

**‘A Moral Divinitie’:
Emmanuel College and the Origins of Cambridge Platonism**

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Abstract:

This thesis attempts to shed light on the origins of the movement known as 'Cambridge Platonism' through a close philosophical and historical analysis of three key figures belonging to Emmanuel College (referred to as the Emmanuel Three): Benjamin Whichcote (1609–1683), Ralph Cudworth (1617–1688) and John Smith (1618?–1652). In particular, it focuses on the common Platonic outlook which the Emmanuel Three deployed against key tenets of the Calvinist theology of their Puritan colleagues at the university. It is argued that the Smith and Cudworth played a central role in the religious controversy that culminated in a tense correspondence between Whichcote and the Puritan theologian Anthony Tuckney in 1651. Part I of the thesis situates this analysis of the Emmanuel Three within the historiographical controversy around Cambridge Platonism. Part II gives an overview of the Emmanuel Three's intellectual context, with a particular focus on a Platonic current centred at Emmanuel College in the late 1630s. Part III turns on to the 1640s and identifies three key areas in which the Emmanuel Three present strikingly similar critiques of important Calvinist doctrines, with a secondary focus on the ways (often recognised by their opponents) in which these critiques reveal the influence of Platonism. Finally, Part IV explores the 'philosophical core' of the Emmanuel Three's philosophical outlook, providing a detailed analysis of their participatory religious epistemology and their conceptions of divine and human freedom. In sum, the thesis uses the historical problem of the origins of Cambridge Platonism to bring out the distinctive philosophical contribution of the often neglected Emmanuel Three to central and formative debates in philosophy of religion.

I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the content of this thesis is my own work and that all assistance received in preparing it and sources have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has not been submitted for any other purposes or degrees.

Samuel Kaldas

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Abbreviations

Aph = Whichcote, Benjamin 1753, *Moral and Religious Aphorisms*, ed. Jeffrey Whichcote & Samuel Salter, Printed for J. Payne, London.

BO = Bellarmine, Robert 1870–74, *Opera Omnia*, ed. J Fèvre, 12 vols., Paris.

BW = Luther, Martin 1525, *The Bondage of the Will*, H Cole (trans.), Digital edn, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/luther/bondage.html>>.

Commons = Cudworth, Ralph 1647, *A Sermon preached before the Honourable House of Commons at Westminster, March 31, 1647*, Printed by Rober Daniel, Cambridge.

Diary = Crossely, J (ed) 1857– 86, *The Diary and Correspondence of Dr. John Worthington*, 3 vols, Charles Simms & Co., Manchester.

De Princ. = Origen of Alexandria 2013, *On First Principles*, trans. GW Butterworth, Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame IN.

EL = *Eight Letters of Dr. Antony Tuckney and Dr. Benjamin Whichcote*, appended to Whichcote 1753, *Moral and Religious Aphorisms* (= Aph).

Enn. = Plotinus 2017, *The Enneads*, ed. LP Gerson, trans. LP Gerson, G Boys-Stones, JM Dillon, RAH King, A Smith & J Wilderbing, Cambridge University Press.

FW = Ralph Cudworth's *Treatise of Freewill* in S Hutton (ed.) 1996, *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality with A Treatise of Freewill*, Cambridge University Press, New York.

Hartib Papers = Greengrass, M, Leslie, M and Hannon, M 2013, *The Hartlib Papers*. HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, <<http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/hartlib>>.

HEC = Bendall, S, Brooke, C & Collinson, P 1999, *A History of Emmanuel College, Cambridge*, The Boydell Press, Woodbridge.

In Tim. = Proclus' *Commentary on the Timaeus*

Inst. = Calvin, John 1845, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. H Beveridge, Digital edn, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes>>.

Lincolnes = Cudworth, Ralph 1664, *Sermon Preached to the Honourable Society of Lincolnes-Inne*, Printed by J. Flesher for R. Royston, London.

ODNB = *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

Poems = More, Henry 1878, *The Complete Poems of Dr Henry More*, ed. AB Grosart, Edinburgh University Press.

PTh. = Ficino, Marsilio 2001–2006, *Platonic Theology*, 6 vols., ed. and trans. MJB Allen, J Warden, J Hankins, W Bowen, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.

SD = Smith, John 1660, *Select Discourses*, Printed by J Flesher for W Morden, Cambridge.

TEIM = Cudworth's *Treatise of Eternal and Immutable Morality* in S Hutton (ed.) 1996, *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality with A Treatise of Freewill*, Cambridge University Press, New York, NY.

TISU = Cudworth 1678, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, Printed for Richard Royston, London.

Works = Whichcote, Benjamin 1751, *The Works of the Learned Benjamin Whichcote, D. D.*, 4 vols., Printed by J. Chalmers for Alexander Thomson, Aberdeen.

Notes on Referencing

To distinguish my emphasis from original italics, I indicate my emphasis within quotations by underlining; all italics in quotations are original. Italics used outside quotations are my own emphasis.

In nearly every case where Smith quotes an ancient source without a citation, I have relied upon the invaluable work of Roger Howard (Smith 2017 in the bibliography) whose online edition identifies the source and location of most of Smith's quotations (<https://cambridgeplatonism.uk/>).

Unless otherwise indicated, dates of matriculation and degree attainment for students at Cambridge are taken from the online ACAD version of the Venn's *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (<http://venn.lib.cam.ac.uk/Documents/acad/intro.html>).

All quotations to Platonic dialogues are from Cooper (1997).

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I - Introduction

(1) The Curious Case of the Learned and Ingenious Men

1.1 A Controversy in Eight Letters

On 8 September 1651, Doctor Benjamin Whichcote, Provost of King's College and Vice Chancellor of the University, received a very important letter from his old friend and former tutor Anthony Tuckney, now the Master of Emmanuel College, both men's *alma mater*. In the letter, Tuckney unburdened himself of deep misgivings he and some of his colleagues had begun to harbour about Whichcote's preaching: 'I know you are not ignorant', Tuckney will write ominously in a second letter, 'what verie sinister thoughts are conceived, and reports scattered, both of your selfe and some others' (EL 40). The lengthy and occasionally fraught exchange that follows, comprising eight letters in total, consists mostly of a debate about the place of reason in religion: Tuckney implores Whichcote to say more about the trustworthiness of divine revelation and less about using human reason to determine spiritual truths, while Whichcote offers apologetic but firm refusals to put reason under the yoke of revelation, or pit them against one another. 'Sir,' he quipped, in an oft-quoted aphorism, 'I oppose not rational to spiritual; for spiritual is most rational' (EL 108).¹

In what remains (at the time of writing) the only book length study of Whichcote's thought, J. D. Roberts remarks that this correspondence marks 'the real beginning of the movement known as Cambridge Platonism' (Roberts 1968, 50). This movement consisted of a small, loose band of anti-Calvinist, Platonic thinkers who emerged from the unlikely womb of Cambridge's most fervently Calvinist colleges (Emmanuel and Christ's) at the height of

¹ On the immediate background to the controversy, see Roberts 1968, 47–9, Micheletti 1976, 116–21 and Helm 2009, 84–6.

Cambridge's most vigorously Calvinist period, and whose broad-minded and generous philosophy has continued to generate scholarly interest.² Whichcote is often cast as the school's founding father, the 'Cambridge Plato' of Cambridge Platonism, around whom disciples — Ralph Cudworth, John Smith, Henry More and others — gathered as Plotinuses and Porphyries (Patrides 1969, 2).³

In his study on Whichcote, Roberts claims that the Whichcote-Tuckney exchange of 1651 contains 'the "germ" of Cambridge Platonism' as a reaction to the Calvinist Puritanism represented by Tuckney and his disaffected colleagues (1968, 49). However, while these letters certainly do represent an early and important expression of the distinctive Christian Platonism that pervades the works of Cudworth, Smith, More and others after them, it would be a mistake to think of the 1651 correspondence as the 'real beginning' of Cambridge Platonism (cf. Staudenbaur 1974, 160). As will be seen, Tuckney himself strongly implies that Whichcote's controversial views have their roots at least a decade earlier, in his association with a group of like-minded persons of which he was, perhaps an elder member, but not the head of a movement. If Tuckney is right, then the 1651 letters are not so much the first, tender shoots of Cambridge Platonism as branches of an already well-rooted tree.

This thesis uses Tuckney's accusations as a launching pad for an investigation of the obscure origins of Cambridge Platonism. The obscurity surrounding the genesis of Cambridge Platonism is a by-product of one of the most interesting things about it, namely, its emergence from one of the most violent and chaotic episodes in the history of Cambridge and of

² Cambridge Platonism as a historiographical category will be discussed a length below (chapter 2), but good introductions to the lives and thought of main figures associated with it are Rogers 1997, Hutton 2013, and Taliaferro 2005, 1–56.

³ This picture of Whichcote as a 'founding father' of Cambridge Platonism is not without its problems, however (see 2.2.1 below).

England. The English Civil War (1642–51) disrupted university life on every level: Parliamentary forces swarmed through the town and the university alike; fellows and masters were ejected; chapels were gutted by iconoclasts; friends became enemies; political pressures set college against college, fellows against their masters, and pupils against their tutors (see below 3.1.7). The times, Tuckney remarked, ‘were *very evil*’ (EL 37). It is not surprising then that we have little evidence to work with when it comes to studying intellectual developments at Cambridge colleges in these years and those immediately before them.

Into this obscure but important period, Tuckney’s letters to Whichcote cast a valuable shaft of light. For in the course of unburdening himself of his long-held misgivings about Whichcote’s preaching, he sets down in writing his impression of just how it was that Whichcote came to hold the views that have caused so much trouble (EL 36–9). In doing so, he provides us with an invaluable glimpse into the context and origins of Cambridge Platonism. Of course, as Whichcote’s intellectual opponent, Tuckney is hardly an unbiased source. For our purposes though, this makes him a better witness rather than a worse one, for who better to sniff out those who shared Whichcote’s views than someone close to Whichcote to whom these views were deeply unsettling?⁴

We will examine Tuckney’s account of Whichcote’s intellectual development in more detail below (chapter 4), but as an introduction to the overall project of this thesis, let me present a broad outline. From Tuckney’s point of view, Whichcote’s break with Calvinist orthodoxy occurred while Whichcote was a fellow and lecturer at Emmanuel College (circa

⁴ More troubling is that Tuckney, by his own admission, was no longer based at Cambridge when the crucial intellectual transformation is alleged to have taken place, having left in 1629 not return until the late 1640s (EL 36; Collinson 2008, ODNB). Nonetheless, it seems clear that Tuckney is speaking as a representative of a larger group of concerned Calvinists at Cambridge (see 4.1 below), and has evidently developed his picture of Whichcote’s intellectual development in conversation with others who share his concerns and were there to witness it (e.g. ‘Since I have heard ...’ [EL 36]).

1633–43), as a direct consequence of his falling under the influence of others with attractive but unorthodox opinions and reading habits. He recalls nothing particularly unusual about Whichcote's views when he served his tutor in the late 1620s (EL 36); it was only after Tuckney had left in 1629 and returned in 1648 (Collinson 2008, ODNB) that he found his former pupil significantly changed. And he believed he knew whom to blame:

Whilest you were fellow here, you were cast into the companie of very learned and ingenious men; who, I fear at least some of them, studyed other authors, more than the scriptures; and Plato and his schollars, above others ... (EL 38)

Alas, Tuckney does not say who these men are, but he evidently has particular names in mind, for he goes on to recite a litany of questionable opinions for which they have developed a reputation. These opinions read like a summary of the major themes of Cambridge Platonism: questioning God's decrees 'because, according to our reason, wee cannot comprehend; how they may stand with His goodness', making 'Philosophers, and other Heathens ... fairer candidates for Heaven; than the scriptures seeme to allow of', and 'giving too much' to reason 'in the mysteries of Faith' (EL 38–9).

Whoever these 'learned and ingenious men' are, they are essential to understanding the obscure origins of Cambridge Platonism, and the 'discursive field' — the network of intellectual friendships — from which it emerged (see Lewis 2010, 13f). We will probably never know all the persons Tuckney had in mind, but a main contention of this thesis is that they included Ralph Cudworth and John Smith of Emmanuel College along, along with Henry More of Christ's; the three men who are usually considered alongside Whichcote as the central figures of Cambridge Platonism. This identification of Tuckney's learned and

ingenious Platonisers with those traditionally identified as Cambridge Platonists provides a counterargument to recent scholarly misgivings about the usefulness and even the existence of Cambridge Platonism as a historical phenomenon.

However, for reasons to be discussed below, this study will focus mainly on the core trio of Cambridge Platonists based at Emmanuel: Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith, referring to More only occasionally to highlight points of resonance.⁵ For brevity, and to distinguish them from the wider, more nebulous group of Cambridge Platonists, we will call Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith the Emmanuel Three. The thesis argues that the Emmanuel Three developed a distinctive Platonic and anti-Calvinist outlook in association with one another and provides a contextually-attuned philosophical analysis of this outlook against the background of the Calvinism embodied by their immediate friends and colleagues at the university.

Ultimately however, the main goals of this thesis are philosophical: the historical problem of the learned and ingenious men serves as a helpful framework through which to highlight and analyse the distinctive philosophical contribution of the often neglected Emmanuel Three to central and formative debates in philosophy of religion.

⁵ I hasten to add that just because More is not one of the major figures of this study does not mean that I do not consider him an essential part of the origins of Cambridge Platonism. We will see repeatedly (4.2.2, 7.3.4) that Tuckney almost certainly considered Henry More to be one of the 'learned and ingenious men' who had corrupted Whichcote's doctrine. However, as I explain below (4.3.2), I have focused on the Emmanuel Three rather than 'the Cambridge Four' largely because unlike the Emmanuel Three (especially Smith and Whichcote), More's intellectual identity as a Platonist and a philosophically sophisticated critic of Calvinism is already well-established, and also because Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith share a close association with one another from the years they spent together at Emmanuel College that marks them out as a distinct circle, however much that circle might overlap with others that include Henry More.

1.2 The Emmanuel Three

Let us begin by getting acquainted with the Emmanuel Three. The brief biographies below reveal significant differences between the three men with regards to age, personality and career trajectory. There are two key things that bind them together, however. The first is that all three grow up and flourish in a central hub of the Puritan community: Emmanuel College. The second is that despite their clear dissent from some of the most cherished doctrines of that community, all three were held in high enough esteem that the Puritan powers saw fit to promote them to places of academic importance in 1644, when Emmanuel men were poured into the many university places left empty by ousted royalists. This will be an important part of identifying Smith and Cudworth as some of Tuckney's learned and ingenious men, for as we will see, Tuckney mentions that the learned and ingenious men are well-respected members of the Puritan community at Cambridge (EL 18, 37).

1.2.1 Benjamin Whichcote (1609–1683)

Although central to the Platonist movement at Cambridge, little has been written on Benjamin Whichcote.⁶ Typically, he has only received occasional attention, usually as background figure in Ralph Cudworth or Henry More's intellectual world. In his own time, however, he was held in great esteem. John Locke called Whichcote's sermons on morality 'Masterpieces' (John Locke to Richard King, 25 August 1703 [De Beer 1989, vol. 8, 57; cf. EL xxxiv]).

Whichcote was born in 1609, making him the oldest of the three. He entered Emmanuel College as a pensioner in 1626, and was tutored by two prominent Calvinists:

⁶ Two important early sources for Whichcote's biography are John Tillotson's funeral sermon (Tillotson 1683) and Samuel Salter's prefaces to the various sections of the *Aphorisms* and *Eight Letters* (Whichcote 1753 = EL). Scholarly accounts of Whichcote's life and career can be found in Tulloch 1871; Beiser 1996, 134–83; Hutton 2005; Gill 2006, 12–29 and Lewis 2010, 17–20.

Anthony Tuckney and Thomas Hill (Roberts 1968, 1–2), both of whom will play a significant role in what is to come. He became a fellow of Emmanuel in 1633, where he served as ‘an excellent Tutor and Instructour of Youth, and bred up many persons of great Quality and others, who afterwards proved usefull and eminent; as many perhaps as any Tutor of that Time’ (Tillotson 1683, 22). Among his pupils were John Smith (one of the Emmanuel Three), John Worthington (the editor of Smith’s *Select Discourses*), and John Wallis.

Whichcote himself was absent from Cambridge when the Earl of Manchester arrived there in 1644 to empty the colleges of all who refused to swear allegiance to Parliament. Perhaps this is how he was able to avoid swearing the *Solemn League and Covenant* (Tillotson 1683, 23; Tulloch 1871, 49). Two notable casualties of the purge were Richard Holdsworth, then Master of Emmanuel College and Vice-Chancellor of the University, and Samuel Collins, the Provost of King’s. Tuckney was chosen to replace Holdsworth and Whichcote reluctantly accepted an appointment to replace Collins, whom he deeply respected (though he insisted that a significant part of his salary be given to the ejected Collins for as long as held the post, an act of magnanimity which won him much respect from all sides, and was typical of his conciliatory character).

The Provost of King’s was a position of great influence, and Whichcote occupied it alongside another which he had acquired in 1636 (Roberts 1968, 2; Lewis 2010, 17): Sunday afternoon lecturer in Trinity Church. It is surprising that Whichcote was afforded such prominent positions, given how unorthodox a thinker he will prove to be. Matthew Cosby takes this as an indication that in 1644, ‘or at an earlier stage in his career he was an orthodox Calvinist in his theology and, if not an active supporter of Parliament, at least not a royalist in his politics’ (Cosby 2016, 32). Similarly, John Tulloch writes:

It may be inferred from this promotion, as also from his training at Emmanuel College, that Whichcote had grown up amongst Puritans, and that his relatives and friends belonged to that party. Whether he himself had ever professed Puritan tenets it is impossible to say. In his early years he probably fell in with the tone of his college. Nor is there any reason to believe that up to this point he had attracted notice by any singularity of opinion (Tulloch 1871, 300)

The main argument of this thesis suggests that Whichcote was not an orthodox Calvinist in 1644, and probably had not been one for some time. But the evidence from Whichcote's early days is so scarce that no conclusions can be made firm. A weak shaft of light into this otherwise obscure period of Whichcote's life is provided by some college exercises delivered by Whichcote that survive as transcriptions in the common-place book of one Francis Wilcox (BL Harl MS 28745). I refer to these occasionally below, but if they contain any seeds of his later anti-Calvinism, they are muted. Whatever the case, if we are to believe Tuckney's letters, by 1651 Whichcote was viewed with great suspicion in some quarters (EL 40).

After the Restoration, Whichcote was ejected from his university position by Royalists seeking to undo the Parliamentary intrusions, and spent the rest of his life as a popular priest and preacher in London (Roberts 1968, 7–14).

We do know, however, that in the 1640s, Whichcote was in touch with a wide circle of influences that mark him out as far more than a benign and unphilosophical preacher. He was an acquaintance of Samuel Hartlib.⁷

Whichcote published nothing while he lived; all the works published in his name are posthumous, and edited together rather messily (Roberts 1968, 267–74; Hutton 2005, 3403–4). They include sermons, aphorisms, and the eight letters exchanged between himself and Anthony Tuckney from late 1651. As such, apart from the eight letters and the few the small number of sermons that include a date, Whichcote’s intellectual development is very difficult to trace.

1.2.2 Ralph Cudworth (1617–1688)

Ralph Cudworth was born into the heart of the Puritan community. His father, Ralph Cudworth Sr, numbered among the Puritan elite: he served as chaplain to James I, and was an intimate friend and a posthumous editor of the most famous English Calvinist, William Perkins (Anon 1736, 24; Gill 2006, 7–11). He had also been, like many of the country’s most prominent Puritans, a fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge (Pailin 2008, ODNB). When Cudworth Sr died in 1624 (when his son was only seven), his mother married John Stoughton, another former Emmanuel fellow and prominent Puritan and Calvinist preacher (Wilson 1969, 131; Stoughton 1640).

It is hardly surprising that at the age of thirteen, Cudworth entered Emmanuel College (Pailin 2008, ODNB). He appears to have excelled there; according to an early biographer,

⁷ Whichcote and Hartlib’s acquaintance goes back at least to the late 1640s; see Hartlib Papers 32/4/1A–2B and 32/4/3A–4B.

Cudworth's tutor (whose identity is unfortunately unknown) declared, '*That no person had been ever admitted into that Society so young, who was such a Proficient in School-Learning as he*' (Anon. 1736, 25). While at Emmanuel, Cudworth sent two letters to his stepfather which reveal the beginnings of his interest in Platonic mystical theology (Solly 1856, 286–91).⁸ He took a series of degrees, culminating in a doctor of divinity in 1651 (BA 1635, MA 1639, BD 1646, DD 1651 [Pailin 2008, ODNB]). After becoming a fellow of Emmanuel in 1639, Cudworth became an extremely popular tutor, 'crowded with Pupils, insomuch that he had no fewer than twenty-eight at once' (Anon. 1736, 25).

When the Parliamentary intruders came to purge the colleges of royalists in 1644, Cudworth swore the *Solemn League and Covenant* (Bodl. Tanner MS 56 fo. 242) and in 1647, became Master of Clare College by Parliamentary appointment. After a brief spell as rector of North Cadbury (the only time in his professional life he would be based outside the university), he returned to Cambridge in 1654 after being elected as Master of Christ's College to replace the late Samuel Bolton (Pailin 2008, ODNB). He was held in high enough esteem by the Puritan parliament to be honoured with an invitation to address the House of Commons in 1647, at the height of the Civil War. Writing from prison, the Royalist former Master of Emmanuel Richard Holdsworth (who remained warmly disposed to Whichcote and Cudworth) wrote: 'Mr Cudworth hath gained well by his sermon, it comes up to the great prizes which have bene given for poetry' (Holdsworth to William Sancroft, 14 Apr 1647, Bodl. Tanner MS 58, 55). Frederick Wilson suggests that the proud legacy (among the Puritans at least) of Cudworth's late, nonconforming stepfather John Stoughton probably had

⁸ The letters were in the personal possession of Thomas Solly, once fellow of Caius College, and may never have surfaced had Solly not appended them to a little-known work of his titled *The Will: Divine and Human*. They are undated, but Cudworth mentions being pressured by his tutor (who is, alas, unnamed again) to sit for a fellowship at Emmanuel, so it must be no later than 1639 when Cudworth became a fellow (Solly 1856, 287; see Carter 2011, 18, n. 51).

something to do with the invitation to address Parliament (Wilson 1969, 131), but Cudworth also had his own merits to recommend him, and became an important consultant for the Parliamentary authorities, including Oliver Cromwell himself (Rogers 1997, 8–9).

But despite his high standing in the Puritan community, Cudworth avoided the fate that befell other college heads intruded by Parliament (including Whichcote and Tuckney) after the Restoration. Cudworth retained his position and remained Master of Christ's College until his death in 1688, despite bitter and persistent attempts by loyal royalists to have him ousted, along with his friend and colleague Henry More (Nicolson 1929, 42–7; Crocker 2003, 84–6).

Far more than Whichcote who was (as we shall see) Cudworth's lifelong friend and a kindred spirit, Cudworth was actively engaged with the philosophical currents sweeping England during his life. He drew widely but carefully from René Descartes, and was apparently the main instigator of More's brief correspondence with the aging Descartes in 1649 (Crocker 2003, 65).

Apart from a small number of sermons and poems, Cudworth only published one major work during his lifetime, the ambitious and lengthy tract against atheism and determinism titled *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678). This work was intended to be the first part of a trilogy defending the three '*Fundamentals or Essentials of True Religion*', namely: the existence of God, the existence and immutability of morality, and free will (*TISU Preface*, ii). The *True Intellectual System* defends the first fundamental, while the second and third (or parts of them) were published from manuscripts as the *Treatise of Eternal and Immutable Morality* and the *Treatise of Freewill* (Hutton, TEIM xii–xiii),

although much important manuscript material remains unpublished (see Carter 2011, 161–8; Leech 2017a & 2017b).

Along with Henry More, Cudworth is one of the only Cambridge Platonists who receives regular attention from philosophers, particularly in the history of ethics. Stephen Darwall, for example, has noted that in some ways, Cudworth’s theory of obligation is an important predecessor to Kant’s idea of practical reason (Darwall 1995, 109–48; discussed in chapter 9 below), while philosophers of religion continue to engage with Cudworth’s anti-voluntarist arguments in contemporary debates about divine command theory (e.g. Schroeder 2005, Wielenberg 2011).

1.2.3 John Smith (c. 1618–1652)

Of the three figures I consider in this thesis, John Smith is the one about whom least is known; in John Tulloch’s poignant phrase, Smith is ‘a thinker without a biography’ (1874, 122). He is also the one who has received the least attention from philosophers. As Derek Michaud notes, ‘Smith’s memory continues today mostly as an ancillary curiosity or source of contextual (or rhetorical) leverage for the study of the more famous Cambridge Platonists—Ralph Cudworth and Henry More, especially’ (2011, 142).⁹

Smith was born in 1618 (or perhaps 1616; see Ridely-Johnson 2016, 4). His early life is obscure, but he enrolled in Emmanuel College, Cambridge, 1636 as a sizar under the tutelage of Benjamin Whichcote (Ridely-Johnson 2016, 5). He received his BA in 1640 and his MA in 1644. When he emerged from his MA in 1644, he was ready to teach Hebrew,

⁹ Nonetheless, some valuable treatments of Smith are Saveson 1958 and 1959; Micheletti 1976; Schneewind 1997, 194–215; Michaud 2015 and 2019; Sheppard 2015, 156–65, Levitin 2015, 128–9 and Ridley-Johnson 2016.

philosophy and geometry in Queen's College, and hold a university professorship in mathematics.¹⁰

By the end of his study at Emmanuel, Smith was proficient in Latin, Greek and Hebrew (and possibly some Arabic), as well as French (and potentially Italian); his personal library contained a number of books in each of these languages (Saveson 1958, 215–6). As we shall see, Smith's ability to read French made him particularly important as an early disseminator of Descartes' ideas.

As a student at Emmanuel, he also made many connections that were crucial to his later development and intellectual legacy. The most important of these was with his tutor, Benjamin Whichcote who saw enough promise in Smith to offer him financial support (SD iv). In Samuel Salter's preface to Whichcote's *Moral and Religious Aphorisms*, we are informed that Smith was wont to transcribe Whichcote's sermons, and that he 'lived on Whichcote' (EL xviii; see also Roberts 1968, 2). It is also likely that at this time, Smith met Ralph Cudworth, a close friend of Whichcote's; John Worthington mentions that Smith 'had always a great affection and respect' for Cudworth (SD xii). I will argue later that a close friendship between Smith and Cudworth is essential for explaining the striking similarities between Cudworth's early sermon to the *House of Commons* and Smith's *Discourses*.

In 1644, as part of the reshuffling of Cambridge faculty in the wake of Parliament's purge of Royalists, Smith was made a Fellow of Queen's College. He was appointed to three teaching posts: Hebrew lecturer (*praelector Hebraicus*), Geometry lecturer (*praelector*

¹⁰ Ridley-Johnson (2016, 7) has located the record of Smith's election as a Fellow of Queen's and the teaching positions he held. I discuss the evidence for Smith's mathematics professorship below, but Mordechai Feingold argues for it at length (Feingold 1990, 19f., 92, note 19).

Geometricus), and Censor of Philosophy (*censor Philosophicus*) (Ridley-Johnson 2016, 7, n. 19).

In 1648–9, Smith seems to have taken up a newly founded lectureship in mathematics. This seems to have been a University-wide lectureship rather than a college position (Feingold 1990, 19f. See also Ridley-Johnson 2016, 35–37). While the content of these lectures is not known to us, we do know that during this lectureship, Smith was corresponding with John Wallis (also formerly of Emmanuel) about various aspects of Descartes’s essay on *Géométrie* from the *Discourse on Method* (Beeley & Scriba 2003, 8–9). It is likely then, that Smith taught, at least in part, from Descartes’s text (either in his university lectureship or in his college role as geometry lecturer). If this is the case, as Ridley-Johnson argues, then ‘Smith’s lectures would have constituted one of the earliest disseminations of Cartesian ideas in Cambridge’ (2016, 39).

At Queen’s, Smith also served as Dean and Catechist, delivering sermons at the college chapel in 1650–1 (Ridley-Johnson 2016, 41). This is the context in which Smith developed much of the material later published as his *Select Discourses* (SD v). It is worth noting that Smith’s *Fourth Discourse*, if delivered as a sermon in 1650–1, is another example of Smith’s role as an early supporter of Cartesian ideas. The *Fourth Discourse* draws heavily on Descartes’ *Passions of the Soul*, which in 1650–1 had only just been published in French in 1649; (it received a Latin and English translation in 1650, but Smith likely used the French copy from his personal library [Saveson 1958, 216]).

Smith was appointed Dean of Queen’s College Chapel and Catechist despite his fairly open anti-Calvinism, which, to Ridley-Johnson suggests that the University was not as

‘religiously restrictive’ in this period as it is sometimes supposed (Ridley-Johnson 2016, 32). Indeed, by 1650, Smith’s old teacher Benjamin Whichcote had been preaching brazenly un-Calvinist sermons at Trinity College (where he held to post of Afternoon Lecturer) for some years, and had begun to arouse the suspicions of his old tutor Anthony Tuckney and the rest of the Puritan ‘old guard’ (Tulloch 1871, 301). Interestingly enough, Tuckney’s controversy with Whichcote on these questions occurs in late 1651, when Smith had been serving as Dean and Catechist for some time too. It is not unlikely that Smith’s sermons contributed to Tuckney’s growing sense of unease.

Smith’s life was cut tragically short by illness. He developed a ‘husking cough’ in 1651, and despite consultations with physicians (including the Paracelsian alchemist Theodore de Mayerne), fell into a stupor, finally passing away on the 7th August 1652 at the age of only 34.¹¹ Were it not for the efforts of his friend and Emmanuel colleague John Worthington, Smith would have left behind no literary legacy worthy of study. But in 1660 (eight years after Smith’s death), Worthington published ten of Smith’s sermons (edited from notes in Smith’s own hand) in a volume of *Select Discourses*. The book sold well enough that it was reprinted in 1673. The lengthy discourse *On Prophecy* met with particularly high praise, and was even translated into Latin by Jean Le Clerc in 1731.

And deservedly so. Dmitri Levitin recently called Smith’s discourse *On Prophecy* ‘perhaps the most detailed mid-century discussion on the epistemological differences between natural reason, divine inspiration, and enthusiasm ... posited against the dual threats of illuminationism and Socinianism’ (ibid., 128). A subordinate goal of this thesis is to bring out

¹¹ A touching account of Smith’s last days found its way into Simon Patrick’s autobiography; see Patrick 1858, 421f.

the philosophical value of Smith's *Discourses*, continuing the valuable work done most recently by Derek Michaud (2011, 2015, 2019).

(2) The (Non-)Existence of Cambridge Platonism

The brief intellectual biographies in the previous chapter consist of relatively uncontroversial facts about the lives of the main actors of this study. The controversy really lies in the question of how closely these three (and perhaps others) can be grouped together as ‘Cambridge Platonists’; and indeed, whether they were ‘Platonists’ in any meaningful sense at all. Even though this thesis focuses squarely on the Emmanuel Three, there is no avoiding the more complicated question of ‘Cambridge Platonism’. We must get clear on the contours of this question if we are to see how the case of the learned and ingenious men can be used to shed some light on the origins of Cambridge Platonism.

2.1 The Cambridge Platonists

In the centuries immediately after their own, Whichcote, Cudworth, Smith and Henry More were often mentioned together as a group of particularly enlightened and tolerant divines in an otherwise dogmatic and intolerant phase of Cambridge’s intellectual life.¹² They were not called ‘Cambridge Platonists’, however, until they became an object of scholarly interest in the late nineteenth century.

The classic statement of what we might call the ‘naïve picture’ of Cambridge Platonism, innocent of more recent challenges, was made most famously by John Tulloch. In 1872, Tulloch published the second, ponderous volume of his ambitious work on *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy*. The first volume, subtitled ‘Liberal Churchmen’, had focused on the religious rationalism of key figures in the so-called ‘Great Tew Circle’ like William

¹² Some important early mentions of some or all of these names together are made by Thomas Burnet (in Burnet 1753, ix), Joseph Glanvill (in manuscript material published in Cope 1954, 273, 275, 279, 280), Thomas Birch (1753, 5–6) and Adam Smith (1759, 356–61).

Chillingworth (1602–44), John Hales (1584–1656) and Jeremy Taylor (1613–67). The second volume was subtitled ‘The Cambridge Platonists’, and purported to trace a distinct but kindred movement of the same kind of religious rationalism that had flourished at Great Tew. This movement, Tulloch wrote, ‘is represented throughout by a succession of well-known Cambridge divines, sometimes spoken of as “Latitudinarians”, and sometimes as “Cambridge Platonists”.’ (1874, 6) He goes on to name the group’s chief members, along with an account of what binds them together:

The chief names in this illustrious succession are Benjamin Whichcote, John Smith, Ralph Cudworth, and Henry More. Apart from the affinities of thought which bind these men together into one of the most characteristic groups in the history of religious and philosophical thought in England, they were all closely united by personal and academic associations. (Tulloch 1874, 6–7)

For Tulloch, the intellectual and personal connections between these four major Cambridge Platonists meant that ‘they stand much more distinctively by themselves’ than the Great Tew Circle, and constitute ‘a school of opinion in a far more real and effective sense (1874, 7).

According to Tulloch’s view, the founder of this school was Benjamin Whichcote, and not simply because he was the eldest. Although he had published the least of all the major Cambridge Platonists, Tulloch considered his magnetic personality as the spark lit the flame:

Whichcote ... was probably, during this important period [1649–60] the teacher who, more than any other at Cambridge, impressed his own mode of thought both upon his colleagues in the university and the rising generation of students ... In a

true sense he may be said to have founded the new school of philosophical theology, although it is chiefly known by the more elaborate writings of others (1874, 45)

Tulloch's basic picture of the Cambridge Platonists as a school of philosophers gathered around Whichcote as a father figure continued to hold wide sway.¹³ To take a few brief highlights: CA Patrides wrote an influential introduction to an edited collection of their major works in 1969, in which he likened each of the Cambridge Platonists to an ancient counterpart: Whichcote to Plato, Smith to Porphyry, Cudworth to Plotinus, and More to Iamblichus (1969, 2; but see also Clark 2017 for an incisive critique of Patrides). In 1996, Frederick Beiser wrote comfortably of the Cambridge Platonists as a 'school', with an 'inner circle' comprised by Henry More, Ralph Cudworth, John Smith and Benjamin Whichcote, and an outer circle of other Cambridge men like John Worthington, Peter Sterry and John Sherman and bound together both by ties of friendship and largely shared philosophical positions on faith, reason, moral realism (1996, 134–83), and this basic grouping continues to represent a wide consensus. In 1999, Michael Gill spoke of Whichcote as 'the founder of Cambridge Platonism' (Gill 1999, 271; Taliaferro 2005, 15;).

2.2 Recent Challenges

Today, however, Cambridge Platonism is a beleaguered term. Among those who use the term 'Cambridge Platonists', it has become customary to preface any discussion of them with a caution that their coherence as a group or their Platonism or both have been vastly overestimated.¹⁴ Summing up these concerns, A. R. Hall writes, 'The usual claim for the existence of a coherent and co-operative group of philosophers called the Cambridge

¹³ For more detailed surveys of the historiography of Cambridge Platonism, see Hall 1990, 58–61; Lewis 2010, 12–17; Micheletti 2011, 9–21.

¹⁴ E.g. Hall 1990, 58; Crocker 2003, xvii; Lewis 2010, 11; Sheppard 2015, 137; Ridley-Johnson 2016, 4.

Platonists must appear weak to anyone who applies a critical eye to the membership of the group and to their various activities' (Hall 1990, 58).

Let us take a brief look at two of the major aspects of the classic picture of Cambridge Platonism that have come under fire: first, their coherence as group founded by Whichcote, and second, their alleged Platonism.

2.2.1 Challenges to their Coherence

If there really was a group of Cambridge Platonists, centred around Whichcote as a founding father, what binds them together and sets them apart from their context as a distinct and recognisable school? Recent critics have suggested that when we pay close attention to the lives and thought of the alleged Cambridge Platonists, we find that nothing really ties them together in a way that distinguishes them from their broader intellectual environment. One of the most forceful cases to this effect is that made by Dmitri Levitin in his magisterial book on *Ancient Wisdom in the Age of the New Science* (2015).

A central aim of Levitin's book is to revise intellectual histories of the seventeenth century which have been driven by 'a totalising, progressivist narrative that stems from the nineteenth century' in which political 'liberalism' and theological 'latitudinarianism' are unhelpfully conflated. This narrative supposes the existence of 'a "liberal" tradition [which] stretched from divines like Hooker through to the "Cambridge Platonists" and to the "latitudinarians", and then to freethinkers and deists. A combination of these groups is then said to constitute a distinctive English "early enlightenment", which, while sometimes "conservative", was still anchored to "liberal", whig divinity' (2015, 13). This attempt to trace a monolithic 'liberal' tradition back through the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries forces

us to fit figures — like Cudworth, Smith and Whichcote into a nineteenth century ‘liberal’ mould that ill suits their nuanced positions.

More to the point, this totalising narrative also causes us see ‘groups’ of thinkers and ‘schools of thought’ where none really existed. One such non-existent school, according to Levitin, was Cambridge Platonism. In many intellectual histories, the Cambridge Platonists are bound together in large part by their distinctive, ‘liberal’ approach to the history of philosophy. As ‘liberals’ and ‘humanists’, the traditional narrative contends, the Cambridge Platonists’ use of Platonic philosophy and appeals to ‘reason’ were a liberal strategy, wielded against that more ‘conservative’ style of divinity which preferred to rely solely on revealed Christian tradition; (for instance, Beiser 1996, 134–83; mentioned by Levitin as one such interpreter [2016, 15, n. 65]). This has allowed intellectual historians to fit the Cambridge Platonist movement into their larger narrative of the ‘English enlightenment’ whereby Englishmen gradually cast off the shackles of tradition and conservatism: the Cambridge Platonists were among the first enlightenment theologians, drawing emphasis away from faith in revelation and placing it instead in humanistic ideals of reason and learning. As Levitin sums it up:

both [the] coherence and importance [of the ‘Cambridge Platonists’] are predicated on the same nineteenth-century whig story that sought to trace a ‘rationalist’ lineage for ‘liberal’ Anglicanism. The idea that they represent an anachronistic remnant of ‘Renaissance humanism’ in an otherwise ‘modern’ world is based on the old assumptions about ‘ancients and moderns’ and about traditions of Platonic ‘syncretism’... (Levitin 2015, 16)

Scholars who construe the Cambridge Platonists in this way bolster this narrative by suggesting that all the group's members saw themselves as uncovering an ancient tradition of Mosaic/Platonic theology, a *prisca theologia*, originating from Moses and passed down through Plato and Greek Platonists. But Levitin argues that 'there was no such thing as a "Cambridge Platonist" attitude to the history of philosophy' (2015, 16) by demonstrating that the various Cambridge Platonists — particularly More, Smith and Cudworth — take very different, sometimes opposite, approaches to the idea of an esoteric *prisca theologia* embedded in ancient texts (2015, 126–38; 171–80).

Levitin concludes that most of the things which supposedly characterise the Cambridge Platonists a distinct school of thought are either commonplace features of their intellectual milieu (such as their emphasis on reason [2015, 16, n. 65]), or (as in the case of their allegedly unified belief in a *prisca theologia*) not really part of their thought at all. Of course, all the putative Cambridge Platonists were interested in ancient wisdom, but 'one did not need to be a "Cambridge Platonist" to be interested in ancient precursors for one's own philosophy' (2015, 324). In sum, Levitin acknowledges that the Cambridge group 'certainly existed as a loose set of acquaintances linked by tutorial relationships and a strong anti-Calvinism (hardly unique in seventeenth-century England)' (2015, 16). But he argues that 'when we abandon this broad framework and terms like *prisca theologia*, the Cambridge group ... begins to lose both the intellectual coherence and importance attributed to it' (2015, 16). Their anti-Calvinism, emphasis on reason and attitudes to ancient philosophy simply do not warrant Tulloch's naïve picture of the Cambridge group as a school of Platonists gathered around Whichcote.

Another challenge to the Cambridge Platonists' coherence concerns their alleged founding by Benjamin Whichcote. In 1974, Staudenbaur made a forceful argument which, although acknowledging the existence of Cambridge Platonism, casts doubt on the extent to which Whichcote should be thought of as its founder, or even as a member. The assumption that Whichcote 'developed the essential position of the Cambridge Platonists before More, Cudworth, and Smith and had a formative influence on these younger men,' in Staudenbaur's view, 'has not a bit of evidence in its favour, and considerable evidence exists which makes it highly improbable' (1974, 159).

Staudenbaur argues that, contrary to Tulloch's view, Whichcote cannot have been the 'founding father' of Cambridge Platonism, on the grounds that he was not philosophically innovative enough, or even enough of a Platonist (see next section) to have sparked the others' interest in Platonism. We will engage with Staudenbaur's views on the origins of Cambridge Platonism in more detail in chapter 4, but suffice it to that Staudenbaur concludes that it Henry More rather than Whichcote who was 'both the founder of the school and its most eminent member' (1974, 163).

I lay out my response to these arguments in the next section (2.3), but to anticipate, I think arguments like Staudenbaur's and Levitin's successfully highlight problems with a naïve and unqualified picture of Cambridge Platonism. Nonetheless, it seems to me that the case for considering Whichcote, Cudworth, Smith (and More, though he is not a primary focus of this study) together as a distinguishable group of thinkers against their milieu does not rest on their defence of a unified vision of the history of philosophy, or of their being gathered around Whichcote as a founding father. Instead, I suggest that Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith are bound together by a distinctly Platonic anti-Calvinism that developed as a

result of their association with each other at Emmanuel College in the late 1630s (likely with the influence of Henry More and some others). Their anti-Calvinism is polemically geared against the particular sort of Calvinist preaching that they were surrounded by at Emmanuel College in this period.

2.2.2 Challenges to their Platonism

I have said that the Emmanuel Three's anti-Calvinism is 'distinctly Platonic', but what does this mean?¹⁵ The unqualified picture of the Cambridge Platonists assumes that the chief factor binding them alleged Cambridge Platonists together is their common defence of an intellectual position that can be meaningfully described as a kind of Platonism. But as early as 1901, E. T. Campagnac was casting doubt on the 'Platonism' of the group. In that year, he published a sourcebook of selections from Whichcote, Smith and Nathanael Culverwell. Campagnac titled the book *The Cambridge Platonists*, and speaks in his introduction of 'the School of the Cambridge Platonists' (1901, xi). But at the same time, he warns that speak of Cambridge Platonists is 'more than a little misleading'. For one, 'Platonism was brought against them as a serious charge, which they were sometimes anxious to rebut'. They quoted Plato and Plotinus frequently, to be sure, but not in ways that suggest a deep philosophical kinship with their thought; rather than faithful interpreters of Plato and Plotinus, they used passages from their texts as springboards from which to launch expressions of their own ideas. So, although clearly influenced by Plato to some extent, Whichcote, Smith and Culverwell, the debt they owe to Plato and Plotinus is not sufficiently deep in Campagnac's view to warrant calling them 'Platonists' in the fullest sense (1901, xi–xii).

¹⁵ An extensive bibliography of critical discussions of the Platonism of the Cambridge Platonism is provided a Lewis (2010, 11, n. 5).

As part of his argument against the supposition that Whichcote was the founder of Cambridge Platonism, Staudenbaur argues that Whichcote was not himself a Platonic thinker in any meaningful way. ‘Was [Whichcote] in any sense a Platonist?’ he asks: ‘I think not. And none of his contemporaries saw him as such’ (1974, 159). He rightly notes, for instance, that ‘Whichcote makes but one passing reference to Plotinus, and hardly mentions Plato himself’ (1974, 159). Hall casts doubt on Whichcote’s Platonism for similar reasons (Hall 1990, 63).

Levitin’s argument against the existence Cambridge Platonism makes a broader case against the group’s ‘Platonism’. Another central aim his book, namely to challenge the reifying use of various ancient ‘-isms’ (Epicureanism, Stoicism, Hermeticism, Platonism, etc.) in intellectual histories of the seventeenth century. Too many intellectual historians ‘take for granted the existence of essentialist “isms” whose play through the course of a historical period charted’ (2015, 4). He quite rightly points out that in the seventeenth century, ‘[n]o one was an “Epicurean” in some essentialist sense: even if they subscribed to the label, their ideas about what it meant were mediated through many layers of humanist historiographical tradition’ (2015, 4). It is far more productive to examine what seventeenth century thinkers themselves understood by these -isms, than to categorise them as true Platonists, Epicureans or Hermeticists.

As for the wider circle of Cambridge Platonists, I will largely agree with recent scholarship that has re-emphasised the Platonic character of Whichcote, More, Cudworth and Smith’s philosophy (e.g. Crocker 2003, xviii; Gill 2006; Carter 2011, 11–13; Hedley 2017, 935; Clark 2017; Michaud 2019; Hedley 2019). More specifically, I concur with Sarah Hutton’s recent insight that even though the term ‘Platonist’ can obscure the wider range of

philosophical strands with which the Cambridge Platonists engaged, when it comes to their moral philosophy, ‘the fundamental element on which they could all agree was on the Platonist foundations of their ethics’ (Hutton 2017, 245–7). Furthermore, I will argue, *pace* Staudenbaur, that this ethical Platonism was recognised as a kind of Platonism by the Emmanuel Three’s Calvinist contemporaries, even in the case of Whichcote.

2.3 A Smaller Target: The Emmanuel Three

This study focuses on a much smaller target than ‘Cambridge Platonism’: the trio by Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith (the Emmanuel Three). But my treatment of their relationship is informed by the historiographical challenges levelled at the wider target of Cambridge Platonism. In light of these challenges, this study of the Emmanuel Three’s connection aims to answer two major questions:

1. Biographical Connection: Is there biographical and historical evidence of a close connection between Whichcote, Smith, Cudworth (and others) that would have allowed for the mutual development of a philosophical outlook?
2. Platonic Outlook: Do the Emmanuel Three actually share a common philosophical outlook that is ‘Platonic’ in any meaningful sense? Is this outlook similar enough between the three to suggest that they mutually influenced each other in significant ways?

If we find that Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith were closely associated with each other as friends and through tutorial relationships, that they produced sermons and discourses around the same time using the same arguments against the same positions, then the cumulative case for considering the three as a philosophical group becomes fairly strong.

2.3.1 Biographical Connections

Biographically speaking, just how closely were the Emmanuel Three associated with each other? Aside from the fact that they were all at Emmanuel College at the same time (we will deal with the timeline more closely below), are there any good reasons to think Cudworth, Smith and Whichcote (and perhaps others) had intellectually significant association with one another? After all, during the period in question, there was steady population of 30–80 students and fellows at Emmanuel, with many comings and goings.¹⁶ Whichcote, Smith and Cudworth would have interacted with many of these as pupils, friends, tutors and mentors, not to mention their connections to members of other colleges. What historical and biographical evidence is there that the Emmanuel Three interacted with each other in the crucial ways that might justify considering them as a philosophical group?

In chapter 4, I present a range of biographical evidence that Whichcote, Smith and Cudworth comprised a particularly close-knit trio of likeminded Emmanuel men, bound together by their love Platonic philosophy and their dissent from the rigid Calvinism that prevailed in the college at that time. This trio must be understood against the background of an earlier and more amorphous group of Platonically-minded figures at Emmanuel College (and beyond), some already usually considered peripherally as Cambridge Platonists (like John Worthington and Peter Sterry), and others who are rarely mentioned in this connection at all (John Sadler and Laurence Sarson).

¹⁶ College Admissions Chart (W. Heffer & Sons: Cambridge, 1908), held in the Emmanuel College Archives. My sincere thanks to archivist Amanda Goode for making it available.

2.3.2 Platonic Outlook

Alongside this biographical question, we must ask the more complex philosophical question of just how closely their views and philosophical projects align with one another. To what extent do the Emmanuel Three share a common philosophical outlook, and to what extent is that outlook meaningfully Platonist?

I will argue that Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith develop a philosophical Platonism of the same sort that Douglas Hedley (in response to Levitin) attributes to Cudworth and More: ‘a living tradition of Platonism, not slavishly “Platonic”, but continuing in the spirit rather than the letter of Platonism’ (2017, 935). The main features of this Platonism are captured well by Charles Taliaferro: ‘a vision of goodness (or the Good) as the preeminent attribute of God — a goodness toward which we are constitutionally oriented. We are constituted so that we naturally seek goodness, and this search finds its consummation in a relationship with God. The Good, and ultimately God, are the objects of our natural desire’ (2005, 16).

More particularly for the purposes of this study, the Emmanuel Three’s Platonism is distinguished by three main ideas about God, goodness and creation:

1. Metaethical Naturalism: an insistence that God’s essential goodness is prior to and rules over his will.
2. God’s Communicative Intent: God’s immutable purpose in creating the world (and human beings in particular) is to conform as many of them as possible to himself and make them participate in his essential goodness.
3. Participatory Epistemology: Human beings come to know God by participating in and embodying his essential goodness (and in this way fulfil his communicative intent).

These three ideas form the philosophical core of the Emmanuel Three's Platonism. All three are defended and deployed by the Emmanuel Three in a polemical struggle against the rival vision of God and goodness represented by their Calvinist colleagues' insistence on double predestination.

There are two important senses in which this outlook is Platonist: one theoretical and one historical. From a theoretical or more abstractly philosophical standpoint, the Emmanuel Three's positions are the offspring of an underlying 'matrix' of views which Lloyd Gerson recently called 'Ur-Platonism', a set of positions which Gerson argues can be found at the core of all genuine Platonisms. Ur-Platonism consists of five rejections: antimaterialism, antimechanism, antinominalism, antirelativism and antiskepticism (Gerson 2013, 10). According to Gerson, all incarnations of Platonism including Plato's own dialogues 'can be usefully thought of as arising out of the matrix of [Ur-Platonism] ... To be a Platonist is, minimally, to have a commitment to [Ur-Platonism]' (ibid. 9f).

Douglas Hedley has already insightfully noted that Cudworth's philosophy is a Platonism of the sort that Gerson describes, fundamentally committed to Ur-Platonism (Hedley 2017, 936). The same can be said of the Platonism I identify in the Emmanuel Three. A different study might trace the presence of all five Ur-Platonic positions in Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith's writings, but given the ethical and epistemological focus of this thesis, I want to draw attention in particular to the antirelativism which Gerson contends that all Platonists fundamentally oppose.

Specifically, a Platonist in Gerson's sense rejects both ethical relativism and epistemological relativism. An ethical relativist 'maintains that "good" just means "good for me" or "good for the group" where good is determined by or constituted by a mental state or states'. Against this view, a Platonist holds 'that goodness is a property of being'; i.e. that what is good is determined by the nature or essence of things, the way they 'are', rather than the way they seem to any observer (Gerson 2013, 13). A Platonists' epistemological antirelativism can be expressed analogously in the claim that like goodness, truth is a property of being, such that what is true is determined by the way things are, and not by the way they seem (ibid.).

We will see below that the Emmanuel Three's core 'Platonist' positions — metaethical naturalism, divine communicative intent and participatory epistemology — are usually deployed as responses to Calvinist claims which the Emmanuel Three perceive as relativist. More precisely, the Emmanuel Three are opposed to views about truth and goodness on which what is true and what is good depends solely on what God himself feels or thinks. So, for instance, God can make any action just or unjust simply by willing it to be so. Likewise, God can make a person righteous simply by considering them righteous (as in the Calvinist doctrine that we are justified by imputed righteousness), rather than actually effecting any change in their character. The Emmanuel Three's Platonism provides them with a philosophical framework which makes goodness and truth eternal and immutable, even for God.

That is one way in which the Emmanuel Three's shared philosophical outlook, comprised by these three core positions, marks them out as Platonists. But we will also see that the Emmanuel Three are Platonists in a more explicit sense too. For one, they articulated

and defended these positions by drawing deeply and creatively on Platonic thought, especially that of Plotinus, Proclus and Origen; in this sense, they can be considered inheritors of a tradition of Greek Christian Platonism represented by the Alexandrian and Cappadocian Fathers (Sheldon-Williams 1967; cf. Dockrill 1997; Michaud 2011; Hedley 2019, 158). But more interestingly, their Calvinist opponents often recognised the Platonic character of the Emmanuel's Three's views and called it out as evidence of an unhealthy reverence for pagan philosophy over Christian theology. So it is not only Gerson's analytical framework that identifies the Emmanuel Three's positions as Platonic; they themselves, along with their hostile contemporaries, did too.

2.3.3 The Emmanuel Three as Cambridge Platonists

In a qualified sense then, I contend here that the Emmanuel Three can and should be thought of as Platonists, and even 'Cambridge Platonists'. Despite Levitin's well-founded worries about improper appeals to 'isms' as explanatory concepts in the history of philosophy, he concedes that they can be used productively: 'This kind of reification can be harmless, such as when an "ism" is used simply as shorthand for an intellectual position: certainly someone who writes a commentary on the *Corpus Aristotelicum* can be usefully described as engaging with one or more of a variety of "Aristotelianisms"' (Levitin 2015, 4). In this way, the Emmanuel Three philosophical outlook can be described as a variety of Platonism: more precisely, a Christianised Platonism, polemically-gearred against what the Emmanuel Three took to be the harsh and tyrannical theology of Calvinism.

Thus, the 'master argument' of thesis, succinctly stated, is that the Emmanuel Three hold a common, distinctly Platonic set of anti-Calvinist views which, along with biographical

evidence for their close association with each other, justifies our reading them as a trio of genuine, 24 carat Platonists, and key suspects in the case of the learned and ingenious men..

This analysis of the Emmanuel Three should not be read as a full-blooded apologia for the unqualified existence of ‘Cambridge Platonism’ as a clearly-defined philosophical school. But it is intended as a corrective to the tendency to view Henry More as the only ‘real’ Platonist of the alleged group, and to dismiss the earlier group of Emmanuel Platonists as preachers rather than philosophers. For instance, A. R. Hall draws a sharp distinction between the ‘Christ’s men’ (Cudworth and More) and the ‘Emmanuel men’ (Smith, Whichcote, Sterry), on the grounds that:

The Emmanuel men were preachers, the Christ’s men were writers. The latter possessed and were influenced by a consciousness of their intellectual relationships to the new scientific movement of the seventeenth century of which the former were wholly innocent. In the sense of the word current during recent centuries, only Cudworth and More could be designated as philosophers; the Emmanuel men were theologians. (1990, 58)

For Hall, the ‘later’ Cambridge Platonists like More and Cudworth are the most philosophical and intellectually connected, while the Emmanuel men like Smith and Whichcote cannot even be considered philosophers in the fullest sense. This study of the Emmanuel Three aims to highlight deeply embedded and philosophically significant commonalities between Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith, revealing a far more sophisticated and unified picture of ‘early’ Cambridge Platonism than accounts like Hall’s suggest.

2.3.4 An Outline of the Master Argument

With this overview of the thesis' overall aims in place, let me present an outline of how we will proceed. Part II below will provide an overview of the historical background to the Emmanuel Three's intellectual development.

Chapter 3 outlines the Calvinist and Puritan background from which the Emmanuel Three's Platonism emerged as a response, tracing both the fortunes of political Puritanism and the spread of Calvinist theology in England in the leadup to the Civil War (3.1), while also introducing Emmanuel College as an important centre of Puritan theology and culture, and the Emmanuel Three's *alma mater* (3.2).

Chapter 4 focuses closely on Emmanuel College c. 1625–1640 (when the Emmanuel Three resided there together) in an attempt to shed some light on the obscure origins of Cambridge Platonism. After introducing the prominent Calvinists who, along with Anthony Tuckney, likely objected to Whichcote's unorthodoxy (4.1), I consider tantalising evidence of a loose confederation of older 'Platonists' who are likely to have catalysed the Emmanuel Three's attraction to Platonic philosophy (4.2). The chapter concludes with a survey of biographical evidence that binds Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith together as close friends and colleagues (4.3).

With the historical background in place, Part III makes the case that in the period between the Parliamentary intrusions of 1644 and Smith's death in 1652, the Emmanuel Three took a united stand against certain key tenets of Calvinist orthodoxy, bringing them into direct confrontation with upholders of Calvinist orthodoxy at the university, and that this was the immediate context for Tuckney's complaints in 1651.

Taking Tuckney's portrait of Whichcote's 'learned and ingenious' Platonisers as a starting point, I identify three controversial philosophical positions Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith each openly defended at the university in the years before Tuckney's first letter. Chapter 5 examines the Emmanuel Three's defence of metaethical naturalism against the prevailing Calvinist tendency to conceive of God's will as entirely unbound by any moral constraints. Chapter 6 examines the Emmanuel Three's implicit criticisms of the Calvinist doctrine of double predestination, which holds that God predestined the majority of the human race to eternal damnation; perhaps drawing on a wider political discourse, the Emmanuel Three compare the God of double predestination to an arbitrary tyrant, in terms directly opposed to prominent English Calvinists. Chapter 7 examines the Emmanuel Three's strikingly similar criticisms of the foundational Calvinist teaching that believers are justified by the 'imputation' of Christ's righteousness. In all three cases, the Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith's works reveal a shared polemical orientation against positions that can be readily identified in the preaching of their Puritan colleagues at the university. Although I largely leave discussion of Plato and Platonism to Part IV, we will see more than one instance in these chapters where Tuckney explicitly identifies the Emmanuel Three's anti-Calvinist stances as 'Platonic'.

Finally, Part IV explores the philosophical underpinnings of the Emmanuel Three's Platonic outlook. Chapter 8 explores their sophisticated participatory theory of religious and moral epistemology, heavily influenced by Plotinus and late ancient Platonism. We will see here why the Emmanuel Three believe their picture of God is more accurate than the tyrannical picture implied by the double decree; we will also see that this epistemology allows them to develop a sort of 'error theory' to explain how their opponents' arbitrary view of God

came about. As a final summary, Chapter 9 highlights the deeply embedded philosophical affinities between Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith by examining how their metaethical naturalism and participatory epistemology come together in their paradoxical views about divine and human autonomy and liberty.

II - Puritans and Platonists in England

(3) Puritanism and Predestination

In order to understand the Emmanuel Three's Platonic outlook in its context, we will need to have a firm grasp of the religious and political background in which they were formed and against which they reacted. Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith were all raised in Puritan homes, which is how they found themselves in the 'cradle of Puritanism': Emmanuel College. In this chapter, we will consider the national fortunes of English Puritanism in the turbulent period leading up to the 1630s and 40s, when the Emmanuel Three met and collaborated in Cambridge. We will also become acquainted with the doctrinal centrepiece of Puritanism: the doctrine of double predestination (whose philosophical implications will be discussed at length in later chapters). The chapter concludes with a much narrower focus on the culture and major personalities of Emmanuel College, which played a crucial role as a theological launching pad for the Puritan initiative to spread the Reformed faith throughout England.

3.1 The Rise of English Puritanism, 1600–1640

3.1.1 The English Puritans

The word 'Puritan' admits of no simple definition, but Puritanism is essentially bound up with the fate of Protestantism in England. In the 1630s and 40s when the Emmanuel Three were together at Cambridge, England had been a Protestant nation for more than a century. But England's break with Rome had been sudden and unusual, especially when compared to the other Protestant nations of Europe. John Spurr captures the chief difference when he writes:

While the European Reformations were often evangelical movements inspired by preachers and theologians, the English Reformation was primarily an act of state; while the reformers' fervent message was taken up by the urban masses and rulers of Europe, few in England were initially much troubled by the *theological* implications of Henry VIII's jurisdictional breach with Rome in the 1530s (Spurr 1998, 8).

England's Reformation was not an organic, popular uprising like those that had swept Geneva and the Netherlands.

The result was that those English Protestants who most deeply identified with Luther and Calvin felt decidedly alienated from their national church. The Church of England might have become confessionally Protestant, but only half-heartedly so. Her official statement of doctrine, the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, were 'Protestant, but in a rather general, even ambivalent, way ... they were simply not very explicit about the crucial doctrines raised by Lutheranism and Calvinism' (Spurr 1998, 9). This doctrinal fuzziness was quite deliberate; the Church of England needed to unify English Christians, many of whom were still Catholics in faith and piety, even if they now repudiated the Pope. But it also meant that the Church of England could not be the kind of Reformed church which those most loyal to the spirit of the Reformation so eagerly desired.

For our purposes, the word 'Puritan' describes to that segment of English Christians whose theological sympathies lay with the Reformers (particularly Calvin) above all others, and who consequently maintained an uneasy, occasionally hostile, relation with the Church of England (Yule 1981, 42–71; Spurr 1998, 28–41; 49–59). Puritanism was by no means

essentially anti-institutional; as we shall see, whenever the institutional church proved itself willing to align with Reformed doctrines, Puritans were more than happy to call themselves proud members. Even when that failed, they were only rarely openly rebellious.

Two questions about the Puritans concern us now: (i) what did they believe? and (ii) how effective were they in propagating it in the leadup to the 1630s and 40s, when the Emmanuel Three began to be active?

3.1.2 Double Predestination

For the most part, Puritans were Calvinists, or more precisely, adherents of the Reformed tradition (Wallace 2008, 206–22). The central, defining theme of the Reformed theological outlook was the doctrine of predestination, ‘both double and absolute, whereby man’s destiny, either election to Heaven or reprobation to Hell, is not conditioned by faith but depends instead on the will of God’ (Tyacke 1990, 1). As a recent history of Emmanuel College puts it:

English Protestants affirmed salvation by faith alone, the logical corollary of which was denial of free will and affirmation of predestination, with salvation intended only for the elect. Whether or not we talk of ‘Calvinism’ (and purists are aware of good reasons why we should not), this was at the formal heart European Protestantism. (HEC 201f [underlining added])¹⁷

Double predestination meant that the salvation or damnation of every human soul

¹⁷ As noted earlier, all underlining within quotations is my own emphasis.

depended entirely on God's eternal decree to save or damn it; that is, to 'predestine' it to Heaven or to Hell. The human soul, morally crippled by Adam's sin, is incapable of performing any good works that might earn salvation; if any soul was saved, then it could only be because God had mercifully and freely chosen to pluck it from the jaws of Hell. It followed that those whom God had not chosen to save in this way — those whom God had 'reprobated', passed over — were condemned to Hell by God's free and eternal decree, just as surely as the elect were appointed to salvation by the same. As Calvin had put it, 'there could be no election without its opposite reprobation' (*Inst.* III.23.1). This is why the doctrine was called double predestination: the elect and damned are both assigned their eternal fates by divine decree; whether one went to Heaven or to Hell, they were there because God had so ordained it.

Why did God bestow this saving mercy on some but not others? It is pretty clear that this question troubled many English Calvinists, given how prominently it features in the many catechisms they disseminated to safeguard the doctrine of predestination. One such catechism contains the following exchange:

[Question]: But will not this argue God of injustice, for his will['s] sake to reprobate men?

[Answer]: No. Because whatsoever God wills, is therefore just, because he wils it: his will being the supreme rule of all justice and righteousness. (Boughton 1623, 29)

In other words, God's decrees to salvation and damnation are just, because God wills them, and whatever God wills is *ipso facto* just and right.

Another important part of the Reformed theological vision was the doctrine of total depravity, according to which all human beings are utterly devoid of any goodness or righteousness that might endear them to God. ‘As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one’, said St Paul, in the *locus classicus* for the doctrine (Rom 3:10). In this connection, the Puritan Thomas Shepard could write: ‘every man is borne stark dead in sinne ... empty of every inward principle of life, voyde of all graces, and hath no more good in him (whatsoever hee thinkes,) then a dead Carrion hath’ (Shepard 1641, 47f). This stark view of human degeneracy accentuated God’s love and mercy in electing to save some (even if not all) members of a human race utterly devoid of good qualities that might make them worth saving. In fact, this was one of the most popular ways to defend God’s choice to reprobate most of the human race: in sending most human beings to Hell, God was merely giving them what they deserved (e.g. Burgess 1652, 646). The remarkable thing was that he had mercifully elected to save any of them at all.

However, while Calvinism of this sort was certainly a central and important part of Puritan identity, there was more to being a Puritan than being a Calvinist. This is important because as we shall see, there is an important sense in which men like Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith who dissented from Calvinism could still be faithful Puritans. Historian John Spurr provides a list of the main characteristics of a typical seventeenth-century Puritan which includes ‘an attachment to the doctrines of Calvinism’, but also many characteristics which non-Calvinists could possess as well, such as ‘dedicat[ion] to evangelical preaching and the propagation of the word of God’, a proclivity for ‘sermon-going, scripture-study, self-examination’, ‘an exceptional hatred of “popery”’, an ‘obsess[ion] with the immorality and the religious apathy of their neighbours’, coupled with a desire to ‘distinguish themselves, the

godly, from the formalists, the worldly and the profane' (1998, 15). In these respects, for the most part, the Emmanuel Three were indistinguishable from their Puritan colleagues.

Even when it came to the typical Puritans' 'personal commitment to, and experience of, the doctrines of justification by faith alone and the predestination of the elect', the Emmanuel Three found ways to couch their un-Calvinist views in language that mimicked orthodox Calvinism. When accused of preaching a kind of justification by works and minimising the role of grace, Whichcote responds with genuine indignation:

I never leave God oute; I ever give Him the principal place ... God is reallie all in all to mee; I hold of Him, derive from Him, live by Him, enjoy my self under Him, hope in Him, expect from Him: there is nothing more written in my heart, than the sense of my dependencie upon Him ... so farre was itt from mee to understand what you fetch out of the words; that nothing seems to mee more horrid ... I shoulde sinne againste all the experience I have of God in my life; if I should say or thinke such a thing. (EL 58)

There is, I think, nothing disingenuous about Whichcote's confession here (*pace* Lichtenstein [1962, 180–2]), but it prudently conceals the fact that alongside this conviction that all believers owe their salvation to God's grace, he believes that this grace is offered to all people, and that the only difference between the elect and the reprobate is that the elect have embraced and freely consented to it, while the reprobate have not.

3.1.3 The 'Calvinist Consensus'

The Puritans' quiet resistance was remarkably effective at 'puritanizing the English church from within' (Spurr 1998, 68; see also Webster 2008, 48–66). By the beginning of the the seventeenth century, their energetic efforts seem to have won over much of the population and, surprisingly, gained them the sympathies of the monarch and the institutional church. A somewhat sensational picture of the spread of Calvinism comes from an episode in 1613 when Benjamin Carier, chaplain to King James I, scandalously converted to Catholicism. In his manifesto he lamented that the Church of England, along with the mind of the whole nation, had been hijacked by Calvinists:

... the lawful Doctrine of the Church of England, is neglected, and contemned as a Relic, or a Rag of Popery, and Calvin's *Institutions* ... fairly bound up with the Preface of the Gospel, is dispersed throughout all Schools, Cities and Villages of England, and hath so infected both Priest and people, as although it be against law, yet it is cried up by voices to be the only current Divinity in Court and Country (Carier 1614, 30f).

And Calvin's doctrines were indeed quite literally 'bound up with the preface of the Gospels', for many of the major English Bibles of the period — like the Genevan Bible of 1560 and the Bishops' Bible of 1568 — included footnotes and marginalia on key verses affirming the Calvinist understanding of predestination (Tyacke 1990, 2). The sheer preponderance of Calvinist preaching, printing and teaching has suggested to many scholars that by the beginning of the seventeenth century, the English Church was characterised by a 'predestinarian orthodoxy' (Como 2000, 64) or even a 'Calvinist hegemony' (Dodds 2007, 59).

