 1:26.

higher Regions of *Divinity*” we should “descend a little into *our-selves*.”²⁸⁶ For Shaftesbury then, it is ultimately humanity’s goodness which should set the standard for our understanding of “the DEITY,” a position that clearly infuriated the neo-Platonic Astell, who held with her correspondent John Norris, at least in part, that “*GOD ... is the only Object of our Love*.”²⁸⁷

Shaftesbury claims his arguments are a “plain home-spun Philosophy,” but they are clearly meant to promote a radical skepticism.²⁸⁸ A proper regulation of one’s “Senses,” he maintains, will stop one from being “addicted to every upstart Sect or Superstition” and “may teach us to oppose more successfully those Delusions which come arm’d with the specious Pretext of moral Certainty, and *Matter of Fact*.”²⁸⁹ His reference to “moral Certainty” echoes the logical ground that Anglican theologians, most famously William Chillingworth, had long used to ground the validity of revealed Scripture, and Shaftesbury explicitly dismisses it as a reasonable basis for religion.²⁹⁰

Shaftesbury’s insistence on humanity’s role in defining supposedly divine standards results in a further (and interconnected) affront to Astell, an oblique attack on women. In his insistence that God be judged according to human standards, Shaftesbury raises the specter of gender, arguing that “impotent” women should not be the gender that we look to for divine attributes:

Is the doing Good for *Glory’s* sake, so divine a thing? or, Is it not diviner, to do Good even where it may be thought inglorious, even to the Ingrateful, and to those who are wholly insensible of the Good they receive? How comes it then that what is so *divine* in

²⁸⁶ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 1:26.

²⁸⁷ Mary Astell and John Norris, *Letters Concerning the Love of God*, eds. E. Derek Taylor and Melvyn New (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 70.

²⁸⁸ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 1:27.

²⁸⁹ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 1:27.

²⁹⁰ See Chapter Three.

us, shou'd lose its Character in the *Divine Being*? And that according as *the* DEITY is represented to us, he shou'd more resemble the weak, womanish, and impotent part of our Nature, than the generous, manly and divine?²⁹¹

Shaftesbury's brusque throwaway attack in this passage on women's natures is perhaps even more infuriating to Astell than the implication that God should be judged by standards derived from an examination of human nature. For Astell, Shaftesbury demonstrates the inherent dangers for women in removing God from a privileged position because once God is judged using human standards women are in danger of becoming marginalized by the refashioning of a deity in the image of a misogynistic culture. As I discuss below, her understanding of High Church Anglican ideology for Astell serves as the crucial defender of women's interests against the misogynist presumptions of English culture. Shaftesbury's arguments that displace divinity's privilege then also greatly undermine Astell's Tory theology that is an essential support of her feminism.

Thus, although Shaftesbury is attacking all forms of revealed religion, his assault on High Church orthodoxy also threatens the basis of Astell's feminist positions: he writes ironically that "*Uniformity in Opinion* (a hopeful Project!)" is promoted as the answer to irreligion, and as a result, "the very end of Government it-self" has become the "*saving of Souls.*"²⁹² Shaftesbury attacks the foundation of Tory religious thought – the need for a universal, royally-sanctioned national Church as a support against irreligion and heterodoxy – as counter-productive because the authoritarianism of a coercive state church violates the necessity of free inquiry for the individual subject that is essential to establishing, by reason, God's true goodness. The Tory Anglican Jonas Proast, for example, argued in his protracted debate with Locke over his 1689 *Epistola de Tolerantia* that the usefulness of the state's ability to coerce dissenters and others to

²⁹¹ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 1:24.

²⁹² Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 1:15.

Anglicanism trumped the need for toleration.²⁹³ Although the attack on Tory religious arguments against toleration is unsurprising, what makes it unique is Shaftesbury's rhetoric and style of argumentation, which is ironic, playful and highly sarcastic. Shaftesbury does away with the common ground generally found in religio-political arguments from both Whig and Tory propagandists by treating divinity itself as an object that must stand the test of public ridicule.

Because of Shaftesbury's ironic attack on High Church orthodoxy, it is no surprise Astell was provoked enough to write a furious reply, one of several to Shaftesbury's controversial *Letter*.²⁹⁴ Astell's response, *Bart'lemy Fair or an Enquiry after Wit in which due Respect is had to a Letter Concerning Enthusiasm*, was originally published under a borrowed name (Mr. Wotton) in 1709.²⁹⁵ Astell, not knowing the anonymous author was Shaftesbury, but suspecting the author was someone connected to aristocratic Whig circles, prefaced the text with an ironic dedication "To the most Illustrious Society OF THE KIT-KATS."²⁹⁶ Astell republished the text in 1722, unchanged except for the title page, which identifies Shaftesbury as the author of the *Letter*, and an additional "Advertisement" appended to the beginning. In *Bart'lemy Fair*, Astell attempts to conjoin the High Church Anglicanism and virtue that Shaftesbury had disassociated, and does so by making an explicitly gendered argument.

²⁹³ For a discussion and analysis of this debate, see especially Richard Vernon, *The Career of Toleration: John Locke, Jonas Proast, and After* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997).

²⁹⁴ See also *Remarks upon the Letter to a Lord, concerning Enthusiasm* (1708) and *Reflections upon A Letter concerning Enthusiasm* (1709).

²⁹⁵ Ruth Perry notes that Astell likely chose "Mr. Wotton" as a pseudonym because William Wotton was famous for opposing Whig arguments during the "Battle of the Books" and also because of his arguments in favor of women's education in his 1694 *Reflections Upon Ancient and Modern Learning* in Perry, *Mary Astell*, 225.

²⁹⁶ Mary Astell, *An Enquiry After Wit: Wherein the Trifling Arguing and Impious Raillery of the Late Earl of Shaftesbury, In his LETTER concerning Enthusiasm, and other Profane Writers, Are fully Answer'd, and justly Exposed*. 2nd ed. (London: 1722), 3.

Although *An Enquiry After Wit* was Astell's last publication, it has received relatively little scholarly attention.²⁹⁷ In the "Advertisement" Astell added to the 1722 second edition, she deliberately positions herself as a Christian martyr because the 1709 edition resulted in mocking attacks on her in the pages of the *Tatler*.²⁹⁸ Her Whig antagonists have "her Thanks" because "Blessedness and Reward" are "promis'd to all who are revil'd and evil spoken of falsely for GOD's Sake."²⁹⁹ Astell rhetorically presents herself as the defender of Christianity against attacks from dissolute libertines: "in a Christian Country, professing so much Zeal for Reformation, there needs no Apology for chastising the Insolence of Profane Persons, however distinguish'd."³⁰⁰ For Astell, Shaftesbury and other Whigs are threatening the vital Protestant ideology on which the High Church Tory conception of Englishness rests. More importantly, her defense should receive special support because its author is a woman. Because libertines especially corrupt women, it falls on virtuous "English Ladies" to fly to the support of English virtue and its Christian foundations. Astell thus turns her sex into an asset in her defense of her authorship:

²⁹⁷ Most commentators focus on Astell's critique of emergent bourgeois capitalism in her *Inquiry*, with less attention paid to the text's religious implications. For discussion along this line, see Perry, *Celebrated*, 221-31 and Van C. Hartman, "Tory Feminism in Mary Astell's 'Bart'lemy Fair," *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 28, no. 3 (1998): 243-65. Much more recently, David Alvarez has called attention to the secular implications of Astell's critique of Shaftesbury's liberal tolerance, arguing that "Astell accurately points to Shaftesbury's role in inaugurating the disciplinary discourses of sentimentality and aesthetics," and that her "text suggests that we should look more closely at how the public sphere is constructed around the need to control religious passion and discourse" in Alvarez, "Reason and Religious Tolerance: Mary Astell's Critique of Shaftesbury," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 44, no. 4 (2011): 481, 489. Although I generally agree with Alvarez's conclusions, he does not locate Astell's arguments historically.

²⁹⁸ On Astell's complex associations with martyrdom, see Kamille Stone Stanton, "'Affliction, the Sincerest Friend': Mary Astell's Philosophy of Women's Superiority through Martyrdom," *Prose Studies* 29, no. 1 (2007): 104-14.

²⁹⁹ Astell, *Enquiry*, no pagination.

³⁰⁰ Astell, *Enquiry*, no pagination.

When [the 1709 *Enquiry*] was wrote, that Sex which us'd to be honour'd with the Character of Devotion and Modesty, had not broke through this natural Barrier, to rush into the bold Licentiousness of the other. Their progress these last Seven Years, has exceeded all we have formerly seen or heard of English Ladies. It is necessary therefore, that some of the Sex shou'd enter their Protest against this horrible Indecency and Novelty, as well as Profaneness.³⁰¹

With characteristic irony Astell suggests that “English Ladies” have embraced “Licentiousness,” thus forcing her, as a woman, to attack this “Profaneness.” She thus turns the tables on those she views as her enemies and defends herself against the sexist attacks leveled at her by *The Tatler* by positioning herself as the defender of English Protestant virtue and “Devotion” against those “Profane Persons” who would dare strip England of its most important ideological pillar – its Anglican faith – by violently decoupling Christianity and virtue.³⁰²

Crucially, however, Astell rejects the political significance of Christianity and wittily adopts the same strategy that Shaftesbury deployed in his *Letter* of appropriating a crucial term in the Anglican rhetorical arsenal; while Shaftesbury turned “enthusiasm” against High Church Anglicans, Astell uses Anglican rhetoric about “popery” against Low Church Anglicans. She observes that those “who tell us, that Popery is worse than Atheism, cannot think as they say, unless they think it better to live without GOD in the World.”³⁰³ “Popery” was an especially adaptable signifier in Anglican ideology throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

³⁰¹ Astell, *Enquiry*, no pagination.

³⁰² For Astell’s connections to religious discourses of virtue, see Hannah Smith, “Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694), and the Anglican Reformation of Manners in Late-Seventeenth-Century England,” in *Mary Astell: Reason, Gender Faith*, 31-48.

³⁰³ Astell, *Enquiry*, no pagination. Alvarez similarly notes that throughout her oeuvre Astell “asserts that women ... can engage in public reasoning” through “aping the language of her critics,” in Alvarez, “Mary Astell’s Critique,” 482.

Astell, while suggesting that any form of Christianity (even Catholicism) is better than atheism, recognizes the politicized appropriation of the term “popery,” arguing that “Let us in GOD’s Name, and with His Truths, heartily oppose the Errors of the Roman Church, but let not Christianity be banish’d from our Land, out of a pretended Fear of Popery.”³⁰⁴ For Astell, the English “shew as little Charity as we ascribe to the Papists, if we exclude from the Kingdom of Heaven, such of them as are invincibly ignorant of their Superstitions and Errors.”³⁰⁵ According to Astell, “under the Pretence of being good Protestants, by which no more is meant than declaring against Popery” those “Men of No-Religion” strike “against Christianity in general.”³⁰⁶ Astell rejects the deployment of religious language used not just by Shaftesbury, but also by several generations of latitudinarian Anglican divines in their disputes with Catholic doctrine. This rehabilitation of religious argument is what motivates her *Enquiry*, and it requires the support of what are to her inarguably clear and rational defenses of Christianity’s truth claims.

Astell thus articulates in the “Advertisement” to her *Enquiry* a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the English state and Christianity than simple renditions of her as a High Church Tory might indicate. For Astell, the government can do nothing to support and protect religion if the virtue of its subjects is corrupted by powerful aristocrats: she writes that “humane Policies are not proper Methods to defend the Church of Christ, or to maintain the Truths and Holiness of the Christian Profession.”³⁰⁷ She makes a crucial distinction here and in the body of her *Enquiry* between the sociopolitical use of religious terms and true belief. In Astell’s scheme, one is a “BIGOT” who is “zealous for the Name and

³⁰⁴ Astell, *Enquiry*, no pagination.

³⁰⁵ Astell, *Enquiry*, no pagination.

³⁰⁶ Astell, *Enquiry*, no pagination.

³⁰⁷ Astell, *Enquiry*, no pagination.

Externals of Religion, without the Life and Power.”³⁰⁸ It thus is not foreign Catholics who are the largest threat, but rather skeptics who imperil the English state. She ends her “Advertisement” by pointing out that two of the most important tropes of Whig ideology, “liberty” and “property,” can mean nothing without both proper Christian morality and philosophy: “For when Men’s Principles are lost, and their Vertue corrupted, Liberty and Property become an easy Prey.”³⁰⁹ What makes Shaftesbury and his Whig colleagues so dangerous in Astell’s view is that the *Letter* – and its particular form of raillery – is equivalent to other irreligious publications because of its self-conscious flouting and misuse of formerly sacred terms.

According to Astell, this misuse of religious language was characteristic of latitudinarians in their skirmishes with both Catholicism and High Church Anglicanism. Even though her immediate target is Shaftesbury, in her attacks on desacralized religious discourse, Astell yokes latitudinarian Anglicans and libertine, deistical Whigs. Because “the *Letter concerning Enthusiasm* (the civil Name they bestow on Christianity) is lately reviv’d” along with other “Impious Books that are publish’d with Impunity,” it is up to Astell again to enter the fray and republish her *Inquiry*.³¹⁰ By explicitly identifying Shaftesbury’s irreligious motives in his implicit extension of enthusiasm to all of Christianity, Astell highlights her larger purpose: articulating a depoliticized Christianity supported by reason. Obviously Astell was no stranger to political theorizing, and also not above making religio-political arguments herself, especially in the three works she published against Occasional Conformity in 1704. In her *Enquiry*, however, part of Astell’s concern is to depoliticize religious discourse and provide its truth claims with

³⁰⁸ Astell, *Enquiry*, no pagination.

³⁰⁹ Astell, *Enquiry*, no pagination.

³¹⁰ Astell, *Enquiry*, no pagination.

what she viewed as solid evidentiary support.³¹¹ Crucially, Astell equates deism and atheism in her “Advertisement,” and because her attacks are now leveled at both, Astell downplays the political rhetoric that was so important to her previous polemical works against dissenters and latitudinarians.

One of Astell’s key moves in *Enquiry* is to oppose Shaftesbury’s wit to reasoned argumentation, and she does so by explicitly invoking gender.³¹² According to Astell, “our Men of Wit” are able to “prove there is no GOD, or that GOD is such an insignificant Idol as the *Letter* describes, let them be as Merry with Him as they think fit”; otherwise it is “the very height of Folly and Madness to treat Him irreverently” until “Proof is made.”³¹³ Reasoned argumentation must come before raillery for Astell. Throughout the *Enquiry*, she is concerned with opposing Shaftesbury’s wit by a counteracting move toward the register of reasoned discourse. Shaftesbury ironically attacks traditional methods of theological dispute by both using Scripture superficially and by dismissing without qualification Pascal’s Wager, a standard of traditional Christian apologetics. For Astell, Shaftesbury’s refusal to participate in traditional methods of theological dispute signals his abdication of his masculine, aristocratic duty. Implicitly revisiting Shaftesbury’s throwaway remark about “the weak, womanish . . . part of our Nature,” Astell accuses her Whig antagonists of first not being gentlemen, and second of acting in an unmanly fashion. She articulates both a rank-based attack that Shaftesbury and his circle lack honor, and a gender-based critique that he is acting unmanly:

³¹¹ There is a large body of scholarship on Astell’s explicitly political engagements. See especially Patricia Springborg, *Mary Astell: Theorist of Freedom from Domination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Hilda L. Smith, “‘Cry up Liberty’: The Political Context for Mary Astell’s Feminism,” in *Mary Astell: Reason, Gender, Faith*, 193-204.

³¹² For an analysis of Shaftesbury’s rhetoric of wit in his *Letter*, see Richard B. Wolf, “Shaftesbury’s Wit in *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm*,” *Modern Philology* 86, no. 1 (1988): 46-53.

³¹³ Astell, *Enquiry*, 109.

WHETHER the Adversaries of Religion be Gentlemen or no, one knows not; they give us Reason to think they are not, since 'tis evident they do not Act like Men of any Honor, or tolerable Breeding. Nothing more Disingenuous and Unmanly than their Attaques; for to wound Religion by Insinuations and fly Suggestions, which is Calumny and Detraction; to Laugh when they cannot Reason, and turn into Ridicule the Arguments they cannot Answer; is as cowardly and foul, as to stab a Man in the Back, whom you dare not meet with Sword in hand. But that an irreligious Man should be a Coward is no wonder; if you want Instances look on the Crouds in the Chocolate, Coffee and Gaming-Houses, who if they were not Poltrons, wou'd be serving their Queen and Country in a Camp.³¹⁴

By assailing religion through mockery and insinuations, Astell's Whig adversaries are neglecting their "manly" duty, which comes as no surprise, since instead of serving under Queen Anne, they spend their days in leisure in the traditional bastions of the secular public sphere. Shaftesbury's wit is in fact a cover for his lack of actual arguments against the truth claims of Christianity. As she says earlier in the *Enquiry*, "Wit ... is a much more uncertain and arbitrary thing than either Reason, or Religion."³¹⁵ Shaftesbury, and by implication the dissolute, masculine Whiggish public sphere of which he is a part, have ceded the theological high ground to the female, High Church Astell. She directs her fierce rhetoric at what she thinks gives Shaftesbury and his Whig allies their legitimacy, their "breeding," a crucial tenet for Shaftesbury. By questioning their civility and honor by identifying them with lower-class "Poltrons," Astell emphasizes how her Whig enemies have renounced their masculine obligation to defend England's Protestant virtue.

³¹⁴ Astell, *Enquiry*, 109.

³¹⁵ Astell, *Enquiry*, 21. For a discussion of Astell's relationship to "reason," and its many manifestations in the early eighteenth century, see especially Apetrei, *Women, Feminism and Religion*.

Astell's preoccupation with reasoned argumentation throughout the *Enquiry* was thus not only motivated by the fact that she sincerely believed it was the best means of robustly supporting Christian truth claims, but also because the wit and mockery used by Shaftesbury and his contemporaries, emanating from the "Crouds in the Chocolate, Coffee and Gaming-Houses," was unavailable to Astell as a woman. She explicitly devalues Whig arguments by linking them to irreligion and cowardice, and attempts to do what she claims they cannot – defend Christian truth claims through reason. As a result, Astell works to offer an evidentiary basis for Christianity. She not only criticizes Shaftesbury's rhetorical methods, but also spends pages modeling an alternative.

Astell writes that "Witty Men" know nothing of Christianity "because they will not apply their Thoughts to the Study of it, nor themselves to the Practice," thus defining the two positions that are crucial to her understanding of Anglican ideology.³¹⁶ In her magnum opus, *The Christian Religion*, discussed in the latter half of this chapter, she is concerned largely with the practice of Christianity, in the *Enquiry* she is more concerned with apologetics. As a way of protesting the "Profanely Saucy" manner in which Shaftesbury treats "the King of Heaven," Astell offers several arguments in favor of Christianity; she seeks to demonstrate that "Reason ... is the Judge of Wit; and Religion, which is only Improv'd Reason, is a Privileg'd Subject, not to be touch'd by Raillery."³¹⁷ By maintaining that reason is a secondary reflection of religion, Astell seeks to set Christianity above the realm of public debate and mockery where Shaftesbury thrusts it. For Astell, mockery cannot delegitimize religious discourse, and a "reasoned" attack on Christianity is a logical impossibility because "Religion ... is only Improv'd Reason."

³¹⁶ Astell, *Enquiry*, 107.

³¹⁷ Astell, *Enquiry*, 108, 74-5.

Through her defense of the reasonableness of Christianity, Astell relies on contemporary scientific discourse to add legitimacy to her claims. She writes that “Mathematics as well as Divinity” have disproved the world’s self-existence without a divine maker.³¹⁸ Because none can accuse “Sir *Isaac Newton*” of “Priestcraft,” he “will Demonstrate this to you, as well as any Divine” assuming “your *Reason* is *sublime* enough to understand him.”³¹⁹ “Priestcraft” served as an important term for Whig attacks on both the Restoration Church and High Church Anglicanism. Mark Goldie argues that “the cynosure of Whig anticlericalism [was] the birth of a new word in the political lexicon, ‘priestcraft.’”³²⁰ Astell recognizes the importance this term has to her Whig antagonists, but ironically enlists Newton, an important Whig, to mitigate its power. For Astell, the self-evident nature of Newton’s work could seemingly be divorced from his politics. Astell asks, “Will you ascribe Self-Existence to the first of Human Race?”³²¹ Likewise, she argues that the “Gravitation” that is so “necessary to the very Being of the Universe, in that form we now behold it, or at least to our Solar System, and as far as our Observations and Reasoning can carry us,” demonstrates evidence of a divine maker. By invoking Sir Isaac Newton in 1709 Astell – somewhat surprisingly for a High Church Tory – participates in what was becoming a crucial defense of early enlightenment Christianity: natural philosophy.

Newtonian natural philosophy, especially as it was promulgated by Newton’s follower William Whiston in his 1696 *New Theory of the Earth* (an attack on Thomas Burnet’s earlier *Sacred Theory of the Earth*), provided Anglican divines with an important weapon in their

³¹⁸ Astell, *Enquiry*, 116.

³¹⁹ Astell, *Enquiry*, 116.

³²⁰ Mark Goldie, “Priestcraft and the birth of Whiggism,” in *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain*, eds. Nicholas Phillipson and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 216.

³²¹ Astell, *Enquiry*, 116.

assault on the increasing tide of irreligion in the early eighteenth century.³²² Indeed, James E. Force maintains that “the perceived strength of the design argument in the first decades of the 18th century” was so powerful that “Whiston can argue that it is impossible to be a true atheist, given all the elements in the Newtonian system supporting an inference to a divine architect.”³²³ Whiston, the latitudinarian divine Samuel Clarke, and other Newtonians argued that advances in natural philosophy were so indisputable that speculative atheism was practically impossible, and thus deists were functionally atheists who were incapable of formulating rational arguments against Christianity and were forced to rely on mockery and scoffing.³²⁴ Following his 1691 death, Robert Boyle left a modest endowment for a series of lectures for “proving the Christian Religion against notorious Infidels,” and these lectures served to propagate Newtonianism in defense of Christianity.³²⁵ Samuel Clarke writes in his 1705 Boyle Lectures that “their bantering and ridiculing, without and before examination . . . without at all considering the main Body of Religion . . . show plainly and undeniably, that they are not really *Deists*, but mere *Atheists*.”³²⁶ Similarly Whiston writes in his 1717 *Astronomical Principles of Religion, Natural and Revealed* that deism is “taken up of late, not by honest Enquirers, impartially searching after Truth,” but is instead “chiefly fallen into of late, by some Irreligious Persons, in the Distress of their Affairs, and upon that surprising and overbearing Light, which Sir *Isaac Newton*’s wonderful discoveries

³²² On William Whiston, see especially James E. Force, *William Whiston: Honest Newtonian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). On Newtonianism and early modern discourse, see especially Robert Markley, *Fallen Languages: Crises of Representation in Newtonian England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

³²³ James E. Force, “The Newtonians and Deism,” in *Essays on the Context, Nature, and Influence of Isaac Newton’s Theology*, eds. James E. Force and Richard H. Popkin (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990), 45.

³²⁴ See Force, “Newtonianism and Deism,” 43-6.

³²⁵ Ezio Vailati, introduction to Samuel Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God and Other Writings*, ed. Ezio Vailati (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), x.

³²⁶ Quoted in Force, “Newtonianism and Deism,” 45.

have afforded; whereby they have perceived that Natural Religion, with its Foundations, were now become too certain to bear any farther Opposition.”³²⁷ For Whiston, Christianity supported by Newtonian natural philosophy is essentially unassailable. Although she is attacking Shaftesbury, a different deistical opponent from those targeted by Clarke and Whiston, Astell equates deism and atheism and relies on Newtonian natural philosophy in a similar way to construct arguments against Shaftesbury’s mocking dismissal of Christianity. The High Church Astell, like Whiston and the Low Church Clarke, contends that in light of the advances of natural philosophy, the mocking of religion by deists is a desperate and empty gesture designed to cover up the lack of any positive arguments in favor of their “irreligion.”

Astell was so intent on attacking Shaftesbury that she broke with many of her conservative fellows to marshal Newtonian arguments against skepticism. Newton (and both Whiston and Clarke) had heterodox interpretations of Christianity. Indeed, Newton, Whiston and Clarke were all anti-trinitarians to different degrees, and despite the usefulness of Newtonianism for countering skepticism, it could also be used to promote deism. Jonathan Israel argues that while Newtonianism “entailed a full-scale revolution” in “all erudite endeavour” it also contained an inherent “desacralizing Deistic tendency.”³²⁸ Moreover, Newton’s religion and the extent to which he held to Anglican orthodoxy has been the subject of scholarly debate. Richard S. Westfall argues that while he “differed from the deists” because of his lack of the “essentially negative spirit” of writers like John Toland and Matthew Tindal, he ultimately “arrived at conclusions remarkably similar to theirs.”³²⁹ More recent criticism has argued against the thesis

³²⁷ Quoted in Force, “Newtonianism and Deism,” 45.

³²⁸ Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, 201, 213.

³²⁹ Richard S. Westfall, “Isaac Newton’s *Theologiae Gentilis Origines Philosophicae*,” in *The Secular Mind: Transformations of Faith in Modern Europe*, ed. W. Warren Wagar (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982), 31.

that Newton had deist sympathies, but in any case his theology was unorthodox.³³⁰ Unlike Astell, many High Church Anglicans viewed Newtonianism suspiciously, believing that it contributed to deism and irreligion, and thought it was political as much as it was religious. Astell's correspondent, the High Church non-juring George Hickeys wrote that "It is their Newtonian philosophy wch hath Made ... so many Arians ... and that Not onely among ye laity but I fear among our devines."³³¹ In addition to his religious unorthodoxy and connections to latitudinarian divines, Newton was a Whig member of Parliament in 1689-90 and he served as Chancellor of the Exchequer under William and Mary. Indeed, Newtonianism is often associated with Whiggish politics.³³² Astell's use of Newton's natural philosophy, then, as one of the crucial supports of her apologetics in her assault on Shaftesbury indicates both how fluid Newtonianism was in the early eighteenth century, and how depoliticized Astell's theology was in her *Enquiry*, despite its polemical tone. Astell set aside her Tory High Church political and theological allegiances in the text because Shaftesbury's deistical assault on Christianity threatened both the basis of English society and her feminism.

³³⁰ See especially James E. Force, "Biblical Interpretation, Newton, and English Deism," in *Scepticism and Irreligion in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, eds. Richard H. Popkin and Arjo Vanderjagt (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 282-305. On Newton's religion, see the essays in James E. Force and Richard H. Popkin, eds., *Newton and Religion: Context, Nature, and Influence* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999) and the essays in James E. Force and Richard H. Popkin, eds., *Essays on the Context, Nature, and Influence of Isaac Newton's Theology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1990). On Newton's anti-trinitarianism, see especially T.C. Pfizenmaier, "Was Isaac Newton an Arian?" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58, no. 1 (1997): 57-80.

