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Politeness, hypocrisy, and Protestant Dissent in England after the Toleration Act, c. 1689 - c. 1750

ABSTRACT: The concept of politeness has been central to studies of eighteenth-century England; less attention has been given to its impact on religious coexistence. This article argues that, while politeness has typically been associated with rejection of the religious divisions of the previous century, it could also be used to perpetuate them. Focusing on the position of Protestant Dissenters in relation to wider society after the Toleration Act of 1689, it argues that cultures of politeness complicated, rather than eased, their social integration. Furthermore, it highlights the centrality of religious questions to social and cultural change in eighteenth-century England.

KEY WORDS: Politeness, England, Religious coexistence, Protestant Dissent, Toleration

WORD COUNT (including footnotes): 10, 243

The concept of politeness has been of utility to contemporaries and historians of eighteenth-century England alike, and has proved particularly central to understanding contemporary sociability. [1] However, its impact on religious coexistence has been less well explored. Proponents of politeness in the first half of the eighteenth century suggested that as a mode of social interaction it facilitated cohesion. As a result, the culture of politeness has generally been dissociated from narratives of continuing religious division in this period, with an historiographical emphasis on the importance of the emergence of a 'more polite' and socially affable religious culture that marked a departure from the divisions of the previous century.[2] Interpreted in this way, the dominant social discourses of the eighteenth century should have tempered religious divisions. This article demonstrates that when applied to Protestant Dissenters from the Established Church, the rhetoric of politeness did quite the opposite.

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[1] Lawrence Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century', *Historical Journal* 45:4 (2002), pp.898, 877.

[2] Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century', p. 890; Jorge Arditi, 'Hegemony and Etiquette: An Exploration on the Transformation of Practice and Power in Eighteenth-Century England', *British Journal of Sociology* 45:2 (1994), p.178.

The so-called “Toleration” Act of 1689 meant that for the first time Protestant Dissenters from the Church of England could worship separately in their own meeting houses. However, as has been widely recognised in recent historiography, the legislation of 1689 did not have the transformative impact on the nature of religious coexistence that had long been supposed. For many Dissenters it was a half victory. The Test and Corporation Acts, barring Dissenters from public office, remained in place, and the 1689 Act gave very little practical guidance on where Dissenting congregations and ministers might fit into the functions of the community at large.[3] It was open to interpretation whether the Act accepted the principle of liberty of conscience, or was merely a means of controlling Protestant Dissent within an essentially intolerant framework. Where Dissenters saw the Toleration Act as indicative of a state acceptance of Dissent, High-Churchmen saw freedom of worship as the indulgent limit of any concession to Dissent.[4] While the legislation of 1689 allowed a certain degree of freedom from persecution for Dissenters, Dissent was by no means a universally accepted aspect of the religious landscape in the first half of the eighteenth century. The Toleration Act, by legitimising Dissent but making the position of Dissenters in civil society unclear, opened up space for debate about the relationship between Church, State, and Dissenter. The official legal status of Dissenters had changed; their broader social and cultural status was uncertain.

In the light of this, it is essential to understand the relationship between continuing religious divisions and the social and cultural developments of the early eighteenth century. Although the legal status of Dissenters had become more difficult to challenge, social ostracism remained an important weapon for opponents of Dissent. In this context, the religiously-inflected use of social discourses in this period turned politeness into more of a tool for division than concord. This article therefore emphasises the inherent exclusivity of the language of politeness. In doing so, it highlights the new perspectives that may emerge from using the lens of religious coexistence to examine the cultural and social life of the eighteenth century.

The following discussion is organised around analysis of the impact of politeness on portrayals of Dissent and Dissenters’ own attempts to navigate their place in society after the Toleration Act. With a particular focus on the label of hypocrisy, the first section explores the influence of politeness on characterisations of Dissenters in contemporary print and visual culture. While hypocrisy was but one of a number of charges laid against Dissenters from the seventeenth-century onwards, it is important here because the concept of politeness heightened concerns about the danger of hypocrisy in social interaction. The relationship between hypocrisy and politeness is explored in detail in the second section, which uses printed discussions of hypocrisy to highlight how the charge of impolite hypocrisy became particularly potent against Dissenters in this context. The third section demonstrates how the difficulties that this created for Dissenters played out in their attempts to balance polite social integration with the maintenance of their distinctive religious identity. Using both printed debates between Dissenters, and manuscript accounts of individuals' attempts to navigate the social landscape, it demonstrates that Dissenters were acutely aware of the danger that polite behaviour might worsen the charges of hypocrisy already laid against them.

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[3] Ralph Stevens, ‘Anglican Responses to the Toleration Act, 1689-1714’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, June 2014), pp.4-5, 11, 17.

[4] Andrew Thompson, ‘Contesting the Test Act: Dissent, Parliament and the Public in the 1730s’, *Parliamentary History* 24:1 (2005), pp.58, 61, 71.

This is not a comprehensive summary of the relationship between politeness and religious coexistence in eighteenth-century England. In confining itself to Protestant Dissent, this article discusses primarily Presbyterians, Independents, and Baptists, who, despite their clear differences, had sufficient collective identity as "Dissenters" to form a committee of 'Protestant Dissenting Deputies' in 1732.[5] The experiences of Quakers and Catholics are not examined, although a similar study of these groups might prove productive. Nevertheless, in line with recent calls for greater conversation between study of eighteenth-century religion, society, and culture, this article flags the importance of thinking about particular issues of religious coexistence when examining sociability in general.[6]

I

Throughout the seventeenth century, "puritans" and Dissenters from the Established Church had been labelled as socially rigid, divisive, and hypocritical individuals.[7] These supposed attributes of the hotter sort of Protestant were consistently adapted to changing social and political purposes.[8] These labels therefore indicate not just the nature of prejudices against Dissenters, but also the relationship between religion and discourses about sociability. In the context of the eighteenth century hackneyed characterisations of Dissenters became entangled with emergent discourses about politeness in the uncertain aftermath of the Toleration Act. The resulting picture of Dissenters as impolite hypocrites demonstrates the extent to which new and apparently inclusive social discourses, such as politeness, could be used to perpetuate the religious divisions of the Reformation well into the eighteenth century.

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[5] James E. Bradley, 'The Public, Parliament and the Protestant Dissenting Deputies, 1732-1740', *Parliamentary History*, 24:1 (2005), p.72.

[6] Jeremy Gregory, 'Introduction: Transforming "the Age of Reason" into "an Age of Faiths": or, Putting Religions and Beliefs (back) into the Eighteenth Century', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 32:3 (2009), pp.289-90.

[7] Patrick Collinson, 'Antipuritanism' in John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp.27-8.