The case for this hegemony has often been overstated, but broadly speaking, few would demur from Nicholas Tyacke's assessment that 'by the end of the sixteenth century the Church of England was largely Calvinist in doctrine' (Tyacke 1990, 3).¹⁸ The best evidence for this is the emollient effect these decades seem to have had on many Puritans who had spent much of the previous century railing against the institutional church. As John Spurr put it, by the early seventeenth century, most Puritans 'simply saw themselves as 'godly', orthodox members of the Church of England'. There was no longer any need for radical non-conformity, now that 'the church and its leaders seemed to be in broad sympathy with puritan aims' (Spurr 1998, 10f).

There were, of course, always exceptions and dissenters. On the one hand, the more radical Puritans remained disaffected, no matter how many overtures the church or king made to pacify them; some of these would leave England for the Dutch republic, or even America, to practice their religion unhindered by the institutional church (White 1992, 141–59; Spurr 1998, 59–67).

3.1.4 The Threat of Arminianism

On the other hand though, as Calvinism waxed ever larger in England and put down roots in the Church of England, anti-Calvinist sentiment began to grow with it, particularly in the universities. English Christianity had an ancient tradition of asceticism and personal struggle against sin, a tradition that each Christian must take up his cross and lay hold of their own

¹⁸ For a more nuanced theological history of the period than the one I have given, see Peter White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

salvation, and this tradition clashed with the blissful, easy assurance promised by Calvin's doctrine of predestination.¹⁹

However, it was the Dutch Arminian controversy of the early 1600s that emboldened English anti-Calvinists to kick back against the Calvinist consensus in earnest. The controversy is named after Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609), a professor of theology at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands. Despite having studied under the great Calvinist Theodore Beza (a student of Calvin himself), Arminius held that God offered salvation to all; whether one was saved or not depended on one's free will decision to accept or reject God's offer. This view was flatly against the Calvinist conviction that each soul's eternal destiny depended entirely on God's decision to save or damn them (Stanglin & McCall 2012, 26–36).

To the overwhelmingly Calvinist Dutch Church, its people still smouldering with anti-Catholic sentiment after a decades long war with Catholic Spain, Arminius' teaching smacked of 'works righteousness' and 'popery'. In 1608, Arminius was summoned to appear at the Hague to publicly clarify his theological views. This he did, but it did little to satisfy his detractors.

Arminius died in 1609, but the controversy only intensified after his death. A vocal group of theologians sympathetic to Arminius' views took up his mantle, and presented their *Five Articles of Remonstrance* in 1610 clarifying their positions on free will, grace and predestination; and accordingly, they became known as the Remonstrants (for the *Five Articles*, see Schaff 1977, vol. III, 545–9). The theological debate quickly spilled well beyond

¹⁹ Richard Hooker's *Law of Ecclesiastical Polity* is a case in point; see White 1992, 124–39; 215–16 and HEC 199–207.

the borders of the Netherlands into one of its closest Protestant neighbours: England. The rise of the ‘Remonstrant’ movement in the Netherlands sent waves of panic through the now firmly Calvinist English Church. King James I was so rattled by the spread of Arminianism that, when he heard in 1610 that an Arminian, Conrad Vorstius, was being considered to take up a chair in theology at Leiden, he personally wrote to the Hague requesting that Vorstius not only be denied the position, but banished from the Netherlands (that is, if the Hague decided that Vorstius should not be burned at the stake, ‘which never any Heretique better deserved’ [James I 1612, 20]). In a public statement on the Dutch controversy, the King made it clear that he gravely feared — and had already begun to detect — the spread of Arminianism to England:

Let the Church of *Christ* then judge, whether it was not high time for Us to bestir Our selves, when as this gangrene had not only taken hold amongst our nearest neighbours ... not only the next house was on fire, but did also creep into the bowels of Our own Kingdom, for which cause, having first given the order, that the said Books of *Vorstius* should be publicly burnt, as well in *Paules* Church-yard, as in both the *Universities* of the Kingdom, We thought it good to renew Our former request unto the States, for the banishment of *Vorstius* ... (James I 1612, 15–16)

The king refers to Arminianism as a fire and a poison, and ponders how best to ‘remaund to hell these abominable *Heresies*’ (ibid. 23). This was precisely the strong, uncompromising response that the English Puritans, so zealous for Reformed doctrine, wanted to see from the head of their national Church.

The matter reached a head in 1619 at the Synod of Dort where delegates from all the major Protestant nations, including England, gathered to decide whether the Remonstrants and their *Five Articles* could be reconciled to the Reformed faith. The Synod concluded rather decisively that they could not; the Remonstrants were heretics, and their views gravely threatened the unity of faith of the Protestant nations (see White 1992, 175–202).

The Synod and its controversies had a polarising effect on the English Church. As Peter White put it, ‘there was, in the aftermath of the synod ... a sharpening of theological polarities in the English Church ...’ On the one hand, ‘extreme anti-Arminian stances were adopted in traditional strongholds of Calvinist orthodoxy,’ which included both the universities (White 1992, 204). The universities acted as focal points for the currents of theological tension sweeping the rest of the country. A letter from a Dutchman visiting Cambridge in 1622 recounts a striking episode that illustrates the extent to which the controversy had divided the university:

I was there at the time of the Commencement ... at which more than thirty doctors of Theology and other knights and nobility were present, where there were the most bitter disputations about predestination, free will, and the other heads of doctrine so greatly controverted among yourselves [i.e. the Dutch], some of the company resolutely defending the opinions of the Remonstrants ... on which matter, when I expressed astonishment, one or two of the doctors ... told me they could not tell me which party, the Remonstrants or the Contra-Remonstrants, had more followers in the university. (Georg Doublet to Gerard Vossius, August 1622 quoted in White 1992, 208)

Whichcote would arrive in Cambridge as an undergraduate in 1626, only four years after this scene took place, with Cudworth and Smith to follow within the next decade. Despite Tuckney's accusation that Whichcote has been reading Arminian works (EL 27), there is little concrete evidence in this early period for any direct connections, personal or intellectual, between the Cambridge Platonists and the Dutch Remonstrants (although, there are tantalising hints).²⁰ It is worth noting that More and Cudworth corresponded with Dutch Arminians see Colie 1957).

To put it mildly then, the Arminian controversy inflamed theological tensions that had already been smouldering in England for some time, both by emboldening the English anti-Calvinists to up their rhetoric in defence of free will and against determinism, and by scandalising Calvinists into more brazen, uncompromising statements of predestinarianism. Political developments in the 1630s and 40s pushed the already tense theological landscape to breaking point.

3.1.5 'A Cataclysmic Showdown'

Although King James' was far from the ideal reformed ruler the Puritans longed for, at least he had taken a firm stand against Arminianism. When his successor, Charles I, took the throne in 1625, he immediately alienated the Puritan community by failing to properly censure the Archbishop of Norwich, Richard Montagu, who had published tracts in 1624 and 1625 which, as one Puritan parliamentarian put it, promoted the 'dangerous opinions of Arminius' (John Pym, *Commons Journals*; quoted in Tyacke 1990, 128; see also White 1992, 215ff). A conference of clergy, including Montagu, was called at York House to address these issues,

²⁰ After the Restoration, More and Cudworth both corresponded with Dutch Arminians, including notably Philippus van Limborch (studied at length in Colie 1957).

but it ended inconclusively, leaving Puritans disaffected with their new king (Tyacke 1990, 164–80; White 1992, 224–30).

The York House Conference ended rather awkwardly for the Puritan delegation. The King and Archbishop failed to give the Puritans what they wanted (a condemnation of Montague's views), and instead put a ban on preaching on the topic altogether: 'The outcome of York House was that the king ... soon indicated [his] preference for Arminian doctrine. By 1630 public debate about these matters ... in university disputations and sermons was forbidden, and the effect of these orders was not neutral but came close to making Anticalvinism the new orthodoxy' (HEC 203). This 'signalled a seismic realignment of religious attitudes', and was the beginning of a shift in royal favour that was to vex the Puritans so grievously in the 1630s that it would contribute significantly to the tensions that exploded into Civil War (HEC 219).

A similar episode, more to the point for this study, occurred not five years later when Thomas Jackson (sometimes dubbed the 'Oxford Platonist' [see Hutton 1978]) published his *Treatise of the Divine Essence and Attributes* in 1628, in which he openly challenged unconditional election. The overwhelmingly Puritan House of Commons censured the work in the same year, on the grounds that it propagated Arminianism (Hegarty 2004, ODNB; White 1992, 270). Again, the Puritans lobbied for a strong response from the king and the archbishop. But to their dismay, the king not only failed to punish Jackson, but added insult to injury by recommending him as president of Corpus Christi College at Oxford in 1631 (Hegarty 2004, ODNB).

It became clear over the next decade that Charles I and Archbishop Laud were not allies of the English Reformation. Among many other things, Puritans began to fear that under their leadership, Arminianism and its older, twin heresy of Pelagianism (that salvation is earned by good works rather than freely gifted to the undeserving) was being allowed spread unchecked. Radical Puritan preachers began using subversive language to describe the Church of England and its monarchy — apocalyptic language referencing the Whore of Babylon and the Antichrist — which was usually reserved by Protestants for the Catholic Church (Spurr 1998, 94–9). The growing discontent was felt as keenly at Cambridge as in the rest of country, especially in Puritan corners like Emmanuel College. Nathaniel Barnard, a fellow of Emmanuel College contemporary with Whichcote, found himself on trial for a provocative sermon preached in 1632. The text was 1 Samuel 4:21: ‘The Glory is departed from Israel’, and Barnard turned it into a bitter rebuke of those ‘who endeavour to quench the Light, and abate the Glory of our *Israel*, by bringing in their *Pelagian* Errors into the Doctrine of our Church establisht by Law, and the Superstitions of the Church of *Rome* into our Worship of God’ (Rushworth 1721, 141). Perhaps the most stunning line in the sermon was this:

Against all such traytors, then, let us take up armes (*there he made a good long pause*) – I mean, the armes of our church and our prayers ... (quoted in HEC 206)

Perhaps Barnard had some inkling that only ten years later, the Puritans would take up very literal arms against the King and established church. By the late 1630s, Puritan discontent with the king and the institutional church had soared to unmanageable levels. ‘A cataclysmic showdown seemed imminent’, writes Spurr (1998, 96).

3.1.6 Puritans in Power

When that showdown finally came in the civil war of the early 1640s, Puritanism's fortunes peaked. This is the immediate background of period which concerns us, roughly 1630–1650 when the Emmanuel Three were together at Emmanuel. The Puritan lords and their armies triumphed over the King's troops, leaving the Puritan parliament effectively in control of the country. The Puritans took this opportunity to push through ecclesiastical and theological reforms that political circumstances had previously denied them. While they had many things on their mind in addition to defending the doctrine of predestination, reforming the doctrine of the Church of England and purging it of popish and Pelagian corruptions introduced by Archbishop Laud were near the top of their agenda.

To this end, the parliament convened a synod of eminent Puritan theologians, the Westminster Assembly of Divines, which met for the first time in 1643. They quickly produced a *Confession of Faith* which, along with its companion *Shorter Catechism* 'have become benchmarks in the English-speaking Calvinist tradition' (Spurr 1998, 103). The Westminster Confession enshrined the double decree of election and reprobation with an unprecedented doctrinal clarity:

Q What hath God especially decreed concerning Angels and Men?

A. God by an eternall and immutable Decree, out of his meer love, for the praise of his glorious grace to bee manifested in due time ... in Christ hath chosen some men to eternall life ... and also according to his sovereign power, and the unsearchable counsell of his own will, (whereby he extendeth or with-holdeth favour as he pleaseth) hath passed by and fore ordained the rest to dishonour and wrath, to be for

their sin inflicted, to the praise of the glory of his justice (Westminster Assembly 1649, 72)

English Calvinism, which had till now relied on preaching and popular piety for its spread, now bore the official seal of the state.

3.1.7 Puritan Purge of Cambridge

In the next section (3.2) we will turn to the more precise situation of Whichchote, Smith and Cudworth's *alma mater* of Emmanuel College during their time there (c. 1630–50). Before we do though, it will be helpful to note how the Civil War affected the University of Cambridge as a whole. The University quickly put itself in the Parliament's crosshairs when several college heads (including Emmanuel's master Richard Holdsworth) made a failed attempt in 1642 to send silver to the king; they were promptly arrested and imprisoned in London (Hoyle 2007, 222–4). To keep an eye on Royalists in the university, and also because of the town's strategic importance as 'the key to the wealthy parliamentary heartland of East Anglia' (HEC 240), Parliament gradually but purposefully turned the town of Cambridge and its castle into an important military outpost. By 1643, Cromwell had garrisoned troops there as a launching point for campaigns further north (Hoyle 2007, 223).

As we might expect, the town and the university were greatly affected, and tensions ran extremely high, especially between the town and the university. 'With the town [of Cambridge] mostly parliamentary and the university largely royalist, there were sometimes skirmishes and deaths in the streets of Cambridge itself' (HEC 241; Hoyle 2007, 224f).

The most dramatic event in Cambridge's wartime history came in early 1644, when Parliament empowered the Earl of Manchester to finally purge the university and all its colleges of royalists. All university members were required to swear the *Solemn League and Covenant for Reformation and Defence of Religion*, an oath loyalty to Parliamentary efforts to protect the reformed faith. Those who refused were ejected from their positions; in all, nearly half the total fellowship of the university was ejected (Hoyle 2007, 228). Samuel Dillingham, a fellow of Emmanuel contemporary with Smith and Cudworth, could not believe his luck when a careless parliamentary officer failed to call his name at the hearing of Emmanuel fellows; he had intended to refuse (BL Tanner MS 56, 240–1). The same Samuel Dillingham recalls contemptuously that Smith and Cudworth both took the covenant (BL Tanner MS 56, 242), but as John Tillotson remarked with admiration at Whichcote's funeral, Whichcote did not (Tillotson 1683, 23; Tulloch 1871, 49).

To fill the places of the large number of important positions that the purge had left vacant, Parliament handpicked men to be immediately elevated to these positions. As we might expect, Emmanuel men were very well-represented among Parliament's chosen replacements. In fact, nearly all the major characters on both sides of the controversy I trace in this study were elevated to new university positions as part of this process, including the Emmanuel Three (as we saw in brief biographies in chapter 1).

3.2 Emmanuel College: The Cradle of Puritanism

It would be hard to find a more characteristic illustration of the quiet but determined spirit of early Puritanism than the famous anecdote about the founding of Emmanuel College. Its founder, Sir Walter Mildmay (1520–1589) was a loyal public servant to Queen Elizabeth, but also a zealous Puritan at a time when the Church of England was still ill-disposed to Puritans.

When in 1583, he founded Emmanuel at Cambridge as the country's first ever Puritan college, the Queen is said to have remarked disapprovingly:

'Sir Walter, I hear you have erected a Puritan foundation', and his politic reply was, 'no, madam, far be it from me to countenance anything contrary to your established laws; but I have set an acorn which, when it becomes an oak, God alone knows what will be the fruit thereof' (quoted in Ford 2008, ODNB).

The Puritans were determined to bring about a full English Reformation, and they would do it without the Church's or the monarch's help if necessary, through a campaign of preaching, teaching and printing. But this quiet revolution would need eloquent, educated and energetic preachers to carry Reformed theology into the parishes and hearts of English Christians.

In this chapter, we will look at Emmanuel College's Puritan origins, with a view to understanding the theological temper of the college in the crucial period circa 1626–1644 when the Emmanuel Three resided there together.

3.2.1 The Emmanuel Race

Emmanuel College had been founded by Sir Walter Mildmay in 1584 as part of the Puritan program of reforming the English Church from within (Morgan 1986, 247–55). By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Puritans of Emmanuel had been a constant thorn in the side of the established church for decades. On liturgical matters like the wearing of surplices and kneeling at communion, the College stubbornly resisted the Church's prescriptions, and they had lingering qualms with the Church's official statements of doctrine.

The College had developed a particularly unfavourable reputation as a hotbed of Puritan discontent (HEC 176–86).

In 1603, King James I met with Puritan leaders in response to bold and incendiary petition they had made, purging the Church of England of its residual popish heresies and practices. The meeting was (predictably) unproductive, and in the aftermath, King James seems to have blamed Emmanuel College in particular for much of the Puritan unrest that had made it necessary. In his words, the incendiary petition that sparked the conference was the work of someone ‘so near of kin to Emmanuel as I shall distrust that race the more while I live’ (Hatfield MS XVI fol. 363, quoted HEC 180).

It is not insignificant that the king refers to Emmanuel men here as a ‘race’. The network of Puritan preachers, teachers and clergymen that formed around Emmanuel College was clan-like in more ways than one; closely connected by ties of blood and marriage. In their history of the College, Bendall, Brooke and Collinson refer to this network as the ‘godly Emmanuel mafia’ (HEC 186–98).

And this mafia had a formidable presence on the national stage. In all the major attempts by the Puritan community to pressure the state Church into line with Reformed doctrine, Emmanuel men had been front and centre. At the ‘Hampton Court Conference’ of 1603, one of the four Puritan representatives was Laurence Chaderton, the first Master of Emmanuel College, handpicked by Mildmay himself when the College first opened (Tyacke 1990, 9–11). Again, when the furore over Richard Montagu’s *New Gagge* broke out in the 1620s, resulting in the York House Conference of 1625, the leaders of Emmanuel College were once again at the heart of the proceedings. Emmanuel’s new Master John Preston

(Chaderton had resigned in 1622) was one of Montague's accusers, taking him to task for what Preston took to be a doctrine of conditional election, whereby God elected to salvation those whom he foresaw as having warranted it (Tyacke 1990, 177–80). And of course, when the Civil War finally afforded Puritans with their chance to enshrine Reformed doctrine as the official doctrine of the Church of England, Emmanuel men were exceedingly well represented in the ranks of the Westminster Assembly. In sum:

Emmanuel in its first half-century nourished a puritan élite, always a minority of the society as a whole, but a hugely important minority, composed in roughly equal numbers of future clerics and laymen, lawyers and magistrates, that formidable and mutually supportive combination of 'ministry and magistracy' which shaped the politics and culture of the English provinces in the decades preceding the Civil War and, almost incidentally, invented American civilization. (HEC 48)

Emmanuel was more than just a college: it was a central cog in the Puritan machine, one which played a crucial role in allowing the Puritan community to fulfil its mission of spreading Reformed Christianity throughout England.

3.2.2 Education at Emmanuel

What was it like to study at Emmanuel College? Every newly admitted student was entrusted to the care of a tutor, chosen from among the Fellows of the college (Lewis 2010, 78–87).

Precisely what a student read and studied depended largely on the discretion of the tutors and the College Lecturer, but the college statutes give us a broad idea:

What books are to be studied in each class, and in what manner they are to be expounded, we leave to the judgment of the Master and Dean. But if the Lecturer himself desire to expound some book (and this we enjoin him from time to time to do), he shall choose what book he likes from the works of Plato, Aristotle, or Cicero (Stubblings ed. 1983, 70).

More likely than not, students went through a mix of the standard scholastic curriculum with more humanistic component which involved wide reading of ancient historians, philosophers and rhetoricians (Ridley-Johnson 2016, 15–22). We get a further sense of the freeform nature of the educational program tutors delivered to their pupils from Richard Holdsworth's *Directions for a Student in the Universitie* (Fletcher 1961, 624–65).

But unlike the other colleges at Cambridge, Emmanuel required all its students to study theology and practice preaching. All members of the College to participate weekly in 'one disputation in sacred Theology, in which each in his turn shall be respondent; and there shall be two opponents, which place shall be filled by each Fellow in turn' (Stubblings ed. 1983, 60). This was the most concrete expression Emmanuel's unique status as Puritan seminary or training ground for preachers. The statutes explain:

... in establishing this College we have set before us this one aim, of rendering as many persons as possible fit for the sacred ministry of the Word and the sacraments; so that from this seminary the Church of England might have men whom it may call forth to instruct the people ... (Stubblings ed. 1983, 60).

Accordingly, the statutes also lay particular stress on the theological orthodoxy of its Fellows. Candidates for fellowship must ‘above all ... be professors of pure religion, contrary to Popery and other heresies, and such as have conformed their life and manners thereunto’ (ibid., 52). To this end, all prospective fellows were to be ‘examined’: ‘the Catechist, or his deputy, shall on the Master’s instruction put them to the test (if need be) in Theology and the true knowledge of God’ (ibid., 55).

Given Emmanuel College’s role as a Puritan seminary in this period, it is tempting to imagine that the college was an inviolable stronghold of uncompromising Calvinism. But it could not have been all that inviolable, for it also produced Whichcote, Smith and Cudworth, and their provocative anti-Calvinism, even as it continued to churn out defenders of Calvinist orthodoxy. As Bendall, Brooke and Collinson note in their history of the college, ‘The library was well stocked and nothing if not eclectic, including not only the Genevan works of John Calvin and Theodore Beza, but a representative collection of Lutheran authors ... as well as medieval scholastics (Aquinas) and Counter-Reformation controversialists (Bellarmine) ... the resources of the College certainly provided for theological diversity and originality, and this would come. Witness the intellectual trajectories of ... Ralph Cudworth, or Benjamin Whichcote. Many flowers could bloom in this soil.’ (HEC 204–5).

3.2.3 Pricking the Conscience

What sort of theology and preaching was Emmanuel founded to promote? Along with Christ’s College, Emmanuel was an intellectual and spiritual centre for a particular flavour of English Calvinism, exemplified by arguably the most influential preacher Puritanism ever produced: William Perkins (1558–1602). His doctrinal masterwork, *Armilla Aurea* (later translated as *The Golden Chaine*) became a standard, classical statement of English Calvinism. Perkins

himself belonged to Christ's college, but was a close friend of Emmanuel's first Master, Laurence Chaderton (Jenkins 2004, ODNB).

Perkins' theological legacy was kept alive at Emmanuel by Chaderton's successor as Master, John Preston, who was Master when Whichcote entered the college in 1626. He died in 1628, before Smith and Cudworth could have met him there, but there is no doubt that Preston was a titanic figure whose influence continued to be felt in subsequent decades not only in Emmanuel, but in the national (and international) Reformed community.

Preston had been a major contributor to Puritans' national efforts to defend double predestination and unconditional election. At the York House Conference of 1625, convened to censure Richard Montagu for his anti-Calvinist and anti-Puritan writings, Preston was one of the most prominent voices for the prosecution (Tyacke 1990, 177–80).

Accordingly, as Master of Emmanuel, he made a particular effort to train promising students into eloquent defenders of Calvinism. To this end, he relied heavily on his close friendship with the notable Puritan John Cotton (Moore 2004, ODNB). Throughout his tenure as Master, he sent gifted Emmanuel students to Cotton's house in Lincolnshire, which Cotton had turned into an 'informal seminary' (Bremer 2004, ODNB). As we shall see presently, Anthony Tuckney was one of the promising students accorded this honour.

Preston was only Master of Emmanuel for six years (1622–1628), but that was long enough for him to leave a profound mark on the College's theological atmosphere, particularly by connecting it to the Calvinist tradition of John Cotton.

The particular brand of Calvinism exemplified by Perkins, Cotton and Preston is known as federal or covenant theology. Its central idea was that God saves the elect by entering into a covenant relationship with them: as covenanted members of God's people through faith in Christ, the elect are graciously 'clothed' in Christ's righteousness and thus have their guilt wiped away. But membership also brings with it an expectation that one will strive to live a life of faith, not in order to earn or keep their place in the covenant — membership was a free and irrevocable gift — but as a means of accepting and acquiring the great benefits given them. As Ellen More describes it, this theology 'enabled Calvinist ministers to reconcile the iron decrees of predestination with the pastoral charge to stir up the faith of their flocks' (1982, 53).

Ironically, this emphasis on the believer's duty to 'make their election sure' by striving to live faithfully opened later covenant theologians to the charge of Arminianism, making salvation conditional on the free will choices (More 1982, 54). They refuted this charge, vigorously, by asserting that even though salvation is conditional on the believer's faith, this faith itself is given as a consequence of election; 'the Condition of the Covenant is also promised in the Covenant', wrote William Ames (quoted in von Rohr 1965, 201). Nonetheless, these two poles of covenant theology — absolute predestination on the one hand, and the duty to strive after holiness and faithfulness as a means of 'consenting' to one's election on the other — became a source of never abating tension in their religious framework (Tipson 2015, 345–68).

As we shall see, it was this tension that allowed preachers who rejected absolute predestination (like the Emmanuel Three) to maintain their Puritan identity by emphasising the struggle for holiness. They could preach as fervently as Perkins or Preston about a

believer's duty to 'make their election sure' by striving for virtue and conquering their passions. But their reticence and skepticism about the Calvinist pole — the parallel insistence that the power to make one's election sure is an irrevocable gift of heaven denied to all but the elect — brought them into conflict with more orthodox Puritans for whom unconditional, irrevocable election was an essential and non-negotiable doctrine of Protestantism.

(4) Emmanuel Puritans and Emmanuel Platonists

The broad historical background is in place: we have surveyed the Puritan struggle to reform the English Church from its beginnings in the late sixteenth century as an effective, grassroots program of preaching, to its dizzying and sudden rise to supremacy at the Westminster Assembly in the 1640s. We have also become acquainted with Emmanuel College, an institution at the heart of the Puritan movement from its very beginnings, and one which supplied many of the main actors on the national stage when Puritanism became the law of church and state.

The last piece of the historical puzzle requires us to zoom in even closer to the Emmanuel Three and ask some very precise questions. I have said that this study approaches the Emmanuel Three's Platonism as an outlook on God and goodness developed in opposition to a rival outlook represented by the Calvinist doctrine Emmanuel College had been founded to preserve. My goal throughout will be to develop a picture of both the Emmanuel Three's Platonism and of the Calvinism they rejected from the works and personalities in whom they are most likely to have encountered it.

To that end, there are three things this last background chapter must achieve. First, it will acquaint us with the 'Puritan old guard': the prominent Puritans at Cambridge,

represented mostly by Tuckney, who took issue with the learned and ingenious men in Whichcote's circle. These men will help us to understand the Calvinism the Emmanuel Three rejected. In the next section (4.2), we will consider to the origins of the Platonism they embraced by trying to identify the earliest exposure to something explicitly called 'Platonism' that Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith were likely to have had; we will see that there were at least three older men in their immediate circle — two at Emmanuel, and one at Christ's — who considered themselves Platonists, and who are likely to have shared and encouraged the Emmanuel Three's interest in both ancient and Renaissance Platonists. The last thing that this chapter will do is establish the biographical connections between Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith; this is an important piece of the puzzle, because in addition to the earlier, more nebulous group of 'Platonists', it is likely that the greatest source of the Emmanuel Three's Platonic inspiration was their friendship with each other.

4.1 The Emmanuel Puritans

In addition to the classic texts of Reformed theology — works by Luther, Calvin, Beza, along with English divines like William Perkins and Emmanuel's own John Preston — the Emmanuel Three would have encountered the Calvinism against which they eventually rebelled in the thought and character of their older Emmanuel contemporaries. This is crucial to understanding the Emmanuel Three's polemical situation: the Calvinist ideas and arguments they challenge below were not simply things they encountered in books; we will see that they were defended by prominent Puritans in the Emmanuel Three's immediate circle of acquaintances from Emmanuel and the wider university community.

A good way to identify likely candidates for the preachers whose ideas the Emmanuel Three were attacking is to look for the Puritans who seemed to be offended and troubled the most by their preaching. We have no explicit evidence of any Puritan complaints about Smith or Cudworth's preaching (although I argue below that they are the unnamed targets of several complaints in Tuckney's letters). But the Whichcote-Tuckney correspondence provides an invaluable window into the uneasiness about Whichcote's preaching, and who was feeling it.

4.1.1 Anthony Tuckney

Let us begin with Tuckney himself. Tuckney — ten years Whichcote's elder — belonged to an older generation of Emmanuel men. He entered the college in 1613 and was elected fellow in 1619 (Collinson 2008, ODNB). When a seventeen year old Whichcote entered Emmanuel in 1626, the twenty-seven year old Tuckney had already been a fellow of the college for eight years. For three years, Tuckney served as Whichcote's tutor, before leaving in 1629 when Emmanuel's master — none other than John Preston — sent him to be mentored by John Cotton the latter's house in Lincolnshire (Wester 1997, 246). Tuckney made such an impression there that when Cotton left for New England, 'the Corporation of *Boston* chose Mr. Tuckney ... into his place: and he kept this Vicarage, at their request, till the Restoration ...' (Salter's preface to the *Eight Letters* in EL, iii).

In 1645, Parliament installed Tuckney as Master of Emmanuel. But his appointment was only nominal at first: Parliament exempted Tuckney from the requirement of residency in Cambridge to allow him to live in London and serve on the Westminster Assembly, where he played a particularly important role in putting together that body's official statements of faith (Tulloch 1874, 54). Tuckney only moved back to Emmanuel as a resident in 1648 (Collinson 2008, ODNB; Greene 1981, 232). When he did, he found his old student Benjamin Whichcote

greatly changed, and mostly not for the better; his misgivings about Whichcote's views and preaching eventually erupt in their 1651 exchange of letters.

4.1.2 Hill, Arrowsmith and Burgess

In the first sentence of his opening letter, Tuckney explains that he has been compelled to write to Whichcote 'Because I understand, that Mr. *Cradock* [one of Whichcote's pupils] was pleased, not long since, to say; (He knows, to whom;) that some of Us deal disingenuously with you: in speaking against some of your Tenents; without dealing with you in private' (EL 1). The 'some of Us' are left unnamed, but the implication is clear: Tuckney and some associates of his have been harbouring deep concerns about Whichcote's preaching which they have been discussing heatedly among themselves, without approaching Whichcote directly. Tuckney is writing now to clear the air.

At the start of his reply, Whichcote mentions two names — without prompting — in a way that strongly suggests they number (along with Tuckney) among those reported to have been speaking against Whichcote's views. These names are 'Dr. Hill' (who had at one time been in 'the relation of Tutor to me'), and 'Dr. Arrowsmith, though not in that relation [of tutor] to me; a later acquaintance indeed, but my friend of choice' (EL 6–7).

'Dr Hill' clearly refers Thomas Hill, who served as Whichcote's tutor at Emmanuel after Tuckney. As a younger man Hill, along with Tuckney had been handpicked by then Master of Emmanuel John Preston to train with renowned preacher John Cotton (HEC, 193–4; Wester 1997, 246). After earning his degrees at Emmanuel (BA 1623, MA 1626, BD 1633), he served in various capacities outside the university, before finally coming back after the Parliamentary purge to take up a university position. At first, it seemed that he was to become Master of his old college, but he ended up at as Master of Trinity instead, while

Tuckney became Master of Emmanuel (Knighton 2004, ODNB). Along with Tuckney, he served on the Westminster Assembly.

Dr Arrowsmith is John Arrowsmith, educated first at St John's (1616–23) and then at St Catharine's (1623–31), before leaving the university to serve in various parishes (Twigg 2004, ODNB). He did not return to Cambridge until 1644, to take up the vacant mastership of St John's College. This is probably why Whichcote calls him a 'later acquaintance': he would not have become acquainted with Arrowsmith until his return to Cambridge in 1644, when they both found themselves as heads of colleges. Along with Tuckney and Hill, he sat on the Westminster Assembly.

Although Arrowsmith was renowned for the sweetness of his temper in personal conversation, he was, in doctrinal matters, rather dogmatic and intolerant (Tulloch 1874, 56). In the words of Samuel Salter, Arrowsmith was 'a very learned and able, but a stiff and narrow Divine' (EL xxxiii). He was an opponent of religious toleration, and his Parliamentary sermons over the 1640s reveal a 'mounting concern about the rise of religious sects and parliament's unwillingness to suppress them' (Twigg 2004, ODNB). His preaching and teaching at Cambridge expressed the same concern: 'Verily this famous University is likely to continue famous', he once remarked in a lecture, 'so long as it continueth orthodox ... so long as we teach, to the praise of the glory of free grace, the love of God in electing freely what persons he will' (1659, 356–7).

There is one last person worth mentioning in this category, even though Whichcote does not name him. Anthony Burgess had come to Emmanuel from St John's in 1627/8 and was an Emmanuel fellow from 1629–35, making him a fellow contemporary with Whichcote

(Vernon 2004, ODNB). Along with Tuckney, Hill and Arrowsmith, Burgess had sat on the Westminster Assembly, and preached frequently for Parliament (ibid).

Certainly, Whichcote and Burgess knew each other well enough; in a letter, Burgess calls Whichcote a ‘loving and much-Honoured Friend’ (Burgess to John Wallis 12/22 Feb 1655/6, Beeley & Scriba 2003, vol. 1, 174). I include him here because unlike Thomas Hill, Burgess left behind a great wealth of sermons and theological treatises that provide valuable insight into the kind of Calvinist theology espoused by the Emmanuel Three’s immediate contemporaries. Given his theological orientation and his association with Tuckney and Arrowsmith, he is very likely to have been among the old friends of Whichcote concerned by his anti-Calvinism.

4.2 The Origins of Cambridge Platonism

So much for the important Calvinists of the Emmanuel Three’s immediate circle. What about the Platonic outlook I intend to argue they shared? Where, when and from whom did they pick it up? According to James D. Roberts, the 1651 controversy between Tuckney and Whichcote ‘marks the real beginning of the movement known as Cambridge Platonism’ (1968, 50). But as Staudenbaur quite fairly points out, this date is far too late. For one, if Roberts is right, ‘the period of germination was exceedingly short since one of the Platonists, John Smith, died less than a year later, in August 1652’ (1974, 160). Staudenbaur suspects that Roberts only chooses this late date ‘because he has no earlier record of Whichcote’s thought’, but remarks that nonetheless, ‘it is impossibly late as the beginning of the movement’, especially given that ‘[s]ome nine years earlier, in 1642, both More and Cudworth published works of Platonic inspiration’; we must therefore ‘seek the origins of the movement prior to 1642’ (1974, 160).

Robert Crocker notes that whereas Henry More ‘has left us a fairly comprehensive sample of his correspondence’, making it relatively to easy identify ‘friends, colleagues and admirers, who shared much of his religious and intellectual disposition’, ‘we know very little of those who might have played a similar role in the lives of Whichcote, Smith and even Cudworth’ (Crocker 2003, xviii). The detective work in these chapters is intended to shed some light on this question, however meagrely.

The question then becomes: can we identify any potential sources of ‘Platonic inspiration’ that may have influenced Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith prior to 1642? I suggest that the evidence (disappointingly scarce though it is) allows us to identify three likely sources of Platonic inspiration, not mutually exclusive: the first is Henry More, and the second is a more nebulous group of men interested in Platonism centred at Emmanuel College. The third is the mutual influence of the Emmanuel Three upon each other, which will be the focus of the rest of the thesis. First, however, we must return to the all-important account of Whichcote’s early university life provided by Tuckney’s letters.

4.2.1 ‘Learned and Ingenious Men’

In Tuckney’s correspondence with Whichcote in 1651, he refers twice to a group of scholars who seem to have gathered themselves around Whichcote, and whom Whichcote seems (in the view of some) to ‘head’.

In his second letter, Tuckney assures Whichcote that he still considers him a dear friend, but explains his concern (and of his colleagues Hill and Arrowsmith) as follows:

we fear, the truth of Christ, much dearer than dear friendes, hath bin and may be prejudiced; and so young ones in the universitie tainted, and others greeved, by a veine of doctrine; which runnes up and down in manie of Your discourses, and [in those] of some others of verie great worth; whom We verie much honour, and whom You head, as some think; though, for this last particular I verily think otherwise. (EL 18)

Three details are essential to note here about these ‘others’. First, Tuckney sees a certain ‘veine of doctrine’ expressed both in Whichcote’s discourses and the works of these other men; a major aim of this thesis is to identify this vein of doctrine in the early works of Smith and Cudworth, so we will leave this aside for now. Second, these others are not out-and-out troublemakers or *personae non gratae* in the Puritan community; on the contrary, like Whichcote, they are men of ‘verie great worth’ — generally well-respected, despite their unorthodox opinions. Lastly, and most intriguingly, Tuckney implies that there is an impression — presumably among those who disapprove of Whichcote’s views — that Whichcote is ‘heading’ this theologically suspect group; Tuckney himself, however, disagrees with this impression. Long before modern scholars of Cambridge Platonism debated Whichcote’s status as the ‘founding father’ of the school, Tuckney was agreeing with Staudenbaur that Whichcote was not the movement’s originator.

But still, this last remark is cryptic; why does Tuckney bother to mention that ‘some’ think Whichcote is heading this problematic association of divines if he himself does not believe it? The picture becomes clearer when we read this remark alongside the account Tuckney gives in the same letter of Whichcote’s development from a promising, impressionable student into a good-hearted man but imprecise preacher. To anticipate,

Tuckney strongly implies that during his absence, Whichcote fell under the influence of certain other men who are ultimately responsible for his controversial views. In light of this account, we should interpret Tuckney's insistence that he does not himself believe Whichcote to be the ringleader of the group as an indication that he holds others responsible for leading him astray. For our purposes though, whether Whichcote was the 'head' of this group, or merely fell under their influence as Tuckney suggests, is not important. The key thing is that whoever these men were, they are likely to have been an essential part of the intellectual and discursive network that gave birth to Cambridge Platonism.

Let us turn then to Tuckney's account of Whichcote's transformation for clues as to who he thinks these others might be. Recalling his time as the teenage Whichcote's tutor, Tuckney writes: '[F]rom your first coming to Cambridge ... I loved you: as finding you then studious and pious, and very loving and observant of me. I remember, I then thought you somewhat cloudie and obscure in your expressions: but then I left you' (EL 36). Tuckney 'left' Whichcote in 1629, when he moved to the house of the legendary Puritan John Cotton in Boston (Collinson 2008, ODNB). He would not return to Cambridge (except for brief visits) until 1648.

Tuckney goes on to tell Whichcote what he has since 'heard' about Whichcote's development during his absence. First, he has been told that when Whichcote 'came to be Lecturer in the colledge, you in a great measure for the yeare laid-aside other studies; and betook yourself to Philosophie and Metaphysicks: which, some think, you were then so immersed in; that ever since you have bin cast into that mould' (EL 37–8). If what Tuckney

has heard is true, then we can date this philosophical awakening to Whichcote's stint as a lecturer in Emmanuel from 1641–3.²¹

Either way, when Tuckney returned in 1648, he found Whichcote greatly changed, and not for the better. He blames the transformation on the influence of certain 'learned and ingenious men' who read Plato more than Holy Scripture:

Whilist you were fellow here, you were cast into the companie of very learned and ingenious men; who, I fear at least some of them, studyed other authors, more than the scriptures; and Plato and his schollars, above others ... (EL 38)

Regrettably, as we saw earlier, Tuckney does not name any of these learned and ingenious men. He does however, give us a long list of problematic views which these men have become, at the time of his writing in 1651, notorious for defending:

And hence in part hath runne a veine of doctrine; which divers very able and worthy men, whom from my heart I much honour, are I fear, too much knowen by. — The power of Nature, in Morals, too much advanced — Reason hath too much given to itt, in the mysteries of Faith ... — Mind and Understanding is all; Heart and Will little spoken of. — The decrees of God quaestion'd and quarrel'd; because, according to our reason, wee cannot comprehend; how they may stand with His goodness: which, according to your phrase, Hee is *under the power of*. — Those Philosophers, and other Heathens, made fairer candidates for Heaven; than the

²¹ The College Bursar's Book records payments to Whichcote as a lecturer in the college (in different subjects) from during these years. Many thanks to Emmanuel Library's Helen Carron (librarian) and Amanda Goode (archivist) for allowing me to consult it.

scriptures seeme to allow of ... A kinde of Moral Divinitie minted; onlie with a little tincture of Christ added: nay, a Platonique faith unites to God. — Inherent righteousnesse so preached, as if not with the prejudice of imputed righteousness, which hath sometimes verie unseemlie language given it; yet much said of the one and very little or nothing of the other ... — This inherent righteousness may be perfect in this life. — An Estate of Love, in this life; above a life of Faith ... (EL 38–9)

The question then, is this: who at Emmanuel College while Whichcote was a fellow espoused these views, openly and notoriously enough for it to become the talk of the university community?

To sum up, Tuckney's account gives us a number of clues about the learned and ingenious men who corrupted Whichcote's faith into a sort of Puritanism: (1) Whichcote fell into their influence 'whilst he was a fellow' of Emmanuel, meaning between 1633 and 1643, long before 1651 and well before Parliament made him Provost of King's; (2) they were eager readers of 'Plato and his scholars'; (3) they promoted a 'vein of doctrine' with all the characteristics listed above.

So, who were these learned and ingenious men, who studied Plato more than Scripture, and taught a vein of doctrine which includes a 'Platonique faith' that unites us to God? In what follows, I suggest three likely candidates, not mutually exclusive. One is Henry More. The second is a group Emmanuel men including, but not necessarily limited to, Peter Sterry, John Sadler and Laurence Sarson. The last and most important set of candidates I leave to 4.3: Ralph Cudworth and John Smith.

4.2.2 Henry More, Platonist

I think it is beyond dispute that one of the learned and ingenious men Tuckney has in mind here is Henry More (see especially 7.3.4 below). By 1651, More was already an open and notorious Platonist and anti-Calvinist, having published his *Psychodia Platonica* or *Platonick Song of the Soul* in 1642. In a polemical tract published in 1651 (the same year as the Whichcote-Tuckney controversy), More suggests that his Platonism has become something of a talking point; he imagines people asking one another, ‘What think you of *More of Christ’s*, that writ the *Platonick Poems*? Nay, what think you of *Platonisme* it self?’ (1651, 36).

In fact, the phrasing of one of Tuckney’s doctrinal complaints singles out More as an explicit target. When Tuckney writes that Whichcote’s learned and ingenious friends hold that ‘a Platonique faith unites to God’ (EL 38), he seems to have lifted the words directly out of More’s ‘*Platonick Poems*’. In More’s *Second Lash* (which Tuckney had evidently been reading; see 7.3.4 below), he quotes a verse of his poem *Psychathanasia* which includes the following lines:

But yet, my Muse, still take an higher flight,
Sing of Platonick Faith in the first *Good*,
That Faith that doth our souls to God unite ...

(More 1651, 37; quoting *Psychathanasia* III.4.14 *Poems* 84f).

As part of his argument that Whichcote could not have founded Cambridge Platonism, and was in fact converted to such Platonism as he held by Henry More, Staudenbaur notes that

‘while More cannot be named as the sole or primary anti-Calvinist influence in the University in the 1640s, he apparently was the only recognised Platonist during that period’ (1974, 162).

In support of this view, Staudenbaur cites More’s complaint to Thomas Vaughan that Vaughan’s writings were giving Platonism a bad name, which concerned him because ‘no body else besides us two [is] dealing with these kinds of notions’ and so people might start to ‘yoke me with so disordered a companion as yourself’ (More 1651, 35; Staudenbaur 1974, 162, note 37).

We will see in the next section why it is far from certain that More was the only recognised Platonist in the period, but his avowed Platonism certainly makes him an attractive candidate for one of Tuckney’s learned and ingenious Platonisers. We have, moreover, some indications that the More was in touch with the Emmanuel Three around this time. We know that Cudworth and More were close colleagues already by the end of the 1640s, because More mentions that his famous correspondence with René Descartes was undertaken largely at Cudworth’s urging (Hartlib 18/1/1A). In his preface to John Smith’s *Select Discourses*, John Worthington (who, as a good friend of both More and Smith, was in a good place to know) mentions in passing that Henry More was ‘One whom our Author highly esteem’d’ (SD xxii). In addition, we now have Tuckney implying very strongly that More has been a bad influence on Whichcote.

4.2.3 John Sadler, Peter Sterry and Laurence Sarson

It is often remarked that Henry More was the first to openly associate himself with Platonism in Cambridge in this period, with his *Psychodia Platonica* published in 1642 (Staudenbaur 1974, 160; Crocker 2003, 12). But evidence for an even earlier source of Platonic inspiration comes from a pair of stray reminiscences in a miscellany of historical particulars about

Emmanuel College collected by Thomas Baker (1656–1740), now filed as Harleian MS 7033.

In a list of brief biographical profiles of Emmanuel fellows, we find two consecutive entries which I reproduce here in full:

Peter Sterry born in Surrey – made Fellow Apr:6:1636. When B.D. he was one of Oliver’s Chaplains, a high flown mysticall Divine. After the King’s Restoration he held a Conventicle at London. He & Sadler hereafter mention’d were the first that were observ’d to make a public Profession of Platonism in the Univer: of Cambridge

John Sadler – born Sussex, Mr of Chancery, Town Clerk of London, & Mr of Magd: Coll: was elected Fellow 17:Jan:1638: When A:B: he maintain’d a Position stuffed with Platonism, & Quotations from the Rabbins. He was one of the three excepted in the Act of oblivion, upon a Book w^{ch} he had printed, entitled, The Rights of the Kingdom. He was Author of The Discourse of Truth &c: (BL Harl MS 7033, fol. 84 verso)

This is a fairly clear indication that something decidedly ‘Platonic’ was happening at Emmanuel College.²²

²² In unpublished but valuable research held in the Emmanuel College Library, independent scholar Vivienne Lake quotes a line from the *Memoirs of William Dillingham* which strongly resembles a line in Baker’s notes: it has been ‘... remark’d that he [Sterry] and one Sadler were the first who were observ’d to make public profession of Platonism in the University of Cambridge’ (Lake [undated], 49). Notably, the first two words of Lake’s quotation contains two words — ‘remark’d that’ — which do not appear in Baker’s notes. This suggests that these *Memoirs* (which I have been sadly unable to locate at the time of writing) may have been Baker’s source.

In both cases, there is no need to rely on Baker's testimony to establish of either man's interest in Platonism. Sterry's debt to Platonism is overt and well-documented by scholars: his many published works contain many marks of the influence of, and often explicit references to Renaissance Platonists of Florence and the later ancient Platonists (Pinto 1930, 387, 393f; Wallace 2011, 58–62). In Sarah Hutton's view, 'Sterry's Platonism is clearly influenced by Ficino. Other Platonist sources cited by him include Proclus, Nicolas of Cusa, Leone Ebreo ... he appears, like More, to have subscribed to the belief in a Platonic/Pythagorean heritage of philosophy' (Hutton 2006, 3040).

Sadler has received far less attention. He was an Emmanuel contemporary (and likely a friend, as we shall see) of both Cudworth and Whichcote, and commanded enough respect in the Puritan community to be appointed Master of Magdalene College in the purge of 1644 (Greaves 2007, ODNB). His few published works reveal an esoteric and eccentric personality (for instance, he is reputed to have prophesied the Fire of London four years prior to 1666); in the words of one historian, 'His contemporaries thought him somewhat of a lunatic' (Shuckburgh 1904, 85).

At any rate, in 1640, he published a masque titled *Masquarade du ciel* that reveals him, at that point, as already a great reader of 'Plato and his scholars'. The masque presents an allegorical tale based on the positions and motions of heavenly bodies in 1639 and 1640.²³ The masque itself seems mostly recount the political upheavals surrounding the Bishops' Wars in Scotland in those years but in a lengthy postscript, Sadler presents an erudite account of traditional philosophical, poetic and alchemical symbolisms attached to Saturn, Jupiter and

²³ Thomas Hodges mentions this work in a letter to William Sancroft the younger dated 8 February 1640: 'Mr Sadler hath set forth two books lately one of my Lord Brookes of the nature of truth, & the other of his owne a Masque it is & represents the passages of 1639. & 1640 under the names & motions of the Plannets' (Bodleian Tanner MS 65, fol. 73).

Mercury (the main actors of his masque). Of all these, however, he singles out the ‘Platonick’ significance of these bodies as being, in his opinion, ‘of all Allegories ... seems most Divine’ (1640, 30).

He also reveals the extent to which he has been reading ‘Plato and his scholars’ when he gives a short reading list for those who want learn more about his sources for the Platonic elements of his masque:

Any Materiall Thing of This *Platonick* Discourse (or Paraphrase on *Poeticall Divinity*) may cleerely be Found in *Plotinus* of the *Three Hypostases*: in Proclus on *Parmenid*, and *Timeus* also His *Theologia Platonica*. Marsilius Ficin. on *Plato’s Cratylus, Mines, Gorgias, & Politicus*: with *Plato’s Epistles*. Mirandula *De Ente & Vno*. Ficin. *De Immortal, Anim. & on Plotinus*. Rossell. on *Pymander, &c.* (1640, 33).

Particularly notable here are Plotinus’ *Enneads* (cited endlessly by Smith and Cudworth) and Proclus’ commentary on the *Timaeus* (so frequently cited by Smith), along with the Florentine Platonists Ficino and Pico della Mirandola who are a noted influence on Peter Sterry (Pinto, Hutton and Wallace op. cit.), and likely, as we shall see, on the Emmanuel Three.

So Sterry and Sadler’s works both reveal wide reading in and great fondness for classic texts late ancient and Florentine Platonism. The key question is, when did Sadler and Sterry discover their shared love Platonism? Sterry’s relatively short stay at Cambridge gives us a fairly clear *post* and *ante quem* (blue indicates election to the fellowship):

	1626	1627	1628	1629	1630	1631	1632	1633	1634	1635	1636	1637	1638	1639	1640	1641	1642	1643
Sterry													?					
Sadler																	?	?

Figure 1: Sterry and Sadler

Sterry entered Emmanuel College in 1629, three years after Whichcote. He proceeded BA in 1633 and MA in 1637, when he was also elected a fellow. But by 1638, he had left Cambridge to accompany the Puritan Robert Greville, Lord Brooke as his chaplain (Pinto 1930, 387; Wallace 2011, 54–5). Sadler entered Emmanuel College as a pensioner in 1630 (BA 1634, MA 1638) was elected fellow in 1639 (Greaves 2007, ODNB). His movements after 1641 are unclear, but takes up a Parliamentary appointment as the Master of Magdalene in 1644.²⁴ The key point is that Sterry and Sadler had gone their separate ways by 1638, when Sterry left Cambridge behind for good.

If the two men developed their interest in Platonism together, we should look to the earlier period circa 1630–37 for its origins. And indeed, there are indications that Sadler and Sterry exerted Platonic influence on one another. That the two were friends is suggested by the fact that when Sterry left to become Greville’s chaplain, he appears to have left his fellowship to Sadler.²⁵ The two also appear to have remained in intellectual contact; otherwise, it is hard to conceive how Sadler ended up penning the preface to Robert Greville’s discourse on *The Nature of Truth*. Published in 1641, Greville’s discourse shows great

²⁴ Sadler appears to have left Cambridge to pursue a career as a lawyer in the early 1640s (Greaves 2007, ODNB; Lake [undated], 49), although this appears to be contradicted by the College Bursar’s book which records payments made to Sadler as a Lecturer through 1643 and 1644.

²⁵ In a letter from Emmanuel student William Sancroft (future archbishop) to his brother from late 1637, Sadler is mentioned as the person most likely to inherit Sterry’s pupils should he leave the college (presumably, Sterry had begun to make arrangements to join the Lord Brooke): Mr Sterry hath turnd over all his pupils & given them leave to chuse other tutours, & ‘tis daily expected wn he should give over his fellowship. phaps ‘tis done already, though conceald, for Mr Sadler is come to the [illegible] uppon it. (Bodl. Tanner MS 70, fol. 164). The phrase is cryptic (not helped by an unfortunately placed illegible word), but Sancroft evidently suspects some quiet arrangement has already been made that would see Sadler inherit Sterry’s fellowship.

affinities to Sterry's own thought, unsurprising given that Sterry had been his chaplain for three years by that time (Strider 1958, 135–7). However, the preface to this discourse is written by a certain 'I. S.' whom we have at least two good reasons to suspect was in fact John Sadler. The first reason is that John Wallis (who would have known Sadler and Sterry from his own time at Emmanuel [1632–40]) wrote a polemical response to the discourse, in which he repeatedly identifies the author of the preface as 'Mr Sadler' (Wallis 1643, 7; 33; 99; Strider 1958, 88–9). The second reason is that Baker's biographical notes identify Sadler, mistakenly it would seem, as the author of 'The Discourse of Truth', even though no such work was ever published under his name (BL Harl MS 7033, fol. 84 verso).

So in addition to Baker's evidence and the clear references to Platonism in the published works of Sterry and Sadler, we have the *Discourse of Truth* of 1641, bearing Sterry's clear Platonising influence and Sadler's preface. Their interest in Platonism would seem to have been part of what connected the two men; the most likely time for this bonding over Platonism to have taken place was the period they spent together at Emmanuel from 1630 to late 1637. It is worth noting that Whichcote and Sterry were lifelong friends; Whichcote preached Sterry's funeral sermon.²⁶ Sadler and Whichcote also appear to have been well-acquainted as fellows of Emmanuel.²⁷ As we will see at various intervals below, Sadler's *Masquarade* contains some clear assertions of the philosophical the metaethical naturalism I argue is central to the Emmanuel Three's common Platonic outlook.

²⁶ On Sterry and Whichcote's friendship, see Sterry 1710, i and Pinto 1930, 387. In the letter mentioned in previous note, Sancroft also mentions that Whichcote saved the absent-minded Sterry from losing £3 due to a scribal error (Bodl. Tanner MS 70, fol. 164).

²⁷ A 1640 letter from Emmanuel pupil Thomas Hodges mentions the journey of a group of Emmanuel fellows to London, but names only two: 'the Mr & 3 Seniors & Mr Whichcote & Mr Sadler' (Bodl. Tanner MS 65, fol. 73). Furthermore, in a dispute about John Worthington's fellowship in late 1641/early 1642, Whichcote and Cudworth wrote a strongly worded petition in favour of Worthington's election that was signed by John Sadler along with another fellow named John Almond (*Diary* I:12–15; Shuckburgh 1904, 90f; Rogers 1997, 8–9).

One last figure worth mentioning before we take stock of this earlier Emmanuel Platonism is Laurence Sarson. Little is known about Sarson; he certainly knew Whichcote, Cudworth and Sadler (and probably Sterry) as Emmanuel fellow, but there is no clear, independent evidence that he remained close with any of them.²⁸ I mention him, however, because in 1645, he publishes an *Analysis of 1 Timothy 1:15* in which he gives a philosophical account of prophecy that draws explicitly on Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis*, Plotinus' *Enneads*, and Marsilio Ficino (Sarson 1645, 44–5) and bears similarities to Smith's *Discourse on Prophecy* (SD 169–281). Sarson draws his inspiration unapologetically from Plato as a source of divine wisdom, citing the famous passage in the *Republic* where Plato insists that we can only apprehend the Good itself through the mediation of the 'offspring' of the Good (*Rep.* 507e—508e). Commenting on this passage, Sarson writes:

Almost each word is big with a deity. *The sonne of the chief good!* and *whom the chief good hath begotten!* and *begotten like to himself!* and *who is that to the mind and things intelligible, which the sunne to the sight and visible objects!* and *that sunne in an intelligible world, as this in the visible!* He could not speak more clearly that there is a Sonne of God; or that this Sonne of God is God; or that by him mankind is illustrated. Platonists had as good reason to conceive that S. John was one of their tribe from the ninth as from the first verse of the first chapter of his Gospel (1645, 52).

²⁸ In the 1641 dispute about Worthington's fellowship, Sarson reluctantly opposed Worthington's election based on a misinterpretation of one of the College Statutes, and recommended a candidate he considered far inferior. However, he changed his mind and heartily supported Worthington after Whichcote and Cudworth paid him a visit in his chambers and corrected his misreading (Worthington, *Diary* I, 15–16). Sarson mentions both Cudworth and Whichcote in a 1641/4 letter to William Sancroft (Bodl. Tanner MS 61, fol. 293).

Sarson certainly has the appearance of someone studied ‘Plato and his schollars ... more than the scripture’ (EL 38), as Tuckney might say.

It is probably worth mentioning too that in a letter to William Sancroft (from either 1641 or 1644), Sarson makes the following marginal comment: ‘I become a Platonist conceive the bodie scarce worthy to bee reckoned pt of a man’ (Bodl. Tanner MS 61, fo. 293). The context of the remark makes it difficult to determine whether Sarson intends this as a report of his convictions based on recent reading, or simply a figure of speech expressing his weariness (I have provided the context in a footnote for the reader to make up their own mind).²⁹

It seems then that A. R. Hall is mistaken when he concludes that while ‘the Christ’s men [More and Cudworth] studied such authors as Marsilio Ficino and Cardano ... their Emmanuel predecessors had not done so’ (Hall 1990, 58). We have seen that the early, published works of at least two Emmanuel men (Sarson and Sadler) betray a clear familiarity and fondness for both Renaissance and late antique Platonists; their influence upon Sturges is also clear, though less explicit. That is not including Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith, whose Platonic influence we are to consider below.

Hall downplays the influence of Platonist philosophical texts on the Emmanuel men by pointing out that the college and university libraries were not well-stocked with Platonic writers: ‘It is not even clear how Whichcote enabled his pupils to read “Plato and his scholars’

²⁹ ‘I much desire & expect your returne to Camebridge. Dayes and nights, houres and minutes are longe to me. I become a Platonist conceive the bodie scarce worthy to bee reckoned pt of a man. Mine serveth duram servitutea, whilst by converseing with the dead, I endeavour to compensate my wante of companie with the liveing. Presente my respects to the Fathers & Brethren ...’ (Bodl. Tanner MS 61, fol. 293).

since none of the relevant works had yet been printed in England and no copies of the continental editions are recorded as being present in Cambridge libraries in Whichcote’s time’ (Hall 1990, 58). But this ignores the great quantity of books that we know were circulating privately between Emmanuel students at this time.³⁰

4.2.3 Early Cambridge Platonism, c. 1635–40

To take stock, let us put all these candidates for Tuckney’s learned and ingenious Platonisers together on a timeline to see when they might have had the chance to influence Whichcote (a change in colour along a row indicates the year in which the person became a fellow; More is in red to distinguish him from the others who are all Emmanuel men):

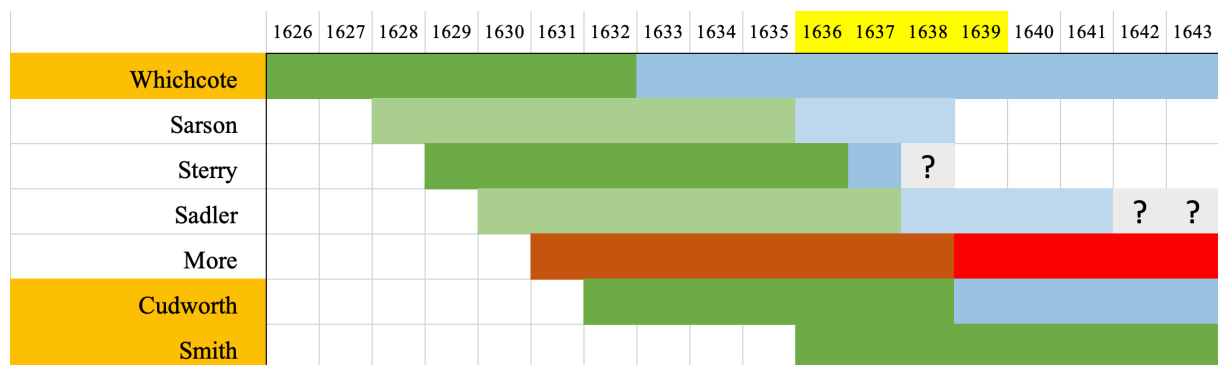


Figure 2: Early Cambridge Platonists

The ‘boiling point’ seems to be around 1636–39. Consider some notable happenings in this period. Around 1635 (if we follow Crocker’s persuasive reasoning), Henry More becomes disillusioned with his scholastic education and discovers ‘the Platonick writers’ including ‘Marsilius Ficinus’ and ‘Plotinus himself’, who guide him during an intense spiritual awakening over 1636–40 (Crocker 2003, 4–6). More’s *Psychodia Platonica* (1642), a song of ‘Platonick faith’ that unites the soul to God through divine illumination, is the fruit of this awakening.

³⁰ On the sorts of books floating around Emmanuel apart from those stocked in the library, see Bodl. Tanner MS 61, 208; Beeley & Scriba 2003, vol. 3, 2; Carter 2011, 14–18; Ridley-Johnson 2016, 32;

In 1638 or 39, over at Emmanuel, Ralph Cudworth (on the cusp of becoming a fellow) writes a letter to his father-in-law John Stoughton, in which we find powerful indications of a similarly ‘Platonick faith’:

[God’s] bosome is ἀληθῆς ψυχῶν πατρις [the true homeland of souls] as the Platonists speake, and hee is the end of all knowledge and learning, the beholding of him the end of all Philosophy saith Plato, tanquam ἐπόπτεια τῆς τελετῆς [the highest level of initiation] to which that divine Heathen thought to sublimate his soule by Mathematicall Abstractions ... (Solly 1856, 288; cf. Smith, SD 11f).

In the same correspondence, Cudworth describes a desire to experience ‘the deepest degree of holy annihilation’, ‘being swallowed up in [God]’ and ‘loosing the little drop’ of his own being ‘in the vast ocean of our eternall God’ (Solly 1856, 290). In the next decade, we will find exactly this sort of language in works by Henry More (1651, 43–4) and John Smith (SD 20). Not only that, but in a 1656 sermon, only five years after the controversy with Whichcote, Tuckney will remark disapprovingly of certain ‘high-flown Platonists of our times’ who ‘say that by their divine contemplations they are abstracted from their own dark personality, their humanity annihilated, and they swallowed up in the profound abyss of the Divinity into which they are wholly transported’ (Tuckney 1676, 225). Part of this description is modelled on a passage from a book of Henry More’s published in 1651, which Tuckney evidently read (7.3.4). But Cudworth is already using this language in private correspondence in 1638/9.

In 1636, a young John Smith arrives at Emmanuel College and becomes a pupil of Benjamin Whichcote, who is so impressed with his abilities that he covers his financial costs for a time (SD vi; Ridley-Johnson 2016, 12).

And one small, final detail worthy of notice: the Emmanuel College Bursar's book records the following payments for library keeper over 1637–39:

Oct 18 1637 ... To Mr Sadler library keeper

Apr 4 1638 ... To Mr Sadler library keeper

Oct 17 1638 ... To Mr Cudworth librarie keeper

Apr 27 1639 ... Mr Cudworth Lib Keeper (Emmanuel College Bursar's Book)³¹

So at the same time that More was discovering the Platonists writers, and just before Cudworth wrote his letters full of 'high-flown Platonism', John Sadler handed over the duty of library keeper to Ralph Cudworth.

All this evidence is, of course, circumstantial; there are no smoking guns here. But the works of Sarson, Sadler and Sterry (not to mention Baker's recollection of these latter two's 'public profession of Platonism'), along with Cudworth's letters to Stoughton, are quite consistent with a small burst of interest in Platonic writers centred at Emmanuel college towards the latter half of the 1630s. This would also explain John Smith's intellectual trajectory, who could have contracted the obsession with Proclus and Plotinus that runs through his *Select Discourses* from any of these men when he arrived at Emmanuel in 1636, to whom he would have been connected by his tutorial relationship with Whichcote. It is

³¹ The Bursar's Book is unpaginated; pages are identified by the dates at the top.

interesting that More's Platonic awakening takes place at Christ's College around the same time (and that Tuckney seems to quote More's work specifically in his account of the doctrines of Whichcote's learned and ingenious friends). In sum, I merely suggest that More, Sterry, Sadler and Sarson (along with Smith and Cudworth for reasons to be discussed at length below) are very good candidates for Tuckney's 'learned and ingenious men' who 'studied ... Plato and his schollars ... more than the scriptures', men into whose company Whichcote fell while he was a fellow (1633–43).

4.3 Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith

The observations we have made above about 'early Cambridge Platonism' provide a sense of the broader intellectual network that might have triggered or catalysed the development of Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith's thought. The majority of this thesis, however, will deal with the much tighter set of the Emmanuel Three. The main body of the thesis is a close, context-sensitive reading of the anti-Calvinist views that colour Whichcote, Smith and Cudworth's texts, and which (I contend) provide a strong case that Smith and Cudworth were in Tuckney's mind as prime examples of the learned and ingenious Platonisers that he and his Puritan colleagues viewed as Whichcote's friends and influencers.

But the philosophical and polemical similarities between the Emmanuel Three we will explore below must be considered alongside their biographical association with one another. This last section is provides a brief survey of biographical evidence that Whichcote, Smith and Cudworth were closely enough associated in their early Cambridge days to have exerted significant intellectual influence upon each other.

4.3.1 Biographical Association

There are three relations to trace here: Whichcote to Cudworth, Whichcote to Smith and Cudworth to Smith.

The relation of Whichcote to Smith is the easiest and least controversial, for we know that Whichcote was Smith's tutor (SD vi). As mentioned earlier, Worthington tells us that Whichcote was so impressed by Smith's intelligence that covered his costs for a while (Ridley-Johnson 2016, 12). Given the importance and intimacy of the tutorial relationship in the seventeenth century college system, we can be sure that Whichcote played a huge part in Smith's intellectual formation (Lewis 2010, 78–87).

The close connection between Whichcote and Cudworth is also relatively uncontroversial. For the most part, it seems that they were lifelong friends; Whichcote even died at Cudworth's house in 1683 (Hutton 2005). It is hard to be certain precisely when this friendship began in earnest, but a few glimpses provided by the surviving evidence suggest that their association began while they were both fellows at Emmanuel. In 1647, the hapless former Master of Emmanuel Richard Holdsworth writes to William Sancroft from the Tower, expressing his hope of seeing Whichcote and Cudworth who had travelled to London together.³² In a dispute about John Worthington's election to the fellowship in late 1641/early 1642, Whichcote and Cudworth spearhead an effort in favour Worthington's election, notably, with the help of John Sadler (*Diary* I:12–15; Shuckburgh 90f; Rogers 1997, 8–9); Worthington was Smith's close friend and the editor of his *Select Discourses* (SD vi).

³² 'I should have wrytt to Mr Whichcott, and Mr Cudworth about them, but I have suspected they were not in the university this fortnight. I heard they were both in towne, but they came not at me' (Bodl. Tanner MS 58, fol. 55).

The most challenging connection to demonstrate, but still crucial for our program of connecting the Emmanuel Three, is that of Cudworth to Smith. We have just seen that Whichcote and Smith were connected as tutor and pupil, and Whichcote and Cudworth were connected as good friends. Certainly, Cudworth would have known Smith as one of Whichcote's pupils, but Whichcote would have had many pupils. Is there any evidence that Cudworth and Smith were particularly closely connected?