³³¹ Quoted in Force, "Biblical Interpretation," 286n9. On the never published Astell-Hickeys correspondence, see Apetrei 139-46.

³³² Margaret C. Jacob argues that Newtonianism was crucial for Whig politics in her *The Newtonians and the English Revolution, 1689-1720* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976). Anita Guerrini counters Jacob's thesis by arguing that Newtonianism "was not confined to a particular political or religious frame of mind in the early eighteenth century," and that "it is difficult to define in sweeping terms a 'Newtonian ideology' in this period" in "The Tory Newtonians: Gregory, Pitcairne, and Their Circle," *The Journal of British Studies* 25, no. 3 (1986): 290. Astell's appropriation of Newtonianism in her *Enquiry* seems to reinforce this claim.

If Shaftesbury's *Letter* "conflates the public with the Whigs," as David Alvarez observes, then Astell's *Enquiry* is an attempt to demonstrate an alternative by overlooking Newton's Whiggish allegiances and by arguing for the universalizing potential of natural philosophy in defense of Christianity.³³³ Astell highlights the exclusionary ideology behind the desacralized Christianity promulgated by Shaftesbury, available only to those men with enough social power to avoid censure, and argues instead for reason supported with natural philosophy as a more universalizing discourse.³³⁴ She promotes Newton and emergent discourses of scientific empiricism because in her view, Newton is unable to be easily tarred with accusations of "priestcraft," the broad-based and increasingly common attack on High Church Anglican clergy made by both Whigs and freethinkers.

As she did in the end of the "Advertisement," Astell also turns Shaftesbury's argumentative strategies against him by willfully appropriating the logic of her enemies. She accuses Shaftesbury of foolishly ascribing "the Natural Effect of Sin, to Religion," a position Astell obviously finds absurd.³³⁵ She sarcastically applies his logic against the Whiggish ideological privileging of property, writing "for the same Reason, the Laws of the Land are the Cause of all the Robberies and Thefts committed in it; since if there had been no such thing as Property, every Man wou'd have had a Right to every thing he cou'd lay his Hands on!"³³⁶ She argues that if sin is simply a reaction against overly prescriptive religious dictates, then the same argument applies to the laws put in place by the state to protect property rights. By demonstrating the incoherence of Shaftesbury's arguments against religion when they are

³³³ Alvarez, "Mary Astell's Critique," 487.

³³⁴ For Astell's critique of "Whig publicness," especially in both parts of her *Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, see chapter four of Anthony Pollock, *Gender and the Fictions of the Public Sphere, 1690-1755* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 117-46.

³³⁵ Astell, *Enquiry*, 158.

³³⁶ Astell, *Enquiry*, 158.

applied to Whiggish philosophy, she implicitly argues against the discursive equivalence he makes between Christianity and other areas of English society.

Astell ends her *Inquiry* by criticizing the slippery rhetoric Shaftesbury and other deists rely on: he “[does] not take care throughout his *Letter*, to distinguish duly between Religion and Enthusiasm.”³³⁷ Although throughout her text, Astell wittily turns Shaftesbury’s rhetoric and arguments against him, she also attempts to move the discussion of religion into the sphere of reason and logic and away from irony and ambiguity. When she claims in her final sentence that to “attaque” Christianity in the oblique ironic manner Shaftesbury does is “Unmanly,” she is doing more than accusing him of acting in a manner not typically coded as masculine; she is also pointing out that, far from promoting tolerance, Shaftesbury’s ironic rhetoric works through the exclusion of voices not associated with his aristocratic Whig circle.

Scientific Rhetoric and the Limits of Scripture

If Astell promotes natural philosophy as a universalizing discourse in her engagement with Shaftesbury, she also saw its strategic efficacy as a method of promoting her feminist interpretation of the Bible in her 1706 Preface to the third edition of her *Reflections upon Marriage*. Specifically, her reference to the Copernican controversy lent rhetorical force to her attack on Locke’s use of Corinthians to argue against women’s equality in his 1705-07 *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St Paul*. Astell’s attack on Locke’s *Paraphrase* in her *Reflections* has been critically neglected, partly because Locke was identified only recently as her target in the text.³³⁸ As Goldie notes, Locke’s conclusions about women’s role in Christianity

³³⁷ Astell, *Enquiry*, 174.

³³⁸ In her notes to Astell’s *Reflections*, Patricia Springborg incorrectly identifies Astell’s “Ingenious Paraphrast” as William Nichols (12n11). More recently, Mark Goldie has correctly identified Locke as Astell’s target in his “Mary Astell and John Locke.”

in his *Paraphrase* were “ambiguous.”³³⁹ As discussed in the previous chapter, although Locke claims that “that the spirit of god and the gift of prophesie should be powerd out upon women as well as men in the time of the gospel is plain from Acts. II.17,” he also argues against any kind of equality between the sexes in everyday life.³⁴⁰ He writes that “The Christian religion was not to give offence by any appearance or suspition that it took away the subordination of the sexes and set the women at liberty from their natural subjection to the men.”³⁴¹ Locke’s use of “natural” is especially galling for Astell because, to her, Locke has no authority to speak for the Law of Nature, and in fact his reading of Paul’s prohibitions against women demonstrate that he does not know what he is talking about. Astell sarcastically attacks “That Learned Paraphrast . . . who lays so much stress on the *Natural Subjection*” of women, and argues that, contra Locke, Paul “forbids Women to teach in the Church . . . not because of any Law of Nature.”³⁴² In her attacks on Locke’s reading of Corinthians, part of Astell’s strategy is surprisingly to circumscribe, in a manner similar to Catharine Trotter and other Whiggish theologians, the limits of Scripture by emphasizing its utilitarian role as a moral guide, and in doing so, she unexpectedly draws on the deep well of religious skepticism created by natural philosophy. In promoting the view of an attenuated Scripture which serves primarily as a moral guidebook, Astell has perhaps more in common with latitudinarian Whig Anglicans than she would have liked to admit. In a passage following a long discussion of the New Testament’s views on sexual equality, Astell writes that she:

³³⁹ Goldie, 81.

³⁴⁰ John Locke, *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians*, ed. Arthur W. Wainwright, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 1:221.

³⁴¹ Locke, *Paraphrase*, 1:222.

³⁴² Astell, *Reflections*, 20.

is of Opinion that Disputes of this kind, extending to Human Nature in general, and not peculiar to those to whom the Word of God has been reveal'd, ought to be decided by natural Reason only. And that the Holy Scriptures shou'd not be Interested in the present Controversy, in which it determines nothing, any more than it does between the *Copernican* and *Ptolomean* Systems. The Design of those Holy Books being to make us excellent Moralists and Perfect Christians, not great Philosophers. And being writ for the Vulgar as well as for the Learned, they are accommodated to the common way of Speech and the Usage of the World.³⁴³

Astell's view of Scripture in this passage has evoked surprise among critics, partly because it conflicts, at least in part, with opinions she voices elsewhere. Goldie writes that it "is striking that Astell here adopts the characteristic position of the Enlightenment rationalist speaking against scriptural fundamentalism" and notes that she "turns the screw by invoking Locke's own principles in the *Reasonableness*" against him.³⁴⁴ Likewise, Apetrei argues that "[t]here is clearly a tension in Astell's thought between a dualism divorcing natural from spiritual knowledge, and a Platonic conception of the unity of Scripture, human Reason and the 'universal Reason.'" ³⁴⁵ Rhetorically, however, using the Copernican controversy to undermine Scriptural authority had a history among Tory women writers.

Springborg notes that Astell's reference to the Copernican dispute is most likely a reference to William Whiston's 1696 *A New Theory of the Earth*, and as mentioned above, Astell was clearly familiar with Newtonianism, but clashes about the role Scripture played in adjudicating astronomical and other scientific disputes had been ongoing throughout the early

³⁴³ Astell, *Reflections*, 13-14.

³⁴⁴ Goldie, 83.

³⁴⁵ Apetrei, 130. For a thorough discussion of Astell's sometimes conflicted thoughts on Scripture, see Apetrei, chap. 4.

modern period.³⁴⁶ In particular, Aphra Behn responded to the controversy in her translator's Preface affixed to her translation of Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur La Pluralité des Mondes*, published in England in 1688 with the title *A Discovery of New Worlds*. After discussing Fontenelle's defense of the Copernican system and wryly claiming that she "cannot but take his part as far as a Woman's Reasoning can go," she argues "that the design of the Bible was not to instruct Mankind in Astronomy, Geometry, or Chronology, but in the Law of God, to lead us to Eternal Life" and that "when any thing of this kind is mentioned, the Expressions are always turned to fit our Capacities, and to fit the common Acceptance, or Appearances of things to the Vulgar."³⁴⁷ Behn's claim that Scripture should accommodate the "Vulgar" is, for her, a skeptical attack on its role as the privileged text of early modern Europe. Similarly, near the end of her Preface, Behn writes that:

as to other things contained in the Holy Scriptures relating to Astronomy, Geometry, Chronology, or other liberal Sciences, we leave those Points to the Opinion of the Learned, who by comparing the several Copies, Translations, Versions, and Editions of the Bible, are best able to reconcile any apparent Differences; and this with all Submission to the Canons of General Councils, and Decrees of the Church. For the

³⁴⁶ Astell, *Reflections*, 13n15. For a discussion of the role the Copernican controversy and other astronomical findings played in altering the theological landscape of early modern Europe, see especially Jean Dietz Moss, *Novelties in the Heavens: Rhetoric and Science in the Copernican Controversy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) and Rienk Vermij, *The Calvinist Copernicans: The Reception of the New Astronomy in the Dutch Republic, 1575-1750* (Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2002).

³⁴⁷ Aphra Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds*, trans. of Bernard de le Bovier de Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur La Pluralité des Mondes*, in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. Janet Todd, 7 vols. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993), 4:78-9.

School-men agitate and debate many things of a higher Nature, than the standing still, or the Motion of the Sun or the Earth.³⁴⁸

As commentators have noted, Behn uses her Preface ironically and subtly to undermine Scriptural authority. Robert Markley argues that she “subjects the text of the Old Testament to a wry and even corrosive skepticism.”³⁴⁹ Admittedly, Behn’s intentions behind her implicit impugning of Scriptural authority are much more skeptical and ambiguous than Astell’s; however, it is striking how similar their rhetoric is. Both authors use the Copernican controversy to circumscribe the authority of the Bible. Astell, like Behn, highlights the polemical nature of Biblical translation, traditionally the sole domain of masculine authors: “Scripture is not always on their side who make parade of it, and thro’ their skill in Languages and the Tricks of the Schools, wrest it from its genuine sense to their own Inventions.”³⁵⁰ By attacking both the interpretation and translation of Scripture, Astell simultaneously could maintain its privileged status while also arguing that it was vulnerable to corruption by masculine culture. She writes that “Women without their own Fault, are kept in Ignorance of the Original, wanting Languages and other helps to Criticise on the Sacred Text, of which they know no more, than Men are pleas’d to impart in their Translations.”³⁵¹ Implicit in Astell’s argument is the astonishing suggestion that biblical translation and interpretation are so vulnerable to masculine interference that it is possible that women lack access to an uncorrupted Christianity because they don’t know Latin and Greek. It is possible that in these passages Astell is again deliberately using Locke’s

³⁴⁸ Behn, *Discovery*, 85.

³⁴⁹ Robert Markley, “Global Analogies: Cosmology, Geosymmetry, and Skepticism in some Works of Aphra Behn,” in *Science, Literature and Rhetoric in Early Modern England*, eds. Juliet Cummins and David Burchell (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2007), 204. See also Sarah Ellenzeig, *The Fringes of Belief: English Literature, Ancient Heresy, and the Politics of Freethinking, 1660-1760* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), chap. 2.

³⁵⁰ Astell, *Reflections*, 14.

³⁵¹ Astell, *Reflections*, 14.

arguments against him, but crucially adding a gendered component; in the Preface to his *Paraphrase*, Locke claims that “it would be no very extravagant Paradox to say, that there are fewer that bring their Opinions to the Sacred Scriptures to be tried by that infallible Rule, than bring the Sacred Scripture to their Opinions, to bend it to them, to make it as they can a Cover and Guard of them.”³⁵² As Astell points out, if what Locke says is true, then women are at an extreme disadvantage, being denied access to determine what Scripture says, except through the mediation of partisan masculine clergy and scholars.

The similar strategies of both Astell and Behn’s skeptical attacks on Scripture demonstrates the adaptable nature of skeptical arguments and the flexibility with which women theologians were able to apply them. What is for Behn a veiled and sophisticated attack on religion itself becomes for Astell a way to limit Scripture in determining questions of gender equality, but not a wholesale attack on Christian revelation.³⁵³ Indeed, in these passages Astell sounds closest to her contemporary, the latitudinarian Whiggish Catharine Trotter (discussed in Chapter Three), who highlights Scripture’s utilitarian moral role at the expense of a rigid orthodox and masculinist interpretation. Astell’s attacks on Locke and Shaftesbury required different strategies. Against Shaftesbury, Astell maintains that natural philosophy provided *a priori* legitimation of Christianity’s truth claims and as such demonstrated Christianity’s availability to all subjects regardless of social position or gender, while three years earlier in her Preface to *Reflections*, she argued that scientific speculation was outside the bounds of Scripture. In both cases, however, scientific rhetoric provides an extra-scriptural way for all to access, what is to Astell, the gender-neutral rationality of the Christian subject, regardless of what Scripture or

³⁵² Locke, *Paraphrase*, 107.

³⁵³ For another discussion of Astell’s sometimes close ties to religious radicalism, see Sarah Ellen Zweig, “The Love of God and the Radical Enlightenment: Mary Astell’s Brush with Spinoza,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64, no. 3 (2003): 379-97.

religious authorities may maintain. In her battle with deism in her 1705 *The Christian Religion*, the question of Scriptural authority and gender is thrust front and center.

Deism and Gender

The author who motivated Astell to write her magnum opus, *The Christian Religion as Profess'd by a Daughter of the Church of England* (1705), was not John Locke, but rather an anonymous author, “a Divine of the Church of England,” who published a short work in 1697 (second ed. 1704) entitled *A Lady's Religion: In a Letter to the Honourable My Lady Howard*. Included with the 1697 edition was a “Prefatory-Epistle,” most probably written by John Toland, and the author of the work was likely Toland’s patron and an associate of Shaftesbury, William Stephens.³⁵⁴ Stephens was a “radical Whig cleric” and author of the 1696 *An Account of the Growth of Deism in England*, which gives a sympathetic account of how the intransigence of High Church ideology – especially clericalism and divine right – paradoxically leads to freethinking.³⁵⁵ In *The Christian Religion*, Astell responds to the second edition of *A Lady's Religion*, which replaced Toland’s Prefatory Epistle with an abbreviated English translation of the Preface affixed to the French translation of the first edition; this Preface likely was written by Pierre Coste. Coste’s translated French Preface contains the only explicit mention of gender, apart from the title of the work, in the text, but his discussion seems to have colored Astell’s response. Apart from gender, Astell had a further reason for being irritated with *A Lady's Religion*: the second French edition was published with a French translation of Locke’s

³⁵⁴ The “Prefatory Epistle” is signed “Adeisidaemon,” a pseudonym often used by Toland. See Apetrei, 124. For the attribution of the work to William Stephens, see Jean Yolton, “Authorship of *A Lady's Religion* (1697),” *Notes and Queries* 236 (1991): 177.

³⁵⁵ Justin Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and its Enemies, 1660-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 17.

Reasonableness of Christianity.³⁵⁶ The similarity in strands of argument between Locke's *Reasonableness* and *A Lady's Religion* was noted by Astell: she writes in her *The Christian Religion* that "the *Ladies Religion* seems to be little else but an Abstract of the *Reasonableness of Christianity*, with all those disadvantages that usually attend Abridgements."³⁵⁷ The resemblance between the two texts is yet another demonstration of the similarity in rhetoric Astell saw between the moderate latitudinarian Anglican position advocated by Locke and the radical deistic arguments advanced by Stephens and Toland.

Coste writes in the translated French Preface that, if he is not "mistaken," the goal of the author of *A Lady's Religion* "was to make appear, that the *Christian Religion* ought to be levelled and accommodated to the reach of the meanest Capacity."³⁵⁸ According to Coste, the author has written a text "full of Wisdom, easy to be explain'd, and every way adapted to the Capacity of the Illiterate, of Women, and of the meanest sort of People, that is to say, of the greatest part of Mankind."³⁵⁹ Coste shockingly conjoins women with illiterate and low-rank men. Furthermore, Coste writes that "no one ... will be so bold as to deny" that "Religion is for the use of the vulgar."³⁶⁰ As we have seen, in her 1706 Preface Astell also maintained that Scripture was "writ for the Vulgar as well as for the Learned," but did so in order to argue that Scripture, in a broad sense, supports her view of gender relations. Two years earlier, Coste uses

³⁵⁶ Yolton, "Authorship," 177.

³⁵⁷ Mary Astell, *Christian*, 309.

³⁵⁸ Pierre Coste, "The Preface to the *French Translation*," in *A Lady's Religion*, 2nd ed. (London: 1704), no pagination.

³⁵⁹ Coste, "Preface," no pagination. Similarly, Locke writes at the end of *Reasonableness of Christianity* that "Where the hand is used to the Plough, and the Spade, the head is seldom elevated to sublime Notions, or exercised in mysterious reasonings. 'Tis well if Men of that rank (to say nothing of the other Sex) can comprehend plain propositions, and a short reasoning about things familiar to their Minds, and nearly allied to their daily experience." John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity As Delivered in the Scriptures*, ed. John C. Higgins-Biddle (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 170.

³⁶⁰ Coste, "Preface," no pagination.

the same argument not to circumscribe Scripture's value in determining questions of gender equality, but instead to endorse a radically attenuated form of Christianity; moreover, in doing so he explicitly maintains that women are to be equated with the "Simple and Illiterate."³⁶¹ Coste thus grounds his endorsement of Stephens's deistic attack on revealed religion on the supposed inability of women, "poor Country People," and other marginalized members of society to understand theology.³⁶² Astell is quick to point out in her 1706 Preface that, for women, this inability derives ultimately from the unequal societal conditions created by masculine authorities and their complete control over scriptural interpretation and translation.

A particular irony of Coste's Preface is his endorsement of Christianity as useful only as a moral guide because, "to pronounce decisively upon the Disputes of Divines, one must plunge himself over-head in reading a great many large Volumes, full of barbarous and unintelligible Terms."³⁶³ Implicit in Coste's suggestion that theological "Disputes" require the ability and desire to read "large Volumes" is that theology is inappropriate for women. Yet, it is clear from Astell's work that this is exactly what she does; her writings are filled with citations to voluminous works of seventeenth-century religious controversy. Moreover, as I argue in the following chapter, one of the central ways Catharine Trotter promotes her religious and intellectual independence is through the appropriation of arguments culled from these "large Volumes." Neither Astell nor Trotter would dispute Christianity's central role as the authoritative instructor of virtue; however, both are careful, in their own ways, to also graft onto their conceptions of Christianity more orthodox conceptions of faith. In addition, they both

³⁶¹ Coste, "Preface," no pagination.

³⁶² Coste, "Preface," no pagination.

³⁶³ Coste, "Preface," no pagination.

mined the rhetoric and arguments of a large number of theological texts to articulate their feminist positions.

It is the lack of any type of orthodox discussion of faith that marks *A Lady's Religion* as a deistic text. Stephens advances a version of Christianity that is essentially an ethics rather than a revealed religion. He argues that “the wisdom of the Christian religion appears first by its being *practical*” and “secondly by being *plain*.”³⁶⁴ According to Stephens, “Doctrine” is only important as “a means to enforce the Gospel moral upon our Practice.”³⁶⁵ The death of Jesus simply serves as an “Example ... to do Good in spite of all Discouragements,” an argument that shockingly devalues the central claim of Christianity that salvation results from Jesus’ death on the cross.³⁶⁶ Stephens is nearly Spinozan in his flouting of Christian orthodoxy, and his argument “that if you shall thus consider Deity as the vital Spirit of the Universe, you will find sufficient Encouragements to the Love thereof, from every Observation you will make upon Nature” is very close to being heretical.³⁶⁷ Stephens thus promotes in his *A Lady's Religion* a radically stripped-down version of Christianity, useful only as an example of virtuous living and with little or no discussion of Christ’s divinity, the role of Providence, or the Trinity.

Astell was motivated to respond to a 91 page work with a long defense of her High Church Anglican principles, *The Christian Religion*: the second edition of 1717 runs to 351 pages. In addition to responding to Locke’s *Reasonableness of Christianity* and Stephens’s *A Lady's Religion*, Astell also attacks at least one more deistic work, the anonymous 1704 *The Principle of the Protestant Reformation Explain’d, in a Letter of Resolution Concerning Church-*

³⁶⁴ William Stephens, *A Lady's Religion*, 2nd ed. (London: 1704), 9.

³⁶⁵ Stephens, *Lady's*, 40.

³⁶⁶ Stephens, *Lady's*, 36.

³⁶⁷ Stephens, *Lady's*, 54.

Communion which was probably written by John Toland.³⁶⁸ Like *A Lady's Religion*, *Principle* was also addressed to a woman and is yet another invective against priestcraft and an argument for a radically circumscribed version of primitive Christianity. Ironically, in his attacks on revealed religion in *Principle*, Toland makes radical arguments about Christianity and women by suggesting that the "Primitive Church-Communion" may "have been performed by a Woman as well as a Man."³⁶⁹ He further observes that "there were some Women who followed Christ ... and saw what he did" and argues that "had ... these Women written a Narrative of what she had seen and heard concerning our Saviour Christ, that Narrative of hers had been part of the Gospel."³⁷⁰ Toland slyly argues for women to hold clerical authority and advances the radical argument that the New Testament itself might have had a female author, arguments that neither Astell nor Trotter ever used. Toland's argument, however, is but one of several he deploys in *Principle* as a means to devalue Scriptural transmission. At the end of the text, for example, he writes that "you are not bound to believe our *English Translation*, any otherwise than as you shall see Cause so to do."³⁷¹ Although Toland, unlike Stephens, argues for a radically attenuated version of Christianity not by denigrating women but by arguing for their central place in Christian history, he does so with a similar agenda.³⁷² Both use gender as a means of

³⁶⁸ See Apetrei, 122-3.

³⁶⁹ John Toland, *The Principle of the Protestant Reformation Explain'd, in a Letter of Resolution Concerning Church-Communion* (London: 1704), 10.

³⁷⁰ Toland, *Principle*, 10-11.

³⁷¹ Toland, *Principle*, 26.

³⁷² Toland also made similar points in several other texts. See Champion, *Republican Learning*, 53. As he points out, "In print and scribal publications Toland self-consciously laid emphasis upon the intellectual abilities of women: while much of this may be the manifestation of his desire to ingratiate himself with an elite social and political milieu, the evidence of his correspondence also reveals a similar attitude" (53). I would add that part of Toland's motivation clearly is to use gender as a means to denigrate orthodox conceptions of Christianity. Ironically, in his preface to *A Lady's Religion* he makes arguments similar to Astell, writing, "Some Women have left behind them Illustrious Monuments of their Invention, Knowledge, and

undermining Scriptural certainties, certainties that Astell viewed as vital to protecting women's interests.

Astell, then, was largely motivated to write *The Christian Religion* by deists' appropriation of women for their own skeptical ends. To counter these writers' portrayals of women, she sets out all that she believes Christianity should be, especially with regard to women. She writes that the "main Design" of the work is "to put Women upon Thinking."³⁷³ Although she sarcastically disputes the very notion of "a Lady's Religion" as distinct from that of man's, she attempts to lay out what "a Woman *ought* to Believe and Practice, and consequently what she *may*."³⁷⁴ The work presents in great detail how Astell believes Christianity should be practiced and how its theology should be defended, and it revisits many of the arguments of her previous writings. In addition she infuses the work with invectives against specific patriarchal inequalities and an unabashed defense of women's rationality as equal to men's: "If GOD had not intended that Women shou'd use their Reason, He wou'd not have given them any, for He does nothing in vain."³⁷⁵ Universal reason was crucial for Astell in undermining misogynistic assumptions about women's supposed weaker understanding of Christianity. She attacks Locke, Stephens and others who argued that Christianity must be understood by all to be comprehensible by arguing that the beliefs of the individual Christian are completely distinct from Christianity's truth claims: Just as how if "a *Ploughman*, may as peremptorily as he pleases, deny all the Propositions in *Euclid*" does not make these propositions

Courage; and what particular persons have done, 'tis possible for the generality of the Species to do, or more," in John Toland, "Prefatory Epistle" to *A Lady's Religion. In a Letter to the Honourable My Lady Howard* (London: 1697), no pagination. Astell, however, obviously saw the entire idea of "A Lady's Religion" as condescending nonsense that struck at the foundation of her feminist arguments.

³⁷³ Astell, *Christian*, "Advertisement," no pagination.

³⁷⁴ Astell, *Christian*, 2, 3.

³⁷⁵ Astell, *Christian*, 5.

“cease to be True,” so with Christianity.³⁷⁶ If Astell can then demonstrate both rationally and empirically – as she attempts to do in both *The Christian Religion* and *Bart’lemy Fair* – the validity of Christian truths and the rightness of her interpretation of those truths, then Christianity is an irreproachable bulwark against gender inequality. As in her attack on Shaftesbury’s caustic skepticism, Astell’s Christian apologetics function for her as an implicit but vital defense of women. By noting that if she were to question in print Caesar’s authorship of his *Commentaries* or Marcus Aurelius’s authorship of his *Meditations* the way skeptical writers attempted to undermine Scriptural transmission this skepticism would be dismissed as “the whimsey of a *very Woman*,” she calls attention to the fact that skeptical men are able to use their gender as a defense in a way unavailable to women writers.

As in her other writings, scientific discourse provides Astell with a similar line of defense in *The Christian Religion*. Like Catharine Trotter, Astell argues that women, more so than men, are in the ideal position to pursue scientific inquiries. She does so by ironically foregrounding the domestic expectations men place on women: “Except in the Duties of our Christian Calling, and the little Oeconomy of a House, Women’s lives are not Active, consequently they ought to be Contemplative.”³⁷⁷ Because women “ought to be Retir’d” and are “design’d by Providence for Speculation,” Astell argues “great Improvements might be made in the Sciences, were not Women enviously excluded from this Proper Business.”³⁷⁸ She points out that women’s forced domesticity could thus serve as an ideal place for scientific work and philosophical speculation, and she implicitly revisits the thesis of her first published work, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* from 1694. As she notes in several places throughout her work, Astell herself serves as a model

³⁷⁶ Astell, *Christian*, 12.

³⁷⁷ Astell, *Christian*, 209.

