

THE OUTLINES OF SKEPTICISM: THE PROBLEM OF MORAL AUTHORITY IN
EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

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ABSTRACT

MELISSA M. CALDWELL: *The Outlines of Skepticism: The Problem of Moral Authority in Early Modern England*
(Under the direction of Reid Barbour)

In this dissertation, I examine the value of skepticism to writers interested in what were competing and even contradictory projects: reform and orthodoxy. Focusing on the work of Thomas More, Richard Hooker, Thomas Nashe, and John Milton, I examine how these writers engaged with skeptical thought in order to respond to the decentering of moral authority caused by the Protestant Reformation. Writing within a context in which moral certainty could no longer be located dogmatically, and in which the individual interpretation of texts in a new era of print culture further destabilized moral authority, these writers reassess the moral value of language and test its potential to regulate the experience of reading. I argue that it is their engagement with skepticism rather than their denial of it that allows these writers to stabilize moral authority by generating didactic texts to replace dogmatic ones as a source of normative moral knowledge. By expanding current critical formulations of early modern skepticism, this dissertation offers a fuller account of skepticism's history and examines the relationship between epistemology and ethics in the early modern period. More largely, this dissertation suggests that the reconstitution of ethical

value through literary modes represents complex responses to epistemic growth and limitation.

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I come to the writing of the acknowledgements page with equal portions of happiness and sorrow. Happiness in the realization that the intellectual journey of the dissertation is now complete and that it is soon to be renewed as I begin to revise my understanding of these pages from the notion that they represent a complete project to the idea that they represent the raw materials for a book. There is happiness, too, as I reflect on all the help that has brought me to this point.

The early modern faculty at UNC Chapel Hill is among the best in the world, and this dissertation would simply not exist without the help of so many of them. I would like to thank all the members of my committee for their rigor and their patience. Darryl Gless willingly joined the committee when asked at nearly a moment's notice. Megan Matchinske has been unflinching in her enthusiasm and, in particular, along with discriminating eye of Eliza Richards who is not apart of my committee, helped me with the seminal task of translating the ideas in my dissertation into a form suitable for the job market. Ritchie Kendall has offered invaluable comments—refreshing, challenging, and insightful—along the way and reminds me continually of the importance of making the relevance of my work apparent to others. At a crucial moment early on, Jessica Wolfe restored my wavering faith in the project after she read drafts of some early chapters and assured me that my ideas were moving in a profitable direction. Along the way her comments have helped me think about my work in new and broader ways.

I have considered myself to be an amazingly fortunate graduate student in having Reid Barbour as my director. In my mind, one could not ask for a more ideal mentor. It was a fated day when I chose to enroll, in the last semester of my senior undergraduate year at UNC, in his seventeenth-century course in order to complete the last requirement for my undergraduate degree in English. Before I set foot in the class, I had already determined that I would hate it. How wrong would I be. It was on the handout distributed on the first day of class that I first set eyes upon Donne's troubling proclamation that "new philosophy calls all in doubt" and Francis Bacon's equally disconcerting admonition that whatever the "the mind seizes and dwells upon with peculiar satisfaction is to be held in suspicion." When I returned to UNC as a graduate student, he worked hard to help me overcome many obstacles ranging from convoluted writing and inexperienced researching to being terrified at the idea of hearing my voice leading a classroom of students. Though I have often thought him mad for it, his confidence in me has been unwavering. A model teacher and scholar, he represents an ideal balance of challenge and rigor tempered by patience and kindness. I will feel a debt of gratitude to him that is not likely to diminish.

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But for all this happy recollection there is also sorrow in the realization that graduate school, the intense period of wonder relatively unimpeded by outside obligations, the childhood of the intellect and the time of rarest intellectual privilege when one can let one’s curiosity run amok and even at times wreak havoc, has come to an end. It is the happiest form of chaos I know, and one that I hope to continue to cultivate, somehow, in the years to come.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: SKEPTICISM IN ENGLAND AND THE PROBLEM OF EARLY MODERN MORAL PHILOSOPHY

We need to reckon with the fact that thinking is an effortful activity, not simply a manipulation of a kaleidoscope of mental images. The attempt to think out problems, as a matter of common introspection and observation, does not seem to take the form of, or be reducible to, a patterned or even a uniformly purposive activity. Rather we engage in an often intolerable wrestle with words and meanings, we spill over the limits of our intelligence and become confused, and we often find that our attempts to synthesize our views reveal conceptual disorders at least as much as coherent doctrines.

--Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas"¹

I. The Problem of English Moral Philosophy

In her own attempts to inspire interest in Renaissance intellectual history among philosophers and historians of philosophy, Jill Kraye has noted the general disregard for Renaissance philosophy in existing narratives of its history.² I would add to her observation that this neglect is even more the case for English philosophy, and is particularly true of English moral philosophy. In narratives of the history of ethics, English moral philosophy is conspicuously absent prior to the mid-seventeenth century. Typically, the contributions of

¹ Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and the History of Ideas," *Visions of Politics, Volume 1: Regarding Method*, 5th ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 79.

² Jill Kraye notes that the "caricatured view of Renaissance humanism," which sees humanism as a movement that "produced narrow-minded pedants, more concerned with the style of a philosophical argument than with its substance and more interested in the classification of philosophical positions than in their concrete and detailed analysis," may be partly to blame for the degree to which Renaissance philosophy has been overlooked (*Humanism and Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Jill Kraye and M.W.F Stone [New York: Routledge, 2000] xii). See also Charles Schmitt, "Towards a History of Renaissance Philosophy," *Aristotelismus und Renaissance: In Memoriam Charles B. Schmitt* (Wiesbaden : Harrassowitz, 1988) 9-16.

English writers to the history of ethics prior to the Cambridge Platonists go unacknowledged, with the exception of the occasional mention of Richard Hooker, Francis Bacon, or Edward Herbert.³ Volume one of the *Cambridge Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts*, which focuses on moral philosophy, includes only one English work, a portion of John Case's commentary on Aristotle.⁴ Although it is true that this is a collection of translated works, even this volume's admittedly abbreviated bibliography of Renaissance moral philosophical texts available in English includes only the works of two other English writers (Joseph Hall's works and Thomas More's *Utopia*). This conspicuous absence from the critical radar across multiple disciplines leads us to important questions both about the location of English moral philosophy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and its exclusion from studies of early modern moral philosophy today.

The problem in part has to do with the character of English moral philosophy which in some ways is very different from its Continental counterparts. By and large, there is no comparable figure in early modern English history to Montaigne, Charron, Primaudaye, Lipsius, Bodin, DuVair, Ficino, Bruno, Pico della Mirandola, Suarez, Sanches, and the list goes on and on. Though many of these figures were related to the church or wrote texts that are in some sense religious, their writings are often more ethical or philosophical than

³ Richard Popkin's first edition of *The History of Scepticism* did include half a chapter devoted to Herbert of Cherbury, though he follows Descartes's unflattering view that in his engagement with skepticism Herbert "failed to comprehend the basic problem at issue" (128). In his most recent revised edition, Popkin also includes a very brief discussion of the Cambridge Platonist Henry More (*The History of Scepticism From Savonarola to Bayle* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2003], 174-180). Other examples of this tendency to ignore English writers include: Michael B. Gill, *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Matthew L. Jones, *The Good Life in the Scientific Revolution: Descartes, Pascal, Leibniz, and the Cultivation of Virtue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); *The Problem of Evil in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Elmar J. Kremer and Michael J. Latzer (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998); Basil Willey, *The English Moralists* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1964).

⁴ *Cambridge Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts, Volume 1: Moral Philosophy*, ed. Jill Kraye (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

religious—that is to say, they can be understood, at least to some degree, without respect to religious context. The same cannot be said of the works of writers like Thomas More, William Perkins, Joseph Hall, Richard Hooker, or Jeremy Taylor, whose works significantly depend upon the religious context—indeed often the polemical context—that encouraged their production. This is, of course, a generalization to which there are exceptions, for example works like Thomas Elyot’s *Of the Knowledge which Maketh a Wise Man*, William Baldwin’s *Treatise of Moral Philosophy*, or William Cornwallis’s *Essays*, which represent a more secular strain of English ethics in the period. But these figures hardly make it into histories of ethics or moral philosophy, and it is perhaps not a coincidence that countries that remained Roman Catholic in the face of the Reformation were precisely countries that produced a form of moral philosophy that was less tied to religious conflict and less a product of a polemical culture.⁵ [cf Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*]

Much of the problem here also has to do with terminology. Terms like morality and ethics utterly fail to communicate the interlacement between religion and moral philosophy in early modern England. This is perhaps why Continental figures, whose works are so much easier to comprehend at the level of a purist ethics, have fit more comfortably into grand narratives about the history of ethics. The term moral theology perhaps works in some instances, assuming one is in fact talking about theology, but clearly not for the subjects of this dissertation. Indeed, it is hard to discuss early modern English texts such as Richard Hooker’s *Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie* as moral philosophy since they were religious, particularly since they were religious at a time when religion was not a discipline of objective study, but an area of knowledge that implicated belief.

⁵ Stanley Cavell speculates in a similar vein when he compares how early modern Continental philosophers engage literature as opposed to English philosophers in *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 2.

Moreover, in addition to their inaccuracy, terms like morality and ethics are often intentionally or unintentionally polemical and political, as critics feel compelled to use their studies of the relationship between ethics or morality and early modern literature as a means to justify the study of literature in general. One recent example of this tendency is Marshall Grossman's *Reading Renaissance Ethics*, an edited volume of essays on the ethics of reading early modern texts both then and now. The collection seeks to revise the cultural and historical specificity of New Historicism by taking into account what he terms the "resistance of the signifier."⁶ In Grossman's view, "material history itself is already inhabited and colonized by literary form" in a way that allows texts to be not just or even primarily purveyors of history, but also ethical agents.⁷ Indeed, in a concluding section that records an exchange between Grossman and Sharon Achinstein, a self-styled "political critic," the two debate whether (as Grossman would have it) ethics ("what should I want") is necessarily a precondition of a political act ("how do I get what I want") or whether (as Achinstein would have it) ethics and politics are indistinguishable "because the conditions in which we are able to *do* ethics...are indeed political."⁸ But despite their disagreement over how ethics is related to politics, both sides of the question use ethics more broadly to justify the study of literature.

So too is the case for E. Armstrong's recent elegiac account of the undermining of early modern theories of education grounded in the moral philosophy of Ciceronian oratorical theory by the more sterile Ramist approach. Armstrong laments the harsh truth of Grafton and Jardine's argument that Ramism "*is* the version of liberal arts teaching that

⁶ "Introduction," *Reading Renaissance Ethics*, ed. Marshall Grossman (New York: Routledge, 2007) 5.

⁷ Grossman, "Introduction" 6.

⁸ Achinstein and Grossman, "Ethics or Politics?: An Exchange Passing through the *Areopagitica*" 263.

‘caught on’ and left its indelible trace on western European thought.’”⁹ For him, interpreting “poetic practices” in the context of the “history of rhetoric” may be one way to reaffirm the importance of “*public action* as a necessary and material end to both academic prose and the texts such prose examines.”¹⁰

I find that the value of the study of early modern ethics derives from the way in which the epistemic instability of the period made normative ethics all the more important. The history of ethics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is significant because it is a moment in intellectual history that can tell us much about how the human mind responds to its own growth and how it compensates for its limitations. In his recent book, *How Skeptics Do Ethics*, Aubrey Neal has argued that ethics has not kept pace with the moral dilemmas of our own contemporary world.¹¹ While it is true that this problem may be a particularly compelling one as the speed of change makes us continually aware—increasingly undeniably so—of our ethical shortcomings, I believe that the ways in which human epistemic change outpaces ethical thought would not seem to be unique to the twentieth or twenty-first centuries. Rather, history shows that ethics is often a step behind changes in the human intellectual condition. Certainly there are some ethical discourses that are fundamentally anticipatory. A good example of this in the early modern period is the discourse of casuistry which seeks to resolve hypothetical moral dilemmas before one encounters them. But normative ethics is more often a fundamentally defensive kind of discourse. Many of the subjects of this dissertation allow for the suggestion that normative ethics in early modern

⁹ Edward Armstrong, *A Ciceronian Sunburn: A Tudor Dialogue on Humanistic Rhetoric and Civic Poetics* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2006) 183.

¹⁰ Armstrong 185.

¹¹ Aubrey Neal, *How Skeptics Do Ethics: A Brief History of the Late Modern Linguistic Turn* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007).

England is defined by its struggle to respond to the epistemic dilemmas occasioned by the Reformation and by print culture.

The subject of this dissertation is the value of skepticism to English writers interested in normative moral value and religious knowledge. Beginning with Thomas More and the birth of printed English religious polemics during the Reformation, I trace the value of uncertainty through later renegotiations of the identity of the Church of England and the moral identity of its subjects in the works of Richard Hooker and Thomas Nashe at the turn of the sixteenth century, and finally to the more volatile reinvention of the parameters of a national church in the early polemical works of John Milton and the parliamentarian Lord Brooke. While they are all writing within a polemical context, each of these writers seeks moral value that is compromised by their linguistic situatedness.

This dissertation initially began as a study of the effects of skepticism on early modern aesthetics. It has evolved into a discussion of the relationship between skepticism and ethics in part because of the strong tie between aesthetics and ethics in the period. In the literature studied in this dissertation, at every turn, aesthetics gets mediated through the ethical and epistemological ramifications of genre and style. These writers are in constant conversation with themselves about their literary choices and the moral authority—or lack thereof—implicit in these choices. One form of this kind of ethical-aesthetic trade off encouraged by skepticism has been studied by Victoria Kahn. In her examination of the influence of skeptical thought on rhetoric and prudence, she argues that early humanists became mired in the ultimately counterproductive rhetorical and epistemological tendencies of skepticism. Although humanists were attracted to the Academic skeptic's discursive practice of *in utramque partem*, the efficacy of this rhetorical dexterity was destabilized

significantly by the epistemic critique of language found in Pyrrhonism. In her view this conflict contributed to the loss of the “practical and political significance” of the linguistic act.¹² In other words, skepticism is embedded in the humanist concept of decorum, which is upheld largely at the expense of universal truth.¹³

I argue that the engagement with skeptical methodology by More, Hooker, Nashe, and Milton is a response to the uncertainty unearthed by the advent of religious experience—that is, by the interiority and subjectivity of religious knowledge. After the Reformation’s challenge to orthodoxy, dogma lost its status as a guarantor of religious or moral certainty. The rise of print culture only augmented the impact of this decentering of moral authority. As print culture allowed more people access to religious and moral texts, and as Protestantism encouraged the individual interpretation of those texts, language was invested with a new moral power—a power that was as potentially stabilizing as it was destabilizing in the quest for a normative ethics. What we see in these writers is a tension within the impulse for reform between the religious and polemical on the one hand, and the moral and humanist, on the other. This is not to say that these represent contrary spheres of influence—clearly humanists could be polemical and religious—but it is to emphasize that the writers I study are all the keenly aware of the fissure between rhetorical savvy and moral authority because of the exigency of the polemical and religious contexts in which they write. Moreover, the question of aesthetics has become all the more urgent and pressing for many of these writers as they hasten to formulate an adequate ethical response to religious uncertainty in the midst of the epistemic crisis resulting from a print culture that makes belief an increasingly textual

¹² Victoria Kahn, *Rhetoric, Prudence, and Skepticism in the Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) 21.

¹³ Kahn 25.

phenomenon. To varying degrees, each of the writers covered in this dissertation responded to this disjunction and to the failure of language more largely by calling into question the relationship of language to moral authority. I would not suggest, as Kahn does, that language has lost its significance, but that in the struggle to invest language with moral value these writers appeal to uncertainty rather than dogma.

Publishing within this context, More, Hooker, Nashe and Milton face an aesthetic and ethical crossroad as writers interested in producing texts that promote reform without overthrowing orthodoxy altogether. I argue that because certainty could no longer be located in dogma, these writers turn their attention to language and its potential to regulate the experience of reading. However, the subjectivity of reading practices caused these writers to reassess the capacity of language to communicate a normative ethics; in the process of doing so, they test the value of different literary modes for both reform and orthodoxy. I argue that these writers deployed these modes in order to reconstitute the normative moral value threatened by the epistemic upheaval of the Reformation. Surprisingly, it is their engagement with skepticism rather than their denial of it that allows them to stabilize moral authority by generating didactic texts to replace dogma as a source of normative moral knowledge.

Clearly, given the diversity of the writers covered in this dissertation—beginning with a doubtful Catholic and ending with a near Puritan—we will encounter vastly different definitions of normative moral value in the course of this dissertation. But despite their differences, it remains crucial that all of these writers are struggling to reconstitute moral knowledge in the context of religious uncertainty. Moreover, in all cases, these writers look to didacticism rather than dogma to invest their texts with moral authority. Normativity, then, aims at certainty that can be located not in dogma—for after the Reformation pluralizes

dogma, it can no longer be a guarantor of moral authority—but in human experience that is regulated by language. I am concerned here entirely with figures who are interested in establishing or reinforcing normative moral values related to a centralized, national church. These writers are often less interested in how theology or ecclesiology defines moral codes than they are in how to communicate and reinforce normative moral value. As Debora Shuger has argued, the writings of orthodox thinkers are often the sites of some of the most conflicted and heterogeneous thought, suggesting the inadequacy of polar categories such as orthodoxy and radicalism.¹⁴ These are not radical reformers, but they are reformers. Moreover, their reform has less to do with changing the nature of the church—indeed, in almost all cases, they believe the sovereignty of the church to be nonnegotiable—than with mentoring the individual's moral identity within that church.

The way these writers employ genre and literary modes in order to reconstitute moral value make their texts not moral philosophy, but moral philosophy in action. By this I mean two things. First, these texts represent a moral philosophy in the making as these writers attempt not to theorize, but to test out the limits of the relationship between normative moral value and language. The text then—and the subjective experience of reading these writers are so attuned to—becomes the meeting place of ethics and experience. In other words, the text is ethical *because* it is experiential. Secondly, because these texts are normative, they are a pragmatic moral philosophy or a moral philosophy in execution in that—even as they express doubts and test boundaries—these writers are confident of the necessity of normative moral belief and behavior. The relationship between these two enterprises is dynamic in that it would seem that sometimes the testing reinforces normative value and sometimes it threatens

¹⁴ See the introduction to Debora Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics, and the Dominant Culture*, rpt. ed. (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

to undercut it altogether. By and large, this literature focuses not on theology or ecclesiology, though these writers sometimes use arguments about these elements of religion in order to recalibrate what Paul Cefalu has called “moral identity.” In other words, what we see in the figures considered in this dissertation is a kind of double consciousness—indeed, a kind of dueling consciousness.¹⁵ And I would argue that this duality only reflects the duality inherent in the Church of England itself, which staked a claim for its identity both on reformation and orthodoxy. In writing within a polemical and religious context these writers reinforce belief in orthodox religion, but at the same time, in writing about religion they are implicitly studying, in some cases in a nearly proto-disciplinary fashion, its limits and jurisdiction.

This dissertation comes out of my interest in, yet ultimate dissatisfaction with, the work of intellectual historians like Richard Popkin. Popkin claims that “scepticism plays a special and different role in the period extending from the religious quarrels leading to the Reformation...due to the fact that the intellectual crisis brought on by the Reformation coincided with the discovery and revival of the arguments of the ancient Greek sceptics.”¹⁶ Popkin’s argument for the revived interest in skepticism seems to some degree tautological. He explains that “the problem of justifying true knowledge does not arise as long as there is an unchallenged criterion. But in an epoch of intellectual revolution such as that under consideration here, the very raising of the problem can produce an insoluble *crise pyrrhonienne*,”¹⁷ which seems tantamount to saying that because philosophers and theologians of the sixteenth century were interested in skepticism, they were affected by

¹⁵ In his biography of Shakespeare, Stephen Greenblatt suggests a similar kind of “double consciousness” to explain Shakespeare’s uncertain attitude towards Catholicism and Protestantism in many of his plays. See Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004) 102-103.

¹⁶ Popkin xix-xx.

¹⁷ Popkin 5.

skepticism. Popkin illustrates how Luther's devaluing of religious authority echoed the Pyrrhonist problem of the criterion leading to an infinite regress of questioning, but he leaves unanswered the question of why Luther's criticism became such a destabilizing force and such a compelling argument in the early sixteenth century. Indeed, so compelling was the Lutheran case that the English church undertook a strategy of self-definition by way of contradistinction to Lutheran heresy and its various and unwieldy permutations, a strategy that it would reemploy throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In that way, orthodoxy becomes a kind of negative moral identity.

As he tries to strike a satisfactory balance between intellectual and cultural history, Popkin traces ideas in texts and follows their intellectual pathways, but other motivations for these ideas are largely ignored. When I began working on this dissertation, I was initially motivated by my interest in the transmission of Skeptic thought through translations, such as the partial Latin translation of John Wolley and the partial English translation of Raleigh. The pioneering works of Popkin, Charles Schmitt, and Luciano Floridi all suggest a rich history of manuscript translation, yet in a study of the effects of skepticism on the constitution of moral identity, following the fault lines of translation and transmission, while still important, to some degree misses the point.¹⁸ Our understanding of the exchange between Luther and Erasmus about whether or not the Holy Spirit should be categorized as a Skeptic really does not depend upon whether or not either one of them had read Sextus Empiricus's *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Diogenes Laertius's *Life of Pyrrho*, or Cicero's *Academica*. Ideas are not circumscribed by the mind; rather, their shape and power are determined not just by their

¹⁸ Charles Schmitt, *Cicero Skepticus: A Study of the Influence of the Academica in the Renaissance* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972); Luciano Floridi, *Sextus Empiricus: The Transmission and Recovery of Pyrrhonism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

ideational commerce, but also by how, why, and in what context they are developed, used, and revised.

Moreover, intellectual historians like Popkin have a penchant for classifying skeptic thought in the early modern period into overly neat categories. While Popkin's breakdown of the skeptical tendencies of the period into the "the quest for faith—pure fideism—and the quest for reasonableness—or a 'mitigated skepticism'" are certainly useful ways of thinking about skepticism, particularly from a pedagogical standpoint, they are also misleadingly limiting.¹⁹ A similar problem arises in the critical tendency to think about skepticism as a kind of early modern version of atheism, for example Don Cameron Allen's dichotomy that divides early modern skeptics into "practical atheists, who lived intemperately and were careless of their salvation" who were more or less harmless "rogues" and "speculative atheists, who often lived decorous lives but who tested every religious notion and were, consequently, very much to be feared."²⁰

Such classifications lead to an inaccurate picture of the significance of skepticism to early modern culture in at least three ways. First, they do not adequately demarcate the very important differences between skeptic belief and skeptic methodology. In the case of

¹⁹ Popkin 15.

²⁰ Don Cameron Allen, *Doubt's Boundless Sea: Skepticism and Faith in the Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1964) 8. This tendency is apparent in many early studies touching early modern skepticism. For other examples of the tendency to define skepticism in terms of classes of belief or to simply define it as the early modern version of atheism, see Ernest A. Strathmann's taxonomy of Elizabethan atheism including but not limited to "religious skepticism, agnosticism, unitarianism, deism, and unethical conduct" (*Sir Walter Raleigh: A Study in Elizabethan Skepticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951) 96); Geoffrey Aggeler's dichotomy between "fideistic skeptics" and "freethinking atheists" in *Nobler in the Mind: The Stoic-Skeptic Dialectic in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Newark and London: University of Delaware Press 1998) 37. Margaret Wiley does better in following Louis Bredvold's sense that "skepticism in the seventeenth century cannot be appreciated as a historical force if it is narrowly defined as a philosophical system. It was protean in nature, as much a group of tendencies as a system" (Louis Bredvold, *The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1934] 16) quoted in *The Subtle Knot: Creative Skepticism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952) 63. However, despite this flexibility, Wiley considers only the usual suspects of the seventeenth century and develops an intellectual history based on what she perceives to be lineages.

Montaigne, for example, form and content, methodology and belief, align relatively easily. But this does not account for someone like Thomas Nashe, for whom skeptical form frequently threatens to endanger his normative moral beliefs. Skepticism, as a method as opposed to a belief, by its very nature is unwieldy in its openness to a variety of uses and interpretations. This is particularly true in a world in which the boundaries between the normative and the non-normative are constantly being renegotiated, as they are amidst the religious turmoil in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. As a methodology, then, skeptical indeterminacy can prove a powerful ally to those interested in a more flexible normative moral value, as it can expand and contract to encompass and limit, to allow the religious liberty that is the hallmark of post-Reformation religious identity and to rein it in.

Another problem with overly neat categories is that they tend to encourage the production of intellectual lineages. Margaret Wiley, for example, draws lineages such as Nicholas of Cusa begot Cornelius Agrippa, who (translated to English in 1568) begot Fulke Greville, and so on in her attempt to document the various philosophical reincarnations of skepticism.²¹ For her, English skepticism is a point in a process beginning in classical Greece extending at least into the Enlightenment, but also reaching as far as Existentialism. Her approach to skepticism identifies broad patterns but downplays important distinctions related to historical context and intentionality.

A third and perhaps most important problem with such classifications is that they tend to highlight some of the most renowned skeptics of the period without giving much thought to what skepticism might mean for those writers we would never actually call skeptics or perhaps even skeptical. Richard Hooker and Thomas More, for example, are two writers

²¹ Wiley 43-47. This is just one example of Wiley's tendency to understand skepticism in terms of specific lines of influence.

whose works are very much concerned with whether or not there are any resources of faith that can lead to normative moral value outside of the church. More often than not, even though they are polemical, their works are not prescriptive; and even though their works are in some sense didactic, they are skeptical. The intellectual history of early modern England has suffered from this tendency in particular, as most studies of early modern skepticism either exclusively focus on the more famous Continental figures of the period or ignore skepticism in England until the middle of the seventeenth century when its presence become more palpable as a secular ethics emerges.²²

Taken together, these tendencies illustrate what Quentin Skinner has called the “mythology of doctrines” that encourages a dangerous kind of reductionism in the history of ideas. If the concept of the “history of ideas” is a kind of equation, such mythology assumes the preeminent value of “ideas” over and above “history.” When ideas are studied at the expense of their context, it becomes relatively easy to produce intellectual lineages that stress anticipations and influences or closed and orderly intellectual systems that adhere to their own internal logic without exception. But such coherent narratives often simply reflect the wishful thinking of the scholarly imagination and neglect a deeper engagement with authorial intention and historical context.²³

²² The exception to this is the considerable literature on skepticism in early modern English drama: William Hamlin’s *Tragedy and Scepticism in Shakespeare’s England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), Stanley Cavell’s *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), Millicent Bell’s *Shakespeare’s Tragic Skepticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), Mathew R. Martin’s *Between Theatre and Philosophy: Skepticism in the Major City Comedies of Ben Jonson and Thomas Middleton* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001), Michael Srigley’s *The Probe of Doubt: Scepticism and Illusion in Shakespeare’s Plays* (Uppsala: Uppsala State University, 2000), Geoffrey Aggeler’s *Nobler in the Mind: The Stoic-Skeptic Dialectic in English Renaissance Tragedy* (1998), Graham Bradshaw’s *Shakespeare’s Scepticism* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1987), and Sukanta Chaudhuri’s *Infirm Glory: Shakespeare and the Renaissance Image of Man* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981), William R. Elton’s *King Lear and the Gods* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1966).

²³ On the “mythology of doctrines,” see Skinner, 59-67; on the “mythology of coherence,” see 67-72.

In looking at the importance of skepticism to normative moral value and to definitions of orthodoxy in early modern England, I have been tracing a kind of intellectual borderland—pace Popkin, not the lines of skepticism, but the outlines of skepticism. By outlines of skepticism I mean not how skepticism is transmitted, but both how it exposed the epistemic limits and possibilities of the human mind and thereby elicited a kind of ethical response as well as how in this enterprise it is ultimately outlined or limited by that response. These writers represent an area of early modern intellectual consciousness where the concerns of orthodoxy and skepticism meet, and instead of destroying each other, they shape each other. Skepticism initiates these writers' uncertainties about language, but it also helps them to address these same uncertainties.

II. The Value of Uncertainty to the English Church

The English church of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was an institution in its adolescence that, from its very outset, capitalized on areas of moral vacuity. Uncertainty was a powerful ally in the struggle to define Protestant religious identity, to strengthen the legitimacy of a national, reformed church, and to transmit normative moral value. Bernard Verkamp has shown the importance of the concept of *adiaphora*, things indifferent to salvation, to the definition of the sixteenth-century English church.²⁴ Since *adiaphora* could be any practice or belief not prescribed by the Bible, the English church had the freedom to develop and revise moral value in the interest of a national unified religion. Though this strategy ended up being the English church's undoing in the seventeenth century, in the

²⁴ Bernard J. Verkamp, *The Indifferent Mean: Adiaphorism in the English Reformation to 1554* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1977).

sixteenth century *adiaphora* allowed it to maneuver itself deftly around the threats of sectarianism and religious diversity more generally.

Adiaphora is just one example of the ways in which uncertainty offered an unscripted moral space that could be used to direct religious belief and moral behavior. So too, looking largely at literary texts, Paul Cefalu highlights the tensions between early modern ethical theory and practice that arise from the uncertainty implicit in the doctrine of the Church of England. He views the English church's search for normativity as a result of the inherent "murkiness" of important soteriological concepts like justification and sanctification.²⁵ Although by looking at literary texts as places that "test [the] working of salvation in practice" he is left with a much more "syncretistic" picture of early modern ethics than Popkin's neater dichotomy of fideism and mitigated skepticism, it may be a picture that is also more textured, provocative, and illuminating.²⁶ In many ways, Cefalu's study, like Reid Barbour's work on Caroline religious culture, is an ambitious reworking of the ways we think about early modern moral uncertainty. Barbour's study of the Caroline religious imagination expands the parameters of the subject of early modern moral philosophy by bringing all the players—literature, philosophy, and religion—to the table. In his assessment of the influence of skepticism on the early modern calculus of moral value, he contends that "English Protestant orthodoxy certainly generated its own versions of dogmatism, but its main tendencies leaned toward the intensive, probing scrutiny of the matrix of religious experience."²⁷ Both Barbour and Cefalu echo Shuger's sense that orthodoxy is an intellectual

²⁵ Paul Cefalu, *Moral Identity in Early Modern Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 2.

²⁶ Cefalu 189.

²⁷ Reid Barbour, *Literature and Religious Culture in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 1.

space filled with conflicts and contradictions that work to define the values and movement of early modern religious culture.

In this dissertation, I trace a chronological arc that defines three points at which orthodoxy was challenged and revised: the period of the Reformation in England in the early sixteenth century, the challenge to the Elizabethan Settlement at the end of the sixteenth century, and the period leading up to the English Civil War. In the first two chapters I seek to contextualize what Richard Popkin has called the “*crise pyrrhonienne*” in the early fiction and polemical works of Thomas More. In the first chapter, I consider how More used the concept of equity in order to scrutinize and stabilize the relationship between reform and orthodoxy. Looking at the *Utopia* and the polemical exchanges between Martin Luther and Desiderius Erasmus, I examine how More’s interpretation of equity comes to define his preference for a skeptical, provisional method of reform over and above Lutheran notions of reform that rest on assertions of epistemic and moral certainty. Moreover, I show how More and Luther’s hermeneutics indicate their contrasting methods of reform, which become apparent in the ways they employ the mode of paradox for either didactic or dogmatic ends. Here we are introduced to a problem related to equity, the Stoic concept of the parities of good and evil. It is a point of moral uncertainty that preoccupies the minds of those interested in both harnessing and containing moral uncertainty, and one that haunts Protestant determinations of normative moral value in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. We will have cause to revisit this moral uncertainty in slightly different forms in chapters three and five.

In chapter two, I examine More’s appeals to fiction within his polemical works of the 1520s, a crucial decade during which printed polemic emerged as a visible and powerful

representative of religious knowledge. More responds to the uncertainty caused by this textualization of belief with a skepticism defined by his reliance on probability and the normative fictions that support orthodoxy. More's uses of fiction—for example, the epistolary frames of his *Responsio ad Lutherum*—go hand in hand with his skepticism as they test the role of printed polemic in formations of religious belief. I read these frames, and the problematic relationship they narrate between printer, author, and reader, as an indication of More's distrust of the printed text as a container for moral value. I also argue that More's shift from traditional polemic in the *Responsio* at the beginning of the 1520s to fictional dialogue in the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* at the end of that decade reflects a transitional period and More's uncertainty about whether didactic fiction may be more effective than dogmatic polemic for fighting the threat of heresy.

In chapter three, I turn from the birth of the English church to its adolescence in the late sixteenth century and Richard Hooker's struggle to steer between the Church's orthodox and reformed identities in his *Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie*. Though often read by modern critics as a dogmatic assertion of Elizabethan orthodoxy, in this chapter I take seriously the accusation by Hooker's adversaries that the *Lawes* contained "speculative doctrine" that sought to make "all religions equal." I argue that this accusation of skepticism is linked to Hooker's preference for a reform and orthodoxy that privileges a language and method of edification over codification. Unlike Thomas Cartwright and others who sought to define the Elizabethan church by contrariety—that is, polemically and in direct opposition to the Church of Rome—Hooker proffers a more rationalist strategy for reform that emphasizes the importance of doubt. For him, orthodoxy relies upon the relationship between reason and the

senses, the relativity of custom, and a taxonomy of moral certainty. In his view, conformity to orthodoxy is not a dogmatic position but a dynamic means of reform.

In chapter four I examine some of the moral pamphlets of the 1580s and 90s that were inspired by a Calvinist hermeneutic that interpreted preternatural phenomena as an index of divine providence. Skeptical of the moral efficacy of language, Thomas Nashe challenges the validity of the analogical thinking that Calvinist interpretations of nature and many of these moral pamphlets depended upon. Looking specifically at his consideration of preternatural phenomena in *Christ's Teares over Jerusalem*, I argue that Nashe mediates between his skepticism about analogical thinking and his commitment to decorum and moral reform. While at times skepticism guides Nashe's own sense of hermeneutics, at other times it threatens to undermine his hope of moral reform.

In the final chapter, as I move from the definition of English Protestant orthodoxy to the site of its ultimate breakdown, I consider a single but crucial point of linguistic failure. I examine how the concept of *adiaphora*, or things indifferent to salvation—a concept whose moral neutrality once allowed the English Church to define its orthodoxy—became a much contested topic on the eve of the English Civil War. Because of its moral indeterminacy, *adiaphora* was deployed by both royalists and parliamentarians to defend religious dogma and liberty respectively, making it anything but the morally neutral category it was purported to be. In response to this increasingly dogmatic category of moral knowledge, a young John Milton at the very beginnings of his polemical career offers an alternative guide to reform and orthodoxy: satire. I argue that Milton replaces *adiaphora* and the artificial, dogmatic moral value that offered conformity and peace at the expense of the liberty of individual

conscience with a non-dogmatic satire that allowed both for religious liberty and normative moral value.

Examining writers that fall outside the boundaries of Popkin's notions of early modern skepticism, this dissertation offers a fuller account of the history of skepticism and reveals how this philosophy influenced literary strategies. These case studies also enable larger discussions of the relationship between epistemology and ethics in the early modern period in England and the ways in which formulations of ethical values constitute attempts to respond to epistemic growth and to compensate for epistemic limitation. I am not a historian, and this dissertation does not claim to be writing even the beginnings of the history of English skepticism. I am more interested in exploring how skepticism as a methodology influenced notions of normative moral value and religious knowledge in early modern England. To a large degree this dissertation falls between disciplinary cracks, and that has been intentional because, like Skinner, I would emphasize the value of incoherence in intellectual history as much as coherence. At various points in my study of ethics and epistemology, I have found it important to take into account social history, the histories of science, medicine, philosophy and law, religious studies, classics, and of course, literary criticism and analysis. I have invested in all of these fields because it is precisely at the boundaries of disciplines—both in early modern texts and our studies of them—the places where disciplinary methodologies and discourses overlap and compete, that the moral and epistemic values and vexations of a culture become most apparent.

CHAPTER 2

THE “*CRISE PYRRHONIENNE*” AND EARLY TUDOR DETERMINATIONS OF NORMATIVE MORAL VALUE

I. Equity and the Problem of the Criterion

In his foundational chapter on the “intellectual crisis of the Reformation” that begins *The History of Scepticism*, Richard Popkin notes that “the problem of justifying a standard of true knowledge does not arise as long as there is an unchallenged criterion. But in an epoch of intellectual revolution [such as the Reformation]...the very raising of the problem can produce an insoluble *crise pyrrhonienne*.” Once a criterion of judgment is challenged, as the Roman Catholic Church was challenged by Martin Luther, evidence for orthodoxy or normativity loses all value because it no longer has an authority to substantiate it.²⁸ The implications of the Lutheran redefinition of a criterion from a normative to a subjective one, Popkin suggests, changed the intellectual landscape of early modern Europe. I would argue that this decentering of moral authority was doubly felt in England, in particular by those interested in both orthodoxy and reform. Initially in the early 1520s the English church was given the task of defining itself in response to Luther’s attempts to undercut a normative criterion of judgment. As it broke away from Rome and evolved into a reformed and independent church itself, it had to defend its own moral and religious existence and recreate the normative criterion it had just discarded itself. This struggle to reconstitute, justify, and

²⁸ Popkin 5.

enforce a normative criterion of moral value and religious knowledge was to become the legacy and the burden of the English Church for the duration of the sixteenth century.

The work of Thomas More is one of the first examples of the Tudor response to this “crise pyrrhonienne” in England. More is a particularly complex example because of his competing moral identities as a humanist and a polemicist whose considerable intellectual and rhetorical talents were appropriated by Henry VIII to defend the Church of England against Lutheran heresy in the 1520s. As a humanist, More was called upon to write fiction and to theorize reform, while as a defender of the Church, he was compelled to write religious polemic and reconstitute normative moral value. Over the course of the next two chapters, we will see that More never fully sacrifices either one of these roles to the other and that there is a constant tension in his work between his interests in reforming and reconstituting moral value.

In the next chapter we will turn to More’s evaluation of fiction, polemic, and the evidence for belief in the context of a newly emerging culture of printed polemical literature. In this chapter we will focus on the importance of the unstable moral category of equity to More’s notion of reform beginning with his humanistic engagement with the term using the genre of fiction and the literary mode of paradox in the *Utopia*. Equity is an important focal point for our discussion because it becomes the cornerstone for the debate over the right method of reform—indeed, the very possibility of reform—among More, Luther, and Erasmus in the 1520s. I will argue that equity reveals the value of uncertainty to determinations of normative moral value and religious knowledge in the context of the proliferation of dogma occasioned by the Reformation. As reformers within the Church of England often walked the line between reforming and stabilizing religious and moral value,

the moral uncertainty of equity and its ability to shore up or undermine moral value provides a logic behind many strategies important to the reform agendas of the English Church in the sixteenth century such as things indifferent and the decorum of religious rhetoric and epistemology. The instability within equity derives from the fact that it is premised upon a recognition of the limitations of human moral knowledge. But at the same time, equity negotiates the value of human experience and judgment in a way that manages the dangers of a more radical skepticism that dismisses the possibility of a criterion of judgment altogether.

The question of equity—how to interpret it, how to determine its value, and how it transforms the relationship between human and divine law—is, to put it mildly, one of utmost importance for early modern determinations of normative moral value.²⁹ A legal and philosophical term in its origin, equity often acts as a guide to formulate provisional standards of judgment when no clear criterion of truth exists. But competing interpretations of equity in the early sixteenth century made the nature of that provisional standard complex and controversial. Part of equity's instability is inherent in the very different definitions we find in Roman and Greek philosophy; both of these definitions made their presence felt in the law courts of the sixteenth century as well as in the religious climate of the Reformation. Though in his recent study of the early modern "culture of equity" Mark Fortier is right to underline its pervasiveness across the cultural spectrum, it was by no means undisputed, and it was not easily assimilated into all areas of Renaissance thought.³⁰ For reasons that shall become apparent, equity was much less contentious in legal categories than it was in the realm of religion and religious discourse; this is particularly true during the Reformation

²⁹ Mark Fortier, *The Culture of Equity in Early Modern England* (Ashgate: Burlington, VT, 2005) 2.

³⁰ Fortier 1-2.

when the question of equity became important for the reconstitution of a criterion of moral judgment.

The linguistic roots of the term “equity” go far towards providing an explanation for the uncertainty surrounding it. In the Hebrew Bible, the word for equity is *mesarim*, which is defined by one Renaissance writer as both “mishor, uprightness, or streightnesse” and “plainness or an equal, even, and plain place.”³¹ But in the Old Testament, the term has no fixed meaning.³² Perhaps even more influential in the dispute over the nature of equity in the Renaissance is the significant difference between the Greek and Latin roots of the term. The Greek root *epieikeia* implies “appropriateness, pliancy, exceptionality, justice, kindness, leniency,” while the Latin root *aequitas* implies “evenness, equality, sameness, justice and fairness.”³³ Hence, depending on whether one preferred the Greek or Roman formulation of equity, the concept potentially could have normative or non-normative value.

In law, equity could urge the right application of the law, or it could be advocated as a kind of law superior or even antithetical to positive law. According to Aristotle, the terms “just” and “equitable” belong to the same genus, but the equitable is superior because it is a modification of legal justice; it bends the law, which is universal, to fit individual cases.³⁴ Equity is just, but it is not justice; instead, it is “a correction of law where it is defective

³¹ The quotation is taken from William Robertson’s *Key to the Hebrew Bible* (London, 1656) (cited in Fortier 31). Religious equity is specifically linked to “mishor,” which is defined as “rectitude” by Edward Pockocke (*Commentary on the Prophecy of Malachi* [Oxford, 1677] 26).

³² Looking at sixteenth-century translations of the Psalms, Fortier has noted a “general unfixedness” in uses of the term (35).

³³ Fortier 3; Arnaldo Biscardi, “On Aequitas and Epieikeia,” *Aequitas and Equity: Equity in Civil Law and Mixed Jurisdictions*, ed. Alfredo Mordechai Rabello (Jerusalem: Hamaccabi Press, 1997) 7.

³⁴ Biscardi 4.

owing to its universality.”³⁵ But in replacing or amending the injustice of the law’s blind universality, equity creates many problems for the stability of moral law. Because equity cannot oppose goodness, it licenses a variety of moral options: “it seems strange if the equitable, being something different from the just, is yet praiseworthy; for either the just or the equitable is not good, if they are different; or, if both are good, they are the same...they are all in a sense correct and not opposed to one another.”³⁶ But Aristotle quickly qualifies this lack of distinction, arguing that the equitable, “though it is better than one kind of justice, yet is just, and it is not as being a different class of thing that it is better than the just. The same thing, then, is just and equitable, and while both are good the equitable is superior. What creates the problem is that the equitable is just, but not the legally just but a correction of legal justice.”³⁷

In practice, the principle of equity diversifies to house gradations within fixed moral categories—levels of goodness are encompassed by an abstract principle of good without ever becoming the good itself. A new ideal necessarily develops in place of an unattainable one to prevent the stasis of skepticism and to allow for a judgment to take place that can be held right only insofar as it attains the replacement that stands in for the universal right. In the Aristotelian view, then, equity represents a standard of good that is meant to compensate for human moral and epistemological limitations.

In Roman law, equity has the potential for similar, problematic moral implications. Its two roots, *aequus* and *aequitas*, evoke the idea of a level field, which allow for an

³⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics, Complete Works*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) 1137b.

³⁶ Aristotle 1137b.

³⁷ Aristotle 1137b.

understanding of equity as both essence of the law and the antithesis to positive law.³⁸ For Cicero equity indicates the right application of positive law rather than the necessity of developing a law superior to it, and in one instance he defines equity as “equal laws in equal cases.”³⁹ Considered by some to be the founder of the term *aequitas*, Cicero reversed “the traditional Roman formulation respecting justice, *bonum et aequum*,” replacing goodness with equality.⁴⁰ Cicero tended to downplay the “defective nature of law” preferring instead to focus on the “strict and rigid...nature” of the law.⁴¹ Though Cicero’s views of equity can be hard to pin down precisely, in this instance at least he does provide a contrast to the Aristotelian view of equity.

In other words, while in the Roman sense equity can be understood either as “the substance and intrinsic justification of the existing legal norms,” in the Greek sense it is “an objective ideal to which the law aims, determining the creation of new norms and the modification of those that do not yet conform to the sense of justice felt in the social conscience.”⁴² These two versions of equity were inherited by lawyers and theologians in the sixteenth century, and both versions of this concept had specific implications for the reform and reconstitution of moral value. In the Aristotelian view, equity would seem to demand increased vigilance of judgment—it requires one not to follow the law, but to diversify the law’s universality by applying it with circumstances taken into account. Such a view

³⁸ Biscardi 7.

³⁹ Cicero, *Topica*, trans. H.M. Hubbell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) IV.23.

⁴⁰ Andrew Majeske, *Equity in English Renaissance Literature: Thomas More and Edmund Spenser* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 19.

⁴¹ Majeske 19.

⁴² This latter point is linked to an idea important to More’s *Utopia*—that in some circumstances the greatest justice may be the greatest injury (Biscardi 8).

admitted hope for the perfection of the law while recognizing the imperfection of existing law. But in the Roman view equity equalizes crimes, which to many—including More and Erasmus—suggested a lack of discretion leading inevitably to human error. The interpretation of equity betokened different approaches to man’s rationality as well as the problem of how to create moral value that responded to human epistemic limitation by promoting an approximate, not arbitrary, justice.

In practice in the sixteenth century, both interpretations of equity could lead to skepticism, for both the Aristotelian and the Roman definitions of equity invested considerable moral value in circumstance. Yet the variability of circumstance ultimately produces the notion of custom, which undermines the sense that a single normative moral law could exist. In his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Sextus Empiricus describes the tenth mode that leads Skeptics to a suspension of judgment. This mode is “mainly concerned with Ethics, being based on rules of conduct, habits, laws, legendary beliefs, and dogmatic conceptions.”⁴³ Sextus records how these different ethical codes can be juxtaposed against each other; for example, law and custom can come into conflict, which calls the moral value of both of them into question. So too, the same concept can work against itself when the laws or habits of one nation are shown to be remarkably different from those of another. Diogenes Laertius paraphrases Sextus’s discussion of law in the tenth mode by describing it as a mode that is “derived from customs” and “laws” and noting that “the same thing [can be] regarded by some as just and by others as unjust, or as good by some and bad by others.”⁴⁴

⁴³ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, trans. R.G. Bury (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000) I.145.

⁴⁴ Diogenes describes it as the fifth mode, rather than the tenth mode like Sextus (Diogenes Laertius, “Life of Pyrrho,” *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R. D. Hicks [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995] IX.83-86).

Because it could be linked to custom and opinion, at best the principle of equity could only be a provisional criterion of moral judgment.

More was concerned with equity as a means of reform for most of his career. It is a prominent concept in his early work *Utopia*, as it is in his later critique of Luther, and in the culmination of his public career as the Lord Chancellor of England, a post he took up in 1529. According to one of More's earliest biographers Thomas Stapleton, the chancellor's position was "supreme" with "no appeal from it...allowed, not even to the King himself." As Chancellor, More gave "judgment not so much according to statute law as according to natural justice and equity."⁴⁵ In his study of More's public career, J.A. Guy has noted the important shifts in early modern legal culture reflected in the development of the court of Chancery and the Star Chamber. These courts had expanded their jurisdiction under Henry VI, Edward IV, and Richard III to become "flexible courts which responded swiftly to changing patterns of public need," which made the other courts in England seem archaic and obsolete by comparison.⁴⁶ The result of these new courts was the redrawing of jurisdictional boundaries.⁴⁷

For some, including More, equity was considered a judgment that reflected a sense of wisdom and mercy that was superior to the common law. In his influential legal text *Doctor and Student*, More's rival Christopher St. Germain defines equity as "a right wiseness that considereth all the particular circumstances of the deed, the which is also tempered with the sweetness of mercy."⁴⁸ Revising the Aristotelian concept of *epieikeia* for a Christian legal

⁴⁵ Thomas Stapleton, *The Life and Illustrious Martyrdom of Sir Thomas More*, trans. Philip E. Hallett, ed. E.E. Reynolds (London: Burnes and Oates, 1966) 18.

⁴⁶ J.A. Guy, *The Public Career of Sir Thomas More* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980) 37.

⁴⁷ Guy 41.

culture, Germain defines equity as “an exception of the law of God, or the law of reason, from the general rules of the law of men, when they by reason of their generality, would in any particular case judge against the law of God or the law of reason...and so it appeareth, that equity taketh away not the very right, but only that that seemeth to be right by the general words of the law.”⁴⁹ As it demands that justice be determined in the light of circumstance, and as it exposes the disjunction between the appearance and reality of justice, it is the place where the law of men comes in conflict with the law of reason and the law of God. Equity sought to remedy the common law, which “had become settled in an age of force rather than of cunning...was conspicuously underdeveloped by 1529 in respect of fraud, perjury, [and] the rules of evidence.”⁵⁰

Chancellors prior to Thomas More, including Wolsey and Morton, had worked to increase the influence of equity in the legal system of England.⁵¹ The number of litigants coming to the Star Chamber and the Court of Chancery rose under Wolsey because “his ministerial policy had aimed first at strict and impartial enforcement of existing law upon all the king’s subjects, irrespective of social status and private power.”⁵² But More recognized the special role of judges and the opportunity they had to make law accord with conscience and reason. Hoping for a “marriage between equity and common law”—if not the overthrow

⁴⁸ Christopher St. Germain, *Doctor and Student* (Union, NJ, Lawbook Exchange, 2002) 44.

⁴⁹ St. Germain 45.

⁵⁰ Guy 48.

⁵¹ Martin Fleisher, *Radical Reform and Political Persuasion in the Life and Writings of Thomas More* (Geneva: Librairie Droz S.A., 1973) 29.

⁵² Guy 38.

of the latter by the former—he argued that judges were to follow their consciences.⁵³ More “applied rigorously the traditional Chancery procedures of surety, security and scrutiny, cultivating in the process a distinctive policy of self-involvement, scrupulousness and discretion.” Such an application helped “to rejuvenate the ancient theory that judges had a personal duty in conscience to see right done by all whose business was entertained in the courts they directed.”⁵⁴ Pursuing a pragmatic rather than an idealist approach to legal reform, “More began instead to rationalize and extend the partnership between Chancery and common law which had distinguished Wolsey’s term of office.” However, More’s attempt at collaboration caused considerable conflict with “professional lawyers” when he began using “injunctions [to restrain] litigation at common law.”⁵⁵ In his own defense More claimed that “injunctions would be unnecessary if the common-law judges would ‘upon reasonable considerations... mitigate and reform the rigour of the law themselves.’”⁵⁶

But despite his interest in increasing the role of equity in the law, More was wary of too much flexibility in the law. Even prior to his work as Chancellor, More had recognized the critical need for a distinction between an equity based on rational principles and one based on arbitrary opinion.⁵⁷ Although More was criticized for requiring justices to mitigate the rigor of the law when necessary under the threat of injunctions, he did so because he

⁵³ Guy 87-88. According to Martin Fleisher, in comparison with St. Germain’s views of legal reform, More’s views are more radical precisely because of his attitudes towards equity. Although More “envisage[d] the replacement of the substantive rules of the common law with substantive rules of equity,” whereas Saint-Germain” only “imagine[d] a far less radical reform involving some accommodation of the laws of England to the standards of natural law,” like St. Germain, More valued equity equally for its right application of the law and for its mitigation of the law’s rigor (26).

⁵⁴ Guy 79.

⁵⁵ Guy 86.

⁵⁶ Roper cited in Guy 87.

⁵⁷ In the *Responsio ad Lutherum* More differentiates between equity and arbitrariness, that is, “against an Antinomian conscience setting itself above the law” (*Responsio*, 5.1.277-9 cited in Fortier 102).

equated the rigor of law with injustice. However, according to More “this rigor does not reside primarily in the law’s formal or general character as rule,” and so consequently the law’s “reformation...does not consist of introducing a certain flexibility in its application.”⁵⁸ Even though More continued the judicial reforms that Wolsey had begun, his attitude towards equity was different from Wolsey’s. More hoped to mitigate the rigor of the law, but he did not intend to undercut or call into question its force. More had a “strict attitude” that “gave substance to the concept of finality in equitable decrees,” whereas “Wolsey had often been tentative, sometimes even resolute, hoping that parties would agree to settle their differences in a spirit of fair compromise.” Quite opposite from Wolsey, More “favoured the severity of common-law theory of the ‘final’ end, an approach which was attractive to plaintiffs seeking restraint of obstructive defendants.”⁵⁹

Even though proponents of equity hoped that its increased role in the judicial system could make the law more accurate and fair, because it admitted competing jurisdictions it also introduced a kind of chaos into the legal system in that it seemed to open the door for a new questioning of legal judgment. One problem with the expansion of jurisdiction of the court of Chancery was the creation of overlapping jurisdictions which litigants could use to their advantage. The expansion of Chancery’s jurisdiction was a prescription for legal pandemonium in that it created a moral space in which many judgments could take place without any judgment being final. Moreover, the complexity of the judiciary system may have been a response to the “increasingly sophisticated” criminal culture of that period.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Fleisher 28.

⁵⁹ Guy 91.

⁶⁰ T. G. Barnes asserts that “as English society was becoming increasingly sophisticated economically and socially, so wrongdoing was becoming more sophisticated. Or at least, contemporary man apprehended better

With this development came a new challenge to the legal system, namely a “new-style litigant, bent less upon asserting a right than not forgoing an advantage, less on winning than not losing in court, and always questing for another court in which to continue battle with his adversaries.”⁶¹

Nevertheless, even though equity was intended to allow the legal system to keep up with new kinds of criminals, in some ways equity threatened to weaken the judicial system by its potential for arbitrariness and its admission of multiple jurisdictions. In the absence of a final decision-making criterion, the English legal system inadvertently became much more provisional. These “unregulated competitions” which arose “between parallel jurisdictions raised, as it seemed, a truly awful prospect of perpetual litigation, especially in real property suits.”⁶² St. Germain, in particular, defined the problem with the court of Chancery as an “element of overlap which would introduce uncertainty into the legal system.” Like More, St. Germain was wary of the implications of the increased powers of Chancery. “Whatever [the court of Chancery and the Star Chamber] were allowed to do,” he contended, they “must never be permitted to rock the foundations of common law, whatever the equities of individual cases or however indefensible in conscience the maxims of law were as rational principles.”⁶³ Equity provided the hope of a more rational law even as it threatened to call into question the very rationality of law.

Equity addresses the uncertainty of moral reforms because it acts as a kind of provisional moral code in the absence of a more stable one, and it emerged as a force in

the nature of that wrongdoing” (“Star Chamber and the Sophistication of the Criminal Law,” *Criminal Law Review* (1977): 316-26, quoted in Guy 48).

⁶¹ Barnes quoted in Guy 89.

⁶² Guy 47.

⁶³ Guy 47.

English law with a new cogency in the early sixteenth century, just as the increasingly pervasive Lutheran heresy demanded a revised standard of evidence for religious belief. These competing notions of equity were important in the early sixteenth century because, as we will see in the pre-Reformation writings of More, Erasmus, and Luther, equity has a complex relationship to skepticism, the constitution of normative moral value, and the nature of individual reform. In the hands of Luther and More, equity is made to serve two masters—both a pragmatic or skeptical and a dogmatic or idealistic reform agenda. Luther's interpretation of equity translates into the possibility of a dramatic and instantaneous reform that allows for the epistemological and ethical purity that defined his true Church. Luther's demand for perfection is evident in his attitude toward language and the style of his polemical works in his debate with More and Erasmus between 1521 and 1526. In More's view, equity could indicate a choice between evils—in other words, the choice of an imperfect good. But as Aristotle indicates, an imperfect good may be just, but it is not justice. For More, equity offers the possibility of effecting reform without undermining the normative standards of judgment; it allows for a gradual program of reform that hinges on a more generous view of a polemical language that seeks to accommodate human faults while moral progress takes place. Ultimately, More sees a fair and expedient trade off between epistemic uncertainty and moral and religious stability. Because of their different interpretations of equity, both More and Luther agreed on the nature of their opponent: both accused each other of unnecessarily introducing doubt into moral value and religious knowledge.

II. Equity, the Third Stoic Paradox, and the Language of Reform in *Utopia*

Though Thomas More was not directly involved in the practice of equity until 1529 when he assumed the post of chancellor after Wolsey's demise, the concept was central to More's understanding of normative moral value and orthodoxy as early as *Utopia* (1518), where it receives prominent treatment. As we shall see, More's somewhat playful, humanist dialectic of equity in the *Utopia* gives way in the 1520s in his *Responsio ad Lutherum* (1523) to a more serious, polemical engagement with the concept and the problems it poses to the constitution of normative moral value in the face of religious reform.

