

Joseph Priestley and the intellectual culture of rational dissent, 1752-1796

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Joseph Priestley and the Intellectual Culture of Rational
Dissent, 1752-1796

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I confirm that this is my own work and that the use of material from other sources has been fully acknowledged.

Abstract

Joseph Priestley and the Intellectual Culture of Rational Dissent, 1752-1796

Recent scholarship on the eighteenth-century polymath Joseph Priestley (1733-1804) has focused on his work as a pioneering scientist, a controversial Unitarian polemicist, and a radical political theorist. This thesis provides an extensive analysis of his comparatively neglected philosophical writings. It situates Priestley's philosophy in the theological context of eighteenth-century rational dissent, and argues that his ideas on ethics, materialism, and determinism came to provide a philosophical foundation for the Socinian theology which came to prominence among Presbyterian congregations in the last decades of the century.

Throughout the thesis I stress the importance of rational debate to the development of Priestley's ideas. The chapters are thus structured around a series of Priestley's engagements with contemporary figures: chapter 1 traces his intellectual development in the context of the debates over moral philosophy and the freedom of the will at the Daventry and Warrington dissenting academies; chapter 2 examines his response to the Scottish 'common sense' philosophers, Thomas Reid, James Beattie, and James Oswald; chapter 3 examines his writings on materialism and philosophical necessity and his debates with Richard Price, John Palmer, Benjamin Dawson, and Joseph Berington; chapter 4 focuses on his attempt to develop a rational defence of Christianity in opposition to the ideas of David Hume; chapter 5 traces the diffusion of his ideas through the syllabuses at the liberal dissenting academies at Warrington, Daventry, and New College, Hackney. The thesis illustrates the process by which Priestley's theology and philosophy defeated a number of rival traditions to become the predominant intellectual position within rational dissent in the late eighteenth century. In the course of doing so, it illuminates some of the complex interconnections between philosophical and theological discourses in the period.

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Acknowledgments	6
List of abbreviations	8
Transcription procedures	10
Introduction: philosophy and rational dissent	11
1. Priestley's intellectual development: the Daventry and Warrington dissenting academies (1752-1767)	20
Philip Doddridge's academy lectures	22
Philosophical debate at Daventry	31
Moral philosophy at Warrington	40
The moral sense in Hartley and Priestley	53
2. Priestley and the Scottish 'common sense' philosophers (1774-1776)	64
Priestley on Reid, Beattie, and Oswald	67
The reception of Reid, Beattie, and Oswald among English rational dissenters	77
The reception of Priestley's <i>Examination</i> and <i>Hartley's Theory of the Human Mind</i> among English rational dissenters	96
Joseph Berington's response to Priestley	103
3. Priestley on materialism and philosophical necessity (1777-1782)	112
Priestley's materialism	113
Priestley on philosophical necessity	126
Philosophical debate in Priestley's and his circle's correspondence	131
Richard Price, Priestley, and the Scots	141

Three responses to Priestley: Palmer, Dawson, and Berington	165
4. Defining rational religion: Priestley's response to Hume (1780-1782)	181
Wodrow and Kenrick on Hume	183
Priestley's <i>Letter's to a Philosophical Unbeliever</i> (1780)	186
Responses to Priestley's <i>Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever</i>	203
5. The reception of Priestley's ideas in the liberal dissenting academies (1781-1796)	217
The philosophical career of Thomas Belsham	222
Epilogue: philosophy and rational dissent after 1796	240
Appendix I: 'DWL MS L.57 (10)'	252
Appendix II: 'HMO MS Seddon 6: problems of dating and authorship'	255
Bibliography	263

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List of abbreviations

CSI	The Charles Surman Index of Ministers, Dr Williams's Library
CR	<i>The Christian Reformer; or, Unitarian Magazine and Review</i> , 1815-33; second series, 1845-63
<i>Disquisitions</i>	Joseph Priestley, <i>Disquisitions relating to Matter and Spirit</i> (1777)
Ditchfield	<i>The Letters of Theophilus Lindsey (1723-1808)</i> , ed. G. M. Ditchfield, 2 vols (Woodbridge, 2007), vol. I
DWL	Dr Williams's Library
E&D	<i>Enlightenment and Dissent</i>
ESTC	<i>English Short Title Catalogue</i>
<i>Examination</i>	Joseph Priestley, <i>An Examination of Dr. Reid's Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense, Dr. Beattie's Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth, and Dr. Oswald's Appeal to Common Sense in Behalf of Religion</i> (1774)
<i>Free Discussion</i>	Joseph Priestley and Richard Price, <i>A Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism and Philosophical Necessity, in a Correspondence between Dr. Price and Dr. Priestley</i> (1778)
Haakonssen (1996)	Knud Haakonssen, ed., <i>Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain</i> (Cambridge, 1996)
Haakonssen (2006)	Knud Haakonssen, ed., <i>The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy</i> , 2 vols (Cambridge, 2006)
HMO	Harris Manchester College, Oxford
<i>Letters to Lindsey</i>	<i>The Letters of Joseph Priestley to Theophilus Lindsey, 1769-1794</i> , ed. Simon Mills (Dr Williams's Centre for Dissenting Studies, 2008), available online at http://www.english.qmul.ac.uk/drwilliams/pubs/JP%20letters.html
Locke, <i>Essay</i>	John Locke, <i>An Essay concerning Human Understanding</i> , ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975)

MR	<i>The Monthly Review (or Literary Journal)</i> , 1749-1789; second series, 1790-1825
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> , ed. Colin Matthew and Brian Harrison, 60 vols (Oxford, 2004) and online at http://www.oxforddnb.com/
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> , ed. John Simpson and Edmund Weiner, 20 vols, 2 nd edn (Oxford, 1989), and online at http://www.dictionary.oed.com/
Peach and Thomas	<i>The Correspondence of Richard Price</i> , ed. W. Bernard Peach and D. O. Thomas, 3 vols (Durham, NC, 1983-1994)
<i>Phil. Necessity</i>	Joseph Priestley, <i>The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated; being an Appendix to the Disquisitions relating to Matter and Spirit</i> (1777)
<i>Phil. Unbeliever</i>	Joseph Priestley, <i>Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever. Part I. Containing an Examination of the Principal Objections to the Doctrines of Natural Religion, and especially those contained in the Writings of Mr. Hume</i> (Bath, 1780)
Rivers	Isabel Rivers, <i>Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780</i> , 2 vols (Cambridge, 1991-2000)
Rivers and Wykes	Isabel Rivers and David L. Wykes, ed., <i>Joseph Priestley: Scientist, Philosopher, and Theologian</i> (Oxford, 2008)
Rutt	<i>The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley</i> , ed. John Towill Rutt, 25 vols (1817-32; New York, 1972; Bristol, 1999)
Schofield (1997)	Robert E. Schofield, <i>The Enlightenment of Joseph Priestley: A Study of his Life and Work from 1733 to 1773</i> (University Park, PA, 1997)
TUHS	<i>Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society</i>
WDA	Westminster Diocesan Archives

The place of publication for works printed before 1900 is London unless otherwise stated.

Transcription procedures

In this thesis I quote numerous extracts from manuscripts. These have been reproduced so as to correspond to the original as closely as is feasible in the medium of type. Original spelling, capitalisation, contractions, deletions, and underlining, as they appear in the manuscripts, have been retained throughout.

The following editorial conventions have been imposed:

In the few cases where the lack of punctuation in the original makes the text difficult to understand, conjectural punctuation has been added in square brackets. Idiosyncratic spellings have been indicated with [sic] only in the few cases where there is potential for confusion. Words and letters missing through a tear in the paper or obscured by a blot are given in square brackets. In cases where a reading is conjectural, this is indicated by a question mark in square brackets immediately after the word in question. Words added as an afterthought above the original line of text have been given between two double slashes.

Introduction: philosophy and rational dissent

Towards the beginning of David Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural and Revealed Religion* (1779) the three characters, Philo, Demea, and Cleanthes, discuss the changing relationship, throughout history, between religion and philosophy. Whereas the Church Fathers and the Protestant reformers had been united in their exaltation of faith and in their declamations against reason, 'our sagacious divines', Philo tells Cleanthes, 'have changed their whole system of philosophy, and talk the language of the STOICS, PLATONISTS, and PERIPATETICS, not that of PYRRHONIANS and ACADEMICS'. 'If we distrust human reason', Philo continues, 'we have now no other principle to lead us into religion'.¹ Although hardly sensitive to the complexities of intellectual history, Philo's speech is a fair analysis of the trajectory of the post-Restoration Church. The ascendancy, within the Church of England, of the latitudinarian movement coincided with the rise of philosophical theism, or rational theology, as the dominant intellectual tendency among Anglican apologists of the early eighteenth century.²

When rational dissent emerged within English Presbyterianism in the second half of the century, it was to this Anglican tradition that it owed its primary intellectual allegiance. The flow of ideas from the latitudinarians to the rational dissenters can be traced through a number of important eighteenth-century authors. The dissenting ministers Isaac Watts (1674-1748) and Philip Doddridge (1702-1751), both, it ought to be stressed, figures who attempted to balance the rational and evangelical tendencies of dissent, nevertheless contributed significantly to the development of the rational strain by producing important works which attempted to show the reasonableness of Christian belief, many of which were widely used as textbooks in the eighteenth-century dissenting academies. The dissenting minister and academy tutor Henry Grove (1684-1738) was another important figure in this respect; for over thirty years Grove lectured on ethics at the Taunton dissenting academy and produced a widely read *System of Moral Philosophy* (published posthumously in 1749) which attempted to ground morality on philosophical

¹ David Hume, *Principal Writings on Religion including Dialogues concerning Natural and Revealed Religion and The Natural History of Religion*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford, 1993), 41-2.

² See Rivers, vol. I, 25-88.

as well as purely scriptural tenets.³ Throughout the eighteenth century, and especially after the Salters' Hall debate of 1719, the rational and the evangelical strains of dissent became increasingly opposed to one another. When the phrase 'rational dissenters' first began to be used in the early 1760s, it most often denoted, at least when used by those sympathetic to its aims, a group of Presbyterian divines advocating a species of practical and rational religion, in opposition to the evangelical doctrine of the rival bodies of dissent.⁴ The formulation of a rational, philosophical understanding of Christianity came to differentiate the theology of the rational dissenters from what they perceived as both the 'superstition' of the Catholics and high-church Anglicans and the 'enthusiasm' of the Calvinistic dissenters. In the last three decades of the century, as rational dissent became increasingly associated with the theology of Socinianism, or, as it came to be known, Unitarianism, this insistence on the powers of human reason and on the rationality of Christian belief gained emphasis, largely in reaction to the rise of evangelical Calvinism among the Congregationalist and Baptist congregations comprising the orthodox wing of Protestant dissent.

However, the philosophical writings of the rational dissenters have not received the critical attention they deserve. Most studies of rational dissent to date have tended to stress either the theological or the political and social aspects of its history.⁵ Most scholarship from within the field of the history of philosophy has focused on the writings

³ Henry Grove, *A System of Moral Philosophy*, ed. T. Amory, 2 vols (1749). M. A. Stewart credits Grove with being 'the first significant Dissenter to recognise ethics as a discipline autonomous from theology', M. A. Stewart, 'The Curriculum in Britain, Ireland, and the Colonies', in Haakonssen (2006), vol. I, 97-120, 109.

⁴ The earliest eighteenth-century usage of the phrase which I have come across is in Soame Jenyns's *A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil* (1761). Here, Jenyns defines 'rational dissenters' in opposition to the Methodists, and is sympathetic to neither sect; whereas the former have 'arbitrarily expunged out of their Bibles every thing, which appears to them contradictory to reason [...] or in other words, every thing which they cannot understand', the latter 'are determined to listen to no reason at all, having with all reason and common-sense declared eternal warfare', Soame Jenyns, *A Free Enquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil*, 4th edn (1761), xvi-vii. William Enfield's 1770 use of the phrase stresses the links between the forms of worship adopted by the rational dissenters and the moderate Anglicans in opposition to the 'crude, injudicious, and often mysterious and unintelligible extemporary prayers of the rigid independents', William Enfield, *Remarks on Several Late Publications relative to the Dissenters* (1770), 55. Joseph Priestley first began to use the term 'rational Dissenters' in 1769, in *Considerations on Differences of Opinion among Christians* (1769) and *A View of the Principles and Conduct of the Protestant Dissenters, with respect to the Civil and Ecclesiastical Constitution of England* (1769). In the *Considerations*, Priestley writes in his letter to the evangelical clergyman Henry Venn that 'rational Dissenters' is 'a term which I am, surely, as much at liberty to use, by way of distinction, as you are to assume the title of *orthodox* for the same purpose', Priestley, *Considerations on Differences of Opinion among Christians* (1769), 77.

⁵ This is the general tendency, for example, of the essays collected in Haakonssen (1996).

of individual thinkers; the majority, it is probably fair to say, on the Presbyterian minister Richard Price (1723-91), who has retained a minor yet important place in histories of moral philosophy until the present day.⁶ With regard to some of the lesser-known figures, Isabel Rivers has written on Doddridge, Watts, and Grove, but her extensive survey of eighteenth-century moral philosophy does not cover the contribution of the Unitarians of the last decades of the century.⁷ The only attempt at a systematic study of the philosophical ideas of rational dissent, Alan P. F. Sell's *Philosophy, Dissent and Nonconformity* (2004), attempts to cover a huge amount of ground, with the inevitable result that the attention paid to individual thinkers is sparse. Moreover, the study makes no attempt to situate the ideas of these thinkers in relation to wider intellectual history.⁸ Thus, in comparison to the body of scholarship dedicated to, for example, the philosophical history of the Scottish Enlightenment, or the French *philosophes*, it is fair to say that the contribution of rational dissent to European intellectual history has been largely ignored.

This thesis is then, at least secondarily, an attempt to go some way towards remedying this situation. By providing a thorough examination of philosophical debate among rational dissenters in the second half of the eighteenth century I hope to outline what I have called an 'intellectual culture of rational dissent'. In addition to some of the figures mentioned above, I here survey the careers and writings of a number of authors who have been largely, in some cases wholly, ignored by previous intellectual historians: among them Edmund Law, Philip Doddridge, John Taylor, John Seddon, William Rose, Joseph Berington, Benjamin Dawson, John Palmer, Matthew Turner, and Thomas Belsham. However, in adopting the phrase 'intellectual culture' I mean to delineate a field of analysis broader than a selection of published works in philosophy and theology. In an attempt to trace the diffusion of philosophical ideas through the wider culture of rational dissent, I draw on a variety of sources, including private correspondence, lecture notes, and journal reviews. This methodology also enables me to move away from a

⁶ See, for example, Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century*, 2nd edn (London, 2002), 170. For a fuller account of the secondary criticism on Price see chapter 3.

⁷ On Doddridge see Rivers, vol. I, 164-204; vol. II, 192-5; *The Defence of Truth through the Knowledge of Error: Philip Doddridge's Academy Lectures* (London, 2003). On Watts see Rivers, vol. I, 164-204; 'Watts, Isaac (1674-1748)', *ODNB*. On Grove see Rivers, vol. II, 190-2.

⁸ Alan P. F. Sell, *Philosophy, Dissent and Nonconformity* (Cambridge, 2004).

traditional, hermeneutic approach to the interpretation of philosophical texts, and towards an understanding of how certain texts functioned in particular educational, denominational, or polemical contexts.

The primary objective of this thesis, however, is to provide an extensive analysis of the philosophical work of Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), arguably the figure who exerted the most important, and certainly the most lasting, influence over the intellectual culture of rational dissent. Priestley's own career provides the boundaries of my chronological framework: I begin in the early 1750s, when he entered the dissenting academy at Daventry, and end around 1796, the year of the dissolution of New College, Hackney, two years after Priestley himself had left England permanently for North America. Priestley's philosophy is most often explored as a means to understanding his scientific or his political theories.⁹ This said, his philosophical work has by no means been ignored by intellectual historians: Robert E. Schofield, the historian of science and Priestley's most recent biographer, has written on many aspects of his philosophy.¹⁰ John G. McEvoy and J. E. McGuire and, more recently, James Dybikowski have sketched systematic accounts of Priestley's philosophical system.¹¹ Schofield and McEvoy and McGuire, in particular, have done much to develop a synoptic approach to understanding Priestley's interests in science, religion, and philosophy.¹² On more specific aspects of Priestley's ideas, Alan P. F. Sell and Aaron Garrett have examined Priestley's response to

⁹ J. G. McEvoy, 'Joseph Priestley, "Aerial Philosopher": Metaphysics and Methodology in Priestley's Chemical Thought, from 1772 to 1781', *Ambix*, 25 (1978), 1-55, 93-116, 153-75; 26 (1979), 16-38; 'Causes, Laws, Powers and Principles: The Metaphysical Foundations of Priestley's Concept of Phlogiston', in *Science, Medicine, and Dissent: Joseph Priestley (1733-1804)*, ed. R. G. W. Anderson and Christopher Lawrence (London, 1987), 55-71. Peter N. Miller, *Defining the Common Good: Empire, Religion and Philosophy in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 2004), 333-8.

¹⁰ Robert E. Schofield, *The Enlightened Joseph Priestley: A Study of His Life and Work from 1773 to 1804* (Pennsylvania, 2004), 43-91; 'Joseph Priestley on Sensation and Perception', in *Studies in Perception: Interrelations in the History of Philosophy and Science*, ed. Peter K. Machamer and Robert G. Turnbull (Columbus, 1980), 336-54; 'Joseph Priestley, Eighteenth-Century British Neo-Platonism, and S. T. Coleridge', in *Transformation and Tradition in the Sciences: Essays in Honour of Bernard Cohen*, ed. Everett Mendelsohn (Cambridge, 1984), 237-54.

¹¹ John G. McEvoy and J. E. McGuire, 'God and Nature: Priestley's Way of Rational Dissent', *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences*, 6 (1975), 325-404; John G. McEvoy, 'Joseph Priestley, Scientist, Philosopher and Divine', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 128.3 (1984), 193-9; James Dybikowski, 'Joseph Priestley, Metaphysician and Philosopher of Religion', in Rivers and Wykes, 80-112.

¹² W. H. Brock, 'Joseph Priestley, Enlightened Experimentalist', in Rivers and Wykes, 49-79, 66-8, provides a bibliographical overview. For an earlier attempt to develop a synoptic account of Priestley's ideas see Erwin N. Hiebert, 'The Integration of Revealed Religion and Scientific Materialism in the Thought of Joseph Priestley', in *Joseph Priestley: Scientist, Theologian, and Metaphysician*, ed. Lester Kieft and Bennett R. Willeford (Cranbury, NJ, 1980), 27-61.

Thomas Reid, and Richard Popkin has analysed his response to Hume.¹³ John W. Yolton has located Priestley's theory of matter in the context of the development of eighteenth-century materialism, and James A. Harris has considered Priestley's necessitarianism in relation to eighteenth-century debates over the freedom of the will.¹⁴ Despite the work of these scholars, however, there is no modern book-length study devoted to Priestley's philosophical career; more extensive accounts of Priestley's philosophical writings remain buried in unpublished PhD theses.¹⁵ In comparison to the available literature on Priestley's contemporaries, Hume, Reid, and even Price, Priestley as a philosopher remains a neglected figure.¹⁶

Moreover, very few of the existing accounts of Priestley's work have attempted to position his philosophical writings within the theological context of eighteenth-century rational dissent.¹⁷ In this thesis I show how Priestley's ideas on ethics, materialism, and necessity were developed as an attempt to provide a philosophical foundation for the Socinian theology which came to prominence among Presbyterian congregations in the last decades of the century. This kind of focus on the interconnected histories of philosophy and theology is not original: in studies of seventeenth-century thought the

¹³ Alan P. F. Sell, 'Priestley's Polemic Against Reid', *The Price-Priestley Newsletter*, 3 (1979), 41-52; Aaron Garrett, 'In Defense of Elephants: Priestley on Reid', *The Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, 2 (2004), 137-53; Richard H. Popkin, 'Joseph Priestley's Criticism of David Hume's Philosophy,' *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 15 (1977), 437-47; *The High Road to Pyrrhonism* (San Diego, CA, 1980), 213-26.

¹⁴ John W. Yolton, *Thinking Matter: Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Minneapolis, 1983), 107-26. James A. Harris, 'Joseph Priestley and "the proper doctrine of philosophical necessity"', *E&D*, 20 (2001), 23-44, reprinted in part in Harris's *Of Liberty and Necessity: The Free Will Debate in Eighteenth-Century British Philosophy* (Oxford, 2005), 167-78.

¹⁵ Examples of unpublished studies of Priestley's philosophy include: Charles Huber Lesser, 'Joseph Priestley (1733-1804): The Mind of a Materialist. An Intellectual Biography' (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1974); Richard Adams Rice, 'Joseph Priestley's Materialist Theory of Cognition: its Evolution and Historical Significance' (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1969). More accessible unpublished studies which cover aspects of Priestley's philosophical thought include: Alison Kennedy, 'John Kenrick and the Transformation of Unitarian Thought' (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Stirling, 2006), esp. 41-91; Matthew Niblett, 'Moral Philosophy, Republican Thought, and the Intellectual Culture of Liberal Dissent in England, 1750-1789' (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Oxford, 2007), esp. 130-196.

¹⁶ Priestley receives only a number of passing mentions in the recently published *Cambridge History of Eighteenth Century Philosophy*, most notably in relation to materialist notions of human nature in Aaron Garrett's 'Human Nature', vol. I, 160-233, and Udo Thiel's 'Self-Consciousness and Personal Identity', vol. I, 286-318, and educational thought in Geraint Parry's 'Education', vol. I, 608-38. Dybikowski has recently drawn attention to Priestley's neglect, and argued that there should be a contemporary book dedicated to his philosophy, Dybikowski, 'Joseph Priestley, Metaphysician and Philosopher of Religion', 111.

¹⁷ One noteworthy attempt to do this is Douglas Hedley's short summary of Priestley's ideas in *Coleridge, Philosophy and Religion: Aids to Reflection and the Mirror of the Spirit* (Cambridge, 2000), 53-7.

idea of a ‘Socinian philosophy’ has a long history.¹⁸ However, studies of eighteenth-century intellectual history have all too often ignored the theological context in which the period’s philosophical ideas were inextricably embedded. Although I give due attention to tracing Priestley’s intellectual influences, my approach is informed by the assumption that the most effective way of understanding Priestley’s philosophical work is as a set of opinions which developed dialogically through a series of articulated responses in particular historical situations. The chapters are thus focused on a series of Priestley’s engagements with contemporary figures: chapter 1 traces his intellectual development in the context of the debates over moral philosophy and the freedom of the will at the Daventry and Warrington dissenting academies. Chapter 2 examines Priestley’s response to Thomas Reid and the Scottish ‘common sense’ philosophers. Chapter 3 analyses his writings on materialism and philosophical necessity and his debate with Richard Price. Chapter 4 focuses on his attempt to develop a rational defence of Christianity in opposition to the ideas of David Hume. Chapter 5 traces the diffusion of Priestley’s ideas through the philosophy syllabuses in the liberal dissenting academies. I also argue that aspects of Priestley’s ideas developed through a process of debate and collaboration within his circle of friends and correspondents, many of whom were also dissenting ministers. In order to trace the workings of this process, I draw extensively on Priestley’s letters to the Unitarian minister Theophilus Lindsey (1723-1808), a new annotated electronic edition of which I have published for the Dr Williams’s Centre for Dissenting Studies as a supplementary part of this project, and on Grayson Ditchfield’s recent edition of the letters of Theophilus Lindsey.¹⁹

Before turning to Priestley himself, however, I should like to clarify further what I mean by discussing an ‘intellectual culture’ of rational dissent. What grounds are there for interpreting the philosophical writings of the rational dissenters as a distinct subgroup of eighteenth-century philosophy, comparable to, for example, the Scottish philosophy of the period?

¹⁸ Nicholas Jolley, for example, writes of Leibniz’s ‘study of Socinian philosophy’ in his analysis of Leibniz’s responses to John Locke and Christoph Stegmann, Nicholas Jolley, ‘Leibniz on Locke and Socinianism’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 39.2 (1978), 233-50.

¹⁹ *Letters to Lindsey*, see also Simon Mills, ‘Aspects of a Polymath: Unveiling J. T. Rutt’s Edition of Joseph Priestley’s Letters to Theophilus Lindsey’, *E&D*, 24 (2008), 24-53; Ditchfield.

Firstly, the intellectual history of rational dissent (much like that of Scottish philosophy) is closely bound up with the history of a number of educational institutions: the liberal dissenting academies. As M. A. Stewart has argued, the academies at Taunton, Tewkesbury, Findern, Kibworth, Dublin, Northampton, Daventry, Warrington, and Hackney were important centres for the dissemination of philosophy.²⁰ Chapters 1 and 5 of this thesis are thus largely concerned with the philosophical syllabuses at the dissenting academies at Daventry, Warrington, and Hackney.

Secondly, the rational dissenters were united by a particular set of intellectual questions and concerns regarding the relationship between certain theological doctrines and philosophical beliefs concerning the human mind, the natural world, and ethics. These concerns are reflected in the way that philosophy was usually divided into pneumatology (comprising natural religion and the study of the human mind) and moral philosophy, and was usually taught, at least in the academies, as part of a curriculum which included the study of the Scriptures, the patristic authors, and ecclesiastical history. Essentially, the rational dissenters were concerned to establish how one of various competing conceptions of ‘rationality’ could be shown to be compatible with Christian belief. In this they were not alone. Many thinkers in the Church of England and the Church of Scotland reflected on very similar questions; in discussing an ‘intellectual culture of rational dissent’ I do not mean to imply that the philosophical ideas of the rational dissenters were developed and discussed in any kind of vacuum. As I have already suggested, when rational dissent first emerged it was very much in the tradition of the Anglican latitudinarians. As rational dissent developed during the eighteenth century, it retained important connections with thinkers within the Church of England and in the Scottish Church and universities.

Thirdly, there is the question of influence. Much like the latitudinarian tradition, the philosophical heritage of rational dissent was extremely eclectic. This eclecticism is well exemplified in Philip Doddridge’s published philosophy lectures, which included references to the classical moralists, particularly Plato and Cicero; the Church Fathers, particularly Origen; the Protestant natural law theorists, Hugo Grotius and Samuel Pufendorf; the seventeenth-century rationalists, particularly Descartes; the eighteenth-

²⁰ M. A. Stewart, ‘The Curriculum in Britain, Ireland, and the Colonies’, 108.

century latitudinarians, particularly Clarke; Locke; and most of the major philosophers and theologians of the early and mid-eighteenth century, including, significantly, free-thinkers such as John Toland, Anthony Collins, and Hume. Broadly speaking, however, there were three identifiable philosophical traditions within rational dissent as it emerged after 1760.

The first of these was the rationalist tradition, most prominently associated with Richard Price and John Taylor (1694-1761), the first divinity and moral philosophy tutor at the Warrington Academy. This tradition was indebted to Samuel Clarke (1675-1729), the most influential latitudinarian philosopher of the eighteenth century, and Joseph Butler (1692-1752), as well as a number of lesser-known figures such as the Anglican moral philosophers John Balguy (1686-1748) and William Wollaston (1659-1724). It advocated a rationalist approach to ethics and a libertarian position on the freedom of the will and was usually, although not exclusively, associated with the theology of Arianism.

The second tradition was the empiricist tradition which came to be associated with, and indeed largely defined by, Priestley. This tradition was indebted to John Locke (1632-1704) and David Hartley (1705-1757), as well as to lesser-known figures in the Lockean tradition such as Edmund Law (1703-1787) and John Gay (1699-1745). However, it also had links to free-thinkers and materialists such as Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and Anthony Collins (1676-1729). It developed an empirical and voluntarist account of morals which drew heavily on Hartley's theory of the association of ideas and eventually, under Priestley's influence, formulated a deterministic account of human actions and a materialist metaphysics. It was usually, again under the influence of Priestley, associated with the theology of Socinianism, or Unitarianism.

The third tradition available to rational dissenters, often overlooked, can be traced back to the writings of Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713). From around the mid-century onwards, many rational dissenters, often as a result of their Scottish university educations, came under the influence of the Shaftesburian ethical tradition, promulgated, with important differences, by George Turnbull (1698-1748) and David Fordyce (1711-1751) at Marischal College, Aberdeen, and by Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) and Adam Smith (1723-1790) at the University of Glasgow. Shaftesburian ethics, the influence of which can be found in both Doddridge's and

Grove's moral philosophy lectures, held that moral judgments were at least partly dependent on an innate moral sense. This Shaftesburian philosophical tradition was usually associated with the moderate Calvinism and theological eirenicism of William Leechman (1706-1785), Professor of Divinity at Glasgow, under whom a significant number of English rational dissenters were educated.

The Shaftesburian and the rationalist traditions are important to this project largely because, I argue, the second, empiricist, tradition was developed, in part at least, as a reaction against them. Priestley was as much a polemicist as he was a philosopher. His (arguably successful) attempt to make his empiricist philosophy and his Socinian theology the predominant intellectual position within rational dissent necessitated that he defeated the rival claims of the other two traditions. It is in the course of these often acrimonious debates that the interconnections between philosophy and theology become clear. The most common charge levelled by Priestley against proponents of the other two traditions was that they relied on the long-exploded theory of innate ideas, which could be made to sanction irrational theological dogmas. Against Priestley, representatives from the other two traditions most usually countered that his Socinianism and his empiricism would lead unavoidably to deism, and even to atheism. It is this battle of ideas which I now set out to explore.

1. Priestley's intellectual development: the Daventry and Warrington dissenting academies (1752-1767)

The dissenting academies of the second half of the eighteenth century were a key influence on the formation of a distinctive intellectual culture within rational dissent.¹ The majority of the figures discussed in the following chapters either studied at or worked for periods as tutors in the academies. Many of them, including Philip Doddridge, John Taylor, Priestley, and Thomas Belsham, were influential figures in the development of dissenting education. Many of the texts I shall discuss here were written while their authors were academy tutors and in some cases were used as textbooks on the academy syllabuses. This is, of course, particularly relevant to Priestley himself. Between 1752 and 1755 Priestley was a student at the Daventry academy. After a short period as a dissenting minister with congregations at Needham Market and Nantwich, he entered the Warrington Academy as tutor in languages and *belles-lettres* where he remained between 1761 and 1767. After he had left Warrington, Priestley remained interested in the progress of the English dissenting academies. His letters written from Birmingham in the late 1780s indicate that he was involved in discussions regarding the affairs of New College, Hackney, founded in 1786.² His letters of this period to Thomas Belsham, the first tutor in divinity at New College, evince an ongoing concern with the academy's fortunes throughout the later 1780s. In 1791, following the Birmingham riots, Priestley took up a position as a tutor at Hackney where he remained for three years lecturing on history and natural philosophy until leaving for North America in 1794.

¹ For an historical overview of the English dissenting academies including fairly detailed accounts of Daventry and Warrington see Irene Parker, *Dissenting Academies in England: their Rise and Progress and their Place among the Educational Systems of the Country* (Cambridge, 1914); Herbert McLachlan, *English Education under the Test Acts: being the History of the Non Conformist Academies (1662-1820)* (Manchester, 1931); J. W. Ashley Smith, *The Birth of Modern Education: the Contribution of the Dissenting Academies 1660-1800* (London, 1954). For a revisionist account of this earlier work see David L. Wykes, 'The Contribution of the Dissenting Academy to the Emergence of Rational Dissent', in Haakonssen (1996), 99-139. For an overview of the teaching of philosophy in the dissenting academies see Martin Fitzpatrick, '“This Candid and Liberal Method”: the Teaching of Philosophy in the Liberal Dissenting Academies of the Late Eighteenth Century in England', in *Recognitions: Essays presented to Edmund Fryde*, ed. Colin Richmond and Isobel Harvey (Aberystwyth, 1996), 481-510; Sell, *Philosophy, Dissent and Nonconformity*; 'Philosophy in the Eighteenth-Century Dissenting Academies of England and Wales', *History of Universities*, 11 (1992), 75-122.

² *Letters to Lindsey*, 17 May 1786.

Taking as its focus the philosophy syllabuses at the Daventry and Warrington academies, this chapter provides an outline of the intellectual background against which Priestley's thought developed. It is important to note that Priestley's own account of his early intellectual development was predominantly doctrinal. The *Memoirs* he compiled in the late 1780s chart a progression from the Calvinism of his childhood to the mature Socinian position he adopted at Leeds after re-reading the patristic scholar Nathaniel Lardner's *A Letter...concerning...the Logos* in the late 1760s.³ However, my aim in this chapter is not to trace the evolution of Priestley's theology. Rather, it is to illustrate the beginnings of Priestley's attempt to formulate the epistemological system which would come to underpin the Socinianism he adopted shortly after leaving Warrington. My contention is that Priestley's early engagement with debates in moral philosophy, which formed an integral part of the syllabuses at Daventry and Warrington, and his early encounter with debates on the freedom of the will, which provided the subject matter for many of his discussions with his tutors and his fellow students at Daventry, laid a crucial foundation for the theological system he later came to embrace.

I begin with an analysis of Philip Doddridge's academy lectures (the textbook used at Daventry and Warrington) to illustrate how eighteenth-century debates in philosophy were discussed in the academy lectures. I then outline how these debates were encountered by Priestley at Daventry, drawing on an extract from his 1754 journal which provides a record of his day-to-day activities, including a valuable account of the academy lectures and of Priestley's own reading.⁴ Subsequently, I examine how the same debates were presented in the lectures at Warrington prior to and during Priestley's years as a tutor there through an analysis of the philosophy teaching of John Taylor and John Seddon. Finally, I trace Priestley's engagement with these ideas through an analysis of a selection of his early writings. In the course of the discussion of moral philosophy, particular attention will be paid to the links between the English dissenting academies

³ Rutt, I, i, 69. Lardner's work had been published in 1759, but had been written over 30 years earlier. On Priestley's conversion to Socinianism see David L. Wykes, 'Joseph Priestley, Minister and Teacher', in Rivers and Wykes, 20-48, esp. 35-8. Priestley began the composition of his *Memoirs* in September 1787. By the end of March 1788 he had composed at least a first draft and had sent it to Lindsey for his suggestions. See *Letters to Lindsey*, 9 September 1787; 21 March 1788. Two MS copies of Priestley's journal are held in the special collections library at Pennsylvania State University.

⁴ The extract has been published with an introduction and notes by Tony Rail and Beryl Thomas as 'Joseph Priestley's Journal while at Daventry Academy, 1754', *E&D*, 13 (1994), 49-113.

and the Scottish universities. I argue that a number of important connections existed between several key figures in the development of Scottish moral philosophy (principally Francis Hutcheson at the University of Glasgow and David Fordyce at Marischal College, Aberdeen) and a number of tutors at the dissenting academies. These connections influenced the moral philosophy taught by the academy tutors as they attempted to negotiate the relationship between virtue and various conceptions of a moral sense, derived ultimately from the writings of the Earl of Shaftesbury but popularised through the teaching and writings of Hutcheson and Fordyce. This analysis opens my account of the relationship between the Scottish universities and the English rational dissenters, and will be important for understanding Priestley's later engagement with Thomas Reid, James Beattie, and James Oswald explored in chapter 2.

Philip Doddridge's academy lectures

Any discussion of the philosophy syllabuses at the liberal dissenting academies must begin with Philip Doddridge's academy lectures. Doddridge was an Independent minister and an academy tutor at Northampton.⁵ His lectures, which originated in the form of a four-year course when he began his career as a tutor in 1730, would become the most significant influence on the teaching at the liberal dissenting academies for at least two generations, forming the core of the syllabuses at Daventry and Warrington until well into the 1770s.⁶ The lectures undoubtedly contributed significantly to the development of philosophical thinking among rational dissenters. In fact, they deserve to be more widely known for their contribution to the development of philosophy in eighteenth-century Britain. Priestley was probably exaggerating, but perhaps not to such a great extent, when he wrote in 1778 that in the academies where Doddridge's lectures were studied 'one half of the metaphysicians of the nation are formed'.⁷

⁵ For Doddridge's biography see Isabel Rivers, 'Doddridge, Philip (1702-1751)', *ODNB*.

⁶ Doddridge's lectures were published posthumously with an introduction by the Daventry tutor Samuel Clark in 1763. See Philip Doddridge, *A Course of Lectures on the Principal Subjects in Pneumatology, Ethics, and Divinity: with References to the Most Considerable Authors on each Subject* (1763). All further references will be to the 1763 edition unless otherwise stated. On Doddridge's lectures, including how they were used in the later dissenting academies, see Isabel Rivers, *The Defence of Truth through the Knowledge of Error: Philip Doddridge's Academy Lectures* (London, 2003).

⁷ *Free Discussion*, 390.

Doddridge's lectures were unique in the eighteenth century for the sheer range of arguments and authors represented across a broad selection of philosophical and theological topics. Although Doddridge's own position on each of the subjects covered is usually made clear, the students were referred to a number of opposing arguments on each of the topics discussed. This practice of outlining an objective picture of theological and philosophical controversies provoked the disapprobation of later commentators.⁸ However, it largely came to define the pedagogical method employed in the liberal dissenting academies in the second half of the century. The lectures generally proceed by stating a proposition which is then elaborated through demonstrations and corollaries. The principal objections to this position are then outlined through a series of scholia, often divided into a counter-argument followed by an answer defending the original proposition. Each demonstration, corollary, and scholium is supplemented by a wide-ranging list of references to philosophers and theologians, both ancient and modern, which the students were expected to follow up in their own reading, often being required to give an overview of opposing positions at the beginning of the subsequent lecture.⁹

A full analysis of Doddridge's philosophy lectures would necessitate a separate study. My concern here is with two aspects of the book. Firstly, I shall examine Doddridge's presentation of contemporary debates in moral philosophy. Doddridge's outline of aspects of Shaftesburian ethics alongside his own rationalist position set an important precedent for the moral philosophy teaching in the later academies. Secondly, I

⁸ See David Bogue and James Bennett, *History of the Dissenters, from the Revolution in 1688, to the Year 1808*, 4 vols (1808-12), vol. III, 479-80; Robert Hall, 'Memoir of the Rev. Thomas Toller', in *The Works of Robert Hall, A. M.*, 6 vols (1832), vol. IV, 307-8. The 'Memoir' was originally prefixed to T. N. Holler, *Sermons on Various Subjects* (1804). William Turner suggested that Doddridge's lectures might generate a 'sceptical, or else a disputatious spirit': Turner, *The Warrington Academy* (Warrington, 1957), 12. Doddridge's lectures were also criticised from the liberal side by Clark, Aikin, and Seddon who argued that Doddridge presupposed the evidence for revelation before it had been proved: Rivers, *The Defence of Truth through the Knowledge of Error*, 28.