A small clue occurs in Worthington's preface to the *Select Discourses*, where we are told that Smith 'had alwaies a great affection and respect' for Cudworth (SD xxii). But a wry remark in a letter from Samuel Dillingham to William Sancroft provides a far more striking indication. Now, recall that in 1644, John Smith been made a fellow of Queens' College by Parliamentary appointment. In his letter (probably from 1644/45, though possibly later), Dillingham provides Sancroft with a list of persons who avoided ejection by subscribing to the *Solemn League and Covenant*, interspersed with his own commentary.³³ Towards the end of the list, Dillingham adds:

... besides which here & there a stragler fel in, Mr Cudworth, Smith of Queens his emulatur ... (Bodl. Tanner MS 56, 242)

The clause is ambiguous, and admits of two interpretations. It could mean that there were two stragglers who fell into the subscription: the first being Mr Cudworth, and the second being Smith of Queens, Cudworth's emulator. In contemporary English, that would be the most natural reading of the underlined phrase. But in the English of the seventeenth century, a 'his'

³³ Bodl. Tanner MS 56, 242. The letter is dated simply 30 Dec; no year is given. For reasons unknown to me, Neile (1900, 171–2) records it as dating from 1650; since the subject of the letter is the Parliamentary intruders forcing colleges to swear the *Solemn League and Covenant*, it would make sense to date it earlier, c. 1644/1645 to the Earl of Manchester's purge (Hoyle 2007, 228).

placed in this way is more likely to serve the function that an apostrophe-s performs for us today.³⁴ In that case, only one straggler fell in here: Mr Cudworth, who is Smith of Queens's emulator. It is Cudworth, that is, who emulates Smith. This would be surprising because Cudworth was — in nearly every way that mattered — Smith's senior. Not only was Cudworth (at least) a year older than Smith, but he had already been at Emmanuel College for four years when Smith arrived in 1636.

Either way, the directionality of the 'emulator' relationship here does not matter a great deal for our purposes. What matters is that in a letter to his friend Sancroft, Dillingham could refer to either Cudworth or Smith as the other's emulator and trust that Sancroft would know what he meant.

In sum then, the scarce biographical evidence does suggest an association between Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith the persisted after 1644 when their Parliamentary appointments sent them to different colleges, and that might explain the close philosophical affinities we will explore at length below.

4.3.2 Noteworthy Omissions

There are of course, several other figures often numbered among the Cambridge Platonists whom I have chosen to omit from the main body of this study, or consider only briefly. Let me say a few words about why and how I have chosen to limit my scope in this way.

The most significant omissions are Henry More and Peter Sterry. Although I cannot argue it at length here, I consider both More and Sterry (despite significant differences) to be

³⁴ I would like thank and Michael Hunter and Marilyn Lewis for their thoughts on how to interpret this clause.

largely of the same mind as the Emmanuel Three. In the case of More — always an open and notorious anti-Calvinist — this is to state the obvious. In the case of Sterry however, it is to dissent from a consensus that views him as a rigid Calvinist, whose Platonic mysticism was simply tacked onto a firm foundation of dogmatic Calvinism. I will make occasional asides below in an attempt to show why, as some scholars have already suggested, this is an inadequate reading of Sterry's complex thought.³⁵ But given that Sterry left Cambridge in 1638, a full treatment of Sterry's writings alongside those of the Emmanuel Three, however philosophically illuminating, would distract from the tighter, historical focus of this study on the genesis of the Emmanuel Three's common outlook. Sterry's time at Emmanuel only coincided with Smith's for about two years, and he does not seem to have been a part of the Cambridge-centred controversy in 1651 that occasioned the Whichcote-Tuckney correspondence.

As I have already made clear, I suspect that Henry More was a significant influence on the Emmanuel Three's thought from an early period. Nonetheless, I have chosen not to incorporate his work into the main body of this analysis for two reasons (in addition to keeping the thesis to a manageable size). First, it is already widely accepted that Henry More was both an avowed Platonist and an interesting (if sometimes misguided) philosopher.³⁶ This is not the case with the Emmanuel Three, particularly Smith and Whichcote, who attract far

³⁵ Hutton's (2006) brief portrait of Sterry does not mention Calvin or Calvinism at all; instead, she describes Sterry's religion as 'a highly tolerant, illuminist Christianity', and points out that his complex views on free will actually align well with Cudworth's, who was emphatically neither a determinist nor a Calvinist. Pinto (1934, 106) and Micheletti (1976, 183) also notice the striking similarities between Smith's idea (shared by Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith) that God's will is both perfectly free and necessarily determined to the good, and Sterry's writings on free will.

³⁶ Numerous monographs on More's life and thought have been published (e.g. Lichtenstein 1962, Hall 1990, Crocker 2003, Reid 2012, Leech 2013). By contrast, Whichcote has received only one book-length treatment (Roberts 1968), and Smith only two (Micheletti 1978 & Michaud 2017). Cudworth has fared slightly better, but not much (Passmore 1951, Carter 2011). A constantly updated bibliography for secondary studies on the various Cambridge Platonists is hosted on the *Cambridge Platonist Research Group* website, <<https://cprg.hypotheses.org/bibliography>>.

less attention from scholars, and even less from philosophers. Second, for reasons that will become clearer below, I am persuaded that even though More shared the polemical orientation and basic philosophical positions as the Emmanuel Three, the philosophical writings of the Emmanuel Three form a tighter and more consistent whole than would the larger body of work consisting of the Emmanuel Three's writings alongside More's.

I pass over Nathaniel Culverwell almost entirely (except as an occasional point of contrast) because despite notable affinities with the Emmanuel Three, his orthodox Calvinism puts him at odds with the positions I identify as the essential, binding feature of the Emmanuel Three's Platonic outlook (Micheletti 1976, 184–206; Hutton 2008).

While the Emmanuel Three and More are the earliest defenders of the Platonic outlook I discuss here, the same basic positions were defended by a later range of figures often called the 'latitude men', including many of Cudworth and More's pupils from their time at Christ's College such as Cudworth's pupil George Rust, and More's pupil Henry Hallywell (Nicolson 1929; Cragg 1950, 61–86). This later wave of Platonic thought, centred at Christ's College, has been ably traced by Christian Hengstermann (2017) and Marilyn Lewis (2010, 2016).

The parameters for our investigation into the curious case of the learned and ingenious men are now set: we have culled the persons of interest down to two key suspects, Smith and Cudworth, who (not discounting the influence of others like More and Sadler) seem uniquely well-placed as Whichcote's close associates to be targets of Tuckney's aspersions. Part III analyses a set of anti-Calvinist themes in the Emmanuel Three's work

III: Rival Conceptions of God and Goodness

In one of the most quoted passages of the preface to his *Opera Omnia*, Henry More proudly recalls that he had already rejected the Calvinist doctrine of double predestination at the age of fourteen. Even though his parents and teachers were all ‘great *Calvinists*,’ the young philosopher ‘very stoutly, and earnestly for my Years, [did] dispute against this *Fate* or *Calvinistick Predestination* ...’ More describes ‘a deep Aversion in my Temper to this Opinion,’ and a ‘firm and unshaken ... Perswasion of the *Divine Justice and Goodness*’ (quoted in Ward 1710, 5–6).

Indeed, More was one of the most open and notorious anti-Calvinists in Cambridge in the leadup to the Whichcote-Tuckney correspondence; we have already seen that Tuckney seems to have More in mind as one of the learned and ingenious men who drew Whichcote away from Calvinist orthodoxy. But as we will see in the next three chapters, More was certainly not the only public dissenter from Calvinism in Cambridge at the time. As Robert Crocker notes in his biography of More, ‘The first Cambridge Platonists, Whichcote, Cudworth, Smith and More, all shared a public notoriety in the University of Cambridge in the 1640s for roundly rejecting the dominant orthodoxies of scholasticism and dogmatic Calvinism’ (2005, xviii). This section of the thesis provides a philosophical analysis of the views which earned the Emmanuel Three this ‘public notoriety’, guided by Tuckney’s report of the anti-Calvinist views of the learned and ingenious men.³⁷

³⁷ Some previous analyses the Calvinist background to Cambridge Platonism are Cragg 1950, 13–36; Cassirer 1953, 63–85; Beiser 1996, 134–83; Gill 2006, 7–29; Carter 2011, 79–82. See also Lewis 2010, 12–13.

To keep this analysis attuned to the Emmanuel Three's Cambridge context circa 1640–52, we will try to develop our picture of the Calvinist views they were opposing in and from the texts and personalities in which the Emmanuel Three are likely to have encountered them. This task is made considerably harder by the fact that the Emmanuel Three almost never identify the holders of the views they are criticising. 'Apart from a minor figure mentioned in *Eternal and Immutable Morality*,' writes Sarah Hutton, '[Cudworth] does not name his Calvinist opponents; but he could well have had in mind Cambridge theologians like William Twisse and Anthony Tuckney' (TEIM xvi–xvii). The same is true of Smith and Whichcote. This reluctance to name opponents is understandable; preaching as they were from the Calvinist heart of Puritan-ruled England, perhaps the safest way course was to 'play the ball and not the man' by attacking Calvinist positions without naming names.

In the next three chapters, our goal will be to identify the philosophical positions that mark the Emmanuel Three out as dissenters from their theological environment, all drawn from Tuckney's list of the heterodox beliefs of the learned and ingenious men. In chapter 5, we will see that in the 1640s, Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith all defended a 'naturalist' view of God's relation to the moral order that put them directly at odds with the Calvinist tradition of William Perkins and John Preston then dominant at Emmanuel College. In chapter 6, we will see that they also criticise the doctrine of the double decree on the grounds that it is inconsistent with God's character, and specifically, with his 'communicative intent' (an idea they draw from Platonic sources). Finally, in chapter 7, we will see these how these fundamental philosophical differences play out in the Emmanuel Three's criticisms of the Reformed doctrine of imputed righteousness. By the end of this section, it should be clear that over the period circa 1644–1651, the Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith defended a strikingly similar Platonic outlook against the same Calvinist positions. In this light, Smith and

Cudworth emerge as very likely suspects in the case of the learned and ingenious men. Moreover, the time Whichcote, Smith and Cudworth spent together at Emmanuel College (1636–44) becomes a likely ground zero for the development of a shared Platonic outlook which they individually began to express after leaving for their various parliamentary appointments in 1644, much to the chagrin of Tuckney and the Puritan old guard, whose increasing discomfort finally boiled over into Tuckney's letters of 1651.

(5) Metaethics: The Ground of the Good

A thing is not first of all reasonable and just, and then afterward willed by God: but it is first of all willed by God, and thereupon becomes reasonable and just.

(William Perkins 1600, 452)

[They] think nothing so essential to the Deity as uncontrollable power and arbitrary will ... [and] impute such dark counsels and dismal actions unto God, as cannot be justified otherwise than by saying that whatsoever God can be supposed to do or will, will be for that reason good or just, because he wills it.

(Cudworth, TEIM 14f)

In this chapter, we will identify the first controversial position which binds the Emmanuel Three together: namely, metaethical naturalism, the view that God's will is necessarily directed by his essential goodness. In 5.1, we will look at the voluntarist consensus among Reformed theologians in the Emmanuel men's context that God's will was unconstrained by any prior standard of moral goodness. In the three subsequent sections (5.2, 5.3 and 5.4), we will turn to Cudworth, Smith and Whichcote in turn, with a particular focus (where possible) on works which date from 1644–51; we will see that in this period, all three make explicit assertions of a metaethical naturalism that directly and polemically contradict the voluntarist consensus of their contemporaries.

How does this question about the relation between God's will and goodness relate to the case of the learned and ingenious men? In Tuckney's account of the 'veine of doctrine' which the learned and ingenious men are 'too much knowen by', we find the following claim: 'The

decrees of God quaestion'd and quarrel'd; because, according to our reason, wee cannot comprehend; how they may stand with His goodness: which, according to your phrase, Hee is *under the power of* (EL 38). This insistence that God is 'under the power' of goodness is the first link in the philosophical chain that binds the Emmanuel Three together, which I call here metaethical naturalism.³⁸ Metaethical naturalism is an to answer a fundamental question in metaethics: what is the *ground* or *foundation* of moral reality? Presumably, moral facts have underlying explanations: if certain actions and dispositions are objectively good, and others objectively evil, what makes them so? Of course, the Platonists and Calvinists alike were theists who believed that the distinction between good and evil was rooted in God himself. The debate between them lay in the question of *how* God relates to this distinction: does God *choose* which states and actions will be morally good, and which morally bad? Could he change the moral realm such that things that are good now would become evil? Or is moral reality as fixed for God as it is for his human subjects?

The philosophical problem here is an old one of course: it is the Euthyphro dilemma (*Euthyph.* 10a). The dilemma forces us to choose between two 'horns' depending on whether we think that God's commands or the moral facts are prior. Either:

- 1) Metaethical Naturalism: God commands us to do things because they are good
- 2) Metaethical Voluntarism: Things are only good because God commands them

For convenience, I will call the first option metaethical naturalism (or just naturalism), because it take the distinction between good and evil to be a natural one, intrinsically woven

³⁸ 'Metaethical', so as to distinguish this usage from other, more popular varieties of philosophical naturalism, like metaphysical naturalism.

into the nature or essence of God, and therefore, the nature of the world as well.³⁹ I will call the second option voluntarism, because it makes God's *will* (*voluntas*) the truthmaker for moral propositions (i.e. 'X is good iff. God wills X').

In this chapter, we will see that over the same short period (c. 1644–1651), the Emmanuel Three all took a controversial stand in favour of metaethical naturalism against voluntarism.⁴⁰ Beiser's description captures the situation well: 'The more we examine Whichcote's early writings, and indeed those of Rust, Cudworth, Smith, and Glanvill, the more we see that this doctrine was originally a reaction against Calvin's voluntarism, which made God's will the source of all goodness and justice' (Beiser 1996, 159; cf. Roberts 2012, 62).

The Emmanuel Three insisted, in direct contradiction to the line routinely taken by Puritan preachers in Cambridge, that God's goodness *precedes* and even *constrains* his will (though chapter 9 will elaborate on why 'constrain' is an unhelpful word here). They did this despite the fact that naturalism was routinely denied and condemned in Puritan preaching about predestination: for reasons bound up with the double decree, Puritans and Calvinist theologians frequently asserted that God's will is entirely unguided by any antecedent causes. Indeed, we will see in chapter 6 that the Emmanuel Three's metaethical naturalism is motivated largely by their rejection of the double decree; but for now our focus will be on the more limited question of how God's will relates to the moral order.

³⁹ The connection between the nature of God and the nature of the world is explored in more detail below (see 6.5.1, 8.1.4).

⁴⁰ The Emmanuel Three had an important forerunner in this regard in the 'Oxford Platonist' Thomas Jackson, whose 1628 *Treatise of the Divine Essence and Attributes* earned a formal censure for 'Arminianism' from the Puritan-controlled parliament in the same year, and attracted persistent criticism from Puritan writers in the following years (Hutton 1978, 637–8). In the thirteenth chapter of his *Treatise*, Jackson argues that '[God's] holiness doth rule his power, and moderate his will ... the one cannot enjoyne, or the other exact any thing not most consonant to the eternall or abstract patterns of equity' (1628, 148).

5.1 Metaethical Voluntarism in Puritan Theology

Let us begin with the explicit rejections of naturalism that were a common theme in Puritan preaching and theological discourse. It is worth noting at the outset that none of the texts we examine here were intended as treatises on metaethics: Luther, Calvin and the Emmanuel men's Puritan contemporaries were all theologians, not philosophers, and as we shall see, they were often philosophically inconsistent. But for all their inconsistencies, they nonetheless make — and rely on — a core set of philosophically noteworthy claims about God's relation to morality. Tracing the underlying metaethics of the Reformers' texts will, therefore, be a delicate task, requiring both charity, and a keen eye for philosophically interesting claims bound up in theological polemics.

Exactly what sort of metaethical claims are we looking for in these texts? We find a helpful and philosophically acute description of them in the opening pages of Cudworth's posthumously published *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*. While Cudworth probably wrote this text quite late (not before the latter part of the 1660s), it represents the mature articulation of metaethical issues Cudworth began to articulate as early as 1644 in his BD thesis (Cudworth 1651; TEIM xx). At the beginning of the *Treatise*, Cudworth identifies his intellectual opponents as 'divers modern theologers' who contend:

that there is nothing absolutely, intrinsically, and naturally good and evil, just and unjust, antecedently to any positive command or prohibition of God; but that the arbitrary will and pleasure of God (that is, an omnipotent Being devoid of all

essential and natural justice), by its commands and prohibitions, is the first and only rule and measure thereof. (TEIM 14)

This is one of the clearest statements of the conception of God I will contend that Whichcote, Smith, and Cudworth were each (in their own ways) resisting on Platonist grounds.

Cudworth regards this theology as a disturbing modern innovation; the ‘ancient fathers of the Christian church’, he insists, ‘were very abhorrent from this doctrine’, but ‘it crept up afterward in the scholastic age’. He identifies William of Ockham (c. 1287–1347) as one of the first to hold ‘that there is no act evil but as it is prohibited by God, and which cannot be made good if it be commanded by God. And so on the other hand as to good’ (TEIM 14). For Ockham, and those who took up his mantle, good and evil were not intrinsically in the nature of things, but properties which God could change by mere fiat.⁴¹

The key claim of this view (at least, in Cudworth’s polemical reconstruction of it in the *Treatise*) is that God’s will is the ultimate determiner of moral truth: consequently, whatever God wills is right and good, simply because he wills it. But for Cudworth, this kind of voluntarism entails a series of intolerable consequences, the chief of which is that it robs God himself of any essential or natural goodness. If the voluntarists are correct, then there is ‘nothing so essential to the Deity as uncontrollable power and arbitrary will’. It would not be out of character for such a God to do things which would seem monstrous to us; and indeed,

⁴¹ Ockham’s views were the catalyst for a Catholic voluntarist tradition that became an important influence on Luther and Calvin: ‘For Ockham the content of natural law (hence of concepts like “good” and “bad”) is not a reflection of some unchanging divine nature in which our reason shares, but is constantly dependent upon God’s will ... [Ockham’s] of extreme voluntarism became a vigorous tradition in the hands of such thinkers as Peter of Ailly (1350–1420), Jean Gerson (1363–1429), and Gabriel Briel (c. 1410). The latter influenced Martin Luther (1483–1546). Through Luther, Philipp Melancthon (1497–1560) and John Calvin (1509–1564), voluntarism became the backbone of most Protestant natural law theory ...’ (Haakonsen 2008, 886).

Cudworth complains that voluntarists of this sort ‘impute such dark counsels and dismal actions unto God, as cannot be justified otherwise than by saying that whatsoever God can be supposed to do or will, will be for that reason good or just, because he wills it’ (TEIM 14f).

Just what are these ‘dark counsels and dismal actions’ which the voluntarists impute unto God? Cudworth helpfully provides a list of positions which he claims any *bona fide* voluntarist will defend:

That to love God is by nature an indifferent thing, and is morally good only, because it is commanded by God ... That God may command what is contrary, as to all the precepts of the Decalogue, so especially to the first, second, third; that holiness is not a conformity with the nature of God; that God hath no natural inclination to the good of the creatures; that God can justly doom an innocent creature to eternal torment. (TEIM 15)

As it turns out, these propositions are mostly summaries of extreme positions defended by a relatively minor Polish Calvinist, Jan Szydłowski (TEIM 15, n. 31). But Cudworth makes clear that he has detected these positions in many other, more prominent authors, whom he is reluctant to name. As he puts it, all these propositions ‘with others of like kind, are word for word asserted by some late authors. Though I think not fit to mention the name of any of them in this place, excepting only one, Joannes Szydlovius ...’ (TEIM 15). Identifying some of these other ‘late authors’ is a central aim of this chapter.⁴²

⁴² It is worth noting that in his unpublished manuscripts, Cudworth criticises by name several of the authors I discuss below — including Luther and Calvin — for holding a view distinct, but closely related, to voluntarism (a sort of theological determinism he calls ‘Divine Fate Violent’). See BL Add MS 4982, 66–70.

But importantly, Cudworth concedes that not all the authors he has in mind are brazen enough to assert all these positions in their most plain, unvarnished form. There are many who hold a voluntarist picture of God but who cannot quite stomach the ugly conclusions to which this picture inevitably leads, and so try to have their cake and eat it too. For this reason, Cudworth praises men like Szydlovius who have the intellectual courage to defend an unvarnished, internally consistent voluntarism:

And yet neither [Szydlovius], nor the rest [who openly assert these propositions], are to be thought any more blameworthy herein than many others, that holding the same premises have either dissembled or disowned those conclusions which unavoidably follow therefrom: but rather to be commended for their openness, simplicity, and ingenuity, in representing their opinion nakedly to the world ... without any veil of mask. (TEIM 15)

This distinction between ‘ingenuous’ voluntarists like Szydlovius, and dissembling ones (who remain unnamed), is crucial for any adequate analysis of the Calvinism which Cudworth is challenging here. As we shall see, the actual texts of men like Tuckney, Perkins, Twisse and especially Calvin himself, are riddled with deep tensions: the most characteristic being Calvin’s insistence that God’s will is entirely uncaused and sovereign, and also that it is essentially just and good. Cudworth’s opponents then, may actually be found to explicitly deny some of the extreme conclusions listed here; Cudworth’s argument though, is that the philosophical underpinnings of their theology do not allow them to do so consistently.

However much actual Calvinists might have prevaricated on the implications of their voluntarism, the more important question is why they were so powerfully drawn to these sorts

of voluntarist views of God in the first place. Turning now to Luther and Calvin, we shall see that the tendency towards voluntarism was not an accidental feature of Protestant thought. On the contrary, the Reformers were driven to voluntarism by one the Reformation's most basic doctrines: that salvation cannot be earned by good works. Against the Roman Catholic doctrine that good works could be done could to earn or merit salvation, the Reformers held that the salvation of any individual soul did not depend on that soul's moral virtue or good works, but was entirely a gift of grace; that is, entirely a result of God's gratuitous choice to save that soul. God's choice to save the elect must be a free determination of his will, and not a response to some independent moral fact such as the moral character of the recipient of his grace.

As a result, the Reformers and Puritans tended to emphasise God's sovereignty, and the mysteriousness of his will. Why does God save some and not others, if no one has merited salvation through their own works? That is none of our business: God can do whatever he wills with his creation. Driven by their central need to defend the free, unwarranted character of God's gift of salvation, the Reformers tended to reject any suggestion that God's will was constrained or regulated by moral facts. It is to this theme that we now turn.

5.1.1 Luther's Bondage of the Will

One of the earliest and most important Protestant appeals to the voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro dilemma occurs in Martin Luther's treatise on the *Bondage of the Will* (1525). It is important to see here how Luther's endorsement of the voluntarist horn flows directly from his doctrine of predestination, or more precisely, from the question of why God predestined some to salvation and others to damnation.

The *Bondage of the Will* was Luther's response to a polemical treatise *On Free Will* (1524) by Erasmus of Rotterdam which had directly criticised Luther's doctrine of predestination on the grounds that the whole Biblical story presupposed that human beings can make free will choices which determine their salvation or damnation (Wriedt 2003, pp. 110–11).

Luther's response was, in sum, that a proper concept of God's sovereignty leaves no room for a meaningful concept of 'free-will'. In *Bondage of the Will*, Luther concedes to Erasmus that created beings have their own natural powers, and that insofar as we act from our nature, we can be said to be acting from ourselves. But this does not amount to free will, because, as Luther also insists, we cannot employ or suppress any of our natural powers or tendencies at will; our natural powers, including our wills, lie entirely under the sway and influence of God's sovereign control. 'Let all the "Free-will" in the world, do all it can with all its powers, and yet, it never will give one proof, either that it can avoid being hardened where God gives not His Spirit, or merit mercy where it is left to its own powers' (BW §82). Just as a flute without human breath must remain silent, human nature cannot act well except where God provides his Holy Spirit: even if human beings have a natural capacity for good action, they do not have the power to activate that capacity without God's direct influence.

Consequently, evil human beings cannot act otherwise than they in fact do. At bottom then, the agent behind all the evil actions which earn sinful men their place in Hell is God himself. To soften the harshness of this conclusion, Luther reminds us that on his view, God performs no evil actions directly and of himself; he simply leaves the innate corruption of sinful human nature to act corruptly:

... when God works in, and by, evil men, the evils themselves are in-wrought, but yet, God cannot do evil, although He thus works the evils by evil men; because, being good Himself He cannot do evil; but He uses evil instruments, which cannot escape the sway and motion of His Omnipotence. The fault, therefore, is in the instruments, which God allows not to remain action-less; seeing that, the evils are done as God Himself moves. (BW §84)

So God is not at fault when he allows evil men to perform evil actions, even though he is actively, causally involved in the motion of their wills towards evil. He is blowing on a broken pipe that cannot but produce an ugly sound; even though the piper's breath is the active cause of the ugly sound, the fault lies in the pipe.

This raises an immediate objection: ought God not then simply refrain from blowing on the broken pipe? That is, shouldn't God cease his active involvement in the wills of evil men? At least then, God could not be implicated in their evil actions. But Luther responds that God *cannot* do this, simply because God *cannot* but be involved in everything that happens; to extend the analogy of the pipe, God's power and sovereignty are such that his breath is moving through all human pipes all the time. To ask God to cease his involvement in evil human volitions is to request that God cease to be sovereign: 'this is to wish that God, for the sake of the wicked, would cease to be God; for this you really desire when you desire his power and action to cease' (BW §88).

Thus far, Luther has been able to defend God's character by showing that, according to our ordinary standards of right and wrong, he is not at fault: a flautist is not a fault for producing an ugly sound when his pipe is broken. But at this point, Luther must face the most

pressing and obvious question raised by all this, for God is no ordinary flautist. He could, if he willed, fix all the pipes in his orchestra in an instant. If God must necessarily blow through all human instruments, and evil necessarily follows from the brokenness of those instruments, why does God not *simply fix the broken pipes*? That is, why does he not simply heal the depraved wills of fallen human beings? Then there would be no evil actions, and God could remain sovereignly involved in the wills of these men without seeming to work evil.

Here, at last, Luther is forced to admit that according to ordinary human standards, God's refusal to save the reprobate seems unjust. After a brief, curious appeal to 'divine mysteries' (to which we will return in chapter 6), Luther makes a clear appeal to the voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro dilemma.⁴³ However unfair God's refusal to save the reprobate might look to us, God has certainly acted justly and rightly because he has done *what he willed*. He explains:

God is that Being, for whose will no cause or reason is to be assigned, as a rule or standard by which it acts; seeing that, nothing is superior or equal to it, but it is itself the rule of all things. For if it acted by any rule or standard, or from any cause or reason, it would be no longer the *will of God*. Wherefore, what God wills, is not therefore right, because He ought or ever was bound so to will; but on the contrary, what takes place is therefore right, because He so wills. A cause and reason are assigned for the will of the creature, but not for the will of the Creator; unless you set up, over Him, another Creator (BW §88).

⁴³ As we shall see in chapter 6, this appeal to God's secret counsels curious flatly contradicts the voluntarist passage that follows it. It is, in fact, an appeal to opposite, naturalist horn of the Euthyphro dilemma: Luther is suggesting that God has secret knowledge that justifies his volitions, and that those secrets explain why his volitions good. If voluntarism were true, no such secret explanations would be necessary to justify God's volitions: it would be enough that they are *God's* volitions.

This is one of the earliest instances of what will become a kind of slogan in Calvinist discussions of this question: that God's will is *its own* standard. God's sovereignty demands that his will be entirely free and self-determining, not constrained by any external facts or causes. As a result, God's volitions are good not because they conform to any standard of goodness or justice, but merely because they are *God's* volitions. This is about as clear an endorsement of the voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro dilemma as we could expect to find.

Before moving on to trace this theme in Calvin and the English Puritans, it is worth emphasising that the considerations which drive Luther to this position, far from being peripheral or speculative, are among the most central and non-negotiable tenets of Reformed theology. Luther appeals to the absolute sovereignty of God's will in an attempt to deal with the question of why God bestows the free, unmerited gift of salvation on some, but not on others. This is a question raised inevitably by Protestantism's fundamental claim that salvation is an unearned gift: if salvation really depends entirely on God's free choice and not at all on human volitions or actions, then why would God not freely choose to give this gift to everyone? Is it not cruel and unfair of God to leave some souls to suffer eternally by withholding his gift, especially if (as Luther has been arguing), the evil actions which earn them their place in Hell are decreed by divine necessity? All these questions turn on issues of philosophical significance — free will and determinism, moral culpability, justice, rightness — and we will treat each of them in more fine-grained detail as we proceed.

For now though, what is important to note is just that Luther's answer to all these questions is simply that God's will cannot be 'cruel' or 'unjust' because it is, itself, the rule of all goodness and justice. This will set an important precedent for Protestant thought.

5.1.2 Calvin's Appeal to Voluntarism

John Calvin was well aware that the doctrine of double predestination made God seem capricious and arbitrary. 'The human mind', he writes, 'when it hears this doctrine, cannot restrain its petulance, but boils and rages as if aroused by the sound of a trumpet' (*Inst.* III.23.1). Calvin devotes a whole chapter of his *Institutes* (III.23) to rebutting the objection that the double decree renders God unjust. In this chapter however, sometimes within the same paragraph, Calvin makes two very different kinds of argument apparently without noticing the shift. On the one hand, he claims straightforwardly that whatever God wills is just *because* he wills it, such that the double decree (being an expression of God's will) cannot fail to be just, no matter how cruel or arbitrary it seems to us. But on the other hand, like Luther, Calvin also appeals to the 'secrets' or 'mysteries' of God's counsel as justification for the double decree. As will be seen (6.4.3 and 6.4.4), this claim that God has hidden reasons for the double decree is actually a naturalist argument (I call it crypto-naturalist below), inconsistent with voluntarism.

For now though, let us focus on Calvin's use of voluntarism to defend the double decree. Critics of the double decree claim that for God 'to devote to destruction whomsoever he pleases, more resembles the caprice of a tyrant than the legal sentence of a judge'. If 'at [God's] mere pleasure men are, without any desert of their own, predestinated to eternal death', then we have good reason to disapprove of God's will and condemn it as unjust (*Inst.* III.23.2). Calvin's response is a straightforward claim that God's will itself determines what is just; to call any of God's decrees unjust is like speaking of married bachelors. The objection itself, in other words, is framed incoherently: to ask 'why' God willed as he did presupposes

that God must have reasons for willing, that his volitions must be caused by something else.

And this is impossible; as Calvin puts it:

For if [God's] will has any cause, there must be something antecedent to it, and to which it is annexed; this it were impious to imagine. The will of God is the supreme rule of righteousness, so that everything which he wills must be held to be righteous by the mere fact of his willing it. Therefore, when it is asked why the Lord did so, we must answer, Because he pleased. But if you proceed farther to ask why he pleased, you ask for something greater and more sublime than the will of God, and nothing such can be found. (*Inst.* III.23.2)

God's volitions have no prior cause, because God's will is itself 'the cause of all that exists' (*Inst.* III.23.5). In asking for the moral reason behind God's decree, that is, the thing that makes God's decree just, we are asking for something that simply does not exist: God's will *is* the 'rule of righteousness'. Nothing else makes it righteous.

In passages like this, at least, Calvin seems to have no need for any 'inscrutable reasons' that justify God's will (of the sort we will encounter in his appeals to God's epistemic authority below): his point is rather that God's volitions cannot have reasons. Indeed, Calvin heads off the whole quest for God's reasons at the outset: 'Let human temerity then be quiet, and cease to inquire after what exists not, lest perhaps it fails to find what does exist' (*Inst.* III.23.2). This is a natural consequence of God's metaphysical primacy: 'that no law can be imposed on Him as a rule for His works, because no law or rule can be thought of better, greater, or more just, than His own will!' (Calvin 1856, 68). There is no higher standard against which God's volitions can be judged any more than there are square circles.

Calvin makes the same move when he turns to the question of why God would create the reprobate in the first place, foreknowing that they would be damned. The answer is ‘Because he so willed,’ and Calvin goes on to explain:

Why he willed it is not ours to ask, as we cannot comprehend, nor can it become us even to raise a controversy as to the justice of the divine will. Whenever we speak of it, we are speaking of the supreme standard of justice. But when justice clearly appears, why should we raise any question of injustice? (*Inst.* III.23.5)

The first sentence here actually provides two different reasons why we ought not ask why God willed as he did. The first is that we ‘cannot comprehend’ — this is the appeal to God’s epistemic authority, to which we will turn in a moment. But the second is that ‘it is not becoming’ to ask a reason for any of God’s willings. It is not becoming because God’s will is itself the ‘supreme standard of justice’. That is to say, the double decree cannot be unjust because it is an expression of God’s will. Thus, ‘justice clearly appears’ in the double decree because God’s will appears in it. In sum, this suggests that the double decree is just *because* it is what God wills; whatever his reasons for so willing, the result of his will is just by definition.

5.1.3 Perkins and Preston: Voluntarism in Cambridge

We saw in chapter 3 that Calvinist predestinarianism was a powerful intellectual force in England by the mid-seventeenth century, aggressively seeking to assert itself against those who challenged the doctrines of absolute predestination and unconditional election. We have also seen that while Cambridge University was deeply divided on questions of predestination,

Emmanuel College itself was an important stronghold of ‘high Calvinist’ predestinarian orthodoxy.

With this cursory survey of Luther and Calvin in place, we now have a better sense of why this predestinarian theology tended towards metaethical voluntarism. The Emmanuel Three would certainly have read and studied both Luther and Calvin; indeed, when accused of reading certain unorthodox theologians, Whichcote replies, ‘trulie I have more read Calvine, and Perkins, and Beza; than all the authors, or names you mention’ (EL 54). But it is easy to demonstrate that the Emmanuel Three would have encountered assertions of voluntarism from sources much closer to home, in their Cambridge tutors, lecturers and fellow students, both at Emmanuel and at other colleges. What did Puritan tradition exemplified by Perkins and Preston have to say about the foundations of morality?

In his doctrinal masterwork, *The Golden Chain*, William Perkins contends that God’s unbounded, entirely uncaused will is itself the ultimate rule of good and evil:

... [God’s will] is the most absolute, supream, and soveraigne cause of all things that are ... having nothing either above it selfe or out of it selfe, to bee an impulsive cause to moove or incline it; and to say otherwise, is to make the will of God to be no will ... (Perkins 1600, 452; cf. Twisse 1631, 365)

For Perkins then, like Calvin and Luther, God’s volitions do not flow from any underlying set of causes; part of what it means to be God is to have a will that is entirely uncaused.

Importantly, Perkins concludes this train of thought by clearly embracing the voluntarist horn of the Euthyphro dilemma:

Gods will is not ruled by another rule of reason or justice, but it selfe is an absolute rule both of justice and reason. A thing is not first of all reasonable and just, and then afterward willed by God: but it is first of all willed by God, and thereupon becomes reasonable and just. (Perkins 1600, 452)

Clearly, for Perkins, it was important that God's will is prior to all moral standards: things are never just or good before they are willed by God. In Emmanuel College in the 1630s and 40s, where Perkins was held up as the gold standard of Puritan orthodoxy, this clear endorsement of voluntarism is unlikely to have gone unnoticed by the Emmanuel Three.

In a posthumously published treatise on God's existence and attributes, John Preston identifies the second attribute of God as his metaphysical primacy: '*God is the first, without all causes, having his being, and beginning from himselfe*' (Preston 1631, 140). This is a standard tenet of theism: God is uncaused and uncreated. But when Preston spells out the implications of this doctrine, he makes an explicit intervention on the question of God's relation to moral realities:

If the *Lord* be without all cause ... then ... he doth not will any thing, because it is just, or desire it, because it is good, or love any thing, because it is pleasant; for there is no cause without him, all perfection is in him originally. (1631, 143)

In an unpublished sermon preserved in a manuscript, Preston makes a similar argument:

Since God is without causes and is the principle cause of all things it followes that he willeth no thing because it is good, neither desireth any thing because it is just[;] Neyther seeketh after any thing for its excellency because there is no /former\ cause that should make it excellent but whatsoever he willeth is Good because he willeth it (BL Sloane MS 598, fo. 14v–14r)

For Preston then, because God is metaphysically ‘first’, none of his willings or doings are governed by any prior standard of goodness or justice.

Likewise, Preston also argues for voluntarism using the scholastic paradigm of efficient causes. He reasons that a thing only has an end if it is created for that end by an efficient cause. Since God has no efficient cause, and was not made for an end (indeed, was not made at all), God remains perfect and irreproachable no matter what he does or wills (BL Sloane MS 598, 13v–15v).

This means that human and divine wills work in fundamentally different ways. Where the human will ought to be directed and ruled by the law of goodness set down by God, God’s will is entirely unbounded and unconstrained by any rules of goodness or justice. Perkins emphasises the difference between human and divine volition:

Indeede mens wils are mooved and disposed by externall causes, out of themselves borrowed from the things whereof deliberation is made, because they are to be ruled by equitie and reason: and a mans bare will without reason is nothing. Nowe Gods

will is not ruled by another rule of reason or justice, but it selfe is an absolute rule both of justice and reason. (Perkins 1600, 452)

This is not to say that Calvinists and Puritans were all voluntarists, or even that they were voluntarists all the time. We will see below (6.4 and 6.5) that even the authors of the most uncompromisingly voluntarist passages we have read above sometimes adopt a surreptitious naturalism when the rhetorical situation demands it. Anthony Burgess contends that God does not have the power to sin, and censures more extreme scholastic voluntarists for holding that view (1651, 95).

We can now return to the Emmanuel Three, for we are ready to identify the first philosophical position that binds them together as philosophical allies: their united rejection of metaethical voluntarism, in terms that directly and polemically contradict the voluntarist passages we have just examined in Calvinist and Puritan authors. In subsequent chapters, we will see that the Emmanuel Three couple their rejection of voluntarism with a picture of what God's nature is like, and why it precludes the double decree, but this will be easier to see after we have examined their explicit rejections of voluntarism.

We shall see too that Whichcote, Smith and Cudworth are driven to reflect on the grounds of morality precisely in reaction to central Reformed claims about salvation. In Cudworth and Smith, these early reflections are already as philosophically informed and driven as they are theological, and for Cudworth, they will later come to form the basis of a much more sophisticated and wide-ranging philosophical project. But in the early texts we are to examine now (the majority of which are sermons), the Platonists' burgeoning philosophy is 'submerged' beneath a theological surface.

5.2 Cudworth's Metaethical Naturalism

We have seen that beginning with Luther and Calvin and continuing right up to the Emmanuel Three's immediate predecessors at Emmanuel, Reformed theologians tended strongly towards metaethical voluntarism. Whatever God wills is good and just, simply because he wills it. We will see in more detail later on how the doctrine of the double decree was the chief motive towards voluntarism for Reformed theologians. We can now turn to Whichcote, Smith and Cudworth as we find them in the 1640s, having just emerged from Calvinist stronghold of

Emmanuel College, at the height of Puritan rule in England. We will see that in the 1640s, Whichcote, Smith and Cudworth all asserted a metaethical naturalism that made God's will subject to the 'eternal and immutable' rules of reason or goodness. As Cudworth will sum it up in his posthumously published *Treatise of Freewill*: 'There is a nature of goodness, and a nature of wisdom antecedent to the will of God, which is the rule and measure of it' (FW 187). By that point, even though Calvinism's popularity had declined since the Restoration, Cudworth will have spent much of his long career refuting the notion of an arbitrary God whose will is undetermined by natural goodness.

As far as the case of the learned and ingenious men goes, however, the question at hand in this section is just how early we can find detect this anti-voluntarist trend in Cudworth's thought? Was Cudworth criticising the voluntarist conception of God in the 1640s, when the theological legacy of Puritan voluntarists like Perkins and Preston was at its heights? And if he does take this controversial stance, does it connect him in meaningful ways to Whichcote or Smith's thinking in the same period?

5.2.1 The Commons Sermon: The Euthyphro Dilemma

One of the clearest and boldest assertions of metaethical naturalism from one of the Emmanuel Three occurs in Ralph Cudworth's 1647 sermon to the House of Commons, when Cudworth makes explicit reference to the Euthyphro dilemma and embraces the naturalist horn. The reference occurs at a point in the sermon where Cudworth is contending that it is metaphysically impossible for us to be reconciled to God unless we are actually, internally transformed into likeness to God. This is impossible, Cudworth argues, because goodness is 'the very proper Character and Essential Tincture of God himself'. And since goodness is so central to God's being, it forms a kind of rule or pattern that necessarily regulates God's

volitions and his activities: ‘Whatsoever God doth in the World, he doth it as it is suitable to the highest Goodnesse; the first Idea, and fairest Copy of which is his own Essence’.

Consequently, God cannot ‘love’ us in any saving sense until we are properly conformed to that ‘Idea’ of his essence (*Commons* 26).

The primary thrust of this passage is to criticise the Calvinist conception of the salvation as a mere ‘imputation’ of Christ’s righteousness to inherently unrighteous believers. We will examine this issue in more detail in chapter 7; for now though, we want to focus on a passage where Cudworth makes a striking and creative appropriation of the Euthyphro dilemma:

Good is not therefore Good, because God out of an arbitrary will of his, would have it so ... Vertue and Holinesse in creatures, as *Plato* well discourseth in his *Euthyphro*, are not *therefore Good, because God loveth them*, and will have them be accounted such; but rather, *God therefore loveth them because they are in themselves simply good.* (*Commons* 26)

In other words, certain states of character are loved by God because they are ‘in themselves simply good’.

In this, Cudworth is taking exactly the opposite position to the voluntarist one we encountered in Preston and Calvin earlier, on which God ‘doth not will any thing, because it is just, or desire it, because it is good, or love any thing, because it is pleasant’ (Preston 1631, 143). But Cudworth pulls about as far in the opposite direction as he can, making the provocative suggestion that even God’s love for himself is contingent on his goodness, such that ‘if there could be any thing in the world better then God, God would love that better then

himself'; no such thing could exist, of course, but the point remains that God loves himself only insofar as he is 'Essentially the most perfect *Good*' (*Commons* 27; cf. Ficino, PTh. II.11.15).⁴⁴ So for Cudworth, God's love only attaches to the things it does because they are really, naturally and essentially good; he could not, by a mere act of will, love different states of character than he in fact does.

Cudworth ties up this section of his sermon with a brief note of disapproval for a view held by some of his co-religionists that fails to take God's essential goodness seriously enough. He remarks:

And it is another mistake which sometimes we have of God, by shaping him out according to the Model of our selves, when we make him nothing but a *blind, dark, impetuous Self will, running through the world*; such as we our selves are furiously acted with, that have not the Ballast of *absolute goodnesse* to poize and settle us. (*Commons* 27)

Brief though this comment is, it demonstrates that Cudworth is operating with a fundamental disapproval for the voluntarist God of Calvin or Perkins. For Cudworth, it is a 'mistake' to think that God's sovereignty or power enables him to will absolutely anything. On the contrary, the ability to do evil or unjust things is a weakness rather than a strength:

No surely, there is a weaknesse and impotency in all Evil, a masculine strength and vigour in all Goodnesse (*Commons* 36)

⁴⁴ NB: References to Ficino's *Platonic Theology* are to the work's internal numbering, rather than the volumes of the modern HUP edition. So here, PTh. II.11.15 refers to book II, chapter 11, paragraph 15 of the *Platonic Theology*, which is found on pp. 177–8 of Volume I of the HUP edition.

For that, except it be in the way of Justice; speaks no Power at all, but mere Impotency, for the Root of all Power, is Goodnesse (*Commons* 37)

God's power is not diminished at all because there are some things he cannot do. To assert that God cannot do evil is not unprecedented in Puritan theology, but goes firmly against the grain of the voluntarist tradition we saw represented in Calvin, Perkins and Preston.⁴⁵

5.2.2 *The Eternal and Immutable Reasons of Good and Evil*

Cudworth delivered his *Commons* sermon in 1647, but there are good reasons to think he began to defend this view of God even earlier. In 1651, Cudworth published a short piece of Latin verse titled *Dantur Rationes Boni et Mali Aeternae et Indispensabiles*, which recorded the positions Cudworth defended either in his BD thesis of 1646, or DD thesis of 1651.⁴⁶ The poem's opening emphasises the primacy, timelessness and immutability of God's moral goodness (*honestum*, virtue):

Image and Form of the unchanging God, Virtue [*Honestum*],
Innate offspring of himself, more primaeval than time,
earlier than the first elements, he recognizes the jurisdiction of no father,
he derives his stock from no birth.

⁴⁵ For comparison, see Emmanuel alumnus Anthony Burgess' assertion that God does not have *potestas peccandi* [the ability to sin] and that God is under a necessity to punish sin (1651, 94–101). This is a kind of naturalism, though as we will see in chapter 6, a very different one to that defended by the Emmanuel Three. It does not challenge Puritan orthodoxy because Burgess stresses that while he thinks God is under an obligation to punish sin, he is never under any obligation to *forgive* it; election and reprobation thus remain totally free and arbitrary decrees.

⁴⁶ On the dating of this work, see Beiser 1996, 147, n. 31 and Pailin 2008, ODNB.

But Cudworth proceeds then to make God's strength and power lie precisely in the fact that his will is in perpetual *subordination* to the rules of goodness:

Finally Divine Will, nurturing creator of the two-fold universe,
did not bring himself forth from her fertile womb.

Rather he follows the Decrees of Good, older than any speech,
not clever by its own commands, nor laws commanded by willing,
awesome, and does not refuse with resentful mind

(Though) God Himself; ready to submit to Right the Eternal Rods (i.e. symbols of
power) of Heaven and the sceptres which rule the world.

It is Godlike to serve Good, to be deserving by means of kindly acts of compliance,
and not to be able to withdraw oneself from What is Just.⁴⁷

Cudworth revels in the assertion that God's will is compliant, ready to submit and not able to withdraw from the Good.

We have just observed this same insistence that real power lies in compliance with goodness rather than the ability to depart in Cudworth's *Commons* sermon. It is elaborated at much greater length in Cudworth's manuscript remains: real liberty lies not in indifferency of the will, but in perfect compliance with goodness (see 9.1 below; cf. BL Add MS 4979, 38–39; 4980, 44–6; FW 175–8; Passmore 1951, 61–5). Even long after the Calvinist hegemony over England had been weakened, Cudworth will write disapprovingly of those 'who persuade themselves that the perfection of the Deity consisteth in being indifferent to all

⁴⁷ A note of sincere thanks to Dr Robert Cowan for helping to translate Cudworth's difficult (and in parts, quite cryptic) Latin text.

things, altogether undetermined by any antecedent motives or reasons of goodness, wisdom, or truth' (FW 187).

So very early on, Cudworth attacks the view that whatever God wills is good simply because he wills it, and defends the contrary view that God's will is bound and regulated by a prior, immutable standard of goodness. Here as in his later writings, the conception of God which Cudworth is rejecting is exactly the conception of God we encountered in Luther, Calvin, Preston and Twisse above. As Cudworth puts it in *Commons*, he is troubled by 'blind, dark, impetuous Self will' a God who has no 'Ballast of absolute goodnesse' to anchor him (*Commons*, 27). The God of the voluntarists has nothing to guide or regulate his volitions, since his will is the only ultimate authority. Against this 'arbitrary' God, Cudworth defends a view on which God's natural, inherent goodness plays the role of a 'ballast': it grounds and stabilises both God's will, and the entire moral domain.

We are almost certainly witnessing here the beginnings of Cudworth's later, more developed attacks on voluntarism in the *True Intellectual System* and the *Treatise of Eternal and Immutable Morality*. In the preface to the *System*, Cudworth mentions that he intends to refute those theists who hold 'That [God's] Will is no way Regulated or Determined, by any Essentiall and Immutable Goodness, and Justice; or that he hath nothing of Morality in his Nature, he being onely Arbitrary Will Omnipotent.' (TISU i)

Similarly, in his *Treatise on Freewill*, he will argue against those 'who persuade themselves that the perfection of the Deity consisteth in being indifferent to all things, altogether undetermined by any antecedent motives or reasons of goodness, wisdom, or truth, and itself to be the sole determiner of all these by an indifferent, arbitrary, contingent and

fortuitous will' (FW 187). 'There is a nature of goodness, and a nature of wisdom antecedent to the will of God, which is the rule and measure of it' (FW 187). The arguments Cudworth deploys against voluntarism and in defence of naturalism in these later works are far more robust and sophisticated than the embryonic versions of them we have just considered, and are responsible for a large part of the renewed scholarly interest in his philosophy (Schroeder 2005, Wielenberg 2011).

5.3 Smith's Naturalism: 'Unchangeable Rules of Goodness'

Two of John Smith's *Select Discourses* indicate that he was also defending metaethical naturalism around the late 1640s. These are *Discourse IX on The Excellency and Nobleness of True Religion* (composed some time between 1644 and 1649), and *Discourse V on the Existence and Nature of God* (composed 1650–1).⁴⁸ Both discourses are roughly contemporary with Cudworth's *Commons* sermon and BD thesis. What we want to see now is that in both these discourses, Smith insists that God's will is constrained or limited by his good nature, which Smith takes to be the ultimate ground or 'ballast' (as Cudworth called it) of moral values. Morality, Smith contends, is grounded in certain 'unchangeable rules of goodness' that partially constitute God's nature.

Let us begin with the earlier discourse on *True Religion*. Smith's purpose in this discourse is to give a philosophical account of a psychological state which he (along with Whichcote) calls 'religion'. 'Religion' is the state of a soul that participates in God and has

⁴⁸ As the ninth and penultimate of the *Select Discourses*, the discourse on *True Religion* belongs to the older set of three discourses (older that is, than *Discourses* 1–6 which all date from 1650–51), and the editor John Worthington identified as 'chapel exercises'. This means that Smith prepared and delivered the discourse no later than 1649 and probably (if it dates from his time at Queen's and not from his student days at Emmanuel) not earlier than 1644.

knowledge of by acquaintance God's moral nature; we will have cause to look at this psychological state in far more detail in chapter 8 when we consider the Emmanuel Three's moral and religious epistemology.

For now though, we will focus on those parts of the discourse on *True Religion* which reveal Smith's position about the relation between God's will and the moral order. This discourse might seem an odd place to look for Smith's views on metaethics: if *True Religion* is a description of the normative state for human minds, why would Smith have reason to discuss the relationship between God's will and moral facts?

The answer is that Smith is a very particular kind of natural law theorist. For Smith, the principles of morality are implanted or engraved in the very structure of the human mind; and since those principles are themselves grounded in God's eternal mind, the human mind contains innate knowledge of God's goodness. That is why Smith begins his definition of religion by referring to God rather than to the mind: 'God is the *First Truth* and *Primitive Goodness*: True Religion is a vigorous *Efflux* and *Emanation* of *Both* upon the Spirits of men, and therefore is called '*a participation of the divine Nature*' (SD 380; cf. 2 Pt 1:4). Religion is possible because 'God hath stamp'd a Copy of his own Archetypal Loveliness upon the Soul, that man by reflecting into himself might behold there the glory of God, *intra se videre Deum*, see within his Soul all those Ideas of Truth which concern the Nature and Essence of God' (SD 382). So true religion, although it is a condition of the human mind, is a direct participation and reflection of God's goodness. Thus, to study religion in humans is to learn something about God's good nature.

One of the things we learn about God's nature in this way is that it contains 'eternal and immutable ideas' of good and evil. A religious soul experiences firsthand 'those *Eternal Rules of Truth and Goodness* which are the Foundation of all Religion ... which God at the first Creation folded up in the Soul of man' (SD 382). Smith calls these innate moral principles '*Truths of Natural Inscription*', consisting of both '*Fundamental principles of Truth*' and 'necessary *Corollaries and Deductions* that may be drawn from thence' (SD 382). So Smith clearly believes that as a consequence of human participation in God's immutable nature, we have access to the necessary and immutable ground of moral truth.

Smith proceeds to make it clear that these principles God has implanted in us are not the mere decrees of his will, but actual impresses of his nature. Their content is therefore as immutable for God as it is for us:

God when he gives his Laws to men, does not by virtue of his *Absolute dominion* dictate any thing at randome, and in such an arbitrary way as some imagine; but he measures all by his own Eternal Goodness (SD 396)

He even asserts that this eternal goodness is a constraint or rule upon God's will:

... God's *Unchangeable Goodness* ... is also *the Unchangeable Rule of his Will*; neither can he any more swerve from it, then he can swerve from himself. Nor does he charge any Duty upon man without consulting first of all with his *Goodness* (SD 396)

So Smith is placing himself in opposition to those who ‘imagine’ that God determines human morality in an ‘arbitrarious way’, unbound by any necessary rules of goodness. But Smith utterly rejects the idea that ‘Heaven’s Monarchy is such an *arbitrary* thing ... as being govern’d by nothing else but by an *Almighty Absolute Will*’ (SD 396; cf. *Commons* 27). We will return in later chapters to the important question of how Smith thinks he can know all this about God’s nature. For now though, all we must note is that in this discourse from 1644–1649, Smith firmly rejects the voluntarist view that whatever God wills is good purely because he wills it.

Similarly, in his later (c. 1650–1) discourse on *God’s Existence and Attributes*, Smith implicitly embraces the naturalist horn of the *Euthyphro* dilemma by insisting that the rules of reason and goodness limit God’s will and legislative power. In the eighth chapter of the discourse, Smith argues that God cannot will or command things which are not essentially good, and that their goodness does not depend on his will. God’s laws and decrees are not ‘the sole Results of an *Absolute will*, but the Sacred Decrees of *Reason* and *Goodness*. I cannot think God to be so *unbounded* in his *Legislative* power, that he can make any thing *Law* ... (SD 154–5).

In sum, it seems safe to conclude that Smith was committed to metaethical naturalism and opposed to voluntarism throughout the later 1640s, around the same time that Cudworth composed his *Commons* sermon and prepared his BD thesis on God’s ‘compliance’ to the unbreakable laws of goodness.

5.4 Whichcote's Naturalism: God Under the Power of Goodness

5.4.1 God 'Under the Power of Goodness'

The earliest hint of naturalism in Whichcote's thought is his 1651 exchange with Anthony Tuckney. The correspondence was sparked by a commencement sermon Whichcote delivered on 7 September 1651, which Tuckney found deeply problematic. He wrote to Whichcote the next day, expressing his concern over several points Whichcote had defended in that sermon; for the most part, Tuckney takes Whichcote to task for putting human reason above revelation, and for his criticisms of imputed righteousness (as we will see in chapters 6 and 7, Whichcote's stance on both of these issues are related to his naturalist view of God's goodness). While the focus is on these issues, rather than the question of how God's goodness relates to his will, the 1651 exchange provides two important clues that Whichcote's views were very much aligned with Smith's and Cudworth's.

The first clue is the verbatim extract Whichcote provides from his offending commencement sermon. The extract is chiefly an attack on the idea that God can be perfectly reconciled to the elect to God even when they still retain ungodly vices. The only way to be reconciled to God, Whichcote insists, is by being transformed from within into a Godlike frame of mind: 'with God there can not be reconciliation; without Our becoming Godlike' (EL 14). Contending for this position, Whichcote makes two remarks in the short extract that deserve our attention here. The first this:

God, being perfectly under the power of goodnesse, can not denie himself: because, if he shou'd depart from goodnesse; which is impossible to God. (EL 14–5)

Whichcote's point is that God cannot be reconciled to sinful human beings because doing so would contradict his goodness. Whichcote makes a second telling remark a few lines later:

...[W]e cannot imagine, that God by his Will and Pleasure can go against his Nature and Being. (EL 15)

That is, the reason God cannot be reconciled to sinners is that it would go against his nature; and God cannot, by mere will or pleasure, do anything that goes against his good nature. To put it plainly, Whichcote is asserting metaethical naturalism: God can only will things which are good (viz. consonant with his natural goodness); he cannot will things which contradict it.

In the context of the sermon, Cudworth is asserting this as part of his critique of the idea that believers are fully reconciled to God before any internal change has been wrought in them (to be discussed at length in chapter 7). Because goodness is so essential to God's nature, we must become really, internally good if we want to be reconciled to him; God cannot relax this requirement by an act of pure will: 'Nothing is more impossible than this, as being against the nature of God, which is in perfect agreement with goodness, and hath an absolute antipathy against iniquity, unrighteousness and sin' (EL 15). This is, for Whichcote, 'a demonstration in Divinity beyond which no demonstration in Astronomy is more certain' (EL 15).' So Whichcote is insisting that a particular course of action is impossible for God because it contradicts his good nature: in this, he is planting his colours firmly on the same patch of ground as Smith and Cudworth.

A second important clue provided by the 1651 exchange is the remark Tuckney's description of the beliefs of the learned and ingenious men. In Whichcote's circle, Tuckney alleges, the following heterodox opinions are defended:

The power of Nature, in Morals, too much advanced ... — The decrees of God quaestion'd and quarrel'd; because, according to our reason, wee cannot comprehend; how they may stand with His goodness: which, according to your phrase, Hee is *under the power of* ... (EL 38)

We have seen that Cudworth and Smith, in the late 1640s, were both preaching that God's will is constrained by his goodness, in direct opposition to the voluntarist tradition of their Calvinist milieu.

So as early as 1651, Whichcote is claiming that God is 'under the power of goodness', frequently and loudly enough that Tuckney is concerned about it. Whichcote's suggestion that God is 'under the power' of his goodness — that his goodness renders some courses of action 'impossible' for God — put him in direct opposition to the voluntarism we encountered in Luther, Calvin, Twisse, Perkins and Preston, for whom God's will is totally unbound by any antecedent cause. It is noteworthy that Tuckney thinks the root of Whichcote's error is his insistence on bringing revealed doctrines under the scrutiny of human reason; the pivotal role that reason plays in the Emmanuel Three's rejection of Calvinism will be explored in detail in chapter 8.

5.4.2 Later Whichcote on Moral Foundations

Where the early sources offer only this little glimpse into Whichcote's views about moral foundations, his later writings are far more explicit. The *Aphorisms* and Whichcote's later sermons are difficult to date (apart from a handful which are dated); the sermons seem to come mostly from after the Restoration.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, these published sermons and *Aphorisms* contain assertions that are clearly elaborations of the same views Tuckney accuses Whichcote of holding in 1651, and which accord strikingly with the views we now know Smith and Cudworth were defending in the 1640s. I agree with Frederick Beiser that, 'Although many of [the *Aphorisms* and sermons] were written after the 1650s, they often reflect views that were developed in the late 1630s, very early in the formation of the Cambridge school' (1996, 159). In this light, we may cautiously take the evidence of the *Aphorisms* and later sermons as reflecting the general tenor of Whichcote's thought in the crucial formative period.

Throughout Whichcote's later writings, he asserts the existence of eternal and immutable laws of goodness which are utterly impervious to all forms of will and power:

There are principles of everlasting righteousness, of unchangeable truth and goodness and of this I may say, that it is not a law that is subject to any power whatsoever: 'tis a law against which there can be no exception or abatement ... according to the nature of God; and that is the law of heaven. (Works II:60f)⁵⁰

⁴⁹ On the dating of Whichcote's later corpus, see Greene 1981, 230.

⁵⁰ Whichcote refers to 'eternal and unchangeable laws of goodness' (or some variation on that phrase) extremely often in his later sermons: e.g. *Works* I:388; II: 194; III:152, 246–7, 259; IV:108–9, 156, 238–9.

Whichcote frequently emphasises, in various contexts, that reason or understanding is superior and prior to will: understanding always comes ‘first’, and is followed by will.⁵¹ Sometimes, Whichcote asserts this as a general metaphysical or ethical principle, without specific reference to God’s will or God’s understanding:

Will cannot be the *first* rule: because Will is changeable; and, if you change Will, Good and Evil wou’d change. If there were no *Difference* in things, there could be no Inconsistencies. There is a Difference in things themselves; antecedent to all use of Power and Will. (Aph #333)

The *Law of Nature* is that, which is Reason; which is Right, and Fit. *Will* stands for nothing, in disjunction from Reason and Right: and our Apprehensions of Right are Regulated by the *Nature of Things*. To give *Will* or *Power* for Reason, is contrary to Reason. Will is no *Rule*, no *Justification* of any thing. (Aph #561)

But he also applies this general principle to the relationship between the divine understanding and the divine will. The divine understanding must be thought of as coming ‘first’, and determining the divine will:

Unchangeableness in God’s Counsils is, because the resolutions of His Choice are always made by the infallibility of His Understanding; and that Understanding is in certain conjunction with the Reason of Things. (Aph #414)

⁵¹ Cf. Cudworth to Stoughton in 1638/9: ‘The will is the Last thing in the soule, and the ultimate resolution of all others’ (Solly 1856, 289).

The Laws of God are not *Impositions* of Will or Power and Pleasure; but the Resolutions of Truth[,] Reason and Justice. (Aph #851)

So Whichcote is convinced that reason and truth are the first principles in God, and that the divine will alone is never the ultimate cause of God's conduct. For Whichcote, this is the same thing as saying that God's goodness or God's nature precede and determine his will and actions 'The Law of Righteousness, is the Law of God's Nature, and the Law of His Actions' (Aph #401). In God, righteousness, nature, goodness, reason and understanding are immutable and eternal, and determine the course of God's will and conduct. The later Whichcote is clearly committed to metaethical naturalism.

Against the Calvinist contention that this naturalist view of God limits God's power and sovereignty, Whichcote insists that power and goodness are inseparably intertwined, such that power without goodness is not actually power at all:

True Liberty, as well as Power, is always in Conjunction with Right and Good. It is Licentiousness and Weakness, that are separated from it. It is not Power; to be arbitrary in the Use of Power ... (Aph #383)

God, to whom *all* Power and Liberty belongs; disclaims all Power and Liberty to do contrary to *Right*. (Aph #274)

Wisdom and Power are Perfections, only as they are *in conjunction* with Justice and Goodness. (Aph #261; cf. *Works* IV:156)

There is that in God himself that is more beautiful than will. It is not majesty and glory divided from goodness, that is the divine perfection; but that wisdom and power are in immutable conjunction in goodness, for where wit and power are without goodness, there may be a diabolical nature. (*Works II*, 398)

For Whichcote then, God's power does not include the ability to do absolutely anything. It is only power to do what is right and in accordance with the nature of things, determined by his own eternal and immutable goodness. The ability to do otherwise would not be a power or a perfection, but a weakness (see Roberts 2012, 61–3).

5.5 Conclusions

We see then that the Emmanuel Three asserted a robust metaethical naturalism that ran directly counter to the voluntarist conception of God enshrined in the Calvinist theology of William Perkins and John Preston, as well as thinkers in the wider Reformed tradition. For Cudworth and Smith, we can be sure that they held this position firmly by the late 1640s. It seems likely that Whichcote held these views in this period as well, if his later works offer any indication.

We saw that Calvinists like Preston and Perkins typically defend voluntarism in the context of defending double predestination. I have postponed discussion of the Emmanuel Three's more explicit criticisms of the double decree to the next chapter, but it is worth noting at this point that Cudworth and Smith are already sounding suspiciously like Tuckney's learned and ingenious Platonisers. In particular, we have seen how Smith and Cudworth's answer early works answer to Tuckney's complaint that the learned and ingenious men question God's decrees because 'according to [their] reason, [they] cannot comprehend; how

they may stand with His goodness’, which they take God to be ‘*under the power of*’ (EL 38). It seems likely that Tuckney would have been concerned to hear Smith insist that God’s laws and decrees are not ‘the sole Results of an *Absolute will*, but the Sacred Decrees of *Reason* and *Goodness*’, and that for that reason, he could never have decreed to make us sinful or miserable for his own glory (SD 154–5). These assertions run directly counter to Perkins’ and Preston’s insistence that double predestination is a pure product of God’s arbitrary will, and not subject to any law or standard of goodness.

In the same vein, it is worth noting that Henry More’s *Psychodia Platonica* of 1642 — which Tuckney apparently quoted in his description of the doctrines of the learned and ingenious men (see 4.2.2) — contains similar assertions of metaethical naturalism to the Emmanuel Three’s. In *Psychathanasia*, More deplores the idea of a God who acts arbitrarily, without any ‘measure’ of goodness to guide him: ‘If God do all things simply at his pleasure / Because he will, and not because its good, / So that his actions will have no set measure / Is’t possible it should be understood / What he intends?’ (III.4.19; *Poems* 85) He warns that we must give no liberty ‘to such odde thoughts, that thus pervert / The laws of God, and rashly do assert / That will rules God, but Good rules not Gods will.’ (*Psychathanasia* III.4.21; *Poems* 85). Just as Cudworth wrote in *Commons* of the ‘Ballast of *absolute goodnesse*’ which stabilises God’s will (*Commons*, 27), More writes: ‘The prop and stay of things is Gods benignity’ (*Psychathanasia* III.4.14; *Poems* 85).

So by asserting metaethical naturalism, the Emmanuel Three were casting their lot in with the well-known Platonist of Christ’s College, Henry More. Smith and Cudworth remain persons-of-interest in the case of the learned and ingenious men.

(6) Is God a Tyrant? Reprobation and God's Goodness

In this chapter we will begin to see that the naturalism-voluntarism debate we have just examined was a manifestation of a deeper conflict about the actual content of God's moral character and conduct. The plan for is as follows. In 6.1, we will take stock of a pre-existing debate about divine tyranny, where English anti-Calvinists objected to the double decree on the grounds that it made God a tyrant. The remaining sections will explore how this debate played out in the Emmanuel Three's immediate context. We will examine two major Calvinist strategies for defending the double decree against the tyranny objection, and see how the Emmanuel Three responded to both. Throughout, the goal will be to see that both the Emmanuel Three and the Calvinists are both ultimately defending different pictures of God's moral character. This will bring us closer to Part IV where we will turn to the philosophical convictions which explain why the Emmanuel Three have the picture of God's character that they do, and how they 'debunk' the rival picture implied by the double decree.

By looking closely at the ways the Emmanuel Three and their Calvinist contemporaries described God's relation to the moral order, we have discovered a fundamental disagreement. Prompted largely by controversy about absolute predestination, Calvinists asserted that God's will is sovereign over everything, including the moral realm: thus, God's will to arbitrarily elect some for salvation and pass others by cannot be unjust, because it is only with reference to God's will that anything can be just or unjust in the first place. But the Emmanuel Three decry the notion of a God whose will is unregulated by antecedent moral principles and capable of absolutely anything, insisting that God's will always follows the immutable goodness of his nature.

This is a significant and noteworthy difference in itself, but it is only the tip of a much deeper iceberg of philosophical disagreement between the Emmanuel Three and their Puritan contemporaries. Commenting on the continuing debate between Calvinists and Arminians, Baggett and Walls note that ‘[w]hile differences over divine sovereignty, election, and correspondingly different accounts of human freedom are often taken to be the most basic points of dispute, in reality, the deepest conflict concerns the very character of God’ (2011, 66). The same is true of the seventeenth century; the heart of the disagreement was that these parties held very different conceptions of God’s moral character and the sort of behaviour that can be ascribed to him. To say that the Emmanuel Platonists were naturalists — viz. that they viewed morality as rooted in God’s immutable nature — still leaves a great deal unsaid, because it does not yet tell us what they thought God’s immutable nature was really like. What sort of morality did they think flows from God’s nature? What sort of things does it render good, and what sort of things does it render evil? And how did this morality find expression in God’s dealing with his creatures?

We have already seen hints at what the rival accounts of God’s character at play here are: Calvinists denied naturalism because they wanted to give God free rein to unconditionally elect some people to salvation and reprobate the rest. Presumably then, the Emmanuel men’s defence of naturalism is tied up somehow with a rejection of the kind of God who would make the double decree; indeed, the Emmanuel Three’s defences of naturalism already examined contain suggestions that they oppose not only their interlocutors’ metaethical views, but their whole concept of God’s character. Simply put, the Emmanuel Three do not think a God who would make the double decree is worthy of worship, or morally upright.