Utopia is a text that confronts, first and foremost, the need to balance a mixed, pragmatic good with a more abstract, idealistic principle of good.⁶⁴ It is a text that opens up questions that plagued More his entire life, but no more so than in the 1520s, when he was forced to balance in practice his humanist interest in reform with his belief in normative religious and civil codes.⁶⁵ Raphael Hythloday represents More's idealist, and it is with perhaps an eerie prescience that More created a character who in some ways sounds very similar to the Martin Luther that will be the nemesis of stable moral value in the following decade. However, even as certain utopian aspects of Raphael's attitudes towards reform, such as his strict dichotomy between categories of good and evil, seem to forecast Luther's views, in the *Responsio ad Lutherum*, More will go so far as to use many of Raphael's arguments against Luther. In his own views of reform that he will advocate actively in the

⁶⁴ More was very well attuned to the complexities involved in the pursuit of equity. According to Andrew Majeske's recent interpretation of More's use of the term, equity is the pivotal point of More's struggle between a theoretically ideal government and the practical necessities of the common experience of government. In its classical derivations, equity "addresses both the supreme practical problem of how to make possible government based on the rule of law, when laws are inherently defective, as well as the vexed problem of how to improve existing regimes in the direction of a theoretically ideal regime." Even as early as his *Utopia*, "More senses that the meaning of equity is in flux," but despite this instability, it still is related to the "core sense of justice" that is in turn concerned with "the ideal political order" (Majeske 1).

⁶⁵ Pearl Hogrefe, *The Sir Thomas More Circle* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1959) 110-111.

1520s, More will both accept and reject aspects of Raphael's reformist attitudes. In this way *Utopia* examines not simply the customs of a place but a whole methodology.

For Raphael the liabilities of equity are manifest in the structure of the courts and in the philosophy of law in England. In his examination of questions of conscience that are experienced on a day to day basis by both England's lower class and its ruling class, Raphael confirms the existence of a "new-style litigant" who endangers the moral certainty and efficacy of Tudor criminal law. But according to Raphael, the increased complexity of the criminal landscape is in fact caused by the law itself. In book 1 of *Utopia*, Raphael contrasts the policy of the Utopians and the limits they put on legislation with "the many nations elsewhere ever making ordinances and yet never one of them achieving good order—nations where whatever a man has acquired he calls his own private property, but where all these laws daily framed are not enough for a man to secure or to defend or even to distinguish from someone else's the goods which each in turn calls his own, a predicament readily attested by the numberless and even new and interminable lawsuits."⁶⁶ Far from recognizing the reforming capabilities of the English court of Chancery, Raphael sees a system that creates not justice but social and moral chaos.

Equity appears in book 1 of *Utopia* in two critical places: in Raphael's critique of England's justice system and in his critique of the court culture of the early sixteenth century. In both of these contexts, the character of "More" offers Raphael an equity that is defined as an imperfect justice—an equity of the lesser of two evils. But equity appears in a third crucial place, this time in book 2, where Raphael discusses Utopian law. Looking at the criticisms of equity in books 1 and 2 offered by Raphael, we find the absolutism of Raphael's

⁶⁶ Thomas More, *Utopia, Complete Works of Sir Thomas More*, ed. Edward Surtz and J.H. Hexter, vol. 4 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965) 103-105.

idealism is often at odds with his understanding of the function of true law, which is based on humanist principles of education. More importantly, in More's view Raphael's methods of undertaking reform are compromised by this absolutism.

Raphael's bold criticisms of the injustices within the social and legal culture of England serves as a call to legal reform. According to Raphael, law should not simply uphold an abstract principle of justice, but should work actively to reform the individual. England's social system has produced involuntary criminals, and capital punishment has been ineffective despite—indeed, because of—its severity. Raphael condemns what he terms England's "Stoical ordinances [that] count all offenses equal so that there is no difference between killing a man and robbing him of a coin when, if equity has any meaning, there is no similarity or connection between the two cases."⁶⁷ Raphael argues that, as it stands, the English justify punishment as payment for breaking the law. But because penal law addresses neither the intention of the thief nor the consequence of the act of theft, the penalty for theft neither attempts to reform the individual nor does it work for the common good. It is a law based on philosophical principle, rather than practical ethics.

Raphael alludes both to the rigid dogma characteristic of the Stoics generally, and to the third of the six paradoxes that make up Cicero's *Paradoxa stoicorum* specifically. This Stoic paradox, which posits the equality of all virtues and vices, is fundamental to the skepticism that influences Protestant determinations of moral value. Despite its alliance with Stoic dogmatism, in the context of the Reformation it is viewed as a principle that undercuts the value of moral judgment based in reason.

⁶⁷ More, *CW* 4.73.

First printed in 1465, the *Paradoxa stoicorum* was one of the earliest printed texts and the most frequently printed of Cicero's works in the sixteenth century.⁶⁸ There has been little to no consensus on whether or not Cicero's stoic paradoxes were meant to be read as a serious exposition of Stoic philosophy or whether they were simply a display of rhetorical skill.⁶⁹ Within the sixteenth century, the text was praised for its value as an example of superior rhetoric while it was also read as moral philosophy. The presence of the third paradox in the writings of More, Luther, and Erasmus amidst very heated debates about the right method of reform would seem to demand that we take philosophical worth of at least the third paradox very seriously indeed.

Critics who have examined this work, even in passing, tend to overlook the problem that the third stoic paradox poses to normative moral value in early modern culture. Elizabeth McCutcheon has argued for the influence of the *Paradoxa* on *Utopia* as well as the complex relationship between the *Paradoxa* and its famous counterpart with which it was nearly always printed, *De officiis*.⁷⁰ In particular she notes the stylistic affinities between the texts, characterizing More's *Utopia* as a "mercurial work, at once comic and serious, entertaining and engaged, addressing serious moral issues, albeit not always in a wholly

⁶⁸ Michele V. Ronnick, *Cicero's Paradoxa Stoicorum: A Commentary, and Interpretation, and a Study of Its Influence* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991) 92.

⁶⁹ On the one end of the critical spectrum, Phyllis Bowman has argued that the paradoxes have "no philosophical value," while his edition of the text Charles Anton has concurred that the text "must not be viewed as a serious work" (Phyllis Bowman, *The Treatment of the Stoic Paradoxes by Cicero, Horace, and Persius*, diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1972, 25; Cicero, *Selections*, ed. Charles Anthon [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1870] 253). Other scholars oppose these attitudes, arguing that the *Paradoxa stoicorum* has a central role in the Ciceronian canon as a text that "initiat[ed]" the ethical inquiries that were characteristic of Cicero's later philosophical works. Still others go so far as to claim that the paradoxes "represent the very pith and marrow of stoic ethics" (Arnold cited in David Sigsbee, *The Ridicule of the Stoic Paradoxes in Ancient Satirical Literature*, diss., University of Michigan, 1968, 4).

⁷⁰ Elizabeth McCutcheon, "More's *Utopia* and Cicero's *Paradoxa Stoicorum*," *Moreana* 86 (1985): 9.

serious way, and daringly using moral paradoxes.”⁷¹ But in her interpretation of More’s use of the *Paradoxa*’s content, McCutcheon’s analysis is less precise. In McCutcheon’s view, More “literalizes what are only tropes in Cicero,” making “Hythlodæus reassembl[e] the moral commonplaces of Western thought and belief, already paradoxes insofar as they challenge the ordinary view of things and the way that human beings live, and reanimate[e] them by distancing himself, his immediate audience, and us from the actual world, showing us ourselves in a new light.”⁷² McCutcheon is right to recognize that many of the six paradoxes included in Cicero’s text would have been unquestioningly permitted by the religious culture of the early sixteenth century. The first two paradoxes, for example—the idea that only what is morally noble is good, or that virtue is sufficient for happiness—found an easy reception into mainstream Christian doctrine. McCutcheon’s argument falters, though, when it comes to the third paradox, which is by no means a moral commonplace of Christian thought.

So too, Rosalie Colie has remarked that in defending the stoic paradoxes Cicero “appear[s] to be defen[ding]...the obvious.”⁷³ This may be true for the other five paradoxes,

⁷¹ McCutcheon, “More’s *Utopia*,” 6-7. The complexity and ambiguity of Cicero’s attitude towards these paradoxes cannot be understated. While Cicero makes clear that these six paradoxes are representative of stoic ethics, he himself gives us very little help in deciding whether or not we should take his “defense” of these paradoxes seriously. He characterizes his work as an amusing personal challenge to see whether he could accommodate these unpopular precepts to the common man and to see whether such subtle philosophical discourse could be made into something useful for everyday life (*Paradoxa stoicorum*, trans. H. Rackham [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001] 4-5). But, he also claims that these paradoxes are “in the highest degree Socratic, and far and away the truest” (5). While other classical writers, most notably Horace, ridiculed this paradox in particular, it is even more significant that Cicero himself ridicules this paradox most prominently in the *Pro Murena* (see Horace’s Satire I.6; Cicero, *Pro Murena*, trans. C. MacDonald [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001] 62-63). For a complete list of places in classical literature where Stoic paradoxes are ridiculed, see the works of Sigsbee and Bowman). This was not lost on early modern commentators on the text, who in their explication of the paradox cite Cicero’s own repudiation (see commentary *Paradoxa stoicorum* [Venice, 1554] 209r).

⁷² McCutcheon, “More’s *Utopia*” 10-11.

⁷³ Rosalie Colie, *Paradoxa Epidemica* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966) 11.

but I would argue that the leveling of virtue and vice could hardly have been an obvious truth in the religious culture of sixteenth-century England. It was the moral rigor embodied in this very paradox that caused later Stoics to modify their ethical system and to develop a more “palatable” version of ethics by introducing the category of *adiaphora*, or things indifferent⁷⁴—a moral category that would become a focal point of the debate over religious reform in England in both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The first English translation of the *Paradoxa* did not occur until 1534, and it reflects the embarrassment with which Renaissance philosophers and theologians must have viewed this paradox. The third paradox is anomalous in itself in that it is the only one of the six which originally does not seem to have been given a Greek subtitle at all. Moreover, when a Greek subtitle finally did appear for the third paradox, it was the one most often manipulated by translators, often mistranslated or left without a translation altogether.⁷⁵ But what is even more striking is that its first English translator Robert Whittington thought it fit to omit the third paradox without warning or comment on this omission to the reader.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Sigsbee 1.

⁷⁵ Ronnick speculates that the early publication date for the *Paradoxa* may be because it represented a kind of *tour de force* in printing because it had the unusual distinction of having bilingual Greek and Latin subtitles (“The *Raison d’Etre* of Fust and Schoeffer’s *De Officiis et Paradoxa Stoicorum*, 1465, 1466,” *Medievalia et Humanistica*, New Series 20 (1993): 123-135). The origin of these aphorisms appears not to be Cicero himself, although no one has been able to determine when or where these subtitles first appeared. For our purposes, it is noteworthy that in medieval Latin translations of the text, all of these subtitles were translated with the exception of the third. Beginning in the sixteenth century the subtitle is translated into Latin, but after looking at several sixteenth-century editions of the *Paradoxa*, it is clear to me that this subtitle alone lacked a standard translation. Moreover, it is almost always either translated incorrectly, using the first sentence of the text of the paradox itself, or it is translated only partially so that it reads “omnia peccata paria,” essentially omitting the parity of good deeds or, if allowing even more ambiguity to enter the paradox, the parity of good and evil deeds.

⁷⁶ Robert Whittington, *The Paradox of Marcus Tullius Cicero* (London, 1534). This fact almost makes one scholar’s assertion that Whittington entirely “mangled the text” a justified, if vitriolic, criticism [Henry Lathrop, *Translations from the Classics into English from Caxton to Chapman, 1477-1620* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1933] 57).

Though it takes us a bit far afield from the early sixteenth century, it is worth noting briefly that the text's second English translator, Thomas Newton, provides another instance in which we can detect the discomfort caused by the version of equity offered in this paradox in the sixteenth century. Newton's text was published twice, once in 1569 and once in 1577, and although he does include the third paradox in both editions, he sets it apart from the other paradoxes. To appreciate the distinction, I will list the paradoxes as Newton writes them:

The first conclusion or Paradoxe, wherein is proved that nothinge is good and laudable but only that which is honeste and virtuous.

The second Paradoxe, wherein is deciphered that in whomsoever virtue is, there lacketh nothing els to bring him to lead an happy life.

The third Paradoxe wherein according to the opinion of the Stoikes, he proveth all faultes to bee equall.

The fourth Paradoxe, wherein is proved that all fooles and brainsickes persons be distraught and alienated from their right mindes: covertly meaning Clodius, and by him all others of like maners and conditions.

The fift Paradoxe, wherein he invaigheth against the insolencye and voluptuous lyving of Marcus Antonius, and proveth all wise men to be free, and all fooles to be Slaves and bondemen.

The syxt and laste paradoxe, wherein he proveth that noone are ryche, but onelye wyse and virtuous men, privaylye nippynge Crassus whose sayde that none was to be named rich, unlesse wiyth his revenues he were able to furnishe and mayntaine an armye.⁷⁷

Although it is true that in the Latin text the term paradox was often translated from the Greek *paradoxon* as *admirabilia* or *opinionatum*, of the six paradoxes, the third is the only one in

⁷⁷ Thomas Newton, *Fowre Severall Treatises of M. Tullius Cicero Conteyning His Most Learned and Eloquent Discourses*... (London, 1577). The 1569 version was published without Newton's consent. This is all the more noteworthy for my argument since the title of the 1569 version in which the *Paradoxa* was published alone is considerably different from the authorized version. The title of the 1569 version reads: *The Booke of Marcus Tullius Cicero Entituled Paradoxa Stoicorum Contayninge a Precise Discours of Divers Poinctes and Conclusions of Vertue and Phylosophie According to the Traditions and Opinions of those Philosophers which Were Called the Stoickes* (London, 1569). The shift of emphasis from philosophy to rhetoric is remarkable.

which Newton explicitly—and I would argue purposefully—introduces the term “opinion.”⁷⁸ It is only in this subtitle that Newton states, as if for emphasis—or justification—that Cicero proves this text “according to the opinion of the Stoikes.”⁷⁹ Newton seems eager to reassure the reader that what Cicero, and he, are translating in this paradox is not their own conclusion. Newton repeats this distinction in the second edition, adding a marginal comment at the beginning of the text: “The Stoickes doe not consider and respecte what is done, but with what minde and entent it is done.”⁸⁰ Aside from the fact that this marginal comment seems superfluous since it repeats the subtitle, it is the only marginal comment which particularly mentions and attributes an idea to the Stoics themselves, rather than to Cicero. From the oddities surrounding the first English translations of this text, it seems likely that Renaissance thinkers were troubled by this paradox and its problematic implications for moral authority.

In addition to the awkwardness with which early modern commentators and translators handled this paradox, we can add Cicero’s own ambiguous treatment of the paradox to its interpretive difficulties. While Cicero’s stance on the paradox is less than clear, what is apparent is that he makes important modifications in his discussion of the paradox that seem to bring into play both Greek and Roman versions of equity. The basic argument of the third stoic paradox as it is found in Cicero’s text is that vice should be measured by the intent of the perpetrator and not by a crime itself or by the consequences of a crime. Cicero’s argument for the third paradox presents three primary cases in which vices

⁷⁸ To use Guarino’s translation from his notes on a series of lectures he gave on the *Paradoxa stoicorum*: “paradoxa dicuntur prerepta admirabilia” or “preter opinionem hominum” (Harley 2549, 51r).

⁷⁹ Newton, 1569, B4v.

⁸⁰ Newton, 1577, 101.

are leveled. In the first case he argues that a sailor is equally unskilled if he sinks a ship full of wheat or one full of gold. He then proceeds to argue that there is no difference between a man's act of adultery with a poor young woman or a well respected woman. In the final case he argues that killing a slave is the same as killing one's father. Comparing these categories of vice—imprudence, lust, and murder—these examples get increasingly complex and problematic because Cicero adds on what would seem to be significant qualifications. Clearly, the moral obligation due to gold is different from that owed to one's father. Although Cicero levels degrees of vice, whether or not he means to level categories of vice is unclear. Cicero himself challenges the equality of virtues and vices on exactly this point in *De finibus bonorum et malorum* where he notes the faulty analogy between the unskillfulness of a sailor with a crime as severe as murder. While the nature of the object that is offended is unimportant in navigation, it is of the utmost importance in conduct.⁸¹ Though not stated explicitly in Cicero's text, the Stoics did not hold that an adulterer would necessarily become a murderer, though it was certainly possible.⁸² Instead, they believed that every form of vice is contained within every single person—except of course for the mythical wise man—but some vices are more pronounced than others.

Renaissance commentators who discuss the text argue that all sins are equal because all sins arise from mental perturbations, and therefore the motivating force of the sin, the passions, are the same for different sins. In general, writers who are not openly hostile to this paradox stress that the equality between sins exists within a category of sin, but not between

⁸¹ Cicero, *De finibus*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) IV.27.74-76.

⁸² As J.M. Rist explains, the rationale behind this differentiation has to do with the close relationship between stoic ethics and physics in the early Stoa. A sin was believed to correspond to an internal disorder that manifested itself as a kind of vibration (*Stoic Philosophy* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977] 88-9).

two different kinds of sins.⁸³ The example of the parricide and the murder of a slave is particularly problematic because it begs the question of whether perturbations alter with persons. In some circumstances, one commentator argues, it will be lawful to kill one's father even though the death of a father is different from the death of a slave because there are more laws regulating the relationship between father and son than the relationship between a man and his slave. Such a crime is permissible because in some instances, when one's motive is good, "it is better to let go of custom than to live disgracefully."⁸⁴

Given the ambiguities and anomalies in the translation history of this paradox, it is not surprising that the ethical challenges presented by this paradox were not lost on lawyers and theologians who influenced legal and religious thought in the sixteenth century. Aquinas considered the problem of the equality of both virtues and of vices. Perhaps one explanation of why the Greek and Latin heading to the paradox is abbreviated can be supplied by the distinction Aquinas makes between these two equalities. All virtues are connected together in right reason, because "to follow virtue is to follow the rule of reason, wherefore the intention of all the virtues is directed to the same end, so that all the virtues are connected together in the right reason of things to be done." But the same cannot be said of vices, for "the intention of the sinner is not directed to the point of straying from the path of reason; rather it is directed to tend to some appetible good."⁸⁵ Interestingly, Aquinas uses Cicero's examples to support his own argument against the equality of either good or evil. When he argues that "Sins take their species from their objects...But some sins are graver than others in respect of

⁸³ See gloss to *Paradoxa stoicorum*, 210r.

⁸⁴ Gloss to *Paradoxa stoicorum*, 210r.

⁸⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. 2, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1981) Pt. I-II, Q. 73, Art. 1.

their species, as murder is graver than theft. Therefore the gravity of sins varies according to their objects,”⁸⁶ he uses Cicero’s example of the many sins embodied in killing one’s father.⁸⁷ In other words, good participates in a unity that evil does not.

But despite some attempts to accept the third stoic paradox into Christian moral law, the issue of the parity of goods and evils was usually resisted prior to the Reformation. Augustine vehemently refuted the third stoic paradox, while Lactantius listed the third stoic paradox in his category of false knowledge.⁸⁸ Influential medieval lawyers, such as Gratian, argued that natural law is the highest law of all in terms of its “origin and dignity,” its “scope,” and that “it ranks more highly [than other laws] according to the force of its provisions.” The *Glossa Ordinaria* of the *Decretum* notes that “there is no dispensation from the precepts or prohibitions of natural law, except, perhaps, when two evils so press on one that he must choose between them.”⁸⁹ But Gratian himself notes that “when inescapable danger compels one to perpetrate one of two evils, we must choose the one that makes us less guilty” by examining the two evils and deciding which is the better of the two evils “by the acuity of pure reason.” A lie, for example, will “offend the Creator, but we stain only ourselves” whereas “when we perform a crime because of a promise, we hold God’s

⁸⁶ Aquinas, Pt. I-II, Q. 73, Art. 6.

⁸⁷ Aquinas, Pt. I-II, Q. 73, Art. 7.

⁸⁸ Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, trans. Anthony Bowen and Peter Garnsey (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003) 212. For a discussion of Augustine’s attitudes towards the Stoics on this point, see Marcia L. Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, vol. 2 (New York: E.J. Brill, 1990) 207. One of the most popular classical writers during the sixteenth century, Plutarch, also wrote several essays against the Stoics that cited the third stoic paradox, including “On Stoic Self-Contradictions,” “The Stoics Talk More Paradoxically than the Poets,” and “Against the Stoics on Common Conceptions” (*Moralia*, vol. XIII, Part II, trans. Harold Cherniss [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976]). On the relationship between More and Plutarch’s stoic essays, see J. Duncan M. Derrett. “The Utopians’ Stoic Chamber-Pots,” *Moreana* 73 (1982): 75-6.

⁸⁹ *Glossa Ordinaria* in Gratian, *Treatise on Laws with the Ordinary Gloss (Decretum DD. 1-20)* trans. Augustine Thompson and James Gordley (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1993) 48.

commands in contempt through pride, harm our neighbors with faithless cruelty, and cut ourselves down with a still crueller sword. In the former case we perish by a twofold lance of guilt, in the latter we are slain three ways.”⁹⁰

But despite Gratian’s stratification of evil to ameliorate guilt, the glossator indicates what is at stake with such a moral taxonomy. The gloss sharply qualifies Gratian’s notion of choosing the better of two evils, arguing that any kind of equality between evils is an indication of a faulty judgment. Giving the example of a choice between a mortal and venial sin, the glossator concludes that “no one can really be in doubt between two evils.” God punishes only those who do wrong voluntarily; if necessity required man to do something evil, then the law would be impossible to obey. But all laws must be possible, “therefore, the person’s doubt cannot really arise from the matter itself, but it must arise in the mind and from foolish opinion.”⁹¹ When a man misreads a moral situation and believes that he is faced with two evils, he “foolishly believes himself to be in doubt. Indeed, it is not really true that both courses of action are evil, even though the interpretation given here [by Gratian] is that both are evil.”⁹² In other words, when parity between goods or evils is supposed to exist, it indicates either faulty human judgment or the presence of an unreachable ideal, which in turn highlights the imperfection of man.⁹³ The alternatives, then, are either to correct

⁹⁰ Gratian D.13 c.1 C. 1.

⁹¹ *Glossa Ordinaria* 49.

⁹² *Glossa Ordinaria* 49.

⁹³ In his study entitled *Excess and Mean in Early Modern English Literature*, Joshua Scodel discusses a how the differences between an individual and general virtue may obscure the true ethical mean. Aristotle notes that “the extreme closest to the mean in particular displays a potentially deceptive “likeness” [*homoiotês*] to virtue” (Joshua Scodel, *Excess and Mean in Early Modern English Literature* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002] 3).

misjudgment, which may not be possible, or, when faced with an unattainable ideal, to create a new, less perfect ideal with an accompanying criterion for judgment.

It is telling that in invoking the third stoic paradox to criticize the severity and unreasonableness of English law, Raphael takes the most extreme view of the third stoic paradox—he interprets it not as an equality that levels degrees of vice within a given category, but as an equality that levels all vices altogether. Raphael’s interpretation of the paradox in its most extreme sense only confirms the degree to which the paradox could be a threat to the constitution of moral value. Against this leveling equity, Raphael posits an equity that reinforces moral distinctions.

The uncertainty of moral law on a systemic scale has important ramifications for individual moral identity. According to Raphael, the problematic outcome of making theft punishable to the same degree as murder is that this leveling is internalized in man’s conscience and can alter man’s motives for the worse. “Since the robber sees that he is in as great danger if merely condemned for theft as if he were convicted of murder as well,” it is possible that this “single consideration will impel him” to become a murderer rather than just a thief.⁹⁴ The severity of the punishment creates a greater motive to deceive the justice system by using violence to erase all traces of crime. The problems inherent in England’s social system may justify theft to some degree because the crime is involuntary since it is necessary to survival; however, the punishment for theft makes it more likely that the crimes that are committed are willful and that the criminal is wholly guilty. England’s laws not only make criminals: they make criminals worse.

Much of Raphael’s critique of equity has to do with his humanist conviction that true law should not simply represent moral boundaries but shape individual moral identity.

⁹⁴ More, *CW* 4.75.

Raphael's expectations for the law were not exceptional. For Erasmus, law had a key place in educating citizens on how to be morally virtuous. In the *Education of a Christian Prince*, Erasmus notes that "the vast majority of crimes spring, as if from a muddy fountain, from perverted ideas about the state of things."⁹⁵ According to Erasmus, laws should "not only prescribe punishment for the guilty but also dissuade men from breaking the law. It is thus a mistake to think that the laws should be restricted to the shortest possible form of words, so that they merely give orders and not instruction; on the contrary, they should be concerned to deter men from law-breaking more by reasoning than by punishments."⁹⁶ Education—and by extension laws that should educate but do not—are even more culpable than human nature for criminal or immoral behavior. This attitude towards law and the nature of evil had significant implications for the nature of moral reform. In a polemical work written against Luther, Erasmus argues that the reason men are more likely to turn to vice than virtue is not because of their corrupt nature, but because of their "degenerate education."⁹⁷

In his discussion of Utopian law, Raphael makes a direct correlation between ignorance and the need for law. The Utopians "have very few laws because very few are needed for persons so educated."⁹⁸ Raphael suggests that men must be able to understand the law if they are to be bound by law, and he highlights the circuitous moral dilemma in which England finds itself. Because the English have created a society in which few men are

⁹⁵ Erasmus, *Education of a Christian Prince*, *Collected Works*, ed. A.H.T. Levi, trans. Neil M. Cheshire and Michael J. Heath, vol. 27 (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1974) 266.

⁹⁶ Erasmus, *Education* 265.

⁹⁷ Erasmus, *Hyperaspistes*, *Collected Works*, ed. Charles Trinkaus, vol. 76-77 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1974-) 2.736. On the importance of education and reform to More and his circle, see Hogrefe, 137.

⁹⁸ More, *CW* 4.195.

learned, more laws are needed; but laws will be either ineffective or unjust because men are unlearned and therefore will not be likely to understand the law.

The interpretation of equity is important to notions of reform, for when it levels moral value, it can entirely undercut the possibility of moral reform for the individual. Despite the fact that Raphael rejects a leveling equity in law, his idealism causes him to accept leveling in other instances. For Raphael, justice and counsel are intrinsically linked, and the problems with the English justice system are symptomatic of the problems with the system of counsel, for the injustice evident in the English social system and penal codes is similar to the injustice within the court itself.⁹⁹

In his condemnation of Raphael's choice of traveling and self-education at the expense of the duties of civic humanism,¹⁰⁰ "More" encourages him not "to force upon people new and strange ideas" but to use "indirect approach" and "to handle matters tactfully" since "what you cannot turn to good you must make as little bad as you can. For it is impossible that all should be well unless all men were good, a situation which I do not expect for a great many years to come!"¹⁰¹ Raphael rejects "More's" pragmatism because he objects to "dissembling" and concludes that it is impossible to do "any good because you are brought among colleagues who would easily corrupt the best of men before being reformed themselves."¹⁰² Reform cannot take place within a morally imperfect court just as justice

⁹⁹ For an alternative reading that argues for the preeminence of injustice as the theme of *Utopia*, see Ed Quattrochi, "Injustice, Not Councilorship: The Theme of Book One of *Utopia*," *Moreana* 31-32 (1971): 19-28.

¹⁰⁰ A recent article by Eric Nelson contends that *Utopia* was taken up in Italy by humanism's "fiercest critics" and "was embraced...for its repudiation of active citizenship" "*Utopia* through Italian Eyes: Thomas More and the Critics of Civic Humanism," *Renaissance Quarterly* 59 (2006): 1041. Nelson has taken Jean Bodin's reading of *Utopia* in his *Six Livres de la Republique* as evidence of More's "conspicuous Hellenism" that serves as a "powerful backdrop for More's thoroughgoing subversion of the Roman republican tradition" (1039).

¹⁰¹ More, *CW* 4.99-101.

cannot take place within a system in which laws are more likely to create crimes than enable reform.

Raphael also rejects the linguistic form of equity espoused by “More,” otherwise known as decorum. In *Utopia* Raphael’s solution to the problem of reform in the English court is simply a policy of indecorous counsel—a policy associated with an “academic philosophy which thinks that everything is suitable to every place.”¹⁰³ But, Raphael notes, as men become more corrupt, they not only use equity to create exceptions for themselves from divine law, but they also reevaluate the jurisdiction of the decorous versus the indecorous. “What did my speech contain that would not be appropriate or obligatory to have propounded everywhere?”, Raphael asks. By contrast, “More” encourages a culture of dissembling in which “useful” philosophy is actively employed in counsel in order to make a world that is “less bad.” According to Raphael, this strategy of reform only uses the normative boundaries set up by decorum to accommodate human vice: “Truly, if all the things which by the perverse morals of men have come to seem odd are to be dropped as unusual and absurd, we must dissemble almost all the doctrines of Christ.” Although “preachers” have had to follow “More’s” “advice” and have “accommodated [God’s] teaching to men’s morals as if it were a rule of soft lead that at least in some way or other [God’s law and man’s corruption] might be made to correspond,” Raphael questions the ethical outcome of such a policy. In his view, such a “method” only ensures “that men may be bad in greater comfort.”¹⁰⁴ While “More’s”

¹⁰² More, *CW* 4.103. On the problem of lying and its relation to a tradition of casuistry and religious dissent, see Perez Zagorin, *Ways of Lying: Dissimulation, Persecution, and Conformity in Early Modern Europe* (London and Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1990).

¹⁰³ More, *CW* 4.99.

¹⁰⁴ More, *CW* 4.101.

decorum would set up a provisional moral code to effect reform, Raphael's leveling use of language only leads to skepticism, in particular, a skepticism associated with dogmatism.

Raphael's bull-in-a-china-shop approach to counsel as well as moral and religious reform makes the ambiguity caused by the stylistic dexterity of *Utopia* itself all the more conspicuous. As we will see, even though Raphael's dichotomous understanding of good and evil and his unconcern for decorum has some affinities with Martin Luther, More will also use parts of Raphael's argument against Luther himself. One critic has noted that inconsistency evident in Raphael's character seems to be one of ends versus means—that is, More and Raphael agree on the former but not the latter.¹⁰⁵ In this way Raphael is one of the first reformers More encountered in his career, though one of his own imagination. It could be said that to some degree More agreed with his opponents on the general goal of reform, though as the tone of much of his polemical work indicates, he staunchly disagreed in terms of means.

In the second book we find that far from wanting to repudiate equity, Raphael wants to rehabilitate it. Raphael does finally espouse a system of equity—an equity of circumstance such as that practiced by the Utopians, not the English. He tells us that aside from adultery, “there is no law prescribing any fixed penalty, but the punishment is assigned by the senate according to the atrocity, or veniality, of the individual crime.”¹⁰⁶ More importantly, as it is for the Stoics, criminal intent is as culpable as criminal action.¹⁰⁷ Raphael lauds the Utopians, for in preferring servitude over capital punishment, they prefer

¹⁰⁵ R.S. Sylvester, “‘Si Hythlodæo Credimus’: Vision and Revision in Thomas More’s *Utopia*,” *Essential Articles for the Study of Thomas More*, ed. R.S. Sylvester and G.P. Marc’hadour (Hamdon, CT: Archon Books, 1977) 295.

¹⁰⁶ More, *CW* 4.191.

¹⁰⁷ More, *CW* 4.193.

moral reform to an ideal of justice.¹⁰⁸ The difference between the two systems hinges upon the law's basis in rationality over custom and the evidence of circumstance over a more stable but imperfect standard of justice.¹⁰⁹

Even though Raphael espouses the equity of the Utopians, that is, a more rational version of equity that is based in circumstance, for Raphael the real reason why the Utopian system is admirable is not because it is an equitable system but because the Utopians have made equity unnecessary altogether. At the close of *Utopia*, before he begins his tirade against pride, Raphael reaffirms the importance of abolishing the notion of private property. He argues that all crime would simply “die out with the destruction of money” because it is this kind of greed that undercuts true moral value and makes law customary and arbitrary.¹¹⁰ In the absence of personal wealth in all its forms, the entire social system would support human virtue because temptation and self-interest—those passions which fuel the codification of custom rather than reason—would cease to exist.

Raphael senses a danger in the indiscriminate application of equity. We have seen how within human law, equity causes considerable problems. Equity has the potential to weaken both the justice system and the moral fabric of men themselves. Within the legal system, the expanded jurisdiction of the court of Chancery has created the possibility of an inconclusive circuit of litigation; moreover, laws that should instruct criminals only

¹⁰⁸ McCutcheon notes that the Utopians have “refashioned punishment as it existed in early modern Europe” (“Puns, Paradoxes, and Heuristic Inquiry: The ‘De Servis’ Section of More’s *Utopia*,” *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Torononensis*, ed. Alexander Dalzell, Richard J. Schoeck, Charles Fantazzi (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1991] 96).

¹⁰⁹ As McCutcheon argues, Utopian equity is not “a manifestation of royal power” or willfulness as it is in the English system, but the more rational “expression of the social order and values of the commonweal, punishing violations of the social bonds between and among people and establishing a punishment that fits the crime” (“Puns, Paradoxes, and Heuristic Inquiry” 96).

¹¹⁰ More, *CW* 4.243.

encourage them to perpetrate greater crimes. Within the culture of counsel at the court of Henry VIII, equity only encourages an atmosphere of dissembling and justifies philosophy's exclusion from politics, where it is so sorely needed. But the greatest danger of equity is that it is a concept that may subordinate divine law to human law and may subject God's law to human judgment.

Immediately after Raphael condemns England's "stoical ordinances that count all offenses equal," he proceeds to qualify his own argument. As we have seen, according to Raphael, when incorporated into human law the equality of vices multiplies, even creates, rather than contains crime. But the outcome is different when the third paradox is read in the context of divine, not human, law. According to Raphael, the commandment "thou shalt not kill" levels all killings; God does not differentiate, for example, between criminal murder and legal execution by the state, prompting Raphael to ask: "If the divine command against killing be held not to apply where human law justifies killing, what prevents men equally from arranging with one another how far rape, adultery, and perjury are admissible?...if this agreement among men [to allow capital punishment] is to have such force as to exempt their henchmen from the obligation of the commandment...will not the law of God then be valid only so far as the law of man permits?" Even the form of equity that Raphael sanctions among the Utopians which differentiates permissible and impermissible actions based on circumstance cannot be applied to God's law. Divine law cannot be circumvented whenever a consensus of men agrees that it is expedient or "right" to do so. If man were able to exempt himself from divine law, then "the result will be that in the same way men will determine in everything how far it suits them that God's commandments should be obeyed."¹¹¹ If this divine law which condemns all killers equally did not exist, then nothing would prevent man

¹¹¹ More, *CW* 4.73.

from creating distinctions between justified and unjustified actions in other types of crime at will.

In other words, even though Raphael would sanction an equity that distinguishes rather than levels crimes within human law, he is quick to remind his audience that God's law is not subject to these kinds of nice equitable distinctions. The danger of viewing God as an equitable God is that the rational and human justice of equity may be confused with divine mercy. Raphael warns that "the new law of mercy in which He gives commands as a father to his sons" should not allow us to "suppose" that God "has allowed us greater license to be cruel to one another."¹¹² Raphael would trade the equity that represents the severities of a dogmatic law that levels moral distinctions for an equity that is more charitable in its ability to make moral distinctions on the basis of circumstance.

In the character of Raphael we see More examining equity's potential for normative and non-normative moral value, for dogma and skepticism. Raphael's critique of the English legal system and the Tudor court culture of counsel reveal More's interest in striking the right balance between constituting normative moral and religious value, on the one hand, and questioning and reforming it, on the other. Raphael rejects the imperfect normative morality which for him typifies English law for a more circumstantial form of equity. But ultimately, Raphael hopes that law abolishes the necessity for equity altogether. Despite Raphael's criticism of the rigor of the Stoics, he follows a similar policy of absolutism which is reflected in his understanding of the language of reform. He rejects courtly decorum, a linguistic normative mode of reform, and in the place of counsel would substitutes the open criticism of vice which More associates with Academic skepticism. In other words, it is possible to say that Utopia is "no place"; it is, instead, a person. Raphael's idealism and his

¹¹² More, *CW* 4.73-75.

dogmatic method of reform make him more utopian than the Utopians themselves. It is a very similar reformist methodology that More will face in the 1520s.

III. Equity and a Pragmatic Approach to Church Reform in the 1520s

In some ways, the free-spirited fictional *Utopia* oddly prefigures More's lifelong career as a polemicist. More's writing of *Utopia* provided him with a test case to try out ideas, responses, and modes that he would be forced to revisit in his more serious encounters in his polemical debates with Luther in the 1520s when the nature of the discussion had changed from the humanist world of ideas to the realism of politics. In the polemical works of More, Luther and Erasmus in the 1520s, the concept of equity underlies the debate over the identity of the true church and the efficacy of grace, merit, and free will in the pursuit of salvation, and the interpretation of Scriptures, an idea we will examine more fully in the next chapter. Both More and Erasmus take Luther to task for his impracticable idealism, for such idealism has no place in the trenches of reform. At the same time, Luther sees the reforms of More and Erasmus as harbingers of a cavalier and willful attitude towards divine justice. While equity was important to all three of these reformers, the diversity of ways in which they understood the term defines the methods of their reforms and the nature of the true church.

In *Utopia* the third stoic paradox acts as a stepping off point for examining a system of law based on a specific kind of equity. The paradox and the concept of equity are equally important in the tenth chapter of More's *Responsio ad Lutherum*, a text whose importance we will consider more fully in the next chapter. In comparing Luther's and More's attitudes

towards the third stoic paradox we find that the acceptance or rejection of the third stoic paradox acts as a kind of touchstone for attitudes towards equity and its place in reform.

Like Raphael, Luther rejects a kind of equity that allows for an imperfect virtue. In his response to Erasmus's skepticism, Luther argues that Christians should be "twice as unyielding as the Stoics themselves."¹¹³ However, More appropriates Raphael's arguments against Luther's leveling of virtue and vice that he sees taking place in Luther's interpretation of grace and merit. Like Raphael, More believes Luther espouses the most radical kind of equity indicated by the third stoic paradox. And like the equity that Raphael fears—that is, an equity that breaks down not just moral boundaries within categories of virtue and vice, but moral boundaries in all categories of virtue and vice—More fears the radically leveling form of equity that emerges in Luther's discussion of grace, merit, and free will. Just as Raphael views England's economy as allowing for an uneven, flexible, and customary law, a law governed by will rather than reason, so too, in More's debate with Luther, More worries about a religion dictated by the individual will of a rogue reformer.

Luther's ambivalence about the use of equity in the realm of religious reform is evident in his own uncertain assertion of the term. Although Luther addresses the concept of equity, his discussion of equity reveals the ambiguities of his position.¹¹⁴ In *Table Talk* Luther associates equity not with uprightness, but with tolerating crookedness.¹¹⁵ In discussing household economy, Luther notes that a husband should allow for forgiveness for

¹¹³ Martin Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio*, in *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, ed. and trans. Philip Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969) 106.

¹¹⁴ Mark Fortier notes that there was no German word equivalent to the notion of equity and the word Luther most frequently employs is, interestingly enough, "recht" (31).

¹¹⁵ Cited in Fortier 39.

his wife, but “ought not to give up the law.”¹¹⁶ Luther defines equity as “not a rash relaxation of laws and discipline” but as “an interpretation of laws which in some cases finds mitigating circumstances, especially in cases in which the law doesn’t decide on principle. According to the circumstances equity weighs for or against. But the weighing must be of such kind that the law isn’t undermined, for no undermining of natural law and divine law must be allowed.”¹¹⁷ In a very typical, but very problematic formulation for Luther, he draws an analogy between divine and natural law. Luther’s frequent qualifications show him gesturing towards an acceptance of a more merciful law, but ultimately unwilling to give up an ideal of justice and its dogmatic assertion.

In *Utopia* we found that equity offered a kind of certainty at the same time that it threatened a kind of destabilizing flexibility. Both in its attendance to circumstance and in its breakdown of moral distinctions equity threatens more than it constitutes normative moral value. The relationship between the tendency of equity to level moral value hinged upon Stoic epistemology. For Luther, truth and falsehood should map easily onto the moral categories of good and evil. One scholar has argued that Luther was attracted to the third stoic paradox and that he pursued a policy of “selective stoicism” that allowed him to adopt the third paradox in order “to secure epistemologically an absolute certainty.”¹¹⁸ Luther argues that the true church must be purely good much in the same way that Raphael demands pure goodness in the English systems of law and counsel. According to Luther, since “Christ

¹¹⁶ Martin Luther, *Table Talk, Luther’s Works*, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert, vol. 54 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955) 43.

¹¹⁷ Luther, *Works* 54.325.

¹¹⁸ Marjorie O’Rourke Boyle. “Stoic Luther: Paradoxical Sin and Necessity,” *Archiv fur Reformationgeschichte* 73 (1982): 79-80. She explains that Stoic philosophy lacks “degrees of morality” because it rejects “degrees of truth.” The oppositional mode of “dialectic is normative” because of the Stoics’s “refusal to posit degrees of truth originated in an epistemological demand for absolute certainty” (Boyle 72-73).

is without sin...it is necessary that the church also be without sin,” for Christ, the foundation of the Church, “should have a building of the same character as [him]self.”¹¹⁹ Luther defines virtue and vice in absolute terms so that “whatever anyone belonging to the church does must be either a good or an evil action.”¹²⁰

In a tone reminiscent of Raphael’s condemnation of the English penal law, More interprets Luther’s arguments as supporting the most radical kind of equality of virtues and vices. Criticizing the unrealistic nature of Luther’s idyllic church, More attacks the Lutheran paradox that “every good work is a sin.” “I almost divine what he means,” More writes sarcastically. “He means, I think, that every single good work is a sin” because sins can occasion pride, “and on the other hand every bad work is a virtue because it is the occasion of humility.” More extrapolates this even further “so that the good works of the papists”—their vigils, alms, prayers and chastity—“are nothing else but unmixed sins because [they have a] weak faith [since]...they do not trust that faith alone without works suffices [to secure salvation]. “But the evil works of the Lutheranists”—their drunkenness, adultery, robbery and blasphemy—are “nothing else but unmixed virtues” “because [they have a] firm faith [since]... they trust firmly that faith alone suffices [for salvation].”¹²¹ Like Raphael, More fears the leveling tendency of the equity borne of Lutheran absolutism.

In his own description of his invisible church, Luther, for a moment, seems to moderate the severity of his views on good and evil. To the Christian all things of place and circumstance “are indifferent and optional” because “every place suits [him], and no place is

¹¹⁹ Luther quoted in More, *Responsio ad Lutherum* in *Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, ed. John M. Headley, vol. 5, 2 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969) 1.155.

¹²⁰ Luther qtd. in More, *CW* 5.1.157.

¹²¹ More, *CW* 5.1.159.

necessary for the [him].” Though Luther claims that this indifference is superseded by the “liberty of spirit” that “reigns” in the Christian, by making the physical church indifferent, Luther makes the church more exclusive. The vacuum left by corporeal indifferencies is readily filled by the moral absolutism that defines the spiritual church in which nothing is ever indifferent.¹²²

More dismisses the Lutheran church with its radical form of equity as having all the reality of “Platonic Ideas”—that is, a church that is not “palpable and perceptible,” “but...which is both in some place and in no place, is in the flesh and is out of the flesh,...is wholly involved in sin and yet does not sin at all”¹²³ At the same time, More censures Luther’s vitriolic rhetoric which, according to More, frequently devolves into the pointless abuse characteristic of the Cynics. In their rejections of normative moral values, both the idyllic Platonist and the raving Cynic endanger the church and the common good of society. Luther’s reconstitution of normative moral value as well as his method of reform are equally awry. Indeed, a telling marginal note in the tenth chapter of the *Responsio* suggests, with much sarcasm, that “perhaps [Luther may have] seen [his ideal church] in Utopia.”¹²⁴

While More understood Lutheran equity as the most unreal and unhelpful principles in the quest for reform, Luther believed that the way More and Erasmus interpreted equity suggested that God’s law was a willful and arbitrary one. Luther’s own understanding of equity becomes clearer in his debate with Erasmus between 1524 and 1526 over free will and

¹²² The text is Luther’s, but quoted by More, *CW* 5.1.165.

¹²³ *CW* 5.2.167, see also *CW* 5.2.179.

¹²⁴ *CW* 5.1.119. The comment is from a marginal note in More’s text. Joseph M. Levine argues that More’s interest in the “real and ideal in human life” manifested itself in the tension between history and fiction in his work. See “Thomas More and the English Renaissance: History and Fiction in *Utopia*,” *The Historical Imagination in Early Modern Britain: History, Rhetoric, and Fiction, 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 70, 88.

the value of grace and merit. According to Luther, the concept of merit undermines God's equity—a mode of decision-making that seems arbitrary to man only because it is mysterious. Luther argues that men's views of God's justice are wrong because they are infected by self-interest, for “when God saves the unworthy without merits, or rather justifies the ungodly with their many demerits, it does not accuse him of injustice; it does not demand to know why he wills this, which in its judgment is most unjust, but because it is advantageous and pleasing to itself it deems it just and good.” However, when God's justice works against man, “when he damns those without merit, then since this is disadvantageous to itself, it is unjust, it is intolerable, and here there is protesting, murmuring, and blaspheming.” Like Raphael, Luther accuses men of judging God's equity by their own standards. In his view, equity should be opposed to will and self-interest, but Erasmus and others “do not judge according to equity, but according as their own interest is affected. For if [they] had regard to equity, [they] would expostulate with God just as much when he crowns the unworthy as when he damns the undeserving. [They] would also praise and extol God just as much when he damns the undeserving as when he praises the unworthy; for there is equal unfairness in either case, judged by our standards.”¹²⁵

Indeed, Erasmus comes to quite the opposite conclusion of Luther in *Hyperaspistes* (1526), but he can do so because he is careful to divide good and evil into graded moral categories. Erasmus differentiates between good intention and a goodness specific to salvation: “Good intentions are not automatically said to be good in the sense that they confer beatitude, for whoever has truly good intentions has been justified by grace but here we use ‘good’ in the sense of something that approaches some resemblance to goodness and

¹²⁵ Martin Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio, Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, trans. and ed. Philip S. Watson, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969) 259.

withdraws from evil to some extent, unless, perhaps, we like that opinion of the Stoics, who make all sins equal, teaching that a person is suddenly either completely good or completely evil.” Erasmus ultimately rejects the idea of the parity of evil because it is a paradoxical “discourse [that] is abhorrent to common sense and foreign to the usual way of thinking in Scripture.”¹²⁶

To explain why Luther’s equity must be rejected to allow for reform, Erasmus uses two similes that posit two opposed views of reform. The first example is a “stoic similie” frequently used as evidence for the third stoic paradox. The simile describes “a man who has fallen into water,” for whom, according to the stoics “it makes no difference whether he is many feet from the surface or two inches away from it if in any case he dies by drowning.” For Erasmus this paradox evidences the wrong-headedness of the third stoic paradox particularly when it is applied to the quest for reform, for such an example suggests that progress towards salvation, while it may be possible, will always be pointless because it will never affect salvation. But Erasmus offers an alternative simile that gives weight to his program for reform. He prefers the example of a great reformer, Augustine. Transforming the stoic simile, Augustine’s example, which is “a comparison drawn from light and darkness,” not only admits degrees, but admits degrees that are effective, for a man moving towards light is less in the dark and hence is perceptibly closer to salvation in a way that matters.¹²⁷

Luther’s attitudes towards reform—his belief in instantaneous transformation, and his demand for epistemological certainty—are embodied in his polemical style. Indeed, the concepts of religious decorum, accommodation, and rhetoric are all refracted through the

¹²⁶ Erasmus, *Hyperaspistes* 2.729.

¹²⁷ Erasmus, *Hyperaspistes* 2.729.

concept of equity. Luther's all-or-nothing versions of good and evil left very little room for humanist enterprises such as the acceptance of classical literature. He had argued that even "the loftiest virtues of the heathen, the best things in the philosophers, the most excellent things in men, which in the eyes of the worlds certainly appear to be, as they are said to be, honourable and good, are nonetheless in the sight of God truly flesh and subservient to the kingdom of Satan; that is to say, they are impious and sacrilegious and on all counts bad."¹²⁸ Erasmus uses pagan philosophy as evidence against Luther's "Stoic notions" that argued "that whatever is done apart from grace is equally damnable, so that the tolerance of Socrates is not less grievous an offense in the sight of God than the cruelty of Nero." Erasmus admitted "that whatever is done without the gift of faith and charity and is not referred to God is not truly good," but he felt that regardless of the power of grace, "whatever does not conflict with faith and charity and makes an approach to them, as it were, can be called good in some sense." Unlike Raphael, who despairs that reform cannot take place in an imperfect environment, such reform is exactly what Erasmus envisioned in the ancient pagan world. He exhorts Luther to "imagine, if you will, gradations of faith and of charity which have not yet attained effective faith, which is only given by God." Such gradations are the very heart of humanist conceptions of reform:

Imagine, if you will, a pagan philosopher who knows that there is one mind that created and governs all things, than which nothing better or greater can exist and from which all good flows forth, that rewards good deeds, that he acknowledges should be worshipped with purity of heart; but he tolerates accepted ceremonies, partly because he despairs of being able to bring the uncultivated crowd to believe anything else, partly because he believes it is to the advantage of the people to be restrained by such a religion until something better emerges, and in the meantime he admonishes those whom he thinks can be taught; he exerts himself to fulfill as well as he can his duties to his country, his parents, his wife, and children, ignoring the ill will stirred up by virtue and hoping to be rewarded by that mind for his good deeds. That some of the

¹²⁸ Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio* 275-276.

pagans had such an attitude is testified by their own books. What then? Shall we say that such a person, when he is conducting himself extremely well, sins quite as much as if he got rid of his wife with poison and prostituted his children? At all events I think that such a person does not lack faith entirely and that his works do not stir up God's wrath but rather that he renders himself capable of receiving God's goodness and makes himself suited to it.¹²⁹

Erasmus moves on from this pagan example to Augustine's methods of conversion. Such gradations of faith may not allow for the revolution that Lutheran reform requires, but they do allow for reform based on the theory of accommodation.¹³⁰ Hence the admission of man's epistemological limitations, and the ethical uncertainties that accompany them, are central to reformers like Erasmus and More, and will become the cornerstone of Protestant reform throughout the sixteenth century.

Like Raphael, Luther's view of equity and his attitudes towards reform are evident in the stylistic habits of his polemical writing. Both More and Erasmus were critical of Luther's tendency to pare down language to simple meanings. In the tenth chapter of the *Responsio* More attacks Luther's denial of the multiple meanings of scripture. In something of a faulty syllogism according to More, Luther makes the certainty of the church depend upon the certainty of scripture and vice versa. Such a "method of demonstration" effectively walls off anyone but Luther because inferences, "like the mazes of a labyrinth," preclude a wider understanding. With such "Platonic ideas" that can be traced to Luther's own mind and to

¹²⁹ Erasmus, *Hyperaspistes* 2.737-738.

¹³⁰ The exclusionist tendencies of the paradox were not lost on Jean Calvin either. In his commentary on Seneca's *De clementia* (1532), Calvin notes that a paradoxical style differentiates the second book from the first book of Seneca's work. The issue, as Calvin expresses it, is one of accommodation. "While in the first Seneca accommodated himself to the popular understanding," by the second book Seneca prioritizes his own wit over the needs of his audience when "he sprinkled [it] with Stoic paradoxes and scholastic subtleties" (337). The editors note that Calvin's commentary on this text reveal the value he places on accommodation "of language to the social station or intellectual comprehension of the intended audience" manifest in his use of the words "accommodare and attemperare," which will become fundamentally important to "Calvin's later Scriptural exegesis" (*Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles and Andre Malan Hugo [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969] 78).

nowhere else, men seeking to understand the reforms of Luther are “fenced in continually by these barricades.”¹³¹

Erasmus’s critique of Luther ultimately comes to the question of language. He attacks not Lutheran syllogism, but instead Luther’s use of paradox and hyperbole as the hallmark of his absolutism; at the same time, Erasmus uses his criticism of Luther’s paradoxical method to define his own form of skepticism. Clearly Luther’s acceptance of the third paradox not only endangers the church as it stands, but also jeopardizes the possibility of a religious reformation altogether. Consequently, far from participating in healthy religious debate, Luther’s style also jeopardizes religious reform. Erasmus, who at times seems constitutionally unable to mention the name of Luther without immediately condemning his paradoxes, concludes his *Hyperaspistes* by drawing out the implications of Luther’s adherence to this paradox. Erasmus posits a more practical and hopeful, albeit humble, form of idealism that counters Luther’s exclusionism. Contrary to Luther’s view that human action and will are worthless, Erasmus argues that “a person who understands much through human reason and believes certain truths about God, who has drunk in a habit of virtue according to his own small measure, is somewhat more capable than a crude soldier who has lived in a profound state of ignorance and the grossest vice.”¹³² The very epistemological uncertainty that Luther so despises is necessary to Erasmus’s process of reform. Luther and Erasmus famously debated the role of skepticism and its implications for faith in their conflict over free will. In his discussion of free will, Erasmus identifies himself with the “ignorance” of Nichodemus and with Gamaliel and praises the latter for “suspend[ing] his

¹³¹ More, *CW* 5.1.179-181.

¹³² Erasmus, *Hyperaspistes* 2.742.

judgment.” It is one’s very ignorance and one’s choice to suspend judgment and to open oneself to education in the face of that ignorance that make one acceptable to God.¹³³

Far from skepticism justifying unnecessary debate, Erasmus uses skepticism to set limits to religious controversy. Like More, Erasmus tries to make scripture and church authority immune to skepticism: “I want nothing to do with Scepticism, no more than I do concerning the decrees of the Catholic church. But on other points, about which asserters struggle and fight to the death, I readily take refuge in the opinion of the Sceptics, that is, I will consider them at length and refrain from rash judgment. For a Sceptic is not someone who doesn’t care to know what is true or false—the name itself is derived from considering—but rather someone who does not reach a final decision easily or fight to the death for his own opinion, but rather accepts as probable what someone else accepts as certain.”¹³⁴ Erasmus would confine debate only to “controverted teachings, about which the church itself was once skeptical and reflected for a long time before defining them, such as the procession of the Holy Spirit from both the other persons.”¹³⁵

Though Luther uses hyperbole and paradox to assert dogma rather than open up questions, Erasmus suggests that the effect may be the opposite because Luther appropriates these modes to make assertions about issues that should not even be open to debate. These modes represent, then, a kind of vain curiosity. It is important, according to Erasmus, to pick one’s battles carefully, that is, to identify which “errors it would be less harmful to overlook than to uproot. Paul knew the distinction between what is lawful and what is expedient: it is lawful to speak the truth; but it is not expedient to do so in front of anyone, at any time, in

¹³³ Erasmus, *Free Will* 46.

¹³⁴ Erasmus, *Hyperaspistes* 1.127-128.

¹³⁵ Erasmus, *Hyperaspistes* 1.119.

any way.”¹³⁶ So even if the necessity that Luther argues for is correct, “what could be more useless than to spread this paradox abroad?”¹³⁷ Erasmus associates paradox with stoic hard-headedness and he ends his diatribe on free will with the assertion that “when propounding principles in an inquiry into truth, I do not think that paradoxical formulas like these, not far removed from riddles, should be used: here I favor restraint,”¹³⁸ for paradoxes that are used to assert dogma can only cause the disruption of social, religious and epistemological order in Christendom.¹³⁹ Erasmus believes that the rhetorical tropes that Luther uses to express his message on the bondage of the will go part and parcel with his message. Luther is dangerous because he “prefer[s] above all to seem uniquely learned by means of paradoxes and hyperboles, although no technique tends more to sedition than they do.”¹⁴⁰

Luther uses rhetoric in order to exclude men from rationally understanding the principles of his religious dissent. This exclusionary tactic betokens for Erasmus a kind of pride. Luther’s sophistry moves their debate towards a kind of closer scholasticism that Erasmus would clearly prefer to avoid. But perhaps even worse, Luther’s rhetoric sequesters the individual believer (Luther) from the community of believers and the church: “Which is more wicked, not to dispute about Christian dogmas beyond what is sufficient or to undermine them, throw them out, trample upon them, and decorate them with your kind of verbal decorations? ... What remains except for you to claim for yourself the spirit of prophecy, or even a certain divinity, so as to pronounce what everyone is hiding in his

¹³⁶ Erasmus, *Free Will* 12.

¹³⁷ Erasmus, *Free Will* 12-13.

¹³⁸ Erasmus, *Free Will* 86.

¹³⁹ Erasmus, *Free Will* 88.

¹⁴⁰ Erasmus, *Hyperaspistes* 1.192.

heart?”¹⁴¹ Fearful of the uncertainty that accompanies education in any form, Luther is, in the words of Raphael Hythloday, a “school teacher who would prefer to beat rather than to teach his students.”¹⁴²

IV. Text, the Value of Uncertainty, and Reform

Though clearly making advances as a term involved in legal reform in the 1520s, equity was arguably a much more vexing concept when it appeared in religious debate and reform. In both realms, equity offered the possibility of greater certainty by trying to reconcile the vagaries of human experience with a normative code of law. But as More, Erasmus, and Luther were well aware, depending on how it was employed, equity could either serve as an answer to the problem of human limitation or it could allow that limitation to run amok.