⁹ For an overview of Doddridge's teaching methods at Northampton see Doddridge, 'Some Account of the Life and Character of the Rev. Thomas Steffe', prefixed to *Sermons on Several Subjects: preached by the Late Reverend Mr. Tho. Steffe, of Taunton* (1742). Steffe was a former student of Doddridge who died in 1740. See also 'Appendix IX, Constitutions Orders & Rules relating to the Academy at Northampton', in Malcolm Deacon, *Philip Doddridge of Northampton 1702-51* (Northampton, 1980), 191-8; Job Orton, *Memoirs of the Life, Character and Writings of the Late Reverend Philip Doddridge, D.D.* (Salop, 1766), 86-122; Andrew Kippis's entry for Doddridge in Andrew Kippis and Joseph Towers, *Biographia Britannica: or, the Lives of the Most Eminent Persons who have flourished in Great-Britain and Ireland, from the Earliest Ages, to the Present Times*, 2nd edn, 5 vols (1778-93), vol. V, 266-315. Kippis, who was a student at Doddridge's Northampton academy between 1741 and 1746, revises much of Orton's account of Doddridge's pedagogical methods.

shall examine Doddridge's discussion concerning the question of the freedom of the will. As with the syllabuses of philosophy being developed in some of the Scottish universities, Doddridge's lectures attempted to ground ethics within a wider conception of human nature. The lectures begin with a section 'Of the powers and faculties of the human mind, and the instinct of brutes' (where Doddridge proposes 'To take a survey of the principal faculties of the human mind'), before proceeding to cover 'the being of God, and his natural perfections', 'Of the nature of moral virtue in general, and the moral attributes of God', followed by the more specifically theological sections.¹⁰ Doddridge's general epistemology, outlined in Part I, is derived from Locke, Descartes, and Isaac Watts. He rejects any innate ideas in the mind (proposition 5), derives all ideas from sensation and reflection, and argues against both Watts's position that '*Abstraction*' constitutes a third source of generating ideas and Peter Browne's position that all ideas are originally derived from sensation.¹¹ However, within this epistemological framework, Doddridge allows for a number of instincts, defined as impulses to action preceding a rational consideration of the beneficial consequences attendant upon it. These instincts, among which Doddridge lists the 'natural appetites' and 'parental affection', 'greatly tend both to the good of individuals and the species'. Although this is not necessarily inconsistent with Doddridge's Lockean position, one of the references here is particularly interesting: in the subsequent corollary Doddridge refers his students to Francis Hutcheson's *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725).¹²

When Doddridge turns specifically to ethics in Part III of his lectures, he advocates a rationalist approach where virtue is defined as acting in accordance with the moral fitness of things.¹³ The conditions for moral action are dependent on a conception of God's nature (as distinct from his will) containing the immutable ideas of 'the *nature, circumstances and relations* of things'.¹⁴ Virtue inheres not in the effects of an action, but in the agent's conformity to these immutable ethical relations. The possibility of acting

¹⁰ Doddridge, *Lectures*, 5.

¹¹ *Lectures*, 12-3.

¹² *Lectures*, 31. Locke, *Essay*, I, iii, 3, concedes that there are certain 'innate practical Principles', defined as 'Inclinations of the Appetite to good'.

¹³ *Lectures*, 106.

¹⁴ *Lectures*, 104.

virtuously assumes a freedom of choice, although Doddridge concedes that exactly how this freedom is to be understood is a complex point. He locates his own position in a tradition including Samuel Clarke, John Balguy, ‘those of the *ancients*’ who defined virtue as ‘*living according to nature*’, and, to a slightly lesser extent, William Wollaston.¹⁵ Interestingly though, just as Doddridge had slightly modified his epistemology to account for the existence of certain instincts, within this rationalist ethical framework he allows for a ‘*Moral Sense*’, defined as ‘a kind of natural instinct’, which apprehends the qualities of actions ‘previous to any reasoning upon the remoter consequences’.¹⁶ Ethical action is thus, in part, aestheticised so that ‘virtue is spontaneously perceived as ‘BEAUTY or excellency’ and vice as ‘TURPITUDE and deformity’.¹⁷ The references are to Hutcheson’s *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections* (1726) and Shaftesbury’s *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711). It is worth noting, however, that in his subsequent discussion Doddridge carefully differentiates his own notion of the moral sense from Hutcheson’s. Doddridge argues that although there certainly is a moral sense, this does not imply an ‘innate idea’ any more than the ‘intuitive discerning of self-evident propositions’ implies that the ideas connected with them are innate. Furthermore, Doddridge criticises Hutcheson, arguing that to allow the instinct of the moral sense to be the foundation of virtue risks making virtue an arbitrary matter.¹⁸ He implies that Hutcheson has essentially misinterpreted Shaftesbury, who, Doddridge argues, is properly understood as a rationalist in ethics. Shaftesbury, Doddridge argues, considers virtue as founded on ‘the *eternal measure and immutable relation* of things’, or, as consisting ‘in a certain just disposition of a rational creature towards the moral objects of right and wrong’.¹⁹

Doddridge’s engagement with aspects of Shaftesburian moral philosophy in his lectures has an interesting history. As early as January 1721, when Doddridge was in his early twenties, he had written to his friend Samuel Clark (1684-1750) informing him that he was reading ‘Lord Shaftesbury’s Works’, noting that ‘as far as I can judge by the half I

¹⁵ *Lectures*, 120. The relevant texts cited by Doddridge are Clarke’s Boyle lectures (1704-5) and Balguy’s *The Foundation of Moral Goodness* (1728).

¹⁶ *Lectures*, 103

¹⁷ *Lectures*, 105.

¹⁸ *Lectures*, 121.

¹⁹ *Lectures*, 121-2. On Doddridge’s engagement with Shaftesbury see Rivers, vol. II, 192-5.

have dispatched, [they] contain a strange mixture of good sense and extravagance'.²⁰ Clark responded, advising Doddridge to guard against Shaftesbury's critical reflections on revealed religion, for which Doddridge thanked him, assuring his mentor of his caution.²¹ As an academy tutor, Doddridge maintained links with the Scottish universities; he was awarded the degree of DD from Marischal College, Aberdeen in 1736 and from King's College, Aberdeen the following year. He was also acquainted with at least one important figure in the development of Scottish moral philosophy: David Fordyce. Fordyce was a lecturer at Marischal College between 1742 and 1751. Paul Wood has located him in a tradition stemming from George Turnbull (1698-1748) (of whom Fordyce wrote approvingly to Doddridge) in which ethics is properly thought to be grounded in a scientific conception of human nature.²² Fordyce's own work advocates a similar approach. His *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, published posthumously in 1754, recommends an application of the method developed in the natural sciences to the study of ethics.²³ This methodology is combined with an interest in Shaftesburian moral sense theory.²⁴ In the *Elements*, Fordyce posits an innate faculty of the moral sense, an 'inward Judge' which serves as a disinterested arbiter over all 'Actions and Principles of Conduct'.²⁵

From around 1737 Fordyce had passed some years in England.²⁶ He spent time at Doddridge's academy, and began a correspondence with Doddridge which he was to resume after his return to Scotland.²⁷ Doddridge evidently thought favourably of Fordyce

²⁰ Philip Doddridge to Samuel Clark, 3 January 1721, *The Correspondence and Diary of Philip Doddridge, D.D.*, ed. John Doddridge Humphreys, 5 vols (1829-31), vol. I, 36.

²¹ Samuel Clark to Philip Doddridge, [March] 1721, *Correspondence*, vol. I, 62; Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *Calendar of the Correspondence of Philip Doddridge DD (1702-1751)* (London, 1979), letter 11. Philip Doddridge to Samuel Clarke, [March] 1721, *Correspondence*, vol. I, 67; Nuttall, *Calendar*, letter 13.

²² On Turnbull see M. A. Stewart, 'George Turnbull and Educational Reform', in *Aberdeen and the Enlightenment*, ed. J. J. Carter and J. H. Pittock (Aberdeen, 1987), 95-103. For Fordyce's recommendation of Turnbull to Doddridge see *Correspondence*, vol. III, 416. On Fordyce see Wood, *The Aberdeen Enlightenment: the Arts Curriculum in the Eighteenth Century* (Aberdeen, 1993), 46; 'Science and the Pursuit of Virtue in the Aberdeen Enlightenment', in *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. M. A. Stewart (Oxford, 1990), 127-49.

²³ David Fordyce, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy in Three Books* (1754), 7.

²⁴ For more on Fordyce's interest in and development of Shaftesburian moral philosophy see Isabel Rivers, 'Shaftesburian Enthusiasm and the Evangelical Revival', in *Revival and Religion since 1700: Essays for John Walsh*, ed. Jane Garnett and Colin Matthew (London, 1993), 21-39.

²⁵ Fordyce, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 18.

²⁶ Wood, *The Aberdeen Enlightenment*, 50.

²⁷ Peter Jones, 'The Polite Academy and the Presbyterians, 1720-1770', in *New Perspectives on the Politics and Culture of Early Modern Scotland*, ed. J. Dwyer et al. (Edinburgh, 1982), 160-5. Doddridge,

and his writings. In a letter to Clark of February 1738 he referred to him as ‘an excellent Scholar’, adding ‘nor did I ever meet with a Person of his Age who had made deeper & juster Reflections on human Nature’.²⁸ Fordyce’s letters to Doddridge indicate that the two men discussed the subject of moral philosophy in some depth. Fordyce sent Doddridge a copy of his manuscript work, an ‘Essay on Human Nature’, in 1739, parts of which at least, Doddridge read and returned with his own comments.²⁹ Fordyce’s *Dialogues concerning Education* (1745; 1748), recommended by Doddridge in a letter to Clark, was a rhapsodic celebration of Doddridge’s educational methods and affectionate religion and Shaftesburian moral philosophy.³⁰ Fordyce’s *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* was listed among the references in Doddridge’s lectures.³¹ Despite their evident acquaintance, however, it is debatable whether Fordyce significantly influenced Doddridge’s philosophy teaching. Isabel Rivers has argued that Fordyce’s *Dialogues* was ‘an act of creative transformation that masked the significant differences between the philosophy teaching of the two men’, and stresses the point that Doddridge’s interpretation of Shaftesbury owed less to Fordyce than to English theologians such as Joseph Butler.³² However, Doddridge’s own position is not, in this case, the most important factor. Doddridge was clearly a rationalist with respect to ethics. However, the references to and summaries of the writings of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Fordyce in his lectures would introduce two generations of English dissenters to these thinkers and debates through the syllabuses of moral philosophy at the liberal dissenting academies. Crucially, this meant that students would encounter these ideas in educational

Correspondence includes eight letters to Doddridge from Fordyce written between 1739 and 1748: vol. III, 363-8, 414-17, 442-3, 516-19; vol. IV, 23-5, 53-5, 536-7; vol. V, 55-7. Nuttall, *Calendar* lists another four letters from Fordyce not included in Humphreys’s edition: letters 568, 617, 702, 898.

²⁸ Philip Doddridge to Samuel Clark, 27 February 1738/9, *Correspondence*, vol. III, 358; Nuttall, *Calendar*, letter 535.

²⁹ See Fordyce’s letter to Doddridge of 3 October 1739, Nuttall, *Calendar*, letter 565. The letter is incorrectly dated by Humphreys to 10 April 1740, *Correspondence*, vol. III, 442-3. That Doddridge read and corrected at least parts of Fordyce’s ‘Essay’ is evident from a letter of 22 August 1741, *Correspondence*, vol. IV, 53-5. Fordyce’s ‘Essay on Human Nature’ was not published and is now lost. Jones writes that ‘parts of it may have surfaced in the *Dialogues concerning Education*’, Jones, ‘The Polite Academy and the Presbyterians’, 161, and Wood, that in it ‘he [Fordyce] apparently combined the concerns of the moralist with the anatomist of the mind’, Wood, *The Aberdeen Enlightenment*, 50.

³⁰ Philip Doddridge to Samuel Clark, 24 February 1744/45; Nuttall, *Calendar*, letter 1041. On the *Dialogues* see Rivers, vol. II, 181-3; ‘Shaftesburian Enthusiasm and the Evangelical Revival’, 32-6.

³¹ Doddridge, *Lectures*, 28; 127; 152; 177.

³² Rivers, vol. II, 195.

environments where they were encouraged to engage critically with both sides of a debate and were free to decide for themselves on philosophical and theological disputes.

Doddridge's lectures introduced the question of liberty and necessity in lectures 18-20. The principal texts referred to are Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Watts's *Philosophical Essays* (1733), and Anthony Collins's *A Philosophical Inquiry concerning Human Liberty* (1717), yet the range of references is typically eclectic.³³ Doddridge's own position is broadly libertarian. However, he typically outlines several of the arguments of necessitarian thinkers. Furthermore, a close examination of these lectures reveals that Doddridge's own position is by no means straightforward. In lecture 18 Doddridge differentiates between four kinds of liberty: natural liberty, external liberty, philosophical liberty, and moral liberty. Natural liberty is defined as a liberty of choice; external liberty as a liberty of action; philosophical liberty as a liberty to act in accordance with reason; moral liberty as being under no constraint of any superior being.³⁴ The four of these in union form a '*Compleat liberty*', defined as 'a certain symmetry or subordination of the faculties', a state of perfection, where the agent is free to act in accordance with the dictates of reason.³⁵

With regard to natural liberty, Doddridge's position is libertarian: he affirms that 'The mind of man is possessed of natural liberty, *i. e.* liberty of choice'.³⁶ This is defended by recourse to four arguments: firstly, our consciousness of the power to choose otherwise than we do in a multitude of instances; secondly, a universal consent that our own actions are morally judged by our own consciences, and that we rightly condemn ourselves for certain actions, which would be meaningless if they were wholly determined; thirdly, the fact that the majority of nations agree to punish individuals for some of their actions, which again would be nonsensical were the actions wholly determined; fourthly, the fact that when equal objects are presented to our choice, we sometimes choose one of them without being able to assign a reason for the preference. Following the demonstrations, Doddridge raises an objection to this position, similar to

³³ Doddridge refers his students to the works of Cicero, Leibniz, Descartes, Philipp van Limborch, John Tillotson, Jean Alphonse Turretine (1671-1737), Clarke, Henry Grove, Colin MacLaurin (1698-1746), John Jackson (1686-1763), Andrew Baxter (1686/7-1750), Hutcheson, Hartley, Butler, Jeremiah Seed (1699?-1747), and Richard Lucas (1648/9-1715).

³⁴ Doddridge, *Lectures*, 34-5.

³⁵ *Lectures*, 35.

³⁶ *Lectures*, 36

that outlined by Locke in the first edition of the *Essay*: we are formed with a ‘necessary desire of happiness’, and thus cannot but choose what, in certain circumstances, is most conducive to promoting our own happiness.³⁷ Doddridge counters this position with the argument that, in certain circumstances, the mind is able to go against its natural inclination if it will lead to some greater good in the future. Yet in these circumstances the mind inevitably ‘condemns itself of folly’, which it would never do if what it chose always appeared to be the greatest good.³⁸ This defence is later qualified, however, in the fifth demonstration of proposition 18 where Doddridge states: ‘It is extremely difficult to remove all the objections against liberty of choice, especially against that which is stated in *Prop. 16. Sch. 1.*’³⁹ In the following seven scholia Doddridge raises further arguments against his original four demonstrations, many of them derived from Collins.⁴⁰

On philosophical liberty Doddridge’s position is more overtly ambivalent. Proposition 17 asserts: ‘The philosophical liberty of the mind is much impaired, and we are obnoxious to a lamentable degree of servitude’.⁴¹ The following four demonstrations explain that this is due to the influence of the passions, which ‘insensibly mingle themselves with the whole process of reasoning [...] obscuring truth and gilding error’, and the ‘Bodily constitution and appetite’, which frequently ‘hinder the execution of the wisest volitions’. According to Doddridge, however, these hindrances to a correct use of the reason are not insurmountable, so that ‘the way to happiness is rather difficult than impossible’. Doddridge here exhibits a scepticism towards the freedom of the will on account of the dictates of the passions; the language and references indicate that his position is derived from (Calvinist) theological concerns. In the first corollary he holds that:

³⁷ *Lectures*, 37. For an account of Locke’s position on the question of liberty and necessity and the ways in which this position altered with the different editions of the *Essay* see Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity*, 19-40.

³⁸ *Lectures*, 37.

³⁹ *Lectures*, 41.

⁴⁰ *Lectures*, 38.

⁴¹ *Lectures*, 39.

experience may convince us too surely, that the symmetry of the soul and subordination of its faculties mentioned *Def. 26. Cor 2.* in which compleat liberty consists, is in a great measure violated in the human soul.⁴²

The references direct the students to the Anglican clergyman Jeremiah Seed's sermon 'On the Corruption of Human Nature', from which many of Doddridge's arguments in this section are derived.⁴³ Proposition 17 concludes the first part of the lectures on an ominous note, asserting: 'There are many particulars in which the knowledge we have of our own minds is very imperfect, and we are a great mystery to ourselves'.⁴⁴ In the following demonstrations Doddridge raises the problematic questions of the relationship between soul and body, dreams, and 'the phaenomenon of phrensy', when the 'state of the nerves and juices of the body [...] so strangely affect our rational powers'.⁴⁵

In Part II, '*Of the BEING of a GOD and his NATURAL PERFECTIONS*', Doddridge raises the difficult question of how natural liberty can be reconciled with divine prescience:

It is objected that if God be thus the author of all of our ideas and of all our motions, then also of all our volitions, which would be inconsistent with that liberty of choice asserted, *Prop. 16.*

He attempts to solve this difficulty by arguing that the will is not 'an effect of any necessary efficient cause', but rather 'a tendency towards the production of an effect'. Notwithstanding all the 'requisites to volition', it lies ultimately 'in our own breast' to determine whether to act one way or another. Although God 'adds efficacy' to our own determinations, 'even when it is most foolish and pernicious', this does not mean that he is the cause of the action. Doddridge defends this position against possible objections by

⁴² *Lectures*, 40.

⁴³ See Jeremiah Seed, *Discourses on Several Important Subjects. To which are added, Eight Sermons preached at the Lady Moyer's Lecture, in the Cathedral Church of St. Pauls, London*, 2 vols (1743), vol. II, 318-45. Doddridge's position here can also be usefully compared with chapter 9 'Of Free Will' in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, see *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss, 4 vols (New Haven, 2003), vol. II, 618-19.

⁴⁴ *Lectures*, 41.

⁴⁵ *Lectures*, 42.

arguing that, maintaining divine prescience, it is more difficult to explain why the deity should not intervene to prevent certain ill-judged actions than to concede the case for him ‘adding efficacy to them in a natural way’.⁴⁶

Philosophical debate at Daventry

This sketch of Doddridge’s lectures serves as an introduction to the kind of philosophy that Priestley would have encountered as a student at Daventry. In addition to forming the core of the syllabus at Northampton, Doddridge’s lectures were used in a manuscript version at Daventry by Caleb Ashworth (1720-1775) and Samuel Clark (1727-1769).⁴⁷ The 1763 printed edition, prepared by Clark, most likely represents fairly accurately the content of the lectures as they were taught during Priestley’s years at the academy. Doddridge’s two hundred and thirty lectures were introduced in the second year and dominated the final three years of the four-year curriculum. The lectures would thus have comprised the core of the syllabus taken by Priestley, who entered the academy in 1752 at the end of the second year of the four-year course.⁴⁸

Furthermore, it was not just Doddridge’s lectures that were preserved in the teaching at Daventry, but, perhaps most importantly, his pedagogical method. The practice of outlining an objective picture of theological and philosophical disputes was the aspect of his own education which Priestley found most stimulating. Recalling his time at the academy, Priestley wrote in his *Memoirs*:

The general plan of our studies, which may be seen in Dr. Doddridge’s published lectures, was exceedingly favourable to free enquiry, as we were referred to authors on both sides of

⁴⁶ *Lectures*, 74.

⁴⁷ Ashworth was one of Doddridge’s former pupils and had been designated by Doddridge as his successor at Northampton. Clark, the sub-tutor, and also a former pupil of Doddridge, had been a philosophy tutor at Northampton. He was the son of Doddridge’s friend Samuel Clark.

⁴⁸ Schofield notes that Priestley began his studies in the third year of the five-year course, Schofield, I, 46. However, in his *Memoirs* Priestley cites his own ‘proficiency in several branches of learning’ as the reason for his being excused ‘all the studies of the first year, and a greater part of those of the second’, Rutt, I, i, 13. This suggests that he entered the academy towards the end of the second year. See ‘Appendix I: DWL MS L.57 (10)’ for more on the dating of Priestley’s years at the academy.

every question, and were even required to give an account of them. It was also expected that we should abridge the most important of them for our future use.⁴⁹

Doddridge's educational method evidently became associated for Priestley with his conviction that controversy served as a pragmatic method for arriving at truth. The academy, he wrote in his *Memoirs*, was 'peculiarly favourable to the serious pursuit of truth, as the students were about equally divided upon every question of much importance'. In this way, the questions of 'liberty and necessity', 'the sleep of the soul', and 'all the articles of theological orthodoxy and heresy' were discussed, with 'Dr. Ashworth taking the orthodox side of every question, and Mr. Clark [...] that of heresy'. Lectures 'had often the air of friendly conversations', and the students 'were permitted to ask whatever questions, and to make whatever remarks, [they] pleased'.⁵⁰ Priestley's *Memoirs* recall that at Daventry 'The public library contained all the books to which we were referred', and his Daventry journal records him reading the references to the lectures on several occasions.⁵¹ The journal indicates that Doddridge's philosophy lectures not only supplied the core of the academic syllabus, but frequently provided the subject matter for discussions at the academy's debating society.⁵² The topic of debate on 20 November, for example, was 'Berkeley's scheme', the subject of an appendix to Part II of Doddridge's lectures.⁵³ Priestley's entry for 25 December records a meeting where John Alexander (1736-1765) and Thomas Jowell debated the deity's 'foreknowledge of contingencies', the content of the second half of lecture 40 from Doddridge's course.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Rutt I, i, 23-4.

⁵⁰ Rutt, I, i, 23.

⁵¹ Rutt, I, i, 24; see, for example, Rail and Thomas, ed., 'Joseph Priestley's Journal', 60; 61.

⁵² The literary or debating society at Daventry met weekly, usually on Wednesdays. All members were expected to contribute a short oration on penalty of a fine. Students took turns to act as chairman or 'moderator', taking notes and presenting a summary of the main debate at the next weekly meeting, Rail and Thomas, ed., 'Joseph Priestley's Journal', 54n.

⁵³ Rail and Thomas, ed., 'Joseph Priestley's Journal', 94; Doddridge, *Lectures*, 101-3.

⁵⁴ Rail and Thomas, ed., 'Joseph Priestley's Journal', 104; Doddridge, *Lectures*, 78-81. John Alexander became minister at Longdon Green chapel, Lichfield. Priestley refers to him in his *Memoirs* as 'Mr Alexander of Birmingham', Rutt, I, i, 25. 'Jowell' (to follow Priestley's spelling) was probably Thomas Joel, minister at Chichester between 1758 and 1760, who was admitted to Daventry on the Coward Fund. However, an entry in the Minutes of the Coward Trust from 18 May 1753 records that it was 'Ordered that Thomas Joel one of the students under the care of Dr. Jennings be dismissed at Midsummer next', 'Minutes Trust W[illiam] C[oward] from May 16th 1738 to Nov^r 30th 1778', DWL New College MSS CT.1, f. 142. This would be incompatible with the fact that 'Jowell' is mentioned in Priestley's journal throughout 1754, unless the note indicated the Joel was dismissed from the Coward Trust fund rather than the academy itself.

Moral philosophy formed a substantial component of the academic syllabus. A timetable dating from Priestley's years at the academy indicates that the teaching of ethics constituted just under half of the week's classes in the penultimate year.⁵⁵ Furthermore, discussions concerning the foundation of ethics evidently featured prominently on the list of topics at the debating society. On 8 May Priestley recorded that he 'delivered an appendix to my oration upon the nature and foundation of virtue', and two days later that he 'Composed and transcribed another method of reconciling the hypothesis about the nature and foundation of virtue in the wise'.⁵⁶

The debate over liberty and necessity also occupied Priestley and his contemporaries during their student years. According to the testimony of his *Memoirs*, Priestley's first encounter with the debate had been in the early 1750s, whilst he was still a grammar school pupil. Priestley defended the position of philosophical liberty in a correspondence with Peter Annet (1693-1769), a free-thinker and a 'Necessarian'.⁵⁷ Although, according to Priestley's later testimony, 'Mr. Annet often pressed [Priestley] to give him [Annet] leave to publish' the letters, Priestley refused, and the originals do not appear to have survived.⁵⁸ Priestley's Daventry journal confirms his statement that his correspondence with Annet lasted for several years: on 8 May and 14 July 1754 Priestley recorded receiving letters from Annet.⁵⁹ Priestley's later recollection that 'liberty and necessity' were among the 'question[s] of much importance' discussed at Daventry is frequently evinced by his journal: in eight separate entries from across the year Priestley recorded discussions on the topic.⁶⁰ On 10 May, for example, Priestley noted: 'In our room, Whitehead, Webb and I talked about liberty and necessity &c. till pretty late'; his entry for 13 November reads: 'Drunk tea with Mr. Tayler, company Jackson, our class, Smith, Webb and Tayler; about necessity, &c.'⁶¹ The same subject comprised several of Priestley's conversations with his tutors. On 25 May, for example, he recorded that he

⁵⁵ See 'Appendix I: DWL MS L.57 (10)'.

⁵⁶ Rail and Thomas, ed., 'Joseph Priestley's Journal', 59.

⁵⁷ Rutt I, i, 19. 'Necessarian' is the noun used (idiosyncratically) by Priestley. I shall hereafter use the more common 'necessitarian' and 'necessitarianism'.

⁵⁸ Rutt, I, i, 19.

⁵⁹ Rail and Thomas, ed., 'Joseph Priestley's Journal', 59; 74. Priestley does not comment on the content of these letters.

⁶⁰ 'Joseph Priestley's Journal', 59; 64; 80; 93; 100; 101; 104.

⁶¹ 'Joseph Priestley's Journal', 59; 93.

‘Spent till eight o’clock with Mr. Ashworth in his closet in serious discourse, and about necessity, extremely agreeable’; on 10 December he recorded a meeting ‘With Mr. Ashworth reading my sermon and talking about necessity, &c.’⁶² In four entries for November and December Priestley recorded writing a discourse on ‘*Practical Necessity*’, adding the final corrections to the piece after the previously cited conversation with Ashworth.⁶³ The question of liberty and necessity was also a popular topic at the academy’s debating society. On 11 December Priestley recorded delivering an oration to the society on ‘liberty no foundation for praise or blame’, presumably modelled on a discourse of the same name which he had recorded composing on 24 November.⁶⁴ The society’s topic for 25 December was, again, ‘liberty and necessity’.⁶⁵ The entry, one of the most detailed descriptions of a society meeting, records that the students discussed ‘proof from appearances’, ‘the foundation of praise and blame upon the schemes’, and the ‘knowledge of contingencies’. Priestley noted that Jowell and Radcliffe Scholefield (1731?-1803) argued for liberty, Francis Webb (1735-1815) for necessity, and that he himself ‘blew for necessity till the last departed’.⁶⁶

The arguments and references presented in Doddridge’s lectures would almost certainly have supplied the content of these debates. In fact, the references to the discussion of liberty and necessity in Doddridge’s lectures would have introduced Priestley to two important thinkers who were to shape his future philosophical career: Anthony Collins and David Hartley. Collins had engaged in a debate with Samuel Clarke in the early eighteenth century, in the course of which he had developed materialist and necessitarian arguments, many of which would be reformulated by Priestley in his 1778 debate with Richard Price.⁶⁷ In Collins’s *A Philosophical Inquiry concerning Human Liberty* Priestley would have discovered most of the arguments which would be central to his own later necessitarianism: the claim that necessity does not deny the freedom of all human actions, the claim that necessity is the only foundation for morality, and the claim that necessitarianism can be proved conclusively through an analysis of cause and

⁶² ‘Joseph Priestley’s Journal’, 64; 100.

⁶³ ‘Joseph Priestley’s Journal’, 94; 95; 99; 100.

⁶⁴ ‘Joseph Priestley’s Journal’, 101; 96.

⁶⁵ ‘Joseph Priestley’s Journal’, 104.

⁶⁶ ‘Joseph Priestley’s Journal’, 104.

⁶⁷ See chapter 3.

effect.⁶⁸ Priestley would later prepare a new edition of Collins's *Inquiry* in an attempt to propagate his own necessitarian ideas.⁶⁹ In the preface to his later *The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated* (1777), he claimed he had first encountered the necessitarian doctrine by reading Collins.⁷⁰

However, he claimed to have been 'much more confirmed' in it by reading Hartley.⁷¹ Priestley first mentioned Hartley in his Daventry journal on 10 June 1754, where he recorded a discussion with Thomas Walker (*d.* 1764), minister of Mill Hill Chapel, Leeds, in the course of which he had spoken 'very much in praise of Hartley'.⁷² He recorded studying the first volume of Hartley's *Observations on Man* (1749) between 26 October and 12 November. One month previously, Priestley had composed a letter to Hartley, and on 6 October he recorded drawing up 'some queries for the examination of Dr Hartley', which most likely comprised a second letter written on 11 October.⁷³ Hartley evidently replied: on 9 December Priestley recorded showing 'Mr. Ashworth the first letter of Hartley to me', noting that 'he [Ashworth] was prodigiously pleased with it'.⁷⁴ The fact that Priestley was reading and corresponding with Hartley at the same time as being engaged in these debates on liberty and necessity suggests that it was Hartley that was the major influence on his ideas at this stage.

Hartley's 'doctrine of vibrations', outlined in Part I of the *Observations of Man*, held that the 'subtle influences' of infinitesimal particles of matter transmit signals through the nervous system. In this way, Hartley developed an account of perception where simple ideas, primarily the ideas of pleasure and pain, are derived directly from material sensations.⁷⁵ These, in turn, develop through the process of association to form

⁶⁸ Anthony Collins, *A Philosophical Inquiry concerning Human Liberty* (1717), ii-iii; 58-9. On Collins's necessitarianism see Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity*, 53-8; William Rowe, 'Causality and Free Will in the Controversy between Collins and Clarke', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 25 (1987), 52-67; Paul Russell, 'Hume's *Treatise* and the Clarke Collins Controversy', *Hume Studies*, 21.1 (1995), 95-115.

⁶⁹ See chapter 4.

⁷⁰ *Phil. Necessity*, xxx.

⁷¹ *Phil. Necessity*, xxx.

⁷² Rail and Thomas, ed., 'Joseph Priestley's Journal', 68.

⁷³ 'Joseph Priestley's Journal', 83-4; 85; 86. In Priestley's *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever* (1780) he noted that in this correspondence he convinced Hartley of the veracity of the argument that 'the pains and mortifications of our infant state are the natural means of lessening the pains and mortifications of advanced life', *Phil. Unbeliever*, 71.

⁷⁴ 'Joseph Priestley's Journal', 100.

⁷⁵ Hartley, *Observations on Man, his Frame his Duty and his Expectations*, 2 vols (1749), vol. I, 5-84. On Hartley see R. C. Allen, *David Hartley on Human Nature* (Albany, 1999).

all our complex ideas, so that the theory of association comes, ultimately, to explain all the intellectual faculties.⁷⁶ Hartley first addresses the question of liberty and necessity in the conclusion to Part I, ‘Containing some Remarks on the mechanism of the Human Mind’.⁷⁷ He here gives his most concise definition of ‘the Mechanism or Necessity of human Actions’:

each Action results from the previous Circumstances of Body and Mind, in the same manner, and with the same Certainty, as other Effects do from their mechanical Causes; so that a Person cannot do indifferently either of the Actions *A*, and its contrary *a*, while the previous Circumstances are the same; but is under an absolute Necessity of doing one of them, and that only.⁷⁸

This position is defined in opposition to ‘Free-will’, being either ‘a Power of doing either the Action *A*, or its contrary *a*; while the previous Circumstances remain the same’ or ‘a Power of beginning Motion’.⁷⁹ Free will, in either of these senses, is impossible because all actions are determined by motives. Motives are defined as the previous circumstances existing in the brain, either the vibrations derived directly from sense impressions, or the compound effect of former impressions developed via association. Free will as defined in various other senses (‘the Power of doing what a person wills to do, or of deliberating, suspending, choosing, &c. or of resisting the Motives of Sensuality, Ambition, Resentment, &c.’) Hartley allows as being consistent with the doctrine of mechanism.⁸⁰ He thus distinguishes between free will ‘in the popular and practical sense’, which is consistent with the mechanistic theory of mind, and free will in the ‘philosophical Sense’, which is not.⁸¹ Hartley here appeals to the authority of experience and observation in support of his theory, and calls on the reader to ‘make the Trial, especially upon himself,

⁷⁶ Hartley’s own term is the ‘intellectual Pleasures and Pains’, which he divides into six classes: Imagination, Ambition, Self-interest, Sympathy, Theopathy, and the Moral Sense. His analysis of these six classes, in which he attempts to derive them from material sensations through the process of association, occurs in chapter IV of volume I: *Observations*, vol. I, 416-99.

⁷⁷ Hartley, *Observations*, vol. I, 500-12. For a further account of ‘Hartley on Association, Mechanism, and Providence’ see Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity*, 156-64.

⁷⁸ *Observations*, vol. I, 500.

⁷⁹ *Observations*, vol. I, 501.

⁸⁰ *Observations*, vol. I, 501.

⁸¹ The sense in which Hartley uses the phrase ‘philosophical free will’ should not be confused with the way the phrase was used by Doddridge.

since such a Self-examination cannot but be profitable'.⁸² Observation, Hartley claims, can establish the doctrine of the mechanism of the mind with the same certainty as we can infer causation in the natural world.

As we shall later see, Hartley's application of the analysis of cause and effect in the natural world to explain the mechanism of the mind would prove fundamental to Priestley's later writings. However, it was Hartley's attempt to reconcile his necessitarianism with morality and religion which was the most significant aspect of his work in relation to the influence it would have over Priestley as a student. The remainder of the conclusion to Part I is largely concerned with illustrating the moral benefits of a belief in philosophical necessity. This is contingent on Hartley's theological assumption that the deity has ordered all things such that 'Virtue must have amiable and pleasing Ideas affixed to it; Vice, odious ones'.⁸³ After considering a number of possible objections to the theory, Hartley lists 'some Consequences of the Doctrine of Mechanism, which seem to me to be strong Presumptions in its favour'.⁸⁴ A belief in philosophical necessity, firstly, reconciles the prescience of God with the free will of man by removing free will in its philosophical sense; secondly, engenders humility and self-annihilation, since all actions are eventually seen to result from the grace and goodness of God; thirdly (for the same reason), abates resentment against others; fourthly, lends support to the doctrine of universal restoration, since all that is done by the appointment of a benevolent deity must result in happiness; fifthly, tends to cause us to labour more with ourselves and others 'from the greater Certainty attending all Endeavours that operate in a mechanical Way'; sixthly, allows a number of scriptural passages to be interpreted which, retaining a belief in philosophical free will, would remain resistant to a coherent interpretation.⁸⁵ In the final section of the conclusion, Hartley raises the possible objection that a belief in philosophical necessity, as well as in his doctrine of vibrations more generally, is inconsistent with the immateriality and immortality of the soul. To this, Hartley answers that his theory does not *prove* the materiality of the soul, but merely assumes some relationship between the soul and the body as a prerequisite to further

⁸² *Observations*, vol. I, 502.

⁸³ *Observations*, vol. I, 504. See Locke, *Essay*, I, iii, 6.

⁸⁴ *Observations*, vol. I, 510.

⁸⁵ *Observations*, vol. I, 510.

enquiries. However, Hartley does concede (following Locke) that matter, ‘if it could be endued with the most simple kinds of Sensation, might also arrive at all that intelligence of which the human Mind is possessed’.⁸⁶ Admitting that this would ‘overturn all the Arguments which are usually brought for the Immateriality of the Soul’, Hartley declines to pursue the question any further.⁸⁷ Finally, Hartley contends that ‘the Immateriality of the Soul has little or no Connexion with its Immortality’. In the final paragraph he advocates a variety of mortalist theory, recommending that ‘we ought to depend upon Him who first breathed into Man the Breath of the present Life, for our Resurrection to a better’.⁸⁸

Hartley returned to the question of liberty and necessity in Part II of the *Observations*. In proposition 14 he argues that religion requires ‘voluntary Powers over our Affections and Actions’, or free will in the popular and practical sense.⁸⁹ In this way, ‘Meditation, religious Conversation, reading practical Books of Religion, and Prayer’ are assigned a role as the means by which we can regulate ‘our Affections and Actions according to the Will of God’.⁹⁰ However, in the following proposition Hartley stresses that this does not mean that religion presupposes free will in the philosophical sense, as defined in the first volume of the work. Subsequently, Hartley considers the objection that, unless philosophical liberty is admitted, there is ‘no Foundation for Commendation or Blame, and consequently no difference between Virtue and Vice’. In response to this, Hartley posits that there are two different modes of speaking (‘as it were, two different Languages’) corresponding to the popular and the philosophical definitions of free will.⁹¹ Speaking in the popular sense, man is justly blamed by others ‘merely for the right or wrong Use of his voluntary powers’.⁹² In the same mode of speaking, a similar judicial role is assigned to the deity, to whom ‘Justice is ascribed’ ‘only in a popular and anthropomorphical Sense’. Thus, according to the same language, God is vindicated from being the ‘Author of Sin’ because sin and vice, as voluntary actions, are ascribed to

⁸⁶ *Observations*, vol. I, 511; Locke, *Essay*, IV, iii, 6.

⁸⁷ *Observations*, vol. I, 511.

⁸⁸ *Observations*, vol. I, 512. On mortalism see chapter 3 below.

⁸⁹ *Observations*, vol. II, 54.

⁹⁰ *Observations*, vol. II, 53.

⁹¹ *Observations*, vol. II, 58.