Remember that Tuckney's learned and ingenious men had reputation for 'questioning and quarrelling the decrees of God' because they could not see 'how they may stand with His goodness' (EL 38). This is, more or less, what Cudworth himself tells us took place in the 1640s. Writing to the Dutch Remonstrant Philippus van Limborch, reminiscing about his days in Emmanuel, Cudworth writes:

When I was examining rather carefully ethical matters and I manifestly perceived ... I was not able to ascribe to God those dreadful decrees, by which he inevitably condemned innocent men out of pure arbitrariousness to guilt and sin, for which they are to atone by everlasting torture ... a very large number of men at our university, influenced by the evidence of this one truth, have gone over to the camp of the Remonstrants (Cudworth to Limborch 1668, quoted in Cassirer 1953, 79)

This reveals that while naturalism is central to the Emmanuel men's position, it is deployed in service of an even more fundamental commitment to an account of the content God's moral nature. Calvinists indeed appealed to voluntarism because they wanted to give God room to do things which seem evil to us. The Emmanuel men (and perhaps English anti-Calvinists more generally) countered with defences of naturalism because they wanted to deny that God could ever do such things. But the Emmanuel men were just as hostile to any forms of metaethical naturalism on which God's immutable nature allowed him to do these same things. They are not committed just to the general thesis that God's will is constrained by his nature; they are also centrally committed to *a particular account of what that nature is like*.

This is an important point: naturalism, as a purely metaethical position, leaves God just as much moral flexibility as does voluntarism. Just because God has an eternally and

immutably good nature does not mean that his conduct will seem good to *us*. It might be eternally and immutably good according to God's nature for him to do things we usually consider monstrous; we will see that some Calvinists insist on just this view. There is no guarantee that the goodness of God's nature corresponds with the familiar standard of goodness we use to measure human conduct. If something God is supposed to have done seems evil to us, that is no reason — if we are naturalists — to conclude that God could not have done it: unless we have full knowledge of God's nature, we cannot be sure that it is in fact evil when measured against the ultimate standard of God's innate goodness.

Accordingly, this chapter will give us deeper insight into the specific kind of moral nature the Emmanuel Three attribute to God by exploring their contribution to the debate about *divine tyranny*. Quite independently of the Emmanuel Three, English anti-Calvinists routinely accused the God of the double decree of being a tyrant, for only a tyrannical ruler could mercilessly destroy a huge swathe of their subjects for crimes they could not help committing. But the Bible, and our own hearts, reveal that God is good, kind and merciful. Therefore, the double decree is unworthy of God, and must be a misinterpretation of Scripture.

In response, Calvinists deploy a range of argumentative strategies to defend their picture of God against the charge of tyranny. As we will see, these strategies are often inconsistent with each other on a purely philosophical level (to wit, they assert both that God needs no justification for the double decree, but also has good reasons for making it). We will find, however, that these conflicting strategies share a common goal: to defend what Calvinists take to be the Biblical picture of God's character against the instinctual abhorrence ordinary human beings have towards that picture. From a Calvinist's point of view, Scripture

clearly teaches that God made the double decree: if this decree strikes most human beings as cruel and tyrannical, it is only because most human beings are thinking inaccurately about the moral principles at play. The real God is the God of the double decree, and if our moral instincts object, Calvinists will demonstrate why our moral instincts are wrong. The point here is that the heart and soul of the Calvinist outlook the Emmanuel Three reject is not a philosophical commitment to voluntarism (which is why they so easily take up naturalist arguments alongside voluntarist ones), but rather a doctrinal conviction about what God is like.

As we examine the Emmanuel Three's responses to these different Calvinist strategies, we will find that they are also driven by a central conviction about what God is like. For reasons that will become properly clear in chapter 8, the Emmanuel Three take as their starting point the conviction that God has the sort of character which *agrees* with our instinctive abhorrence for the idea of reprobation. Where the Calvinists deploy various strategies to show why our moral instincts about the double decree are mistaken, the Emmanuel Three vigorously assert the opposite: our moral instincts about who God is, the intuitive twinge of horror that strikes us when we imagine millions of souls eternally and unavoidably damned for the glory of God, is in fact the best and most reliable indication that no such God exists. This is because, on the Emmanuel Three's philosophical outlook (which, as will be seen, is basically Platonic), the moral instincts which find the double decree tyrannical are the most rational and Godlike part of us. As Edward Fowler, an apologist for the Cambridge Platonists, would write in 1670: 'For my part, I can believe no sence of any Scripture true, that plainly contradicts the self-evident notions of Good and Evil, that God hath put into my soul, and were born with me' (Fowler 1670, 218).

So, we are left with two very different responses to the problem posed by the apparent injustice of the double decree. The Puritans take the double decree as an indisputable fact of divine revelation, and so defend its against the charge of tyranny using an inconsistent cocktail of voluntarism and naturalism, on which God needs no good reasons to reprobate the non-elect, but also has good reasons for doing so. Either way, our instinct to brand the God of the double decree as wicked tyrant is mistaken. But the Emmanuel Three take the opposite view: clear moral reasoning about God reveals to us, just as it did to the Platonists of old, that the real God could never make the double decree. The real God finds the idea of predestination to Hell as morally abhorrent as we do.

Seeing how these two conflicting pictures of God's moral character play out in the debate about divine tyranny will further highlight the distinctive and controversial views which mark the Emmanuel Three out as philosophical allies against their aggressively Calvinist milieu. In particular, it will give us a better picture of what they thought God's essential goodness was actually like. But it will also pave the way for the final section (Part IV) where we will investigate the underlying participatory epistemology that grounds their claim to know God's character well enough to reject the double decree.

6.1 The Double Decree and Tyranny

The purpose of this chapter is show that the naturalist-voluntarist debate we examined above is rooted in a deeper conflict about God's moral character, or more precisely, about what it means for God to be a good and upright sovereign over the universe. We will do this by looking at the way both parties think about the Calvinist doctrine that God predestined a large portion of the human race to Hell.

6.1.1 Arbitrariness and Tyranny in Political Discourse, c. 1620–1650

To lead into the debate about God's moral character, we must take note of an important piece of political background we have not yet considered. I am referring to a curious overlap between the anti-voluntarist language used by the Emmanuel Three, and the heated political discourse that boiled up around the conflict between Charles I and Parliament in the 1620s, 30s and 40s. As relations between the king and Parliament deteriorated, English political writers on both sides of the dispute began to characterise the other side as exercising (or wanting to exercise) 'arbitrary' or 'tyrannical' power over the nation (see Nyquist 2013, 147–51). In the fraught years of the 1640s and 50s, the national mood was particularly sensitive to charges of tyranny and arbitrary rule by brute force.

A computer search on EEBO for particular keywords illustrates the magnitude of this shift in political discourse. A search for the word 'arbitrary' on EEBO in all English works in the 120 years from 1500 to 1620 yields 670 hits in 245 different records. A search for the same word in works in the thirty year period 1620 to 1650 yields 4468 hits in 1645 different records. Similarly, a search for the word 'tyrannical' in English works from 1500 to 1620 yields 1824 hits in 681 records. In 1620–1630, there are 2667 hits in 1268 records for the same word. This is not just because EEBO lacks records for the earlier period, or because printing was cheaper in the later period; when the same search is run for closely related words like 'tyrant' or 'arbiter' the ratio is far more what we might expect: the words are printed many more times in the earlier 120 year period than in the thirty year period from 1620–50.⁵² Evidently, the breakdown of the relationship between Charles I and Parliament sparked a

⁵² Searching for 'tyrant' — 1500–1620: 11067 hits in 2031 records vs. 1620–1650: 6569 hits in 1805 records. Searching for 'arbiter': 1500–1620 yields 413 hits in 243 records vs. 1620–1650: 332 hits in 218 records).

wave of condemnation of all forms of ‘tyrannical’ and ‘arbitrary’ power. Of course, what any one writer meant by ‘arbitrary’ or ‘tyrannical’ rule depended a great deal on their particular agenda, but it was not something that any ruler wanted to be called as far as they could avoid it. The ways these words are employed in political debate from 1620–1650 reveal some striking parallels with the Emmanuel Platonists’ anti-voluntarist polemics.

One of the chief marks of a tyrant is the wielding of power ‘arbitrarily’, such that the sovereign seems to be above the censure of any laws or standards of accountability. Thus, in response to a call for Parliament not to be bound by precedents, a Royalist polemicist writes:

This is an excellent ground to justify their innocence against all the world. For if they can make it appeare, they are not bound to keepe any law, no man can accuse them for the breach of any. What obligation can justice lay on them, who by a strange vertue of representation, are not capable of doing wrong[?] It will become justice, because they did it ... (Diggs 1642, 113)

Diggs fears that if Parliament is no longer required to abide by precedents, their decisions will become entirely unregulated by any constraining laws. Whatever they do will ‘become’ just, simply ‘because they did it’. This is troubling because it leaves those ruled by Parliament with no recourse to challenge unfair or oppressive decisions; Parliament’s decisions would be unanchored and unmoored by any checks and balances. We cannot help but be reminded here of repeated claims in Calvin, Perkins and Preston (see 4.1 above) that things become just only after God wills them, and of the Platonists’ insistence that God’s will is always anchored and bounded by the ‘eternal law’ of his goodness and justice.

On the other side of the political divide, an anonymous anti-monarchist pamphleteer warns that if the King should win the war, ‘then we are *ad arbitrium Principis*, at the arbitrary will of our Prince for all that we enjoy ... *Voluntas regis legis habet vigorem*, the will of the Prince, is a law, then would all depend upon our Sovereignes pleasure, we could make no certain claime or title to any thing under heaven ...’ (Anon. 1643, 7–8). If the King regains control, the people will be at the mercy of his arbitrary whims. In his *Arrow Against All Tyranny*, the Leveller Richard Overton describes the same fear of an arbitrary ruler; he warns would-be tyrants: ‘it is in vaine for you to thinke you have power over us, to save us or destroy us at your pleasure, to doe with us as you list’ (1646, 5). This arbitrariness is an important feature of tyranny: a tyrant is unregulated, chaotic and unpredictable because it only their will — their ‘mere pleasure’ — that determines how they wield their power, rather than any stable principles of justice or rightness. As another pamphleteer put it: ‘This is arbitrary Government, when no form is observed’ (*The Camp of Christ* 1642, 15).

Arbitrary rule is so dangerous because it leaves the tyrant unlimited scope to use their power against the interests of their citizens. During the proceedings against Charles I, a Parliamentary speaker accused the King of tyranny for just this reason: ‘Truly, we have been told, *Rex est, qui bene regit, Tyrannus qui populum opprimit* [He is a king that rules well; a tyrant who oppresses the people], and if that be the definition of a Tyrant, then see if you come short of it in your Actions, and whether not the highest Tyrant by that way of arbitrary Government, which you sought to introduce ...’ (*Full Proceedings of the High Court of Justice against King Charles* 1654, 83). Charles’s arbitrary government is directly connected to his oppression of the people.

In an allegorical dialogue, Nathaniel Ingelo, a fellow of Queen's College contemporary with Smith, praises a fictional king called Anaxagathus ('good ruler') for his refusal to do everything his authority allowed him:

He was unwilling also to make an Example against the Law, and let his Subjects see that it was possible for sin to be unpunishable. He would make no use of an Arbitrary Power ... neither did he think he lost any thing of his Power by not doing every thing which he might. (Ingelo 1660, II, 51).

Anaxagathus made a point of making himself publicly accountable to the law, and did not consider this limitation as any sort of lessening of his power. As a result, his people freely and joyfully obeyed him, because his concern for their good was obvious to them: 'Whilst the King strictly observ'd the establish'd Laws, the People learn'd Obedience from his Government. His great Care of his Subjects safety made them perform their Duties with an unspeakable willingness ...' (ibid.). By subjecting himself to a law and placing a limit on power that might otherwise be wielded arbitrarily, Anaxagathus wins the good faith of his subjects.

So it is the 'form' and order provided principles of justice and rightness that keep a populace safe from the arbitrary whims of their rulers. As Whichcote would later put it in one of his Aphorisms, '*Rule of Right* is the Weak man's Strength, and the Strong man's Curb ... [it] arraigns the Intruder's Violence' (Aph #1141). The rule of right may be a people's only defence against the conventional force of a tyrannical sovereign. In this vein, Overton warns the men of Parliament that the same moral principles that justify their opposition to the King will apply to them as well should they win the civil war:

... for if for the safety of the people, [the King] might in equity be opposed by you in his tyrannies oppressions & cruelties, even so may you by the same rule of right reason, be opposed by the people in generall, in the like cases of distruction and ruine by you upon them, for the safety of the people is the Soveraigne Law, to which all must become subject ... (Overton 1646, 5)

Overton directs this rhetoric against tyrannical statesmen, but he is sounding similar notes to the Emmanuel Three's rhetoric against a voluntarist God. For Overton, the 'rule of right reason' and the 'Soveraigne Law' form an unshakeable moral foundation that no amount of brute force can overcome; similarly, the Emmanuel Platonists' talk of 'eternal rules' and 'immutable justice' form the basis of God's sovereignty. Overton concludes that all tyranny 'whatsoever, and in whomsoever, is in it selfe unnaturall, illegall' (1646, 5), echoing the Emmanuel men's insistence that even in God, goodness is good by nature, good in itself.

6.1.2 Reprobation as Divine Tyranny

In heated and politically-charged debates about predestination, English critics of Calvinism had begun to use exactly this language to describe the God of Calvinist doctrine. When human sovereigns act cruelly or tyrannously, our intuition is to call them to account: no matter how powerful they are, they are still obliged to respect basic principles of justice and goodness. But what are Christians to think when it is God himself who seems to be acting cruelly and tyrannously?

In some cases, the connection between political and theological tyranny was explicit. Near the beginning of his treatise against political tyrants and hypocrites, another Leveller William Walwyn takes aim at those in ‘the Reformed Churches’ (1649, 12) who hold to absolute and double predestination: ‘God deliver us from such doctors[;] ... unmercifull men which will maintaine, that God hath predestinated one man to salvation more then another ...’ (1649, 11). Walwyn takes this doctrine to be a blasphemous misuse of Scripture: ‘it was not written that thou shouldest construe it to make God a tyrant ...’ (1649, 12). For someone like Walwyn, the resemblance between Calvinist theology and political tyranny was obvious.

In fact, English Calvinists themselves seem to have been aware of a general feeling in some quarters that the God they believed in was a tyrant. In one of his polemical defences of double predestination, William Twisse acknowledges that in the eyes of his opponents, the doctrine of double predestination ‘ascribes unto [God], farre greater cruelty, then can be found in the most bloody and barbarous Tyrant in the World’ (Twisse 1653, vol. 2, 10). Calvinists were aware too that providing rational and moral grounds for their conception of God would be an uphill battle. In fact, they largely acknowledge that it does not make much moral sense: ‘we acknowledge the seeming harshnes of it, as well as our Adversaries, yet because we find it revealed in Gods word, we hold it our duty to embrace it, and therehence conclude that it is *aequissimum* [most just]’ (Twisse 1653, vol. 1, 14). As Twisse points out, Puritans believe in the double decree because on their reading, Scripture declares it, not because it is a truth of reason.

Let us be more precise about the sense in which the double decree seemed to critics to cast God as a cruel tyrant. The most ostensibly tyrannical action of the Calvinists’ God was

his decree of reprobation: the second, negative component of the double decree. To recap, here is a standard Puritan catechism's definition of reprobation:

Tell me now, what is Reprobation? It is the decree of God, wherby he hath from all eternitie ordayned, not to have mercy on some men and women in Christ, nor to make them partakers of the meanes of salvation, but to passe them by, leave them in their sinne, and for them justly to condemne them to perpetual torments in Hell, for the glory of his power and justice.

What is the moving cause of Reprobation? None other but the good pleasure of Gods will. (Boughton 1623, 28)

So reprobation means that God — for no other cause than the ‘good pleasure of his will’ — has granted eternal life to some and denied it to others.

There are several aspects of this doctrine that made God's rule seem tyrannical to English anti-Calvinists. The first is that as all orthodox Puritans insist, God's choice of whom to elect and whom to reprobate is entirely arbitrary, depending on the mere pleasure God's will. As Anthony Burgess of Emmanuel College put it, ‘If it be asked why hath God mercy on this or that man ... the answer is, So is the will of God.’ (1656, 250). This arbitrary choice to save some and let others be damned goes against the standards of justice and fairness to which we normally hold human sovereigns.

John Arrowsmith, one of Tuckney's Puritan old guard, acknowledges that this inequitable treatment is one of the most objectionable aspects of double predestination: ‘It is God's awarding *paribus imparia* [unequal things to equal persons,] unlike destinies to men of

like conditions considered in the same lump, and doing this arbitrarily, according to the good pleasure and counsel of his own will, that setteth [us] on crying out of iniquity in Gods proceedings' (Arrowsmith 1659, 344–5). By Arrowsmith's own admission then, the double decree contradicts an important principle of equity that regulates human conduct.

As we shall see when we examine Puritan reactions to these criticisms, the standard response to the unfairness objection was that in sending the reprobate to Hell, God was only giving them their just deserts. God did not damn them because he had not elected them, but because they were sinful. The problem with this, however, is that Calvinist doctrine also taught that God had denied the reprobate the grace that would have made it possible for them to avoid sin, and so he was essentially damning them for sins which, by his own design, they could not avoid committing. We see this in the frequent assertion if God really willed everyone to be saved, then everyone would be saved: 'Christ doth not dispence [saving grace] to every one; for if He did, every one would come home to Christ' (Arrowsmith 1660, 124). The only reason not all have come home to Christ is that Christ does not, in fact, will everyone to come home to him. Thus, Reformed theologians comfortably speak of God 'denying salvation' to the reprobate, or even 'inflicting damnation' on them, as intentionally as he freely bestows salvation on the elect (e.g. Twisse 1653, vol. 1, 37). This is because 'God makes use of [the damnation of the reprobate] to his owne ends and the manifestation of his owne glory' (Twisse 1653, vol. 2, 27). In light of all this, there is no escaping the troubling sense that according to Reformed doctrine, God in some real sense *desires* and *delights* in the torment of those in Hell.

Indeed, he seems to have created the reprobate for exactly this purpose: 'It is true God did appoint both *Judas* and all other wicked persons, that never break off their sinnes by

repentance, unto destruction, of his own voluntary disposition. For God workes all things according to the counsaile of his will ...' (Twisse 1653, vol. 2, 26). According to John Arrowsmith, this was one of the chief targets for anti-Calvinist critics: 'viz. that God made sundry of his creatures on purpose to damn them: a thing which the Rhetorick of our adversaries is wont to blow up to the highest pitch of aggravation.' (1659, 336).

In more ways than one then, the double decree struck critics of Calvinism as an indictment of God's moral character, attributing to God the vices and wickedness we typically see in the worst human tyrants. A particularly striking example of this sort of criticism — one which we know Emmanuel theologians were discussing (Tanner MS 65:64; 67:160) — was a treatise by a certain Samuel Hoard, titled *God's Love to Mankind* (see Twisse 1653, vol. 2, 1).

In this work, Hoard challenges the Calvinist picture of God by arguing that human beings in a situation analogous to God's could not justly act as God has done if he has made the decree of reprobation. '[T]he unavoydable damnation of so many millions', he wrote, 'cannot be absolutely and antecedently intended by God, without the greatest injustice and cruelty which may in no wise be imputed to God' (Hoard 1633, 23). To illustrate this injustice, Hoard compares God to a human parent:

We cannot in reason thinke that any man in the world can so farre put off humanity and nature, as to resolve with himsefe to marry and beget Children, that after they are borne and have lived a while with him, he may hang them up by the tongues, teare their flesh with scourges, pull it from their bones with burning pincers, or put them to any cruell tortures; that by thus torturing them he may shew what his authority and power is over them Much lesse can we beleeve without great violence

to reason, that the God of mercy can so far forget himselfe, as out of his absolute pleasure to ordaine such infinit multitudes of his children made after his own Image, to everlasting fire; & create them one after another, that after the end of a short life here, he might torment them without end hereafter, to shew his power & sovereignty over them. (Hoard 1633, 15–6)

Hoard's point is that if it is so obviously wicked for a human father to act in this way to his children, it should be equally obvious that God — who cannot act wickedly — could not possibly have absolutely predestined millions of human beings to eternal torment.

Of course, Hoard's argument will only be effective if his opponents agree that God is bound by the same moral principles that govern human behaviour. As we have seen already, many Calvinists did not. Twisse, for instance, responds to Hoard by rejecting the comparison of God to a human parent: 'Is it safe to measure out Gods proceedings, by the proceedings of men? What Father or Mother would be content to execute a Child of theirs upon the Gallowes, when by some capitall crime he hath deserved it? How much lesse hold them upon the rack of continuall tortures; what then? must not God be allowed to inflict eternall death upon his creatures?' (Twisse 1653, vol. 1, 137; cf. Sterry 1675, 149). Twisse objects to the analogy: in the matter of punishment, the attitude a good human father has towards his children is not analogous to God's attitude to his creatures. What would be unthinkable for a human father to do to his children is evidently quite ordinary for God to do with his creatures.

In more recent times, this issue has been called 'the bad god problem' for philosophical Calvinism. It is a philosophical problem raised specifically by the Calvinist doctrine of

absolute predestination both to Heaven for the saved, and to Hell for the damned, and has to do with the moral character of God.

... on [Calvinism], God could have saved everyone without violating anyone's free will. Since Calvinists are not universalists, this means that the non-elect go to hell due to God's sovereign choice alone when they could just as easily have been reconciled to God and experienced an eternity of joy rather than an eternity of pain and sadness. If this is true, there is no intelligible sense in which God loves those who are lost, nor is there any recognizable sense in which he is good to them. This is the 'bad god objection' (Baggett & Walls 2011, 71).

6.1.3 Voluntarist and Crypto-Naturalist Responses

We now have a better grasp of what anti-Calvinists meant when they accused Calvinists of construing God as a tyrant. As we turn now to consider how the tyranny objection played out in the Emmanuel Three's context, we find that in order to rescue God's reputation from the charge of tyranny, the Calvinists deployed two main strategies which we will consider in turn.

The first strategy will be familiar from chapter 4: a naked appeal to voluntarism. Here, the Calvinist shrugs their shoulders and says that however tyrannical God's decrees might seem to us, God cannot be charged with a vice like tyranny because he is not bound by any moral constraints whatsoever. This is an emotionally unsatisfying response, perhaps, but a consistent one. If a human ruler were to make some decree analogous to the double decree, they would be rightly charged with tyranny, because human rulers are bound by the moral laws God has set down. But God's will is governed by no law — whatever he wills is good by definition — and so God can never be charged with tyranny.

Against this argument, the Emmanuel Three fall back on the metaethical naturalism we saw them defending in chapter 4. But now, we will get to see clearly what was only implied by the passages we examined there: the Emmanuel Three's assertions of metaethical naturalism are made specifically in the context of attacking the double decree. We will see that the Emmanuel Three reject voluntarist models of God's sovereignty on the same grounds that antityrannical political writers call for checks and balances on the power of sovereigns. For the Emmanuel Three, the eternal and immutable rules of goodness preclude the double decree just as the 'rule of right' prevents a tyrannical sovereign from committing atrocities against their subjects.

The second kind of Calvinist strategy, however, is what I will call a 'crypto-naturalist' strategy. On this strategy, Calvinists refute the charge of divine tyranny by appealing to various ways in which reprobation is actually good and just (and so not tyrannical). Sometimes, this involves appealing to moral principles that are already familiar to us (e.g. the 'Just Deserts' defence: all human beings deserve to go to Hell anyway, so God is doing nothing unjust by sending the majority of them there). More often though, Calvinists appeal to a mysterious standard of goodness contained in the depths of God's wisdom; measured against this standard, the double decree is just and right, and only looks tyrannical to us because we cannot comprehend the exalted moral standard at play. On these strategies then, Calvinists show that God is not a tyrant by applying some moral standard of justification to the double decree.

As we shall see, this kind of strategy involves an implicit and usually unacknowledged embrace of metaethical naturalism quite incompatible with voluntarism. In order to justify

God's actions, these strategies implicitly admit that there are moral standards (even if very high and mysterious ones) that govern God's actions. But funnily enough, the Calvinists who make this sort of defence are nearly all the same ones — Perkins, Preston, Burgess, Arrowsmith, not to mention Calvin himself — who made fervent defences of voluntarism in the previous chapter; in fact, they sometimes give naturalist and voluntarist arguments on the same page or in the same paragraph. Because these naturalist defences are usually unacknowledged and deployed alongside more nakedly voluntarist defences, I call them 'crypto-naturalist'; they are naturalist arguments masquerading as voluntarist arguments.

Against these crypto-naturalist strategies, the Emmanuel Three are far more explicit about their own convictions about God's character, and why they reject the rival Calvinist picture. In brief, they are convinced that a fundamental part of God's character is his unwavering intention to communicate his own goodness as far as possible to other creatures; such a God would never intentionally deprive any human beings of goodness that he could provide to them. They also point out that this image of God is far more consistent with moral instincts we normally consider virtuous and Godlike, and that these moral instincts are reliable indicators of God's character.

6.2 Voluntarist Defences of Reprobation

6.2.1 Perkins and Preston's Voluntarist Defence

We have already seen (in chapter 4) that many Reformed thinkers — from Luther and Calvin to Perkins and Preston — made explicit defences of metaethical voluntarism. As I suggested earlier, this provides them with a relatively painless solution to the scandal of the decree of reprobation: reprobation must be just, because God wills it, and whatever God wills is *ipso facto* just. In this section, we will run through a brief sample of Reformed appeals to

voluntarism specifically in defence of the decree of reprobation. As will become increasingly clear, Reformed theologians' fondness for voluntarism was not a deeply-rooted philosophical conviction about God's relation to morality, but a rhetorical tool to rebut the charge that their doctrine makes God tyrannous and wicked.

A typical Puritan catechism explains the apparent unfairness of reprobation with an unvarnished appeal to voluntarism:

[Question]: But will not this argue God of injustice, for his will sake to reprobate men?

[Answer]: No. Because whatsoever God wills, is therefore just, because he wils it: his will being the supreme rule of all justice and righteousness. (Boughton 1623, 29)

This is the same voluntarist picture of God we examined in the previous chapter. Here though, it is being deployed in a very particular way, as a defence of God's conduct with regard to reprobation.

The same move is made with more sophistication by figures associated with Emmanuel and Christ's Colleges. We saw earlier (in 5.1.3) that William Perkins takes God's will as metaphysically primary and entirely uncaused. He draws on this notion when prompted to explain the apparent cruelty of the decree of reprobation. When God wills to 'desert' a reprobate soul and abandon it to sin and damnation:

... this his will is not to be blamed: for men are not to imagine, that a thing must first be just, and then afterward that God doth will it: but contrariwise, first God wills a thing, and thereupon it becomes just. (Perkins 1600, 675)

Created beings are morally bound to will only what is good and just; but God's will is not bound in the same way. So God can will to reprobate any soul and in the mere act of so willing, make that volition a just and good one.

For John Preston too, who served as Master of Emmanuel when Tuckney and Whichcote entered the college, God's metaphysical primacy explains why God's actions cannot be evaluated against the same principles of justice as a human sovereign might:

... in our judging of the waies of *God*, we should take heed of framing a modell of our owne, as to thinke, because such a thing is just; therefore the *Lord* wils it: the reason of this conceit is, because we thinke that *God* must goe by our rule; we forget this, that every thing is just because he wils it; it is not that *God* wils it, because it is good or just ... (Preston 1631, 143)

But Preston's intention here is to use voluntarism to explain the apparent unfairness of double predestination. Having argued at length for God's independence from any moral standard, he concludes:

... therefore in the mysteries of predestination, we are to say thus with our selves; Thus I finde the *Lord* hath set it downe, thus he hath expressed himselfe in his Word,

such is his pleasure; and therefore it is reason, and just such against which there can be no exception. (Preston 1631, 144)

It is enough to know by divine revelation that God made the double decree: knowing this is equivalent to knowing that the double decree is just and good, no matter how it might strike us.

Preston goes on to describe God's moral and metaphysical primacy in a different key that will help him address the issue of reprobation: because God's will is the only rule of justice, God himself — rather than anything external to him — is the only 'end' for any of his actions:

If *God* be without all cause, then he may doe all things for himselfe, and for his owne glory; because he that hath no cause above, or without himselfe, he needs not doe any thing but for himself ... wee must not expect, that *God* should doe any thing for any other end, for any other creature in the world; for having no end above himselfe, it is impossible that hee should have any end but himself ... (Preston 1631, 144)

With this principle in place, Preston moves to the question of reprobation itself, and the apparent injustice of God's leaving so many to damnation. He poses the question and then answers it with reference to the 'vessels of wrath' verse in Romans 9:

Whereas this objection might be made; Will he cast men to hell? will hee damne them for his owne glory? Yes (saith he) all his actions even that also is for his own

sake; *Rom 9.22 ... What if GOD willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power knowne, endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath filled to destruction?* &c. This is enough, he hath no end, no cause above himselfe; and therefore it is reason enough, he doth it because he will doe it. (Preston 1631, 144–5)

Preston goes on, in the next sentence, to appeal to a moral principle — the right of an owner to destroy his property — according to which God’s conduct here is revealed to be just (1631, 145–6), without realising that his voluntarism renders the appeal redundant. But as a self-contained defence of reprobation, his argument that God may act entirely for his own ends is consistently voluntarist. He concludes:

God, because hee is the first cause, hee may have what end he will, and no man can say, why doest thou so? hee may make some vessels of honour, and some of dishonour, and all for himselfe, and his owne glory ... (1631, 145)

As wicked as it might seem for God to make vessels solely to destroy them for his own glory, because God is ‘the first cause’, he can set his own ends with complete moral freedom. God’s conduct with regard to the reprobate is just, because God willed it.

In this way, God can do things with impunity that a human sovereign could not do. Unlike God, ‘man may not doe any thing for his owne end, but he is bound to doe all for an higher end, as hee that made us hath appointed ...’ (1631, 146). If a man ignores God’s commandments and treats his fellow human beings as mere means to his own ends, then he ‘arrogate[s] that to himselfe, which is the *Lords*, who is without cause, which is an high kinde of idolatry’ (1631, 147). The point is that what would be wicked and tyrannous for a human to

do is not wicked and tyrannous when God does it, because God's will is not subject to any higher standard of morality.

6.2.2 Arrowsmith and Burgess on God's Arbitrary Rule

We saw that in contemporary political discourse, one of the chief marks of a tyrant was their 'arbitrary rule': that is, ruling by brute force rather than according to principles of justice. It is interesting then that in the preaching of Tuckney's associates John Arrowsmith and Anthony Burgess, we find explicit defences of the idea that God, unlike human sovereigns, has every right to rule arbitrarily, especially in the matter of predestination.

We encountered John Arrowsmith earlier as one of the two old friends (along with Thomas Hill) whom Whichcote guesses have been complaining about him (see 4.1 above). In his posthumously published catechetical lectures — clearly prepared for a Cambridge audience (e.g. Arrowsmith 1659, 356) — Arrowsmith fervently defends God's right to act arbitrarily in matters of salvation. He excoriates those whom he sarcastically calls 'the great Masters of Reason (as they would be accounted)', who 'although they be not unwilling to yield an independant Sovereignty and Arbitrary working to some men, as in the Eastern parts of the world most do to their absolute Monarchs ... yet out of their deep enmity and malignity against God, deny him the like prerogative, and will therefore be always found opposing his Decrees, and those most, that are most Arbitrary' (1659, 355).

Tuckney's Emmanuel colleague, Anthony Burgess makes a similar point in a sermon published in 1656. The sermon is on a verse in John's Gospel, where Christ says to God the Father: 'As thou hast given [thy Son] power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him' (Jn 17:2). Enumerating the characteristics to this power to

grant eternal life, Burgess writes: ‘*This power is arbitrary in the use of it; He opens this mans heart and leaveth another shut ...*’, referring to God’s divine prerogative to elect and reprobate others at will. Burgess calls this the ‘sovereign arbitrary power of God’ (1656, 38). In sum, Burgess holds that, ‘*God hath this end in this spiritual Creation, to shew his absolute Dominion, and free Liberty in exercising his gracious Power upon what Subjects he pleaseth*’ (Burgess 1652, 293). In this endeavour, God is bound by no rules of right or fairness; the arbitrariness of his choices only serves to highlight his ‘absolute dominion’.

6.3 The Emmanuel Three’s Critique of the Voluntarist Defence

6.3.1 Smith versus Perkins and Preston

In his discussion of God’s liberty in the discourse on God’s existence and nature (c. 1650–1), Smith directly contradicts the voluntarist defence of reprobation we have just encountered in Perkins, Preston, Burgess and Arrowsmith. Smith agrees, of course, the God is infinitely free. However, he makes a point of debunking what he takes to be popular misconception of God’s freedom, on which God is said to be ‘free’ with regard to the *reasons* or *motives* of his actions. ‘We must not conceive God to be the *freest* Agent, because he can doe and prescribe what he pleaseth, and so set up an Absolute will which shall make both Law and Reason, as some imagine’ (SD 133). Remember that Preston, for instance, had argued that since double predestination ‘is [God’s] pleasure ... therefore it is reason ...’ (1631, 144). It becomes reason because God has willed it.

Smith also rejects any conception of God on which he cruelly glorifies himself through the destruction of his creatures. His argument on this front is that a human ruler who made decrees like this would be justly condemned for cruelty and injustice.

Reflecting on the nature of God's justice, Smith argues that God's motive in legislating against evil and executing punishments for sin must be motivated by a genuine desire to prevent transgressions taking place; if God punishes sinful actions, it is only out of concern for his subjects' welfare. He contends for this by appealing to our moral intuitions about what makes a good and just human ruler:

We would not think him a good Ruler that should give out *Laws* to *ensnare* his Subjects, with an even indifferency of Mind whether his Laws be kept, or Punishments suffered; but such a one who would make the best security or Right and Equity by wholesome *Laws*, and annexing *Punishments* as a mean to prevent transgression, and not to manifest Severity. (SD 151–2)

To view the execution of punishment as an end in itself 'might rather seem *Cruelty* than *Justice*' (SD 152).

Smith bolsters this point with a thought experiment that further appeals to our moral intuitions about human leadership. Imagine, he says, a 'Good and Righteous man' in some remote place who has supreme authority over one hundred men. This man wisely prescribes the penalty of death for the crime of murder. But then suppose that 'one proves a Murderer, kills one of his fellows; afterwards repents heartily, and is likely to prove usefull among the rest of his fellows ... [and] there is no danger, upon sparing the Penitent's life, that any one of them should be encouraged to commit the like evil.' (SD 152) In this case, 'the *Justice* of this *Righteous* and *Good* Commander would *spare* this poor Penitent ... for it affects not any blood; and when it destroys, it is out of necessity, to take away a destructive person, and to

give example, which in the Case stated falls not out' (SD 152).⁵³ In other words, a truly just leader only ever punishes reluctantly, when the punishment will prevent further transgression. We will see presently (6.5.2 and 6.5.3) that Smith is working on the implicit assumption that God has 'communicative intent', i.e. that God's prime and unchangeable motive is to maximise the wellbeing of each individual creature.

These things which Smith tells us God could not do — lead us inevitably to our ruin by 'secret inspiration' or by exploiting our natural infirmity, manifest his justice by making his creatures miserable — should sound familiar. Few in Smith's context would have missed the resemblance of these 'cruel and ambitious byways' to the comportment of Calvin's God. Calvin's God causes the Fall of Adam and the damnation of the larger part of human beings as a means of glorifying himself: 'The first man fell because the Lord deemed it meet that he should: why he deemed it meet, we know not. It is certain, however, that it was just, because he saw that his own glory would thereby be displayed.' (*Inst.* III.23.8) This view of the purpose of reprobation is well echoed in Puritan preaching at Cambridge during the 1640s; according to William Ames of Christ's College, 'the end of God in reprobation, is not properly the destruction of the Creature, but the Justice of God, which shines forth in deformed destruction' (Ames 1642, 121; cf. Ainsworth 1641, 40).

Smith, however, contends that God could never do such things, and his evidence is that they reveal a pattern of action characteristic of '*Cruell*', '*Ambitious*' and 'degenerated' human beings. For Smith, it is clear that since God is good, he cannot do things which we call human beings vicious for doing. 'God,' Smith insists, 'does not make Creatures for the meer

⁵³ Cf. Later Whichcote: 'But if the sinner leave off to sin, and condemn himself; then the necessity of punishment is taken away: for *that* for which punishment is made use of, is obtained without punishment. And we never make use of a *mean*, if the *end* be obtained.' (*Works* IV:167)

sport of his Almighty arm, to raise and ruine and toss up and down at meer pleasure.’ (SD 155) It is only cruel human beings who ‘seek their own advantage in the mischiefs of other men’ (SD 155). For Smith, this comparison is enough to render any conception of God on which he acts in this way ridiculous.

In a similar vein, in the second discourse *On Superstition*, Smith identifies the root cause of superstition as ‘*a false opinion of the Deity, that renders him dreadfull and terrible, as being rigorous and imperious*’ (SD 26). Smith uses language strongly reminiscent of the political, antityrannical rhetoric we examined earlier to explain that superstitious people fear God for the same reasons that ordinary people fear an earthly tyrant:

They are apt to count this Divine Supremacy as but a piece of Tyranny that by its Sovereign Will makes too great encroachments upon their Liberties, and which will eat up all their Right and Property; and therefore are slavishly afraid of him ... fearing Heaven’s Monarchy as a severe and churlish Tyranny from which they cannot absolve themselves, as [Plutarch] speaks ... (SD 27)

It is worth noting at this stage that we know that John Smith did not accept the double decree at this point in his life because of a striking recollection of by a younger contemporary. Near the end of his life, the illustrious bishop of Ely, Simon Patrick, recalled (from written notes) a conversation with Smith during his student days at Queen’s College, where Smith was a Fellow from 1644 until his death in 1652. Patrick recalls that the two were ‘discoursing together about the doctrine of absolute predestination; which I told him had always seemed to me very hard, and I could never answer the objections against it, but was advised by divines to silence carnal reason’ (Patrick 1858, 419). Note that the advice to ‘silence carnal reason’ is

exactly the sort of response we would expect from divines aligned with Preston and Perkins (cf. Brinsley 1652, vol. 1, 135–6; Arrowsmith 1659, 352–5). Around the same time, William Twisse argues that ‘because the word of God doth testify this truth unto us, it becomes all Christian hearts to submit, and to acknowledge the equity of it, though we are not able to comprehend the reason of it’ (Twisse 1653, 14).

But according to Patrick’s diaries, Smith’s response was quite unlike the other divines he had consulted, for in answer to his question:

... [Smith] fell a laughing, and told me they were good and sound reasons which I had objected against that doctrine; and made such a representation of the nature of God to me, and of his good-will to men in Christ Jesus, as quite altered my opinion, and made me take the liberty to read such authors (which were forbidden me) as settled me in the belief that God would really have all men to be saved ... (Patrick 1858, 419)

This anecdote reveals two important things about Smith’s attitude to the double decree in the 1640s. For one, he rejected the call of Calvinist divines to ‘silence carnal reason’ when it came to God’s actions; by validating Patrick’s concerns about the doctrine, Smith affirmed that human reason can be appropriately applied to God’s activity. Secondly, it reveals that Smith’s theological orientation

Patrick entered Queen’s College in 1644 — the same year as Smith — so this exchange could have taken place any time between that year and Smith’s death in 1652, the

same period that the *Select Discourses* were being composed. It is not surprising then, that we find in the *Discourses* several explicit criticisms of the character of a reprobating God.

6.3.2 God's Accountability to the Rule of Right

It is interesting to consider Smith's critique of divine tyranny alongside a theme in Whichcote's works. For the later Whichcote, the fact that God observes the same rules of reason and goodness which govern human conduct means that we never need fear arbitrary tyranny from him as a divine sovereign. Among human beings, 'reason and right' make co-operation and mutual welfare possible: 'It is *Reason and Right* only; which, in One man, is any thing to Another' (Aph #565). It is this law of reason that prevents the strong from tyrannising the weak: "'Tis no rule to a man's actions, to do that which he may maintain by power and priviledge; but ... to comply in all things with the *reason of things*, and *the rule of right*, and in all things to be according to the nature, mind and will of God ... the rule of right, the reason of things. These are the laws, by which we are to act and govern our lives ...' (*Works* II:70–1). Thus, a ruler who makes themselves accountable to reason will earn the trust of their subjects, while a ruler who governs by the brute force of arbitrary will make them fearful of tyranny: 'for as to the reason of things, another man may judge as well as he: but from will, when no reason is given, no body knows what he may be sure of, or what he may expect' (*Works* IV:432).

So human sovereigns are to be held accountable to the rule of reason. But Whichcote also insists that in his dealings with us, God is bound by the same rule of reason. In a 1668 sermon, to argue for the solidity and immutability of the moral law of reason, Whichcote declares that this law is incontrovertible even for God in his dealings with human beings: 'for I tell you, *'tis a law in heaven, and which God takes notice of in all his dispensations to his*

creatures. It is that which God will give an account of himself by, to the understandings of his creatures' (*Works* II:66–7). Whichcote summons a host of Biblical evidence that '*all the ways of God are ways of truth of righteousness and of judgement*', which he interprets as assertions of naturalism (*Works* II:67). God's unfailing faithfulness to the moral nature of things provides a model for rational, virtuous action for human beings: '... we are to examine by reason and by argument, because God applies to reason and judgement and to understanding ...' (*Works* II:69). In all God's dealings with us, we can be sure 'that we shall have no other usage from him, but what is justifiable by *Reason*' (Aph #852).

Because God operates on the same principles of reason that govern our moral conduct, we can expect God to operate fairly and reasonably with us, giving an account of his actions. He does this so well, in fact, that we should learn from him how to do so with one another: '*God applies to our Faculties; and deals with us by Reason and Argument. Let us learn of God, to deal with One another in Meekness, Calmness, and Reason; and so Represent God.*' (Aph #572). As Whichcote's son Jeffrey put it in the preface to the *Aphorisms*, Whichcote held that '*God truly is unto Us, what he is in Himself; the Perfection of Goodness, directed by the Perfection of Wisdom ... so that ... no man can reasonably Expect less, from God; than what is the Natural Issue of the greatest Goodness and Love*' (Aph vi). If we would expect certain things from good and upright human sovereigns, we ought to expect no less from God.

Clearly then, Whichcote would reject the assertions of his Emmanuel contemporaries Preston, Burgess and Arrowsmith that God is not bound to give any answer for his dealings with us, and that he has the right to deal arbitrarily with his creations in matters of predestination. Where Whichcote's older Emmanuel colleague, Anthony Burgess insisted that '*Gods Dispensation herein [viz. in double predestination] is wholly Arbitrary, and none may*

say unto God, Why doest thou so?’ (Burgess 1652, 293), Whichcote held that God — although perhaps not strictly obliged to give an account of his dealings with us — will nonetheless justify his conduct with reference to the same rational standard that governs human morality. On this basis, he could write rather boldly:

Do not think, God has done anything concerning Thee; *before* thou camest into Being: whereby thou art determined, either to Sin or Misery. This is a Falsehood: and They, that entertain such thoughts, live in a Lie. (Aph #811)⁵⁴

God does not, because of his Omnipotency, deal *Arbitrarily* with us; but according to Right, and Reason: and whatever he does, is therefore Accountable; because Reasonable. (Aph. #417)

In this respect, Whichcote echoes an argument made by Smith in his discourse on the *Existence and Nature of God* to the effect that God is bound by the same moral law that rules human conduct. Smith appeals to Cicero as an ancient authority for ‘*seeing there is such an Entercourse and Society as it were between God and Men, therefore there is also some Law between them, which is the Bond of all Communion*’ (SD 154; quoting Cicero, *De Legibus* I.23). At the beginning of his discussion of the ‘entercourse’ between God and human beings, Smith immediately reminds us that God’s will is guided by an antecedent law or rule:

... God himself, from whom all *Law* takes its rise and emanation, is not *Exlex* and *without all Law*, nor, in a sober sense *above it*. Neither are the Primitive rules of his

⁵⁴ Cf. William Twisse, ‘we willingly confesse that the decree of God was antecedent to the deserts, for reprobation is as antient as election; and election was made before the foundation of the world’ (Twisse 1653, II:27).

Oeconomy in this world the sole Results of an *Absolute will*, but the Sacred Decrees of *Reason* and *Goodness* ... (SD 154)

In this case, Smith mentions the law which governs God's volitions so that he can further argue that the same law is implanted in the human soul as a guide to human actions:

And so we come to consider that Law embosom'd in the Souls of men which ties them again to their Creatour, and this is called *The Law of Nature*; which indeed is nothing else but a Paraphrase or Comment upon the Nature of God as it copies forth itself in the Soul of Man. (SD 156)

In other words, the human soul is built on the blueprint of God's nature, and as such, the same eternal and immutable 'decrees of reason and goodness' which are built into God are built into us.

Puritans needed this guarantee that God would deal with them fairly as well; they developed it in the form of 'covenant theology' where God binds himself in a covenant to save the elect: 'the essential point behind the covenant is to limit and bind the will of God, so that it is no longer mysterious and arbitrary regarding the all-important matter of salvation' (Beiser 1996, 157). Thus, however arbitrary the choice of whom and whom not to elect may be, once the choice is made, the elect can be sure that God will not arbitrarily change his will to save them.

Whichcote is also aware that Calvinists — particularly when defending God's right to reprobate — would interpret Biblical talk of God's judging righteously in a voluntarist key.

Of course God judges with justice and righteousness, they would say; justice and righteousness mean whatever he wills them to mean! But to Whichcote, it makes little sense to interpret Biblical claims that God acts justly as really meaning that he wills whatever he happens to will: ‘Can any imagine, that [this Biblical language] signifies no more, but that things are as *will* would have them[?] ... [T]here are not bare words and titles, not shadows and imaginations. ... All things are not arbitrary and positive constitution; but there is that which is lovely and comely in itself ...’ (*Works* II, 67). Echoing the argument central to the first book of Cudworth’s *Treatise of Eternal and Immutable Morality*, Whichcote insists that the rule of right is not based on God’s will, but on the nature of things in themselves, meaning that God is as beholden to the rule of right as any human sovereign.

In another sermon, he flatly denies the idea that God’s volitions might be justified by the mere fact that he willed them: ‘*Will alone* should never be insisted on for justification ... God only can say in the language of the psalmist *whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he* (Ps 135:6 and 115:3) because his will is in an immutable conjunction with right and goodness’ (*Works* II, 402).

So although there is little to draw on from the early years of Whichcote’s career, we see that Whichcote’s *Aphorisms* and later sermons contain lengthy and explicit arguments against a reprobating God on the basis that such a God could be justly condemned as a tyrant according to the eternal and immutable rule of right. There is no reason to think that these passages from Whichcote’s later works reflect a position that Whichcote would not have held in the late 1640s, when (as saw in the previous section) his former student John Smith was defending it at great length. The Whichcote-Tuckney correspondence shows that by 1651, Whichcote had been preaching for some time (long enough to seriously frustrate Tuckney)

that God is ‘perfectly under the power of goodnesse’, and that it is inconceivable ‘that God by his Will and Pleasure can go against his Nature and Being’ (EL 15). The later passages we have examined here have the same anti-Calvinist, anti-voluntarist thrust as Smith’s discourses and (as we will see) Cudworth’s *Commons* sermon; a point evidently not lost on Tuckney, who complained in 1651 that among Whichcote’s circle, ‘the decrees of God [are] quæstion’d and quarrel’d; because, according to our reason, wee cannot comprehend; how they may stand with His goodness’ (EL 14–15).

6.3.3 Cudworth Against Divine Tyranny

Cudworth makes the same critique of a voluntarist God as we have just seen in Smith and Whichcote, through brief hints in his 1647 *Commons* sermon, and even more explicit assertions in his later works.

Let us begin with *Commons*. Just as Smith rejected the notion of a God who glorifies himself through human misery on the grounds that human beings who act this way are condemned as cruel, Cudworth balks at the notion of a God who could save human beings, but chooses instead to assert his sovereignty by allowing them to be damned:

Or must we say ... that God indeed is able to rescue us out of the Power of sinne & Satan, when we sigh & grone towards him, but yet sometimes to exercise his absolute Authority his uncontrollable Dominion, he delights rather in plunging wretched souls down into infernall Night, & everlasting Darknesse? (*Commons* 37–8)

If this were true, it would make ‘the God of the whole World ... [n]othing but a cruell and dreadfull *Erynnis*’ (*Commons* 38). Like Smith, Cudworth clearly believes it would be wrong for God to act cruelly or delight in the eternal damnation of human souls.

The antityrannical thrust of Cudworth’s critique of the voluntarist God becomes far more apparent in his later works. In his *True Intellectual System* (published 1678), Cudworth will complain of the unhealthy and superstitious terror people have of God because they perceive him as a ‘meer Arbitrary and Tyrannical Being’ (TIS 661). The root cause of this pathological fear of God, Cudworth suggests, is the belief that God is not guided or restrained by any natural, immutable standard of morality:

[... they] think the *Moral Differences of Good and Evil*, have no foundation in Nature, but only in *Law or Arbitrary Constitution* (which *Law* is contrary to *Nature*, *Nature* being *Liberty*, but *Law* *Restraint*;) as they cannot but really *Hate* that, which *Hinders* them of their *True Liberty* and *Chief Good*, so must they needs interpret the *Severity of the Deity* so much spoken of against *Wickedness*, to be nothing else, but *Cruelty and Arbitrary Tyranny*. (TIS 661–2)

In his *Treatise of Freewill*, he remarks that if voluntarism were true, there would be no grounds for faith and trust in God: the voluntarist view ‘overthrows all morality and science at once, making ... the moral differences of good and evil mere arbitrary things ... [and] thereby also destroys all faith and trust or confidence in God, as well as the certainty of Christian religion’ (FW 187). Without any immutable, natural standards of goodness, our relationship with God would become unstable, much as would occur in the case of a tyrant who refused to abide by the rule of right.

6.3.4 Henry More

Again, it is worth noting here how these criticisms bring the Emmanuel Three into line with Anthony Tuckney's least favourite Platonist, Henry More. As early as 1642, we find More publishing strongly worded criticisms of double predestination as completely inconsistent with God's good nature. In the third canto of *Psychozoia*, he excoriates his Calvinist contemporaries who defend double predestination and total depravity, poetically describing them as holed up in a fortress with a 'double wall': 'The first *Inevitable Destiny / Of Gods decree*; the other they do call / *Invincible fleshie Infirmitie*' (*Psychozoia* III.22; *Poems* 35).

Likewise, in *Psychathanasia*, he criticises the notion that God might make his creatures miserable or fail to seek their wellbeing in order to accrue some benefit to himself:

'When nothing can to Gods own self accrew / Who's infinitely happy; sure the end / Of this creation simply was to shew / His flowing goodnesse, which he doth out- send / Not for himself; for nought can him amend; / But to his creature doth his good impart' (*Psychathanasia* III.4.16; *Poems* 85)

He balks at the possibility that God might 'do [human beings] some despight', 'all to shew his mighty excellency / His uncontrolled strength ...' (*Psychathanasia* III.4.18; *Poems* 85) If God can conduct himself in this way, then the basis of our trust in him would be totally eroded: 'For ought we know ... God may act that ill / Onely to show his might, and his free mind fulfill' (*Psychathanasia* III.4.21; *Poems* 85).

6.3.6 Conclusions

We have seen then that the Emmanuel Three take strikingly similar stands against challenge the voluntarist defences of double predestination made by their university colleagues. If voluntarism is true, then we have no more reason to love and trust God than we do a wicked and arbitrary tyrant. Unless our reverence for God is nothing more than the cowardly obedience and obsequiousness we use to keep tyrants at bay, there must be some rational foundation that allows us to see him as a good and just ruler, rather than a merely powerful one. And surely, that rational foundation guarantees that just as it is wicked for a human ruler to rule arbitrarily and delight in their destruction, no God worthy of worship could possibly do such things either.

6.4 Crypto-Naturalist Defences of Reprobation

The voluntarist defence of reprobation we examined above is philosophically consistent, but as its defenders admit, repugnant to our moral instincts. The fact that reprobation might actually be morally good because the God who performed it has no antecedent moral law feels like a mere technicality; it does not make God seem any less cruel or unloving for abandoning so many human beings to Hell whom he could effortlessly save. This is perhaps why, alongside the voluntarist defence of double predestination, Calvinists also employ a range of naturalist arguments for its justice by appealing to moral reasons or principles which explain the moral sense in God's decision to reprobate so many.

These naturalist defences are, as we shall see, incompatible with voluntarism: appeals to justifying reasons for God's actions are both unnecessary and impossible if voluntarism is true. All of them appeal to some moral principle distinct from God's will to demonstrate the justness of his volitions. But in doing this, they contradict the strong voluntarist position; as

Calvin put it, ‘Whenever we speak of [the divine will], we are speaking of the supreme standard of justice. But when justice clearly appears, why should we raise any question of injustice?’ (*Inst.* III.23.5). If the divine will is the ultimate standard of justice, it is nonsensical to try and demonstrate the justness of God’s volitions with reference to anything distinct from the mere fact that God has willed them.

In his later writings, Cudworth is particularly critical of divines who contradict themselves by arguing both that God’s will is unbound by any antecedent law or nature, and that God is intrinsically good and just. In his *True Intellectual System*, he observes that some writers:

... sometimes unskilfully attribute to the Deity, things *Inconsistent* or *Contradictious* to one another, because seeming to them to be all *Perfections*. As for example, though it be concluded generally by Theologers, [1] that there is a *Natural Justice* and *Sanctity* in the Deity, yet do some notwithstanding contend, [2] That the *Will of God* is not determined by any *Antecedent Rule* or *Nature of Justice*, but that whatsoever he could be supposed to Will Arbitrarily, would therefore be *Ipsa facto Just*; which is called by them the *Divine Sovereignty*, and look’d upon as a *Great Perfection*. Though it be certain that these Two Things are directly *Contradictious* to one another ... (TISU 649 [numbering added]).

Cudworth’s point is simply that [1] and [2] cannot be held at the same time. If there is any natural or essential goodness in God, then voluntarism is false. If voluntarism is true, and God’s will is not bound by any antecedent standard of goodness, then God does not have any natural or essential goodness.

But if they noted it at all, this inconsistency does not seem to have bothered Reformed thinkers. They were not, after all, committed to voluntarism *per se*; they were committed to the double decree. And despite the contradiction, naturalist defences of reprobation serve an important rhetorical purpose. They serve to make the Calvinist God more appealing to our moral sensibilities, in a way that voluntarist appeals cannot. Because voluntarist appeals emphasise the arbitrariness of God's will, and his lack of obligation to secure our wellbeing, they create a decidedly unappealing picture of God; one which does not naturally inspire love or admiration.

So these are naturalist arguments trying to blend into a voluntarist background. The person making them is explicitly committed to voluntarism, rejecting naturalism as incompatible with God's sovereignty, but employs naturalist arguments as well in order to lessen the fear or distaste a naked voluntarism might occasion in hearers. For this reason, I call these arguments 'crypto-naturalist'.

Crypto-naturalist strategies attempt to preserve some meaningful sense in which God can be identified as good and just with reference to a standard distinct from his arbitrary will. The difference is easily seen in comparison to strategies that might be used to defend a political leader who has committed apparently immoral actions that tarnish their public image. The voluntarist strategy is analogous to defending the leader's actions by simply appealing to their legal or political authority, rather than any justifying reasons for their actions. The crypto-naturalist strategies are analogous to justifying the leader's scandalous actions by trying to show that they were harsh but necessary, or that the victims deserved what came to them.

Three common types of crypto-naturalist strategies are:

1. *Appeals to God's Right as Owner and Creator*: the same moral principle which makes us able to do whatever we want with our own property gives God absolute impunity to create, destroy, redeem or condemn any of his creatures.
2. *Reprobation as Just Deserts*: on objective, purely moral grounds, the reprobate deserve to be in Hell, so God is doing nothing wrong in sending them there, even though he could save them.
3. *Appeals to God's Hidden Reasons*: God has good reasons for reprobation, but they are beyond the reach of human reason.

These are all very different moves to straight voluntarism. By appealing to non-arbitrary moral reasons for reprobation, they preserve a sense of God's natural justice and goodness which purely voluntarist strategies defences seem to deny. They implicitly head off the sort of objection which Edward Fowler makes in his retelling of this debate in 1670: '[I]n calling God a just God, [voluntarists] say just nothing of him ... that is, no more than this, that he wills what he wills ...' (1670, 218).

6.4.1 God's Sovereign Right of Ownership

The first sort of appeal is to God's sovereign rights as the 'owner' of human beings; it contends that God has analogous moral rights over us as we have over our possessions. John Preston argues, for instance, that God's status as our creator gives him a kind of sovereignty or ownership over us. In Preston's words:

... this difference is to be observed between the creatures and *God*; there is no creature can say of any thing, that this is mine owne, because he made it not, they are not the masters of them; but *God* may doe what hee will, what he pleaseth, because they are his owne.’ (Preston 1631, 146)

This explains why God can justly do things to his subjects which human sovereigns cannot do without being accused of tyranny or cruelty: no human sovereign literally *owns* their subjects, and so we are right to condemn those sovereigns who act as though they did. But God is not a human sovereign.

In his *Golden Chain*, William Perkins makes a similar move by appealing to the moral rights human beings have over their livestock. Although ‘God might be thought cruell, if ... he had ordained the greatest part of the world to destruction,’ Perkins writes, ‘He decreed also ... that men should live by the slaughter of beasts; and yet God is not therefore cruell against them: and surely God is no more bounden unto man, then unto the very bruit beasts.’⁵⁵ The moral relationship between God and human beings is analogous to that between human beings and livestock. Consequently, he concludes that ‘God could well enough have decreed, that even all men should utterly have beene rejected, and yet he should have beene never a whit either cruell or unjust’ (Perkins 1600, 171). So unlike the voluntarist defence which frees God from all moral constraints, this appeals to a familiar moral principle that can be used to measure the uprightness of God’s conduct: just as we are not outraged when a shepherd

⁵⁵ This livestock analogy was widespread enough that Samuel Hoard addressed it in his anti-Calvinist tract on *God’s Love to Mankind* in 1633. He likely has Perkins in mind when he reports that Calvinists defend reprobation by contending that since ‘God may without any breach of goodnesse or justice appoint brute creatures to be slayne for mans use: therefore he may ordeyne men to be cast into hell torments for ever for his owne use’ (Hoard 1633, 17).

slaughters his livestock for food or trade, we should not be outraged when God reprobates human beings for his own glory.

Closer to the Emmanuel Three's time, Tuckney's friend John Arrowsmith also defends reprobation on the grounds that, 'if the grand laws of the universe be duly heeded, which is that all creatures be subservient to their makers glory according to the proverb. *The Lord hath made all things for himself, yea even the wicked for the day of evil*: Seeing the end of reprobating any is mainly this, that God may thereby be exalted' (Arrowsmith 1659, 347). Reprobation is justified not by appeal to God's will as the ultimate standard of goodness, but to the 'grand law of the universe' that creatures be subservient to their makers.

A similar defence is made by Anthony Burgess, where God's actions are justified with reference to a moral principle of ownership:

... all mankinde is said to be in Gods hand as the clay in the hand of the Potter. [S]o that if God from wise and most righteous ends have chosen some and left others in their damnable estate ... yet we have no cause to grudge or repine, because all are Gods, to dispose of at his pleasure; For although his holy and righteous nature is the cause that he cannot do any thing that is evil or unjust, yet the dominion and sovereignty he hath may make him dispose of all things as he pleaseth ... (Burgess 1656, 177)

Once more, there is no need to appeal to God's sovereign freedom to will whatever he pleases; a familiar moral principle of sovereignty or divine ownership explains why his decree of reprobation is not evil or unjust.

6.4.2 *The 'Just Deserts' Defence*

Another common crypto-naturalist strategy is to appeal to the wickedness of the reprobate. Since all human beings deserve eternal damnation, God is not doing anything unjust by letting most of them receive it. We should be amazed instead that God saves anyone at all by graciously electing them out of Hell. If a human judge pardons a single criminal from a gang of murderers, we should praise his clemency rather than grumble at his sending the rest of them to the gallows.

In this connection, many Puritans emphasised that God was not the active or immediate cause of the damnation of the reprobate. The direct cause of damnation is the reprobate's sin, which justly receives damnation (e.g. Ames 1642, 123; Twisse 1653, vol. 2, 27–29). If a judge sentences ten murderers to the noose but pardons one of them, he is the immediate cause of the pardoned criminal's survival, but not of the execution of the rest: the pardoned criminal is saved by judge's mercy, but the rest are being executed because of their crime. In the same way, the reprobate are damned for their own sin; the fact that God chooses graciously to pardon some does not make him responsible for the damnation of the rest. Thus, God's character would remain untarnished even if he had saved no one:

Neither may this be thought injustice in God, for if he had not saved one man, none could have blamed him; we see he did not spare one of the Apostate Angels; Thus also might he have done with all man-kinde. Let us therefore admire the goodnesse of God that chooseth any to eternal life. (Burgess 1652, 646)

In a later series of sermons, Burgess concludes:

[I]t is in the sovereign power of God to choose whom he pleaseth to Salvation, and to leave the rest in their damnable estate: *Neither is this any cruelty or injustice in God*, for he might have forsaken all mankinde, and not recovered one of them, why then should we so wickedly murmure at Gods secret but righteous dispensation of these things, and not rather admire the grace of God that any are saved? (1656, 52)

Although this is an appeal to God's sovereignty, it is not a voluntarist appeal to God's standing outside all moral constraints, but to a distinctly moral kind of sovereignty; viz. the sort of sovereignty which makes it just for a civil leader to execute customary punishments for crimes.

6.4.3 God's Unfathomable Goodness in Luther and Calvin

The last and most sophisticated crypto-naturalist strategy worth our attention takes a different tack. Like the previous strategies, it contends that reprobation is actually good when measured against the moral standard appropriate for God's actions. However, rather than specifying some familiar moral principle that justifies reprobation, it appeals instead to some hidden and unfathomable divine standard of goodness, according to which reprobation is a good and glorious act. On this view, reprobation only looks so abominable and unfair to us because of our limited epistemic position: we are not in a place to judge of the kind of goodness at play. So the double decree flows directly out of God's essentially good nature, but because we are epistemically limited, we are unable to perceive the goodness and justice of it.

The result is that for Luther, there is a clear difference between what is good *to us* and what is good *to God*. Defending God's decision to create human beings who would be necessarily wicked, Luther points out that even though the book of Genesis tells us that all of God's creations were 'very good':

... this was said, not with reference to us, but with reference to God. For it is not said, 'Man saw all the things that God had made, and behold they were very good.' Many things seem very good unto God, and are very good, which seem unto us very evil ... Thus, afflictions, evils, errors, hell, nay, all the very best works of God, are, in the sight of the world, very evil, and even damnable ... (BW §83)

God's grasp of what is good and what is evil is very different, and far better than ours; many things that seem evil to us are in fact good, in God's clearer eyes.

He ends this chapter with an important remark: 'And therefore, how those things [afflictions, evils, errors, hell] are good in the sight of God, which are evil in our sight, is known only unto God and unto those who see with the eyes of God; that is, who have the Spirit' (BW §83). The strong implication is that God has access to moral knowledge that we do not, which explains why scandalous things like reprobation and Hell are in fact good.

Indeed, Luther says as much later on in the same work: immediately before the famous voluntarist passage we examined earlier, where Luther insists that God's will has 'no cause or reason' and no 'rule or standard by which it acts' (BW §88), we also find an appeal to God's incomprehensible wisdom. To the question of why God does not heal human sinfulness so that the reprobate become capable of avoiding Hell, Luther responds: 'This

belongs to those secrets of Majesty, where “His judgements are past finding out”. Nor is it ours to search into, but to adore these mysteries’ (BW §88). So even though Luther acknowledges the possibility that some people may come to see with God’s eyes, and perceive the goodness of reprobation, he thinks our ordinary, unsanctified moral intuitions are radically out of sync with God’s when it comes to the goodness of Hell.

Similar appeals occur in Calvin’s writings, alongside the voluntarist defences of the double decree we examined earlier (in 5.1.2). In those voluntarist passages, Calvin claims that however unjust the double decree might seem to us, since God has willed it, it must be right, because ‘to be right’ just means ‘to be willed by God’. He even dissuades us from searching for any underlying reasons for God’s volitions by assuring us that no such reasons could possibly exist, because if they did, they would *per impossibile* be more sovereign than God (*Inst.* III.23.2).

But in the same chapter of the *Institutes* where Calvin uses the strongly voluntarist language we examined earlier, we find other passages in Calvin which imply that there are in fact deeper reasons for God’s volitions, reasons which are inaccessible to human reason. Consider, for instance, Calvin’s response to another puzzling, seemingly capricious divine decision, namely, his bringing about the Fall through Adam’s sin:

I admit that by the will of God all the sons of Adam fell into that state of wretchedness in which they are now involved; and this is just what I said at the first, that we must always return to the mere pleasure of the divine will, the cause of which is hidden in himself. (*Inst.* III.23.4, *emph. added*)

The last clause of this sentence refers to a hidden cause for God's decision, and could be read as directly contradicting those voluntarist passages we examined earlier, where Calvin seems to insist emphatically that antecedent causes for God's volitions do not exist at all: if God is God, his volitions must be entirely uncaused. The claim here, however, seems to be that there do exist causes for 'the mere pleasure of God's will', albeit causes which are often 'hidden in himself'.

The contradiction to Calvin's voluntarist passages becomes clearer when we look at other places where Calvin makes the appeal to hidden, mysterious causes for God's decrees:

Paul ... shows that the counsel of God, in electing and reprobating men, is without doubt more profound and more deeply concealed than the human mind can penetrate. Wherefore, man, consider (as the apostle adviseth thee) who and what thou art, and concede more to God than the measure and compass of thine own nature ... (Calvin 1856, 71)

Calvin is not speaking here as we would expect from an unapologetic voluntarist. He asserts that God's volitions are the result of mysterious 'counsel'. He emphatically denies our ability to make sound judgements about the goodness of God's volitions: 'it were unjust that those profound judgements, which transcend all our powers of discernment, should be subjected to our calculation' (*Inst.* III.23.1). In this case, God's decrees only seem harsh to us because 'the procedure of divine justice is too high to be scanned by human measure, or comprehended by the feebleness of human intellect' (III.23.4). We ought therefore to adopt a posture of epistemic humility when it comes to apparent injustices committed by God: 'our rule of

modesty ought to be, that where God's reason for His works lies hidden, we should nevertheless believe Him to be just' (Calvin 1856, 72).

Neither Luther nor Calvin seem to notice the contradiction between their appeals to God's inscrutable wisdom on the one hand, and to God's absolute sovereignty on the other. If one is fully committed to the idea that God's will is its own rule, and that whatever God wills is right just because he wills it, there is no need to appeal to divine 'secrets' or 'mysteries' that might, if they were known, justify or explain God's decision to save some and damn others. For a full-blooded voluntarist, no justifying causes for God's decisions are necessary, or even possible. The appeal to God's unfathomable goodness is unmistakably a naturalist response to the problem of the double decree: it justifies God's decrees by appealing to God's essential goodness, not to the mere fact that they are expressions of God's will.