³⁷⁸ Astell, *Christian*, 210.

of emulation for women, and is also aware of the drawbacks associated with female authorship. Near the end of *Christian Religion*, Astell observes how critics of the work “perhaps will think there’s too much of the Woman in it, too much of my particular Manner and Thoughts.”³⁷⁹ Acutely aware of the stranglehold men have on theological discourse, Astell is able to use male domination of all aspects of society to buttress her arguments against societal customs which degrade women and turn England away from its proper Christian duty.

Because Astell argues women are allowed to write history, she uses it to make a larger point about the imperfect and unequal nature of scholarly endeavors. After first noting that she advises women “to study to improve [their] Mind” because they are clearly “capable,” she spends several paragraphs discussing what areas it is proper for women to pursue.³⁸⁰ Astell writes:

some Men say that Heraldry is a pretty Study for a Woman, for this reason, I suppose, that she may know how to Blazon her Lord and Master’s great Achievements! They allow us Poetry, Plays, and Romances, to Divert us and themselves; and when they would express a particular Esteem for a Woman’s Sense, they recommend History ... since the Men being the Historians, they seldom condescend to record the great and good Actions of Women; and when they take notice of them, ‘tis with this wise Remark, that such Women *acted above their Sex*. By which one must suppose they wou’d have their Readers understand, that they were not Women who did those Great Actions, but that they were Men in Petticoats!³⁸¹

³⁷⁹ Astell, *Christian*, 289.

³⁸⁰ Astell, *Christian*, 206.

³⁸¹ Astell, *Christian*, 206-7.

Again Astell dismisses popular fiction as unfit for serious study and observes how men literally write women out of history. Her striking image of men's denigration of women in history calls attention to the ways in which the historical narrative is corrupted by unreliable masculine authorities.³⁸² Although she is not explicit in this section of her text, Astell implies that the counterpoint of fallible historical and cultural narratives is Christian Scripture, and her reading of the role of prominent women in the Bible in her 1706 Preface to *Reflections* acts as a counter-text to the patriarchal histories written by men that Astell highlights in *The Christian Religion*. Her recognition of the way historical narratives can be shaped by masculine authorities to exclude marginalized voices helps to explain why she struggled so hard to prevent the Bible from succumbing to the secular trajectory of becoming a mere cultural and historical touchstone rather than an authoritative guide to spiritual and moral matters.

Paradoxically for the modern reader, then, Astell defends the Bible as a more enlightened historical text than any produced by her rapidly secularizing Enlightenment culture. Her critique of irreligion and deism demonstrates how slippery religious rhetoric was in the Restoration and early eighteenth century. The freethinking rhetoric employed by writers such as Shaftesbury and Toland was indistinguishable in many places from that used by more liberal Anglicans like John Locke. Crucially, however, Astell highlighted the exclusionary ideologies promoted by writers who relied on skeptical arguments against Anglican orthodoxy. As Astell demonstrated throughout her work, far from inaugurating any kind of gender equality, emergent discourses of secularism often functioned through misogyny and exclusion. The debates about Scripture's sacred place in society in the long eighteenth century signaled more than a crisis of faith in

³⁸² For a discussion of Astell's "feminist historiography" in a different context, see William Kolbrener, "Gendering the Modern: Mary Astell's Feminist Historiography," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 44, no. 1 (2004): 1-24.

English culture for Astell; it also marked the de-legitimation of the Bible's ability to act as an irreproachable safeguard of women's rationality and place in society.

Chapter 3: Catharine Trotter, Religious Rhetoric, and the Moral Sense

Scholarship on Catharine Trotter is often split along disciplinary lines. Historians and scholars of philosophy have – in a very limited way – considered her contributions to early eighteenth-century debates about the ideas of John Locke and the development of British empirical and moral philosophy. The primary critical work done on Trotter in literary studies, however, usually considers just the five plays and one novella she wrote early in her life as opposed to her later philosophical and religious works. In a sense, this critical dichotomy reflects the two parts of her career. Although she began her writing career as a playwright, after 1706 she stopped publishing literary works altogether to focus on writing philosophy and leading a semi-retired life as a wife and mother. Literary scholars, in particular, have neglected Trotter’s contributions to the philosophy of the early eighteenth-century and her role in helping to establish the eighteenth-century ideology of sensibility. In the only extended book-length consideration of Trotter’s entire career, Anne Kelley argues that because “the image of her as an obscure, dull and prudish learned lady ... has been constructed over the last three hundred years,” her philosophical work as “been overlooked or misunderstood.”³⁸³ Like Mary Astell’s perceived political conservatism, the traditional aspects of Trotter’s personal life and career (although her religious and political convictions were less “conservative” in many ways than Astell’s) has no doubt added to the critical neglect and misunderstanding, especially in literary studies. In this chapter, I analyze two periods of Trotter’s career: her early negotiations with Catholicism in the first decade of the eighteenth century and her synthesis of competing strands of British moral philosophy published in several works in the 1740s and 1750s. I argue that

³⁸³ Anne Kelley, *Catharine Trotter: An early modern writer in the vanguard of feminism* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), 11. For a full consideration and study of Trotter’s critical reputation see Kelley’s first chapter.

Trotter's early Catholicism (and the criticism it entailed) and her eventual conversion to the Church of England played crucial roles in the development of her unique gendered theology and that her Christian fusion of rationalist and affective strands of moral discourse, informed by both her understanding of Locke and Samuel Clarke and her renunciation of Catholicism, is a significant but critically neglected contribution to eighteenth-century sensibility.

A Discourse Concerning a Guide in Controversies as Intellectual Autobiography

Trotter's non-dogmatic theology has important consequences when considered in the context of the contentious debates occurring in the English church in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. B.W. Young argues that Christian liberty and the right to private judgment were the lynchpins of a long tradition of latitudinarian Anglicanism. According to Young, "'Christian liberty' was the rallying cry of an antidogmatic tradition which took the form of a consciously Erasmian plea for the right of private judgement to prevail over the rigidity of dogmatic divines."³⁸⁴ Trotter is clearly an inheritor and important (though critically neglected) contributor to this important strain of Anglican thought. Kelley has a brief mention of Trotter's connections to the multi-faceted and complex latitudinarian Anglican tradition, noting that her associations with Locke and Gilbert Burnet and her *Discourse* demonstrate "sympathy with this approach."³⁸⁵ Broadly considered, Trotter's siding with the liberal churchmen against more dogmatic divines (and also, indirectly, against Astell) is crucial, particularly because she formed the greater part of her association with both Locke and Burnet and latitudinarian thinking while still a committed Catholic (a position that even the relatively tolerant Locke considered beyond

³⁸⁴ B.W. Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) 22-3.

³⁸⁵ Kelley, *Catharine Trotter* 141.

the pale in his *Epistola de Tolerantia*), and considering her later influence on mid-century Bluestocking authors.

In contrast to her more famous contemporary Mary Astell, who ended her career loathing John Locke, Catharine Trotter is perhaps best-known as a philosopher for her lifelong defense of Locke. She entered the world of eighteenth-century theological debate in 1702 with arguably her most important work, *A Defence of Mr. Locke's Essay of Human Understanding*. While historically significant because of its status as an early, robust, and female-authored defense of Locke's controversial philosophy, part of its significance lies in the fact that Trotter was still five years away from renouncing her Catholicism for the Anglican Church when she wrote it. Trotter's early professed Catholicism constitutes an important aspect of her own philosophy that needs to be incorporated into larger discussions of her thought. In her critical biography of Trotter (whose married name after 1708 was Cockburn), Kelley persuasively argues that Trotter's "consistent defence of John Locke ... identifies her as a radical thinker, outside the traditional conventions of High Church Toryism," and notes Trotter's close connections to other thinkers aligned with liberal Anglican advocates of religious toleration, especially Gilbert Burnet.³⁸⁶ Although Trotter's connections with Locke and latitudinarian thinkers were indeed "radical" for a woman writer in the first decade of the eighteenth century, neither Locke nor Burnet were politically sympathetic to Catholicism. Locke implicitly denied toleration on political grounds to Catholics in his 1689 *Epistola de Tolerantia*, and Burnet was well-known as an enemy of politicized Catholicism, having dissuaded a wealthy benefactor from funding Astell's religious retirement for women because "it would look like preparing a way for popish

³⁸⁶ Kelley, *Catharine Trotter* 141. For Trotter's "radicalism," see also 170 and 216.

orders.”³⁸⁷ Though both Burnet and Locke held Trotter in high regard despite her Catholicism, her religion invited attacks from enemies and remonstrances from friends. Trotter’s correspondence with Thomas Burnet of Kemnay, in part, led her eventually to question her own religious commitments, culminating in her 1707 *A Discourse Concerning a Guide in Controversies*, a short attack on Catholic infallibility, which marked her conversion to the Church of England. Focusing on Trotter’s correspondence and her *Discourse*, this section clarifies Trotter’s complex relations to Anglican theology before and after her conversion and situates the *Discourse* historically and biographically. In her *Discourse*, the liberal Anglican emphasis on individual judgment and toleration becomes a form of intellectual autobiography for Trotter.

The exact circumstances of Trotter’s conversion to Catholicism are unclear.³⁸⁸ Although Trotter was raised as an Anglican, Thomas Birch writes that “notwithstanding her education in the protestant religion, her intimacy with several families of distinction of the *Romish* persuasion exposed her, while very young, to impressions in favour of that church, which not being removed by her conferences with some eminent and learned members of the church of *England*, she

³⁸⁷ This is recounted by George Ballard in his 1752 *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain Who Have Been Celebrated for their Writings or Skill in the Learned Languages, Arts and Science*, ed. Ruth Perry (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985), 383.

³⁸⁸ Trotter published *A Defence of Mr. Locke’s Essay of Human Understanding* in 1702. In 1707 she publicly renounced her Catholicism with the publication of *A Discourse Concerning a Guide in Controversies*. Trotter married Reverend Patrick Cockburn in 1708 who in 1713 took a curacy at St. Dunstan’s in London. In her later years, Trotter wrote several more extensive theological works, primarily in defense of Locke and Samuel Clarke. Trotter aided Thomas Birch in his collection of her work, but she died in 1749, two years before its publication. Birch’s two volume *Works* reprinted almost all of her philosophical works and correspondence but did not publish her novella and included only one of her plays. The primary source for Trotter’s biography is Thomas Birch’s “The Life of Mrs. Catharine Cockburn” appended to the beginning of his 1751 collection of *The Works of Mrs. Catharine Cockburn, Theological, Moral, Dramatic, and Poetical*. Subsequent biographers have relied on Birch as their main source. Kelley supplements Birch with new primary research, and argues convincingly that it is more likely her birth date is 1674, and not the 1679 that Birch claims, in Kelley, *Catharine Trotter*, 1n1.

followed the dictates of a misguided conscience.”³⁸⁹ If Birch is to be believed, Trotter followed the path of several prominent Anglican theologians, including William Chillingworth, who converted to Catholicism before ultimately returning to Protestantism. Notable in Birch’s account of her conversion is his remark that Anglican divines could not convince Trotter to return to Anglicanism despite their “conferences” with her. As we shall see, Trotter portrays her reconversion to Anglicanism as rational and deliberative, a result of her own study of the relevant theological texts and not as a result of persuasion.³⁹⁰

Indeed, Trotter carefully deflects the gentle persuasions of her correspondents and friends to leave Catholicism. Birch’s discussion of Trotter’s “misguided conscience” is of a piece with his anxious portrayal of her early Catholicism. He tells us that Trotter had “so strict an observance of [Catholicism’s] fasts, as proved extremely injurious to her health.”³⁹¹ Several of Trotter’s friends also were anxious about her Catholicism. Gilbert Burnet’s wife Elizabeth wrote to Locke in 1702, “I know not by what misfortune of ill compeny both the writer of the late book

³⁸⁹ Thomas Birch, “The Life of Mrs. Catharine Cockburn,” in *The Works of Mrs. Catharine Cockburn, Theological, Moral, Dramatic, and Poetical*, 2 vols. (London: 1751), 1:v. Kelley speculates that Trotter may have been influenced by the Earl of Perth who was related to her mother and who converted to Catholicism in 1685, the year of the ascension of James II, in Kelley, *Catharine Trotter*, 146.

³⁹⁰ For a consideration of Trotter’s philosophical and theological writing, see Kelley, *Catharine Trotter*, chap. 5; Jacqueline Broad, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), chap. 6; Martha Brandt Bolton, “Some Aspects of the Philosophical Work of Catharine Trotter” in *Hypatia’s Daughters: Fifteen Hundred Years of Women Philosophers*, ed. Linda Lopez McAlister (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 139-64; Patricia Sheridan, “Reflection, Nature, and Moral Law: The Extent of Catharine Cockburn’s Lockeanism in her *Defence of Mr. Locke’s Essay*,” *Hypatia* 22, no. 3 (2007): 133-151; Patricia Sheridan’s introduction to *Catharine Trotter Cockburn: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Patricia Sheridan (Peterborough: Broadview, 2006), 9-27; Kathryn J. Ready, “Damaris Cudworth Masham, Catharine Trotter Cockburn, and the Feminist Legacy of Locke’s Theory of Personal Identity,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35, no. 4 (2002): 563-576; and Mary Ellen Waithe, “Catharine Trotter Cockburn,” in *A History of Women Philosophers, Vol. III, Modern Women Philosophers, 1600-1900*, ed. Mary Ellen Waithe (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 101-25.

³⁹¹ Birch, “The Life,” 1:xx-xxi.

[Trotter's 1702 *Defence*] and her sister turned papist and are so I think at this time, your Champion is unmarried, and having as you see a more than comon genius write three plays ... but as you will allow by her late litle book, 'tis great pety her studys are not better directed, and I can't but admier that one of such clear thoughts can be of a religion that puts such schacles on the exercies of thought and reason."³⁹² Elizabeth Burnet echoes Anglican theologians in promoting reason as a crucial component of religious belief and claiming that Catholicism hinders the use of that reason. Burnet also hopes that Locke "could be an instrument to free her from those errors" because Trotter "would perhaps pay more difference to you then to any other, which would be not only a kindness in its self, but make her more capable of the asistence and incouragment of her Frinds."³⁹³ Trotter's apparent refusal to convert, despite evident pressure, perplexed Elizabeth Burnet. She obviously thought Trotter's esteem for Locke might convince her to accept the Church of England. Yet it is clear from her 1702 *Defence* and her published correspondence that Trotter herself, at least until 1707, did not see Catholicism either impeding her freedom of conscience or damaging her social standing. Nor was her Catholicism an intellectual barrier to her friendship with the Burnets. Moreover, when Locke did write to Trotter in late 1702, he thanks her for her *Defence* in the most effusive terms and does not mention her Catholicism.³⁹⁴ Trotter's friendship with the Burnets and her unequivocal defense of Locke while still a committed Catholic suggest how fluid religious categories were for individuals at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and also show that drastic religious differences seem to have fewer personal and social consequences than are sometimes assumed.

³⁹² Mrs. Elizabeth Burnet, formerly Berkeley, to Locke, 20 June 1702 in *The Correspondence of John Locke*, ed. E.S. De Beer, 8 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 7: letter no. 3153.

³⁹³ Mrs. Elizabeth Burnet, formerly Berkeley, to Locke, 20 June 1702.

³⁹⁴ Locke to Catharine Trotter, later Mrs. Cockburn, 30 Dec. 1702 in *The Correspondence of John Locke*, ed. E.S. De Beer, 8 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 7: letter no. 3234.

Trotter's religion attracted notice from another quarter early in the eighteenth century as well. Trotter was a colleague of, and had a "close friendship" with, the playwright and Tory propagandist Delarivier Manley.³⁹⁵ Both Trotter and Manley were attacked in the anonymous satire *The Female Wits: Or the Triumvirate of Poets at Rehearsal*.³⁹⁶ By 1709, however, Manley began assailing her former friend in print. Trotter appeared as "Daphne" in *New Atalantis* (1709), "Lais" in *Memoirs of Europe* (1710) and "Calista" in *The History of Rivella* (1714); in the latter Manley accuses Trotter of "Insincerity" and hypocrisy: "*CALISTA* who was the most of a *Prude* in her outward Professions, and the least of it in her inward Practice, unless you'll think it no *Prudery* to allow Freedoms with the Air of Restraint."³⁹⁷ As several scholars have noted, Manley's motivations stem from personal, professional, and political disagreements with Trotter, whose associations with the Marlboroughs, a prominent Whig family, especially incensed Manley.³⁹⁸ In *New Atalantis*, Manley first accuses Trotter of having an affair with the Duke of Marlborough (Count Fortunatas) and then asserts that she "assumed an air of *Virtue pretended*" and "fitted her self with an excellent mask called religion, having as often changed and as often professed her self a votary to that shrine, where was to be found the most apparent interest, or

³⁹⁵ Ruth Herman, *The Business of a Woman: The Political Writings of Delarivier Manley* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), 236.

³⁹⁶ For a discussion of this satire, see Laurie Finke, "The Satire of Women Writers in *The Female Wits*," *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700* 8, no. 2 (1984): 64-71.

³⁹⁷ Delarivier Manley, *The History of Rivella* in *The Novels of Mary Delariviere Manley*, ed. Patricia Köster, 2 vols. (Gainesville: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1971), 2:802. See Patricia Köster's index in volume 2 for the identification of Trotter in Manley's works (2:872). Köster notes that "Daphne" is identified as "Mrs. Griffin" in the key to *New Atalantis*, but this is very likely a misidentification and "Daphne" is almost certainly Trotter (1: xxviiiin24).

³⁹⁸ Herman, *The Business of a Woman*, 236. See also Kelley, *Catharine Trotter*, 21-3. For the political dimensions of Manley's writings, see also chapter 4 of Ros Ballaster, *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 114-52; and chapter 3 of Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 88-144.

which priest had the greatest art of persuading.”³⁹⁹ By claiming that Trotter’s virtue is false, that her religious convictions are simply a “mask,” and that cynical opportunism brought about by clerical influence motivates her vacillations between Catholicism and Anglicanism, Manley intentionally challenges her sincerity as a Christian and theological writer. Ironically, she also anticipates the critiques that Birch levels against Trotter’s Catholicism, although he attacks Manley in his “Life” in order to defend Trotter. Birch, as I have noted, like Manley, claims Trotter’s conversion to Catholicism resulted from her being misguided by the powerful influences of prominent Roman Catholic families.

Manley attacks Trotter by eroticizing her. By casting Trotter as a character in a fictional or semi-fictional narrative, she refuses to take Trotter’s religious convictions seriously. Trotter’s turn from writing plays to writing theology seems especially to have irritated Manley, and in her assault on Trotter, Manley confronts the gendered value judgment implicit in her turn to theology after the supposedly morally ambiguous profession of playwriting:

But Daphne’s marriage crossed her delights. How does she exclaim against that breach of friendship in the fair? How regret the authority of a husband, who has boldly dared to carry his wife into the country? Where she now sets up for regularity and intends to be an ornament to that religion, which she had once before abandoned and newly again professed. She will write no more for the stage; ‘tis profane, indiscreet, unpardonable. Controversy engrosses all her hours: the Muses must give place.⁴⁰⁰

For Manley, theology is worse than playwriting. She notes that “Controversy engrosses all her hours,” despite her retreat from the “profane” London stage. By shrewdly relating criticism

³⁹⁹ Delarivier Manley, *New Atalantis*, ed. Rosalind Ballaster (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 160.

⁴⁰⁰ Manley, *New Atalantis*, 160.

leveled at the stage to criticism arising from theological disputation, Manley overturns what she sees as a false dichotomy between the controversy surrounding plays and that surrounding theology. For Manley, Trotter's escape into marriage, the country, and theological writing and away from London and the stage is a sign of her gullibility in buying into the strictures of a masculine, whiggish paternalism. Herman notes that Manley "was first and foremost a Protestant," who by this time was also a paid Tory propagandist.⁴⁰¹ Yet, their friendship while Trotter was still a Catholic suggests that religious differences did not play a major role in dissolving their friendship until motivated by political and personal factors. This disparity between private friendships among Anglicans and Catholics and often shrill public animosity in print was a common one in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and offers a key insight for understanding how a Catholic could write a defense of Locke. Indeed, Trotter's friendship with the Marlboroughs, Gilbert Burnet and Thomas Burnet of Kemnay vividly illustrates this difference between private relationships and public doctrinal disagreements between Anglicans and Catholics. In particular, Trotter's published correspondence with Thomas Burnet reveals the unique theological and political positions she held before she renounced Catholicism in 1707.⁴⁰²

Manley's foregrounding of Trotter's erotic qualities is surprisingly similar to Thomas Burnet of Kemnay's refusal to take Trotter's Catholicism seriously in their correspondence; Burnet sees Trotter's Catholicism as the stumbling block to their potential marriage, despite her

⁴⁰¹ Herman, *The Business of a Woman*, 199.

⁴⁰² Thomas Burnet of Kemnay, a relation of Gilbert Burnet, is not the same Thomas Burnet who famously attacked Locke's *Essay*. In his *Works*, Birch refers to Trotter's correspondent as "George Burnet," but this is erroneous. For a discussion of this error and Thomas Burnet of Kemnay, see S.A. Grave, *Locke and Burnet* (Perth: Philosophy Society of W.A. and Department of Philosophy, University of Western Australia, 1981), vn3; and especially Kelley, *Catharine Trotter*, 4n13 and 199n5.

evident disinterest in him as a marriage partner. From 1701 until after her marriage in 1708, Trotter exchanged letters with Thomas Burnet, who was travelling the continent; as Kelley notes, much of their correspondence concerns differences between Protestantism and Catholicism, because for a time Burnet clearly considered Trotter as a potential wife if he could convert her to the Church of England.⁴⁰³ In a letter dated 5 July 1704, Burnet wrote to Trotter that her *Defence* is “the best picture of [Trotter’s] philosophical mind,” but he “desire[s]” a picture of her “corporeal features of face.”⁴⁰⁴ Trotter refused his request because, she says, a picture is “generally thought a mark of gallantry” and she “is uncertain what hands it might fall into.”⁴⁰⁵ Trotter’s refusal to send Burnet her picture is an almost explicit rejection of his eroticization of their epistolary relationship and an attempt to reframe their discussion around a theologically unspecific Christianity. Trotter “would ... advise” Burnet not to “place too much” hope for happiness in her because “there is always a danger in desiring very ardently even the greatest good this life affords”; instead, Trotter writes, they should have “a pious resignation to the will of him, who is the author and disposer of all.”⁴⁰⁶ Trotter’s appeal to Godly submission – while undoubtedly genuine – is primarily a means to ward off Burnet’s advances. Much of their correspondence, nonetheless, involves erotically charged theological debate; if Burnet can convince her to return to the Church of England, presumably he can also persuade her that he is a suitable marriage partner. When forced to defend her Catholicism from his attacks, Trotter significantly does not defend Catholic dogma, but instead articulates a tolerant Christianity stripped of doctrinal differences. While an aspect of her motivation is annoyance at Burnet’s

⁴⁰³ Kelley, *Catharine Trotter*, 199.

⁴⁰⁴ Mr. Burnet to Mrs. Trotter, 5 July 1704, in *Works*, 2:170.

⁴⁰⁵ Mrs. Trotter to Mr. Burnet, 8 Aug. 1704, in *Works*, 2:176.

⁴⁰⁶ Mrs. Trotter to Mr. Burnet, 8 Aug. 1704, in *Works*, 2:176.

sometimes awkward advances, Trotter crafts an extremely liberal and tolerant theology in defending her Catholicism.

In her first letter to Burnet, Trotter asks that their further correspondence avoid tedious theological disputes: “Curious questions even in theology tend very little to edification; and no doubt the best study, and the best religion, is the knowledge and practice of our duty, in the belief of all God has revealed to us.”⁴⁰⁷ Later in the letter, she writes:

But as for the name of any church, I know indeed none necessary to the being of the church, but that of catholic, nor any form of government, but in obedience to one catholic visible head for unity sake; which if you think not necessary, and that all other differences between particular churches are but indifferent things, there is no occasion for any dispute between us. For I am not fond of such controversies, where going upon different grounds, we are neither of us likely to convince the other. And if you please, I would profit by the reflexion upon the madness of studying the controversial part of religion, rather than the positive and clear. Let our correspondence be on useful and moral subjects.⁴⁰⁸

Trotter’s defense of her Catholicism avoids any mention of doctrine and instead champions the basic principles of Christian toleration – “the positive and clear” – that partly rests on utilitarian as well as moral ends. As she acknowledges, there are some essential aspects of Christianity that all must subscribe to, and not all aspects can be “indifferent”; however, her understanding of what is “indifferent” differs from Burnet’s. Yet, in her correspondence, Trotter avoids delving into the enormously vexed question of Christian essentials at any length and instead discusses the religious fundamentals that she hopes unite all Christians.

⁴⁰⁷ Mrs. Trotter to Mr. Burnet, 9 Dec. 1701, in *Works*, 2:157.

⁴⁰⁸ Mrs. Trotter to Mr. Burnet, 9 Dec. 1701, in *Works*, 2:159.

In a letter dated 2 Feb. 1704, Trotter puts forward loosely defined essentials – “the doctrine and authority of *Jesus Christ*” – and repeatedly emphasizes the moral utility of Christianity as the common ground between herself and Burnet:

I consider nothing in the opinions of my friends, but what is likely to influence their morals; and provided they worship the true God, and acknowledge the doctrine and authority of *Jesus Christ*, I think we are sufficiently united in *religion* for all the ends of friendship. To say the truth, I have of late almost forgot all distinction of churches; for having had some occasion of observing more than before the great growth of infidelity; that there are many, who disbelieve, and more, who doubt, that there ever was any divine revelation, I have employed myself much in considering the proofs, and defending the truth of the *Christian* religion; which has so entirely engaged my concern, that when I am with those, who sincerely submit to the authority of *Jesus Christ*, what sense soever they understand him in, I am satisfied, and really think myself with one of my own communion.⁴⁰⁹

Trotter defends her Catholicism through ecumenical appeals and by promoting a doctrinally minimal Christianity that evades even the supposedly huge chasm separating Protestant and Catholic belief. According to Trotter, the great enemy of Christianity is not the difference between Protestantism and Catholicism; it is instead the supposed growth of “infidelity”: Anglicans and Anglo-Catholics need to make common cause against irreligion and skepticism. Trotter also gives an indication that she is studying the “proofs” of Christianity, a study that leads three years later to her reconversion to Anglicanism. Trotter’s claim that she is in “communion” with anyone who accepts “the authority of *Jesus Christ*, what sense soever they

⁴⁰⁹ Mrs. Trotter to Mr. Burnet, 2 Feb. 1704, in *Works*, 2:167-68.

understand him in” is an astonishingly broad ecumenical plea, even if it is partly motivated by Burnet’s epistolary harassment.