⁹² *Observations*, vol. II, 59.

men.⁹³ In the philosophical language, however, the justice of God is more properly spoken of as ‘Benevolence’.⁹⁴ Happiness has thus come to replace virtue as the criterion of ethics. Hartley uses a Lockean distinction between primary and secondary qualities to illustrate his point:

according to this, Virtue and Vice are to Actions, what secondary Qualities are to natural Bodies; *i. e.* only Ways of expressing the Relation which they bear to Happiness and Misery, just as the secondary Qualities of Bodies are only modifications of the primary ones.⁹⁵

In the philosophical sense, God is spoken of as the author of sin; however, since vice and sin are to be properly understood as ‘Modifications and Compositions of natural Evil’, this is only to ascribe natural evil to the deity.⁹⁶ However, since ‘the Balance of natural Good’ is infinite, even this natural evil ‘will be absorbed and annihilated by it’.⁹⁷ Hartley again draws on Locke to illustrate this concept:

It may a little illustrate what is here delivered, to remark, that as we should not say of a superior Being, whose Sight could penetrate to the ultimate Constitution of Bodies, that he distinguished Colours, but rather, that he distinguished those modifications of Matter which produce the Appearances of Colours in us, so we ought not to ascribe our secondary Ideas of Virtue and Vice to superior Intelligences, and much less to the supreme.⁹⁸

In the final paragraph of proposition 15, Hartley conjectures that a belief in free will as the vindication of the divine benevolence has probably arisen from an ‘Anthropomorphism of too gross a kind’.⁹⁹ This last section is particularly significant as it is very likely to have supplied the argument for the oration delivered by Priestley to the

⁹³ *Observations*, vol. II, 60.

⁹⁴ *Observations*, vol. II, 61.

⁹⁵ *Observations*, vol. II, 60. See Locke, *Essay*, II, xx, 2. Hume made a very similar analogy, see chapter 3.

⁹⁶ *Observations*, vol. II, 61.

⁹⁷ *Observations*, vol. II, 61.

⁹⁸ *Observations*, vol. II, 61.

⁹⁹ *Observations*, vol. II, 65.

debating society on 11 December on ‘liberty no foundation for praise or blame’.¹⁰⁰ Just two days previously, Priestley had recorded receiving his first letter from Hartley in answer to four queries he had sent him on 11 October.¹⁰¹

In fact, the influence of Hartley’s *Observations* on Priestley’s thinking is difficult to overestimate: Hartley was to exert a major influence over all of Priestley’s mature philosophical thought. In his *Memoirs*, Priestley wrote that Hartley’s work ‘produced the greatest and, in my opinion, the most favourable effect on my general turn of thinking through life’, and in the mid-1770s that ‘I think myself more indebted to this one treatise, than to all the books I ever read beside; the scriptures excluded’.¹⁰² When Priestley developed his own early answer to the debate on the foundation of morals, it was also to Hartley’s *Observations* that he would turn. Before considering Priestley’s writings, however, I shall first examine how the topic of moral philosophy was taught by some of Priestley’s predecessors and contemporaries at Warrington.

Moral Philosophy at Warrington

With some significant variations and criticisms, Doddridge’s lectures were also used in the teaching at Warrington whilst Priestley was a tutor there between 1761 and 1767, principally by John Aikin and John Seddon. Writing to Seddon from Warrington in April 1762, Priestley referred to ‘Mr. Aikin’s intention of reading from Dr. Doddridge’s divinity lectures, printed or not printed’, and in his subsequent two letters enquired of Seddon, at this point on a visit to London, about the progress of the printing of Doddridge’s lectures on Aikin’s behalf.¹⁰³ The same emphasis on moral philosophy was continued at Warrington. According to a plan of studies published in 1760, moral philosophy constituted a significant part of the third and final years of the four-year

¹⁰⁰ Rail and Thomas, ed., ‘Joseph Priestley’s Journal’, 101.

¹⁰¹ ‘Joseph Priestley’s Journal’, 100; 86.

¹⁰² *Examination*, xix.

¹⁰³ Joseph Priestley to John Seddon, 9 April 1762, printed *CR*, 10 new ser. (1854), 625-7. See also Joseph Priestley to John Seddon, 6 May 1762, HMO MS Seddon 1, f. 85, printed *CR*, 10 new ser. (1854), 628; Joseph Priestley to John Seddon, 19 May 1762, printed *CR*, 10 new ser. (1854), 629.

course for divinity students.¹⁰⁴ Lay students followed a ‘short system of Morality concluding with the Evidences of the Christian Religion’ in their third year.¹⁰⁵

Furthermore, as with the example of Doddridge and Fordyce, there were some significant inter-personal links between the Scottish universities and the Warrington Academy. The relationship between Doddridge and Fordyce ought to be seen as part of a wider set of connections between the Scottish universities and the English dissenting academies. There are a number of practical reasons for these connections. Whereas in the early eighteenth century it had been typical for the children of dissenting families to attend continental universities, in the latter half of the century there was an increasing tendency for English dissenters to be educated in Scotland. This may have been in part due to the shift on the continent to the vernacular languages (rather than Latin) as the medium of instruction, although financial considerations undoubtedly played a major part. Several of the funds established specifically to assist the education of English dissenters provided the financial means for a Scottish university education.¹⁰⁶ Consequentially, a significant number of the English academy tutors had graduated at one of the five Scottish universities.¹⁰⁷ This inevitably meant that some tutors brought into the academies aspects of the moral philosophy being developed in the Scottish universities among the moderate wing of Scottish Presbyterianism. The rationalist and the Shaftesburian approaches to ethics outlined in Doddridge’s lectures found a correspondence in the different approaches to moral philosophy exemplified by the individual tutors at Warrington. John Taylor (1694-1761), an Arian in theology, and the first divinity and moral philosophy tutor between 1757 and 1761, took a staunchly rationalist approach to ethics and was hostile to Scottish thought.¹⁰⁸ Seddon (1724-1770), who lectured sporadically on moral philosophy throughout the 1760s, seems, like Doddridge, to have had some degree of sympathy with Scottish philosophy. Although

¹⁰⁴ The plan has been reproduced in McLachlan, *Warrington Academy*, 40-2. One copy, *A Report of the State of the Academy at Warrington drawn up by the Trustees at their Annual Meeting July 10, MDCCLX* (Warrington[?], 1760), survives at HMO.

¹⁰⁵ McLachlan, *The Warrington Academy*, 40.

¹⁰⁶ McLachlan, *English Education under the Test Acts*, 30; Walter D. Jeremy, *The Presbyterian Fund and Dr. Daniel Williams’s Trust: with Biographical Notes of the Trustees, and some Account of their Academies, Scholarships and Schools* (1885).

¹⁰⁷ McLachlan gives a fairly extensive list in *English Education under the Test Acts*, 30.

¹⁰⁸ On Taylor see G. T. Eddy, *Dr Taylor of Norwich: Wesley’s Arch-Heretic* (Peterborough, 2003), esp. Appendix IV: ‘Taylor’s Opposition to Hutcheson’s Moral Philosophy’, 191-8.

much has been written on the teaching of the early Warrington tutors, little of this work has been substantiated by much concrete evidence.¹⁰⁹ In the following account, I shall re-examine some of the available sources in order to develop a more accurate picture of what was actually taught in the moral philosophy lectures at Warrington.

As the first tutor in moral philosophy at Warrington, Taylor's writings indicate the rationalist bent of the ethics taught at the academy's inception. Taylor was on close terms with William Leechman (1706-1785), Professor of Divinity at Glasgow University between 1743 and 1761. Leechman visited the Warrington Academy in the summer of 1759, where he met Taylor, with whom he was subsequently to correspond from Glasgow.¹¹⁰ He was behind Taylor's being awarded the degree of DD by the University of Glasgow in 1756.¹¹¹ Leechman, besides being an important theologian in his own right, was a contemporary, friend, and biographer of Francis Hutcheson. However, Taylor's writings indicate that he was wholly unsympathetic to the moral philosophy developed by Hutcheson in the 1720s.

Writing to his friend George Benson (1699-1762) from Norwich in June 1757, Taylor expressed his approbation of the Warrington Trustees' decision to offer Samuel Dyer (1725-1772), who had been a student at Glasgow, the position of tutor in moral philosophy.¹¹² Although Dyer declined the offer, Taylor had evidently hoped that he would accept and was candidly forthright in declaring his reasons for this preference to Benson. The passage is interesting for the insight it provides into both Taylor's aversion to Hutchesonian moral philosophy and the threat Taylor perceived this philosophy would pose to his own theology:

¹⁰⁹ The most important accounts of the Warrington Academy are Herbert McLachlan, *Warrington Academy: its History and Influence* (Manchester, 1943); William Turner, *The Warrington Academy*. The latter is a collection of essays first published in the *MR* between 1813 and 1815. Much of Turner's account, however (based on information provided by John Simpson, a student at Warrington between 1760 and 1765), seems to have been unreliable. Henry A. Bright, 'A Historical Sketch of Warrington Academy', *CR*, 17 new ser. (1861), 682-9; 732-48 (despite McLachlan's claim that it was based on papers and letters which had originally belonged to John Seddon (McLachlan, *Warrington Academy*, vii)) adds little to Turner's account. See also H. L. Short, 'Warrington Academy', *Hibbert Journal*, 56 (1957-8), 1-7. P. O'Brien, *Warrington Academy, 1757-86: its Predecessors and Successors* (Wigan, 1989) is largely a summary of the information contained in these earlier texts.

¹¹⁰ William Leechman, *Sermons, by William Leechman, D. D. Late Principal of the College of Glasgow. To Which is Prefixed some Account of his Life, and of his Lectures, by James Woodrow, D. D. Minister at Stevenson*, 2 vols (1789), vol. I, 74.

¹¹¹ McLachlan, *English Education under the Test Acts*, 31.

¹¹² W. Innes Addison, ed., *The Matriculation Albums of the University of Glasgow from 1728 to 1858* (Glasgow, 1913), 32.

I am much pleased that they have nominated Mr Sam. Dyer, for moral Philosophy and polite Literature, as hoping that he is not in Mr Hutcheson's Scheme of Glasgow, which would by no means suit my Divinity, nor be any proper Foundation of it, but believing that he understands better Principles. I hope he will accept the Office.¹¹³

Two years later, after having commenced his duties as tutor in moral philosophy, Taylor published his own *An Examination of the Scheme of Morality, Advanced by Dr. Hutcheson* (1759). The *Examination* was a critical account of Hutcheson's works of the 1720s in which Taylor accused Hutcheson's philosophy of severing the link between reason and the internal principles of virtue.¹¹⁴ Taylor's *A Sketch of Moral Philosophy; or an Essay to Demonstrate the Principles of Virtue and Religion upon a New, Natural, and Easy Plan* (1760), published a year later for the use of his Warrington pupils, gives an indication of Taylor's own position. Writing to Benson in October 1759 Taylor, in a passage which again illuminates the connection he perceived between his philosophy and his theology, described the work as:

my own Scheme of moral Philosophy, which has for 30 Years or more been the subject of frequent & close reflection, & the rule by which I have examined the principles of Revelation.¹¹⁵

In the same letter, he acknowledged a debt to Richard Price, whose *A Review of the Principal Questions and Difficulties in Morals* had been published a year earlier in 1758, yet criticised Price's work for its adoption of 'Notions of the operations of the mind, wch I think are too minute & disputable; or, however, of no use in explaining the Foundations of Virtue, but rather imbaras than clear the Subject'.¹¹⁶ In the preface to his own work, Taylor again acknowledged his debts: to his friend Phillips Glover, author of *An Inquiry concerning Virtue and Happiness* (1751), and to Price. He identified the purpose of the

¹¹³ John Taylor to George Benson, 23 June 1757, Eddy, *Dr. Taylor of Norwich*, 228-30.

¹¹⁴ John Taylor, *An Examination of the Scheme of Morality advanced by Dr. Hutcheson, Late Professor of Morality, in the University of Glasgow* (1759).

¹¹⁵ John Taylor to George Benson, 25 October 1759, Eddy, *Dr. Taylor of Norwich*, 231-3.

¹¹⁶ John Taylor to George Benson, 25 October 1759, Eddy, *Dr. Taylor of Norwich*, 231-3. On Price's moral philosophy, see chapter 3.

book as being prefatory to the study of William Wollaston's *The Religion of Nature Delineated* (1722).¹¹⁷

The essence of Taylor's approach to moral philosophy can be summarised by definition 14: '*TO know the Nature of Things, is the same as to know the Obligation to right Action*'.¹¹⁸ Like Doddridge, Taylor was a rationalist in ethics, founding virtue in a concept of '*Truth, or the Nature of Things*' which he regularly compares to the *a priori* truths of mathematics and geometry. His rationalist stance is reflected by the book's mathematical form in which the principles of virtue are set out: '*Just as in Euclid, the simple principles of Geometry are demonstrated, in a Series of Propositions*'.¹¹⁹ Taylor identifies '*REASON, or Understanding*' as '*the only Faculty in the human Constitution, which can perceive moral Obligations*'.¹²⁰ Unlike Doddridge, he refuses to concede that instinct might have any role in informing moral choices. Taylor clearly distinguishes reason from '*the simple Perceptions of Sense*' and '*the Feelings of mere animal Nature*', both of which are incapable of deducing '*any Truths from the Natures, or Relations of Objects*'.¹²¹ In Taylor's system, '*all instinctive Inclinations, Passions and Affections, such as Fear, Sorrow, Joy, Compassion, Love, &c. must be excluded from the Notion and Principle of moral Action*' so that '*Instincts can constitute no Part or Principle of Morality*'.¹²²

Taylor's ethical system holds that the freedom of the will is a necessary prerequisite for virtuous action. Towards the start of the work, he writes that '*The primary Reason, or Foundation of Virtue*' should be '*perfectly consistent with Liberty, or Freedom of Choice*'.¹²³ In chapter IV, '*Of Agency*', Taylor draws on an argument similar to the second point advanced by Doddridge in support of natural liberty:

¹¹⁷ John Taylor, *A Sketch of Moral Philosophy; or an Essay to demonstrate the Principles of Virtue and Religion upon a New, Natural and Easy Plan* (1760), iv.

¹¹⁸ Taylor, *A Sketch of Moral Philosophy*, 16.

¹¹⁹ *A Sketch of Moral Philosophy*, iii.

¹²⁰ *A Sketch of Moral Philosophy*, 60.

¹²¹ *A Sketch of Moral Philosophy*, 32.

¹²² *A Sketch of Moral Philosophy*, 48.

¹²³ *A Sketch of Moral Philosophy*, 8-9.

Our being necessarily justified, or condemned by the Reflections of our Minds upon our own Actions, proves that *we* are accountable for them, as being the proper and only Authors of them.¹²⁴

Contrary to the position suggested by Doddridge (and later adopted by Hartley and Priestley), Taylor argues that the ‘*Motives of Pleasure, or Pain, Profit, or Loss, do not affect Agency*’. Although he concedes that ‘These work powerfully on the Mind’, they do not work ‘*necessarily*’, seeing there are many who choose to act contrary to their Influence’.¹²⁵ Taylor later reconciles this freedom of the will with divine prescience: ‘*though Virtue is essentially the Effect of free Choice, yet the great GOD can abundantly assist our virtuous Choices and Endeavours, without interfering with our Freedom, or Agency*’.¹²⁶ This is done, Taylor argues, ‘by proposing Motives, weakning the Impressions of Sense and Passion, throwing more Light into the Mind, comforting the Heart, strengthening virtuous Desires, Endeavours and Resolutions’.¹²⁷

A very different approach was exemplified in the teaching of John Seddon, who appears to have been more receptive to Scottish moral philosophy. Like many English rational dissenters, Seddon had studied in Scotland. After leaving the Kendal Academy, where he had been a student under Caleb Rotheram, he continued his education at the University of Glasgow. He is listed in the university records under a group of students who matriculated in 1744; whilst it is unlikely that Seddon enrolled on the arts course, it is certainly possible that he attended Hutcheson’s popular moral philosophy lectures, an option frequently pursued by divinity students.¹²⁸ Later accounts of Seddon’s acquaintance with Hutcheson derive from Robert B. Aspland’s 1854 biography of Seddon in the *Christian Reformer*.¹²⁹ In addition to noting Seddon’s friendship with

¹²⁴ *A Sketch of Moral Philosophy*, 39.

¹²⁵ *A Sketch of Moral Philosophy*, 42.

¹²⁶ *A Sketch of Moral Philosophy*, 73.

¹²⁷ *A Sketch of Moral Philosophy*, 73.

¹²⁸ Innes Addison, ed., *The Matriculation Albums of the University of Glasgow*, 32. Seddon is briefly mentioned in Alexander Carlyle’s *Anecdotes and Characters of the Times*, ed. James Kinsley (London, 1973), 52. Carlyle (1722-1805) was a divinity student at Glasgow between 1743 and 1744. I am grateful to Professor M. A. Stewart for information on the University of Glasgow during Seddon’s years as a student there.

¹²⁹ Robert B. Aspland, ‘Brief Memoir of Rev. John Seddon, of Warrington, with Selections from his Letters and Papers. No. 1’, *CR*, 10, new ser. (1854), 224-40. Aspland (1805-1869) had attended Glasgow University himself between 1819 and 1822 and graduated MA. He most likely gained his knowledge of

Leechman, Aspland wrote that ‘Seddon and his three English Friends [Robert Andrews, John Holland, and Richard Godwin] were favourite pupils of the Professor [Hutcheson], who was attracted to them by their intelligence and cultivation, and also by their connection with the liberal Dissenters’.¹³⁰ The case of Robert Andrews (*fl.* 1747-1766) is interesting as a parallel to Seddon’s career, and as a possible indication of the lasting effects of a Scottish university education.¹³¹ Andrews had been educated with Seddon under Ashworth at Kendal. In 1747, after leaving Glasgow, he was appointed minister to the Presbyterian congregation at Lydgate, Yorkshire, and in 1753 moved to Platt Chapel in Rusholme, Lancashire. In the same year, he corresponded with Seddon on theological topics and on the principles of a dissenting academy.¹³² The previous year, Andrews had published a work entitled *Animadversions on Mr. Brown’s Three Essays on the Characteristicks* (1752), a defence of the writings of the Earl of Shaftesbury against the criticisms of John Brown (1715-1766).¹³³ Whether Aspland’s account of Seddon’s acquaintance with Hutcheson was accurate or not, it is fairly certain that Seddon was at least familiar with Hutcheson’s writings. ‘The Rev. Mr. John Seddon of Warrington’ is listed as a subscriber to Hutcheson’s *A System of Moral Philosophy*, edited and published posthumously by his son in 1755 and prefaced with a biographical account of the author by Leechman.¹³⁴ The same book, as well as Hutcheson’s *An Inquiry into our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725) and *An Essay on the Nature of the Passions and Affections* (1728), was among the collection in the Warrington Academy library by 1775.¹³⁵

Seddon from his father, Robert Aspland (1782-1845), a Unitarian convert who had been familiar with the second generation of Unitarians such as Thomas Belsham.

¹³⁰ Aspland, ‘Brief Memoir of Rev. John Seddon’, 225. Neither Andrews, Holland, or Godwin are listed in the printed university records. That Andrews was at Glasgow is confirmed in the Wodrow/Kenrick correspondence. In a letter of 10 July 1759 Wodrow referred to ‘Andrews’ as one of ‘our College Companions’. On 31 March 1769 Kenrick wrote informing Wodrow of Robert Andrews’s death, DWL MS 24.157, 33; 45. On the correspondence see chapter 2.

¹³¹ On Andrews see Sarah Annes Brown, ‘Andrews, Robert (*fl.* 1747–1766)’, *ODNB*.

¹³² See Robert Andrews to John Seddon, 11 May 1753, HMO MS Seddon 1, f. 9; Robert Andrews to John Seddon, 11 July 1753, HMO MS Seddon 1, f. 11. The correspondence suggests that Andrews was at some point involved in the organisation of a dissenting academy, however he is not mentioned in McLachlan, *English Education Under the Test Acts*.

¹³³ See Robert Andrews, *Animadversions on Mr. Brown’s Three Essays on the Characteristicks* (1752).

¹³⁴ Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy, in Three Books* (1755). Other dissenters listed as subscribers to the work include Samuel Chandler (1693-1766), James Duchal (*d.* 1761), and William Turner (1714-1794). Theophilus Lindsey, not at this stage of his career a dissenter, is also listed.

¹³⁵ *A Select Catalogue of Books in the Library of the Warrington Academy* (Warrington, 1775), 17.

Moreover, there is some concrete evidence of the details of Seddon's teaching at Warrington. In October 1760, Taylor, just six months before his death, wrote to Benson expressing his despair at the affairs of the academy. He informed Benson of 'a new scheme opening in these parts' which 'has already, I am persuaded, infected the Academy, and, I apprehend, will affect both that & my self still more deeply'.¹³⁶ The 'scheme' to which Taylor was referring was very likely to have been a new system of moral philosophy. At some point, either in late 1759 or early 1760, Seddon had taken over the moral philosophy class from the ageing Taylor. Word of Taylor's dissatisfaction reached the Trustees, who wrote to Taylor in January 1760, requesting him to detail the specifics of his complaints. The minutes of a meeting held the following September to address these concerns record nine paragraphs of Taylor's grievances, among them his statement that:

I am greatly dissatisfied that a Lecture in Moral Philosophy has been set up of late, and some of my Pupils drawn to attend it, in direct Repugnance to my Principles; and in support of such as I expressly declared against before I came into Lancashire.

The response, noted in the minute book alongside Taylor's statement, records that:

The person here aimed at is Mr. Seddon, who at the request of some of the pupils that were ready for that Branch of Study, consented to read over with them Dr. Nettleton and some other Books, as they understood that the Dr. [i.e. Taylor], from the Ill state of his Health, did not intend to give any lectures in Moral Philosophy that session.¹³⁷

Dr Thomas Nettleton (1683-1742) was an eminent Halifax physician and a fellow of the Royal Society with strong links to the dissenters in the north of England.¹³⁸ He was the author of the anonymously published *Some Thoughts concerning Virtue and Happiness*

¹³⁶ John Taylor to George Benson, 7 October 1760, Eddy, *Dr. Taylor of Norwich*, 234-5.

¹³⁷ MS Minute Book of the Trustees and Committee, HMO MS Warrington 2.

¹³⁸ On Nettleton see Herbert McLachlan, 'Thomas Nettleton, M. D.', *TUHS*, 9 (1947), 21-7; 'Nettleton, William [sic] (1683-1742)', *The Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century British Philosophers* ed. John Yolton, John Valdimir Price, and John Stephens, 2 vols (Bristol, 1999), vol. II, 647-8.

in a *Letter to a Clergyman* (1729).¹³⁹ The work was reissued in 1736 as *A Treatise on Virtue and Happiness* and passed through at least a further seven editions published between the late 1730s and 1776. Nettleton had written to Hutcheson sending him a copy of the *Treatise* in 1735, a year before the work's publication.¹⁴⁰

Nettleton's book begins by distinguishing between 'the province of the *understanding*', the function of which is 'to discover truth, and to improve *knowledge*', and '*sense*', being 'the power to be thus affected, or to feel *pleasure* and *pain*'.¹⁴¹ Nettleton goes on to equate virtue with happiness; following the dictates of the sense, or the 'powers of *affection*', the 'scope and end of all our motions, the general aim of our conduct is or at least ought to be, *happiness*'.¹⁴² In section II of the work Nettleton defines the '*moral sense*', variously referred to as a '*sense of right and wrong*', the '*conscience*', or simply 'honour', as 'the power of the mind to distinguish sentiments, dispositions and actions, and to be thus differently affected by them'.¹⁴³ As perceived by the moral sense, moral action is aestheticised, so that 'all those dispositions, and actions, that render mankind generous and beneficent, and that evidently lead to the public good, and to the order and harmony of society, do always appear beautiful and amiable'.¹⁴⁴ The fact that Seddon read through Nettleton with his students, combined with the evidence of his subscription to Hutcheson's *System of Moral Philosophy*, lends support to later assertions of Seddon's partiality for Hutchesonian moral philosophy.¹⁴⁵ It is tempting to speculate what the 'other Books' referred to in the Trustees' minutes might have been: a library catalogue from the Warrington Academy indicates that Nettleton's book was shelved between Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks* and Hutcheson's and Burnet's *Letters concerning the True Foundation of Virtue or Moral Goodness* (1735).¹⁴⁶

¹³⁹ Thomas Nettleton, *Some Thoughts concerning Virtue and Happiness in a Letter to a Clergyman* (1729).

¹⁴⁰ The letter is now held in the National Library of Scotland: Thomas Nettleton to Francis Hutcheson, 25 September 1735, MS 9252, ff. 98-9 (communication from M. A. Stewart).

¹⁴¹ Thomas Nettleton, *A Treatise on Virtue and Happiness*, 2nd edn (1736), 2.

¹⁴² *A Treatise on Virtue and Happiness*, 2nd edn, 22.

¹⁴³ *A Treatise on Virtue and Happiness*, 2nd edn, 149.

¹⁴⁴ *A Treatise on Virtue and Happiness*, 2nd edn, 154.

¹⁴⁵ Ashley Smith commented that 'Seddon followed Hutcheson in his ethical theory', *The Birth of Modern Education*, 160. Turner recollected Seddon's 'great partiality for the Hutchesonian metaphysics' which he cited as one cause of Seddon's disagreements with Taylor, *The Warrington Academy*, 30.

¹⁴⁶ HMO MS Misc 24 (vii). The Warrington library held the second edition of Nettleton's *A Treatise concerning Virtue and Happiness* (1736).

It is also possible to further reconstruct Seddon's teaching at Warrington using a set of extant manuscript lecture notes thought to have been delivered at Warrington by Seddon some time between 1767 and 1770.¹⁴⁷ These notes indicate that Seddon's lectures on philosophy were very closely modelled on Doddridge's. Of the eleven notebooks on philosophical topics, six comprise an extended commentary on one or two propositions and their subsequent corollaries from Doddridge's textbook. The references to page numbers indicate that Seddon was working from a printed volume, which must have been Clark's 1763 edition. The remaining five notebooks contain notes for lectures on language and logic, the references in which indicate that Seddon was using Isaac Watts's *Logick: or, the Right Use of Reason in the Enquiry after Truth* (1725), which had been used by Doddridge at Northampton and by Ashworth and Clark at Daventry. As Isabel Rivers has shown, it was not uncommon for tutors using Doddridge's lectures in the dissenting academies to update the syllabus by adding references to more recent works on the debates covered by Doddridge's course.¹⁴⁸ It is clear from the notebooks that this is exactly the way in which Doddridge's lectures were used at Warrington. A number of references to works published from 1750 onwards show that the students were referred to studies from the second half of the eighteenth century. Some of these references also point to intellectual ties between the dissenting academies and the Scottish universities. In a notebook labelled 'No 26', for example, a commentary on Part IV of Watts's *Logick*, Seddon refers to James Harris's *Hermes, or, A Philosophical Enquiry concerning Universal Grammar* (1751).¹⁴⁹ The same notebook contains what is very likely to be a reference to the work of Robert Simson (1687-1768), Professor of Mathematics at Glasgow.¹⁵⁰ In a notebook labelled 'No 4' Seddon moves from Doddridge's definition 5 ('Spirit is a thinking being, or a being which has the power of thought') to a discussion of the distinction between body and matter and the question of whether two bodies can be

¹⁴⁷ See 'Appendix II: MS Seddon 6: problems of dating and authorship'. All further quotations from these lectures are from HMO MS Seddon 6.

¹⁴⁸ Rivers, *The Defence of Truth through the Knowledge of Error*, 18-26.

¹⁴⁹ The work was held in the academy library, see *A Select Catalogue of Books in the Library of the Warrington Academy*, 7.

¹⁵⁰ The reference in the notes is to a 'D^r. Sympson' who 'has explained some of these definitions [in the first book of the *Elements* of Euclid] 'by having recourse to the solid in which[?] he appears to use the analytic method'. This is probably a reference to Simson's edition of Euclid's *Elements* (1756), which was among the books in the Warrington Academy library, *A Select Catalogue of Books in the Library of the Warrington Academy*, 12.

united without an increase of weight. He subsequently refers the students to the work of ‘the Disciples of Dr Black’. The reference is to Joseph Black (1728-1799), who in the mid-1750s carried out chemical experiments on alkalis at Edinburgh University which demonstrated that when a quantity of magnesia alba was heated the weight of the substance which remained was less than the original white powder.¹⁵¹ Similarly, in a notebook labelled ‘No 12’, a discussion of Doddridge’s proposition 2 (‘To survey the pheænomena observable in Brute Animals, which seem to bear some resemblance to the faculties of the human mind’), there is a reference to experiments with opium carried out in 1755 by Robert Whytt (1714-1766), Professor of Medicine at Edinburgh, published by the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh in 1756.¹⁵²

In ethics Seddon’s lecture notes indicate a practical rather than a speculative approach. In a notebook labelled ‘No 39 Logic’ he posits a dichotomy between ‘Discourses upon General and unlimited Topics’ and ‘the contemplation of limited propositions or particular subjects’. Whereas the latter are ‘full of real Instruction and increase our knowledge’, the former are ‘little better than sounds without sense’. To illustrate his point, Seddon refers disparagingly to ‘the endless controversies about the foundation of virtue whether it be founded on a sense of right and wrong or a peculiar sense called the moral sense or whether it depends on the will of Deity’. For Seddon, this kind of theoretical debate is less important than an analysis of particular actions and the classification of these actions as either ethically right or wrong: ‘whereas each of these [the positions on the foundation of virtue] are so many mediums to prove what is virtuous or vitious and whatever actions come under any of these descriptions may be pronounced virtuous’.

Only one notebook is devoted entirely to moral philosophy, the eleventh in the volume, which is largely a commentary on definition 42 and the subsequent corollaries and scholium, definition 43, and propositions 53 and 54 from Doddridge’s lectures. The correspondent section in Doddridge is largely concerned with establishing the difference between verbal propositions deemed to be either logically or ethically true. In the scholia

¹⁵¹ See R. G. W. Anderson, ‘Black, Joseph (1728-1799)’, *ODNB*. Black became a tutor (later professor) of chemistry at the universities of Edinburgh (1756-1766) and Glasgow (1766-1794).

¹⁵² The reference is to ‘An Account of some Experiments made with Opium on Living and Dying Animals; by Robert Whytt’, published in *Essays and Observations, Physical and Literary read before a Society in Edinburgh*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1756), vol. II, 280-316.

Doddridge adduces ‘a further argument, taken from the nature of ethical truth’ that ‘seems to imply something in it so sacred, that a violation of it is dishonourable, contemptible, and therefore vicious’. He subsequently refers to the opinion expressed by some that ‘God has given us a sense, by which we unavoidably delight in the truth’, the references directing the students to John Balguy’s *The Law of Truth: or, the Obligations of Reason essential to all Religion* (1733) and Joseph Butler’s *The Analogy of Natural and Revealed Religion to the Constitution and Course of Nature* (1736). In the following scholium Doddridge considers ‘a question of considerable difficulty and importance; whether it may be in any case lawful to be ethically false’. He considers the two opposing opinions: firstly, that the sacred nature of truth prohibits it in all cases and, secondly, that, in those rare instances where the happiness of mankind might be more effectually promoted by falsehood than truth, ‘falsehood ceases to be a vice and becomes a virtue’.¹⁵³ Although conceding that the question is, perhaps, ‘not possible for any human or finite understanding to determine’, Doddridge ultimately decides that the second is ‘a maxim so dangerous to human society, that it seems, that a wise and benevolent man, who firmly believes it, would on his own principles teach the contrary’.¹⁵⁴

In his lecture Seddon argued, with Doddridge, that the sacred nature of truth prohibits the speaking of falsehood in all cases, noting that ‘To speak Truth therefore is one of the most determinate moral maxims that can possibly be’. The ‘sense’ referred to in Doddridge’s lectures finds a counterpart in Seddon’s notes, which refer frequently to a sense of ‘honour’ or ‘integrity’, later more fully defined as ‘a sense of honour[,] a dread of shame[,] an undaunted spirit[,] contempt of Danger[,] and love of Truth’. In his notes on ‘those circumstances that require and will justify the violation of truth’, Seddon considers the opinion of some that ‘self preservation is superior to Benevolence’. He counters this by arguing that ‘self preservation is of two kinds[:] the Preservation of life and the preservation of Integrity’. Interestingly, Seddon adds a consideration, not mentioned in this section of Doddridge’s lectures, that the motives to action are not always derived from reason but that ‘In general where the fear of Death or any great Evil stares a person in the face it leaves little Room for Reflection how to escape it and

¹⁵³ Doddridge, *Lectures*, 137.

¹⁵⁴ *Lectures*, 137; 138.

generally in such cases we act from impulse and passion more than Reason'. A similar interest in impulses arising prior to the dictates of reason is evinced where Seddon counters the 'supposition that a man[']s life is of greater importance to him than his integrity' by citing the example of the 'parental[,] conjugal effects and the amor patriæ', and the desire, 'thought the highest pitch of virtue', 'to expose our own lives for[?] the lives of those dearest to us'.

The lack of any direct reference to Hutcheson in these lectures suggests, perhaps, that the link between Seddon and Hutcheson might have been somewhat over emphasised by later commentators. Nevertheless, the lectures do confirm that Seddon took a very different approach to ethics from Taylor's rationalist stance. His interest in impulse and passion evince an approach to moral philosophy which, if not directly derived from Hutcheson, is not dissimilar to that found in Nettleton's work. It is thus fair to say that the rationalist ethics taught by Taylor at the academy's inception had, by the late 1760s, been modified by Seddon's interest in Scottish moral sense philosophy.¹⁵⁵ Unfortunately, none of the lectures deal in any depth with the question of liberty and necessity.¹⁵⁶ However, Priestley's later recollection that the tutors at Warrington during his time there were all 'zealous Necessarians' might be somewhat misleading.¹⁵⁷ Priestley's assertion of a shared doctrinal position among the Warrington tutors conceals the extent to which the philosophical underpinnings of his thought were moving in a different direction from both the rationalist and the Shaftesburian traditions. It is in the context of the debates over the question of the moral sense at Warrington that I shall now turn to examine Priestley's early writings.

¹⁵⁵ John Aikin (1713-1780), who succeeded Taylor in the divinity chair in 1761, also appears to have had some connections to Scottish moral philosophy. Aikin studied at King's College, Aberdeen in the 1730s and was an assistant to Doddridge at Northampton between 1737 and 1739. He was acquainted with Fordyce (Doddridge, *Correspondence*, vol. IV, 23-5), and, according to Turner, in his classes in moral philosophy in the mid-1760s 'sometimes followed Doddridge's method, but more frequently pursued a scheme of his own, not, however, materially differing from that of David Fordyce, in the *Preceptor*', Turner, *Warrington Academy*, 18. On the *Preceptor* see Rivers, vol. II, 182-4.

¹⁵⁶ In one of the notebooks, labelled 'No 17 Prop 14 Original of Passions', Seddon writes: 'We suppose the mind to be an active principle, as far as it is so it would be absurd to suppose it passive in its operations to be directed by the motions of the Body, for that would make the Body the agent, or at least the Instrument'.

¹⁵⁷ Rutt, I, i, 59.

The moral sense in Hartley and Priestley

What is most significant in Priestley's writings of this period is the way in which his thought was developing in a very different direction from the intellectual milieu in which he was working. This was undoubtedly due to his encounter with the works of Collins and Hartley, but also to his engagement with the writings of another author who would influentially shape his later thought: Edmund Law. Law (1703-1787) is something of a neglected influence on the early formation of Priestley's ideas.¹⁵⁸ He most likely served as an important link between Priestley and a previous generation of late seventeenth-century natural law theorists; his writings illustrate well the means by which philosophical and theological ideas were fused in Priestley's thought. Law was, at various times during his career, Fellow of Christ's (1724-1737), Master of Peterhouse (1756-87), Knightbridge Professor of Moral Theology (1764-69), and Bishop of Carlisle (1768). At Cambridge, Law was an important channel for the diffusion of Lockean thought. He was a close associate of Francis Blackburne (1705-1787), Theophilus Lindsey's future father-in-law, and his theological writings exerted a prominent influence over the future Unitarians John Jebb, John Disney, and Gilbert Wakefield.¹⁵⁹ Law's *Considerations on the Propriety of requiring Subscription to Articles of Faith* (1774) was his contribution to the debate occasioned by the petition to Parliament against compulsory subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles, with which Lindsey was to become prominently involved, and on which Lindsey and Priestley were to correspond in the early 1770s.¹⁶⁰ Law's *Considerations on the State of the World with regard to the Theory of Religion* (1745) is cited in Doddridge's lectures in Part VI, 'In which the Genuineness and Credibility of the

¹⁵⁸ Schofield's account of Priestley's time at Daventry, for example, does not mention Law. Despite McEvoy's and McGuire's assertion that 'the wider intellectual background of his [Priestley's] intellectual indebtedness is largely unexplored' they do not include Law along with Hobbes, Collins, Spinoza, Kames, Edwards, and Hume in their list of Priestley's influences, McEvoy and McGuire, 'God and Nature: Priestley's Way of Rational Dissent', 327.

¹⁵⁹ On Law see John Stephens, 'Edmund Law and his Circle at Cambridge: some Philosophical Activity of the 1730s', in *The Philosophical Canon in the 17th and 18th Centuries: Essays in Honour of John W. Yolton*, ed. G. A. J. Rogers and Sylvania Tomaselli (Rochester, NY, 1996), 163-73; Brian W. Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England: Theological Debate from Locke to Burke* (Oxford, 1998), chapters 2-3; Rivers, vol. II, 333-5; John Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of the Enlightenment: Science, Religion and Politics from the Restoration to the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1989), 129-30.

¹⁶⁰ Law was the only one of the bishops to approve of the abolition of clerical subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles in 1772: Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of the Enlightenment*, 129.

Old and New Testament is asserted and vindicated'.¹⁶¹ Priestley recorded reading the work, as well as Law's *A Discourse upon the Life and Character of Christ* (1749), in his Daventry journal over the weekend of 10-12 May 1754.¹⁶² Through his later friendship with Lindsey, Priestley certainly met Law on at least one occasion. In a letter to John Jebb of February 1774, Lindsey recorded a meeting at the house of David Hartley jnr (1731-1813) at Golden Square in London between himself and Priestley and Law, Richard Price, and Benjamin Franklin.¹⁶³

In Law's *Considerations*, two themes which would prove central to Priestley's thinking across the diversity of his interests are given particularly succinct expression. The first of these is an epistemology derived from Locke and Hartley. Law's connection to Hartley can be traced through to John Gay (1699-1745), whom Hartley credited with providing him with the germ of the idea that would lead to his associationist theory, and who contributed a 'Preliminary Dissertation concerning the Fundamental Picture of Virtue or Morality', to Law's translation of William King's *De origine mali* (1731).¹⁶⁴ In Law's 'The Nature and Obligations of Man, as a Sensible and Rational Being', prefixed to later editions of the translation, he traced the development of the theory of the association of ideas from Locke, through Gay, to its fruition in Hartley.¹⁶⁵ The *Considerations* cite Hartley's *Observations on Man* in the second edition of 1749, and further references to Hartley's work were added to later editions.¹⁶⁶ During his years at Cambridge, Law was engaged in a lengthy correspondence with Hartley on the *Observations*.¹⁶⁷ Law's debt to Locke in the *Considerations* comes across most pertinently through his aversion to innate ideas, and through his prioritising of man's intrinsic desire for happiness:

¹⁶¹ Doddridge, *Lectures*, 315.