To sum up then, even though Luther and Calvin make appeals to voluntarism as justification for God's apparent cruelties in matters to do with predestination, they simultaneously make decidedly un-voluntarist appeals to secret, hidden reasons that would justify God's actions if we could know them. But either way, the polemical thrust is the same: stop presuming to judge God by the rules that govern human morality.

6.4.4 Puritan Appeals to God's Unfathomable Goodness

The same crypto-naturalist appeals to God's hidden reasons with regard to the decree of reprobation occur frequently in the Puritan tradition of the Emmanuel Three's colleagues and teachers at Emmanuel College. We saw (in 6.2.2) that Anthony Burgess and John Arrowsmith explicitly defend God's right to deal arbitrarily with his creatures, since, unlike a human ruler, he is unbound by any standard or rule of justice. This is consistent with the voluntarist horn of

the Euthyphro dilemma: God can will whatever he likes with regard to his creatures, because prior to his willing, nothing is right or wrong, just or unjust.

But in his *Armilla Catechetica*, Arrowsmith attempts to have his cake and eat it too, arguing that while God's volitions are indeed arbitrary, they are also supremely rational:

Although God may be truly said to act arbitrarily, yet he never doth any thing unadvisedly, but according to the counsel of his will, which is always rational, though our shallow reason in this state of degeneracy and mortality be not able to fathome the depth of its contrivements, and thereupon ready to cavil at, and call in question the equity of them. (1659, 308–9; cf. Brinsley 1652, vol. 1, 136)

So God's electing and reprobating will is rational and just, and only seems otherwise to us because in our corrupted state, our reason is incapable of comprehending the rationality behind it. Accordingly, Arrowsmith repeatedly censures those who bring their 'corrupt' or 'wicked reason' to bear on the question of election (e.g. 1659, 306–8). He approvingly quotes Luther: 'Reason, thou art a fool, and dost not understand the matters of God' (quoted in Arrowsmith 1659, 309).

Similarly, in Anthony Burgess' lectures on justification, we find the same appeal to God's unfathomable goodness. When considering the apparent injustice of God's electing some to salvation while passing over others, his first response is an appeal to God's supreme and impenetrable wisdom:

For can we search into the deep counsels of God? Do we comprehend the purposes and ends of God? We should rather conclude, There is righteousness in all these things, though we cannot pierce into it . . . Gods will is the law of righteousness, and none but God himself, whose understanding is infinite, can comprehend his own wayes. (1656, 674–5; cf. Perkins 1600, 675)

As in Luther, what seems evil to us must be good, since God has done it; we simply lack the epistemic capacity to see why. But then, immediately afterwards, Burgess makes an appeal to voluntarism: ‘God is not unrighteous in passing by *some*, and leaving *others*, *Because he hath an absolute sovereignty, and dominion over all*. He is not subject to any as a superior; Neither is he bound by any Laws imposed upon him, only his own holiness is that eternal Rule and Law, by which he doth all things, and if *none may say unto a King, why doest thou so?* Much less to the King of Kings: Therefore learned Divines make Election, neither an act of mercy, or of justice, but of sovereignty and dominion only.’ (1656, 675; see also Burgess 1652, 407; 695). So Burgess maintains at once that there is a righteousness in election and reprobation which we cannot perceive, and also that God’s decrees are pure acts of sovereignty and dominion, not guided by any laws of mercy or justice.

6.4.5 *The Curious Calvinism of Peter Sterry*

Interestingly enough, in his more Calvinist moods, Peter Sterry — one of the original Emmanuel Platonists — makes a similar appeal to God’s superior moral vision to defend the goodness of Hell. Sterry is more consistent however, since as we observed earlier (5.5.2), he is firmly committed to metaethical naturalism, and never supplements his appeals to God’s unfathomable goodness with appeals to God’s arbitrary sovereignty. As Dewey Wallace

notes, over the course of his many works, Sterry maintains that apparent evils like Hell and divine wrath are really:

God's love disguised, and on that basis he developed a theodicy: "God sees the saddest, the bloodiest Tragedies, that are acted by Man or Devils: yet he sees them with pleasure, because he sees them in his own light. By this light he sees the Power, Wisdom, Goodness, Glory, working in every Object." And so [Sterry] exhorts his readers to "no more call any thing by those afflicting Names of Death, Sorrow, Loss, or Pain" but to "see in every thing a Joy unutterable." When the work of God's wrath shall be seen as part of a complete divine design it will be seen as a triumph of divine love' (Wallace 2011, 64; quoting Sterry 1675, 216, 218 and 1710, 59).

We will see in the next section (6.5.4) that this theodicy sits in an uncomfortable tension with Sterry's Platonist conception of God as absolute goodness and benignity, but taken on their own, these passages echo Luther or Calvin's defence of reprobation as good to God in a way that we currently cannot perceive. From this angle, there is no need to invoke God's sovereignty over the moral realm; even according to our ordinary moral standards, God is acting justly when he allows most human beings to go to Hell.

6.4.6 The Heart of Crypto-Naturalist Strategies

At the heart of all these crypto-naturalist strategies for defending reprobation lies the claim that there exists a standard of justice that can be meaningfully applied to God's actions, and which shows the double decree to have been just and good. In some cases, the standard of justice invoked is familiar one, like that which governs human relationships with livestock or property. In other cases, the standard of justice is something far more mysterious. The

common ground though is this: whatever the proper standard of goodness for God is, it is consistent with reprobation. Either way, our natural repulsion at the idea of reprobation is shown to be misguided: it turns out that God is good in such a way that reprobation is good too; if reprobation does not seem good to us, it is simply because we have an impoverished notion of goodness.

It is worth noting that questions of this sort about God's moral reasons are still very much at issue in philosophy of religion. In reaction to a new formulation of the problem of evil (the so-called 'evidential problem of evil', developed by William Rowe and Paul Draper in the 1980s), a number of Christian philosophers have elaborated a position now known as sceptical theism (Wykstra 2017). In brief, skeptical theists contend that '*if* the God of theism exists, we humans should not expect to see or grasp very much of God's purposes for divine actions—including the divine actions of allowing or even causing events that bring much of the horrific suffering around us' (Wykstra 2017, 99–100).

6.5 Divine Communicative Intent

*There is no Perfection wanting in God; which our own
hearts could desire should be in Him*

(Aph #331)

*Can Wise, Just, Good, do ought that's harsh or vain?
All what he doth is for the creatures gain*

(*Psychathanasia* III.4.22; More's Poems 85)

The Emmanuel Three, naturally enough, do not agree that God's nature might actually be consonant with the double decree. They believe that any rational idea of God's character

includes infinite goodness, and more specifically, an unwavering intention to communicate his essential goodness to other beings. A God like this would never willingly deprive any creature of his goodness, let alone create millions of human beings for the sole purpose of condemning them to eternal separation from himself. What we thus know about God is so certain that it overrules any interpretations of Scripture that seem to contradict it.

6.5.1 God's Communicative Intent

[T]here is an unbounded and Almighty Love, that without any disdain or envy freely communicates it self to every thing he made ... (SD 437)

The Emmanuel Three (but Smith and Cudworth in particular) draw heavily on a Platonic definition of divine goodness that has its roots in the *Timaeus*. In the brief preview of the Emmanuel Three's Platonism I provided earlier, I called this idea God's communicative intent. The idea is simply that God is fundamentally and unalterably committed to making everything he creates resemble himself as much as possible.

In the creation account of the *Timaeus*, we are told that the divine Demiurge formed the world after the superlatively good and beautiful pattern of 'that which always is', i.e. eternal, immutable Being (*Tim.* 27d–28d). Plato gives us an account of the Demiurge's underlying creative goal which will be essential to later Platonic thought, and to the Cambridge Platonists. Why did God create the world?

Let us state the reason why: He was good, and one who is good can never become jealous of anything. And so, being free of jealousy, he wanted everything to become

as much like himself as was possible ... [T]his, more than anything else, was the most preeminent reason for the origin of the world's coming to be. The god wanted everything to be good and nothing to be bad so far as that was possible, and so he took over all that was visible ... and brought it from a state of disorder to one of order, because he believed that order was in every way better than disorder. Now it wasn't permitted (nor is it now) that one who is supremely good should do anything but what is best. (*Tim* 29e–30b)

The important idea here is that the Demiurge wants every thing he creates to resemble himself as much as possible, since he is the highest good, and he wants to maximise goodness. This is what is meant by the insistence that God is free of 'jealousy'; he does not want to keep all the goodness to himself, but wants to communicate it to other beings as far as they can possibly receive it. If anything fails to resemble his essential goodness, it is not because the Demiurge stingily withheld it.

This idea that God has 'communicative intent' and is committed to spreading his goodness as far as possible is essential to the Emmanuel Three's philosophy of religion. It is particularly explicit in Smith's fifth discourse, on the *Existence and Nature of God*. Towards the end of the discourse, he asserts at length that it is in God's nature to liberally and generously share his essential goodness with beings beyond himself. God is always sending out '*the free Effluxes of his own Omnipotent Love and Goodness, which alwaies moves along with [external things], and never willingly departs from them*' (SD 140). He asserts this against a rival view of God, according to which God created the world 'out of a piece of *Self-Interest*, as if he had had any design to advance himself, or to enlarge his own stock of glory and happiness' (SD 140). Those who hold this view imagine God 'as it were casting about

how he might erect a new Monopoly of glory to himself, and so to serve this purpose made the World, that he might have a stock of glory here going in it' (SD 141).

But this, Smith concludes, is a view unworthy of God; those who hold it are fancifully projecting their own selfish ambitions onto God (see 8.4.2 below). God's creative goals were purely altruistic, entirely other-centred. Drawing on the authority of the Christian Platonist Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* V.11), Smith insists that God himself benefits nothing from creating us; his only goal was to create beings distinct from himself upon whom he could graciously bestow his own essential goodness, for 'he needs neither our *Happiness* nor our *Misery* to make himself more illustrious by; being full in himself, it was his good pleasure to communicate of his own fulness' (SD 141; cf. SD 155ff; cf. Ficino, PTh. II.13.1).⁵⁶

To bolster this point, Smith refers to the creation story of the *Timaeus* and its elaboration in Proclus' commentary on that dialogue. Smith sees a fundamental agreement between the creation account of Genesis, where God calls the creation 'very good', and the account of the Demiurge in the *Timaeus*; the biblical Creator and Timaeus' Demiurge are both fundamentally concerned with the goodness of their creations: '*Timaeus Locrus* represents the Creatour of the World in the same strain that *Moses* did ... delighted as it were in himself to see that all things that he had made were good, and some things exceeding good' (SD 142). For Smith then, God's purpose in creation was to communicate his own goodness beyond himself as far as possible.

Smith concludes that this communication of his essential goodness is the only valid sense in which God can be said to have made the world 'for his own glory'. 'God does then

⁵⁶ Another likely inspiration here is Marsilio Ficino, see PTh. II.9.11; II.13.2–3.

most *glorifie* and exalt himself in the most triumphant way that may be ... when he most of all communicates himself' (SD 142). This is especially true with regard to human beings: 'we then most of all *glorifie* him, when we partake most of him' (SD 142f; cf. SD 409–10). Or as Henry More put it in 1642, 'All he intends is our accomplishment, His being is self-full, self-joy'd, self-excellent' (*Psychathanasia* III.4.22; *Poems* 85).

Smith (as usual) is the most explicit about his Platonist sources, but the same insistence on God's communicative intent can be found in Whichcote and Cudworth. In Whichcote's 1651 sermon text on reconciliation, we read that if want to please God, we must not only accept the gift of his forgiveness but be really, internally conformed to him: '*We must yeelde ... receive stamps and impressions from God; and God can not be farther pleased, than goodnesse takes place*' (EL 15).

Likewise, in Cudworth's 1647 *Commons* sermon, we are told that 'God who is *absolute goodnesse*, cannot love any of his Creatures & take pleasure in them, without bestowing a communication of his Goodnesse and Likenesse upon them' (*Commons* 27). God displays his power most, not through brute force, but through the communication of his goodness: 'Gods *Power* displayed in the World, is nothing but his *Goodnesse* strongly reaching all things ... and irresistibly imparting it self to every thing, according to those severall degrees in which it is capable of it' (*Commons* 37).

The most philosophically sophisticated articulation of this idea is probably the one given by Cudworth in the *True Intellectual System* of 1678. Although much is obscure about Plato's notion of the Good, Cudworth writes, this is clear:

that this Nature of Good which is also the Nature of God, includes *Benignity* in it, when he gives this account of Gods both Making the World and after such a Manner; *Because he was Good, and that which is Good hath no Envy in it, and therefore he both made the World, and also made it as well, and as like to himself as was possible.* (TISU 205)

Similarly, in his posthumously published *Treatise of Freewill*, Cudworth describes God as ‘infinite disinterested love displaying itself wisely, therefore producing from his fecundity all things that could be made and were fit to be made’ (FW 205). Again, God, having no envy, always desires to share his immutable goodness as far as possible with other entities.

6.5.2 *Reprobation and the Glory of God*

The Emmanuel Three insist with the ancient Platonists that God is most glorified when human beings partake of his essential goodness, and use this insistence on God’s communicative intent to challenge double predestination. As Crocker has observed, ‘reacting to Calvinist predestinarianism [Whichcote, Cudworth, Smith and More] emphasised, particularly after the Alexandrine Fathers, Clement and Origen, the pre-eminent beneficence of the deity in his dealings with mankind’ (Crocker 2003, xviii). Because God is not stingy or niggardly with his goodness, if we find that any parts of creation lack the stamps and impressions of God’s goodness, it is certainly not because God has intentionally withheld it.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Cf. Henry More’s *Psychathanasia*, where he complains bitterly of certain men who want to deny God’s essential goodness: ‘But you O bitter men and soure of sprite! Which brand Gods name with such foul infamy, As though poor humane race he did or slight, Or curiously view to do them some despight’ (*Psychathanasia* III.4.17; *Poems* 85); ‘O belch of hell! O horrid blasphemy! / That Heavens unblemish’d beauty thus dost stain / And brand Gods nature with such infamy: Can *Wise, Just, Good*, do ought that’s harsh or vain? / All what he doth is for the creatures gain’ (ibid. III.4.22; *Poems* 85).

With this in mind, we can return to crypto-naturalist defences of reprobation. As we have seen, one can be a naturalist about God and goodness (whether openly, like Peter Sterry, or as an undercover voluntarist) and still hold that reprobation is somehow consonant with God's essential goodness. We might suppose that a universe in which many millions of people are inevitably condemned to eternal torments actually fulfils God's creative purposes, and answers to some part of his essentially good nature. Since being in Hell, by definition, means to be deprived of God's essential goodness, a decree of reprobation would mean that God wilfully and voluntarily deprives millions of human beings who have the potential to be rendered happy and Godlike of the grace that could easily render them so.

On such views, God's essential goodness — which he is bound to follow by natural necessity — does not require him to communicate his goodness to all his creatures. In his attack on the Oxford Platonist Thomas Jackson, Twisse makes his denial of God's communicative intent explicit. According to Twisse, God's goodness is satisfied by glorifying himself:

But as for any law of obedience that God is bound unto, I know none, no not to his owne goodnesse as being neither bound to manifest it nor to communicate it: but by necessity of nature he loves it, that is, himselfe, and by necessity of nature whatsoever he doth, he must doe for himselfe, and for the setting foorth of his owne glory, as he shall thinke good, and not to any other end. (Twisse 1631, 365)

Note the crypto-naturalism of this passage: God is bound 'by necessity of nature' to do what is good, but what is good amounts only to the 'setting forth of his own glory', and this can be done as well by withholding his goodness as by communicating it.

Thus, Twisse is quite content to admit that God wilfully and intentionally deprives the reprobate of salvation. 'It is without question', he writes, 'that God leaves many in that woefull estate ... the guilt whereof is eternall death; and seeing that if he so leaves them, it cannot be denied, but that God intended so to leave them' (Twisse 1653, vol. 1, 39). So those in Hell are there because God wants them to be. Consequently, he holds that God could easily save any of those in Hell and render them Godlike if he chose to: 'It is true, it is in Gods power to preserve any man from any sinne; it is in his power to take any man off from any sinfull course by repentance, if he will; but he is bound to none, *he hath mercy on whom he will, and whom he will he hardeneth*; and in all this he is not culpable.' (Twisse 1653, vol. 2, 28). As John Cotton (Preston's friend and Tuckney and Thomas Hill's former mentor) had written, when a human beings sins, it is because 'thus farre it was [God's] will, as not to hinder it, and to leave a man to himselfe, or to Satan, or to opportunity to do it; It was not the will of God to command or allow, but to permit and to punish by so doing' (Cotton 1641, 194). So God could communicate his goodness to the reprobate, but he chooses not to; this is not culpable because he is not obliged to save anyone at all (as per the 'just deserts' defence). In acting this way, God is still doing good, because the only good for God himself is the setting forth of his glory, which is achieved in this case by depriving the reprobate of salvation.

But if God has the communicative intent of Plato's Demiurge, then world he creates is intended to be as beautiful and good as possible in every part. If God has this communicative intent, then a decree of reprobation would be inconceivable. God could would never intentionally withhold his goodness from anyone whom he could otherwise conform to himself. Plato's God is always doing his absolute best to bring as much of the world as

possible into conformity with his own essential order and goodness: to the extent that any person fails to become good, it is because they failed to respond to God's prompting. Smith certainly has views like Twisse's in mind when he complains that:

... we are wont sometimes to paint [God] forth too much in the likeness of corrupt and impotent men, that ... much sport themselves and applaud their own Greatness, to hear what hideous cries the Severity of their own Power can extort from those they have a mind to make miserable. (SD 141)

As far as Smith's God is concerned, 'His Honour is His Love and Goodness in paraphrase, spreading it self over all those that can or doe receive it' (SD 143).

Smith specifically takes aim at any idea of God which holds that he might 'make us *sinfull*' or 'make his creatures *miserable* ... so he might shew himself *Just*' (SD 155). This idea of God sounds very much like Calvin's God of the *Institutes*, who 'arranges all things by his sovereign counsel, in such a way that individuals are born, who are doomed from the womb to certain death, and are to glorify him by their destruction' (*Inst.* III.23.6). Calvin insists that this was God's plan from the beginning; Adam himself only sinned because 'the Lord deemed it meet that he should', and we can be sure that God's will was just in this respect, 'because he saw that his own glory would thereby be displayed' (*Inst.* III.23.8). For Calvin, God is glorified by the damnation of the reprobate, and this is part of the reason we should not be troubled by it.

But against this conception of God, Smith reasserts his belief in God's communicative intent: 'But as the Divinity could propound nothing to it self in the making of the World but

the *Communication* of its own *Love* and *Goodness*; so it can never swerve from the same Scope and End in the dispensation of it self to it' (SD 155). If some human beings are not communicants in God's goodness, it is not because God has willed to deprive them, but because their own self-will has made them incapable of receiving it: 'No, that εὐδοκία or good pleasure of that Will that made them is the same still, it changes not, though we may change, and make our selves incapable of partaking the blissfull fruits and effects of it' (SD 156); 'There is no such thing as *sowre Despight and Envy* lodged in the bosome of that ever-blessed Being above ... of whose benign influences we are then only deprived when we hide and withdraw our selves from them' (SD 334).

6.5.3 *Divine and Human Goodness*

Another implication of communicative intent (to be explored more fully in chapter 8) is that human virtue offers us a real window into God's goodness. As Cudworth notes in the passage from the *System* above, if God has communicative intent, then '*Vertue* is defined to be, An *Assimilation to the Deity*' (TISU 205). Good human beings are good in the same way and with the same goodness that God is good. In Whichcote's even stronger terms, 'God *imposeth* no Law of Righteousness upon Us; which He doth not observe Himself' (Aph #85). Simply put, the Emmanuel Three take human goodness as an accurate (albeit paler) reflection of God's goodness. Thus, if it would be evil for a human being to deprive millions of some major benefit they could easily provide, it is also evil (and therefore impossible) for God to do so.

Recall Hoard's analogy comparing a reprobating God to a murderous parent. William Twisse objected to the analogy because it unfairly applies human standards of goodness to God, who is not bound by the same moral rules as human parents are with regard to their

children. Twisse explains that in saving some and reprobating others, ‘the Lord carrieth himselfe not according to mens workes, but merely according to the pleasure of his owne will ...’ (Twisse 1653, vol. 2, 27).

In his response to the Oxford Platonist Thomas Jackson, Twisse illustrates this important difference between God and humanity by pointing out that in the Bible, God often does things which no upright human being would. In the course of his comprehensive dismantling of Jackson’s *Treatise*, Twisse takes aim at the title of its twelfth chapter: ‘Of the infinity and immutability of Divine Goodnesse communicative, or as it is the patterne of morall goodnesse in the creature’ (Jackson 1628, 128). This title alone is enough to raise Twisse’s hackles, for it implies that God communicates his *own* goodness to morally upright human beings, such that good human beings are good in the same sense that God is: ‘I doe not like this Title, the disjunctive argueth, that Gods goodnesse communicative as communicative, is the patterne of morall goodnesse in the creature’ (Twisse 1631, 417).

But God’s goodness, Twisse argues, is very different from human goodness, so that God often does things which good human beings are forbidden to do. In the 2 Kings, for instance, God causes two she-bears to devour the children who mocked his prophet Elisha (2 Kg 2:23–5), but we human beings ‘must not imitate God in the like, [for] we must still blesse them that curse us, and pray for them, that persecute us’ (1631, 417). Twisse’s point here is that the pattern of God’s goodness is different from the pattern of human goodness. That is why God can reprobate millions without contradicting his goodness, even though from a human perspective this appears to be a great evil.

The Emmanuel Three, on the other hand, hold that God's own essential goodness is nowhere more manifest than in virtuous and upright human beings. As Cudworth's *True Intellectual System* would have it, virtue in human beings is 'An Assimilation to the Deity ... and descend[s] downward to us from the Deity' (TISU 205). This is because God's communicative intent compels him to fill human beings, who have the greatest potential for Godlikeness in all creation, with the very same eternal and immutable goodness that makes him who he is. We will discuss more fully how this view leads them to 'debunk' the decree of reprobation in chapter 8 below.

But for now, we can see the fundamental conflict between their Platonic view of divine communication and a crypto-naturalist view like Twisse's crystallised in a later sermon of Whichcote's. Where Twisse rejects Hoard's murderous parent analogy because God is not bound to be good in the same way that a human parent is, Whichcote argues that God must be at least as good to his children as a virtuous human parent is to their children:

[A]ll the tenderness that is in parents, it is eminently, transcendently in God: and it is but an expression from God and a derivation from God, and a resemblance of him and that which you cannot but attribute to a parent of reputation you cannot (unless you be wholly sacrilegious and injurious) but attribute that, or the like to God. These are the foundations of reason that are satisfactory to all persons that are of purified minds, of raised intellectuals, and this is *credible in itself of God* ... This is rational, thus to think of God ... (*Works* II, 94; cf. Ficino, PTh. II.13.1)

Of course, a clever Calvinist could respond that reprobation expresses an even higher ideal of parental love for the reprobate than any human parent can emulate, or any human mind

comprehend. Whichcote would have to concede the possibility, unless he wants to claim that nothing about God's essential goodness remains unknown to us. But he evidently thinks that reason gives us enough access to God's eternal and immutable goodness to know that God is more, not less, loving to his children than good human parents are to theirs. As Whichcote puts it in an *Aphorism*: 'There is *no* Perfection wanting in *God*; which our own hearts could desire should be in Him' (Aph #331; cf. #237).⁵⁸

6.5.4 Sterry's Calvinist Naturalism?

Before we move on, we must make an important detour through Peter Sterry, one of the early 'publicly professing' Platonists of Emmanuel. We saw earlier that like Luther and Calvin, Sterry reconciles God's goodness with the existence of Hell by appealing to a currently unknowable standard of goodness. He attempts to work this into his Platonist vision of the universe as the grand emanation of God's essential love and goodness. God's universe is no less good or loving because it also contains a Hell, Sterry explains: '*Divine Love* (which transcendently excels in all Wisdom and Prudence, beyond all the highest wits of men ...) knoweth how to joynt an *Hell* into its work, with such Divine Artifice, incomprehensible to Men or Angels, that this also shall be beautiful, with delights in its place, and shall give a sweetness, a lustre to the whole piece' (Sterry 1675, xxiv).⁵⁹ God knows about goodness and beauty better than us, and this superior knowledge is what allows him to weave a perfectly good universe that also contains a Hell. This could be read as Sterry's Platonic spin on the classic Calvinist idea that God and the elect in Heaven will rejoice at the sufferings of the

⁵⁸ It is interesting to note that Nathaniel Culverwell, sometimes considered a Cambridge Platonist, harshly criticised the Arminianism of Hoard's *God's Love to Mankind* (see Culverwell 2001, xiii), putting him at odds with the Emmanuel Three who I have argued implicitly agree with Hoard.

⁵⁹ Counting from the first page of the preface (which is unpaginated).

reprobate, since God is glorified through them; no doubt many of his Calvinist contemporaries would have interpreted him this way. If that is what Sterry means, then he is not a Platonist in the sense that I have argued Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith are above: that is, he does not think that God's essential goodness requires him to share his goodness with all entities as far as possible.

But there is at least one powerful reason to suggest that Sterry's view was not so distant from the Emmanuel Three's in this regard. By the end of his life, and for some years before (though it is not clear how many), Sterry was a confirmed and consistent believer in universal salvation: in the end, there will be no Hell, because although some must suffer temporarily after death, God has in fact elected all human beings to salvation, without exception (Wallace 2011, 57–8). Perhaps Sterry's Platonist convictions eventually overpowered his Calvinism: ultimately, there could be no place for a divinely-ordained eternal Hell in a world created by an all-powerful God with irresistible communicative intent.

6.6 Conclusions

The case for identifying Smith and Cudworth as learned and ingenious men is becoming stronger. Recall once more Tuckney complained that Whichcote and his company questioned and quarrelled with God's decrees because on the grounds that 'according to our reason, wee cannot comprehend; how they may stande with His goodness' (EL 38). What we saw hinted at in the Emmanuel Three's defence of metaethical naturalism in chapter 5 has now become explicit: the Emmanuel Three believed that God's good nature utterly precludes tyrannous enormities like the double decree. Against voluntarist opponents who deny that God is bound to deal fairly with us, the Emmanuel Three insist that God be held to an immutable moral standard just as political pamphleteers do with their sovereigns. Against crypto-naturalist

opponents who hold that God has good and just reasons for reprobation, the Emmanuel Three pose a rival picture of God's character, one that fits our moral instincts far better, on which God could never intentionally deprive his creatures of his own goodness. In their responses to both these Calvinist strategies then, the Emmanuel Three contend that the double decree is incompatible with God's goodness.

(7) Reconciliation and Imputed Righteousness

Our picture of the Emmanuel Three's rival conception of God and goodness in the 1640s and early 50s is almost complete. To cap it off, we must see how the Cambridge Platonists' rejection of voluntarism and corresponding embrace of naturalism had important implications for another central doctrine of Calvinist orthodoxy: that of imputed righteousness. As we shall see, it is in their early criticisms of this doctrine that the Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith stand out most clearly against their Puritan context, and most clearly answer to Tuckney's complaints about the learned and ingenious Platonisers.

Section 7.1 will introduce the Calvinist doctrine of justification by imputed righteousness, and identify some important points of controversy it occasioned in the broader theological context. Section 7.2 shows how this doctrine resonates with the voluntarist conception of God we saw in chapters 5 and 6. Finally, sections 7.3 and 7.4 examine two significant ways in which the Emmanuel Three challenge the doctrine of imputed righteousness: first by defending the idea that we are saved by having Christ's righteousness really 'infused' into our souls, rather than merely 'imputed' (and here, Tuckney will accuse them explicitly of a 'Platonique faith'); and secondly, by attacking the possibility of imputed righteousness on grounds drawn from their metaethical naturalism.

This will largely conclude the case for the prosecution in the matter of the learned and ingenious men. It will also pave the way for Part IV where we will turn to the religious and moral epistemology that underlies the Emmanuel Three's dissent from Puritan orthodoxy in all these respects: i.e. their metaethical naturalism, their moral critique of the decree of reprobation, and the concept of imputed righteousness.

7.1 Imputed Righteousness in Reformed Thought

Puritans considered all human beings sinful and worthy of damnation from the moment they are born (e.g. Shepard 1655, 8–9). Salvation comes to the select few whom God has elected in a series of distinct stages or ‘degrees’ that are carefully distinguished in Puritan theology.

They differ slightly in the naming and number of the various stages, but the fundamental pattern is always the same.⁶⁰ For our purposes, two of these stages are important:

‘justification’, where God wipes away a believer’s guilt by imputing Christ’s righteousness to them, and sanctification, where the believer is gradually transformed from a sinful human being into a glorious state of righteous Godlikeness.

7.1.1 Justification

When a person sins or acts righteously, they attain a corresponding legal state in God’s eyes: guilt (for sin) or merit (for righteousness). ‘Guiltinesse’, explains William Ames of Christ’s College, is a ‘consequent adjunct’ of sin, ‘and is a worthinesse and deserving of punishment’ (1642, 61). Guilt makes one liable to punishment (which is ‘an evill inflicted upon the *Sinner* for his *Sinne*’ [Ames 1642, 62]), while merit brings one into God’s favour.

By default, all human beings are guilty and deserving of divine punishment, both for their own sins and for the sin of Adam whose guilt rests on all his descendants. In Calvin’s words, ‘All of us ... descending from an impure seed, come into the world tainted with the contagion of sin. Nay, before we behold the light of the sun we are in God’s sight defiled and

⁶⁰ For instance, William Perkins’ *Golden Chaine* gives four degrees: calling, justification, sanctification, glorification (1600, 114–28, 141–5). Thomas Shepard gives five: justification, reconciliation, adoption, sanctification, glorification (1655, 12–13).

polluted' (Calvin, *Inst.* 2.1.5; cf. Ames 1642, 77). As a result, all human beings are destined for Hell.

God, however, makes a decree of election to deliver certain, select persons from this condemnation. The elect receive the benefits of this decree in successive stages, the first of which is justification. In this stage, God grants the elected person a legal or forensic acquittal from the guilt of sin that restores their moral standing with God. As Thomas Shepard puts it, the first benefit the elect receive from Christ is:

Justification, which is the Gracious Sentence of God the Father, whereby for the satisfaction of Christ apprehended by Faith, and imputed to the faithfull, he absolves them from the guilt and condemnation of all sins, and accepts them as perfectly righteous to eternall life (Shepard 1655, 12).

Justification also repairs the elect's standing with God in other ways. For Shepard, justification is followed swiftly by reconciliation ('whereby a Christian justified is actually reconciled, and at peace with God') and adoption ('whereby the Lord accounts the faithfull his Sons, [and] crowns them with the privileges of Sons') (Shepard 1655, 12). In sum, justification recategorises the elect in God's eyes, taking away their status as guilty sinners and enemies of God and granting them the status of righteous friends and children of God.

As the previous quotation from Brinsley indicates, this recategorisation takes place through a process of 'imputation', or as Emmanuel's Anthony Burgess puts it, an 'accounting': to be imputed righteous '*doth imply an accounting just*' (1651, 6). Imputation is a process where forensic states like guilt and merit become attached to persons other than the

original agent of the sin or righteousness that produced them. In justification, God performs a double act of imputation: ‘a kinde of translation of the beleevers sinnes unto Christ, and againe Christs righteousnes unto the beleever, by meanes of Gods divine imputation’ (Perkins 1600, 122–3). The first imputation is ‘remission of sins’, where God imputes the guilt of the elect’s sins to Christ and executes the punishment for it on the cross, leaving the elect blameless in God’s eyes (e.g. Perkins 1600, 145; Shepard 1641, 90, 99; Ames 1642, 133; Brinsley 1652, I:65–6). The second is ‘imputation of righteousness’ where Christ’s righteousness imputed to the elect, allowing them to be ‘accounted just in the sight of God’ (e.g. Perkins 1600, 156–7; Brinsley 1652, II:36). In this way, writes Perkins, God demonstrates both his justice and his mercy: ‘His justice, in that he punished the sinnes of the elect, in his Sonnes owne person[;] His mercie, in that he pardoned their sinne, for the merites of his Sonne’ (1600, 145; cf. Shepard 1641, 90).⁶¹ So the elect are restored to good moral standing with God by trading moral qualities with Christ: Christ takes on the elect’s sinfulness and the elect take on Christ’s righteousness.

However, the exact process by which a believer became justified was the subject of much controversy among Puritans. In general, there were two errors to be avoided in treating of justification: Arminianism (which makes salvation depend on our free will) on the one hand, and ‘antinomianism’ (which says that since we are saved, we may sin as much we please) on the other. In his 1651 lectures on justification, Burgess defends what he takes to be the orthodox doctrine of justification against both the Arminians ‘who look for a Philosophicall *Justification*, or righteousnesse of works [e]ither wholly issuing from our free will ... or partly from it ...’, and the opposite error, ‘viz. such a setting up of Free Grace in

⁶¹ Again though, for strict voluntarists, this transfer of moral properties should be unnecessary: there would be no need for God to punish his Son in place of the elect, because God could, by an act of pure will, absolve the elect of guilt.

Justification, that should make the Law as to all purposes uselesse ...' (1651, 'Preface' iii; cf. 24–6). The former made salvation depend at least partly on us rather than on God's grace. The latter gave the elect license to sin as much as they pleased without consequence.

To properly understand the orthodox notion of imputed righteousness against which the Emmanuel Three rebelled, we will briefly examine how Puritans defined justification so as to guard against these two extremes.

7.1.2 Imputed vs. Natural/Moral Righteousness

Against the Pelagian or Arminian error that we are saved by efforts of our own free will rather than God's free choice to elect us, Puritans insist that even the highest levels of virtue human beings are capable of attaining in their natural condition is totally unacceptable to God. By imputing Christ's righteousness to us, justification gives us something we could never achieve on our own: the right to stand blameless before God. Christ's imputed righteousness is importantly unlike the sort of moral virtue we can achieve by being decent people and obeying the commandments. 'When men are judged by their natural endowments', asserts Calvin, 'not a iota of good will be found from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot' (*Inst.* III.14.1). '[T]ake a Man, that is naturall', writes Tuckney's friend John Arrowsmith: 'by the improvement of nature, he may go on a great way: but he cannot, by all the improvements of nature, deserve grace at the hands of God' (1660, 125).

Calvin admits that there have been genuinely good human beings among the pagans, and that their goodness indeed came from God:

I deny not, that whatever excellent endowments appear in unbelievers are divine gifts. Nor do I set myself so much in opposition to common sense, as to contend that there was no difference between the justice, moderation, and equity of Titus and Trajan, and the rage, intemperance, and cruelty of Caligula, Nero, and Domitian ...
(*Inst.* III.14.2)

Indeed, God even encourages this sort of natural virtue among human beings by granting gifts of special, divine virtue to some who are ‘otherwise profane’ (*Inst.* II.2.4), and ‘visit[ing] those who cultivate virtue with many temporal blessings’ (*Inst.* III.14.2; cf. Perkins 1600, 1047–8). In this way, the morally upright pagans of antiquity can be said to be virtuous after a fashion, but not in any sense that might save them from damnation: ‘we hesitate not, in common language, to say, that one is of a good, another of a vicious nature; though we cease not to hold that both are placed under the universal condition of human depravity’ (*Inst.* II.2.4).

So in Calvin’s mind, all these natural virtues are only the ‘external image’ and ‘outward semblance’ of real goodness (*Inst.* III.14.2). He concludes that,

... as there is no sanctification without union with Christ, it is evident that [virtuous pagans] are bad trees which are beautiful and fair to look upon, and may even produce fruit, sweet to the taste, but are still very far from good. Hence we easily perceive that every thing which man thinks, designs, and performs, before he is reconciled to God by faith, is cursed, and not only of no avail for justification, but merits certain damnation. (*Inst.* III.14.4)

This is why all non-Christians who possess virtues are as corrupt and damnable in God's eyes as the vicious. The only thing that can reconcile us to God and save us from damnation is the gift of imputed righteousness, whereby God attributes to us a kind of righteousness far greater than any we could actually achieve in this life.

In mid-1600s Cambridge, Anthony Tuckney was a vocal and polemical defender of Calvinist orthodoxy about imputed righteousness. As Tuckney puts it in a sermon delivered some time after 1660, 'it is not Morality nor the most unblameably vertuous either inward habits, or outward performances in an estate of irregnecy, which can so commend us to God as that we may safely rely on, or rest in them for our acceptance with him (1676, 153).

Tuckney does not deny 'a moral, civil, vertuous and unblameable life and carriage is of great worth and highly to be valued' (1676, 153), but this does not mean that moral and civil virtues have any currency in the court of heaven. Like Calvin, Tuckney readily acknowledges that there are and have been many moral pagans; 'this *Morality* may be found in them who never *savingly knew Christ* ... you shall hardly find the life of the worst without some good works, so in such as are not so bad you may sometimes find many' (1676, 160). But this morality would do them little good in the end, for it amounts to nothing more than the paltry goodness inherent in fallen human nature:

It's one thing that Nature yields, and far another which Grace: Or if not only from *Nature* for the *Cause*, yet such as meer *natural men* may be capable of for *the subject*. But as trim as *Nature* may look in some mens eyes, yet ... in *Prosper's* judgment, *that which is highly esteemed among men may be abomination in the sight of God* ... and if *by nature* we be *children of wrath* (Eph 2:3) that sure cannot pacific

God's anger, which we may have, whilst we are in a meer natural condition (1676, 161).

Tuckney is echoing Calvin's conclusion that while moral virtues 'may have their praise in civil society and the common intercourse of life ... before the judgment-seat of God they will be of no value to establish a claim of righteousness' (*Inst.* II.2.4). Even the greatest heights of moral virtue we can achieve in this life pale into utter worthlessness compared to God's goodness and can do nothing to reconcile us to God and save us from Hell; only the free gift of imputed righteousness, received by explicit confession and faith in Christ, can do that.

So it was essential for Reformed Puritans like Tuckney that no amount of virtue we can achieve naturally can make us acceptable to God. God's goodness is so far above anything human nature is capable of, and human nature so utterly ruined by sin, that only the forensic gift of Christ's imputed merit will do us any good in God's court of justice.

7.1.3 Imputed vs. Inherent or 'Infused' Righteousness

Puritans also insist that the imputed righteousness which saves us should be carefully distinguished from the virtuous state of character that *results* from being saved. To this end, they make a strong distinction between the early and later stages of the salvific process. In the early stages like adoption and justification, the elect are merely *accounted* righteous; God imputes or attributes Christ's righteousness to them, covering up the fact that they are still inherently sinful. It is only in the later stages of sanctification, regeneration and glorification, where the believers are 'by little and little renewed in holiness and righteousness' (Perkins 1600, 124), that believers actually become righteous, rather than merely being accounted so. While justification is instantaneous, sanctification is a gradual process: '*Justification is perfected at*

once,' Thomas Shepard explains, 'and admits of no degrees, because it is by Christ his perfect righteousness', but 'sanctification is imperfect, being begun in this life' (1655, 12). In these later stages, the elect are actually made righteous and come to inwardly possess characteristics that render them amiable and acceptable to God such as holiness and righteousness.

Emphatically then, the righteousness that the elect receive in justification is not inherent — i.e. not really 'within' the believer — but imputed to them, accounted as theirs. In Calvin's classical formulation: 'when God justifies us through the intercession of Christ, he does not acquit us on a proof of our own innocence, but by an imputation of righteousness, so that though not righteous in ourselves, we are deemed righteous in Christ' (*Inst.* III.9.3). Justification is 'the acceptance with which God receives us into his favour as if we were righteous' (*Inst.* III.9.2). We remain as we were, but God is changed (relative to us), 'becom[ing], instead of a judge, an indulgent Father' (*Inst.* III.11.1). Puritans frequently describe imputation as God 'covering' the sins of the elect with the garment of Christ's righteousness (e.g. Ames 1642, 137; Burgess 1651, 47–8, 216–7; Tuckney 1676, 48, 164).

Here though, Calvinists open themselves up to the charge of antinomianism, in that they seem to be saying that since election is an unconditional and irrevocable gift, a believer can sin as much as they please without fear of punishment (e.g. Tuckney 1676, 675–6; Burgess 1651, 47–8). No matter what they do, they will still be considered righteous in God's eyes, covered by the spotless garment of Christ's righteousness. To distance themselves from this unattractive position, covenant theologians in the tradition of Perkins and Preston made justification *conditional* upon a believer's faith and repentance (Rohr 1965, 196–8). '[N]one shall be Justified', wrote Tuckney's Emmanuel colleague Anthony Burgess, 'but such sinners who feel their guilt, and desire to be eased of that burden ... this may be made good against

the Antinomian, that a man is not Justified, till repenting and beleeving' (1651, 12; cf. 168–74; Brinsley 1652, I:109f). So elect believers are by definition those who repent and move away from sin, thus preventing the Puritans from being accused of promoting an antinomian liberty to sin.

This conditional language would steer the Puritans dangerously close to Arminianism — making salvation conditional on something in our power — if they did not emphasise at the same time that the saving faith and repentance requisite for salvation are themselves free gifts of God, which no one can perform of their own free will (Rohr 1965, 200). Thus, while the covenant of grace is conditional, as William Ames puts it, 'the condition of the Covenant is also promised in the Covenant' (quoted Rohr 1965, 201). It is true that God saves all who believe and reject sin, but no one can believe and reject sin unless God gives them the power to do so, and God only gives this power to the elect.

It should be emphasised that although faith and repentance are 'conditions' for receiving grace and salvation, no orthodox Puritan would hold that they make us worthy of salvation. They only qualify us to receive the forensic gift of Christ's righteousness because God has stipulated them as entry conditions to his covenant. Faith and repentance are not the causes of our justification, but only the conditions that must be met before we can receive it (Brinsley 1652 I:109–11). If faith and repentance themselves justified us before God, then it would be our own righteousness, not Christ's, that justified us before God. And so Burgess insists that the imputed righteousness we attain in justification is not 'an *inherent righteousness*, or a *qualitative Justice* ... but it may be called a *Legal* or *Judicial righteousness*' (1651, 17). It is a change of legal standing, not moral character: 'when we say, There is a change made in a man by Justification, it is not meant of an inward, *absolute*

and *physical* one, such as is in Sanctification, when of unholy we are made holy, but *morall* and *relative*; as when one is made a Magistrate, or husband and wife' (Burgess 1651, 167; cf. Ames 1642, 146). So faith and repentance leaves us inherently as sinful as we were before; the only change they bring about is a forensic one.

Importantly, some Reformation thinkers like Andreas Osiander and Michael Servetus became notorious for their dissent on this point (Calvin, *Inst.* III.11.5–6; Tuckney 1676, 225; 1679, 307–8; cf. also Vainio 2008, 95–117; Garcia 2009, 416ff). Osiander, a German Reformer, had controversially taught that Christ's righteousness was inherently, ontologically 'infused' into believers rather than his righteousness merely being imputed to them (see Vainio 2008, 95–100). According to Calvin, Osiander's dangerous error is that he thinks 'that God justifies not only by pardoning but by regenerating' (*Inst.* III.11.6). Emmanuel preacher John Brinsley likely has Osiander in mind when he insists that Christ becomes '*Righteousnesse* to the believer ... not by way of Infusion, but Imputation; not by putting a Righteousnesse *into* him, but by putting a *Righteousness upon* him' (Brinsley 1652, 37; cf. Ames 1642, 146).

The spectre of Osiander still loomed large in Tuckney's mind well into the 1650s. In a posthumously published Latin treatise (undated), he criticises Osiander for having mixed up justification (where righteousness is merely imputed to us) with sanctification (where we are made inherently righteous):

[Osiander's opinion] totally *confounds* justification with *sanctification*, supposing it to lie in *inherent righteousness*, in which it forms a syncretism with the *Papists* ... They in like manner suppose *justification* to lie in infused *inherent grace*: *Osiander*

in the very *essential righteousness of God*; but both [suppose it to lie in] in an inherent, inhabiting [grace] — not forensically and on account of imputation, but physically on account of *an infusion of righteousness* (whatever this turns out to be), which makes a man righteous ... (Tuckney 1679, 308)⁶²

To Tuckney's mind, Osiander's claim that Christ saves us by really 'infusing' us with his righteousness contradicts the clear Biblical teaching.⁶³

This does not mean that Puritans thought true believers would remain completely unchanged by their entrance into a covenant relationship with God. If a person is genuinely one of the elect, their faith and repentance will lead them to a desire a holy and righteous life. Stumblings and false starts notwithstanding, they should find that they are beginning to increase in righteousness and grow into 'a Christian conversation [manner of life], wherein are brought forth fruits worthie amendment of life' (Perkins 1600, 128). If this happens, they can be greatly reassured that they are indeed counted among the elect. The only explanation for one's growth in righteousness is that one has really been elected: 'This no man either will, or can performe, but such an one as is in the sight of God regenerated and justified, and indued with true faith' (Perkins 1600, 128). Although sanctification is never complete in one's earthly lifetime, such moral improvement is a sure sign that it has already begun to take place, just as the first rays of dawn signal the coming of the morning sun (Perkins 1600, 1047). Consequently, Puritans spent much time and effort trying to determine whether or not they

⁶² ... justificationem cum *sanctificatione* omninò *confundit*, cum in *justitiâ inhaerente* sitam esse statuit, in quo cum *Pontificiis* syncretismus facit ... Hi siquidem *justificationem* in *gratiâ inhaerente* infuse ponunt: *Osiander* in ipsâ *essentia Dei justitiâ*; at utrique in inhaerente, inhabitante, & non forinsecè & per imputationem, sed physice per *justitiae* (quaecunque ea demùm fuerit) *infusionem* hominem justum efficiente ...

⁶³ Notably, even a Catholic anti-Calvinist like Robert Bellarmine considered Osiander's doctrine of union with God as the formal cause of salvation a dangerous error (BO VI:220–2).

could glimpse the first hints of this sanctification in themselves; this was what it meant to ‘make one’s election sure’, or to seek ‘assurance’ of one’s salvation.⁶⁴

But of course, these comforting beginnings of inherent righteousness were only an indicator that their salvation had already been guaranteed by imputation. To think that these glimmers of virtue themselves could give a believer confidence before God’s tribunal, would be to fall into the same error as those who think they can find favour with God through their natural or moral righteousness. A good Puritan must remember that it is God’s gift of legal pardon — not sanctification — that guarantees their salvation; ‘in the workes of the regenerate’, Ames writes, ‘there is not that respect of merit whereby any reward is obtained by Justice’ (Ames 1642, 239). If our salvation were in any way dependent on the degree of sanctification we achieve here and now, in this life, then we would have no hope of salvation. This important qualification protected the fundamental Reformed intuition of that salvation is entirely unmerited and that the elect are damnable sinners whom God has chosen to save despite their sinfulness.

In sum, the Puritan consensus at Cambridge was that when God desired to save one of his elect, he granted them the power to repent and believe in the Gospel. Their faith and repentance allowed them to receive the forensic gift of Christ’s righteousness, which guaranteed their salvation. From that point on, they could expect to see slow but sure moral improvements within themselves, signalling that God had begun to render them really righteous. But they must always remember that they are not really righteous, not yet. They are

⁶⁴ E.g. John Cotton reflects at length on precisely how this reflection can be done without falling into a sinful sense of ‘security’ in *Sixteene Questions of Serious and Necessary Consequence* (1644).

saved because they have attained the moral standing of Christ by a legal covenant, not because they have any inherent goodness that could acquit them in God's court.

What matters most for our purposes is that despite their attempts to ward off the charge of antinomianism by making repentance necessary for salvation, Puritan preachers in the Emmanuel Three's context still held that the elect are reconciled to God by a forensic imputation of Christ's righteousness, such that God can account them righteous without their actually being so. A justified believer is 'legally' righteous, but not 'really' or 'inherently' righteous. And although God has every intention of rendering the elect really righteous in the fulness of time, their salvation is already accomplished by this legal change; the little hints of sanctification that start to take place in their hearts are only signs that they have been justified, not at all causes of their justification.

7.2 Imputation and Voluntarism

In sum then, Puritan orthodoxy held that believers are saved by having Christ's righteousness legally or virtually imputed to them, a process which involves a change in God's attitude towards them, but not in the believer's actual character. A change in character will inevitably follow, and glimmers of it begin to appear in this life, but the orthodox emphasis is always that an individual believer's salvation depends entirely on a gracious change in God's appraisal of them which is completed instantaneously when the believer professes faith in Christ. For this reason, Puritan preachers routinely insist that we are saved only on account the righteousness imputed to us through Christ, not by the inherent righteousness we develop in the early stages of sanctification, and certainly not by any natural or moral virtue.

While it might seem that we have strayed into overly theological territory, we will see that the Emmanuel Three object to this orthodox view for reasons bound up inseparably with their metaethical naturalism and their rejection of God's right to elect and reprobate arbitrarily. Remember that the voluntarist-naturalist debate hinged on the issue of whether God's will was bounded or regulated by the nature of things. Voluntarists insisted that God's will was never bound by the nature of things: he could do absolutely anything he willed and make that thing right simply by willing it. The Emmanuel Three defended a contrary view of God's moral character, which posited an eternal and immutable standard of goodness that governed God's volitions: even God was bound to act in accordance with the moral nature of things.

With this in mind, it is easy to anticipate why the Emmanuel Three would object to the orthodox Puritan emphasis on imputed over inherent or natural righteousness as the cause of our reconciliation with God. When Puritans preached about imputed righteousness, they were intent on preserving the absolute freedom of God's election: his choice of whom to elect and whom to reprobate must be entirely uncaused by any properties of the persons in question. God makes the decree, says John Brinsley, an Emmanuel preacher from Preston's time, 'meerly out of the good pleasure of his own will, without any respect ... to any thing in the persons so disposed of' (1655, 150; cf. Bolton 1646, 214; Twisse 1653, 37). Similarly, William Ames of Christ's College insists that since election 'depends upon no cause, reason or outward condition, but it doth purely proceed from the will of him that predestinateth', it follows that election has nothing to do with the 'quality' or 'condition' inherent in the elect: 'for it is sufficient to understand that men are the object of this decree, so that the difference of the decree doth not depend upon man, but that difference, which is found in men, doth follow upon the decree' (Ames 1642, 117–8). In other words, it is essential to Puritan doctrine

that the *only* difference between the elect and the reprobate is that the former consists in God's decree, rather than any inherent qualities; the elect and the reprobate are inherently equal, but differentiated on the legal plane by God's decree.

What does this have to do with the distinction between imputed and inherent righteousness? Well, arguably, the reason Puritans insist so vigorously that we are saved by imputed rather than natural or inherent righteousness is that they want to make it indisputably clear that God's causeless and unbounded will is the only cause of salvation. There must be no suggestion that God is at all responding to realities external to him in his decrees of election and reprobation. As William Twisse puts it (paraphrasing Aquinas) 'the act of predestination is the act of God's will, and ... *there can be no cause of the will of God, as touching the act of God willing, but only as touching the things willed by God*' (1653, 36). That is why God's act of imputation — the act by which he executes the decree of predestination — must be viewed as a pure act of divine will with no prior or external causes whatsoever. Inherent and natural moral qualities existing in the elect must have nothing to do with it. So the insistence on imputed righteousness as the only cause of salvation is a way of preserving God's absolute freedom in election and reprobation: we are only saved because God decides to consider us righteous.⁶⁵

The Emmanuel Three however, with their naturalist picture of God, were repelled by the idea that imputed righteousness could be the whole ground of reconciliation. In the rest of

⁶⁵ Curiously though, we find occasional remarks from Puritans suggesting that Christ's death was necessary for the redemption of the elect; that is, God could not have simply forgiven the elect, without punishing his Son in their stead. Anthony Burgess, for example, contends that while 'God is free, whether he will procure, or *prepare an object of justice*', once he 'hath so *prepared an object*, then he is not *loosned* from the *obligation of Justice*. (Burgess 1651, 97–8). According to a full-blooded, consistent voluntarism, God should not be 'obliged' in any way towards his creations. In holding God to this necessity, Burgess commits exactly the sort of error Cudworth complains of in his *True Intellectual System* by trying to hold that God's will is both absolutely uncaused and innately just (see 5.5.1 above).

this chapter, we will see that without naming any of their targets, the Emmanuel Three challenge the view that the elect are reconciled to God through merely God's *re-labelling* or *re-categorising* them as righteous, rather than actually *making* them righteous. Instead, they insist on explicitly Platonic grounds that God *cannot* count anyone righteous if they are not righteous inherently, that is, if they do not participate in his essential goodness. They write off any kind of reconciliation distinct from inherent participation in his goodness as a kind of lie; a case of arbitrary will overruling the actual nature of things. As Whichcote's *Aphorisms* succinctly put it: '*Relative* Holiness, depending upon an Arbitrary act ... alters not the Nature and Quality of the thing; but only the Relation and Use of it. Things *Relatively* Holy have never been Equalized with *Real* Holiness ...' (Aph #263, #264).

On the Emmanuel Three's view rather, God saves human beings by actually infusing his essential goodness into them, rendering them genuinely Godlike and acceptable (as far as their free will allows), in this life.⁶⁶ Importantly, their view implies that Christ's reconciling work is done *on us* rather than on God: salvation is not a result of God changing his disposition towards us, but of us reconciling our internal character to his. We will see that Smith and Cudworth both elaborate these views in the 1640s, and that their views correspond strikingly to Tuckney's complaints to Whichcote in their 1651 correspondence.

We will approach the Emmanuel Three's critique of salvation by imputed righteousness under two headings, both inspired by the accusations levelled at Whichcote by

⁶⁶ The Emmanuel Three do not think of salvation as something distinct from this process of becoming Godlike; it is not that becoming Godlike makes us worthy of salvation, but rather that God's efforts to save us succeed when we respond to communicative emanations and become conformed to him. 'Heaven' is nothing other than a state of communion with God, while 'Hell' is a state of being deprived of God's essence; in this sense, both heaven and hell are already parts of our experience on earth rather than future destinations (Aph #809, #1118; *Works* II:194; III:153, 216–17; *Commons* 51; *Lincolnes* 29–31 SD 149–51, 329–30, 410, 427–8, 446–7; cf. Gill 1999, 274–80).

Tuckney and his fellow Calvinists. First, we will look at the Emmanuel Three's 'Platonic' view of justification, on which we are justified in God's eyes only to the extent that we come to participate in his essential goodness. Second, we will look at the Emmanuel Three's polemic against the idea of imputation, where they insist that not even God can 'will' us into salvation if we are not essentially righteous.

7.3 'A Platonique Faith Unites to God'

In his 1651 correspondence with Whichcote, one of Tuckney's complaints is that Whichcote's learned and ingenious friends overemphasise inherent and natural righteousness as better grounds for justification than imputed righteousness (EL 38–9). I contend here that we can catch Smith and Cudworth (along with Whichcote) red-handed, doing exactly this in works all dated between 1644 and 1651. But in order to see this, we will need a clear picture of how the Emmanuel Three understand the process of justification, i.e. the process whereby God reconciles sinners to himself.

7.3.1 *Smith's Platonic Theory of Justification*

To this end, we may begin with John Smith's discourse on *Legal and Evangelical Righteousness*, composed circa 1644–1649 while Smith was a fellow of Queen's College.⁶⁷ In chapter 5 of that discourse, Smith gives an account of precisely how sinners become justified and acceptable to God through Christ. His account of justification has two propositions, the first of which is:

⁶⁷ It comes from the earlier set of three 'chappel exercises' (*Discourses 7, 8 and 9*) so dates to some time prior to 1649. It was probably written sometime after 1644 when Smith was appointed Dean and Catechist of Queen's College (Ridley-Johnson 2016, 41–2, 54–9). The Emmanuel College Account Book does not give any indication that Smith held a teaching or preaching role at Emmanuel, giving us all the more reason to suppose that three older discourses were prepared as part of his duties at Queen's.

The Divine judgment and estimation of every thing is according to the truth of the thing; and Gods acceptance or disacceptance of things is suitable and proportionable to his judgment (SD 325f).

What does this have to do with the doctrine of justification? Smith's point here becomes clearer when read alongside the second proposition:

God's justifying of Sinners in pardoning and remitting their sins carries in it a necessary reference to the sanctifying of their Natures; without which Justification would rather be a glorious name than a real privilege to the Souls of men. (SD 329)

So Smith's position is that God cannot 'esteem' or 'judge' any person to be something they are not, justification must be a process must be a process where the believer truly *becomes* righteous, rather than merely being 'esteemed' so.

This is because, for Smith, God's estimations of things are governed by 'the Eternal Idea of Goodness' as unswervingly as his will is governed by the eternal and immutable rules of goodness. Just as God's will is bound by the immutable rule of goodness, God's judgements about what is good are bound by the immutable truth about what is good. More specifically, he can only love and highly esteem things if they really are good, i.e. if they really resemble his own essential goodness: 'Wherever he sees his own Image shining in the Souls of men, and a conformity of life to that Eternal Idea of Goodness which is himself, he loves it and takes a complacency in it, as that which is from himself, and is a true Imitation of himself' (SD 326). This necessary connection between God's goodness and his love also makes it the case that God loves himself necessarily, as the highest and most perfect exemplar

of goodness: ‘as his own unbounded Being & Goodness is the Primary and Original object of his Immense and Almighty Love: so also every thing that partakes of him, partakes proportionably of his Love’ (SD 326; cf. SD 129–30; *Commons* 27; Aph #1028). So God loves (i.e. values, highly esteems) those things that resemble him, since inasmuch as he is the best exemplar of goodness, he is himself the highest object his love, and loves all other things to the extent that they imitate him.

This is not to say, however, that God is incapable of loving any person until they become perfectly free of sin. Even though God necessarily loves only what resembles him, even the most sinful souls retain an innate resemblance to God, which God always desires to liberate from the cloying mists of sin (SD 13–15). Unlike Calvin or their Puritan colleagues, the Emmanuel Three have no concept of ‘total depravity’ (see 8.1 below; cf. Lichtenstein 1962, 180–6 on Whichcote and More).

If justification is really to reconcile us with God and make us proper objects of his love, then it must involve an actual transformation into the kind of being that God loves: namely, the kind of being that ‘imitates’ or ‘participates’ in his own essential goodness. Justification means becoming like God; it is what happens when God conveys his essential goodness to a faithful soul:

Divine *Love* according to those degrees by which it works upon the Souls of men in transforming them into its own likeness, by the same it renders them more acceptable to it self, minglith it self with and uniteth it self to them ... (SD 327)

For Smith then, the only thing that makes us acceptable to God is a ‘mingling’ and ‘union’ of God’s nature.

It is worth noting that Smith explicitly appeals to what he calls the ‘Platonic theology’ of philosophers like Pythagoras and Proclus to explain why justification must involve actual transformation into Godlikeness:

It was a common Notion in the old *Pythagorean* and *Platonick* Theology, Τὸν Δία μετασχηματισθέντα εἰς τὸν ἔρωτα, &c. as *Proclus* phraseth it, That the Divinity transformed into Love, and enamour’d with it’s own unlimited Perfections and spotless Beauty, delighted to copy forth and shadow out it self as it were in created Beings, which are perpetually embraced in the warm bosome of the same Love, which they can never swerve nor apostatize from, till they also prove apostate to the estate of their Creation (SD 326; quoting Proclus, *In Tim.* 156a).

He makes a similar appeal to the teaching of ‘the *Platonists*’ at the end of the discourse, when explaining the need for Christ to serve as a mediator between ‘Pure Divinity and Impure Sinners’ (SD 345). Thus, the Platonic theology of participation gives Smith the conceptual framework he needs to articulate his understanding of the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith.

The Platonic character of Smith’s theory of justification is evident in his definition of faith as union with God. He describes faith in ontological or metaphysical terms as a kind of ‘sympathy’ rather than a merely cognitive profession of belief:

[Faith] is that powerful Attractive which by a strong and divine Sympathy draws down the virtue of Heaven into the Souls of men, which strongly and forcibly moves the Souls of good men into a conjunction with that Divine goodness ... This is that Divine Impress that invincibly draws and sucks them in by degrees into the Divinity, and so unites them more and more to the Centre of Life and Love (SD 333).

While this definition of faith contains no explicit reference to Plato or Platonists, it bears an undeniable resemblance to the description of knowing God Smith will draw from Plotinus in the first of his Queens' discourses. There, he writes that a person knows God when 'he endeavours the nearest Union with the Divine Essence that may be, κέντρον κέντρῳ συνάψας, as *Plotinus* speaks; knitting his owne centre, if he have any, unto the centre of the Divine Being' (SD 20; quoting *Enn.* VI.9.10.17–20). So Smith describes both faith and knowledge of God and in Platonic terms, as a 'uniting of centres' with God and a transformative union with the divine essence.

Because this is what Smith means by faith, he can maintain with all orthodox Protestants that believers are justified by faith in Christ. He can even echo classic Calvinist condemnations of those who trust in their own natural righteousness (cf. 6.1.2 above) rather than the righteousness which comes from faith and free grace (SD 308–10; 341f). Only, for Smith, the righteousness which comes through faith and free grace does not refer the covenant-gift of imputed righteousness, but the inherent goodness which comes to us through an intimate union with the divine goodness that reconciles us to God by inwardly transforming us.

7.3.2 Cudworth's Platonic Theory of Justification

In Cudworth's 1647 sermon to the *House of Commons*, we find a nearly identical insistence that because God's goodness is his most essential property, God *cannot* reconcile himself to creatures who are not harmonised with his essential goodness. Cudworth gives an account of the essential connection between goodness and God's love which makes the same point as Smith's first proposition:

... God doth not fondly love himself, because he is *himself*, but therefore he loveth himself because he is the highest and most absolute *Goodnesse*: so that if there could be any thing in the world better then God, God would love that better then himself: but because he is Essentially the most perfect *Good*; therefore he cannot but love his own *goodnesse*, infinitely above all other things (*Commons 27*; cf. SD 325f)

For Cudworth then, as for Smith (SD 326), God loves himself only because he is the best and most substantial instantiation of goodness, and when he loves creatures, he does so precisely to the extent that they mimic and imitate his goodness.

Consequently, we can only win God's favour by receiving a real communication of God's goodness:

God who is *absolute goodnesse*, cannot love any of his Creatures & take pleasure in them, without bestowing a communication of his Goodnesse and Likenesse upon them. God cannot make a Gospel, to promise men Life & Happinesse hereafter, without being *regenerated*, & made partakers of his holinesse. (*Commons 27*)

For Cudworth, as much as for Smith, no one can be justified in God's eyes without their becoming inherently Godlike.

How are we made Godlike? Like Smith, Cudworth describes true justification in metaphysical terms, as a communication of God's own essential goodness — the goodness which alone can be the object of his love — into the souls of believers. Christ's saving mission was 'to kindle here that *Divine life* amongst men, which is certainly dearer unto God, then any thing else whatsoever in the World; and to propagat this Celestiall fire, from one heart still unto another, untill the end of the World' (*Commons* 33). Just as Smith describes God's love 'working' on human hearts to render them Godlike, Cudworth tells us that God 'freely lends his Beams, and disperseth his *influence* to all', with the result that receptive hearts come to contain '*Gods own Life and Nature* here in the World' (*Commons* 33f). The result is that God's essence becomes present believers in a shockingly literal sense, as '*something of God in flesh*; and, in a sober and qualified sence, *Divinity incarnate*' and 'nothing else but Gods own Self communicated to us' (*Commons* 33f, 35).

7.3.3 Whichcote vs. Tuckney on Reconciliation

We must return briefly to the 1651 Tuckney-Whichcote correspondence in order to confirm that Smith and Cudworths' controversial emphasis on inherent righteousness is also to be found in Whichcote. Recall that the initial spark for Tuckney's letter was a commencement sermon Whichcote had delivered the previous day. Among other things, Tuckney took exception to what Whichcote had said in that sermon

... about Reconciliation; that it 'doth not operate on God, but on Us' ... is Divinity that my heart riseth against ... to say that the ground of God's reconciliation is from

any thing in Us; and not from His free grace, freely justifying the ungodly, is to deny one of the fundamental truths of the Gospel (EL 4).

The gospel truth at issue here is the Reformed doctrine of unconditional election: if believers are reconciled to God through a real change in them rather than in God's attitude toward them, then election seems to be conditional upon something: we are reconciled to God not by a free gift of grace, but because we have been changed in such a way that we become more favourable to God. The whole point of election is that is completely unwarranted; that we are reconciled to God while we are still sinners.

In his reply, Whichcote helpfully provides a verbatim 'copy of [his] notes in that point', to show Tuckney just how far he had misunderstood him (EL 13). The lengthy extract which follows begins with a sustained attack on the idea that we can be saved without being inwardly transformed, to which we will return presently. At this point though, the most striking part of Whichcote's sermon extract is this:

But with God there can not be reconciliation; without Our becoming Godlike ... God, being perfectly under the power of goodnesse, can not denie himself: because, if he shou'd, he wou'd depart from goodnesse; which is impossible to God. Therefore *We* must yeelde, be subdued to the rules of goodnesse, receive stamps and impressions from God; and God can not be farther pleased, than goodnesse takes place (EL 14–15).

For Whichcote, like Cudworth and Smith, reconciliation is a process of transformation whereby God's essential goodness is communicated to (or 'stamped' and 'impressed' upon) his creatures.

Thus, all three are unbendingly convinced that without the actual conveyance of goodness, there can be no reconciliation:

[Smith]: The Holy Spirit can never suffer any unhallowed or defiled thing to enter into it or to unite it self with it ... There is no perfect or th[o]rough reconciliation wrought between God and the Souls of men, while any defiled and impure thing dwells within the Soul (SD 327)

[Cudworth]: As soon may Light and Darknesse be espoused together, and Mid-night be married to the Noon-day; as God can be joyned in a league of friendship, to any wicked Soul (*Commons* 27f)

[Whichcote]: Nothing is more impossible than this; as being against the nature of God: which is in perfect agreement with goodnesse, and hath an absolute antipathie against iniquity, unrightouesnesse and sin. (EL 15)

Because goodness is the essence of God, no soul can be reconciled to him without acquiring inward resemblance to him; such a reconciliation is simply metaphysically impossible.

To take stock then: we have caught Smith (c. 1644–1649), Cudworth (1647) and Whichcote (1651) making strikingly similar claims about God transmitting his essential

goodness to believers in the process of justification. Smith at least, explicitly identifies his views on this point with the participatory metaphysics of ancient Platonists.

7.3.4 'High-Flown Platonists' and Infused Righteousness

But it is not only Smith who sees something Platonic about this model of justification. Not long after his complaint about a 'Platonique faith' in the 1651 correspondence, Tuckney began to preach about certain 'high-flown Platonists' of his own time who insist that we are saved by an infusion of God's essential goodness. Beginning in 1656, Tuckney preached a series of sermons on 2 Peter 1:4, which states that believers will become 'partakers of the divine nature'. In the first of these sermons, he argues at length that this does not refer to 'a real participation of the Divine Essence' as some 'most corrupt' writers have suggested. He names two: Andreas Osiander, who held that we are 'justified by Gods and Christs essential justice', and Michael Servetus, who 'maintained that the essential Godhead is transfused into the Godly, as the Soul is into the body' (1676, 225).