Trotter’s pleas, however, were in vain. Burnet responds to her by implicitly insulting Trotter’s Catholic family and friends: “*I wish you may not continue to be the only miracle of that religion, to wit, that a philosopher of your sense should not leave those of that way, that are all either ignorant, or given to a reprobate sense.*”⁴¹⁰ Burnet’s rhetoric here seems unduly harsh, and in her response, it is obvious that Trotter is annoyed:

I wish indeed there was no such thing as distinction of churches; and then I doubt not there would be much more real religion; the name and notion of which I am sorry to observe being confined to the being of some particular community, and the whole of it, I am afraid, placed by most in a zeal for those points, which make the differences between them, from which mistaken zeal, no doubt have proceeded all the massacres, persecutions, and hatred of their fellow Christians, which all churches have been inclined to when in power; and I believe it is generally true, that those, who are most bigotted to a sect, or most rigid and precise in their forms and outward discipline, are most negligent of the moral duties, which certainly are the main end of religion.⁴¹¹

Trotter’s rhetoric in response to Burnet’s insensitivity becomes even more insistent, especially her argument that “mistaken zeal” is responsible for “massacres” and “persecutions.” She makes a forceful distinction between political Christianity and active, lived Christianity: theological

⁴¹⁰ Mr. Burnet to Mrs. Trotter, 17 July 1704, in *Works*, 2:172.

⁴¹¹ Mrs. Trotter to Mr. Burnet, 8 Aug. 1704, in *Works*, 2:176-77. Birch, in his “Life,” quotes this section of Trotter’s letter and notes that Trotter “speaks upon the subject of religion, with a spirit of moderation unusual in the communion, of which she still professed herself; and this charitableness and latitude of sentiments seems to have increased from the farther examination, which she was then probably making into the state of the controversy, between the church of *Rome* and the Protestants” (1:xxv-xxvi).

differences between churches, exacerbated by the abuse of power, hinder the practical, moral duties of Christians. This distinction, emphasizing the experience of the individual believer, is a significant one for the period and helps explain the distinctive theology Trotter articulates. If Christianity has little hope of being united in theological specificities, it can then hope to transcend these differences by appealing to the common moral register of all believers.

Burnet's response ignores her appeals, and his logic anticipates the position Trotter defends in *Discourse*: "You know every thing well but religion; which you will never understand truly and surely by any method so well, as by reading Scripture in any language you understand, and chusing for yourself."⁴¹² Burnet falls back on standard Anglican apologetic, disregarding Trotter's doctrinally minimal defense of her religion. Because Burnet either repeatedly ignores or willfully misinterprets Trotter's ecumenical appeals and her doctrinally minimal Christianity, her rhetoric becomes more charged in the letter of 8 Aug. 1704; she begins painting herself into a rhetorical corner by refusing to defend Catholic doctrine in favor of an ultra-liberal church with vaguely defined essentials. Not a skeptic herself, Trotter defends her Catholicism and her own freedom of belief through the type of slippery, ambiguous theological language that notorious free-thinkers like John Toland employed. Indeed, in her *Discourse*, where she strenuously argues against Catholic claims of infallibility in favor of the Protestant liberty of private judgment, her interlocutor accuses her of arguments that destabilize the entire foundation of Christian belief itself.

In a later letter, Burnet condescendingly informs Trotter that her financial difficulties could be eased by marrying "an honest man."⁴¹³ Such a man, he continues, "would gladly seek you, if you were to be found in the church of *England*; whereas now they must bring you home

⁴¹² Mr. Burnet to Mrs. Trotter, 9 Dec. 1704, in *Works*, 2:185-86

⁴¹³ Mr. Burnet to Mrs. Trotter, 5 July 1705, in *Works*, 2:178 [pagination replicated].

like the straying lamb into the mother church of *England*, before they can rejoice over you, and lay you in their bosom.”⁴¹⁴ Burnet’s insistent eroticizing of religious conversion causes Trotter to signal her irritation by responding, “I cannot imagine, what concern you suppose I might be in about settling my person,” and claims that she has “been always very fearful of putting my happiness entirely in the power of any one, though a difference in religion is what I have least apprehended would destroy it.”⁴¹⁵ Trotter’s language against marriage is powerful; a married woman is forced to place her happiness “entirely in the power” of her husband. Marriage according to Trotter – at least as she portrays it for Burnet – signals a woman’s abdication of freedom, intellectually as well as economically.⁴¹⁶ She also sarcastically turns Burnet’s logic against him – demonstrating how it collapses when applied to marriage – by arguing “if there were any uneasiness” about a marriage between a Protestant and a Catholic, “it should be on the Romanists side, since to think any one communion absolutely necessary, seems to me not very agreeable to the principles of the reformation, where every one is allowed to be in all points the only judges for themselves.”⁴¹⁷ In addition to her deflection of Burnet’s advances by her emphasis on their “friendship,” she also reiterates the Latitudinarian-inflected arguments she had made previously.⁴¹⁸ She “cannot think myself at a great distance from the communion of any *Christians*; esteeming an agreement in the duties of practice, in the worship of one God, and faith in Christ, the only essentials sufficient to establish an union in friendship”; and she goes on to emphasize that “when one is satisfied, that the church, of which one has professed one’s self,

⁴¹⁴ Mr. Burnet to Mrs. Trotter, 5 July 1705, in *Works*, 2:178 [pagination replicated].

⁴¹⁵ Mrs. Trotter to Mr. Burnet, 7 July 1705, in *Works*, 2:186 [pagination replicated].

⁴¹⁶ For a discussion of Trotter’s views on marriage, especially with regard to her fiction, see Kelley, *Catharine Trotter*, 63-6.

⁴¹⁷ Mrs. Trotter to Mr. Burnet, 7 July 1705, in *Works*, 2:186 [pagination replicated].

⁴¹⁸ See also Trotter’s letter to Burnet of 8 Aug. 1704, where, in Kelley’s words, Trotter is “quick to point out the difference between friendship and passion,” in Kelley, *Catharine Trotter*, 202.

teaches all necessary truths, which none can deny of ours; it is better to continue in it, than to make a noise in the world with changing.”⁴¹⁹ Although she is loathe in her correspondence to define “all necessary truths,” she puts forward the claim, without qualification, that “none can deny” the Catholic Church adheres to these truths – a claim that it is not at all clear Burnet or other Protestant apologists would accept. Two years after this letter was written, however, Trotter did “make a noise in the world” and renounced her Catholicism with the publication of her *Discourse*, an extended attack on the doctrine of infallibility. In 1707, Trotter reconciled her religious affiliation with the arguments she formulated to Burnet, which arose both from her attempts to evade his advances and her Lockeanism. The arguments in her correspondence anticipate those in her 1707 *Discourse*.

By 1707, Trotter had publicly abandoned Catholicism for the Church of England, was on the verge of marriage, and had stopped writing plays. Despite her appeals to doctrinal minimalism in her correspondence with Burnet, Trotter’s *Discourse* is structured as an attack on the Catholic doctrine of infallibility. Kelley argues that the “views [Trotter] expresses in her correspondence are completely in accord with” her 1707 *Discourse* because both argue for “religious toleration and a doctrinal approach which is accessible to the layman.”⁴²⁰ Although generally accurate, Kelley’s claim downplays the extent to which Trotter’s more strident public statement in her *Discourse* differs from her personal reservations, as they were expressed to Burnet, about disrupting religious unity for the sake of doctrine. After her conversion and the publication of her *Discourse*, Burnet wrote triumphantly to Trotter that “you have foiled the adversaries so with their own weapons, and have wrested their own arguments out of their own

⁴¹⁹ Mrs. Trotter to Mr. Burnet, 7 July 1705, in *Works*, 2:187 [pagination replicated].

⁴²⁰ Kelley, *Catharine Trotter*, 201.

mouths.”⁴²¹ Trotter responds with thanks and an admission of her own previous stubbornness: “I am glad you are so well satisfied with the reasoning in my [*Discourse*], and wish they may be as convincing to those, who need them; but I know too well the power of strong prejudices, to hope for much effect from them, or greatly to wonder, that others do not see what seems sufficiently plain to me.”⁴²² Her rhetoric signals the personal nature of her *Discourse*. The arguments that Trotter deploys are not simply the strongest she can bring against Catholic doctrine, but those that seem to have overcome her own former obstinacy. She thus reveals to Burnet the autobiographical nature of the work, despite its original anonymous publication.

Trotter’s downplaying in her private correspondence, then, of theological differences between Protestantism and Catholicism stands in sharp contrast to the more vociferous public attack she presents in *Discourse*. Yet this disparity between public stridency and the personal wavering of belief and acceptance of private religious commitments reflects the complexities of English Church-State relations. Even if individual conversions were not uncommon, the public differences between Catholicism and Protestantism were great. As numerous scholars have argued, anti-Catholic discourse did an enormous amount of cultural and ideological work in Great Britain during the long eighteenth century. Linda Colley argues for the importance of Protestantism to the evolution of British nationalism along with an equally important anti-Catholicism; she argues that “the most striking feature in the religious landscape” of 1700s Britain was “the gulf between Protestant and Catholic.”⁴²³ Although Colley’s analysis has been

⁴²¹ Mr. Burnet to Mrs. Trotter, 17 June 1707, in *Works*, 2:195.

⁴²² Mrs. Trotter to Mr. Burnet, n.d., in *Works*, 2:198.

⁴²³ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 19. See also Raymond D. Tumbleson, *Catholicism in the English Protestant Imagination: Nationalism, Religion, and Literature, 1660-1745* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Colin Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England, c. 1714-80: A Political and Social Study* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993).

criticized, among other reasons, for minimizing dissent and treating English Protestantism as a hegemonic ideology, the vast amount of anti-Catholic propaganda produced by Anglican apologists in the latter half of the seventeenth century suggests how important this rhetoric was to English identity.⁴²⁴ As significant as anti-Catholic rhetoric was for ideologies of British nationalism, distinctions were very often made between attacks on politicized Catholicism – often signaled by the term “anti-popery,” a “free-floating term of opprobrium” in the words of Peter Lake – and the Catholicism of individual British subjects.⁴²⁵ Colin Haydon contends “that the fear of Popery was not incompatible with good relations between individual Protestants and Papists.”⁴²⁶ In his recent study of the Revolution of 1688, Steve Pincus argues that “there is good reason to believe that for all of their rhetoric against ‘popery,’ many of the Williamite bishops had no such animus against Roman Catholics” and specifically points out that despite “normally taken to be the fiercest of English opponents of Catholicism,” Gilbert Burnet, “was in fact explicit in his pleas for moderation and toleration.”⁴²⁷ This distinction between politicized “popery” and the beliefs of individual Catholic believers is one that Trotter makes in her correspondence with Burnet. Discussing her reading of Swift’s *A Tale of a Tub*, Trotter writes that the book “is intended a ridicule both of Popery and Calvinism” and that she found it “very

⁴²⁴ For a critique of Colley along these lines, see Jeremy Black, “Confessional state or elect nation? Religion and identity in eighteenth-century England” in *Protestantism and National Identity: Britain and Ireland, c.1650-c.1850*, eds. Tony Claydon and Ian McBride (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 53-74.

⁴²⁵ Peter Lake, “Anti-Popery: the Structure of a Prejudice,” in *Conflict in Early Stuart England: Studies in Religion and Politics 1603-1642*, eds. Richard Cust and Ann Hughes (London: Longman, 1989), 96.

⁴²⁶ Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism*, 12.

⁴²⁷ Steve Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 432.

diverting,” evidently because she could distinguish his satire of Popery from her own Catholicism.⁴²⁸

Locating the distinction between politicized Catholicism and Catholic belief was central to debates about toleration of Catholics. John Marshall writes that “Locke was desirous during the period of composition of [*A Letter Concerning Toleration*] to find a way to distinguish between some Catholic worship and belief as tolerable and some Catholic political commitments as intolerable”; Gilbert Burnet also struggled with this issue.⁴²⁹ One of the important sticking points, both politically and theologically, for Protestant defenders of toleration was the issue of the infallibility of the Pope and Catholic councils. Indeed, debates about whether some version of infallibility was necessary for Christian truth consumed theological writers in the seventeenth century. Concern over what remains to ground Christianity if theologians reject infallible certainty helped motivate many of the important works by seventeenth-century defenders of Protestantism such as William Chillingworth and Edward Stillingfleet.⁴³⁰ Once an authoritative interpreter of scripture is removed, what remains is, in Christopher Hill’s memorable phrase, “logically a doctrine of individualist anarchy.”⁴³¹ Containing this interpretive anarchy was the business of Anglican apologetics throughout the latter half of the seventeenth and into the eighteenth century. With the 1707 publication of *A Discourse Concerning a Guide in Controversies*, Trotter strides into this debate by arguing for the primacy of the individual

⁴²⁸ Mrs. Trotter to Mr. Burnet, 8 Aug. 1704, in *Works*, 2:178.

⁴²⁹ John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture: Religious Intolerance and Arguments for Religious Toleration in Early Modern and ‘Early Enlightenment’ Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 692-93.

⁴³⁰ On the question of certainty, see Henry G. Van Leeuwen, *The Problem of Certainty in English Thought 1630-1690* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963).

⁴³¹ Christopher Hill, *Collected Essays of Christopher Hill*, 3 vols. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), 2:38.

believer. Although often neglected, the text is important because it is one of the few places where Trotter explicitly discusses Protestant apologetics and Catholic doctrine.⁴³²

Discourse is a concise attack on the Catholic doctrine of infallibility, and Trotter is able to draw on a long history of debates about infallibility that helped shape English Protestant thought.⁴³³ One of the arguments against infallibility that Trotter encountered is found in Book 1 Chapter 4 of Locke's *Essay*. Locke writes:

The *Romanists* say, 'Tis best for Men, and so, suitable to the goodness of God, that there should be an infallible Judge of Controversies on Earth; and therefore there is one: and I, by the same Reason, say, 'Tis better for Men that every Man himself should be infallible. I leave them to consider, whether by the force of this Argument they shall think, that every Man is so. I think it a very good Argument, to say, the infinitely wise God hath made it so: And therefore it is best. But it *seems to me a little too much Confidence of our own Wisdom, to say, I think it best, and therefore God hath made it so;* and in the matter in Hand, it will be in vain to argue from such a Topick, that God hath done so, when certain Experience shews us, that he hath not.⁴³⁴

⁴³² Mary Ellen Waithe merely mentions that *Discourse* was published "when Trotter could no longer reconcile Locke's epistemology with her Catholic faith," although Waithe's claim seems to differ from Trotter's stated reasons for publishing the text, in Waithe, "Catharine Trotter Cockburn," 102. Jacqueline Broad notes that Trotter's *Discourse* "gave an account of her conversion to the Church of England," but does not explore this account at any length, in Broad, *Women Philosophers*, 144. Kelley contextualizes *Discourse* in terms of the rest of Trotter's work, rightly noting that the text is significant "[o]n a biographical level" as "a public statement of her theological position" and that it "demonstrates a consistency of concern with her other philosophical writing" (151), but she does not examine the text's connections to earlier Protestant apologetics, in Kelley, *Catharine Trotter*, 146-52.

⁴³³ Trotter also later wrote a short undated refutation of infallibility, evidently an answer to a letter she had received, included in her *Works*, 2:134-38.

⁴³⁴ John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), I.iv.12.

There are echoes of this argument in Trotter's claim in *Discourse* that "without proving, that God has given us another *determined* guide, this is only arguing, that he should have done something, which he has not done."⁴³⁵ For both Locke and Trotter, Catholics assume their own infallibility and then project it onto a 'false' image of God. After thoroughly studying the matter, Trotter was unable to see any place scripturally or empirically where infallibility could be located.

Seventeenth-century debate about Catholic infallibility helped shape English Protestant thought long before Locke, and his understanding of William Chillingworth's 1638 *The Religion of Protestants A Safe Way to Salvation* influenced his 1695 *The Reasonableness of Christianity*.⁴³⁶ As Frederick Beiser argues, "the infallibility controversy' of the early seventeenth century" was for Chillingworth and his circle at Great Tew, "the cauldron from which their essential beliefs and ideals sprang."⁴³⁷ Chillingworth argued in *The Religion of Protestants* that "moral certainty," although not absolute infallible certainty, in scripture was sufficient for salvation in contrast to Catholic claims that without infallibility, salvation was uncertain.⁴³⁸ According to Henry G. Van Leeuwen, the "moral certainty" of Chillingworth "is described as the certainty a sane, reasonable, thoughtful person has after considering all available

⁴³⁵ Catharine Trotter, *A Discourse Concerning a Guide in Controversies, in Two Letters, Written to One of the Church of Rome*, in *Works*, 1:14.

⁴³⁶ Locke also wrote at least one unpublished piece on infallibility. See John C. Biddle, "John Locke's Essay on Infallibility: Introduction, Text, and Translation," *Journal of Church and State* 19 (1977): 301-27; and John Locke, *Locke: Political Essays*, ed. Mark Goldie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 204-9, 226-30. On Chillingworth's influence on Locke, see John C. Higgins-Biddle's introduction to John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, ed. John C. Higgins-Biddle (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), lvii-lviii, lxiii-lxvii.

⁴³⁷ Frederick C. Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason: The Defense of Rationality in the Early English Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 104.

⁴³⁸ On Chillingworth, see Robert R. Orr, *Reason and Authority: The Thought of William Chillingworth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967); and Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Catholics, Anglicans and Puritans: Seventeenth Century Essays* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1987), chap. 4.

evidence as fully and impartially as is possible.”⁴³⁹ Chillingworth’s moral certainty in scripture results in his well-known statement in *The Religion of Protestants* that “The BIBLE, The BIBLE, I say, The BIBLE only is the religion of Protestants!”⁴⁴⁰ This belief in the primacy of the Bible came “after a long (and as I verily believe and hope,) impartial search of *the true way to eternall happinesse*.”⁴⁴¹ In her *Discourse*, Trotter echoes the idea of an impartial search for truth leading one away from infallibility and to the Bible that Chillingworth embraces. She also relies at least implicitly on arguments that he and others had made, including Edward Stillingfleet, who in numerous works from 1665 onwards spent a great deal of time attacking Roman Catholic doctrine, especially infallibility.⁴⁴² In fact, Stillingfleet’s polemics against the Catholic Church partially motivated the Catholic work that Trotter responds to in *Discourse*, Abraham Woodhead’s *The Guide in Controversies*; Woodhead in fact singles out Stillingfleet, along with Archbishop Laud, as an opponent on his title page. It is unclear how much of Chillingworth and Stillingfleet Trotter had read; although she quotes neither author in the *Discourse*, her reading of Woodhead’s text would have made her at least familiar with their arguments.

These seventeenth-century works debating infallibility were catalysts for Trotter’s conversion. In his “Life,” Birch presents a partial account of Trotter’s conversion to the Church of England and the composition of her *Discourse*: near the end of 1706 or the beginning of 1707, Trotter’s “doubts about the *Romish* religion, which she had so many years professed, having led

⁴³⁹ Van Leeuwen, *The Problem of Certainty*, 23. The first English citation of the term “moral certainty” in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is to Chillingworth’s 1638 *The Religion of Protestants*.

⁴⁴⁰ William Chillingworth, *The Religion of Protestants A Safe Way to Salvation* (Oxford: 1638), 375.

⁴⁴¹ Chillingworth, *The Religion of Protestants*, 376.

⁴⁴² Barry Till, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., s.v. “Stillingfleet, Edward.” On Stillingfleet, see Robert Todd Carroll, *The Common-Sense Philosophy of Religion of Bishop Edward Stillingfleet 1635-1699* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975).

her to a thorough examination of the grounds of it, by consulting the best books on both sides of the question, and advising with men of the best judgment, the result of it was a conviction of the falseness of the pretensions of that church.”⁴⁴³ Birch claims that “*a Guide in Controversy* was particularly discussed by her” and the first letter of her *Discourse* is a response to this text.⁴⁴⁴ According to Birch, Trotter was so concerned with the issue of infallibility that she “procured” Elizabeth Burnet to consult Samuel Clarke about the issue, “and shew him a paper, which had been put into her hands, urging the difficulties on that article on the side of the papists.”⁴⁴⁵ Clarke’s response is given in an undated letter from Elizabeth Burnet to Trotter, included in Birch’s “Life.” According to Elizabeth Burnet, Clarke:

says, the fact is false; for, besides that tradition can much more assuredly convey down a book, than any unwritten doctrine, how concerning soever, as is plain by the early corruption of that great and fundamental article of the belief of one God, which while men lived to see the third and fourth generation, was yet corrupted and lost in the idolatry of the greatest part of the world: besides this probability, it is certain in fact, there never was so clear, so uninterrupted a tradition for any thing, as that, which conveys to us the scriptures. On the other side, there is not any tradition at all, that will support the infallibility, as now taught in the *Romish* church. The reason he said, *as now taught*, was, because they falsely wrest some antient passages of fathers to the point disputed; for that was only meant, that *Christ* should always have a church on earth, men professing

⁴⁴³ Birch, “The Life,” 1:xxix-xxx.

⁴⁴⁴ Birch, “The Life,” 1:xxx.

⁴⁴⁵ Birch, “The Life,” 1:xxx-xxxi.

Christian doctrines; and that all those powers, that then let themselves to persecute and destroy it, should not be able to do it.⁴⁴⁶

Clarke's arguments for the primacy of scripture as a bulwark against corruption, the privileging of the written tradition over oral traditions, and the lack of scriptural support for infallibility are echoed in Trotter's *Discourse*. The brevity of Trotter's *Discourse* (the original 1707 edition is only 43 pages) in contrast to the voluminous seventeenth-century works that she draws on suggests the ways in which eighteenth-century writers were compacting and mining the capacious theological treatises of the seventeenth century; Gilbert Burnet commends the *Discourse* by suggesting that, "many readers being encouraged to seek for information in pieces of this size, who have neither the mind nor the leisure to go through large volumes."⁴⁴⁷ Although Burnet claims the *Discourse* was not originally written for the public, there was a second edition published in Edinburgh in 1728, which, as Kelley notes, "suggests that Trotter may have made the decision to print the second edition."⁴⁴⁸ If Trotter did indeed have a hand in the 1728 edition of the *Discourse*, it suggests that she felt the work was an important theological defense of Anglicanism more than twenty years after its original publication.

The structure of *Discourse* is complex. It was published together as two letters with an anonymous preface by Gilbert Burnet. The first letter, as reprinted in Birch's *Works*, is addressed to "Mr. B-----t a Romish Priest," evidently someone Trotter contacted to discuss the theological controversies about infallibility.⁴⁴⁹ The second letter is from Trotter to a "Mr. H -----, who had

⁴⁴⁶ Quoted in Birch, "The Life," 1:xxxi-xxxii.

⁴⁴⁷ Preface to *Discourse*, 1:3. Both *Discourse* and its Preface were published anonymously, but Birch states that Gilbert Burnet was the author of the Preface (1:xxx).

⁴⁴⁸ Kelley, *Catharine Trotter*, 146n19.

⁴⁴⁹ Trotter, *Discourse*, 1:5. Birch identifies the priest as a Mr. Bennet (1:xxx). The original 1707 edition does not include this address.

procured an Answer to the foregoing Letter from a Stranger to the Author."⁴⁵⁰ Trotter begins the second letter, as reprinted in Birch's *Works*, telling her new correspondent that she is "sorry" Mr. Bennet's "indisposition hindered him from answering" her letter and thanks him for finding a new respondent.⁴⁵¹ The respondent's objections to Trotter's first letter are not included, but may be discerned from her responses, as Burnet notes in his preface.⁴⁵² Because the Catholic objections are framed by her responses, Trotter asserts rhetorical control over the arguments.

The first letter is a response to Abraham Woodhead's 1667 *The Guide in Controversies, or, A Rational Account of the Doctrine of Roman Catholicks, Concerning the Ecclesiastical Guide in Controversies of Religion*, which itself is primarily a response to writings by Laud, Stillingfleet, Chillingworth, and other Anglican writers.⁴⁵³ Woodhead (1609-1678) was a prolific Roman Catholic author and theologian who published numerous and lengthy controversial works on Catholicism, church government and other topics.⁴⁵⁴ At the beginning of her *Discourse*, Trotter claims that she "read that concerning the *Guide in Controversies* twice," and then expounds on what will be the major theme of her criticism: the necessity to judge religious truths for oneself.⁴⁵⁵ She writes that the Catholic maxim of doubt as a mortal sin "gives great prejudice against those, who hold it, as the best security of error, and the most effectual bar against the discovery of truth; for which a very different disposition is requisite, viz. A readiness to submit to

⁴⁵⁰ Trotter, *Discourse*, 1:17. Again, the original 1707 edition does not include the address.

⁴⁵¹ Trotter, *Discourse*, 1:17. The original 1707 edition does not include this discussion.

⁴⁵² Preface to *Discourse*, 1:4.

⁴⁵³ Woodhead's text was published in 1667 with the title page listing the author as "R.H." This edition runs to 366 pages. In 1673 a second edition with additions was published running to 448 pages, again with the listed author as "R.H." Judging by her page citations in *Discourse*, Trotter is responding to the 1673 second edition.

⁴⁵⁴ Jerome Bertram, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., s.v. "Woodhead, Abraham." On Woodhead and *The Guide in Controversies*, see also George H. Tavard, *The Seventeenth-Century Tradition: A Study in Recusant Thought* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), 212-18.

⁴⁵⁵ Trotter, *Discourse*, 1:5.

the evidence of truth, how opposite soever to our present persuasions.”⁴⁵⁶ It is noteworthy that she claims she read the text twice, given its large size and dense prose, and that she felt willing to counter its arguments with a short letter, later printed as a pamphlet. Trotter is responding to a work nearly forty years old, from a time when the threat of Catholicism to the English state was much more acute. Not surprisingly, then, her tract generally follows the logic of many of its anti-Catholic predecessors from the previous century. Discussing anti-Catholic and Anglican apologetic works of primarily the 1680s, Raymond Tumbleson demonstrates that “[t]ract after tract organizes its attack on Rome into three headings: that it is contrary to scripture, to antiquity or the primitive Church, and to reason,” and that “[t]he book of God, the book of nature, and inward guidance formed a conventional rhetoric of Anglican apologetic.”⁴⁵⁷ As Tumbleson demonstrates, what was particularly troublesome for Anglican theologians was the problem of attacking Catholic ideas of infallibility while still maintaining the ideas of Anglican authority that were essential to the defense of England’s Established Church: “It was the task of the Anglican ideologues ... to find a ‘middle ground’ in which hierarchy could remain stable despite the displacement of its papal capstone.”⁴⁵⁸ In her *Discourse*, Trotter primarily wrestles with this issue of what grounds Christian authority in the absence of a coercive infallibility, and, in doing so, embraces the latitudinarian Anglican position that she had sympathy with while still a committed Catholic which relies on a believer’s reasoned interpretation of scripture.

Throughout her theological writings, one of Trotter’s primary concerns is ending Christian strife caused by what she considers the inconsequential disagreements that obscure “true” Christianity and its moral ends. In this regard, she ironically shared the same goal as

⁴⁵⁶ Trotter, *Discourse*, 1:5-6.