Historians of politeness have emphasised that as a discourse associated with socially agreeable behaviour, it emerged in rejection of the excess of the previous century. As part of this, 'sociability and manners in religion were urged as alternatives to enthusiasm and fanaticism'.[9] Yet at least one label used against Dissenters - that of the hypocrite - became more, rather than less, potent when used in the context of the idealisation of politeness. Politeness could itself be regarded as inherently hypocritical, because it prioritised comely social behaviour over expression of true feeling, and concern about this featured in eighteenth-century discussions of polite education.[10] However, proponents of politeness argued that as long as manners were cultivated alongside taste and natural theology, hypocrisy could be avoided.[11] Indeed, for its advocates, this was a mode of conduct in which 'social actors establish a trust that allows them then to tell the truth, to criticise, and to urge reforms on others without offending them'.[12]

This view of politeness as a means to promote truth and virtue as well as social ease could be used to interpret the supposed ill-manners of Dissenters as symptomatic of hypocrisy. The arch-advocate of polite manners, Anthony Ashley-Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, made it clear that the ill humour of those who insisted on strictness and rigidity in discussing religious matters was not only impolite, but was in itself a sign of hypocrisy. He argued that religious matters should be treated with 'good humour' and religious principles examined with 'freedom and familiarity…If it be spurious or mixed with any other imposture, it will be detected and exposed'.[13] Excessive rigidity in religion was thus not a sign of honesty, but an indication of an unwillingness to subject it to free examination. Shaftesbury was by no means unsympathetic towards Dissent; his views expressed a general distaste for rigidity and fanaticism in social discourse, rather than a specific criticism of Dissent. However, his position was symptomatic of a broader emphasis in this period on good manners in religion that could be used to attack the position of Dissent. The view that, in a truly polite person, religion and manners are consonant with one another was also propounded by the author of *The Female Spectator*, Eliza Haywood, when she instructed that 'true Religion and *Good Manners*, which are built upon a solid and unshaken Foundation, are always uniform and constant'.[14] If Dissenters failed to subscribe to contemporary expectations of social behaviour, instead distinguishing themselves through a strict outward piety, they were demonstrating hypocritical and self-interested zeal that would force others to 'suffer the Chagrin' of their 'ill-humour'.[15]

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[8] Peter Lake, 'Anti-Puritanism: The Structure of a Prejudice' in Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake (eds), *Religious Politics in Post-Reformation England. Essays in Honour of Nicholas Tyacke* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006), pp.81-2, 87.

[9] Klein, 'Politeness and the interpretation of the British eighteenth century', pp.874, 875.

[10] Jenny Davidson, *Hypocrisy and the Politics of Politeness. Manners and Morals from Locke to Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.46.

[11] Nicholas Phillipson, 'Politeness and politics in the reigns of Anne and the early Hanoverians' in J. G. A. Pocock, Gordon J. Schochet, and Lois Schwoerer (eds), *The Varieties of British Political Thought, 1500-1800* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.225.

[12] Klein, 'Politeness and the interpretation of the British eighteenth century', p.890.

This was a view propagated with vehemence in contemporary "character" literature, which frequently included descriptions of Dissenters. This genre, developed in the first half of the seventeenth century and popular well into the eighteenth, is useful for examining how the label of the hypocrite was used and re-adapted in the light of new social discourses.[16] It should nevertheless be treated with care. In providing short snapshots of contemporary "types", character literature tends to provide exaggerated generalisations, emphasising representations rather than relationships. Its significance therefore lies in the insights it provides into what authors thought their readers would identify as the commonly recognised characteristics of a type.

The idea of a Dissenter as an ill-humoured hypocrite is evident in Thomas Brown's 1705 *Legacy for the ladies*, which contains a biting description of the 'pretended Godly woman', who uses religion as a cover for licentiousness, acts as a cuckold to her husband, and 'owns no other neighbour but those of her own profession'.[17] Similar themes appear in Ned Ward's character of 'The formal Precision; or, The devout Lady' in his 1708 *Modern world disrob'd*. Not only was such a lady over-formal in her posture and appearance, but she was profane in private and unsuited to general society: she was 'only a fit Companion for a formal Hypocrite...an agreeable Wife to a miserly Enthusiast'.[18] These themes were reproduced and adapted repeatedly elsewhere.[19] For these authors, the vice of those they described was two-fold: Dissenters were socially exclusive and unable to conform to social expectation; they were also licentious in their private behaviour.

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[13] Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm* (London: 1708), pp.49-50.

[14] Eliza Haywood, *The Female Spectator* (London: 1745-6), Vol. 4, p.326.

[15] Jean Baptiste Morvan de Bellegarde, *Reflexions Upon the Politeness of Manners; with Maxims for Civil Society* (London: 1707), p.146.

[16] Jim Daems, *Seventeenth-Century Literature and Culture* (London: Continuum, 2006), p.74.

[17] Thomas Brown, *A Legacy for the Ladies, or Characters of the Women of the Age* (London: 1705), pp.16-24.

This notion drew on a long legacy of characterisation of Dissenters that had begun with John Earle's character of the 'She precise Hypocrite' in 1628. Earle described 'a Nonconformist' whose 'puritie consists much in her Linnen'.[20] He emphasised that she makes an outward show of religion, but has no real religious understanding whatsoever. Thus 'Her devotion at the Church is much in the turning up of her eye', and she 'over flowes so with the Bible, that she spils it upon every occasion'.[21] Furthermore, her pretences to purity and unorthodox religious views made her a social nuisance, who 'rayles at other Women'.[22] She was an enemy to merriment, and 'is more fiery against the May-pole then her Husband'.[23] For Earle, the female religious nonconformist was both empty of religion and troublesome to society through behaviour that went against social and gender norms.

Earle's text and ideas were recycled across the seventeenth and into the eighteenth century.[24] However, in eighteenth-century versions, the influence of concerns about fashion and politeness rise to the surface. The description of 'A female hypocrite, or devil in disguise' in *The true characters* (1708), for instance, clearly drew on Earle, using phrases such as 'She never thinks a Sermon good, unless she ride five Mile to Hear it'.[25] However, the author substantially added to and changed Earle's text, drawing attention to both the lack of polite fashion and the ill behaviour of those who pretended to piety. The result was that his 'female hypocrite' valued herself 'for being neither in, nor out of the Fashion. She wears the best of Silks and Linnen…but dress so *Odly*, that she spoils her Shape, and the Make of her

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[18] Edward Ward, *The Modern World Disrob'd: or, Both Sexes Stript of their Pretended Vertue* (London: 1708), p.8.
[19] See for instance, William Pittis, *Aesop at Oxford: or, a Few Select Fables in Verse* (London: 1708), pp.19-23; *The World Display'd: or Mankind Painted in their Proper Colours* (London: 1742), pp.69-71, 111-118.
[20] Peter Earle, *Micro-Cosmographie, or, A Peece of the World Discovered in Essayes and Characters* (London: 1628), sig.H5v.
[21] Ibid., sigs.H6r, H7r-v.
[22] Ibid., sigs.H7r, H7v.
[23] Ibid., sig.H8v.
[24] See for example, *Mirth and Wisdom in a Miscellany of Different Characters, Relating to Different Persons and Perswasions* (London: 1703), p.3.
[25] *The True Characters* (London: 1708), pp.7, 9. See Earle, *Micro-Cosmographie*, p.86.

Face by screwing it into the Model of *Nonconformity*'.[26] Once again we see the hypocritical ill-humour of Dissenters represented as causing the double vice of, on the one hand, behaving hypocritically, and, on the other, failing to conform to social norms in public.