Tuckney's criticisms of this view rehearse the themes of older critiques by Reformed theologians of Andreas Osiander (Calvin, *Inst.* I.15.5; Vainio 2008, 95–117; Garcia 2009, 416ff). But what is particularly interesting for our purposes here is that Tuckney repeatedly identifies this erroneous view of our connection to God as associated with Plato or Platonism. He adds a cryptic reference to defenders of this doctrine much closer to home:

... and some high-flown Platonists of our times take but a little lower flight, whilst they ... say that by their divine contemplations they are abstracted from their own dark personality, their humanity annihilated, and they swallowed up in the profound

abyss of the Divinity into which they are wholly transported (1676, 225; cf. Tuckney 1679, 307–8).

According to Tuckney then, Osiander’s old heresy of participation in God’s essential righteousness was still alive in his own time, preached by certain ‘Platonists’ who believed that they could be ‘swallowed up in the abyss of divinity’ through contemplation.⁶⁸

Apart from Whichcote himself, who might Tuckney have in mind?⁶⁹ The identity of at least one of his targets is beyond dispute: Cudworth’s good friend Henry More of Christ’s College. A marginal note (though it is unclear whether it was put there by Tuckney or by the editor of the *Forty Sermons*) directs readers to ‘*Mores 2. lash of Alazon, pag. 43*’.⁷⁰ The reference is to More’s *Second Lash of Alazonomastix* published in 1651; on page 43 of that work, we find a passage which Tuckney has clearly drawn from to capture the views of the ‘high-flown Platonists’:

How lovely, how magnificent a state is the soul of man in, when the life of God inactuating her, shoots her along with himself through Heaven and Earth, makes her unite with, and after a sort feel herself animate the whole world, as if she had become God and all things ... This is to become *Deiform*, to be thus suspended (not by

⁶⁸ It is worth noting that Tuckney was quite comfortable describing salvation as participation to God’s nature, so long as it was sufficiently distanced from its ‘Osiandric’ sense. Even though during the stages of adoption and justification, our righteousness is only relative and virtual, when we come to regeneration and sanctification, a believer is inwardly transformed into Godlikeness; he even thinks there is a sense in which we then become ‘Θεόφοροι ... Θεοειδεῖς, Θεοείκελοι ... or as *Calvin* [expresseth it] as far as our measure reacheth we are like God, one with God ... (Tuckney 1676, 230) — the very terms to which he objects earlier in the same sermon (ibid. 224).

⁶⁹ ‘*We must be* in our measure, degree, and proportion, in respect of Moral Perfections; of Holiness, Righteousness, Goodness and Truth; what *God is*, in his Highth, Excellency, and Fullness: for in all Moral Perfections, God is imitable by us; We may resemble God: God is communicable to us; We may partake of Him’ (Aph #50).

⁷⁰ The same note is found in a Latin version of this passage from a different work (Tuckney 1679, 307), perhaps suggesting that Tuckney himself is the original, since the *Forty Sermons* of 1676 and the *Praelectiones Theologicae* of 1679 have different editors.

imagination, but by union of life, Κέντρον κέντρῳ συνάψαντα, joyning centers with God) and by a sensible touch to be held up from the clotty dark Personality of this compacted body ... (More 1651, 43–4).

Tuckney's mention of being 'abstracted from one's dark personality' is clearly drawn directly from More's words here.

But whether Tuckney realised it or not, the same language was being used, at the same time, by Cudworth and Smith. We have encountered the Greek quotation in More's text — Κέντρον κέντρῳ συνάψαντα (*Enn.* VI.9.10.18) — once before already (7.3.1 above). John Smith quotes it in his first discourse — prepared in 1650–1, the same year as More's *Second Lash* — to describe what happens when a person 'by *Universal Love* and *Holy affection* abstracting himself from himself, endeavours the nearest Union with the Divine Essence that may be, κέντρον κέντρῳ συνάψας, as *Plotinus* speaks; knitting his owne centre ... unto the centre of the Divine Being' (SD 20). Tuckney complains that these Platonists believe they are 'abstracted from their own dark personality'; in the passage from More above, no mention is made of 'abstracting' oneself, though Smith uses it here. Regardless, Tuckney would surely have said of Smith, as he says of More, Servetus and Osiander, that 'to pretend to get so near as properly to *participate* of the *essence* of God, flieth higher than *Lucifer*'s pride ... and is Antichristian Blasphemy' (1676, 225–6). On Tuckney's view then, Smith had fallen into the tainted by the same 'Platonic' error as More, which taught that a righteous soul is abstracted from itself and 'knitted' into a union with God's essence.

Even earlier (around 1638/9), Cudworth was writing to his stepfather of his desire to experience 'the deepest degree of holy annihilation', be 'swallowed up in [God]' and 'loos[e]

the little drop' of his own being 'in the vast ocean of our eternall God' (Solly 1856, 290). It seems that already at this early stage, Cudworth was using the sort of language Tuckney would later attribute to these 'high-flown Platonists', who want to have 'their humanity annihilated, and they swallowed up in the profound abyss of the Divinity into which they are wholly transported' (Tuckney 1676, 225).

Recall that in Tuckney's pained recollection of Whichcote's intellectual trajectory, he complains that Whichcote fell under the influence of 'learned and ingenious men' who 'studied other authors, more than the scriptures; and Plato and his schollars, above others' (EL 37f). It was these men who promoted a controversial 'veine of doctrine' which included the claim that 'a Platonique faith unites to God' (EL 39). Now we have seen that in 1655/6, Tuckney preached against certain 'high-flown Platonists' of his time who, like Osiander, thought we could be justified by participating in the divine essence and receiving infusions of God's essential goodness. We know that one immediate target of Tuckney's criticism was Henry More, but we have seen that Smith's discourses contain the same Platonic language that Tuckney singles out for criticism in More's *Second Lash*.

So, while we still have no 'smoking gun' — that is, no positive identification of Smith or Cudworth as the 'learned and ingenious men' responsible for Whichcote's increasing reputation for unorthodoxy — the circumstantial evidence is piling up. As we saw earlier, in his discourse on justification (c. 1644–49), Smith appeals explicitly to what he calls the 'Platonic theology' of thinkers like Pythagoras and Proclus to explain why justification must involve actual participation divine goodness (SD 326). We also saw that Cudworth's 1647 *Commons* sermon defends a similar view of justification as conformity God's essential goodness, received by 'communication' and 'vital contact' with God.

7.3.5 'Moral Divinitie' and Heaven-bound Heathens

There is yet more evidence indicting Cudworth and Smith as targets of Tuckney's criticism in the 1651 correspondence. In addition to their 'Osiandric' emphasis on inherent righteousness, Tuckney feels that Whichcote's friends place too much value on merely natural, moral virtue — i.e. the 'bare morality' we examined in 6.1.2:

The power of Nature, in Morals, too much advanced— Those Philosophers, and other Heathens, made fairer candidates for Heaven; than the scriptures seeme to allow of ... A kinde of Moral Divinitie minted; onlie with a little tincture of Christ added: nay, a Platonique faith unites to God ... — An Estate of Love, in this life; above a life of Faith ... (EL 38–9)

In all of these cases, Tuckney's concern is that the 'natural' moral virtues are being given pride of place over imputed righteousness. These are the sorts of virtues which are attainable apart from explicit faith in Christ. Thus, 'heathens' who embodied the moral virtues but had no faith in Christ seem to be just as worthy of heaven as Christian believers (see Rivers 1991, 36). As we saw earlier, Calvinist theology is vigorously opposed to allowing this natural righteousness any place in salvation.

Here again, there are reasons to suspect Cudworth and Smith. In *Commons*, Cudworth suggests that a heathen who had never even heard of Christ but still strove for moral virtue was closer to God than an immoral but right-believing Christian:

He that endeavours really to mortifie his lusts, and to comply with that truth in his life, which his Conscience is convinced of; is neerer a Christian, though he never heard of Christ; then he that believes all the vulgar Articles of the Christian faith, and plainly denyeth Christ in his life. (*Commons* 14)

This is because for Cudworth, the thing that really saves us is to have a Godlike soul, and having a Godlike soul is a matter of being morally good. It is possible to have a Godlike soul even without having true propositional beliefs about God and Christianity.

In a sermon circa 1660, Tuckney complains about certain ‘*compleat Moralists*’ who, he contends, have fallen back into the old heresy of salvation by works by making virtue rather than imputed righteousness the ground of justification:

And to be justified and saved for our good works is that which not only the most *ignorant* people, but our most compleat Moralists build upon ... from a self[-]-flattering intuition of their vertuous qualifications and performances ... [which] so glister and glare in their eyes, and are such realities, that Christ and faith in him they look at as Notions (Tuckney 1676, 158)

We will see that the Emmanuel Three criticise imputed righteousness as a ‘mere notion’ in the next section. But here, we are more interested in what Tuckney says about how these moralists view righteous pagans.

Tuckney goes on to approvingly quote St Augustine’s condemnation of those ‘*moral Pagans*’ who would ‘not become *Christians*, as being by their good life self[-]-sufficient’

(1676, 158); i.e. those pagans who thought so much of their own virtue that they felt no need for Christ's pardon. But Tuckney complains that his own 'moralists' think exactly the same way as these self-sufficient pagans: 'And the like are, if not the words, yet the thoughts of our exact Moralists. They are, they think, got *high* enough, that they need not ascend higher, nay so *high* in themselves that they look at *faith*, at least at *true believers*, as much *under them*' (1676, 158). So here, Tuckney associates an overvaluation of natural virtue among the pagans with certain moralists of his own time who make virtue rather than belief the true criterion of salvation.

Tuckney's friend John Arrowsmith, whom Whichcote identifies as one of the Puritan elders he suspects he has offended, criticises the Pelagian error which attributes genuine, God-accepted righteousness to heathen philosophers: 'The *Pelagians* indeed were of opinion that those vertues which appeared in heathen Philosophers and others of eminent note for morality, though they had not received the knowledge of Christ, were true graces' (Arrowsmith 1659, 77f).

Likewise, Smith's discourses often make the Christian quest for conformity to God more or less identical to the quest for philosophical knowledge among the ancient Platonists (SD 10f; 17–21; 163f; 316f). That other notorious Platonist, Henry More, had summed up his admiration for Platonic philosophy in 1651: '*Platonisme* ... is the most noble and effectuall Engine to fetch up a mans mind to true virtue and holinesse, next to the Bible, that is extant in the world' (More 1651, 36). In the same vein, Smith's first discourse on *The True Method of Attaining to Divine Knowledge*, Smith draws heavily on Platonic methods of acquiring knowledge of God and divine things. According to Smith, the Platonist desire separate one's soul from one's body was aimed at granting us the ability to 'καθαρῶς φιλοσοφεῖν

[*philosophise purely*], as *Socrates* speaks, that is indeed, sincerely understand Divine Truth; for that was the scope of their Philosophy' (SD 10; cf. SD 434–5). He goes on to praise their definition of philosophy as '*a Meditation of Death*; aiming herein at onely a *Moral* way of *dying*, by loosening the Soul from the Body and this Sensitive life ... (SD 10) Clearly then, Smith sees considerable merit in the ancient Platonic quest to seek divine knowledge by morally purifying the soul, and them as worthy of imitation by Christians seeking the same thing. He also speaks in approving terms of Plotinus' notion of knowledge of God as 'a living Imitation of a Godlike perfection', although he adds that 'such a *Life* and *Knowledge* as this is, peculiarly belongs to the true and sober Christian who lives in Him who is *Life* it self' (SD 20f).

Once more, there is evidence that this sort of thing raised hackles among Tuckney and his Puritan colleagues. In a 1658 sermon, Tuckney warns preachers against teaching only that '*Philosophy*, or bare Morality, which they that never heard of Christ might do as well as we, and so ... make *Aristotle's* Ethicks our Bible, or the Documents of Plato, whom we call *Divine*, our Divinity' (1676, 673). The worry is that people will start to think philosophical virtues of the sort that Aristotle and Plato wrote about are enough to give us true knowledge of God, quite apart from the special revelation of Christ.

Smith and Cudworth's openness to seeing genuine Godlikeness and knowledge of God in virtuous pagans is a corollary of their emphasis on inherent, essential goodness as the only means of reconciliation with God. Because it is a moral frame of mind that endears us to God and makes us good, rather than the legal benefits of a covenant relationship, it is possible for pagans to come very close to God by means of natural theology, apart from special

revelation of Christ. It is not hard to see how, for Calvinists like Arrowsmith and Tuckney, this could look like a ‘Moral Divinitie’ and a ‘Platonique faith’.

7.3.6 The ‘Platonick Faith’ of the Emmanuel Three

Writing nearly a century later, Adam Smith seems to consider Whichcote, Smith and Cudworth ‘Platonists’ for much the same reason. In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith provides a brief discussion of a moral system that ‘makes virtue consist in benevolence’ (1759, 359). This system was held by philosophers who ‘pretended to follow chiefly the opinions of Plato and Pythagoras’ and were therefore ‘commonly known by the name of the later Platonists’ (ibid., 359). In recent times, ‘it was adopted by several divines of the most eminent piety and learning and of the most amiable manners; particularly, by Dr. Ralph Cudworth, by Dr. Henry More, and by Mr. John Smith of Cambridge’ (ibid., 360f). On this Platonic view of morality, Smith tells us:

The whole perfection and virtue of the human mind consisted in some resemblance or participation of the divine perfections, and consequently, in being filled with the same principle of benevolence and love which influenced all the actions of the deity ... [They believed] that by fostering in our own minds the same divine principle, we could bring our own affections to a greater resemblance with his holy attributes, and thereby become more proper objects of his love and esteem; till at last we arrived at that immediate converse and communication with the deity to which it was the great object of this philosophy to raise us. (Smith 1759, 360).

As Adam Smith reads it, the key feature of Cudworth, More and Smith's Platonic system of morality is that it makes virtue consist in resemblance or participation of the divine mind. (The same could easily be said of Whichcote, as will become evident in chapter 8).

It is noteworthy then that Tuckney repeatedly accuses Whichcote's friends of Platonism precisely because they hold that we are justified by having our souls conformed to God's essential goodness. A hostile contemporary like Tuckney and a later admirer like Adam Smith both associate the Emmanuel men with Plato and Platonism because of their peculiarly Platonic view of human goodness as a close participation in God's essential goodness. I would suggest that this participatory view of goodness and justification is, in large part, what makes the Emmanuel Three (and More as well) Platonists in a meaningful sense, both in their original context and in retrospective appraisals.

7.4 'The Prejudice of Imputed Righteousness'

Now that we have seen how the Emmanuel Three's praise of inherent and natural righteousness went against Tuckney's Calvinist orthodoxy, we must turn our attention to the corresponding negative and 'unseemlie' language they apply to imputed righteousness. Let us return to one of Tuckney's complaints in the 1651 correspondence. Among Whichcote and his friends, Tuckney laments:

Inherent righteousnesse [is] so preached, as if not with the prejudice of imputed righteousness, which hath sometimes verie unseemlie language given it; yet much said of the one and very little or nothing of the other ... (EL 38–9).

Note that the accusation here is not that Whichcote and his unnamed colleagues deny imputed righteousness outright. Rather, they place a heavy emphasis on inherent righteousness, while paying lip service to the role of imputed righteousness ('as if not with the prejudice of imputed righteousness'); moreover, when they do speak substantively about imputed righteousness, they describe it in 'verie unseemlie language'.

The next step in our mounting case for pinning Smith and Cudworth with this charge will be to examine their unseemly assertions about imputed righteousness c. 1640–51. First though, it is important to note that the critiques of imputed righteousness we will hear from the Emmanuel Three echo similar comments made by Henry More around the same time. Remember that Tuckney branded a 'high-flown Platonist' for his emphasis on participation in God's nature (see 4.2.2 and 7.3.4 above). But More was also one of the loudest and harshest critics of imputed righteousness in Cambridge at this time (Micheletti 2011, 31). In his *Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness*, More decries 'the danger and groundlessness of this overmuch Idolized doctrine'. Imputed righteousness, he declares, 'is a very *Idol*, that is *Nothing* ... I mean nothing of it self but a mere Phrase' (1660, xxvi). The only sort of righteousness that could possibly reconcile us to God is inherent righteousness:

I appeal to the judgement and conscience of the most zealous assertour of *Imputative Righteousness* ... whether when he talks of being cloathed with Christs righteousness in this imputative sense, he can understand any thing but being as it were armed and defended from the wrath of God and all the ill consequences thereof. For if this Righteousness we are thus cloathed with were a Righteousness that really kept us (suppose) from Envy, from Drunkenness, from Adultery, and made us

Charitable, Sober and Chast; it were not then imputative, but inherent. (1660, xxvi–vii)

It is nonsense, More contends, to think of being protected from God's wrath in any meaningful sense, apart from being made inherently righteous. To be reconciled to God without actually becoming 'Charitable, Sober and Chast' is to speak nonsense. He concludes that as distinct from the inherent righteousness we receive through sanctification, 'this Phrase of *Imputative Righteousness* has no signification at all' and 'tends to that loathsome and pestilential error of *Antinomianisme*' (1660, xxvii). This hostility to imputed righteousness is another important point of contact between More and the Emmanuel Three.

Again, the basic intuition here is Platonic. Consider Marsilio Ficino's paraphrase of Plato's words in the *Republic*: 'Since you cannot hide or flee from the divine eyes and hands, take especial care that you do not sin, that is, that you never become unlike God. For God hates degenerate souls far removed from His likeness. Even if you have acquired the ring of Gyges and the helmet of the underworld, flee far from injustice.' (Ficino, PTh. XIV.10.17, loosely paraphrasing *Rep.* X, 612a–b).

These comments from More and Ficino capture the essence of the Emmanuel Three's objections to justification by imputed righteousness. While all three make brief gestures in the direction of a valid sense in which Christ's righteousness is legally imputed to believers, washing away their guilt in a forensic sense, they spend most of their time delivering much lengthier complaints about the over-emphasis on imputed righteousness over inherent righteousness which is far more valuable. They reject all suggestions that reconciliation with God can meaningfully consist in something other than our actual, essential transformation into

a state of Godlike virtue. And this is where their anti-voluntarism comes in: the only thing that can save us is being really, essentially good; no act of God's mere will and pleasure can relax this requirement.

This last section examines Whichcote, Smith and Cudworth's parallel critiques of the idea that we can be saved by merely imputed righteousness. The fact that all three use such similar 'unseemly' language about imputed righteousness further strengthens the case for identifying Smith and Cudworth as two of the 'learned and ingenious men' whom Tuckney blames for having corrupted Whichcote's orthodoxy.

7.4.1 Imputation as Divine Disingenuousness

The passages we have just examined correspond to Tuckney's complaint that Whichcote and his ingenious companions over-emphasise inherent righteousness. However Tuckney seemed more concerned by the prejudicial and 'unseemlie language' they seemed to apply to imputed righteousness. And indeed, we will see in this section that the Emmanuel Three's emphasis on reconciliation as an actual transformation comes bundled together with an extended critique of the entire notion of imputation. In sum, the Emmanuel Three contrast the real goodness we attain through participation in God's nature with the airy, ethereal sort of righteousness that supposedly comes to us through mere 'imputation'. Moreover, they provocatively suggest that inherent righteousness by participation is a surer indication of a believer's good standing with God than the mere confession of faith that is traditionally thought to apply the merits of Christ's death to us. In this way, as Tuckney might put it, the Emmanuel Three prejudice imputed righteousness by comparing it very unfavourably with the inherent righteousness. And they do this, as we shall see, for reasons intrinsically bound up with their rejection of voluntarism and their commitment to God's 'eternal and immutable' essential goodness.

We saw earlier that the orthodox Puritan teaching about justification was that through faith in Christ, a believer switches moral places with Christ, so that although they remain inherently sinful, God views them as guiltless and righteous. Christ thus saves the elect not by effecting any change in them, but by advocating for them in the court of heaven, winning them a free pardon for their sins. The Emmanuel Three never deny that this sort of imputation takes place. Whichcote acknowledge that there is a sense Christ saves the elect by ‘acting upon God in their behalfe’, serving as an ‘advocate *for us*’ and ‘a sacrifice for the expiation and atonement of sin’ (EL 13, 14, 15). Smith acknowledges that Christ’s saving work, while taking place primarily in us, also has an effect in the court of heaven (SD 324, 329–32). Cudworth makes brief remarks to the same effect (*Commons* 44, 48; cf. *Lincolnes* 2, 23, 26).

Nonetheless, they spend far more time attacking the idea that this sort of imputation alone can really do us any good. One way they do this is to suggest that any reconciliation with God based solely on imputed righteousness would be disingenuous and inauthentic. Whichcote illustrates the absurdity of this sort of reconciliation with the image of an uneasy settlement between two parties who despise each other:

For reconciliation between God and Us, is not wrought, as sometimes it is said and pretended to be ... between parties mutually incensed and exasperated one against another: when the urgency of a case makes them to forbear hostility ... their inward antipathie and enmitie in the mean while rather increased, inflamed ... so that, though an amnestie be consented-to, yet they are not friendes; but in heart enemies. (EL 14; cf. Aph #448).

In this sort of reconciliation, there is a disconnect between the formal, outward appearance effected by the amnesty, and the internal, felt relationship between the two parties: they are ‘formally’ at peace, but inwardly at each other’s throats. This kind of falseness, Whichcote insists, is impossible for God: ‘God’s acts are not false’, Whichcote concludes, God cannot make a vaine shew’ (EL 14; cf. *Works* II, 380; IV, 10). As Cudworth will put it in a later sermon (difficult to date, but published in 1664), this view ‘makes God in Justifying to pronounce a false Sentence, and to conceive of things otherwise then they are’ (*Lincolnes* 21; cf. SD 325f). As Whichcote will put it in a later sermon, clearly emphasising his much earlier convictions: ‘You put a lie upon God for him to esteem any one righteous that is unrighteous ... and if God should should esteem him righteous, this act of God’s would be a wrong act: *imputation of righteousness*, it will prove but an imagination in us ...’ (*Works* II, 380).

In his 1647 *Commons* sermon, Cudworth paints a similar picture to illustrate the absurdity of God’s reconciling with the inherently sinful. He ridicules the idea that God would arbitrarily decide to bestow his approval on particular persons, ‘and though they should remain under the power of all their lusts, yet they should still continue his *beloved ones*, and he would notwithstanding, at last bring them undoubtedly into heaven’ (*Commons* 22). This would turn God into a dissembling flatterer who thinks one thing but projects another in his behaviour:

[This] is nothing else, but to make the God that we worship, the God of the new Testament, a *προσωπολήπτης*, *an accepter of persons*: and one that should encourage that in the world which is diametrically opposite to Gods own Life and Being. (*Commons* 22)

This is a ‘monstrous and deformed *Notion*’ of God, Cudworth concludes (ibid.).

Smith’s *Discourses* contain repeated criticisms of this faulty notion of God as a disingenuous nepotist. The error at the heart of this misperception of God is that like a slick politician who can be bribed into letting our sins and lusts slide. Most of Smith’s criticisms in this regard seem to be directed at Catholics, who think their rituals and penances will persuade God to turn a blind eye to their sins: ‘such as these are very apt to persuade themselves that they may pacifie him and purchase his favour with some *cheap services*, as if Heaven it self could become guilty of *Bribery*, and an *Immutable Justice* be flattered into *Partiality* and *Respect of persons*’ (SD 363). But of course, God is unswervingly bound to the eternal rules of goodness to be thus swayed.

Anti-Catholic polemic of this sort is par for the course in Puritan preaching, but Smith goes on to provocatively suggests that many Protestants fall into the same superstition by supposing that their election exempts them from the demands of morality. Instead of bribing God with rituals and customs like Catholics, these deluded Protestants hope to win free pardon by belonging to a special, privileged group. These deluded Protestants fasten on particular doctrines and abstract notions of justification:

But I doubt sometimes some of our *Dogmata* and Notions about Justification may puff us up in far higher and goodlier conceits of our selves then God hath of us ... [we] think ourselvs in as good credit and repute with God as we are with our selves, and that we are become Heaven’s darlings ... (SD 324–5).

Such Christians are so ‘so ravish’d with’ the ‘doctrines and notions of Free-Grace and Justification; the magnificent Titles of *Sons of God* and Heirs of Heaven’ that they suppose God will exempt them from the hard, self-effacing task of becoming internally Godlike (SD 369–71). Where a Papist might think he can bribe God with masses and indulgences, a similarly deluded Protestant thinks he can continue in his unrighteousness because he is one of the elect.

In all these cases, reconciliation with God based solely on forensic justification (i.e. the gift of good moral standing with God separate from real transformation) is rejected on the grounds that it would make God disingenuous, hiding his essential antipathy towards evil behind an outward show of love for the elect. Against this view, the Emmanuel Three insist that God only ever judges of things as they really are and cannot pretend he does not. Their insistence on this point is directly connected to their metaethical naturalism, i.e. to the priority of God’s goodness over his will. Reconciliation based solely on imputed righteousness is impossible, Whichcote concludes, because ‘we cannot imagine, that God by His Will and Pleasure can go against his Nature and Being’ (EL 15).

7.4.2 Imputed Unrighteousness as ‘Mere Notion’ or ‘Imagination’

The Emmanuel Three also allege that imputed righteousness cannot save us from sin and death because it is only a fictive, imaginary righteousness. In the Emmanuel Three’s broader psychology, the imagination or fancy is often contrasted with the rational faculty (see below 8.3). While reason is bound to conceive of things according to the nature or *ratio* of things, imagination is free to conceive of things however the will sees fit: ‘*Imagination* may stamp any Idea that it finds within it as it pleases to what Seal it will set upon them, and mold them into any likeness (SD 368–9). In his *True Intellectual System*, Cudworth will often dismiss a

concept he doesn't like as 'a meer *Imaginary Thing*, that hath no Reality without our Minds' (TISU 770; cf. 67, 696; cf. Whichcote, *Works* II, 46; IV, 136). Imagination can therefore create fictions: things which exist only as abstract notions or conceits and not anywhere in the real world. As one of Whichcote's *Aphorisms* puts it 'Christian Religion is but imaginary; if it doth not attain-to the Reconciliation of our Spirits to the rule of Righteousness and the nature of God' (Aph #408; cf. #132).

In their writings from 1640s and 50s, the Emmanuel Three frequently exhort their hearers not to place their hopes for salvation in the mere notion or fancy of imputed righteousness, but to seek a real, concretely existing righteousness instead. Such an empty notion of righteousness cannot fix the problem of our corrupt natures; since the inward corruption separating us from God is real, the righteousness that reconciles us to him must be real as well. 'The *first Adam* ... brought in a reall defilement, which like a noisome Leprosie, hath overspread all mankind', Cudworth argues, 'and therefore *the second Adam* must not onely fill the World with a conceit, of Holinesse, and meer Imaginary Righteousnesse; but he must really convey, such an *immortall seed* of Grace into the hearts of true Believers' (*Commons* 32; cf. *Lincolnes* 17–18). It is ridiculous, he contends, to suppose that Christ died on the cross:

merely to bring in a Notion into the World, without producing any reall and substantiall effect at all, without the changing, mending, and reforming of the World: so that men should still be as wicked as they were before ... onely, they should not be *thought so*: they should still remain as full of all the filthy sores, of sinne & corruption as before; onely, they should be *accounted whole* (*Commons* 45).

What we need is not only to be ‘accounted’ holy and free from sin, but really to be so. In a later sermon, Cudworth will remark that for God to consider us righteous simply because he has imputed Christ’s righteousness to us is as ridiculous as our considering a sick person healthy because we have imputed another’s health to them (*Lincolnes* 21f; cf. *Commons* 42f).

Like Cudworth, Smith in his discourse on *Righteousness* warns his readers that righteousness which exists only in thought, with no inherent reality, will not endear them to God at all:

It is not a *pertinacious Imagination* of our Names being enrolled in the Book of life, or of the Debt-books of Heaven being crossed ... it is not, I say, a *pertinacious Imagination* of any of these that can make us ere the better: And a *mere Conceit or Opinion* as it makes us *never the better in reality* within our selves; so it cannot render us *ere the more acceptable* to God *who judges of all things as they are*. No, it must be a *true Compliance with the Divine will*, which must render us such as the Divinity may take pleasure in (SD 328)

In his 1651 commencement sermon, Whichcote warned that we must not think we are reconciled to God purely by some external, judicial process, for — again — this to place our trust in a conceit rather than a reality: ‘impotently to flatter our-selves in the conceit of such a thing, which *a parte Dei ponit repugnantiam*; were, instead of reconciling Heaven and Earth, to divide God against Himselfe ... If we wou’d be true to our-selves ... let not our sense give our conceits the lye ...’ (EL 15). Again, only real Godlikeness can reconcile us to God; no amount of conceiving or accounting things other than they really are will get around this.

7.4.3 *The Grounds of Assurance*

The traditional emphasis in Puritan preaching was that assurance of salvation should be based on the conviction that God has eternally and irrevocably predestined us to salvation; we can take comfort, knowing that our names are written in heaven in indelible handwriting. Thus, Arrowsmith: ‘nothing doth more inflame a Christians love then a firm belief of his personal election from eternity, after he hath been able to evidence the writing of his name in heaven, by the experience he hath had of an heavenly calling ...’ (Arrowsmith 1659, 357). The ‘evidence’ that one’s name is written in heaven is one’s slow but sure growth in righteousness and holiness; but again (see 7.1.3 above), this is only evidence that God has already accounted us righteous and will bring us to heaven.

The Emmanuel Three, on the other hand, encourage believers not to think about eternal decrees of predestination and names written in heaven at all; they dismiss this as a kind of over-curious prying into God’s business. Thus, in a public sermon (given some time prior to 1650 and published as the tenth of the *Select Discourses*), Smith writes that a believer ought ‘to moderate his curiosity of prying into God’s *Book of life* ...’; he should not feel the need ‘to pry into Heaven’s secrets and to search into the hidden rolles of Eternity, there to see the whole plot of his Salvation’ (SD 427–8).⁷¹ In his 1647 *Commons* sermon, Cudworth mirrors Smith’s language nearly to the letter: ‘We are no where commanded to pry into these secrets ... We have no warrant in Scripture, to peep into these hidden Rolls and Volumes of Eternity ... to perswade our selves that we are certainly elected to everlasting happinesse’ (*Commons* 8f).

⁷¹ On the dating of the tenth discourse, see SD xxxiii; Ridley-Johnson 2016, 8; 42.

Instead, we should derive our confidence in salvation by striving to attain here and now the sanctified, inherently righteous state of character that constitutes heavenly bliss. Smith argues that even if we could compel God to supernaturally reveal that we are eternally predestined for salvation, it would still be ‘more desireable to find a Revelation of all *from within* ... in the Reall and Internal impressions of a Godlike nature upon his own spirit’; such a believer would no longer care whether or not his name is written in heaven, because he would now ‘find *the Foundation and Beginning of Heaven and Happiness within himself*’ (SD 427). As Cudworth puts it, ‘The best assurance that any one can have of his interest in God, is doubtlesse the conformity of his soul to him’ (*Commons* 9); ‘not an airy notion of Christ swimming in his brain, but Christ really dwelling and living in his heart’ (*Commons* 8).

Smith and Cudworth further illustrate the inadequacy of imputed righteousness by appropriating the traditional Puritan image of imputed righteousness as a royal cloak cast over a beggarly sinner (e.g. Burgess 1651, 47–8, 216–7). Smith and Cudworth also speak of imputed righteousness as a covering or garment, but in sarcastic and negative terms. Cudworth contends that surely Christ died ‘not onely to *cover sinne*, by spreading the Purple Robe of Christs death and sufferings over it, whilst it still remaineth in us with all its filth and noisomnesse unremoved; but also ... to *cleanse* us, and *free* us from it’ (*Commons* 29). Likewise, Smith warns that we will regress into an Old Testament legalism ‘if we make the Righteousness which is of Christ by Faith to serve us only as an *Outward Covering*, and endeavour not after an *Internal transformation* of our Minds and Souls into it’ (SD 324).⁷²

⁷² Complicating the standard picture of Peter Sterry as a rigid Calvinist, we find him sounding a similar note: ‘Now is Jesus Christ a Sacrifice for our Redemption, Sanctification, Salvation; not by an *imaginary, notional, arbitrary Imputation*, but a judgment founded upon the *Divine Nature of things*, and a real *immediate Union* between Christ and the World’ (1675, 53).

Whichcote (in a later sermon) uses the same metaphor to insist that our reconciliation to God must be inward rather than an external covering: ‘Apparel, though never so rich, will not cure an internal malady, without an inward application. Make what imputation you will ... if there be not a renewal in the spirit of the mind, the man cannot be justified’ (*Works* II, 380).

While the Emmanuel Three’s language takes the form of traditional covenant theology exhortations to make one’s calling and election sure, a deeper look reveals their emphasis to be exactly opposite to the Puritan orthodoxy represented by their older Emmanuel colleagues. Any Puritan would agree that one ought not to sin with abandon and excuse one’s behaviour by appealing to one’s election. Tuckney strikes the same homiletical tone as the Emmanuel Three when he preaches on the necessity of manifesting one’s election in one’s actions: ‘although Art may paint, yet Nature is real, and therefore if thou sayest that thou art *partaker of this divine Nature*... say, and then do and be what may really and substantially prove and manifest it, otherwise an Ape will be an Ape though with a childs coat put upon it’ (Tuckney 1676, 259).

But in the orthodox Calvinism of Tuckney and Burgess, the ‘covering’ of imputed righteousness is a more glorious and effective solution to sin than any inherent righteousness whatsoever: ‘Besides the Robe of *Christs Righteousness*, all other coverings of the best suits of your *moral vertues* have *spots* and *rents*, at best are more *narrow than that a man can wrap himself*’ (Tuckney 1676, 164). For Burgess, imputed righteousness is just as effective in reconciling us to God as inherent righteousness would be: ‘it is all one, as to Gods glory, and as to thy comfort, whether righteousnesse be thine *inherent*, or thine *imputed*, if it be a true real righteousnesse’ (Burgess 1651, 11).

By contrast, for the Emmanuel Three, to place our confidence in this flimsy, external covering is to be audaciously presumptuous about our welcome with God (akin to marching confidently into a formal occasion wearing a bathrobe and bunny slippers). Cudworth warns that a believer who ‘builds all his comfort upon an ungrounded perswasion, that God from all eternity hath loved him, and absolutely decreed him to life and happinesse, and seeketh not for God really dwelling in his soul; he builds his house upon a Quicksand ...’ (*Commons* 8; cf. 42). It is real, inherent Godlikeness that should assure us of our salvation, rather than any eternal decree of predestination.

‘They therefore deceive and flatter themselves extreamly’, cautions Whichcote, ‘who thinke of reconciliation with God, by meanes of a Saviour acting upon God in their behalf; and not also working in or upon them, to make them Godlike’ (EL 15). Whichcote goes onto insist that salvation itself consists in this Godlikeness; it is our internal transformation to Godlikeness itself that reconciles us to God rather than any external change in God’s attitude toward us: ‘Some look at salvation as at a thing at distance from them ... exemption from punishment; freedom from enemies abroad: but it is the mending of our natures ... our being restored righteousnesse, goodnesse, and truth; and our being reconciled to God, so as we may truly finde the kingdom of God within us’ (EL 16).

In a similar way, Smith warns believers not to seek an ‘aiery speculation of Heaven as a (though never so undoubtedly) *to come*’, but rather to seek ‘*Heaven it self*; which indeed we can never well be assured of, untill we find it rising up within our selves and glorifying our own Souls’ (SD 441–2).

In a carefully qualified sense, the Emmanuel Platonists could agree that believers should put no trust in their own righteousness, but only in that righteousness ‘which is through the faith of Christ’. But in their view, the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ is necessarily real and inherent: Christ’s gracious gift to us is to really make us good, not simply to make God consider us good (e.g. SD 319–20, 328, 340ff).

Similarly, the Emmanuel Three agree that we are justified by faith. But because they take justification to be identical with inherent, concrete moral virtue (viz. sanctification into Godlikeness), they believe faith saves us only inasmuch as it actually conforms us to God. Thus Smith contends in his discourse on *Righteousness* that faith saves us because it transforms the soul into Godlikeness, not because it procures a legal pardon. He insists that true faith does not seek a ‘mere empty Pardon of sin; it desires not only to stand upon clear terms with Heaven by procuring the crossing of all the Debt-books of our sins there; but *rather* pursues after an Internal participation of the Divine nature’ (SD 338). To the extent that a believer’s faith spurs them on to the attainment of this end, their faith justifies them in God’s eyes. This is the sense in which Smith unapologetically reads Scripture as ‘attribut[ing] a kind of *Justification to Good works*’, since God finds in those who perform them ‘*a true conformity to his own Goodness and Holiness*’ (SD 327; cf. 338).

But the saving faith Smith describes here is emphatically not the saving faith of covenant theology. As we have seen (7.1), in Puritan theology, faith is an act which legally enrolls us in the covenant whereby God reciprocates our faith and repentance with the gift of imputed righteousness that acquits us before God, while leaving us inherently sinful. For Smith though, faith brings about an ‘internal participation’ in God’s goodness here and now, not just a forensic acquittal of sin that leaves our souls unchanged.

As noted earlier, the Emmanuel Three acknowledge that forensic imputation is a legitimate part of the salvific process. But they view this legal pardon of sins as little more than a gesture on Christ's part, intended to entice us to the transformation that will really save us; as Smith puts it, Christ only pardons our sins to remove the 'eternal bar and restraint' that our guiltiness placed on our access to God's transforming grace (SD 330–1). Overall, the Emmanuel Three do not object to the idea of imputed righteousness *per se*, but rather to the view 'that *Antinomian Error* which is too often insinuated under the Notion of *Imputed Righteousness*, as if there were no necessity of *Inherent Righteousness* and a *Real Victory over Sin* in order to Salvation, but that an Imputed or Imaginary one might serve the turn ...' (*Lincolnes* 23). From this angle, the Emmanuel Three look like ordinary Puritans defending Calvinist orthodoxy, along with men like Burgess and Tuckney, against the dangers of antinomianism.

But they are decidedly unorthodox in that, while not rejecting the value of imputed righteousness entirely, the Emmanuel Three strongly insist that only real, inherent Godlikeness can justify us before God, and that to trust that imputed righteousness will save us is to place all our hopes in a mere notion, an ethereal, abstract sort of righteousness. In sum then, the Emmanuel Three all depict imputed righteousness as a shadowy and unreal thing, not at all to be relied upon in the quest for salvation.

7.4.4 Puritan Defences of Imputed Righteousness

If we examine sermons preached by Tuckney and his Cambridge Puritan colleagues in this same period, we find several suggestions that the Emmanuel Three's unseemly language about imputed righteousness was striking a nerve.

In a 1656 sermon, Tuckney complains of a rising tide of scepticism, led by ‘*Pyrrhoes* Scholars [viz. sceptics] who abound every where in this loose age’, and who are determined ‘to doubt, and query, and question all, not only in *Philosophy*, but in *Divinity* ... and that in the most solid and substantial points of it, as the *Sovereignty of God in his Decrees and Providence. God’s free grace if it seem in the least to intrench on our free will, the imputation of the first Adam’s sin to our guilt, and of the second Adam’s* [viz. Christ’s] *righteousness to our Justification* ...’ (1676, 187). In another sermon (c. 1655/6) Tuckney responds to the charge that imputed righteousness is unreal or imaginary. He makes clear that the charges he is responding to come from within the Puritan community, as well as from without: ‘*The Imputation of Christ’s righteousness to us in Justification is not putative, or putatitious, as some of us lisp, and the Papists speak it out*’ (1676, 172). Against this view, Tuckney remarks that even though imputed righteousness is only ‘relative’ (rather than inherent), it is still real and effective:

Indeed *Justification* is a *Relative Grace*, and we are wont to say that *Relationes sunt minimae Entitatis* [*relations are the least existent things*] ... yet a true Believer that feeleth the benefit of it rejoiceth in it ... There is greatest reality in Gods giving, and in *faiths receiving*. Christ hath really satisfied for us, and this is really conveyed and applied to us. (1676, 172; cf. Whichcote, Aph. #263, #264).

Evidently, Tuckney is responding to interlocutors who have challenged the reality and the entity of imputed righteousness. When Tuckney insists that a believer’s hopes in his election are not ‘*λεπταὶ ἐλπίδες* [thin hopes], not as a *Spiders Web*, or *giving up the Ghost*, as some others are called: poor thin conceipts and notions’ (Tuckney 1676, 172), he might as well be

speaking directly against Smith and Cudworth who criticise reliance on imputed rather than inherent righteousness as a reliance on empty notions rather than substantial (SD 338).

Similarly, in a treatise on justification published in 1651, Anthony Burgess defends the ‘reality’ of God’s imputations against the ‘Papist’ charge that they are ‘a meer fiction and imagination, without any truth indeed’ (Burgess 1651, 10). Naturally, he would have in mind traditional Catholic attacks on Protestant soteriology made by Counter-Reformation figures like Cardinal Bellarmine (e.g. *Controversarium De Justificatione*, Lib. II, cap. VII [BO VI:224–8]). But Burgess’s defences seem curiously aligned to the polemics against imputation we have just seen in the Emmanuel Three’s early writings. If the person doing the imputing was a mere human being, he contends, then we could rightly object that imputed righteousness is a mere conceit and empty notion. But since the person doing the imputing is God, his estimations actually change the reality of things:

God his gracious accounting and esteeming of us so, is reall: and seeing he is most wise, just and holy, what he doth judge must needs be so; we many times justifie our selves, but then it is sometimes a meer opinion, we are indeed condemned at that present, but it cannot be so with God. (Burgess 1651, 10).

In the same work on justification, Burgess attempts to head off the charge of divine dishonesty by insisting that insofar as the righteousness imputed to believers is *real* (it belongs to Christ, after all), no dishonesty is involved in God’s accounting them righteous despite their lack of *inherent* righteousness:

God doth not account him just who is not so, and certainly to esteem a man just without righteousness, is as absurd as to account a man learned without learning, or the wall white without whitenesse; only we say this Righteousness that doth to make a man just, is not *inherent* in him, but *reckoned to him* by the *satisfaction of another* ... (Burgess 1651, 6)

In simpler terms, imputed righteousness is not a disingenuous fiction, because God never pretends that he has made the elect *really* righteous; he knows that he has only *accounted* them so. While Burgess probably has Catholic critics like Bellarmine in mind here, he might just as easily be responding to Smith's first proposition on justification that God only esteems things as they really are, or Cudworth's remark that imputing righteousness to a sinful person is as incoherent as imputing healthiness to a sick person (*Lincolnes* 21–2).

Finally, in a sermon preached some time after 1660, aimed at showing that no natural morality can endear us to God, Tuckney makes a telling remark that suggests he is responding to fellow Cambridge preachers who have accused some of downplaying the importance of moral virtue to cover up their own vices; Tuckney does not want to be misunderstood, 'as though I intended to decry *morality*, as I have heard from this place some pretty sharply inveighed against for it with reflections as though they were defective in that which they so speak against' (1676, 153). Cudworth and Smith both charge those who emphasise imputed over inherent righteousness of trying to justify their own immoral behaviour. It is as though they think, Cudworth complains, 'God had intended nothing else ... but to *dandle* our corrupt nature, and contrive a smooth and easie way for us to come to happinesse, without the toilsome labour of subduing our lusts and sinfull affections' (*Commons* 21f; cf. SD 324–5, 363).

Of course, Puritans had many opponents against whom to defend the reality and saving power of imputed righteousness: the comments need not have been inspired by the Emmanuel Three. But given what we have seen about the Emmanuel Three's criticisms of imputed righteousness, and their correspondence to Tuckney's complaints to Whichcote, it hardly seems implausible. I suggest therefore that these texts are the written remains of a controversy in Cambridge which first inspired Tuckney to write to Whichcote with his concerns. Although Tuckney does not name any of the 'learned and ingenious men' he considers to have corrupted Whichcote's orthodoxy, we have seen that Smith and Cudworth were preaching exactly the sorts of 'unseemly language' about imputed righteousness that troubled Tuckney and his colleagues like Anthony Burgess, in the same period of the 1640s and 50s.

7.5 Conclusions

This exploration of the Emmanuel Three's polemics about reconciliation and imputed righteousness gives us a different angle on the central philosophical debate about naturalism and voluntarism we examined earlier. The idea that we can be saved purely by an act of divine imputation, without any corresponding change in our moral character, is a natural companion to the Reformed voluntarism we examined in chapters 4 and 5: it fits well with the notion of a God whose sovereign will is unbound and unregulated by any firm, immutable moral realities. Such a God can make people 'really' righteous and acceptable without changing their natures, simply by a legal or forensic act of imputation. Conversely, the Emmanuel Three's insistence that reconciliation can only take through a real transformation into Godlikeness is consistent with their naturalism, which binds God's will to the *rationes* or

essential natures of things, which are themselves founded in God's eternal and immutable nature.

At this point, we can largely lay to rest our campaign to unmask Cudworth and Smith as Tuckney's learned and ingenious Platonisers (although, should they appeal their conviction, there is further evidence of their Platonic collusion still to come). The previous chapters have focused (as far as possible) on Cudworth and Smith's works dating from the crucial period c. 1644–52, where both occupied prominent roles in the university community by Parliamentary appointment. In this period, we have caught them both, along with Whichcote, defending anti-Calvinist positions which Tuckney mentions in his account of the learned and ingenious men's unorthodox 'veine of doctrine', and defending them not incidentally, but as part of a shared philosophical outlook which (adding to our case) has the fingerprints of 'Plato and his scholars' all over it. On this basis, I suggest that unless Tuckney was entirely unaware of the sorts of things Cudworth and Smith had been preaching and teaching in this period, they were both (along with Henry More, and perhaps others) in Tuckney's mind as learned and ingenious men who corrupted Whichcote's theology while he was a fellow of Emmanuel. This also cements the case for viewing the time Whichcote, Smith and Cudworth spent together at Emmanuel (c. 1636–44) as the initial gestation period for their common outlook, which would accord with Tuckney's report that Whichcote fell under the spell of the learned and ingenious men while he was an Emmanuel fellow (c. 1633–43).

IV: The Philosophical Core of Cambridge Platonism

Where the focus of Part III was to demonstrate that the Emmanuel Three defended a shared set of shared philosophical commitments against their Calvinist environment, our purpose in this Part IV will be to look ‘under the hood’ of these commitments, and discern the deeper philosophical outlook which they used to conceptualise and articulate their anti-Calvinism. The core of this outlook is their sophisticated approach to moral and religious epistemology, and model of God’s autonomising, liberating influence on the soul. It is also here that we will see most clearly how deeply the Emmanuel Three rely on the philosophy of Platonic thinkers like Plotinus, Origen and Marsilio Ficino (though they are not always explicit about it).

Because our focus has changed in this way, it will be less necessary in this section to anchor ourselves to the chronological ‘sweet spot’ of 1640–52 when Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith would have been able to arouse the ire of Tuckney and his fellow Calvinists. Accordingly, in this section I will draw more freely on works from Whichcote and Cudworth’s later years, interpreting them as attempts to buttress and develop the implications of the philosophical commitments the three friends already shared in the 1640s.

Even so, these next chapters still serve to buttress the case for a Platonic outlook shared by the Emmanuel Three with roots in their earlier association with each other. Indeed, given that Smith died in 1652, the similarities between his *Select Discourses* and the later works of Cudworth and Whichcote are best explained by supposing that, as Tuckney’s accusations suggest, the Emmanuel Three’s ‘Platonic faith’ had already taken its basic shape by the 1640s when they began to deploy it against Calvinist doctrines. It is only now,

however, as we begin to examine their views on moral and religious epistemology and on liberty and autonomy, that the Platonic influences on this outlook will begin to stand out in earnest.

(8) Participatory Epistemology: Knowing the Good by Acquaintance

What we have seen so far reveals that the Emmanuel Three held a different picture of God than their Puritan contemporaries: it was clear to them that certain actions attributed to God by Calvinist doctrine — like reprobating millions arbitrarily and justifying his elect by imputation — were incompatible with God's good nature. The question we turn to now is, how could they claim to know what God's nature is like better than their opponents? What justification did they offer for the accuracy of their own picture of God?

In this chapter we will see that the Emmanuel Three's rival conception of God rests on a distinctive religious epistemology, heavily informed by ancient Platonist sources, which makes reason our means of epistemic access to God. This epistemology gives them the resources they need to contend that their own picture of God is more accurate than that of the Calvinists, and also to explain why the Calvinists have misunderstood God in the particular ways they have.

To anticipate, the Emmanuel Three believe that God is knowable by immediate awareness or acquaintance where God is directly present to the mind of the knower. Only this kind of direct knowledge of God is reliable; knowledge of God that relies on mere description or speculation inevitably involves anthropomorphising and distorting God's actual essence. The Emmanuel Three's epistemology is a theory of knowledge by acquaintance of the sort Bertrand Russell famously contrasted with knowledge by description (Russell 1910–11).

I call this account of religious knowledge a ‘participatory epistemology’ because the Emmanuel Three also insist that we can only have knowledge of God by acquaintance when we are psychologically conformed to God through direct participation in or communion with him. Direct acquaintance with God occurs through the mirror or lens of the soul itself through the transforming power of reason or intellect. The rational faculty, the Emmanuel Three contend, causes the soul to participate in whatever it is directed towards: thus, when our rational or intellectual faculty is directed toward God, the soul participates in and takes on the form of God. The more our souls resemble God in this way, the clearer and more vivid a picture of him we can form in our souls. When our reason is directed elsewhere, our souls participate in lesser things not resembling God, our vision of him becomes systematically distorted by our moral defects, much as muddied or coloured glass distorts things viewed through it. In simpler terms, inasmuch as we fall short of internally resembling God’s moral perfection, we inevitably project our own vices and faults onto God. Indeed, the Emmanuel Three all explain the picture of tyrannical, arbitrary God presented by Calvinists as a picture distorted by the arbitrary and tyrannous tendencies of Calvinists themselves.

This claim that God can be known through reason once again puts the Emmanuel Three at significant odds with the Puritan consensus of their immediate context. While not at all opposed to the idea of direct spiritual acquaintance with God, Puritans typically downplay the role of reason in our apprehension of God. As we have already seen, especially when it comes to questions about God’s apparently tyrannical decrees, Puritans tend to emphasise the smallness and faultiness of human reason, and our utter inability to comprehend God’s reasons for his actions. It is foolish and impudent to attempt to penetrate the cavernous depths of God’s infinite wisdom with the puny candle of human reason (e.g. Tuckney 1654, 50–2; cf.

Roberts 1968, 65). It is much safer, they contend, to rely on the clear declarations of Scripture for our picture of who God is and what he has done.

But on the Emmanuel Three's participatory epistemology, even the revelations of Scripture — considered only as a set of propositional claims about God's character and activity — only take us so far in our knowledge of God. No matter how scrupulously we might study the words of Scripture, if our souls are not actually conformed to God, we will still inevitably misrepresent him. The only sure way to know what God is like is to perceive him directly through the faculty in us that most resembles him: reason. Scripture may help us along this road, by inviting and exhorting us to the imitation of God, but that is all. And hence, if we find that some interpretation or other of Scripture paints a picture of God's character that contradicts the picture we receive through rational participation in God's nature, we should reject that interpretation as a distortion.

This, I suggest, is exactly what we have seen happening in the foregoing chapters. When Whichcote, Smith and Cudworth reject the tyrannical, arbitrary picture of God painted by the double decree, they do so because that picture contradicts the image of God they perceive most clearly in their own rational acquaintance with God. To paraphrase, the Emmanuel Three find that their best and highest moral instincts, the most rational and righteous parts of human nature, abhor the injustice and arbitrariness of the double decree. But where Puritans would counsel them to silence human reason and submit to the plain testimony of Scripture, the Emmanuel Three insist that these rational and moral objections to the double decree — the wide consensus that no virtuous human being could ever make such a decree — points powerfully to the conclusion that God could not have made any such decree. To someone like Anthony Tuckney, this is a grave theological error that impudently

exalts human reason over the sovereign declarations of God. But for Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith alike, it is absurd to accept a picture of God that goes against our highest rational and moral intuitions of him, for it is these intuitions that reveal him to us better than anything else.

To analyse this complex, multifaceted view of religious epistemology is a difficult task because it constantly blurs the boundaries of philosophical domains we usually prefer to keep separate. So let me present some prefatory caveats. First, there is no meaningful distinction here between moral epistemology and religious epistemology: since God is goodness itself, ‘the Good’ in the Platonic sense, knowing God is the same thing as knowing the moral truth of things. Second, although our focus is on the Emmanuel Three’s epistemology — their account of how we come to know God and the good — we will quickly find that in their philosophy, knowing the good is more or less synonymous with being good. So while we, for instance, tend to think of being virtuous as one thing, and of knowing what virtue is as quite another, the Emmanuel Three will run these concepts together in ways that can be confusing if we are not primed to what they are doing.

The epistemological theory we will explore in this chapter will highlight the deep philosophical similarities, distinctly Platonic, that bind Whichcote, Smith and Cudworth together in the 1640s and 50s and beyond. In outline, 8.1 introduces the Emmanuel Three’s shared understanding of how reason gives us epistemic access God by connecting and conforming us to him. 8.2 analyses this view of ‘perceiving God’ through the lens of Bertrand Russell’s distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description, contending that the Emmanuel Three explicitly defend the position that God is known by

direct acquaintance. Finally, 8.3 gives an account of the Emmanuel Three's 'error theory', i.e. their explanation of how their theological opponents arrived at their voluntarist view of God.

8.1 Perceiving God Through Reason

Reason is not a shallow thing: it is the first Participation from God: therefore he, that observes Reason, observes God. (Whichcote, Aphorisms #460)

There is a certain affinity between the mind and God, of whom the mind is an intellectual image ... [B]y reason of this fact, the mind, especially if it is purified and separated from bodily matter, is able to have some perception of the divine nature. (Origen, De Principiis I.1.7)

For the Emmanuel Three, God is known through reason. In the same way that colours are known by sight and sounds by hearing, God's nature and character can be known by directing our rational faculties toward him. If we are to understand this properly, we will need to have a clear grasp of just what they think 'reason' is, and how it allows us to know its objects. As Mario Micheletti insightfully notes:

To understand Whichcote (and Smith after him) well, we must always remember that the reason of which he speaks is not the reason of absolute rationalism, but ... 'the candle of the Lord.' It is not only the means by which a man arrives at a natural

acquaintance of God and intuits the *objective* ‘reason of things’ ... but also the means by which God is manifested to the spirit of man ... (Micheletti 1976, 127; cf. Spellmeyer 1982, 55–6)

We turn now to the Emmanuel Three’s conception of reason as the source of religious knowledge because it is there that we will find the hidden root of all the Emmanuel Three’s departures from Puritan orthodoxy: that is, in their conviction that human reason reveals God’s nature and character to us better than anything else.

8.1.1 Platonic Knowledge by Resemblance

Smith and Cudworth in particular draw heavily on Plotinus and other ancient Platonists for their understanding of how reason connects us to God. In an important passage of the *Enneads*, Plotinus tells his pupils that the only way to see the Good is to attain a virtuous, rightly-ordered soul that resembles the Good itself as far as possible. Thus, the first step in attaining knowledge of the Good is to set our souls straight: ‘you should remove superfluities and straighten things that are crooked, work on the things that are dark, making them bright, and not stop “working on your statue” until the divine splendour of virtue shines in you, until you see “Self-Control enthroned on the holy seat”’ (*Enn.* I.6.9). When virtue thus shines within our souls, we will be able to see the Good by looking inward at ourselves:

If you see that you have become this, at that moment you have become sight, and you can be confident about yourself, and you have at this moment ascended here, no longer in need of someone to show you. Just open your eyes and see, for this alone is the eye that sees the great beauty. (*Enn.* I.6.9)

Only when a soul is virtuous and rightly-ordered does it become capable of beholding the ‘great beauty’ of the Good or the One; and when it does, the vision is communicated through the medium of one’s own virtuous soul.

This insistence on virtue as a precondition for knowledge or vision of the Good is tied to a wider epistemological principle in Plotinus’ thought which defines knowing or seeing as a process in which the knower comes to resemble the thing-known. For Plotinus, ‘we understand each thing by being the same as it’ (*Enn.* I.8.1; cf. *Enn.* 5.1.5 ‘For intellection is a vision in which seeing and what is seen are one’). Thus, resemblance to the object we wish to understand is necessary for understanding it properly: ‘the one who sees has a kinship with that which is seen, and he must make himself the same as it if he is to attain the sight’ (*Enn.* I.6.9). Consequently, a soul that wants to see the Good and the Beautiful must itself become good and beautiful:

For no eye has ever seen the sun without becoming sun-like, nor could a soul ever see Beauty without becoming beautiful. You must first actually become wholly Godlike and wholly beautiful if you intend to see god and Beauty. (*Enn.* I.6.9).

This is why knowing the Good, the highest and most perfect kind of being, is so difficult: knowing the Good requires us to actually become good.

This concept of knowledge by kinship or resemblance is central to the Emmanuel Three’s religious epistemology. The most explicit in this regard is Smith, whose first discourse on *Divine Knowledge* quotes heavily from the passage of the *Enneads* we have just read. This discourse is intended as a methodological preface to a series of catechetical lectures

to be delivered at Queen’s College from late 1650 to mid 1651 (Ridley-Johnson 2016, 41). It serves, in Smith’s words, as ‘a *Prolegomenon* or Preface to what [he] shall afterwards discourse upon the Heads of Divinity’ (SD 2). Smith’s purpose in this discourse is to find ‘principles’ that underlie the ‘science’ or discipline of divinity (i.e. theology, knowledge of God). Since ‘every Art & Science hath some certain Principles upon which the whole Frame and Body of it must depend’ (SD 1), Smith wants to present an account of the ‘*True Method of Knowing*’ (SD 2), the epistemic bedrock on which all truths of divinity must be built.

In the opening paragraphs of the discourse on *Divine Knowledge*, Smith gives Plotinus’ philosophical quest for virtue a decidedly Christian spin:

γνώσις ἐκάστων δι’ὁμοιότητος γίνεται [*Enn.* I.8.1, knowledge of each thing is through likeness to it], as the Greek Philosopher hath well observed, Everything is best known by that which bears a just resemblance and analogie with it ... [A]s the Eye cannot behold the Sun, ἡλιοειδής μὴ γινόμενος, unless it be *Sun-like*, and hath the form and resemblance of the Sun drawn in it; so neither can the Soul of man behold God, θεοειδής μὴ γινομένη, unless it be *Godlike*, hath God formed in it, and be made a partaker of the Divine Nature. (SD 2–3)

This last phrase which Smith has appended to the quotations from Plotinus’ *Enneads* is 2 Peter 1:4, a *locus classicus* for the Christian doctrine of deification or theosis (Russell 2006, 151f). This passage thus represents the deft weaving together of the Platonic quest for seeing the good with the Christian quest for deification characteristic of Smith’s *Discourses*.⁷³

⁷³ Derek Michaud has demonstrated persuasively that Smith relies as much here on Origen as on Plotinus (2015, 199–219).

This Plotinian idea of knowledge by resemblance is also central to Whichcote's religious epistemology (though on the whole, he is less interested about the philosophical intricacies of his religious epistemology). 'The *Mind* as a Glass', he writes 'receives all Images; and the Soul becomes *That*, with which it is in conjunction' (Aph #366). And therefore, sounding very much like his former pupil Smith, Whichcote quotes Plotinus without attribution:

The eye could never behold the sun, if it were not like it. The mind of man could never contemplate God, if it be not *God-like*; for (as in nature) there must be a suitable disposition of the faculty to the object ... (*Works* II:188f)

It is Cudworth who, in his later work on epistemology, will give the most mature philosophical treatment to this theory of knowledge by resemblance. In TEIM, he draws on Aristotle alongside Plotinus to contend that the soul knows by conforming itself to the things it tries to know (TEIM 76–7). The soul can only know anything because it has 'a potential omniformity in it'; that is, the soul is capable of taking on the form of other things by conceiving or 'framing' an idea of them: '*the Rational Soul or Mind, is in a manner All things, It being able to frame some Idea and Conception or other, of whatsoever is in the Nature of things, and hath either an Actual or Possible Existence*' (TISU 638). Thus, the mind is a microcosm of the real and possible worlds: 'a kind of notional or representative world, as it were a diaphanous and crystalline sphere, in which the ideas and images of all things existing in the real universe may be reflected or represented' (TEIM 77; cf. TISU 638).

For the Emmanuel Three then, taking their cue from Plotinus, reason brings the soul into ‘conjunction’ with its objects, and causes the soul to take on the form of each object.

8.1.2 *The Moral Dimension of Reason*

Every rational creature is therefore susceptible of praise and of blame, of praise, if in accordance with the reason which he has in him he advances to better things; of blame, if he departs from the rule and course of what is right ...

(Origen, *De Princ.* I.5.2)

It is not hard to see why, given this Plotinian theory of knowledge by resemblance, reason plays not only an epistemological, but a moral role. Since God is the highest good, directing our reason towards God is the greatest thing we can do both for ourselves and those around us, because when we come into rational conjunction with God, our souls are transformed into Godlike virtue. It is a moral imperative to direct our reason ‘upwards’ towards God, rather than ‘downwards’ towards material things.⁷⁴

This moral notion of reason has its roots in Plato himself. In the *Phaedo*, human beings are described as divine, immortal souls entrapped or entombed in the dark prison of material bodies. A virtuous person is one who embraces her true nature by contemplating on

⁷⁴ Although some forms of Platonism refuse to see any goodness or usefulness in the material world, it is worth clarifying that the Emmanuel Three’s Platonism is not one of them. They do not suggest that we never ought to think about or enjoy material things. On the contrary, since the material world is a reflection of God’s essential goodness, a soul in which reason reigns will be able to perceive the essential goodness inherent in material objects, so that their contact with sensory objects becomes a stepping stone for contact with God (e.g. *Commons* vi, 18; SD 380; 431f; 456; *Works* III: 190f, 372f). The danger occurs when our reasoning power is dulled, allowing us to be distracted by the beautiful appearance of material things, so that we attribute intrinsic goodness to them and seek them as ends in themselves rather than vehicles of divine goodness (SD 136–8). The same can be said of many thinkers in the ancient Platonic tradition (Hadot 1995, 97–9).

divine things, that is, things which resemble her true nature; ‘the soul is most like the divine, deathless, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, always the same as itself’ (*Phd.* 81a). When a person who has spent their life contemplating such things dies, their soul ‘makes its way to the invisible, which is like itself, the divine and immortal and wise, and arriving there it can be happy ... [and] truly spend the rest of time with the gods’ (*Phd.* 81a).

The body and the material world, on the other hand, are alien to the soul’s rational and divine nature. Unlike the deathless and immaterial soul, ‘the body is most like that which is human, mortal, multiform, unintelligible, soluble and never consistently the same’ (*Phd.* 80a–b). When a soul neglects its rational nature, it becomes attached to material things, unable to perceive their need for the higher things. As a result, the soul becomes conformed to material things as surely as a rational soul becomes conformed to the divine; it becomes ‘permeated by the physical, which constant intercourse and association with the body ... has caused to become ingrained in it’ (*Phd.* 81c–d; cf. SD 386). When a person who lives in this irrational way dies, their soul is unable to rise up to realm of the gods at death:

if the soul is polluted and impure when it leaves the body, having always been associated with it and served it, bewitched by physical desires and pleasures to the point at which nothing seems to exist for it but the physical ... and if that soul is accustomed to hate and fear and avoid that which is dim and invisible to the eyes but intelligible and to be grasped by philosophy — do you think such a soul will escape pure and by itself? (*Phd.* 81b)

Plotinus paints a miserable portrait of this sort of soul, ‘dragged in every direction by its chains towards whatever it happens to perceive with its senses, with much of what belongs to

the body adulterating it, deeply implicating itself with the material element and, taking that element into itself due to that adulteration that only makes it worse' (*Enn.* I.6.5; cf. SD 386). So the principle that the soul resembles what it knows cuts both ways: if a soul binds itself to physical things, it muddies its divine and immaterial essence and becomes mired in the material plane.

Thus, for ancient Platonists, the goal of philosophy was to live in accordance with reason — the soul's higher nature — and above the confusions and miseries that result from an unhealthy attachment to the material world. James Duerlinger captures this nicely: 'The Platonists claimed the the goal of philosophy is the attainment of likeness to the gods (*homiōsis theoi*) with respect to their possession of a blissful, unerring cognition of ultimate reality and freedom from the passions (*pathē*) and other evils which attend the soul's embodiment ... On this view, the theory and practice of the Platonic philosophy also constitutes a religion, and its ethics, a religious ethics' (Duerlinger 1985, 315).

The Emmanuel Three share this Platonic model of religious ethics (though heavily Christianised, in the tradition of patristic Platonism).⁷⁵ This is why, as I cautioned earlier, they promiscuously mix their moral philosophy and epistemology. As the early Emmanuel Platonist John Sadler put it, '*Understanding* and *Will*, are [not] Two Things really Distinct; but *Both* make, *Both* are, but *One Soule*, under *Two* Notions' (1640, 36): to make something the object of one's understanding is also to direct oneself towards it as an end. For the Emmanuel men as for Plato or Plotinus, to know some object in the fullest sense is the same thing as conforming oneself to it; it is more like a conjugal knowing in the Biblical sense than

⁷⁵ On the Cambridge Platonists' connection to patristic Platonism, see Dockrill 1997, Michaud 2011, Hengsternann 2017 and Hedley 2019.

a mere cognitive knowing. Thus, Smith describes aiming at an end as a kind of knowing by resemblance: to aim at an end is to bring the soul into contact with that end, and since the soul is impressionable like wax, the soul will take on the form of what it comes into contact with: ‘The Soul is alwaies stamp’d with the same Characters that are engraven upon the *End* it aims at; and while it converses with it, and sets it self before it, *it is turned as Wax to the Seal*’ (SD 405). Consequently, a great deal hangs on whether we set our minds on good, heavenly things or corruptible, earthly things:

He that pursues any *worldly* interest or *earthly* thing as his *End*, becomes himself also γεώδης *Earthly*’; conversely, ‘the more the Soul directs it self to God, the more it becomes θεοειδής *Godlike*, deriving a print of that glory and beauty upon it self which it converseth with (SD 405–6).⁷⁶

Whichcote evidently shares this same vision; our souls take on the properties of either God or mindless matter, depending on how well we exercise our reason:

He that by motion upwards contemplates God, converses with things spiritual and immaterial, he doth fit himself more for attendance upon God, and converses with angels and separate souls; but he that through brutishness and sensuality sinks into this lower world, and lives to grow less, he will finally shrivel up and come to nothing. (*Works* IV, 141; cf. IV:263)

⁷⁶ For this same theme in Cudworth’s later manuscripts, see Carter 2011, 95f.

For all the Emmanuel Three alike then, reason connects us to God because it is reason that is most Godlike in us, but it is up to us to amplify and nurture this Godlikeness by directing reason ‘upwards’ towards its proper object.

8.1.3 Godlikeness: A Good Mind and a Good Life

What we have just seen about the Platonic roots of the Emmanuel Three’s religious epistemology allows us to grasp why in their writings, they make virtue or Godlikeness identical with knowledge of God’s essence and character. Knowing x means becoming x -like, so knowing God means becoming Godlike. For this reason, they consider the goal of philosophy and of the Christian life alike to be attaining knowledge of God, which necessarily involves becoming Godlike through union or spiritual contact with God.

In the next section (8.2), we will consider just how the Emmanuel Three believe that a virtuous and Godlike person gains epistemic access to God’s nature; i.e. how being Godlike gives a person knowledge about God. To do this well, we will need a more precise picture of the psychological state of Godlikeness.