⁴⁵⁷ Tumbleson, *Catholicism*, 119.

⁴⁵⁸ Tumbleson, *Catholicism*, 91.

Abraham Woodhead, who saw in the infallibility of a universal Catholic Church the tool to end discord.⁴⁵⁹ It is tempting to think that one of the promises Trotter found most reassuring in Catholicism was exactly this hope for unity, but by 1707 when she rejected infallibility, she is intent on seeking another way. A common strategy for Anglican divines was to substitute the supposed authority of reason for that of Papal authority; as Tumbleson notes, “In the absence of mechanisms of authority such as Catholicism’s councils and popes, conformity demands that reason itself must be uniform.”⁴⁶⁰ Locke attempted in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* to distill Christianity to its fundamental essence (belief in Jesus as the Messiah) and argue that agreement with only a doctrinally minimal Christianity was essential. As we have seen in Trotter’s letters, she follows a similar strategy, deemphasizing to a large degree doctrinal differences between Catholic and Protestant in favor of loosely defined essentials and an appeal to the moral utility of Christianity. Her discussion of these issues with Thomas Burnet met with little specific criticism from him; however, in the second letter of *Discourse*, she responds perceptively to the criticism, both Catholic and implicitly High Church Anglican, that she is destabilizing the entire foundation of religion itself.

In the first letter of *Discourse*, Trotter focuses almost exclusively on the discussion of infallibility in *The Guide in Controversies*. Much of her argument challenges Woodhead’s readings of the Bible – his contention that scripture gives the church a promise of infallibility – with her own biblical exegesis, supported by her familiarity with other Protestant critics of infallibility. In doing so, she elevates the individual believer and subjective religious beliefs above both church hierarchy and tradition. Like Woodhead, Trotter argues that if scripture gave

⁴⁵⁹ Kenneth L. Campbell, *The Intellectual Struggle of the English Papists in the Seventeenth Century: The Catholic Dilemma* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1986), 146.

⁴⁶⁰ Tumbleson, *Catholicism*, 111.

its readers “the least hint of any person, or number of persons, whom, in case of divisions, all Christians are obliged to follow” then certainly there would be more “peace and order”; however, in contrast to Woodhead, Trotter argues that this authority is nowhere to be found in the Bible.⁴⁶¹ Trotter points out that his arguments depend on “human reason and probabilities,” and thus fall far short of infallibility.⁴⁶² In arguing that supposed infallible statements are merely probable, she echoes Chillingworth, who logically argued that “the claim to make propositions which are metaphysically or absolutely certain, can never be based on probable reasons.”⁴⁶³ Trotter echoes Locke’s argument in *Two Treatises of Government* – a cornerstone of Whig political philosophy – by claiming that Protestants “are not tied to ... obedience in *all cases*: ‘tis a human constitution; and whenever any of those, (tho’ otherwise their lawful superiors) depart from their sole infallible rule, the Scriptures, the people are not obliged to follow them.”⁴⁶⁴ However, she finds herself drawn by her logic to the common trouble spot of Anglican apologetics: if not in the Church, where does religious authority rest? For Trotter, as for many liberal Anglicans and dissenters, it is in the individual believer’s own interpretation of scripture: “we are to (*try the spirits*) examine all doctrines, and as they agree or not to that rule [scripture], accordingly to receive, or reject them; which if it resolve at last into every man’s private judgment, is it not vain to urge absurdities or inconveniences from that?”⁴⁶⁵ Trotter’s arguments, though, are more than a restatement of liberal Anglicanism because the dilemmas she describes and the conclusions she reaches reflect what she experienced. In arguing against Catholic claims

⁴⁶¹ Trotter, *Discourse*, 1:8-9.

⁴⁶² Trotter, *Discourse*, 1:10.

⁴⁶³ Orr, *Reason and Authority*, 57.

⁴⁶⁴ Trotter, *Discourse*, 1:12. As Kelley rightly observes, Trotter’s arguments have “more than a little flavour of the whiggish concept of contractual government about” them, in Kelley, *Catharine Trotter*, 148.

⁴⁶⁵ Trotter, *Discourse*, 1:14.

of authority by asserting the primacy of private judgment as essential to Christianity, she is describing her own intellectual journey from committed Catholic to liberal Protestant. For Trotter, privileging private judgment necessitates a liberal, tolerant church: “Those divisions, that are now among Christians, seem not the necessary consequence of a diversity of opinions, but of mens having made the terms of communion straiter than God has made the terms of salvation.”⁴⁶⁶ Here, Trotter again echoes Chillingworth, who writes, “the greatest Schismatiques, who make the way to heaven narrower, the yোক of Christ heavier, the differences of Faith greater, the conditions of Ecclesiasticall government harder, and stricter, then they were made at the begining by Christ and his Apostles.”⁴⁶⁷ For both Chillingworth and Trotter, Christianity is not responsible for division and strife; rather, it is schismatics who create problems by corrupting church teachings away from the original, unifying message preached by Christ and the first apostles.

The unpublished response to Trotter’s first letter largely consists of an accusation that her logic removes any possible ground of Christian belief; as she writes, quoting from her respondent, her “objections against a living *infallible guide*, equally *overthrow the infallibility of Scripture* itself.”⁴⁶⁸ Part of Trotter’s response, in the well-trodden path of her Anglican predecessors Chillingworth and Stillingfleet, is to emphasize that the responder’s argument is circular: “the *gentleman* must grant, whether he will have the Scriptures believed on the authority of the *church* as infallible, or the church on the authority of the *Scriptures*; for one of them must be received on a moral certainty, unless he will argue in a circle.”⁴⁶⁹ Trotter’s use of the term “moral certainty” also hearkens back to Chillingworth; she notes that either the church

⁴⁶⁶ Trotter, *Discourse*, 1:14.

⁴⁶⁷ Chillingworth, *The Religion of Protestants*, 180.

⁴⁶⁸ Trotter, *Discourse*, 1:17.

⁴⁶⁹ Trotter, *Discourse*, 1:19.

or scripture must be accepted with something less than absolute, infallible certainty.⁴⁷⁰ As Trotter's own conversion demonstrates, her acceptance of the primacy of scripture without the need for an infallible interpreter is more than academic; it is instead a hard won point that she arrived at by the study of seventeenth-century theological texts.

Trotter asserts that the responder's argument has very dangerous consequences: "it would only prove, that the authority of church and Scripture are equally uncertain; a sort of arguments, which I *wish* none would make use of, but those who *design* to overthrow Christianity itself; which I would no means suppose to be the gentleman's aim, notwithstanding his hard insinuations of me."⁴⁷¹ Trotter defends herself against her respondent's accusations of skepticism by vigorously defending the truth of the scriptures. Biblical truth rests on the authority of the early Christian witnesses: "the Scriptures could never have been received, as books written by inspired men, if the first Christians, to whom they were delivered, had not *known the great facts contained in them to be true.*"⁴⁷² Authority rests, then, in the written word, and not in a secretive conclave of priests. She also returns to her central argument from the first letter and again relies on Lockean political philosophy to articulate her most important point:

for there is an obligation of subordination and submission to [parents and sovereign princes], laid upon all children and subjects, by God's express order. ... But if they will go beyond that, by commanding any thing contrary to the word or will of God, in that we

⁴⁷⁰ Trotter uses the term "moral certainty" again near the end of *Discourse*, writing, "So that I am as far to seek as ever for a living infallible guide, finding no direction to such a guide in the Scriptures, nor any tradition sufficient to give a moral certainty of it" (1:41).

⁴⁷¹ Trotter, *Discourse*, 1:20.

⁴⁷² Trotter, *Discourse*, 1:27-28. By invoking the credibility of the early Christian writers as a defense of scriptural truth, Trotter is in line with standard Anglican claims for the validity of scripture. Gerard Reedy writes about Anglican divines of the late seventeenth century that "a major Anglican argument for the truth of Scripture directly concerned the credibility of its authors" in Reedy, *The Bible and Reason: Anglicans and Scripture in Late Seventeenth-Century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 97.

must not obey them; and consequently we must have a liberty of *judging for ourselves*, whether they do so or not. Now if this is true, with relation to our natural and civil governors (as I believe every body will allow that it is) why is not the same limitation as consistent with our obligation of obeying spiritual governors? No doubt, this liberty of judging for ourselves may be abused in all those relations: wicked children and rebels, as well as *Hereticks*, may make this a pretence for throwing off their duty; but that does not make the rule less true, or hinder those from being justified by it, who act sincerely in it.⁴⁷³

At the heart of Trotter's theological position is the necessity for individual religious judgments, even if those judgments differ from those of the church hierarchy or established religious authority. It is not a coincidence that her respondent recognizes that her argument has potentially radical implications. For Trotter, Catholic arguments rest on a coercive authority which needs to be rejected by the liberty-loving English who resist tyrannical authority, even if, as she concedes, the English can more easily be seduced by "Hereticks" who reject all Christian authority.

Trotter's equation of civil and spiritual governors may be usefully compared to the position on church authority argued by the Tory Mary Astell, who, as Patricia Springborg observes, "fell short of denying the individual believer the right to divide the Church by private opinion."⁴⁷⁴

Astell writes "that to acquiesce in the Authority of the Church" is "[t]he calling in to our assistance the Judgment and Advice of those whom GOD hath set over us" and "in such disputable points as we're not able to determine for our selves" we should submit "to the Voice

⁴⁷³ Trotter, *Discourse*, 1:23-24.

⁴⁷⁴ Patricia Springborg, introduction to *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Parts I and II* by Mary Astell, ed. Patricia Springborg (Peterborough: Broadview, 2002), 30.

of our Guides.”⁴⁷⁵ Trotter is less willing than Astell to obey clerical authority and consequently foregrounds the liberty of the individual believer over the authority of the church, a position she began articulating in her correspondence with Thomas Burnet. Despite being published anonymously in 1707, her *Discourse* is thus the culmination of her own path from Catholic to Protestant, a kind of intellectual autobiography as well as Protestant *apologia*. In condensing the lengthy seventeenth-century Anglican arguments that were crucial for her own personal conversion, she implies that her own intellectual and religious change of heart can serve as an example to others.

If, for Trotter, the final ground of religious judgment is the individual, ultimately the crux of the *Discourse* is hermeneutical: how should one interpret scripture? According to Trotter, when read in an un-biased manner, scripture interprets itself: “’Tis true, the Scriptures have been misunderstood, or perverted, and that in matters of great importance: but this is no argument, that they are not plain in such things; for those, who have misinterpreted them, have not done it, by adhering to the plain and obvious sense of them.”⁴⁷⁶ For Trotter, “all the mistakes about the meaning of Scripture only shew the great danger, of being too careless, too curious, or any way biassed in studying them.”⁴⁷⁷ In arguing for the accuracy and plainness of the Bible – as in her asserting that early Christian witnesses provide unassailable evidence for the accuracy of scripture – Trotter bypasses what was becoming a central tenet of free-thinkers: a criticism of the veracity of scripture. She spends little time discussing scriptural accuracy, and her interpretive strategy is to emphasize its “plain and obvious sense,” an argument that she extends to other

⁴⁷⁵ Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Part II: wherein a method is offer’d for the improvement of their minds* in *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Parts I and II*, ed. Patricia Springborg (Peterborough: Broadview, 2002), 139.

⁴⁷⁶ Trotter, *Discourse*, 1:32.

⁴⁷⁷ Trotter, *Discourse*, 1:32-33.

texts, including her own. For Trotter, to interpret scripture properly, one must approach the text free of ideological predispositions and preconceived ideas.⁴⁷⁸

By highlighting private judgment to such a high degree, Trotter places herself in the tradition of a liberal Anglicanism that, in part, had its genesis in Chillingworth's *Religion of Protestants*. Such a position has obvious benefits for a female writer entering the masculine dominated world of theological debate. By arguing for both the need to approach scripture free from bias and that there is no requirement for an interpretive authority as crucial for acting as a true Christian, she elevates her stance to a theological position. Even her own texts (which might normally be ignored because of the gender of the author) must be read in a similar manner to Protestant scripture, completely (if ideally) free from bias. Trotter makes this connection explicit in *Discourse* when she sarcastically notes that her previous letter "does not need an infallible interpreter; though the gentleman, for want of a little care, has mistaken my meaning, in more places than I have mentioned."⁴⁷⁹ Throughout the *Discourse*, Trotter continually asserts her Protestant duty to interpretive freedom within the idea of a Christian sense of conscience. Through her short, sober autobiographical assault on Catholic infallibility, she argues for her own legitimacy as a religious contestant and for her own individual moral and spiritual authority.

⁴⁷⁸ Locke argues for a similar scriptural interpretive strategy in the Preface to his 1705 *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*: "Nothing is more acceptable to Phansie than plyant Terms and Expressions that are not obstinate, in such it can find its account with Delight, and with them be illuminated, Orthodox, infallible at pleasure, and in its own way. But where the Sense of the Author goes visibly in its own Train, and the Words, receiving a determin'd Sense from their Companions and Adjacents, will not consent to give Countenance and Colour to what is agreed to be right, and must be supported at any rate, there Men of establish'd Orthodoxie do not so well find their Satisfaction. And perhaps if it were well examin'd, it would be no very extravagant Paradox to say, that there are fewer that bring their Opinions to the Sacred Scripture to be tried by that infallible Rule, than bring the Sacred Scripture to their Opinions, to bend it to them, to make it as they can a Cover and Guard of them." John Locke, *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St Paul*, ed. Arthur W. Wainwright, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 1:107.

⁴⁷⁹ Trotter, *Discourse*, 1:33.

Moral Philosophy, Benevolence, and Sensibility

A related legacy of Trotter's philosophy for mid-century writers was her discussions of benevolence and morality. Her sense of Christian benevolence is a crucial strain of thought that has implications for the later, mid-century development of sensibility. Crucially, Trotter's thoughts on Christian benevolence are drawn in part by her understanding and promulgation of her feminist views. Martha Brandt Bolton speculates that the reason Trotter defended Clark's moral philosophy against marginal figures such as Edmund Law and William King is because she had a practical political aim of defending a non-dogmatic Christianity from those writers within orthodox Christianity who advocated more dogmatic positions because to her, strident defenses of Christian dogma ended up inadvertently supporting the work of skeptical writers. As a result, Trotter's philosophy – especially her writings on morality – were (and certainly are today) less well-known than they might have been had she devoted more time to attacking better known writers such as Shaftesbury and Hutcheson.⁴⁸⁰ Nevertheless, the fact that Trotter did have an impact on her contemporaries is perhaps best exemplified by the fact that Birch published her collected works and Bluestocking writers viewed her as an inspiration for their own work and looked forward to the publication of her collected works.⁴⁸¹ Furthermore, in a citation

⁴⁸⁰ Brandt Bolton, 585-88. Brandt Bolton, however, further argues that Trotter could have spent more time attacking Hutcheson because he defended “versions of the interested scheme” and he was a “nonreligionist moral theorist,” both claims of which I would disagree with.

⁴⁸¹ In the correspondence between the Bluestocking writers Elizabeth Carter and Catherine Talbot, Trotter is discussed several times. In a letter dated 3 April 1750 from Talbot to Carter, the discussion is about Birch's pending publication of Trotter's *Works*: “I wish I could give you a more satisfactory account of Mrs. Cockburn's book; it will not be out this twelvemonth, and I am assured it will be much benefited by the delay, as they are collecting from all parts of the world Letters and papers of value.” In a letter dated 20 August 1751, Carter writes to Talbot that Trotter “seems to have had a most remarkable clear understanding and an excellent heart,” despite her having “read but little” of her work. Talbot agrees, writing that Trotter “seems to have had an honest, upright, affectionate heart” but suggests that it is “a pity that her last years were in a manner lost in obscurity so little suited to her genius.” See *A Series of Letters Between*

unmentioned by Kelley or Brandt Bolton, the moral philosopher Richard Price cites and recommends Trotter's correspondence with Thomas Sharp, Archdeacon of Northumberland, published in her *Works*. Sharp writes in the first edition of his 1748 *A Review of the Principal Questions and Difficulties in Morals* that "The letters which passed between the judicious and candid Dr. Sharp and Mrs. Cockburn, published in the second volume of the works of the latter, deserve to be consulted."⁴⁸² Price's recommendation of Trotter's correspondence is important because it supports Margaret Atherton's claim that Trotter's "published works can be seen as outgrowths of the activity exemplified in her letters."⁴⁸³ Eighteenth-century moral philosophers viewed Trotter's arguments in her published correspondence as valuable contributions to moral philosophy. Significantly, Price is associated with the rationalist side of eighteenth-century moral philosophy, and he believed that ultimately what grounded morality was a subject's ability to guide his or her behavior by a rational perception of right and wrong conduct. He sums up this position in eighteenth-century moral thought in *Review* (and also demonstrates why he is so concerned with accurate terminology) when he states, "whether our moral ideas are derived from the *understanding* or from a *sense*; it will be necessary to state distinctly the different natures and

Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot From the Year 1741 to 1770, ed. Montagu Pennington, 4 vols. (London: 1809), 1:333, 2:49, 2:52. The generation of intellectual writers after Trotter seemingly felt less compelled, at least in private, to defend female learning because of its benefits to the domestic sphere. Talbot's concern over Trotter's obscure later years demonstrates the difference between women's attitudes toward public versus private justifications for their learning and philosophical writing.

⁴⁸² Richard Price, *A Review of the Principal Questions and Difficulties in Morals* (London: 1758), 407. Cited in Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780, vol. II Shaftesbury to Hume* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 227n295.

⁴⁸³ Margaret Atherton, "Women Philosophers in Early Modern England," in *A Companion to Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Steven Nadler (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 416.

provinces of sense and reason.”⁴⁸⁴ The distinction between sense and reason was ground for much of the debate in eighteenth-century British moral philosophy, a debate that figures prominently in Trotter’s letters.

In his work tracing the philosophical influences and antecedents of arguably the most important trope of eighteenth-century sentimental literature, the good-natured man, John K. Sheriff discusses this division between sense and reason in eighteenth-century moral thought:

The rationalists were convinced that they founded morality on human nature in that man has as his fundamental characteristic the ability to reason, and thereby the ability to understand truth. To follow reason and to follow nature were for them the same thing.

The sentimentalists stoutly maintained that in order to follow human nature one ought to follow it naturally, instinctively, automatically.⁴⁸⁵

Sheriff notes that this division was not absolute: “the debate between the rationalists and the sentimentalists is a bickering within a single camp, and both camps valued both reason and benevolence, but in varying degrees.”⁴⁸⁶ Nonetheless, according to Sheriff, “As the century progressed, the sentimentalists won the field in ethical theory. The progression seems to have been from a morality based on God’s commandments, to a morality based on nature, to a morality based on feeling and social custom. In the Cambridge Platonists and Latitudinarians, in Shaftesbury, Hume, and Smith, sentimental ethics had a continuous development.”⁴⁸⁷ This shift

⁴⁸⁴ Richard Price, *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*, in *British Moralists, 1650-1800*, ed. D.D. Raphael, 2 vols. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 2:135.

⁴⁸⁵ John K. Sheriff, *The Good-Natured Man: The Evolution of a Moral Idea, 1660-1800* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1982), 6. Similarly, Rivers contends that after Shaftesbury, what “emerged in the 1720s was an important and continuing debate concerning the foundation of morals and the correct definition of the moral faculty, a debate that centred on the relative functions of reason and the affections in moral life” (154).

⁴⁸⁶ Sheriff, *Good-Natured Man*, 12.

⁴⁸⁷ Sheriff, *Good-Natured Man*, 17.

in ethics went hand in hand with an increased emphasis placed on interpretive freedom by latitudinarian writers. As Trotter argues in her *Discourse*, the only way to posit the coherence of an individual's interpretive authority is to presuppose a commitment on his or her part to ethics. Sheriff does not consider contributions from Trotter or any other period female philosopher to either the development of sentimental ethics or their contributions to the culture of sensibility; however, as a writer firmly within latitudinarian Anglican circles and as a central contributor to eighteenth-century moral discourse, Trotter needs to be included in this critical narrative. Significantly, although largely in the rationalist camp, she drew inspiration from latitudinarian thinkers, especially the Burnets. As I have noted, this inspiration primarily came while she was still a professed Catholic. Moreover, although a defender of the rationalists Locke and especially Clarke, Trotter had many affinities with thinkers aligned with sentimental ethics, particularly Francis Hutcheson. Trotter is firmly entrenched on both sides of the critical division in eighteenth-century moral thought, moral thought that was the primary philosophical antecedent to the eighteenth-century culture of sensibility.

Patricia Sheridan identifies this complexity in Trotter's thought when she notes that in her writings, "we find elements of moral sense theory integrated into a rationalistic fitness theory," and her "fusion of these seemingly divergent strains of thought may serve to shed some light on Hutcheson's moral sense theory with respect to rationalistic moral theories."⁴⁸⁸ However, she does not explore this connection at any length. Trotter's brief comments on Shaftesbury and Hutcheson demonstrate her multifaceted views of sentimental ethics as she simultaneously appropriated aspects of their thought while distancing herself in important ways from their larger projects. Her unique synthesis of a rationalist and sentimental ethics provides an

⁴⁸⁸ Sheridan, introduction, 22.

important contribution to the philosophical precursors of the eighteenth-century ideology of sensibility. Trotter argues that this synthesis demands a practical Christian benevolence, an aspect that was drawn, in part, from her intellectual engagement with Catholicism, and that serves as perhaps the primary marker of later eighteenth-century fictional representations of sensibility.

Shaftesbury only used the term “moral sense” in passing, and although he is sometimes credited as being foundational to the creation of an affective sense of morality, rationality was also important to his moral scheme.⁴⁸⁹ As Lawrence E. Klein argues, “Human morality, though it arose in the feelings, was a phenomenon of consciousness and rationality as well.”⁴⁹⁰

Shaftesbury writes in his *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit*:

So that if a Creature be generous, kind, constant, compassionate; yet if he cannot reflect on what he himself does, or sees other do, so as to take notice of what is *worthy* and *honest*; and make that Notice or Conception of *Worth* and *Honesty* to be an Object of his Affection, he has not the Character of being *virtuous*: For thus, and no otherwise, he is

⁴⁸⁹ On Shaftesbury’s use of the term “moral sense,” see Rivers, 2:124.

⁴⁹⁰ Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral discourse and cultural politics in early eighteenth-century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 56. Rivers also documents Shaftesbury’s inconsistent discussion of the moral faculty. Tracing the complicated strands of Shaftesbury’s thought, she argues “If Shaftesbury’s various accounts of the moral faculty are looked at together, three main strands are clear: the natural or emotional, the rational or educational, and the aesthetic. First, moral distinctions are real, and the faculty that discerns them is natural. Second, this natural faculty does not operate unaided and uncontrolled; it requires some element of rational reflection, education, or discipline (though Shaftesbury changes his mind about the extent) to bring it out. Third, the process whereby we make moral judgements of good and bad is very like the process whereby we make aesthetic judgements of beauty and deformity” (126).

capable of having a *Sense of Right or Wrong*; a Sentiment or Judgment of what is done, thro just, equal, and good Affection, or the contrary.⁴⁹¹

This passage illustrates Shaftesbury's conflicted feelings about the grounds of morality; an agent can be naturally benevolent, but the agent must further make his or her own (or others) benevolent actions an object of affection through rational reflection. This conflict is summed up in Shaftesbury's conflating of "Sentiment" and "Judgement" at the end of the passage. At the base of Shaftesbury's moral scheme is an affective sense, but at a second order level reason also is absolutely essential.

Shaftesbury's privileging of affect in morality, while still maintaining an aspect of rationality helps explain Trotter's conflicted feelings towards his work. In addition, Trotter took great exception to Shaftesbury's ambiguous and unorthodox religion. In her later published letters, Trotter has long exchanges about moral philosophy and discusses Shaftesbury several times with her niece, a defender of his philosophy. Throughout, Trotter maintains the primacy of Christianity. In a letter to her niece from 3 September 1743, Trotter cautions her niece "not to be too fond of such moralists, as would draw us from all societies of Christians" because in the Gospels "undoubtedly the purest morality is to be found, and upon the surest grounds."⁴⁹² In the same letter, she laments that "the noble earl you so much admire (the great oracle of the deists) is one of these; whose fine genius, and personal virtue, might otherwise have been of great service to the religion of his country."⁴⁹³ By 1743, Shaftesbury's reputation as an "oracle of the deists" was secure, and, although recognizing his contributions to moral philosophy, Trotter's sarcasm in calling him "noble" and her lament about how he could have been "of great service" to

⁴⁹¹ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Philip Ayres, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 1:204.

⁴⁹² Mrs. Cockburn to her Niece, 3 Sept. 1743, in *Works* 2:313.

⁴⁹³ Mrs. Cockburn to her Niece, 3 Sept. 1743, in *Works* 2:313.

English Christianity indicates why she was unable to fully embrace his work. Shaftesbury's association with deism was a continuous sticking point for Trotter, as it was for both Astell and Fielding. In a letter for 12 June 1744 to her niece, Trotter considers that "perhaps [Shaftesbury] was a good *Christian*" when he published the latitudinarian Benjamin Whichcote's sermons in 1698.⁴⁹⁴ However, he "seems to have taken a prejudice against [Locke] at the same time, that he fell out with revelation."⁴⁹⁵ Trotter thus equates Lockean ideas with Christianity in her criticism of Shaftesbury and speculates that his skepticism may have been provoked by "the violencies, divisions, or degeneracy of *Christians*."⁴⁹⁶ She again highlights the importance, to her, of a practical latitudinarian-inflected Christianity free from dogmatic divisions, similar to what she expressed almost 40 years earlier in her discussions of Catholicism with Thomas Burnet of Kemnay.

In other letters with her niece, Trotter engages directly with Shaftesbury's ideas of a moral sense. She writes that if Shaftesbury "founds *virtue* on the *moral sense*, as I think he does, his scheme and mine can by no means agree" because she founds "virtue solely on the essential difference, nature, and relation of things, not on any instincts" (an essentially Clarkeian idea). Trotter does concede, however, that she allows "the moral sense its due weight in point of obligation."⁴⁹⁷ Although she accepts the role of a "moral sense," she views it as too ambiguous to serve as a foundation for virtue, instead embracing Clarke's idea that morality arises out of the way God structured nature.

Trotter seems to be consistent in her writings in arguing that morality is rationally grounded in the essential nature of the universe, yet she does reserve a place for an unmediated,

⁴⁹⁴ Mrs. Cockburn to her Niece, 12 June 1744, in *Works* 2:318.

⁴⁹⁵ Mrs. Cockburn to her Niece, 12 June 1744, in *Works* 2:318.

⁴⁹⁶ Mrs. Cockburn to her Niece, 12 June 1744, in *Works* 2:318.