There was also a gendered aspect to this particular theme of hypocrisy. Spiritual writers frequently suggested that women were more easily led astray because they tended towards willfulness and carnal reasoning.[27] The view that women were more vulnerable in this way may have hardened in the eighteenth century as medical ideas about the distinctiveness of the female nervous system developed.[28] This was particularly important in the context of criticism of Dissent, because, as Ann Hughes has shown through the example of relations between the Restoration nonconformist Richard Baxter and his wife, some Dissenting women were encouraged to voice their religious views more freely than their conforming counterparts.[29] The choice made by authors of character literature to portray Dissent through a female figure may therefore have been both a criticism of the perceived freedom of expression of Dissenting women, and an attempt to reinforce the notion that Dissenters were particularly vulnerable to carnal hypocrisy.

However, the visual culture of the period propounds the view that all Dissenters were simultaneously impolite, unfashionable, and hypocritical. This was a striking theme of the illustrative print to the 1729 broadside, a *Comical sonnet on Ch------s blue bonnet*, which shows a non-conformist minister's cap as covering two faces at once, thus representing hypocrisy (**Figure 1**). As the ballad which accompanies the woodcut indicates, the hat is more than just a feeble garment with which to attempt to hide the hypocritical faces of Dissent.[30] It also embodies its sinful and low-born nature, hence how

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[26] Ibid., p.7.

[27] Patricia Crawford, 'Public Duty, Conscience, and Women in Early Modern England', in John Morrill, Paul Slack, and Daniel Woolf (eds), *Public Duty and Private Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England: Essays Presented to G. E. Aylmer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.70; Anthony Fletcher, 'Beyond the Church: Women's Spiritual Experience at Home and in the Community 1600-1900' in R. N. Swanson (ed.), *Gender and Christian religion*, Studies in Church History, 34 (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998), p.188.

[28] G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility. Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1992), pp.27-8; See also Karen Harvey, 'The Substance of Sexual Difference: Change and Persistence in Representations of the Body in Eighteenth-Century England', *Gender and History* 14:2 (2002), pp.202-223.

[29] Ann Hughes, 'Puritanism and Gender' in John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 300, 302.

[30] *A Comical Sonnet on Ch----s Blue Bonnet* (London: 1729), f.1r.

> This *Bonnet* will sanctify *Cobblers* and *Taylors*,
> And make even Saints of *Robbers* and *Jaylers;*
> This *Bonnet* enlightens *Black-smiths* and *Sow-gelders*,
> And qualifies *Weavers* and *Culters* for *Elders*.[31]

Indeed, it is suggested that as well as hiding two faces, the bonnet teaches the wearer to act 'Just e'en as the present occasion may jump, / To move with the *Head*, or to wag with the *Rump*'.[32] The bonnet thus allows even the criminal in society to pretend to sanctity whilst simultaneously training them up in the supposed seditious and fickle practices of Dissent, modelled by their Parliamentarian forefathers in the Civil Wars. In presenting this image, the *Comical sonnet* suggests a strong link between a visually recognisable aspect of Dissent and seditious hypocrisy. At the same time, it emphasises that Dissent and the divisive behaviour associated with it are outdated. This is no new hat, conforming to the style of the age: 'The Fashion is Old'.[33] Dissenters were once again simultaneously criticised for both hypocrisy and failure to conform to social and cultural norms.

[Figure 1 here]

Figure 1: Woodcut from *A Comical sonnet on Ch------s blue bonnet* (London: 1729).

[Figure 2 here]

Figure 2: Woodcut illustration of the cloak referred to in *A merry new joke, on Joseph's old Cloak* (London: 1729).

[Figure 3 here]

Figure 3: *The Turncoats* (London: 1709-10). Etching and engraving on paper. 197 x 253mm. British Museum no. 1868,0808.3422.

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[31] Ibid., f.1v.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., f.1r.

This theme emerged in other visual depictions of Dissent. The *Comical sonnet* was a sequel to another ballad published earlier that year, entitled *A merry new joke, on Joseph's old Cloak* (**Figure 2**). The ballad tells the story of how the cloak 'cut in old Oliver's Days' had continued to be recut and used from the interregnum to the time of writing, and had so disintegrated as to be only fit to be made a bonnet. Throughout, the cloak is described as being used as a hypocritical cover for seditious acts:

> 'This *Cloak* to no Party was yet ever true,
> The Inside was *Black*, and the Outside was *Blue*:
> 'Twas smooth all without, and rough all within,
> A Shew of *Religion*, a Mantle to Sin'.[34]

Its disintegration to scraps by the end of the ballad suggests that Dissent had lost all integrity. As with the bonnet, in this ballad the image of the cloak represents the sedition and hypocrisy of Dissenters. This three-way association between the appearance of Dissenters, the cloaking of truth through hypocritical behaviour, and apparent imperviousness to contemporary fashion is most clearly spelled out in the 1709 broadside *The Turncoats*, published in response to controversy over Dissenters' practice of occasional conformity (**Figure 3**). In the print, the figure on the left asks his tailor whether he could 'make this Gown into a Cloak upon Occasion'; the tailor in the middle tells his customer in the short (nonconformist) cloak 'let me take the length of your conscience', and receives the reply 'Let the Gown be lin'd with a Cloak to turn at pleasure'.[35] In this scene, the outer clothing of the clergyman becomes a tool to indicate the status of his allegiance to the Church at his own convenience. Although the charge of hypocrisy in *The turncoats* does not apply exclusively to Dissenters, the implication is that allowing occasional conformity leads to moral vacuity, reducing religion to mere outward form.

The message given by each of these prints is not just that the cloak and the hat represent the seditious hypocrisy taken on by Dissenters, but that they are clinging to an old, outdated, unfashionable way of thinking. In each case the Dissenting viewpoint is presented not just as hypocritical, but also entirely out-moded. By using these garments to represent the perceived hypocrisy of Dissent, the authors of these prints suggested not just that Dissenters were deceitful, but that they were unfashionably so.

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[34] *A Merry New Joke, on Joseph's Old Cloak* (London: 1729), f.1r.

[35] *The Turncoats* (London: 1709-1710).

In the context of the eighteenth century, the old charge of hypocrisy was sharpened by associations with impoliteness. However, this did not mean that if Dissenters conformed to polite, fashionable, behaviour they could escape criticism. Dissenters who subscribed to contemporary social norms might equally be regarded as hypocritical. Given that they claimed that their communion was more pious than that of the Church of England, if their behaviour was not discernibly different from others then their dissent from the Established Church was hard to justify. The Cheshire Presbyterian and prolific diarist Sarah Savage was made aware of this in June 1716, when her neighbour, Mr Wright, told her that he might be more persuaded to go to a Dissenters' meeting with his wife '"if I could...see you any better for going"'.[36] It was on these grounds that the author of a letter to *The Gentleman's Magazine* in December 1747 argued that 'a change of our Church government for the Presbyterian, would be of no advantage towards the amendment of the manners of our present age'.[37]

Expectations of polite behaviour presented a difficult problem for Dissenters. If they did not demonstrate difference from others in their behaviour, they risked the accusation that their separation from the Church of England was an unprincipled attempt to undermine stability and unity. As the writer and biographer Robert Sanders put it, 'no person can, with the least degree of reason, dissent from the Established Church, unless it be with a view of being a better man, or a sincerer Christian'.[38] If Dissenters did not show these attributes in their behaviour their dissent was pointless. While Dissenters who exhibited outward piety were, as we have seen, cast under suspicion of committing the dual vice of masking their impiety while behaving impolitely, failure to demonstrate outwardly pious behaviour could equally leave Dissenters open to charges of hypocrisy. Whatever stance they took with regard to contemporary social expectations, Dissenters could be labelled as hypocritical outsiders.