What More, Luther, and Erasmus’s interest in the moral ambiguity of equity and the third stoic paradox show us is that in this period uncertain moral value is central to discussions of the constitution of orthodoxy. As Richard Popkin has noted in his study of the arguments of Sextus Empiricus, as long as certainty is maintained, questions can always be brought against it. Conversely, I would point out that uncertainty is not as easily undermined by epistemic critique because its power comes not from its truth claims but from its appeal to the common good. In other words, it makes no truth claims on the basis of epistemology, but on the basis of pragmatism. Though More fears arbitrary moral value, after the spread of Lutheran heresy that value ironically is defined by its flexibility, not its absolutism. Imperfect good, over and above absolute good, is the mainstay of orthodoxy for defenders of

¹⁴¹ Erasmus, *Hyperaspistes* 1.126.

¹⁴² More, *CW* 4.61.

the English Church. Hence, it is not altogether unwise to align uncertainty with both the reform and the reconstitution of normative moral value and religious knowledge. The flexibility inherent in uncertainty gave the English Church a considerable amount of maneuverability.

Though he is filled with criticisms for England, and though he proffers a utopia as a corrective to England, according to More, Raphael's unwillingness to engage society makes him a malcontent more interested in complaining among a small group of friends rather than doing anything about the problems he observes. But in the end, we must consider that Raphael Hythloday is, after all, a fictional character; so too, we must consider what greater purpose this debate between equity of an imperfect good and the that of stoic rigor and the respective strategies of reform that they proffer might serve. It is an irony characteristic of the wit of Thomas More, that Raphael Hythloday himself, even as he rejects equity and decorum as imperfect means to justice, is in fact himself an agent working within a larger linguistic method—namely, the *Utopia* itself and the tradition of Renaissance dialogue and paradox. As Damian Grace has argued in his discussion of *Utopia* and Academic skepticism, More uses probability in *Utopia* on both sides of the argument, forcing the reader to judge which is the better side.¹⁴³ But in some ways the dichotomy is a set up, for in *Utopia* the truth is found “*in utramque partem*,”¹⁴⁴ not in one place but on both sides of the argument, making *Utopia* a work that uses skepticism as a method of reform.¹⁴⁵ Contrary to how Luther

¹⁴³ Damian Grace, “*Utopia* and Academic Skepticism,” *More's Utopia and the Utopian Inheritance*, ed. A.D. Cousins and Damian Grace (New York: University Press of America, 1995) 11.

¹⁴⁴ Grace 9.

¹⁴⁵ Grace 17.

uses the paradoxical mode, that is, to limit intellectual engagement and questioning, More uses it to open up questioning.

Moreover, Raphael is a problematic example as a counselor, because the knowledge he brings from travel is a knowledge that introduces custom and relativity into a discussion of equity. *Utopia* is organized as a diptych, book I being an exposition of the moral and social ills of England while book II ostensibly holds up the virtuous customs of the island of Utopia. It invites a comparison between two cultures much like the comparison we observed earlier in skeptic doctrine in which justice is defined relatively, according to one's culture. If we take Raphael at his word, then book II is a travel narrative. The knowledge Raphael brings from travel marks him as a purveyor of custom and relativity—in many ways not unlike the humanists were. And like humanists, Raphael's appropriation of a distant culture as a moral model levels cultural distinctions in ways that may or may not be valid. On the other hand, there really is no evidence that Utopia exists, and it may in fact be a figment of Raphael's imagination. Even more largely, *Utopia* is, of course, a figment of More's imagination. The text is the place and Raphael's experience of Utopia, real or imagined, has a natural analogy in the reader's experience with Utopia. In either case, the emphasis on experience would seem to highlight More's own sense of the possibilities and uncertainties surrounding the resources of reform, in particular the role of the humanist appropriation of pagan culture, the role of the imagination, and the role of fiction.

If viewed in the context of More's pre-Reformation writings of the 1520s, the form and style of *Utopia* take on a new significance. Scholars have argued over whether *Utopia* should be read more as a skeptical dialogue or a dogmatic monologue, since so much of the first book and nearly the entire second book are taken up with Raphael's monologue. Indeed,

the entire book could be read as a very complex dialectic of dogmatism and skepticism. Moreover, what is true regardless of whether the text is read as a dialogue or a monologue is that the text is a paradox.¹⁴⁶ Although More largely dropped the paradoxical mode after the *Utopia*, there the mode works, as so many have argued, as a method of opening up inquiry. On some level it can be said that the paradox is an equitable mode, and this is true in a number of ways. On the one hand, it levels ideas, in that it brings together in “a central pivot of equivocation upon which two arguments (logically unconnected) meet and turn.”¹⁴⁷ On the other hand, in the sixteenth century it is a genre that is often “associated with the literature of skepticism” which uses as a “basic weapon” a “historical survey of knowledge” that forces dogmatists to confront the unmistakable diversity of opinion. Crucially, the method of the paradox, like the dialogue, is “dramatic,” making the reader “conclud[e] that knowledge is dramatic, i.e., that it is proportional to each historical scene,”¹⁴⁸ or to put it another way and relate the mode back to equity, to make the reader conclude that knowledge is circumstantial. In my reading the *Utopia* is a fundamentally skeptical text. It evidences not the dogmatic and indecorous skepticism of Raphael, but rather embodies a more subtle kind of reform message: it is an equitable text that accommodates More’s very real criticisms of England to his audience through the indecorous voice of Raphael. But at the same time, it would be

¹⁴⁶ Looking at the tension between epicurean and stoic ethics in the text, Elizabeth McCutcheon sees More’s defense of pleasure and virtue as evidence that “More is simultaneously writing a declamation (mock encomium) and a moral paradox of the Stoic sort, daringly combining what are, from a traditional Stoic perspective, polarized extremes as he does so” (“More’s *Utopia*” 18). See also Elizabeth McCutcheon’s article arguing that More’s use of puns and paradoxes indicates links that “adumbrate large concerns about bonding and binding and initiate the heuristic inquiry in which readers are invited to participate,” and that it is “the nature of these bonds repeatedly invites questions about justice and equity, the very issues that connect” the two books (“Puns, Paradoxes, and Heuristic Inquiry,” 93-94; and “Denying the Contrary: More’s Use of Litotes in the *Utopia*,” *Moreana* 31-32 [1971]: 107-121).

¹⁴⁷ A.E. Malloch, “Techniques and Function of Renaissance Paradox,” *Studies in Philology* 53 (1956): 194.

¹⁴⁸ Malloch 202.

wrong to read Raphael as the mouthpiece of Thomas More, for Raphael's character, and the knowledge he has, are problematic in important ways—indeed, in similar ways as equity is.

Despite his problematic idealism and methodology of reform, Raphael functions as a fictional character used by Thomas More to open up a dialogue about the methods of reform. Raphael is, then, the imperfect, decorous agent of counsel that he so disdains; he is, whether he would want to be or not, a decorous purveyor of normative moral value. Though More frequently turns to elements of fiction throughout his polemical career, *Utopia* stands as More's final fictional work. And though it is fiction, it inaugurates More's incisive examination of the importance of two equitable—that is, imperfect and provisional—resources of reform, fiction and the imagination specifically, and more largely humanism itself. But More never entirely leaves behind the fictional mode even in his polemical works, and his concern over the influence of fiction and the imagination as agents of reform that we see dawning in *Utopia* will stay with him as he addresses the “real” reformers of the 1520s. It is to More's use of normative fictions within the polemical mode and the influence of that mode on belief in the 1520s that we will now turn.

CHAPTER 3

THE EVIDENCE OF FAITH: TEXTUALITY, PROBABILITY, AND THE DILEMMA OF TUDOR POLEMICS

I. Spreading Heresy: The Dilemma of Tudor Polemics

The period beginning with the publication of Luther's *Babylonian Captivity* in 1521 and ending with Thomas More's last polemical work the *Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* in 1533 is arguably one of the most important periods in the history of the English reformation. During this period it became clear that the church in England would have to begin to define itself not only in response to the interiorization of belief encouraged by Lutheran heresy, but also in response to the textualization of belief brought about by the reformers' use of the printing press. The proliferation of printed books and pamphlets and the mounting visibility of heresy caused important changes in the laws governing treason and evidence in heresy trials. English heretics exiled to the Continent wrote and exported their vernacular works back into England to an audience impatient for their arrival. The importation of heretical works elicited a dramatic and distinctly public response from the Tudor government, namely book burnings and the development of a new representative of religious knowledge: printed religious polemic. At the same time, the rise in heretics and the resulting heresy trials—one outcome of this uncontrollable importation—occasioned discussions over the nature of the evidence for religious belief. Colliding with the dangerous consequences of reformed religion—the interiorization of religious belief free from external markers—the upsurge of

heresy led to a reevaluation of what constituted an individual's credibility and how such credibility could be identified. In other words, Lutheran heresy made religious belief both invisible in its interiorization of belief and yet strangely more visible in its use of the printing press. Both of these impulses threatened the stable standards of religious belief.

More's polemical works of the 1520s, the *Responsio ad Lutherum* (1523) and the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1528/9) weigh the value of polemical writing and fiction to the preservation of an authoritative church. As the printing trade began to change the shape of communication, knowledge, and religious experience, polemical literature emerged as a mode by which to bridge oral and textual as well as private and public expressions of conviction. More's polemical works explore the epistemological uncertainties being unearthed in a world in which the intellect was becoming an increasingly textual phenomenon. As they have emphasized the differences and continuities between oral and textual as well as print and manuscript cultures, scholars have debated whether the influence of publishing should be read as a gradual phenomenon or as an intellectual revolution. What is certain is that as heretical and polemical literature was produced, imported, and exported to and from the Continent and England on an unprecedented and an unknowable scale in the 1520s. Maintaining the moral and religious consensus upon which a stable society depended became increasingly difficult for state and religious authorities.¹⁴⁹ More's *Responsio ad Lutherum* initiated the public discourse in England that sought to answer Luther's heresies as well as his personal attack on Henry VIII. The *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, on the other hand, is a very different kind of polemic designed to counter the Lutheran heresy that had

¹⁴⁹ On the tension between print's ability to create consensus and disorder, see Jesse M. Lander, *Inventing Polemic: Religion, Print, and Literary Culture in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 1-55.

infiltrated London and England's universities. However, in both these works, fiction plays a key role in More's evaluation of the standards of religious belief in the 1520s.

During the decade of the 1520s, the English church redefined itself in its movement towards autonomy and its demonstrative reform measures against a backdrop of approaching enemies—both actual and feared. At the beginning of the 1520s, Lutheran ideas threatened from abroad, while the low whispers of heretics became undeniably audible at home.¹⁵⁰ When the first book burning took place in England under the order of Cuthbert Tunstal in May of 1521, John Fisher, bishop of Rochester, preached a sermon pointed directly at censuring the Lutheran quest to find an internal ground of religious conviction. Such conviction was sponsored by the Holy Spirit in conjunction with the reading of scripture. Providing an unfulfilling, if not unconvincing, answer to Luther's objections to the sacraments, Fisher reinforced the moral authority of the church by flatly informing his audience that "[i]n the observancies of the chyrche" many things are necessary, but despite their necessities "the reason why that we so do [these necessary things] is not open to al men." "Who can expresse the reason of al those wordes, gestures, orders, quesnyons, answers that there be accustomed," asked Fisher, when "Tradycyons were left unto the chrysten people by chryst & his apostles" which must be followed "notwithstandynge they be not wryten in scrypture."¹⁵¹ In a decade in which heresy and religious belief were becoming textual, the Church defended itself based on its atextuality.

¹⁵⁰ William A. Clebsch has argued that the two should not be confused and that there was nothing explicitly Lutheran about the heretical teachings occurring at Oxford and Cambridge (*England's Earliest Protestants* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964). See also Susan Brigden's description of London as a place that held both individual dissidents with their own idiosyncrasies and a "distinct heretical community" (*London and the Reformation* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989] 84).

¹⁵¹ Clebsch gives Fisher a prominent role in the movement of polemical writing in England from Latin to the vernacular: "Fisher established the terminology, chose the ground, and set the tone for the doctrinal and ecclesiological debates which were the substance of the English Reformation" prior to the "king's matter." See

Neither the reassurance of church authority by Fisher nor the government force of Tunstal was successful in narrowing the widening avenues of exposure to Lutheran ideas. Pope Leo X had condemned all of Luther's writings in June of 1520, and the Edict of Worms, written and signed in May of 1521, allowed the use of force to secure conformity to the pope's decree. But despite these efforts at containment, it seems clear that the book burning demonstrations in London in the 1520s were more a sign of the English government's failure to control the importation and printing of heretical books and the church's equally significant failure to prevent the books from being bought and read than they were an effective show of force.¹⁵² By 1525, heretics publicly declared their doctrines at the universities of England; towards the end of that same year the first copies of William Tyndale's vernacular translation of the New Testament were published.¹⁵³ With the advent of Tyndale's Bible in 1526 and the increasing number of English exiles influenced by Lutheranism while seeking refuge on the Continent, the shape and the language of the opposition to the Church of England were in the process of an important transformation. A crucial aspect of that transformation was the increased influence of printed materials imported into and printed in England. The preponderance of works printed up to 1535 were religious texts—practical, devotional, liturgical, and polemical, making not just the Bible, but

John Fisher, "Sermon of Jo. Fisher bp. Of Roch. 'agayn the pernicious doctrine of Martin luuther..." *The English Works of John Fisher* (London: EETS, 1876) 333-334.

¹⁵² See Clebsch, chapter 1, D. M. Loades, "The Press Under the Early Tudors," *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, IV (1964) 30-31, and Frederick Seaton Seibert, *Freedom of the Press in England, 1476-1776* (University of Illinois Press, 1952).

¹⁵³ Clebsch speculates that developments on the continent and in England may not be a coincidental, but rather a collaborative effort to drive forward reforms (26).

print itself the means to demonstrate an authority that could either support or rival all sources of orthodoxy.¹⁵⁴

D. M. Loades has argued that prior to the advent of religious polemics that infiltrated the religious culture of the 1520s, “there is no sign that the authorities in England were aware of the potential dangers of the press.”¹⁵⁵ Before 1520, the printing press was virtually unregulated in England. The laws that did exist were remnants of responses to the Lollard heresies a century earlier. Arundel’s *Oxford Constitutions* had been “designed to halt the copying, distributing, and reading of *manuscript* Lollard tracts,” but these manuscripts were “a menace more easily regulated than the flow of books from Europe’s many printing presses.”¹⁵⁶ But towards the end of the decade a series of acts by the government suggests that Henry VIII was becoming aware not only of the press’s dangers, but of its potential to uphold political power. Between 1528 and 1534 Henry revised the previously open-ended policies that allowed foreign printers unrestricted access to the printing trade in England, created his own list of prohibited books, established a licensing system that allowed printing monopolies, and, finally, restricted all importations of foreign books into England.¹⁵⁷

The substantial rise in the printing and unlicensed importation of books from the Continent, the prominence of the dialogue form in public religious discourse,¹⁵⁸ and the movement towards the use of the vernacular over Latin as the language of controversy made

¹⁵⁴ H.S. Bennett, *English Books & Readers, 1475 to 1557: Being a Study in the History of the Book Trade from Caxton to the Incorporation of the Stationers' Company* (Cambridge University Press, 1969).

¹⁵⁵ Loades 30.

¹⁵⁶ Italics added. Clebsch 13.

¹⁵⁷ Siebert 2, 32. See also the “Tudor prologue” to S. Mutchow Towers’s *Control of Religious Printing in Early Stuart England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003) 17-32 passim.

¹⁵⁸ Rainer Pineas, *Thomas More and Tudor Polemic* (Indiana University Press, 1968) 80-92.

the published word an influential component of religious identity and required the development of a decorum for controversial writing about religion. Beyond the physical markers of worship—sacraments, priests, and church structures—printed polemic was invested with a new force as a visible public expression of piety. As reformers actively sought out this means to self-definition, many began to fear the decline of the unity and absolutism of Roman Catholic authority; however, Henry VIII and other leaders of the church in England began to recognize that the established religion would have to use published texts to redefine itself in the face of the diversity that was cementing irremediable divisions in religious culture.

At the center of this revision of spiritual identity and expression we find Thomas More. Throughout his career, More evidences a deep-seated anxiety over how to judge men's profession of belief when it is so difficult to know the secrets of the human heart and conscience. This judgment was complicated even further for More by the uncertainties that print culture introduced into religious truth. Though doubtful about using text to convey any truth, let alone religious truth, the optimistic but practical More sought to use fiction and dialogue as a way of gaining access to personal conviction.

For More, fiction and the suspension of disbelief it could support had an important role to play in social welfare. Once a work was published or even became a candidate for publication, it readily eluded an author's control. Publication, then, could break down the boundaries between the intended fictions of the author, the idiosyncrasies of a publisher or copyist, and the misinterpretations of even the sharpest of readers. Facing the uncertain power that publication offered to religious discourse, More appealed to normative fictions—that is, beliefs that cannot be demonstrated by reason but that nonetheless may foster social

harmony—in their various guises of faith, probability, conviction, and the law that defined the political and religious solidarity of England. In doing so he hoped to contain Lutheran doubts that threatened to dismantle the singular truth of religion by leading to an infinite regress of independent questioning.

The conflict with Luther began with the publication of his *Babylonian Captivity* in 1520, continued with Henry VIII's defense of the seven sacraments in 1521, Luther's attack on Henry in 1522, and culminated in More's *Responsio ad Lutherum* in 1523. Its excessive invectives written at the request of Henry VIII, it is the only major polemical work More would ever write in Latin.¹⁵⁹ As the decade neared its end, More began composing his first major English work, the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, which, like the *Responsio*, was undertaken at an indeclinable request, this time that of Cuthbert Tunstal.¹⁶⁰ By this time, the situation in England was more desperate, for the futility of the King's proclamations banning heretical books and instituting book burnings was becoming painfully obvious to Henry and Tunstal.¹⁶¹ Far from undermining the importation of the Lutheran books being produced on the continent by exiled Englishmen, the bonfires of books only funded the exiles since the Church, in buying up the prohibited books in order to burn them, was fast becoming the greatest patron of heretics in addition to fueling public interest in books deemed so worthy of persecution. More's *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, printed in 1529, represented a delayed reaction to the influence of Tyndale's translation of the New Testament, which, according to

¹⁵⁹ This does not include More's "Letter to Bugenhagen" from 1526, which may have been intended for publication, but was never published. E.F. Rogers, "Sir Thomas More's Letter to Bugenhagen," *Essential Articles for the Study of Thomas More*, ed. R. S. Sylvester and G. P. Marchadour (Hamden: Archon Books, 1977) 447-454.

¹⁶⁰ Although, on tenuous evidence More's biographer Richard Marius claims that More probably asked for the commission from Tunstal (*Thomas More: A Biography* [London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1985] 338).

¹⁶¹ The proclamations took place in March, 1529 and June, 1530 (*Tudor Proclamations*, vol. 1, ed. Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964], 181-186; 193-197).

the estimates of many scholars, was imported into England by the thousands, and the publication of Tyndale's *Parable of the Wicked Mammon*, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, and a list of other works bearing what the church believed to be an unmistakable and diabolical Lutheran influence. In both 1523 and 1529 Thomas More was placed in the uncomfortable position of dismantling a threat to the church that had already had time to establish itself.

Thomas More's *Responsio ad Lutherum* was published in the same year as Fisher's *Asssertionis Lutheranae confutatio*, prompting one scholar to give these important polemical works the distinction of "establish[ing] the grounds and the form of Catholic polemics in England throughout the first era of the Reformation." "The endeavor" of More and Fisher's work "was to expose and publicize the doctrines and doings of Luther" with the intent that the public—or at least the Latin-reading public—needed the texts themselves so that "all might conclude [Luther's] self-evident error and damnation." But because such a polemical methodology only made heresy even more available to the reading public, More sometimes questioned whether this cure was any worse than the disease.¹⁶² In the *Responsio*, More committed himself to representing the words of Henry and Luther as they were written, side by side, doubting that the average reader would be so industrious as to compare the two sources on his own. By the time More was a seasoned veteran of polemic, he noted the polemicist's dilemma: "[T]hey most folyshe heretyke in a town, may write mo fals heresyys in one lefe, than the wisest man in the hole world can well and conveniently by reason and

¹⁶²The doubtful utility of this method has been noted by Clebsch, for example, who says that Fisher and More were "not too intelligent" and that their responses to heresy were "dreadfully risky" (20).

authoryte soyle & confute in fourtye.”¹⁶³ While the mind was almost habitually or instinctively willing to accommodate negative doubt, that is, doubt raised without evidence, it was less ready to produce or accept an answer to doubt.

Far from just defining the grounds of religious polemic in the decades to come, More used the *Responsio* to interrogate whether religious polemic could be an effective mode, and if so, what purpose it could and should reasonably expect to fulfill, especially when the church’s identity was becoming as unsteady as that of its enemies. While the *Responsio* calls into question the very enterprise of polemic using its fictive frame, the *Dialogue* turns wholly to fiction in order to call into question reformist modes of belief. The exact convictions of More during this period are far from clear. Scholars have debated whether his defense is of the Roman Catholic Church, the English Catholic Church, England and Henry VIII, or even whether at heart he thought of himself as defending anything at all. Despite More’s dislike of heresy, especially “seditious heresy,”¹⁶⁴ we find him not heedlessly immersing himself in the public discourse of religious controversy, but rather cautiously examining how print transmits and translates religious debate and what affect a published text has on religious controversy and consciousness. In his use of fiction in his polemical works throughout the 1520s, More tests the changing role of language in the formation of religious belief. While his early use of fiction reveals his skepticism about the new media of printed polemic, by the end of the decade More deploys fiction skillfully to affirm the value of uncertainty and skepticism rather than dogmatic polemic to religious orthodoxy and the reform of heresy.

¹⁶³ Thomas More, *Apology in Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, ed. J.B. Trapp, vol. 9 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979) 8.

¹⁶⁴ The distinction is R. W. Chambers’s, *Thomas More* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1958) 282. I point out this distinction because More’s biographers often depict More as a crusader against heresy whereas I am suggesting that More shows signs of being uncomfortable with this role. See Marius, *Thomas More*, esp. 325-350, but cf. Alistair Fox, *Thomas More: History and Providence* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982) 130 ff.

II. Fiction and the Normative Value of Religious Polemic

In its methodology More's *Responsio ad Lutherum* is a highly conventional religious polemic. But the text becomes much less conventional when we consider its publication history combined with More's important revisions in the fictional epistles accompanying its two editions. The fictional epistolary narratives that frame the two versions of the *Responsio ad Lutherum* call our attention to More's uneasiness about printed religious polemic specifically, and the influence of text on religious belief more generally. Beyond using his fictions for entertainment and emotional detachment, the frames evidence More's skepticism and are the product of his escalating uncertainty about the most effective way to curb heresy. As "printed polemic [began] to displace oral disputation," More found himself in the midst of an epistemological shift that required a reexamination of the boundaries between oral and visual cultures.¹⁶⁵

If we compare More's *Letter to Maartin van Dorp* (1515) with his *Responsio ad Lutherum*, we see an early manifestation of his vacillating attitude towards the question of whether or not printed polemic was useful for religious reform or orthodoxy. In this letter, More considers how a letter to Erasmus that was published before the intended recipient was able to read it compromises the text's original meaning. In 1514, Maartin van Dorp composed a letter attacking Erasmus for his Greek New Testament and his *Moriae encomium*. Dorp's letter elicited a hasty reply from Erasmus, which was in turn answered by Dorp with a second letter. Significantly, Erasmus never received either letter from Dorp; the first he found in the hands of a friend in Antwerp, and a copy of the second was given to him

¹⁶⁵ John Headley, Introduction to *Responsio ad Lutherum*, *CW* 5.2. 809.

by More himself. By the end of 1515, Dorp supervised the publication of his letter and Erasmus's reply.¹⁶⁶

In his letter to Dorp, More stresses the importance of personal conference in religious and intellectual debate. He expresses his displeasure that he had been unable to speak to Dorp in person because he had been detained by the obligations of his political career. Similarly, he censures Dorp for addressing Erasmus by letter rather than meeting with him after he had been "recently...summoned for a private visit." "Why not give his instructions in person," More asks, "instead of waiting to step out the door and then shouting them up from the street, when Erasmus was so far away that, though he should have been either the first or even the only person to hear the advice, he was not only the last to find out about it but he learned of it only through others?"¹⁶⁷ Because the letter was published before it was read by its intended recipient, any purpose it had as a corrective or instructive piece of advice had been compromised by its publication, for what was constructive advice in private conversation or epistolary exchange became offensive polemic when committed to the printed page. In other words, not only is textual communication not as useful in More's mind as oral communication, but once a manuscript text is published, its fundamental meaning may change or become obsolete.¹⁶⁸

More chastises Dorp for his second letter to Erasmus "which is being read everywhere" and facetiously claims that he is certain that Dorp would never have let the

¹⁶⁶ This summary of the historical context is indebted to the information provided by Daniel Kinney in *In Defense of Humanism in The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 15 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986) xix-xxiii.

¹⁶⁷ More, *CW* 15.7.

¹⁶⁸ In a very different context at the end of the sixteenth century, Paul Yachnin has argued that the "rise of a literary marketplace was a necessary precondition for the fulfillment of the humanist, incorporative ideal of reading" ("Eating Montaigne," *Reading Renaissance Ethics*, ed. Marshall Grossman [New York: Routledge, 2007] 159).

letter out to the public intentionally. “The main reason that drives me to think so,” More writes with irony, is that some passages are written “so acerbically” and “so shoddily” that Dorp “would have written more mercifully...and more carefully” if he had known that the document would become public knowledge. However, More’s claim must be set against his censure of Dorp a few lines later, in which he states that Dorp wrote “as if [he is] deliberately twisting the meaning of [Erasmus’s] words to get all the theologians and even all the universities, as they are called, up in arms against him.”¹⁶⁹ He warns Dorp that although he may not have meant any “ill will” towards Erasmus, readers “who fail to appreciate fully the modesty and the veritably swanlike candor of [his] nature” may misinterpret his meaning and intentions.¹⁷⁰ In sum, in the letter to Dorp, More suggests that a public, printed text is vulnerable to misinterpretation, that at best it renders ambiguous and at worst it misrepresents the intention of the author, and that it encourages satire and polemics rather than learning or reasoned debate.

This small scale polemical incident is writ large in the early 1520s in the exchange between Henry, Luther, and More, for by then the nature of the debate had changed, and the stakes were even higher. No longer was the debate between two individual humanists, but between large scale representatives of orthodoxy and heresy. In his response to Luther, More made some concessions to the polemical mode—perhaps necessarily so—though his mistrust of the mode itself had only intensified. More reaffirmed his dislike of polemic as a form of public discourse, for it indicated nearly the desperate state of a church or a nation that was

¹⁶⁹ More, *CW* 15.9-11.

¹⁷⁰ It is significant too that More tells Dorp in his letter a story of a personal conference with a man who had an attitude like Dorp’s towards scholasticism. Their conference just happens to take place in a booksellers shop. Here texts of the public domain prove useful, but rather than pick up a polemical work off the shelf, More picks up St. Augustine’s tract *On the Divination of Demons* and assists him in reading and interpreting the passage (*CW* 15.69).

faced with a significantly high level of danger. Because a polemical work—or any other kind of writing for that matter—was unlikely to have any effect on a tried and true heretic, it would do more to spread heretical ideas than to correct them. What had begun in 1520 as an offensive gesture, Luther's *Babylonian Captivity*, had readily evolved into a contest between a radical reformer and the King of England, who composed his response in order to secure himself the title of Defender of the Faith.¹⁷¹ With the help of his advisors, probably More, Henry responded with a defense of the seven sacraments; from those two statements of position came a series of increasingly irrational and self-sustaining exchanges between Luther and the King.

The message of his lengthy answer to Luther in defense of Henry VIII is that polemical writings are the product of a fallen, sinful world. More begins the *Responsio* with an affirmation of the advantages of print to religious debate and with a justification of his conventional polemical style. Though challenged by Luther to a personal confrontation, More thinks the printed medium is the safest position from which to attack his adversary: "I think no one is so senseless as to enter the place to which his enemy summons him for a fight, since there cannot be a more level plain for the struggle, or one less exposed to ambush, than a controversy carried on by means of published books, in which neither side can pretend, either that any point was falsely kept from the record by the secretaries, or later corrupted by forgers, or that anything had escaped him unforeseen in the heat of a hurried disputation."¹⁷² Human error—both honest and dishonest—endangers a dispute when it is transcribed from an oral to a textual, in this case manuscript, medium. The erroneous copy, it

¹⁷¹ Headley, Introduction, *CW* 5.2.721-722.

¹⁷² More, *CW* 5.1.45.

would seem, is then what would be either copied or published and placed on permanent public record. Indeed, the *Responsio* takes the form it takes—that of a point-by-point refutation with immense quotations from Luther’s and Henry’s texts with More’s comments mediating between the two—precisely because More does not want to be accused of misquoting his opponent.

But despite this affirmation, More’s uncertainty about the value of oral, manuscript, and published mediums to orthodoxy and reform is apparent in the intricate and ambiguous epistolary narratives with which he frames and complicates the *Responsio*. Like his other rhetorical flourishes—his “merry tales,” penetrating humor, and incisive irony that appear earlier in his fiction and later in his *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*—More’s fictional frames have been celebrated chiefly for their stylistic rather than their substantive value. In his analysis of More’s polemical works, Rainer Pineas assigns the epistolary exchange between William Ross and John Carcellius prefaced to the second edition of the *Responsio* the “polemical function...of acting as *praemunitio* or prejudicial introduction to the book that More is about to attack.”¹⁷³ Commenting on More’s use of the epistle to envision this frame narrative, John Headley argues that “the exercise of good letters and polemic” went hand in hand.¹⁷⁴ But if the fictional frames are rhetorically powerful, they also focus the reader’s attention on the uncertainty of language and of the printed text. The fictions embedded in his nonfiction works not only are didactic and diversionary, but they also dichotomize appearance and reality in a way that exposes the artificiality of the written word.

When scholars question why More chose to create these fictional frame narratives, they often remark that such a cunning device should be seen as characteristic of the author of

¹⁷³ Pineas 15.

¹⁷⁴ Headley, Introduction, *CW* 5.2.778.

the interpretive labyrinths of *Utopia*. Headley, for example, suggests that More adopted a persona suitable to his temperament and goes so far as to suggest that the only reason More did not continue the fiction throughout the work was that the increasing demands of his political career prevented him from doing so at the time. The epistolary personas allow More to “keep his distance” from the necessary vehemence of his *quid pro quo* attack on Luther. They represent a “strand of *festivitas*” which interacts with and counterbalances his “Christian *gravitas*,” in order to prevent his “earnest piety” from becoming “insupportable to himself, and also to his readers.”¹⁷⁵

The publication history of the *Responsio* is complicated, but untangling it reveals the purposefulness of these frame letters and the depths of More’s anxieties about publication. More produced two versions, now known as the Baravellus and the Rosseus editions. The Baravellus was printed between February and June of 1523, while the Rosseus was printed in December of that same year. With a few presentation copies made, More suppressed the work, made significant additions to the tenth chapter of the first book and rewrote the frame.¹⁷⁶ More wrote the manuscripts and the errata sheets himself, not trusting the work to anyone else.¹⁷⁷

The Baravellus edition begins with two prefatory letters, John Carcellius’s letter to the reader followed by Baravellus’s letter to Lucullus. Of these three, only Carcellius will reappear in the frame of the Rosseus edition, while Baravellus and Lucullus, the latter of which we never actually hear from, never appear again. Indeed, as John Headley notes, the

¹⁷⁵ Headley, Introduction, *CW* 5.2.794-795.

¹⁷⁶ This and subsequent discussion textual history of the *Responsio* is taken from John Headley’s thorough discussion in the standard Yale edition of More’s work (*CW*, 5.2.832-848).

¹⁷⁷ See Stapleton, 39, as cited in Headley, Introduction, *CW* 5.2.835; R.R. McCutcheon 84.

only reason we know of their existence at all is because a single copy of the Baravellus edition has been preserved.

In the first edition, the letter of Carcellius to the reader indicates that he comes into contact with the text when he casually visits a printer's shop. The unnamed printer shows Carcellius his latest endeavor—a "little book brought to him from Spain, written by Ferdinand Baravellus, a man very outstanding in theology." Baravellus writes the book, Carcellius says, because Luther's slanders undermine religious unity and social hierarchy.

The printer's motives for reprinting the work is profit; the printer is confident that this text "is the kind of work...everyone would be eager to buy." Carcellius asks to borrow the book and vows to help the printer in his project if he is able to "add to the value of the work in any way...so that the book might be more favorably received when it was published."¹⁷⁸ He approves of the work and decides to give the book some order, adding chapters with titles and "an index so that single items might be found more readily by the reader." He also hopes that these editorial measures will make the text more competitive with imported texts, which Carcellius anticipates since the work "seemed to be just what all the people were looking for."¹⁷⁹ Carcellius admits the invasiveness of his editorial practice by warning the reader that he has had to make changes and add comments of his own and by asking the reader's forgiveness for "boldly [laying] hands on the writing of another person."¹⁸⁰ From the outset, Carcellius is associated with and takes an active role in the printing trade even as he also

¹⁷⁸ More, *CW* 5.1.3.

¹⁷⁹ More, *CW* 5.1.5.

¹⁸⁰ It is interesting to think about the ways in which the practice of editing further complicated notions of the moral authority of a text in the period. For a discussion of this specifically as related to the concept of intellectual property, see John Freeman's "Utopia, Incorporated: Reassessing Intellectual Property Rights to 'the Island,'" *English Literary Renaissance* 37.1 (2007): 3-33.

serves as a reader and editor for the text, advising future readers of its shortcomings, but ultimately of its desirability.

In the second prefatory letter in the Baravellus edition, significantly also a record of a conversation, we can discern the character of the author of the *Responsio* from his own words. By his own account, Baravellus is “tricked” into writing this text by the uncle of Lucullus.¹⁸¹ He identifies himself as a part of the “university” and his conversation with Lucullus’s uncle begins with the uncle questioning him on the temper of the university towards the works of Luther. Baravellus attests to the generally lukewarm attitude of Luther’s readers at first, which turned fiery only after the publication of Luther’s *Babylonian Captivity*. Though he seems only incidentally concerned about the spread of Lutheranism, Baravellus feels obligated to answer Luther because he does not merely defend himself, but attacks the King and in doing so “twist[s]” the words of Henry “in the telling, so that through fraud he could appear to the reader as witty.” Despite these political motivations for writing the book, Baravellus is certainly the weaker side in his debate with Lucullus’s uncle. He reluctantly writes this text, offering repeated excuses to Lucullus’s uncle as to why responding to the ravings of a lunatic—even if they are ravings against Henry VIII—is pointless. But finally, Baravellus is persuaded, that is, nearly commanded, “to answer at length” and juxtapose the King’s and Luther’s texts, adding to them his own commentary. The uncle advises that the project will require him to “do violence to [his] excessively modest nature” in order to match wits with the “frenzied friarlet.”¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ More, *CW* 5.1.8. It is perhaps worth mentioning that Lucullus is the defender of dogma in the second book of Cicero’s *Academica*. Whether or not More intended any allusion to that work, we of course have no way of knowing.

¹⁸² More, *CW* 5.1.11.

What emerges from these two letters are two distinct views of Baravellus, two ways of approaching a text, and a number of ways in which texts are being altered for better and for worse. If we compare the printer's version of the author with the author's own account of the genesis of the work, we see both Baravellus's and Carcellius's shortcomings. Carcellius articulates a social, political, and theological agenda for the work that seems inconsistent with Baravellus's pathetic rendition of why he wrote the work. At most, Baravellus has a political agenda remote from religious controversy per se. Carcellius also makes claims about the audience of this work that Baravellus seems never to have considered. As a polemical writer, Baravellus lacks intention and will, although it is unclear whether this absence of moral intent detracts from the efficacy of the polemic. What is clear is that his very nature must be adapted to fit the tone of religious controversy. Baravellus indicates the trepidation with which More viewed the potential affects of polemicism on the writer himself.

Then there is Caracellius. Carcellius is suspiciously eager to make the text's publication as financially successful as possible. While he is zealous for controversy, the idea of curbing heresy could not be further from his mind. He wishes to seek revenge against Luther for insulting Henry VIII and England more generally, but there is little thought to what this text can actually do against the spread or prevention of heresy. Carcellius also claims to amend the text in order to make it more reader-friendly, but in fact, his emendations do not support that claim. One look at the so-called index will reveal a long list without any readily recognizable organization—chronological, topical, alphabetical—whatsoever.

In other words, in determining the "value" of a text, Carcellius considers the book's newsworthiness and profitability over its moral intent or value. Carcellius's focus on the

economic success of the press is particularly instructive in light of David Loades's argument that printing and popular literacy were mutually encouraging. "Before 1520," Loades explains, "there was a thin trickle of ballads and romances" which Loades contrasts with the "vast flood" of a broader range of printed materials "by the end of the century." He attributes this flood both to the "influence of printing" and "vernacular bibles," which occasioned this "change...by creating a fresh demand in the minds of those already literate." Loades places a special emphasis on the role of religious controversial writing of the 1520s, "especially from 1529 onward when they became a source of news and argument on the current issues of domestic politics."¹⁸³

In a later letter to Erasmus dated June 1532, More's anxiety about the motives of the reading public can be seen in full relief. Complaining about the "open-door policy towards these newfangled erroneous sects," More worries that the "steady stream of books written in our vernacular and containing mistranslations, and worse, misinterpretations of Scripture, have been sending into our land every brand of heresy from Belgium." He had responded to many of these works—just as he had reluctantly written the *Responsio*—not for the men who will examine all texts carefully, "but because some people would like to give an approving eye to novel ideas, out of superficial curiosity, and to dangerous ideas, out of devilry; and in so doing they assent to what they read, not because they believe it to be true, but because they want it to be true."¹⁸⁴ Print, it would seem, only corroborated intellectual freedom and indulged human error.

¹⁸³ Loades 30.

¹⁸⁴ *Thomas More: Selected Letters*, ed. Elizabeth F. Rogers (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961) 176.

In the prefatory letters to the first edition of the *Responsio*, More anticipates the ethical dilemma that printed religious polemic brings about by the 1530s. More would seem to be calling into question the motives of polemic—probably in part because in defending Henry’s *Assertio* from Luther’s attack on it, More is defending a text that was less a product of Henry’s “intellectual curiosity or holy zeal” and more of his desire for a “resounding title.”¹⁸⁵ The entire exchange points to More’s uneasiness about print as an agent of reform. In the two letters prefaced to the Baravellus edition, there is little correspondence between the intentions of the publisher/reader and the writer. Indeed, the publisher/reader Carcellius and the writer Baravellus work at cross-purposes.¹⁸⁶ Carcellius thinks only of the reader and little of the author, while Baravellus, at least in the prefatory epistle, has little concern for his audience. As the editor, Carcellius addresses the reader; Baravellus addresses Lucullus; and never shall the editor, reader, and writer meet. Never, that is, until the Rosseus edition.

John Headley notes that in dropping Baravellus from the second, this time published and circulated, edition, More “explains the premature appearance of the first issue and satisfactorily accounts for all the activities, doubts, and confusion of the loyal Carcellius.”¹⁸⁷ The second edition ends with the printer explaining the need for the emendations that the author required and made, which provides a rationale for the second edition. In the Rosseus edition, More rewrote the prefatory letters, this time dropping the Spanish persona of Baravellus and taking on the persona of an Englishman. Headley has argued that this change occurred because “the Baravellus had been somewhat overly fanciful and remote in its

¹⁸⁵ Headley, Introduction, *CW* 5.2.721.

¹⁸⁶ On humanist anxieties about the corruptibility of the printed text, see Martin Davies, “Humanism in Script and Print in the Fifteenth Century,” *Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Jill Kraye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) esp. 57.

¹⁸⁷ Headley, Introduction, *CW* 5.2.797.

Spanish setting, [while] the revised version is emphatically English,” and it was appropriate that an Englishman should defend the English king. Quite true, but this does not explain why More did not just change the settings and the names, but rewrites the letters altogether.

Though still very early in his public career, by 1523 More’s hesitations about publication had many precedents in his own as yet brief printing history. In 1518 in response to the 1513 attack of Germain de Brie, or Brixius, on England, More published a collection of epigrams. He was encouraged, he tells Erasmus in May 1520, to print his own and Brixius’s writings together in order to open the entire contents of the controversy to the reader and to allow the reader to judge with all the information in hand. In the end, Erasmus persuaded More to suppress his writings against Brixius, including a letter that had already been published. More immediately bought up all the copies not yet sold by the printer to prevent his letter against Brixius from becoming available to the public.¹⁸⁸ This episode in More’s publication history will become one of a pattern—both in fact and fiction. The publication history of the *Utopia* is yet another example as is his letter to Bugenhagen in 1526.¹⁸⁹

In the first letter of the second edition of the text, Carcellius suggests to us just how desirable polemical texts are to the reading public. Staying with a host outside of Rome, Ross is given Luther’s response to Henry’s *Assertio*. Ross immediately takes the book, saying, “Indeed, there is nothing I would rather read.”¹⁹⁰ It would seem fairly safe to say that Ross is no heretic, not even the incipient heretic whom More introduces us to in a *Dialogue*

¹⁸⁸ Headley, Introduction, *CW*, 5.2.838-839.

¹⁸⁹ Scholars have puzzled over why More’s lengthy letter to Bugenhagen was never published, though it seems intended for publication. See the discussion of Richard Marius in his biography of More (325-332), and Elizabeth F. Rogers in “Letter to Bugenhagen,” *Essential Articles for the Study of Thomas More*.

¹⁹⁰ More, *CW* 5.1.15.

Concerning Heresies. Ross claims that after reading the King's book—which, though polemical, would seem to be justified reading for even the most pious Englishman—he must read Luther's because the King's arguments were so solid that he cannot imagine what Luther would say that would be a “credible” argument. Moreover, Ross not only reads the book, he reads it aloud to the host. Ross is unbothered by the fact that this book has been put on the papal Index because it is so entirely heretical that it could never be mistaken for anything other than what it is—“scurrilous railing and heresies abhorrent to the ears of all good men.”¹⁹¹ In many ways Ross represents the rarest of creatures—the ideal reader—whose existence, as More's 1532 letter to Erasmus indicates, he increasing doubts.

The ways in which the host convinces Ross resemble the ways in which the uncle convinces Baravellus to respond to Luther. Ross refuses to allow the book to be rushed into print and wants time to do more research on some of his points, but he does allow his learned host to borrow it and show it to friends. The host then disseminates the text in manuscript among “several of his learned friends.” “My host,” Ross writes, that is, the very man who convinces Ross for the necessity of this text, “assured me that the work would remain in my control.” When the host returns the manuscript to Ross, he encourages him to publish the book immediately, noting that the learned men to whom he had showed the book had wanted to publish the book without Ross's consent, but the host kept his word and did not allow such publication to take place. However, the way in which Ross repeatedly stresses the host's insistence that he print the text immediately serves to raise the reader's suspicion of the host's character. It seems likely, given the discovery that Ross is about to make, that the host knew that one of his friends had copied the book and very possibly was planning to publish it.

¹⁹¹ More, *CW* 5.1.19.

Ross finally agrees to publish, but still doubtful, he sends the book to Carcellius—the very man who in the letter in the first edition was so eager to harness the selling power of polemic. It would seem that the eagerness for polemical writing is an index of its moral unreliability. Making an additional manuscript of the book, Ross gives the book to a young man he identifies only as Herman of Prague, a one-time student of Carcellius in England. Never hearing from Carcellius, Ross assumes that the book is lost, for he has “no doubt” of Herman’s “trustworthiness...even yet.” For a man who feels strongly the need to control polemical works, Ross puts his text in a good deal of jeopardy in various ways. While preparing yet a third manuscript to send to Carcellius again, Ross finds that the book has already been published and that another man has claimed it as his own. Ross notes that since he was sending the manuscript only to a friend, he neglected to put his name on the text, so he assumes that “some compassionate man received it as a child cast off by an unknown father and brought it out as his own.”¹⁹²

In short, far from being a rhetorical device, the letters that frame the *Responsio* can be read more substantively, as taking part in and addressing the very problematic relationship between print culture, religious polemics, and religious belief. None of Ross’s decisions, with the exception of his initial desire to read the text, are his own. After Ross reads Luther’s text, he is morally compelled towards an indeclinable, inertial path. Publication makes new demands on the orthodox Christian whose responsibility it is, whether he likes it or not, to respond to such an attack. It becomes apparent in the 1520s that the cost of ignoring such texts is futile book bannings and burnings. Six years following the publication of the *Responsio ad Lutherum*, More will articulate the problematic nature of the polemical mode when he begins his *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* with “an olde sayd saw”: “One busyness

¹⁹² More, *CW* 5.1.23-25.

begettyth and bryngeth forth a nother.”¹⁹³ These prefatory fictional epistles foreshadow the flurry of polemical debate in which More will find himself entangled between 1529 and 1533. With their mixed motives, questionable agendas, and careless misinterpretations, Carcellius, Baravellius, and Ross are every bit as ambiguous and illegible as the more overtly fictional character Raphael Hythlodaye. If the epistles are meant to prejudice the reader, they prejudice him against the printed text as a source of religious knowledge altogether.

More’s suspicions about the limited moral value of a printed text becomes even clearer if we turn to the content of the *Responsio*. In addition to the fictitious narrative that frames the *Responsio* and calls into question the effects of a polemical, print culture on religious belief, More also takes on the question of the problem of Lutheran biblical hermeneutics in his lengthy tenth chapter. The emerging print-dominated, vernacular polemical culture of the 1520s that forced More to reassess the value and means of printed religious debate went hand in hand with a similar reevaluation occasioned by the Lutheran heresy of *sola scriptura*. More’s hermeneutics evidences his distrust of the printed text. If printed texts are unwieldy containers of meaning, the scriptures do not escape More’s scrutiny either. For More, the written word has no special value; many things necessary to salvation have not been recorded in the scriptures, but the unwritten word may be seen as a stronger source of certainty.

As we saw in the first chapter, in the important tenth chapter of his *Responsio ad Lutherum*, More attacked the dogmatism of Luther’s ecclesiology as an impediment to reform; here too, More also attacked the epistemological certainty that was the basis of Lutheran hermeneutics. According to More, epistemological certainty was a luxury that a reformer often did not have and did not need. In contrast to Luther, More deemphasizes the

¹⁹³ More, *CW* 6.1.21.

power of the written word, arguing that many things necessary to salvation have not been recorded in the scriptures. Instead, More looks to what he called the unwritten word of God as a source of certainty. More concedes that Luther's strictly literal reading of the written scripture allows him the security of a single meaning, but this meaning which Luther "present[s] as the indubitably true meaning" is frequently one that is the "least probable of many." In other words, the literal sense of scripture grants certainty, but not a perfect truth. More accepts the ambiguity of the scriptures (an ambiguity which Luther patently denies): "The literal sense, if it should ever be evident, is almost always the only one effective for proving anything; still, since it often happens that a matter is expressed too obscurely for that single meaning to flash out from the ambiguous words, all the most learned men and the holiest of ancient theologians have usually ascertained various meanings, leaving the matter open for careful consideration."¹⁹⁴ But this instantaneous transformation from ignorance to knowledge mirrors Luther's model for the ideal reader: that is, like the spontaneous emergence of a Stoic sage out of an ordinary man, the perfect reader will move instantaneously from ignorance to knowledge, from damnation to salvation.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, the greater problem is that the false sense of certainty gained by a literal interpretation creates all the more reason for doubt in matters that require faith. In the *Apology*, More will complain that for heretics "there is nothyng that ought to be taken for a sure and undowted

¹⁹⁴ More, *CW* 5.1.125-127. R. R. McCutcheon in his discussion of More's transplantation of Ciceronian probability into a Christian framework argues that "the persistent issue of probability as a principle of argument becomes an aspect of the formal question of speech versus writing. That is, More sees Luther's reliance on scripture as an epistemological limitation" ("The *Responsio Ad Lutherum*: Thomas More's Inchoate Dialogue with Heresy," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 22.1 (1991): 87.

¹⁹⁵ On the "instantaneous" change from ignorance to wisdom that the Stoic sage must undergo, see E. Zeller, *Stoics, Epicureans, Skeptics*, trans. Oswald J. Reichel (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1870). Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle notes that Luther struggled with uncertainty because he could not accept the idea of congruous merit, which would necessitate that the believer be able to conform his will to god's because it was impossible to ever fully know God's will." Boyle argues that "Luther's doctrine of justification as instantaneous and complete is classically Stoic" ("Stoic Luther" 73-74).

trouth of the crysten bylyefe, but yf it maye be proved by playne and evident scripture,” though even the written scripture cannot be identified “but by the chyrch.”¹⁹⁶ More argues that the physical church and both necessary and unnecessary points of doctrine are contained in the unwritten word of God. On the other hand, More dismisses the Lutheran concept of the invisible church. In other words, More bases the church and its sacraments on the unwritten word of God, while Luther seeks to justify an invisible church on the concrete text of scripture.

More’s attempt to acknowledge the new weight given by Lutheran reformers to individual religious experience is evident in his understanding of the individual’s interaction with the Scriptures. More argues that the truth of scripture is transmitted orally through sanctioned channels, but that the act of “hearing” God was a decidedly experiential form of knowledge. The holy spirit, “*theos agraptos*; that is, ‘the God of whom nothing is written,’” could be the only guarantor of scriptural truth. Significantly, the Holy Spirit spoke not just to clergy, but to the common man. Even an average uneducated man, for example, the apostle Peter, might receive the truths of scripture without reading or hearing the scriptures read. Peter learned by experience, “not from a word written exteriorly but from the Spirit of the Father pouring Himself out interiorly”; nevertheless, he should be no less certain about the word of God just because “he felt it, did not read it,” or just “because he heard it interiorly, not exteriorly.”¹⁹⁷ But according to More, this individual religious experience only strengthened the power of the Church because it immunized the laity against heresy. Stronger than tablets of stone, wood, or any printed text, the “new law [is written] inwardly by the finger of God on the book of the heart...[and] what he has written on the heart will

¹⁹⁶ More, *CW* 9.5.

¹⁹⁷ More, *CW* 5.1.245.

last...so indelibly that no deceptions of the heretics can erase it, no matter how many scriptural texts they produce from the books of the gospel that are apparently contrary to the true faith.”¹⁹⁸

What we see in the *Responsio* is More questioning how print culture affects textual meaning as well as how the new culture of polemical literature that print culture gives rise to in the 1520s affects religious belief. For More, Luther’s hermeneutics which would seem to undercut true religious meaning only further indicate the uncertainties of the relationship between the printed text and religious belief.

In the peroration of the *Responsio*, reflects on the ethical costs of polemic for its writer. He notes that polemic loses its efficacy when the writer “recount[s] decently what has been written indecently.”¹⁹⁹ More fears that in answering polemic in the only way polemic can be answered—that is, with equally abrasive if not more abusive polemic—the publishing of controversies will only perpetuate religious divisions and make more members of society aware of them.²⁰⁰ The peroration ends with a confession that utterly deflates the religious value of the text when More notes that his “book [is] not to be the kind that demands publication as something that must be read, so I trust it is not the kind which a person ought rightly to condemn who deigns to read Luther’s trifles.”²⁰¹ If a man already rejects Lutheran doctrine, then he has no need to read this book, the author claims; moreover, these books, the author realizes, are the products and perpetuation of heresy. The author, far from wanting his

¹⁹⁸ More, *CW* 5.1.101-103.

¹⁹⁹ More, *CW* 5.1.685. R. R. McCutcheon notes the difficult position of a Christian apologist: “To enter into an exchange with heresy is to concede it some standing and to imply that matters of faith can be arrived at by reason” (77).

²⁰⁰ Headley, Introduction, *CW* 5.2.685.

²⁰¹ Headley, Introduction, *CW* 5.2.693.

work to be a best seller as Carcellius does, would rather all polemical works be burned than that they be necessary.²⁰² The mode of religious polemic, then, by its very nature, has no absolute moral or religious value; it is entirely dependent upon its very problematic context for its ethical value. More's doubt about the polemical mode as an effective purveyor of moral value is underscored by the fact that this kind of text is highly circumstantial and unstable, and that any good it can create exists only in response to human error.

III. Normative Fiction and the Criterion

More's discussions of scripture and Lutheran hermeneutics in the tenth chapter of the *Responsio* are instructive because they show him defining his commitment to a church that promotes orthodoxy and social harmony at the cost of certainty. Though he censures the utopian nature of the Lutheran church, More himself sought to reinforce the fictions necessary to hold society together with as little damage as possible to the ideal of religious truth. For this reason, it is important that although More begins the decade of the 1520s by using fiction in a limited capacity to examine the moral stakes of the polemical mode in print, by the end of the decade he will forgo traditional polemic for the more skeptical form of the fictional dialogue. But it is precisely within this less dogmatic form that More searches for certainty. In the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, More uses fiction to justify the indemonstrable but necessary assumptions that religious and political unities rest upon.

²⁰² This idea is echoed in William Roper, *Life of Sir Thomas More* (1553) reprinted in *Two Early Tudor Lives*, ed. Richard Sylvester and Davis Harding (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 223. Tom Betteridge examines the "productive relation between words, acts and beliefs in mid-Tudor writing" (52). According to Betteridge, "mid-Tudor treason laws can be seen as attempts to control and regulate the language of politics through the erection of boundaries that mapped out acceptable political speech by constructing specific words and phrases as legally unspeakable within the body politic" (53). See "'As a Shadow to a Body': Heresy, Treason and the Law in the Sixteenth Century" in *Anatomy of Tudor Literature* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001) 52-62.

Central to the stabilizing power of these fictions is something More terms “credence.” Though it is difficult to separate truth from falsehood, credence emerges as a criterion to help a man determine what to believe. Credence is a negotiation between the individual conscience and all external sources of knowledge—political and religious institutions, history and tradition, texts, and heretics—but social and religious harmony, not truth, is its final aim.²⁰³ It can be defined quantitatively or qualitatively, that is, it can be manifested either as a faith in consensus or as a faith in an individual based on the evidence of his virtuous character. Either way, for More the essential characteristic of credence is that it follows a logic of probability. Moreover, More contrasts credence and the probability it is based upon with a similar but destabilizing rationale for religious reform: possibility. Unlike possibility, which recommends a stay in judgment and which will not resolve doubt, probability can be a benchmark for a legitimate or normative value judgment.

Many scholars have argued that probabilism arrived in human consciousness only after the work of Pascal. Ian Hacking in particular has argued that societies that lack sophisticated mathematics and that value piety are not environments in which probabilism can exist.²⁰⁴ But if we look at the two forms of probability Hacking describes, we can see that something that at the very least approaches probability is central in the discussions of law, justice, faith, and ethics in the early sixteenth century. Hacking distinguishes between a

²⁰³ Roger Deakins has discussed the influence of Agricolan dialectic on the Tudor dialogue, that is, “the art of arguing about probable propositions employing probable (rather than certain) arguments with enough skill to instill belief (*fides*) in the reader.” Though Deakins cites the *Utopia* as one of the five of the “two hundred and thirty-odd Tudor dialogues extant” that qualifies as a “genre dialogue,” clearly More’s *Dialogue* belongs to the larger group of “anti-genre” dialogues. See “The Tudor Prose Dialogue: Genre and Anti-Genre,” *SEL* 20 (1980): 6, 16, 18-23.

²⁰⁴ Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975) 8. But see Ilkka Kantola, *Probability and Moral Uncertainty in Late Medieval and Early Modern Times* (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola Society, 1994).

probability that is based on degrees of belief in the integrity of a given piece of evidence and a probability that is defined by the production of stable relative frequencies.²⁰⁵ Though More's ideas about consensus are not aleatory in the least, clearly there are hints of both of these definitions in his understanding of quantitative and qualitative consensus.²⁰⁶ In the *Dialogue* there are two important test cases that More uses in developing his sense of the evidence necessary to establish credence: the belief in miracles, or more to the point, a faith in those who claim to have seen miracles, and witness testimony in heresy trials. Both of these cases reveal More's attempts to answer the problem of the uncontrollable uncertainty that occurs when men use subjective experience as a criterion for faith.

The nature of probability and credence are investigated in the fictional exchange between two oppositional characters, a narrator who represents orthodoxy and a messenger who represents an "incipient heretic." Through the characters of his *Dialogue*—actual and implied—More dramatizes the strain that print culture and Lutheran heresy placed upon social relationships. The increasing subjectivity and interiority of religious identity made credence difficult to determine with any precision. The subject of credence opens the *Dialogue*, and we soon discover that it is the very cause of the *Dialogue*—both in the sense that it is the impetus for the conversation that takes place as well as the record of that conversation. The narrator suspects that the messenger has Lutheran sympathies from the very beginning; however, in an attempt to put the narrator at ease regarding his religious leanings, the messenger arrives with a "letter of credence" written by a third party we never

²⁰⁵ Hacking 1.