¹⁶² Rail and Thomas, ed., 'Joseph Priestley's Journal', 59-60. After reading the first part of Law's *Considerations* Priestley 'composed and transcribed another method of reconciling the hypothesis about the nature and foundation of virtue in the wise' (59).

¹⁶³ Ditchfield, 176.

¹⁶⁴ See Hartley, *Observations*, vol. I, v. Gay's dissertation was published anonymously in the first edition of 1731 and was acknowledged to be the author's in a fourth edition of 1758.

¹⁶⁵ William King, *An Essay on the Origin of Evil*, 5th edn (1781), lix.

¹⁶⁶ The fourth edition of 1759, for example, contains four references to Hartley's *Observations* and the seventh edition of 1784, five.

¹⁶⁷ Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of the Enlightenment*, 129.

In short, how much more wise and beneficial is the present constitution of things! where all is left to Mankind themselves, who have both the forming and disposing of each other; nay where men are at liberty in a great measure to frame their own Natures and Dispositions: where they have no inconvenient or pernicious Principle to lay to Nature's Charge, no properly innate Notions or Implanted Instincts, no truly natural Appetite or Affection to snag or bypass them, except that universal Sense and strong Desire of Happiness.¹⁶⁸

Such a disposition to locate the foundations of moral obligation in mankind's desire for happiness was an important intellectual current at eighteenth-century Cambridge. A trajectory of the idea can be traced from Locke's *Essay*, particularly his chapter 'Of Power' from Book II, through publications such as John Clarke's *The Foundation of Morality in Theory and Practice* (1726), Gay's 'Dissertation', Butler's *Analogy of Religion*, and Hartley's *Observations*, to influential theologians of the late eighteenth century such as William Paley.¹⁶⁹ The concept is referred to in Doddridge's lectures where Doddridge, discussing the question of innate ideas in the mind, concedes that, in one sense, 'Mr. Locke owns innate practical principles, as the *desire of happiness*'.¹⁷⁰ The idea was to have important implications for the theological framework eventually developed by Priestley, particularly regarding the concept of a benevolent deity with the happiness of mankind as the criterion of his will. In Priestley's system the concept of God's benevolence would eventually come to replace various conceptions of God's nature, or the nature of things, which served as the ontological foundation for ethics in the rationalist schemes common to Doddridge, Taylor, and Price.¹⁷¹

Priestley's early assimilation of these ideas is well illustrated by the first volume of his *Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion*. The work was first published in 1772, but was drafted whilst Priestley was a student at Daventry in the early months of 1755 and used by him for a course of lectures delivered to his first congregation at Needham

¹⁶⁸ Edmund Law, *Considerations on the State of the World with regard to the Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, 1745), 12. See Locke, *Essay*, I, iii, 3: 'Nature, I confess, has put into Man a desire of Happiness, and an aversion to Misery: These are indeed innate practical Principles'.

¹⁶⁹ Priestley recorded reading chapter VI of Butler's *Analogy*, which deals with the question of liberty and necessity, on 5 December 1754, Rail and Thomas, ed., 'Joseph Priestley's Journal', 99. On Paley, see chapter 3.

¹⁷⁰ Doddridge, *Lectures*, 15.

¹⁷¹ See chapter 3.

Market in the late 1750s.¹⁷² In the *Institutes*, Priestley argues that from man's consciousness of his own desire for universal happiness can be inferred the benevolent nature of the deity:

can it be supposed that our maker would have constituted us in such a manner, as that our natural ideas of perfection and excellence should not be applicable to the essential attributes of his own nature? Our natural approbation of love and benevolence is, therefore, a proof of the divine benevolence, as it cannot be supposed that he should have made us to hate, and not to love himself.¹⁷³

Following from this, Priestley equates the will of the deity with an optimistic utilitarian benevolence: 'Upon the whole, the face of things is such as gives us abundant reason to conclude, that God made every thing with a view to the happiness of his creatures and offspring'.¹⁷⁴

The second, and perhaps the more prominent theme in Law's work with respect to its influence over the range of Priestley's thought, is a teleological notion of progress firmly rooted within a scheme of Christian theology. In this respect, Law combines an optimism characteristic of a range of eighteenth-century thinkers with a rationalised form of Christian millenarianism shared by other prominent figures within rational dissent such as Richard Price. The principal thesis of Law's work is that 'Arts and Sciences' and 'Natural and Revealed Religion' are in a constant state of progress, with mankind's knowledge of the human sciences retaining a constant relation to his knowledge of religion. Law argues for the 'partial Communication of Christianity', vindicated by the notion that:

Mankind are not, nor ever have been, capable of entering into the Depths of knowledge at once, of receiving a whole system of Natural or Moral Truths together; but must be let into

¹⁷² On the composition of the *Institutes* see Rutt, I, i, 27. According to Priestley's son, Joseph Priestley jnr., Priestley recorded the composition of the first volume of his *Institutes* in his diary under January, February, and March 1755. According to the same source, the second volume was composed between 1 April and 23 June. On Priestley's use of the *Institutes* at Needham Market see Rutt, I, i, 30.

¹⁷³ Joseph Priestley, *Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion, Vol. 1. Containing the Elements of Natural Religion; to which is prefixed, an Essay on the Best Method of communicating Religious Knowledge to the Members of Christian Societies* (1772), 29.

¹⁷⁴ Priestley, *Institutes*, vol. I, 28.

them by degrees, and have them communicated by little and little, as they are able to bear it.¹⁷⁵

Distinguishing between ‘the Delivery of a Doctrine’ and ‘its general Reception in the world’, his argument holds that although the original revelation of Christianity was dependent on an act of divine intervention, its development and fruition depend largely on ‘man’s own Dispositions both natural and moral’.¹⁷⁶ Concomitant with this is Law’s account of the gradual refinement of the doctrine of Christianity itself. As would the later Priestley, Law holds that Christianity must be gradually purged of its accretions, specifically the remnants of ‘Jewish Fables and Traditions’ and the ‘impure mixture of Philosophy’ bequeathed by the first gentile converts.¹⁷⁷ As mankind’s knowledge of natural religion (broadly conceived to include all the human sciences) gradually increases, so too will his understanding of revealed religion:

It is probable that the knowledge of Religion alone is not at a stand; but on the contrary, that as we continually advance in the study of GOD’S Works, so we shall come to a proportionally better understanding of his *Word*.¹⁷⁸

Locating himself in the tradition of the Protestant reformers, Law holds that through the refinement of scriptural exegesis and the advancement of textual criticism, human endeavour is assigned an active role in the unfolding of God’s divine plan. As human reason gradually perfects itself, ‘Divine Revelation will gradually clear up, and Christianity itself draw nearer to its fullness’.¹⁷⁹

Priestley’s *Institutes* once again reflect Law’s arguments in the *Considerations*. Priestley adopts a similar notion of progress, writing towards the opening of the *Institutes* that ‘[the] Works of God [...] are not yet compleated; for as far as they are subject to our inspection, they are evidently in a progress to something more perfect’.¹⁸⁰ Within God’s

¹⁷⁵ Law, *Considerations*, 6; 51.

¹⁷⁶ *Considerations*, 53; 33.

¹⁷⁷ *Considerations*, 169.

¹⁷⁸ *Considerations*, 184.

¹⁷⁹ *Considerations*, 184.

¹⁸⁰ Priestley, *Institutes*, vol. I, 17.

providential scheme, designed to promote the ultimate happiness of mankind, human knowledge gradually perfects itself:

Knowledge, and a variety of improvements depending upon knowledge (all of which are directly or indirectly subservient to happiness) have been increasing from the time of our earliest acquaintance with history to the present; and in the last century this progress has been amazingly rapid.¹⁸¹

It is within this framework of Christian teleology that Priestley's engagements with contemporary debates surrounding both the question of the foundation of ethics and the question of free will and necessity need to be understood.

In Hartley's *Observations*, Priestley would have encountered a very different solution to the question concerning the foundation of morals to that proposed by authors working in either the rationalist or the Shaftesburian traditions. In his analysis of the moral sense in chapter IV of the first volume of the *Observations*, Hartley had described the formation of the moral sense (variously referred to as the conscience or the moral judgment) through the process of association. He compares his own approach to the prevailing instinctual and rationalist conceptions of the moral faculty:

The Moral Sense or Judgment here spoken of, is sometimes considered as an Instinct, sometimes as Determinations of the Mind, grounded on the eternal Reasons and Relations of Things.¹⁸²

Against the first position, Hartley argues that it remains untenable in the absence of evidence of moral judgments arising independently of prior associations; against the second, that grounding morality and our judgments concerning it on any eternal criteria ought, similarly, to be supported by strong evidence. In the absence of such evidence Hartley argues for his own position that all 'our moral Judgments, Approbations, and Disapprobations' can be deduced from association alone. Hartley is thus able to claim

¹⁸¹ *Institutes*, vol. I, 20.

¹⁸² Hartley, *Observations*, vol. I, 498.

that the moral sense is neither instinctual, nor founded on an *a priori* concept of reason, but ‘generated necessarily and mechanically’.¹⁸³

Priestley’s assimilation of Hartley’s model of associationism, and its opposition to theories of taste founded on instinct, is well illustrated by his *A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism*. These lectures were first published in 1777, but were composed whilst Priestley was a tutor at Warrington for a course of lectures delivered in 1762.¹⁸⁴ In the preface to the published work, most likely written in the 1770s, Priestley cited his reason for publishing the lectures as being to provide an explication of Hartley’s theory: ‘I have been induced to do it [publish] partly with a view to the illustration of the doctrine of the association of ideas, to which there is a constant reference through the whole work’.¹⁸⁵ In this respect he lays claim to a degree of originality, asserting that ‘the *theory*’ is new. As did Doddridge and the Scots in relation to ethics, Priestley holds that some conception of human nature is a prerequisite to a satisfactory theory of oratory. The third part of the *Lectures* is thus largely devoted to explaining ‘the properties, or principles, in our frame which lay the mind open to its [oratory’s] influences’.¹⁸⁶ In Priestley’s theory, aesthetic pleasure is traced down to the material sensations of pleasure and pain caused by sensory impressions. Intellectual pleasure is conceived of as an extension of sensual pleasures ‘combined together in infinitely-various degrees and proportions’.¹⁸⁷ Priestley here differentiates his own theory from those based on any conception of an innate faculty. Noting that the effect of oratory is achieved by exciting either the ‘*passions*’ or the ‘*pleasures of the imagination*’, Priestley dismisses the notion of ‘some philosophers’ that these feelings are attributable to ‘so many distinct *reflex*, or *internal senses*, as they call those faculties of the mind by which we perceive them’.¹⁸⁸ Rejecting the notion that the value of an object is perceived spontaneously by an indwelling aesthetic sense, Priestley uses Hartley’s theory to argue that a faculty of aesthetic judgment (or taste) is acquired through the process of association. In this way, aesthetic appreciation is radically democratised: the principles of taste are derived from education, and can thus be

¹⁸³ *Observations on Man*, vol. I, 504.

¹⁸⁴ Joseph Priestley, *A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism* (1777), i.

¹⁸⁵ Priestley, *Oratory and Criticism*, i.

¹⁸⁶ *Oratory and Criticism*, 72.

¹⁸⁷ *Oratory and Criticism*, 137.

¹⁸⁸ *Oratory and Criticism*, 72.

‘acquired’ by ‘scarce any person’.¹⁸⁹ That our idea of taste is not innate, Priestley proceeds to demonstrate (in a manner reminiscent of Locke) by noting the differences between the aesthetic standards held by different historical and geographical cultures.¹⁹⁰ This does not, however, mean that taste is entirely relative. In accordance with Priestley’s theory of progress, he posits the idea that through increased cross-cultural intercourse ‘an uniform and perfect standard of taste will at length be established over the whole world’.¹⁹¹ Taste is thus necessarily a part of the body of collective human knowledge, conceived by Priestley as being in a continual and divinely regulated progress towards perfection.

Although Priestley did not specifically mention ethics in the *Lectures*, it is possible to infer from his position on the development of the faculty of taste his sentiments on the moral faculty. In fact, Priestley himself had drawn this connection between the two in his *Institutes*, writing that ‘a taste for natural, and also for artificial propriety, beauty, and sublimity, has a connection with a taste for moral propriety, moral beauty, and dignity’.¹⁹² In the *Institutes* Priestley had acknowledged Hartley as a significant influence, citing his dependence on the *Observations* for the second and third parts of his own work.¹⁹³ Part II of the *Institutes* makes essentially the same argument which the *Lectures on Oratory and Criticism* would do in relation to taste, by applying Hartley’s theory of the association of ideas to explain the development of the conscience, or moral sense. Priestley identifies the ‘springs of all our actions’ as the ‘*passions*’ or ‘*affections*’ resulting from the pleasure and pain experienced by an agent in contact with the world.¹⁹⁴ These are divided into a hierarchy of classes, beginning with the ‘*appetites*’, or the desire to seek after corporeal and sensual pleasure and to avoid bodily pain, and

¹⁸⁹ *Oratory and Criticism*, 74.

¹⁹⁰ On the connection between Locke and Priestley’s *Lectures on Oratory and Criticism* see Dabney Townsend, ‘The Aesthetics of Joseph Priestley’, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 51.4 (1993), 561-70. Townsend argues that ‘Priestley’s use of Hartley’s associationism is restricted by his relative independence from Hartley’s explanatory and apologetic structures’ (i.e. his theological system and the theory of vibrations) and that Priestley’s approach to aesthetics is ‘thoroughly Lockeian’ (569). My summary here argues against this, by suggesting that Priestley’s theory is, at least in part, dependent on the theology he shared with Hartley.

¹⁹¹ *Oratory and Criticism*, 135.

¹⁹² Priestley, *Institutes*, vol. I, 99.

¹⁹³ *Institutes*, vol. I, xviii.

¹⁹⁴ *Institutes*, vol. I, 77.

culminating in the ‘*moral sense*’, or ‘a love of virtue and hatred of vice in the abstract’.¹⁹⁵ Each of the classes is derived from those below it in the hierarchy through the process of association, so that each class is a more refined version of the lower classes. What is most significant is that, as in Hartley’s account, the conscience, or moral sense, is not innate, but is gradually formed through an individual’s contact with the circumstances of a world ordered by a benevolent divine will. The conscience is acquired as ‘the result of a great variety of impressions, the conclusions of our own minds, and the opinions of others, respecting what is right and fit in our conduct’.¹⁹⁶ For this reason, Priestley can define the ‘two just and independent rules of human conduct’ as ‘the will of God’ and ‘a regard to our own real happiness’ (the latter coinciding with the former in so far as ‘our happiness is an object with the divine being no less than it is with ourselves’).¹⁹⁷ The conscience is thus ‘properly considered as a *substitute*’ and ‘is, in fact, improved and corrected from time to time by having recourse to these rules’.¹⁹⁸

The solution to the question of the foundation of the moral sense which Priestley discovered in Hartley was to inform the whole of his later philosophy. Importantly, however, it also laid the foundation for the theological system he later came to adopt. Priestley’s attempt to conceive of these epistemological issues in a more explicitly theological context is well illustrated by one of his sermons, *The Doctrine of Divine Influence on the Human Mind*. The work elucidates some of the theological implications of Priestley’s rejection of an innate moral sense. Although this sermon was published to mark the ordination of Thomas Jervis (1748-1833) in 1779, it was modelled on a much earlier text drawn up by Priestley at Needham Market some time between 1755 and 1761. Priestley recorded in his *Memoirs* the composition of a treatise ‘on the doctrine of the *divine influence*’, for which he had collected and arranged a selection of relevant biblical texts and which he made use of in composing the later published work.¹⁹⁹ How closely this treatise resembled the later publication is unclear: the preface of the published sermon locates the argument in the context of the debates over necessitarianism in which Priestley was involved in the late 1770s. Nevertheless, the substance of the argument,

¹⁹⁵ *Institutes*, vol. I, 83.

¹⁹⁶ *Institutes*, vol. I, 72.

¹⁹⁷ *Institutes*, vol. I, 67; 70.

¹⁹⁸ *Institutes*, vol. I, 72.

¹⁹⁹ Rutt, I, i, 39-40.

based on an interpretation of two New Testament texts, presumably dates from the earlier period.

In the sermon, Priestley argues for the ‘doctrine of the exclusion of all *immediate agency of the Deity on the minds of men*’.²⁰⁰ He might well have first encountered this question at Daventry in Doddridge’s lectures. In Part V of his lectures, ‘*Of the Reason to expect and desire a REVELATION: and the internal and external EVIDENCE with which we may suppose it should be attended*’, Doddridge had raised the question of whether an individual could have the truth of a revelation ‘immediately discovered to him by some divine agency on his mind’. Although Doddridge cautions that the immediate agency of the deity could be construed as ‘enthusiastical pretence’ by those who had never experienced it, he concedes that it is possible: ‘It cannot be denied, that such an immediate impulse on the mind of each individual is possible to divine power’.²⁰¹ In Priestley’s view, however, an acceptance that the deity directs men towards good or evil, not by any immediate agency, but ‘by no other means than the natural influence of proper instructions and motives’ not only resolves the question, but penetrates ‘to the root of the grossest and most dangerous delusions that the christian world has, in all ages, been subject to’.²⁰² Priestley enlists Hugo Grotius and ‘other divines and commentators of the greatest repute’ in support of his position.²⁰³ The sermon proceeds by drawing on two New Testament parables (Matt. 8: 3-10 and Luke 8: 6-9) to illustrate the point that ‘the *nature of man* is supposed to be a thing that is never operated upon by the divine power *immediately*, but always through the medium of certain means, without the mind, naturally adapted to that end’.²⁰⁴ Priestley emphasises the cautionary point raised in Doddridge’s lectures, stressing that he associates any claim for the immediate agency of the deity with religious enthusiasm. He rejects the possibility that ‘certain supernatural

²⁰⁰ Joseph Priestley, *The Doctrine of Divine Influence on the Human Mind considered, in a Sermon, published at the Request of many Persons who have occasionally heard it* (Bath, 1779), iv.

²⁰¹ Doddridge, *Lectures*, 246. Note that Locke, *Essay*, IV, xix, 16, also holds that ‘I am far from denying, that God can, or doth sometimes enlighten Mens Minds in the apprehending of certain Truths, or excite them to Good Actions by the immediate influence and assistance of the Holy Spirit, without any extraordinary Signs accompanying it’.

²⁰² Priestley, *The Doctrine of Divine Influence*, iv.

²⁰³ Priestley’s source is probably Grotius’s *De Veritae Christianae Religionis* (1627).

²⁰⁴ *The Doctrine of Divine Influence*, 5-6.

impulses and feelings, of vague and uncertain description' can have any possible relation to moral virtue.²⁰⁵

As we shall see shortly, Priestley's aversion to 'impulses and feelings' of a 'vague and uncertain description' would become more acutely focused when he came to engage with contemporary Scottish philosophy in the mid-1770s. It will be particularly important in considering these writings to note that, from the very beginning of his engagement with epistemological questions, the philosophical and theological implications of these ideas are inseparable.

²⁰⁵ *The Doctrine of Divine Influence*, 30.

2. Priestley and the Scottish ‘common sense’ philosophers (1774-1776)

At least one reader of Priestley’s *Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion* was unimpressed. On 18 June 1774 Thomas Reid, Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow, recorded after reading the work that ‘In this first part of the Being & Perfections of God the Author seems to be very superficial. There appears no such precision as to discover a Philosophical Acumen in abstract Reasoning’. Priestley’s attempt to speak to an audience of young students and yet to retain the voice of scholarly authority did little to impress Reid: ‘The work seems to be too abstract for the vulgar’, noted the latter, ‘and too shallow for the Learned’. Interestingly, Priestley’s description of the formation of the conscience by the process of association was one aspect of the work that particularly interested Reid. He correctly recognised that ‘The peculiarities of this Volume are chiefly taken from Dr Hartley’ and again recorded his unflattering opinion of the work: in Priestley’s ‘Analysis of the Principles of Action in the Human Mind’, Reid could discover ‘nothing distinct or precise’.¹

The occasion for Reid’s encounter with Priestley’s work was a letter Priestley had sent to Reid on the publication of his *Examination* in April 1774.² The *Examination* was an attempted refutation of three Scottish philosophers, Reid, James Beattie, and James Oswald, authors working largely independently of one another, but styled by Priestley as representatives of a ‘common sense’ school.³ Modern and eighteenth-century commentators have generally agreed that Priestley failed to appreciate the complexity of the arguments underlying Reid’s, Beattie’s, and Oswald’s advocacy of ‘common sense’.

¹ *Thomas Reid on the Animate Creation: Papers relating to the Life Sciences*, ed. Paul Wood (Edinburgh, 1995), 127.

² For details of the letters see *Examination*, 346-7. Reid, unlike Beattie and Oswald, chose not to reply to Priestley.

³ Reid (1710-1796) had studied philosophy at Marischal College in the 1720s under George Turnbull; in 1752 he was elected Professor of Philosophy at King’s. His *Inquiry into the Human Mind, on the Principles of Common Sense* was published at Edinburgh in 1764, and in the same year he was appointed Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow. Beattie (1735-1803) was Professor of Moral Philosophy and Logic at Marischal College from 1760 until 1796; his *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth, in opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism* was published in 1770. Oswald (1715-1769), the only one of the three not to hold a university chair, was a Church of Scotland minister at Methven, Perthshire; his *Appeal to Common Sense in behalf of Religion* was published in two volumes in 1766 and 1772. In a letter to Elizabeth Montagu of 27 May 1774 Beattie stressed, against Priestley’s insinuation that he, Oswald, and Reid ‘wrote in concert’, the independence of his own work. See William Forbes, *An Account of the Life and Writings of James Beattie* (1824), 203-5.

Reid in particular has been the subject of much interest on the part of historians of philosophy in recent years. This has contributed to a consensus that Priestley's refutation of the position outlined in the *Inquiry* seriously underestimated the force of Reid's argument.⁴ My aim in this chapter is not to engage in debates on the merits of Priestley's work. Rather, I shall attempt to reconstruct the context in which the work was written in order to illustrate why Priestley reacted so forcibly to Reid's, Beattie's, and Oswald's common sense theories.

One essential factor to bear in mind in attempting to effect this reconstruction is that in the early 1770s Reid's, Beattie's, and Oswald's works had been exceptionally well received. The merits of Reid's work were acknowledged by contemporaries as intellectually divergent as Hume and Price. Beattie's success, as James A. Harris has argued convincingly, ought to be accounted for, less by his philosophical merits, than by 'the widespread belief in this period that there is no need to answer on their own terms the arguments of those who would undermine natural and instinctive beliefs in, for example, liberty and moral responsibility'.⁵ The same factor undoubtedly accounted for the success of Oswald's work. One of my aims in this chapter is to demonstrate that this high estimation of Reid's, Beattie's, and Oswald's writings was shared by some rational dissenters in Priestley's circle. As I have begun to explore in the previous chapter, some of these figures had strong connections with the Scottish universities. Their interest in and sympathy with the writings of Reid, Beattie, and Oswald ought to be understood in the context of these connections, and as part of a broader interest taken by English rational dissenters in the philosophy of Francis Hutcheson, and in lesser-known figures working in the Shaftesburian tradition such as James Harris (1709-1780), Shaftesbury's nephew and principal English follower, and James Burnett, Lord Monboddo (1714-1799). Through extending this picture of English and Scottish connections, this chapter develops a new context for understanding Priestley's *Examination*. The work is best

⁴ Alan Tapper, 'Reid and Priestley on Method and the Mind', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 52 (2003), 511-25, reprinted as chapter 7 of *The Philosophy of Thomas Reid: A Collection of Essays*, ed. John Haldane and Stephen Read (Oxford, 2003), 98-112, is a perceptive analysis of both authors' claim to a Newtonian method. Perhaps the most sympathetic attempts to understand Priestley's position are Alan Tapper, 'The Beginnings of Priestley's Materialism', *E&D*, 1 (1982), 73-81; Garrett, 'In Defense of Elephants: Priestley on Reid'; Dybikowski, 'Joseph Priestley, Metaphysician and Philosopher of Religion', esp. 86-91; McEvoy and McGuire, 'God and Nature: Priestley's Way of Rational Dissent', esp. 357-74.

⁵ Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity*, 154.

understood when considered as being directed primarily towards this audience of English dissenters sympathetic to Scottish thought.

Priestley was not a sophisticated interpreter of the philosophy of his contemporaries. He saw in Reid's, Beattie's, and Oswald's writings an attempt to combat scepticism by recourse to a variety of the theory of innate ideas. Priestley tended to ignore the often subtle differences between moral sense, common sense, and even rationalist theories of mind. In addition to the strictures on Reid, Beattie, and Oswald, he included two appendices to his *Examination* on the rationalist Richard Price's *A Review of the Principal Questions and Difficulties in Morals* (1758) and on the Shaftesburian James Harris's *Hermes, or, A Philosophical Inquiry concerning Universal Grammar* (1751), texts which Priestley understood to be advancing essentially the same argument as Reid. Priestley's understanding of what Reid, Beattie, and Oswald were attempting to do is further exemplified by his choice of a quotation for the title-page of the work. Both editions of the *Examination* are prefaced with a passage from William Gay's preliminary dissertation to Edmund Law's translation of William King's *Origin of Evil*:

*As some men have imagined innate ideas, because they had forgot how they came by them; so others have set up almost as many distinct instincts as there are acquired principles of acting.*⁶

It is significant here that Gay, writing in 1731, is thinking primarily of Hutcheson's concept of the moral sense. That Priestley could preface his own argument against Reid, Beattie, and Oswald with a quotation from Gay arguing against Hutcheson written over forty years earlier, suggests that he considered the issues at stake to be essentially the same.⁷

⁶ William Gay, 'Preliminary Dissertation concerning the Fundamental Picture of Virtue or Morality', in William King, *An Essay on the Origin of Evil*, trans. Edmund Law, 4th edn (Cambridge, 1758), xxxix.

⁷ Interestingly, Edmund Law, in the sixth edition of his *Considerations of the Theory of Religion* (1774), added a note to the appendix, 'Concerning the Use of the Word *SOUL* in Holy Scriptures; and the State of the *Dead* there described', which showed that he interpreted Beattie in a similar way. Beattie, Law holds, is, 'like some other of his countrymen, entirely devoted to the old doctrine of abstract immaterial substances and their immutable identity, of innate senses, implanted instincts, &c. for want probably of having read any thing lately written on the present subject, which might, I apprehend, lead them to a more just and more natural way of philosophising', *Considerations of the Theory of Religion*, 6th edn

For Priestley the theory of innate ideas was dangerous for two reasons. Firstly, it established the doctrines of natural religion on a precarious epistemological foundation, laying Christianity open to criticism from the attacks of unbelievers. Secondly, it could easily be made to validate recourse to arbitrary judgments in religious matters, such as subscriptions to human creeds and formularies. In his *Examination* Priestley was attempting to forge a philosophical position for the emergent rational dissenting movement in the tradition of Locke and Hartley. It was on the principles of these writers that Priestley felt that the tenets of natural religion could be most securely upheld. The fact that he was attempting to do this within an intellectual community with a strong interest in Scottish thought might, in part, account for the work's polemical and even aggressive tone.

Priestley on Reid, Beattie, and Oswald

Crucial to understanding Priestley's engagement with Reid, Beattie, and Oswald is an appreciation of the difference between the authors' attitudes to the philosophy of David Hume. Reid, as he acknowledged in the dedication to his *Inquiry*, had fully accepted the sceptical conclusions reached by Hume in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40). Reid conceived of Hume's scepticism as the inevitable consequence of Lockeian epistemology. In the *Inquiry* he refers at several points to the development of what he terms the '*ideal system*', or the '*doctrine of ideas*', which, beginning with Descartes, is refined through Locke, Malebranche, and Berkeley, and culminates in the scepticism of Hume's *Treatise*. Reid holds that this ideal system – defined as the doctrine that 'nothing is perceived but what is in the mind which perceives it: That we do not really perceive things that are external, but only certain images and pictures of them imprinted upon the mind, which are called *impressions* and *ideas*' – leads inevitably to scepticism on such fundamental articles of belief as the existence of the perceiving subject and our belief of an external world.⁸ He therefore concedes the necessity, either to fully accept Hume's sceptical conclusions, or to call into question the whole system of the doctrine of ideas,

(Cambridge, 1774), 431. Beattie noticed the criticism in a letter to Elizabeth Montagu of 13 March 1774, Forbes, *Life of Beattie*, 190-3.

⁸ Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind, on the Principles of Common Sense* (Edinburgh, 1764), vii-viii.

being the underlying principle upon which these conclusions are founded. Reid opts for the latter option: he concludes that the ideal system must contain some ‘defects and blemishes’, and thus sets about attempting to formulate a new model of the means by which the mind acquires knowledge of certain primary truths.⁹

It is within this context that Reid has recourse to the faculty of ‘common sense’. ‘Common sense’, for Reid, is a mode of cognition operating prior to reason by which certain first principles, such as our belief in the veracity of our senses and our belief in the existence of an external world, can be known independently of the data of sense perception. In this way, ‘common sense’ offers an explanation of the origin of certain ideas derived from neither of the two Lockean faculties of sensation or reflection. Exactly how ‘common sense’ works is not entirely clear from the *Inquiry*. Reid (as Priestley was quick to recognise) often has recourse to figurative language and analogy in order to explain the faculty. In the course of a discussion of ‘natural signs’, for example, Reid writes that the thing signified is suggested or ‘conjure[d] [...] up’, ‘as it were, by a natural kind of magic’.¹⁰ Neither is it always clear from the text exactly how ‘common sense’ modifies the ideal system. At a number of points Reid seems to attempt to dispense altogether with the doctrine of ideas: ‘they [ideas] are a mere fiction and hypothesis, contrived to solve the phaenomena of the human understanding’; at others, Reid, following Locke, uses the analogy of the linguistic signifier to explain the way that sensations lead the mind directly to a consideration of external things, so that the idea present to the mind becomes the sign of an external reality and not something to be considered in itself.¹¹

In his *Inquiry* Reid frequently appears to be straining to find a vocabulary to express a model of the mind different from the received hypothesis. In the introduction he writes: ‘It is hardly possible to make any innovation in our philosophy concerning the mind and its operations, without using new words and phrases, or giving a different meaning to those that are received’.¹² At several points in the text, he struggles to redefine certain key terms. In the section ‘Of Smelling’, for example, Reid notes:

⁹ *Inquiry*, 20.

¹⁰ *Inquiry*, 126.

¹¹ *Inquiry*, 46; Locke, *Essay*, II, ix, 6.

¹² Reid, *Inquiry*, 7.

since our own language affords no other name for this sensation, we shall call it a *smell* or *odour*, carefully excluding from the meaning of those names every thing but the sensation itself, at least till we have examined it.¹³

Later, attempting to define the term ‘suggestion’, he explains: ‘I beg leave to make use of the word suggestion because I know not one more proper, to express a power of mind which seems entirely to have escaped the notice of philosophers’.¹⁴ In this respect, it is worth noting that Reid never uses the phrase ‘innate ideas’.¹⁵ ‘Common sense’ accounts for what Reid variously defines as ‘original perceptions and notions of the mind’ or ‘certain principles [...] which the constitution of our nature leads us to believe’.¹⁶

Interestingly, Reid frequently has recourse to the expressions of ‘common language’ to uphold certain facts about the world, the notion that colour, for example, is a quality inherent in bodies. Reid hints towards the idea, although this is not something clearly developed in the *Inquiry*, that ‘common language’, particularly similarities between words or expressions across different languages, might reveal something about the structure of the mind.¹⁷ This is in marked contrast to Hartley and Priestley. Hartley, as we have seen in chapter 1, had identified an important distinction between what he had termed ‘popular language’ and ‘philosophical language’. Only the latter is a suitable medium for accurately discussing philosophical questions. Similarly for Priestley, philosophical questions such as the doctrine of necessity ‘oblige a man to depart from the common *language*’.¹⁸ Priestley’s observation towards the opening of his *Examination* that ‘*Words* are of great *use* in the business of thinking, but are not necessary to it’ reveals a subtle but important distinction between Priestley’s and Reid’s view of the relationship between language and the structure of the human mind.¹⁹ The occasional lack of clarity in Reid’s work is the result of his attempt to define ‘common sense’ as a faculty excluded from the system of philosophy he had inherited from Locke, Berkeley,

¹³ *Inquiry*, 49

¹⁴ *Inquiry*, 50.

¹⁵ Reid only once uses the word ‘innate’ in the *Inquiry* to describe the mind’s ability to interpret the signs used in his concept of ‘natural language’ (469).

¹⁶ Reid, *Inquiry*, 10; 58.

¹⁷ Reid develops this idea most fully in *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (Edinburgh, 1785).

¹⁸ *Examination*, 178.

¹⁹ *Examination*, xlvi.

and Hume. What Reid was not attempting to do was to refute Hume's conclusions by positing a number of 'innate ideas' in the sense in which the phrase had been defined through the writings of these authors.

A shared concern at the conclusions reached by Hume is what most strongly united Reid with Beattie. In fact, Beattie went even further than Reid on this point and criticised the respect accorded to Hume by Reid and other members of the Aberdeen Philosophical Society.²⁰ Beattie's *Essay on Truth* is essentially an attempt to refute the danger posed by Humeian scepticism to morality and religion by a more forceful enunciation of the doctrine of 'common sense'. Beattie self-consciously addresses his work to the widest possible audience. In the introduction he explains that:

several subjects of intricate speculation are examined in this book: but I have endeavoured, by constant appeals to fact and experience, by illustrations and examples the most familiar I could think of, and by a plainness and perspicuity of expression which sometimes may appear too much affected, to examine them in such a way, as I hope cannot fail to render them intelligible, even to those who are not much conversant in studies of this kind.²¹

Throughout the *Essay*, Beattie relies heavily on this rhetorical strategy of 'plainness and perspicuity of expression'.²² He frequently opposes his own platitudes ('Truth, like virtue, to be loved, needs only to be seen') to the 'paradoxes', 'ambiguous phrases', and 'improprieties and errors' of the 'metaphysicians', namely Berkeley and Hume and, to a lesser extent, Descartes, Locke, and Malebranche.²³ He acknowledges that he is using the phrase 'common sense' in the way it had been defined by Reid and Claude Buffier (1661-1737), yet he also attempts to find parallel concepts among the ancients, 'that I may not be suspected of affecting either an uncommon doctrine, or uncommon modes of

²⁰ See Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity*, 140.

²¹ James Beattie, *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth; in opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism* (Edinburgh, 1770), 18-19.

²² The 'plainness and perspicuity of the reasoning' in Beattie's *Essay* which made it 'intelligible to everybody' were what most impressed George III about Beattie's work. See Forbes, *Life of Beattie*, 150.

²³ Beattie, *Essay on Truth*, 19.

expression'.²⁴ 'Common sense', according to Beattie, ought to be properly distinguished from 'reason'. 'Reason' is the 'energy which unites a conclusion with a first principle by a gradual chain of intermediate relations'; 'common sense' is most explicitly defined as:

that power of the mind which perceives truth, or commands belief, not by progressive argumentation, but by an instantaneous, instinctive, and irresistible impulse; derived neither from education nor from habit, but from nature; acting independently on our will, whenever its object is presented, according to an established law, and therefore properly called *Sense*; and acting in a similar manner upon all, or at least upon a great majority of mankind, and therefore properly called *Common Sense*.²⁵

Beattie thus introduces a number of terms, such as 'instinct' and 'intuition', not used by Reid in the *Inquiry*. 'Instinct' and 'intuition' become synonymous with 'common sense' at various points in the *Essay*.²⁶ The knowledge of the veracity of our senses, for example, is obtained 'not by reason, but by instinct, or common sense'.²⁷ The power of 'intuition' can distinguish the dictates of common sense from acquired prejudices.²⁸ Beattie extends the province of 'common sense' to make it account for moral judgements: 'The performance of certain actions, and the indulgence of certain affectations, is attended with an agreeable feeling, of a peculiar kind, which I call moral approbation'.²⁹ He here distances his own position from a rationalist understanding of ethical judgments:

I cannot prove, in regard to my moral feelings, that they are conformable to any extrinsic and eternal relations of things; but I know that my constitution necessarily determines me to believe them just and genuine, even as it determines me to believe that I myself exist.³⁰

²⁴ *Essay on Truth*, 36. Beattie finds something similar to his own understanding of 'common sense' in both one usage of the Latin '*sensus communis*' (particularly as the phrase was used by Lucretius) and in the Aristotelian '*κοινὰ δόξα*'. On the connections between Reid and Buffier see Louise Marcil-Lacoste, *Claude Buffier and Thomas Reid: Two Common-Sense Philosophers* (Kingston, 1982).

²⁵ *Essay on Truth*, 41.

²⁶ On Reid's later usage of the term 'intuition' see below.

²⁷ *Essay on Truth*, 62.

²⁸ *Essay on Truth*, 382.

²⁹ *Essay on Truth*, 69.

³⁰ *Essay on Truth*, 70.