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[36] Mrs Savage's Diary, May 31st 1714 to December 25 1723 (C18th copy), Bodleian Library (Bod.), Oxford, MS. Eng. misc. e. 331, p. 105.

[37] *Miscellaneous Correspondence: Containing Essays, Dissertations, &c...Sent to the Author of the Gentleman's Magazine* (London: 1742-1748), p.351.

[38] Robert Sanders, *Lucubrations of Gaffer Graybeard. Containing Many Curious Particulars Relating to the Manners of the People in England, During the Present Age* (London: 1774), p.78.

II

Discourses of politeness and impoliteness could thus be used to perpetuate and transform the old charge of hypocrisy against Dissenters in the eighteenth century. The impact of this was further enhanced by changes in perceptions of hypocrisy itself. While some late-seventeenth- and eighteenth-century discussions of hypocrisy began to show willingness to tolerate it in some circumstances, in the context of an emphasis on politeness and social conformity, the impolite hypocrisy of Dissenters remained beyond the pale.

Studies of political and religious discourse in the later seventeenth- early eighteenth-centuries have suggested heightened concern about hypocrisy and the nature of truth in this period.[39] The work of Mark Knights has been crucial in connecting this to the political and religious context of the time. Emphasising both the role of partisan dispute in creating ambiguity over the meaning of words and representations, and the extent to which religion became a tool of partisan polemic, he has demonstrated how religious and political diversity presented a challenge to established ideas about sincerity.[40] Against this background, the threat that hypocrisy presented to social and political stability was a driving force in debates about the practice of occasional conformity to the Established Church and the political position of Dissenters in the first decade of the eighteenth century. Having long been an element of the "anti-Puritan" stereotype, the charge of hypocrisy was flung from all sides, reflecting 'a perception that interest rather than conscience prevailed'.[41]

Hypocrisy had numerous forms, some of which were regarded as more vicious than others. For many contemporaries hypocrisy remained an unacceptable vice. The novelist and dramatist Henry Fielding was clear in his *Essay on the knowledge and characters of men* (1743) that young people ought to be protected from 'the pernicious Designs of that detestable Fiend, Hypocrisy', and taught to identify it in all its various personifications, including such characters as 'A flatterer', 'a Promiser', and 'a Saint'.[42] Fielding would have approved of the mid-eighteenth-century commonplace book of John Tylston, Hannah Tylston, and Hannah Lightbody, Unitarian children from Liverpool, which drew on a selection of texts to give a damning definition of hypocrisy. Quoting 'Brooks remedys', originally published in 1661, the entry for hypocrisy notes 'History speaks of a kind of witches that stirring a broad would put on their eyes, but returning home boxed them up again. So do Hypocrites.'[43] "Hypocrisy" was generally regarded as a negative attribute; as Jenny Davidson highlights, even those who defended hypocrisy often did so under another name - manners, civility, decorum, politeness - because 'To defend hypocrisy under its own name means breaking a taboo'.[44]

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[39] Kate Loveman, *Reading Fictions, 1660-1740. Deception in English Literary and Political Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008), pp.3, 7-8; Jack Lynch, *Deception and Detection in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008), pp.1, 10.

[40] Mark Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain. Partisanship and Political Culture* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.22, 214-5; Mark Knights, *The Devil in Disguise. Deception, Delusion, and Fanaticism in the Early English Enlightenment* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.7.

[41] Mark Knights, 'Occasional Conformity and the Representation of Dissent: Hypocrisy, Sincerity, Moderation, and Zeal', *Parliamentary History* 24:1 (2005), pp.49, 51.

Nevertheless, there were those who did just that. The justifications they gave, and the distinctions they made between different types of hypocrisy are essential to understanding the changing nature and impact of the label as applied to Dissenters. The first form of hypocrisy actively promoted by some contemporaries was that associated with outward conformity to the law. The notion that abiding by the law contrary to private belief is an acceptable form of hypocrisy had been supported in the mid-seventeenth-century by Thomas Hobbes. He proposed that for subjects the only certain virtue was obedience to the law; disobedience to private conscience in aid of this end was therefore justifiable for the sake of the peace and stability of the state.[45] Some elements of his argument can be seen in the justification of hypocrisy given by Jonathan Swift in his *Project for the advancement of religion* (1709). Swift's view was that it was the Prince's duty to make virtuous behaviour a qualification for public office in order to combat the spread of profanity. Acknowledging that 'making Religion a necessary Step to Interest and Favour, might encrease Hypocrisy among us', he advocated it on the grounds that it 'is often with Religion as with Love; which by much dissembling, at last grows real'.[46] Although Swift, unlike

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[42] Henry Fielding, 'An Essay on the Knowledge and Characters of Men' in Henry Knight Miller (ed.), *The Wesleyan Edition of the Works of Henry Fielding: Miscellanies by Henry Fielding, Esq, Vol. 1* (Oxford Scholarship Online, accessed 15 May 2017), pp.156, 164-7.

[43] Commonplace Book of John Tylston, with additions by Hannah Tylston and Hannah Lightbody, Bod.: MS. Eng. misc. d. 311, p.45. The original quote can be found in Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies Against Satans Devices* (London: 1661), p.105.

[44] Davidson, *Hypocrisy and the Politics of Politeness*, p.6.

[45] Thomas Hobbes, *De Corpore Politico, or, The Elements of Law, Moral and Politick* (London: 2nd edn, 1652), pp.130-1.

[46] Jonathan Swift, *A Project for the Advancement of Religion and the Reformation of Manners* (London: 1709), pp.43-44.

Hobbes, was concerned about personal morality, he too justified hypocrisy in moral matters because even if it allowed for individual vice it would benefit the nation as a whole. Making virtue a qualification for office 'would quickly make Vice so scandalous, that those who could not subdue, would at least endeavour to disguise it'.[47] For both thinkers, rulers should encourage obedience and virtue in society. Individual hypocrisy was justifiable for this end.

Swift was not alone in the early eighteenth century in promoting the idea that hypocrisy, while ultimately undesirable, could be a force for good. *The Observator*, a whig periodical established by the political writer John Tutchin, argued along very similar lines in April 1702 that 'If all *Prophane* and *Vicious Persons* were...not suffer'd to enjoy Places of *Profit* and *Trust*, the powerful Argument of *Interest* would oblige Men to be Vertuous, or at least to seem so...the vile Hypocrite would only hurt himself, when otherwise, his *open Prophaness* would be Contagious'.[48] Similarly, it was concluded in the periodical the *British Apollo* in November 1708 that profaneness was a greater sin than hypocrisy because 'The Profane Despises all Religion, the Hypocrite thinks it Worth the *Counterfeit*' and 'The Profane makes Prosylites to Profaneness; the Hypocrite wou'd not be wanting to make Prosylites to Hypocrisy'.[49] Hypocrisy was damaging for the individual, but profanity spread its malicious influence among society. If hypocrisy prevented profanity it was therefore justifiable. In the words of the *Spectator* in June 1712, 'Hypocrisie cannot indeed be too much detested, but at the same time is to be preferred to open Impiety. They are both equally destructive to the Person who is possessed of them; but in regard to others, Hypocrisie is not so pernicious as bare-faced Irreligion.'[50]