²⁰⁶ Edmund F. Byrne makes a similar argument for Thomas Aquinas. See *Probability and Opinion: A Study in the Medieval Presuppositions of Post-medieval Theories of Probability* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968) 296-302. Gerolamo Cardano's *Liber de ludo aleae* attempts to deal with both logical and mathematical probability as well. See *The Book of Games on Chance*, transl. Sydney Henry Gould. Rpt from *Cardano: The Gambling Scholar* by Oystein Ore (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winson, 1961).

see that is meant to validate his religious character. But not so easily put off from his suspicions, the narrator begins the dialogic process of locating and exposing the threat of heresy that he suspects. The dialogue, then, illustrates the degree to which the increasing interiority of religion and faith combined with a new readership of an English scripture placed a significant strain on social bonds, making the maintenance of religious authority particularly important. Once again, More's fictional frame calls our attention to the complex and dynamic relationship between oral, manuscript, and print culture.

However, the stability of religious authority is especially problematic for the narrator because unlike Luther, who defined the true church as an entity purified of all evil, the narrator contends that the church is a mixture of good and evil. Because of this mixture, the church must be held together by a normative religious authority that will negotiate and control these differences. According to the narrator, truth and falsity often reside closely together, making it difficult for the individual to separate them and encouraging the splintering of religious belief. "Never was there a heretic / that said all false," affirms the narrator, who reads the subtle changes that Tyndale makes in his translation of the Bible as an example of the ease with which heresy can be spread without the reader's knowledge.²⁰⁷ This problematic mixture makes finding standards for credence all the more difficult—and all the more important.

While the narrator insists that religious truth must be determined on the basis of consensus, the messenger is a great believer in the value of the senses. The first of the four books of the *Dialogue* is devoted to a debate between the messenger and the narrator over the veracity of miracles. The discussion centers on the question of qualitative probability—

²⁰⁷ Thomas More, *The Dialogue Concerning Heresy* in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, ed. Richard C. Marius, vol. 6, 2 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981) 30.

whether or not men who are known to be honest should be believed when what they report seems entirely against reason and nature. According to the narrator, far from being contrary to reason, a “styffe” stance against miracles is likely to occasion “unreasonableness.”²⁰⁸ If an individual is credible, so the argument of the narrator goes, then he should be believed even if what he says seems impossible because it is probable that a person who is an honest and virtuous man will not lie about what he claims to have seen or what he claims to know. Probability is a more reliable criterion when it is grounded in the evidence of virtue rather than the senses.

According to the narrator, reason and judgment based on experience and the senses are often deceptive and lead to error. To illustrate this point, the narrator gives the example of the “man of Inde” who, never having left his own country and so never having seen any skin color other than black, assumes that white skin is contrary to the nature of man. In a case such as this, logical conclusions based on sense experience do not lead to an approximation of truth.²⁰⁹ The messenger agrees with the narrator’s conclusion, but argues that the missing ingredient is the education that would inform the man of Inde that skin color is determined by climate. The narrator unfavorably compares the man of Inde to the messenger, who assumes by a kind of formal syllogism that all men are fools and so only knowledge confirmed by one’s own senses is trustworthy. Significantly, the “man of Inde” is likely a reference to St.

²⁰⁸ More, *CW* 6.1.63.

²⁰⁹ This argument which is exemplified by the ignorance of the man of Inde is particularly interesting in light of ideas about heresy and the new world. Raphael Hythloday brings religion to the Utopians, but hints that this introduction may ultimately weaken their society. Writing eight years later in 1537, Francisco de Vitoria argued that there was no reason why Indians should be expected to accept Christianity. Indeed, doing so would have represented a weakness on their part. Vitoria—a figure that historians of probability who argue that probability is a late seventeenth-century phenomenon seldom know how to explain—wrote that if “barbarians” were introduced to both Christians and Saracens, “they would not be able or obliged to guess which of these two was the truer religion without some more visible proof of probability on one side or the other.” See *De indis in Francisco de Vitoria: Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrence (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 271.

Thomas, the doubting apostle.²¹⁰ Moreover, the narrator compares the messenger to the doubting Thomas who wants “goddess blessynge to byleue that I se not.”²¹¹

The narrator then attempts to define faith skeptically in response to the messenger’s empiricism, and he notes that many kinds of knowledge—not just spiritual knowledge—require the assistance of faith. Many social bonds depend upon a faith in indemonstrable premises.²¹² For example, no firsthand experiential knowledge exists that identifies beyond doubt one’s relatives. Following the messenger’s standards for confirming truth, no man can ever truly know who his parents are, since he was not cognitively present at his conception or delivery, nor can a man ever really know who his son is since only his wife (presumably) knows for certain the father of the child. So too, certain everyday phenomena like weather would “semeth...impossible” without an affirmed belief in the science of astronomy.²¹³ But the messenger privileges the truths of his own experience over the word of a thousand or more men. The narrator warns him that it is just as dangerous “in beyng over harde of byleve / of thyngys that by reason and nature seme and apere impossible / where thye be

²¹⁰ Germain Marc’hadour notes that More always referred to doubting Thomas as ‘Saint Thomas of Inde’ because of his missionary work there (“A Name for All Seasons” in *Essential Articles for the Study of Thomas More*, ed. R.S. Sylvester and G.P. Marc’hadour [Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1977] 560). Marc’hadour also notes a pun at work. The word “Morian” means “belonging to Thomas More” but in the sixteenth century the term would have been “synonymous with Blackamore, Blackmoor, or man of Inde” (548).

²¹¹ More, *CW* 6.1.84, and cf. the note in 6.2.625.

²¹² In his discussion of More and Euclidean geometry, Ralph Keen has noted the Platonic element of Euclid’s theories, which accept “axioms” as “self-evident” and “without proof”: “The crucial fact is that [axioms] are unprovable, but still necessary for certain knowledge. In maintaining the unprovability of his axioms, Euclid also rejected sensible knowledge as the basis of proof” (“Thomas More and Geometry” *Moreana* 86 [1985]: 154).

²¹³ More, *CW* 6.1.66. It should be noted, however, that this is a problematic argument for the messenger to make, given his earlier tirade against learning.

reportyd by credible wytnes / havyng no cause to lye” as to be “to light of credence.”²¹⁴ In other words, the senses cannot be trusted as a source of doubt or belief.

So too, the senses are not an adequate measure of miracles. According to the narrator, an event or phenomenon is often termed miraculous not because it is truly something against nature, or as the narrator defines it, those things which God does that “doth nothing against nature / but some specyall benefyte above nature,” but because, like the man of Inde, the limitations of man’s senses in conjunction with the imagination invent miracles out of the unfamiliar.²¹⁵ “They acquayntaunce and dayly beholdynge takyth away the wondering” as, for example, a man born blind that regains his sight might consider the sun, moon, and stars to be miraculous, when a sighted man takes for granted that they are natural phenomena.²¹⁶ There is very little reason “why we sholde of reason more mervayle of the revyvyng of a dede man / than of the bredynge / bryngynge forth and growynge of a chylde into the state of man.”²¹⁷ Even the latest inventions and discoveries—the world as a sphere, the melding of iron, the separating of silver, for example—represent a kind of knowledge for which the cause remains unknown. The narrator’s argument is not meant to undercut faith in true miracles or to suggest that miracles do not exist, but rather to show that the senses are not an adequate guide to religious knowledge. Since categories like the miraculous become subjective and arbitrary when measured by sensory experience, they cease to become a

²¹⁴ More, *CW* 6.1.70.

²¹⁵ More, *CW* 6.1.75.

²¹⁶ This argument would seem to be a paraphrase of the ninth mode of skepticism as listed in Sextus Empiricus’s *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, in which the suspension of judgement is based on the “constancy or rarity of occurrence.” Sextus notes according to the Skeptics, “the sun is, of course, much more amazing than a comet; yet because we see the sun constantly but the comet rarely we are so amazed by the comet that we even regard it as a divine portent, while the sun causes no amazement at all” (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I.141). See also Diogenes Laertius, “Life of Pyrrho,” IX.87.

²¹⁷ More, *CW* 6.1.80.

source of true religious knowledge. In order to remain a valid form of religious knowledge, the truly miraculous must be based on a more certain form of evidence.

The crucial point of the narrator's questioning of the messenger's unwavering reliance on the senses is that probability must be separated from—and trusted above—possibility. Faith may use probability to lead to certainty, but reasoning based on sensory evidence produces only a number of equal possibilities that leads to the irresolvable doubt that jeopardizes stable religious knowledge and normative moral value. The messenger will be convinced by neither qualitative nor quantitative probability, that is, by neither the virtue of an authority nor by consensus. Even “if they were... .x thousande / they were worn out of credence with me,” says the messenger, “whan they sholde tell me that they sawe the thyng that my selfe knoweth by nature and reason vnpossible.”²¹⁸ Because the messenger makes judgments about truth and falsehood based on reason and possibility, all men are equally believable or unbelievable. The messenger lacks a standard of judgment unless he is judging by ocular proof. “Thus moche haue I proued,” claims the narrator at the end of the chapter, “that yf ye byleue no man in suche thyngys as maye not be / than must it follow that ye ought to byleue no man in many thyngys that may be / for all is one to you... And of trouthe ye can not tell whyther they may be or may not be / excepte they be two suche thyngys as imply contradiccion / as one selfe thyng in one selfe parte to be both white and blacke at ones.”²¹⁹

According to More's critics, this non-experiential view of faith jeopardized its sincerity and led to skepticism. In his response to More's *Dialogue*, William Tyndale vehemently contests the value that the narrator—and by extension, More—placed in probability based on individual virtue or consensus. In his *Answer to Sir Thomas More's*

²¹⁸ More, *CW* 6.1.68.

²¹⁹ More, *CW* 6.1.70.

Dialogue Concerning Heresies (1531), Tyndale attacks More for his belief in either a quantitative or a qualitative probability. According to him, More's faith is an inferior faith he terms "historical faith," which depends upon "the truth and honesty of the teller, or of the common fame and consent of many." In Tyndale's view, this kind of faith may only lead to doubt precisely because it is difficult to maintain non-experiential belief in the midst of conflicting opinions. "If one told me that the Turk had won a city, and I believed it, moved with the honesty of the man," a man's faith would be jeopardized "if there come another [man] that seemeth more honest, or that hath better persuasions that it is not so, I think immediately that [the first man] lied, and lose my faith again." This kind of secondhand faith is always open to the possibility of correction, which prevents constant belief. "A feeling faith," on the other hand, "is as if a man were there present when [the city] was won, and there were wounded, and there lost all that he had, and were taken prisoner there also: that man should so believe, that all the world could not turn him from his faith." Only experiential faith—a faith which, Tyndale suggests, entails suffering—will keep a man constant. The first kind of faith is "but an opinion" which is easily disproved "if a more glorious reason be made."²²⁰

The practical stakes of the narrator's discussion of miracles culminates in book three of the *Dialogue*, where his attention turns to an examination of the evidence for faith in heresy trials. The dynamics of heresy trials made painfully obvious the problems of the Lutheran interiorization of belief. John Bellamy has argued that the "proliferation of Tudor treason laws" was the "by-product" of the challenge of Rome to the king's supremacy.²²¹ By

²²⁰ William Tyndale, *Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue...* ed. Henry Walter, the Parker Society, vol. 44 (Cambridge: University Press, 1841) 50-51.

²²¹ *The Tudor Law of Treason* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1979) 12.

1534, heresy officially became a crime of treason. In addition to giving jurisdiction to lay authorities and bishops in enquiries into heresy, the Henrican government “introduce[d] provision for witnesses into legislation promoting religious obedience,” and the testimony of prosecution witnesses “dominated the Tudor treason trials and secured so many of the convictions.”²²² Though the outcome of a trial depended upon local self-informing jurors, by the Middle Ages the standards for jurors and evidence had changed and power had shifted from the jury to the judge.²²³ Up until the fifteenth century, a witness’s testimony was not tested in front of the jurors.²²⁴ By the Tudor period “trial juries were thought to be fact finders and assessors of the credibility of those who testified.”²²⁵ By 1532, two to three witnesses were required in heresy trials, and the defendant was permitted to use his own witnesses as long as they were “of as good honestie and credence” as those of the prosecution.²²⁶

But the standards for accusation were not as reliable as those of evidence. Many trials were based on nothing but “seditious words uttered and overheard in public places” or “information” that allowed the accuser to make a charge and then “withdraw into obscurity without any legal responsibilities”²²⁷ Many accusations of treason between 1532-1540 were

²²² John Bellamy, *Criminal Law and Society in Late Medieval and Tudor England* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1984) 38; *Tudor Law*, 154; 151. For a discussion of the significance of these changes, see G.R. Elton, *Policy and Police: The Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972) 288-292, 293 ff.

²²³ Thomas Andrew Green, *Verdict According to Conscience: Perspectives on the English Criminal Jury Trials 1200-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) 105-106.

²²⁴ Green 110.

²²⁵ Green 130. On changes in the jury and evidence, see also Barbara J. Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) 173-176.

²²⁶ Fox, *History and Providence*, 179; Bellamy, *Criminal Law*, 38; *Tudor Law*, 154.

²²⁷ Bellamy, *Tudor Law* 84; *Criminal Law* 90.

“without proper foundation often being prompted by malice.”²²⁸ In other words, by the early sixteenth century, in order to make a correct conviction, the jury had to assess the credibility of the witnesses, the accusation, and even the confession or abjuration of the defendant.²²⁹

Indeed, the very basis of positive law was probability. In his popular *Dialogue between a Doctor and a Student*, Christopher St. Germain defined the many intellectual faculties that contribute to common law; crucially, St. Germain expressed concern about the effects of heresy on these natural faculties. In particular, he cites “sinderesis,” the “natural power of the soul” which is the “law of reason,” that allows man to judge good and evil without error. Despite its infallibility as a faculty, it has been perverted in heretics “by the darkness of ignorance” which makes them believe that “when they die for the wickedness of their error, [they] believe they die for the very truth of their faith.”²³⁰ The corrective to heresy is found in positive law. However, the “law of man” or positive law is “a thing which is necessary, and probably follow[s]...the law of reason and...the law of God.” St. Germain notes that positive law “is called probable, in that it appeareth to many, and especially to wise men to be true” since the law of reason and the law of God is “very hard” to determine.²³¹

²²⁸ Bellamy, *Tudor Law* 84.

²²⁹ In the thirteenth century, the fourth Lateran Council formed new religious rules in an attempt to make heretics more apparent. The confession was viewed as a kind of “miniature...court of law” which highlighted the relationship among conscience, the church, and law. With judges and juries required to judge according to conscience, “evaluation of evidence was thus a moral matter, while conscience had a cognitive role” (James Franklin, *The Science of Conjecture: Evidence and Probability before Pascal* [Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001] 66).

²³⁰ St. Germain 39.

²³¹ St. Germain 9-10.

The *Dialogue* was published in 1529, in the midst of a significant increase in heresy trials as well as shifting standards for evidence.²³² A large part of these changes has to do with legislation about treason that addressed slander and libel.²³³ The possession of banned books—not one’s beliefs per se—became a pivotal piece of evidence in the heresy trials. Of five Henrican heresy statutes, only the “act concerning those who printed or sold prohibited books...relied on accusation by private persons, and trial by ‘sufficient’ witness”; all other acts simply used witnesses for accusation.²³⁴

In book three, More considers the credibility of witnesses, oaths, and abjurations in heresy trials as concrete justifications for the moral value of probability. The majority of book three is devoted to discussing heresy trials—in particular, the famous trial of Thomas Bilney and Richard Hunne. The use of credence in determining the integrity of witnesses was crucial in Thomas Bilney’s trial, which ended, to the narrator’s palpable disgust, in Bilney abjuring heresy to save his life.²³⁵ The most vexing part of Bilney’s abjuration was its exclusion of any admission of guilt—Bilney never had to confess that he ever held heretical views himself. The messenger absurdly suggests that perhaps Bilney forgot that he ever held these views, but the narrator notes that many credible men had come forward who claimed to have heard some of Bilney’s heretical sermons. The messenger attempts to call their testimony in doubt “for lacke of [their] indyfferency peradventure as they stode

²³² As Dale Billingsley notes, “for heresy to be exposed, both the intention of the heretic and the interpretation of his utterance must be made clear, and the very limitations of human knowing make certainty about either factor impossible” (“The Messenger and the Reader in Thomas More’s *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, *SEL* 24 [1984]: 11). This supports Betteridge’s claim that “heresy examinations...were struggles over language with the interrogators attempting to force the accused into their discourse” (“Heresy, Treason, and the Law” 54).

²³³ Slander of the king was a “novel treason without close medieval precedent” (Bellamy, *Tudor Law*, 27).

²³⁴ See Bellamy, *Tudor Law* 154; *Criminal Law* 38, 47.

²³⁵ Shapiro notes a “turning point” in 1563 when legislation made perjury a crime, but clearly lying is at issue in the *Dialogue* (176).

unsworne.”²³⁶ Indeed, the messenger is not persuaded of Bilney’s guilt by the number of heretics that have adopted his beliefs, nor of over twenty men who have materialized to testify to Bilney’s heresies. As St. Germain suggests, it would seem that the messenger’s “sinderesis” has been warped by heresy. The narrator says that the messenger’s doubts are “a thyng straunge,” to which the messenger only reaffirms his irresolvable doubts: “Why...sholde this be straunge to you? Me thynketh it sholde be straunge to no man but very playne to euery man / that it myght be so. For I praye you, myght it not so be? Were it not possible that they myght all lye and though they were as many mo?”²³⁷ In the messenger’s case, the kind of literalism and doubt sanctioned by Lutheran heresy gives free reign to the imagination to ignore the logic of probability that rests on faith in consensus or virtue.

More uses this conversation between the narrator and the messenger, this dialectic of probability and possibility, to insist upon a standard of belief in men. The narrator admits the possibility, but as he frequently reminds us of the scholasticism of the messenger’s methodology, so too here he notes that the narrator’s argument “were rather to be graunted at a scole in argument / than at a courte in judgement.”²³⁸ It is at this point, being at his “wyttes ende,” that the narrator seeks to answer the messenger’s possibilities using a “merry tale” of the fictional court case of Wylken and Symken. The fiction is a kind of parable meant to underline the dangers of experience to the normative moral value that upholds social harmony.

The story begins with a strange wager in which Wylken bets Symken that he can prove that a horse has recently traveled a certain road. The two agree to the wager, and they

²³⁶ More, *CW* 6.1.273.

²³⁷ More, *CW* 6.1.273.

²³⁸ More, *CW* 6.1.274.

take four judges with them to determine the winner. In Symken, More gives us not just the image of a mere doubter, but the very picture of a skeptic who revels in man's uncertainty. Because he looks for certainty in the truths of experience, Symken's disbelief is confirmed by his imagination. Both Symken and Wylken note that horse shoes appear on the road until they reach a body of water at which point the horse evidently was taken on a ship and is no longer traceable. Though Wylken believes that this visible evidence is enough to earn him his wager, Symken objects, for the "so-called" horse may be a gelding or a mare, and hence, no horse at all. This first objection, the narrator tells us, is a legal matter because both parties agree that some creature resembling a horse walked the road, though the exact categorization of the animal—whether geldings and mares should be classified as horses or not seems to be open for debate—must be determined by the "checker chamber case" or even, by praemunire, the papal court in Rome.

But Symken's second challenge to Wylken's evidence is not a matter that the courts are able to address. Symken begins a new line of argument that calls into doubt knowledge that is deducted from sensory experience. Though a rational man like Wylken would seem to be perfectly within the bounds of reason in forming the conclusion that a horse has walked on the road based on the fact that he has witnessed the hoof prints with his own eyes, Symken objects to this assumption. "Lo here ye se," says Symken, "men have gone this way / and how can ye than be sure that any horse wente here? For I put case sayth he that these men whiche wente here had horse shone in theyr handes made fast upon longe steles / and always as they wente pricked them downe harde in the ground." As arbitrary as this "wyse invencion" sounds, it is possible because it levels reason and the imagination, probability and possibility. Both are interpreting the same sign, though in different ways, but neither

interpretation can be proven. Therefore, argues Symken, one argument cannot be held to be truer than another.

Even more problematic is the fact that—like the heretical pamphlets plaguing England—all Symken has needed to do to win the wager is to introduce uncertainty; the outcome of the wager favors Symken not because he has proven or disproven anything, but only because he has assigned possibility the same epistemic value as probability. Both the narrator and the messenger scoff at Symken's wit in the end, but the importance of this story is not forgotten, for with Symken, More shows the degree to which the imagination and individual experience and all the possibilities they can conjure, must be kept in check by law based on reason grounded in a probability based on virtue or consensus. He also further illustrates the problem that subjective experience produces for judgment, in this case for the judgment of law. At the same time, More implicitly acquiesces that the laws upon which society is based are in large part probable, not demonstrable. If doubt—that is, the nature of man, is not controlled by law, social harmony is unlikely to survive.

The unwieldy human imagination of a citizen like Symken—or like the messenger, or Luther, for that matter—wreaks havoc on the assumptions upon which custom and law are based. This kind of inventiveness lacks any criterion for judgment. For though it may be the case that all the witnesses against Bilney have lied and that the church cannot tell whether Bilney's abjuration is true or false, giving free reign to these kinds of possibilities to the extent that they prevent legal action and endanger orthodoxy is too high a cost, for "it may be," retorts the narrator, "yf we go this way to worke / that all the men lyed that ever have sayd they came from Rome / and that all the briefs and bulles were fayned that ever were supposed to be brought from thens / for ought that he can tell that never came there hym

self.” Indeed, the narrator mockingly argues that since the messenger has never been to Rome himself he might “as well doubt whether there were any Rome or no.”²³⁹ Symken’s belief in possibility rather than probability creates the infinite regress of questioning that was typical of skepticism and that is symptomatic of what Popkin has labeled the “*crise pyrrhonienne*.”

But if Symken represents the unlicensed questioning of Luther or the messenger, he also represents Bilney, who makes oaths which he knows not to be true. But More uses a bit of intellectual slight of hand to convince the messenger here too. The messenger fears that the supposed witnesses against Bilney are lying themselves because they lack “indifferency.” In the end what the narrator argues is not that the witnesses are indifferent and therefore truthful; instead his argument is contingent upon the faith that if two indifferent men come to a judgment based on the testimony of these witnesses (note that More does nothing to restore any credibility to these witnesses themselves) then probability tells the judges (who are able to make judgments irrespective of witness testimony anyway) that Bilney must be guilty. More overlooks validating the witnesses because their sheer number lends them legitimacy, but again, also because there is no evidence to be found for credence in Tudor heresy trials. More’s answer to the “*crise pyrrhonienne*,” then, is not a legal system based on truth, but an admittedly flawed system that judges and regulates religious belief; it is not a system that prizes truth, but rather one that prizes normativity. More engages in skepticism about the senses not to promote it, but to limit a more dangerous kind of skepticism—the kind that leads to irremediable uncertainty and doubt. In doing so, he relies neither solely on faith nor reason, but upon some third thing that rests uneasily between the two: fiction.

²³⁹ More, *CW* 6.1.278.

IV. Print Culture and the Dangers of “Consensus”

Despite More’s adherence to the authority of consensus and the virtue of the church, to some degree he defies Tyndale’s neat dichotomy between a “historical” and a “feeling” faith. More did, in fact, put a premium on a “feeling faith”—that is, a faith based on personal experience of the unwritten word of God rather than the wrote affirmation of the written word or the seeming certainty of a literal hermeneutics. More’s early polemical work shows a reform-minded man keenly aware of the challenge that Lutheran reforms in combination with a new culture of printed polemic presented to his steadfast affirmation of church orthodoxy. Such a belief at best defied, at worst undermined, the consensus that More’s church so depended upon. In the face of such a category of belief whose uncertainty contested the codification of normative moral and religious value, More looks to probability as the basis of moral value and religious knowledge. The *Responsio* shows More seeking to come to terms with the challenges print culture presented to the use of language as an agent of normative moral value and religious knowledge. The *Dialogue* continues and develops More’s uncertainty about the basis of moral value and religious knowledge as he criticizes reformed religious identity based on individual experience by calling into question the value of the senses for religious belief.

More’s early polemical works reveal how the importation of heretical texts into England in the 1520s, Lutheran hermeneutics, print culture, and the more general interiorization of religious identity challenged him to reexamine the evidence for faith. Throughout the *Dialogue*, determining when credence makes one faithful and when it makes one a fool is at issue in both secular and sacred realms. Part of the problem stemmed from the necessarily indeterminate state of heresy. When the messenger questions the court’s

standards for witnesses, the narrator explains the essential dilemma of heresy. “The chyeft cause why that in heyghnouse crimynall causes / as thefte / murder / treason / & heresy” that the law accepts witnesses that it would not normally accept in trials of lesser offenses is that if the court did not do so “all such crymes shold passe forth vnpunished / and therby shold ye world swarm full of such myscheueous peple for lacke of profe and tryall in the mater.” For heretics do not usually bring with them “a notary / & honest wytnesse...but vse to do yt by stelth as couertly as they can.”²⁴⁰ Indeed, one of the most convincing pieces of evidence was “written evidence of traitorous intent,”²⁴¹ and often it was books, rather than beliefs, that were the most damning pieces of evidence in trials.²⁴²

In the *Dialogue*, More reassesses the nature of belief in light of the rise of heresy in England. He argues that belief rests on probability based on consensus, and consensus, in turn, rests—at least to some degree—upon fiction. Yet clearly, More is also working against the fictions of the printed page—and losing the battle. It should be noted, too, that More’s polemical works of the 1520s represent something of an anomaly in his polemical career. After his *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, More largely retreats from fiction and returns to vehement polemic. This period, then, represents an important testing ground as the relationship between language and belief are recalibrated to accommodate an era of new epistemological challenges for moral authority and ethics.

In one of these later texts, the *Apology*, that More wrote to criticize St. Germain’s denial of the Church’s authority in the law, the issue of credence and of the Tudor

²⁴⁰ More, *CW* 6.1.263.

²⁴¹ Bellamy, *Tudor Law* 86.

²⁴² This was true, the narrator notes, in the cases of Bilney as well as Hunne. See also Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*, which often mentions books found as evidence.

polemicist's dilemma come to the fore. Citing some of his later polemical works, many of More's opponents have criticized him for being too one-sided. His "wurkes were worthy myche more credence," his critics tell him, if he "had wryten more indyfferently." He finds himself in a losing comparison with St. Germain who has written in a "charytable mylde maner."²⁴³ But Germain's charity, according to More, is a dangerous rhetoric that seems to express the values of a consensus rather than the opinion of a single man. In sharp contrast to his own characteristic "quod he" and "quod I," a device he employs in the *Dialogue*, St. Germain's rhetorical handle is "some say." More argues that this rhetorical shift is of the utmost importance, for "Under hys fayre figure of *some say* / he maye ye wote well, & some saye that he so doth, devyse to brynge in all the myschyefe that any man can saye. And yet over thys without hys masker of *Some say* / he saith open faced some of the wurste hym selfe, and that in some thynges that are as some trewe men saye not trewe."²⁴⁴ In other words, print makes it possible to fabricate consensus when no consensus exists, and it threatens to invalidate More's much-valued criterion of judgment, probability. It is this ability to fabricate authority, enabled by print culture, and not simply the questioning of the Renaissance mind, that facilitates the intellectual crisis—the "crise pyrrhonienne"—of the Reformation in England. And it is this crisis of the textualization of belief that will be a great source of stability and instability for the Church of England as it sought to mediate between its orthodox and reformed identities for many years to come.

²⁴³ More, *CW* 9.5.

²⁴⁴ More, *CW* 9.56.

CHAPTER 4

DENYING THE CONTRARY: CUSTOM AND CONFORMITY IN THE 1590s

I. Hooker and Elizabethan Religious Polemic

As we have seen in the work of Thomas More, from its inception, the Church of England was riddled with problems of uncertainty surrounding notions of reform that had as much to do with doctrine and discipline as they did to do with discourse. Central to the establishment of the Elizabethan church was the multivalent question of edification, that is, a notion of reform related both to church polity and individual moral progress.²⁴⁵ On the macroscopic level, edification refers to the overall movement towards reform, which began in earnest under Edward VI and, in the view of many, came to a grinding halt with the Elizabethan Settlement. Once propelled with momentum towards reform, as the Church of England came closer to defining itself, the effort to reform shifted into the work to maintain and enforce its increasingly nationalist, religious identity. But the question of edification also occurred on a microscopic level as the value of moral philosophy and the possibility of individual reform was called into question by influential Calvinist notions of grace and predestination.

²⁴⁵ Diarmaid MacCulloch notes the contentiousness of the notion of “edification” in the late sixteenth century. For Puritans, edification referred to the building and strengthening of the church viz a viz the “‘lively stones’ of the elect” rather than the visible church. The conformist, on the other hand, typically associated the metaphor with the aids offered to the individual believer by the church. For this debate, see Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Later Reformation in England, 1547-1603* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 71-73. See also William P. Haugaard, *Elizabeth and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) 233ff.

Paul Cefalu has studied the “divergent ways that Conformists and Puritans attempt to construct a moral theology that remains consistent with this widespread position against moral perfectionism” in the early modern period, as reformed Protestant ideas concerning sanctification vastly complicated—indeed, made nearly impossible—the idea that a “compensatory moral system should be incorporated into the order of salvation” at all.²⁴⁶ In England, the question of edification was rendered even more complicated by differences in reformed and orthodox interpretations of the Church’s role in individual edification. The uncertainties about edification on both the institutional and individual level are mirrored in the more general confusion in England over notions of orthodoxy and conformity, on the one hand, and dissent and contrariety, on the other. Modern scholarship has shown that notions of orthodoxy were not well defined in England by the end of the sixteenth century. In particular, Debora Shuger has criticized early modern scholars’ nearly habitual “division of beliefs into the orthodox and subversive,” a dichotomy rendered false in her view by the way that “the so-called subversive ideas keep resurfacing, however contained, within the confines of orthodoxy” in early modern literature.²⁴⁷ Reading the scholarship on both sides of this dichotomy—we will call the sides orthodox or conformist and puritan or reformer, acknowledging that these are all contentious terms without treading into the debate over terminology ourselves—one cannot help but be impressed by how complex and how symbiotic these two sides really are. Patrick Collinson and Peter Lake have famously feuded over the extent to which Puritanism “had [any] substantial existence beyond what was attributed to it by those enemies who first invented it as an abusive term,” Collinson insisting

²⁴⁶ Paul Cefalu, *Moral Identity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 80.

²⁴⁷ Debora Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics, and the Dominant Culture* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990) 1.

that the “character of a puritan, both in the literary-generic sense and more generally, originated as an attributed character, charged with intensely polemical resonances,” while Lake has criticized scholars for inventing the myth of a codified Anglicanism well before its time.”²⁴⁸ Collinson himself has argued that conformist writers like Bancroft and Hooker tell a story of “progressive radicalization” and to him it seems likely that religion was not as “polarized [as they] represented it.”²⁴⁹

Susan Brigden is illuminating on the way in which these two sides used defensive strategies that at times inadvertently worked to define each other. For example, Archbishop Whitgift seemingly solidified the Puritan or reformist objection to the church with his insistence on subscription of the clergy to an article to which “no puritan, no ‘precisian’ could, in conscience, consent” in 1583; at the same time the reformist offensive launched via polemical attacks only served to create a highly paradoxical defensive strategy on the part of some of the most prominent members of the church.²⁵⁰ At least for a brief moment before the rise of a more definitive sectarianism in the seventeenth century, at the end of the sixteenth century the reformist puritan cause enjoyed a perhaps blissful—if politically ineffective—moment of relative solidarity while the Church of England largely suffered from an adolescent identity crisis.

²⁴⁸ Patrick Collinson, “Ecclesiastical Vitriol: Religious Satire in the 1590s and the Invention of Puritanism,” *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade*, ed. John Guy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 155; Peter Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans? Presbyterian and English Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988) 145ff.

²⁴⁹ Patrick Collinson, “Hooker and the Elizabethan Establishment,” *Richard Hooker and the Construction of Christian Community*, ed. Arthur Stephen McGrade (Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1997) 152, 159.

²⁵⁰ Susan Brigden, *New Worlds, Lost Worlds: The Rule of the Tudors, 1485-1603* (New York: Viking, 2000) 326-327. On attitudes towards subscription and role of subscription in stifling reform, see also Kenneth Fincham, “Clerical Conformity from Whitgift to Laud” and Peter Lake, “Moving the Goal Posts? Modified Subscription and the Construction of Conformity in the Early Stuart Church” both in *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church, c. 1560-1660*, ed. Peter Lake and Michael Questier (Rochester: Boydell Press, 2000) 125-158 and 179-210, respectively.

The question of edification is particularly relevant to an understanding of the culture of polemical discourse that flourished in the 1580s and 1590s. One of the central questions faced by writers of this discourse was whether it was meant to invite reform or to reinforce a status quo, and whether or not the latter could be accomplished without the former. In other words, late sixteenth-century polemical literature is frequently a mode of discourse caught between the impulse to edify and to codify. In his recent bid to “rehabilitate the category of polemic,” Jesse Lander has argued that we should recognize the “productivity, if not the prettiness, of polemic,” for in his view “polemic produces arguments and identities: early modern polemic is not only polarizing but also pluralizing.”²⁵¹ Lander encourages us to view polemical literature not just as an argumentative, emotionally-charged genre, but as a genre endowed with a kind of rationalism. The long-standing “negative assessment of polemic” which sees the genre as “the opposite of dialogue and negotiation” is deceptively one-sided and can only lead to the conclusion that polemic is concerned solely with “retrenchment, the hardening of partisan identities and ideas, [and] a sort of discursive calcification.” Lander’s argument depends upon his sense that that the “bipolar model of addresser and addressee” creates a false sense of dichotomy, and we should “recognize[e] instead that the audience for polemic is variegated and split”; hence, “the polemicist’s aim is not to convert the object of attack but to convince a wider audience that the case is so.”²⁵²

Whether or not Lander’s claim can be made always and everywhere is debatable, but what is so important about Lander’s rationalist view of polemic is that it brings into sharper focus a very real thread of confusion in the discursive wars of religion at the end of

²⁵¹ Jesse M. Lander, *Inventing Polemic: Religion, Print, and Literary Culture in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 34.

²⁵² Lander 11-12.

Elizabeth's reign caused in part by the variety of ethical discourses available to the public. It is a difficulty occasioned as well by the problematic rhetorical position of the Church of England, poised as it was—or as it claimed it was—as a Church in the famous “middle way.” Scholars have tended to stress this as an irenic or faux irenic stance, but it is also a position riddled with theological, ethical, and philosophical problems, not the least of which is making an argument for changes in theological and moral value in the face of the increasing sense of the relativity of custom.

Lander's two models of polemic imply one model whose end is the zealous enforcement of dogma and another whose end is rational and didactic. I would argue that in the late sixteenth century generally, and in the work of Richard Hooker specifically, both of these models are being used and even tested against each other. The uncertain relationship between dogma and didacticism is evident in the reception of Hooker's work, both by his contemporaries and by modern scholars. It is perhaps telling that the man who has been considered by many to be the founder and poster child for a well-defined “Anglicanism” died in 1600 while composing an answer to the writer of *A Christian Letter of certaine English Protestants, unfayned favourers of the present state of religion, authorized and professed in England* (1599), who had condemned the “Speculative Doctrine” contained in the *Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie* as well as what he perceived to be Hooker's implicit critique of the policies of Elizabeth towards the Church of Rome.²⁵³ In short, even the most conformist of conformists could be read as a nonconformist while clearly the opposite cannot be said of the nonconformists who, though not exactly organized—certainly not as organized as they would

²⁵³ On the tendency of the author/s of *A Christian Letter* to focus nearly myopically on the places that Hooker deviates from the Thirty-Nine Articles, see the Introduction to the Folger Library Edition of *The Works of Richard Hooker*, ed. John E. Booty, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) xiv.

become by 1640—did have a certain kind of solidarity that the Church of England was struggling to find.²⁵⁴

The evolution of scholarly literature on Hooker has moved him away from his unquestioned reputation as an orthodox defender of the Elizabethan Church and as a codifier of the *via media* to consider the often complex synthesis of orthodox and reformed theology found in his work. Some scholars have analyzed this hybridity in terms of a particular theological idea, for example justification, while others have pointed out the inconsistencies that can be found in Hooker's views when the entire body of his work is read against itself.²⁵⁵ What I find more compelling than the debate among modern scholarship about Hooker's religious leanings is the way in which his contemporary opponents like the writer of *A Christian Letter* often read his doctrine as dangerous to both the peace of England and the unity of the English Church.²⁵⁶

For Hooker, the question of edification is imbedded in his understanding of reform. One of the primary ways that Hooker assesses the validity of reform is to consider its original inception, how and why it was passed on to its followers, and the changes accrued along the

²⁵⁴ It could be argued that the church did find its identity just a few years after Hooker died at the Hampton Court Conference of 1604. According to MacCulloch, this was the moment when “avant-garde conformists for the first time boldly put forth their point of view in a public context, rather than in the protected atmosphere of university lecture halls” (*The Reformation: A History* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2004) 497. This was also the moment when James I emerged as a successful mediator of reformation politics, and a relatively peaceful Jacobean church rose from the ashes of the more uncertain Elizabethan Settlement (Mark Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed* (New York: Penguin, 1996) 73.

²⁵⁵ For a study of Hooker's theory of justification and how it intersects with reformed theology, see Corneliu C. Simut, *Richard Hooker and his Early Doctrine of Justification*. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005). For a study of how Hooker's leanings evolve over time, see Nigel Voak, *Richard Hooker and Reformed Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). Both authors include an introduction with an overview of the evolution of scholarship on Hooker.

²⁵⁶ Following the impulse of “Skinnerian contextualism,” Peter Lake has noted the rich “interpretive grid” that can be gained by taking into account the contemporary reception of the *Lawes*. See Peter Lake, “Business as Usual? The Immediate Reception of Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 52.3 (2001): 456-457.

way. In the *Lawes*, Hooker seems less concerned with the codification of the *via media* than with the refutation of the *via extrema* represented for him particularly by the reform strategies of Thomas Cartwright. In response to the Church of England's policy of conformity, Cartwright proposed a reform strategy based on contrariety. Contrariety was so problematic for Hooker precisely because it dismissed the importance of edification both to the stability of the English Church and the moral strength of the individual believer.

In the work of Hooker, conformity emerges as a strategy of reform that calls into account not just the Church of England, but also the Church's proximity to the dual influences of Rome and Geneva. For Hooker conformity is not consonant with the stasis represented by the Elizabethan Settlement, but is rather a dynamic process of reform that relies upon the role of doubt in the development of a rational religion. In this chapter I will examine moral value in the work of Hooker, his tendency to deny contrariety as a valid strategy for reform, and the centrality of that denial to his understanding of the relationship between certainty and moral law. In positing conformity as a more rational alternative to contrariety, Hooker investigates the usefulness of doubt, and a concept in his view closely related to it, *adiaphora*. To many of his opponents, Hooker's approach to doctrine and conformity actually led to the breakdown of religious unity in England. I will argue that some of these objections are based on destabilizing aspects of Hooker's method to determine moral value, namely the reliance of reason on the senses, the observation of custom, and the taxonomy of certainty. While these elements avert contrariety, they substitute human notions of relative certainty and imperfect knowledge for a divinely appointed church. At the same time, they act as a Calvinist critique and affirm the value of edification.

II. “False Prophets” and the Skepticism of the Elizabethan Church

It is fair to say that a concern about the dangers of false knowledge permeates and in some cases dominates much of the literature of the 1580s and 1590s. In many ways, all avenues of belief were blocked by doubt, or at least the anticipation of doubt.²⁵⁷ As conformist ministers struggled to defend the church against the entertaining pamphlets written by Martin Marprelate, they sought to give their congregation the means by which to distinguish between religious truth and the “vain babblings” of “false prophets.” Martin Marprelate may have been the mascot for false prophecy, but he was just the starkest manifestation of a much more subtle and pervasive anxiety about the nature of reform. Even a decade prior to the Church’s conflict with Marprelate, Whitgift and the much less rhetorically savvy Thomas Cartwright debated reforms in the Admonition Controversy. As Whitgift recited the oft-quoted mantra of the conformists, “Errare possum, haereticus esse nolo,” he cautioned his audience against failing to distinguish between the church and the reformer, between true theology and morality. While the church may err, error should not be identified with heresy, and while reformers may offer sound moral advice, such advice should not be mistaken for church doctrine. Whitgift defended his distinctions, arguing that “I do [criticize]” the reformers “[not] because I would have men abstain from reproof vice, and exhorting to godliness, but to let it be understood that these be no certain proofs of the verity of the doctrine, being commonly used in most vehement sort of the heretics and

²⁵⁷ Perhaps the greatest theological manifestation of this doubt is Williams Perkin’s doctrine of “temporary faith” found in his 1589 treatise *A Treatise tending unto a declaration whether a man be in the estate of damnation or in the estate of grace*. For a discussion of this “embarrassment” of English Calvinism, see R.T. Kendall’s classic study, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1549* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) esp. 67-78.

sectaries, to allure the people unto them, and to win credit unto their opinions.”²⁵⁸ If allowed to heretics, moral authority could act as a lure to tempt unsuspecting reform-minded members of the laity into the snares of false doctrine.

From one perspective, the position of Whitgift and the Elizabethan church regarding reform was hardly clear cut. In their defense of the Church against the purveyors of false knowledge, conformist-minded ministers like Whitgift took a dual tactic. In addition to legislating measures to ensure conformity, essentially attempting to make their constituents hard-line dogmatists, the church also employed a defensive rhetoric that was largely a rhetoric of skepticism in the sense that it encouraged people to be skeptical about what they heard. Whitgift admitted the need to “grow in faith and knowledge, and always be growing and going forward,” yet for him, this kind of reform did not make it necessary “that we must daily invent new opinions, or broach new doctrines, and alter in judgement.” On the contrary, Whitgift argued that “we must grow in strength of faith, we must increase in practice and love of virtue, we must study to increase our knowledge, that we may be the more confirmed in the truth that we have learned out of the word of God. This is an evil collection: we must grow in the knowledge of the truth; therefore must always be altering and changing our religion.”²⁵⁹ Whitgift’s rhetoric of reform which encourages the idea of the development of knowledge only led back to an affirmation of the church as it was.

However, Whitgift begins his *Defense of his Answer to the Admonition to the Parliament* with a skeptical epigraph that undercuts such certainty: “If any man thinke that he

²⁵⁸ John Whitgift, *The Defense of the Answer to the Admonition against the Reply of Thomas Cartwright*, Works, vol. 46, The Parker Society (Cambridge: University Press, 1856) 8, 98.

²⁵⁹ Whitgift, *Defense* 44.

knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to knowe.”²⁶⁰ In the epistle to the reader he recommends a certain kind of trial to protect oneself against false prophets, presumably men such as Cartwright. “Try before thou trust: believe not lightly every report,” he urges, “as thou hast two ears, so use them both: condemn no man before he be heard: abstain from speaking evil of any when he is not present to make thee answer (for that is a great injury): respect not the person, but the cause, and let not every pretended zeal carry thee headlong thou knowest not whither.” Crucially, Whitgift encourages the same kind of trial for his own polemical work defending the Church of England as he urges the reader to use for “false prophets” and admonishes his reader to “suspend thy judgment of this book, until thou hast advisedly and indifferently read the same.”²⁶¹

Many scholars have noted the degree to which the Marprelate controversy put Whitgift in a nearly impossible position because the tracts were designed to win the opinions of the masses by their sheer entertainment value alone. Moreover, Whitgift was mindful that Marprelate was more interested in reaching the masses than the Parliament.²⁶² Trading “the prolix and chaotically systematic canons of contemporary disputation or polemical exchange” for “the demotic mode of the gutter press,”²⁶³ Whitgift knowingly sanctioned the breakdown of religious decorum on the conformist side when he hired Thomas Nashe and other “low brow” writers to combat Marprelate on his own terms.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁰ John Whitgift, *Defense* 48.

²⁶¹ Whitgift, *Defense* 75.

²⁶² Donald Joseph McGinn, *The Admonition Controversy* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1949) 27.

²⁶³ Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's lewd hat: Protestants, Papists, and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) 508, 515.

²⁶⁴ On the difficulties of conducting a decorous debate against such an entertaining opponent, and the sheer value of entertainment to Marprelate and others, see Raymond A. Anselment, ‘*Betwixt Jest and Earnest*’: *Marprelate, Milton, Marvell, Swift and the Decorum of Religious Ridicule* (Toronto, University of Toronto

The incident of Martin Marprelate is important not only in the history of the early modern English church but also in early modern literature because it marks a breakdown in the theory of decorum.²⁶⁵ Given that both reformers and the Church of England alike rejected Marprelate's style (even if the former did not always object to his matter), it seems fairly certain that Whitgift must have anticipated a very real threat in Marprelate's bid for a popular audience.²⁶⁶ The fact that such indecorous writing was, on some level, so effective in a matter so important must have made conformist and non-conformist writers alike wonder what the value of decorum was, since it was certainly not its cogency.²⁶⁷ Moreover, the mixed message of Whitgift shows that this crisis of decorum with regard to style is only symptomatic of a larger crisis over the question of epistemological decorum surrounding religious reform. Perhaps because the Church of England had been accused by its reformist antagonists of adhering too much to the Church of Rome, its defenders did not simply highlight the value of consensus; instead, they changed tactics to encourage a skeptical outlook. It is not a skeptical outlook without boundaries, but it is a push towards putting control in the mind of the individual believer—perhaps because this was the church's only hope to control the effects of polemical literature on a large scale.

Press, 1979) 34; Sandra Clark, *The Elizabethan Pamphleteers: Popular Moralistic Pamphlets, 1580-1640* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983) 121, 163.

²⁶⁵ See, for example Joseph Black's argument that the Marprelate tracts engender debate over what kind of language should be used for religious debate and who should be involved in the debate ("The Rhetoric of Reaction: The Martin Marprelate Tracts (1588-1589), Anti-Martinism, and the Uses of Print in Early Modern England," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28.3 (1997): 709).

²⁶⁶ On the reservations expressed by many of Marprelate's contemporaries regarding their style, see Anselment 55.

²⁶⁷ Victoria Kahn's work has shown the anxiety some writers felt over the influence of skepticism on the moral force of rhetoric to persuade people to right action. For the complex ways in which skepticism is both the basis for decorum but also questions the efficacy of rhetoric, see her book *Rhetoric, Prudence, and Skepticism in the Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

This uneasy strategy of conformity that would harness the trial of individual reason for its own ends is readily apparent in one of Richard Bancroft's sermons of the late 1580s. Bancroft cautions his audience against the threat of "false prophets," which would seem to indicate the seriousness with which these men considered their opponent. In a sermon preached at Paul's Cross in 1588, Bancroft warns, "'Stay prophane and vaine babblings, for they will increase unto more ungodliness'" because schism opens the door to its dreaded cousin heresy.²⁶⁸ Bancroft as well as the anti-Martinist author of *Mirror for Martinists* (1590) uses a reference to Melanchthon succinctly to define the problem: "We understand whom to avoid (meaning the Papists) but as yet whom to follow we know not."²⁶⁹ Perhaps because they needed to validate their own disruption of their conformity with the Church of Rome, the conformists of the English Church tend to justify their newfound orthodoxy in light of historical change. Bancroft compares false prophets, in this case specifically Martinists, to "Helena, of Greece, for that they move as great contention in the church as she did troubles betwixt Grecians and Trojans."²⁷⁰ Rhetoric aside, the suggestion seems to be that in fighting the Martinists the English Church finds itself in the midst of an epic and historic battle.

Just as Whitgift had used trial as a means to defend the Church against Cartwright in the 1570s, Bancroft similarly encouraged his audience to "Trie the spirits whether they be of God." But Bancroft is quick to follow up his exhortation to trial with a caveat about its limits: "Some forbid the children of GOD to proove any thing. Others command them to be ever seeking and proving of all things. But neither of them both in a right good sense, do deale therein as they ought to do. A meane course betwixt these two is to be allowed of and

²⁶⁸ Richard Bancroft, *A Sermon Preached at Paules Crosse on the 9 of Februarie...1588* (London, 1588) A2.

²⁶⁹ Bancroft 4.

²⁷⁰ Bancroft 6.

followed: which is, that we proove some things, and that we receive without curiositie some other things being already examined, proved and tried to our hands.”²⁷¹ In defining a mean between the complete condemnation and complete licensing of individual trial, Bancroft effectively announces the epistemological repercussions of the *via media*. The ideal layman, it would seem, should value his own reason up to a point. Indeed, though it is not exactly clear how Bancroft envisions proof, what is perhaps most striking about this passage is that doctrine is not proved to the mind, but is “proved and tried to our hands.”

For Bancroft, the greatest danger of reform is its potential to encourage variability and relativity within the church. Finding no proof for their ideas in “the words of scripture, fathers or counsels,” the reformers’ methods seem to be dictated by current necessity rather than universal or divine law. The Scriptures, which become variable and customary in the hands of reformers, “are appointed to serve the time, and have divers understandings: so that at one time they may be expounded after the universall, common, and ordinarie custome: & that the same custome being changed, the meaning of the Scriptures may likewise be changed...for the understanding of the scriptures runneth with the practice of the church.” Such an understanding of church practice suggests that “obedience [is] most full & perfect which is without reason.”²⁷² Despite his own exhortation that individuals should be skeptical of false prophets and scrutinize their doctrines, he criticizes the kind of “prophet” that would have the “people to be alwaies seeking and searching (as well themselves as their followers) [and] can never finde whereupon to rest. Now they are carried hither, not thither. They are

²⁷¹ Bancroft 33.

²⁷² Bancroft 37.

alwaies learning...but do never attaine to the truth.”²⁷³ Uncertainty is the weapon of heretics and schismatics, who bring their potential followers into a state of uncertainty by encouraging them to “*search, examine, trie and seeke*” so that they become more susceptible to reformist doctrine.²⁷⁴ But Bancroft differentiates the trial he charges his reader with from the trial of doctrine, which is only to be undertaken by “those who have skill to so trie it” lest “all religion will wholie become doubtfull.”²⁷⁵

Given his fear of willfully determined doctrine and a church destabilized by too much reform, it is perhaps not surprising that Bancroft indicts what he sees as the inevitable outcome of such questioning—that is, an unfettered desire for liberty. Discussing the subscription of ministers required for them to obtain their degrees, he warns men against the skepticism exemplified by the reformer Osiander, who viewed subscription as a “wickedness” and “cruelty” whereby “Christian liberty is...restrained” and a “yoke and bondage laid upon mens consciences.” “These out cries” Bancroft affirms by citing Melancthon’s commentary, “in so great licentiousness and confusion of this time are plausible with many, who take to themselves an infinite libertie of coyning newe opinions, and in a Pirronious sort of the overthrowing of all things which have been rightly determined.”²⁷⁶ According to Bancroft, the unshakeable dogma of reformers can only have one result: unlicensed skepticism and the forfeiture of any systematic religion altogether.

Bancroft’s fear of skepticism is surprising if we consider the degree to which the opponents of the church were dogmatists. More important than the rhetorical chaos

²⁷³ Bancroft 38.

²⁷⁴ Bancroft 39-40.

²⁷⁵ Bancroft 45-46.

²⁷⁶ Bancroft 48. He quotes from Melancthon’s *De calumniis Osiandri*.

occasioned by the Marprelate tracts is how the willful dogmatism of the tracts influenced the Church's conception of its audience. In large part Bancroft had very little desire to change or refute the hard-nosed stance of the Martinists. Instead, it was those skeptics in the middle, those indifferent members of the laity who were caught in between a church struggling for definition and its reform-minded dissenters, who were the true subjects of Bancroft's rhetoric.

Bancroft begins his large catalogue of reformist doctrine, *A Survey of the Pretended Holy Discipline* (1593), by noting that he can do nothing for those men "addicted unto their own opinions, as concerning the pretended holy Discipline" but pray that their "prejudiciall and obstinate mindes" may be "mollify[ed]" by God. He addresses his text instead to those "both of the clergy and laitye, who notwithstanding they favour the pretended discipline, euen with singleness of heart" yet they realize "that men may be often times deceiued with shewes and probabilities, as allwayes heretofore many haue beene." In order to combat the weakness of the human mind, Bancroft envisions a system of checks and balances wherein the "spirites of any prophets in our dayes" are "subiect to the spirites of other prophets" and he hopes that those who are not dogmatists "will be pleased, I trust, to yeald themselves vnto the Apostolicall rules of trying of all thinges, and not be carried away, either with rashnesse or preiudice, to belieue any spirit, vntil they haue tried it thoroughly whether it be of god."²⁷⁷ Trial, then, is an exercise in reason and a way to control human error.

Though some have categorized Bancroft as one of the greatest polemicists of the 1590s and the *Survey* as one of the greatest polemical works of the late sixteenth century, it still bears noting that he begins his text if not with irenicism, then at least with hope that the

²⁷⁷ Bancroft, "To the Reader," *A Survey of the Pretended Holy Discipline* (London, 1593) 2v.

dominant religious landscape is not polemical but pluralist. It is “on behalfe” of the reform-minded men “and for their sakes especially” that he has “presumed to offer vnto their wise and indifferent consideration, such simple notes and observations . . . whereby if either they or any other shall reape anye profit, to the establishing of their mindes in this giddy age, from running vppe and downe after euery young start-vp, hether and thether, to seeke new platforms of Church-gouernement in this place or that: when as we haue one of our owne, which is in my conscience truly Apostolicall.”²⁷⁸ Read in this light, Bancroft’s intent is not that far afield from that of Francis Bacon in the first edition of his essay “Of Studies”: “Read not to contradict, nor to believe, but to weigh and consider.”²⁷⁹ Bancroft both encourages the skeptics, and writes for them specifically, as though the dogmatists were beyond the hope of the most compelling evidence and the most persuasive rhetoric—or perhaps at least beyond the rhetoric Bancroft wishes to use. It is against this background of uncertainty—the anxiety about false prophets and the Church’s problematic rhetorical position—that Hooker’s understanding of the moral value of doubt and custom should be read.

III. Fashioning the Skeptical Reader

In their defense of the Elizabethan Church and their articulations of conformity, Bancroft and Whitgift show us the complex interplay between dogma and skepticism as a rhetorical strategy. This tendency has much to do with the breakdown of religious decorum and the disjunction between style and subject matter. Though stylistically reformist writings such as the Marprelate tracts can be said to be skeptical in the way that their rhetorical

²⁷⁸ Bancroft, *Survey* 3r.

²⁷⁹ Francis Bacon, “Of Studies” in “Of the Colours of Good and Evil” (1597), *Francis Bacon, Selections* ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 81.

shiftiness showcases the deceptiveness of persona and rhetoric in a way that underscores the subjectivity of truth, they are ultimately dogmatic.²⁸⁰ So too, perhaps the opposite can be argued of Richard Hooker's *Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie* which, for all its philosophical and theological weightiness, can be quite skeptical.²⁸¹ Indeed, the mix of dogmatism and skepticism so apparent in the works of Whitgift and Bancroft finds perhaps its greatest expression in Richard Hooker's *Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie*, in which doubt and custom prove to be leading principles of reform. In Hooker, as Debora Shuger has so eloquently written, "one discerns a groping to hold together the disparate elements of a changing culture, seemingly archaic mystical representations, a problematic historicism, [and] epistemic contradictions."²⁸²

But if doubt was an important ingredient in late sixteenth-century orthodoxy and the "dominant culture was not an obscurantist monolith of ideological...commonplaces nor were questioning and doubt invariable subversive attacks on a monological orthodoxy,"²⁸³ not all of Hooker's contemporaries agreed or made allowances for this expansion of orthodoxy to include doubt as a strategy for conformity. Hooker's own critics were keenly aware of the unorthodox tendencies of his supposed defense of the English Church. Far from being concerned only about the ways in which the *Lawes* deviated from the Thirty-Nine Articles, the anonymous writer of *A Christian Letter* (1599) questioned the very incorporation and use of philosophy in the *Lawes*. In his view, Hooker's *Lawes* leveled Scripture "to bee at the least

²⁸⁰ As Anselment argues, the tracts tend to "transform conventions of animadversion into imaginative attack" thereby placing a considerable emphasis on character (43).

²⁸¹ On the disparity between the conventionality of subject matter and the formal experimentation of pamphleteers, see Clark 161, 172.

²⁸² Shuger 26.

²⁸³ Shuger 25-26.

of no greater moment then Aristotle and the Schoolmen.”²⁸⁴ In addition, the writer was suspicious of Hooker’s overall agenda in writing the *Lawes*, which he considered to be too tolerant at best, skeptical and atheistic at worst: “Doe you meane to bring in a confusion of all thinges, to reconcile heaven and earth, and to make all religions equall? Will you bring us to Atheisme, or to Poperie? Or to prepare a plot for an Interim, that our streetes may runne with blood, when all religions shal bee tolerated, and one shall bearde and provoke another? Are there not examples sufficient of unspeakeable massacres abroad?”²⁸⁵ Though the writer of *A Christian Letter* is unknown, some have suggested Andrew Willet as a likely candidate. Willet has been described as an orthodox clergymen with a moderate impulse for reform, but this quotation makes his religious affiliation entirely unimportant, for the writer would seem to fear schism, the Catholic Church, and Continental reformers equally. The writer of *A Christian Letter* feared what he viewed as both the theoretical and practical ramifications of the *Lawes*: that it supported a relativistic view of religion and that it encouraged the importation of the civic chaos caused by Continental reformers into England.