‘Common sense’ further accounts for our belief in certain first principles of religion. Most importantly from Priestley’s point of view, Beattie attributes the certainty of the freedom of the will and our knowledge of an afterlife to ‘common sense’.³¹

As James Fieser has observed, Reid’s influence on Oswald ought not to be overstated.³² Oswald’s notion of ‘common sense’ probably owed more to Buffier’s *Traité des premières vérités et de la source de nos jugements* (1724) and Lord Kames’s *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (1751) than to Reid’s *Inquiry*, which is mentioned only twice in passing in the first volume of the *Appeal to Common Sense in Behalf of Religion* (1766). Fieser argues that, for Oswald, common sense perceptions have a uniquely rational content, and that in this sense Oswald understands the concept of ‘common sense’ in a much narrower way than Reid.³³ Like Beattie, however, Oswald allows ‘common sense’ to account for our belief in numerous principles of morality and religion. Oswald’s *Appeal* also posits a similar trajectory of modern philosophy to that found in Reid and Beattie. According to Oswald’s narrative, in the philosophy of Locke ‘Innate ideas were dismissed, and with them the primary truths of religion and virtue’.³⁴ From Locke’s mistake has arisen the lamentable inability of modern philosophers ‘to give satisfaction to the world concerning truths in which all mankind are concerned’.³⁵ Only through recourse to ‘common sense’ can ‘the great truths of natural philosophy, theology, and ethics [...] maintain their ground against all the attacks of the most subtile reasoning’. As in Beattie, ‘common sense’ is invoked as an antidote to what Oswald terms ‘universal scepticism’, encapsulated most forcibly in the writings of Hume.³⁶

As Harris has observed, Priestley as a philosopher was ‘peculiarly insensitive to sceptical arguments of any kind’.³⁷ Priestley did not appear to perceive any need to engage seriously with the more technical metaphysical aspects of Hume’s writings. In the preface to his *Examination* Priestley wrote that ‘Mr. Hume has been very ably answered, again and again, upon more solid principles than those of this new common sense’,

³¹ *Essay on Truth*, 328-73; 15.

³² James Fieser, Introduction to James Oswald, *An Appeal to Common Sense in behalf of Religion* (Bristol, 2000), xvii.

³³ Fieser, Introduction, xvii.

³⁴ Oswald, *An Appeal to Common Sense in behalf of Religion*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1766, 1772), vol. I, 150.

³⁵ *An Appeal to Common Sense*, vol. I, 90.

³⁶ *An Appeal to Common Sense*, vol. I, 57; 109.

³⁷ Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity*, 16.

referring his readers to the first two volumes of his own *Institutes*.³⁸ It is illustrative of the difference between Priestley and Reid that Priestley here singles out for attention the second volume of his *Institutes* ‘which relates to the evidences of christianity’.³⁹ Whereas Reid had styled his own work as a response to Hume’s *Treatise*, Priestley placed a greater importance on a work which countered Hume’s criticisms of the evidence for miracles and the apostolic testimonies, which had first appeared nearly a decade later in Hume’s *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding* (1748). In fact, in the course of his discussion of Beattie’s *Essay* in the *Examination*, Priestley claimed that he was ‘truly pleased with such publications as those of Mr. Hume’, as they have occasioned the subject of religion to be ‘more thoroughly canvassed, and consequently to be better understood than it was before’.⁴⁰

For Priestley, Reid’s attempt to describe a capacity of the mind by which primary truths could be known independently of the Lockean faculties of sensation and reflection was both unnecessary and obfuscatory. In Priestley’s understanding, developed largely from Hartley, all ideas could be traced to their source in sensations occasioned by the impressions of external stimuli. In this sense, Priestley even criticises Locke for his hastiness in concluding that there is ‘some other source of our ideas besides the external senses’.⁴¹ In the introductory observations to his *Examination*, Priestley singles out Reid’s contention that we necessarily believe in the existence of external objects as distinct from our ideas of them.⁴² For Priestley, such a contention is ungrounded: the mind derives all its knowledge from ideas generated by sense perception, and the external world ‘is nothing more than an hypothesis, to account for those ideas’.⁴³ Priestley here acknowledges that Berkeley’s theory that ideas could be accounted for by the immediate agency of the deity, without the medium of external objects, is philosophically tenable. He holds only that it is ‘more natural’ to suppose that there really are such external objects, and that the simplicity of the theory recommends it.⁴⁴ As had Reid, Beattie, and Oswald, Priestley refers to a trajectory stemming from Descartes to Locke. However,

³⁸ *Examination*, xxvii.

³⁹ *Examination*, xxvii.

⁴⁰ *Examination*, 193.

⁴¹ *Examination*, 5.

⁴² *Examination*, lx.

⁴³ *Examination*, lx.

⁴⁴ *Examination*, lix.

whereas the Scots had claimed that this led directly to Humeian scepticism, Priestley identifies Hartley as the culmination of this tradition, his writings having ‘thrown more useful light upon the theory of the mind than Newton did upon the theory of the natural world’.⁴⁵ Priestley characterises Reid, Beattie, and Oswald, as thinkers ‘of little and contracted minds’, who ‘instead of doing, or attempting to do anything themselves, are busily employed in watching the footsteps of others, and cavilling at every thing they do’.⁴⁶ Priestley thus reverses the dichotomy established by Beattie and Oswald between their own rhetorical clarity and Hume’s and Berkeley’s obscurantism. He accuses Beattie of sheltering in ‘*obscurity*’ and Oswald of adopting an air of ‘*mysticism*’.⁴⁷

The core argument of Priestley’s work is that Hartley’s theory of the association of ideas is an adequate foundation on which to ground all complex ideas, including moral judgments and the principles of natural religion. His strategy in the *Examination* is to ridicule the theory of ‘common sense’ by pointing out the apparently arbitrary nature by which it posits certain axioms. Independently of its philosophical merits or demerits, Priestley’s work is, in this respect, reasonably effective as a polemical tract. He begins his examination of Reid’s *Inquiry* by drawing up a list of all of the ‘*instinctive principles*’ posited by Reid, supported by a long string of quotations from Reid’s work. Priestley’s point in cataloguing the various aspects of Reid’s ‘common sense’ in this way is to highlight the fact that the principles appear to be arbitrarily asserted. He later accuses Reid of founding his whole system on ‘*relative truth*’ arising solely from ‘his constitution’, and points to a discrepancy between the systems of Reid and Beattie on the one hand, and of Oswald on the other, in the last of which ‘common sense’ is conceived of as being founded, at least in part, on rational judgments.⁴⁸ Priestley relies on this same argument in his response to all three authors. At the heart of his work is the charge that the notion of ‘common sense’ is both irrational and opens the door to relativism. Whereas in Locke, Priestley argues, axioms are grounded in ‘the perception of the agreement or disagreement of any ideas’, and therefore depend on ‘the necessary nature of things’ which is ‘*absolute, unchangeable, and everlasting*’, grounding these axioms in ‘common

⁴⁵ *Examination*, 2.

⁴⁶ *Examination*, 3.

⁴⁷ *Examination*, 174; 260

⁴⁸ *Examination*, 47.

sense' makes them dependent on 'some unaccountable instinctive persuasions, depending upon the arbitrary constitution of our nature'.⁴⁹ According to Priestley, the system of 'common sense' admits of no appeal to reason. He criticises all three authors for making fundamental axioms dependent on nothing more than a 'feeling', which if closely scrutinised 'might appear to be a mere prejudice'.⁵⁰

The most interesting parts of Priestley's work are the various points at which he is most explicit about why he perceived the doctrine of 'common sense' to be so dangerous. In the course of his discussion of Beattie's *Essay*, Priestley argues that grounding moral obligation in 'common sense', as Beattie does, is problematic in that it makes moral obligation dependent on feeling. Feelings, Priestley points out, are necessarily subjective. The examples that Priestley subsequently uses to make his point are important: many people may genuinely feel remorse upon 'the omission of a superstitious ceremony', or may feel real satisfaction 'after confessing to a priest, and having received his absolution'.⁵¹ The implication, of course, is that 'common sense' might as easily sanction the tenets of Catholicism as it might Beattie's own Protestantism. Furthermore, it is significant that Priestley singles out the points where Beattie argues from the principles of 'common sense' for theological positions with which Priestley disagreed. Priestley particularly censures, for example, Beattie's grounding of the doctrine of a future state on the evidence of 'common sense'. In eschewing all reasoning about the fundamental principles of religion, Priestley claims, Beattie has made way for 'all the extravagancies of credulity, enthusiasm, and mysticism'.⁵²

Priestley is most explicit on the implications of this in his discussion of Oswald. He re-emphasises his caution that the doctrinal tenets of any denomination could be justified by recourse to the principles of 'common sense', again using Catholicism as an example: 'Papists may begin to avail themselves of them for the support of all those doctrines and maxims for which the powers of reason had proved insufficient'.⁵³ Priestley then points to the danger in extending 'common sense', as Beattie and Oswald had done, beyond the confines of strictly metaphysical axioms. In the sphere of political

⁴⁹ *Examination*, 121.

⁵⁰ *Examination*, 121.

⁵¹ *Examination*, 159.

⁵² *Examination*, 161.

⁵³ *Examination*, 200.

philosophy, for example, there is no reason why ‘common sense’ could not be appealed to in order to justify certain tenets: ‘politicians also, possessing themselves of this advantage, may venture once more to thunder out upon us their exploded doctrines of passive obedience and non-resistance’.⁵⁴ As Priestley points out, Oswald was particularly susceptible to this charge. His *Appeal* had listed ‘*obedience to the magistrate*’ among the primary truths that could be derived from ‘common sense’. For a dissenter such as Priestley, it is obvious why this kind of thinking was inherently dangerous. Furthermore, as Priestley would have been aware, Oswald, as a minister of the Church of Scotland, and Beattie, as a professor at Marischal College, would have been under obligation to subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith.⁵⁵ The Westminster Confession declared (chapter 20) that ‘they who, upon pretence of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God’, and (chapter 23) that the civil magistrate retained the authority to suppress blasphemy and heresy.⁵⁶ Thus, although he does not explicitly level the charge against the Scots, Priestley may well have thought of ‘common sense’ as a way of assigning epistemological status to the doctrines contained in a particular church creed – in this case one that advocated not only obedience to the magistrate but trinitarianism (chapter 2), free will (chapter 9), and original sin (chapter 6), all positions with which Priestley had come to disagree. Here, of course, Priestley is firmly in a Lockean tradition. One argument against innate ideas advanced in Book I of Locke’s *Essay* is that:

if different Men of different Sects should go about to give us a List of those innate practical Principles, they would set down only such as suited their distinct Hypotheses, and were fit to support the Doctrines of their particular Schools or Churches.

⁵⁴ *Examination*, 201

⁵⁵ Priestley makes this point in the letter he addressed to Beattie dated 29 June 1774 printed in Appendix III of his *Examination*, 370. Although Beattie, as Professor of Moral Philosophy at Marischal College, would have been technically required to subscribe to the Westminster Confession, subscription was rarely enforced (communication from M. A. Stewart).

⁵⁶ *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647), *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, vol. II, 601-49.

In fact, Priestley probably had in mind Locke's comment that 'no body [...] has ventured yet to give a Catalogue of them [innate Principles]', when drawing up his own list of Reid's 'instinctive principles'.⁵⁷

Priestley's answer to the threats posed by Reid's, Beattie's, and Oswald's theories was his persistent advocacy of Hartley's doctrine of association. In 1775, in an attempt to stem the spreading popularity of their writings, Priestley published his own edition of *Hartley's Theory of the Human Mind, on the Principle of the Association of Ideas; with Essays relating to the Subject of it*. The aim of Priestley's work was to facilitate the study of Hartley's *Observation on Man*. The selections from Hartley were prefaced with three short essays written by Priestley, 'A General View of the Doctrine of Vibrations', 'A General View of the Association of Ideas', and 'Of Complex and Abstract Ideas'. In the second essay Priestley once again emphasised his opposition to theories advocating innate instincts; he here appears to have had Reid, Beattie, and Oswald particularly in mind. Ascribing the development of all complex ideas to Hartley's doctrine of association, Priestley wrote that:

All is performed by the general disposition of the mind to conform to its circumstances, and to be modified by them, without that seemingly operose and inelegant contrivance, of different original, independent instincts adapted to a thousand different occasions and either implanted in us at different times, or contrived to lie dormant till they are wanted.⁵⁸

The reception of Reid, Beattie, and Oswald among English rational dissenters

Reid's, Beattie's, and Oswald's works were immensely well received both north and south of the border in the 1770s. In 1773 Bennet Langton (1737-1801) wrote to James Boswell with news of the glowing reputation of Reid's *Inquiry* in London: 'You have to be sure looked into his [Reid's] *Enquiry*; when I was in London I thought the Reputation of that work seemed to be high and likely to increase very fast'.⁵⁹ Beattie's *Essay* went

⁵⁷ Locke, *Essay*, I, iii, 14.

⁵⁸ *Hartley's Theory of the Human Mind, on the Principle of the Association of Ideas; with Essays relating to the Subject of it*, ed. Joseph Priestley (1775), xxxii.

⁵⁹ Bennet Langton to James Boswell, 17 June 1773, *The Correspondence of James Boswell with Certain Members of the Club*, ed. Charles N. Fifer (London, 1976), 29-32.

through six editions between 1770 and 1776; it was favourably reviewed in nearly all of the major periodicals, and earned its author honorary degrees from King's College, Aberdeen and Oxford, an audience with King George III and Queen Charlotte, and a royal pension of £200 a year.⁶⁰ In 1773 Joshua Reynolds painted a portrait of Beattie entitled 'The Triumph of Truth', depicting Beattie against an allegorical backdrop in which an angel representing 'truth' vanquishes 'sophistry', 'scepticism', and 'infidelity' representing Hume and Voltaire.⁶¹ Oswald's *Appeal* was favourably noticed in the *Monthly Review* and the *Critical Review*.⁶²

This admiration was shared by many English rational dissenters. The surviving evidence from Priestley's and his circle's correspondence suggests that Beattie's *Essay* was generally well received among them. In September 1770 Lindsey wrote to Francis Hastings, tenth Earl of Huntingdon (1728-1789), with news that he had encountered Beattie's *Essay* 'During [his] travels in the north'. Lindsey evidently felt that the work would serve as an antidote to the popular sceptical opinions to which Hastings, who later abandoned Christianity altogether, was willing to give some credence. He continues:

I could heartily wish to recommend the book to your Lordship's perusal, who are no superficial reader of any thing. Forgive me saying, that I think it will help to correct some prejudices, not originally upon your mind, to my certain knowledge, but of late years taken up, and which, tho' common with some little minds that I know, yet your *great good sense* is naturally above them.⁶³

Priestley first encountered Beattie's *Essay* shortly after its publication in May 1770. In August he told Lindsey: 'I shall soon read Beattie. Dr Leechman gave me a good account of it some time ago'.⁶⁴ The fact that Priestley first heard about the work through Leechman points again to evidence of connections between the English dissenters and the

⁶⁰ On Beattie's success see *James Beattie's London Diary*, ed. R. S. Walker (Aberdeen, 1946); Forbes, *Life of Beattie*; Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity*, 153-4.

⁶¹ Reynolds himself suggested this reading of the figures in a letter to Beattie of 22 February 1774. See Forbes, *Life of Beattie*, 150.

⁶² *Critical Review*, 23 (1767), 100-12. For the work's reception in the *Monthly Review* see below.

⁶³ Ditchfield, 111-12.

⁶⁴ *Letters to Lindsey*, 30 August 1770.

Scots.⁶⁵ Priestley had evidently read the work by the end of the year and, like Lindsey, his first impression seems to have been favourable. The only aspect of the work with which Priestley appeared to disagree was Beattie's libertarianism. On 8 December he wrote to Samuel Merivale (1715-1771), tutor at the dissenting academy at Exeter: 'I like Beattie as you do, and am not afraid of its overturning the doctrine of necessity', adding: 'Hartley has sufficiently shewn that it is a principle by no means peculiar to unbelievers'.⁶⁶ In the preface to his *Examination*, Priestley confirmed that he had read Beattie's *Essay* 'at its first coming out'. He here reiterates that he initially concurred with Leechman's, Merivale's, and Lindsey's favourable estimation of the work. Despite the fact that Beattie's principles seemed to Priestley 'to be very wrong', he admitted to being 'much pleased with the good intention with which the book seemed to have been written, and with some of his lively strictures upon Mr. Hume'.⁶⁷

Beattie also appears to have found favour among dissenters in the capital. When he visited London in 1773, at the height of the *Essay*'s popularity, he was introduced to Richard Price through Elizabeth Montague (1718-1800). He attended a meeting of the Royal Society, afterwards visiting a coffeehouse with Price and John Calder (1733-1815), deputy librarian at Dr Williams's Library and a dissenting minister in London, who became well acquainted with Lindsey and preached on at least one occasion at Lindsey's Essex Street chapel.⁶⁸ On 24 May he dined at Newington Green with Price, noting in his diary that Andrew Kippis (1725-1795), minister of the Presbyterian congregation at Princes Street, Westminster, was present, and that the company discussed the affairs of

⁶⁵ Thomas P. Millar writes that Priestley 'corresponded with Hutcheson's student William Leechman', 'Where Did College English Studies Come From?', *Rhetoric Review* (1990), 50-69, 57. However, he gives no evidence to substantiate the claim. No letters between the two are known to have survived. Leechman evidently corresponded with William Turner (1761-1859), who had studied theology under him at Glasgow before becoming a dissenting minister at Hanover Square Chapel, Newcastle (1782-1841). In October 1783 Lindsey acknowledged the receipt of an extract from a letter from Leechman to Turner, noting: 'it is with some degree of reverence that I look upon that excellent man [Leechman], from two of whose sermons, on Prayer, and on the character of a Minister, I profess to have received much benefit and edification very early in life', Ditchfield, 398.

⁶⁶ Rutt, I, i, 126.

⁶⁷ *Examination*, viii.

⁶⁸ *James Beattie's London Diary*, 30-2; On Calder's preaching for Lindsey see *The Journal of Samuel Curwell, Loyalist*, ed. Andrew Oliver, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA, 1972), vol. II, 832. Beattie afterwards wrote to Calder on at least one occasion, see Rutt, I, i, 197.

the petitioning clergy.⁶⁹ Three years later, both Price and Calder subscribed to a quarto edition of Beattie's *Essay on Truth* printed at Edinburgh in 1776.⁷⁰

A similarly receptive attitude to Oswald's *Inquiry* can be found in the writings of another rational dissenter close to Priestley, William Enfield. Enfield (1741-1797) had studied at Daventry in the late 1750s, and in 1770 became minister to the congregation of the Cairo Street Chapel, Warrington. In the same year he succeeded Priestley as tutor in *belles-lettres* at the Warrington Academy where he remained until the academy's closure in 1783. In addition to works on geometry, natural philosophy, and elocution, Enfield was the author of an influential two-volume abridgement and translation of the *Historia critica philosophiae* by the German historian Johann Jakob Brucker (1696-1770).⁷¹ He received the degree of LLD from the University of Edinburgh in 1774. In 1770 Enfield published anonymously *Remarks on Several Late Publications relative to the Dissenters; in a Letter to Dr. Priestley*. The work was a moderate criticism of what Enfield perceived to be 'a degree of precipitation', an 'inattention to real life', and a 'vehemence of temper' characterising Priestley's recently published works, which Enfield feared would weaken the dissenting cause.⁷² The *Remarks* also contained an unflattering account of the 'fruitless course of study' pursued by students preparing for the ministry in the dissenting academies, in which Enfield criticised the overly-rationalistic bent of the divinity syllabus.⁷³ Towards the conclusion of the *Remarks*, Enfield cautioned his readers against an absolute reliance on the reasoning powers in the pursuit of religious knowledge. With

⁶⁹ James Beattie's *London Diary*, 40. Beattie also noted that 'Dissenters here seem inclined to Socinianism'.

⁷⁰ Beattie, *Essays on the Nature and Immutability of Truth in opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism; on Poetry and Music as they affect the Mind; on Laughter, and Ludicrous Composition; on the Utility of Classical Learning* (Edinburgh, 1776).

⁷¹ On the significance of Enfield's abridged translation see Knud Haakonssen's introduction to the 2001 Thoemmes Press reprint of William Enfield, *The History of Philosophy from the Earliest Periods: Drawn up from Brucker's Historia critica philosophiae*, 2 vols (Bristol, 2001), vol. I, v-xii. See also 'Enfield, William', *The Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century British Philosophers*, vol. I, 313-16.

⁷² William Enfield, *Remarks on Several Late Publications relative to the Dissenters; in a Letter to Dr. Priestley* (1770), 5. The works which Enfield was referring to were Priestley's *Remarks on some Paragraphs in the Fourth Volume of Dr. Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England, relating to the Dissenters* (1769), *Considerations on Church Authority; occasioned by Dr. Balguy's Sermon, on that Subject* (1769), *A View of the Principles and Conduct of the Protestant Dissenters, with respect to the Civil and Ecclesiastical Constitution of England* (1769), and *A Free Address to Protestant Dissenters, as such* (1769).

⁷³ Enfield, *Remarks*, 34.

the significant qualification that there are a number of ‘self-evident and primary truths, which the mind receives as soon as they are proposed’, Enfield warned:

There is so much difficulty in taking a full and complete view of a subject, and in ascertaining the connection between the several steps of an argument; and consequently so much fallacy in human reasoning; that [...] we must, after all our speculations, remain in some degree of doubt and uncertainty.⁷⁴

Priestley replied to Enfield’s remarks in *Letters to the Author of the Remarks on Several Late Publications relative to the Dissenters* (1770). After responding to each of Enfield’s criticisms in turn, Priestley accused Enfield of laying ‘the foundation for universal scepticism’ through his assertion of the fallacious nature of human reasoning.⁷⁵ Priestley argues that the truths which the mind receives as soon as they are proposed are exceedingly few, and that fundamental religious doctrines – ‘the being and unity of God’, ‘the foundation of virtue’, ‘the evidence of the mission of Christ’, and the ‘belief of a resurrection and a future life’ – should not be counted among them. Despite this, Priestley affirms that he has ‘not the least doubt, or uncertainty’ concerning the truth of these beliefs.⁷⁶ In Enfield’s *A Second Letter to the Rev. Dr. Priestley* (1770) Enfield accused Priestley of misconstruing what he had written concerning ‘the uncertainty of human knowledge’.⁷⁷ He continues to state that if Priestley had read ‘a late publication, entitled, “An Appeal to Common Sense in behalf of religion”’ then he would have understood that by ‘*self evident* and *primary* truths’ Enfield had meant ‘not merely such as are strictly speaking axioms, but such as are obvious deductions of reasoning’, under which ‘all the fundamental truths of religion and christianity may be comprised’.⁷⁸ Enfield subsequently explains that he was using the phrase ‘self evident and primary truths’ in his first work in the sense in which it had been defined by Oswald: ‘It was my having just read this work,

⁷⁴ *Remarks*, 68.

⁷⁵ Priestley, *Letters to the Author of the Remarks on Several Late Publications relative to the Dissenters*, in *A Letter to Dr. Priestley* (1770), 65-6.

⁷⁶ *Letters to the Author of the Remarks*, 60.

⁷⁷ William Enfield, *A Second Letter to Dr. Priestley* (1770), 80. *ESTC* lists only one British copy of this work at Queens’ College, Cambridge. The whole pamphlet has been reprinted in James Fieser, ed., *Early Responses to Reid, Oswald, Beattie and Stewart*, 2 vols (Bristol, 2000), vol. I, 77-81. Subsequent references are to the modern edition of the text.

⁷⁸ *A Second Letter to Dr. Priestley*, 80.

which led me to express myself in this manner'.⁷⁹ It was Enfield's recommendation of Oswald's *Appeal* which first brought the work to Priestley's attention. In the introduction to the third volume of his *Institutes* (1774) Priestley noted that he had promised Enfield he would read the work.⁸⁰ He comments here that Oswald's *Appeal* had found favour among others, as well as Enfield, in his own circle: he apologises that his own opinion of the work should 'differ so much from that of this ingenious writer [Enfield], and indeed from that of many other persons whom I much respect'.⁸¹

There is also some evidence that Reid's, Beattie's, and Oswald's works were incorporated into the philosophy syllabuses at the liberal dissenting academies. By 1775 Reid's *Inquiry* was among the collection in the library at the Warrington Academy.⁸² By 1786, when the library was transferred to Manchester New College, Oswald's *Appeal* and Beattie's *Essay on Truth* had been added to the collection.⁸³ Another catalogue, drawn up in the 1780s after the library had transferred to Manchester College, contains a record of additions made to the library in the last two decades of the century. The catalogue indicates that Beattie's *Evidences of the Christian Religion* (1786) and *Elements of Moral Science* (1790) and Reid's *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785) and *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* (1788) were later added to the library's collection at some point between 1786 and 1803.⁸⁴ Samuel Merivale used Beattie and Reid in his philosophy lectures in the early 1770s at the Exeter Academy. Merivale updated the references in Doddridge's lectures, which, like most academy tutors, he had continued to use as his textbook, by adding references to sections of Beattie's *Essay on Truth* and Reid's *Inquiry*.⁸⁵ When Andrew Kippis added his own extensive notes to his 1794 edition of

⁷⁹ *A Second Letter to Dr. Priestley*, 4.

⁸⁰ Priestley, *Institutes*, 2nd edn, vol. II, 160.

⁸¹ *Institutes*, 2nd edn, vol. II, 160.

⁸² *A Select Catalogue of Books in the Library of the Warrington Academy*, 17. In 1775 the library also held copies of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and James Harris's *Philosophical Arrangements* (1775).

⁸³ HMO MS Misc 24 (i). On the transfer of the library see Paul Morgan, 'Manchester College and its Books', in *Truth, Liberty, Religion: Essays celebrating Two Hundred Years of Manchester College*, ed. Barbara Smith (Oxford, 1986), 113-26.

⁸⁴ HMO MS Misc 24 (iv).

⁸⁵ Philip Doddridge, *A Course of Lectures on the Principal Subjects in Pneumatology, Ethics, and Divinity; with References to the Most Considerable Authors on Each Subject. By the Late Rev. Philip Doddridge, D. D. To which are added the Various Writers on the Same Topics, who have appeared since the Doctor's Decease*, 2 vols, ed. Andrew Kippis, 3rd edn (1794), vol. I. When compiling this work Kippis was given a copy of Merivale's teaching notes by James Manning of Exeter. Kippis's own copy of the work (British

Doddridge's lectures he included many references to Reid's, Beattie's, and Oswald's works.⁸⁶

This receptive attitude to Reid, Beattie, and Oswald exemplified by some of the leading figures within rational dissent ought to be understood in the context of a wider interest on the part of English rational dissenters in Scottish authors, accountable for by the fact that many of them had been educated in the Scottish universities. George Walker (1734?-1807), for example, had followed the same course as John Seddon and Robert Andrews in progressing from Caleb Rotherham's Kendal Academy to continue his studies in Scotland. For a short period from November 1751, Walker studied at Edinburgh, probably in order to pursue his mathematical interests under Matthew Stewart (1717-1785). However, his study was not confined to mathematics: in a letter to his uncle from Edinburgh, Walker wrote that 'Morality, criticism, and some of the higher branches of mathematics, are the public classes in which I am engaged'.⁸⁷ In 1752 Walker moved to Glasgow to attend William Leechman's divinity lectures. Walker would have been at Glasgow too late to encounter Hutcheson in person. Yet during his time at the university he would certainly have met George Muirhead (1715-1773), Professor of Humanity (Latin), and James Moor (1712-1779), Professor of Greek, both of whom had studied moral philosophy under Hutcheson.⁸⁸ Walker might also have attended the moral philosophy lectures of Adam Smith (1723-1790), who, as a student at Glasgow between 1737 and 1740, had studied pneumatics and moral philosophy under Hutcheson. In 1751 Smith became Professor of Logic at Glasgow and took over the chair of moral philosophy the following year.

Library 1601/9) contains the references from Merivale's notes (marked 'M') inserted by hand. The references to Reid and Beattie are at Doddridge, *Lectures*, ed. Kippis, 3rd edn, 14; 43. Merivale also added many references to the works of Hutcheson, Price, and Hartley, and to John Taylor's *A Sketch of Moral Philosophy* and *An Examination of the Scheme of Morality, Advanced by Dr. Hutcheson*. On Kippis's edition of Doddridge see Rivers, *The Defence of Truth through the Knowledge of Error*, 22.

⁸⁶ Doddridge, *Lectures*, ed. Kippis, 3rd edn. See, for example, vol. I, 22. It would be interesting to pursue further Kippis's role in disseminating Scottish moral philosophy among rational dissenters. He is known to have been one of the 'Society of Gentlemen' responsible for the production of *The Library; or, Moral and Critical Magazine*, a periodical published in 1761-2 by Ralph Griffiths. The *Library*, which appears to have been neglected as a source by intellectual historians, contained many articles on ethics: the perspective of the authors is generally rationalist, however there are a number of pieces which discuss Scottish moral philosophy. See, for example, the discussion of Hutcheson's and Hume's 'moral sense' theory, *The Library*, 2 (1762), 170.

⁸⁷ George Walker, *Essays on Various Subjects*, 2 vols (1809), vol. I, xix.

⁸⁸ Moor had also assisted with Hutcheson's campaign to further the study of the Greek moralists at the university, see Rivers, vol. II, 159.

At Glasgow, Walker was a contemporary of the English dissenters Newcome Cappe (1733-1800) and Nicholas Clayton (1730-1797).⁸⁹ All three men would go on to contribute significantly to late eighteenth-century rational dissent. Cappe, who had studied at Kibworth under Aikin in 1748 and at Northampton under Doddridge between 1749 and 1752, became a dissenting minister at St Saviourgate Chapel, York. Clayton, who had also studied at Northampton under Doddridge, served as a dissenting minister at Boston, Lincolnshire and Liverpool, and went on to succeed Aikin as tutor in divinity at Warrington in 1781. Walker became a dissenting minister at Durham, Great Yarmouth, and Nottingham. He succeeded John Holt as tutor in mathematics at Warrington in 1772, and was appointed tutor in divinity at Manchester New College in 1798. During their time at Glasgow, Walker, Cappe, and Clayton forged intellectual links which would endure following their return south of the border. According to his wife and biographer Catherine Cappe (1744-1821), Cappe corresponded with Leechman and Adam Smith after his departure from Edinburgh in 1755.⁹⁰ Cappe was evidently still in contact with Leechman as late as 1785; according to Thomas Belsham, Lindsey wrote to Cappe ‘early in the year 1785’ requesting Cappe to apply to Leechman for ‘some authentic account’ of Hutcheson.⁹¹ Catherine Cappe noted that Cappe was in touch with Smith until 1787, recounting a conversation between them in that year on ‘the interesting subject of Revelation’.⁹²

In light of his educational background and connections, it is no surprise that Walker was at least familiar with Hutcheson’s writings. This is evident from an essay ‘On Imitation and Fashion’, published posthumously in 1809, but dateable to as early as the mid-1770s.⁹³ In the essay, Walker refers to the ‘moral system of Hutcheson’ which

⁸⁹ See Innes Addison, ed., *The Matriculation Albums of the University of Glasgow*, 47-8.

⁹⁰ Newcome Cappe, *Discourses chiefly on Devotional Subjects, by Newcome Cappe to which are prefixed Memoirs of his Life by Catherine Cappe* (York, 1805), li. Hiroshi Mizuta writes that Cappe had a ‘close personal connection’ with Smith, and that Smith owned a copy of Cappe’s sermon on the American Revolution, *Adam Smith’s Library: A Catalogue*, ed. Hiroshi Mizuta (Oxford, 2000), xix. Unfortunately, no letters between the two appear to have survived.

⁹¹ Belsham, *Memoirs of Lindsey*, 186n; Ditchfield, 461.

⁹² Newcome Cappe, *Critical Remarks on Many Important Passages of Scripture together with Dissertations upon Several Subjects, tending to illustrate the Phraseology and Doctrine of the New Testament to which are added Memoirs of his Life*, 2 vols (York, 1802), vol. I, xiii.

⁹³ In a note to the printed text Walker writes that ‘this essay was read to a learned body near thirty years before the *Zoonomia* was given to the public’, Walker, *Essays*, vol. II, 220. The first volume of Erasmus Darwin’s *Zoonomia* was published in 1794 which, if Walker’s statement was correct, would date the essay

posits ‘only a greater number of instincts, and instincts of a higher order, in man than in his fellow-animals’.⁹⁴ Furthermore, in an essay from the first volume of the collection, ‘On Tragedy, and the Interest in Tragical Representations’, Walker suggests some affinity with Hutcheson’s and Smith’s writings on ethics. In a consideration of the effects of ‘the exhibition of tragic imitations’, Walker identifies ‘passion, or sympathy, in a more extended sense’ as ‘an acknowledged, and powerful, and highly valuable principle of our natures’.⁹⁵ However, the essay ‘On Imitation and Fashion’ illustrates well Walker’s divergence from any theory of the moral sense derived from Hutcheson. In the essay, Walker criticises Locke for what he perceives to be an overly-simplistic attempt to deduce all human knowledge from the faculties of sensation and reflection.⁹⁶ Defining sensation as either ‘touching’ or ‘the image or representation of the thing seen or felt’, and reflection as ‘the power of continuing or renewing the presence of the image or impression’, Walker holds that these two faculties alone are insufficient to explain the mind’s ability to make moral judgements:

to step from the bare image to an intellectual or moral judgement; and because the representation of a thing is excited within us, to find by inference certain moral relations, which we bear to it, is to make but one stride from Earth to Heaven.⁹⁷

Walker thus concedes the necessity of ‘some original faculty in the human mind, which shall be sufficient to produce all this intellectual and moral furniture’.⁹⁸ He identifies this, not, as Hartley and Priestley had done, as the principle of the association of ideas, nor by recourse to a Hutchesonian notion of a moral sense, but as the mind’s propensity to

to as early as the mid-1760s. However, the references to Lord Monboddo’s theories on language indicate that Walker was familiar with Monboddo’s *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, the first volume of which was not published until 1773. Walker’s rather bizarre theory of how human beings lost their tails, and the concomitant reference to Monboddo (vol. II, 223), suggest that the essay was not written before 1774, when Monboddo published a revised second edition of the first volume containing a section on the ‘orang outang’ and suggesting the controversial theory that human beings were at one stage possessed of tails. The paper was most likely read at the literary club which Walker formed at Nottingham with Gilbert Wakefield in the mid-1770s.

⁹⁴ Walker, *Essays*, vol. II, 218.

⁹⁵ *Essays*, vol. I, 68.

⁹⁶ *Essays*, vol. II, 230.

⁹⁷ *Essays*, vol. II, 230-1.

⁹⁸ *Essays*, vol. II, 231.

imitation. Walker acknowledges his debt for the theory of the imitative faculty to James Burnett, Lord Monboddo, author of *Of the Origin and Progress of Language* (1773-92). Like Locke and Priestley, and as opposed to rationalists such as Price and Taylor, Walker advocates an historical and geographical relativism in his approach to morality: ‘There appears therefore to be nothing in the mind of man, which invites or rejects one intellectual idea rather than another’.⁹⁹ His recourse to the theory of imitation means that this relativism is even more extreme than Priestley’s, the explanation of the mind’s method of forming moral judgements being more or less detached from any theological framework. Walker only has recourse to theology when attempting to answer the question of how ‘this stock of ideas, sentiments and determinations, which are transplanted from one mind to another, came originally to exist’.¹⁰⁰ Walker here suggests that ‘the first progenitor of the human race was furnished *ab origine*, by the universal Mind, the great patron of all imitation, with a certain stock of intellectual and moral ideas’.¹⁰¹

According to Walker’s son and biographer, Walker and Priestley maintained a frequent correspondence beginning sometime in the 1760s during Walker’s time at Great Yarmouth.¹⁰² Unfortunately, none of these letters appear to have survived. However, from the extant extracts printed in Walker’s biography it is clear that philosophical topics formed a part of the discussion. In fact, one of Priestley’s clearest statements on his own understanding of the moral sense can be found in an extract from a letter to Walker, dateable to 1775, the year that Priestley published his edition of Hartley and a second edition of his *Examination*. In the letter, Priestley defines his own stance in opposition to the position he believed was shared by Walker and Hutcheson:

As you have not studied Hartley, it would do to no purpose to write to you about metaphysics. I believe nothing of any *original determination of the mind to the objects of morality*, or to any other objects: and though you and Mr. Hutchinson [sic] say *there must be* such things, I do not see a shadow of proof for it. I do not expect however, that the reading of Hartley will convince you, any more than another reading of Hutcheson

⁹⁹ *Essays*, vol. II, 236.

¹⁰⁰ *Essays*, vol. II, 253.

¹⁰¹ *Essays*, vol. II, 254.

¹⁰² *Essays*, vol. I, lxvii.

would convince me. We are both too old, to adopt a new general system of metaphysics.¹⁰³

On the evidence of Walker's essays, the implication of Priestley's statement (that Walker followed Hutcheson in his ethical theory) would seem to be erroneous. The statement is probably illustrative of Priestley's tendency to group together differing theories of an original determination of the mind to explain moral judgements in opposition to Hartley's theory of association. Priestley's assumption that Walker had not studied Hartley may also be incorrect. In another essay from the 1809 collection, 'Probable Arguments in Favour of the Immateriality of the Soul', Walker presumably had Hartley in mind when, in considering the question of whether the brain is the seat of the soul, he wrote that 'There is another illustration, which at least confers more dignity on the subject than any tale of vibrations or *vibratiunculae* can do'.¹⁰⁴ However, Walker's precise opinions are less important than the fact that his writings point to evidence of a serious interest in Scottish philosophy by an English rational dissenter in Priestley's circle of correspondents. I shall now turn to examine one of the fullest surviving bodies of letters written by Priestley's dissenting contemporaries, which sheds even more light both on this intellectual transmission between Scotland and the English dissenters and on the reception of Reid's, Beattie's, and Oswald's writings and Priestley's response to them.¹⁰⁵

The correspondence of James Wodrow (1730-1810) and Samuel Kenrick (1728-1810) is a particularly valuable source for investigating the exchange of ideas between the Scottish universities and the English dissenters.¹⁰⁶ The letters provide a fascinating first hand account of the reception of the writings of a number of leading Scottish authors

¹⁰³ Joseph Priestley to George Walker, *A Scientific Autobiography of Joseph Priestley (1733-1804)*, ed. Robert E. Schofield (Cambridge, MA, 1966), 149-50. The source for the letter is the version printed in Walker, *Essays*, vol. I, lxxviii-lxxii. Schofield dates the letter to 'probably before 6 April 1775'.

¹⁰⁴ Walker, *Essays*, vol. II, 51.

¹⁰⁵ Another figure whom it would be interesting to explore alongside Walker, Cappe, and Clayton in relation to his Glasgow connections is William Hazlitt (1737-1820), who matriculated from the University of Glasgow in 1756 and graduated MA in 1761. See Duncan Wu, "'Polemical Divinity": William Hazlitt at the University of Glasgow', *Romanticism*, 6.2 (2000), 163-77.