⁴⁹⁷ Mrs. Cockburn to her Niece, 2 Oct. 1747, in *Works* 2:330.

affective sense of practical morality. In her 1747 *Remarks Upon the Principles and Reasonings of Dr Rutherford's Essay on the Nature and Obligation of Virtue* she writes:

that though our passions, our benevolent affections, our love of truth, and approbation of what appears to us right and fit, are natural, and implanted in us for good and useful purposes; yet the *application* of any of these, is not determined by nature, but is put in our own power, so that we may make either a right or a wrong use of them: It is our fault if we suffer our passions or affections to be our masters.⁴⁹⁸

Although for Trotter the passions can act as an important impetus to Christian benevolence, it is essential that they be rationally controlled. Likewise, a few pages later, she maintains that founding “virtue *solely* on benevolent affections, and an *instinctive* sense of right and wrong” is troublesome because “if these may be worn out, or unattended to, or misguided, virtue must be left on a very precarious foundation which I leave them to defend as well as they can.”⁴⁹⁹

Instead, she is “only concerned to maintain, that a disinterested benevolence and approbation of virtue are *natural* to man, and given him as proper excitements to good actions.”⁵⁰⁰ Trotter is thus concerned that grounding morality on what she views as only a subjective basis, an affective moral sense, is problematic; nonetheless, subjects do maintain an affective element internal to their behavior that is essential to practical morality. This division in Trotter’s thought between the foundation of morality in the fitness of the created order and practical morality as experienced by individual subjects is crucial. As we have seen, it is of a piece with her larger concerns for a practical Christianity in both her letters and her *Discourse*.

⁴⁹⁸ Catharine Trotter, *Remarks Upon the Principles and Reasonings of Dr Rutherford's Essay on the Nature and Obligation of Virtue* in *Works* 2:31.

⁴⁹⁹ Trotter, *Remark Upon the Principless*, 2:33.

⁵⁰⁰ Trotter, *Remark Upon the Principless*, 2:33.

Trotter makes this division between affect and rationality in her thinking on morality explicit in another letter to her niece dated 20 November 1744:

When you read my *Remarks* again, you will observe, that I place morality solely and entirely on the *nature, relations, and fitness of things*; for I cannot conceive how any other principle can have the least share in the foundation of virtue. But perhaps you meant our *obligation* to the *practice* of moral virtue, which is a distinct consideration; and that I do indeed place upon a threefold bottom, the fitness of things, the moral sense (not a blind instinct) and the will of God.⁵⁰¹

Throughout her career, Trotter was concerned not with just abstract speculation, but, with the practical consequences of philosophy. Her stance on morality is no different. In her discussion of Shaftesbury, as we have seen, her first instinct is to assume his skepticism is brought upon by the failings within the Christian community itself. Notably, in the passage above, she articulates a place for an affective moral sense, but is explicit that it is not simply a “blind instinct.” Trotter’s use of “blind instinct” is a signal that she primarily has the thought of Francis Hutcheson in mind. As she does with Shaftesbury, Trotter has conflicted feelings about Hutcheson, though she does not question his religious orthodoxy. Instead, although she is willing to give a place to sentiment in morality, she cannot abide the idea of an unmediated sense as the foundation of morality. In her 1747 *Remarks*, she notes that although she has “a great esteem for that ingenious author’s writings, in which are many useful truths” she “cannot agree with him, that a *blind instinct* (if that is what he means by a *moral sense*) or that public affections (as he calls them) are the proper *foundations of virtue*.”⁵⁰² In a letter to her niece, Trotter defends her understanding of

⁵⁰¹ Mrs. Cockburn to her Niece, 20 Nov. 1744, in *Works* 2:323.

⁵⁰² Catharine Trotter, *Remarks Upon the Principles and Reasonings of Dr Rutherford’s Essay on the Nature and Obligation of Virtue* in *Works* 2:18.

Hutcheson's sense of the moral faculty as instinctual and reason-less: "You ask me, who it is, that calls the moral sense a *blind instinct*, for you are sure *Mr. Hutchison* does not. But that is understood to be *Mr. Hutchison's* meaning by all, who have wrote upon it Indeed an *instinctive approbation of virtue &c.* can have no other meaning, for all instincts ... act without judgment."⁵⁰³ An instinctual moral sense can be acceptable to Trotter insofar as it promotes active Christian benevolence, but to her, it should never be considered as a foundation of morality. Instead, morality should be grounded in the rational understanding of the fitness of God's created order. Trotter thus argues that the idea of a moral sense must have both crucial rational and practical aspects. In her *Remarks Upon Some Writers in the Controversy Concerning the Foundation of Moral Virtue and Moral Obligation* Trotter writes that "Dr. Clarke and his followers maintain, that the *fitness of things*, and conscience or the *moral sense* (by which they never understand, nor would I be understood to mean, a blind instinct, but a consciousness consequent upon the perceptions of the rational mind) have *in themselves* an obligatory power."⁵⁰⁴ Here we can see Trotter's Clarkean formulation of an affective moral sense subordinated to the rational understanding that was so important to her. Although the philosophical landscape had changed considerably in the 40 years between the publication of Trotter's *Discourse* and her later writings on morality, Trotter maintains a consistent emphasis on the need to rationally ground Christian ethics, while at the same time allowing interpretive freedom to individual subjects. In her letters to her niece, written when she was nearly 70 years

⁵⁰³ Mrs. Cockburn to her Niece, 2 Oct. 1747, in *Works* 2:338. In her 1743 *Remarks Upon Some Writers in the Controversy Concerning the Foundation of Moral Virtue and Moral Obligation* Trotter likewise writes that William Law "argues very justly against Mr. *Hutchinson*, that this is no proof, that the *moral sense and publick affections* (in his language) are mere *instincts* implanted in us, since they are all resolvable into *reason*, and are undeniably cultivated and improved, by making a right use of our faculties" in *Works* 2:412.

⁵⁰⁴ Catharine Trotter, *Remarks Upon Some Writers in the Controversy Concerning the Foundation of Moral Virtue and Moral Obligation* in *Works* 1:407.

old, Trotter reinvigorates her arguments about the vital role an interpretive freedom supported with an attendant ethics plays to a proper understanding of Christianity that she had first articulated in the early eighteenth century.

Trotter's wide-ranging critical discussions of the British moral philosophers of her day is remarkable, particularly when it is remembered that moral philosophy of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was primarily practiced by men educated in universities or dissenting academies (Shaftesbury is a notable exception, as Rivers notes).⁵⁰⁵ Trotter's crucial – but critically ignored – contribution to this debate was a particular synthesis of sentiment and reason in the debate over the foundation and function of morality. Kelley argues convincingly, drawing on both Trotter's fiction and her philosophy, that for Trotter, "rational morality is the key to empowerment for women."⁵⁰⁶ Although Kelley does not consider at any length Trotter's writings on the sentimental ethics of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, Trotter's appropriation and modification of their views is certainly of a piece with her desire for the betterment of women. Moreover, her emphasis on separating an affective Christianized aspect of the moral faculty from a rationalistic foundation, drawn from both her intellectual engagement with Catholicism in the early eighteenth century and her own unique fusion of rationalist and sentimental ethics, anticipates and has similarities to the active intrinsic benevolent morality of later fictionalized representations of sentimental ethics in the work of Henry Fielding, Henry Mackenzie, Laurence Sterne and, as I discuss in the following chapter, Sarah Fielding. Trotter needs to be recognized as an important contributor to the culture of sensibility, arguably the most important ideological discourse of the latter half of the eighteenth century.

⁵⁰⁵ Rivers, 2:91.

⁵⁰⁶ Kelley, *Catharine Trotter*, 61.

Chapter 4: Sarah Fielding, Masculine Heroism, and the “True Christian Philosophy”

In her 1774 work honoring famous women, *The Female Advocate*, Mary Scott praises Sarah Fielding’s “talent, with ingenuous Art, to trace the secret mazes of the Heart,” and her “mind, that nobly scorn’d each low desire, / And glow’d with pure Religion’s warmest fire.”⁵⁰⁷ Scott yokes two aspects of Fielding’s work that often get omitted from critical discussions: her sentimental exploration of “the secret mazes of the Heart” and her Christianity.⁵⁰⁸ Critics have identified Sarah Fielding as a pioneering writer of sentimental literature, and while eighteenth-century sensibility has a long scholarly tradition, few scholars have examined at length the religious discourse that permeates *David Simple*.⁵⁰⁹ The primary feature of David’s character throughout both *The Adventures* and *Volume the Last* is his ambiguous identity as what Richard

⁵⁰⁷ Mary Scott, *The Female Advocate; a poem. Occasioned by reading Mr. Duncombe’s Femiuiad* (London: 1774), pp. 22-3, lines 257-58, 263-64.

⁵⁰⁸ Scott’s formulation recalls Henry Fielding’s claim, in his preface to the second edition of *David Simple*, that “the Merit” of the novel “consists in a vast Penetration into human Nature, a deep and profound Discernment of all the Mazes, Windings, and Labyrinths, which perplex the Heart of Man” (See Appendix 1 of *The Adventures of David Simple and Volume the Last*, ed. Peter Sabor (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1998), 345. In general, I will refer to the 1744 *The Adventures of David Simple* as *The Adventures* and to the 1753 *The Adventures of David Simple, Volume the Last* as *Volume the Last*.

⁵⁰⁹ Gerard Barker argues that Sarah Fielding “anticipates the novel of feeling decades before such writers as Mackenzie, Goldsmith, and Henry Brooke” in his essay “*David Simple*: The Novel of Sensibility in Embryo,” *Modern Language Studies* 12, no. 2 (Spring 1982): 69. Since R.S. Crane, critics have examined writings and sermons by Anglican divines in the latitudinarian tradition to partially locate the origins of sensibility. See Crane, “Suggestions Toward a Genealogy of the ‘Man of Feeling,’” *English Literary History* 1, no. 3 (December 1934): 205-30. Crane’s thesis has not gone uncontested. See especially Donald Greene, “Latitudinarianism and Sensibility: The Genealogy of the ‘Man of Feeling’ Reconsidered,” *Modern Philology* 75 (November 1977): 159-83. For the origins of the “man of feeling,” see John K. Sheriff, *The Good-Natured Man: The Evolution of a Moral Ideal, 1660-1800* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1982). For discussions of eighteenth-century sensibility see especially John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986); and Paul Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Steele called a “Christian hero,” a contested figure throughout the eighteenth century. Eighteenth-century novelists repeatedly struggled with how to present a fictional character embodying Christian principles because the interpretation of those principles by High and Low Church Anglicans as well as dissenters was hotly contested. An overzealous defense of specific (High Church) Anglican doctrines could result in civil unrest, as it did in the wake of Sacheverell’s 1710 trial, and, as I have discussed in previous chapters, any kind of fervent, vocal Christianity could also bring about charges of enthusiasm.⁵¹⁰ Too little attention paid to Christianity might result in accusations of deism or atheism. Throughout both parts of *David Simple*, Fielding experiments with the role of the Christian hero and her negotiations with competing models raise a host of questions: what characteristics define a Christian hero? What should be the extent of the hero’s interactions with society? What happens when tragedy befalls a Christian hero?⁵¹¹

Although Fielding does not use the term “Christian hero,” it is a fitting description of David throughout both *The Adventures* and *Volume the Last*. The term is perhaps best known as the title of Richard Steele’s first published work, *The Christian Hero* (1701). Steele wonders why “the Heathen struts, and the Christian sneaks in our Imagination” and endeavors to

⁵¹⁰ Henry Sacheverell gave several famous sermons on the danger the English Church faced because of its supposed abandonment by the Whig ministry. After his trial and suspension, several riots, including attacks on dissenting houses of worship, broke out. Sacheverell said at his trial that “never were the ministers of Christ so abused and vilified . . . never was infidelity and atheism so impudent.” Qtd. in Donald A. Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger: Parsons and Parishioners, 1660-1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 15.

⁵¹¹ Until the past two decades, Sarah Fielding was often treated as an imitation of either her brother or Richardson. Thankfully, the critical outlook for her has changed, and she is now viewed as a strikingly original contributor to the history of eighteenth-century literature. For a discussion of the relationship of the three, see Peter Sabor, “Richardson, Henry Fielding, and Sarah Fielding” in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1740-1830*, eds. Thomas Keymer and Jon Mee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 139-56.

demonstrate the supremacy of Christianity over more fashionable pagan philosophy.⁵¹² The descriptions in *The Christian Hero* of “true” Christian principles (the importance of benevolence especially) anticipate many of the qualities associated with David’s character, and it is possible Fielding had read the text. As Malcolm Kelsall notes, “Steele was among her favourite authors.”⁵¹³ Steele’s claim that “It is not a Stoical Rant ... to be unmov’d at Misfortunes” because Christianity “has fortify’d our Minds on all sides, and made’em Impregnable by any Happiness or Misery with which this World can attack it” is representative of David’s character, especially in *Volume the Last*.⁵¹⁴ Moreover, Steele’s notion of Christianity as “an exalted Superstructure” over human nature already “fram’d for mutual Kindness” and an “Eternal God” who “presses us by Natural Society to a close Union with each other” served as a counter-example to libertinism, and aptly describes David and his community of friends who are all driven into marriage not by lust, but by friendship and benevolence.⁵¹⁵ Regardless of Steele’s specific influences on Fielding, *The Christian Hero* was just one of many early eighteenth-century texts that discursively negotiated between competing models of virtuous heroism, both Christian and otherwise. Jerry Beasley notes the important influence of Christian ideologies to the fiction of the 1740s and argues that “Christian heroism ... constituted a new delineation of the ideals of the age.”⁵¹⁶ While rightly arguing that David is a Christian hero, Beasley does not explore the implications of David’s heroism at any length. Like many eighteenth-century

⁵¹² Richard Steele, *The Christian Hero*, ed. Rae Blanchard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), 15. *The Christian Hero* is also the title of a 1734/5 George Lillo tragedy. Fielding was familiar with Lillo’s plays and references *The London Merchant* and *The Fatal Curiosity in The Adventures*.

⁵¹³ Malcolm Kelsall, introduction to *The Adventures of David Simple*, by Sarah Fielding, ed. Malcolm Kelsall (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), xii.

⁵¹⁴ Steele, 75.

⁵¹⁵ Steele, 77-8.

⁵¹⁶ Jerry C. Beasley, *Novels of the 1740s* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1982), 11.

authors, Fielding deals with this negotiation in her fiction, using competing strands of Christian discourse to depict David and his friends. The characters of *David Simple* dramatize the religious controversies that permeated England in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries discussed in previous chapters. Recognizing the complexities of David's Christian heroism is vital to understanding how both parts of the novel are situated historically.

Linda Bree is an exception to the critics who downplay Fielding's use of Christian discourse, and she astutely argues that in *Volume the Last*, David is "a type of Christian hero."⁵¹⁷ Although Bree claims that the "Christian aspect to David's character is much more apparent in *Volume the Last*," I argue that his Christian heroism is just as important in *The Adventures*, albeit in a sometimes different form.⁵¹⁸ It is easy to see why *Volume the Last* seems more explicitly religious because the narrator compares the suffering that David and his friends undergo to Job's, and his vision of an ideal community must wait for the afterlife. Fielding anticipates the theology she dramatizes in *Volume the Last* in her 1749 critical defense of *Clarissa, Remarks on Clarissa*, a text which has led critics to emphasize the influence of Richardson hanging over *Volume the Last*. Bree suggests that "Richardson's insistence upon a tragic, rather than a comic, ending, as consistent both with real life and with true Christian exemplarity, helped to shape the final part of David Simple's story."⁵¹⁹ More specifically, Richardson's influence on Fielding was primarily theological, and the theology embedded in *Clarissa* (and praised by Fielding) altered her conception of David and his community when she wrote *Volume the Last* in 1753. However, Job-like pious suffering is just one aspect of David's Christian heroism, and in many ways, the

⁵¹⁷ Linda Bree, *Sarah Fielding* (New York: Twayne, 1996), 81.

⁵¹⁸ Bree, 81.

⁵¹⁹ Bree, 79.

complex theological makeup of David's character remains consistent throughout both parts of *David Simple*.

To understand the complexities of David's character, we need to recognize the stakes involved for Fielding in exemplary Christian heroism. Fielding's *Remarks* was a significant intervention in the contemporary debates surrounding *Clarissa*, and by extension the theological tensions within notions of Christian heroism. Peter Sabor observes that *Remarks* "played a significant role in shaping Richardson's revisions and additions to *Clarissa*."⁵²⁰ Richardson was repeatedly frustrated by his readers' interpretations of *Clarissa*. Many readers were particularly irate about Clarissa's death at the end of the novel because it frustrated their desire for a romantic marriage between Clarissa and Lovelace and a traditional happy ending.⁵²¹ Richardson defended his narrative choices in postscripts to editions of the novel and in his correspondence with readers. In the postscript to the 1748 first edition of *Clarissa*, Richardson defines his notion of "Poetical Justice" in theological terms: his novel "is designed to inculcate upon the human mind, under the guise of an Amusement, the great Lessons of Christianity."⁵²² He ends his discussion by noting that all "who that are in earnest in their Profession of Christianity ... will rather envy than regret the triumphant death of CLARISSA" whose virtues "HEAVEN only could reward."⁵²³ For Richardson, the purpose of his fiction is religious instruction; he thus sees no fundamental distinction between theology and aesthetics. Richardson similarly notes in a letter

⁵²⁰ Peter Sabor, introduction to *Remarks on Clarissa* by Sarah Fielding, ed. Peter Sabor. Augustan Reprint Society Publication Numbers 231-232 (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1985), vi.

⁵²¹ See especially Thomas Keymer, *Richardson's "Clarissa" and the Eighteenth-Century Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and Elspeth Knights, "'Daring but to touch the hem of her garment': Women Reading *Clarissa*," *Women's Writing* 7, no. 2 (2000): 221-45.

⁵²² Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa. Or the History of a Young Lady*, 1st ed., 7 vols. (London: 1748), 7:425.

⁵²³ Richardson, 7:431.

dated 15 December 1748 to Lady Bradshaigh, a particularly insistent critic, that “A Writer who follows Nature and pretends to keep the Christian System in his Eye, cannot make a Heaven in this World for his Favourites.”⁵²⁴ For Richardson, a happy ending would negate the orthodox Christian purpose of the text. In his discussion of the theology of *Clarissa*, Thomas Keymer argues that “all forms of happy ending were ... unavailable” for Richardson “because the just apportioning of reward and punishment within the world was ... a false expectation.”⁵²⁵

Clarissa’s virtue can be rewarded only in the Christian afterlife. In her *Remarks*, Fielding defends Richardson’s decision to delay rewards until the extratextual space of the Christian afterlife. Fielding defends the ending of *Clarissa*, and by extension, the dramatized theology of *Volume the Last*.

Remarks is structured fictionally. The character of Miss Gibson defends the novel from criticisms raised by “a pretty large Assembly of mix’d Company,” evidently those raised by contemporary readers.⁵²⁶ The end of *Remarks* consists of two letters exchanged between Miss Gibson and Bellario, an initial detractor of the novel’s ending who changes his opinions as a consequence of Miss Gibson’s arguments. In her letter, Miss Gibson writes that if “the Story was not to have ended tragically, the grand Moral would have been lost.”⁵²⁷ She continues:

[Clarissa] I think could not find a better Close to her Misfortunes than a triumphant Death. Triumphant it may very well be called, when her Soul, fortified by a truly Christian Philosophy, melted and softened in the School of Affliction, had conquered every earthly Desire, baffled every uneasy Passion, lost every disturbing Fear, while

⁵²⁴ Samuel Richardson to Lady Bradshaigh, 15 December 1748, in *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 108.

⁵²⁵ Keymer, 209.

⁵²⁶ Sarah Fielding, *Remarks on Clarissa, Addressed to the Author* (London: 1749), 4.

⁵²⁷ Fielding, *Remarks*, 54.

nothing remained in her tender Bosom but a lively Hope of future Happiness. ... The Death of *Clarissa* is, I believe, the only Death of the Kind in any Story; and in her Character, the Author has thrown into Action (if I may be allowed the Expression) the true Christian Philosophy, shewn its Force to ennoble the human Mind, till it can look with Serenity on all human Misfortunes, and take from Death itself its gloomy Horrors.⁵²⁸

In this passage we can partially locate the turn from romance to tragedy present in *Volume the Last*. Fielding's comments in *Remarks on Clarissa* robustly defend the importance of a narratively represented Christian death to a "true Christian philosophy," an idea that influenced *Volume the Last*. As Bree argues, "Fielding's rejection of the principles of 'poetical Justice' ... is based on the fact that such a doctrine flies in the face both of Christian morality and of real life."⁵²⁹ Fielding's surviving letters make it clear that she greatly admired Richardson and was certainly influenced by his example; however, it is also possible that at least part of the tragedy present in *Volume the Last* stems from Fielding's awareness of the popularity of *Clarissa*. Fielding astutely altered the ending of *David Simple* from happy to tragic to take advantage of the new vogue for a pious and suffering Christian protagonist.⁵³⁰ Her *Remarks*, in addition to defending Richardson's novel, authorizes the mode of Christian heroism that characterizes David in *Volume the Last*.

As critics have noted, and the novel makes clear, Job is one of the primary models of religious heroism for David in *Volume the Last*. Because of her attentive reading of *Clarissa*, Fielding altered David's story in the sequel to take advantage of the popularity that *Clarissa's*

⁵²⁸ Fielding, *Remarks*, 55.

⁵²⁹ Bree, 80.

⁵³⁰ Although of course Henry Fielding's works were still enormously popular. *Tom Jones*, published in 1749, outsold *Clarissa*.

Job-like model of pious suffering excited. Jonathan Lamb identifies the dominant form of theodicy from the book of Job as “an argument founded on a postulate that nothing happens or subsists in the world beyond the horizons of the divine plan; hence the apparently most anomalous and heartbreaking events are dispensations made according to an ultimately coherent system.”⁵³¹ *Volume the Last* is replete with references to death, suffering, and heaven: by the end of the novel, everyone has died except Cynthia and David’s child Camilla, yet the characters respond to these tragedies by submitting to God’s ultimately coherent plan. During his wife’s illness and eventual death, David, “like *Job* ... could almost have contended with the Almighty” but ultimately he, again like Job, “humbly acquiesced, satisfied in the Wisdom as well as the Goodness of the great Disposer of Events.”⁵³² In *Volume the Last*, it is David’s acquiescence to God’s divine plan for justice that in part defines his “true Christian philosophy.” His reward, like Clarissa’s, must be delayed until the afterlife. Early in the novel the narrator states that as David’s group “had suffered, as yet, no material Separation, so they had not tasted of that temporary Sorrow, which, though enough to embitter our Cup, is not sufficient to subdue a Christian Mind, whose Reliance on a future State is its only Foundation for Happiness.”⁵³³ In *Volume the Last*, then, hope for happiness shifts from the establishment of a well-ordered community of like-minded individuals at the end of *The Adventures* to a Richardsonian faith in divine rewards in the Christian afterlife. Similarly, while dying, David’s wife Camilla “was all

⁵³¹ Jonathan Lamb, *The Rhetoric of Suffering: Reading the Book of Job in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 63.

⁵³² Fielding, *David Simple*, 328. The narrator compares David to Job earlier in *Volume the Last* as well: “For, like *Job*, *David Simple* patiently submitted to the temporary Sufferings allotted him; and, from a Dependence on his Maker, acquired that Chearfulness and Calmness of Mind, which is not in the Power of the highest worldly Prosperity, without such a Dependence, to bestow” (261). See also 303.

⁵³³ Fielding, *David Simple*, 261.

Resignation and Submission to the Will of her God.”⁵³⁴ After she has died, the narrator notes that had he “been an Infidel” David “would have raved to Madness, or wept himself to Death,” but when “the Christian Hope came over his Mind, that his Camilla was really happy ... his Grief would subside, and patient Resignation take its Place.”⁵³⁵ The novel ends with a long first person account by David of his life and coming death. He notes his uniqueness – “there was something peculiar in my Frame” – as well as the dangers of hoping for lasting happiness with friends “subject to Infirmities, Diseases, and to certain Death.”⁵³⁶ The solution for these “Horrors of Friendship” is the Christian afterlife.⁵³⁷ Dying, David writes, “with a strong and lively Hope in the Revelation God has been pleased to send us, and with a Heart swelling with Gratitude for that Revelation, I can carry my Prospect beyond the Grave.”⁵³⁸ A Christian death for David in *Volume the Last*, as it is for Clarissa, is a crucial marker of true Christian principles.⁵³⁹

Yet, in important ways, David’s Christian heroism is not a function solely of his suffering and impending death, but remains consistent throughout *The Adventures* and *Volume the Last*. Despite its positive outlook *The Adventures* is more explicitly Christian than previous critics have assumed. Fielding often appropriated Anglican rhetoric in striking ways. In Fielding’s first extant letter to Richardson, she expresses her admiration for his second novel in gendered

⁵³⁴ Fielding, *David Simple*, 327.

⁵³⁵ Fielding, *David Simple*, 329.

⁵³⁶ Fielding, *David Simple*, 340-1.

⁵³⁷ Fielding, *David Simple*, 341.

⁵³⁸ Fielding, *David Simple*, 342.

⁵³⁹ Critics disagree over how the afterlife functions in *Volume the Last*. John Richetti remarks that even “the most pious of Christian readers, I would guess, found it difficult to keep steadily in mind that the last shall be first and that death is a joyful release into heavenly bliss” in *The English Novel in History: 1700-1780* (London: Routledge, 1999), 250. Janet Todd claims that the sense of the afterlife in *Volume the Last* “is less able than in *Clarissa* to compensate for the generalised ills in this world” in *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing and Fiction, 1660-1800* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 165. Betty A. Schellenberg, however, disagrees with Todd’s assessment, as do I. See Schellenberg, *The Conversational Circle: Rereading the English Novel, 1740-1775* (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 1996), 158n7.

religious allusions: “In short, Sir, no pen but your’s can do justice to Clarissa. Often have I reflected on my own vanity in daring but to touch the hem of her garment; and your excuse for both what I have done, and what I have not done, is all the hopes of, | Sir, your ever faithful | humble Servant.”⁵⁴⁰ Fielding included with the letter a presentation copy of *Remarks on Clarissa*, so the stakes for her were high in her correspondence with Richardson.⁵⁴¹ Earlier in the letter, Fielding carefully humbles by observing that a male dinner companion called her and her friend Jane Collier “*silly women*,” a distance reinforced later with the biblical allusion, “daring but to touch the hem of her garment.”⁵⁴² Her rhetorical distancing is emphasized in the last sentence which, the editors of the collected letters point out, alludes to the General Confession in the Anglican Order for Morning Prayer.⁵⁴³ Because of her esteem for Richardson and with an eye toward gaining his favor, Fielding shrewdly subordinates herself rhetorically by using the kind of religious language that she knew would appeal to him. She was aware of the rhetorical possibilities Anglican discourse offered and was savvy enough to deploy it in both her correspondence and her fiction.