The principle that personal hypocrisy was acceptable in the name of wider social benefit was a key part of justifications of hypocrisy in social conduct. The most famous of these, Bernard Mandeville's argument in *The Fable of the Bees* (1714) for 'Private vices publick benefits', suggested that it was socially useful to fake virtue, because while manners made for good personal relationships, vices promoted the commercial success of the kingdom.[51] Genuine virtue, Mandeville argued, could be damaging to a society that was stimulated by greed and pride.[52] Hypocrisy was thus in some respects in the public interest. Mandeville's view was a provocative one. He was widely condemned for promoting irreligion, and he should not be taken as representative of general attitudes to hypocrisy.[53] However, while other advocates of the social benefits of manners in covering up vice were less brazen in their arguments, they did come close to suggesting that hypocrisy was justifiable as a lesser evil if it was for the benefit of others. This was seen in translation of the French conduct writer Jean Baptiste Morvan de Bellegarde, who, while condemning the 'Hypocrisy of...counterfeit *Politeness*', suggested that 'If you can't divest yourself of your bad Qualities…shrowd them from publick notice. Why will you have others suffer the Chagrin of your ill-humour..?'[54] De Bellegarde's statements are somewhat contradictory, reflecting the contemporary difficulty with squaring ideas about politeness and good manners with ideals of sincerity and truth.[55] However, they resonate with other more explicit justifications of hypocrisy. Just as for Hobbes hypocrisy was permissible in the name of obedience to the law that maintained the peace of society, and for Swift hypocritical pretence to morality could be accepted if it promoted virtue across wider society, for de Bellegarde some level of hypocrisy in social behaviour might be justifiable to protect wider company from an individual's morosity.

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[47] Ibid., p.27.

[48] *The Observator*, London, 8 April 1702, Issue 2, f.1r; J. A. Downie, 'Tutchin, John (1660x64–1707)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004) [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27899, accessed 25 Sept 2017].

[49] *British Apollo*, London, 10-12 Nov. 1708, Issue 79, f.1r.

[50] *Spectator*, London, 15 August 1712, Issue CCCCLVIII, f.1v.

[51] Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees, or, Private Vices Publick Benefits* (London: 1714), sig.A4r.

Given that in the seventeenth century hypocrisy had been regarded by many as 'the worst vice they could imagine', where had this reluctant willingness (however patchy) to accept the benefits of some forms of hypocrisy come from?[56] Like the discourse of politeness, it was in part a response to the events of the previous century. Some churchmen feared that reactions to the rigid hypocrisy of interregnum Puritans had led to open profanity, with the result that individuals no longer felt shame in declaring vice.[57] Against this, hypocrisy might be regarded as the lesser of two evils. However, this did not mean that the perceived hypocrisy of the hotter sort of Protestant could be regarded as tolerable. This was made clear in the narrative of the anti-whig and anti-Dissenting nonjuror Charles Leslie, who wrote that since the ‘Deluge of *Enthusiasm*’ that characterised the Interregnum, ‘*Atheism* has appeared barefaced, and the *War* is carried on, with the Help of the Confederate *Sects*, against all *Religion* in General. And open *Blasphemy* has succeeded *Hypocrisy.*’[58] Hypocrisy was indeed the lesser evil, but for Leslie both hypocrisy and blasphemy were promoted by those who deviated from mainstream Protestantism.

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[52] David Runciman, *Political hypocrisy. The Mask of Power from Hobbes to Orwell and Beyond* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), p.49.

[53] See for example John Dennis, *Vice and Luxury Publick Mischiefs: Or, Remarks on a Book Intituled, The Fable of the Bees; or, Private Vices Publick Benefits* (London: 1724); George Blewitt, *An Enquiry Whether a General Practice of Virtue Tends to the Wealth or Poverty, Benefit or Disadvantage of a People?* (London: 1725).

[54] de Bellegarde, *Reflexions Upon the Politeness of Manners*, pp.4, 146.

[55] Davidson, *Hypocrisy and the Politics of Politeness*, pp.2, 8.

[56] Jacques Bos, 'The Hidden Self of the Hypocrite' in Toon van Houdt, Jan L. de Jong, Zoran Kwak, Marijke Pies, and Mare van Vaeck (eds), *On the Edge of Truth and Honesty. Principles and Strategies of Fraud and Deceit in the Early Modern Period* (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2002), p.67.

[57] John Kay, 'The Hypocrisy of Jonathan Swift: Swift's *Project* Reconsidered', *University of Toronto Quarterly* 44:3 (1975), p.215.

Hypocrisy was therefore in part being rehabilitated as a tool in the battle against open profanity, but Dissenters continued to be labelled negatively as hypocritical. This was possible because there were some types of hypocrisy that everyone considered unacceptable. Thus in *An enquiry into the origin of honour* (1732), Mandeville distinguished between ‘Fashionable hypocrites’, who go to Church without real devotion ‘from no other Principle than an Aversion to singularity, and a Desire of being in the Fashion’, and ‘Malicious hypocrites’, who ‘pretend to a great Deal of Religion, when they know their Pretensions to be false; who take Pains to appear Pious and Devout...in Hopes that they shall be trusted’.[59] Malicious hypocrites gave false appearances for their own ends; fashionable hypocrites were merely seeking to fit the norms of society. This was not so far from Hobbes’s resolute condemnation of the hypocrisy of those who, during the Civil Wars, failed ‘to perceive that the Laws of the Land were made by the King, to oblige his Subjects to Peace and Justice’ and instead concealed the ultimate vice of disobedience to the state behind the language of godliness and piety.[60] Hypocrisy could only ever be considered acceptable if it conferred a benefit on wider society. Hypocrisy purely for selfish ends was always condemned. The impolite hypocrisy ascribed to Dissenters fitted into this latter category. It was self-serving behaviour that sought to conceal impiety in an unmannerly fashion, the sort of hypocrisy that even Mandeville would have regarded as ‘malicious’.[61]

III

It is clear that the labels being applied to Dissenters in eighteenth-century England were not conducive to their smooth integration within wider society after the Toleration Act. Despite changes in understandings of hypocrisy, it was a charge that continued to be interpreted negatively in relation to

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[58] Charles Leslie, *View of the Times their Principles and Practices* (London: 4 vols., 1708-9) Vol.1, Issue 250, 8 October 1707.

[59] Bernard Mandeville, *An Enquiry into the Origin of Honour* (London: 1732), pp.201-2.

[60] Thomas Hobbes, *Behemoth, or, An Epitome of the Civil Wars of England, from 1640 to 1660* (London: 1679), p.163; Runciman, *Political Hypocrisy*, p.34.

[61] Mandeville, *An Enquiry into the Origin of Honour*, pp.201-2.

Dissent. Furthermore, against the backdrop of new discourses about politeness and fashionable conduct, Dissenters faced the additional problem of their hypocrisy being associated with impolite, outdated, and socially unacceptable behaviour. How then did this shape Dissenters' behaviour as they adjusted to the limited legal "toleration" of 1689?