¹⁰⁶ The correspondence consists of 279 letters written between 1750 and 1810. The letters are held at DWL and catalogued as DWL MSS 24.157. See *Woodrow-Kenrick Correspondence c. 1750-1810* (Wakefield, 1982) which contains an introduction by Colin Bonwick and a calendar of the correspondence prepared by John Creasey. For a study of Wodrow's and Kenrick's respective attitudes to the political events of their age see Martin Fitzpatrick, 'The Enlightenment, Politics and Providence: some Scottish and English Comparisons', in Haakonssen (1996), 44-98.

by an educated and informed English dissenter, and a record of how Priestley's works were received among Scottish Presbyterians. Kenrick, the son of a dissenting minister, entered Glasgow University in 1743 with the intention of training for the dissenting ministry.¹⁰⁷ He was appointed to one of the Dr Williams's Exhibitions in the university and was admitted to the degree of Master of Arts in 1747. After leaving Glasgow, Kenrick pursued a career as a private tutor. Between 1760 and 1763 he accompanied one of his pupils on a European tour where he met Voltaire and Rousseau. Some time around 1765, he moved to Bewdley in Worcestershire, and by the 1770s had established himself as a prominent banker, the profession in which he remained until his retirement in 1810. During this time, he remained closely involved in the affairs of the English dissenters. He followed the fortunes of the dissenting academies (he declined the offer of a position as tutor in modern languages at Warrington) and kept abreast of doctrinal and political debates.¹⁰⁸ He met Priestley in 1783, soon became an admirer of his theological writings, and subsequently visited him a number of times at Birmingham. Kenrick was one of the first members of the Western Unitarian Society founded by his nephew Timothy Kenrick (1759-1804) in 1792.¹⁰⁹ In 1790 he acted as secretary to a delegate meeting of Worcestershire dissenters which had passed resolutions in support of the campaign for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts.

James Wodrow, the son of a Church of Scotland minister and historian from Eastwood, Renfrewshire, had also entered Glasgow University in the early 1740s.¹¹⁰ In 1750 he graduated MA, and in the same year was appointed university librarian, a position that he held for five years, although actively for only three. At Glasgow, Wodrow was personally acquainted with Adam Smith, William Leechman, and a number of other professors at the university. Unlike Kenrick, Wodrow pursued his original intention to enter the ministry and was licensed as a preacher in 1753. In 1759 he transferred to the parish of Stevenston, in the presbytery of Irvine, where he settled for

¹⁰⁷ Innes Addison, ed., *The Matriculation Albums of the University of Glasgow*, 30.

¹⁰⁸ Kenrick gave financial support to the establishment of New College, Hackney in 1786. See *List of Subscribers to the New Academical Institution established in the Neighbourhood of London in 1786* (1786). On the offer to teach at Warrington see Kenrick to Wodrow, 30 August 1775, DWL MS 24.157 (53).

¹⁰⁹ See the list of members printed in *Society of Unitarian Christians, established in the West of England* (Exeter[?], 1792).

¹¹⁰ Innes Addison, ed., *The Matriculation Albums of the University of Glasgow*, 27. On Wodrow see Martin Fitzpatrick, 'Wodrow, James (1730-1810)', *ODNB*.

life. Woodrow was awarded a doctorate of divinity by Glasgow University in 1786. He published two sermons under the title *The Measures of Divine Providence towards Men and Nations* in 1794.

At Glasgow, Wodrow and Kenrick would have been contemporaries of Robert Andrews and John Seddon. Both men would probably have known Walker and Clayton, and were certainly acquainted with Cappe, whom Kenrick visited at York in 1759.¹¹¹ Like Cappe, Andrews, and Seddon, Wodrow and Kenrick had studied theology under Leechman, for whom they both retained an immense admiration throughout their adult lives. Writing in 1786, Kenrick recalled the time in the late 1740s when ‘you & I & many more //scribbled// transcripts’ of Leechman’s theological lectures on composition and the evidences of Christianity.¹¹² When Kenrick met Leechman at York Cathedral over a decade later in June 1759 he wrote to Wodrow that ‘[his] heart beat with joy at the sight’.¹¹³ Wodrow was later responsible for an edition of Leechman’s sermons published in 1789, to which he contributed a biographical account of the author drawing on his own recollections, and about which he corresponded extensively with Kenrick between 1786 and 1790. Both men had also studied philosophy under Hutcheson. Writing to Wodrow in 1769, Kenrick recollected ‘the milky philosophy we sucked in from the amiable Hutcheson’.¹¹⁴ In October 1784, Wodrow, expressing a desire to become more acquainted with the history of the debate concerning liberty and necessity, wrote to Kenrick that ‘I still remember & you will also how very full Professor Hutcheson was in his Lectures & have often wished since to be master of that History on which he spent two or three Lectures’.¹¹⁵

The letters testify at several points to the pervading influence of Hutchesonian moral philosophy at the University of Glasgow in the decades following Hutcheson’s death, and to the lasting effect which his teaching had on his former students. In January 1752 Wodrow informed Kenrick that Adam Smith, who had taken over the chair of moral philosophy in that year, had ‘thrown out some contemptuous expressions of Mr Hutcheson’. He adds a cautionary note that ‘the young man’ should ‘take care to guard

¹¹¹ Kenrick to Wodrow, 14 June 1759, DWL MS 24.157 (31).

¹¹² Kenrick to Wodrow, 21 January 1786, DWL MS 24.157 (110).

¹¹³ Kenrick to Wodrow, 14 June 1759, DWL MS 24.157 (31).

¹¹⁴ Kenrick to Wodrow, 31 March 1769, DWL MS 24.157 (48).

¹¹⁵ Wodrow to Kenrick, 22 October 1784, DWL MS 24.157 (84).

against his censures’, as ‘there are some of Mr Hns scholars still about the college who will perhaps try to turn the mouths of the cannon against himself’.¹¹⁶ In 1760 Kenrick wrote to Wodrow from Utrecht with news of Archibald Maclaine (1722-1804), minister of the Scots Presbyterian church in The Hague, whom Kenrick and Wodrow had known at Glasgow in 1745. Kenrick wrote of Maclaine: ‘I take him to be the very picture of our amiable High priest in philosophy Mr Hutcheson’.¹¹⁷ In January of the next year, Wodrow referred to Maclaine as being ‘a warm Hutchesonian’, adding: ‘I am sure he will exert himself to defend Benevolence & the Moral Sense against that beautiful and refined system of Hobbism’.¹¹⁸ From the letters it is evident that both men valued Leechman’s and Hutcheson’s teaching for its tendency to promote theological liberalism and an irenic approach to religious and philosophical questions. Lamenting the increase of faction among the Scottish clergy in 1784, Kenrick wrote to Wodrow:

to think that the disciples of a Hutcheson and a Leechman should degenerate so soon: - when 40 years //ago// they seemed eagerly to imbibe the most liberal sentiments in philosophy & religion, at the fountain head, w^{ch} I expected long ere now, would have enriched wth its streams the most distant corners of the country.¹¹⁹

After completing their studies, both men retained a keen interest in contemporary intellectual debate; among the many subjects touched upon in the correspondence Wodrow and Kenrick frequently discussed their reading of current philosophical and theological works. Many of these passages provide fascinating accounts of how contemporary works in philosophy were read and understood by educated but non-specialised readers. In addition to a fairly detailed record of the two men’s reading of David Hume, to which I shall return in chapter 4, the letters contain descriptive accounts of the work of a number of significant eighteenth-century authors working in the Shaftesburian tradition. Kenrick’s and Wodrow’s keen interest in this subject is suggested

¹¹⁶ Wodrow to Kenrick, 21 January 1752, DWL MS 24.157 (16).

¹¹⁷ Kenrick to Wodrow, 6 August 1760, DWL MS 24.157 (41).

¹¹⁸ Wodrow to Kenrick, 4 January 1761, DWL MS 24.157 (42). Maclaine published an important English translation of Johann Lorenz von Mosheim’s *Institutiones historiae ecclesiasticae antiquae et recentioris* (1755) in 1765.

¹¹⁹ Kenrick to Wodrow, 2 June 1784, DWL, MS 24.157 (80).

by the fact that several of these descriptions were written shortly after the works' first publication. In 1752 Kenrick sent Wodrow a report of his reading of James Harris's *Hermes*. Kenrick was an ardent admirer of the work: he prefaces his fairly substantial account of a chapter on 'Time & the Times or tenses of verbs' with his assertion that 'I admire this acute Philosopher when he traces this barren uncultivated contemptible subject wth the curious regular perspicuity of a profound Peripatetic'. Kenrick adds: 'His former ingenious production [possibly a reference to Harris's *Three Treatises* (1765)] engages my highest admiration by the sublimity & real importance of the subjects treated'.¹²⁰ In July 1759 an account Kenrick had sent Wodrow of his travels around England occasioned Wodrow's reflections on Adam's Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). Wodrow concisely summarises the argument of the work – 'The whole of it stands upon the immaginary substitution of ourselves in the place of others which seems to be the foundation of his sympathy' – and draws attention to the text's stylistic merits: 'the language is simple and beautiful; the Painting of the Passions & situation of men admirable'. He cautiously expresses his belief that the work's approach to ethics is compatible with Christianity: 'the author seems to have a strong detestation of vice & perhaps a regard for religion'. In this respect, he contrasts Smith's ethical theory with Hume's, although acknowledging his suspicion that the underlying principles of the two authors may not be dissimilar: 'it does not appear to me that the book has any licentious tendency like the most part of David Hume's writing on those subjects tho' perhaps the principles are at bottom the same'.¹²¹

These two examples are fairly typical of Wodrow's and Kenrick's responses to the philosophical texts they encountered. Both men were drawn to comment on the particulars of a work's style. However, whereas Kenrick's comments are marked by an often playful and exuberant appreciation, Wodrow typically exhibits a more cautious approach. No doubt Wodrow's profession as a minister in the Church of Scotland was behind his urge to assess each work's compatibility, or incompatibility, with Christian doctrine. It was undoubtedly Wodrow's theological orthodoxy that explained his cautious approach to the ethical theories of Hume and Smith. Interestingly, this is countered by his

¹²⁰ Kenrick to Wodrow, no date, DWL MS 24.157 (19).

¹²¹ Wodrow to Kenrick, 10 July 1759, DWL MS 24.157 (33).

enthusiastic account of the moral philosophy eventually developed by Reid. In July 1788 Wodrow sent Kenrick an account of his reading of Reid's *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* (1788). The extract is significant in that demonstrates that by the late 1780s Wodrow was convinced by Reid's ethical theory. He clearly valued Reid's cautious approach in attempting to delineate the boundaries of human knowledge. The passage also shows that the word 'intuitive' had entered Wodrow's vocabulary, presumably in the sense in which it had been defined by Reid in his *Essay on Active Powers of Man* (1788), and had come to denote what Wodrow thought of as a positive attribute of Reid's work:

I have read lately the greatest part of Dr. Reid's last publication on the active powers of the human mind. Tho' the subject is dry & beatten yet the book is entertaining & in my judgment the best I ever read on the theory of Ethicks there is perhaps too little practical what of this there is, is excellent. Dr. R. is a most Acute Metaphysician & sound Moralist. His knowledge is so clear that you would sometimes think it intuitive He gives up the point at once when it exceeds his faculties: & states with great modesty & precision the bounds of human knowledge on these deep subjects.¹²²

One more rational dissenter whose writings demonstrate an acquaintance with contemporary Scottish philosophy was William Rose, the principal reviewer of philosophical books at the *Monthly Review*. Founded by Ralph Griffiths (1720?-1803) in 1749, the *Monthly Review* was the first journal to attempt to publish reviews of all printed books, except chapbooks.¹²³ The *Monthly Review* covered nearly all of the most important works in religion and philosophy from the second half of the eighteenth century; the often extensive quotations from the works under review enabled readers to keep abreast of books which they might not have had access to.¹²⁴ It quickly gained a reputation for promoting Whiggish political views and had strong connections with the rational dissenters, numbering Rose, Seddon, Aikin, Enfield, Abraham Rees, John Jebb,

¹²² Wodrow to Kenrick, 3 July 1788, DWL MS 24.157 (137). For examples of Reid's use of the term 'intuitive' see Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, 378; 399; 418; 471.

¹²³ On the *MR* see Derek Roper, *Reviewing before the Edinburgh 1788-1802* (London, 1978); Antonia Forster, 'Review Journals and the Reading Public', in *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England: New Essays*, ed. Isabel Rivers (London, 2001), 171-90.

¹²⁴ It is worth noting that the *MR* tended to ignore Methodist publications.

Samuel Clark, and Samuel Badcock among its reviewers.¹²⁵ Samuel Johnson famously stated that ‘The Monthly Reviewers [...] are not Deists; but they are for pulling down all establishments’.¹²⁶ Abraham Rees, writing in the *Monthly Review* in 1773, declared that ‘We (*Reviewers*) are [...] little friends to Priestcraft [...]. How often have we poured down peals of thunder, from our aerial heights, on the heads of ambitious and lordly ecclesiastics!’¹²⁷ For its time, the *Monthly Review* had a wide readership. It is estimated that in 1776 the *Monthly Review* sold 3,500 copies, rising to between 6 and 7,000 in 1783.¹²⁸ Writing to William Turner (1761-1859) in 1783, Lindsey noted in the course of describing a hostile review of Priestley’s *An History of the Corruptions of Christianity* (1786) that ‘the Reviewer speaks to thousands every month’.¹²⁹ The publication clearly had a prominent influence on contemporary opinion, to the extent that it could influence the sales of particular works. In August 1784 Lindsey informed William Tayleur (1712-1796), a wealthy dissenting layman at Shrewsbury and a benefactor of Priestley and Lindsey, that ‘The malignity of the *Monthly Reviewer* has so far had its effect as to stop the sale of his [i.e. Priestley’s] late Publications’.¹³⁰ Antonia Forster has pointed to ‘plenty of evidence of a general belief that the public did listen to reviewers’.¹³¹ The fact that the *Monthly Review* numbered so many rational dissenters among its staff and was read by rational dissenters (Lindsey and Kenrick both followed the reviews carefully) suggest that this influence was particularly strong among rational dissenters.

William Rose (1719-1786) was thus an influential voice on philosophical topics among rational dissenters in England. A dissenter and a Scot, Rose was the son of Hugh Rose of Birse, Aberdeenshire.¹³² He had studied at King’s College, Aberdeen between 1736 and 1740 under the regents Daniel Bradfute and Thomas Gordon, and was awarded a

¹²⁵ Antonia Forster has noted that the link between the *MR* and dissent ought not to be overstated; many of the reviewers were Anglican clergymen, Forster, ‘Review Journals and the Reading Public’, 180.

¹²⁶ *Boswell’s Life of Johnson*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, rev. L. F. Powell, 6 vols (Oxford, 1934), vol. III, 32.

¹²⁷ Abraham Rees, ‘Review of *The Essay on Truth shewn to be Sophistical*’, *MR*, 49 (1773), 49-56, 50.

¹²⁸ Antonia Forster, ‘Griffiths, Ralph (1720?-1803)’, *ODNB*. See also Antonia Forster, ‘Review Journals and the Reading Public’, 178.

¹²⁹ Ditchfield, 398.

¹³⁰ Ditchfield, 443.

¹³¹ Antonia Forster, ‘Review Journals and the Reading Public’, 187.

¹³² There is a brief and unsatisfactory biographical account of Rose under the *ODNB* entry for his son Samuel (1767-1804), W. P. Courtney, ‘Rose, Samuel (1767-1804)’, rev. S. C. Bushell, *ODNB*. Further biographical information is contained in a letter from Kenrick to Wodrow, 20 July 1786, DWL MS 24.157 (119).

doctor of laws degree by the university in 1783.¹³³ Some time between 1745 and 1746 Rose worked as an assistant at Doddridge's academy at Northampton. He married Sarah, the daughter of Doddridge's mentor Samuel Clark, and the couple moved first to Kew and then to Chiswick where Rose ran a successful boarding school. He wrote numerous reviews of philosophical and theological works for the *Monthly Review*, from its inception in 1749 until his death in 1786.¹³⁴ Rose was personally acquainted with Hume, who evidently thought highly of him. Hume wrote to William Strahan of his 'great Regard' for Rose and the letter suggests that Rose might have requested Hume's services for the *Monthly Review*.¹³⁵ He was also acquainted with Adam Smith and Reid.¹³⁶ Wodrow mentioned in a letter to Kenrick of 1786 that he had heard Thomas Reid and William Richardson (1743-1814), Professor of Humanity at Glasgow, 'speak of him [Rose] in terms of high esteem', adding that Richardson and Rose had maintained a correspondence.¹³⁷ Rose helped Reid to find a publisher for his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785);¹³⁸ an anecdote included in the *London Review* in 1775, possibly written by William Kenrick (1725-1799), accused Rose, 'a friend and country man of the Author's [i.e. Reid]', of soliciting the office of reviewing Reid's *Inquiry* ahead of a fellow reviewer who had written a critical appraisal of the work.¹³⁹ Rose's son Samuel was a student at Glasgow between 1783 and 1787, and on at least one occasion delivered papers from Reid to his father.¹⁴⁰

¹³³ Peter John Anderson, ed., *Roll of Alumni in the Arts of the University and King's College of Aberdeen, 1596-1860* (Aberdeen, 1900), 75.

¹³⁴ On Rose's reviewing for the *MR* see Isabel Rivers, 'Responses to Hume on Religion by Anglicans and Dissenters', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 52 (2001), 675-95; James Fieser, 'The Eighteenth-Century British Reviews of Hume's Writings', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 57.4 (1996), 645-57. Rose's contributions to the *MR* are listed in Benjamin Christie Nangle, *The Monthly Review First Series 1749-1789: Indexes of Contributors and Articles*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1934). Rose's reviews of Reid's, Beattie's, and Oswald's works for the *MR* have been republished in James Fieser, ed., *Early Responses to Reid, Oswald, Beattie and Stewart*, vol. I.

¹³⁵ *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. Y. T. Greig, 2 vols (Oxford, 1932), vol. I, 336; Fieser, 'The Eighteenth-Century British Reviews of Hume's Writings', 649.

¹³⁶ On the connection between Rose and Smith see James A. Gherity, 'A Quest for an Unrecognised Publication of Adam Smith', *Journal of Political Economy*, 18.1 (1971), 113-16.

¹³⁷ Wodrow to Kenrick, 28 August 1786, DWL MS 24.157 (121).

¹³⁸ Thomas Reid to James Gregory, 14 March 1784, *The Works of Thomas Reid, D. D. now fully collected, with Selections from his Unpublished Letters*, ed. William Hamilton, 4th edn (Edinburgh, 1854), 63-4.

¹³⁹ *London Review*, 1 (1775), 92.

¹⁴⁰ Thomas Reid to James Gregory, 14 March 1784, *The Works of Thomas Reid*, 63-4.

Rose's articles for the *Monthly Review* demonstrate a receptive attitude to Scottish philosophical works. Although his reviews, typically for those of the time, consist mainly of summaries accompanied by long quotations from the works under analysis, the occasional evaluative comments indicate an acute judgement and a perceptive understanding of the issues being discussed. In 1755 Rose had favourably reviewed Hutcheson's *A System of Moral Philosophy* (1755). His review begins with a eulogy to the author and continues with a favourable account of Hutcheson's epistemology, before providing a summary of Hutcheson's theory of human nature, stressing the disinterested nature of the moral sense.¹⁴¹ A decade later, in May 1764, Rose reviewed Reid's *Inquiry* for the *Monthly Review*. Although he refrains from pronouncing authoritatively on the success of the work ('whether he has delineated it [the human mind] justly or not, we shall not take upon us to determine'), he is favourable in his estimation of Reid as a philosophical author, pointing to 'many proofs of uncommon acuteness and penetration'.¹⁴² Rose's review of Beattie's *Essay*, published in the *Monthly Review* in 1770, was equally positive. The review indicates that Rose, in line with eighteenth-century attitudes, considered an attempt to defend religion and morality as meritorious in itself, irrespective of its philosophical merits. In this sense, he aligns himself intellectually with Beattie, who understood 'religion', 'truth', and 'virtue' as more or less synonymous, and in opposition to Hume and Priestley, who, in different ways, posited a distinction between these concepts.¹⁴³ Rose's evaluative comments focus less on the work's intellectual merits than on Beattie's ethical and aesthetic virtues.¹⁴⁴ However, in the second part of the review published the following year, Rose appears more decisive in his estimation of the work's intellectual value. He comments specifically on Beattie's critique of Hume's contention that 'justice, genius, and bodily strength, are virtues of the same kind', and commends Beattie's demonstration that 'this very important error hath arisen, either from inaccurate observation, or from Mr. Hume's being imposed upon by

¹⁴¹ *MR*, 13 (1755), 61.

¹⁴² *MR*, 30 (1764), 359.

¹⁴³ See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* [1739-40], ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, rev. P. H. Nidditch, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1987), 469-70; Clemens [Priestley], Introduction, *The Theological Repository; consisting of Original Essays, Hints, Queries, &c. calculated to promote Religious Knowledge*, 2nd edn (1773), xi.

¹⁴⁴ *MR*, 42 (1770), 450.

words not well understood, or rather from both causes'.¹⁴⁵ He concludes the review by noting that 'many Readers' have taken great offence at Beattie's manner of treating the 'modern sceptics', before proceeding to justify Beattie's work: 'though we have the sincerest respect for Mr. Hume's distinguished abilities, yet we cannot think that he is treated with any greater degree of freedom or severity than he deserves'.¹⁴⁶ Rose's review of Oswald's *Appeal* was again largely favourable. In the course of his review of the first volume of the work, published in the *Monthly Review* for February 1767, Rose asserts his belief that common sense is an effective antidote to Humeian scepticism.¹⁴⁷ In his 1772 review of the second volume, Rose gives a favourable estimation of Oswald as an author and, with some qualification, of the *Appeal* as a work.¹⁴⁸ These reviews are, perhaps, less interesting for their intellectual content than for the fact that they would all have been read by numerous rational dissenters. They thus provide another good indication of the generally favourable reception of Scottish moral philosophy among the intellectual community of rational dissent.

The reception of Priestley's *Examination* and Hartley's *Theory of the Human Mind* among English rational dissenters

Contrary to this generally positive reception afforded to the writings of Reid, Beattie, and Oswald, Priestley's *Examination* appears to have been somewhat coolly received among English dissenters. When the work was published in 1774 Priestley was out of the country on a continental tour with his patron Lord Shelburne. Writing to William Turner on 6 October 1774, Lindsey related a report from Priestley's London bookseller Joseph Johnson (1738-1809) that 'Dr. Priestley's [reply] to the Northern Philosophers sells well'. However, the optimistic report of the work's sales is tempered by Lindsey's subsequent remark that '[they] complain of the uncourteousness of some parts'.¹⁴⁹ Priestley was back in England by the beginning of the next month. Lindsey wrote again to Turner on 17 November that 'I find that all (all, at least, I know) like much his book agst y^e Scotch

¹⁴⁵ *MR*, 43 (1770), 277.

¹⁴⁶ *MR*, 43 (1770), 283.

¹⁴⁷ *MR*, 36 (1767), 129.

¹⁴⁸ *MR*, 47 (1772), 58.

¹⁴⁹ Ditchfield, 194-5; 199.

philosophers, though they disapprove the manner of some parts.’ In the same letter he related an anecdote he had received from John Lee (1733-1793), the eminent dissenting attorney, that a

Mr. Macdonald, a young counsellor of Lincoln’s Inn, just come from Edinburgh, had been with Dr. [William] Robertson and Hume at the time they had just read our friend’s book, and they both declared that the manner of the work was proper, as the argument was unanswerable.¹⁵⁰

The ‘Mr. Macdonald’ to whom Lindsey referred was probably Sir Archibald Macdonald (1747-1826) who had entered Lincoln’s Inn in 1765 and been called to the bar in 1770.¹⁵¹ Priestley’s *Examination* certainly did come to Hume’s attention: Adam Smith wrote to Hume from London in May 1775 with the news that ‘Your friends here have been all much diverted with Priestley’s answer to Beattie’.¹⁵² Yet it is impossible to corroborate the story, and the statement should probably be taken with a degree of scepticism. Although Hume is unlikely to have disapproved of an attack on Reid, Beattie, and Oswald (he wrote to William Strahan in October 1775 of ‘Dr Reid’ and ‘that bigoted silly Fellow, Beattie’), his purported praise of Priestley’s work is less plausible.¹⁵³ To judge by Lord Kames’s response, Priestley’s work was received north of the border with a note of mirth and contempt. Kames wrote to William Creech in October of 1774 that ‘Dr Reid is here [at Blairdrummond] whom I employ’d to read passages out of Priestley for the amusement of us all’.¹⁵⁴ On Priestley’s edition of Hartley, Lindsey was typically enthusiastic. Writing to Turner on 6 October 1774 he noted that he was correcting a proof sheet of the second of the three dissertations, and informed Turner that ‘The dissertations are masterly, [and] will recommend the work to which they are prefaced’.¹⁵⁵ However, even among Lindsey’s circle of correspondents praise for the work was not unanimous: Francis Blackburne wrote to Lindsey from Richmond on 13 October 1775 with the news

¹⁵⁰ Ditchfield, 199.

¹⁵¹ David Lemmings, ‘Macdonald, Sir Archibald, first baronet (1747-1826)’, *ODNB*.

¹⁵² *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*, ed. Ernest Campbell Mossner and Ian Simpson Ross (Oxford, 1977), 182.

¹⁵³ *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, 2nd edn (London, 1983), vol. II, 301.

¹⁵⁴ Lord Kames to William Creech, 4 October 1774, quoted in *Thomas Reid on the Animate Creation*, 35.

¹⁵⁵ Ditchfield, 195.

that ‘I have just had a glimpse of a page or two of Dr. P.’s operations on David Hartley, whom he seems not to have understood as I do’.¹⁵⁶

Rose too was much more critical of Priestley’s attack of the Scots. In his 1775 review of the *Examination* for the *Monthly Review* he had little to say on the argument of the work, yet was scathing in his condemnation of Priestley’s pugnacious tone: ‘the petulant, illiberal, and contemptuous manner, in which he treats his adversaries in the work now before us, is disgraceful to him as a gentleman, as a philosopher, and as a christian’.¹⁵⁷ The review also hints at the widespread disapproval of Priestley’s work among his own circle on the grounds of its intemperance:

Some of his warmest friends and admirers, persons, of whose abilities and virtues he is known to entertain the highest opinion, instead of thinking him very temperate, we know with certainty, think him very intemperate, and have expressed their dissatisfaction with his manner of writing, in the strongest terms.¹⁵⁸

Yet it is in the *Monthly Review* article covering Priestley’s edition of *Hartley’s Theory of the Human Mind* (1775) that the most forceful criticism of Priestley’s intellectual position is voiced. Fascinatingly, although this review is listed as being by Rose in Benjamin Nangle’s index of contributors to the *Monthly Review*, it is now known to have been largely the work of Reid. The article published in the *Monthly Review* is an adaptation of a longer manuscript written by Reid entitled ‘Miscellaneous Reflections on Priestley’s Account of Hartley’s Theory of the Human Mind’.¹⁵⁹ It is not possible to determine whether Reid requested the office of reviewing Priestley’s edition, or whether Rose (or Griffiths) asked Reid to write it. The fact that Nangle identified Rose as the author suggests that it was edited by Rose for inclusion in the *Monthly Review*.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Rutt, I, i, 252.

¹⁵⁷ *MR*, 52 (1775), 293.

¹⁵⁸ *MR*, 52 (1775), 292-3. The dissenting minister Samuel Badcock (1747-1788) made a very similar point some years later. See *A Slight Sketch of the Controversy between Dr. Priestley and his Opponents on the Subject of his Disquisitions on Matter and Spirit* (1782), 3. Badcock was a dissenting minister at Barnstaple and South Molton. He conformed to the Church of England in 1786.

¹⁵⁹ The full text has been reproduced by Wood in *Thomas Reid on the Animate Creation*, 132-68.

¹⁶⁰ Nangle identified the contributors to the *MR* using Ralph Griffiths’s own copy of the periodical now held in the Bodleian Library. Griffiths identified the authors by inscribing their initials at the end of each article. Rose’s contributions were identified by Griffiths with the single letter ‘R’. See Nangle, *The Monthly*

In its criticisms of Priestley's introductory essays the printed review closely follows Reid's manuscript. Reid's text draws attention to Priestley's failure to accurately define what he understands by 'instincts', criticises his neglect of the history of the doctrine of association, and points out his inaccurate understanding of the philosophy of Locke. At points, Rose appears to have toned down Reid's criticisms. Rose omitted from the printed review Reid's exclamation: 'I am weary of Pursuing the incoherent & absurd Notions of this flimsy writer, who surely mistook his Talent when he attempted to write upon abstract subjects'.¹⁶¹ However, the article in the *Monthly Review* also contains a number of criticisms of Priestley's position which were not part of Reid's original text. It can only be assumed that these passages were added by Rose. Rose added an extra paragraph pointing out the incoherence of Priestley's argument that ideas could continue independently of the mind's conceptions in which he noted that 'Dr. Priestley does not understand the doctrine which he has taken to elucidate'.¹⁶² The second part of the review assessing Priestley's editorial abilities is only loosely based on Reid's manuscript. Rose omitted a fairly substantial part of Reid's text in which Reid had criticised Hartley for combining conjectural propositions with propositions that had been adequately proved without distinguishing between the two.¹⁶³ Rose added an extra paragraph criticising Priestley's practical editorial abilities, emphasising the fact that many of the references to preceding propositions in Priestley's edition were incorrect due to the 'hurry and inattention' with which the work had evidently been prepared.¹⁶⁴ Rose's most substantial addition to Reid's manuscript comprises a concluding observation on the similarity between the epistemological systems of Hartley and Hume:

Dr. Priestley in his examination of Dr. Reid's Inquiry, &c. has treated Mr. Hume's philosophy with great contempt, as being both superficial, yet in what relates to the principles of the understanding, there is a remarkable coincidence of sentiments, in

Review First Series 1749-1789: Indexes of Contributors and Articles, vol. I, xiii; 37. It is possible that Reid sent the article to Griffiths, and that Griffiths then sent it on the Rose, allowing Rose to decide whether to insert the article with or without amendments. For an example of a similar editorial practice see Nangle, vol. I, x.

¹⁶¹ *Thomas Reid on the Animate Creation*, 145.

¹⁶² *MR*, 53 (1775), 383.

¹⁶³ *Thomas Reid on the Animate Creation*, 152.

¹⁶⁴ *MR*, 54 (1776), 45.

almost every thing material, between that Author and Dr. Hartley; who is considered by our own Editor as the greatest of all uninspired writers.¹⁶⁵

The passage is presumably modelled on an observation in Reid's manuscript that 'Mr Hume in his Treatise of human Nature, printed ten years before Dr Hartley's Observations on Man, grounds almost his whole System of human Mind upon the Laws of Association'.¹⁶⁶ Reid subsequently observes that 'There is indeed a remarkable agreement in the Systems of Hobbs of Hume & of Hartley with regard to the Faculties of the human Mind; however widely the last may differ from the others in his Religious Principles'.¹⁶⁷ In the conclusion to the printed review, Rose developed this observation, making explicit the irony that this similarity in the epistemological theories of Hume and Hartley should lead to such divergent conclusions:

It may seem strange, however, that if the fundamental principles of the two Systems are so much the same, the conclusions should be so different. Hume's is made a foundation of universal pyrrhonism; Hartley's, on the contrary, of a sort of religious system, comprehending revealed as well as natural religion.¹⁶⁸

This review is interesting in that, perhaps more than any of Rose's other articles for the *Monthly Review*, it provides an insight into his own philosophical ideas. Not only does the fact that Rose allowed Reid to write a critical review of Priestley's work suggest a loose affinity between the two men's positions, but the fact that Rose developed some of Reid's criticisms against Priestley's and Hartley's philosophy demonstrates that they shared a critical opinion of these ideas.

Wodrow's and Kenrick's respective attitudes to Priestley reflect the general strain of their criticism: Kenrick's enthusiasm is matched by Wodrow's more cautious approach. Writing to Wodrow in 1781, shortly after Priestley's arrival at Birmingham, Kenrick referred to Priestley as 'this wonderful man, who writes and does so much'.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ *MR*, 54 (1776), 46.

¹⁶⁶ *Thomas Reid on the Animate Creation*, 136.

¹⁶⁷ *Thomas Reid on the Animate Creation*, 136.

¹⁶⁸ *MR*, 54 (1776), 46.

¹⁶⁹ Kenrick to Wodrow, 15 August 1781, DWL MS 24.157 (72).

He commented approvingly on Priestley's first sermon preached at Birmingham and on his *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever* (1780), conjecturing optimistically that 'by means of his & other such free writings, the world will be enlightened'.¹⁷⁰ Shortly after his first meeting with Priestley at Birmingham, Kenrick wrote that 'I shall never tire of defending him – I love and admire him so much'.¹⁷¹ The correspondence suggests that Priestley's writings were not always easily available at Glasgow. In 1791, for example, Wodrow noted that few of Priestley's works reached Scotland, conjecturing: 'there is scarcely a copy of his letter to Burke but mine in the kingdom'.¹⁷² The letters of the 1780s contain a number of records of Kenrick sending copies of Priestley's works, or his own summaries of them, to Glasgow for Wodrow to read.¹⁷³

However, Wodrow's responses to these works are most often marked by caution. Despite commenting approvingly on Priestley's *Address to the Serious and Candid Professors of Christianity* (1771) and *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever*, the 'elegant & handsome encomium' which Wodrow paid Priestley in 1784 was tempered by the observation (much to Kenrick's amusement) that Priestley clearly had 'a Bee in his bonnet'. Although the letter from Wodrow has not survived, Kenrick referred to 'a certain want of judgment & prudence' with which his friend had charged Priestley.¹⁷⁴ Wodrow was evidently less susceptible to Priestley's controversial style: promising to send Wodrow a copy of Priestley's second letter to Samuel Horsley, Kenrick warned his friend that 'Your meek spirit will not relish' the work.¹⁷⁵ In a letter of January 1784, Wodrow included a long quotation from a letter he had received from the Church of Scotland minister William M'Gill (1732-1807), containing a detailed critical appraisal of Priestley's character and writings. Although M'Gill claimed to 'admire the variety & the vigour of his talents' and to 'believe with Mr Kenrick that he love[d] truth', he expressed his concern that Priestley:

¹⁷⁰ Kenrick to Wodrow, 2 June 1784, DWL MS 24.157 (80). For more on Kenrick's and Wodrow's response to Priestley's *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever* see chapter 4.

¹⁷¹ Kenrick to Wodrow, 28 September 1784, DWL MS 24.157 (83).

¹⁷² Wodrow to Kenrick, 16 June 1791, DWL MS 24.157 (164). The 'letter to Burke' is Priestley, *Letters to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, occasioned by his Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Birmingham, 1791).

¹⁷³ See, for example, Kenrick to Wodrow, 2 June 1784, DWL MS 24.157 (80); Kenrick to Wodrow, 7 October 1786, DWL MS 24.157 (123).

¹⁷⁴ Kenrick to Wodrow, 2 June 1784, DWL MS 24.157 (80).

¹⁷⁵ Kenrick to Wodrow, 2-3 December 1784, DWL MS 24.157 (85).

does not seem to look at her [truth] with that respect & modesty which becomes one who sees but ‘thro a glass darkly’; on the contrary he pushes boldly forward into her most secret recesses, & I fear often hugs an illusion in place of her. Many of his nostrums both in Philosophy & Theology are too hastily taken up, and set forth in too peremptory and dogmatical a way.¹⁷⁶

Despite Wodrow’s comment that M’Gill’s ‘prejudices against the worthy Dr’ are ‘stronger than my own’, there is certainly a sense in the letters that Wodrow shared something of his colleague’s reservations about Kenrick’s intellectual hero.

A similar attitude is reflected in Wodrow’s and Kenrick’s recorded responses to Priestley’s philosophical works. Although both men wrote enthusiastically of Priestley’s response to Hume (see chapter 4), Wodrow’s account of Priestley’s writings on necessity (see chapter 3) developed a perceptive criticism of Priestley’s necessitarianism. Interestingly, however, one point of agreement between Wodrow and Kenrick on the subject of Priestley’s philosophical writings is their respective attitudes to his response to Reid, Beattie, and Oswald. Although neither Wodrow nor Kenrick mentioned Reid’s *Inquiry*, Beattie’s *Essay*, or Oswald’s *Appeal* at the time of their publication, it is clear from later comments that they were certainly familiar with Reid’s and (in Kenrick’s case) Beattie’s works. Kenrick’s response to Priestley’s *Examination* comprises one of the only critical comments he makes on Priestley or his works in the correspondence. In 1781 Kenrick noted that Priestley’s response to Hume was addressed ‘wth a good deal more civility, & good manners, than 3 or 4 years ago when he brandished his tawmahaw against the celebrated Oswald, Reid, & Beattie’.¹⁷⁷ Three years later, in September 1784, Kenrick again recalled Priestley’s attack on the Scottish authors, writing to Wodrow:

I confess there was a time that I highly blamed his furious attack on your harmless threefold Doctors – to treat the amiable Beattie wth such severity shocked me & I thought the modest industrious Reid much too roughly handled.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Wodrow to Kenrick, 3 January 1784, DWL MS 24.157 (87).

¹⁷⁷ Kenrick to Wodrow, 15 August 1781, DWL MS 24.157 (72).

¹⁷⁸ Kenrick to Wodrow, 28 September 1784, DWL MS 24.157 (83).

Similarly, in June 1787, Wodrow qualified his admiration of Priestley's *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever* with a comparison between Priestley and Reid. Commenting that Priestley's work was 'too metaphysical', and that he was not 'perfectly satisfied of the soundness of his and Hartley's Philosophy', Wodrow asserted his preference for the work of the Scottish author: 'I think Dr Reid's more intelligible more founded in fact & feeling and more likely to prevail even in this sceptical age'.¹⁷⁹

Joseph Berington's response to Priestley

Another author critical of Priestley's *Examination* and edition of *Hartley's Theory of the Human Mind*, and one no less perceptive than Rose, Reid, Wodrow, or Kenrick, was the Roman Catholic priest Joseph Berington, who published his *Letters on Materialism and Hartley's Theory of the Human Mind* anonymously in 1776. As a Catholic, Berington (1743-1827) had come from a very different educational background to the rational dissenters in Priestley's circle. After receiving his preparatory education at Esquerchin, Berington had entered the English college at Douai on 12 August 1756.¹⁸⁰ Douai had been established in 1568 as the first of several colleges on the continent specifically designed for the training of Roman Catholic priests to work in England. Probably under the tutor William Wilkinson (1722-1780), Berington would have attended the two-year philosophy course prefatory to the four-year syllabus in divinity. At least according to the printed syllabus, the philosophy course at Douai was heavily influenced by Thomism and largely confined to the study of Aristotelian logic, physics, and metaphysics.¹⁸¹ However, there is some evidence that tutors did not strictly adhere to these guidelines.¹⁸² The extant details of Berington's career suggest that at Douai he encountered a number of modern European philosophical works. Following his ordination into the Roman Catholic

¹⁷⁹ Wodrow to Kenrick, 15 June 1787, DWL MS 24.157 (130).