Though very few scholars have taken the time to consider the weight and validity of this accusation against Hooker, it is a worthwhile endeavor to consider the degree to which Hooker’s *Lawes* can be read as “bring[ing] in a confusion of all things” and what that might mean, since Hooker clearly is not a radical reformer.²⁸⁶ One reason why this writer might

²⁸⁴ On the uses of philosophy to Scripture and vice versa for Hooker, see W. David Neelands, “Hooker on Scripture, Reason, and ‘Tradition,’” *Richard Hooker and the Construction of Christian Community*, ed. Arthur Stephen McGrade (Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1997) 75-94.

²⁸⁵ *A Christian Letter*, in the *Folger Library Edition of the Complete Works of Richard Hooker*, ed. John E. Booty, vol. 4 (Cambridge : Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977-1982) 68.

²⁸⁶ Paul E. Forte argues for the philosophical rather than coercive style of Hooker; he notes, however, that this propensity had problematic consequences: “Whereas the majority of controversialists on both sides of the discipline question were content to state their positions dogmatically, Hooker insisted that the entire matter be studied from the ground of philosophy...Hence, his style of argumentation, which replaces the conventional

have made such a claim is because of the precarious position of the English Church: a church of reform at once not broken from Rome, at once instituting reforms not always unlike those of the Continent, and in both respects opening itself up to the charge of innovation and the borrowings of custom.²⁸⁷ In some of his most recent scholarship, Patrick Collinson has invited us to consider the awkward relationship between England and the reforms taking place on the Continent. Collinson has argued that the Elizabethan Settlement “rested primarily on the principles of autonomy from Rome and royal supremacy, not on the reception of true doctrine and conformity with the community of Reformed churches. Consequently, relations between England and the centres of Continental reform were never secure and always subject to political arbitrariness.”²⁸⁸ However, despite this more passive relationship to Continental reformed churches, Collinson simultaneously detects within Puritan communities in London a “sense of solidarity with the international Protestant community...in their active involvement in the affairs of the stranger churches, which they continued to regard as models of the ‘church rightly reformed’ such as they hoped to see established in England.”²⁸⁹ Despite political gestures in support of a distinctly English orthodoxy, it would seem that England was subject to the influence of the Continent as many reform-minded individuals actively promoted cross-cultural exchange as they participated in

apologetic method of answering an opponent point for point with the more radical method of inquiring into the nature, elements, and qualities of the subject in question...hence the inconclusive structure of his work” (136-137). See “Hooker’s Theory of Law,” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 12.2 (1982): 133-157.

²⁸⁷ As Robert K. Faulkner notes, “Hooker seems to have thought the church he defended its own worst enemy.” See *Richard Hooker and the Politics of a Christian England* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981) 13.

²⁸⁸ Patrick Collinson, “England and International Calvinism, 1558-1640,” *From Cranmer to Sancroft* (New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2006) 75-76. William P. Haugaard sees many of the editorial choices made in drafting the Thirty-Nine Articles as representative of England’s ambiguous relationship with the doctrine and discipline of continental reformers (233, 258-272).

²⁸⁹ Collinson, “International Calvinism” 87-88.

both English and Continental churches. In conjunction with Collinson's view, it is interesting to note that although the author of *A Christian Letter* was anonymous, its printer was associated with the French church and was known for producing Puritan tracts.²⁹⁰

The question of reform was bound up for many in the question of national identity. The writer of a *Myld and Just Defence of Certeyne Arguments* (1606) justifies the reformers' interest in the changes in church doctrine on the Continent by downplaying the boundaries of nationality. Against the zealous anti-papist clergyman Gabriel Powell's argument that reformers "emulat[e]...forreyne novelty," the writer argues that their reforms are "neither noveltie, nor forreyne."²⁹¹ While the rejection of the charge of novelty is not particularly novel itself, as most reformers found precedent for their ideas in the example of the apostolic Church, the writer redefines the notion of "foreign" so as to minimize its importance altogether:

Touching the word *forreyne*, though indeed the thinges desired by us are in all Churches of other Countryes fully reformed in doctrine with ours, yet those Churches being all the same houshold of faith that we are, they are not aptly called forreyne. As Englishmen traveling in other Countryes and living after English fashion, are not therefore Forreyners in respect of England whiles they so travel; but still to be accounted of the same country, so all Churches and all members of the Church, in what Country so ever they be, are not to be accounted Forreyners one to another, because they are all Citizens of heaven, and we make all one family or body.²⁹²

The writer of a *Myld and Just Defense* suggests both that the unity of faith was fast superseding nationalism as an indicator of religious identity and that the Continental church exerted a powerful force on the English Church; in other words, the idea of reform was

²⁹⁰ Peter White, *Predestination, Policy, and Polemic: Conflict and Consensus in the English Church from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 130.

²⁹¹ Anonymous [?], *Myld and Just Defence of Certeyne Arguments at the Last Session of Parliament* (1606) 310.

²⁹² Ibid. 311.

changing conceptions of English identity and nationalism. Read against the *Myld and Just Defense*, the writer of *A Christian Letter*'s criticism about the potential of the *Lawes* to promote the breakdown of an English reformed religion seems all the more incisive. Though the intent of the *Lawes* has been debated,²⁹³ part of Hooker's purpose would seem to involve not simply defining the English Church, but taking stock of the complicated relationship between the English Church and the models of reform proffered by Continental reformers.

The Preface to the *Lawes* illustrates the uncertainty with which Hooker viewed reform—uncertainty both about how to undertake it and how to combat it. Like Bancroft and Whitgift, Hooker welcomes his readers to try notions of reform, as when he asks that “men doe but holde themselves in suspense” while they read his *Lawes*, subjecting it to the “generall triall and judgement of the whole world.”²⁹⁴ He begins his Preface by taking a seemingly irenic stance as he attempts to diffuse any polemical charge in the text by virtue of his very identity as an orthodox clergyman responding to the writings of polemical reformers like Thomas Cartwright and Martin Marprelate. He challenges his readers to divorce his text from its author and to “regard not who it is which speaketh, but [to] waigh only what is spoken.” As Hooker denies an adversarial persona, he invites reformers to a joint rational examination of the truth, describing himself as “one, who desireth even to embrace together with you the selfe same truth, if it be the truth...for plainer accesse whereunto, let it be lawfull for me to rip up to the verie bottome, how and by whome your Discipline was planted, at such time as this age we live in began to make first trial thereof.”²⁹⁵ Because

²⁹³ See Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans?* 239.

²⁹⁴ *FLE* I, 1.1.2.

²⁹⁵ *FLE* I, Preface 2.2-2.3. In Rudolph Almasý's view, such a rhetorical move is indicative of the “mythology of early modern religious polemics and its implied promise that final judgment can be rendered and that truth—and peace—can be found” (228). Hooker often “does away with the ‘indifferent reader’ and gives both himself

Calvin and his followers are convinced that they are correct, and Hooker and others are “fully perswaded otherwise,” he proposes that “some kinde of triall be used to finde out which part is in error.”²⁹⁶ The *Lawes*, then, is set up at the very beginning of the text as a kind of comparative analysis of the process of reform. Hooker imagines not just a text of polemic, but a text of trial.

In particular, Hooker examines recent Protestant history for clues to the nature of reform. Beginning with the Preface to the *Lawes*, Hooker reveals his preoccupation not with the failure of Continental reformers, but with their success. At the same time that he invites reformers to attend his magisterial symposium on reform, Hooker acts as a quasi-objective historiographer of the Protestant church as he catalogues the mistakes of Luther and Calvin. For Hooker the root of the problem of reform is that reformers of the past have not accurately demarcated the moral value of their reforms because they have not differentiated between things necessary and things indifferent to salvation. Indeed, he argues that the current state of the Church of England—that is, the discursive reformist siege it is undergoing—is derived from two critical problems, one a moral miscalculation, or “misdistinction” as he terms it, made by Calvin and one a flaw inherent in human nature. What Hooker finds is that both the Calvinist reformers’ failures and their followers’ ignorance of these short-comings are caused by the susceptibility of the mind to prejudice.

Calvin’s mistake, quite simply, was that the multiple churches that developed when he undertook a reformation in Geneva led to “marvelous great dissimilitudes” the more that people separated themselves from Rome. In turn this newfound religious pluralism caused

and his prebyterian opponents the power to render judgment” (229). See Rudolph P. Almasy, “Language and Exclusion in the First Book of Hooker’s *Politie*,” *Richard Hooker and the English Reformation*, ed. W.J. Torrance Kirby (Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003) 227-242.

²⁹⁶ *FLE* I, Preface 2.7, 2.10.

“jealousies, hartburnings, jarres and discords amongst them” that “might have easily bene prevented, if the orders which each Church did thinke fit and convenient for it selfe, had not so preremptorily bene established under that high commaunding forme, which tendered them unto the people, as things everlastinglie required” for salvation.²⁹⁷ Once these dissimilarities had been given the force of doctrine rather than acknowledged as things indifferent, the reformers were loath to undermine their own credibility by retracting their stance. Exacerbating the evil of the Calvinist reformer’s miscalculation in polity, human nature’s tendency to “worketh in us all a love to our owne counsels” makes the possibility of true reform even less likely.²⁹⁸ The consequences of that self-love combined with the “contradiction of others” would seem to be both polemical discourse and the perversion of reason. Once committed to an opinion, man fights to maintain it by “sharp[ening] the wit to dispute, to argue, and by all meanes to reason for it.” Hence, a “wise man” like Calvin is able to find “at the least a probable opinion of likelihood” in the Scriptures in support of his own views of doctrine and polity. Juxtaposed as it is against the example of Calvin, Hooker’s claim that “the first meane whereby nature teacheth men to judge good from evill as well in lawes as in other things, is the force of their owne discretion,” would seem to be a very problematic assertion that highlights the great influence of human error on reform.²⁹⁹

Both the success and failure of Continental reformers indicate for Hooker the preeminent importance of making moral distinctions when undertaking reform. The ability to discern good from evil is easy in things necessary to salvation. In “more obscure, more

²⁹⁷ *FLE* I, Preface 2.2

²⁹⁸ *FLE* I, Preface 2.8.

²⁹⁹ *FLE* I, Preface 3.1. Nigel Voak has compellingly argued for the primacy of the intellect as the force of error in Hooker’s economy of reformation.

intricate and hard to be judged” cases which are “a lower degree of importance,” God has appointed particular individuals—presumably men like Hooker—to the study of divinity. To illuminate and justify this claim, Hooker uses a metaphor from Galen to articulate his understanding of the role of reason in reform: “If the understanding power or facultie of the soule be (*sayeth the grand Phisition*) like unto bodily sight not of equall sharpnes in all, what can be more convenient that, even as the darke-sighted man is directed by the cleare about things visible, so likewise in matters of deeper discourse the wise in heart do shewe the simple where his way lyeth.”³⁰⁰ Supported by this and other metaphors arguing for an ecclesiastical hierarchy that adequately addresses the intellectual shortcomings of man, Hooker then shifts away from his earlier objective and even irenic tones to commanding his audience to “Presume not yee that are sheepe to make your selves guides of them that should guide you, neither seeke ye to overskip the folde which they about you have pitched. It suficeth for your part, if ye can well frame your selves to be ordered. Take not upon you to judge your judges, nor to make them subject to your lawes who should be a law to you. For God is not a god of sedition and confusion but of order and peace.”³⁰¹ How very far we have come in the short distance of a preface from Hooker’s invitation to “regard not who it is that speaketh.”

In short, the shiftiness of Hooker’s rhetorical registers throughout the Preface—from the irenic, nearly conversational dialogue with reformers, to the objective analysis of Protestant history, to the polemical mouthpiece of the English Church—would seem to indicate his awareness of the precarious rhetorical situation of the English Church. For all of his rhetorical wanderings—call it instability or call it craftiness—Hooker does seem invested

³⁰⁰ *FLE* I, Preface 3.2.

³⁰¹ *FLE* I, Preface 3.2-3.3.

in interrogating the value of various forms of human knowledge in order to understand their place in legislating reform. Quoting Galen again, whose blend of rationalism and empiricism reappears in crucial points in the *Lawes* when Hooker addresses the method of reform, he considers the dangers of mental presuppositions, that is, the dogmatic mind, to reform. Hooker notes that “many times ...that which a credible person telleth is easily thought probable by such as are well perswaded of him. But if two, or three, or foure, agree all in the same tale, they judge it then to be out of controversy, and so are many times overtaken, for want of due consideration; eyther some common cause leading them all into error, or one mans oversight deceiving manie through their too much credulitie and easiness of beliefe.” Error can spread from person to person like a disease, tainting the mind with prejudice as it does so. It is this tendency of the mind to be prejudiced—this tendency that has made Luther and Calvin so successful—that Hooker returns to again and again as both a means and an impediment to reform.³⁰²

Despite the admitted uncertainty of reformers in England who profess not to know “with whom the truth is,” they have been remarkably successful in convincing a large number of people of their ideas.³⁰³ According to Hooker, their success has been due in large part to their zealous dogma that so influences the mind of their followers that it makes men unable to gain access to the truth of the Scriptures. This approach is typified for Hooker by their reliance on a nearly mystical kind of deduction. Just as the followers of Pythagoras became obsessed with the “speculate knowledge of numbers” by which they vainly interpreted the world around them, so too reformers have been able to “fashio[n] the very

³⁰² *FLE* I, Preface 4.8.

³⁰³ *FLE* I, Preface 3.4.

notions and conceits of mens minds in such sort, that when they read the Scripture, they may thinke that every thing soundeth towards the advancement of that discipline, and to the utter disgrace of the contrary.’³⁰⁴ Though reformers’ claim to *sola scriptura* would seem to be a claim to evidence, Hooker suggests instead that they use a more deductive kind of logic, planting notions without proof in the mind of men which then allows them to find appropriate “evidence” for their preformed ideas. The trope so commonly used by almost all writers of this period in the prefatory matter requesting an “indifferent reader,” far from being simply rhetoric, has a particularly pointed meaning in the context of Hooker’s *Lawes*.³⁰⁵

Unlike Bancroft, who effectively gives up on dogmatic reformers and turns his attention to the readers who had not yet made up their minds, Hooker is interested in turning dogmatists into skeptics. In matters of reform, Hooker avers, doubt should be the guiding principle. Though men should not “observe those lawes which in their hearts they are steadfastly perswaded to be against the law of God,” Hooker realizes that it is not likely that these men will change their belief. The only reasonable recourse left for these men caught in the bind of conscience that does not involve the very undesirable outcome of political resistance is that they “for the time...suspend” their “perswasion” lest they “offend against

³⁰⁴ *FLE* I, Preface 3.9.

³⁰⁵ For example, Hooker’s defender William Covel argues that the charge that Hooker’s *Lawes* posits “speculative Doctrine” is due to the writer’s own prejudice: “It will appear so plainly, that to the indifferent reader I shall not need to add any further answer; for any man may see, that you have judged his words, as they do colours, which look upon them with green spectacles and think that which they see is green, when indeed that is green whereby they see. The best remedy will be to use charity, where judgment wanteth” (*A Just and Temperate Defense of the Five Books of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Polity*, ed. John A. Taylor [Lewiston: E. Mellon Press, 1998] 128). Rudolph P. Almasy notes Hooker’s tendency to “substitute[e] Presbyterians for the indifferent readers,” with the idea that by appealing to reason rather than passion he may “pushes [them]...toward hope” and moral reformation (“Language and Exclusion in the First Book of Hooker’s *Politie*,” *Richard Hooker and the English Reformation*, ed. W.J. Torrance Kirby (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003) 235.

God by troubling his Church without any just or necessary cause.”³⁰⁶ In other words, Hooker would move reformers away from their deductive, dogmatic impulses, impulses which are likely to lead to political instability, to a skepticism that may not rid the mind of prejudice, but will keep it from doing further harm.

IV. Certainty and Moral Value

Long before *A Christian Letter* was published in 1599, Hooker had established himself as someone dangerous to the unity of the Church; indeed, the claim that his ideas were subversive to peace bookends Hooker’s career. In 1586, Walter Travers, Hooker’s noted Calvinist adversary at the Temple Church in London, was prohibited from preaching because of his public criticisms of Hooker’s exposition of doctrine, in particular his views on predestination and justification. In the exchange between Hooker and Travers in that same year over this dismissal, Hooker notes that Travers criticized him for his “inconformity” and his “surlie and unpeaceable disposition.”³⁰⁷ Travers worries that Hooker’s preaching will break the church asunder because he knows of very few men “who make any conscience of their ministry” who will be able to prevent themselves from speaking out against Hooker’s doctrines.³⁰⁸ In his counter to Travers, Hooker claims that Travers is blinded by his own reason. He questions the prejudiced mind of Travers, who “judgeth my wordes, as they do

³⁰⁶ *FLE* I, Preface 6.6. Compare Hooker’s assertion in his *Answer to Travers* that “Moste true it is which the graund philosopher hath. *Every man judgeth well of that he knoweth*. And therefore till we knowe the thinges throughly whereof we judge it is a pointe of judgemente to staie our judgemente.” The first part of the formulation is from the *Nichomachean Ethics*; the second part is Hooker’s addition (V.245). Paul Cefalu explains, “while Hooker’s moral agents are require *to act* virtuously, they are not required *to be* virtuous”; hence in the shift from natural to positive law, the exposition of a theory of virtue gives way to Hooker’s insistence on obedience (90).

³⁰⁷ *The Answere of Mr. Richard Hooker to the Supplication Preferred by Mr. Walter Travers, FLE*, ed. Laetitia Yeandle and Egil Grislis, vol. 5 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990) 227-228.

³⁰⁸ Walter Travers, *A Supplication Made to the Privy Councel, FLE* V.200.

colours which looke upon them with greene spectacles and thinke that which they see is greene. When indeed that is greene whereby they see.”³⁰⁹

In his early surviving sermons of the 1580s, Hooker exhibits a profound concern for the role of the mind in belief-formation and for the certainty of moral value. And, in fact, it is precisely these concerns that Travers’s criticizes. Travers primary criticisms of Hooker have to do with Hooker’s assertions that “*his best author was his own reason*” and that “*the assurance of that we believe by the word, is not so certeyne as of that we perceive by sense.*”³¹⁰ Hooker’s defense of both these views in his *Answer* to Travers are the foundations for his justification for the necessary presence of doubt in religious experience.

In his *Sermon of the Certainty and Perpetuity of Faith in the Elect* (1585-1586), Hooker addresses the question of the moral value of doubt—that is, of whether or not the admission of doubt into one’s mind makes one an unbeliever. Crucially, Hooker limits doubt by differentiating between the doubt of the “unbeliever” and the “weak believer,” noting that, in the latter, doubt is an affirmation of piety and humility, that is, an appropriate understanding of man’s position in relation to his salvation and to God.³¹¹ Hooker separates the truth of experience and the truth of faith in order to explain doubt. He begins by distinguishing between the Certainty of Evidence, “that which we know by sense, or by infallible demonstration” when the truth is “cleere...[and] manifest” to the mind, and the Certainty of Adherence, which is based on affection and intuition and is characteristic of “the

³⁰⁹ Travers, *FLE* V.235.

³¹⁰ Travers, *FLE* V.198, 200.

³¹¹ Hooker, *A Learned and Comfortable Sermon of the Certaintie and Perpetuitie of Faith in the Elect*, *FLE*, vol. 5, ed. Laetitia Yeandle and Egil Grislis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990) 72.

principles, articles, and conclusions of the Christian faith.”³¹² While the Certainty of Evidence stresses the certainty of information coming from the senses and the fact that proof must always be more certain than the “thing proved,” the Certainty of Adherence stresses the more uncertain apprehension of goodness. Faith allows that the “promises of God” are recognized “not only as true, but also as good.” And even when the evidence of truth “is so small that it grieveth him to feel his weakness in assenting thereunto,” the Certainty of Adherence so fixes belief that “all the world is not able quite and clean to remove him from it; but he striveth with himself to hope against all reason of believing.”³¹³

The indemonstrable truths of religion which are in part the source of doubt as they are the basis of faith, give doubt a necessary theological purpose: it is evidence that man does not possess inherent righteousness and that he requires divine intervention for justification.³¹⁴ Doubt and the variability it allows within goodness provide an explanation for the varieties of religious experience without necessitating that one experience entirely preclude another. If the certainty of faith was categorized in the same way as the certainty of sensible experience, then there would be no levels of faith: “The trueth of somethinges is so evident, that no man which heareth them can doubt of them: As when wee heare, that *a part of anything is less then the whole*, the mind is constrained to say this is true. If it were so in matters of faith then

³¹² *FLE* V.70.

³¹³ *FLE* V, 71.

³¹⁴ On the problem of inherent righteousness, see *Sermon on Perpetuity*, V.71. Paul Cefalu addresses Hooker’s interest in this problem in the *Lawes* by considering what he sees as the telling absence of a distinct theory of virtue in the *Lawes*. He considers the theological repercussions that the limitations of the human mind has on sanctification for Hooker: “Hooker’s sanctified individuals would seem to be putting the theological cart before the moralistic horse: their reconditioned wills allow them to begin to glimpse divine beatitude, yet we cannot be sure that their intellects have been fundamentally renovated such that they fully understand the nature of proximate ends that are set forth by natural laws” (97).

as all men have equall certaintie of this, so no believer should be more scripulous and doubtfull then another.”³¹⁵

In his *Answer* to Travers’s *Supplication to the Privy Counsel*, Hooker elaborates on the distinction he makes between the Certainty of Adherence and the Certainty of Evidence in his *Sermon of the Certaintie and Perpetuitie of Faith in the Elect*, when he distinguishes the kind of knowledge gained from senses and that gained from faith:

I have taughte [Travers] saith *That the assurance of thinges which we believe by the word is not so certeyne as of that we perceive by sense*. And is it as certayne? Yea I taughte as he hym self I truste woulde not denye that the thinges which God doeth promys in his worde are surer unto us then any thinge we touche handle or see, but are we so sure and certeyne of them? if we be, why doth God so often prove his promises unto us as he doth by arguments taken from our sensible experiences? We must be surer of the profe then of the thinge proved, otherwise it is no profe. Howe is it that if tenne men do all looke upon the moone, every one of them knoweth it as certainly to be the moone as another: But many beleevinge one and the same promis all have not one and the same fulnesse of perswasion? Howe falleth it out that men beinge assured of any thinge by sense can be no surer of it then they are, whereas the strongest in faith that lyveth upon the earth hath alwaies neede to labor and stryve, and praie that his assurance concerning heavenly and spirituall thinges maie growe increase and be augmented?³¹⁶

Even as Hooker differentiates the certainty of the senses from the uncertainty of faith, he links faith with the senses when he argues that God “prove[s] his promises...by arguments taken from our sensible experience.” Despite this linking of the certainty of the senses to faith, clearly faith requires labor to grow and develop that knowledge from the senses does not. If faith were as certain as the senses, or if goodness were as certain as truth, then it would entirely undercut the necessity of moral growth.

Despite this discussion of the senses and their relation to faith, Hooker does defend himself from Travers’s accusation of a more subjective, idiosyncratic reason by identifying a

³¹⁵ *FLE* V.70.

³¹⁶ *Answer*, *FLE* V.236-237.

reason that is highly theological and deductive.³¹⁷ He denies that he relies upon “myne owne reason as nowe it is reported” by Travers, and claims instead that he looks to that

true sound divine reason, reson whereby those conclusions mighte be out of Ste Paule demonstrated and not probably discoursed of onely, reson proper to that science whereby the thinges of god are knowne, theologicall reason which out of principles in scripture that are playne soundly deduceth more doubtful inferences, in suche sorte that being herd they neither can be denied nor any thing repugnaunte unto them received, but whatsoever was before otherwise by miscollecting gathered out of darker places is therby forced to yeld it self and the true consonaunte meaning of sentences not understood is broughte to lighte.³¹⁸

This deductive reason is clearly, for Hooker, applicable to the knowledge of God, but it competes with his notion of the imperfect knowledge of man that is based on faith and is applicable to the study of virtue and reform.

In his early work, Hooker attempts to uphold a neat dichotomy between faith and the senses, between goodness and truth. But this neat dichotomy between the sensory knowledge and faith gives way in the *Lawes* to a more expansive religious epistemology that does include a role for the senses, or at the very least for a reason that is not always deductive but is quite often mired in circumstance and custom and which operates actively and disputatively. It is this latter reason, not the more deductive, certain theological reason, that provides the basis for Hooker’s articulation of conformity as a dynamic strategy for reform that actively evaluates the role of the variability of custom to a stable English Church. In contrast to the reformer’s deductive and speculative approach to influencing the minds of their followers, Hooker characterizes the mind early in the first book of the *Lawes* in a way that emphasizes the role of the senses and an inductive reason.

³¹⁷ *FLE* V.198.

³¹⁸ *FLE* V.255.

Hooker's comparison of angelic and human knowledge underscores the central role of the senses to human knowledge. While "Angels alreadie have full and complete knowledge in the highest degree that can be imparted unto them," men begin from an "utter vacuity" and must instead "growe by degrees, till they come at length to be even as the Angels themselves are." Invoking a description of the mind of man from Aristotle's *De anima* that is repeated by Thomas Aquinas, Hooker characterizes the mind as "a booke, wherein nothing is, and yet all things may be imprinted."³¹⁹ It is up to man to "search by what steppes and degrees" the mind may ascend "unto perfection of knowledge." At the very point at which he underscores the mind's potential, Hooker describes the importance of the senses to the development of man's moral knowledge. Until men "grow to some ripenes of yeares, the soule of man doth only store it selfe with conceipts of things of inferiour and more open qualitie." But rather than holding man back, as they might in Platonic epistemology, Hooker insists that the senses "doe serve as instruments unto that which is greater," namely reason. Reason, in turn, may be aided by "the helps of true art and learning," which Hooker says are neglected in "this age of the world." Though Hooker emphasizes the role of "education and instruction" in making it possible for man "to judge rightly between truth and error, good and evill,"³²⁰ he does not dismiss the senses for education. The senses retain an important role in discerning law, for it "is a great deale more easie for common sense to discerne, then for any man by skill and learning to determine" when a man's reason is "capable of those lawes, whereby he is then bound to guide his action." Hooker contrasts the value of abstraction and practice to illustrate his claim: "Even

³¹⁹ *FLE* I, 1.6.1. For the source of this conception of the mind, see Aristotle, *De anima*, III.4.430a and Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I.79.2.

³²⁰ *FLE* I.6.5.

as it is not in Philosophers, who best knowe the nature both of fire and of golde, to teach what degree of the one will serve to purifie the other, so well as the artisan, who doth this by fire, discerneth by sense when the fire that that degree of heat which sufficeth for his purpose.”³²¹ Observation and the information it lends man through the common sense is a greater indicator of reason and law than reason is alone.

In addition to this fuller articulation of the role of the senses in recognizing law and becoming a moral agent, the dichotomous certainty that Hooker offered in the *Sermon of the Certaintie and Perpetuitie of Faith in the Elect* is replaced by a taxonomy of certainty that allows greater room for doubt, things indifferent, and custom. Hooker’s understanding of this taxonomy relies upon his notion of the epistemological decorousness of the mind. In his discussion in the *Lawes* of evidence for faith that can be found outside of the Scriptures, Hooker notes that the mind of man has a kind of decorum inherent to it: it quite rightly proportions certainty of belief in relation to evidence. Although the mind naturally “desireth evermore to know the truth according to the most infallible certainty which the nature of things can yield,” the fallible nature of the mind does not allow that all things are known with equal certainty. Hooker creates a spectrum of assurance that ranges from “plaine aspect and intuitive beholding,” to “strong and invincible demonstration” and finally to “probability.”³²² Though reformers would know all things with complete certainty, Hooker cautions that “it is not required or can be exacted at our hands, that we should yield unto any thing other assent, then such as doth answere the evidence which is to be had of that we assent unto.” Hooker’s taxonomy of assurance creates an epistemological decorum that allows for doubt. Because of this decorum, “even in matters divine, concerning some things

³²¹ *FLE* 1.6.5.

³²² *FLE* 1.2.7.5.

we may lawfully doubt and suspend our judgment, inclining neyther to one side nor other.”

The reformers’ untenable desire for certainty—the desire that earned the puritans the name of “precisians”—causes people unnecessarily to doubt themselves and to “fall into anguish and perplexitie” over what they imagine to be a “lacke of faith.” “The hearts assent” to truth is proportionate to the evidence “which the truth hath eyther in itselfe or through prooffe” and “neither can it be stronger, being grounded [upon evidence] as it should be.”³²³ Despite its deficits, the mind naturally preserves truth through its discretionary powers “because [it] doth rather follow probable perswasions, then approve the thinges that have in them no likelihood of truth at all.”³²⁴ For Hooker, doubt is not only natural, but also reasonable; more importantly, incorporated into moral reform, it has the potential to bring the good of reform closer to truth.

V. Contrariety, Custom, and the Elizabethan Church

Hooker’s understanding of conformity as a strategy for reformation depends upon his sense that human goodness must always be understood in terms of levels of certainty. Hooker tends to stress levels of certainty because they help him articulate conformity as a kind of reform distinct from the simple opposition advocated by Thomas Cartwright and other Puritan reformers. Even before Hooker, Francis Bacon expressed the problematic nature of the Martinist reform agenda in his *Advertisement Touching the Controversies of the Church of England*. According to Bacon, the Martinists’ method of reforming by opposition is an inherently flawed practice:

³²³ *FLE* 1.2.7.5.

³²⁴ *FLE* 1.2.7.5.

Most of the heresies and schisms of the church have sprung up of this root; while men have made it as it were their scale, by which to measure the bounds of the most perfect religion; taking it by the furthest distance from the error last condemned...they think it the true touchstone to try what is good and holy, by measuring what is more or less opposite to the institutions of the Church of Rome; be it ceremony, be it policy or government, yea be it other institution of greater weight, that is ever most perfect which is removed most degrees from that church; and that is ever polluted and blemished which participateth in any appearance with it.³²⁵

The central notion here is measure, that is, the idea that reform is a nearly quantitative process that can be empirically measured, as if with a scale. Bacon introduces what, for Hooker, will be two competing notions of the reformed church. On the one hand, reformation and the church can be thought of in degrees, indicating that reform must be measured in increments. On the other hand, the reformers measure not by increment and degree, but by opposition. For Hooker, reformation by degree engages reason in the process of reform, while reformation by opposition is a nearly knee-jerk reaction to a (mis)perception of absolute evil. This reaction is problematic both because it undermines the role of reason and because it assumes a too simplistic understanding of good and evil.

Cartwright openly avowed the effectiveness of reforming by contraries.³²⁶ Basing his principles of moral and religious reform on the commonly accepted dictum of Hippocratic medicine, Cartwright argued that “contraries are cured by their contraries.” Since “Christianitie and Antichristianitie, the Gospell and Poperie be contraries,” it seemed logical to Cartwright that “Antichristianity must be cured not by it self, but by that which is (as much

³²⁵ Bacon 9-10.

³²⁶ As Stuart Clark has shown in his compelling treatment of contrariety in the Renaissance, contrariety was often used as a strategy by which to organize disparate aspects of experience and variety more generally and was as much a “mental modality” as it was a “linguistic strategy” (*Thinking with Demons* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997] 50, 52).

as may be) contrary unto it.”³²⁷ Cartwright easily translates the medical notion of polarity to morality: “If a man would bring a drunken man to sobriety, the best and nearest way is to carry him as farre from his excesse in drinke as may be: and if a man could not keepe a meane, it were better to fault in prescribing lesse then he should drinke, then to fault in giving him more then he ought.” In Cartwright’s view, moving as far from one excess as possible does not lead one to another, opposite excess; rather, such opposition is necessary to reach the good, as he illustrates in the metaphor of the crooked stick. In order to make a crooked stick straight, “we do not only bow it so farre until it come to be straight, but we bend it so farre until we make it so crooked of the other side, as it was before of the first side, to this end that at the last it may stand straight, and as it were in the midway between both the crookes.” Hence, Cartwright concludes, the “best and surest policy” for reform is “utter inconformity” to the Church of Rome.³²⁸ Reform depends upon defining the contrary to a given evil with the idea that direct opposition to that evil will produce good.

In contrast to Cartwright, Hooker understood the problem of determining the nature of the true reformed church as one of decorous proportion. Offering an alternative model of reform, Hooker rejects Cartwright’s idea that a stick can only be brought to its median point by bending it in the opposite direction; he argues instead that “he which will perfectly recover a sick and restore a diseased body unto health, must not endeavor so much to bring it to a state of simple contrariety, as of fit proportion in contrariety unto those evils which are to be cured.” Using a medical metaphor, Hooker illustrates his view that Cartwright’s polarizing mode of reformation produces only new and even more destructive forms of evil, as “he that

³²⁷ It is interesting to note that Cartwright seems to have been interested in medicine, writing as he did a text entitled *An Hospital for the Diseased* (London: 1578) which was republished several times.

³²⁸ Cartwright quoted in Hooker *FLE* I.4.3.2.

will take away extreme heat by setting the body in extremity of cold, shall undoubtedly remove the disease, but together with it the diseased too.” A more careful anatomy of the problem is required. A “skilful cure” requires first “the knowledge of the part affected,” then the identification “of the evil which doth effect it.” Only after evil and its effects have been isolated can the reformer proceed with making conclusions “not only of the kind but also of the measure of contrary things whereby to remove it.”³²⁹ An accurate determination of contraries involves analysis and scrutiny.

It is quite appropriate that Hooker’s notion of a measured reform in the *Lawes* corresponds to conceptions of diagnosis and cure in Galenic thought.³³⁰ In ancient medicine, Hippocrates represented a movement towards finding cures based on the observation of nature. Nature, in turn, was understood as a unified living organism composed of diverse parts which could only be understood relative to the whole organism.³³¹ Galen, who studied Hippocrates and was influenced heavily by his reliance on observation, connected logic to observation and experimentation.³³² Galen’s writings, some of which were first translated and published in England by Thomas Linacre and were published in full in Italy in 1525, represented a *prisca medicina*, a return to purer sources of Greek medicine.³³³

³²⁹ *FLE* I.4.8.1.

³³⁰ For a limited description of the interplay of medical metaphors in reformist thought, see David N. Harley, “Medical Metaphors in English Moral Theology: 1560-1660,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 48 (1993): 396-435.

³³¹ Arthur John Brock, Introduction in *On the Natural Faculties* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916) xxvi.

³³² Brock, xxxiii; P.N. Singer, *Introduction in Galen: Selected Works* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) xv.

³³³ Andrew Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550-1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 35.

While Galen's predecessors had adequately developed theories of the elements and their oppositional relationships, he criticizes them for neglecting to address the all important concept of the "well-balanced mixture." In Galen's view, excess could only be understood in relation to this ideal balance. The "aim" of a "healthy regime" is "to cool any body which is hotter than it should be, to heat any which is colder...in each case the attempt is to remedy an excess by the introduction of what is missing, in order to bring about a state which may be described as well-balanced or median."³³⁴ Galen envisioned mixtures not in absolute terms, but in degrees. A preponderance of any one element could be described as an imbalance, a disease, or in the worst cases, death.³³⁵ What this meant, then, is that cures could only be obtained through an analysis of proportion: "To all these objects, that is animals and plants, we attribute the best, median type of mixture within their own genus, not in the absolute terms which involve an equality of opposites, but when they are possessed of that type of good proportion relevant to their faculties." Galen saw an easy transition between medical and ethical theory using this idea of proportion. "Justice," for example, "is thought of in this way, as a technique of finding equality not by any fixed measure, but by use of the criteria appropriate to the case. Thus in the case of all well-balanced animals and plants, their equality of mixture consists not in the amounts of each element in the mixture, but in the appropriateness of these amounts to the nature of the animal or plant in question."³³⁶

Almost as Galen revised Hippocratic theories of medicine by incorporating experimentation and anatomization, so too does Hooker seem to posit a measure of reform

³³⁴ Galen, *Mixtures in Selected Works*, trans. P.N. Singer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 206.

³³⁵ Galen 207.

³³⁶ Galen 220.

that revises Cartwright's more simplistic view of the moral values at stake. Like Galen, who rejects a too simplistic notion of diagnosis and cure, Hooker rejects a too simplistic method of reform and values the idea of mixture. For Hooker and his defenders, the most accurate method of reform required a more incisive form of reason than the strategy for reform offered by Cartwright and his followers. In his *Just and Temperate Defense of the Five Books of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1603), William Covel succinctly encapsulates Hooker's attitude towards Cartwright's assumption of the absolute opposition of good and evil. Though the Papists clearly must be reformed, "we are loath to grow to an error on the contrary hand, and to derogate too much from the Church of God: by which removal of one extremity with another, the world, seeking to procure a remedy, hath purchased a mere exchange of the evil, which before was felt."³³⁷ But Covel also elaborated to explain why such a strategy was logically unsound and an incompetent measure of reform: "The nearness, oftentimes to evil, is warrant enough for suspicion, to accuse of evil; and because all errors are not equally distant from the truth, some men, in their true assertions, are supposed, by weak judgments, not to differ at all from error."³³⁸ In other words, like Calvin's "misdistinctions" which transformed things indifferent into things fundamental for salvation, English reformers like Travers are not discriminating enough to differentiate between absolute evil and an imperfect, but useful, good.

In addition to being entrenched in the medical terminology and debates of the late sixteenth century, Hooker's rejection of Cartwright's neat dichotomy also is indebted to his dismissal of the more simplistic Ramist logic to which men like Travers and Cartwright

³³⁷ Covel 20; see also Hooker *FLE* II.5.8.4.

³³⁸ Covel 51.

gravitated.³³⁹ Hooker's movement from the more one-dimensional notion of certainty in his *Sermon of the Certaintie and Perpetuitie of Faith in the Elect* to his exploration of different levels of certainty and religious experience in the *Lawes* is indicative of his adherence to more complex, Aristotelian structures which, for him, were more rational and more representative of the nature not of truth, but of the nature of goodness. In his early work, Hooker is committed to the idea of separating truth from goodness. In his *Learned Treatise on Justification*, Hooker differentiates between the knowledge of truth and the knowledge of good: "Devills know the same thinges which we believe, and the mindes of the most ungodly maie be fully perswaded of the truth, which knowledge in the one and perswasion in the other is sometimes termed faith but equivocally, being indede no suche faith as that whereby a christian man is justified. It is the spirite of adoption which worketh faith in us, in them not: the thinges which we believe are by us apprehended not only as true but also as good and that to us: as good they are not by them apprehended, as true they are."³⁴⁰ While truth can be apprehended by anyone, even devils, goodness can only be apprehended by those with faith.

We can see, then, why it is so important for Hooker to open up forms of certainty and to allow for what he calls a "latitude or extent" within notions of good.³⁴¹ For Hooker, the problem with Cartwright's theory is that good and evil—at least human good and evil, as opposed to the philosophical notion of absolute good and evil—do not neatly fit into a model

³³⁹ For a discussion of the use of dichotomy in Ramist logic and its influence, see Perry Miller's *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), especially chapter V. See Lee W. Gibbs, "Theology, Logic, and Rhetoric in the Temple Controversy between Richard Hooker and Walter Travers," *Anglican Theological Review* 65.2 (1983): 177-188.

³⁴⁰ *Treatise on Justification*, *FLE* V.136-137. This quotation would seem to contradict Voak's view that, like Aquinas, Hooker sees good and evil as mapping onto truth and falsehood fairly easily, a view which he uses to conclude: "Characteristically for his period, therefore, Hooker believed that ethics was an objective science, on a level with natural scientific enquiry" (31-32).

³⁴¹ *FLE* I.1.8.8.

of equal opposition.³⁴² Hooker's objection to the notion of reforming by contrariety has much to do with his argument that reason has a basis in the senses, his defense of custom as something that must be constantly evaluated to determine its moral worth, and his sense that *adiaphora* and levels of certainty allow the church license to prescribe a rational form of orthodoxy.³⁴³ The primary way in which Hooker defends the Church's customs is by invoking the morally neutral category of *adiaphora*, or things indifferent to salvation, as a neutral moral category that allows the church to use customs based on their expediency. Using the moral vacuity of indifferency, Hooker maneuvered within this moral space to justify the customs of the Church. He created a framework for moral choice in things indifferent by making expediency the measure of judgment, a measurement similar to Stoic notions of "things preferred." In his treatment of indifferency Hooker argued that it was impossible to "otherwise think, than that what things God doth neither command nor forbid, the same he permitteth with approbation either to be done or left undone. 'All things are lawful unto me,' saith the Apostle, speaking, as it seemeth, in the person of the Christian gentile for maintenance of liberty in things indifferent; whereunto his answer is, that

³⁴² Rudolph Almasy stresses what he calls Hooker's "language of obedience and submission" in Book I of the *Lawes*. According to Almasy, "there is variety among people who need to be guided, although no such variety among those who need to lead" (233). It is interesting to consider the degree to which Hooker's notion of good and evil maps onto his understanding of church polity.

³⁴³ As Arthur Ferguson has noted, Hooker's "primary problem was to advance a theory of custom which would accommodate the diversity actually existing in the Christian church and justify in particular the practice of the Church of England against the biblical absolutism of the Puritans." He too links Hooker's defense of custom to his use of what he calls "the relativistic implications inherent in the adiaphoristic principle" used by apologists for the via media ("The Historical Perspective of Richard Hooker: A Renaissance Paradox," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 3 (1973): 29). *Adiaphora* helped Hooker rationalize relativity by "distinguish[ing] between matters human and divine, between those subject to unaided historical investigation and those that lay beyond its reach. With this kind of background, he was able to make unprecedented use of the freedom permitted, though not prescribed, by the Thomist system of law to explore temporal change within the reassuring framework of an apparently stable universe" (49). In his study of the history of *adiaphora*, Bernard Verkamp connects Hooker to a tradition of "adiaphorists [that] could in the end very often appeal to nothing else but the 'reasonableness' of their action" (171). See Bernard Verkamp, *The Indifferent Mean: Adiaphorism in the English Reformation to 1554* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1977).

nevertheless, ‘all things are not expedient;’ in things indifferent there is a choice, they are not always expedient.”³⁴⁴

But for Hooker, the concept of *adiaphora* goes hand in hand with his sense that reason must determine *adiaphora*, and that reason is not fundamentally imitative but disputative. It is this definition of reason as disputative that must be brought to bear on an analysis of custom. Clearly, for Hooker, custom is not always positive, and it is particularly dangerous because it can lead to relative notions of good and evil. Hooker cites Augustine’s description of “certaine halfwaking men...who neither altogether asleepe in folly, nor yet throughly awake in the light of true understanding, have thought that there is not at all any thing just and righteous in it selfe: but looke wherewith nations are inured, seeing each sort of people hath a different kind of right from each other, and that which is right of it owne nature must be every where one and the same, therefore in it self there is nothing right.”³⁴⁵ This threat of moral relativism is why it is so important, Hooker stresses, that the law of reason must be “universally agreed upon” and that “the greatest morall duties we owe towards God or man, may without any difficultie be concluded.”³⁴⁶ According to Hooker, it is custom that has caused the breakdown in this universality and that explains why not all men accept the same moral law. When “lewde and wicked custome” grows in popularity and garners a large following—as Hooker indicates in his Preface that it did in the case of Calvin—it “may of force even in plaine things...smother the light of naturall understanding,

³⁴⁴ *FLE* I.2.4.4.

³⁴⁵ *FLE* I.1.8.10.

³⁴⁶ *FLE* I.1.8.10.

because men will not bend their wits to examine, whether things wherewith they have been accustomed, be good or evill.”³⁴⁷

Yet, such a negative view of custom is a precarious assertion for Hooker to make, for in comparison to the reformers who claim that their reforms take the Church of England back to the original apostolic church, the Church of England itself is remarkably customary. Moreover, as Hooker negotiates the relationship between the identity of the reformed English Church and its doctrinal and ecclesiological borrowings from Geneva and Rome, it becomes apparent that Hooker’s church is associated with custom by virtue of its extraordinary inclusiveness. The relationship of the English Church to the Church of Rome was absolutely central, in Hooker’s view, to understanding how to undertake reformation. In Hooker’s mind, conformity is not an impediment to reform, nor does it undercut the value of the moral decision making of the individual. It was an individual’s moral duty to pursue both reform and conformity at the same time: “The indisposition therefore of the Church of Rome to reforme hir selfe must be no stay unto us from performing our duetie to God, even as desire of retaining conformitie with them could be no excuse if we did not performe that duetie. Notwithstanding so far as lawefullie we may, we have held, and doe hold fellowship with them.” Hooker views reform in a relativist light; just as there are many who “make the Church of Rome utterly no Church at all, by reason of so many, so grievous errors in their doctrines” so too there are many who “under pretence of imagined corruptions in our discipline, doe give even as hard a judgment of the Church of England it selfe.” Hooker extends his notion of the visible Church out further, to show that “even heretickes them

³⁴⁷ *FLE* I.1.8.11.

selves” are “a part of the visible Church,” “though a maimed part.”³⁴⁸ To some degree this undercuts the certainty and the value of the visible Church while at the same time allowing Hooker to make a case for the necessity of a centralized ecclesiastical authority.

A point of contention between Cartwright and Hooker over the right method of reform that encapsulates Hooker’s sense of the importance of a discriminating reason is their differing interpretations over Tertullian’s *De idolatria*. Cartwright argues that according to Tertullian, “Christians should not be like the Idolators, no not in those things which of themselves are most indifferent to be used or not used.”³⁴⁹ In his defense of England’s retention of some of the customs of the Church of Rome, Hooker argues that custom cannot be dismissed without a rational examination of it. Comparing the relationship between the Church of Rome and the Church of England to the heathen nations neighboring Israel, Hooker argues that “we may doubt, whether the Lord in all such indifferent ceremonies, as those whereof we dispute, did frame his people of set purpose unto any utter dissimilitude, either with Aegyptians or with any other nation els...there is no necessitie to thinke, that God for feare of infection by reason of neerness forbad them to be like the Cananites or the Aegyptions, in those things which otherwise had bene lawful enough.”³⁵⁰ Moral value is determined by use, but the moral value of use is not transferable: an indifferent practice is not made evil simply because it is used by the Papists. Moreover, a custom established by heretics which was once evil, may “being presently without harme” become indifferent.³⁵¹

³⁴⁸ *FLE* I.3.1.10-11.

³⁴⁹ Cartwright quoted in Hooker *FLE* I.4.3.2.

³⁵⁰ *FLE* I.5.6.3.

³⁵¹ *FLE* I.4.12.4.

Reforming by the Cartwright's logic of contraries not only limited reform, but also sanctioned innovation that ultimately discredited the moral authority of the Church. To utterly exclude the Roman church from reform by fighting over things indifferent made reform seem irrational at best. Moreover, eschewing all Roman Catholic practice is counterproductive, if the reformers' goal really is to enact religious reform, for "when God did by his good Spirite put it into our hearts, first to reforme ourselves (whence grewe our separation) and then by all good means to seeke also their reformation; had we not onely cut off their corruptions but also estranged ourselves from them in things indifferent, who seeth not howe greatly prejudiciall this might have beene to so good a cause, and what occasion it had given them to thinke (to their greater obduration in evill) that, through a froward or wanton desire of innovation, we did constrainedly those things, for which conscience was pretended?"³⁵² For Hooker, the method of reform went far towards validating the process of reform itself. Moreover, if reform is undertaken incorrectly, it may make "prejudiciall" against reform those very individuals most in need of reform.

At times Hooker does see good and evil in absolute terms. For example, he argues that there is an essential unity between good and evil, and that men "needeth [not] one rule to know the good and another the evil by."³⁵³ Earlier in the *Lawes* Hooker had used the metaphor of the crooked stick in order to describe his notion of good and evil: "For he that knoweth what is straight doth even thereby discern what is crooked because the absence of straightness in bodies capable thereof is crookedness. Goodness in actions is like unto straightness; wherefore that which is done well we term *right*."³⁵⁴ But Hooker never

³⁵² *FLE* I.4.7.6.

³⁵³ *FLE* I.1.8.1.

maintains this notion of rightness for very long, and more often he turns his attention towards classifying moral value, arguing that reason may judge an act to be mandatory in the case of absolute notions of good and evil, permissive in the case of diverse and evitable evil, and admonitory in cases of diverse good. Moreover, even as Hooker champions the astute observation of church practice above the irrationality of the reformers, observation is a fundamentally flawed practice, but one necessary in the current age. The observation of “signes and tokens” that are indicators of goodness are ranked a far distant second place to the “most sure and infallible way” to understand goodness: through “the knowledge of causes whereby it is made such.”³⁵⁵ The knowledge of causes is “so hard that all shunne it, and had rather walke as men do in the darke by hap hazard, then tread so long and intricate mazes for knowledges sake.”

Hooker, then, is a moral reformer very much attuned to the needs and deficits of his own age. He characterizes himself as a physician helpless against the imbecility of his own patient. Just as “Physicians” often must forego the “methods of curing” that they “know to be the fittest” on account of their patient’s “impatency,” so too in “this present age full of tongue and weake of braine” Hooker chooses not to “make any curious or deep inquirie” into the “causes of goodness.” Far from using an ineffective “far removed discourse,” Hooker concentrates instead not on abstract theories of virtue, but discussions of goodness that address the very real anxieties of the period about the presence of doubt and the possibility of moral reform.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁴ *FLE* I.1.8.1.

³⁵⁵ *FLE* I.1.8.2-3.

³⁵⁶ *FLE* I.8.2.

VI. Bringing “all to a confusion” and Motivating Reform

In his biography of Richard Hooker published with the 1665 edition of Hooker’s complete works, Izaak Walton characterizes Hooker in his youth as “an early Questionist, quietly inquisitive *Why this was, and that was not, to be remembered? Why this was granted, and that denied?*”³⁵⁷ Though Walton is quick to assert that modesty keeps this penchant for questioning in check, it is telling that even Hooker’s sympathetic biographer cannot resist the idea that he is a man with a mind more prone to raising questions than answering them.

In his denial of the reformer’s position that scripture is the only rule of moral truth, Hooker cites doubting Thomas as proof that all moral value need not be found exactly in the scriptures.³⁵⁸ Commenting on the Biblical episode in which doubting Thomas must see the wounded Christ in order to believe in the resurrection, Hooker concludes, “Can there be any thing more plaine, then that which by these two sentences [about Thomas’s demand for ocular proof] appeareth, namely, that there may be a certaine beliefe grounded upon other assurance then Scripture; any thing more cleare, then that we are sayd not onely to believe the things which we knowe by anothers relation, but even whatsoever we are certainly perswaded of, whether it be by reason or by sense?” In his argument for the validity of things indifferent, Hooker argues that it is necessary to doubt that the Scripture is the only source of knowledge about certain human action and belief. In a nearly tautological expression of the nature of belief, Hooker rhetorically highlights the problem of the doctrine of *sola scriptura*: “The ground of credite is the credibility of thinges credited.”³⁵⁹ The certainty upon which all

³⁵⁷ *Walton’s Lives* (London: Falcon Educational Books, 1951) 126. The *Oxford English Dictionary*’s brief look at the history of the word “questionist” suggests both that it was used to refer to theological speculation and that it was not a positive term, making Walton’s choice all the more conspicuous.

³⁵⁸ On the ease with which Hooker uses Scripture for philosophical points, and philosophy for Scriptural proofs, see W. David Neelands 75-94.

of Hooker's uncertainties rest and perhaps the only thing that keeps Hooker from true skepticism is his unwavering assertion that a criterion of belief is absolutely necessary to moral value and that the church serves as that criterion. Even if Scripture credited all belief and doctrine, "yet still that Scripture which giveth credit to the rest, would require another Scripture to give credite unto it."³⁶⁰ Indeed, in some of the most pessimistic moments of the *Lawes*, one can reasonably wonder whether Hooker does not see the sole purpose and the sole infallible truth of religion more generally, and the English Church more specifically, as protecting man from the skepticism that is so natural to human nature. Moreover, there is a just irony in the fact that even as he argues for the English Church as a source of assurance, he uses one of the greatest Biblical doubters to do so.

Determinations of moral value, the basis for any method of reform, is, finally, the point over which Hooker dissents from the reformers. According to Covell, the problem with the writer who criticizes Hooker's *Lawes* in *A Christian Letter* is that he does not have an appropriate notion of good and evil, which causes him to come to the three false conclusions that "all sin is but *one* sin...that all sins are *equal*...[and] that all sins are *united*."³⁶¹ Against these conclusions, Covell argues instead "that sins are of divers kinds; of divers degrees; of divers natures; and that all are not, where one is."³⁶² Here again, as we saw in the debate between More, Luther, and Erasmus over moral reform, the problematic third Stoic paradox haunts Protestant determinations of moral value. Quoting the paradox nearly verbatim and at length, Covell comes to the conclusion that "howsoever, in some sort, virtues are called equal;

³⁵⁹ *FLE* I.2.4.1.

³⁶⁰ *FLE* I.2.4.2.

³⁶¹ Covell 50.

³⁶² Covell 52.

yet vices are not: for all virtues, from the vanity of the world, tend but to one perfection (either to reason, as the Philosophers thought; or, to say better, to the revealed will of God, which is the rule of good and evil); but sins departing from this lead unto divers vanities, in divers kinds. Neither are virtues all equal simply, but by a kind of proportion; because they all proceed from the love of God, and all tend unto his glory.” Hence, the reformer’s impulse to “run so far, with a desire for safety, from those opinions that were thought dangerous” brings them only “at length unto those that were much more dangerous, in truth.”³⁶³

Though the *Lawes* can and should be read as an extension of the Admonition Controversy, more largely Hooker’s interest to explain doubt and levels of certainty with regard to moral value is a philosophical response to many problems inherent in Calvinism for notions of edification and reform. Perhaps the irony of Calvinism, which started as a reform measure (though a measure distinct from Calvin himself), is that the well-noted “anguish and perplexitie” caused by its central tenets about grace and predestination undercut individual motivation for reform. It is precisely man’s uncertainty about moral value that in Hooker’s view allows for reform. According to Covell, it is “the consideration of this inequality of sin, as it acquainteth us with those steps that sin maketh in us; so it causeth us not to despair that we have committed some, but to hope and to be thankful, that we have escaped greater.”³⁶⁴ As difficult to accept as levels of certainty were to some, as much as *adiaphora* invited speculation about the nature of moral value and its apparent relativity, and as much as Hooker’s *Lawes* threatened “to bring all into a confusion,” it is possible that such moral confusion was necessary in Hooker’s view to motivate reform. Though Hooker’s movement from dichotomy to taxonomy may allow a fissure in the union of truth and goodness, in

³⁶³ Covell 53.

³⁶⁴ Covell 53.

Hooker's view, that fissure allowed for an alternative space where conformity could flourish and was preferable to what he saw as the full scale breakdown of truth and goodness that the strategy of opposition offered.

CHAPTER 5

PRETERNATURAL PHENOMENA, SKEPTICISM, AND THE BREAKDOWN OF ANALOGICAL THINKING AT THE END OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

I. Empiricism, Natural Philosophy, and Moral Value

At the end of the sixteenth century, preternatural phenomena were an important site of intersection between natural and moral knowledge. Many looked to unexplainable natural phenomena such as earthquakes and astrological conjunctions as messages from God about the moral state of England. Yet there was a great sense of uncertainty about these signs and whether or not they should be considered supernatural or preternatural at all. The increasing interest in experience, empiricism, and observation in natural philosophy shored up the epistemic demands on preternatural phenomena. As these standards became more pressing, and it seemed as though man's understanding of preternatural phenomena could become more certain, many began to question whether a knowledge apprehended by the senses should act as a moral guide. In other words, as preternatural phenomena became more certain, it provoked questions about the shape and characteristics of moral knowledge. Was it right for moral knowledge to be empirically certain? And if it was empirically certain, then was the source of moral knowledge God or man or was moral value some strange collaborative project between them?

Moral and natural philosophy enjoyed an increasingly strained relationship in this period, and advances in natural philosophy were sometimes justified at the expense of moral philosophy. Twice in the *Advancement of Learning*, Francis Bacon argues that it was not

natural knowledge that caused the fall of man, but moral knowledge. In his defense of natural philosophy against the charge of atheism, Bacon contends that “it was not the pure knowledge of nature and universality, a knowledge by the light whereof man did give names unto other creatures in Paradise, as they were brought before him, according unto their proprieties, which gave the occasion to the fall; but it was the proud knowledge of good and evil, with an intent in man to give law unto himself and to depend no more upon God’s commandments, which was the form of the temptation.” It was not the “natural knowledge of creatures, but the moral knowledge of good and evil” that caused the fall of man.³⁶⁵ Yet, for Bacon the study of nature can be profoundly moral, as when he writes famously at the beginning of his essay “Of Atheism,” “a little philosophy inclineth man’s mind to atheism; but depth in philosophy bringeth men’s minds about to religion.”³⁶⁶ This tension between Bacon’s differentiation and commingling of natural and moral knowledge clearly articulates the uneasy relationship between natural and moral law in this period.