Dissenters were highly sensitive to these criticisms, and this played heavily into internal debates about how they should behave in relation to the rest of society after the Toleration Act. In 1730 the Dissenter and controversialist Strickland Gough wrote that Dissenters might benefit from employing a dancing-master at their academies, 'to give them a gracefulness and gentility of address, and prune off all clumsiness and aukwardness that is disagreeable to people of fashion'.[62] Gough had by 1735 taken Holy Orders within the Established Church, but his *Enquiry into the causes of the decay of the Dissenting interest* sparked debate among his Dissenting contemporaries.[63] Arguing that Dissenting ministers had a poor understanding of their own principles and that they displayed a conduct that did little justice to their interests, he suggested that the primary objections to Dissent were based on 'the aukwardness and impoliteness of our Preachers', and that their cause would be strengthened if preachers adjusted their manner of address accordingly.[64] The replies of leading Dissenting ministers to his suggestions were mixed. While they recognised the necessity of ensuring that Dissent was socially acceptable, writers such as Isaac Watts and Philip Doddridge were concerned that emphasis on respectability and social conformity might endanger the distinctive identity of the Dissenting interest, leading to further decline of the cause and leaving it open to attacks from its opponents on the grounds of hypocrisy. Their arguments reveal Dissenters' consciousness of the difficulty of balancing the need for integration with the maintenance of their distinctive identity after the Toleration Act.

Strickland Gough's suggestion that embracing politeness might be a way to counter the perceived decline of Dissent received some sympathy from those who replied to him in print. The Northamptonshire Independent minister Philip Doddridge acknowledged that 'some care should be taken…to engage students to a genteel and complaisant behaviour' on the basis that 'the common people...are peculiarly pleas'd with the visits and converse of those, who they know may be welcome to greater company'.[65] Doddridge was wary of neglecting the need for socially appealing and polite behaviour. However, he denied that impoliteness was the reason behind the decline of Dissent. Politeness would not win back consciences 'for those that are truly religious...attend of publick worship, not that they may be amused with a form or a sound...but that their hearts may be enlarged as in the presence of God'.[66] Those who had conformed, he argued, had done so on the grounds of political interest, marriage, and a dislike of piety, not because Dissenters were ill-mannered.[67]

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[62] Strickland Gough, *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Decay of the Dissenting Interest* (London: 1730), p.43.
[63] Alexander Gordon, 'Gough, Strickland (*d.* 1752)', rev. Marilyn L. Brooks, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11142, accessed 6 July 2017].
[64] Gough, *An Enquiry*, pp.34, 37-8.

Doddridge, alongside others, stressed instead that a pious manner of living was the only way of maintaining Dissent.[68] The London Independent minister Abraham Taylor emphasised that 'that which recommends…[ministers] to the greater part of our people, is the piety of their lives, and their plain, serious, and scriptural way of preaching'.[69] Although in disagreement with Taylor over other matters, Southampton minister Isaac Watts supported this idea, arguing that Dissenters ought to be ashamed if they were found inferior to members of the Established Church 'either in Virtue towards Men or Piety towards God'.[70] Watts's substantial work, attempting to revive 'practical religion' in the name of sustaining the Dissenting interest, set out clearly that the key element of Dissenting identity had to be their superior piety, asking his readers 'What do all our Pretences to separation mean, if we ascend to no superior Degrees of Goodness?'.[71] For Watts, Dissenters had to justify their continued Dissent by representing their religion in every aspect of their lives and behaviour: 'your Goodness toward Men [ought to] distinguish you if possible from your Neighbours, as much as you are distinguished by your protest and publick Separation from their Forms or Worship'.[72] Far from promoting politeness and integration by conformity to contemporary manners and fashions, Watts suggested that the survival and distinction of the Dissenting interest rested on rejecting them.

What is evident on both sides of the debate, however, is that all parties were occupied with how to act in a manner that would avoid playing into the hands of their critics. In particular, they were concerned that the mode of behaviour they promoted should not leave Dissenters vulnerable to charges of hypocrisy. This was spelled out clearly by Watts in his warning to Dissenters that keeping profane company and being taken along with the fashionable vices of the world would 'give too just an Occasion to charge you with Hypocrisy'.[73] Doddridge also opposed those who placed too great an emphasis on politeness on the grounds that 'a cause may be ruin'd by learned and polite men, if, with their other furniture, they have not religion and prudence too'.[74] Yet in many ways, Strickland Gough, who argued the opposite, was preoccupied with the same concerns. His desire to make preachers less censorious in their sermons would ensure both that 'they would no longer terrify and frighten' individuals from the church and that no-one had 'an opportunity of complaining that they do not act consistently with their principles'.[75] Gough, Watts, and Doddridge were all worried about how to maintain the Dissenting interest's distinctive identity while avoiding being criticised on the grounds of hypocritical behaviour. Doddridge and Watts proposed that the Dissenting cause was based on their claim to practical religion and piety, and that they thus had to observe a strictness in their conduct. In contrast, Gough argued that Dissenters should not claim greater piety than others, instead emphasising their adherence to the cause of liberty and the need to demonstrate graceful and agreeable religion. The Dissent envisaged by Watts and Doddridge was one that avoided hypocrisy by maintaining the strict standards of piety it made claim to; in Gough's scheme Dissenters avoided hypocrisy by denying claims to higher piety in the first place.

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[65] Philip Doddridge, *Free Thoughts on the Most Probable Means of Reviving the Dissenting Interest* (London: 1730), p.38.

[66] Ibid., p.20.

[67] Ibid., p.16.

[68] Ibid., p.6.

[69] Abraham Taylor, *A Letter to the Author of an Enquiry into the Causes of the Decay of the Dissenting Interest* (London: 1730), p.4.

[70] Isaac Watts, *An Humble Attempt Toward the Revival of Practical Religion among Christians, and Particularly the Protestant Dissenters* (London: 1731), p.171.

[71] Ibid., p.169.

[72] Ibid., p.236.

This debate highlights how the label of hypocrisy as applied to Dissenters after 1689 had an important impact on their self-perception. The desire to avoid hypocrisy was crucial in determining Dissenters' attempts to define their identity and maintain their cause after they had been granted a degree of legal toleration. Centring on the need for Dissenters to show simultaneously that they were grateful for the liberty of conscience that they had been granted, that they posed no threat to civil society, and that they still had a distinctive identity, this debate threw the old charge of hypocrisy into a new cultural context in which an emphasis on politeness created greater need for social conformity. This heady mix of new social demands, old stereotypes, and changing ideology created a background against which it was particularly challenging for Dissenters to create a distinct or unified cause.

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[73] Ibid., p.228

[74] Ibid., p.10.

[75] Gough, *An Enquiry*, pp.37-8.