¹⁸⁰ J. P. Chinnici, 'Berington, Joseph (1743-1827)', *ODNB*. There is a short article on Berington in *The Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century British Philosophers*, vol. I, 83-4.

¹⁸¹ Michael Sharratt, 'Copernicalism at Douai', *Durham University Journal*, 67 (1974-5), 41-8, 43.

¹⁸² P. R. Harris has argued that 'from the purely philosophical point of view Douai was well abreast of current thought early in the eighteenth century', P. R. Harris, 'The English College, Douai, 1750-1794', *Recusant History*, 10 (1969), 79-95, 85. Sharratt has challenged this as not being grounded on sufficient evidence, but has shown through the use of extant student notes that, at least in the field of astronomy, Wilkinson's lectures were engaged with contemporary debate, 'Copernicalism at Douai'. See also B. Hoban, 'The Philosophical Tradition of Douay', *Ushaw Magazine*, 63 (1953), 145-9.

priesthood in 1770, Berington was appointed Professor of Philosophy at Douai. His professorial thesis evinced a strong interest in the philosophy of Locke and in the psychology of the Swiss naturalist and philosopher Charles Bonnet (1720-1793).¹⁸³ In an important and controversial passage of his thesis, Berington maintained a connection between ideas and sensations occasioned by the action of external objects on the senses, referred to the mind as being ‘united to the body’, and concluded, contentiously, that Locke and Bonnet ‘teach the truth’.¹⁸⁴ His comments infuriated the Bishop of Arras, who charged Berington with anti-scholasticism and with advocating ‘doctrines of a dangerous aspect, from whence Deists may draw conclusions favourable to their tenets’.¹⁸⁵ The Bishop wrote to Alban Butler (1709-1773), Berington’s colleague at Douai, demanding that Berington be suspended from teaching immediately. Butler subsequently wrote to the President of the college, Henry Tichbourne Blount, imploring him to remove Berington from the institution in order to avoid a scandal.¹⁸⁶ The following year, Berington returned to England, and after some years at Wolverhampton took charge of the small mission at Oscott, in Staffordshire, where he became close friends with the Quaker businessman at Barr, Samuel Galton (1720-1779). It was during this period that he probably first met Priestley through meetings of the Lunar Society, a group of Birmingham entrepreneurs who met monthly to discuss their scientific interests.¹⁸⁷

Priestley and Berington came into contact with one another at several points over the next two decades in relation to their shared theological and political interests.¹⁸⁸ In their philosophical opinions they occupied very different positions. In letter VI of Berington’s *Letters on Materialism*, ‘*The doctrine of instinctive principles reviewed and*

¹⁸³ Joseph Berington, ‘Theses ex logica et psychologia’, WDA, Douay Papers, vol. XLVIII, ff. 82-7. On Bonnet see John C. O’Neal, *The Authority of Experience: Sensationist Theory in the French Enlightenment* (University Park, PA, 1996), 61-82, O’Neal notes a link between Bonnet and Hartley, 82.

¹⁸⁴ The passage in question reads: ‘Qui omni sensu careret, ideâ careret omni; anima quippè, corpori unita, nisi ipso mediante, non agit, non sentit, non percipit &c: ergo verum docent *Lock, Bonnet &c.*’, Berington, ‘Theses ex logica et psychologia’. I am very grateful to David Powell for his assistance in translating Berington’s thesis.

¹⁸⁵ Joseph Berington to Bishop James Talbot, 10 October 1771, WDA, Douay Papers, vol. XLVIII, f. 86.

¹⁸⁶ Alban Butler to Henry Tichbourne Blount, 7 August 1771, WDA, Douay Papers, vol. XLVIII, f. 85

¹⁸⁷ Berington’s attendance at a meeting of the Lunar Society at Priestley’s house is described in *Life of Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck*, ed. Christiana C. Hankin, 2 vols (1858), vol. I, 48. According to the testimony of a former servant at Priestley’s Birmingham home, ‘Mr Berington, the Catholic at Barr, used frequently to call to see him’, see Alan Ruston, ‘A Servant’s View of Joseph Priestley’, *E&D*, 8 (1989), 115-19.

¹⁸⁸ Simon Mills, ‘Joseph Priestley’s Connections with Jews and Catholics’, *TUHS*, 24.3 (2009), 176-191.

contrasted with Hartley's Theory', Berington responded specifically to Priestley's *Examination*. He begins by declaring himself to be no admirer of Reid's, Beattie's, and Oswald's theory of 'common sense'. However, Berington is sceptical as to whether Priestley's advocacy of Hartley's theory of association is a sufficient retort. Whereas Rose and Reid had attempted to undermine Priestley's position by drawing attention to the similarity between Hartley's and Hume's psychology, Berington stressed the essentially similar claims of 'common sense' and 'association'. Both, according to Berington, are 'equally *necessary*, and equally *infallible* in their operations'.¹⁸⁹ Both locate the source of knowledge in the bodily organs (in Hartley's case the 'nervous vibrations' and in Reid's, Beattie's, and Oswald's cases the 'constitutional propensities'), and both hold that ideas are generated independently of the will, and according to pre-established laws.

Berington goes on to identify what he saw as a central paradox in Priestley's position. Whilst Priestley was claiming to refute the recourse to 'instinct' or 'intuition' advocated by the Scots by reaffirming the importance of 'reason', his claim that association could ultimately account for all complex ideas left as little room for the role of reason as did 'common sense'. By defining the 'judgment' as a 'complex feeling of the coincidence of ideas', rather than, as in Locke, an idea of reflection, essentially different from ideas derived directly from sensation, Hartley was equally open to the charge that he had made the judgment of truth and falsehood dependent on an impulsive and instantaneous feeling. Berington singles out specifically Priestley's claim in his *Examination* that 'the faculty by which we perceive truth, is the farthest possible from any thing, that resembles a *sense*'. For Berington, nothing could be closer to a sense than the '*internal feeling*, which judgment, assent, and dissent, are by Dr. Hartley defined to be'.¹⁹⁰ In this analysis, the doctrine of association 'will be found to make as bold encroachments on the province of reason, as that execrable common sense'.¹⁹¹

Through his criticism of Priestley's response to Reid, Beattie, and Oswald Berington struck at the heart of what Priestley was attempting to achieve: a rational

¹⁸⁹ Joseph Berington, *Letters on Materialism and Hartley's Theory of the Human Mind, addressed to Dr. Priestley* (1776), 122.

¹⁹⁰ *Letters on Materialism*, 127.

¹⁹¹ *Letters on Materialism*, 125.

system of epistemology on which to ground his theology. Berington evidently shared Priestley's concern that the epistemological doctrine outlined by Reid, Beattie, and Oswald was an unstable foundation for a rational theological system. Referring to 'instinctive principles', he wrote that 'They open wide the door to fanaticism and every enthusiastic conceit, erecting an instinctive feeling into the universal judge of truth, in every branch of morality and religion'.¹⁹² Yet in a key passage, he argues that Hartley's theory, at least in his reading of it, is equally susceptible to the charge that it validates arbitrary judgments as is the common sense theory of the Scots:

Also is your notion equally favourable to fanaticism and bigotry: for the man, who is taught to believe, that all is conducted by a train of mechanical impulse, will think himself as much necessitated to pursue each warm impression, as he who trusts his conscience to the infallible guidance of instinct or interior lights. He may be either that poor priest-ridden mortal, whose blindness you so pathetically lament; or he may be obliged to subscribe the Scotch confession of faith; or, which is not the less extraordinary, he may *perceive himself rather inclined* to dismember his native *creed*, and to dissent from almost every article of the Christian belief.¹⁹³

The implication, of course, is that Hartley's theory of the association of ideas could equally serve as a foundation for the theology of Catholicism, Anglicanism, or for the Calvinist Presbyterianism of the Church of Scotland, as it could for Priestley's own Socinianism.

In the remaining sections of the work, Berington criticises various other aspects of Priestley's and Hartley's system. In letter IV, '*Objections to the union system answered; and man's future existence demonstrated*', Berington argues against Priestley on theological grounds. His objection here is to Priestley's insistence that man's hope of a future existence derives not from his knowledge of an immaterial soul deduced by reason (which Priestley denies), but solely from the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the dead contained in the Scriptures. For Berington, such a view assigns too much to revelation and weakens the arguments for natural religion. He claims that on this point

¹⁹² *Letters on Materialism*, 121.

¹⁹³ *Letters on Materialism*, 134. The italicised text is a parody of a passage in Priestley's edition of Hartley, see below.

Priestley again falls prey to the paradox that whereas on the one hand he is claiming to be exalting reason above ‘instinct, bigotry and enthusiasm’, on the other hand he is undermining the claims of reason by denying that man could naturally arrive at the knowledge of his own immortality.¹⁹⁴ Berington’s position is that man’s knowledge of a future state is a tenet of natural, as well as of revealed religion. He holds that ‘reason can itself point to man an *hereafter*’, and identifies the demonstration of this point as the principal concern of his own work.¹⁹⁵

Berington’s *Letters on Materialism* was also one of the first responses to Priestley’s (at this point still nascent) materialist theory. In the first of the prefatory essays to his edition of Hartley, Priestley had made a controversial suggestion. Whereas Hartley had retained a vestigial dualism, upholding an essential difference between ‘matter’ and ‘spirit’, Priestley suggested that the doctrine of vibrations rendered the need for any non-material substance to explain the mind’s operations obsolete, cautiously conjecturing:

I am rather inclined to think that though the subject is beyond our comprehension at present, man does not consist of two principles, so essentially different from one another as matter and spirit [...] I rather think the whole man is of some uniform composition, and that the property of perception, as well as the other powers that are termed mental, is the result (whether necessary or not) of such an organical structure as that of the brain.¹⁹⁶

Against this suggestion, Berington advanced what were essentially the same objections made by Samuel Clarke to Anthony Collins.¹⁹⁷ For Berington, the power of perception is incompatible with the composition of parts. Whereas particular feelings could be conceived to arise in distinct nervous points, if the brain were the seat of all affections then there would be as many individual percipient beings as there were affections.¹⁹⁸ The unity of consciousness necessary for the faculties of judgment, or for the perception of

¹⁹⁴ *Letters on Materialism*, 24.

¹⁹⁵ *Letters on Materialism*, 84.

¹⁹⁶ *Hartley’s Theory of the Human Mind*, xx.

¹⁹⁷ Particularly Samuel Clarke, *A Defense of an Argument made use of in a Letter to Mr Dodwel, to prove the Immateriality and Natural Immortality of the Soul* (1707), 8-15.

¹⁹⁸ Berington, *Letters on Materialism*, 63.

harmony or proportion, cannot be accounted for by the individual parts of the brain. Berington could not accept Priestley's (and Collins's) argument that consciousness could be a property of systems of matter, without being a property of that system's parts. For Berington 'Organization alone can never give a capacity to the component elements of the brain or body, of which, in their unorganized state, they were totally void'.¹⁹⁹ The only way out of this for the materialist is that each individual element of matter must be endowed with the capacity of perception, and Berington demonstrates the absurdity of following through this supposition whether matter be thought of as indivisible monads or as compounded and infinitely divisible.²⁰⁰

In letter VIII, '*Remarks on the doctrine of Necessity as stated by Doctor Hartley*', Berington addresses Hartley's and Priestley's advocacy of philosophical necessity. By this stage in the text, the tone of his language has become markedly more pugnacious. He opens the letter with the comment that:

Dr. Hartley's theory is not only reprehensible from its coincidence with the doctrine of instinct, and from its insufficiency to explain all the affections of the mind, but far more so for being productive of a consequence, big with fatal evils to the interests of morality and religion.²⁰¹

Berington here reveals his debt to Wollaston. He rejects Hartley's theory that motives are the mechanical causes of our actions by positing a distinction between 'moral' and 'physical' modes of operation.²⁰² Motives are 'moral causes', that is, although they do have a physical effect on us, they do not in themselves produce our actions. Rather, motives act on the mind which then determines itself to act by the free exertion of its own innate powers.²⁰³ In response to Hartley's contention that philosophical free will is inconsistent with the prescience of the deity, Berington restates Wollaston's argument

¹⁹⁹ *Letters on Materialism*, 68.

²⁰⁰ *Letters on Materialism*, 48-9.

²⁰¹ *Letters on Materialism*, 161.

²⁰² *Letters on Materialism*, 166. The distinction dates back at least to the Bramhall/Hobbes debate in the late seventeenth century. See John Bramhall, *A Defence of True Liberty from Antecedent and Extrinsic Necessity, being an Answer to a Late Book of Mr. Thomas Hobbes of Malmsbury, intituled, A Treatise of Liberty and Necessity* (1655), 167.

²⁰³ Berington, *Letters on Materialism*, 166.

from *The Religion of Nature Delineated* (1722): ‘God foresees, or rather sees the actions of free agents, because they *will be*, not that they will be because he *foresees them*’. God’s foreknowledge of an action ought not to be misunderstood as being the cause of that action; an agent’s choice is thus consistent with God’s foreknowledge.²⁰⁴

In letter IX Berington sketches an outline of his own philosophical system, which draws together some of the various points made in the course of his criticisms. In opposition to Priestley and Hartley, Berington upholds an uncompromising dualism: ‘Man is a mixed being, a compound of two substances essentially different, *matter and soul*’.²⁰⁵ Yet Berington rejects Priestley’s assertion that matter and spirit are always described as having no common properties by which they can affect or act upon one another. He allows that matter is possessed of a limited ‘active force’. The human brain ought to be conceived of as an instrument endowed with the greatest energetic powers of which matter is susceptible, and as such as ‘a fit habitation for a substance, *simple and highly active*, as is the soul’.²⁰⁶ He advocates what he terms the ‘doctrine of *physical influence*’: the soul can be ‘roused into action’ by the impulses of the body; ‘the various mental powers [will] be progressively brought into action, and man will feel, will perceive, will think, and will reason, just as the respective operative causes exert their influence’.²⁰⁷ In this way, Berington concedes a large part of Hartley’s epistemological system. He concludes the first part of letter IX with the statement: ‘I agree then with you and Dr. Hartley in adopting the doctrine of vibrations, and the consequent generation and association of ideas, as far as ideas may be taken for the immediate objects of the mind in thinking’.²⁰⁸ However, Berington subsequently reasserts his opinion that the faculties of ‘*perceiving*’, ‘*liking or disliking*’, ‘*distinguishing*’, and ‘*attending*’ cannot be the direct effects of any nervous vibrations.²⁰⁹ These faculties Berington holds, in a sense, to be innate. They are ‘certain primary maxims’ which the mind infers rationally, independently of sense perception.²¹⁰ Berington rejects Hartley’s and Priestley’s

²⁰⁴ *Letters on Materialism*, 192-3. This defence of the compatibility of free will and divine omniscience is standard by the mid-eighteenth century.

²⁰⁵ *Letters on Materialism*, 196.

²⁰⁶ *Letters on Materialism*, 75.

²⁰⁷ *Letters on Materialism*, 76; 75.

²⁰⁸ *Letters on Materialism*, 199-200.

²⁰⁹ *Letters on Materialism*, 201.

²¹⁰ *Letters on Materialism*, 158.

contention that the mind is purely passive in its reception of sensations. For Berington, the mind is active: just as external stimuli act upon the mind, so the mind, in turn, acts upon the physical brain. In a state of attention the mind ‘*reacts* upon the moving fibres, heightens their vibrations, and the mental effects are thus rendered more intense’.²¹¹ Berington might have derived at least part of his own position from Bonnet; among the influences he cites are Robert Whytt, the Scottish physician and natural philosopher, and Locke. In fact, Berington claimed that his own system was none other ‘than the original doctrine of Mr. Locke, exhibited, perhaps in a more striking and less complex point of view’.²¹² However, Berington pursues Locke’s ideas in a very different direction from Hartley and Priestley: the primary maxims ‘by a kind of native light flash upon the mind’. Describing the action of the mind upon the brain Berington writes: ‘Here the mind for a time chuses to dwell: we feel a kind of expansive energy unfold itself, and the ideal colouring becomes more glowing and expressive’.²¹³

In his approach to ethics Berington also moves away from a Lockean position, at least as it had been developed by Hartley and Priestley. Among the primary maxims known independently of experience, Berington lists the knowledge of morality. Although he concedes that Hartley’s and Priestley’s theory of the formation of the moral sense is a useful explanation of the diversity of moral sentiments, he accepts the rationalist thesis that the morality of actions is founded on the ‘*eternal reasons and relations of things*’.²¹⁴ He thus cannot accept Hartley’s and Priestley’s contention that the knowledge of morality is in no sense innate. Although the doctrine of association can account for differences of sentiment occasioned by different ‘modes of education’, ‘difference of age’, ‘prevailing fashions’, and the ‘influence of climate’, to insist that ‘the whole work of morality’ is due to the association of ideas is to be ‘far too sanguine and precipitate’.²¹⁵ Berington holds that ‘an all-wise being must have provided some principle, innate to our very

²¹¹ *Letters on Materialism*, 203.

²¹² *Letters on Materialism*, 212; for the reference to ‘Dr Whytte’ see 206. Whytt’s *Essay on the Vital and other Involuntary Motions of Animals* (1751) elaborated the doctrine that a sentient principle in man is initiated by motion in the muscles. On Whytt see R. K. French, *Robert Whytt, the Soul and Medicine* (London, 1969), Catherine Packham, ‘Feigning Fictions: Imagination, Hypothesis, and Philosophical Writing in the Scottish Enlightenment’, *The Eighteenth Century*, 48.2 (2007), 149-71, esp. 166-9.

²¹³ *Letters on Materialism*, 157; 203. Compare this with Locke’s description of intuition at *Essay*, IV, ii, 1.

²¹⁴ *Letters on Materialism*, 156.

²¹⁵ *Letters on Materialism*, 158.

constitutions, whereby the charms of truth and virtue might be felt, and their respective rights immoveably fixed, in opposition to error and vice'. He identifies 'the grand moral principle, *do as you would be done by*' as an ethical truth transcending any particular historical or geographical circumstance'.²¹⁶

It is difficult to ascertain what impression, if any, Berington's philosophical work made on his contemporaries.²¹⁷ Priestley was clearly unimpressed: he later wrote in the preface to the second edition his *Disquisitions* (1782) of Berington as being 'a man of a truly liberal turn of mind, and cultivated understanding' but 'warped, as I think him to be, by his education'.²¹⁸ However, as we shall see in chapter 3, Berington's criticisms were to be an important stimulus for the development of Priestley's ideas. His work is also interesting in that, although he occupied a very different theological position to that of the English rational dissenters, he can be listed with Rose, Enfield, Kenrick, and Walker among those in Priestley's circle who, although from different perspectives, were critical of the direction in which Priestley's philosophy was developing. These divergent philosophical positions within the rational dissenting movement would come to a head in the late 1770s and early 1780s when Priestley developed at length his materialist and necessitarian theories.

²¹⁶ *Letters on Materialism*, 158.

²¹⁷ The work left at least one contemporary reader unimpressed. A hand-written note on the title page of the copy now held at Dr Williams's Library, possibly written by a student at New College, Hackney, reads 'A very flippant & superficial performance!'

²¹⁸ Joseph Priestley, *Disquisitions relating to Matter and Spirit*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (Birmingham, 1782), vol. I, xxxii.

3. Priestley on materialism and philosophical necessity (1777-1782)

In 1777 Priestley published the most important of his philosophical works: *Disquisitions relating to Matter and Spirit*, with its appendix *The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity illustrated*. These two volumes contain most of the key elements of Priestley's mature philosophical system; in them he attempted to prove conclusively his theories of materialism and philosophical necessity and to illustrate the compatibility of these theories with his Socinian theology. The publication of the *Disquisitions* initiated intense debate from the late 1770s until well into the 1790s. It occasioned a number of book-length responses, which, in turn, prompted Priestley to reply to his critics in separate tracts and in letters printed as appendices to the second edition of the work; discussion of the book and its ideas filled the letters pages of the literary journals. The most common charge levelled against Priestley was that his ideas led directly to atheism. Although Priestley had attempted to stress the compatibility of his materialist and necessitarian theories with Christian doctrine, his bold assertion that man had no soul distinct from his body was widely regarded as a rejection of the whole system of Christianity. As Samuel Badcock, one of the more perceptive contemporary commentators on the debate, observed, Priestley, in this respect, 'had the misfortune of being misunderstood, or misrepresented beyond any other writer of rank and character in the literary world'. His enemies, of whom, as Badcock noted, 'as a Presbyterian he ha[d] many, and as a Socinian more', clambered over one another to refute what they saw as Priestley's dangerous and absurd doctrines.¹

I begin this chapter by considering in some detail Priestley's theories of materialism and philosophical necessity. A fairly substantial body of criticism has been produced on these two subjects and I here attempt to position my own account in relation to this work. My particular concern is to emphasise two important contexts for understanding Priestley's writings. Firstly, I situate Priestley's philosophical ideas within the theological context in which they developed; an understanding of this context will prove essential when moving on to consider the reaction of Priestley's contemporaries to his controversial theories. This theological context of Priestley's ideas has tended to be

¹ Badcock, *A Slight Sketch* (1782), 27-8.

overlooked by recent commentators, and my own account will go some way towards redressing this. Secondly, I show that Priestley's ideas developed through a process of collaboration within his circle of correspondents. Following this analysis, I examine some of the responses to Priestley's work, focusing specifically on how Priestley's doctrines of materialism and philosophical necessity were discussed within the intellectual culture of rational dissent. Subsequently, I turn to the most significant response to Priestley's ideas to emerge from within this culture, that of Richard Price. I briefly outline Price's intellectual development in order to show how he came to arrive at almost antithetical conclusions to Priestley on the subjects of moral philosophy, materialism, and the freedom of the will. I then turn to Price's and Priestley's *A Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism and Philosophical Necessity*. Once again, I locate this analysis in relation to the links between the rational dissenters and the Scots by exploring some of Price's connections with a number of important Scottish thinkers, namely, Hume, Reid, and Lord Monboddo. Exploring these connections will extend the picture of intellectual exchange between the Scots and the English rational dissenters developed in the previous two chapters. Finally, I examine three responses to Priestley's ideas from different denominational perspectives, each of which attempted, in various ways, to challenge Priestley's claim to have laid a rational, philosophical foundation for Christian theology.

Priestley's materialism

Much of the argument of the *Disquisitions* rests on a fundamental contention concerning the nature of matter. Priestley's starting point is to affirm the primacy of force over substance as the foundation of the phenomenal world.² In the opening section of the work

² Thackray has described Priestley's prioritising of forces as the logical conclusion to the development of ideas from Newton to Boscovich: see Arnold Thackray, *Atoms and Powers: An Essay on Newtonian Matter-Theory and the Development of Chemistry* (Cambridge, MA, 1970), 249. On the background to this development see Thackray, *Atoms and Powers*, 179-92. However, McEvoy has contested this interpretation, arguing that 'the imposition of this Newtonian framework on Priestley's scientific thought constitutes a grave distortion of the philosophical presuppositions of his natural philosophy, which are decidedly anti-Newtonian', John G. McEvoy, 'Causes and Laws, Powers and Principles: the Metaphysical Foundation of Priestley's Concept of Phlogiston', 62. McEvoy and McGuire argue that 'Priestley's theory of matter is radically different from Newton's in both its nature and its assumptions', McEvoy and McGuire, 'God and Nature: Priestley's Way of Rational Dissent', 395. More recently, Christopher Kaiser has reasserted Thackray's position, arguing that 'In a sense, Priestley was simply a consistent Newtonian',

Priestley argues that matter has traditionally been defined as a solid and impenetrable substance, incapable of initiating motion until it is acted upon by a foreign power.³ However, to define solidity and impenetrability as properties inherent in the nature of matter is, according to Priestley, a philosophical error. The idea of impenetrability is derived solely from resistance. Empirical observation has revealed that resistance is not occasioned by solid matter, but by a power of repulsion acting at a distance from the body itself.⁴ Impenetrability is thus not an essential property of matter, but rather an effect resulting from an prior repulsive force. Similarly, solidity ought to be understood as the effect of the force of attraction. Without this attractive force, there is no way of explaining the cohesion of atoms in bulk materials; without an infinitely strong power of attraction there is no way of conceiving how individual atoms retain any determinate form. The idea of solidity, and even of form itself, is thus meaningless without a prior power of attraction upon which it depends.

This new way of thinking about matter inevitably raises the question of what matter is if not a solid and impenetrable substance. To this Priestley responds that the only strictly philosophical answer is that any substance can only be said to possess such properties as appearances prove it to be possessed of. In adherence to this method (which Priestley claims to have inherited from Newton) he asserts that matter is possessed only of the property of extension and of the powers of attraction and repulsion, these qualities being all that can be necessarily inferred from appearances.⁵ To the charge that matter,

Christopher B. Kaiser, *Creational Theology and the History of the Physical Sciences: the Creationist Tradition from Basil to Bohr* (Leiden, 1997), 308.

³ *Disquisitions*, 2-4.

⁴ *Disquisitions*, 4-5. Priestley cites his own *History of Electricity* in which he had recorded an experiment to determine the force necessary to bring stacked coins into actual contact with one another (*The History and Present State of Electricity, with Original Experiments* (1769), 702), the observation of Thomas Melville (1726-1753) that a drop of water rolls upon a cabbage leaf without ever actually coming into contact with it quoted in his *The History and Present State of Discoveries relating to Vision, Light, and Colours* (1772), 454, and Newton's experiments with light rays.

⁵ It is important to note that Priestley's translation of Newton's rule is idiosyncratic in a way that serves his own purposes. Priestley translates Newton's 'Causas rerum naturalium non plures admitti debere, quam quæ et veræ sint et earum phaenomenis explicandis sufficient' as 'we are to admit no more causes of things than are sufficient to explain appearances', significantly omitting the first condition, i.e. 'that are true', Isaac Newton, *Philosophiæ naturalis principia mathematica*, 3rd edn (1726), 387; Priestley, *Disquisitions*, 2. See Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity*, 172-3. Priestley's interpretation of Newton's method of reasoning was of particular concern to Reid: see Alan Tapper, 'Reid and Priestley on Method and the Mind', in *The Philosophy of Thomas Reid*, esp. 102-6; *Thomas Reid on the Animate Creation*, 41-6. Interestingly, Price, in his comments on Priestley's *The History of the Present State of Discoveries relating to Vision, Light, and Colours* (1772), had censured Priestley's translation of passages from Newton. Priestley wrote to Price on

thus defined, is little different to spirit, Priestley replies that ‘it no way concerns me [...] to maintain that there is any such difference between them as has been hitherto supposed’.⁶ In fact, since matter has no properties but those of attraction and repulsion, ‘it ought to rise in our esteem, as making a nearer approach to the nature of spiritual and immaterial beings, as we have been taught to call those which are opposed to gross matter’.⁷

Priestley claimed to have derived his theory of matter from the writings of the natural philosopher John Michell (1724-93), whom Priestley knew personally, and the mathematician, philosopher, and Jesuit priest Roger Joseph Boscovich (1711-1787).⁸ He had first encountered the point theory of matter developed in Boscovich’s *Theoria Philosophicæ Naturalis* (1758) whilst working on his *History of Vision, Light, and Colours* (1772) in the early 1770s.⁹ In the *Disquisitions* he quotes a long passage from his earlier work describing Boscovich’s and Michell’s ideas. It was Boscovich who, for Priestley, had shown that

matter is not *impenetrable*, as before him it had been universally taken for granted; but that it consists of *physical points* only, endued with powers of attraction and repulsion,

23 November 1771: ‘Two of the passages you have censured are in the words of Mr. Michell. What you say is “by no means rightly expressed,” is his variation of Motte’s translation of Newton, which I had before used. I have not so often departed from Newton’s own words as you imagine; hardly ever, except to make his phrase more modern’, Rutt, I, i, 156; Peach and Thomas, vol. I, 120-2, esp. 122n11.

⁶ *Disquisitions*, 16.

⁷ *Disquisitions*, 17.

⁸ *Disquisitions*, 19. Michell’s theories were outlined in *A Treatise of Artificial Magnets* (1750) and in several papers of the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* for 1767 and 1784. On Michell see Robert E. Schofield, *Mechanism and Materialism: British Natural Philosophy in an Age of Reason* (Princeton, 1970), 241-3; Clyde L. Hardin, ‘The Scientific Work of the Reverend John Michell’, *Annals of Science*, 22 (1966), 27-47. On Priestley’s connection with Michell see Rutt, I, i, 78. On Boscovich (now more often spelled Ruder Boscovic) see Schofield, *Mechanism and Materialism*, 236-41; Thackray, *Atoms and Powers*, 150-5; L. L. Whyte, ‘R. J. Boscovich, S.J., F.R.S. (1711-1787), and the Mathematics of Atomism’, *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, 13.1 (1958), 38-48.

⁹ Priestley first mentioned Boscovich in a letter to Price written in November 1771, Rutt, I, i, 154-6. He was probably introduced to Boscovich’s work by Michell, who had met Boscovich at Cambridge some time between 1760 and 1761, see Karis Muller, ‘Point Atomism, Space and God, 1760-80’, *The European Legacy*, 12.3 (2007), 277-92, 278. Muller also notes that Priestley met Boscovich in Paris in 1775, through a letter of introduction from Michell, and discussed the *Theoria* with him. However, no source is cited for the meeting.

taking place at different distances, that is, surrounded with various spheres of attraction and repulsion.¹⁰

However, as John G. McEvoy has argued, Priestley, in accordance with his empiricist epistemology, avoided committing himself definitively to any thesis on the internal structure of matter.¹¹ In confining himself to what could be demonstrated from appearances, Priestley only speculatively adopts Boscovich's theory of point atomism. His most important contention is a negative one: that there is not sufficient evidence to conclude that matter is possessed of the properties of solidity and impenetrability. In this respect, the significance of Boscovich's ideas ought not, perhaps, to be over emphasised.¹² For Priestley the internal structure of matter remains ultimately unknowable. It is on this point that McEvoy and McGuire criticise Priestley's approach as inadequate. They argue that Priestley failed to see that 'the fundamental properties of matter cannot be established by observation alone' and that Priestley neglected to offer the more expedient conceptual analysis of the logical dependence of terms such as solidity and impenetrability on the concept of repulsion.¹³ However, in sections of the text Priestley does go some way towards doing this, and here he owes as much to Locke as he does to Newton, Boscovich, or Michell.

In section IX of the *Disquisitions*, Priestley is far more explicit on the philosophical contention underpinning his argument on the nature of matter. Priestley argues here that our ideas of 'substance' and 'essence', whether we are thinking of material or immaterial substances, are merely linguistic expressions which are of little help in accurately describing the phenomenal world or our conceptions of it. In fact, Priestley argues, 'we can have no proper idea of any *essence* whatever'.¹⁴ Although we cannot but speak of the powers of attraction and repulsion as being powers 'residing in

¹⁰ *Disquisitions*, 19; Priestley, *The History and Present State of Discoveries relating to Vision, Light, and Colours*, 391.

¹¹ McEvoy, 'Causes and Laws, Powers and Principles', 55-71, 62; Priestley, *Disquisitions*, 2nd edn, vol. I, 32; 35.

¹² McEvoy and McGuire argue that 'Priestley's adherence to a Boscovichian theory of matter was not as wholehearted and complete as has been supposed', 'God and Nature: Priestley's Way of Rational Dissent', 395. See also John G. McEvoy 'Joseph Priestley, Natural Philosopher: Some Comments on Professor Schofield's Views', *Ambix*, 15 (1968), 115-23.

¹³ McEvoy and McGuire, 'God and Nature: Priestley's Way of Rational Dissent', 388-99.

¹⁴ *Disquisitions*, 104.

some *thing, substance, or essence*’, our ideas cannot go beyond the powers of which a thing is possessed.¹⁵ If we insist on defining matter as a substance then it is ‘as immaterial a one as any person can wish for’; however, this is effectively beyond the realm of any meaningful conception as it can suggest no idea whatsoever.¹⁶ Priestley’s point here develops an idea which he probably first encountered in Locke’s *Essay*. In Book I of the *Essay*, Locke had argued that the idea of substance cannot be derived from either of the two categories of sensation or reflection. These being the only two sources from which ideas are derived,

We can have no such *clear Idea* at all, and therefore signify nothing by the word *Substance*, but only an uncertain supposition of we know not what; (*i.e.* of something whereof we have no particular distinct positive *Idea*), which we take to be the *substratum*, or support, of those *Ideas* we do know.¹⁷

In Book II Locke considers the same question in more detail. He here argues that the idea of substance is nothing but an unknown and purely conjectural support of qualities which we find existing. The substance of matter can thus only accurately be defined as ‘*something* wherein those many sensible Qualities, which affect our Senses, do subsist’.¹⁸ If anyone were asked to define what this *something* was that the qualities of, for example, solidity and extension cohered in, then he would, according to Locke,

Not be in a much better case, than the *Indian* before mentioned; who, saying that the World was supported by a great Elephant, was asked, what the Elephant rested on; to

¹⁵ *Disquisitions*, 105.

¹⁶ *Disquisitions*, 105.

¹⁷ Locke, *Essay*, I, iv, 18. On the question of substance in Locke’s philosophy see Michael Ayers, ‘The Ideas of Power and Substance in Locke’s Philosophy’, *Philosophical Quarterly*, 25 (1975), 1-27, reprinted in *Locke on Human Understanding*, ed. I. C. Tipton (Oxford, 1977), 77-104; Ayers, ‘Substance: Prolegomena to a Realist Theory of Identity’, *The Journal of Philosophy*, 88 (1991), 69-90; Gideon Yaffe, ‘Locke on Ideas of Substance and the Veil of Perception’, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 85 (2004), 252-72. It is interesting to note that, in the context of the antitrinitarian controversies of the 1690s, Locke’s ideas on substance were interpreted as inherently antitrinitarian: see Edward Stillingfleet, *A Discourse in Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity: with an Answer to the Late Socinian Objections against it from Scripture, Antiquity and Reason* (1697), esp. chapter 10.

¹⁸ Locke, *Essay*, II, xxiii, 5.

which his answer was, a great Tortoise: But being again pressed to know what gave support to the broad-back'd Tortoise, replied something, he knew not what.¹⁹

As Schofield has pointed out, Priestley would have encountered a direct precedent, derived from Locke, for his own position in Doddridge's lectures.²⁰ In Part I, '*On the Powers and Faculties of the Human Mind*', Doddridge stated in a corollary to definition 3: 'We can have no conception of any such substance distinct from all the properties of the being in which they inhere; for this would imply that the being itself inheres, and so on to infinity'.²¹ The references direct the students to the two passages in Locke's *Essay* referred to above. Thus, although (as Priestley readily acknowledged) Locke tends to assume in the *Essay* that solidity is essential to matter, his interrogation of the idea of substance opened the way for Priestley to dismantle the conceptual framework within which a traditional distinction between matter and spirit was understood. In fact, Priestley probably alludes directly to the passage on substance in Locke's *Essay* when explaining Michell's insight occasioned by studying Andrew Baxter's theory of matter.²² In Baxter's theory, particles of matter are bound together by an immaterial force. These particles consist of smaller particles bound by the same immaterial force and so on *ad infinitum*, so that if the particles have any existence at all they are indiscernible, every effect being produced by the immaterial force. Thus Michell,

Instead, therefore, of placing the world upon the giant, the giant upon the tortoise, and the tortoise upon he could tell not what, [...] placed the world at once upon itself; and finding it still necessary, in order to solve the appearances of nature, to admit of extended and penetrable immaterial substance, if he maintained the impenetrability of matter; and observing farther, that all we perceive by contact, &c. is this penetrable immaterial substance, and not the impenetrable one; [...] began to think that he might as well admit of *penetrable material*, as *penetrable immaterial* substance; especially as

¹⁹ Locke, *Essay*, II, xxiii, 2. The 'Indian Philosopher' and the 'Elephant' are first mentioned at *Essay*, II, xiii, 19.

²⁰ Schofield, *Mechanism and Materialism*, 265.

²¹ Doddridge, *Lectures*, 2.

²² Baxter (1686/7-1750) was a Scottish natural philosopher and metaphysician. His most important philosophical work was *An Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul* (1733), which features frequently among the references in Doddridge's lectures. See Paul Wood, 'Baxter, Andrew (1686/7-1750)', *ODNB*.

we know nothing more of the nature of substance than that it is something which supports properties.²³

Although Priestley does not fully develop the idea, and falls back on a notion of substance in other sections of the work, he is philosophically at his most interesting at the points where he extends Locke's nominalism to suggest that his own prioritising of forces over atoms necessitates a conceptual framework where empirically observed qualities have come to replace substances.

In stripping matter of its traditional properties and by attributing to it only the quality of extension and the powers of attraction and repulsion, Priestley recognised that he had blurred the boundary between matter and the operations of the deity. On this question of the relationship of the deity to the physical universe, Priestley's position in the *Disquisitions* is not entirely clear. In fact, Priestley appears to have changed his opinion between 1777 and 1782 when he published a second edition of the text. In section I of the first edition he is keen to stress that he is not arguing that the powers of attraction and repulsion are self-existent in matter:

All that my argument amounts to, is, that from whatever source these powers are derived, or by whatever being they are communicated, matter cannot exist without them; and if that superior power, or being, withdraw its influence, the substance itself necessarily ceases to exist, or is annihilated.²⁴

This is presumably in order to preserve a distinction between matter and the operations of the deity, and to avoid eliminating either matter or the deity from the universe completely. Priestley accuses Baxter of the former position. According to Priestley, in Baxter's theory the powers of resistance and cohesion are essential to matter; given that these powers are the immediate agency of the deity himself, Baxter is effectively arguing that 'there is not in nature any such thing as *matter* distinct from *the Deity*, and *his operations*'.²⁵ However, in the second edition of 1782, Priestley seems to distance

²³ *Disquisitions*, 22.

²⁴ *Disquisitions*, 7.