The problematic status of nature as a resource for moral law is nowhere more apparent than in the discussions of the preternatural in the 1580s and 90s. Late Elizabethan England was a marvelous age—that is, an age endowed with a strong sense of the ties between the natural, preternatural, and the supernatural. It would seem that moral guidance was everywhere: plagues, comets, earthquakes, astrological conjunctions and so many other unexplainable phenomena provided much material for the moral pamphleteering so popular at the end of the century. In particular, prognostication pamphlets as well as works dealing with the influence of the stars and planets on man—both physically as well as politically,

³⁶⁵ Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning, Selections*, ed. Brian Vickers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 123, 150.

³⁶⁶ Bacon, “Of Atheism,” *Selections*, ed. Brian Vickers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 371.

morally, and socially—proliferated. As seen in the work of Philip Stubbes and other puritan moralists, the sense of moral decline, particularly in London, added to the sense of doom accumulating at the end of Elizabeth's reign that fuelled the production and demand for prognostication literature. Although the powers of preternatural phenomena captivated the imagination and harnessed the fears of the philosopher and layman alike for centuries leading up to the early modern period, in the late sixteenth century, pamphlets dealing with preternatural phenomena emerged as a guide to stem the tide of England's moral collapse.

But as Lorraine Daston has argued, trying to determine what was truly a miracle or sign from God was “a delicate matter of balancing theological context against admittedly incomplete natural knowledge.”³⁶⁷ The status of astrology in the period provides a particularly good illustration of her point. Hardly a science, arguably an art, possibly a miracle: astrology is a prime example of the early modern tendency to set up epistemological boundaries that immediately become blurry, the kind of impulse that can be indulged by a culture still unencumbered by strict disciplinary categories.³⁶⁸ Philip Melanchthon's attitude fairly typifies the convoluted relationship between astrology and astronomy in the period. In his preface to Sacrobosco's *De sphaera*, a standard university textbook on astronomy, Melanchthon focused his writing on the defense of astrology rather than the praise of

³⁶⁷ Lorraine Daston, “Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe,” *Wonders, Marvels, and Monsters in Early Modern Culture* ed. Peter G. Platt (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999) 82.

³⁶⁸ Even the term “mathematici,” used in the classical period, and appropriated by many Renaissance writers to refer to the astrologer, points to this confusion. Most recently Nicholas Popper has interpreted this confusion as an indicator of how “deeply interwoven” the histories of magic, astrology, mathematics, and astronomy really are (“Abraham, Planter of Mathematics”: Histories of Mathematics and Astrology in Early Modern Europe,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* (2006): 89-90. Interestingly, Charles Schmitt has traced a similar conflict in the Renaissance use of the words *experientia* and *experimentum* (“Experience and Experiment: A Comparison of Zabarella's View with Galileo's in *De Motu*,” *Studies in the Renaissance* 16 [1969]: esp. 86-92).

astronomy alone.³⁶⁹ While he differentiates between the astrologer and the astronomer, the two share a very close relationship. Astronomy measures and tracks the motions of the heavenly bodies, while astrology is classified as “a part of natural philosophy, which teaches what effects the light of the stars has on the elements and on mixed bodies, and which temperaments, alterations, or inclinations it contrives.”³⁷⁰ In Melanchthon’s rendering, both forms of knowledge were highly empirical.

The methodologies for both astronomy and astrology were in a significant period of redefinition and any neat distinction between astronomy as an empirical knowledge and astrology as a more imaginative, analogical knowledge is bound to be problematic. For example, Cardano had argued for the importance of the empiricism of Hippocratic method as a model for the astrologer’s enterprise.³⁷¹ Meanwhile, in his *Scholae mathematicae* (1569), Peter Ramus had argued for the importance of direct observation like that practiced by the ancient Greeks over and above the use of mathematical models. Ramus’s argument prompted a response from Kepler, who quoted him on the title page of his *Astronomia nova* (1609), but proceeded to use that text to defend the use of mathematical models and hypothesis in astronomy.³⁷²

³⁶⁹ On the close relationship between astronomy and astrology for Melanchthon, see Sachiko Kusukawa, *The Transformation of Natural Philosophy: The Case of Philip Melanchthon*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 130 ff. But see also D.C. Allen’s account of the tension between the “art of astrology and the science of astronomy” in *Star-Crossed Renaissance: The Quarrel about Astrology and Its Influence in England* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1941) 53ff.

³⁷⁰ *The Dignity of Astrology in Philip Melanchthon: Orations on Philosophy and Education*, ed. Sachiko Kusukawa, trans. Christine F. Salazar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 122.

³⁷¹ Anthony Grafton, “From Apotheosis to Analysis: Some Late Renaissance Histories of Classical Astronomy,” *History and the Disciplines: The Reclassification of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Donald R. Kelley (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1997) 270-271.

³⁷² Grafton 261-262.

But clearly astronomy was empirical in a way astrology was not, and more importantly, astrology was often implicitly or explicitly a moral discourse in a way that astronomy never could be. Pamphlet literature of the 1580s and 90s reveals the extent to which many writers felt the need to interpret natural and unnatural events. In general, prognostication literature, inasmuch as it is an indicator of anxiety over predestination and the doctrine of election, serves a very cogent ethical purpose.³⁷³ As such, the business of interpreting nature—not just physical phenomena such as the alignment of the planets, weather, and cataclysmic events such as earthquakes, but also other extraordinary natural events such as diseases, droughts, and plagues—became an important focal point for much pamphlet literature. Poised between sensory knowledge, demonstration, and empiricism on the one hand, and Platonism, magic, and analogical thinking on the other hand, at the end of the sixteenth century astrology found itself between two competing methodologies. In other words, the debates over astrology’s relationship to moral knowledge provide a window into the contested value of empiricism to conceptions of moral knowledge and moral discourse.

That preternatural phenomena could act as signifiers of God’s attitude towards man was largely made possible by the prevalence of analogical thinking in the period.

Dorothy Koenigsberger has argued that early modern analogical thinking is an attempt at knowledge production, as when men “use the real or seeming similarities, or the identical

³⁷³ As Alexandra Walsham and others have shown, much of this literature is indicative of an intense anxiety about and scrutiny of the concept of providence and God’s communication with the individual believer. According to Walsham, such literature proves the degree to which Calvinist doctrine was not simply up for debate among divines, but also very much a part of mainstream culture, regardless of the degree to which it was actually accepted or understood (*Providence in Early Modern England* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999] 32). See also Sandra Clark’s argument that news pamphlets in particular indicate the belief that “every event could be seen and shown to illustrate some facet of God’s relationship to man, especially his providential control of human affairs and his careful and constant warning of the inevitable consequences of sinful living” (Sandra Clark, *The Elizabethan Pamphleteers: Popular Moralistic Pamphlets, 1580-1640* [Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983] 89).

likenesses, between one thing and other...to describe what is less known from that which they feel they already know.”³⁷⁴ Brian Vickers has shown the degree to which the interest in the occult is entirely dependent upon analogical thinking. But he reminds us too that for the occult, analogy is not simply a trope, but rather “it posits a real connection, an interequation or identity of elements on the corresponding levels of classification.”³⁷⁵ What is important for our purposes is that as sensory knowledge and experience became more important to Renaissance natural philosophy, many became concerned about the uncertainty that this allowed into the analogy between natural and moral knowledge. The problem was not necessarily that the correspondence no longer existed, but rather a growing recognition that man simply could not understand it; and significantly, it was not that man could not understand it because it was knowledge shrouded in divine mystery, but because he could not perceive it with his senses.

With an increasing emphasis on empiricism and induction, astrology’s reliance upon analogical thinking is the heart of much of the polemical literature written against it.³⁷⁶ But as astrology moved towards a more empirical framework, the basis of moral knowledge had to be reevaluated and changed accordingly. Much of this is helped by advances in astronomy so that, as Daston notes, “In the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries preternatural phenomena swung from the almost-supernatural extreme of portents to the

³⁷⁴ Dorothy Koenigsberger, *Renaissance Man and Creative Thinking* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979) 2.

³⁷⁵ Brian Vickers, “Analogy versus Identity: The Rejection of Occult Symbolism, 1580-1680,” *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, ed. Brian Vickers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 148, 122.

³⁷⁶ Sheila J. Rabin has noted that analogical thinking was one of the main problems Pico cited against astrology, since he viewed this as a too generalizing method to go about understanding the human mind, body, and culture (“Pico and Magic and Astrology,” *Pico Della Mirandola: New Essays*, ed. M.V. Dougherty [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008] 168.)

almost-natural extreme of Baconian facts.”³⁷⁷ But despite this movement, many still viewed astrology, as Melanchthon had, as occupying a middle place that allowed for a continuum between arts as diverse as divination and medicine.³⁷⁸ Moreover, even Bacon associated astrology along with natural magic and alchemy as “sciences...which have had better intelligence and confederacy with the imagination of man than with his reason.”³⁷⁹

One way in which this strange middle place between two opposing methodologies expressed itself in Renaissance texts was in the way in which astrology was often associated with poetry and rhetoric by both its opponents and supporters.³⁸⁰ In the *Vanitie and Uncertaintie of the Artes and Sciences*, Agrippa calls astrology “nothing eels but meere trifles, poetes fables, and monstrous sayings, with whiche they haue imagined that the Heauen is abundantly replenished. And there is no sort of men, that more agree together, then Astrologers and Poetes.” The only difference between them is that “Astrologers do liue, abuse men, and gaine by these fables, whilst the Poetes inuentours of them doo leade their life in greate necessitie.”³⁸¹

Perhaps both because of its association with rhetoric and its debatable relationship with the senses, the polemics over astrology was a key site for the importation of skepticism into English. In the *Tetrabiblos*, Ptolemy had noted the epistemic difficulties presented by

³⁷⁷ Lorraine Daston explains the complex and shifting category of the preternatural in “Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe,” *Wonders, Marvels, and Monsters in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Peter G. Platt (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999) 88.

³⁷⁸ Melanchthon, *Preface* 111.

³⁷⁹ *Advancement of Learning* 143.

³⁸⁰ In his article on “Universal Analogy and the Culture of the Renaissance,” Joseph A. Mazzeo notes that “the tendency of Renaissance quasi-science and philosophy to be satisfied in inquiry with aesthetic contemplation of a metaphor or analogy is parallel to the use of metaphor in poetry where it serves no further end and is offered as a final statement (*Journal of the History of Ideas* 15.2 [1954]: 300).

³⁸¹ Henry Cornelius Agrippa, *Of the Vanitie and Uncertainie of the Artes and Sciences*, ed. Catherine M. Dunn (Northridge, CA: California State University Foundation, 1974) 98.

astrology: “Even though one approach astrology in the most inquiring and legitimate spirit possible, he may frequently err...because of the very nature of the thing and his own weakness in comparison with the magnitude of his profession.” As a form of knowledge, astrology was uncertain because it was “composed of so many unlike elements”; hence, it must always be “conjectural and [is] not to be absolutely affirmed.”³⁸² Acceptance or rejection of astrology reflected one’s attitude towards the senses and had much to do with how one chose to accommodate their fallibility.

Polemical literature written against astrology has a long-standing tradition dating back to Sextus Empiricus, whose *Adversus astrologos* influenced Pico della Mirandola’s *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*.³⁸³ In addition, the spokesperson for the second book of Cicero’s oft quoted *De divinatione* is the Skeptic Carneades, who concludes that “divination is not applicable in any case where knowledge is gained through the senses.”³⁸⁴ For the most part, those people who criticized astrology took a skeptical point of view, arguing that knowledge, if there were any to be had, had to come through the senses. But as astrology became more associated with astronomy, an area of knowledge becoming increasingly available to sense perception, it offered the possibility that astrology might be a way to methodize moral relativity. In other words, the connection between an unmethodized moral knowledge and an increasingly empirical branch of natural philosophy suggested that moral knowledge might have something to gain from natural philosophy.

³⁸² Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, ed. and trans. F.E. Robbins (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001) I.2.

³⁸³ In his account of Pico’s attitudes towards astrology, Steven Broecke argues that rather than simply being a polemic against astrology, the *Disputationes* should be read instead as a call to astrological reform (*The Limits of Influence: Pico, Louvain, and the Crisis of Renaissance Astrology* [Leiden: Brill, 2003] 65).

³⁸⁴ Cicero, *De divinatione* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979) II. iii. 9.

In his *Defense of Poesy*, Philip Sidney illustrates the problematic figure of the astrologer in the late sixteenth century and his relationship to natural and moral knowledge. Sidney chooses to defend the knowledge of the poet by using the astrologer as a primary counter example. This choice is all the more revealing since Sidney tends to defend poetry from things it has been, in his view, unfairly and unadvisedly associated with or accused of. Sidney describes the ill-advised pursuit of other forms of learning that attempt to “lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of.” He devises a list of forms of learning that are related to astrology and the occult sciences: “Some that thought this felicity principally to be gotten by knowledge, and no knowledge to be so high or heavenly as acquaintance with the stars, gave themselves to astronomy; others, persuading themselves to be demigods if they knew the cause of things, became natural and supernatural philosophers; some an admirable delight drew to music; and some the certainty of demonstration to the mathematics.” Sidney then invokes the story repeated in nearly every polemic published against astrology: “When by the balance of experience it was found that the astronomer, looking to the stars, might fall in a ditch...then lo, did proof, the overruler of opinions, make manifest that all these are but serving sciences, which, as they have each a private end in themselves, so yet are they all directed to the highest end of the mistress-knowledge, by the Greeks called *architectonike*, which stands (as I think) in the knowledge of a man’s self, in the ethic and politic consideration, with the end of well-doing and not of well-knowing only.”³⁸⁵ At best, this unfavorable comparison between astrology and poetry suggests that astrology may lead to a kind of incomplete moral

³⁸⁵ Philip Sidney, *A Defense of Poetry*, ed. J.A. Van Dorsten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 28-29.

law; at worst, it suggests that astrology leads only to a knowledge of natural, but not moral, law.

This story, which refers to the ancient astronomer Thales and is found in one of Plato's primary works on epistemology, the *Theaetetus*, is highly instructive about the issues surrounding astrology in the early modern period. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates expands and elucidates Protagoras's idea of man as the measure of all things and argues that perception and experience are the primary means of knowledge. At the same time, he explores the uncertainty inherent in sense perception. The story of Thales arises during his critique of philosophers who make themselves look like fools because of their lack of experience.³⁸⁶ In using this story as a counter to the moral knowledge gained from poetry, Sidney draws our attention to the importance of experience for the moral cogency of Elizabethan poetics.

Although Sidney famously uses the zodiac as the metaphor for the poetic wit, his ultimate critique of astrology comes in the ironic *Astrophil and Stella* in sonnet XXVI in which astrology becomes a rhetoric in the service of the courtier poet.³⁸⁷ Here Sidney uses astrology to underline the importance of method to moral knowledge. Though "dusty wits dare scorn astrology" and the "promising wonders" and "birthright in the sky" that any astrologer would recognize in Stella's beauty (here specifically her "lamps" or eyes)

Astrophil affirms in the sestet,

For me, I do Nature unidle know,
And know great causes great effects procure,
And know those bodies reign on low.
And if these rules did fail, proof makes me sure,
Who oft fore-judge my after-following race

³⁸⁶ Plato, *Theaetetus*, *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997) 174a-174d.

³⁸⁷ Sidney 24.

By only those two eyes in Stella's face.³⁸⁸

Setting aside questions of whether Stella's beauty more invigorates moral virtue or moral depravity, the repetition of "know" in the first three lines of the sestet sets up a comparison between two kinds of evidence for moral knowledge, "rules" and "proof." The courtier-poet finds evidence for the untenable rules of astrological influence in Stella's face.³⁸⁹ Sidney fairly reflects competing deductive and inductive models of poetics, natural, and moral knowledge. He also indicates that deductive forms of knowledge—that associated with astrology and rules—are less valid than experience. At the very least experience offers certainty when deductive method falters.

In this period of transition in moral philosophy, natural philosophy, and literary criticism writers pause to assess the place of sensory knowledge in dermining moral value. Astrology and knowledge of preternatural phenomena play a key part in discussions about not just appropriate, but effective, moral language. In this chapter I will begin by considering the attitudes of Jean Calvin and Philip Melanchthon towards astrology. These two writers set up two traditions of thought about astrology and its relationship to moral knowledge, both of which were influential in England. In the second section I will then consider the writings of the Harvey brothers in the 1580s on preternatural phenomena and how they offer us a spectrum of ways to look at the question of the relationship between moral and natural knowledge. I will then consider the example of Thomas Nashe's *Christs Teares over Jerusalem*, in which preternatural phenomena get to the heart of the limits of the human mind and moral discourse as he mediates his own competing interests in the value of decorum and skepticism for moral reform. I will conclude by way of looking at the reemergence of

³⁸⁸ *Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 163.

³⁸⁹ Katherine Duncan-Jones notes that Sidney himself was probably not a supporter of judicial astrology (361).

astrological polemic at the turn of the century as it reveals the implications of sensory knowledge for moral value.

II. Reform and the Problem of Mixed Causation

Defenders and detractors of astrology interpreted it either in terms of signification or causation. In practice these two aspects led to significant methodological differences and religious controversies. While the moral health of a nation was signified by preternatural signs such as earthquakes and comets, the moral health of an individual was often framed in terms of causation. For Jean Calvin, astrology, which was always interpreted as a cause of moral value, threatened providence; astronomy, on the other hand, could be beneficial insofar as contemplation of the heavens affirmed divine order. For Philip Melancthon, who envisioned a closer relationship between astrology and astronomy, astrology could actually strengthen the argument for providence, especially when granted a causative role in moral law.

The idea that astrology shaped the moral behavior of an individual made it, to some degree, fall victim to Calvinism.³⁹⁰ Calvin considered astrology not as a means to interpret providence, but as its competitor. However, it can also be said that Calvinism fell victim to astrology in that astral determinism ran the risk of looking too much like the doctrine of election; many believed that the moral determinism that was the logical outcome of nativities short-circuited moral value in the same way that Calvinism could seem to render piety and

³⁹⁰ While I generally agree with Walsham that Protestantism does have a great ability to absorb “older models of interpretation” such as divination and that “too much emphasis has been placed on Protestantism’s intolerance of rival explanatory systems like sorcery and astrology, and upon the violent rupture which the Reformation effected with traditional belief,” there is nevertheless a real sense of competition between providence and prognostication (180, 206).

ethics useless.³⁹¹ In both cases, the notion of reform and grace was rendered obsolete.³⁹² Indeed, it is perhaps telling that Calvin begins his *Admonition against Astrology Judiciall* with a discussion of how astral determinism is not a “licence to all evill”—almost as though by protesting against this view he is implicitly defending his own doctrine of predestination.³⁹³

In the *Institutes*, Calvin praises the study of nature as a source of moral knowledge. Man’s ability or inability to read nature was central to his knowledge of himself and of God. Nature was a primary source of knowledge of God, and, since knowledge of God necessitates a certain kind of behavior, Calvin reasoned, a guide to moral action. Moreover, this kind of knowledge was freely open to everyone: “There are innumerable evidences both in heaven and on earth that declare his wonderful wisdom; not only those more recondite matters for the closer observation of which astronomy, medicine, and natural science are intended, but also those which thrust themselves upon the sight of even the most untutored and ignorant persons, so that they cannot open their eyes without being compelled to witness them.” With more specialized knowledge of nature comes a more specialized knowledge of God; as man comes to understand higher levels of nature, such as the “motion of the stars,” “God’s providence shows itself more explicitly.”³⁹⁴ Astrologers looked at the heavens in order to

³⁹¹ Jean Calvin, *An Admonition against Astrology Judiciall*, trans. G.G. (London, 1563) A4. This coincidence has more to do with astrology’s use in by the Stoics than it has to do with any actual affinity to Calvinism itself. In his introduction to his translation of Ptolomy’s *Tetrabiblos*, F.E. Robbins notes that astrology was a significant point of contention between the New Academy and the Stoic sect (Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, ed. and trans. F.E. Robbins, [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001] xii).

³⁹² On this charge by those unfavorable to judicial astrology, see Walsham (25).

³⁹³ Calvin A4.

³⁹⁴ Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1960) I.5.53.

understand man, while Calvin suggested that the heavens should tell man more about God and moral value would be revealed through that knowledge.

It is this correspondence between knowledge of God and knowledge of nature that stabilizes Calvinist ethics.³⁹⁵ Because man's understanding of nature is fundamentally corrupt and imperfect, so too is his understanding of ethics: "Because all of us are inclined by nature to hypocrisy, a kind of empty image of righteousness in place of righteousness itself abundantly satisfies us. And because nothing appears in or around us that has not been contaminated by great immorality, what is a little less pleases us as a thing most pure—so long as we confine our minds within the limits of human corruption." Man's limited ability to apprehend moral law finds an analogy in the limitations of the senses:

Just so, an eye to which nothing is shown but black objects judges something dirty white or even rather darkly mottled to be whiteness itself. Indeed, we can discern still more clearly from the bodily senses how much we are deluded in estimating the powers of the soul. For if in broad daylight we either look down upon the ground or survey whatever meets our view round about, we seem to ourselves endowed with the strongest and keenest sight; yet when we look up to the sun and gaze straight at it, that power of sight which was particularly strong on earth is at once blunted and confused by a great brilliance, and thus we are compelled to admit that our keenness in looking upon things earthly is sheer dullness when it comes to the sun. So it happens in estimating our spiritual goods. As long as we do not look beyond the earth, being quite content with our own righteousness, wisdom and virtue, we flatter ourselves most sweetly, and fancy ourselves all but demigods.³⁹⁶

Indeed, knowledge of the heavens would seem to be absolutely necessary to calibrate man's moral compass, for it is only by comparison with something greater that man understands his own strengths and weaknesses.

But the idea that astrology directly influenced the physical world was problematic for Calvin. In his *Admonition against Astrology Judiciall*, Calvin praised the "true Astrologie,"

³⁹⁵ Calvin, *Institutes* I.2.37.

³⁹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes* I.2.37-38.

and even admitted that certain revered Old Testament biblical figures such as Moses looked to the stars for guidance in important decisions about husbandry and civil policy. However, like Ficino, he was quick to note that the “naturall order and disposition that God hath set in the staires and planets to judge of their office and propertie and virtue and to bring all to their end and use” was a “Speciall knowledge” not meant for all persons to comprehend.³⁹⁷

Careful to protect the role of providence in the lives of men from interference from the role of the stars, Calvin only allowed that at most stars may “emprunte certain qualities in the persones but they cannot cause that this thing or that should fall upon them.”³⁹⁸ Insofar as astrology could replace the prescriptions of God and social custom and may get in the way of man’s civic duty, it was a destabilizing force to the Christian commonwealth and to individual moral reform.³⁹⁹

According to Calvin, astrologers attribute causality to celestial forces, rather than seeing them instead as signs from God. The latter is an observational mode in which man interprets the will of God, while the former instead activates the imagination and ultimately redirects man’s attention away from God.⁴⁰⁰ The danger of this mistake is wide-ranging in that it is applied not just to men, but to religion; hence, astrology leads to a sense that religion is customary and relative. Astrologers

make all Christian religion as wel subject to the stars as mens bodies. For they undertake to render a reason wherefore Mahomet and his Alcoran hath a greater dominion then Christs and his gospel: to wit because the aspect of the staires is more favorable to the one then to the other....these phantastical felowes say that some corner of some signe of the Zodiak doeth cause man to believe [the Bible].

³⁹⁷ Calvin, *Admonition* A4.

³⁹⁸ Calvin, *Admonition* B5.

³⁹⁹ Calvin, *Admonition* C1.

⁴⁰⁰ Calvin, *Admonition* C2, D2.

Contrariwise the sect of Mahomet as the Scripture teacheth us is a iust plague of God to punishe the ingratitude of the world. And yet they will make men believe that it is set up and advanced by the disposition of the stars. To be shorte it is evident that all they which mainteyne such madness know not what it is to speake of God and his religion, no more then brute beastes.⁴⁰¹

In its attempts to explain variety on earth, astrology suggests that religion's *raison d'être* is natural and material rather than spiritual. Even more problematic, the evidence produced by astrology for religious difference contradicts Biblical truth. Despite the fact that Calvin views nature as a source of moral knowledge in the *Institutes*, astrology is a clear exception because it suggests that nature should be read in a causative rather than a signifying way. Calvin feared that the book of nature might supplant the book of Scripture as a source of moral knowledge, and in doing so move moral knowledge away from providence and towards relativism.

Many in England followed in Calvin's polemical footsteps, including William Fulke and William Perkins. For both writers, astrology failed as a source of moral knowledge because it lacked an empirical basis. At the same time that Calvin was published in England, William Fulke wrote the first English polemic against astrology entitled *Antiprognosticon* (1560), a text devoted to astrologers in general, and to Nostradamus in particular. Fulke made much of both the obscurity of the art and its utter lack of method: "There is no mean whereby mans witte may atteyne to so greate knowledge, ther is no methode, no induction, that can maintayne truth of those propositions, which they take for their principles...For by what reason are ye able to demonstrate or shewe, that Saturne is so hertefull, malicious, and

⁴⁰¹ Calvin, *Admonition* D5.

pestilent? By induction?”⁴⁰² For Fulke, the reliance on astrology only exhibited man’s irrationality and made men like “bruite beaste[s].”⁴⁰³

So too in his *Foure Great Lyers* (1585), William Perkins polemically addressed “the Astrologers, the Star-gazers, and Prognosticators” who he hoped would be “as stubble [and] the fire will burn them [and] they shall not deliuer their own liues from the power of the flame.” Perkins considered astrology a kind of “idolatry...covered with fayre and golden shewes,”⁴⁰⁴ and like Fulke, he questioned the soundness of its methodology. Much less dismissive of the idea of astral determinism than Calvin, he compared the prognostication of the astrologer to the diagnosis of a physician and contended that although a physician may test out his diagnosis in order to more fully understand causality, an astrologer is much more limited in his ability to experience and observe the heavens.⁴⁰⁵ Because of the seeming proximity between diagnosis and prognostication, “for some, skepticism over astrology transferred to skepticism about medical profession,” but in the case of Perkins, medicine served as a counter example to a methodologically less certain astrology.⁴⁰⁶ For Perkins, the hallmark of “humaine learning which is profitable, and hath use in the life of man, is...often observations, and experience.”⁴⁰⁷ Man is impeded from understanding celestial causality by his “imbecilitie of wit,” as well as the infinite number of stars, their variety, and movement.

⁴⁰² William Fulke, *Antiprognoticon, that is to saye, an Invective agaynst the vayne and unprofitable predictions of the Astrologians as Nostradamus, etc.*, (1560) B2-B3.

⁴⁰³ Fulke C2.

⁴⁰⁴ W[illiam]. P[erkins]., *Fovre Great Lyers...A Resolution to the countri-man, proving it vtterly unlawfull to buye or use our yearly Prognostications* (London: 1585) B1.

⁴⁰⁵ This is a somewhat ironic contrast since astrology was actually used in medical training, at least in Italy, to aid prognosis (Broecke 13).

⁴⁰⁶ Maclean 306.

⁴⁰⁷ Perkins C5.

In addition, the study of astrology is also vexed by the “infinite varietie of inferiour things, which do hinder, pervert, change, receive, or not receive the virtue and predictions of the stars.”⁴⁰⁸ As we shall see, Perkins arguments about the inadequacy of the senses in a more general way, echoes the arguments that will be taken from Sextus Empiricus by polemicists at the turn of the century.

While Calvin and his followers like Fulke and Perkins tended to stress the inadequacy of the senses in gauging astrological phenomena, Philip Melanchthon dealt with this inadequacy very differently. Instead of giving up on astrological knowledge, Melanchthon tried to validate astrology by pushing it closer to its relatively more stable cousin, astronomy.⁴⁰⁹ Melanchthon stressed the breadth of astrology, its key virtue being the general impressions that could be taken from it and interpreted. But despite the uncertainty of astrology, Melanchthon still considered it an art that, like medicine or politics, relied not upon guessing, but upon the “interpretations” of “certain observations.”⁴¹⁰ In making astrology a crucial part of natural philosophy, Melanchthon moved the notion of morality towards natural law: “Astrology is a part of natural philosophy, which teaches what effects the light of the stars has on the elements and on mixed bodies, and which temperaments, alterations, or inclinations it contrives. And since morals, studies, decisions, and vicissitudes often re-echo inclinations, ‘each follows the elements of his nature’, as it is said.”⁴¹¹ This movement towards a more natural view of custom and moral law made is more stable.

⁴⁰⁸ Perkins D2.

⁴⁰⁹ Kusakawa 149.

⁴¹⁰ Melanchthon, *The Dignity of Astrology* 121.

⁴¹¹ Melanchthon, *The Dignity of Astrology* 122. On the importance of astrology to Melanchthon’s natural philosophy and his refutation of pyrrhonian skepticism, see Sachiko Kusakawa, *The Transformation of Natural Philosophy: The Case of Philip Melanchthon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 149-150.

Unlike Calvin, Melanchthon was comfortable with a more mixed and complicated picture of human knowledge, action, and will. In his view, human action has three sources: natural inclination, the category under which he put astrology; divine providence, which acted above nature; and demons. For Melanchthon, astrology went very far in explaining the moral and religious variety in the world: “If anyone contemplated the character of different regions and the minds of various peoples, what other cause for this difference could he show than the nature of the heavens?...And I do not judge that education, habit, custom, laws and advice contribute nothing to ruling these inclinations, but I put these, too, under that category of action that springs from nature.”⁴¹² Melanchthon borrows this idea of mixture from Hippocrates, who argued that “not only the difference between regions has its origin in heavenly causes, but also the differences in customs between various regions. If these things are certain, it is manifest that the foundation of the art is true and fixed, that is that heavenly light has great influence in tempering and changing the elements and the mixed bodies....and [the planets] in various combinations, form wonderful mixtures, just as in remedies various herbs are mixed, and voices in song.”⁴¹³ Moreover, such a mixture was supported by Ptolemy, who argued that the decrees of astrologers do not have the force of command or certainty as though they were “praetors.”⁴¹⁴ For Melanchthon, the study of the stars only corroborated a providential universe and was in some ways necessary to protect from what otherwise would seem to be the most likely conclusion: that such mixture was not organized, but clearly a product of chance.⁴¹⁵ By finding a rational, natural basis for custom, astrology

⁴¹² Melanchthon, *Preface* 110.

⁴¹³ Melanchthon, *Dignity of Astrology* 123.

⁴¹⁴ Philip Melanchthon, *Preface to On the Sphere* 110-111.

⁴¹⁵ Melanchthon, *Preface* 109; *Of Astronomy and Geography* 118.

made it less relative. Astrology, then, acts as a kind of coping mechanism that can protect providential order from what could seem to be a shapeless, various world.

The attitudes of Calvin and Melancthon towards astrology show how high the religious and moral stakes were surrounding discussions of astrology. One's attitude towards astrology said much about one's understanding of the will, providence, the possibilities of human knowledge, and the relationship of that knowledge to moral value.

They also foreground two very different views of the relationship between moral law and nature and two very different ways of dealing with uncertainty. For Melancthon, the uncertainty of mixture is a kind of tool to help man build a stronger understanding of himself and a means to moral improvement. For Calvin, the stars have much less practical use and a much greater contemplative use. The contemplation of the stars helps man to affirm God's presence and suggests a providential order, but they do not act as a practical tool that man can use to develop his own moral agency. But as William Fulke and William Perkins's demand for a more empirical basis of moral knowledge shows, a belief in the moral value of astrology meant making certain epistemological sacrifices: it meant accepting a less than certain source of moral truth.

III. The Brothers Harvey and the Discourses of Preternatural Phenomena

The moral and epistemological stakes set up in the writings of Calvin and Melancthon on astrology carry into the writings in the 1580s on earthquakes, astrological conjunctions, and other preternatural phenomena in England that many took to be signs of God's impending wrath. In an early work predating the ominous signs of the 1580s, Pierre Boaistuau notes that the very category of the supernatural is a function of man's incomplete

knowledge: “Touching things supernaturall or about nature, we are to think they are not so cold in respect of nature, as though she had made ought by chance, whereof she was not able to yield a reason, but rather having regard to us, whose weak understanding cannot conceive her secret means in working.”⁴¹⁶ Because supernatural or preternatural phenomena occurred in an epistemological and hence interpretive fissure, a fissure that would to some degree be filled very soon by Kepler and Galileo, one’s response to them was a great moral test. For Thomas Churchyard, this test polarized piety and sensory knowledge. After exhorting his reader to reflect upon the earthquake and make himself “a new man” in his short discourse on the earthquake of 1580, Churchyard writes, “Let such fine wittes search out secretes, and sift what they can from the bottome of their senses. Yet those that feare God (and feelee in their consciences a diuine motion from the consideration of worldly wonders) will take the Earthquake to be of a nother kinde of Nature: And beholding the miraculous manner of the same, with open armes, and humble heart, will embrace Gods visitation, and worthily welcome the messenger he sendeth.”⁴¹⁷ For Churchyard, nature was either to be understood rationally or simply believed, and only its faithful “embrace,” he would seem to suggest, will lead to moral reform.

These two works roughly represent the two kinds of texts being produced about prognostication in England in the 1580s. The first kind were texts like Churchyard’s, which argued that preternatural phenomena were signs from God and which warned people about the dangers of not taking serious the business of interpreting and applying the lessons embedded in these signs. The second kind of text was that like Boastuau’s, or to pick an

⁴¹⁶ Pierre Boastuau, Epistle Dedicatory in *Certaine Secrete Wonders of Nature...* trans. E. Fenton (London: 1569).

⁴¹⁷ Thomas Churchyard, *A Warning for the Wise, A Feare to the Fond, a Bridle to the Lewd, and a Glasse to the Good. Written of the Late Earthquake...* (London: 1580).

example from the decade, Henry Howard's *Defensative against the Poyson of Supposed Prophecies* (1583), that is, texts that warned people not to take prophecies too seriously.

The brothers Harvey—Gabriel, John, and Richard—form a triumvirate who dedicated much thought in the 1580s to this very question of how preternatural phenomena should be interpreted. Taken together, their writings exemplify the broad spectrum of discourse that could be used to discuss nature. Within the larger question of man's ignorance of the physical processes governing supernatural phenomenon, these men tested the relationship between moral and natural law.

John and Richard wrote treatises on the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn that occurred in 1583, and both were subject to the harsh ridicules of Thomas Nashe in *Pierce Penniless*, primarily because they made predictions that did not come true.⁴¹⁸ In his *Astrological Discourse* (1583), Richard Harvey prepares people for the possibility of the Apocalypse and a new world. He discusses the planets largely in moral or astrological terms rather than astronomical ones. For Richard, the problem of interpreting planetary motion has as much to do with the planet's distance from earth as it does to do with the uncertain interactions of moral value. Richard discusses the conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in moral terms, noting that Saturn is called *Infortunum maius*, and Jupiter, *Fortuna maior*. "It is doubtless the more hard and difficult, to set downe any certaine effects and Accidents, thereof to ensue," when Saturn and Jupiter conjoin, "because the Fortune [of Jupiter] and Infortune [of Saturn] are equally matched, and as it were, indifferentlye encountered with

⁴¹⁸ Thomas Nashe, *Piers Penniless His Supplication to the Devil, The Unfortunate Traveller and Other Works*, ed. J.B. Steane (New York: Penguin, 1985) 94-95.

power and strength.”⁴¹⁹ Part of the power of a conjunction comes from the union of “starre beames.” Citing Hermes Trismegistus, Richard weighs the difficult philosophical and moral question about the relative strength of good and evil:

An aspect can not diminish the signification of a Coniunction: but a coniunction diminisheth the signification of an aspect, as ther foloweth. And yet by nature it is simply and essentially neither good nor evill, but sometimes good and sometimes evil, according to the nature and disposition of the planets, which are conioyned, so that consequently, seeing a coniunction of good planets is fortunate, of evill infortunate, it is a very difficult matter to determine upon the coniunction which is good in respect of Iupiter, and evil in respect of Saturne.⁴²⁰

In the end he resolves that evil will result from the conjunction of these two planets; while hindrance has no effect on Jupiter, when an evil planet such as Saturn is hindered it is “made all the worse, and [its] malice & hindrance is increased the more.” The result of the conjunction ranges from bad weather to the fall of kingdoms to religious persecution.⁴²¹ Read within the context of the moral disorder and civil unrest in England, according to Richard these omens can signify nothing less than the apocalypse.⁴²²

In his addition to Richard’s treatise on the conjunction, John Harvey takes a strikingly different approach to discussing astrology—and a much more astronomical one—in his *Astrological Addition* (1583) that was to be “annexed” to his brother’s earlier text. Though it is an “addition,” it offers a fundamentally different discussion of astrology.⁴²³ Against his brother Gabriel, who questions the uses of judicial astrology, he argues that “the legitimation

⁴¹⁹ Richard Harvey, *An Astrological Discourse Upon the Great and Notable Coniunction of the Two Superior Planets, Saturne & Jupiter, which shall happen the 28 day of April 1583* (London, 1583) 9.

⁴²⁰ Richard Harvey, *Astrological Discourse* 10.

⁴²¹ Richard Harvey, *Astrological Discourse* 14-15.

⁴²² Richard Harvey, *Astrological Discourse* 46-47.

⁴²³ D.C. Allen has claimed that John’s addition “does little more in his book than augment the number of authorities that Richard had cited in support of his thesis,” but this seems to me to miss the mark (*The Star-Crossed Renaissance* 123).

of liberall sciences, and as wel of this, as of any other, is to be avowed rather by the generall practice of all ages, then by any such particular proofe.”⁴²⁴ Applying, as others had, Ramist method to astrological discourse, John takes a less analogical and more streamlined approach to astrology, arguing that Jupiter may reign over Saturn, but he refuses to “define [anything] morallie” and vows “only to survey the naturall causes and signes of naturall effects.”⁴²⁵ But even though his discussion downplays a moral interpretation of nature, John’s text makes a similar call to reform as his brother’s, if a bit of a more tempered one. Far from making the extreme predictions of his brother forecasting the end of the world, John emphasizes a more optimistic reform message. He affirms that England is not irrevocably lost, but that the future punishments from God that may be indicated by the conjunction are alterable “upon humble signification of a contrite and reformed heart.”⁴²⁶

John Harvey’s more tepid engagement with astrology may be explained by the fact that he was not always so uncritical of astrology. In the same year that he published his corrective to his brother’s text, he also published a *Discursive Probleme Concerning Prophecies* to consider “how far they are to be valued, or credited, according to the surest rules, and directions in Divinitie, Philosophie, Astrologie, and other Learning.” As the title would suggest, the text is a highly skeptical one, and in it John seeks to

essay problematically, and as our schoolmen term it, disputatively, what may therein appeare most probable. My intention is not to teach, but to learne: neither do I affect the credite of a deepe Artist, but am content to be reputed a reasonable Questionist. I would be loath to misuse any person, or disguise any matter in tearmes: and therefore will not presume any farther, but to put the case, and like a tractable Peripatetician, or rather Academique, by demaunding, and arguing, to proceede tentatively, and

⁴²⁴ John Harvey, *An Astrologicall Addition, or Supplement to be Annexed to the Late Discourse upon the Great Conjunction of Saturne and Jupiter* (London: 1583) B3.

⁴²⁵ John Harvey, *Astrologicall Addition* C2v.

⁴²⁶ John Harvey, *Astrologicall Addition* C5.

discoursively, as the foresaid schoolmen use to call it. If percase your *Pro* weigh down my *Contra*, I am soone answered; and will not greatly travel to trouble, or entangle you with intricate replies, or reionders: but am ready ynough to yield without the least obstinacie, and to confesse in all philosophical, and Christian humilitie, *Errare possum, haereticus esse nolo*. In the mean time, give me leave to doubt...⁴²⁷

The *Addition* shows that John does see some moral value in supernatural phenomenon; however, in his *Discursive Probleme* he steps back from this moral value to assess it through a skeptical lens. Moreover, because it is methodological rather than dogmatic, he understands his skepticism to be in the service of, not in opposition to, Christian piety.

Prophecies, no matter their supposed source, are called into question; foreknowledge whether it be gained from “chronologicall computations, Theologicall constructions, Cabalisticall traditionas, and Mathemeaticall speculations fall out much alike, ambiguous, uncertaine, fallible, erroneous, deceitful.”⁴²⁸ For John the problem with prophecy, and with astrology in particular, is its reliance on overly obscure language. Using adjectives that recall the courtly rogues of Skelton’s *Magnyfycence*, he notes how prognosticators rely upon rhetoric: “so pliable and convertible is the nature of such pretended prophecies, and so continually practicable are the imposturall conveyances, and chevisances of such busie cheaters and cozeners, as usually play upon the advantage of these sophisticall inventions.”⁴²⁹ Astrology is a kind of rhetoric without substance, a hall of linguistic mirrors hardly worth the interpretive effort it would seem to demand:

Were it not a needles, or booteles labor, to make a special Analysis, either of their Abcedary and Alphabetical Spels, or of their Characteristicall, and Polygraphical suttelties, or of their Acrostique, and Anagrammatistique devises, or of their

⁴²⁷ John Harvey, *A Discursive Probleme Concerning Prophecies, How far they are to be valued, or credited, according to the surest rules, and directions in Divinitie, Philosophie, Astrologie, and other Learning* (London, 1588) 7.

⁴²⁸ John Harvey, *Discoursative* 16; 34.

⁴²⁹ John Harvey, *Discoursative* 45.

Steganographicall, and Hieroglyphicall mysteries, or of their hyperbolicall metaphors, phantasticall allegories, and heraldicall illusions, or of their ambiguous equivocations, interdeur amphibologies, and aenigmaticall riddles, or finally of any their other colourable glosses, and hypocritically subordinations, in some like prestigiatory, and sophisticall veine?⁴³⁰

In other words, the ability to be an astrologer is wholly dependent upon language and rhetoric. In the end, again much like Skelton, John Harvey champions the true foresight gained by prudence, art, and experience over these false virtues. The so-called knowledge gained from astrology becomes a stand-in for true virtue. Wisdom and foresight of princes and leaders, and wise men more generally should not be confused with that of prognosticators.⁴³¹

In sum, in John and Richard Harvey we find two brothers discussing astrology in various ways and thereby testing its moral worth and usefulness for moral reform. The fact that John can, in the same year, publish a text that supports the notion of astrology's moral worth and a text that questions such a notion reveals how uncertain people really were about preternatural phenomena as a source of moral knowledge in the late sixteenth century. With his skepticism, John in particular presses the question of whether it is valid to find an analogy for moral law in natural law.

The third and most notorious Harvey brother was also very interested in the relationship between moral knowledge and nature. Prior to his brothers' discussions of astrology, Gabriel considered similar questions about the moral value of nature in 1580 in a letter to Spenser on how to interpret the earthquake of that same year.⁴³² As a fellow at

⁴³⁰ John Harvey, *Discoursative* 65-66ff.

⁴³¹ John Harvey, *Discoursative* 82-83.

⁴³² John notes in his *Astrological Addition* that Gabriel disapproves of his two brothers' serious interest in astrology, but if he was Spenser's E.K. in the *Shepherd's Calendar*, a poet and a text partly dependent upon

Pembroke Hall, Harvey was known for his interest in new learning seen mainly in his advocacy of Ramism against Aristotelianism and his defense of “nu fresh paradoxis,” as he termed them. Many of his more adversarial colleagues feared that his “singularity in philosophi” would become particularly dangerous if he decided to focus his attention on religion.⁴³³

Harvey uses three different rhetorical registers—one analogical, one satirical, and one philosophical—to discuss the causes and origins of earthquakes. The letter is essentially a dialogue between Harvey and two women, Madame Incredula and Mistresse Inquisitiva, who want to hear the verdict of a “university man” on the origin of the earthquake that they have just experienced. The allegorical names immediately clue us in that this is not an entirely serious dialogue, at least not yet. As in his brother Richard’s exposition of astrological conjunction, Harvey first explains earthquakes in terms of good and evil, elemental mixture and balance: “The Earth you knowe, is a mightie great huge body, and consisteth of many diuers, and contrarie members, & vaines, and arteries, and concauties, wherein to auoide the absurditie of *Vacuum*, most necessarily, be very great store of substantiall matter, and sundry Accidental humours, & fumes, and spirites, either good, or bad, or mixte.” An earthquake is produced when “Euill” takes a “Predominaunt Course” and “working vehemently in the partes, and malitiously encountering the good, forcibly tosseth, and cruelly disturbeth the whole.”⁴³⁴ Rejecting this explanation, Mistress Inquisitiva accuses Harvey of telling them a

notions of hierarchy and analogy found in astrology, then we have to consider whether or not Gabriel Harvey invested any value in the moral import of astrology, if not its more pragmatic utility.

⁴³³ Gabriel Harvey, *Letter-Book*, ed. Edward Scott (Westminster: Camden Society, 1854) 11.

⁴³⁴ Gabriel Harvey, *Works*, ed. Alexander Grosart (New York: AMS Press, 1966) I.44-45.

“trim goodly Tale of Robinhood” and chides Harvey for an “eloquence” that “farre passeth [her] Intelligence.”⁴³⁵

Upon second try, Harvey then produces a story about earth composed of men and beasts that are

continually at variaunce and fewde with an other, evermore seeking to be revenged upon...so likewise within it too, it hath also some, as vengibly and forwardly bent, as for Example, Woormes, and Moules, and Cunnyes, and such other valiauntly highminded Creatures, the Sonnes and daughters of *Mars & Bellona* that nurrish civill debate, and contrarie factions amongst them selves: which are seldome, or never ended too, without miserable bloodshed, and deadly warre: and then go me their Gunnes lustily off, and the one dischargeth his Peece couraggiously at the other: and there is such a Generall dub a dubbe amongst them...that the whole Earth agayne...is terribly hoysed.⁴³⁶

The women, realizing they are being mocked, cut Harvey off and press him for a less “cunning” explanation.

Harvey’s two false starts highlight the ease with which one may invent fables with which to understand preternatural events. Though the second explanation has a greater degree of humor and insincerity, that it is juxtaposed against a discussion of elements and mixture would seem to call into question the first, seemingly more serious explanation of the earthquake. Harvey is very disparaging towards the women’s desire to understand the earthquake; indeed, he argues that while learned men are moved to understand the earthquake by virtue of its *motus*, women, and more largely the lesser educated and emotionally driven men that they would seem to represent for Harvey, are moved by virtue of its *metus*, in which case they will likely never be capable of understanding it.⁴³⁷ The women’s names, Inquisitiva

⁴³⁵ Gabriel Harvey 47.

⁴³⁶ Gabriel Harvey 49-50.

⁴³⁷ Gabriel Harvey 46.

and Incredula, become important here—for it is only skeptical listeners like themselves that force Harvey beyond his fictions and move him away from the “pleasant and pittie familiar discourse” announced in the letter’s title to the “short, but sharpe, and learned Iudgement” embedded in the text.

When Harvey does finally undertake a serious discussion of the earthquake, what he produces is a philosophical monologue that considers the importance of mixed causality and the inadequacies of current human knowledge in its attempt to understand natural phenomena with a mixed causality. Harvey notes that natural phenomena may “depen[d] upon a supernatural Efficient Cause, and ten[d] to a Supernaturall Morall End.”⁴³⁸ Moral law is the site of a merger between the natural and the supernatural; in other words, the very existence of a moral meaning turns nature into something supernatural, something beyond human knowledge. Despite John Harvey’s later suggestion that his brother may not approve of studies in astrology, here Gabriel Harvey does not reject the notions of portents:

I denie not, but Earthquakes (as well as many other fearfull Accidentes in the same Number,) are terrible signes, and as it were certaine menacing forerunners, and forewarners of the great latter day, and therefore out of controversie the more reverndly to be considered upon: and I acknowledge considering the Eventes, and sequels, according to the collection and discourse of mans Reason, they have seemed to Prognosticate, and threaten to this, and that Citie, utter ruyne and destruction.

But at the same time, not every preternatural event is a supernatural event. In an uncharacteristic display of humility, Gabriel notes that it is difficult to make generalizations about such phenomena, or to presume

⁴³⁸ Gabriel Harvey 53-54. Earthquakes had long been recognized for their importance. Despite his adherence to a natural history, even Pliny notes that the dangers of earthquakes are not physical alone, but rather the “fact that it is a portent.” Rome, in particular, enjoyed a rough history with earthquakes, for “the city of Rome was never shaken without this being a premonition of something about to happen.” (Pliny, *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991] II.lxxxvi.200).

as to determine precisely and peremptorily of this, or every the like singular Earthquake, to be necessarily and undoubtedly a supernaturall, and immediate fatall Action of God, for this, or that singular intent, when as I am sure, there may be a sufficient Naturall, eyther necessarie or contingent Cause in the very Earth it selfe: and there is no question, but the selfe same operation in Genere or in specie, may at one tyme, proceeding of one Cause, and referred to one End, be preternaturall or supernaturall: at another tyme, proceeding of another, or the same Cause, and referred to an other End, but Ordinarie, and Naturall.⁴³⁹

The earthquake is not simply or even primarily a moral wake up call for England as it was for so many others, like Churchyard, who wrote about it. Rather, it is an alarum to natural philosophers and historians to undertake a description of “the generall Nature of Earthquakes by definition, and the speciall diversitie of them by division” with a “complete Induction of many credible and autenticall, both olde and newe, divine and prophane, Greeke, Lattine, and other Examples.” Harvey calls for a “Historicall Induction of particulares” in order to determine by “generall Experience” whether earthquakes “*sine omni exceptione*, are ominous, and significative Effectes, as they say of Comets” or whether they can be both natural and supernatural.⁴⁴⁰ In other words, Harvey posits that nature sometimes is just nature. It may be a message from God, but it is not so exclusively, and it is up to men to develop a more discriminating understanding of nature in order to be able to differentiate a portent from a bad storm.⁴⁴¹

Harvey’s interpretation of the earthquake of 1580 certainly shows how it is that he was accused of “nu paradoxes,” for Harvey is atypical in his emphasis on the possibility of a

⁴³⁹ Gabriel Harvey 55-56.

⁴⁴⁰ Gabriel Harvey 62-63.

⁴⁴¹ In his analysis of Harvey’s reading of Gaurico’s 1552 *Tractatus Astrologus* Nicholas Popper has noted that Havey’s understanding of astrology is always overshadowed by his interest in technology: “By making astrology dependent upon the proper usage of precise instruments, Gabriel shifts the basis of prognostication from horoscopic interpretation to mathematical polytechnoscopy. He thus defends his brother by yoking the restoration of astrology to the restoration of worldly practices underway among the mathematical practitioners of London” (Nicholas Popper, “The English Polydaedali: How Gabriel Harvey Read Late Tutor London,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* [2005]: 375).

material nature. Ranging from Richard, who tends to read nature in moral terms, to John who questions whether or not nature should be read morally but still produces moral readings of nature, to Harvey who sees in nature not the call for moral reform, but the call to reform natural philosophy, we see a range of responses to the moral and epistemological liminality occasioned by preternatural phenomenon in the 1580s.

IV. Nashe, Plain Dealing, and the Uncertainty about Analogical Thinking

What worries Thomas Nashe about preternatural phenomena for the most part is not their cause or meaning. In *Christs Teares over Jerusalem*, preternatural phenomena are very clearly signs sent by God to warn men that they are sinful and that if they do not reform immediately, they will be destroyed. That much is very clear for Nashe. The question that compels Nashe's engagement with preternatural phenomena centers on why these signs do not work.

A defender of normative morality against dissenters to the English Church like Martin Marprelate, Thomas Nashe is a figure whose sense of moral decorum and authority was profoundly shaped by his interest in skepticism. Much of Nashe's work of the early 1590s questions the value of the human mind to the creation of moral order. A litmus test for Nashe of the mind's relationship to moral order is its response to signifiers, in particular, to language and to nature. Because rhetoric is a key concept for Nashe in the search for moral reform, his works of this period are profitably considered in relief against the prognostication literature of the 1580s and 90s and the movement to codify an English style and poetics. In part, these discourses come together in his anxiety about (mis)interpretation and analogy and their place in the intellectual and moral culture of the period.

One of the main motivations behind Nashe's interest in skepticism would seem to be his sense of the hermeneutic crisis of the 1590s during which time the practice of writing, reading, and interpreting literature underwent a period of reassessment. Certainly Nashe's involvement in the Martin Marprelate episode did nothing to set his mind at ease regarding Elizabethan literary culture, let alone normative morality.⁴⁴² In his epistle to the printer at the opening of *Pierce Penniless* (1592), he indicates his dissatisfaction with the current state of moral reform: "I am grown at length to see into the vanity of the world more than ever I did, and now I condemn myself for nothing so much as playing the dolt in print. Out upon it, it is odious, specially in this moralizing age, wherein everyone seeks to shew himself a politician by misinterpreting."⁴⁴³ In his disgust that "there is nothing that [a man] may not wrest or pervert," Nashe reveals his uneasiness about the fluidity of textual meaning. However, he holds on to the possibility that polemics and satire are one way to reclaim moral value for literature. Nashe warns his reader, "*Sed caveat emptor*, let the interpreter beware; for none ever heard me make allegories of an idle text. Write who will against me, but let him look his life be without scandal."⁴⁴⁴ In this moral-rhetorical economy, a faulty text, like a sinful life, is a text worthy of "allegory"—that is, worthy of a corrective.

⁴⁴² On the role of wit and decorum in constructing Elizabethan moral discourse, see Joseph Black, "The Rhetoric of Reaction: The Martin Marprelate Tracts (1588-1589), Anti-Martinism, and the Uses of Print in Early Modern England," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28.3 (1997): 709ff and Raymond A. Anselment, '*Betwixt Jest and Earnest*': *Marprelate, Milton, Marvell, Swift and the Decorum of Religious Ridicule*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979) 34ff.

⁴⁴³ *Pierce Penniless* 50. See also *Summer's Last Will and Testament, Complete Works*, vol. 3, ed. Ronald B. McKerrow (Oxford: Horace Hart, 1958) 148. In her study of Elizabethan prose pamphlets, Sandra Clark has examined the considerable vogue for "pamphlets properly called moralistic rather than moral or religious" which treated not only "events, situations, phenomena, and fashions as objects of moral reflection, but also subject[ed] all kinds of experience to moral judgments of a trite and limiting kind." These moral pamphlets were "less serious, less considerable than moral or religious pamphlets, more frivolous, more ephemeral, less far-reaching, and their context is restricted to a realm of easy judgment and fixed and unquestioned standards" (33).

⁴⁴⁴ *Pierce Penniless* 51.

In his *Preface to Astrophil and Stella* (1591), which predates *Pierce Penniless* by a year, Nashe specifically links his sense of the alarming state of Elizabethan decorum and hermeneutics with his interest in and admiration for skepticism. Preceding, as it does, the work of one of the most renowned critics of Elizabethan decorum, it seems all the more a commentary on Elizabethan literary culture. In his praise of the deceased Sidney and his literary legacy, Nashe worries about his own style. Though he does not wish to write with a “rethoricke of dulnesse,” he does choose a “heauie gated” style over the empty rhetoric produced by “lighter” wits. Nashe justifies his choice with two important allusions, both of which point to skepticism as a guide to moral value. The first comes in the form of a quotation from the sixth book of Cicero’s *Republic*, more commonly known as the dream of Scipio: “For my part euery man as he likes, *Mens cuiusque is est quisque*.”⁴⁴⁵ In Cicero, the quotation is set in context of an assertion of the disjunction between reality and appearance, the inner self and the external body: “That man whom your outward form reveals is not yourself; the spirit is the true self, not the physical figure which can be pointed out by a finger.”⁴⁴⁶ This passage reflects what Nashe perceives to be the disjunction between the style of the text, its meaning, and the intent of the writer.

While Nashe’s flippant “euery man as he likes” would seem to give up on moral value, the overall message of the passage affirms the need for rhetorical distinctions. Perhaps playing off of the dream of Scipio, which is a discussion about the ideal statesman, Nashe uses the metaphor of an ass who is “no great statesman” of the animal kingdom to represent those writers who use an inflated, meaningless rhetoric. However, Nashe admits that some

⁴⁴⁵ Nashe, *Preface to Astrophil and Stella*, *Complete Works*, vol. 3, ed. Ronald B. McKerrow (Oxford: Horace Hart, 1958) 332.