There may have been a temptation in published debates for Dissenting Ministers to exaggerate the difficulties that Dissenters faced in order to reignite zeal for their cause in a period when Dissenters' religion no longer brought them danger to life and liberty. However, this sensitivity to hypocrisy and the belief that it was more incumbent upon Dissenters than others to lead a demonstrably pious life is also evident in the accounts of individual Dissenters. The young Presbyterian diarist, Anne Dawson, for instance, recorded numerous occasions when she was ashamed of her conduct because she believed that she, as a Dissenter, should know better. She wrote on 9 October 1721 that although she was grateful that her education had prevented her from cursing, swearing, and obscene discourse, she had often indulged in sinful jesting, lying, and had caused sin in others through her words, stating 'I who ought to have been an example of piety to others have instead of that incoraged to sin w*i*th the lips Lord humble me for it'.[76] Dawson placed great emphasis throughout her diary on pious conduct that was different to that of the rest of the world. Her determination to retain a Christian character free from hypocrisy is further evident in her entry for 9 May 1722, when she was contemplating breaking off her courtship with a man who she felt had been dishonest, writing that 'it is my earnest endeavour to cary well to him & if I do cast him of to do it like a Christian & not in anger and passion no I abhor such a carriage in others & will not do it my self'.[77] For Anne Dawson, her aspiration to a truly Christian identity was defined against the danger of hypocrisy. At the other end of life, the prolific diarist Sarah Savage also demonstrated awareness of the danger that any sign of hypocrisy posed to Dissenters. Writing in 1743, in her 78th year, she expressed concern at the behaviours of the followers of Wesley, some of whom had attended her Presbyterian meeting. She described how they 'Pretend to the Spirit, & its Motions', and felt that it ''tis too True th*a*t Religion is Wounded by such as we tho*ugh*t its Friend'.[78] Savage was keen that what she saw as the hypocritical pretences of the Methodists be not mixed up with the religion of her congregation.

Savage's brother, the prominent Presbyterian minister Matthew Henry, was equally concerned that he avoid the label of hypocrisy, and his diary and letters to his father show numerous occasions on which he fought against it. He was highly censorious of drunkenness, to the extent that he showed little sympathy for those who died or were injured as a result of their inebriation.[79] His willingness to challenge ‘obstinate Drunkeness’ may have been the motivation behind false accusations that he himself had fallen into drink, brought against him in the 1690s.[80] Faced in court with the testimony of a number of witnesses to Henry’s sobriety, his accusers ‘solemly profess’d…that there was not the least ground or footstep of truth in the Story’. Henry was anxious that his name be cleared, and noted that the outcome of the case had been recorded ‘in the Book’, sending a copy to his father. His relief was apparent in his comment that the verdict ‘I trust may tend to the furtherance of the Gospel, esp*ecial*ly to remove an objection commenly made ag*ains*t the Testimony I desire upon all occasions to bear ag*ains*t Drunkenness’.[81] Henry’s attempts to enforce sobriety in his local area were clearly not popular, and the false charges against him appear in this context to look like a concerted attempt to label him a hypocrite. Henry was acutely aware of the damage that this could do not only to his personal reputation, but to the cause of the Dissenters in general. Piety was both a badge of distinction, and integral to the reputation of the Dissenting cause.

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[76] Diary of Anne (Dawson) Evans 1721-1722, British Library (BL), London, Add MS 71626, f.4r.

[77] Ibid., f.28r.

[78] Sarah Savage's Journal, 1743-8, Dr Williams's Library (DWL), London, Henry MSS: 90.2, entry for 30 May 1743.

[79] Diary of Matthew Henry, 1705-1713, Bod., MS Eng. misc. e. 330, f.5r.

This was not to say that Dissenters necessarily shied away from praising polite behaviour. Indeed, funeral sermons of ministers often mentioned their polite comportment. However, they were also careful to emphasise that this politeness came from inner goodness rather than observance of social norms, and that it should not take precedence over godliness. Thus in his account of the life of the Irish Presbyterian Minister Michael Bruce, fellow Presbyterian James Kirkpatrick wrote that ‘He was a gentleman of polite manners and address, and of a most generous spirit’, but also stressed that ‘the imitation of God consists principally in goodness...A careful observer must have seen in him, that if he had not been genteely educated, yet the goodness of his heart would have made him a well bred man; an ingenuous disposition to oblige every one, would have produced effects of the same kind in him, that politeness does in others’. [82] Bruce’s polite education was incidental; his conduct was a product of his innately godly disposition.

However, Dissenters might find themselves capitulating to the need to be polite under social pressure, and this was far less laudable. It caused considerable anxiety for some individuals who were concerned that they were both betraying their pious cause, and exposing themselves to the accusation of hypocrisy. This is suggested by the words of Savage in January 1717, when she recorded that 'we dined at Wrenbury Hall w*i*th Mr Voice, a splendid entertainment, - I envy not the great man state more inward satisfaction w*i*th a good Book in my own Closet that w*i*th all the Visits, modes, & forms, &c. yet think it duty to be friendly & respectful to those who are so to us'.[83] She was cautious about showing too much enthusiasm for this presumably lavish affair, emphasising that, despite her willingness to attend the occasion, she engaged with 'modes and forms' out of duty rather than preference.

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[80] Ibid., f.10r.

[81] Matthew Henry to Philip Henry, 4 Sept., n.d. (c. 1694), Bod., MS Eng. lett. e. 29, no. 149.

[82] James Duchal and James Kirkpatrick, *A sermon on occasion of the much lamented death of the late Reverend Mr John Abernethy...by James Duchal. With an appendix containing some brief memoirs of the lives and characters of the late Revd Messieurs Thomas Shaw, William Taylor, Michael Bruce, and Samuel Haliday...by James Kirkpatrick* (Dublin: 1741), pp. 30, 28.

This sense of internal conflict with regard to social conduct is also present in Anne Dawson's account. She who lamented her frequent failures to exhibit suitably pious behaviour in the company of others: on 19 May 1722 she reflected that 'If I take a View of my carrage this Week I must be ashamed of it tho I have not spent mush of it in idleness yet I have spent it in trifling and visiting...I am oft forced to look back on most of my visets with a sort of a regret', wishing that 'serious or at least Profitable Discourse was more in fashion in this Gentel age'.[84] Dawson found social visits troubling; the implication is that she both found it difficult to act contrary to fashion while in company, and lamented that her social discomfort was not eased by more godly conversation. At the same time as they were eager to promote the piety of the Dissenting cause, social realities could prove difficult for individuals to navigate.

Concerns about the socially divisive nature of Dissent were not, as we have seen, new to the eighteenth century. However, contemporary advice on Dissenters' conduct, particularly that given in printed sermons, suggests that Dissenters were now reading the dangers of the label of hypocrisy with the effects of the Toleration Act in mind. Such sermons not only reminded Dissenters that behaviour that could be interpreted as hypocritical was potentially damaging to the Dissenting interest, but also that relationships between Dissenters and members of the Established Church within smaller communities could be broken down by hypocritical action. Furthermore, it is clear that this was advice that was perceived to be particularly suitable in the wake of the Toleration Act.

In 1734 a Newcastle Dissenting minister, William Wilson, reminded his congregation that the 'mild and gentle' laws of the country which 'give every one of us *Liberty* to chuse our own Ministers' meant that his congregation had to be careful to respect that liberty in others, lest power fall into the hand of their opponents, who might ‘justly...say, *what Reason have you to expect Liberty from us, when ye take it from one another*’.[85] Advising his congregation on what might serve the maintenance of the Dissenting interest in this context, he claimed that ‘serious Religion is its chief Support...if these things fail among us; if our People grow loose and formal, or their Ministers become remiss and superficial in their Performances...no lasting Establishment can be expected to our Cause. Without Piety, a Dissenter, any Dissenting Congregation, nay, the Interest itself, I humbly conceive, scarce deserves a Name’.[86] For Wilson in the wake of the Toleration Act it was not viable to attempt to promote the Dissenting interest by suggesting that others were wrong, for that could only lead to accusations of hypocrisy. Instead, Dissenters had to mark out their distinctiveness through a demonstration of their sincere piety. Like Doddridge and Watts, Wilson believed that a dedicated and unblemished record of practical religiosity was the only way to demonstrate the validity of Dissent.