First though, a quick note about terminology: Whichcote and Smith (and Cudworth much more rarely) typically refer to a Godlike state of the soul as ‘religion’. In their wider Puritan context, religion was a general term for piety or righteous living; William Ames for instance, wrote that ‘Religion is Observance, whereby we performe those things which doe directly pertaine to the bringing of honour to God’ (1642, 243).

When it comes to the Emmanuel Three, however, we must be especially careful to set aside our contemporary definitions of religion as doctrinal confession or group affiliation.

‘Religion *is not* a System of Doctrines, an Observance of Modes ...’ writes Whichcote (Aph #1127). Religion ‘is not a Notion’, but rather, a psychological condition: a ‘Frame and *Temper* of our Minds’ (Aph #338). When Smith, for example, speaks about ‘the rise and original’ of religion, or its ‘progress’, ‘term and end’ (SD 379), he is speaking about the psychological process of acquiring this temper.

In line with what we have just seen about rational participation in God as the end of human nature, religion refers to a soul’s conformity to God’s nature. In short, religion is Godlikeness: ‘Religion in us is our Resemblance of God’ (Aph #1028), wrote Whichcote; ‘Religion is, *τις ὁμοίωσις Θεοῦ, κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν ἀνθρώπου*, the being as much like God as Man can be like him.’ (Aph #591).

This resemblance comes about when the truth and goodness which constitute God’s nature are communicated to and incorporated into a soul:

God is the First Truth and Primitive Goodness: True Religion is a vigorous *Efflux* and *Emanation* of *Both* upon the Spirits of men, and therefore is called a *participation of the divine Nature* (Smith, SD 382; cf. Whichcote, *Works* IV, 300f).

Again mixing Platonic and New Testament language (2 Peter 1:4’s participation of the divine nature, with the Procline terms ‘efflux’ and ‘emanation’ [SD 141–2]), Smith holds that while God is himself the ground of truth and goodness, these are accessible to us as effluxes. Religion is what God’s essential truth and goodness are called when they emanate from God and participated in by a human being.

The same notion is present in Cudworth. While Cudworth does not often use the word ‘religion’ to refer this state of Godlikeness, his account of psychological perfection attained by rational participation in God is identical to theirs. The ultimate aim for human beings is to achieve ‘real Conformity to [God’s] Nature and Participation of his Spirit’ (*Lincolnes* 26; cf. *Lincolnes* 38). The whole end of the Gospel is ‘a *Divine nature*, ‘tis a *Godlike* frame and disposition of spirit’ (*Commons* 46).⁷⁷

Our question now is this: in what does this ‘frame’, ‘temper’ or ‘disposition’ of mind called religion or Godlikeness — the state which allows a person knows God — consist? To pave the way for our investigation of the epistemological value of this psychological state, we need to take note of two of its defining properties, both of which are summed up nicely in one Whichcote’s *Aphorisms*: ‘Religion is a good Mind, and a good Life’ (Aph #440). In more technical language, Godlikeness has both a *cognitive* and a *practical* component. These correspond to the two divine attributes in which, Smith claims, a religious person must participate: truth and goodness. Accordingly, Godlikeness or knowledge of God consists in (1) perceiving the world *rationally*, i.e. in accordance with the *reason* or *truth* of things, and (2) a *practical* disposition to live and act well. We will consider these in turn.

8.1.4 ‘A Good Mind’: Cognitive Godlikeness

For the Emmanuel Three, the proper use of reason gives us epistemic access to God and also to the nature of created things. This is simply because, like any Platonists worthy of the name, they hold that the world itself and everything in it derives its nature from the eternal and

⁷⁷ Cudworth’s less frequent use of the word is nonetheless consistent with Smith and Whichcote’s. In *Commons*, he tells us that ‘the *Life of Christ*’ is ‘the Pith and Kernel of all Religion’ (*Commons* i). For the most part though, in *Commons* and *Lincolnes*, Cudworth uses the word ‘religion’ when he is telling us that religion does not consist in mere words and notions or external displays of piety (e.g. *Commons* 56f; *Lincolnes* 67). This is consistent with Smith and Whichcote’s insistence that religion is not a mere system of doctrines or a set of outward observances (e.g. SD 361, 367–72; Aph #1127).

immutable ideas contained in God's intellect.⁷⁸ Like the human intellect, God's mind contains 'representations' or 'ideas' of everything that has been and ever could be created: Cudworth calls these 'intelligible essences (*rationes*) and verities of things' (TEIM 128). The ideas of God's mind determine the eternal and immutable natures or truths of all things: 'Things are true ... as they are answerable to the idea of them in the divine mind pre-existent to them' (Whichcote, *Works* III, 370). For Cudworth, the existence of these *rationes* is essentially bound up with the existence of the divine intellect:

It is all one to affirm that there are eternal *rationes*, essences of things, and verities necessarily existing, and to say that there is an infinite, omnipotent, and eternal Mind, necessarily existing that always actually comprehendeth himself, the essences of all things, and their verities, or, rather, which is the *rationes*, essences, and verities of all thing (TEIM 128; cf. TISU 737)

God's mind is therefore the intellectual blueprint of all reality — 'a *Mind Senior to the world*' (TISU 736) — since everything God created is modelled off some intelligible essence or *ratio* contained in the divine intellect.

This does not mean, of course, that God could change the nature of things just by conceiving or thinking of them differently. The *rationes* which populate God's mind are 'all *Necessary and Immutable Truths*', '*the Same Yesterday, to Day, and For ever*', because they are direct expressions of his immutable nature (TISU, 733–738; cf. TEIM 126–9). The truth

⁷⁸ On God's essence as the paradigm or pattern of the creation, see also Ficino PTh. II.10.1–4; II.11.11; II.12.8; XI.4.14. See SD 62, 141–3; TISU 387–8; 730–7; TEIM 115–50; Darwall 1995, 121–8. Whichcote almost never uses the word 'idea' in the Platonic sense of Cudworth and Smith, but he views God's rational nature as the ground of the 'reasons of things' (Works I:71, II:93; 396–7; Aph #468, #531). See also Sadler 1640, 30–33 for an early expression of Emmanuel Platonist interest in this idea.

of God's mind is "the most unbending and incompatible, the most necessary, firm, immutable, and adamant thing in the world" (TEIM 137).

Human beings are capable of understanding the world God has created because God has implanted a derivative copy of this immutable blueprint into the fabric of the human mind.⁷⁹ This is what makes human beings 'rational', namely their participation in God's ideas which are the *rationes* of things. The Emmanuel Three differ somewhat in their accounts of just how the divine ideas are contained in human minds, but the differences are not germane to our purposes here.⁸⁰ It is safe to say that for the Emmanuel Three, the proper use of reason grants us knowledge of the 'reason of things' by participation in God's intellect, and error of all kinds results from a failure to use reason properly. When we fail to use reason properly (through moral vice or inattention), we end up framing distorted and inaccurate ideas or images of things. In Cudworth's phrase, unlike God's in mind which 'all universal verities are always actually comprehended', human minds 'do not always actually contain the *rationes* of things and their verities in them' because they are 'many times ignorant, doubting, erring' (TEIM 130).

So our internal picture of things does not always map onto the reality of those things. But reality is a stubborn thing and does not change to accommodate our misperceptions of it: 'Though the *Reason* of the *Subject* be prejudiced and corrupted', Whichcote warns, 'yet the *Reason* of the *Thing* continues sacred and unchanged' (Aph. #150; cf. *Works* IV, 150). The

⁷⁹ TISU 387, 721; TEIM 77; SD 124, 382, 457. Whichcote does not speak of divine ideas imprinted on the mind as Smith and Cudworth do; he even sometimes describes the mind as a *rasa* or *abrasa tabula* (*Works* II:4, III:215). Nonetheless, he certainly believes the mind contains innate 'seeds' of rationality which sprout into rational principles of action when properly fostered (*Works* II:4, III:141, 211, 218; Aph #444; see also Gill 1999, 274–5).

⁸⁰ For a more thorough treatment of innate ideas in the four main Cambridge Platonists, see Scott 1990.

reason of things is immutable, but our own fallible reasons are more than capable of forming faulty conceptions of things.

In keeping with what we have seen about the moral dimension of reason, the Emmanuel Three clearly think our moral failures boil down to rational failure to apprehend things as they are. While some mistakes about reality (such as believing in ether or phlogiston, to take some modern examples) will have limited moral consequences, the Emmanuel Three are concerned here with the rational failure to apprehend the values of things correctly. Whichcote describes the kind of moral cognition at issue here as follows:

... here we do enquire whether things be right or wrong, good or evil, and accordingly charge ourselves (if we be persons of conscience); and we are to be in reconciliation with things that are good, and to have a displacency against things that are impure, unholy and contrary to the mind and will of God (*Works III*, 373).

Failure to perceive right and wrong, good and evil correctly will lead to our contradicting God's nature in our lives and actions, and put us out of step with the reality of things: 'If we think otherwise than the truth of things, we live in a lie' warns Whichcote (*Works III*, 372). Specifically, if we have selfish passions in us, they obscure our internal copy of God's ideas and render our vision of the world morally unreliable:

While we lodge any filthy vice in us ... it will be continually climbing up into the ... *Hegemonicall* powers of the Soul, into the bed of Reason, and defile it ... it will twine about our Judgements and Understandings, till it hath suck'd out the Life and Spirit of them ... (SD 5; cf. Whichcote, *Works III*, 99).

Vice corrupts not only our character and our actions, but our judgements and understandings. Only a holy and Godlike mind can be a fit medium for discerning the copy of God's ideas he has implanted in the soul (SD 97–8).

Thus, according to Whichcote, 'the occasion of all the evil that breaks in upon mortals, [is] that we do not conceive of things as they are' (*Works* III, 371). This is why the faculty of imagination, which can shape mental images of things according to the unbounded power of the will, is so dangerous when misused, for 'imagination makes the case within, tho' not without; for as a man conceives, so is the case within' (*Works* III, 371; see also 8.3.2 and 8.3.3 below). Thus, sin and vice prove to be not only immoral but also *irrational*; their wrongness is a consequence of their lack of conformity with reason: 'Sin is a Vitiating of the Reason of Man' (Aph #1023). All our moral failures ultimately result from a failure to focus our reason properly on God: 'We suffer Difficulty in the Exercise of Virtue; because our Understandings are short and Fallible ...' (Aph #328; cf. *Works* III, 227f). Or as Smith puts it, our failures to love the Good consistently 'ariseth from the weakness of our Understandings, that do not present things to us always in the same Orient lustre and beauty' (SD 129; cf. SD 134). Our moral failures result from the failure to apprehend the world constantly as it really is.

By contrast, when we direct our minds to God and participate in his eternal ideas, then the knowledge we derive from him is as eternally and immutably true as God's own vision of the world, particularly with regard to morality. 'These two things go to together', Whichcote opines, 'to know *God*; and to know the *Difference* of Good and Evil' (Aph #728). Such knowledge 'has nothing either of fiction or of arbitrariness in it, but is "the comprehension of

that which immutably *is*” (TEIM 127). In moral matters, the proper use of reason brings us into contact with the same ‘natural’ or ‘essential’ rules and ideas of goodness that cause and determine God’s volitions. As Whichcote puts it, ‘By true religion a man’s nature is reconciled to the everlasting laws of goodness, righteousness and truth. This is religion, for a man resolvedly to govern himself ... by the reason of things, and the right of cases, as the rule of actions’ (*Works* II:388). Or in Smith’s words, ‘A Good man endeavours to walk by Eternal and Unchangeable Rules of Reason’ (SD 386). The same eternal, immutable rule governs the volitions and actions of a religious person and the volitions of God.

When a human intellect participates in God’s intellect, their vision of created things becomes informed by the pattern of divine ideas which God himself used as a blueprint to create them in the first place:

And seeing God ... runs through all created Essence, containing the Archetypal Ideas of all things in himself, and from thence deriving and imparting several prints of Beauty and Excellency all the world over, a Soul that is truly *θεοειδής* God-like, a Mind that is enlightned from the same Fountain ... cannot but every where behold it self in the midst of that Glorious Unbounded Being who is indivisibly every where. (SD 434)

In this sense, a Godlike soul sees the world with God’s eyes. In this way, Godlikeness brings one into harmony with the whole created order; it makes us relate to everything just as we ought to. Thus, for Whichcote, one of the ‘parts’ of religion is ‘an universal Reconciliation with the whole Creation of God’ (Aph #1091). Without this reconciliation to the ‘reason’ of things (viz. the rational blueprint of creation contained in God’s mind), we can never flourish:

‘There is no Happiness, or Peace; but in the Compliance of the *Temper* of our Minds with the Reason of things: which is a Conformity with the Everlasting Law of Righteousness’ (Aph #902). In this way, ‘we come to harmonize with the nature, and mind, and will of God; to think of things as he thinks; to savour and relish them as he does’ (*Works* II:361).

This goes a long way to explaining why the Emmanuel Three insist so uncompromisingly that religion is a fundamentally rational thing, putting themselves further at odds with Puritan orthodoxy.⁸¹ Just as Calvinists took a low view of ‘natural’ righteousness compared to the gracious gift of imputed righteousness (see 7.1.2 above), they took a low view of natural reason when compared to the gracious gift of divine revelation (Helm 2009, 64–97). Tuckney reports widespread uneasiness about the prominent place given to rationality in Whichcote’s preaching. In Tuckney’s words, Whichcote’s commencement speech which so cried up reason over faith was taken as ‘but the fourth edition of what manie of [Whichcote’s hearers] had before, in your position, determination, sermons, at Trinity and elsewhere’ (EL 20). Nor is Whichcote the only culprit, for this crying up of reason has been ‘carried-on with a high hand, both by your selfe and others’ (EL 20).

But Whichcote sums up the attitude of the Emmanuel Three in his rejoinder to Tuckney: ‘Sir, I oppose not rational to spiritual; for spiritual is most rational’ (EL 108; Beiser 1996, 138–9; cf. Origen, *De Princ.* I.1.2 ‘the spirit [refers to] that which is intellectual, or as we also call it, spiritual’). For the Emmanuel Three, reason is the most divine and Godlike part of us; thus, the right use of reason is what makes us most ‘religious’ and most Godlike: ‘There is nothing so intrinsically Rational, as *Religion* is; nothing, that can so Justify it self;

⁸¹ For more on the Platonic roots of the Emmanuel Three’s emphasis on the place of reason in religion, see Spellmeyer 1982, 55–6; Rogers 1997, 4–5; Helm 2009, 84–97.

nothing, that hath so pure Reason to recommend itself ...' (Aph #457). Reason is no threat to revealed religion, because God — who is supremely rational — directs his revelations specifically to rational creatures. Reason and revelation fit together as lock and key: reason is the part of us that (when properly calibrated) most powerfully resonates and harmonises with the divine truths it reveals. 'What doth God speak to, but my reason?' Whichcote contends, 'and shoulde not that, which is spoken-to, heare? should itt not judge, discerne, conceeve, what is God's meaning?' (EL 48; cf. *Works* III:182)

And Smith, sounding very much like Whichcote's pupil, declares that it is nothing but 'a fond imagination that Religion should extinguish Reason; whenas Religion makes it more illustrious and vigorous; and they that live most in the exercise of *Religion*, shall find their *Reason* most enlarged' (SD 388). Reason is thus the most Godlike part of us, 'a spark of the divine, something that is literally a piece of God' (Gill 2006, 20); Reason is 'the very image of God within ourselves' (*Works* III, 212; cf. TISU 720–2; TEIM 77, 128–30).

In all this, we can hear the echo of the Emmanuel Three's uneasiness about metaethical voluntarism on the one hand, and about imputed righteousness on the other. The God of voluntarism can make things good or evil purely by acts of will, with no guidance or direction from the eternal and immutable nature of things. In this, he bears an unflattering resemblance to a passion-ridden and deluded human being who lets his unbounded imagination conceive of things by pure, arbitrary will, rather than letting reason conceive of things as they really are. Similarly, relying on imputed righteousness is a particularly dangerous example of imagination making something the case within that is not the case without: the believer imagines themselves to be reconciled with God, ignoring the fact that their actual nature is still radically at odds with God's own. In both cases, the Emmanuel men

insist that it is God's immutable, rational nature rather than his will which determines moral realities. In their exhortations to become Godlike through the exercise of reason, the Emmanuel Three are exhorting us to tap into the same reservoir of eternal and immutable essences that governs God's will and actions. That is the first part of what it means to be Godlike or religious: to have a Godlike — i.e. rational — mind.

8.1.5 'A Good Life': Practical Godlikeness

Attaining this rational, Godlike perspective on reality is not something which only happens in the intellect: it has a transformative effect on the whole soul which flows necessarily into affections, our wills, and from there, into our actions. Put simply, a 'good mind' produces a good life: 'Where men are Renewed, Knowledge doth effect Goodness' (Aph #871).

Before we unpack this further, it is essential to note that for all the unorthodoxy of their underlying views, the Emmanuel Three's insistence that knowledge of God translate into practical goodness has many safe, traditional precedents in Puritan preaching. Emmanuel's Anthony Burgess explains that in the Biblical paradigm, knowledge of God leads to hearty affections which necessarily produce corresponding actions. In Burgess' terms, this sort of knowledge consists of both 'the *affectus* and *effectui concomitatis*', affect and the concomitant effect (i.e. action) (Burgess 1656, 84). Such knowledge 'is *practicall* and operative, for it's a known Rule, that among the Hebrews, *Words of Knowledge are put for all the affections and effects that use to follow such Knowledge ... and in this sence To know the true God is taken so to know as to do all those things that are commanded by him' (Burgess 1656, 73).*

Consequently, wicked persons who claim to know God, 'though they have never so much speculative understanding, yet because by their lives and ungodly waies they dishonour him, therefore they are said not to know him' (Burgess 1656, 84). Speculative knowledge of divine

truths without corresponding action will not do its possessor much good: ‘meer knowledge without doing, is not happinesse’ (ibid., 84). Naturally though, practical virtue was not at all a cause of one’s salvation, only a sign that one had been elected and was beginning to undergo sanctification (cf. Brinsley 1652, vol. 2, 209–15).

Like their Puritan contemporaries, the Emmanuel Three also think we can tell whether someone’s knowledge of God is genuine or superficial based on how well that knowledge displays itself in their actions. For the Emmanuel Platonists — like the Platonists of old — virtue and knowledge are synonyms. To know some moral value is to act in accordance with it and every moral failure is at bottom a rational failure. If we possessed genuine knowledge of the moral realities in question, it would go ‘all the way down’ and become part of our character, necessarily affecting our conduct. As one commentator on Whichcote summed up his view: ‘reason appropriates these values and incorporates them within the soul in such wise that they form its disposition and become its temper; and so it is the governing principle which directs our appetites and controls our passions.’ (Roberts Sr. 1968, 66) To understand a moral value is to have that value woven into the entire fabric of one’s soul.

The Emmanuel Three’s picture of authentic, all-the-way-down virtue that comes from rational apprehension of the Good is captured lucidly in one of Whichcote’s *Aphorisms*:

When a man knows, what he should be; and this Truth is become the Reason of his Mind, and the Temper of his Spirit; then his Religion is, as it were, incarnate in him; is that which he Lives by, and governs himself by. Knowledge is entertained, embraced, consented-to, wrought-in by consideration; a man’s self is charged with

it; Knowledge becomes Goodness in the Subject; and to Do certainly follows. (Aph #621)

So the cognitive Godlikeness we examined earlier — ‘knowing’ the Good and conforming the ‘Reason of our minds’ with the ‘reason of things’ — flows into our actions by effecting a transformation of the whole soul. As Whichcote puts it in another *Aphorism*:

Religion doth possess and affect the *whole* man: in the Understanding, it is Knowledge; in the Life, it is Obedience; in the Affections, it is Delight in God ... in our Dealings, it is Uprightness, Integrity, Correspondence with the Rule of Righteousness: Religion makes men *Virtuous*, in all Instances (Aph #956).

A religious person knows God through their reason, while their affections delight in God, and this love and knowledge come together to produce virtuous action. A Godlike person then, is one whose will, affections and actions are formed by a direct participation in God’s nature.

In this sense, Smith can even say that our wills and affections are as essential to a true knowledge of God as rational understanding:

God is not better defin’d to us by our Understandings then by our Wills and Affections: He is not onely the Eternal Reason, that Almighty Mind and Wisdome which our Understandings converse with; but he is also that unstained Beauty and Supreme Good which our Wills are perpetually catching after ... (SD 137)

So knowledge of God in the understanding — if genuine — is swiftly followed by a love of God and goodness in the affective and volitional part of the soul. As Whichcote puts it in a later sermon:

For the divine light received into the mind doth first irradiate and clear the mind ... and this is the first work: *mental illumination; raising right notions of God, and things in our minds* ... Yet light alone works not a change. But there must be *holy affection*. Knowledge is the *first* step to virtue: but goodness is not, but *by delight and choice*. (*Works* III, 103; cf. SD 372; *Enn.* I.6.7)

Knowledge must be followed by love and internal transformation. In his mature philosophy, Cudworth will develop this concept into a complex theory of ‘intellectual instincts’, i.e. passions that are fundamentally rational in character (Darwall 1995, 136–9; Leech 2017a; Kaldas forthcoming).

To explain this idea that genuine rational conceptions must be absorbed into life and practice, the Emmanuel Three all employ a ‘digestive’ metaphor. In his 1647 *Commons* sermon, Cudworth writes:

The Gospel, though it be a Sovereigne and Medicinall thing in it self, yet the mere knowing and believing of the history of it, will do us no good: we can receive no vertue from it, till it be inwardly digested & concocted into our souls, till it be made *Ours*, and become a living thing in our hearts ... if it be onely without us, [it] cannot save us; no more then that Physicians Bill, could cure the ignorant Patient of his disease, who, when it was commended to him, took the Paper onely, and put it up

in his pocket, but never drunk the Potion that was prescribed in it. (*Commons* 43; cf. SD 8–9)

To inwardly ‘digest’ and absorb gospel truths in this way means, for Cudworth, to live them out practically. Moral truth can never:

... expresse it self sufficiently in Words and Sounds, but it will best declare and speak it self in Actions The *Life* of divine Truths, is better expressed in Actions then in Words, because Actions are more *Living things*, then words; Words, are nothing but the dead Resemblances, and Pictures of those Truths, which *live and breath in Actions*. (*Commons*, 41)

Clearly then, knowing God by reason does not mean simply acquiring a propositional understanding of Christian doctrine; the ‘reason’ and ‘understanding’ at work here is not merely propositional but practical.⁸²

Echoing this ‘digestive metaphor’, Smith writes in his first *Discourse* that there is ‘an inward beauty, life and loveliness in Divine Truth, which cannot be known but onely then when it is digested into life and practice’ (SD 8–9). Like Cudworth, Smith is sceptical about the capacity of mere words and treatises to convey genuine knowledge of God: ‘Divine Truth is better understood, as it unfolds itself in the purity of mens hearts and lives, then in all those subtil Niceties into which curious Wits may lay it forth’ (SD 9). He is particularly concerned about theological works written by persons whose lives did not reflect their alleged

⁸² Of course, Cudworth — a studious and erudite scholar — still sees great value in scholarly work in all the sciences, including divinity (*Commons* v; 18–19). He simply does not want to see this sort of scholastic endeavour considered a substitute for practical knowledge of God.

knowledge of divine things: ‘they cannot be good at Theorie who have been so bad at the Practice’ (SD 12). In the end, it not the most well-studied Christian who knows God best, but rather, ‘He that is most Practical in Divine things’ who ‘hath the purest and sincerest Knowledge of them’ (SD 2). This is why Christ and his disciples never set out divine truths in ‘any *Systeme* or *Body*’ or ‘any *Canons* or *Articles of Belief*’, because their true aim was to exhort people to:

... true Piety, and a Godlike pattern of purity, as the best way to thrive in all spiritual understanding. [Christ’s] main scope was to promote an Holy life, as the best and most compendious way to a right Belief. He hangs all true acquaintance with Divinity upon the doing Gods will ... (SD 9)

On Smith’s reading then, Christ himself considered knowledge of God intrinsically bound up with the practical doing of God’s will.

In his later sermons, Whichcote compares moral truths that are not translated into practice to undigested food sitting in a stomach:

If what we eat and drink be not ... conveyed to the several parts of the body for their sustenance and nourishment, it becomes matter of sickness and disease. Knowledge is the food of the soul ... and therefore is not ultimately to rest in knowledge, in understanding, but in will and affections; should become goodness; that that is knowledge in the mind and understanding, should in conversation and actions of life produce obedience. (*Works* III:214; cf. II:142; IV:146).

If the mind apprehends the moral truth but the will does not carry it out, the ‘harmony’ of the soul is put ‘vastly’ out of proportion (*Works* III:215).⁸³

For Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith alike then, to genuinely know God is to live like God by acting from the same motives that God does.⁸⁴ Reason is the entry point, where God reveals his nature to us, but it takes moral effort to let that revelation sink down into the ‘frame’ and ‘temper’ of our souls. To ‘digest’ moral truths into action means causing them to pass from the intellect into the will and the affections: a person who truly knows divine things also loves, wills and acts accordingly.

This organic connection between right reason and a good life features prominently in Whichcote’s controversy with Tuckney. In his correspondence with Tuckney, Whichcote defends the rational bent of his sermons by contending that preaching must appeal to the hearer’s understanding if it is really to be absorbed and digested into the hearer’s life and practice (EL 108–9). Only rational preaching really pierces the heart of the hearer; preaching that fails to connect with the hearers’ reason only makes a slight dent on their outer parts. Thus, Whichcote contrasts his preferred style of rational preaching with the sort of ‘conceited, impotent, affected CANTING ... when the Ear receeves wordes, which offer no matter to the Understanding’ and therefore ‘make no impression on the inward sense’ (EL 108). Preaching

⁸³ Cf. John Sadler’s *Masquarade*, which compares the understanding and the will to dilation and contraction of a heart: ‘[*Understanding and Will*] ... parallell those *Two Noble, and truly Vitall Acts*; which we find in that ... that lump of living ... Flesh, which we call our *Heart*. For, me thinks the *Understanding* may be fitly cald, the *Soule’s Diastole*; by which it sucks in, that pure *blood of Truth*; which is concocted in *Septo Anime*; till (being made true *Vitall Spirits*, of *Morall Goodnesse*.) it be sent out again, by the *Soule’s Systole*, called *Will*: whence come all the *Motions*, or *Pulses*, which we find in our *Morall Arteries* ...’ (1640, 36).

⁸⁴ In a very early, undated sermon of Whichcote’s that survives only in a hastily written transcription in the common-place book of one Francis Wilcox, Whichcote describes virtuous, Godlike conduct as an indication that we have a ‘vatisation’ of God: ‘Pray not for an imitation, be redy to doe Good, expresse something of God in this kind; wee ought to be above the world in this particular and certain grace, will show it self, and will expresse this vatisation of God ... let us exercise this vertue of patience. That soe we may imitate G[od] in the world.’ (BL Harl MS 28745, fol. 24).

is most likely to produce a lasting change in the hearer when ‘things are most thorowlie seen-into, most cleerlie understood; the minde not so much amused with forms of Wordes, as made acquainted with the inwards of things; the reason of them and the necessarie connexion of termes cleerlie layde-open to the mind and discovered’ (EL 108f). When preaching makes the ‘inwards’ (viz. the *rationes*, verities) of things clear to the hearers, then it is likely to bring about a real change in their vision of the world and their actions, rather than simply washing over them.

There is an even earlier expression of this reason-centred picture of the good life in the remarkable letters written by a young Cudworth to his stepfather John Stoughton (see 1.2.2 above). In these letters, dating probably to 1638 or 1639, Cudworth reflects on what he hopes to gain from all his studies. He is clearly disillusioned about much of the book-learning he is undertaking, and decries the world’s obsession with it: ‘most of that which the world calls knowledge, as Plutarch speakes of the Philosophy of his time, ‘twas but καπνὸς φιλοσοφίας [a vapour of philosophy], so our Tounses and jangling Arts, are to that which is true knowledge and wisdom’ (Solly 1856, 289).

In contrast to these mere ‘Tongues and jangling arts’, Cudworth tells us what he takes to be the mark of true knowledge or wisdom: a change in the actual fabric of the soul expressed in practical life. Anything that dwells ‘in *animâ* but *tanquam in Vase* [in the soul as though in a vessel], and doth not alter and change the soule’ cannot truly be called knowledge (Solly 1856, 288–9; cf. *Rep.* VII, 518a–d; Whichcote, *Works* IV, 142). Attaining knowledge is not about ‘how much I fill my soule but change the crasis and Complection of it’; this is the sort of knowledge that ‘bring[s] in Nectar to feed [one’s] will and affections’ (Solly 1856, 289). ‘[A]ll true knowledge if our understanding were right, would end in the Practicall

Loving and closing with God' (Solly 1856, 288). So already in the late 1630s, Cudworth insists that the only knowledge of God worth having is the sort which transforms the whole temper of the soul and leads to a love of God expressed in actions.

8.1.6 Godlikeness and Goodness

The picture of Godlikeness we have just seen from the Emmanuel Three is complex, displaying a total disregard for our usual, clear distinctions between epistemology, religion and moral philosophy. Nonetheless, its many moving parts form a coherent whole: just as (in the Plotinian idiom) the eye cannot behold the sun without becoming sunlike, the soul cannot know God without becoming Godlike. To be Godlike is to have a mind that conceives of things as God conceives of them, and to live a life consistent with this God's eye view of things. As Whichcote sums it up in a sermon, in becoming virtuous:

... we come to savour and relish the things of God, come to judge of things as God judgeth, come to adhere to the rule of righteousness as God doth, whose understanding is in an inseparable conjunction with truth; and his will is in an inseparable conjunction with his understanding ... (*Works* II:361)

It is worth making explicit here the Emmanuel Three's underlying assumption that the human soul, and particularly human reason, are fundamentally 'God-shaped' from the beginning; rationality in human beings is a particularly strong expression of God's intention to communicate his essence to his creations.

This is in marked contrast with Calvin's thought, which denies that the human soul, even at the peaks of virtue attainable in this life, is capable of accurately reflecting God. For Calvin, ever since Adam's primordial sin, 'although we grant that the image of God was not utterly effaced and destroyed in [humanity], it was, however, so corrupted, that any thing which remains is fearful deformity' (*Inst.* I.15.4).

By contrast, the Emmanuel Three think that a virtuous soul exists in intimate union with God, and lives off a constant stream of goodness flowing into it and conforming it to the divine image. As Smith puts it, God relates to rational souls as a seal relates to its stamp:

... the *Impresse* of Souls is, it is nothing but God himself, who could not write his own name so as that it might be read but onely in Rationall Natures. Neither could he make such without imparting such an Imitation of his own Eternall Understanding to them ... (SD 124)

Religion or Godlikeness consists in nurturing and fostering the innate impress of God's eternal understanding, and living a life consistent with it. When we attain this Godlike state, we fulfil God's communicative intention to spread his goodness abroad into beings distinct from himself.

8.2 Acquaintance, not Description

We have just seen that in order to be truly Godlike, a person must express their knowledge of divine things in action and in the very 'frame' and 'temper' of their souls. Knowledge of God which sits in the intellect without descending into the heart and will fails to be genuine knowledge. This is an expression of the Plotinian principle that knowing is by *homiōsis*: only

a someone who is *really like* God can really be said to know what God himself is like. In this section, we will look more closely at how the Emmanuel Three think Godlikeness gives its possessor epistemic access to God's nature: to anticipate, they believe that a Godlike person has knowledge of God by direct and immediate acquaintance.

This will lead into the third section of this chapter, where we see how this theory of religious epistemology is deployed in the Emmanuel Three's controversy with Calvinists about God's character and relation to goodness. We will see that this knowledge by acquaintance is the source of the Emmanuel Three's evidence that God is not as the voluntarists describe him. Their own acquaintance with God, and that of others, testifies to the fact that God's goodness directs and governs his will, and that he could never make the double decree, or reconcile himself to sinful persons based solely on imputed righteousness.

8.2.1 Russell on Acquaintance vs. Description

I have suggested that the Emmanuel Three think Godlikeness allows a person to know God by direct acquaintance. I am using acquaintance here in the technical sense of Bertrand Russell's classic distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description.

According to Russell's distinction, acquaintance is direct awareness we have of any object that is 'present' to us. In his own words, 'I am acquainted with an object when I have a direct cognitive relation to that object, i.e. when I am directly aware of the object itself' (1910–11, 108). Acquaintance is what a subject has towards an object that is presented to her: 'to say that S has acquaintance with O is essentially the same thing as to say that O is presented to S' (ibid. 108). One of Russell's paradigmatic examples of knowledge by acquaintance is sensory qualities like sound and colour: 'When I see a colour or hear a noise, I

have a direct acquaintance with the colour or the noise' (1910–11, 109). In such cases, what we are aware is not the physical phenomena that cause the sound or colour, but the 'sense-data' itself, i.e. the qualia of colour and sound. For Russell, we can also have knowledge by acquaintance of both particulars and universals; e.g. we can know by acquaintance of 'particular yellows', and also, 'if we have seen a sufficient number of yellows ... the universal *yellow*' (1910–11, 111; 1912, 28). But we cannot have knowledge by acquaintance of physical objects, or the minds and thoughts of other people, because these are never things of which we are directly or immediately aware (1910–11, 112; 1912, 25–6). In sum then, we can know by acquaintance anything of which we can be immediately or directly aware; anything, that is, that can be immediately present to our conscious experience.

By contrast, we have knowledge by description of an object when we know something about it under a description of it as 'the so-and-so', such that we know there is a particular thing in existence that is the object of our knowledge, but lack direct awareness of that thing (1910–11, 113; 1912, 29). Unlike knowledge by acquaintance, knowledge by description is not a direct cognitive relation between the subject and the object of knowledge. Russell illustrates with the example of a person who knew Bismarck:

What this person was acquainted with were certain sense-data which he connected (rightly, we will suppose) with Bismarck's body. His body as a physical object, and still more his mind, were only known as the body and the mind connected with these sense-data. That is, they were known by description. (1910–11, 114)

Bismarck's wife, for instance, who heard and saw and spoke with him, had no direct awareness of either Bismarck's body or mind, but only of sense-data which she must assume

reflected the ‘real’ Bismarck. She therefore only ever knew her husband by description — the description borne by sense-data that she took to reflect his thoughts and movements and appearance. These description-bearing sense-data, however, were known to her by acquaintance.

In more simple terms then, we can have knowledge by acquaintance of the immediate objects of our conscious minds, but of nothing outside them. Everything that is not an immediate part of our conscious mind comes must transfer information through the medium of our thoughts or sense-experiences; this is often called ‘the veil of perception’. Thus, sense-data of which we are directly aware provides us with descriptive knowledge of some external object of which we are not directly aware.

In the rest of this section, we will see that the Emmanuel Three believe that many people who profess to know God really only know him by description. They exhort their hearers to dispense with mere descriptive knowledge, and instead come to know God through Godlikeness. By becoming Godlike, they argue, believers will no longer need to glean their knowledge of God indirectly through descriptive mediums; instead, they will have direct, immediate, intuitive access to God’s nature, in that their minds will be so filled with God that God becomes as immediately knowable to them as their own thoughts and sense data.

With this distinction in place, we want to see two things in the coming sections. First (in 8.2.2) we will see that Smith and Cudworth especially decry knowledge of God by mere description as inadequate and fundamentally lacking something. Then (in 8.2.3), we will see that the thing knowledge by description is lacking is ‘sensory’ or ‘vital’ contact with God in

the soul. Finally (in 8.2.4) we will analyse the Emmanuel Three's account of 'vital' contact with God to show that it counts as a theory of knowledge by acquaintance.

8.2.2 Against Knowledge of God by Description

Like many Puritans, the Emmanuel Three are critical of putative religious knowledge that consists only in words and abstract ideas rather than in life and actions. Cudworth's 1647 *Commons* sermon and Smith's first *Discourse* from 1650–1 both include a vigorous polemic against knowledge of God that is merely by description rather than by direct acquaintance. As Smith states early in the first discourse, divinity is 'something rather to be understood by a *Spiritual sensation*, then by any *Verbal description*' (SD 2).

Both Smith and Cudworth express misgivings about a culture obsessed with book-knowledge to the detriment of the living, practical knowledge which this verse makes the true measure of knowledge of God. Cudworth inveighs against those who 'think they know Christ enough, out of their Creeds and Catechismes, and Confessions of Faith' and 'doubt not but that they are sufficiently instructed in all the mysteries of the Kingdome of Heaven' (*Commons* 3). But their vast theological learning fails to actually acquaint them with God himself:

Cold Theorems and Maximes, dry and jejune Disputes, lean syllogisticall reasonings, could never yet of themselves beget the least glympse of true heavenly light, the least sap of saving knowledge in any heart. All this is but the groping of the poore dark spirit of man after truth ... Words and syllables which are but dead things, cannot possibly convey the living notions of heavenly truths to us. (*Commons* 5)

This is the general sense of all the repeated assertions in *Commons* that words and syllables alone can never convey the ‘vital’ and ‘living’ qualities of divine truth.

The vitality missing from verbal descriptions of God is, as we shall see, the sort of vitality that causes knowledge of God to spread from the intellect into the heart and will; in the language of the previous section, Cudworth is criticising here those who think they can get by with a ‘good mind’ but not a ‘good life’. The passages we are about to examine reveal the irony of such an approach: a good mind that does not lead to a good life turns out not to be a good mind at all, but only a shadowy imitation of it. Genuine knowledge of God and goodness necessarily leads to action.

In his first discourse, Smith is similarly negative about the capacity of verbal descriptions to capture God accurately. He warns:

It is but a thin, aiery knowledge that got by meer Speculation, which is usher’d in by Syllogisms and Demonstrations; but that which springs forth from true Goodness is θεϊότερόν τι πάσης ἀποδείξεως [something diviner than all demonstration], as *Origen* speaks ... (SD 4)

Smith and Cudworth both use the metaphor of the soul as animating principle of the body to describe the relation of divine truth to the words that express it. Without the actual acquaintance with God, words that describe truths about him are mere ‘skeletons’ of truth:

There is a *Caro* and a *Spiritus*, a *Flesh* and a *Spirit*, a *Bodie* and a *Soul*, in all the writings of the Scriptures: it is but the *Flesh*, and *Body*, of Divine Truths, that is printed upon Paper; which many Moths of Books and Libraries, do onely feed upon; many Walking Scheletons of knowledge, that bury and entombe Truths, in the Living Sepulchres of their souls ... (*Commons* 40)

Employing the same metaphor, Smith warns his audience at Queens that:

To seek our Divinity meerly in Books and Writings, is *to seek the living among the dead*: we doe but in vain seek God many times in these, where his Truth too often is not so much *enshrin'd*, as *entomb'd*. (SD 3)

For both men written texts and propositional descriptions of God are ‘the mere Bark and Rind of Truths’ (*Commons* 40) or an ‘*outward Shell*’ (Smith, SD 8). To focus on the outer shell and not the inward, living flesh is to miss the point.

Notably, Smith and Cudworth quote the same passage from Plotinus as part of their claim that God is not properly known by mere description. In *Commons*, Cudworth contrasts those who know God only by ‘*speculative notions, and opinions*’ and who ‘feed upon mere notions in Religion’ to those who ‘taste and relish God within themselves’ (*Commons* 16–17). Elaborating on this point, Cudworth quotes the ‘noble Philosopher’ Plotinus:

And indeed, as it was well spoken by a noble Philosopher, ἄνευ ἀρετῆς Θεὸς ὄνομα μόνον, that without *purity and virtue God is nothing but an empty name* ... (*Commons* 17)

In context, Plotinus is speaking of how useless it is to seek to know God without trying to attain virtue, since ‘it is virtue that leads one to the goal and that reveals god, when it is present in the soul ... but when uttered without true virtue, “god” is just a name’ (*Enn.* II.9.15). This is a corollary of the participatory epistemology we examined earlier (in 8.1.1), where knowledge of any thing requires resemblance or *homoiōsis* of that thing. Here in *Commons*, Cudworth applies this Plotinian principle to human beings who claim to know God without participating in God’s goodness: ‘so it is as true here, that without obedience to Christs Commandments, without the *life of Christ* dwelling in us, whatsoever *opinions* we entertain of him, Christ is but onely named by us, he is not known’ (*Commons* 17). So just as ‘God’ apart from his goodness is an empty name, knowledge of God divorced from practical virtue is not really knowledge of him at all, but an empty, hollow kind of shell of knowledge.

In his first *Discourse*, Smith quotes the same phrase from the *Enneads* in order to make exactly the same point as Cudworth. In this passage, Smith is making an argument we encountered above (8.1.5) that knowing God is always bound up with virtuous living: ‘there is an inward beauty, life and loveliness in Divine Truth, which cannot be known but onely then when it is digested into life and practice’ (SD 8f). In the course arguing that knowledge of God requires real virtue in the knower, Smith quotes the same line: ἄνευ ἀρετῆς Θεὸς ὄνομα μόνον, *Without Vertue and Real Goodness God is but a name* (SD 9 [Howard 2017, 105]).

In strikingly similar language, Smith and Cudworth describe the inability of ‘ink and paper’ to capture the living quality of knowledge of God:

it is not so much a *System* and *Body* of saving Divinity, but the *Spirit* and *vital Influx* of it spreading it self over all the Powers of mens Souls, and quickening them into a Divine life: it is not so properly a Doctrine that is wrapt up in ink and paper, as it is *Vitalis Scientia*, a living impression made upon the Soul and Spirit (SD 323)

But there is a *Soul*, and *Spirit* of divine Truths, that could never yet be congealed into Inke, that could never be blotted upon Paper, which by a secret traduction and conveyance, passeth from one Soul unto another; being able to dwell and lodge no where, but in a Spirituall being, in a Living thing; because it self is nothing but *Life* and *Spirit*. (*Commons* 40f)

We must not think we have then attained to the *right knowledge* of Truth, when we have broke through the *outward Shell of words & phrases that house it up*; or when by a *Logical Analysis* we have found out the dependencies and coherencies of them ...” (SD 8)

We should hear echoes here of the Emmanuel Three’s polemic against imputed righteousness, and the metaethical position underlying it. Like the empty notion of imputed righteousness, a merely descriptive knowledge of God lacks the one thing that really reconciles us to him: Godlikeness, internal participation of God’s nature.

It is worth noting that in all this, Smith and Cudworth are again expressing a common theme of Puritan preaching, where we are exhorted not to content ourselves with knowing God in a merely notional way, but to invite him into our hearts and affect our conduct (albeit with a distinctive, Platonic spin). As Peter Harrison notes, an ‘explicit technical vocabulary’

begins to emerge in the English religious literature of this period, ‘in which the virtues of experimental knowledge are contrasted variously with mere speculative knowledge, with book learning, with second-hand reports of particular religious experiences, and with the doctrinal pronouncements of religious authorities’ (Harrison 2011, 414; e.g. Preston 1638, 52, 176; Brinsley 1652, II:58, 205; Tuckney 1676, 174). We see once more that the Emmanuel Three are able to echo homiletical themes that were essential to Puritan religious culture, which goes a long way to explaining why they continued to command respect in the Puritan community despite their controversial views.

8.2.3 Reason as Spiritual Sense

If mere verbal description does not provide genuine knowledge of God, then what does? The answer we should expect, given what we saw earlier about Godlikeness and a good life, is that it is the proper use of reason and the practical transformation of the whole soul that brings us beyond merely verbal descriptions of God and into actual, participatory knowledge of him. This is certainly the Emmanuel Three’s view, but I want to focus now on a particular metaphor that they (and Smith especially) use to describe what it is like to know God by participation. The metaphor is that of sensation: when we know God by thinking, feeling and acting *like* him rather than merely thinking or speaking *about* him, our knowledge of him becomes a kind of vision or direct perceptual contact. As the Renaissance Platonist Marsilio Ficino puts it, the soul knows God through ‘a certain viewing or touching of things divine’ (PTh. XII.4.5).

Sensory language of this sort abounds in both the *Commons* sermon and Smith’s *Discourses*:

There is an Inward sense in Mans Soul, which, were it once awaken'd and excited with an inward tast and relish of the Divinity, could better define God to him than all the world else ... (Smith, SD 426–7)

[E]very true Christian ... tasteth and relisheth God within himself, he hath *quendam saporem Dei*, a certain savour of him (Cudworth, *Commons* 16–17)

Religion 'sett[es] the mind in intimacy and acquaintance with God', so that the soul 'see[s] the brightness and excellency of divinity' (Whichcote, *Works* IV, 300)

This emphasis on 'spiritual sensation' has received renewed scholarly attention in recent years (thanks particularly, in the case of Smith, to the valuable work of Derek Michaud [2011, 2017, 2019]).

It is worth noting briefly that this language of spiritual sensation is also conspicuously present in the works of two early Emmanuel Platonists: Peter Sterry and Laurence Sarson. As Mario Micheletti has noted, Sterry's spiritual sense language is particularly similar to Smith's (Micheletti 1976, 187; cf. Sterry 1657, 30; Wallace 2011, 65–9). In a 1645 treatise, Sarson argues that divine truth has a sensory quality, and draws frequently on Platonic sources (Sarson 1645 12–14, 43–4, 51–2). At one point, Sarson and Smith even quote the same ancient saying attributed to the priests of Mercury: 'γλυκὸν ἡ ἀληθεία, Truth is sweet' (Sarson 1645, 13; cf. SD 16). We may speculate that the Platonic theme of inwardly sensing God's goodness was one of the earliest themes that the Platonically-minded men of Emmanuel explored together.

But our focus here is on the Emmanuel Three, and Smith and Cudworth in particular.⁸⁵

In Smith's description, goodness is a substance with a phenomenal quality analogous to colour, pitch or sweetness. Just as it is impossible to describe colour to a person born blind, this phenomenal quality of goodness is impossible to capture in words, but can only be grasped by direct acquaintance:

But yet all that Knowledge which is separated from an inward acquaintance with Vertue and Goodness, is of a far different nature from that which ariseth out of a true living sense of them ... by which alone we know the true Perfection, Sweetness, Energie, and Loveliness of them, and all that which is οὔτε ῥητὸν, οὔτε γραπτὸν [neither spoken nor written], that which can no more be known by a naked Demonstration, then Colours can be perceived of a blinde man by any Definition or Description which he can hear of them. (SD 15).

Cudworth uses exactly the same sensory language in *Commons*.

A Painter that would draw a Rose, though he may flourish some likenesse of it in figure and colour, yet he can never paint the sent and fragrancy ... Neither are we able to inclose in words and letters, the Life, Soul, and Essence of any Spirituall truths; & as it were to incorporate it in them. (*Commons* 6)

Thus, we cannot learn about goodness only by hearing or reading about it; we must 'find it within our selves, and be experimentally acquainted with it' (*Commons* 6). As Whichcote

⁸⁵ For spiritual sense language in Whichcote's works, particularly in relation to morality, see *Works* I:34; II:9, 188–9, 361; III:179, 369, 395; IV:300–2.

concisely sums it up, ‘We ought not *Name* God; without a *Sense of Him* upon our Minds.’ (Aph #1000; cf. *Works* II:188; III:369).

This turn to sensory language might seem to contradict the Emmanuel Three’s insistence that God is to be known through reason. If God is to be known through reason and understanding, then why shouldn’t ‘syllogisms’ and ‘logical analysis’ be appropriate means of acquainting ourselves with him?⁸⁶ But this objection forgets the Emmanuel Three’s commitment to the older Platonist tradition on which the rational faculty has powers beyond those ‘discursive’ abilities standardly attributed to it. Like most philosophers of their time, they agree that reason is the faculty that analyses, syllogises, ratiocinates and judges of the truth of things. But they also hold that, when applied to Truth itself (i.e. God himself) rather than particular truths (and aided by efforts of intellectual asceticism), reason can apprehend things in much the same way that a human eye apprehends colour: by direct, sensory perception. It is this sensual, phenomenal quality of divine truth that merely descriptive, propositional knowledge about God fails to capture. The reason mere descriptions of God fail to bring about a practical transformation in the knower is that they lack this sensory, phenomenal feel.

The rational faculty that performs this perceptual function can be distinguished from the one which does sums and syllogisms; Smith distinguishes between discursive and perceptual reason using the Plotinian terms *dianoia* and *nous* (‘We shall then converse with God τῷ νῷ, whereas before we convers’d with him onely τῇ διανοίᾳ, with our *Discursive faculty*, as the *Platonists* were wont to distinguish’ [SD 16]). But even so, the faculty that

⁸⁶ In a similar vein, Michael Gill (2004; 2006, 38–57) has argued that Cudworth contradicted himself by espousing a ‘sentimentalist’ morality that marginalises reason in *Commons* and *Lincolnes*, and then switching to a ‘rationalist’ morality in his later works. For a response that reads a consistent moral epistemology that brings reason and sentiment together, see Kaldas forthcoming.

directly perceives goodness is nonetheless reason itself; a higher form of the same faculty that deals with sums and syllogisms. It is simply that when turned to God as an object, reason itself is transformed into a kind of vision; in Smith's striking words:

When Reason once is raised into a converse with God, it is turn'd into Sense: That which before was onely *Faith* well built upon sure Principles, (for such our *Science* may be) now becomes *Vision* ... (SD 16)

At these heights of contemplation, reason is transformed from a faculty that merely thinks and syllogises into one that perceives God experientially. But importantly, although it is a function of reason, this vision of God is still a fundamentally moral endeavour (Michaud 2015, 301–3).

Again, Smith draws on Plotinus for confirmation: 'Divinity is not so well perceiv'd by a subtile wit, ὡςπερ αἰσθήσει κεκαθαυμένη, *as by a purified sense*, as *Plotinus* phraseth it' (SD 10).⁸⁷ A 'purified sense' for Plotinus is a mind purified from attachment to earthly things and restored to its innate kinship with God and the Good: 'You must first actually become wholly god-like and wholly beautiful if you intend to see god and Beauty' (*Enn.* I.6.9). a mind that is still attached to earthly things must squint through a 'sight bleary with vices and not having been purified', which is 'not able to see all the bright objects', because it lacks 'a kinship with that which is seen' (*Enn.* I.6.9). And so Smith tells us that if we want to see God with the eye of reason, we must be like 'The *Platonists* [who] were herein so wary and solicitous, that they thought the Mindes of men could never be purg'd enough from those earthly dregs of Sense and Passion, in which they were so much steep'd, before they could be capable of their divine *Metaphysicks* ...' (SD 10). The 'inward beauty, life and loveliness in

⁸⁷ Howard (2017, 107) cites *Enn.* II.4.15, apparently mistakenly.

Divine Truth ... cannot be known but onely then when it is digested into life and practice' (SD 8–9). The phenomenal experience of God's goodness is only accessible to those whose lives and actions are Godlike.

This notion of seeing God directly through a 'purified sense' is therefore, exactly parallel to the idea we have already examined that in order to know God, one must have a Godlike mind. One only perceives God when one's soul is Godlike; the 'spiritual eyes' that give us direct, experiential knowledge of God's goodness are dull and bleary unless they are themselves suffused with the goodness they are trying to see.

This is the overarching message of the entire first portion of Cudworth's *Commons* sermon. It is only when 'the *life of Christ* deeply rooted in his heart' that a believer 'tasteth and relisheth God within himself' (*Commons* 16f). We cannot be 'experimentally acquainted' with virtue until we 'find it within our selves' (*Commons* 6). This is why, in fact, Cudworth is so negative about imputed righteousness as a means of reconciling with God: instead of speculatively trying 'to perswade our selves that we are certainly elected to everlasting happinesse' by some mysterious heavenly transaction, we should look inwards to see 'the *image of God*, in righteousness and true holinesse, shaped in our hearts' (*Commons* 8–9).

To make this point, Cudworth appropriates Plotinus' advice to beginners on the quest to see God. At the beginning of the philosophical quest, 'the soul is not yet able to look at the bright objects before it' and so 'must first be accustomed to look at beautiful practices, next beautiful works'. It does this by striving to become virtuous and beautiful itself, through moral improvement, 'until the divine splendour of virtue shines in you'. At that point, there

will be no need to look elsewhere for vision of God: when you have become virtuous and Godlike, 'you have at this moment ascended here, no longer in need of someone to show you. Just open your eyes and see ...' (*Enn.* I.6.9)

Cudworth compares Puritan attempts to persuade themselves that they have been forensically declared righteous in God's eyes to looking at objects too bright for a soul just beginning on the quest for virtue: 'Gods everlasting decree, is too dazeling and bright an object for us at first to set our eye upon' (*Commons* 9). Instead, he advises:

it is far easier and safer for us to look upon the raies of [God's] goodnesse and holinesse as they are reflected in our own hearts, and there to read the mild and gentle Characters of Gods love to us, in our love to him, and our hearty compliance with his heavenly will: as it is safer for us if we would see the Sunne, to look upon it here below in a pale of water; then to cast up our daring eyes upon the body of the Sun it self, which is too radiant and scorching for us. The best assurance that any one can have of his interest in God, is doubtlesse the conformity of his soul to him. (*Commons* 9)

As we have often seen Smith do, Cudworth has co-opted a Plotinian metaphor for a distinctly Puritan audience. If a Christian wants to see proof of their good standing with God, they should not cast their eyes up into the dazzling heights of God's everlasting decrees (as Puritans are wont to do), but they should instead turn their eyes inwards, where we can directly and immediately perceive God's presence.

8.2.4 Acquaintance and the Veil of Perception

We have seen that for the Emmanuel Three, knowledge of God's goodness is a matter of phenomenal or sensory perception (where purified intellect is the sense organ). But this is not yet enough to show that they think we know God himself by direct acquaintance, in Russell's terms, for there is still the problem of the 'veil of perception'. In Russell's framework, ordinary sensations do not bring us into direct acquaintance with sensory objects: we only have direct acquaintance of the sense-data produced by an external object, not of the object itself. The external object remains shrouded in a 'veil' of intermediary sense-data. When we have sensory experience of a red apple, for instance, we have knowledge by acquaintance of the redness of our experience, but not of the apple itself. The apple itself is only known to us by description, as 'the apple that makes me experience red sense-data', that is by the description carried to us by a particular experience. But we are never directly aware of the apple itself.

If we know God by through sensory perception, as the Emmanuel Three suppose, should not the same problem apply? Are we not becoming acquainted with our own internal sense-data, our own phenomenal experiences of God's goodness, rather than with God himself? Whichcote shows little interest in Cartesian philosophy, but both Smith and Cudworth display great familiarity and affinity for the works of Descartes, whose theory of ideas brought this problem to forefront of philosophical discussion (Saveson 1959; Sailor 1962). Smith's discourses do not address the veil of perception or sensory knowledge directly, but Smith draws heavily on Descartes' theory of the passions and animal spirits (SD 93–6, 116–20). Cudworth, however, clearly argues that sense-perception does not bring us into contact with material objects, but only with our own sense-data. Both Smith and Cudworth, then, almost certainly held that ordinary acts of sensation do not bring us into direct

acquaintance with sensible objects. But both hold that inwardly sensing God's goodness through reason is importantly different from ordinary sensation, in that God becomes literally 'mingled' with the thoughts of a virtuous mind, so intimately that in perceiving their own thoughts and ideas, a virtuous person is also directly perceiving God.

Cudworth, certainly, does not naively suppose that sensation brings us into direct acquaintance with its objects. This is consistent with their Platonism; as noted by Daniel Howe, the Cambridge Platonists were particularly drawn to the epistemology laid out in Plato's *Phaedrus*, according to which: 'the objects our senses encounter are but shadows of the eternal Ideas existing in the Mind of God. True human wisdom consists in understanding not the shadows but the reality behind them' (Howe 1988, 471). Counterintuitively, if we want to perceive the true essence of any thing, even a physical object, we must not look at its outward form using our bodily senses, but rather look into our own souls. As Cudworth puts it, 'the Universal *Intelligible Essences* of Things ... are the proper and immediate *Objects of Science*' (TISU 735 [misprinted as 728]), rather than material objects themselves (cf. More, *Poems* 59f).

As early as his *Lincolnes* sermon, Cudworth points out that all the sensory and affective qualities of the external objects are really just qualities of our own ideas excited or awakened by those external objects; we are only directly acquainted with the ideas excited by external objects, not with the objects themselves:

... for, according to the ancient *Democritical* Philosophy, this whole visible World is nothing else but mere extended Bulk, and hath nothing Real in it but *Atomes* or *Particles* ... But all the Colour, Beauty and Varnish, all that which charms and

bewitches us in these Objects without us, is nothing but the Vital Sensations and Relishes of our own Souls ... Those things which we are enamoured with, thinking them to be without us, being nothing but the Vital Energies of our own Spirits ...
(*Lincolnes* 39–40)

Lincolnes was composed no later than 1664, and as noted earlier we know that Cudworth was already engaging with Cartesian philosophy by 1649 (Hartlib 18/1/1A; Passmore 1951, 7–14). and Cudworth's *True Intellectual System* and *Treatise on the Eternal and Immutable Reality* both deal at length with our lack of direct awareness of physical objects (TISU 638ff; TEIM 40–3, 62–6, 112; see also Passmore 1951, 29–32). Cudworth would certainly agree with Russell that in ordinary sensation, we are directly acquainted with our own sense-data (which Cudworth calls the 'vital sensations' or 'vital energies' of our souls), and not with the objects that excite them in us.

But when it comes to perceiving God with the 'purified sense' of a virtuous intellect, no such veil of perception intrudes between the sensing soul and the object of sensation. God can therefore be known far more intimately and immediately than the material world. Direct epistemic access to the physical world is impossible is because the knowing soul is of a radically different nature to the physical world, and all knowledge is by likeness or resemblance (as saw in 7.1.1). According to Cudworth, despite being infinite and impossible to grasp fully — God is far more present to our souls than physical objects are, because while the soul is fundamentally dissimilar to material world but fundamentally, structurally akin to God; '[T]here is *Cognatio quaedam* a certain near *Kindred* and *Alliance* between the Soul and God' (*Lincolnes* 40; cf. Origen, *De Princ.* I.1.7); in Ficino's words, 'only mind flows from

mind' (PTh XII.4.5). Thus, the more rational and harmonious with God's mind we become, the more our souls are filled with God's actual presence:

It is true indeed, that the Deity is more *Incomprehensible* to us than any thing else whatsoever ... but for the very same reason, may it be said also, in some sence, that it is more Knowable and Conceivable than any thing. As the Sun, though by reason of its Excessive Splendour, it dazle our weak sight, yet is it notwithstanding far more Visible also ... Where there is more of Light, there is more of Visibility, so where there is more Entity, Reality, and Perfection, there is there more of *Conceptibility* and *Cognoscibility*; such an Object Filling up the Mind more, and Acting more strongly upon it. (TISU 639; cf. EL 46; PTh. XII.4.5)

Since God is perfect mind and perfect reason, and we are mental and rational beings, we are far more capable of knowing God by resemblance than the mindless and irrational *res extensa* without us.

Consequently, God can become a direct object of acquaintance by uniting himself so intimately to a virtuous soul that he becomes as immediately present to them as their own thoughts and sense data (cf. Farrer 1968, 6–11; Evdokimov 2002, 59). As Smith writes, God is present to virtuous souls in a way that he is not present to vicious souls:

God is not present to Wicked men, when his Almighty Essence supports them and maintains them in Being; ἀλλ' ἔστι τῷ δυναμένῳ θίγειν παρὸν, but *he is present to him that can touch him, hath an inward feeling knowledge of God and is intimately*

united to him; τῷ δὲ ἀδυνατοῦντι οὐ πάρεστι, *but to him that cannot thus touch him he is not present.* (SD 391; quoting *Enn.* 6.9.7).

Similarly, Cudworth asserts that when our will and affections are conformed to God through rational participation in him, God himself comes to dwell in the heart: ‘then we are acted by God himself, and the whole Divinity floweth in upon us’ (*Commons* 21). The more a soul resembles God, the more concrete God’s presence in that soul becomes: God ‘is pleased to impart himself to [his people] in this life, so far as they are capable of his Communications’ (SD 391).

As we have seen, our capacity to ‘see God’ inwardly is a direct function of our resemblance to him: ‘God hath stamp’d a Copy of his own Archetypal Loveliness upon the Soul, that man by reflecting into himself might behold there the glory of God, *intra se videre Deum* [*see God within himself*], see within his Soul all those Ideas of Truth which concern the Nature and Essence of God, by reason of its own resemblance of God’ (SD 382). This requires us to be Godlike, of course — to have a ‘good mind’ and a ‘good life’ — but if we satisfy these conditions, looking in at one’s soul is also looking in at God, because God becomes literally present in a Godlike soul who responds to that:

... true God-like vital influence whereby the Divinity derives it self into the Souls of men, enlivening and transforming them into its own likeness, and strongly imprinting upon them a Copy of its own Beauty and Goodness ... Briefly, *It is that whereby God comes to dwell in us, and we in him.* (SD 309)

Indeed, to describe the end of the salvific process, Smith uses a Greek patristic term — θέωσις, theosis or deification — to describe the kind of unity that obtains between God and virtuous soul.⁸⁸ A soul that completely renounces self-love and has all its will and affections directed towards God as the highest good: ‘becomes *Deified*. This indeed is such a Θεωσις *Deification* as is not transacted merely upon the stage of *Fancy* ... but in the highest Powers of the Soul by a living and quickning Spirit of true Religion there uniting God and the Soul together in *the Unity of Affections, Will and End*’ (SD 407). So the resemblance of the soul to God constitutes a real unity, a real coming together of God and the soul.

In *Commons*, Cudworth draws on the same patristic tradition, citing Athanasius of Alexandria’s famous dictum Θεὸς γέγονεν ἄνθρωπος ἵνα ἡμᾶς ἐν ἑαυτῷ θεοποιήσῃ [God became a human being that we might become God in him], or in Cudworth’s freer translation, ‘*God was therefore incarnated and made man, that he might Deifie us*’ (*Commons* 26).⁸⁹ How exactly do we become deified? Cudworth answers: by having moral goodness in our souls, because, ‘the very proper Character, and Essentiall Tincture of God himself, is nothing else but *Goodnesse*’ (*Commons* 26).

Even though God is present everywhere in the universe in a general sense, he is present in a particularly concrete way in virtuous souls: ‘this *Divine life* begun and kindled in any heart, wheresoever it be, is *something of God in flesh*; and, in a sober and qualified sence, *Divinity incarnate*; and all particular Christians, that are really possessed of it, so many *Mysticall Christs*’ (*Commons* 33–4). This ‘divine life’ that becomes incarnate in virtuous

⁸⁸ On deification in Greek patristic thought, see Russell 2006. The two quotations from Gregory of Nazianzus’ *Orations* at the beginning of this discourse (SD 375) suggest Gregory as one of Smith’s sources for this term.

⁸⁹ Quoting Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, ch. 54. On Cudworth’s notion of deification, see Clark 2017, 873f.

souls is ‘is nothing else but Gods own Self communicated to us, his own Sonne born in our hearts’ (*Commons* 35).

Here, Smith is at his most unapologetically Platonic, or rather, Plotinian: a person attains genuine knowledge of God when ‘by *Universal Love* and *Holy affection* abstracting himself from himself, endeavours the nearest Union with the Divine Essence that may be, κέντρον κέντρον συνάψας, as *Plotinus* speaks; knitting his owne centre, if have any, unto the centre of the Divine Being’ (SD 20; cf. 321). Smith goes on: ‘To such an one the *Platonists* are wont to attribute θεϊαν ἐπιστήμην a true *Divine wisdom* ... Such a knowledge is alwaies pregnant with *Divine Vertue*, which ariseth out of an happy Union of Souls with God, and is nothing else but a living Imitation of a Godlike perfection [sic]’ (SD 20).

As a necessary result of this ‘happy Union’, the knower’s way of life is conformed to God’s goodness:

This Life is nothing else but God’s own breath within him, and an *Infant-Christ* (if I may use the expression) formed in his Soul, who is in a sense ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης, *the shining forth of the Father’s glory* (SD 21).

This state of communion with God can never be fully achieved in our earthly life, because in our current state, our ‘*Imaginative Powers* ... will be breathing a grosse dew upon the pure Glasse of our Understandings, and so sully and besmear it, that we cannot see the Image of the Divinity sincerely in it’ (SD 21). Nonetheless, the kind of religious knowledge we can have in this earthly state is still full-blown communion with God’s essence: ‘a true heavenly

fire kindled from God's own Altar' (SD 21), and so constitutes genuine (however limited) acquaintance with God's nature.

In sum, a virtuous person perceives God's goodness directly: not through the veil of verbal description or the mental medium of sense-data. In the Emmanuel Three's Platonic religious epistemology, God's goodness is as immediately present to a virtuous soul as that soul's own thoughts and experiences: 'the Spirit of a Good man (as it is well express'd by the Philosopher) ἀκίνετως ἐνίδρυται ἐν τῇ οὐσίᾳ τῆς θείας ἀγαθότητος, & is alwaies drinking in Fountain-Goodness, and fills it self more and more, till it be filled with all the fulness of God' (SD 392).

8.3 Misperceiving God

The previous two sections have clarified the sense in which the Emmanuel Three believe reason gives us epistemic access to God. As it turns out, they also have a fairly developed theory to explain how popular misconceptions and mistaken characterisations of God come about. In short, their idea is that when a person fails to live virtuously and enter into perceptual contact with God, their conception of God is untethered from the reality and becomes distorted. These inaccurate images of God are unbound and unguided by the constraints of reason, but they still form in fairly predictable ways. To wit, one's image of God always reflects one's own vices. If we think of the purified reason of a virtuous soul as a clear glass through which God is seen accurately, a passionate and vice-clouded reason is like a cloudy, off-colour lens which projects its blemishes and irregularities onto its object. Thus, inaccurate pictures of God are systematically distorted according to the particular vices and passions that afflict the person who holds them.

Through the right use of reason and virtuous living, a person can nurture the innate seeds of Godlikeness implanted in their souls into full-blown Godlikeness. When this is done, the soul can turn its rational eye inward and encounter God's goodness not only as an object of dry, rational contemplation, but as an object of direct, phenomenally-charged acquaintance.

After introducing the Platonic theory of how the passions and the 'animal imagination' distort our image of God (8.3.1–3), we will see that the Emmanuel Three all identify the same passion as the root cause of the voluntarist misperception (8.3.4–5).

8.3.1 Passions as Epistemic Distortions

Therefore, our business in time, is to get the victory over those unreasonable passions which annoy us; that so we may readily ascend into the state of intellectual being.

(Whichcote, *Works* IV, 255)

We noted in passing earlier on that bodily passions and moral vices have a distorting and benumbing effect on the soul's ability to perceive God within itself. What is it about bodily passions that so stifle the soul's sense of God? Again, the Emmanuel Three's basic terms of reference here come from Platonist sources.

Likewise, we saw that the Emmanuel Three draw heavily on the Platonic moral teaching that one must abstract one's soul from one's body in order to purify it from the body's irrational and distorting influence. Plato and Platonists describe this need to keep the body pure in both a metaphysical key and an epistemological key. In metaphysical terms, the

soul must not mingle with matter because the soul is essentially immaterial, like God and the Forms, and mixing with matter adulterates and corrupts it (e.g. *Phd.* 67a; *Enn.* I.6.5).