⁴⁴⁶ Cicero, *De re publica*, trans. Clinton Walker Keyes (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) VI.24.26.

will be fooled by the ass because he dresses himself in statesman's clothing. This disjunction of appearance and reality endemic in Elizabethan literature brings Nashe to the second allusion, and the one that announces his admiration for the skepticism of Sextus Empiricus: "Our opinion (as Sextus Empedocus affirmeth) giues the name of good or ill to euery thing. Out of whose works (latelie translated into English, for the benefit of vnlearned writers) a man might collect a whole booke of this argument, which no doubt woulde proue a worthy commonwealth matter, and far better than wits waxe karnell: much good worship haue the Author."⁴⁴⁷ Rather than deem Sextus's relativism a threat, Nashe finds in it a warning and a call to the importance of a discriminating mind for readers and writers alike. He admonishes that true literature is labor intensive, "a harder thing then making golde of quicksiluer."⁴⁴⁸ This alchemical metaphor suggests not only that literature is difficult, but that it requires a human ingenuity that goes beyond nature—an appropriately idealistic and complementary conclusion for a preface to Sidnean poetry.

Both readers' misinterpretations of literature and their more general inability to distinguish between true literature and that which is simply stylistic pomp are only symptomatic of the larger moral degradation of society. In his preface to *Astrophil and Stella*, Nashe crystallizes his life-long struggle between decorum and skepticism; his works of this period are obsessed with an examination of how to write moral literature in an age in which misinterpretation is the hermeneutic rule of the day.⁴⁴⁹ As the preface to *Astrophil and Stella* suggests, for Nashe wit and its extremes, that is, wittiness as well as a dearth of wit, are a

⁴⁴⁷ *Preface* III.332.

⁴⁴⁸ *Preface* III.332-333.

⁴⁴⁹ The best treatment of Nashe's struggle with decorum and skepticism is Reid Barbour's extended discussion of Nashe wherein he views Nashe as a transitional figure between Greene and Dekker in *Deciphering Elizabethan Fiction* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1993).

central concern. While rhetoric and wit are very important to Nashe, he also realizes how easily they can render a text morally useless.⁴⁵⁰ In short, at the outset of his literary career, Nashe questions whether or not decorum can work in the service of moral writing.⁴⁵¹

One place in particular where this questioning can be seen is in his recurring fascination with the notion of plainness. In *Summer's Last Will and Testament* (1592), Nashe nostalgically harkens back to a day, pre-Marprelate, perhaps pre-print, when real social bonds, not literary ones, held society together:

For men (meane men), the skumme & drosse of all,
Will talke and babble of they know not what,
Vpbraid, depraeue, and taunt they care not whom:
Surmises passe for sound approued truthes:
Familiaritie and conference,
That were the sinewes of societies,
Are now for vnderminings onely vsde,
And nouell wits, that loue none but themselues,
Thinke wisdomes height as falsehood slily couch't,
Seeking each other to o'erthrow his mate.⁴⁵²

When Summer laments the loss of “simplicity and plainness,” for Nashe these terms refer not simply or even primarily to rhetoric; they are, in fact, terms with deep cultural and moral meaning for him.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵⁰In his early anti-Martinist work, Nashe attacked the dearth of wit characteristic in his view of puritan writing, but wit in its many forms was a constant concern for Nashe throughout his career. Charles Nicholl notes the degree to which in the Marprelate controversy Nashe “cannot quite dissociate his own insubordinations from Martin’s” (*A Cup of News* [Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984] 77).

⁴⁵¹As Jonathan Crewe has noted, Nashe relationship to decorum is complex as he does not entirely repudiate decorum, but rather more typically “renders decorum suspect or problematical” because he often “identif[ies] stylistic decorum with outward conformity rather than with a profound fitness of things” (*Unredeemed Rhetoric: Thomas Nashe and the Scandal of Authorship* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982] 26-27).

⁴⁵²*SLWT* III.1189-1198.

⁴⁵³*SLWT* III.1162.

While these two adjectives are seldom used of Nashe's prose, there is a sense in many of his texts that such virtues are of the greatest value to moral reform. For Nashe, one of the greatest impediments to reform is excess such as that he condemns in his first moral treatise, the *Anatomie of Absuditie* (1589). At the end of his *Preface to Menaphon* Nashe describes his *Anatomie* as a call to the reform of literature. He advises his readers that his "*Anatomie of Absurdities* may acquaint you ere long with my skill in surgery, wherein the diseases of Art more merrily discouered may make our maimed Poets put together their blankes vnto the building of an Hospitall."⁴⁵⁴ Moreover, the *Anatomie* is an important text because in alluding to Philip Stubbes's *Anatomy of Abuses*, and in borrowing heavily throughout the text from Agrippa's *Vanitie of the Artes and Sciences*, Nashe announces his interest in moral literature and in using skepticism to promote moral value.

The *Anatomie* is a fairly conventional catalogue of morally dangerous persons masquerading as brokers of virtue. As his title page indicates, the text is intended to benefit those lost in moral extremes, both the "licentious" and those "addicted to a more nyce stoycall austeritie" equally. The court, the poet, the puritanical moralist and the facilities of learning are all brought to account for their respective vanities. What these brokers have in common are the different forms of excess that make them ineffectual. In Nashe's estimation, neither popular writers nor university wits, nor moralizing pedants are particularly effective writers.⁴⁵⁵

The text begins with an interrogation of the virtues espoused in Castiglione's *Courtier* and the courtier poets who present themselves "as the Authors of eloquence, and fountains of

⁴⁵⁴ Nashe, *Preface to Menaphon*, *Complete Works*, vol. 3, ed. Ronald B. McKerrow (Oxford: Horace Hart, 1958) 324.

⁴⁵⁵ Hilliard 24.

our finer phrases, when as they sette before us, nought but a confused masse of wordes without matter, a Chaos of sentences without any profitable sense....[or] Morall of greater moment.”⁴⁵⁶ Nashe moves from the misguided rhetorical excess of the courtier poet to those who “make the Presse the dunghill” and, in an unmistakable allusion to the polemical moralist Philip Stubbes, those who “preten[d] forsooth to anatomize abuses, and stubbe up sin by the rootes.” In their overly-puritanical desire to censure things so greatly that no room is left for “lawfull use,”⁴⁵⁷ those who would style themselves the “Church militant” are nothing else but a dangerous lot of “Malcontents.”⁴⁵⁸

Nashe moves finally to epistemic excess, of which the greatest example are overly “curious” astrologers, “who are infected with a farther improbabilitie, challenging knowledge unto themselves of deeper misteries.” Like Sidney in his *Defense of Poesy*, Nashe cites the story of Thales, the ancient astrologer who ignored what was “under his feet” in order to “search more curiouslie into the secrets of nature” and to “foretell the tokens [of God’s] wrath.” But even as he begins this passage on unsanctioned knowledge by focusing on astrologers, his discussion moves seamlessly from astrology back to a condemnation of certain kinds of English poets:

Thus are the ignorant deluded, the simple misused, and the sacred Science of Astronomie discredited, and in truth what leasings will not make-shifts invent for money? What whyl they not faine for gaine? Hence come our babbling Ballets, and our new found Songs and Sonets, which every rednose fiddler hath at his fingers end...Be it a truth which they would tune, they enterlace it with a lye or two to make meter, not regarding veritie, so they may make up the verse, not unlike to Homer, who cared not what he fained, so hee might make his Countrimen famous. But as the

⁴⁵⁶ Nashe, *The Anatomie of Absurditie* (London: 1589) A1r.

⁴⁵⁷ *Anatomie* B2r.

⁴⁵⁸ *Anatomie* B3v.

straightest thinges beeing put into water, seeme crooked, so the crediblest trothes, if once they come with in the compass of these mens wits, seeme tales.⁴⁵⁹

In short, like astrology which is also meant to dupe the simple, poetry is “an occupation [of] lying.”⁴⁶⁰ Probably alluding to the debate over quantitative verse raised by Gabriel Harvey, Spenser, Daniel, and Campion, Nashe notes the sacrifice of truth for the sake of style. Wit here is a distorting mechanism, so that even when man may light upon truth, that truth may be of very little use and entirely incommunicable.

But Nashe walks a narrow road here since, despite his skepticism about certain deceptive forms of rhetoric and obscurity, he is not ready to give up the value of rhetoric altogether. In a reprisal of Sidney’s *Defense of Poesy*, Nashe argues that true poetry marries the relative clarity of historical evidence and experience to a certain kind of philosophical and moral obscurity: “I account of Poetrie, as of a more hidden and divine kinde of Philosophy, enwrapped in blinde fables and darke stories, wherein the principles of more excellent Arts and morall precepts of manners, illustrated with divers examples of other kindgomes and Countries are contained.” The poet, he argues citing Cicero, predates the philosopher in the “studie of wisdome.” Here Nashe promotes a kind of decorous obscurity: “Things that are most profitable” should be “shrouded under the fables that are most obscure,” yet this obscurity should not be irresolvable, but linked to history, natural philosophy, or moral philosophy.⁴⁶¹

Despite his interest in a kind of obscurity, Nashe ends the text in a way that significantly complicates our understanding of his poetics. Emphasizing the greater worth of

⁴⁵⁹ *Anatomie* B3v.

⁴⁶⁰ *Anatomie* B3v.

⁴⁶¹ *Anatomie* C1r.

experience over art and of moral value over poetry, he recommends that poets should “endeavour to adde unto Arte Experience, [because] experience is more profitable voide of arte, then arte which hath not experience. Of it selfe arte is unprofitable without experience.”⁴⁶² Nashe ends this early text with a discussion of the difficulty of moral reform by citing Socrates, “who reduced all Philosophy unto the manners, [and] sayd, that thys was the greatest wisdome, to distinguish good & evill thinges.” Only by discriminating between good and evil may man attain that “unestimable iewell” termed by Nashe “an honest conversation.” But such a skill is hard to achieve, and Nashe challenges his reader: “Let hime that is inclined but to one extreame, secretly try by himselfe, with what facilitie or difficulty he may suppress it in himselfe, and his owne practice will teach him, that he is led captive by his own inclinations, and overcome by his wicked cogitations. If then so difficult a thing in accomplishment, seemes one sins suppression, howe laborious woulde be the reformation of an altogether evil conversation.”⁴⁶³ One of the most important sites of the distinction between good and evil is the text itself, and Nashe ends the *Anatomie* by noting that only the right kind of learning—and by extension, the right kind of text—can help a man against his own “inclinations” to evil and can help him achieve the ideal of “an honest conuersation.”

Clearly for Nashe, the text becomes a kind of ethical dilemma that the reader must answer. But Nashe’s defense of literature and its contribution to the reader’s moral identity are never as clear as we might like them to be. In his defense of poetry against a “sencelesse stoicall austeritie,” Nashe argues that texts will not “infect the minde and corrupt the

⁴⁶² *Anatomie* E3r.

⁴⁶³ *Anatomie* E3v.

manners” of a good man. Just as “Sunne beames touching the earth remaine still from whence they came, so a wyse mans mind, although sometimes by chance it wandreth here and there, yet it hath recourse in staid yeeres to that it ought.”⁴⁶⁴ Yet Nashe warns the reader to be “warie” and to learn “as wel to discerne thy losse as thy gaine, thy hurt as thy good, least being wonne to haue a faurourable like of Poets wanton lines, thou be excited unto the imitation of their lust.”⁴⁶⁵ We are left, then, with the sense that the text is a site of moral challenge, but without as clear a sense of the text as a site of moral authority.

Nashe returns to this question of the moral authority of the text in one of his most religious texts, *Christs Teares over Jerusalem*. This text begins with the premise that man is surrounded by the signs of moral value, if only he could understand them. Such signs include the preternatural phenomena sent by God to warn man about the dangers of his sinfulness. For Nashe, man’s inability to read the signs of heaven is symptomatic of the inability to distinguish between good and evil suggested at the end of the *Anatomy of Absurditie*. Moreover, this breakdown has much to do with Nashe’s sense of the problem of analogical thinking, and the difficulty of making the literary text a purveyor of moral value.

Although *Christs Teares* is one of Nashe’s most didactic texts, it is also, in more subtle ways than many of his other texts, a very skeptical text, in large part because of its complex engagement with experience and history. In this text, recent natural phenomena such as the earthquake of 1580 are set in context of a long-standing tradition of prognostication dating back to the biblical account of the destruction of Jerusalem. By the time Nashe wrote *Christs Teares*, the Elizabethan audience had proved itself to be much more resistant to reform than Nashe had imagined in the *Anatomie*. Marprelate had more or

⁴⁶⁴ *Anatomie* C2r

⁴⁶⁵ *Anatomie* E3r.

less come and gone, and Nashe's battle with the Harvey brothers was in full swing. Though several of Nashe's works treat fundamental moral issues facing society, *Christs Teares* stands out with an uncharacteristic sense of urgency and sincerity, so much so that Charles Nicholl has argued somewhat bizarrely that the text constitutes "an actual nervous breakdown."⁴⁶⁶ More to the point, the text is a culmination of the sometimes productive sometimes unhappy merger in Nashe between skepticism and moral reform.

Nashe was not the only person wondering about the connection between the ominous astrological signs and preternatural phenomena of the 1580s, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the current moral health of England. If anything, the signs of the 1580s were as reassuring as they were frightening: they at once served as evidence that the English nation was elect while at the same time suggesting the real possibility that England was on the verge of losing its chosen status. As early as 1584, John Stockwood preached a sermon inspired by recent unnatural events warning the people of England about the need for repentance. His *Sermon of the moste lamentable destruction of Ierusalem* capitalized on the anxiety about these events and the possibility that they somehow represented the displeasure of God. Jerusalem was unable to heed the warnings of God. It was not their ignorance that destroyed them, but rather their "brutishe dulnesse, that blinded them that they coulde not see GOD offerynge hym selfe unto them, nor yet perceive hys favour, nor the tokens of his kindled wrath, so that they were the cause of theyr owne destruction." Almost a cloaked warning to England to beware of the pride of nationalism, Stockwood notes that Jerusalem was "the chiefe Citie of the worlde" filled with "Scribes and Pharisies" who were revered for their

⁴⁶⁶ Charles Nicholl, *A Cup of News: The Life of Thomas Nashe* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) 169.

“knowledge and virtue.” Yet despite this preeminent status and great learning, the people of Jerusalem failed to interpret the message of Christ.⁴⁶⁷

The destruction of Jerusalem, as confirmed by both the Bible and historiographers, served as a poignant example for John Stockwood and for Thomas Nashe of what happens when the means to moral reform fail.⁴⁶⁸ It is essentially a parable of the breakdown of communication between God and man, and the breakdown of the relationship between moral law and human action. It is, I would argue, a lesson of some significance for the writer thinking both about the problem of interpretation and literary decorum in this age of moralizing pamphleteers.

A long overdue continuation of an earlier flurry of pamphlets occurring in the 1580s following the earthquake of 1580, *Christs Teares over Jerusalem* significantly reinvents the discourse used to interpret that event.⁴⁶⁹ For many in the 1580s the significance of the earthquake had to do with determining its cause, but for Nashe the interpretation of the event and its spiritual import takes precedence over characterizing its origin. Although the earthquake awakened many to the possibility of God’s displeasure with England’s religious and moral state, many doubted whether such a sign would have any real impact.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁷ John Stockwood, *A very Fruitfull and Necessary Sermon of the Moste Lamentable Destruction of Ierusalem* (London: 1584) B1v.

⁴⁶⁸ For a historical rendition of this story, see Edward Livelie’s *True Chronologie of the Times of the Persian Monarchie, and after to the Destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans* (London: 1597).

⁴⁶⁹ Catherine Cox has noted the importance of another preternatural phenomena on this text, the plague that had attacked London in 1593. She attributes the generic hybridity of this text, merging as it does satire and sermon with prophecy and anatomy, to Nashe’s insistence on “truth’s revelation and the urgency of reform.” (“Voices of Prophecy and Prayer in Thomas Nashe’s *Christ’s Tears Over Jerusalem*,” *Renaissance Papers* [2000]: 54-55).

⁴⁷⁰ Walsham does note, however, many “campaigns to alter moral standards” known by historians as the “Reformation of Manners” following the earthquake and other natural disasters in the 1580s (132, 133, 135).

Nashe depicts God as a kind of author trying and failing to reach his audience, namely the Israelites. It is fitting that Nashe should once again revisit the question of the relationship between style and moral discourse at the outset of this text and that once again he should return to the notion of “plainness.” *Christs Teares* was published twice, each time with a different preface that acknowledged Nashe’s ongoing polemical engagement with Gabriel Harvey. Nashe’s prefatory remarks bring us back to the question of decorum, its relationship to skepticism, and its moral value. In the earliest edition, the prefatory letter issues an apology to Harvey and a change in Nashe’s rhetorical-moral methodology. Nashe declares his “farewells to fantastickall Satirisme” wherein he had “here-to-fore misspent [his] spirit.” Alluding to St. Augustine’s *Retractions*, Nashe repudiates his former polemical career and announces his “unfained conuersion” to less vain kind of writing. Harvey’s response to Nashe’s apology was one of incredulity, and he harshly criticized Nashe for the style of *Christs Teares*, which he considered to be blasphemous.⁴⁷¹ After receiving this bitter response from Harvey, Nashe abruptly changed his prefatory letter and declared himself an “Academick...who absolutely conclude[s] that nothing is to be affirmed” and lamented that this was the result of “deal[ing] plainly.” The brief, earlier renunciation of satire gives way in the second edition to a longer meditation on the problem of misinterpretation. Nashe condemns those men who have misinterpreted the *Unfortunate Traveller* by finding topical analogies where none exist. These “new decipherers,”⁴⁷² as Nashe terms them, lack “honest plain meaning” because they create an “infinite number of these phantastical strange hieroglyphs....and stretch words on the tenter hooks so miserably, that a man were as good

⁴⁷¹ Gabriel Harvey, *A New Letter of Notable Content, Works*, vol. I, ed. Alexander Grosart (New York: AMS Press, 1966) 273-274.

⁴⁷² On the complexities of this term, see Reid Barbour’s *Deciphering Elizabethan Fiction*.

considering every circumstance, write on cheuerell as on paper.”⁴⁷³ Elizabethan literary culture is bankrupt of the plainness so valued in *Summer’s Last Will and Testament*.

Dealing plainly is a concept that goes hand-in-hand with Nashe’s tense relationship to skepticism. As before, the concept has less to do with rhetoric, and more to do with stabilized textual meaning. For Nashe morally useful writing necessitates persuading readers to forgo the attraction of “*probabile*” to their imagination and encouraging them instead to embrace “*manifeste verum*.” Indeed, *Christs Teares* is highly rhetorical, and Nashe spends much time in his preface to the reader in the second edition defending his rhetorical choices. In a sense, plain dealing represents an attempt to escape a nominalist notion of words as signifiers; it is about breaking away from the moral uncertainty offered by mere analogy and striking the reader to the “marrow,” as he says.

The address to the reader in the second edition of *Christs Teares* reveals the true complexity of decorum and the conflicted ways in which Nashe sought to deal with it. The conflict between rhetoric and plain speaking becomes even more apparent in the invocation to the text. Nashe begins very self-consciously with an invocation that questions what kind of style to use for this text that is to be London’s “looking glasse.” As a kind of prophet, Nashe hopes to be God’s “pure simple Orator” and to “transform [him]self from [him]self, to be thy unworthy Speaker to the World.” Leaving behind “any ambitious hope of the vain merite of Arte,” Nashe “disinherit[s] [his] wit” and asks instead that “fiery Cloven-tongued

⁴⁷³ According to McKerrow and the *OED*, cheverel is a kind of leather noted for its flexibility. The phrase was often applied disparagingly, as it was by Philip Stubbes in the *Anatomy of Abuses*, to the conscience (McKerrow IV.250).

inspiration” be his muse and give his words “the forcible wings of the Lightnings, that they may pierce vnawares into the marrow and reynes of my Readers.”⁴⁷⁴

It is important to recognize that Nashe wrote *Christs Teares* just after the completion of *Terrors of the Night*, a wild dream vision that examines divination and by extension, the moral agency of the mind. Nashe shows the mind to be a place where distinctions simply cannot survive, a characteristic which directly affects the nature of literature.⁴⁷⁵ Night is the stomping ground of the guilty conscience, where “the table of our heart is turned to an index of iniquities, and all our thoughts are nothing but texts to condemn us.”⁴⁷⁶ And just as thoughts are texts, so too are texts dreams, as Nashe declares that “this whole tractate is but a dream,” and not the transcendent golden vision of Sidnean poetics, but an entirely “leadene dream” mired in the realities of human limitation.⁴⁷⁷ The key to this text is not so much that the literary text is an expression of the mind so much as it is the degree to which, for Nashe, the literary text becomes a kind of synecdoche of the mind and thereby reveals its natural state of chaos: “No such figure as the first chaose whereout the world was extraught, as our dreams in the night. In them all states, all sexes, all places, are confounded and meet

⁴⁷⁴ *Christ's Teares* III.14. More recently Christopher Hill has argued for the overlap between preaching and the prose pamphlets of which *Christ's Teares* is a part, noting that these texts “are always involved in a delicate interchange between the danger of affection and the need for compelling elocution.” Christopher A. Hill, “Thomas Nashe’s Imitation of Christ,” *Prose Studies* 28.2 (2006): 211.

⁴⁷⁵ As Per Sivefors has noted, the mind is “not so much amoral as premoral, a carnivalesque sphere where ethical judgements are set aside.” Creating a dream vision that takes a “neither/nor position” Nashe “refutes both the idea of dream interpretation as morally valuable because dreams are divinely inspired, and the idea of dream interpretation as condemnable because dreams are mere insignificant by-products.” Ultimately, the text “challenges the idea of the literary text as a container of ethical values” (“‘All this tractate is but a Dream’: The Ethics of Dream Narration in Thomas Nashe’s *The Terrors of the Night*” in *Textual Ethos Studies, or Locating Ethics*, ed. Anna Fahraeus and AnnKatrin Jonsson [New York: Rodopi, 2005] 167, 162).

⁴⁷⁶ Nashe, *Terrors of the Night, The Unfortunate Traveller and Other Works*, ed. J.B. Steane (New York: Penguin, 1985) 208.

⁴⁷⁷ *Terrors* 224.

together. Our cogitations run on like heaps like men to part a fray where every one strikes his text fellow....they confound in one gallimaufry.”⁴⁷⁸ Though an *Anatomy of Absurditie* highlights the importance of social and moral distinctions to Nashe, in *Terrors of the Night* he confronts the reality that the mind is an unreliable ethical agent and in need of much ordering itself.

Again returning to the threat of a willful and subjective hermeneutics, Nashe modifies the proverbial “everyone shapes his own fortune as he lists” to the more pessimistic “everyone shapes his own fears and fancies as he list.” But this sense of control quickly evaporates as he describes the mind. The mind is wholly physical and, a kind of preternatural phenomenon itself, in a constant state of bad weather: “In all points our brains are like the firmament, and exhale in every prespect like gross mistempered vapours and meteors: of the more foeculent combustible airy matter whereof, affrighting forms and monstrous images innumerable are created, but of the slimy unwieldier drossy part, dull melancholy or drowsiness.” Weather is an apt metaphor for Nashe’s picture of the mind; not only is it prodigious, but it is in constant motion: “And as the firmament is still moving and working, so uncessant is the wheeling and rolling on of our brains, which every hour are tempering some new piece of prodigy or other, and turmoiling, mixing and changing the course of our thoughts.” Crucially Nashe ends this passage not with an affirmation that “there are no true apparitions or prodigies” but rather “to show how easily we may be flouted if we take not great heed with our own antique suppositions.”⁴⁷⁹ In other words, the purpose of *Terrors of*

⁴⁷⁸ *Terrors* 219.

⁴⁷⁹ *Terrors* 241.

the Night is not simply to reveal the nature of the mind, but to teach the reader to doubt the mind's ability to perceive, interpret, and order.

Though vastly different in style, *Christs Teares* struggles with similar questions about the ethical agency of the human mind. Indeed, because it is a much more morally didactic text, the stakes of this struggle are even higher. As the text opens with questions about decorum, its content only reinforces the problems of rhetoric, language, and human communication. After his invocation, Nashe immediately emphasizes the great and varied means by which God attempted to communicate with the people of Jerusalem prior to its destruction. In the very first line of the text itself, he notes that "It is not vnknown, by how many & sundry waies GOD spake by Visions, Dreames, Prophecies and Wonders, to his chosen *Ierusalem*, onely to move his chosen *Ierusalem* wholie to cleaue vnto him." Too reassured by their own sense of election, the people of Jerusalem ignored the preternatural signs sent by God and looked instead to their "own inuentions."⁴⁸⁰ In response to the people's ignorance, God ups the ante, as it were, and sends in his second line of communication, the prophets. Despite the fact that God sends several battalions of them, they are all successively either beaten, killed, or stoned.⁴⁸¹ Somewhat naively believing that the prophets must have been mistaken for "seducers and deceiuers," God finally decides to send what seems to him to be a full-proof form of communication, Christ. To make Christ identifiable as his son, God gives him not royal robes, but the power to work "miracles aboue the imagination of man." After Christ sufficiently proves who he is to the Jews so that "they should have no credible or truth-like exception to them," he "went into their

⁴⁸⁰ CT II.16.

⁴⁸¹ CT II.18.

Assemblies...freely deliuered his message, declared from whence he came, gentlie expostulated their ill dealing, desired them to haue care of themselues, told them the danger of their obstinancie, and wooed them (with many fayre promises) to repent and be conuerted.” Though Nashe emphasizes here the many ways in which Christ spoke to the Jews (“freely deliuered...declared...gentlie expostulated...” etc.), his message of reform has absolutely no effect. When all these other means of communication fail, Christ’s “last refuge was to deale plainly with them, and explane to them full what plagues and warres were entering in at their gates for their disloyaltie and doggednesse.”⁴⁸²

Christ is the example, par excellence for Nashe, of plain dealing. The savior is essentially God’s last ditch effort to try to save Jerusalem from its own sinfulness, and crucially, he is God’s most open, unanalogical form of communication. What we see here, then, is a spectrum ranging from the highly signified (earthquakes, prophets, and even Christ’s miracles) to the direct (Christ preaching openly), not entirely unlike the one Nashe has struggled with throughout his literary career. Prior to the imagined oration Nashe is about to present, Christ had spent thirty years “repro[u]ing, preach[ing], exhort[ing] with al the wooing words [he] could, endeououring to mollify, melt & pierce [the Israelites’] harts” in an attempt to heal the “malady of [Jerusalem’s] incredulity.”⁴⁸³ Nashe emphasizes not only the problem interpreting God, but quite the contrary, the problem that man may fully understand God and yet not heed him. Nashe’s God is hardly a mysterious, Calvinist God, and in some ways would seem to be quite powerless in his ability to reform man or society. Not only can man not read divine signs: he cannot accept plain truth.

⁴⁸² *CT* II.19.

⁴⁸³ *CT* II.20.

That this is a text about orthodox moral reform for Nashe becomes clear in Christ's oration, where his single theme is the need for Jerusalem to "gather together." Israel, like England, has been a country filled with strife, warfare, and contention. Christ has been sent to "gather [the Israelites] to repentance and amendment of life," as if such amendment required a unified whole, not the land of sectarianism that currently defines the English religious landscape: "All my Fathers Angels stand *gathered* together about his Throne; No bread is made, but of graines of Corne *gathered* together: no building is rayseed, but a number of stones glued and *gathered* together. There is no perfect society or Citty, but of a number of men *gathered* together..."⁴⁸⁴ There is no doubt that for Nashe unity is the hallmark of a morally strong society.

After giving the oration of Christ to Jerusalem, Nashe casts off that persona to begin to give his account of the marvelous astronomical signs and monstrous births that Jerusalem witnessed. But before getting too far, he questions his own method: "what should I ouer-blacke mine Inke, perlex pale Paper, rumatize my Readers eyes, with the sad tedious recital, of all the prognosticating signes of their ruine. Stories have lost and tyred themselves in this Story. Should I but make an Index to any one Writer of them, it would aske a Booke alone. Some few abbreuiated alleagements I will content my selfe with, and so passe on-ward to more necessary matter."⁴⁸⁵ It would seem that neither the miracles of Christ nor the portents of God nor their retelling have been successful in reforming England. Nashe moves, then, to the "more necessary matter," that is the history of the destruction of Jerusalem and more

⁴⁸⁴ CT II.28 (italics original).

⁴⁸⁵ CT II.61-62.

importantly to its direct application to London which “deserve[s] as great a *desolation as Jerusalem*.”⁴⁸⁶

The last portion of *Christs Teares* stylistically and thematically revisits the *Anatomy of Absurditie*, almost as if Nashe realizes that his somewhat preliminary moral sketch is not up to task of moral reform; conversely, such a revisitation in this context suggests that Nashe also does not trust the audience for *Christs Teares*, as by tacking on a reprisal of the *Anatomie* he would simply seem to be spelling out the analogy for his audience in order to prevent any misinterpretation. He circles back once again to a condemnation of pride and its various manifestations such as the usurer’s avarice, the poet’s vain-glory, the atheist’s curiosity and doubt, the discontent of the court and heretics. Among the social and religious ills he revisits, the most extended treatment is given to atheism, in which he warns people in particular of the “Pironiks, whose position and opinion it is, that there is no hel or misery but opinion,” and who fall into two categories, inward and outward atheists. The inward atheist is Nashe’s version of an over-zealous reformer; he appears to be godly and “makes conscience and the spirit of God, a long side-cloake, for all his oppressions and policies.” The outward atheist is the rationalist who needs concrete proof for the existence of God. Like Christ, Nashe tries to gather his audience, to unify them in forgetting about “sects and forraine opinions” and in focusing them so that “Atheisme be the onely string you beate on: for there is no Sect now in England so scattered as Atheisme.”⁴⁸⁷ Particularly troubling for Nashe, though, is the weakness with which this group has been combated: “I am at my wits end when I view how coldly, in comparison of other Countrimen, our *Englishmen* write. How in

⁴⁸⁶ CT II.80.

⁴⁸⁷ CT II.121.

their bookes of confutation, they show no wit or courage, as well as learning.” The “Leade and Tinne Muses”⁴⁸⁸ and the “brown-bread dorbellisme” of the English will not be sufficient to counteract “the superabundance of wit” that characterizes atheists. To be effective, one needs “antique histories...philosophers confession or opinion of God...[and] an infinite laborinths of books” in order to overcome the “sloth-fauoring innovation” of atheists⁴⁸⁹: “Christ when hee sayd *you must forsake all and follow him*, meant not you should forsake all artes and follow him.” Nashe affirms human art as “steppes and degrees” that allow men “to climb vp to heauen.”⁴⁹⁰

Although the repudiation of atheism and the skepticism that was often the byword for it was becoming conventional at about this time, it is still a little surprising to see Nashe name Pyrrhonism as such an evil when he would seem to affirm it both only two years earlier in the preface to *Astrophil and Stella* and even in the reference to Academic skepticism in the preface to this very text. Clearly the skepticism he means here involves the dangers of sectarianism and it is surely true that sectarianism is much more dangerous in a religious context with which we end this text than in a rhetorical context with which we begin. Strikingly, Nashe reaffirms the value of literature as something that allows men “to climb vp to heauen” precisely at this moment of the repudiation of skepticism. And yet we might wonder too, if it is the case that with the failure of analogy and with rhetoric more generally, the threat of skepticism becomes simply too much for Nashe the moralist to bear? Is it possible that with the failure of analogy, skepticism must be repudiated and an idealist sense of the moral value of literature restored? As valuable a guide as skepticism serves for Nashe

⁴⁸⁸ CT II.122.

⁴⁸⁹ CT II.130.

⁴⁹⁰ CT II.125.

in thinking about the human mind and the importance of decorum, it would seem, the skeptic must be kept at bay when it comes to the spiritual state of England.

Even though Harvey thought Nashe blasphemous for putting words into the mouth of Christ, Nashe may simply be trying to subvert historical precedent. If God's first line of communication is portents, England has already received those in the 1580s. By taking on the role of prophet and by putting words into the mouth of Christ, Nashe may simply be trying to use literature to get around the occurrence of the second coming, at least to put it off for a while. Fiction and analogy may be the only line of defense man has left, but as Nashe shows in his prefatory remarks, his revival of the *Anatomie* at the end of *Christs Teares*, and his doubts about the mind as a moral agent in *Terrors of the Night*, he is not at all assured of the effectiveness of this means.

In *Christs Teares* there are many signes and tokens of God's wrath to come. But they are not found, as astronomers argue, in the "regiment and operation of Planets" nor in "strange Prophetical reports." Rather, "if we would hunt after signes and tokens, wee should ominate from our hardnesse or heart, and want of charitie amongst brethren, that Gods iustice is hard entering. No certainer coniecture is there of the ruine of any kingdome, then their revolting from God."⁴⁹¹ "The blazing starre, the Earth-quake, the dearth and famine some fewe years since" have not sufficiently frightened the people of London to repent. It is Nashe's hope that the most startling and unnatural of prodigies, human sin, may act to inspire men to gather to repent in "one united intercessionment."⁴⁹²

In sum, I would argue that this text questions the value of analogy for moral reform, and in fact, may even indicate the breakdown of analogical thinking on a number of levels.

⁴⁹¹ CT II.172.

⁴⁹² CT II.173.

First, there is the breakdown noted in the prefatory materials—that is, the sense that analogy cannot work because misinterpretation is the rule of the day. We see this manifested in Gabriel Harvey’s misreading of Nashe’s “plain dealing” style of apology; in the misreadings of the *Unfortunate Traveller* Nashe cites; and in people’s criticisms and misinterpretation of Nashe’s stylistic choices in *Christs Teares*. On another level, we also see that human misinterpretation has historical precedent in the Israelites who ignored or misunderstood both God’s signs (omens, prophets, and miracles) and his plain dealing (Christ’s preaching). It should be remembered, too, that the very occasion of Nashe’s text is what Nashe perceives as the moral depravity of Elizabethan society that has not heeded the portents of the 1580s indicating that the real divine message has fallen on deaf ears. Finally, there is a breakdown in the text itself, I think, in Nashe’s choice to link the first part of *Christs Teares* (the oration of Christ) with a fuller reprisal of the *Anatomy of Absurditie*. Nashe notes that the destruction of Jerusalem has often been told. Josephus, an oft read historian for example, tells the story quite well. But it is almost as if history, and the analogy the reader should be able to draw to it, are not enough for Nashe. By tacking on this *Anatomy of Absurditie* style discourse, Nashe would seem to attempt plain dealing—that is, not trusting his audience to draw their own conclusions from what had to be, by 1593, a fairly obvious equation, that is, that England was, for better or for worse, the New Jerusalem.

V. Conclusion: John Chamber and Christopher Heydon: Fashioning Morality against the Skeptical Critique of Astrology

The Skeptick (c. 1590), the translation of Sextus Empiricus Nashe is believed to be referring to in his preface to *Astrophil and Stella*, emphasizes skepticism’s struggle to come to terms with diversity of human experience it confirms. Not only is there variety among the

senses of any one individual, but also each individual's senses differ from another's. Moreover, even the object of apprehension would seem to add unaccountable variety: "If it be replied [to this problem of the variety of sense experience] that nature hath ordained as many instruments of sense as there are sensible objects, I demand what nature? For there is a confused controversy about the very essence of nature, some affirming it to be one thing, others another, few agreeing. So that what the quality of an apple is, or whether it hath one quality or many, I know not."⁴⁹³ As it is in a state of flux between empirical and analogical methodologies of apprehension, astrology is an example of the skeptic's dilemma in Elizabethan culture.

The disagreement over preternatural phenomena—both their cause and their signification—is an episode in Elizabethan history that similarly shows men attempting to make sense of nature's diversity and to translate this diversity into moral terms. As I said at the outset, traditionally, moral discourses about astrology are polemical in character, the most famous of these in the Renaissance being that of Pico della Mirandola.⁴⁹⁴ The ancient precedent for this tradition was Sextus Empiricus's *Adversus astrologos*, which was a text directed specifically against nativities rather than all astrological knowledge full stop. For Sextus, the main problem was not that astrology contained nothing morally useful, and certainly not that man was wrong for prying into the secrets of God. It was not that astrology was wrong, but that it was imperceptible. Sextus had argued that if man could avoid bad weather and have a perfect apprehension of the planets, he "could find in [astrology]

⁴⁹³ This passage is taken from the text of *The Skeptick* attributed to Walter Raleigh reprinted in William M. Hamlin's "A Lost Translation Found? An Edition of *The Skeptick* (c. 1590) Based on Extant Manuscripts [with text]," *English Literary Renaissance* 31.1 (2001): 51.

⁴⁹⁴ For a full account of these texts, see Allen's *Star-Crossed Renaissance*. As he has shown, in Italy alone the attitudes of Ficino, Pico, and Pontano fairly run the gamut of the polemical chart.

substantial truth; but when there exists some obstacle to the accurate perception of celestial objects, it is far otherwise.”⁴⁹⁵ To draw a nativity correctly, one had not only to be able to see the stars, but one had to know the exact moment and place of conception and generation.

Sextus’s arguments were revitalized in a polemical exchange at the turn of the seventeenth century between a clergyman of the Church of England, John Chamber, who published a treatise against judicial astrology in 1601, and a soldier named Christopher Heydon, who responded to Chamber with a defense in 1603.⁴⁹⁶ Though John Chamber only mentions Sextus Empiricus once, his text includes, as Heydon frequently reminds his reader, large portions translated directly from the *Adversus astrologos*. What is crucial about this episode is that for both these men, the value of astrology was predicated on its relationship to the senses.

According to Chamber, it is not possible for man to apprehend fully the movements and natures of the astrological bodies;⁴⁹⁷ hence, custom is a much more compelling explanation for moral diversity for him: “Next to our bringing up come our actions, desires, and businesse, in which is chiefly to be considered the custome of countries, which we know to be guided not by any naturall necessity or power of stares; but by lawes, customes, examples, discipline, by the quality and oportunitie of the place, of by a mans owne consultation and opinion.” For Chamber, moral identity is determined by the moral norms that have govern it, for “where there is no punishment, there even the better sort will offend:

⁴⁹⁵ Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus mathematici* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) V. 353-355.

⁴⁹⁶ Allen has suggested that this resurgence of polemical astrological literature around 1600 after a relative period of quiet may have to do with a the sense of moral decline in the 1590s represented by the proliferation of satirical pamphlets in that decade (125).

⁴⁹⁷ On Chamber’s view of the limitations of the senses, see for example John Chamber, *A Treatise Against Judicial Astrology* (London: 1601) 30, 32, 54, 65, 73 77.

but where there is sharp and due correction, even the naturally bad will refrain from offence.” It is by “imitation” of the good and the evil that men observe on a daily basis that creates their moral habits: “By imitation of the good many daily become good; and ill by imitation of the ill, what starre soever they be borne under. So for occasion and opportunitie, no starre maketh fishers and hunters, where there is no occasion of fishing and hunting. Againe, what starre soever men be borne under, they will fall to fishing and hunting, if occasion serve, and need force them.”⁴⁹⁸ For Chamber, there is no sense of an ethics based on man’s correspondence with the heavenly bodies; nor is morality based on an analogy between natural and moral law. Ethics is determined by experience and chance; it is not essential, but cultural.

For Heydon, the hallmark of astrology is its ability to make the best use of the knowledge of the senses. In comparison to medicine, astrology is a more empirically stable science; whereas a physician reasons by effects and signs which can often play him false, “on the contrarie, the Astrologer iudgeth neither by signes, nor effects, but by causes. Whereof the motions, configurations, and positions of the heauenly bodies, are all grounded vpon *Mathematicall* demonstration. And the properties, or virtue of the heauenly influence, vpon the obseruation, and knowne experience, of great learned men, euen from the beginning of the world.” The knowledge of “knowne causes” relied upon by the astrologer “is more demonstratiue & infallible” than the “signes or effects” depended upon by the physician.⁴⁹⁹ Heydon criticizes both Sextus and Chamber for ignoring the “precise demonstration” and the

⁴⁹⁸ Chamber 128-129.

⁴⁹⁹ Heydon 354-355.

“painefull industrie of the learned” that has allowed astrology “to haue growne to as exquisite a perfection, as the practice of any art whatsoeuer.”⁵⁰⁰

It on the basis of astrology’s perfection that Heydon insists on its importance to moral philosophy: “What more proper ende hath *morall philosophie*, then felicitie? And what arte in the world in this respect, is comparable to *Astrologie*?”⁵⁰¹ In Heydon’s mind astrology is just an extension the more commonly accepted humoral theory, for it teaches man “matters, which pertaine to the goods of the bodie, and minde, by vnderstanding the constitution of the bodie, and direct[s] him to moderate those affections, whose violence naturally doth carrie him from the meane, wherein virtue consists.”⁵⁰² It not only offers man the knowledge of his what he can reasonably hope “to haue by his owne naturall constellation” with regard “to outward goods of fortune,” but it also “instructeth him how to encrease the same, by what meanes, and at what time he may aptliest applie his owne industrie, to attaine unto it, by his naturall constitution.”⁵⁰³ In other words, astrology both offers man the knowledge of himself as he is, and as he should be.

But even as astrology has the moral authority to instruct man in his own particular virtues, Heydon admits that it still houses several unknowns that indicate the imperfection of man. Astrology attests to the fallen world in which man lives, for it is symptomatic of original sin and representative of man’s place within a broken analogy. Before the fall, man and nature formed the two halves of what Heydon terms “a iust *Analogie*”:

⁵⁰⁰ Heydon 135-136. Allen notes that ignorance of new technology is characteristic of opponents of astrology (99).

⁵⁰¹ Heydon 222.

⁵⁰² Heydon 99, 222.

⁵⁰³ Heydon 222.

Had the nature of man neuer beene corrupted by the fall of our first parents & so maimed and depriued of those graces wherewith he was indued at the first; this diuine light had still shines vnto him, as the guide and direction of all our powers: the inward faculties had still agreed in an exact harmonie, to the good constitution of the outward partes: and the nature of all superiour and inferiour things would haue answered to our temperature in a iust *Analogie*: the elements and all elementary things beeing at the first exquisitely prepared to agree with the perfect constitution of our bodies, would have stil remained conformable vnto them; and in their constant stabilitie and vnchangeablenesse, not onely not haue annoyed our bodies, with any superfluous or excrementall matter, out of kind or hurtfull vnto vs, but still haue maintained the naturall heate and radicall moister intire and vnspent.

He stresses the symmetry and stability of nature that is reflected in man's own constitution—presumably both in moral and physical health—before the fall. After the fall, both man and nature fall into disrepair. But perhaps because of the multiplicity of evil as compared to the unity of good, they no longer uphold an analogy, even in their similar states of depravity.

Instead of being two halves of an analogy, they become “unproportionable to each other”:

But afterward, when (as the word of God testifieth) the deprauation of mans nature by sinne, had not onely dissolued this former goodly agreement of our inward powers, by soule discord, and vnfitnesse, but besides, by meanes hereof, further depraued and disordered the durable temperature of the other members, with an vnproportionable distemper: The symmetrie also, and consent of other partes of nature, were likewise changed with mans condition, and became vnproportionable vnto him. In so much that the earth itselfe, through the curse of God for our sinne, was depriued of the former vigour, and brought forth thornes; that is euery thing more troublesome, and vnkindly then before. The action of the stares, in this vncleannesse of our corrupted nature, became vnluckie and improsperius: the light of reason whereby we should haue guided the other faculties, was, almost totally eclipsed: and the power of our will which should rule the rest was now growne feeble and faint, and all our other powers whatsoeuer became disobedient, sauadge, and irregular.⁵⁰⁴

Hence, after the fall nature still may offer moral information, but it is not a moral model for man. It is not a model for man, but a mirror: it reflects not a perfect ideal, but only the imperfections of man himself. In other words, it is moral knowledge in that it is self-knowledge. Moreover, subject to the empiricism that Heydon champions, the heavens are

⁵⁰⁴ Heydon 100-101.

problematic exemplars of moral value because such observation may only reveal how unruly they really are.

Taken together, these various engagements of Elizabethan writers with the moral value of preternatural phenomena reveal a moral philosophy in transition. As the knowledge of preternatural phenomena becomes increasingly natural, it causes these writers to consider the character of moral knowledge and the methods by which it should be attained. Though Don Cameron Allen has argued that the interest in prognostication was particularly strong in the sixteenth century because of a “growing skepticism about the verity of Christian doctrine,”⁵⁰⁵ I would argue that this interest is due as well the ways in which empiricism was rapidly reshaping the jurisdiction of moral knowledge. Even someone like Heydon, who affirms the moral value of preternatural phenomena on the basis of its apprehensibility, shows us that empiricism cannot repair the lost analogy between man and nature but only register their unruly and unclassifiable divergences from goodness. Moral knowledge, then, becomes less a standard to achieve, or one half of an analogical relationship that man hopes to complement, than an index of human moral limitation.

⁵⁰⁵ Allen 47.

CHAPTER 6

MINDS INDIFFERENT: THE VALUE OF *ADIAPHORA* ON THE EVE OF THE ENGLISH CIVIL WAR

I. Redefining *Adiaphora*

On the eve of the Civil War, England witnessed a debate over religious reform perhaps unparalleled since the effects of the Reformation had redrawn the channels and boundaries of religious authority. In the climate of increasing political and religious tensions as the personal rule of Charles I came to a close, the search for religious truth began to be measured against an ideal of a national religion unified by doctrine and practice with a new complexity and intensity. The claims of the Laudian bishops alongside the monarch to an unrestricted jurisdiction based on divine right crowded in on the privilege of Parliament and the moral authority of the individual conscience. In varying degrees, members of Parliament, ministers of every religious faction, and pamphleteers weighed the consequences of restructuring the Church in order to diminish the bishops' influence upon the monarch, civil affairs, and religious doctrine and practice.

Between 1638 and 1642, the debate over Episcopacy acted as a calculus for the value of historical traditions, human judgment, and the imagination to salvation. At the center of this debate was the doctrine of *adiaphora*, a point of epistemological uncertainty that blocked any easy resolution to this conflict. The Canons of 1640 defined *adiaphora* as “of its own nature indifferent, neither commanded nor condemned by the Word of God, either

expresly, or by immediate deduction,” and they argued “therefore that no Religion is to be placed therein, or scruple to be made thereon.”⁵⁰⁶ But in practice religion was “placed therein” and scruples were “made thereon.” On the surface, the Episcopal controversy scrutinized polity, but at its core the conflict was over the validity of man-made moral law. For English Protestants just before the Civil War, *adiaphora* threatened not so much a dearth of moral value as an instability, even a failure of moral knowledge. Those favoring Episcopacy clung to the peace and epistemological consistency they found in the truths of historical tradition. Reformers, however, invited the peace of toleration that allowed the seemingly paradoxical—religious certainty and epistemological diversity. Looking variously to divine, canon, natural and civil law, writers engaged in this debate were connected by their interest in finding a moral law that maintained both truth and peace without sacrificing the integrity of either one.

In 1638 in his *Religion of the Protestants*, William Chillingworth articulated a new kind of toleration that questioned the desirability of a fixed standard by which to measure the individual conscience. This introduction of skepticism signified a clear development of Richard Hooker’s investigation into the usefulness of doubt in his discussion of orthodoxy in the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, though by comparison, Hooker’s doubt was much more closely tied to his confidence in the importance of a unified orthodoxy than the idea of toleration. Between 1638 and 1642 England watched as the Laudian impositions on the Scottish Kirk in the late 1630s culminated in the Bishops’ Wars in 1640, as Ireland erupted in rebellion in 1641, and as its own civil war commenced in 1642. Controversialists of all stripes in the Episcopal debate—from moderate Episcopalians mildly examining the

⁵⁰⁶ Archbishops Canterbury and York, *Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiasticall* (1640) reprinted in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol. 1, ed. Don M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959) 992.

jurisdiction of the Church, to Presbyterians who would replace bishops with presbyters, to Independents who had a clear interest in an increased space for religious liberty, to more radical opponents of any national church—found themselves reassessing the reform measures undertaken by the Elizabethan Church that had brought them to this uncertain point in ecclesiastical history. Amid the political and religious strife of the early 1640s, as civil war in England became increasingly probable, both Hooker's confidence and Chillingworth's skepticism proved insufficient models for either moderate or radical nonconformists who were themselves torn by their commitment to the freedom of conscience and toleration on the one hand, and a sense of moral duty and a call to the active resistance of the Caroline Church on the other. In 1641 and 1642, the eminent Parliamentarian Robert Greville, Lord Brooke and the emerging pamphleteer John Milton proposed that reforms be grounded in an active conscience. For both, the doctrine of *adiaphora* proved to be crucial to their justifications for and limitations of freedom of conscience as they steered between the moral absolutism and moral relativism indifference could generate. Although Brooke accepted and Milton rejected the doctrine of *adiaphora*, both offered a reinterpretation of it that differed from what it had been during the not-so-distant "reforms" of the Elizabethan Church. Rather than encourage an unlicensed conscience, in the struggle for religious liberty the moral uncertainties posed by *adiaphora* provoked arguments for new standards by which to justify moral action and betokened significant changes in moral and religious discourse.

II. The Artificial Peace of Forced Conformity

On the eve of the Civil War, normative morality crumbled as the security of a coherent national church gradually gave way to the "cutting...squaring...hewing...

schisms...[and] many dissections” necessary “ere the house of God [could] be built.”⁵⁰⁷

Adiaphorism complicated moral decision-making because it was flexible enough to encompass a variety of moral judgments, yet it could generate absolutist and rigid moral hierarchies.⁵⁰⁸ Because of its ambiguity and the readiness with which religious reformers and orthodox divines interpreted indifferency, the term could be used to argue virtually any position in the Episcopal controversy.⁵⁰⁹

An important ally of Queen Elizabeth in her conservative manipulation of church reforms, *adiaphora* allowed her to assert a nearly absolutist control over her bishops while seeming to lend them a degree of freedom.⁵¹⁰ With little resolved by the Elizabethan Settlement and the modest changes that the Thirty-Nine Articles made in the ceremonies and traditions of the Church, the limitations of Elizabethan church reform resurfaced in the 1630s.⁵¹¹ Article 20 in particular carried an ambiguity that haunted the Laudian Church.

⁵⁰⁷ John Milton, *Areopagitica, Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol. 2, ed. Don M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959) 555. All quotations from Milton’s prose works are taken from the Yale University Press edition.

⁵⁰⁸ The duality inherent in the doctrine of *adiaphora* –that is, its tendency towards relativism and absolutism - can be found in its classical sources as well. It was a frequent point of debate between the Skeptics and the Stoics. See Cicero, *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), esp. III.12 ff. and IV.69-71; Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Skepticism*, ed. Jeffrey Henderson, trans. R. G. Bury (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) esp. III.178 ff and *Against the Ethicists*, ed. G.P. Goold, trans. R. G. Bury (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); and Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2, trans. R. D. Hicks (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995) VII.104-107.

⁵⁰⁹ For a discussion of the history of *adiaphora* up to and including the sixteenth century, see Bernard Verkamp’s *The Indifferent Mean: Adiaphorism in the English Reformation to 1554* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1977); for attitudes towards *adiaphora* earlier than Elizabeth, see W. Gordon Zeeveld’s *Foundations of Tudor Policy* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1969); for a more historical approach to adiaphorism during the reign of Elizabeth, see William P. Haugaard’s *Elizabeth and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

⁵¹⁰ On the “redefinition” of the role of the bishop amidst Elizabethan reforms, see Felicity Heal, *Of Prelates and Princes: A Study of the Economic and Social Position of the Tudor Episcopate* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980) 237-238. For a discussion of Elizabeth’s demand for an outward conformity that allowed “inward and unseen” freedoms, see Ramie Targoff, *Common Prayer: The Language of Public Devotion in Early Modern England* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2001) 3-4.

⁵¹¹ Haugaard 125.

Corroborated during Elizabeth's reign by the 1563 Convocation, the Articles as printed under Edward limited the Church's authority by stating that the "church must not ordain anything contrary to God's word written." But the 1571 Convocation amended the article to give "the Church...power to decree rites or ceremonies, and authority in controversies of faith," effectively changing it from a negative to positive law.⁵¹² This change was a contentious point for Archbishop Laud during a 1637 speech censuring John Bastwick, Henry Burton, and William Prynne for their "innovations" in religion. The latter argued for the Articles as interpreted by Edward VI, but Laud declared these void and offered to produce multiple editions of the Thirty-Nine Articles from different years in both English and Latin—a necessary piece of evidence since this alteration in the article mysteriously appeared and vanished from the printed page throughout the reign of Elizabeth.⁵¹³

The unfinished reforms of the Elizabethan Church opened the door for a critical re-evaluation of the Caroline Church.⁵¹⁴ The Root and Branch Petition of 1640 unequivocally demanded that church polity "with all its dependencies, roots and branches, may be abolished, and all laws in their behalf made void, and the government according to God's Word may be rightly placed amongst us."⁵¹⁵ Prior to 1643 and the adoption of the Solemn

⁵¹² Haugaard 253.

⁵¹³ For Laud, Elizabeth, rather than Edward, was the unquestionable standard by which the Caroline Church should be measured. See William Laud, *A Speech Delivered in the Starr-Chamber...at the Censure of John Bastwick, Henry Burton, and William Prynne* (1637) reprinted in *The Works of William Laud*, vol. 6 (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1857) 6.1.64-68.

⁵¹⁴ Smectymnuus, *An Answer...to the Humble Remonstrance* (London, printed for I. Rothwell, 1641) passim; *Vindication of the Answer to the Humble Remonstrance...further debated* (London: printed for John Rothwell, 1641) passim.

⁵¹⁵ On the question of Episcopal reform or abolition, see S.R. Gardiner, *Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution*, 3rd ed., rev. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906) 138; chapter one in volume one of William A. Shaw's *A History of the English Church during the Civil Wars and under the Commonwealth 1640-1660*, 2 vols. (New York: Burt Franklin Reprints, 1974); and William M. Lamont's *Godly Rule: Politics and Religion, 1603-1660* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1969) 83.

League and Covenant, the controversy extended beyond ecclesiology to question the very role of the Church in the composition of corporate religious worship and its influence on individual faith and salvation. Reformers rejected the Church's power to legislate things indifferent, concluding that any attempt to do so trampled religious freedoms and endangered their very salvation. While Elizabethan reform measures centered on polity, by the 1640s, the line between ecclesiology and soteriology was being relocated, for some vanishing altogether.⁵¹⁶ Along with the merger of ecclesiological and soteriological reforms came the internalization of indifference. The ambiguity of things indifferent called into question Episcopal authority, but at the same time its vulnerability to diverse interpretations challenged assumptions about the reliability of conscience. Its interpretive breadth altered the nature of true faith from something that existed absolutely, to something that existed in degrees.

In his *Religion of the Protestants*, William Chillingworth recalled Richard Hooker's distinction between a "certainty of adherence" and a "certainty of evidence" in matters of faith, which Hooker used to assure men that doubt caused by human weakness was not faithlessness.⁵¹⁷ Chillingworth, however, used this distinction to introduce and legitimize levels of faith not in order to grant assurance to the doubtful, but to promote toleration. Like opinion, faith could be "an assent...built upon lesse evidence then that of sense or

⁵¹⁶ Arthur B. Ferguson argues that the threat of Puritanism to Anglicanism "lay not so much in its theology as in its ecclesiastical polity" (195). In his debate with Whitgift, William Cartwright distinguished between the visible and the invisible church, the former consisting only in "that which is executed by man...external discipline and visible ceremonies...[and] things indifferent" (*Clio Unbound: Perception of the Social and Cultural Past in Renaissance England* [Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1979] 199).

⁵¹⁷ Richard Hooker, *A...Sermon of the Certainty and Perpetuity of Faith in the Elect*, *The Works of Mr. Richard Hooker*, vol. 2 (Oxford, T. Tegg, 1843) 574.

science...[that] admits degrees.”⁵¹⁸ Though God granted man all things necessary for salvation, this provision did not guarantee an end to religious controversy. According to Chillingworth, religious controversy was an essential part of religion and should not be dismissed as mere doubt that, with God’s grace, would be overcome. Disagreement could exist even in fundamental points without necessitating damnation.⁵¹⁹ Indeed, the catalogue of fundamentals called for by many of Chillingworth’s contemporaries would only codify error because the “variety of circumstances” made it as easy to create an exact list of fundamental points of religion as “to make a coat to fit the Moon in all her changes.”⁵²⁰ The search for truth alone—the very acceptance of controversy—assured man of God’s favor.⁵²¹ The only certainty gained by artificial measures was the certainty of human error.

Chillingworth’s expansion of faith to encompass degrees signals a significant change in early modern religious culture from one that felt threatened by epistemological flexibility in religious matters to one that could turn to this flexibility as a source of assurance. In the place of a static category of indifference emerged a newly dynamic category of individual right that demanded that spiritual assurance be accompanied by an active search for the means to attain one’s salvation. But if *adiaphora* could promote the freedom of individual conscience, the emerging dogmatism of separatists made it clear that the freedom of the individual conscience might invent a new kind of religious tyranny. The fight to remove

⁵¹⁸ William Chillingworth, *The Religion of the Protestants* (Oxford, printed by Leonard Lichfield, 1638) 35.

⁵¹⁹ Chillingworth 35-38.