David Simple likewise demonstrates Fielding’s awareness and use of eighteenth-century Anglican discourse. As I have noted, in large part the change in David’s circumstances between the two parts responds to larger changes in how a Christian hero functioned in the eighteenth-century literary marketplace between 1744 and 1753. A perceptive reader of the literary marketplace, producing an array of writing in several genres between the early 1740s and 1762,

⁵⁴⁰ Sarah Fielding to Samuel Richardson, 8 January 1748/9, in *The Correspondence of Henry and Sarah Fielding*, ed. Martin C. Battestin and Clive T. Probyn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 123.

⁵⁴¹ Fielding, *Correspondence*, 124n3.

⁵⁴² Fielding, *Correspondence*, 123.

⁵⁴³ Fielding, *Correspondence*, 124n5.

Fielding admitted she wrote *David Simple* because of “*Distress in her Circumstances*.”⁵⁴⁴ The narrative crux that governed Fielding’s changing focus and tone of *The Adventures* and *Volume the Last* is the negotiation between competing models of Christian heroism motivated by both market factors and a desire to map competing strands of theological discourse onto a religiously virtuous, but theologically unspecific character. David as a Christian Hero is an ideological figure who works to embody generalized Christian virtues at the expense of theological specificities. In both parts of the novel, Fielding emphasizes a broad-based, minimalist religious discourse, which had affinities with the latitudinarianism of Catharine Trotter and others. The generalized religious virtue of David’s “True Christian Philosophy” elides the contentious disputes between High Church, Catholic, Low Church, and dissenting Christians which characterized the English Church in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

David’s role as a Christian hero interacts in complex ways with the novel’s larger sentimental and satiric project.⁵⁴⁵ Understanding David as Fielding’s attempt at articulating a sentimental yet overtly religious hero as a vehicle for her satire allows us to see more clearly how such two seemingly opposed discourses as sentiment and ironic satire fit together. Mapping, in a broad sense, simple Christian principles stripped of theological specificities and division

⁵⁴⁴ Sarah Fielding writes in the “Advertisement to the Reader” at the beginning of *David Simple*, “the best Excuse that can be made for a Woman’s venturing to write at all, is that which really produced this Book; Distress in her Circumstances” (3). Fielding was well aware of the marketing benefits of *David Simple*. As Betty A. Schellenberg points out, “the Author of David Simple” is used on the title page of six of her works. See Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 99.

⁵⁴⁵ For a discussion of Fielding’s relationship to satire and how it is partially reconciled with her sentimentalism, see Sara Gadeken, “Sarah Fielding and the Salic Law of Wit,” *Studies in English Literature* 42, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 541-57. James Kim explores Fielding’s “experiment in synthesizing irony and sentimentality” (477) in his essay “Mourning, Melancholia, and Modernity: Sentimental Irony and Downward Mobility in *David Simple*,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 22, no. 3 (Spring 2010): 477-502.

onto David allows Fielding's moral didacticism to stand in starker relief. Indeed, Fielding's satiric project of moral reform relies on David's theologically minimalist benevolent nature. Although his childlike benevolence tempts readers to view him as almost irredeemably foolish, this would be a mistake.⁵⁴⁶ In both parts David's naïveté (which even the narrator at times gently mocks) does indeed create trouble for him and his companions, even as it also creates the ironic distance necessary for readers to relate to his simple Christian goodwill.

Fielding's working relationship with her brother Henry in the early 1740s offers insights into the ideologies (religious and otherwise) that shaped *David Simple*.⁵⁴⁷ The two shared a close and complex literary association, and while Henry Fielding's religious allegiances have been the subject of debate, it seems at least aspects of latitudinarian Anglican theology were influential to his thinking.⁵⁴⁸ Bree notes that Sarah is most likely the author of both Leonora's letter in *Joseph Andrews* and Anna Boleyn's narrative in *A Journey From This World to the Next*.⁵⁴⁹ For his part,

⁵⁴⁶ Critics such as Deborah-Downs Miers and Rebecca Hussey both see the worldlier Cynthia as a more compelling protagonist than David. See Deborah Downs-Miers, "Springing the Trap: Subtexts and Subversions," in *Fetter'd or Free? British Women Novelists, 1670-1815*, eds. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1986), 308-23 and Rebecca Hussey, "The Sentimental Traveler: Emotion, Movement, and Economy in Sarah Fielding's *Adventures of David Simple* and *Volume the Last*," *The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual* 19 (2009): 213-38.

⁵⁴⁷ Martin Battestin and Clive Probyn assert "that when Sarah began to write for publication (perhaps by 1740), she did so in close collaboration with her brother" in the introduction to *The Correspondence of Henry and Sarah Fielding*, xxvi.

⁵⁴⁸ Martin Battestin sees Henry Fielding's work as being largely informed by latitudinarianism. See Martin C. Battestin, *The Moral Basis of Fielding's Art: A Study of "Joseph Andrews"* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1959) and Martin C. Battestin with Ruthe R. Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* (London: Routledge, 1989). Henry Knight Miller also discusses the influence of latitudinarian discourse on Fielding's conception of ethics, but is less adamant about its direct influence. See Henry Knight Miller, *Essays on Fielding's Miscellanies: A Commentary on Volume One* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961). However, other critics disagree with Battestin's endorsement of the latitudinarian influence. For example, Ronald Paulson sees Henry Fielding as being influenced by deist discourse. See Ronald Paulson, *The Life of Henry Fielding: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

⁵⁴⁹ Bree, 7.

Henry provided a preface to and revised the second edition of *David Simple*.⁵⁵⁰ Several commentators have called attention to specific literary connections between the work of Sarah and her brother.⁵⁵¹ Most important for my purposes is Gerard Barker's claim that Henry "probably influenced his sister's conception of [David Simple] ... by means of his concept of good-nature."⁵⁵² As both Sarah's contribution of Leonora's letter to Henry's novel and her later appropriation of his concept of good-nature demonstrate, the working relationship between the two seemed to center primarily on discourses of sentiment and feeling, not on satire.

Since Henry's ethic of good-nature and its foundations – at least in part – in latitudinarian Anglican ideology influenced *David Simple*, this ethic is worth examining at some length.⁵⁵³ As Barker notes, Henry's verse essay "Of Good-Nature" is practically a description of David.⁵⁵⁴ His elaboration of his conception of good-nature in the *Champion* for Thursday, 27 March 1740 paraphrases a line from *Macbeth* when he writes that good-nature "is (as *Shakespear* calls it) the Milk, or rather the Cream of Human Nature."⁵⁵⁵ It seems likely that Sarah had Henry's conception of good-nature in mind when she also describes David as having "more of what

⁵⁵⁰ He also remarked in the Preface, "two or three Hints which arose in the reading of it, and some little Direction as to the Conduct of the second Volume [Books III and IV of *David Simple*], much the greater Part of which I never saw till Print, were all the Aid she received from me" (344). For a discussion and analysis of Henry's revisions and alterations to the second edition of *David Simple*, see Janine Barchas, "Sarah Fielding's Dashing Style and Eighteenth-Century Print Culture," *English Literary History* 63, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 633-56.

⁵⁵¹ Richard Terry discusses Sarah's debt to essays from Henry's *Miscellanies*, especially his "Of the Remedy of Affliction for the Loss of our Friends" in his essay "*David Simple* and the Fallacy of Friendship," *Studies in English Literature* 44, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 525-44. Yoshihiro Shiratori argues for the influence of *David Simple* on Henry's *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon* in Shiratori, "*The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*: Henry Fielding's Art of Tormenting," *Poetica: An International Journal of Linguistic-Literary Studies* 67 (2007): 61.

⁵⁵² Barker, 70.

⁵⁵³ For a thorough analysis of Henry's conceptions of good-nature and its connections to latitudinarian discourse see Battestin, *Moral Basis*, and Miller *Essays on Fielding's Miscellanies*.

⁵⁵⁴ Barker, 70-1.

⁵⁵⁵ Henry Fielding, *Contributions to The Champion and Related Writings*, ed. W. B. Coley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 255.

Shakespear calls the *Milk of Human Kind*, than any Man that ever was born.”⁵⁵⁶ However, Sarah carefully Christianized Henry’s ethic of good-nature for her own purposes.

Henry himself specifically notes the importance of Christianity as an alloy to good-nature in the same essay:

That as Good-nature, which is the chief, if not only Quality in the Mind of Man in the least tending that Way, doth not forbid the avenging an Injury, Christianity hath taught us something beyond what the Religion of Nature and Philosophy could arrive at; and consequently, that it is not *as old as the Creation*, nor is Revelation useless with regard to Morality, if it had been taught us no more than this excellent Doctrine, which if generally followed, would make Mankind much happier, as well as better, than they are.⁵⁵⁷

On the question of revenge then (particularly relevant to *David Simple*) good-nature must be strengthened by Christianity, which is both constitutive of and a supplement to good-nature against the threat of deism, as the allusion to Matthew Tindal’s 1730 deist work *Christianity as Old as the Creation* makes clear. However, as his weak negative phrasings in this passage seem to indicate, Henry offers a rhetorically measured endorsement of Christian revelation. His conception of good-nature is far from a straightforwardly orthodox Christian concept. Indeed, in the same essay, his descriptions of God as “*The best natur’d Being in the Universe*” (likely drawn from Shaftesbury) and his claim that the more we “cultivate” good-nature, “the nearer we draw to Divine Perfection,” sound much closer to deism.⁵⁵⁸ Sarah modifies Henry’s more secular and deistic ethic of good-nature to make it explicitly Christian yet theologically unspecific in *David Simple*.

⁵⁵⁶ Fielding, *David Simple*, 100.

⁵⁵⁷ H. Fielding, *Contributions*, 253.

⁵⁵⁸ H. Fielding, *Contributions*, 255. In his apparatus to the text, W. B. Coley notes this passage is “Evidently an imprecise recollection of Shaftesbury” (255n4).

Although in some ways David's temperament reflects Henry's concept of good-nature, his character lacks a sense of judgment. In the same essay, Henry notes how important judgment is to true good-nature: "That as Good-nature requires a distinguishing Faculty, which is another Word for Judgment, and is perhaps the sole Boundary between Wisdom and Folly; it is impossible for a Fool, who hath no distinguishing Faculty, to be good-natured."⁵⁵⁹ Sarah's David seems to lack "a distinguishing Faculty" and he is prone to folly. David's lack of judgment marks a further split from her more satirically inclined brother that also serves to highlight both the theologically unspecific Christian principles motivating her fiction and the role women play in propagating English Christianity. David's lack of judgment allows greater reader identification with his simple non-doctrinal Christian principles partly because the worldly Cynthia covers up his foolishness and instructs David in the mercenary ways of English society. The educated and sophisticated Cynthia allows David's simple Christian benevolence to flourish, suggesting that women can have a more rational understanding of Christianity than men. Unlike the naïve Christian heroism of Parson Adams, David rarely becomes a figure of mirth, meant to be mocked by the reader; rather, David's lack of judgment (especially when he is supported by his friends) places him in situations in which his Christian benevolence can be un-reflexively exercised. Fielding uses, to an extent, Henry's (Christian and secular) ethic of good-nature to emphasize David's heroism, but crucially she is careful to recast Henry's ethic of good-nature in explicitly Christian terms, an ethic itself constructed from a complex background of religious and secular discursive formations.

The Christianity that David and his friends embody in *The Adventures* and *Volume the Last* primarily takes the form of good-natured benevolence, which is important for Fielding's

⁵⁵⁹ H. Fielding, *Contributions*, 253.

satire. The novel avoids mentions of specific religious doctrine and ceremony and puts in its place a noncontroversial simple Christianity, thus steering clear of any theological or political controversy. For example, at the end of *The Adventures*, David spontaneously “proposed the going to Church” as a way to “thank his *Creator*, for giving him so much Happiness.”⁵⁶⁰ David attends church out of thankfulness for his circumstances that he and his friends see as a “Mark of divine Providence” and not out of any doctrinal or political obligations.⁵⁶¹ By fashioning a broad Christianity that clearly leans toward latitudinarian ideology as the primary marker of the ideal way of orienting oneself to English society, and avoiding any politically charged religious pitfalls, Fielding uses David’s religion as a vehicle for her satire. The satiric function of the novel works in large part by contrasting David’s simple Christian ideology to the beliefs of various characters he meets who embody negatively figured, overtly irreligious philosophies: in various parts of the novel David and his friends meet an avowed atheist (really David’s debauched brother), a stoic rationalist, an irreligious fop, and other characters explicitly hostile to Christianity. Fielding’s primary way of demonstrating the corruption of English society is by embodying that corruption in characters who are enemies of a benevolent, latitudinarian-inflected Christianity and who violate the bounds of good-nature.

The behavior and beliefs of David’s brother Daniel offer the most extreme example of an ideology contrasted to his unreflexive Christianity. Early in the novel, Daniel is described as “one of those Wretches, whose only Happiness centers in themselves.”⁵⁶² His duplicity with the family will and subsequent exposure as a liar provokes David’s quixotic quest “to travel through

⁵⁶⁰ Fielding, *David Simple*, 222.

⁵⁶¹ Fielding, *David Simple*, 223.

⁵⁶² Fielding, *David Simple*, 8.

the whole World, rather than not meet with a real Friend.”⁵⁶³ When Daniel shows up again in a stagecoach with Cynthia in the third book of *The Adventures*, he is known only as “*The Atheist*.”⁵⁶⁴ He “was as dirty as if he had sat up two or three Nights together” and “one Side of his Face was beat black and blue, by Falls he had had in his Drink, and Skirmishes he had met with.”⁵⁶⁵ Daniel’s type of debauched atheism (as opposed to a later, more philosophical unbelief) was a common theological straw man in the period. In his 1704 Boyle Lectures, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*, the latitudinarian divine Samuel Clarke identified the causes of atheism as falling into only three categories: extreme ignorance, debauchery, or faulty “speculative reasoning.”⁵⁶⁶ Clarke’s text is primarily concerned with refuting the third type of atheism, associated with “Mr. Hobbes, Spinoza, and their followers,” but he devotes a paragraph early in the essay to describing degenerate atheists:⁵⁶⁷

Being totally debauched and corrupted in their practice, they have by a vicious and degenerate life corrupted the principles of their nature and defaced the reason of their own minds. And instead of fairly and impartially enquiring into the rules and obligations of nature and the reasons and fitness of things, [they] have accustomed themselves only to mock and scoff at religion and, being under the power of evil habits and the slavery of unreasonable and indulged lusts, are resolved not to harken to any reasoning which would oblige them to forsake their beloved vices.⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶³ Fielding, *David Simple*, 21.

⁵⁶⁴ Fielding, *David Simple*, 138.

⁵⁶⁵ Fielding, *David Simple*, 137.

⁵⁶⁶ Samuel Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God And Other Writings*, ed. Ezio Vailati (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3. Henry Fielding was familiar with Clarke’s writings and mentions him by name in *Amelia*.

⁵⁶⁷ Clarke, 3.

⁵⁶⁸ Clarke, 3.

Clarke's account of atheism caused by degeneracy aptly describes Daniel, an unrepentant (until the end of the novel) criminal and drunk, whose only arguments against God are "*the Unevenness of the Roads*" and the headache that comes with a hangover.⁵⁶⁹

Daniel's irreligion is a consequence of his corrupted lifestyle, but the guise of an atheist is merely one of Daniel's irreligious roles. Near the end of the novel, in a chapter entitled, "*In which is related the Life of an Atheist*," Daniel recounts how, in order to swindle money, he also took on the role of first a religious con artist and then a deist.⁵⁷⁰ Like a corrupt televangelist today, Daniel "chiefly frequented *old Women*" and talked "very religiously" to collect money fraudulently.⁵⁷¹ Unable to keep up the ruse because his "Propensity to all manner of Vice was so strong" he is unmasked, only then to remake himself as "a Moralist" who "cried down all Religion – calling it *Superstition*" and rails against the clergy.⁵⁷² Daniel uses this guise to trick those "who were so glad to catch hold on any thing that they thought could give them any Reputation of Sense" out of their money.⁵⁷³ Again found out, he "began to curse the Author of my Being."⁵⁷⁴ Daniel squanders what remains of his money in "Drink – and Debauchery" and becomes an atheist out of "the Fear of believing there was a *Deity*."⁵⁷⁵ Daniel is the bogeyman of a century of quasi-strategic and quasi-paranoid attacks on various strains of "atheism." David's exemplary Christian role in the text is brought into greater relief because Daniel functions as a cipher for all manner of eighteenth-century irreligion: debauched atheism, deism, and anti-clericalism. Daniel's guises at the end of the novel demonstrate various accusations that could be

⁵⁶⁹ Fielding, *David Simple*, 139.

⁵⁷⁰ Fielding, *David Simple*, 222.

⁵⁷¹ Fielding, *David Simple*, 225.

⁵⁷² Fielding, *David Simple*, 225-6.

⁵⁷³ Fielding, *David Simple*, 225.

⁵⁷⁴ Fielding, *David Simple*, 226.

⁵⁷⁵ Fielding, *David Simple*, 226.

leveled at his brother like insincerity and hypocrisy. The text associates these with the obviously immoral and fraudulent Daniel and deflects these criticisms from David. Daniel also works to gloss over David's noncommittal theology: by attacking atheism in its various guises, the novel subsumes theological dispute to a fight against a greater enemy.

Daniel isn't the only irreligious character David has dealings with in *The Adventures*. Before David meets his true friends Cynthia, Valentine and Camilla, he encounters several false ones, including Mr. Orgueil, whose very name means Pride. As critics have noted, Orgueil is a satiric representation of a Stoic rationalist.⁵⁷⁶ Because Orgueil "did not rate Men at all by the Riches they possessed, but by their own Behaviour" David thinks he has finally "met with the Completion of his Wishes" and found a true friend.⁵⁷⁷ He observes Orgueil and "could not find he was guilty of any one Vice" and determines his only failing is "a too severe Condemnation" of other people's actions.⁵⁷⁸ Orgueil expects everyone to "act up to the strictest Rules of Reason and Goodness."⁵⁷⁹ Of course, David soon learns that Orgueil is not what he is looking for in a friend because of his lack of compassion.

David first suspects Orgueil when he observes that he can tell a tragic tale with "dry Eyes and quite unmoved."⁵⁸⁰ Orgueil states that he looks "upon Compassion, Sir, to be a very great Weakness; I have no Superstition to fright me into my Duty, but I do what I think just by all the World, for the real Love of *Rectitude* is the Motive of all my Actions."⁵⁸¹ This morality is strictly internal. Unlike David, whose good-nature implicitly comes from unreflexive Christianity,

⁵⁷⁶ Malcolm Kelsall observes that "Orgueil is a caricature of a Stoic" in the notes to his edition of the novel. See Sarah Fielding, *The Adventures of David Simple*, ed. Malcolm Kelsall (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 434.

⁵⁷⁷ Fielding, *David Simple*, 44.

⁵⁷⁸ Fielding, *David Simple*, 45.

⁵⁷⁹ Fielding, *David Simple*, 45.

⁵⁸⁰ Fielding, *David Simple*, 55.

⁵⁸¹ Fielding, *David Simple*, 55.

Orgueil's comes from egocentric rational contemplation, and he criticizes David's form of compassion as self-interest. What is crucial about Orgueil's function in *David Simple* is how Fielding explicitly describes him (and consequently his neo-Stoicism) as un-Christian. Orgueil claims he has no superstition to scare him into doing what is right and as Mr. Spatter, David's next traveling companion, states, he "has made a *God* of himself" and (in a statement that recalls Shaftesbury), "thinks even Obedience to the Divine Will, would be but a mean Motive to his Actions."⁵⁸² David's realization of Orgueil's true nature (even though Mr. Spatter is a less than reliable narrator, as David himself acknowledges in *Volume the Last*) forces him to recast his search for a true friend in explicitly religious terms. When David decides to leave Orgueil and follow Spatter, he announces he is searching for "a Person who could be trusted, one who was capable of being a real Friend; whose every Action proceeded either from Obedience to the *Divine Will*, or from the Delight he took in doing good."⁵⁸³ Orgueil's type of unfeeling rationalism is at odds with the basic premises of an emerging ideology of sensibility which prioritizes affect and emotion. After his disappointments with Orgueil, David explicitly reformulates his search for a friend in latitudinarian terms; he seeks someone whose conduct aligns him or her with divine commands or who takes delight in doing good. His actions proceed from obedience to an ideal Christianity or embodied benevolence, and Fielding explicitly equates the two.

By intentionally opposing David to neo-Stoic philosophy, Fielding again deflects potential criticism of her "True Christian Philosophy" as self-righteous and props up the benevolent, primitive Christianity of David as the proper antidote to the pride that is the hallmark – to her – of neo-Stoic rationalism. The contrast between the Stoic overemphasis on reason and

⁵⁸² Fielding, *David Simple*, 56.

⁵⁸³ Fielding, *David Simple*, 59.

Christian morality was a central concern for divines and religious writers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and Steele's *The Christian Hero* is in large part an attack on neo-Stoicism.⁵⁸⁴ Primitive Christianity often stood as a counterexample to the philosophy praised by the Stoics. For example, in a 1694 English translation of Malebranche, primitive Christian virtue is contrasted to pagan stoicism: "*St. Paul* and the Primitive *Christians*, had doubtless more Vertue than *Cato* and all the *Stoicks*."⁵⁸⁵ Fielding fictionalizes this conflict between primitive Christianity and Stoicism, and as she does with Daniel's various irreligious guises, sets David's Christian heroism against competing strands of non and quasi-Christian moral and philosophical discourse. Attacking neo-Stoicism is a way for the novel again to elide theological disputes by attacking an external adversary.

Orgueil returns in *Volume the Last*, and Fielding also introduces his ridiculous wife as the primary antagonists in the sequel and explicitly irreligious foils for David and his small community, deflecting criticism that otherwise might be directed at David. Despite the novel's comparisons of the hero to Job and grim preoccupation with suffering, David's interactions with the irreligious Orgueil show him to be essentially the same benevolent hero he was in *The Adventures*. He again comes into conflict with Orgueil's "Rule of Rectitude," and in *Volume the Last* Orgueil's principles cause real harm to David's family.⁵⁸⁶ The malevolence shown by Orgueil and his wife stands in stark contrast to the principles of David's Christian community. Orgueil's frequent opinions of Christianity in *Volume the Last* are intended to be ironically dismissed by the reader. He "allowed *St. Paul* to be a very fine Writer" because he "had human

⁵⁸⁴ See Blanchard's introduction to Steele, *The Christian Hero*, xvii-xxv.

⁵⁸⁵ *Father Malebranche's Treatise Concerning the Search after Truth*, trans. T. Taylor (Oxford: 1694), 93. Cited in Blanchard, xix.

⁵⁸⁶ Fielding, *David Simple*, 281.

Learning before he became a Teacher of the Christian Doctrines.”⁵⁸⁷ He made the “Miracle of [Paul’s] conversion ... the common Subject of his Ridicule.”⁵⁸⁸ Orgueil’s deistic insistence on denying miracles and Christian revelation mark him as hopelessly corrupt, and thus Mrs. Orgueil’s jealous and hypocritical condemnation of David “for his Pride” helps prevent his benevolence from appearing self-righteous. Just as she does in *The Adventures*, Fielding places David’s brand of Christian heroism in conflict with competing ethical philosophies to ensure that even his seeming folly is preferable to the alternatives.

When David is attending Orgueil in his illness, the two have a long debate about religion. David attempts “to prove that human Wisdom can soar no higher than the Knowledge of our Dependance on God” while Orgueil “laboured hard to prove ... the Justness of worshipping his Idol, human Reason.”⁵⁸⁹ Because Orgueil “admired *Christ’s* Sermon on the Mount, for the Beauty of its Morality ... he thought himself a Christian,” an idea the narrator finds preposterous because “every Word he uttered” showed that “his every Notion of Religion was confined to Self-adoration.”⁵⁹⁰ Unable to convert David “to the Sect of Self-worshippers,” Orgueil “grew angry, and at different Times introduced the Words, an Enthusiast, a Methodist, a mad Man; and at last, as an unconquerable Argument, told him, that he held Principles which were fit for nothing but old Women.”⁵⁹¹ As Brett C. McNelly demonstrates, enthusiasm, madness and Methodism were often equated in mid-eighteenth-century England.⁵⁹² As I have discussed in previous chapters, a charge of enthusiasm in the eighteenth century could of course stand for all

⁵⁸⁷ Fielding, *David Simple*, 281.

⁵⁸⁸ Fielding, *David Simple*, 281-2.

⁵⁸⁹ Fielding, *David Simple*, 332.

⁵⁹⁰ Fielding, *David Simple*, 332.

⁵⁹¹ Fielding, *David Simple*, 333.

⁵⁹² Brett C. McNelly, “Method or Madness: Methodist Devotion and the Anti-Methodist Response” in *Religion in the Age of Reason: A Transatlantic Study of the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Kathryn Duncan (New York: AMS, 2009), 195-210.

manner of socially inappropriate or morally suspect conduct. One contemporary polemicist writes “if by an Enthusiast is meant a Deceiver ... I do not know a worse Sort of Enthusiasm ... than those Ministers who solemnly profess to be inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost.”⁵⁹³ Another claims that Methodism “is a *Composition of Enthusiasm, Superstition, and Imposture*” and “it is most properly *Enthusiasm*; which is *Religion run mad*.”⁵⁹⁴ David could be vulnerable to such charges because of his non-doctrinal Christian benevolence and sometimes naïve behavior. Orgueil signals the “opprobrious Names” that could be heaped on sentimental benevolence in eighteenth-century England, but the novel dismisses these labels as nonsense because they come out of the mouth of a character satirically mocked as both foolish and irreligious.⁵⁹⁵ The consequence is that David’s brand of broad, benevolent good-natured Christianity is reinforced even in the midst of his sufferings.

Besides Daniel and Orgueil, other characters David meets are also figured as explicitly irreligious. Mr. Spatter’s lack of true Christianity leads David to abandon him as well. While talking, Spatter and David end up on revenge. Spatter claims:

“I think there is nothing so pleasant as Revenge; I would pursue a Man who had injured me, to the very Brink of Life: I know it would be impossible for me ever to forgive him, and I would have him live, only that I might have the Pleasure of seeing him miserable.”

David was amazed at this, and said, “Pray, Sir, consider, as you are a Christian, you cannot act in this manner.” *Spatter* replied, “he was sorry it was against the Rules of

⁵⁹³ William Mason, *Methodism displayed, and Enthusiasm detected* (London: 1756), 29.

⁵⁹⁴ George Lavington, *The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists, compar’d* (London: 1749), 81. Cited in McNelly, 197.

⁵⁹⁵ Fielding, *David Simple*, 333.