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[83] Mrs Savage's Diary, pp.133-4.

[84] Diary of Anne (Dawson) Evans, f. 28v.

Wilson was not alone in reminding congregations of Protestant Dissenters to be grateful for liberty of conscience and avoid the hypocrisy of denying it to others. The sermon of Lancashire Dissenting minister Samuel Bourn to a congregation in Dudley, Worcestershire, in 1738, celebrated that the Church of England had given up the ‘terrible principles’ of ‘Calling conscientious Christians by *ill Names*, only for their upright Opinions, and teaching the way of Truth; and then doing to them *ill Things* to incapacitate and disqualify them for publick Service’, by allowing liberty of conscience. However, he also warned Protestant Dissenters against getting left behind in this respect by continuing to rail against those of a different profession, reminding the congregation to ‘Let not *Protestant Dissenters* be the last who open their Eyes, the last in throwing off this Remnant of Popery’.[87] Bourn presented the Toleration Act as an important moment for Dissenters in allowing them liberty, but he also recognised that it created new risks that Dissenters might demonstrate a hypocritical attitude towards those from which they differed.

This view was equally evident in the sermon of Benjamin Mills given at Maidstone, Kent, in 1741, in which he encouraged his hearers and readers to ‘carry [y]ourselves in so strictly, loyal, and peaceable a Manner, that we may hereby conciliate’, rather than appearing sour about the remaining privileges that were barred to them under the law.[88] For these ministers, the change in the status of Dissent under the law made attention to the danger of hypocrisy particularly important, not just for the reputation of Dissent, but for maintaining their liberty.[89] More than ever, therefore, the onus was on Dissenting congregations to ensure that the lives they lived were peaceable and pious, justifying both their separation from the Established Church, and their "toleration" under the law. The emphasis on conciliation suggests awareness that their behaviour needed to be consonant with the supposedly inclusive polite discourse of the age. Dissenters navigated social and religious expectations in a variety of ways in this period, but issues of hypocrisy and politeness were central to all.

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[85] William Wilson, *Charity, as a Rule of Conduct in the Affairs of a Religious Society, Explain'd and Recommended. A Sermon Preach'd to a Congregation of Protestant Dissenters in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, November the 22nd 1733* (London: 1734), pp.25-6.

[86] Ibid., p.29.

[87] Samuel Bourn, *The True Christian Way of Striving for the Faith of the Gospel. A Sermon Preach’d to a Congregation of Protestant-Dissenters, Ministers, and Private Christians...in Dudley in Worcestershire, May 23 1738* (London: 1738), p.26.

IV

Many of the legal, social, and political changes of the first half of the eighteenth century appear, at first glance, to have been highly favourable to the fortunes of Protestant Dissent. The Toleration Act of 1689, albeit still limited in its provision, had tacitly acknowledged some degree of religious pluralism as inevitable. For the first time, the worship of Protestant Dissenters was protected under the law. Furthermore, modes of discussion and labels used to describe Dissent were subject to changing meanings and contexts. Hypocrisy, a charge long levelled against Puritans and nonconformists, and regarded as the ultimate vice for much of the seventeenth century, was beginning to be regarded by some as acceptable in certain contexts. In addition, the increasing dominance of discourses of "politeness" and "moderation" in reaction to 'the socially disruptive impact of religion in the seventeenth century'[90] would be expected to have acted as a discouragement to the social marginalisation or abuse of Dissenters.

A closer look at the changing impact of accusations of hypocrisy against Dissenters demonstrates that this was not necessarily the case. As has been emphasised elsewhere, legal toleration was by no means universally welcome, and its critics continued to fight to limit the provisions of the 1689 Act as far as possible.[91] What this article has emphasised, however, is the extent to which alongside attempts to limit the legal and political rights of Dissenters, languages of social interaction also continued to be tools for exclusion. The label of hypocrisy was applied to Dissenters in this period with reference to ideals of politeness, suggesting that far from promoting inclusivity and limiting religious divisions, politeness could be used to emphasise difference. This was evident in the double-sided criticism faced by Dissenters with regard to their social conduct. On the one hand, ostensibly pious behaviour was now being discussed not just in terms of its probable hypocrisy, but as a symptom of Dissenters' impoliteness. On the other hand, Dissenters who failed to distinguish themselves significantly from others in their social behaviour could be regarded as hypocritical in their supposedly principled Dissent from the Established Church. From this angle, it appears that it was nearly impossible for Dissenters both to conform to emerging social expectations and avoid the charge of hypocrisy.

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[88] Benjamin Mills, *A Sermon Preached to a Congregation of Protestant Dissenters, at Maidston, November 5, 1741* (London: 1741), pp.33-4.

[89] Mark Goldie, 'The Theory of Religious Intolerance in Restoration England' in Ole Peter Grell, Jonathan Israel, and Nicholas Tyacke (eds), *From Persecution to Toleration. The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p.346.

[90] Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century', p.890.

The particular difficulty of managing this dual threat after the Toleration Act was reflected in Dissenters' comments on their behaviour after 1689. The need to balance social integration with distinguishing the cause of Dissent through pious behaviour is apparent through the debates among leading ministers about the role that polite conduct should play in their ministry, and in the reactions of individual Dissenters to the awkward demands that social situations could place on them. The immense sensitivity of Dissenters to these concerns suggests that, contrary to its pretences to inclusivity, when combined with the charge of selfish hypocrisy the language of politeness could in fact be highly exclusive, acting to emphasise rather than brush over religious divides. Politeness was only inclusive insofar as individuals were able to subscribe to its ideals.

Politeness was not, of course, the only mode of social interaction in the eighteenth century. As Kate Davison has highlighted, we should be wary of creating dichotomies of polite-impolite behaviour, when the reality was that individuals adapted a much wider social register to a variety of contexts. It was in fact possible for 'multiple and often contradictory behaviours to co-exist'; politeness was but one of them.[92] In this sense, an analysis of attitudes towards Protestant Dissenters exclusively through the languages of hypocrisy and politeness paints a picture that is too black and white, emphasising inclusion and exclusion as opposites when the reality was much murkier, involving coterminous ideas about neighbourliness, civility, and trust. What it does highlight, however, is the extent to which even social languages that ostensibly promoted harmony could be manipulated to perpetuate and reinterpret the religious questions that had so catastrophically divided the country in the previous century. It suggests that, much as proponents of politeness might have liked to pretend otherwise, it is difficult to understand the operation of the multiple social registers of the eighteenth century without keeping underlying religious divisions in mind.

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[91] Thompson, 'Contesting the Test Act', p. 61.

[92] Kate Davison, 'Occasional Politeness and Gentlemen's Laughter in Eighteenth-Century England', *Historical Journal* 57:4 (2014), pp.931, 945; See also Helen Berry, 'Rethinking Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Moll King's Coffee House and the Significance of "Flash Talk"', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 11 (2001), pp.65-81.