⁵²⁰ Chillingworth 134. In his discussion of the seventeenth-century endeavor to “reconstitut[e] [Protestant] heroism” (12), Reid Barbour devotes the second chapter of his *Literature and Religious Culture in England* to Chillingworth and his followers at Great Tew, who were developing, he argues, a new kind of “skeptical-fallible heroism” (74). For a discussion of the influence of skepticism on seventeenth-century religion, see *Literature and Religious Culture in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁵²¹ Chillingworth 182, 135.

adiaphora from the jurisdiction of ecclesiastical control to private law highlighted the question of whether and to what degree individual conscience was any more valid, tolerant, or reasonable than the willfulness of ecclesiastical legislation.⁵²² Both the unity of moral absolutism and the toleration of religious pluralism threatened to sacrifice truth for the sake of peace.

The degrees of faith welcomed by Chillingworth made the scrutiny and censure of the human mind's involvement in religion all the more important. Like Hooker, Joseph Hall defended Christian orthodoxy by associating adiaphorism in the hands of the individual with a misspent curiosity. Under the laity's control, adiaphorism loomed as a kind of skepticism that disrupted religious unity by questioning the limits of established religious truth. According to Hall, intellectual liberty in religious matters tore down important distinctions between lawful and unlawful kinds of knowledge. Those that "would know only that they may know" possessed a "fond curiosity" and "a vicious disposition of the soul." The "vicious disposition" to which Hall referred was the desire to know matters unnecessary without an honest motivation. Only "things, which are necessary and useful, can be no other than praise-worthy."⁵²³ Juxtaposed against the laudable pursuit for "necessary and useful knowledge," Hall's denunciation of curiosity became a plea against the laity's search to determine things indifferent. His sense that there was a spectrum of knowledge ranging from the permissible to the damnable represented the position of many bishops of the Church of England on the

⁵²² The outburst of millenarianism and the government of the Saints in the late 1640s indicates how real this question was and the potential extremism of its practical outcome. See the introduction of A.S.P. Woodhouse's *Puritanism and Liberty, Being the Army Debates (1647-49) from the Clarke Manuscripts* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1951).

⁵²³ Joseph Hall, *Christian Moderation, The Works of Joseph Hall*, vol. 6 (Oxford, D.A. Talboys, 1837-1839) 425-426.

issue of *adiaphora* in the hands of the laity. Though the bishops recognized indifference as a kind of knowledge, a multiplicity of judgments on things indifferent was expendable for the sake of a national church.

But one of Hall's most notorious and persistent opponents, the group of pamphleteers called "Smectymnuus,"⁵²⁴ favored religious toleration and worried that the peace of orthodoxy would compromise the search for religious truth. "We well know," Smectymnuus wrote in the second of their treatises denouncing Hall, "that peace is that *Helena*, that all are suitors unto; and wee know as well, that peace without truth is as a painted *Jezabell*, and to be thrown down by all those who are on the Lords side."⁵²⁵ Hall defended the post-Apostolic Church, despite its mistakes. Certainty should be prized over skepticism in matters of religion, for even "if there were some errors" Hall asked, "shall we suspect all truths?"⁵²⁶ Looking in 1640 to the volatile situation in Scotland, Hall cautioned his "Northern Brethren" not to be carried away by "mis-zealous teachers, who have...over-run the truth in a detestation of error: and have utterly lost peace in an inconsiderate chace of a fained perfection."⁵²⁷ Hall feared that the certainty many found in their conscience would make an "*ignis fatuus*" out of moral judgment altogether.⁵²⁸

Adiaphora's relationship to truth became more complex on the eve of the Civil War because it forced an examination of the relative value of religious truth and civic peace to the

⁵²⁴ The Smectymnuans included five Presbyterian ministers opposed to both Episcopacy and Independency: Stephen Marshall, Edmund Calamy, Thomas Young, Matthew Newcomen and William Spurstow. See Frederick L. Taft and Ashur Baizer, "The Legion of Smec," *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol. 1, Appendix F, ed. Don M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953) 1001-1008.

⁵²⁵ Smectymnuus, *A Vindication* 47.

⁵²⁶ Joseph Hall, *Episcopacy by Divine Right Asserted*, 3 parts (London, Printed by R.B. 1640) 1.54.

⁵²⁷ Hall 3.45.

⁵²⁸ Joseph Hall, *A Modest Confutation...against Smectymnuus, Milton's Contemporary Reputation*, ed. W.R. Parker (1642; reprint; Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1940) 2.

English Church. It was hoped—but by no means certain to anyone involved in the debate over Episcopacy—that the two could coexist. Despite their differences, both Hall and Chillingworth attacked the myth of perfect religious knowledge. Hall warned that religious harmony based on toleration was an ideal “more fit to be expected in Platonical speculation, than in a true reality of existence.”⁵²⁹ Godly perfection seemed to demand a world without *adiaphora*, that is, a world doomed to conflict. In the context of the intensifying dissatisfaction with ecclesiastical and civil hierarchy, the heated debates over the doctrine of *adiaphora* increased its moral weight and exposed the shallow veneer of its neutrality. Once reformers of the Laudian Church began to appeal to *adiaphora* as a way of legitimizing individual judgment against the corporate judgment of the Church, *adiaphora* became a critical kind of knowledge with an undecided epistemology. It opened up the possibility that true religious knowledge could be both inspired by, yet separate from, the evident truths of things necessary found in the scriptures. Because the reformers considered things indifferent as “burthens” the bishops imposed upon the laity that could affect individual salvation, the knowledge of *adiaphora* was a knowledge not just of virtue, but of salvation.

At its core, the shifting nature of indifferency was more than an ecclesiological or soteriological quagmire: it pinpoints a historical moment of linguistic failure. In a speech given to the Parliament in 1641, Lord Say and Seal pleaded against the Church’s control over the liturgy, arguing that nonconformists were afflicted by “ceremonies and things indifferent to you [the Laudian bishops],” which to them were “but burthens, which without offence to the State, or prejudice to the Churches, you may take off if you will.”⁵³⁰ But in his response

⁵²⁹ Hall, *Christian Moderation* 445-46.

⁵³⁰ Laud, *An Answer* 139.

to Lord Say and Seal's speech, Laud rightly indicated the paradox of nonconformity. According to Lord Say and Seal, if something is truly indifferent, it is not worth legislating. But Laud countered, "First, my Lord but a very little before tells 'of yokes of bondage and gross corruptions.' And are they so soon become but 'ceremonies and things indifferent?' If they be more than 'ceremonies and things indifferent,' then my Lord delivers not the whole truth; and if they be but 'ceremonies and things indifferent,' then his Lordship and all other Separatists ought rather to yield to the Church in such things, than for such things to separate from it."⁵³¹ For Lord Say and Seal indifference was inseparable from moral truth, while for Laud its meaning was determined by moral legislation; but for neither one was it morally neutral.

The exchange between Laud and Lord Say and Seal, the concerns of Hall over intellectual liberty in religion, and the skeptical toleration of Chillingworth indicate that indifference had outgrown its definition. Those involved in the debate over Episcopacy, then, participated in a process of inventing an adequate discourse to accommodate indifference's transformation. In the Elizabethan Church *adiaphora* were intended to ease the Church's "intolerable burden" on the individual lay person or bishop, but in the atmosphere of open religious rebellion in the early 1640s, things indifferent were not a point of compromise. Instead, *adiaphora* freighted the individual conscience with the weight of its salvation as it demanded, rather than averted, a value judgment. How this judgment was best attained became a focal point for those interested in religious reform and those opposed to it.

⁵³¹ Laud, *An Answer* 141.

III. *Adiaphora* and the Rationalist's Rebellion

In 1644 in *Areopagitica* Milton lauded the prominent Parliamentarian Robert Greville, Lord Brooke for his contribution to the debate over Episcopacy. Milton summarized Brooke's 1641 parliamentary address entitled *A Discourse Opening the Nature of Episcopacy* as a work composed with the most "mild and peacefull" words that "[exhort] us to hear with patience and humility those, however they be miscall'd, that desire to live purely, in such a use of Gods Ordinances, as the best guidance of their conscience gives them, and to tolerat them, though in some disconformity to ourselves."⁵³² As Milton affirms, Brooke is notable for his sustained attempt to articulate a fully rational explanation of how to resolve the conflict between moral certainty and the toleration of religious pluralism.⁵³³ Keenly aware that the moral category that indifference once represented was obsolete, he exposed *adiaphora* for what it was in 1641: a convention of religious rhetoric. Playing absolutist notions of good against the subjectivity of human perceptions of good, in his *Discourse*, Brooke took a stand against Episcopacy that declared *adiaphora* to be a positive form of knowledge that could guide moral behavior at a time when moral codes were increasingly shift. By accepting indifference's rigidity *and* its relativity instead of arguing one interpretation over the other, Brooke pursued the moral perfectionism feared by Hall and Chillingworth without sacrificing his commitment to toleration.

On the eve of the Civil War, Brooke's indifference posed the question of how to overcome the imperfections of the mind. Both Episcopacy and the individual conscience

⁵³² Milton, *Areopagitica, Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol. 2, ed. Ernest Sirluck (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959) 560-561.

⁵³³ For a summary of *A Discourse*, see part three of Robert E.L. Strider's biography *Robert Greville, Lord Brooke* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958). Strider views Brooke as an important part of a movement toward "liberal rationalism" in the 1640s that served ultimately to differentiate the more tolerant Separatists from the more rigid Puritans.

were imperfect sources of moral truth because they were equally apt to act selfishly and threatened civic harmony and certain moral judgment. Brooke discussed *adiaphora* with the intention of limiting the authority of Episcopal judgment, though not with the hope of abolishing moral authority altogether. According to Brooke the mark of a true church was its rationality and its interest in the common good. Only “right reason,” not a national catechism, “must be [the] Judge” of what was indifferent or necessary to salvation.⁵³⁴ In his censure of the bishops Brooke targeted their irrationality, both arguing that their claim that “the Church hath power...in Indifferent things” was unreasonable and underhandedly implying that individual right reason had a significant role to play in the development of standards for things indifferent.⁵³⁵ Though Brooke sharply criticized the practices of the bishops, who sought to control “not onely Indifferent things in the *Church* [but]... *All Indifferent things*,” encompassing in their “*Net of Indifferencie*” the people’s civil and religious liberties,⁵³⁶ he perceived the need for a unifying standard for indifferency. Even allowing that “the *Church* hath all power in *Indifferents*,” which Brooke did not, “who hath made the *Church* a *Judge* (beyond appeale) *what is Indifferent?*.” “If the Church shall judge *indifferent* things to be *necessary*, and *necessary* to be indifferent,” moral distinctions were leveled “under one notion.”⁵³⁷ Because the commonplace definition of indifferency—something neither commanded nor forbidden in the scriptures—lacked positive value, as it explained “onley what ‘tis *not*, and *Negatives* make no *Definition*,” Brooke redefined

⁵³⁴ Robert Greville, Lord Brooke, *Discourse Opening the Nature of Episcopacy in Tracts on Liberty in the Puritan Revolution, 1638-1647*, vol. 2, ed. William Haller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934) 13.

⁵³⁵ Brooke 11.

⁵³⁶ Brooke 12.

⁵³⁷ Brooke 12.

adiaphorism for the benefit of those seeking the right way to respond to civil and religious conflict.⁵³⁸

Read in context with his earlier views on truth, Brooke's discussion of *adiaphora* in his parliamentary address challenges the necessity of moral uncertainty even as it admits the limitations of human perception. In *The Nature of Truth* (1640) written a year prior to his *Discourse*, Brooke revealed his doubts about the human apprehension of moral truth. Moral truth in its "universall nature, and in the particular actings of it," was just as difficult to discern as "sacred mysteries." Often the pursuit of moral truth only fueled moral degeneracy. "Truth is that golden apple," Brooke warned, that even "the most refined wits, the most high-raised fancies of the world, have courted...in vaine, these many ages." Using a "Palsie hand," or "the perspective of thicke reason," men have "either mounted too high, and confounding the Creator with the creature, [made] her God: or descend[ed] too low, and deserting the universal nature, have confined their thoughts to some individuall Truth, and restrained her birth to severall parcels within the Chaos."⁵³⁹ The mind habitually leveled value through abstraction or cordoned off value into idiosyncratic notions of truth unconnected to the world around it.

But despite these weaknesses, man also possessed a more ideal form of reason that was an "ample Sphere of Truth."⁵⁴⁰ Collapsing the line between understanding good and being good, Brooke attempted to unite truth, being, and morality because such unity might

⁵³⁸ Brooke 17.

⁵³⁹ Robert Greville, Lord Brooke, "Letter to a Private Friend," *The Nature of Truth* (1640; reprint, Farnborough: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1969) sig. A11v-A12r.

⁵⁴⁰ Brooke, *Nature of Truth* 23.

foster tolerance.⁵⁴¹ However, ontological unity was often undercut by epistemological variety. Man created a “Maze” of divisions and distinctions in categories of knowledge and existence because “the very knowledge of the Being of things, is more than we are capable of,” but ultimately all things are “of one nature, variegated only in our apprehension.”⁵⁴²

The mathematician John Wallis responded to Brooke’s theory of unity in *Truth tried: or, Animadversions on...The Nature of Truth* (first published, 1642). He argued that ontological, epistemological, and moral good and evil by nature were very different. While being and nonbeing permitted no middle term in Wallis’ view, moral good and evil as well as logical truth and falsehood were relative. However, even morality and epistemology were not unified because there could be a category of indifference between moral good and moral evil, but “there [cannot] be a *Medium* between *Truth* and *Falsehood*, as there is between *Good* and *Evil*; For though there may be an *Indifferent Action*, which is neither *Good* (positively) nor *Evil*; yet is there not an *Indifferent Proposition* which is neither True nor False.”⁵⁴³ In other words, moral goodness and truth were disconnected so that the one could be no guarantor of the other. Individualized notions of morality, though they may be good, were not a stand-in for religious truth. A year later Brooke confronted this same conclusion in his discussion of *adiaphora* in his *Discourse*.⁵⁴⁴ His philosophical discussion of this doctrine within a parliamentary address attests to the urgent fear occasioned by the possibility that human error

⁵⁴¹ Brooke, *Nature of Truth* 59.

⁵⁴² Brooke, *Nature of Truth* 131-132.

⁵⁴³ John Wallis, *Truth Tried: or, Animadversions on...The Nature of Truth...* (London: Richard Bishop, 1642) 86.

⁵⁴⁴ Brooke never discusses indifference in *The Nature of Truth*, which makes one suspect that Wallis may have read both of Brooke’s works. Wallis intended Brooke to read *Truth Tried*, but Brooke’s untimely death prevented that.

made concinnity between moral truth and peace unlikely, if not impossible. Brooke looked to “Right Reason,” premised on a “certaine constant Rule, taken from the *Nature of Things*,” to “dictate” what was morally best.⁵⁴⁵ But the extremes in natural law and moral law differed significantly. In the natural world, indifferency was “*neither of the Two Extremes, yet participates of Both*” just as “Lukwarme, as Warme, Differeth not from *Hot*, yet differeth as *Coole*; and therefore is *Indifferent*.” In nature indifferency was unproblematically composite. But heterogeneity was easier to accept in nature than it was in morality. “I conceive,” Brooke wrote, “such *Indifference*, will not, cannot be found in *Morals*, as it is in *Naturals*. The reason is, because the two *extremes* are not here (as in many *Naturals*) Both *Positive Beings*; so that [in *Naturals*] a *Medium* may really participate of *Both*. *White and Blacke* indeed are *Both positives*, but so is not *Evill*; but only the privation of *Good*, which is the other extreme.”⁵⁴⁶ Because good had a positive and evil a negative value, indifferency was at once an absolute and relative category. If moral indifferency followed natural indifferency, the result, as Brooke saw it, was a monstrous hybrid of good and evil.

As contrary to logic as it might seem, Brooke found relativity not in evil, but in the absolute notion of good. Brooke submitted to one of “*Tullies Paradoxes*” that “*omnia peccata [sunt] paria*” because he accepted the Stoic belief in absolute good.⁵⁴⁷ Anything tainted with any amount of evil can never be good, regardless of circumstances. However, Brooke would not allow the same kind of leveling to occur in his understanding of moral good, and it is in this category that he reintroduced moral distinctions, but did so without

⁵⁴⁵ Brooke, *Discourse* 22-23.

⁵⁴⁶ Brooke, *Discourse* 18-19.

⁵⁴⁷ Brooke, *Discourse* 19.

undermining the integrity of absolute goodness. On some level, he wanted to have his cake and eat it too: on the one hand, he needed indifference to be morally neutral so that it could be a source of peace, but at the same time, he needed indifference to have value so that it could guide moral action. Despite the characteristic relativity of indifference, Brooke believed that a standard of judgment could be developed in a way that might afford some reconciliation to truth and peace.

One way that Brooke attempted to resolve his desire for a neutral indifference and an indifference charged with goodness was by acknowledging circumstance to create what he termed an “*equality of Use*.” Emphasizing the importance of individual reason, he argued that the standard of pure good could not be determined by only its object and end alone, but “every *Morall circumstance*, of time, place, &c. [must] rightly concur.”⁵⁴⁸ Rather than a self-defeating mixture of moral values, indifference was lawful, wholly good, and had an equality of use all premised on reason’s evaluation of circumstance. In his claim for indifference’s equality of use, Brooke confronted two complications concerning the components of moral action. First, he questioned “whether in two contraries (as *Doing*, *not doing*) one must not needs be *Better* than the other,” and second, “whether in this case I am not tyed to take, and doe the *Best*, but am equally *Indifferent* to *Both*.”⁵⁴⁹

Brooke was clearly not a radical; he believed that the church should control indifference provided that its legislation did not raise the suspicions of individual conscience.

⁵⁴⁸ Brooke, *Discourse* 19-20. Barbour examines the skeptical evaluation of religious “circumstance” for the Protestants of the 1620s, 1630s, and 1640s, which he defines as that which “pertains to the discursive conditions of persons, places, and times (both past and future); to the circumscribing realities of matter and providence; to worship as decoration and as imagination; to the ways in which Protestants interact, institute their churches, think, solve moral and social dilemmas; and to the means through which they dramatize, spread, and heroize the faith, and find salvation” (11). It is the point at which “the indifferent and fundamental converge” in the religious imagination of the period (18).

⁵⁴⁹ Brooke, *Discourse* 21.

However, when the “least scruple” arose in the individual conscience, Brooke advised men to become skeptics, suspending all action until reason united circumstantial and universal good or until some form of expedience emerged.⁵⁵⁰ Right reason could prioritize indifferents by an expediency that respected civic harmony, while at the same time dictating what was best based on individual circumstance. As long as circumstance was tied to reason, it was a reliable indicator for moral judgment. Although Brooke feared that moral absolutism would undermine his goals of toleration, he was equally anxious that an uncompromising skepticism could be dangerous to moral truth and action. He discouraged the endless examination of rationality, lest it “turne all practice into bare and nice Speculation,” for by 1641, there was little time for “nice Speculation.”⁵⁵¹

Brooke’s admittance of moral distinctions provided access to a certain moral truth, but more importantly, it provided an accountability for the doctrine of things indifferent. Such stability combined with a dynamic hierarchy yielded a variable, but tolerant, morality in the face of an ascending Christian liberty that fostered a de-valuing of moral truth. Brooke placed “all the *Indifference* (in the world)...in our Understandings, and the Darkenesse thereof, (which makes them wavering sometimes, and doubtfull whether to doe or not, so that in them seemes some *Indifference* to either extreme)” but no thing or action is ever indifferent “*in Re, in Se*; but to our *Understanding* some things seeme so, for want of Good

⁵⁵⁰ Brooke, *Discourse* 23-24.

⁵⁵¹ Brooke, *Discourse* 23. Victoria Kahn links indifference in the political and religious climate during the Civil War to a rhetorical tradition derived from the general influence of Machiavellianism on England. Brooke had, Kahn writes, a “Machiavellian appreciation of contingency as the condition for political action, not to mention freedom of religion.” See *Machiavellian Rhetoric: From the Counter-Reformation to Milton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) 146. In my view, skepticism seems to appeal to Brooke, though he rejects contingency, the logical outcome of a skeptical worldview.

light.”⁵⁵² Indifferency was a phantom of the mind and an indicator of its limits. Used willfully, indifference argued a world ordered by contingency rather than providence. Though treated as a means to accommodate the faultiness of man’s knowledge of truth, in reality it was a flaw characteristic of the human mind, which could never apprehend that “every thing is either True or False, Certainly *to Be*, or *not to Be*.” Ontological and epistemological good—being and truth—always elude man because of the limitations of understanding; morality, though an imperfect science that can only aspire to perfection, is the closest man can come to these truths.⁵⁵³ By confining the reality of indifferency to the mind, Brooke made the mind more fallible, but moral truth more certain.

Rather than forfeit the individual search for truth to forced conformity, Brooke asserted that even in a world of *adiaphora*, men could act with conviction and with certainty. The institutionalized legislation of indifferency made a right knowledge of things themselves all the more difficult because ecclesiastical law particularized and politicized indifferency by dividing it into categories of lawful and unlawful. Legislation, another indicator of the mind’s weakness, could only rule over perceptible “seeming indifferents,” not true moral action, which was beyond the province of a human mind that is entirely subjected to circumstance, the canons of a national church, the prerogative of a monarch, and most importantly, its own limitations.⁵⁵⁴

For Brooke, true liberty of conscience admitted neither contingency nor moral choice without accountability. It allowed man the freedom to search for God’s truth in “seeming”

⁵⁵² Brooke, *Discourse* 26-27.

⁵⁵³ Brooke, *Discourse* 26.

⁵⁵⁴ Brooke, *Discourse* 28.

indifferents, but the necessity of that search did not undermine the value of moral choice. But most importantly, even in a universe that admitted *adiaphora* as a moral crutch for the sake of toleration, true moral action could still take place: truth and peace could coexist. The difficulty of *adiaphora* in the mid-seventeenth century was that, in order for it to be a valid moral category, it had to have an origin independent of the human mind—whether it be the individual mind or the collective mind of the church—yet if it possessed such an origin, it was no longer a thing indifferent, but something more akin to divine knowledge. Such a coup on the unreliability of human perception was possible if reason was grounded in “the *Thing* itself” and unified the good of circumstance with absolute good.⁵⁵⁵ Brooke’s willingness to accept both an absolute and relative model of indifferency freed it from its moral privation and reoriented it as an object of divine truth, without leading to dogma. However, as a philosophical category indifferency always would beg the question of whether truth need be moral, while as a theological category it called into doubt whether morality need be true.

IV. Replacing the Moral Guidance of *Adiaphora*: Miltonic Discipline and Style

Lord Brooke’s rationalism demonstrates why, on the eve of the Civil War, *adiaphora* came to represent powerful soteriological truths that motivated action. Like Lord Brooke, John Milton sought to determine how and why the individual conscience was a better guide than the bishops to what he called “saving knowledge.” William Riley Parker has argued that in his anti-prelatical tracts Milton’s “fervent theory of spiritual and poetical illumination led him to damn Episcopacy for destroying the dignity of the individual; but it never occurred to

⁵⁵⁵ Brooke, *Discourse* 24.

him that this involved the principle of freedom of conscience.”⁵⁵⁶ On the contrary, liberty of conscience is not only integral to Milton’s anti-episcopal stance, but it supersedes church polity as the key focus of these tracts. Though the tracts vary radically in style, their common denominator is their emphasis on the importance of the individual layman acquiring moral knowledge without the imposition of law and censure. Legislated morality overlooked the importance of conviction.

Crucial to Milton’s early views on the liberty of conscience was his doubtful attitude towards invention in any form. In the course of his five anti-episcopal tracts of 1641 and 1642, Milton weighed the value of the passions, of education, of persuasion, and of literary style as answers to indifference. Brooke had suggested that the concept of *adiaphora*, while an index of the weakness of reason, could be modified to become a valid moral guide. But for Milton in these early pamphlets, indifference embodied the human mind’s creative rather than perceptive faculties, a knowledge submitted only to will and never to reason. Indifference was particularly vulnerable to error because it relied upon the imagination, will, historical contingency, and rhetorical obscurity; moreover, it implied that the individual conscience was inadequate to formulate moral truths.⁵⁵⁷ In his attempts to replace indifference with a more certain moral guide, Milton redefined the imagination’s role in forming morality by admitting room for the imagination through religious discourse and discipline. Subsequent to his anti-prelatical tracts Milton drifted away from the corporate but less hierarchical authority of Presbyterianism to test the epistemological flexibility of indifference, but in the anti-prelatical tracts indifference served as an example of a religious

⁵⁵⁶ William Riley Parker, *Milton: A Biography*, 2 vols., rev. and ed. Gordon Campbell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 1.224.

⁵⁵⁷ Cf. Arthur E. Barker’s reading in his chapter entitled “The Intellectual Ray” in his *Milton and the Puritan Dilemma, 1641-1660* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1942).

imagination gone awry and as a foil against which he measured the individual conscience. In his attack upon an ingenuity that worked against religious truth and liberty, Milton sought to develop a discourse to motivate, rather than undermine, England's moral reformation.

In Milton's first two anti-episcopal works, *Of Reformation* (May, 1641) and *Of Prelatical Episcopacy* (June/July, 1641), he exposed the inadequacy of history as a source of moral knowledge. Indeed, these two treatises show how for Milton the Episcopal debate was not over church polity, but over the moral superiority of the conscience as an alternative to the customs of doctrine and discipline rooted in church history.⁵⁵⁸ In Milton's attack on the bishops' patristic arguments for Episcopacy, he posited that the arbitrariness of history undermined its validity as a source of moral knowledge. In all likelihood written no more than a month apart, these treatises were juxtaposed to reinforce his argument: while in *Of Reformation* Milton exposed the inconsistencies in the works of the Church Fathers, in *Of Prelatical Episcopacy* he turned these same sources against the Archbishop James Ussher in a point-by-point refutation stylistically reminiscent of the scholastic pedantry he constantly mocked. The ready manipulation of these sources called into question the certainty of a church that founded its identity on the sandy shores of history and tradition.

Because it was based in history and custom, the bishops used indifference to justify the moral grab-bag they deemed church doctrine and practice. In the very beginning of *Of Reformation*, Milton criticized the Church of England for attempting to use the "weak and fallible office of the Senses, to be either the Ushers, or Interpreters, of heavenly Mysteries"

⁵⁵⁸ In response to the anti-prelatical pamphlets in 1640 and 1641, bishops defended their view of church hierarchy based on historical evidence. Aside from the works of Hall, in 1641 a large compilation of documents termed *Certain Brief Treatises* defending the jurisdiction of bishops was issued. *Of Prelatical Episcopacy* is a response to this work, in particular to James Ussher's contribution, *The Originall of Bishops and Metropolitans*. See *Certain Brief Treatises* (Oxford: Leon Lichfield, 1641) 43-75.

because using “deceivable traditions...attribute[s] purity, or impurity, to things indifferent, [so] that [the bishops] might bring the inward acts of the *Spirit* to the outward, and customary ey-Service of the body, as if they could make God earthly, and fleshly, because they could not make themselves *heavenly*, and *Spirituell*.”⁵⁵⁹ *Adiaphora* was sensory knowledge—if it could be called knowledge at all—and the bishops’ reliance on *adiaphora* for moral law proved them feeble authorities on the principles of moral living. Such a dependency dampened Milton’s hopes for nothing less than a perfect reformation in England. Though England had been given a “*Precedencie*” by God “to be the first *Restorer* of *buried Truth*” and should have already “attain’d Perfection,” the “*purity* of [its] *Doctrine*” had been weakened by the lack of “Discipline, which is the *execution* and *applying* of *Doctrine*.”⁵⁶⁰ Because of their tendency indiscriminately to accommodate the pure and impure, at best things indifferent stalled the progress of a national spiritual reformation.

Neither history nor the traditional indifferency founded upon it offered the perfect reformation Milton sought. Just as the bishops mixed the pure with the impure, so too the historian mingled the certain with the uncertain. Milton inveighed against the “*Fathers*, *Martyrs*, [and] *Christian Emperors*” not out of spite, but out of the “meere necessity to vindicate the spotlesse *Truth* from an ignominious bondage, whose native worth is now become of such a low esteeme, that shee is like to finde small credit with us for what she can say, unlesse shee can bring a Ticket from *Cranmer*, *Latimer*, and *Ridley*; or prove her selfe a retainer to *Constantine*, and weare his *badge*.”⁵⁶¹ In their study of the scripture and antiquity,

⁵⁵⁹ John Milton, *Of Reformation Touching Church-Discipline in England*, *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol. 1, ed. Don. M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953) 520.

⁵⁶⁰ *Of Reformation* 526.

⁵⁶¹ *Of Reformation* 535.

the Church Fathers matched the certain word of God to the uncertain knowledge of history, making the two collide “as accidentally and absurdly, as *Epicurus* his atoms to patch up a Leucippean *Ignatius*, enclining rather to make this phantasme an expounder, or indeed a depraver of Saint *Paul*, then Saint *Paul* an examiner, and discoverer of this impostorship.”⁵⁶² “Truth” according to Milton, “is the daughter not of Time, but of Heaven, only bred up heer below in Christian hearts, between two grave & holy nurses the Doctrine, and Discipline of the Gospel.”⁵⁶³

In his first two anti-prelatical tracts, Milton grounded his hope for a national reformation on the assumption that scripture was the sole source of moral truth, offering a plain and necessitous truth in place of an uncertain, if traditional, indifferency. In *Of Reformation* he was altogether skeptical of the continuity of truth over time, which is why history, like the senses, was an unacceptable guide to normative moral values. Because “*succession of truth may fail*,” truth must be “*renew[ed]*” by having “*recourse to the fountaines*.” “If a Channel, or Conduit pipe” that has “*brought in water plentifully before, suddenly fail*,” that is, if truth became obscured by time as, in Milton’s eyes, the Apostolic Church had, then “*doe we not goe to the fountaine to know the cause...thus ought we to doe, keeping Gods precepts, that if in ought the truth shall be chang’d, we may repaire to the Gospel*.”⁵⁶⁴ Milton allowed that reform of the Church, a change in perceived truth, may exist, but it could be found only in scripture, not in human invention.

⁵⁶² John Milton, *Of Prelatical Episcopacy, The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol. 1, ed. Don. M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953) 651.

⁵⁶³ *Of Prelatical Episcopacy* 639.

⁵⁶⁴ Milton quoting Cyprian, *Of Reformation* 563-564.

“Repair[ing] to the Gospel” to correct a corrupted church polity or policy required the right interpretation of the gospel. The bishops had emphasized the obscurities of the gospel in order to justify withholding it from the laity. But Milton argued that although some books of the Bible were “clouded,” “yet ever that which is most necessary to be known is most easie; and that which is most difficult, so farre expounds it selfe ever, as to tell us how little it imports our *saving knowledge*.” The bishops insisted on a “generall obscurity over all the text [of Scripture]” in order to “disswade men from reading it.” But the bishops, “[men] of Power amongst us,” distorted the message of God and lacked “gentlenesse” and “fair dealing” when they “require[d] strict, and punctual obedience, and yet [gave] out all [their] commands ambiguous and obscure, [so that] we should think [they] had a plot upon us, certainly such commands were no commands, but snares.” When the bishops claimed that darker more obscure passages were necessary for salvation, they transformed things that “little...[import]...*saving knowledge*” into necessities.⁵⁶⁵ Obscurity and indifferency for Milton went hand in hand with the bishops’ domination over the layman’s conscience.

Despite truth’s “plainnesse, and brightnes,” which was hidden only by “the darknes and crookednesse” of the human mind, determining necessities was not a simple matter.⁵⁶⁶ The truth of scripture had not changed, but the certainty of human apprehension had. This vexed certainty is evident in Milton’s seemingly paradoxical vision of truth as plain necessity and platonic abstraction. But ironically, truth’s mysticism as much as its plainness allowed Milton freely to invest all men and women with the abilities to perceive moral knowledge. “If

⁵⁶⁵ *Of Reformation* 566.

⁵⁶⁶ *Of Reformation* 566. As William Chillingworth explained, while the “Apostles were led into all Truths by the Spirit, *efficaciter*,” the Caroline Church “is led also into all truth by the Apostles *writings, sufficient*” (146).

we will but purge with sovraign eyesalve that intellectual ray which *God* hath planted in us,” Milton wrote, “then we would beleieve the Scriptures protesting their own plainnes, and perspicuity, calling them to be instructed, not only the *wise*, and *learned*, but the *simple*, the *poor*, the *babes*, foretelling an extraordinary effusion of *Gods* Spirit upon every age, and sexe, attributing to all men, and requiring from them the ability of searching, trying, examing all things, and by the Spirit discerning that which is good.”⁵⁶⁷ Any inability to perceive truth derived from man’s faulty understanding, the dross that covered the “intellectual ray” within all men. Man’s “darknes and crookednesse” obstructed human apprehension but only insofar as men attempted to define things beyond the plain and necessary truths God willingly allowed men.

According to Milton, “the *Wisdom* of *God* created *understanding*, fit and proportionable to Truth the object, and end of it, as the eye to the thing visible.” But even if the mind did misapprehend truth, it did not threaten truth’s autonomy, for if “our *understanding* have a film of *ignorance* over it, or be blear with gazing on other false glisterings, what is that to Truth?” Because real moral truth was without the taint of human law, *adiaphora* created more epistemological problems than it solved. “*Truth*,” Milton wrote quoting Athanasius “*wants no humane lore, as being evident in it selfe, and by the preaching of Christ now opens brighter then the Sun*”; the “effusion of *Gods* Spirit’ upon ‘all men’ occurred independent of the strictures of the Church, though clearly not independent of individual human endeavor.⁵⁶⁸ All that was necessary for the perfect English reformation to occur, then, was that the confusion the bishops caused by maintaining the traditions of

⁵⁶⁷ *Of Reformation* 566.

⁵⁶⁸ *Of Reformation* 566.

indifferency be cleared by encouraging all men to actively search the scripture for moral knowledge.

In *Of Reformation* and *Of Prelatical Episcopacy*, Milton appropriated historical discourse in order to explode the myth that it could provide any certainty for church doctrine. In his next two anti-prelatical works, Milton engaged very different prose styles in his quest to free conscience from the bishops, from church history, and from indifferency. Although one is a satire in the vein of Cartwright and the other an eloquent and moderate exposition in the style of Hooker, the *Animadversions* (July, 1641) and the *Reason of Church Government* (January/February, 1642) attempted to compensate for the history that Milton had rendered so useless in his first works against the bishops. With history lacking certainty and the scripture plain but abstract, Milton needed a means by which individual conscience could overcome the inconsistencies of time and chance. At home Milton faced the failure of the Short Parliament in 1640 and the undecided outcome of the Long Parliament; abroad he watched as the rapidly deteriorating relationship between England and Ireland culminated in the notoriously bloody Irish Rebellion in October of 1641.⁵⁶⁹ By the time Milton wrote the *Reason of Church Government*, he possessed a real fear that the Irish might invade—and that such an invasion might be an indication of God's displeasure with England's failed attempts at reform. Perhaps because of the uncertain directions in which English religious and civil liberties were heading, Milton became more tolerant of error in an effort to push forward reforms.

Rather than stress the ability of the common layman to comprehend the divine truths of scripture, Milton began to concentrate on ways in which the present laity were in danger

⁵⁶⁹ Don M. Wolfe, "Introduction," *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol. 1, 68-170.

of passing by their opportunity for reform. In both the *Animadversions* and the *Reason of Church Government* Milton retrenched his demands for moral perfection and introduced degrees of moral knowledge. Rather than give abstract definitions of truth, in these works Milton instead articulated two complementary definitions of reason. Most striking is the emphasis in both definitions on the role of the passions in cognition. In his first prose satire, Milton linked passion to reason. The “grim laughter” that appeared in *Animadversions*, Milton cautioned, “cannot be taxt of levity or insolence,” for laughter is “oft-times a strong and sinewy force in teaching and confuting”; nor should “indignation and scorne” come under censure, for anger and laughter are the “two most rationall faculties of humane intellect.”⁵⁷⁰

Similarly, in the *Reason of Church Government* Milton replaced the abstract “intellectual ray” of *Of Reformation* with a more material examination of the operations of the mind. Because truth must encounter the passions, it had an “unhappinesse fatall to her.” Before it could reach “the triall and inspection of the Understanding,” truth was forced “to passe through many little wards and limits of the severall Affections and Desires” where to gain a hearing it “must put on such colours and attire, as those Pathetick handmaids of the soul please to lead her in to their Queen.” If the affections accepted truth on its own merits, they “let her passe in her own likenesse,” but Milton was more interested in the process by which the mind rejected truth. In cases of an unpalatable truth, the passions brought truth to the understanding “habited and colour’d like a notorious Falsehood.” When faced with a pleasing “Falsehood” the passions “[were] so artfull to counterfeit the very shape and visage of Truth, [so] that the Understanding” no longer recognized either truth or falsehood and

⁵⁷⁰ John Milton, *Animadversions, The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol. 1, ed. Don. M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953) 663-664.

“sentenc[ed] for the most part one for the other at the first blush, according to the suttile imposture of these sensual mistresses that keep the ports and passages between her and the object.”⁵⁷¹ At the mercy of the operations of the mind, truth could be dominated by affection so that human perception became invention.

In the midst of a religious culture that had accepted the mingling of the pure and impure, saving knowledge and uncertainties, Milton sought to explain why truth and falsehood were so readily interchanged in the mind and what that meant for the legitimacy of what men called conscience. But unlike the plain, independent, and necessary truth of *Of Reformation* that remained unaffected by “the film of ignorance” covering human understanding, by 1641 truth seemed to Milton to be in a precarious position. Because England appeared to be slipping further away from its role as “*Restorer of buried Truth*,” Milton admitted that truth required “colours and attire” to move beyond the affections and to reach the more deeply buried faculty of reason. But in dressing up truth—whether it be with ceremony or language—the inventor always risked compromising its nature.

In *Of Reformation* and *Of Prelatical Episcopacy* Milton had asserted that the Church had dressed indifferencies as soteriological necessities and vice versa. Building on this conclusion, in the *Reason of Church Government* Milton noted that the Church’s tendency to mix-and-match certain truths with invented fictions was the tendency of the human mind in general. As in the art of sculpture “seldome any elegance is wrought without a superfluous wast and refuse in the transaction,” so too in the art of moral reformation truth and falsehood must have a “fierce encounter.” The clash of these contraries would produce “many fond errors and fanatick opinions,” but once the “reformation shall be perfeted” these opinions

⁵⁷¹ John Milton, *The Reason of Church Government Urg’d against Prelaty*, *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol. 1, ed. Don. M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953) 830-831.

would be but simple examples of ‘the exercise of our knowledge, not the disturbance, or interruption of our faith.’⁵⁷² After the perfect moral reformation had been completed, error would become innocuous. But during the process of reformation—as Milton believed England was, or should be in 1642—the mind’s ability to alter the face of truth was much more dangerous. To admit indifferencies as a moral category only destabilized the perception of truth and encouraged men to mistake fictitious invention for the mandates of conscience.

Milton could not dismiss the role of the passions in the perception of moral truth because it allowed the possibility that education could be a more reliable guide to moral truth than legislation. With the introduction of passion into man’s spiritual life, Milton began to examine the influence of the external world and to consider more seriously the possibility that the external forces above and beyond but ultimately based in scripture could be significant to moral development. The greatest guide to moral development was discipline. Though an external application of doctrine and the “very visible shape and image of virtue,” and the most likely “visible shape [that] can be given of divine things,” discipline could resist chance and human invention. Discipline, “if it be at all the worke of man...must be of such a one as is a true knower of himselfe, and himselfe in whom contemplation and practice, wit, prudence, fortitude, and eloquence must be rarely met, both to comprehend the hidden causes of things, and span in his thoughts all the various effects that passion or complexion can work in mans nature.”⁵⁷³ For the man who possessed the knowledge to formulate it, discipline was an external indicator of internal virtue. But, for the man who was not yet regenerate, discipline was an aid. The admonishment of shame combined with the inner

⁵⁷² *The Reason of Church Government* 796.

⁵⁷³ *The Reason of Church Government* 751, 753.

“self-knowledge” Milton termed “esteem” worked together to increase the force and accuracy of conscience even as they regulated moral knowledge. The regenerate man who possessed esteem and could apply discipline and shame was not only a skilled minister who possessed a great knowledge of human nature, but also a man with the capacities of a great orator who could use the passions to encourage moral development.

But while discipline was a function of the understanding rather than the imagination, in the *Animadversions* and the *Reason of Church Government* Milton also suggested the benefits of the union of knowledge and invention. Poetry and satire could stand as a kind of discipline that punished and affected the inner man without force and without restricting religious freedoms.⁵⁷⁴ Both his role in the Smectymnuan debate and his as-yet-unrealized poetic vocation embodied “the enforcement of conscience.”⁵⁷⁵ In contrast to the bishops’ moral innovations, in the *Reason of Church Government* Milton declared that his poetic aspiration to create virtuous fictions was “the inspired gift of God.”⁵⁷⁶ Like discipline, satire required self-knowledge and a knowledge of others; it evidenced regeneracy and guided the unregenerate, even though it was neither restrictive nor compulsive. Unlike the imposition of

⁵⁷⁴ Beginning with Milton French’s classic essay “Milton as Satirist,” *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 51:2 (1936): 414-429, a number of scholars have suggested the importance of Milton’s views on satire to his sense of rhetoric: Raymond A. Anselment, “*Betwixt Jest and Earnest*”: *Marprelate, Milton, Marvell, Swift and the Decorum of Religious Ridicule* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), especially chapter four; Victoria Kahn, “Allegory, the Sublime, and the Rhetoric of Things Indifferent in *Paradise Lost*,” *Creative Imitation: New Essays on Renaissance Literature in Honor of Thomas M. Greene*, in David Quint et al. (Binghamton, Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1992) 130-131; Thomas Kranidas, “Style and Rectitude in Seventeenth-Century Prose: Hall, Smectymnuus, and Milton,” *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 46:3 (1983): 237-269; Henry S. Limouze, “Joseph Hall and the Prose Style of John Milton,” *Milton Studies*, 15 (1981): 121-141; Joel Morkan, “Wrath and Laughter: Milton’s Ideas on Satire,” *Studies in Philology*, 69.4 (1972): 475-495.

⁵⁷⁵ *Reason of Church Government* 806.

⁵⁷⁶ *Reason of Church Government* 816.

adiaphora, discipline and satire required the transference of knowledge from the regenerate to the unregenerate in order to be effective.

Milton's justification of the authority of conscience both limited the moral innovation of bishops and reasserted the validity of moral fiction at the same time. Even as he criticized the bishops' "tyrannical duncery," under which "no free and splendid wit [could] flourish,"⁵⁷⁷ he began to reclaim human invention. But the nature of truth had changed. It was no longer an abstract mystical entity found only by reading scripture; rather these two tracts suggest that the process by which truth was found was by no means a pure or linear one. At least temporarily, the absolutism and idealism of moral perfection evident in *Of Reformation* and *Of Prelatical Episcopacy* had to be sacrificed for liberation and progress in the *Animadversions* and the *Reason of Church Government*. A perfect reformation was still on the horizon, but the road to it was not as simple or as straightforward as it had once seemed.

In his final contribution to the Smectymnuan debate, Milton undertook a forceful defense of the satirical language he had used to censure Joseph Hall in the *Animadversions*. The *Apology* (April, 1642) constitutes a passionate meditation on the decorum of religious discourse. Milton's pamphlet was a response to Joseph Hall's *Modest Confutation* (January [?], 1642), itself a response to the *Animadversions*. In the *Reason of Church Government* Milton had invoked the language of martyrdom by contrasting the exemplary behavior of Christ who evidenced "strength by suffering, dignity by lowliness" against the pomp and pride of the bishops.⁵⁷⁸ But in the *Apology*, Milton invoked the same language yet again, this time to announce to the world that though "silence and sufferance" had been the best means

⁵⁷⁷ *Reason of Church Government* 820.

⁵⁷⁸ *Reason of Church Government* 824.

of refuting his enemies, silence was no longer an act of moral valor. Against the charge of Hall that he espoused a selfish religion that disregarded the common good,⁵⁷⁹ Milton declared that he no longer viewed himself as “mine own person, but as a member incorporate into that truth whereof I was perswaded”: he defended his earlier silence as he now defended his outspokenness.⁵⁸⁰

The debate between Milton and Hall over satire found its inspiration in their attitudes towards the laity. Hall argued that religion should not be judged by the people; Milton, he claimed “against the command of God himself, dare[d] bring not the Congregation onely, but the very beasts of the people, within the borders of the Mount.”⁵⁸¹ Set forms of liturgy were the “most expedient” way of dealing with the people because they used the “subsidiary helps of invention, disposition, memory, [and] language” in order to “accommodate the capacity of the people.”⁵⁸² Milton objected to the liturgy on the grounds that it corrupted the relationship between matter, style, and audience. As early as the *Animadversions* Milton had argued that something may in “substance...savor of something holy, and ancient, this is but the matter.” Just as important was “the forme and end of the thing [which] may yet render it either superstitious, fruitlesse, or impious.”⁵⁸³ Form was not just something external, but “an essence” that affected substance, something resembling intention more than action.⁵⁸⁴ But ironically, just as Milton had accused the bishops of unnecessarily obscuring saving

⁵⁷⁹ Hall, *Modest Confutation* 30.

⁵⁸⁰ John Milton. *Apology, The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, vol. 1, ed. Don. M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953) 870-871.

⁵⁸¹ Hall, *Modest Confutation* 23.

⁵⁸² Hall, *Modest Confutation* 26-27.

⁵⁸³ *Animadversions* 686.

⁵⁸⁴ *Animadversions* 688.

knowledge in *Of Reformation*, Hall claimed that “honest and simple Christians would no more know how to understand” Milton’s extemporaneous prayers than they would “a Scene out of *Johnsons Cataline*.”⁵⁸⁵ Hall believed that a set form was just as likely to kindle the affections of the laity towards god as a private prayer, but Hall’s greatest fear of extemporaneous prayer was that it “will set such a fire on your Spirits, that they will need quenching, or the whole Kingdome will burn with them.” “Weigh these circumstances,” Hall admonished, “and you will see that there is an expediency of set forms in a nationall Church,”⁵⁸⁶ for the “authority is lawfull and just; the thing in it self indifferent, and in the circumstance, expedient.”⁵⁸⁷

In the *Reason of Church Government* Milton had claimed that he “hath neither envy nor gall,” but rather the motivation for his pamphlets lay in the “enforcement of conscience.”⁵⁸⁸ Because even a sincere conscience could invent as well as perceive truth without recognizing the difference, Milton felt that it was important to differentiate between different types and sources of passion. But clearly his discourse in the *Animadversions* was more inflammatory than Hall thought appropriate for religious discourse. In his arguments against Milton’s style, Hall appropriated the arguments of Francis Bacon in his *Wise and Moderate Discourse Concerning Church-Affaires*, first published only in 1641. Though written in the 1590s, Bacon’s work was quite at home in the climate of the pamphlet wars of 1641 and 1642.⁵⁸⁹ Attributing the disunity in the English Church to the current controversy

⁵⁸⁵ Hall, *Modest Confutation* 27.

⁵⁸⁶ Hall, *Modest Confutation* 30.

⁵⁸⁷ Hall, *Modest Confutation* 33.

⁵⁸⁸ *Reason of Church Government* 806.

⁵⁸⁹ See Brian Vickers’ notes to his edition of *Francis Bacon* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1996) 494-501.

“about Ceremonies, and things indifferent,” Bacon had attacked the “unmodest and deformed kinde of writing lately entertained, whereby matters of religion are handled in the stile of the stage.” “To turne religion into a Comedy or Satyr, to search and rip up wounds with a laughing countenance, to intermix Scripture and Scurrility sometime in one sentence,” according to Bacon, “is a thing farre from the devout reverence of a Christian, and scant beseeming the honest regard of a sober man.”⁵⁹⁰ Far from being a subject open for the scrutiny of man, when the Church was under the administration of pious and dutiful bishops, it should be “situate, as it were, upon an hill.”⁵⁹¹ As it did for Hall, so too for Bacon indifference protected the Church from scrutiny because it attempted to make controversy unnecessary in order to keep the Church out of public religious discourse.

In the aggressive attacks of the *Animadversions*, Milton had first claimed the usefulness of a ‘toothed’ satire. He reveled in “now this permission of free writing,” which “were there no good else in it, yet at some times thus licenc’t, is such an unripping, such an Anatomie of the shiest, and tenderest particular truths, as makes not only the whole Nation in many points the wiser, but also presents, and carries home to Princes, and men most remote from vulgar concourse, such a full insight of every lurking evil, or restrained good among the Commons.”⁵⁹² Milton, Bacon, and Hall acknowledged the role passion played in religion and were concerned about the confusion that seemed responsible, if not for generating, then for maintaining the current level of controversy—that is, the confusion between valid and invalid motives for action. Bacon characterized the confusion as one between love and zeal. “[The]

⁵⁹⁰ Francis Bacon, *A Wise and Moderate Discourse Concerning Church Affaires* (N.p., 1641) 4, 7-8.

⁵⁹¹ Bacon 15.

⁵⁹² *Animadversions* 670.

character of love,” Bacon claimed, “is more proper for debates of this [religious] nature, than that of zeale.”⁵⁹³ Hall tried to moderate satire’s vitriol by emphasizing its history. Satire “signified anciently any kind of miscellaneous writing, which we now term *Essayes*,” and even when satire did become a moral discourse “it came to be restrained to such kind of writings, as contained the vices of the times” but not of the people.⁵⁹⁴ In the *Animadversions* Milton attacked Hall for using ineffectual discourse for moral reformation. Hall worried about “zeal” that lacked “discretion” even if it did derive from “knowledge.”⁵⁹⁵ To Milton, the extremes of passionate zeal, on the one hand, and Hall’s “toothlesse satires” on the other, seemed equally inappropriate for moral discourse—the former were too fanciful to be valid and the latter were too dull to be effective, either as education or as punishment: “Let me informe you, a toothlesse Satyr is as improper as a toothed sleekstone, and as bullish.”⁵⁹⁶

In the *Apology* Milton defended his use of satire as an instrument of moral instruction, an instrument, which, he noted, Old Testament prophets and martyrs had used effectively.⁵⁹⁷ He observed that a kind of decorum restrained written religious discourse that did not apply to the minister’s sermons. Writing, Milton argued, should be allowed the same passion as the minister’s oratory because the writer as much as the orator must consider the different passions and humors of his audience to be effective. Though some writers have been “indu’d with a staid moderation, and soundnesse of argument to teach and convince the rationall and sober-minded,” yet such discourse was not “the only expedient course of

⁵⁹³ Bacon 46.

⁵⁹⁴ Hall, *Modest Confutation* 9.

⁵⁹⁵ Hall, *Modest Confutation* 20.

⁵⁹⁶ *Animadversions* 670.

⁵⁹⁷ *Apology* 903.

teaching.” “In times of opposition...against new heresies arising, or old corruptions to be reform’d” when “coole unpassionate mildnesse of positive wisdom is not enough” to overcome opposition, “then (that I may have leave to soare a while as the Poets use) then Zeale whose substance is ethereal” is necessary.⁵⁹⁸ The zeal that the bishops used to enforce conformity was equally useful to the cause of religious liberty.

In his attempt to justify satire as a valid form of religious discourse, Milton claimed that style and morality were inseparable. Eloquence never finds its source in anger, but in the “regenerate reason” of the man whose art “returnes and approaches neerest to nature from whence it came; and they expresse nature best, who in their lives least wander from her safe leading.”⁵⁹⁹ Composition itself became for Milton a metaphor for virtue: “He who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought him selfe to bee a true Poem, that is, a composition, and patterne of the best and honourablest things.”⁶⁰⁰ Like discipline and the minister’s oratory, satire displayed one man’s virtues while it censored another’s. Far from undercutting the certainty of conscience, Milton found that if religion accepted aid from certain forms of discourse, passion and understanding could meet without damaging the integrity of each other. Satire remedied “lukewarmness,” allowed passionate conviction, and replaced indifference as a moral guide. The moral censure of satire—and eventually, Milton projected, his poetry—while not possessing the certainty of the gospel for moral truth, offered guidance without restricting or depriving men of their liberties.

As an important part of the Episcopacy’s programme of forced conformity, *adiaphora* compelled Milton to recommend an alternative means to moral supervision. Doing so helped

⁵⁹⁸ *Apology* 900.

⁵⁹⁹ *Apology* 874.

⁶⁰⁰ *Apology* 890.

to define his own convictions about moral discourse and the role of the poet as he began his career. Rather than highlighting rational action, as Lord Brooke had, Milton focused on developing a discourse that possessed the rhetorical force of preaching to encourage reformation. Considered as a form of discipline, the moral discourse of satire could overcome the need for indifferency without replacing it with other forms of moral restrictions or compulsions—that is, it could replace moral absolutism without introducing skepticism.⁶⁰¹ While education provided a compelling alternative to forced conformity, Milton’s early prose questioned not just the value of ecclesiastical legislation nor simply the potential for the human mind to apprehend divine truth, but rather the ability of the human mind to invent—not just perceive—moral distinctions, categories, and fictions.

V. Conclusion: The Language of Religious Toleration and the Language of Moral Action

The vigorous debate over Episcopal jurisdiction and the nature of things indifferent signals a sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit search for a discourse adequate to formulate valid moral codes amongst the disorienting expansion religious liberty in the early 1640s. In the war between religious freedom and the Caroline Church, “indifferency” did not suggest neutrality for anyone involved. The bishops were not indifferent to “things indifferent” because their legislation demanded obedience; the reformers, on the other hand, were not indifferent because of the problematic union of ecclesiology and soteriology.

⁶⁰¹ Despite Achsah Guibbory’s tendency to ignore important shifts in Milton’s attitudes towards texts in the anti-prelatical tracts, she does argue that Milton justifies the spiritual aims of his poetic enterprise while condemning “‘man’s invention’ in the worship of God” by insisting on the absolute spirituality of the Gospel and asserting a “clear opposition between truth and error” (*Ceremony and Community from Herbert to Milton: Literature, Religion, and Cultural Conflict in Seventeenth-Century England* [Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998] 148, 155).

In *The Nature of Truth*, Brooke questioned the gap between philosophical and religious truth. “Why doe wee make Philosophy and Divinity two Sciences?,” Brooke asked, “What is True Philosophy but Divinity? And if it be not True, it is not Philosophy.”⁶⁰² For Lord Brooke, the merger of religion and philosophy aided him in his struggle to redefine *adiaphora* and to establish a standard of judgment for moral values that averted absolutism and relativism. Those defending the practices of the Church of England often condemned the use of philosophical discourse in religious matters. Joseph Hall perhaps most markedly banished philosophy from theology.⁶⁰³ Philosophical discourse jeopardized the stability of the Church as it offered an alternative means of examining truths, even those beyond rational proof. Brooke’s rationalism and Milton’s satire stretched the decorum of moral discourse as they sought a method of interpreting the perplexities of moral knowledge that the Church so happily swept under the legislative carpet.⁶⁰⁴ Neither orthodoxy nor reform was immune to error. The difference lay in the willingness of the reformers to jeopardize peace for the sake truth, and the hesitance of the bishops to risk national unity for religious freedom.

In short, *adiaphora* was a highly contested space in the negotiation between truth and peace. Both Brooke’s acceptance of *adiaphora* as a means to promote moral action and religious toleration as well as Milton’s attempt to replace *adiaphora* with the moral guidance of satire measured the value of a positive religious discourse against a skeptical one. As an important component of the debate over Episcopacy prior to the English Civil War, *adiaphora*’s significance lies in its engagement in a larger process of acclimating moral

⁶⁰² Brooke, *Nature of Truth* 124.

⁶⁰³ Hall, *Christian Moderation* 424, 428.

⁶⁰⁴ Lamont summarizes the state of Anglican rhetoric rather bluntly, though not incorrectly, when he writes that in 1641 “the Anglican case, whatever its incidental virtues, had one basic flaw: it was dull” (79).

judgment and discourse to a new culture of religious and political liberty, for it was unclear whether such a climate would allow normative morality to exist at all.

Significantly, Milton did not, finally, leave *adiaphora* completely behind. In 1644, two years after his final anti-prelatical tract, Milton published *Areopagitica*, in which he reclaimed some value for certain kinds of *adiaphora*. Though still scathing in his attitudes towards a legislated truth that threatened to turn all truth “into all shapes except her own,” Milton considered the possibility of an indifferency based on charity rather than oppression.⁶⁰⁵ In contrast to “tolerated Popery, and open superstition,” Milton defined a category of “neighboring differences, or rather indifferences...whether in some point of doctrine or of discipline, which though they be many, yet need not interrupt *the unity of Spirit*.” As long as the idea persisted that there was a single, unknown Truth, England could find unity in the collective search for moral truth, if not in individual conviction. This reformation, Milton averred, though perhaps not perfect, could encompass truth, difference, and concord “if”—and it was a considerable and ultimately a fatal “if”—those involved in the religious strife of civil war “could but find among [themselves] *the bond of peace*.”⁶⁰⁶ Unfortunately, the “bond of peace” proved to be the most elusive truth of them all.

⁶⁰⁵ *Areopagitica* 563.

⁶⁰⁶ *Areopagitica* 565.

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