Christianity, but he could not help his Temper; he thought forgiving any body a very great Meanness, and he was sure it was what he could never bring himself to do.”⁵⁹⁶

This doctrine so disturbs David that “he could not sleep that Night,” and he departs the next day “without taking Leave or any Notice of him, in order to seek a new Lodging,” going so far as to call Spatter “a perfect Daemon.”⁵⁹⁷ Although Varnish’s later description of Spatter mitigates David’s revulsion, it is again evident in this passage that at the root of what David is searching for is someone like himself, someone who subordinates baser inclinations to a theologically unspecific Christian ethic. Spatter’s beliefs also highlight perhaps the most important element of David’s nature – revenge. The passivity inherent in his avoidance of those he finds unworthy or who do him harm is what marks him as morally exemplary in the novel. Earlier, when David is spurned in his affections by Nanny Johnson, a possible love interest, the narrator notes “as tenderness was always predominant” in David’s mind, “no Anger, nor even a just Cause of Hatred, could ever make him inveterate, or revengeful: It cost him very little to be a Christian in that Point.”⁵⁹⁸ David’s passive doctrine of quietly avoiding someone “whenever he found out any thing he thought despicable” is not a sign of weakness in his character, but of Fielding’s conception of embodied Christianity and its manifestation in David’s actions.⁵⁹⁹ “Desiring to do good,” says Cynthia, is a “true Christian Principle.”⁶⁰⁰

David’s episode with Nanny Johnson demonstrates Fielding’s larger moral project of linking feminism and Christianity in *The Adventures*. The scene underscores what true Christian principles are and how they should be held by women as well as men, not just the exemplary

⁵⁹⁶ Fielding, *David Simple*, 75.

⁵⁹⁷ Fielding, *David Simple*, 76.

⁵⁹⁸ Fielding, *David Simple*, 30.

⁵⁹⁹ Fielding, *David Simple*, 59.

⁶⁰⁰ Fielding, *David Simple*, 140.

hero, although David's non-aggressive masculinity likewise encourages readers to relate to him as an exemplar regardless of their gender. David believes his quest is at an end when he meets Miss Johnson, the daughter of wealthy jeweler. While part of his attraction to her is clearly sexual, her virtuous behavior allures David even more; he watches "her very narrowly, to see, if her Mind was equal to her Person, which was indeed very agreeable."⁶⁰¹ He considers her behavior to be "in all respects engaging" and "her Duty to her Father, Complaisance and Affection to her Sister, and Humanity to the Servants" lead him to conclude that "his traveling was at an end."⁶⁰² Ironically, Miss Johnson's duty to her father leads to the breakdown of David's relationship with her because Mr. Johnson's only motivation for finding his daughters matches is his own monetary gain.

The falling out centers on religion, partly in the form of anti-Semitism. A "rich Jew," visiting Mr. Johnson on business who "*thought Women's Souls were of no great Consequence,*" becomes smitten with Nanny's older sister.⁶⁰³ Of course religion becomes a stumbling block for the match, but this is quickly overcome by her father because, although the suitor "might object to her being a Christian," she had always obeyed her father and "therefore he need not fear her conforming to whatever he pleased."⁶⁰⁴ The sister is approached (and effectively forced to consent) with the thought of changing her religion to better her father's financial situation:

She was at first startled at the thoughts of changing her Religion; but as she had no more Understanding, than was just necessary to set off her own Charms, by knowing which Dress, and which Posture became her best; and had never been taught any thing more than to go to Church of a Sunday, when she was not wanted to stay at home to overlook

⁶⁰¹ Fielding, *David Simple*, 23.

⁶⁰² Fielding, *David Simple*, 24.

⁶⁰³ Fielding, *David Simple*, 25.

⁶⁰⁴ Fielding, *David Simple*, 26.

the Dinner, without knowing any other Reason for it than Custom: The rich Presents the Jew made her, and the Promises of keeping her great, soon overcame all her Scruples, and she consented to have him.⁶⁰⁵

Because of the unfit and superficial education given to women, the sister has never been taught anything but religion as a custom, resulting in her readiness to shrug off her Christianity for money. This connection between education and religion is an important area where Fielding's feminism and her religion intersect, a nexus stressed throughout both *The Adventures* and *Volume the Last*. When Cynthia mentions that she and Camilla were friends because of a shared love of reading and learning, her "Mother was frighten'd out of her Wits," and thought they "should draw *Circles* - - - and turn *Conjurers*."⁶⁰⁶ Cynthia's mother has the mistaken belief that education is detrimental to religion and might even turn the girls to the occult. Likewise, in *Volume the Last*, Mrs. Dunster defends Cynthia's methods of education to Mrs. Orgueil because she often reads "the Bible to the Children."⁶⁰⁷ Christianity is a key component of Fielding's feminist project. For Fielding, women require the right type of education, something she spends a great deal of time exploring in her novel *The Cry*, discussed below.

Ironically, for the modern reader, the normative social reliance on Christian foundations creates many of the problems for the characters in *David Simple*. As Bree points out, legal principles derived in part from the Bible supported the lack of any kind of equality in marriage for women.⁶⁰⁸ Fielding, like Mary Astell, also recognizes the constraints placed on women by Christianity. In Miss Gibson's letter to Bellario in *Remarks*, she writes, "as the Laws of God and Man have placed a Woman totally in the Power of her Husband, I believe it is utterly impossible

⁶⁰⁵ Fielding, *David Simple*, 26.

⁶⁰⁶ Fielding, *David Simple*, 84.

⁶⁰⁷ Fielding, *David Simple*, 257.

⁶⁰⁸ Bree, 37.

for any young Woman, who has any Reflection, not to form in her Mind some kind of Picture of the Sort of Man in whose Power she would chuse to place herself.”⁶⁰⁹ Miss Gibson notes, in a statement very reminiscent of Astell, that because of the difficulty in finding a man good enough to “submit without Reluctance” and because of the “Example daily before her of her Mother’s being tyrannized over,” Clarissa “thought a single Life, in all Probability, would be for her the happiest.”⁶¹⁰ Fielding, like Astell, maintains that marriage to the wrong man is fatal because religion offers no escape for women; consequently, it is imperative that women either remain single or find a husband like either David or Valentine in *David Simple*, whose primary virtue is his kindness and friendship. Both Fielding and Astell were very cognizant of the injurious effects that an increasingly secularized, masculine society might have on women. In particular, in the novel following *Volume the Last*, Fielding critiques masculine polite society in a manner very similar to Astell.

The Cry, Shaftesbury, and Secularization

Sarah Fielding published *The Cry: A New Dramatic Fable* in 1754, one year after *Volume the Last*. If Fielding did indeed modify David Simple’s story in *Volume the Last* to take advantage of the changing tastes of the literary scene, she charted a radical new path for fiction in *The Cry*. *The Cry*, although not completely neglected in modern scholarship, has received less commentary than *David Simple*, and there is no modern edition of the text apart from a 1986 facsimile reprint. This neglect may stem from the fact that the authorship of the text is in question and from its experimental nature. Although it is almost certain that Fielding co-wrote the work with her friend and companion, Jane Collier, the precise contribution of each to the

⁶⁰⁹ Fielding, *Remarks*, 51.

⁶¹⁰ Fielding, *Remarks*, 52. See especially Mary Astell’s *Some Reflections Upon Marriage* in Astell, *Political Writings*, ed. Patricia Springborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 7-31.

authorship of the text is unclear.⁶¹¹ Collier was the daughter of the neo-Platonic philosopher Arthur Collier and the author of the satirical *The Art of Ingeniously Tormenting* (1753).

As the subtitle of *The Cry: A New Dramatic Fable* suggests, the text is highly experimental, “an innovative and wholly original prose work, a combination of allegory, philosophy ... feminism, and social satire.”⁶¹² Although the structure of the text is original, the central plot (which is told in fits and starts) is relatively conventional. The sympathetic protagonist Portia becomes acquainted through her friend (and one of the two main antagonists) Melantha with the family of Nicanor, a widower with three children. Oliver (the other primary antagonist) is Nicanor’s eldest son and the twins Ferdinand and Cordelia are younger siblings. Upon meeting the family, Portia is rightly skeptical of Oliver, but befriends Cordelia and falls in love with Ferdinand. The reader is meant to trust the judgment of Portia, and her beliefs and practices are clearly those with which Fielding sympathized. Nicanor has wasted the family fortune on his mistress, Cylinda. Because of his profligacy, the family becomes dependent on Oliver, who takes a perverse pleasure in his family’s reliance on him. Ferdinand eventually sails to the West Indies and succeeds in becoming wealthy. Upon his return, Ferdinand’s behavior undergoes a markedly negative shift, and as a result, Portia refuses his offer of marriage. Ferdinand, prompted by a sudden sickness which befalls Portia, reveals that he altered his

⁶¹¹ See Carolyn Woodward, “Who Wrote *The Cry*?: A Fable for Our Times,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 9, no. 1 (1996): 91-7, and especially Woodward, “Jane Collier, Sarah Fielding, and the Motif of Tormenting,” *The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual* 16 (2005): 259-73. Woodward remarks that the authorship of the text should probably be understood as “Sarah Fielding with Jane Collier.” More recently, she has called attention to the fact that “Collaboration was Fielding’s natural writing mode” and she urges scholars to take a more nuanced approach to eighteenth-century collaborative authorship in her “The Modern Figure of the Author, Sarah Fielding, and the Case of *The Histories of Some of the Penitents of the Magdalen House*,” *English* 58, no. 223 (2009): 281.

⁶¹² Fielding, *Correspondence*, xxxiv.

behavior to test her, and the two marry and take in Cordelia and Nicanor, while Oliver and Melantha are left to an unhappy marriage.

Several critics have commented that the central plot of *The Cry* acts as a commentary on Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*. Bree notes that there are several moments where the work "threatens to subvert Richardson's narrative of a loving young woman and an ideal son of a faulty father," and Emily C. Friedman suggests that the text "can be understood as ... functioning as 'Remarks on *Grandison*.'" ⁶¹³ As with her *Volume the Last*, Fielding was obviously an astute reader of contemporary fiction, and her response to Richardson within the body of her fictional narrative demonstrates the intertextual nature of her work. ⁶¹⁴ Indeed, it is this intertextuality that is the most interesting aspect of *The Cry*, and that highlights the quasi-latitudinarian oriented didacticism that, like with *David Simple*, informs the text.

Although the main plot is relatively straightforward, the structure is anything but. "The Cry" of the title refers to a chorus of characters who comment on the action and respond to Portia. *The Cry* spends the text mocking, deriding and shouting down Portia's virtue and ideals. They are not a uniform voice, and at times throughout the text individual characters come forward or parts of the Cry disagree with each other. The readers of the work are encouraged to "bear" themselves "On the wings of Fancy" and imagine an "assembly" who have "an inveterate hatred to Truth and Simplicity, and which are possess'd also with a strong desire of supporting Affectation and Fallacy." ⁶¹⁵ Portia is supported by the Spenserian Una, who acts as the voice of

⁶¹³ Bree, 163n9; Emily C. Friedman, "Remarks on Richardson: Sarah Fielding and the Rational Reader," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 22, no. 2 (2009-10): 320.

⁶¹⁴ Woodward observes that the novel "is notable in staging its explorations of ideas as conversations, not only within the text but intertextually" in "Motif," 262.

⁶¹⁵ Sarah Fielding with Jane Collier, *The Cry: A New Dramatic Fable*, 3 vols. (London: 1754), 1:19.

truth in the text and is as different from the Cry as “truth from error.”⁶¹⁶ Although several critics have noted the dramatic aspects of the novel (it is divided into scenes, for example) and the way the Cry often functions as a theater audience, the Cry also represents the negative aspects (to Fielding) of the masculine public sphere.⁶¹⁷ Similarly, G.A. Starr observes that the Cry “personifies the polite world, represented as complacent and obtuse, but also as malicious and mercurial.”⁶¹⁸ Fielding, in a manner that has affinities with Astell, critiques the masculine culture she sees around her by associating it with the malevolent Cry, and demonstrates that the Cry’s preferred method of criticism, raillery, is damaging and vacuous. As I discuss below, Fielding, like Astell, also critiques Shaftesbury’s philosophy along similar lines. With both her critiques of masculine culture and Shaftesbury, she upholds a theologically unspecific Christianity (notably held by the virtuous females in the novel) as the proper belief system in opposition to various irreligious philosophies promoted by the text’s antagonists.

The collaborative effort between Fielding and Collier demonstrates how crucial intertextuality was to the creation of the novel. In her commonplace book Collier reveals the nature of her and Fielding’s collaboration using a sewing metaphor. The commonplace book reports that “Jenny is struck with the description Sally has given of her Plan, & hastens to Change, buys all the Silks, sorts them, and lays them in Sallys way” and “Sally begins weaving,

⁶¹⁶ Fielding, *The Cry*, 1:22.

⁶¹⁷ Bree, for example, notes that “analogies with drama are maintained throughout the novel,” and often the Cry act similar to a contemporary theater audience mocking the action (95). Fielding was certainly no stranger to the actions of theater audiences. In *David Simple*, David is astonished by the “hideous Din” and “Confusion of Sounds” by the audience of a play he attends (54).

⁶¹⁸ G.A. Starr, “From Socrates to Sarah Fielding: Benevolence, Irony, and Conversation,” in *Passionate Encounters in a Time of Sensibility*, eds. Maximillian E. Novak and Anne Mellor (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000), 111.

and a sweet flowerd brocade turns out.”⁶¹⁹ Jenny then “makes the flowers all Joyn according to the Pattern designed by Sally.”⁶²⁰ Exactly what the “Silks” refers to is not completely clear, but it at least in part represents the large number of texts that Fielding and Collier drew on in the creation of *The Cry*. As Woodward observes, the works of the many authors cited in the novel “are the raw materials out of which *The Cry* was constructed.”⁶²¹ Like both Catharine Trotter and Mary Astell, Fielding carefully defines her feminist Christianity against the irreligious philosophies promulgated by writers in masculine dominated polite society. The works of writers such as Shaftesbury and Epicurus function in *The Cry* in a similar way to Orgueil and his Stoic philosophy in *David Simple*: the philosophies these writers promote are placed in the mouth of a clear antagonist in the text (Cylinda), and thus are meant to be contrasted to the non-doctrinal Christianity promoted by the sympathetic and virtuous Portia.

Although Portia is obviously the moral center, the most dynamic character in the novel is Cylinda. J. Paul Hunter describes her as “By far the most interesting character in the novel, and arguably the most sympathetic.”⁶²² Cylinda, the mistress of Nicanor, who indirectly ends up creating most of the financial difficulties that motivate the plot, narrates her movement between Stoicism, Skepticism, Platonism, Shaftesburianism, and ultimately Christianity. Cylinda relates that although she had “learn’t to read ... out of the Bible,” because “all [her] conversation which by [her] father’s acquaintance fell chiefly amongst men of learning, and great literature, [she] had never heard the sacred writings mentioned with half the reverence which was paid to the

⁶¹⁹ “Sallys & Jennys Emblem,” qtd. in Woodward, “Tormenting,” 260.

⁶²⁰ “Sallys & Jennys Emblem,” 260.

⁶²¹ Woodward, “Tormenting,” 262.

⁶²² J. Paul Hunter, “Novels and History and Northrop Frye,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24, no. 2 (1990-91): 236.

heathen authors.”⁶²³ She “looked on christianity as well as every other religion, only as a piece of policy invented to keep the ignorant vulgar in awe” and she was prouder “in remembering a verse of *Homer*, *Virgil*, or *Horace*, or a sentiment in *Plato* than in knowing the whole doctrine of the old and new testament.”⁶²⁴ Cylinda’s philosophical wrongheadedness ultimately rests on her classical education and the privileging of “heathen” writers over Christianity by “men of learning.” Both the voices of the Cry and these “men of learning” denigrate the “True Christian Philosophy” that motivates Fielding’s feminism. Although critics have noted Fielding’s use of “Addisonian characters,” her revisiting in *The Cry* of the idea that Christianity is superior to “heathen” philosophy suggests, just as in *David Simple*, that the Low Church Anglicanism promoted in texts such as Steele’s *The Christian Hero* was a crucial influence on her fiction.⁶²⁵ Timothy Dykstal argues that Fielding endorses active and lived experience above philosophical learning, writing that Fielding “means that philosophy is meant to be practiced, not just recited” and that “[t]he moral of Cylinda’s story is that neither women nor men can gain wisdom by a cut-rate survey of philosophical schools.”⁶²⁶ Dykstal and other critics have also noted the importance of Christianity as opposed to classical philosophy in the novel.⁶²⁷ However, it is not simply “Christianity” that informs Fielding’s novels, but is instead a latitudinarian Christianity that emphasizes practical virtue. Fielding certainly emphasizes lived Christianity above passive, book-learned philosophy, but Cylinda’s repeated failures with various philosophical schools and her failure to internalize Christian truths by merely reading the Bible demonstrate Fielding’s

⁶²³ Fielding, *The Cry*, 3:101-2.

⁶²⁴ Fielding, *The Cry*, 3:102.

⁶²⁵ Woodward, “Who Wrote *The Cry*?” 92.

⁶²⁶ Timothy Dykstal, “Provoking the Ancients: Classical Learning and Imitation in Fielding and Collier,” *College Literature* 31, no. 3 (2004): 110, 111.

⁶²⁷ Dykstal, 110. Bree also observes that Cylinda’s “studies have had an iniquitous effect because she has not learned the ethical principles of a distinctly nonclassical Christian virtue” and “Christian principles ... underpin [Portia’s] ideas and opinions,” in Bree, 99, 104.

endorsement of a doctrinally minimal yet actively lived Christianity derived in part from latitudinarian Whig writers like Steele.

Ellen Gardiner persuasively argues that Portia acts as a type of Christ figure in the novel, but also maintains that “Collier’s and Fielding’s use of the Bible as the authoritative text which empowers Portia and themselves to be literary and social critics may be the most subversive of all the strategies they use in their narrative,” and that “until this point, the Bible had been a favored tool for teaching women to be properly submissive to authority.”⁶²⁸ Yet, as we have seen, Fielding inherits a tradition that writers such as Mary Astell and Catharine Trotter inaugurated several decades earlier. Indeed, although Astell and Fielding promote different conceptions of Christianity, the thread they share is an attempt to rescue Christianity for women from what they see as irreligious masculine intrusion. They both maintain that the secularization arising from a growing skepticism and an emphasis on classical culture being advanced by masculine polite society have deleterious effects on women. This critique of secularization is most clearly seen in Fielding’s criticisms of Shaftesbury in *The Cry*.

In the character of Cylinda, Fielding narrates the fears expressed by Astell in *Bart’lemy Fair* about the injurious effects of Shaftesbury’s desacralization of Christian revelation on both English society and women. She also uses Cylinda to demonstrate that while the Christianity upheld by her fiction is doctrinally minimal, it is not secularized religion stripped of revelation. Although Cylinda did attend church as a youth, she “sagaciously separated every word that was peculiar to the christian doctrine, from those which treated of the beauties of morality,” leaving the former to “the mob” and herself “concerned only in the latter.”⁶²⁹ Cylinda, like Shaftesbury,

⁶²⁸ Ellen Gardiner, *Regulating Readers: Gender and Literary Criticism in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999), 129.

⁶²⁹ Fielding, *The Cry*, 3:102-3.

divorces morality from revealed religion. These irreligious leanings are further supported by her “admiration” for Shaftesbury, which “originally arose from the common conversation [she] heard at table from [her] father and his companions.”⁶³⁰ Cylinda’s “father was a learned and generally esteemed a very wise man” because of the “approbation” he received “from the whole body of moral philosophers.”⁶³¹ He educated Cylinda “as if [she] had been a boy”: she learnt Latin and Greek and spent her time “reading the most admired authors.”⁶³² Because her father taught her “about the nature of mankind and natural religion: from which [she] collected no more than ... That ‘twas very right to do right, and very wrong to do wrong” she “worships” her “own understanding,” forming “an implicit faith in the infallibility of this [her] new-formed deity.”⁶³³ For Fielding, Cylinda is emblematic of an essentially false brand of feminism predicated on secular reason – without a grounding in Christianity her morality is self-centered and relativistic. Cylinda’s faith in her own understanding immediately makes her susceptible to the flattery of her cousin Phaon, who cajoles her by praising her intelligence and arguing “that women of uncommon understanding, and a superiority of parts, ought not to be tied in fetters by the rules of honour or forms of established custom” which are “fit to be imposed only on the vulgar and illiterate.”⁶³⁴ Because of Phaon’s flattery, Cylinda is “commanded by the divinity [she] worshipped, to assist [her] imagination in inflaming [her] passions.”⁶³⁵ Crucially, Cylinda’s desire is motivated by her un-Christian, self-interested philosophy. Fielding articulates the threat to women of a masculine education unmoored from Christianity. Cylinda’s irreligion, derived from a predatory masculine culture, results immediately in a threat to her virtue: She was

⁶³⁰ Fielding, *The Cry*, 2:276.

⁶³¹ Fielding, *The Cry*, 2:253.

⁶³² Fielding, *The Cry*, 2:254, 256.

⁶³³ Fielding, *The Cry*, 2:257, 261-2.

⁶³⁴ Fielding, *The Cry*, 2:266.

⁶³⁵ Fielding, *The Cry*, 2:267.

“pleased” to discover “the folly of those people, who would imagine that nature, or the God of nature (for [she] always considered them as synonymous terms) would give laws to restrain those passions which were . . . natural to us.”⁶³⁶ Her equation of God with nature suggests the deism that underlies her philosophy, and its result is no check on her behavior, leaving her open to the seduction by her cousin, which is only thwarted by his untimely death abroad.

Cylinda’s irreligious upbringing leaves her open to Shaftesbury’s influence. Remarkably, Fielding fictionally represents the negative effects of Shaftesbury’s philosophy that Astell highlighted in *Bart’lemy Fair*, especially his test of ridicule.⁶³⁷ Cylinda narrates “that the making RIDICULE the TEST OF TRUTH was most perfectly agreeable to [her] inclinations.”⁶³⁸ Even more dangerous for Cylinda is her reading of Shaftesbury’s *Letter* that denies Christian revelation, exactly as Astell had warned: “That pleasant fancy of a grave bishop’s believing in fairies, with the words *tradition* and *revelation* being jumbled in so very near to that story, had the effect designed, and easily convinced me that all belief in revelation or tradition had in it something very ridiculous.”⁶³⁹ Cylinda’s narration of her Shaftesburian corruption echoes Astell’s complaint of Shaftesbury’s *Letter* that he “has made several horrible Jumbles, which are

⁶³⁶ Fielding, *The Cry*, 2:268.

⁶³⁷ Fielding’s extended critique of Shaftesbury in the middle of her novel has surprised readers. In the eighteenth century, Hester Thrale Piozzi speculated that Arthur Collier had written it. See Fielding, *Correspondence*, 136n10. Starr argues that “Fielding’s critique of ridicule may have been part of a pro-Anglican, anti-Shaftesburian program of the Ralph Allen circle” in Starr, “From Socrates,” 123n30. Allen was Henry Fielding’s friend and patron, and also was friends with Sarah Fielding. It is notable, however, that Henry Fielding was less antagonistic toward Shaftesbury than Sarah. See, for example, the mention of Shaftesbury in Henry’s *The Champion*, discussed above.

⁶³⁸ Fielding, *The Cry*, 2:276-77.

⁶³⁹ Fielding, *The Cry*, 2:277.

not less Silly, than they are Profane.”⁶⁴⁰ The ultimate effect of Shaftesbury’s philosophy on Cylinda is that it “equaled [her] with the deity” and as a result, she claims “that the deity was to submit to *my* censures” and this made her “superior to the supreme being.”⁶⁴¹ Because of his philosophy, Cylinda drew the “conclusion, that religion itself was all policy and priestcraft, fit only to awe the vulgar and illiterate.”⁶⁴² She thus articulates exactly what Astell argues will happen because of Shaftesbury’s work. Although Cylinda ultimately abandons his philosophy, she does so only for selfish reasons, because she realizes that “*Shaftesbury*’s owning that the narrow-sightedness of us mortals” contradicts her idea that she “was sovereign judge of all things.”⁶⁴³

Cylinda then moves on to other irreligious philosophies, although they are presented in less detail than Shaftesbury’s. Portia is given the last word, claiming that “Of all the inventions in which mankind have delighted, this favourite of making ridicule the test of truth, stands foremost in the rank for doing mischief.”⁶⁴⁴ Portia, the sympathetic voice in the text, explicitly rejects Shaftesbury’s ridicule test of truth on the same grounds that Astell did over 40 years earlier. In contrast to Cylinda’s upbringing, Portia says that although she read “the most admired ancient authors, the greatest care was taken to shut out from [her] bosom philosophic pride” and her “home was to be the christian faith into which [she] was baptized” and her “trust was to be placed in the revelation of God.”⁶⁴⁵ Ultimately, Cylinda realizes the error of her ways, and at the end of the novel, embraces the doctrinally minimal Christianity espoused by both Portia and

⁶⁴⁰ Mary Astell, *An Enquiry After Wit: Wherein the Trifling Arguing and Impious Raillery Of the Late Earl of Shaftesbury, In his Letter concerning Enthusiasm, and other Profane Writers, Are fully Answer’d and justly Exposed*, 2nd ed. (London, 1722), 174.

⁶⁴¹ Fielding, *The Cry*, 2:283.

⁶⁴² Fielding, *The Cry*, 2:284.

⁶⁴³ Fielding, *The Cry*, 2:294.

⁶⁴⁴ Fielding, *The Cry*, 2:296.

⁶⁴⁵ Fielding, *The Cry*, 3:113.

Una: “*Una* received *Cylinda* with a benignity peculiar to her nature, and smiled with pleasure on her new-made convert; telling her also, that if her penitence was real, and her heart truly reclaim’d, that she should not want encouragement to persevere in the road to virtue, and consequently to lasting happiness.”⁶⁴⁶ *Cylinda*’s redemption demonstrates to the reader that her lasciviousness and corruption were not a consequence of her feminine susceptibility, but were rather due to the fact that she was brought up with a neo-classical masculine education that neglected proper Christian virtue and thereby exposed her to the damaging effects of Shaftesbury’s philosophy.

Fielding dramatizes the similar anxiety both Astell and Trotter had that the growing societal emphasis on moral philosophers like Shaftesbury at the expense of simpler Protestant virtue will have damaging effects on women. For Fielding, secular moral philosophy divorced from revealed Christianity leads directly to the vulnerability of women who can be seduced both intellectually and sexually by men who flatter their intelligence. The secularization brought upon by Shaftesbury’s emphasis on benevolent sociability at the expense of religious belief does not result in the protection of women’s interests according to Fielding; rather, it is, as with Astell, the Bible that ultimately provides the greatest support to English women. The protagonists of both *David Simple* and *The Cry* ultimately rely on an unmediated and doctrinally minimal Christianity as a support against an increasingly secularized and corrupt English culture.

⁶⁴⁶ Fielding, *The Cry*, 3:292.

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