But they also describe the same idea in epistemological terms: the soul must separate from the body because the soul's goal is to know the truth of things by seeing God, and the body interferes with the soul's ability to know. It is not that the body simply blinds the soul from seeing the truth of things; at least then, we might realise the problem. Far more insidiously, the body presents us with a counterfeit truth, one which leads us to do evil things and forget our rational nature. The body 'fills us with wants, desires, fears, all sorts of illusions and much nonsense' Plato warns (*Phd.* 66c). In more practical terms, the body feeds a particular set of values to the soul, which prompt it to seek things like wealth, pleasure and power, all of which are not really valuable and distract the soul from its true goal of rational union with God: 'the body and its desires cause war, civil discord and battles, for all wars are due to the desire to acquire wealth, and it is the body and the care of it, to which we are enslaved, which compel us to acquire wealth, and all this makes us too busy to practice philosophy' (*Phd.* 66c–d). If a soul heeds the promptings of these bodily passions, as Origen describes it, then 'a man forgets himself and is unaware of what befits him, his whole purpose centres around his bodily experiences and in all his movements he is occupied with the pleasures and lusts of the body' (Origen, *De Princ.* II.9.1; cf. *Enn.* V.1.1; Duerlinger 1985, 319–20).

When the soul lives like this, it becomes 'mixed' and 'filled with', 'sewn' and 'riveted' to the body. But importantly, the soul's adulteration through mixture with the body has a cognitive component; the soul is held to the body by its beliefs as much as by any sort of metaphysical mixture of substances:

... every pleasure or pain provides, as it were, another nail to rivet the soul to the body and to weld them together. It makes the soul corporeal, so that it believes that truth is what the body says it is. As it shares the beliefs and delights of the body ...
(*Phd.* 83d)

This is what happens when the soul is ‘enmeshed in the body, and has come to experience the same things as it, and has come to believe the same things’ (*Enn.* I.2.3). It has adopted the body’s perspective as its own, and values what the body values. Smith is clearly drawing on this Platonic language when he warns us that ‘[t]he more deeply our Souls dive into our Bodies, the more will Reason and Sensuality run into one another, and make up a most dilute, unsavoury, and muddie kinde of knowledge’ (SD 15–16).

When the body is mixed up with the soul in this way, the soul cannot perceive the world rationally, as it really is; instead, the passions drive us to value things that are not really valuable (*Works* IV, 432–4). Only by eliminating the ‘muddiness’ of bodily attachments and passions can we ready ourselves for proper awareness of the Good: ‘we must shut the Eyes of Sense, and open that brighter Eye of our Understandings, that other Eye of the Soul ... This is the way to see clearly; the light of the Divine World will then begin to fall upon us, and those sacred ἐλλάμψεις [irradiations], those pure *Coruscations* of Immortal and Ever-living truth will shine out into us, and in Gods own light shall we behold him’ (SD 16).

8.3.2 *Animal Imagination*

Because reason is so vitiated in an impassioned soul, its lower, animal faculties begin to usurp the functions that should be played by reason. In particular, the soul’s conceptions of things,

which should be drawn from rational participation in God's ideas, instead come to be formed by the faculty of 'fancy' or 'imagination'. In the Emmanuel Three's Platonic psychology, imagination is an animal instinct: it serves a role for animals that we nowadays attribute to instinct: imagination paints an attractive picture of the things the animal needs to survive and presents this picture to the animal's soul, prompting it to act accordingly (cf. Plotinus, *Enn.* VI.8.3.8–18). The Christian Origen of Alexandria explains that imagination is the faculty which 'moves' animals to action: 'there exists in certain animals such an image, that is, a desire or feeling, which by a natural instinct impels and excites them to ordered and complex motion; thus, spiders weave webs and bees build hives at the prompting of an instinctual 'image' that makes them desire to do so (*De Princ.* III.1.2 [Lat]).

Animals lack free will and moral culpability because 'beyond this imaginative nature, [they] possess nothing else' (*De Princ.* III.1.2 [Gk]); they inevitably, unthinkingly do whatever their animal imagination prompts them to. A rational creature, however, 'has something besides its imaginative nature, namely reason, which judges the images' (*De Princ.* III.1.3 [Gk]). Unlike animals, rational creatures can use reason to accept or reject the valuations presented by their animal imagination, and this is what makes them capable of praise and blame, and vice and virtue: 'So it happens that, since there are in the nature of reason possibilities of contemplating good and evil ... we are worthy of praise when we devote ourselves to the practice of good, and of blame when we act in the opposite way' (*De Princ.* III.1.3 [Gk]; cf. *Enn.* III.1.7).

The upshot is this: a soul that is enslaved to passions and mixed with the body is one that lets its animal imagination tell it what to seek and what to avoid. This is what Whichcote means when he warns that we are 'more apt to *live the life of our body* than of our *spirit*', and

that when this happens, ‘motion follows the body, more than the spirit ... imagination and fancy do mingle themselves with the motion of pure intellect’ (*Works* II, 353f; cf. III:165). If we want to escape the debilitating deceptions of the passions, we need to abstract our soul from our bodies so that reason can get a clear view of things and correct the distorted valuations our passions try to force on us (cf. *Enn.* I.1.9).⁹⁰

Whichcote captures the danger of trusting imagination rather than reason when he warns: ‘it is a true rule, that imagination makes the case within, tho’ not without; for as a man conceives, so is the case within ... but the state of things is determined ... [and] fixed by God in the moment of creation’ (*Works* III:371; cf. I:137). To have a ‘good mind’, as we saw earlier, is to conceive of things as they really are; to have the conceptions of our minds align with the reasons of things without. But if we listen to the promptings of animal imagination rather than reason, we are bound to conceive of things other than they are.

8.3.3 Imagination and Divine Anthropomorphism

So, an impassioned soul is alienated from its divine nature and perceives the world on the body’s terms. What happens when a soul corrupted in this way tries to think about God? What does it conceive him to be like? Recall that the Emmanuel Three distinguish between the bare descriptive notion of God and actual, perceptual contact with God. It is helpful here to extend their sensory metaphor: think of the bare notion of God as a sort of black and white outline, which requires direct, phenomenal experience of God’s goodness to provide colour and vibrancy. When a soul is impassioned and sees everything through the lens of imagination rather than reason, it can still have a descriptive notion of God; a bare, black-and-white

⁹⁰ All of this bears a striking resemblance to the theory of passions Descartes gives in *The Passions of the Soul* (see Saveson 1959, Dillon 1990). Cf. also Cudworth’s views, discussed in Hutton 2017, 478.

outline. But because its vision of goodness is so skewed by the passions, it colours in the image with its own carnal values. The result is a picture of God that has the same basic properties as the real God — all-powerful, all-benevolent, etc. — but whose character reflects the soul's own vices and passions. In the Emmanuel Three's language, the resulting picture of God is 'fanciful' and 'imaginary' in the worst ways: a paradigm case of imagination making something the case within that is not the case without.

As part of his critique of imputed righteousness in the 1647 *Commons* sermon, Cudworth uses this metaphor of painting and colouring to explain why it is that some people believe God is a nepotistic despot who is content to ignore the sins of the elect. He writes:

indeed nothing is more ordinary, then for us to shape out such monstrous and deformed Notions of God unto our selves, by looking upon him through the coloured Medium of our own corrupt hearts, and having the eye of our soul tinctured by the suffusions of our own lusts. (*Commons* 22–3)

The mistake we make here is to colour in our picture of God with values drawn from the worst parts of us: 'draw him out thus with the blackest Coal of our own corrupt hearts; and to make the very blots and blurs of our own souls, to be the Letters, which we spell out his name by' (*Commons* 24).

But this is not how rational perception works. The animal imagination, informed by the irrational moral perspective of the body, does not depict things as they really are. Thus, this nepotistic God is a pure fancy, a mere imagination, existing 'within' the mind but not 'without':

But there is no such God as this any where in the world, but onely in some mens false imaginations, who know not all this while, that they look upon themselves instead of God, and make an Idol of themselves, which they worship and adore for him; being so full of themselves, that whatsoever they see round about them, even God himself, they colour with their own Tincture ... (*Commons* 25)

Smith uses similar language in his account of the popular ‘anti-deities’ (false conceptions of God) imagined by superstitious persons and atheists in his second, third and eighth *Discourses* (Micheletti 1976, 334). Unlike reason, which forms its conceptions of God by letting God impress his archetypal ideas upon it like a seal on wax, imagination is an unruly and irrational faculty that tries to impose its own carnal perspective on reality. It pulls the bare concept of God ‘down’ into its bodily perspective and tries to stamp it with its own idea of goodness:

As they say of the force of *Imagination*, that *Vis Imaginativa signat foetum*; so *Imagination* may stamp any Idea that it finds within itself upon the *Passions*, and turn them as it pleases to what Seal it will set upon them, and mold them into any likeness ... (SD 368–9)

Genuine, rational knowledge of God is a result of God’s impressing himself on the soul, but this imaginative picture of God is driven by ‘the power of [one’s] own *Imagination* deriving that *Force* to it which bears it up and guides all its motions and operations’ (SD 369).

In one of Whichcote's later sermons, we find a good illustration of how this process plays with regard to a person's conception of heaven and eternal life. Because impassioned souls hold a distorted, materialistic view of the good, their imagination fashions a picture of heaven as nothing but a place where earthly pleasures extended in duration or increased in intensity. Whichcote is certain that no man 'immersed in a sensual brutish life, can have any true notion of heaven, or of glory: these must signify no more to him, than a local happiness, and sensual enjoyment ... something that is suitable to the sensual mind: that is the highest they have' (*Works* III, 48; cf. Origen, *De Princ.* II.9.2). Thus, the bare concept of heaven is stamped or coloured in with a distorted colour scheme drawn from the passion-driven imagination. This is what Smith calls 'a Sensual and Fleshly apprehension of God' and 'Fleshly apprehensions of Divine things' (SD 370, 372).

Imagination only has this freedom to conceive of things other than they are in souls where God and real goodness is not present through rational participation. People who think God can be bribed into ignoring our vices only think this, 'Because they are not acquainted with God, and know him not as he is in himself, therefore they are ready to paint him forth to themselves in their own shape' (SD 363). When people neglect reason in matters of religion, Whichcote explains, they 'run into ways of fond imagination, folly, and self-conceit; misrepresenting God to themselves ...' (*Works* III, 257). One of his favourite verses to quote on this point is Romans 1:21: 'But [they] became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened' (*Works* III, 236, 237, 244, 245, 247, 256). He quotes it because, according to the text of Romans, the consequence of these imaginings was that they misrepresented God: 'And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man ...' (Rm 1:23).

This distorted cognitive and moral outlook, more than anything else, is what hinders the soul from knowing God. According to Plotinus, ‘it is honouring these things and dishonouring themselves that is the cause of their absolute ignorance of god’. When one views the world this way, one’s soul becomes an unfit medium for receiving the effluxes and impresses of God’s communicative goodness; in an impassioned soul, Plotinus continues, ‘neither the nature nor the power of god could ever “be impressed in one’s heart”’ (*Enn.* V.1.1.). Or in the words of his pupil Porphyry: ‘inasmuch as a man longs after the body and the things of the body in so far does he fail to know God, and is blind to the sight of God’ (1856, 64). We know that in the Platonic view, we must be like God in order to know God. But it turns out, we must also see things like God in order to know him. To be like him also involves knowing and valuing things the way that God does.

This subtle point of Platonic moral philosophy is essential to understanding why it is that the Emmanuel Three speak of passions as poisoning or numbing our internal acquaintance with God. There is, Smith tells us, an ‘*incrumentum immunditiei* [crust of filth] upon all corrupt Minds, which hinders the lively taste and relish of [divine truth]’ (SD 286; cf. *Commons* 78–82; *Works* III:99). Our ‘imaginative powers’, representing and supporting our passions, are the chief obstacle to our minds forming a clear picture of God: ‘Our own *Imaginative Powers*, which are perpetually attending the highest acts of our Souls, will be breathing a grosse dew upon the pure Glasse of our Understandings, and so fully and besmear it, that we cannot see the Image of the Divinity sincerely in it’ (SD 21; cf. 425–9). Whichcote agrees: ‘The *illapses* and breakings in of God upon us, these require a mind that is not subject to passion; but in a serene and quiet posture; where there is no tumult of imagination’ (*Works* III, 47; cf. SD 445).

Interestingly enough, all of this is expressed by Cudworth as early as his 1638/9 letters to Stoughton. In the second letter, he writes of how ‘the beams of divine light’ that God is always sending into the soul are distorted by the dark glass of flesh and sensuality:

Our soules, as the substance of them is cloistered up within the thicke walls of the body, so their apprehensions are much bounded and imprisoned within the darke dungeon of sence; and because all their actions are from sence and thro sence, like pure Sunbeams, that receive a Materiall Impression of color if they pass thro colord glasse, so they by percolation thorough the body have a grosse and earthly tincture: and indeed have allso lost their owne primitive purity (Solly 1856, 290)

Here already we find the idea that the bright impresses we receive from God are always being coloured by the irrational perspective of the body, so that our image of God takes on the a ‘grosse and earthly’ hue. This anxiety about the passions is summed up nicely in one of Whichcote’s *Aphorisms*:

Those, who are *Crafty*, think; the Wisdom of God warrants Him to Deceive:

Those, who are *Revengeful*, think; the Goodness of God permits Him to be Cruel:

Those, who are *Arbitrary*, think; the Sovereignty of God is the Account of his

Actions. Every one attributes to God, what he finds in Himself ... (Aph. #388)⁹¹

⁹¹ It is worth noting that the Emmanuel Three’s insistence that our passions distort our view of God opens them up to a serious counterattack from their Calvinist opponents. Recall that some Calvinists made a crypto-naturalist argument that double predestination actually accords with God’s essential goodness in some way that is either difficult or impossible for unregenerate human minds to understand (6.4 above). The Emmanuel Three rejected this view mostly by countering it with a positive picture of God’s essential goodness which they thought appealed our moral intuitions far better than the Calvinist picture. But by acknowledging that passions inevitably distort our perception of God’s goodness, the Emmanuel Three reveal a weak point their Calvinist opponents could easily exploit. Even if they are right that God’s goodness, as far as we can apprehend it, is inconsistent with the arbitrariness of the double decree, it remains possible that in the deeper recesses of God’s nature, those depths of his goodness which our vices keep hidden from us, there lies some reason or justification for the double decree. In some parts of his life, Sterry seems to have held a view like this (Sterry 1675, 146; Wallace

8.3.4 Self-Will: Will Overruling Reason

So the Emmanuel Three believe that if we are not careful, our imaginations will fashion a concept of God that reflects our own bodily passions rather than the reality. What does all this have to do with the double decree? Well, consider this small aside in Smith's discourse on *Divine Knowledge*: after arguing that the only way to know God accurately is to conquer the passions, he warns his hearers not to be too fanatical in their defence of any particular theologians' teachings, because:

A bitter juice of corrupt affections may sometimes be strain'd into the inke of our greatest Clerks, their Doctrines may tast too sowre of the cask they come through ... Some men have too *bad hearts* to have *good heads*: they cannot be good at Theorie who have been so bad at the Practice, as we may justly fear too many of those from whom we are apt to take the Articles of our Belief have been ... (SD 12; cf. Aph. #285)

In other words, Smith fears that the doctrines of certain widely read and revered theologians are tainted by the distorting hue of those theologians' passions. Clearly then, Smith thinks that animal imagination and impassioned perception of God played a part in the theological controversies of his time.

2011, 64). However, as we saw earlier, a great deal of the disagreement here turns on whether one thinks that our instinctive reaction to the double decree is a result of our fallen, degenerate consciences or a result of God-planted morality. The Emmanuel Three would probably respond that if reprobation does accord with God's goodness, it is strange that virtuous and Godlike human beings are so unlike the God who would decree it. As Edward Fowler will write in a later account of the Cambridge Platonist's views: 'For my part, I can believe no sence of any Scripture true, that plainly contradicts the self-evident notions of Good and Evil, that God hath put into my soul, and were born with me ...' (Fowler 1670, 218).

If we look carefully at the Emmanuel Three's critiques of the Calvinist God which we examined in previous chapters, we find that all three identify the same, particular passion as the root cause of their opponents' theological error. In other words, the Emmanuel Three have a kind of 'error theory' to explain why so many people have come to believe that God is an arbitrary, domineering tyrant with no regard for goodness or justice. In sum, they contend that God seems this way to such people, because their idea of God is drawn not from rational acquaintance, but from an animal imagination fuelled by a particular passion which they call self-will (or a cluster of similar passions attached to it like 'self-love' and 'ambition'). Persons afflicted by this passion prize control over others, brute power and self-determination above all else, and they inevitably project these vices onto God.

When a soul corrupted with this sort of passion thinks about God, its animal imagination draws a picture of God consistent with the values and desires suggested by self-will and self-love: a God who can do whatever he wills without constraint, who can set, modify and ignore rules as he sees fit. Thus, they end up with a God who arbitrarily reprobates millions, and bends the rules for his elect like a nepotistic despot. And because the soul is crusted over with this un-Godlike passion, God's communicative goodness cannot penetrate the soul to correct the mistake.

It is worth noting that self-will plays an important role in late Platonic philosophy. It is often singled out by ancient Platonists as the reason our souls fell out of communion with the Good and came to be embodied in the first place. In Plotinus, for example, we read that our initial falling away from the Good into materiality was caused by a cluster of vices all centred around a desire to exist on one's own, apart from the One:

The starting point for their evil is, then, audacity (ἡ τόλμα), generation, primary difference, and their willing that they belong to themselves (τὸ βουληθῆναι ἑαυτῶν εἶναι). Since they appeared actually to take pleasure in their autonomy (τῷ αὐτεξουσίῳ), and to have made much use of their self-motion (τῷ κινεῖσθαι παρ' αὐτῶν), running in the opposite direction and getting as far away from home as possible, they came not to know even that they themselves were from the intelligible world. (*Enn.* V.1.1)

Words and phrases like βουληθῆναι ἑαυτῶν εἶναι (literally, willing to be one's own) and αὐτεξουσίῳ (literally, authority over oneself) translate naturally into self-will (cf. SD 359; Louth 2007, 42).

In human society, this dangerous passion of self-will which caused the original fall of souls manifests itself as a love of popularity and political ambitiousness. According to Olympiodorus, the prideful passion that drives human beings to seek power and popularity is the same passion that caused the primordial 'falling away'. He tells us that souls first fell into bodies due to the passions of 'ambition' (φιλοτιμία) and 'the will to rule' (φιλαρχία) (*Lectures on the Phaedo* VI.2, [Westerink trans. 96]; cf. *Phd* 82c). These two passions are mentioned in the *Phaedo* (82c) as characteristic of the carnal way of life Plato considers to be the most inimical to philosophy. So not only did these souls desire to be autonomous and self-ruling, they also wanted to wield power dominion over others who would be forced to honour and obey them.

The upshot is that in late Platonic thought, the 'original sin' of immaterial souls was something like a desire to be separate and autonomous from the Good, coupled with a desire

to exert dominion and authority over others. Whichcote captures the essence of this passion when he preaches against the ‘horrid exorbitancy’ of self-will. People who suffer from this passion ‘*do because they will.*’ He warns that there is:

Nothing more injurious, in respect of another’s right ... nothing more heterogeneous, in respect of rule and order, than self-will ... He that gives himself up to self-will, he is a rebel against God’s creation; he is a confounder of right, a vexation to all men ... (*Works II*, 402)

This should remind us of the Emmanuel Three’s discussion of tyranny (discussed above in 6.3). A tyrant is so harmful to their subjects they refuse to subject their wills to the rule of right; their desire for power and control drives them to reject the constraints that the immutable rule of right would place on their dominion. The self-willed person Whichcote describes in this sermon who disdains ‘rule and order’ and ‘confounds of right’, is a tyrant on much smaller scale.

In such cases, harm is done when a self-willed person subverts the natural order of things by letting their will bulldoze over the dictates of reason and understanding: ‘It is contrary to the *order* of things; for Will and Affections to go before Understanding and Judgement. It is natural, that *Will* should follow; and that *Understanding* should go before’ (Aph. #814; cf. #38). In this way, self-will embodies the essence of all passions, rule in the soul ‘whenever a man’s will moves and goes *before* the reason of his mind; much more, if a man hath a will *against* the reason of his mind’ (*Works IV*, 431).

In a different sermon, Whichcote describes the way self-willed people conduct themselves in debate: ‘they offer no reason for what they say. Their presumption, imagination and conceit, that is their reason they give: whereas reason is the only assurance of truth’ (*Works* IV, 395). Again, this is a kind of small-scale tyranny: the self-willed person refuses to be constrained by the ballast of reason, and instead attempts to bulldoze over rational argument with brute force of imagination and conceit (which are cognitive productions of self-will rather than of reason and intellect).

For John Smith, self-will inevitably afflicts any soul that lacks vital, rational participation in God; in the absence of the beams of divine illumination to invigorate the intellect, the will starts to ‘swells’ beyond its bounds and starts to overpower reason:

Ever since our Minds became so dim-sighted as not to pierce into that Original and Primitive Blessedness which is above, our Wills are too big for our Understandings, and will believe their beloved prey is to be found where Reason discovers it not: they will pursue it through all the vast Wilderness of this World, and force our Understandings to follow the chase with them: nor may we think to tame this violent appetite or allay the heat of it, except we can look upward to some Eternal and Almighty goodness which is alone able to master it. (SD 136)

So self-will is a disordered state of soul that comes about when our intellect becomes so weak that our wills overpower it; instead of following the intellect as it ought to, the will starts to drag the intellect along behind it (resulting in animal imaginations rather than rational ideas). Only direct perceptual contact with God — ‘looking upward to some Eternal and Almighty goodness’ — can bring this unruly and irrational state of soul into order.

8.3.5 Self-Will as the Cause of Voluntarism

If we return now to the Emmanuel Three's critiques of the double decree and imputed righteousness, we find that all three identify self-will or a similar vice as the corrupting passion at the root of their opponents' theological error. The reason some people think God is entirely unbound by any rule of goodness, or that he can reconcile himself to internally sinful souls by a mere act of imputation, is that their own souls are afflicted by the passion of self-will, and they are projecting this disorder onto God.

Let us begin with Smith. In his discourse on God's attributes, Smith criticises Calvinist idea that God predestines the reprobate to Hell in order to glorify himself. During his discussion of God's glory, he notes disapprovingly that some conceive of God as a vain and narcissistic despot, 'as it were casting about how he might erect a new Monopoly of glory to himself' (SD 141). Such people suppose that God only made the world and human beings so that they could glorify and praise him, and so flatter his ego. Here, Smith explains this misperception of God as a byproduct of the vainglory and love of popularity of the people who hold it:

And I doubt we are wont sometimes to paint him forth too much in the likeness of corrupt and impotent men, that by a fond ambition please themselves and feed their lustfull phansies with their own praises chanted out to them by their admirers, and another while as much sport themselves and applaud their own Greatness, to hear what hideous cries the Severity of their own Power can extort from those they have a mind to make miserable. (SD 141)

Smith does not call this passion ‘self-will’, but this is clearly the same set of vices which Plato calls φιλοτιμία and φιλαρχία (*Phd.* 82c): a love of popularity coupled with a desire to impose and exert one’s power over others. He makes the same criticism of the voluntarist concept of God even more strongly in his earlier discourse on *True Religion*, this time explicitly naming self-will and the desire to impose upon others as the offending passions:

Some are apt to look upon God as some Peevish and Self-will’d thing, because themselves are such: and seeing that their own Absolute and naked Wills are for the most part the Rules of all their actions and the impositions which they lay upon others; they think that Heaven’s Monarchy is such an *arbitrary* thing too, as being govern’d by nothing else but by an *Almighty Absolute Will*. (SD 396)

By contrast, any soul that has perceptual contact with God by resembling and participating in his goodness knows that God is not like this at all: ‘the Soul that is acquainted most intimately with the *Divine Will*, would more certainly resolve us, That God’s *Unchangeable Goodness* ... is also *the Unchangeable Rule of his Will*’ (SD 396). In saying this, Smith is doing precisely what Tuckney complained about: rejecting the God of the double decrees on the grounds that ‘according to his reason, he cannot comprehend; how they may stande with His goodness’ (EL 38). Smith claims that anyone who knows God through rational participation also knows from direct experience how inaccurate the voluntarist picture is. The voluntarist picture is a projection of voluntarists’ own psychological disorderliness onto God, imagining that his will is as uncontrolled by reason as their own.

In Cudworth’s unpublished manuscripts on free will, we find a similar diagnosis of those who conceive of God as an arbitrary power. He laments that even though ‘arbitrary

selfwill' (the ability to will absolutely anything) is not a perfection at all, but a vice, yet 'though there be many that think that God cannot be God without it'. He proceeds to explain how this conception of God comes about:

yet this doth but show the Blindnesse & degeneracy of Mankind & the blind intoxicating witchcraft of Vice that it makes men transfer their very vices upon the Deity because they are strongly facinated wth this opinion that lawlesse unbounded arbitrary self-will is the greatest Liberty ... They therefore draw out a picture of God according to their own dark & vitious apprehensions & make him to be nothing but arbitrary Self-will armed wth infinite Power. (BL Add MS 4980, 43)

Once again, self-will in a human being colours their picture of God's perfections, and produces a distorted and vicious caricature.

In his discourse on the *Shortness and Vanity of a Pharisaick Righteousness*, Smith makes a similar criticism of the view that God can choose to reconcile us to himself by a pure act of will rather than by internally transforming us into his likeness. Such people suppose that 'they may pacifie [God] and purchase his favour with some *cheap services*, as if Heaven it self could become guilty of *Bribery*, and an *Immutable Justice* be flattered into *Partiality* and *Respect of persons*' (SD 363). Why do they conceive of God this way? Smith explains:

Because they are not acquainted with God, and know him not as he is in himself, therefore they are ready to paint him forth to themselves in their own shape: and because they themselves are full of *Peevishness* and *Self-will*, arbitrarily imposing and prescribing to others without sufficient evidence of Reason, and are easily

inticed by *Flatteries*; they are apt to represent the Divinity also to themselves in the same form (SD 363).

Just like the self-willed arguers Whichcote mentions above, who offer no reasons for their points of view apart from imaginations and presumptions, Smith contends that self-willed people who arbitrarily impose on others with total disregard for right reason are the sort of people who think God is able to waive the rules of justice by a mere act of will.

Cudworth makes a similar critique of imputed righteousness in his *Commons* sermon when he contrasts what he takes to be the true notion of God — who only loves essential goodness — with the false notion of God who can reconcile himself to un-Godlike souls with a click of his omnipotent fingers:

it is another mistake which sometimes we have of God, by shaping him out according to the Model of our selves, when we make him nothing but a *blind, dark, impetuous Self will*, running through the world; such as we our selves are furiously acted with, that have not the Ballast of *absolute goodnesse* to poize and settle us.
(*Commons* 27)

The only reason we sometimes think God can bypass his absolute goodness by an act of will is that our own wills are unconstrained and running amok, without the ‘ballast’ of reason and goodness. Likewise, in Cudworth’s sermon at *Lincolnes-Inne*, he identifies reliance on imputed righteousness as the fruit of an irrational, animal imagination powered by ‘self-love’:

Some ... make to themselves a mere phantastical and imaginary Religion, conceiting that there is nothing at all for them to do, but confidently to believe that all is already done for them, all imputed and accounted to them ... But such a Faith as this is nothing else but mere Phancy and carnal Imagination, proceeding from that natural Self-love whereby men fondly dote upon themselves, and are apt to think that God loves them as fondly and as partially as they love themselves, tying his affection to their particular outward Persons, their very Flesh and Blood; hereby making God a Being like to themselves, that is wholly acted by arbitrary Self-will, Fondness and Partiality; and perverting the whole Nature and Design of Religion, which is not mere Phantastry and an histrionical Shew, but a real Victory over the real Evil of Sin ... (*Lincolnes* 57)

Again, the conception of God implied by the doctrine of imputed righteousness is identified as a product of fancy and imagination, driven by the passion of ‘arbitrary self-will’. The conception of God at play has been shaped by an instinctual, impassioned soul projecting its own carnal values of favouritism, privilege and arbitrary authority onto God. But as Cudworth gravely warns, ‘there is no such God as this any where in the world, but onely in some mens false imaginations’ (*Commons* 24; cf. SD 351).

In sum then, the voluntarist positions we observed the Emmanuel Three challenge in Part II of this study — the double decree and justification by imputed righteousness — can be traced back to a particular kind of soul-sickness. Those who accept these voluntarist positions are those whose wills have grown swollen and usurped the role that should be played by reason. Rather than bringing their will into line with the reason of things, they want to impose

their will on the world and on others; and they imagine that God resembles them in this respect. They think God has a little regard for the reason of things as they do.

8.4 Reason Bridging the Divine and the Human

To sum up the argument of this chapter and relate it to this study's master argument, let us recall a theme we encountered earlier in our examination of the Emmanuel Three's critique of the voluntarist God as arbitrary and tyrannical. We saw in chapter 6 that the Emmanuel Three reject the arbitrary view of God by drawing on their metaethical naturalism: God cannot be an arbitrary tyrant, they contended, because there is an eternal and immutable rule of goodness, prior to God's will. We have now seen that this eternal and immutable rule that prevents God's rule from collapsing (*per impossibile*) into tyranny is the 'reason of things', the rational ideas contained in God's mind.

In this chapter, we have looked 'under the hood' of this framework, at the inner workings of the Emmanuel Three's theory of reason. We have seen how and why they think reason can provide epistemic access both to God's moral character and to the eternal and immutable moral principles that govern divine and human actions. On the Emmanuel Three's epistemology, we have access to this rational blueprint of reality through our ability to participate in God's goodness and perceive him directly with the eye of reason. This effectively puts God and human beings on the same moral plane in matters of election and predestination. God will be able to justify his every decree and judgement by a standard of reason that we have as much access to as God does. In this way, the immutable laws of reason form a bridge between God and human beings, a repository of shared motives and principles of action, which make God's actions intelligible and even (to some extent) imitable for human

beings. This is the sense in which Smith quotes with approval Cicero's saying that reason is '*Vinculum Dei & Hominis*' (SD 389).

And this is the sense in which Tuckney rightly accuses Whichcote and his company of rejecting God's decrees of double predestination on the grounds that 'according to our reason, we cannot comprehend; how they may stand with His goodness' (EL 38). Rational participation in God reveals him to be the exemplar of all the best virtues we perceive in good human beings, and also reveal (and make us partakers of) God's communicative intent.

It is important to note that the Emmanuel Three are not necessarily claiming that they know better who God is because they themselves are personally more virtuous than their Calvinist colleagues. In appealing to reason — to what our natural and inborn sense of what is good and evil — the Emmanuel Three are appealing to the broad consensus of all rational beings. As Whichcote remarks, 'there never was any considerable *opposition* against the main principles of natural or reveal'd truth ... No man of any competence or proportion of goodness hath risen up against any of these great instances of morality, or the main articles of Christian faith, but these have had (as I may say) *universal acknowledgement*' (*Works* III:31). In other words, just as good people in all times and cultures have agreed on basic moral values like fairness and benevolence, good people always acknowledge the moral sense of Christian doctrine (even if they do not take the further step of confessing it themselves). The idea of an infinitely benign God with indefatigable communicative intent is one which 'any man that is in the use of sober reason will acknowledge [as] a thing of fairest belief' (*Works* III:38).

But the doctrine of reprobation is repugnant to this universal moral consensus; it strikes all good persons who hear it as abhorrent. The Calvinists chalk this up to the depravity of fallen human nature, but the Emmanuel Three, who take this universal reason as the very ‘voice of God’ in Christians and heathens alike, hold that any doctrine so repugnant to reason must be a misreading of divine revelation. Edward Fowler, a later apologist for the Cambridge Platonists, captures the essence of the argument here when he writes: ‘That doctrine [viz. double predestination] doth as evidently contradict the natural notions God hath imprinted in the original constitution of humane souls, as can be; at least to *me* it seems so to do, so doth it to thousands of others that are neither Fools nor Mad-men’ (1670, 212–3). So the Emmanuel Three’s appeal to reason does not rest on the claim that they, personally, are more virtuous than their opponents; their point is just that inasmuch as any good human being feels repulsed by the double decree, their repulsion is based on a direct acquaintance with God and should be trusted.

(9) Liberty, Violence and Practical Reason

We might sum up the Emmanuel Three's Platonic outlook as a tension between two deep intuitions. On the one hand, there is the iron immutability of reason and goodness: reality is what it is, and no amount of willing or conceiving can bend it. But on the other hand, we have their ardent rejection of all forms of tyranny and imposition, their abhorrence of violence and brute force. These two poles seem opposed: one tends towards an uncompromising fixedness and the other to freedom from all constraints.

In this last chapter, we will see that not only does the Emmanuel Three's Platonic outlook acknowledge this tension; it even embraces and revels in the paradoxical way that absolute freedom and absolute fixedness come together at the highest levels of being. But most importantly, we will see that what allows them to bring these two poles together is what Stephen Darwall perceptively identified in Cudworth's later works as a theory of practical reason (1995, 109–48). We will see in this last chapter that this theory of practical reason draws together all the components of the Emmanuel Three's Platonic outlook we have considered in earlier chapters — metaethical naturalism, divine communicative intent, and participatory epistemology. This will illustrate the extent to which the Platonic outlook binds together not only the thought of Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith, but also runs through each of their views on different philosophical topics like obligation, freedom, and pedagogy.

Section 9.1 discusses the way in which, following Platonists like Plotinus and Ficino, the Emmanuel Three hold that God is both infinitely free and necessarily determined by his essential goodness. 9.2 shows how this paradoxical freedom-in-necessity also provides the model for the Emmanuel Three's conception of the liberty human beings can attain by living virtuously. Finally, 9.3 demonstrates that this conception of liberty informs the Emmanuel

Three's broader notions of pedagogy and epistemology, especially with regard to reason's role in religion.

9.1 Divine Reason and Divine Liberty

In chapter 5 on metaethical naturalism, we saw that the Emmanuel Three insist that God's will is regulated by the eternal and immutable reasons of things, grounded in his intellect. In this way, God's intellect precedes and directs God's will; he cannot will anything contrary to the normative picture of the good defined by his intellect. We saw also (4.1) that Puritan theologians tended to reject this view on the grounds that it limited God's sovereignty (Roberts 2012, 61f). If God's will must abide by principles of morality and reason, those principles would be greater than God; to be fully sovereign, God's will must be unbound by any rational or moral principles. This is the sort of position Cudworth has in mind when he writes in one of his freewill manuscripts:

They make pendulous, wavering & versatill Freewill to be an equall Perfection every way & to be an essentiall attribute of the Deity & conceive it to be the most glorious prerogative thereof, not to be necessarily but contingently determind to Goodnesse Justice & Wisedome, thinking hereby to advance to advance his Dominion Sovereignty & Liberty ... (BL Add MS 4980, 45)

In other words, such thinkers make the ability to act contrary to goodness an essential part of what it means to be divinely powerful. For them, a God whose will is necessarily determined towards goodness is a God 'constrained' or 'under the thrall' of goodness, and so not really a God at all (Roberts 2012, 61).

The Emmanuel Three, however, would not agree that their position puts God under the ‘constraints’ of goodness. J. R. Roberts’ summary of Whichcote’s views also applies to the rest of the Emmanuel Three, for whom: ‘Goodness is not a constraint on power because it is not external to the nature of power; Goodness is the essence of power’; since ‘goodness and righteousness are constitutive principles of God’s nature ... it makes no sense to conceive of them as constraints’ (2012, 62). Thus, God’s will is ‘limited’ in that he can only will what is good. But power and liberty just are ‘willing what is good’: the ability to will otherwise is the ability to be less powerful. In Smith’s words, to imagine God as free to stray from his goodness is ‘to make God free to dethrone himself, and set up a *Liberty* within him that should contend with the royall prerogative of his own boundless Wisdome’ (SD 133).⁹² So the Puritans who want to defend God’s sovereignty by giving him the ability to act contrary to goodness are really, from the Emmanuel Three’s perspective, insisting that God has the ability to diminish his sovereignty; the freedom they take to be a divine perfection is in fact an imperfection.

The consequence is that the Emmanuel Three’s concept of God is at once superlatively free and sovereign, and also necessarily and totally determined towards the Good:

God indeed is the most determinate Being in the whole Universe, free from fortuitous Chance & Contingency ... God is the most determinate Being in this sense because he is one way; but not as if he were under necessity ... yet he is most of all in his own Power ἄρχω[v] καὶ κύριος ἑαυτοῦ a Prince & Lord of himself, he is most

⁹² Cf. Whichcote, Aph #261, #274, #724; *Works* II:398 and Cudworth, *Commons* 37; FW 185–90; Carter 2011, 92–5; BL Add MS 4980, 44–6. Henry More defends a similar position, see Lichtenstein 1962, 180–2.

of all autexousious⁹³ in a simple refined sense under the Power of nothing but himself & his own Perfection (BL Add MS 4980, 43; cf. Carter 2011, 93)

God's freedom consists in his being 'a nature of infinite love, goodness, or benignity, displaying itself according to infinite and perfect wisdom' (FW 187). The ability to be anything apart from this would be an ability to be less free.

This insistence on the identity of power and goodness is a deeply Neoplatonic intuition. Marsilio Ficino, for example, contends that 'God is what He is such that He could not be something else ... or rather, He would not want to be something else because He is all good'; in fact, 'to be able or want to be different would be weakness or folly' (PTh. II.12.2). Likewise, in the *Enneads*, Plotinus considers whether the One is imperfect because it is 'enslaved' to its own good nature and cannot be other than it is (*Enn.* VI.8). He concludes that a perfectly simple being like the One cannot be 'enslaved' to its own nature, because the slave and the enslaver are identical:

One can speak of slavery to one's own nature if you distinguish between the thing enslaved and what it is enslaved to. For how could a simple nature ... not be free? For you could not say that it acts according to its nature, such that its substantiality is one thing and its activity is another, if indeed in the intelligible world existence and acting are identical.⁹⁴ If, then, the activity is not because of another thing nor up to another thing, how can it not be free? (*Enn.* VI.8.4.23–30; cf. Ficino, PTh. II.12.2).

⁹³ A neologism coined by Cudworth from the Greek philosophical term *αὐτεξουσία*, meaning 'self-power' or 'control over oneself' (see Hutton 2017, 469).

⁹⁴ Cf. John Sadler's *Masquarade*: 'Action is so necessary a Companion to Entity, that all things seeme to have as much Activity, as Entity' (1640, 34).

In the philosophical vocabulary of the Emmanuel Three's context, this amounts to saying God's will cannot be constrained by his intellect because his will and intellect are identical. This is, in fact, more or less exactly what the early Emmanuel Platonist John Sadler says in his *Masquarade*: God's will is 'A *Rationall Will* (may I so speak?) A *Rationall Activity*. *Action* is so necessary a Companion to *Entity*, that all things seeme to have as much *Activity*, as *Entity*' (1640, 34). God's will and action are identical with his entity or essence. As Cudworth puts it, 'In his essence was his will & therefore there was nothing in him different from his Essence ... ' (BL Add MS 4980, 44). In this sense, Cudworth can even say that 'that God was first of all his own Will' (ibid). So there is nothing extrinsic to God's will — not even another 'part' of God such as his nature or intellect — that determines God's will; God's will is determined to the good because it is a fundamentally *good* will.

On this view then, God has — or rather, God *is* — an *understanding will* or a *willing intellect*. In Ficino's words, 'in God being, understanding, and willing are truly identical ... not only does He will just as He is and as He understands ... but He also understands and exists just as He wills' (PTh. II.12.6; cf. II.11.15). Just as God is perfect mind or intellect, he is also perfect will: so long as we remember that his will is not blind and arbitrary but suffused with intellectual light.

This is an exact counterpart to the Emmanuel Three's insistence that moral knowledge and virtuous living must go hand in hand. In fact, I would suggest that what we have here, in this Plotinian union of divine goodness, reason and will, is a theory of divine practical reason. Stephen Darwall perceptively notes that Cudworth's later works contain an implicit theory of practical reason, in that he holds that 'Perfect mind must be practical; it must be determined to

will some things and not others'; for there are 'motives intrinsic to perfect intellect' (Darwall 1995, 115). As Darwall sums it up, for Cudworth:

Whatever an action's being morally good or evil ... is more precisely, it is part of intellectual nature — a modification of mind. There is no independent normative order that is somehow disclosed to mind. The fundamental categories and truths of morality are implicit in intellectual activity itself. (1995, 126)

This is exactly what the Plotinian identity of God's nature and will implies: there is nothing extrinsic to God's will that determines it to conform to goodness and reason; part of what it means for God to be a perfect and divine intellect is that his will is determined a certain way.

We end up with a picture of God who is at once the freest and the most determined thing conceivable. He is, on the one hand, absolutely and indefectibly oriented towards goodness; in this sense, 'the divine nature ... is the most determinate thing in the world' (BL Add MS 4980, 46). But this fixed orientation does not make God less free; on the contrary, it makes him pre-eminently free, for the goodness to which he is determined is essentially rational, and (in Smith's words) 'the *Spring* of all *Liberty* [is] nothing else but *Reason*' (SD 133). Insofar as God's intellect is always clear, bright and intrinsically-motivated towards the good, God is infinitely free: 'the Divine Understanding beholding all things most clearly, must needs beget the greatest *Freedome* that may be' (SD 134).

9.2 Human Liberty

He is least of all Free; nay, he is the veriest Slave in the world; who hath either Will or Power to vary from the Law of Right (Aph #725)

Unlike God who is always indefectibly determined towards the good, human beings are able to make voluntary movements either towards or away from it. This ability to depart from the good is more accurately described as a power to ‘attend’ more or less to the ideas of reason and goodness innately built into the soul. All moral failure thus boils down to a failure to bring practical reason to bear on a situation: ‘But because he might have made a better judgement than now he did, had he more intensely considered, and more maturely deliberated, which, that [he] did not, was [his] own fault’ (FW 179; cf. 201).⁹⁵ The extent to which we attend to the good and let it direct our actions is not determined by necessity of nature, and we are liable to praise or blame depending on how well we attend to the good (FW 183; cf. Hedley 2019, 152–4).

If one considers this ability to neglect practical reason as a kind of freedom, then in this respect, we are more free than God who is indefectibly determined to the good by necessity. But as we have already seen, the ability to depart from the good is not a freedom at all in the view of the Emmanuel Three. As Whichcote puts it: ‘*Posse male agere* [the ability to do evil], is an Imperfection: for such liberty of power is not in God. To do *amiss*, is not *Power*; but *Deficiency* and *Deformity*’ (Aph #13; cf. #725, #1134). As Passmore (summarising Cudworth’s view) expresses it, ‘Free-will is not ... the same thing as freedom ... To talk of us possessing the power to choose the good life implies that we are not perfect: a perfect being does not *choose* the good life ... he *lives* the good life by nature’ (1951, 61f). The power to do other than good is just the power to be less free; in this sense, our ability to neglect practical reason is in fact an imperfection, to be shed as we increase in virtue and

⁹⁵ Only Cudworth had a developed (though still problematic) theory of contingent free-will, i.e. a theory of exactly how it is that we are susceptible of praise or blame (see Passmore 1951, 58–67; also cf. Stanciu 2007 and Leech 2017b).

Godlikeness. The more Godlike a person becomes, the less possible it becomes for them to will contrary to the good, and the more fixed to the good they become, the freer they become. The end goal is a state of perfect, Godlike liberty where, just like God, we are at once immutably determined towards the good but also superlatively free and autonomous.

There is a problem here, however. Let us grant Plotinus his contention that God is not ‘enslaved’ to his own nature because he *is* his nature, and one cannot be enslaved to oneself. It is still the case that a Godlike human being is absolutely determined by the goodness of *God’s* nature. If that is what human perfection consists in, then it seems that human perfection precludes being free in the same way that God is free: for in allowing ourselves to be conformed to God, are we not making ourselves passive to him, and letting him dominate and impose himself upon us? Perfect human beings, it seems, are not ‘lords and princes’ of themselves as God is of himself; God is the lord and prince of them, and they are driven about like slaves beneath his stifling yoke.

The only thing that prevents this from being the case, from the Emmanuel Three’s perspective, is the human capacity for reason. They heartily agree that a person who obeys God’s commandments without apprehending the reasons for them is not free or liberated; in fact, they typically describe this sort of behaviour as ‘servile’ or ‘mechanical’. Plotinus himself points out that even those who believe true things and do good actions are not necessarily autonomous, for ‘it is not the case that, if someone has the right belief and acts on it, he would really uncontroversially have autonomy [ἀὐτεξούσιον] unless he knows why it is right, and is not driven towards his duty by chance or imagination’ (*Enn.* VI.8.3.5–10). Without a rational understanding (in the practical, intrinsically-motivated sense we discussed earlier) of what one is doing, one cannot be doing it autonomously.

The Emmanuel Three give this Plotinian emphasis on rational autonomy a decidedly Protestant rhetorical spin, turning it into a critique of Pharisaic and hypocritical religion where people make an outward show of being righteous, without having absorbed the nature of righteousness into themselves. Thus, Smith writes:

That is but *a Mechanical religion* which moves no longer then some *External weights and Impulses* are upon it, whether those be ... from some Worldly thing or from God himself, while he acts upon men from *without* them, and not from *within* them. (SD 470)

Similarly, Cudworth warns against taking religion to be ‘a *Legall and Servile* thing’, consisting in nothing but ‘the *dead Law of outward Works*, which indeed if it be alone, subjects us to a *State of Bondage*’ (*Commons* 73). People who keep God’s commandments in this way are ‘onely Passive to God’s Law, and unwillingly subject to it (as an Enemy) for fear of Wrath and Vengeance. And this must needs be a state of miserable Bondage and Servility, Distraction and Perplexity of minde’ (*Lincolnes* 43). In this respect, they are fundamentally un-Godlike, for their determination to the good is a violent, external imposition rather than an autonomous outflowing of their inner character; they are not masters and lords of themselves but servile slaves to God.

What distinguishes mechanical religion from real Godlikeness is that a Godlike person becomes so closely identified with God’s practical intellect that God’s motives really are their motives. In the way we explored earlier (8.1.4 and 8.1.5), the rational vision of God’s immutable intellect becomes the rational vision of a Godlike human soul. In a person whose

mind has become Godlike in this way, Plotinus remarks, the inclination towards the good is not de-autonomising or violent, for ‘How can something borne towards the Good be forced, when the desire is voluntary, and if it knows, in moving towards it as good, that it is good?’ (*Enn.* VI.8.4.14–16) When an agent apprehends the good by reason — in a practical and will-determining way — they become fixed to the good without losing their autonomy (Leroux 1996, 308–9).

Accordingly, Whichcote explains that the only way to really obey God’s commandments is to perceive the reasons behind them:

It is hard to obey; where we see no Reason for the Thing in itself: where there is a Reason for it, in the thing itself; if I maintain a right Temper and Complexion of Soul, I shall have a Complacency and Harmony with the things that are good: but where we see no Reason, only are obliged by a Positive Command; we are bent upon Liberty ... (Aph #498; cf. Gill 1999, 274)

There is something false and disingenuous about servile obedience of this sort: seeing no reason for God’s commands, the mechanical believer secretly longs to be free of them.⁹⁶

This is where reason plays such a crucial role. Without reason, God’s laws are an alien imposition on us, arbitrarily restricting our conduct. But as we have seen (see 6.3.2, 8.1 and 8.4 above), reason acts as a ‘bridge’ between God and human beings in that when properly

⁹⁶ Recall here Whichcote’s comparison of reconciliation by imputed righteousness to a conflict between two ‘parties mutually incensed and exasperated one against another’ who are grudgingly forced to reconcile, so that ‘though an amnestie be consented-to, yet they are not friendes; but in heart enemies’ (EL 14). A mechanical Christian nurses the same hidden enmity towards God in their heart. Cf. Smith, ‘... *fear* of God alwaies carries in it a secret *Antipathy* against him’ (SD 365).

used, it allows us to participate in God's mind and see the world from God's perspective. From a moral point of view, this means that we can access for ourselves the reasons that drove God to command what he did.

All this means, really, is that reason allows us to discover that what God commands is really good in itself. As Whichcote repeats many times in the *Aphorisms*, 'Virtue has *Reward*, and Vice has *Punishment*, arising out of itself' (Aph #241; cf. #133, #145, #162, #253; cf. Gill 1999, 274–80). Religion and virtue are nothing but the restoration of a human being's natural normative psychological state (Aph #41, #382; Culverwell 1971, 49). This is a basically Platonic moral framework, where the prudential (what is good for the agent) and the moral (what is morally good) come entirely together (*Theaet.* 176e–177b; Cicero, *De Re Publica* 3.22). As Smith puts it, a rational soul apprehends the eternal law 'that *Plato* speaks of ... *That Purity and Holiness shall be happy, and all Vice and Sin miserable*' (SD 150; cf. *Phaedrus* 248c). Smith gives us a good indication when he explains the reason for the commandment Jesus identifies as the greatest of all, namely 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind' (Mt 22:37): 'Had God himself been any thing else then the *First and Greatest Good* of man, then to have loved him with the full strength of all our Faculties should not have been *the First and Greatest Commandment*, as our Saviour tells us it is' (SD 396). In other words, God's commandments are all designed to bring us into harmony with God himself, who is 'the First and Greatest Good of man' (cf. Aph #444, #540). So long as we only know God by description and at a distance, we can only hope to be mechanical Christians, following instructions we do not really understand to achieve an end whose value we know only at second-hand.

But if we cleanse our minds of the passions and come to know God through reason, our direct acquaintance with his goodness gives us an '*inward sense* of that Bliss and Peace which goes along with' participating in God (SD 471). In this way, doing good and Godlike things becomes something we authentically desire to do:

True religion and an inward acquaintance with God discovers nothing in him but *pure and sincere Goodness* ... This makes the Commandments of God light and easy and far from being grievous. There needs no Law to compel a Mind acted by the true spirit of *divine love* to serve God or to comply with his Will. It is the choice of such a Soul to endeavour to conform it self to him, and draw from him as much as may be an Imitation of that Goodness and Perfection which it finds in him. Such a Christian does not therefore obey his Commands only because it is God's Will that he should do so, but because he sees the Law of God to be truly *perfect* ... and such a thing as his Soul loves ... (SD 368).

It is the perceptual quality of reason, reason as direct acquaintance with God's goodness, that makes reason practical and determines the soul towards the good in the very act of reasoning. Indeed, though he never expounds it in detail, Smith arguably shares Cudworth's conviction in the practicality of perfect intellect:

we must get our Minds awakened with clear and evident Principles of Light; we must get our Judgments and Consciences well informed with sober and practical Truth, such as tends to make us most like to God, and to reconcile our natures more perfectly to Divine goodness. (SD 461)

Whichcote too (despite significant differences from Cudworth) holds that reason itself is what obligates and motivates us toward the good: ‘*Intellectual* Nature is commanded by nothing, but Reason, and Consideration’ (Aph #451); ‘the principles of reason ... are principles of action’ (*Works* II:4).⁹⁷ For the Emmanuel Three alike then, reason connects us to the eternal and immutable reasons of goodness that underlie God’s commandments, so that the commandments become necessary expressions of the natural temper of our mind.

Just as virtue becomes something a rational soul seeks, sin becomes something they genuinely want to avoid, not simply to evade God’s wrath, but because they see all sin as a loss of freedom. The Emmanuel Three all describe the loss of autonomy caused by sin in Platonic terms; sin compromises our autonomy by subjecting the free, rational soul to the heavy, irrational impetus of the body (cf. *Phd.* 66c–67b, 81c–d; *Enn.* I.2.3, I.6.5, I.6.9). A rational soul perceives that freedom to sin is no freedom at all, for sin keeps us in a condition of most absolute Slavery, when we are wholly under the Tyrannicall commands of our lusts’

⁹⁷ For Whichcote, there seems to be a much looser identity (though still strong) between rational apprehension and virtuous willing. We see this in Whichcote’s frequent warnings that just because we have apprehended the moral reasons of things in a situation does not mean that we will act well: we can and often do rationally apprehend a situation accurately but still fail to act virtuously (e.g. *Works* III:90–2, 152–8, 212–18). He remarks, for instance, that the condemnation of sinners will be ‘that where men either *did* know or *might* know, there they either grossly neglected themselves, or went against their light ...’ (*Works* III:152). Note that there are two ways to sin here: by failing to know better, or by knowing better but acting evilly anyway (by ‘going against one’s light’). For contrast, Cudworth’s philosophy of free precludes the possibility that we might know better but still act evilly; he consistently holds that we act immorally only when we culpably neglect to bring reason to bear on a situation (Darwall 1995, 139–41). So for Cudworth, the only kind of culpable fault is that we *might* have known better; never that we *did* know better (for if we had known, we would not have sinned). Whichcote sometimes echoes Cudworth in describing sin as a failure to reason well enough (e.g. *Works* III:295; Aph #1103, #1108, #1158), but he evidently does not exclude the possibility that we will rationally apprehend the moral truth and still defy it in our actions. But although rational apprehension and virtuous willing come apart for Whichcote, they are still bound together very closely, for in order to go against one’s light, Whichcote thinks that one has to do great violence to one’s intellect: ‘there is nothing more unnatural, or of greater deformity in the whole world, than that an intelligent agent should have the reason of things in his mind, and that it should not give law and rule, in temper, life, and action ...’ (*Works* III:91). But we can go further and say for Whichcote, a person who goes against the dictates of their intellect necessarily failed to bring their intellect fully to bear on the situation; if they had, the dictates of reason would have become ‘the temper’ and ‘complexion’ of their mind and no part of the soul would have had been able to overpower its recommendations (Aph #621). The best explanation for these confusions is probably that Whichcote himself did not have a clear and consistent theory about the exact relation between the proper exercise of reason and virtuous willing. Arguably, the same confusions, in a more muted form, plague Cudworth’s thought on free will too (see Passmore 1951, 59–65).

(*Commons* 76; cf. 78); ‘wicked men are of most *narrow* and *confined* Spirits, they are so contracted by the *pinching particularities* of Earthly and created things, so imprisoned in a dark dungeon of *Sensuality* and *Selfishness*, so streightned through their *Carnal* designs and *Ends ...*’ (SD 394; cf. SD 388, 457–8).

So through practical reason, the soul perceives that the only way to be truly free and autonomous is to be conformed to God, the freest and most autonomous thing in the world. When a person sees the world this way, they ‘willingly ... doe that which is agreeable to the Laws of Goodness since this is the genuine Nature of the Soul when once it is freed from mistakes and encumbrances from that which is heterogeneous and adventitious to it, that cloggs it and oppresses it’ (*Lincolnes*, 37–8). Unlike passion-corrupted reason which brings us into the thrall of material objects that that straiten and confine us; a purified, practical intellect sends us willingly towards God as the only object to whom we can conform without losing our autonomy. God’s influence on the soul is itself rational and autonomising, harmonising with the soul’s innate practical intellect: as the Renaissance Platonist Ficino puts it, God ‘does not affect [things] from without, but moves them from within’ (PTh. II.13.4). God ‘pushes’ the soul towards the same end as the soul’s own practical reason. In this way, as a soul increases in virtue, it is not only becoming more Godlike; it is also becoming more and more authentically itself: ‘It is the chiefest of Good Things, for a Man to be *Himself*’ (Aph #416; cf. PTh. II.12.4).

As a result, we no longer need to obey God’s commands blindly, for we will know from direct experience that ‘There is a Reason for what we do, from the *Things* themselves’ (Aph #455). In fact, if our rational eyes were always clear, we would not need to be commanded to do good at all; written and revealed commands are only needed as occasional

reminders to point our weak, fallible intellects in the right direction (see SD 158–9). As Whichcote sums it up, there is nothing at all in religion that a fully rational person would refuse to do: ‘I know nothing forbidden by the *Gospel*; which One of true Reason would desire to have Liberty to do’ (Aph #487; cf. #220).

In this way, Godlike persons are as determined by their natures as God is, but they are also pre-eminently free. The truth of God’s nature is ‘the most unbending and incompatible, the most necessary, firm, immutable, and adamantine thing in the world’ (TEIM 137). But at the same time, the more firmly and immutably we conform to that nature, the more free and autonomous we become. Cudworth captures this paradox in his description of the ‘law of love’ at the end of his *Commons* sermon:

The Law that I speak of, it is a *Law of Love*, which is the most powerfull Law in the World; and yet it freeth us in a manner from all Law without us, because it maketh us become a *Law unto our selves* ... Love is at once a Freedome from all Law, a State of purest Liberty, and yet a Law too, of the most constraining and indispensable Necessity. (*Commons* 75–6; cf. Breteau 2008, 143; Hedley 2019, 155–6)

Or, as Smith (writing around the same time) puts it, ‘If we should ask a Good man, when he finds himself best at ease, when he finds himself most free; his answer would be, When he is under the most powerfull constraints of divine Love.’ (SD 395)

9.3 Seeing with One's Own Eyes

*Neither God, nor Man, doth alter any one's Mind;
otherwise than by Reason, Perswasion, and
Satisfaction: for Intellectual Nature is commanded by
nothing, but Reason, and Consideration.*

(Aph #451)

Notice how this whole framework of practical reason and moral motivation rests on the Emmanuel Three's metaethical naturalism. For contrast, and as a reminder of the Emmanuel Three's Calvinist background, consider the Puritan theologian William Twisse's insistence that our duty to obey God is grounded entirely in God's authority, and has nothing to do with his wisdom or righteousness: for, '[making decrees] belongs to power and authority, not to wisdom. The subject many times may be wiser then the Prince; yet hath he not therefore any authority over his Prince, to make lawes to binde him, but rather the Prince though inferiour in wisdom, hath power over him' (Twisse 1631, 389). But for the Emmanuel Three, if God's commands were not grounded in his immutable, practical intellect — the same practical intellect we participate in through reason — obedience to God would collapse into an irrational servility far below the dignity of human nature. If God's commandments were the product of a blind and arbitrary will, rather than a will suffused with intellectual light (FW 177), we could only ever obey him blindly. In Michael Gill's words, 'we would all be in the position of children who, upon asking why they are supposed to do something, are told, 'Because I said so, that's why!'' (2004, 158).

If someone demands my obedience simply 'Because they say so!', they are stifling my autonomy by forcing the arbitrary impetus of their will into the psychological driver's seat that should be occupied by my own practical intellect. Even if I obey, I will be doing so like a machine or brute beast, not as a Godlike rational agent. It is my right, and even my

responsibility, to only do what reason counsels me to do: 'A Man has as much Right to use his *own Understanding*, in judging of Truth; as he has a Right to use his own Eyes, to see his way' (Aph #40). Whoever suppresses reason, 'sins against his light, and goes against his conscience; goes against his very make, and doth that which is violent, horrid and unnatural' (*Works* III:145).

It is no surprise then, that in his controversy with Anthony Tuckney, Whichcote insists that the church ought not to impose any doctrines on the faithful as necessary to believe except those which are agreeable to reason. When Tuckney implores him to defer to the authority of councils and synods, Whichcote replies: 'I will duly consider what they say: but I am not sure, because They so resolve; I must see with my owne eyes' (EL 51). Reason, as the very 'voice of God' in our minds, is the best means we have of distinguishing divine revelation from the impositions and falsehoods of human invention. Human impositions have to force their way in, but 'Divine truth [is] allwaies carrying it's own light and evidence; so as that the mind receiving itt is illuminated, edified, satisfied ... as understanding and knowing itt; I reteine itt, as a wellcome guest; itt is not forced into mee, but I let it in' (EL 48; cf. SD 14). That is how education is supposed to work: 'Men are not to be Taught with *Clubs*; but with *Fescues*, pointing to the Letters. Letters are not to be knocked into the Head, but to be offered to the eye' (Aph #353; cf. #451).

This strategy of non-violent education is also mirrored in the way the Emmanuel Three conceive of God's efforts to convert human beings to a righteous, Godlike life. Cudworth writes of the 'sweet violence' God uses to draw people into conformity with himself: '*Truth and Love*, are two the most powerfull things in the world, and when they both go together, they cannot easily be withstood. The Golden Beams of Truth, and the Silken

Cords of Love, twisted together, will draw men on with a sweet violence, whether they will or no' (*Commons* 62–3). For Smith too, the divine effluxes God sends out to conform human beings to himself at once extremely powerful, but gentle and gracious: 'Grace and true Religion is no lazy or sluggish thing ... all the *motions* of it are *soft* and *gentle*: While it acts most *powerfully* within, it also acts most *peacefully*' (SD 473).

If God were to use violence or intimidation instead, bypassing reason, he would be going violently against his own nature, and his own communicative intent: 'To use *Power*, to control the Principles of Human Nature; (the Use of *Reason*, the Exercise of *Liberty*) is as strange a *Phaenomenon*, as ... to bring the Sun back again, or to make it fill the world with darkness. God does not this: if he did, he would contest with himself; his *Power* would rise-up against his *Wisdom*; and he would disparage and frustrate his own workmanship' (Aph #38). And if God would never attempt to bypass human reason in his efforts to convert us, we should never do so either: 'Why should We think to do that, which God will not do — to over-bear *Reason* with *Violence*!' (ibid.)

9.4 Conclusions

This brief look at the Emmanuel Three's views on freedom and autonomy has, I hope, revealed the extent to which their Platonic outlook binds together not only the individual works of Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith, but also binds together the different aspects of their respective worldviews. We have seen in this chapter, for example, how the Emmanuel Three's metaethical naturalism — which they were all defending in the 1640s — is a fundamental component of all three men's conceptions of how God commands obligate us without stifling our autonomy. By the same token, we have seen that this view of obligation rests centrally on a theory of participatory epistemology, where reason involves becoming

Godlike by participation in God's own practical intellect. And although we touched on it only briefly here, all of this assumes God's communicative intent: God refuses to deal with human beings in any way that might compromise their Godlike autonomy, because his only goal is to render everything as Godlike as possible. So all the components of the Emmanuel Three's Platonic outlook — metaethical naturalism, God's communicative intent and participatory epistemology — are readily discernible as key parts of implicit assumptions of Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith's thinking about free will and liberty.

(10) Conclusions

The close study of the Emmanuel Three’s texts from which we have just emerged reveals a striking and deeply-embedded affinity between them. The Emmanuel Three share a set of core philosophical intuitions: metaethical naturalism, God’s communicative intent, participatory epistemology. They articulate these positions in terms drawn largely from the ancient Platonists like Plotinus, Origen and Proclus, but their immediate purpose is to provide a philosophical response to the Calvinist view of God.

Overall, we can sum up the Emmanuel Three’s Platonic outlook by observing that they approach the various issues we explored above by creating a contrast between higher and lower kinds of realities:

	Metaethics	Salvation	Religious Epistemology	Liberty
<i>Higher Realities</i>	God’s Goodness/Understanding	Inherent Righteousness	Knowledge of God by Acquaintance	Godlikeness
<i>Lower Realities</i>	God’s Will	Imputed Righteousness	Knowledge of God by Description	Mechanical Religion

The higher realities are substantial, eternal, immutable, grounded in the nature of things, while lower realities are ethereal, relative, unanchored from the reality of things. Thus, in metaethics, goodness is founded in God’s eternal and immutable rational nature rather than his will, which (when conceived as distinct from his nature) is arbitrary and unpredictable. In the theory of justification, we are saved by real, concrete inherent righteousness that brings us into correspondence with God’s nature, rather than merely imputed righteousness that has only a relative, theoretical existence. Likewise, when it comes to knowing God, words and

descriptions are only outward shells, capable of being inaccurately coloured and distorted by our arbitrary and irrational passions; by contrast, knowledge of God by direct, rational acquaintance brings us into real, transformative contact with God's essence. And finally, as we saw in the previous chapter, genuine Godlikeness is contrasted with the slavish, external and insincere efforts of 'mechanical' or 'servile' religion, where God's commandments are obeyed outwardly without having any effect on the soul. What John Passmore said of Cudworth's moral philosophy could be said just as truly of all the Emmanuel Three: 'Happiness, freedom, goodness, rationality, spirituality different names for the same thing: the escape of the soul from human bondage, the bondage of egoism' (1951, 78).

This view of God and his essential goodness provided the Emmanuel Three with a philosophically compelling alternative to the conception of God implied by the double decree, a conception which they all found impossible to accept on moral grounds as much as philosophical. Indeed, alongside their shared love for Plato, their abhorrence for the doctrine of the double decree and the arbitrary character it ascribed to God was one of the things that bound them together most strongly. Accordingly, all three men defend and expound their Platonic outlook as part of a direct, polemical engagement with the dominant Calvinism of their Puritan milieu.

I have suggested that the best explanation for these deeply embedded philosophical similarities is that Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith developed their views in close association with one another as friends and colleagues at Emmanuel College in the late 1630s, and continued to be influenced by one another in subsequent years. Along with Henry More (and perhaps others), Whichcote, Cudworth and Smith aroused the ire of their orthodox Calvinist colleagues. It seems likely that whoever else may have been involved, Cudworth and Smith

were remembered by Tuckney as some of the ‘learned and ingenious men’ whom he blames for corrupting Whichcote’s theology into a ‘Platonique faith’ and a ‘moral divinitie’. Given that as we have seen, Henry More was also an implicit target of Tuckney’s complaints, Tuckney’s correspondence provides us with very early evidence that Whichcote, More, Cudworth and Smith were viewed as shared defenders of a controversial, distinctly Platonic kind of anti-Calvinism. Although we have focused here on the earliest expressions of the Emmanuel Three’s Platonic outlook, the same core positions and intuitions continue to dominate the thought of Cudworth and Whichcote well into their later careers, and would have no doubt done the same for Smith, had illness not taken him.

I close now with a few brief remarks about the significance of the preceding argument for scholarship on Cambridge Platonism. In light of the evidence for a minor Platonic revival at Emmanuel College in the 1630s and 1640s, and more significantly, the deeply rooted philosophical commonalities binding the Emmanuel Three together, I would suggest that recent criticisms of ‘Cambridge Platonism’ as a historiographical category have been somewhat overstated. While Dmitri Levitin’s criticisms (considered in chapter 2) successfully highlight problems with the naïve picture of Cambridge Platonism set out by earlier commentators like Tulloch, these problems do not warrant concluding the ‘non-existence’ of Cambridge Platonism; they only call for a revision, not the abandonment, of the term. Likewise, it is far too strong to say, as A. Rupert Hall did, that ‘the usual claim for the existence of a coherent and co-operative group of philosophers called the Cambridge Platonists must appear weak to anyone who applies a critical eye to the membership of the group and to their various activities’ (Hall 1990, 58). The soundness of this claim depends on just how widely one casts the net of Cambridge Platonism: if the term is taken to refer to a large, nebulous group containing not only major figures like the Emmanuel Three and Henry

More, but including figures like Nathaniel Culverwell, John Worthington, and perhaps the later 'latitudinarians', then the category does indeed wither beneath a critical eye.

However, this study has shown, I hope, that at least one 'core group' at the heart of what has been called Cambridge Platonism (namely, the Emmanuel Three) really existed as a close philosophical alliance. Whichcote, Cudworth, and Smith (and More too, though that is not argued at length here) defend a philosophical outlook that gives every indication of having been developed in tandem, as the fruit of deep and long-lasting friendships, and a shared distaste for the Calvinism of their Emmanuel peers.

Although not explored at length here, this study has also highlighted several features of the Emmanuel Three's thought that may provide insights into issues in contemporary philosophy of religion, particularly in the areas of religious epistemology and experience, and the relationship of God to morality.

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