²⁵ *Disquisitions*, 8.

himself from this initial assertion. In section III of the second edition he writes that the question of whether the forces of attraction and repulsion inhere in matter or not lies beyond the scope of his enquiry:

how far the powers which we ascribe to it [matter] may be said to inhere in, or belong to it, or how far they are the effect of a foreign power, viz. that of the deity, concerns not my system in particular.²⁶

Yet Priestley goes on to say, in defence of the implications of the theory outlined by Boscovich, that if, in a Newtonian conception of the universe, everything is understood to be the result of the divine agency acting upon matter, it makes little difference to say that everything *is* the divine agency.²⁷ In order to resolve the point, Priestley states his own position thus: ‘On this hypothesis every thing is the *divine power*; but still, strictly speaking, every thing is not *the Deity himself*’.²⁸ The centres of attraction and repulsion are fixed by God and all action is his action, but neither the centres of attraction nor solid matter are in any way part of God himself. In this way, Priestley defends himself against the accusation of pantheism; he differentiates his own position from being ‘any thing like the opinion of Spinoza’ on the grounds that he maintains a distinction between the deity and his creation, holding ‘every inferior intelligent being’ to have ‘a consciousness distinct from that of the supreme intelligence’.²⁹

However, Priestley’s redefinition of materialism inevitably leads him to speculate, albeit tentatively, that the divine being itself may be material. Yet all that Priestley is willing to positively assert here is that the divine being exists in space, and that he has the

²⁶ *Disquisitions*, 2nd edn, vol. I, 37.

²⁷ *Disquisitions*, 2nd edn, vol. I, 40. On Newton’s conception of the relationship between God’s nature and space and time see Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England*, 91-3; J. E. McGuire, ‘Existence, Actuality and Necessity: Newton on Space and Time’, *Annals of Science*, 35 (1978), 463-508.

²⁸ *Disquisitions*, 2nd edn, vol. I, 41.

²⁹ *Disquisitions*, 2nd edn, vol. I, 42. McEvoy and McGuire believe that there is direct and indirect evidence that Priestley was familiar with Spinoza’s work and that ‘Spinoza’s position provides an illuminating framework for discussing Priestley’s thought’; however, they argue that Priestley’s position in the *Disquisitions* is differentiated from Spinoza’s by its insistence on a voluntarist conception of the deity, McEvoy and McGuire, ‘God and Nature: Priestley’s Way of Rational Dissent’, 331; 333. Conversely, P. M. Heinman holds that ‘the influence of Spinoza is doubtful’, P. M. Heinman, ‘Voluntarism and Immanence: Conceptions of Nature in Eighteenth-Century Thought’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 39.2 (1978), 271-83. I am inclined to Heinman’s view.

power of acting upon matter.³⁰ In support of the first point, Priestley appeals to the testimony of the Scriptures. In section XIV Priestley provides a list of biblical images describing the deity, not as immaterial – as the word is understood by contemporary metaphysicians – but as something filling or penetrating all things. From this he concludes that:

If our modern metaphysicians would attend a little to such passages of scripture as these, and consider what must have been the sentiments of the writers, and of those who were present at the scenes described in them [...] they would not be so much alarmed as they now are, or affect to be, at every thing like *materiality* ascribed even to the Divine Being.³¹

He cites the opinions of the Church Fathers Tertullian (c. 160-220), and Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215), which Priestley derived from the French historian Isaac de Beausobre (1659-1738), as evidence that this was the idea of the deity held by the earliest philosophical Christians.³² According to Priestley, these early commentators held the deity to be material, and would have been unable to conceive of the concept of immaterial substance employed by modern metaphysicians.

Having established these arguments on the nature of matter, Priestley proceeds to the next point of the *Disquisitions*. This is largely a restatement of the argument he had suggested two years earlier in his prefatory essay to Hartley: that man is composed of a uniform substance and that the mental powers are the result of the physical structure of the brain. Priestley's theory of matter gives an added force to this argument. It was largely the fact that the properties of inertness and solidity were thought to be incompatible with the powers of sensation, perception, and thought that had proved the strongest argument against the contention that consciousness could be a property of an organised system of matter. Now that matter has been redefined, with the powers of attraction and repulsion substituted for the properties of inertness and solidity, this objection largely disappears. Drawing again on the authority of his Newtonian method,

³⁰ *Disquisitions*, 2nd edn, vol. I, 149.

³¹ *Disquisitions*, 138; *Disquisitions*, 2nd edn, vol. I, 177-8.

³² For Priestley's acknowledgement of his debt to Beausobre see *Disquisitions*, xxix-xxx.

Priestley argues that, as the powers of sensation, perception, and thought have always been found in conjunction with a certain organised system of matter, then we can only conclude that those powers depend upon the system, at least until it can be proved that the powers are incompatible with other known properties of the same substance.³³ Priestley points to the writings of the dissenting minister Joseph Hallet (1692-1744), especially Hallet's discourse 'Of the Soul' (1729), as a precedent for his own position. However, although Hallet had argued that the immortality of the soul could not be deduced from nature, he had accepted the doctrine on the authority of revealed religion.³⁴ Priestley sets out to show that there is no evidence in the Scriptures to support the doctrine. This dual reliance on the evidence of Scripture and natural philosophy is in line with the method employed by Priestley throughout the *Disquisitions*. For Priestley, the testimony of the Scriptures is of equal authority to the results of the observation of the natural world; both the text of the Bible and the investigation of nature reveal accurate information about human nature and the nature of the universe. In this way the seemingly confusing manner in which Priestley shifts between experimental physics and scriptural exegesis is completely consistent with his epistemological framework. In section X Priestley thus quotes extensively from the Old and New Testaments in order to prove that there is no separate soul and that the thinking powers are the necessary result of the life of the body.³⁵

Priestley continues to refute a number of particular objections to his materialist system. Most of his argument here is structured around the seemingly contradictory assumption of the immaterialist system that two substances which have no properties in common can inexplicably act upon one another. Priestley traces the source of this problem to Descartes, the founder of the modern immaterial system, and then dismisses some of the ideas suggested by Descartes, Malebranche, and Leibniz to account for the interaction of mind and matter.³⁶ What is perhaps most interesting here is that, exactly as he had in his refutation of the Scottish 'common sense' philosophy, Priestley maintains a link between erroneous philosophical notions and the mysteries of orthodox theological

³³ *Disquisitions*, 25.

³⁴ *Disquisitions*, 29-31.

³⁵ *Disquisitions*, 114-33.

³⁶ *Disquisitions*, 62-4

doctrine. The inexplicable interaction of two essentially different substances, for example, Priestley compares to the theological doctrines of ‘the bread and the wine in the Lord’s supper becoming the real body and blood of Christ’ and ‘each of the three persons in the Trinity being equally God, and yet there being no more Gods than one’, significantly linking the Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation with the Protestant (and Catholic) doctrine of the Trinity.³⁷

Priestley continues to defend his thesis against the objections to materialism raised by an earlier generation of influential authors, all of whom had featured prominently in the philosophical sections of Doddridge’s lecture course. In section VIII, for example, Priestley briefly outlines the objections of William Wollaston (objections VIII-XI) and Andrew Baxter (objections XII-XIV), followed by his own positions.³⁸ This is interesting, in that it shows Priestley’s ideas developing in dialogue with thinkers well known within the intellectual culture of rational dissent. Yet Priestley also refers specifically to some of the objections to his materialism that had been raised by his contemporaries, notably Berington.³⁹ Most of Priestley’s defences against Berington’s criticisms are unclear and only partially developed. However, they seem to rest on the assumption that consciousness can be the result of an organised system of parts, without, as Berington would hold, necessarily being a property of each part of the system. Priestley criticises Berington’s attempt to argue for a physical influence between the body and the mind whilst maintaining an essential difference between matter and spirit. For Priestley, this hypothesis confounds the two substances, and ‘lays the foundation for the grossest materialism’.⁴⁰ In response to Berington’s point that, pursued to its conclusion, materialism implies that every separate particle of the brain must be conscious, Priestley draws on Hartley’s theory of vibrations to show that, if consciousness depends on a very complex vibration, then it ‘cannot possibly belong to a single *atom*, but must belong to a *vibrating system*, of some extent’.⁴¹ To Berington’s objection that materialism is incompatible with the faculty of judgment, or with any faculty of the mind which depends upon comparison, Priestley argues that if, as Berington concedes, there are no

³⁷ *Disquisitions*, 60.

³⁸ *Disquisitions*, 93-6; 96-101.

³⁹ For Berington’s initial criticisms of Priestley’s materialism see chapter 2.

⁴⁰ *Disquisitions*, 71.

⁴¹ *Disquisitions*, 87.

ideas in the mind which have not resulted from the state of the brain, then it is inconsistent to maintain that certain faculties cannot be traced to their origin in material sensations.⁴² However, Priestley subsequently argues, somewhat confusingly, that there is no reason to suppose that the brain does not have a super-added percipient or sentient power, in addition to its vibrating power, to account for these faculties.⁴³ These passages are primarily interesting in that the number of references to Berington's work in the *Disquisitions* suggests that his criticisms had a significant effect on Priestley's attempts to clarify his materialist system.

From Priestley's theses on materialism and the uniform composition of man follow a number of secondary, but no less important, theological contentions. It is here that one key intention of the *Disquisitions* becomes most explicit: Priestley's rejection of dualism clears the way for a rational interpretation (by which Priestley means both systematic and free from inexplicable mysteries) of the Bible. His materialist system provides Priestley with the epistemological and ontological foundation for his Socinian theology. In section VI Priestley argues that on his system all kinds of problematic questions haunting orthodox theology – what happens to the soul during sleep, whether the soul unites with the body at birth or during copulation, whether animals have immortal souls – simply disappear. More importantly, Priestley attributes to the system of immaterialism the development of a number of false theological doctrines, among them the Catholic ideas of purgatory and the worship of the dead, the Gnostic idea of the pre-existence of human souls, and the modern idea, derived from this, of the pre-existence of Christ, all of which have obscured the scriptural doctrine of Unitarian Christianity. All of these false doctrines are swept away by Priestley's materialist system. To the refutation of this last point (the pre-existence of Christ) Priestley devotes a number of sections of the work. The interpolation of the doctrine into Christianity is, according to Priestley, perhaps 'the greatest disservice that the introduction of philosophy [into Christianity] ever did'.⁴⁴

The argument that man is wholly material is also consistent with Priestley's ideas on the resurrection. Priestley's mortalist thesis, essentially a fusion of his materialist

⁴² *Disquisitions*, 90-1.

⁴³ *Disquisitions*, 91.

⁴⁴ *Disquisitions*, 297.

epistemology with a literalist reading of the New Testament, held that the whole man dies and is resurrected by God by a miraculous intervention at a designated future time. This is largely a development of Edmund Law's and Francis Blackburne's idea of the sleep of the soul.⁴⁵ However, the key point for Priestley is that the soul is not naturally immortal. In section XIII Priestley argues that death ought to be understood as a decomposition of physical parts resulting in the extinction, but not the annihilation, of the whole man.⁴⁶ At the resurrection the deity recomposes these physical parts so that the same body, or what Priestley (following Bonnet) calls 'the *germ* of the organical body', rises again.⁴⁷ This, Priestley argues, is consistent with the doctrine of the resurrection as described by St Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. In the second half of the work, Priestley constructs an elaborate historical argument developing the idea that immaterialism and the resulting theological doctrines relating to a separate and immortal soul were accretions into early Christianity stemming from the Alexandrine Church Fathers' synthesis of Christian doctrine and the Oriental philosophy which they had inherited from the Greeks.⁴⁸ In this respect, Priestley is following in a number of intellectual traditions, including that of early eighteenth-century free-thinkers such as John Toland (1670-1722), whose *Letters to Serena* (1704) he quotes, and that of the dissenting minister and academy tutor Theophilus Gale (1628-1679), whose *Philosophia Generalis* (1676) Priestley quotes in the *Disquisitions*.⁴⁹ Much of the historical argument Priestley derived from the Continental ecclesiastical historians Beausobre, Louis Ellies Dupin (1657-1719), Johann Lorenz von Mosheim (1694-1755), and Jacques Basnage (1653-1723).

It is important to remember that although these theological points appear to follow secondarily from the principal philosophical contentions, Priestley himself understood them as an important, if not the most important, part of the work. This is well illustrated

⁴⁵ Law's ideas on mortalism can be found in his 'Appendix concerning the Use of the Words Soul and Spirit in the Holy Scripture' added to later editions of his *Considerations*. For Blackburne's ideas see *A Short Historical View of the Controversy concerning an Intermediate State and the Separate Existence of the Soul between Death and the General Resurrection* (1765). On mortalism in the eighteenth century see B. W. Young, "'The Soul-Sleeping System': Politics and Heresy in Eighteenth-Century England", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 45 (1994), 64-81. On the wider background see Norman T. Burns, *Christian Mortalism from Tyndale to Milton* (Cambridge, 1972).

⁴⁶ *Disquisitions*, 155-66, esp. 161.

⁴⁷ *Disquisitions*, 161.

⁴⁸ *Disquisitions*, 166-347.

⁴⁹ *Disquisitions*, 169, 175; *Disquisitions*, 236.

by a letter which Priestley wrote to Joshua Toulmin (1740-1815), dissenting minister at Mary Street General Baptist Chapel, Taunton, in December 1776. In the letter Priestley informed Toulmin of the recent publication of the *Disquisitions*. His subsequent comment shows that he conceived of the argument of the book in both philosophical and theological terms; from the thesis that man is a wholly material being it immediately follows that the doctrine of the pre-existence of Christ is false: ‘You will easily guess the principal design of it [the *Disquisitions*]’, Priestley told Toulmin,

but it has rather a greater extent than the title speaks [...] You will not easily imagine the connexion; but one great object of the book is to combat the doctrine of pre-existence, and especially that of our Saviour.⁵⁰

This understanding of the book as a theological work is reflected in other comments in the letters of Priestley’s circle. Toulmin subsequently told Joseph Bretland (1742-1819) that Priestley himself had claimed the work would throw ‘great light on the Socinian controversy’.⁵¹ Lindsey evidently understood the theological aspect of the book to be paramount: he wrote to William Turner in September 1776, referring to the *Disquisitions* as ‘a tract on the mortality of the soul’.⁵² As we shall see, this theological aspect of the work remained at the forefront of discussions of the book among Priestley’s acquaintances. Before examining some of these letters in more detail, however, it is necessary to consider one further aspect of Priestley’s ideas.

Priestley on philosophical necessity

In an appendix to the *Disquisitions*, which essentially constitutes a second volume, Priestley outlined at length his theory of philosophical necessity. For Priestley, this followed as the direct consequence of the propositions established in the former work: ‘the doctrine of necessity’ is ‘the immediate result of the doctrine of the materiality of

⁵⁰ Rutt, I, i, 296.

⁵¹ Rutt, I, i, 306.

⁵² Ditchfield, 230.

man; for mechanism is the undoubted consequence of materialism'.⁵³ In Priestley's mind, both his materialism and his necessitarianism were fully consistent with his Socinian theology, and all three could be proved from the observation of the natural world and a rational interpretation of the Scriptures.⁵⁴

Priestley's use of the term 'mechanism' belies his debt to Hartley; his definition of philosophical necessity does not differ significantly from Hartley's account of the 'Mechanism or Necessity of human actions' as described in chapter 1.⁵⁵ The defining features of Priestley's necessitarianism can be conveniently summarised in three points.⁵⁶ Firstly, Priestley argues that the will, as do all other powers of the human mind, operates according to some fixed law of nature. In this way, he is continuing Hartley's project, as he understood it, to apply the method pioneered by Newton for the study of the natural world to the analysis of the human mind. Secondly, Priestley holds that motives influence the mind in a definite and invariable manner so that volitions are always determined by a preceding motive in exactly the same way in which effects are always preceded by causes in the operations of the natural world. Thirdly, Priestley argues that the whole chain of necessity can be traced to a first cause, the Deity, who sets the entire process in motion in accord with his benevolent intentions for humanity. In defence of this necessitarian position, Priestley argues, against the libertarians, that the only sense of liberty which he denies is the liberty of choosing between two or more different courses of action whilst the previous circumstances (which Priestley defines as the agent's 'state of mind' and 'views of things') remain the same.⁵⁷

The argument in support of necessitarianism upon which Priestley places most emphasis is that of cause and effect. In fact, Priestley argues that the whole doctrine of necessity can be proved solely on this point.⁵⁸ His argument here depends on the continuity he assumes between the operations of the intellectual and natural worlds.⁵⁹ He charges the libertarian with holding that effects can occur without preceding causes, a position ultimately destructive of all reasoning, firstly, because it inevitably leads to the

⁵³ *Disquisitions*, 2nd edn, vol. I, v.

⁵⁴ *Disquisitions*, 2nd edn, vol. I, v.

⁵⁵ See chapter 1.

⁵⁶ Priestley's most concise definition of his theory of necessity is at *Phil. Necessity*, 7-8.

⁵⁷ *Phil. Necessity*, 7.

⁵⁸ *Phil. Necessity*, 9.

⁵⁹ *Phil. Necessity*, 11.

conclusion that no fixed laws operate in the mental sphere and, secondly, because it undermines the only argument for the being of a God.⁶⁰ Priestley's insistence that a universal law governs both body and mind leads him to ignore the distinction, fundamental to many eighteenth-century libertarians (including Berington and Price), between 'moral' and 'physical' necessity. To Berington's argument, for example, that the 'moral influence of motives is as *certain*, though not as *necessitating* as is the physical cause', Priestley replies that this distinction is 'merely *verbal*'; as long as the mind acts '*certainly*', '*invariably*', or '*constantly*' in relation to motives then the necessitarian argument holds good.⁶¹

Most of the second half of Priestley's work is concerned with defending the moral consequences of his necessitarian doctrine. In sections VII and VIII, Priestley attempts to show that only the doctrine of necessity provides a stable foundation for the propriety of administering rewards and punishments or praise and blame.⁶² The purpose of both reward and punishment being to encourage habits and dispositions of mind conducive to virtuous action, the function of both becomes obsolete if, as in the libertarian scheme, an agent can act independently of all motives. If, Priestley argues, the power of self-determination is capable of counteracting all dispositions or habits then it effectively loses its relation to morality.⁶³ To the criticism that the theory of necessity leads to fatalism, Priestley replies, somewhat opaquely, that our own actions and determinations are necessary links in the causal chain.⁶⁴ In section IX, Priestley follows Hartley in arguing that virtue is only further encouraged by the conviction that God is the sole cause of all things.⁶⁵ In the necessitarian scheme, 'we see God in every thing, and may be said to see every thing in God'; this naturally produces humility and annihilates the tendency to bear ill-will towards others.⁶⁶ To the necessitarian, 'the idea of *real absolute evil* wholly disappears' since all apparent evils are recognised as contributory to 'the greater

⁶⁰ *Phil. Necessity*, 15.

⁶¹ *Phil. Necessity*, 18; see also 59-60.

⁶² The argument was not new to Priestley: whilst a student at Daventry he had delivered an oration to the debating society on 'liberty no foundation for praise or blame', see chapter 1.

⁶³ *Phil. Necessity*, 58.

⁶⁴ *Phil. Necessity*, 99.

⁶⁵ *Phil. Necessity*, 108; see chapter 1.

⁶⁶ *Phil. Necessity*, 108-9.

good', being necessary links in a divinely ordained system.⁶⁷ Priestley does not flinch from the fact that this makes God the author of sin.⁶⁸ However, he maintains the moral goodness of God on the grounds that God's intentions are benevolent. For Priestley, even apparent evil perpetuated by God is morally justified as long as the consequence is happiness: 'Whatever terminates in good, philosophically speaking, is good'.⁶⁹ On these grounds, Priestley defends the moral consequences of the necessitarian scheme against Hume (who, Priestley claims, indicts God with moral turpitude) and Hobbes (who justifies the divine conduct on account of power, rather than benevolence).⁷⁰ Furthermore, Priestley refutes any potential objections to his thesis by claiming that any scheme which acknowledges the divine prescience unavoidably makes God the author of sin. He refuses to acknowledge the distinction advanced by Wollaston, and repeated by Berington, between God's foreseeing an event and God's being the cause of that event.⁷¹

Priestley is here explicit on the position he had reached on the question of the foundation of virtue. In an important passage, he writes that: 'the proper *foundation*, or rather the *ultimate object*, of virtue is *general utility*, since it consists of such conduct, as tends to make intelligent creatures the most truly happy'.⁷² What is interesting about this statement is that, from the very outset, Priestley can effectively eschew the question concerning the 'foundation' of virtue and focus instead on its 'object'. Priestley's empiricism commits him to abandoning the possibility that an *a priori* conception of God's nature – as opposed to an active idea of God's will as manifested in the physical universe – could act as the foundation of moral action.⁷³ Having established, from a reasoned analysis of the natural world and from Scripture, that the deity is concerned with promoting the happiness of his creatures, it follows that to act virtuously is simply to act in accordance with the will of the deity, that is to act in a way which produces the greatest amount of happiness both for oneself and for others.

⁶⁷ *Phil. Necessity*, 110.

⁶⁸ *Phil. Necessity*, 117.

⁶⁹ *Phil. Necessity*, 115.

⁷⁰ *Phil. Necessity*, 118-20.

⁷¹ *Phil. Necessity*, 126; see chapter 2.

⁷² *Phil. Necessity*, 120.

⁷³ Priestley later wrote in the second edition of his *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever*, in relation to 'the idea concerning the *foundation of morals*', that 'I perceive no necessary connection between intelligence, as such, and any particular *intention* or *object* whatever', *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever. Part I*, 2nd edn (Birmingham, 1787), 189.

As was the case in relation to his materialism, Priestley is at pains to stress that his necessitarianism is sanctioned by the doctrine of the Scriptures. In section XI he lists several passages from the Old and New Testaments to show that God was considered by the sacred writers as the author of the works of men, both good and evil. Even the death of Christ is always spoken of in the gospel accounts as being ‘most expressly *decreed*’ and ‘*appointed by God*’.⁷⁴ Priestley is also keen to stress that such events are most often represented as coming to pass, not by divine intervention, but in the common course of providence.⁷⁵ Although this does not prove that the sacred writers were necessitarians, in the sense in which Priestley has defined the term, it does illustrate that they regarded God as the ultimate cause of all events.

In the final section of the work, Priestley attempts to distinguish his own philosophical necessity from the doctrine of predestination held by the Calvinists. Although the two schemes may be ostensibly similar in some respects, the only genuine point of comparison between them is that both hold that the future happiness or misery of all men is foreknown by the Deity.⁷⁶ According to Priestley, the essential difference between them concerns their respective attitudes to man’s role within this scheme; the doctrine of philosophical necessity assigns a more active part to the agent than Calvinist doctrine. Whereas in the necessitarian system man’s actions and dispositions are ‘the necessary and sole means of his present and future happiness’, in the Calvinist scheme man, being in his nature sinful and unregenerate, is wholly passive in the act of regeneration.⁷⁷ The difference is that necessitarianism allows for the gradual education and perfectibility of man as he strives towards his own happiness by conforming his actions to the will of God, whereas Calvinism allows only for the passive reception of God’s grace through a wholly arbitrary act of divine intervention. Priestley’s principal focus here is on the moral effects which each doctrine is likely to have on its adherents. Whereas the Calvinist is unlikely to give any attention to his moral conduct, his personal happiness being wholly dependent on the arbitrary will of the deity, the necessitarian will exert himself to the utmost, as he knows that his exertions directly and necessarily

⁷⁴ *Phil. Necessity*, 141.

⁷⁵ *Phil. Necessity*, 144-8.

⁷⁶ *Phil. Necessity*, 153.

⁷⁷ *Phil. Necessity*, 154.

determine his happiness. The necessitarian, as defined by Priestley, further rejects the doctrines of original sin and atonement. Calvinism rejects the popular sense of free will, i.e. the power of doing as we please, and in this sense cannot be reconciled with the doctrine of Scripture. Priestley thus identifies the true doctrine of philosophical necessity as a relatively recent development, and credits Thomas Hobbes with its first clear expression.⁷⁸ Among the Calvinists only the American Congregationalist Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) and the Church of England clergyman Augustus Toplady (1740-1778) have come close to expressing the true philosophical doctrine of necessity, and yet their own systems, Priestley argues, would be virtually unrecognisable to most Calvinists.⁷⁹

Philosophical debate in Priestley's and his circle's correspondence

Priestley's decision to clarify the distinction between his own system and the predestination of the Calvinists was most likely prompted by a letter he had received from Augustus Toplady following the publication of his *Examination*.⁸⁰ Toplady strongly commended Priestley's refutation, as he saw it, of Reid, Beattie, and Oswald, but rebuked him for his occasional criticisms of the Calvinists, who, he advised Priestley, 'so far as concerns the article of necessity, are your actual friends and allies'.⁸¹ Priestley subsequently sent Toplady a copy of the *Disquisitions*, requesting his correspondent's opinion of the work. Toplady replied that he agreed wholeheartedly with Priestley's necessitarianism but found his materialism 'equally absurd in itself, and Atheistical in its tendency'.⁸² Toplady was particularly critical of Priestley's attempt to find scriptural support for his materialist thesis: 'if we take scripture into account', observed Toplady,

⁷⁸ *Phil. Necessity*, 160.

⁷⁹ *Phil. Necessity*, 160.

⁸⁰ On Toplady see the anonymous *A Memoir of some Principal Circumstances in the Life and Death of the Reverend and Learned Augustus Montague Toplady, B.A. Late Vicar of Broad Henbury, Devon*, 2nd edn (1778); Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England*, 76-8.

⁸¹ Rutt, I, i, 259. Toplady was not the last of Priestley's readers to equate his necessitarianism with Calvinism: in his *History of Philosophy*, Alfred Weber (1868-1958) noted, in an interesting misreading, that 'Priestley appeals to the Bible, and believes that his system can be reconciled with Christianity and even with Calvinism', Alfred Weber, *History of Philosophy*, trans. Frank Thilly (New York, 1925), 332.

⁸² Rutt, I, i, 310.

‘not all the subtlety, nor all the violence of criticism, will ever be able to establish your system on that ground’.⁸³

In fact, Priestley’s letters reveal many more interesting details concerning the immediate responses to, and the composition of, the *Disquisitions*. In the previous chapter, I depicted Priestley, in his development of Hartleian sensationalism and in his polemical rejection of Scottish common sense theories, as pursuing a somewhat isolated intellectual trajectory within rational dissent. Yet Priestley’s and his circle’s surviving correspondence from the late 1770s and early 1780s indicates that his radical ideas on materialism and philosophical necessity were being developed within a small network of likeminded dissenting ministers. A number of these figures played an important collaborative role, corresponding with Priestley on particular aspects of the work. In 1778 Priestley prepared a selection of ‘Illustrations of some Particulars in the Disquisitions on Matter and Spirit’ in response to remarks he had received on copies of his work circulated among his acquaintances prior to its publication. In the ‘Illustrations’ he noted that he had ‘put copies of the work [i.e. the *Disquisitions*], after it was printed off, into the hands of several of my friends, both well and ill affected to my general system, that I might have the benefit of their remarks, and take advantage of them’.⁸⁴ These ‘Illustrations’ themselves were then circulated among Priestley’s acquaintances who had read the *Disquisitions*.⁸⁵

One of the most important of these correspondents was Newcome Cappe. The extant details of Cappe’s biography suggest that he had followed a similar intellectual trajectory to Priestley, developing his system of Christianity in response to the criticisms of unbelievers. At Northampton under Doddridge, Cappe had carefully studied the English and French Deists, concluding that their strictures were levelled only at the false accretions to Christianity.⁸⁶ Despite his time at Glasgow and connections with Leechman and Smith, he does not appear to have been drawn to Hutcheson’s moral sense theory or,

⁸³ Rutt, I, i, 311.

⁸⁴ *Free Discussion*, 229.

⁸⁵ Rutt, I, i, 317.

⁸⁶ Cappe, *Critical Remarks*, vol. I, xv. Cappe later published an anonymous defence of Priestley’s *History of the Corruptions of Christianity* (1786) in response to a criticism of the work by Samuel Badcock in the *MR* of June 1783.

unlike Walker, Kenrick, or Wodrow, to have had much interest in Scottish philosophy.⁸⁷ According to his wife, Cappe, like Priestley, studied Hartley's *Observations* closely, leaving among his papers extensive shorthand notes on Hartley's theory; he thought 'very highly' of the work and even intended to produce a new edition.⁸⁸ Between the years 1761 and 1785 Cappe corresponded 'very frequently' with Priestley.⁸⁹ What has survived of these letters testifies not only to shared intellectual concerns between them, but also to active collaboration on Priestley's theological and philosophical works dating back to the early 1770s.

One particular example of this collaboration concerns the manuscript of a set of theological lectures which later became the first printed volume of Priestley's *Institutes*, published in 1772.⁹⁰ In December 1770 Priestley was in the process of preparing the manuscript to be sent to the printers. In a letter to Lindsey of the same month, he expressed his hope that Lindsey had seen the lectures, subsequently instructing him to forward them to Cappe at York, who, he wrote, 'is to peruse them before they come back to me'.⁹¹ By January of the next year, the manuscript was back in Priestley's possession. A number of later comments by Priestley suggest that Cappe's suggestions had a significant influence on the final text.⁹² The second volume of the *Institutes* evidently passed through this same process of collaborative revision. Priestley wrote to Cappe in February 1772 asking him to read the work.⁹³ Cappe evidently agreed: Priestley wrote to Lindsey in May requesting him to 'look into' what he had written of the second volume of the *Institutes*, noting that 'The papers are at present in Mr Cappe's hands'.⁹⁴ Cappe's suggestions were delayed for over two years as a result of problems he was experiencing with his eyesight.⁹⁵ In March 1774 Priestley told Cappe that he valued his remarks so much that he would rather wait for half a year than proceed without them. He assured Cappe:

⁸⁷ On Cappe's Glasgow connections see chapter 2.

⁸⁸ *Critical Remarks*, vol. I, lxxv. See also Catherine Cappe to Lant Carpenter, 5 June 1802, HMO MS Lant Carpenter 1 (42).

⁸⁹ *Critical Remarks*, vol. I, xxxii.

⁹⁰ On the composition of the *Institutes* see chapter 1.

⁹¹ *Letters to Lindsey*, 6 December 1770.

⁹² Rutt, I, i, 158.

⁹³ Rutt, I, i, 158.

⁹⁴ *Letters to Lindsey*, May 1772.

⁹⁵ *Critical Remarks*, vol. I, xxxix.

I am so truly sensible of your superior judgment in these things, that there is hardly a hint that you have suggested which I have not adopted in what is yet printed of the Institutes.⁹⁶

Following his return from the continent in January 1775, Priestley wrote to Cappe with news of the publication of his edition of Hartley. Priestley told Cappe on this occasion that he would have done ‘nothing in the metaphysical way’ without seeking Cappe’s advice, were it not for Cappe’s continuing health problems. He continued: ‘there is none of my acquaintance that I could expect to enter into my views so much as yourself, and who is at the same time so capable of assisting me’, and assured Cappe that he would send him manuscript drafts of all of his future publications.⁹⁷ In April 1777 Priestley wrote informing Cappe of his progress on the *Disquisitions*. The letter indicates that Cappe, although accepting the doctrine of necessity, was not willing to follow Priestley in developing Hartley’s associationism into a complete theory of materialism:

I have now in the press a pretty large metaphysical work, as mentioned in the list of my books in the volume on Air. It is written with great freedom, and I flatter myself you will not dislike the latter part of it, which contains my illustrations of the doctrine of necessity, though you will hardly go with me through the other, in which I endeavour to prove that man has no soul besides his brain; yet Mr Lindsey and Mr. Jebb, who have seen the whole work, agree with me in every thing. I mean to have it printed some time before it be published, and shall send you one of the first copies, to have the benefit of your remarks.⁹⁸

Five months later, Priestley wrote to Cappe requesting him to proof-read the work, and emphasising again the potential differences in their opinions.⁹⁹ Notwithstanding these differences, however, Priestley’s comments suggest that Cappe’s criticisms and suggestions had a significant influence on the development of his ideas. A number of the

⁹⁶ Rutt, I, i, 231.

⁹⁷ Rutt, I, i, 265.

⁹⁸ Rutt, I, i, 299. The ‘volume on Air’ is *Experiments and Observations on Different Kinds of Air*, 3 vols (1777), vol. III.

⁹⁹ Rutt, I, i, 300.

passages in the ‘Illustrations’ clarifying Priestley’s materialist system were most likely responses to some of the points raised by Cappe.

Priestley’s surviving letters to Joseph Bretland, dissenting minister at Exeter, also indicate that the correspondence between them included a substantial discussion of philosophical topics.¹⁰⁰ Bretland had studied at the second dissenting academy at Exeter under Micajah Towgood (1700-1792), Samuel Merivale (1715-1771), and John Hogg;¹⁰¹ he later became a dissenting minister at the Mint Meeting House where he adopted Unitarian principles, denying the Trinity and affirming the humanity of Christ. In 1773 Bretland wrote to Priestley outlining his objections to the doctrine of the penetrability of matter, a summary of which he had most likely read in Priestley’s *History of Vision, Light, and Colours*.¹⁰² Unfortunately, Bretland’s original letter does not appear to have survived, yet it is possible to glean something of his opinions from two extant replies from Priestley. On 7 March, Priestley wrote to Bretland, noting that ‘The objections you make to the hypothesis of the penetrability of matter are very ingenious, and not easily answered’.¹⁰³ Priestley responded to Bretland’s objections by explaining the nominalism informing Michell’s theory of matter:

Mr. Michell supposes that wherever the properties or powers of any substance are, there is the substance itself, something that we call *substance* being necessary to the support of any properties; but what any substance is, devoid of all properties, we cannot, from the nature of the thing, have any idea whatever; since all the notices that we receive of any substance are communicated to us by means of its properties, and such as bear some relation to our senses, which are the inlets to all our knowledge. And any property may be ascribed to any substance that does not suppose the absence of some other property.¹⁰⁴

Bretland, like Cappe, was clearly an admirer of Hartley’s philosophy. Priestley wrote to Bretland again in December 1777, noting that ‘of all my acquaintance, I consider you as

¹⁰⁰ According to Benjamin Mardon, all of Bretland’s letters to Priestley were destroyed in the Birmingham riots of 1791, Rutt, I, i, 191.

¹⁰¹ John Hogg was minister at the Mint Meeting 1772-1789 and afterwards a banker at Exeter, see Jonathan Frayne, ‘Exeter Academy 1760-1771’, *Devon and Cornwall Notes and Queries*, 4 (1906), 108-11.

¹⁰² Rutt, I, i, 189-91.

¹⁰³ Rutt, I, i, 189.

¹⁰⁴ Rutt, I, i, 190.

most likely to enter deeply into Hartley's theory, and contribute to the farther investigation of that important subject'. Bretland had evidently written to Priestley previously explaining his understanding of Hartley's theory; Priestley continues, in a rather pedagogical tone: 'I am satisfied from what you say that you clearly understand his theory, which few do, and are apprised of the very extensive application of it'. Despite his concerns over the force theory of matter, Bretland, presumably under the influence of Hartley, had, at least to Priestley's mind, adopted the necessitarian scheme. Priestley told Bretland to expect copies of the *Disquisitions* and *Philosophical Necessity* through his bookseller Joseph Johnson, predicting that, although the work would 'rather shock and offend many of [his] friends', Bretland might be more receptive to its arguments: 'Many', wrote Priestley, 'cannot be reconciled to the doctrine of Necessity; but thus, if I mistake not, you have long been with me'.¹⁰⁵ Bretland subsequently read and drafted a series of remarks on the *Disquisitions* which he then sent to Priestley. In June 1778, Priestley wrote to Bretland thanking him for these remarks, noting that they were 'very ingenious', and promising to use them when he revised the work.¹⁰⁶ Bretland was not the only of Priestley's correspondents to raise questions concerning Michell's and Boscovich's theories. 'Almost every body', Priestley told Bretland in the same letter, 'smiles at my notion of matter'.¹⁰⁷ In a set of 'Additional Illustrations' Priestley recorded that 'Several of my friends have proposed to me queries concerning the *physical indivisible points*, of which I have sometimes supposed matter to consist'.¹⁰⁸ The long passage on the nature of matter in this section is almost certainly Priestley's reply to the queries raised by Bretland and others on this topic.¹⁰⁹ Priestley's surviving correspondence with Bretland and Cappe thus provides a glimpse into the way in which his ideas on materialism and philosophical necessity were developed in dialogue with other rational dissenters in his circle.

Beyond Priestley's immediate circle of correspondents his ideas on materialism and philosophical necessity generated lively debate. Among those to whom Priestley sent a copy of the *Disquisitions* was Joshua Toulmin. A letter from Toulmin to Bretland of 30 December 1777 demonstrates that Toulmin was, at first, equivocal in his endorsement of

¹⁰⁵ Rutt, I, i, 302.

¹⁰⁶ Rutt, I, i, 317.

¹⁰⁷ Rutt, I, i, 304.

¹⁰⁸ *Free Discussion*, 242.

¹⁰⁹ *Free Discussion*, 243-56.

Priestley's ideas.¹¹⁰ The letter illustrates that Toulmin was concerned that Priestley had not done enough to disassociate necessitarianism from infidelity. The practical application of the doctrine of philosophical necessity, Toulmin felt, could be problematic: he enquired of Bretland 'what answer [Priestley] would give to a drunkard, or any other vicious character, whom he was tenderly admonishing, that should allege the plea of necessity to extenuate his guilt'.¹¹¹ Eight months later, however, Toulmin had evidently become more receptive to Priestley's ideas. On 19 August 1778 he admitted to John Sturch (*d.* 1794), minister to the Pyle Street congregation, Newport, that Priestley's argument for philosophical necessity had made him 'more than half a convert to his scheme'. Concerning the doctrine of materialism, Toulmin felt that 'the Phenomena of human nature appears to me to give, at least, great support to [Priestley's] Idea of the human constitution'. Toulmin subsequently commented that '[t]he Historical part of [the] book on Spirit relative to the rise of the notion of X's pre-existence' seemed 'particularly to merit the attention & consideration of those who embrace that sentiment', despite his opinion that the historical sections of the book were 'independent of the truth or falsehood of [the] general theory concerning Matter and Spirit'.¹¹² There is some further evidence that Priestley's ideas were well received among Unitarians in the south-west. In July 1779 Priestley travelled to Lypstone near Exeter to preach his sermon *The Doctrine of Divine Influence on the Human Mind* at the ordination of Thomas Jervis. As I have shown in chapter 1, the sermon attempted to illustrate Hartley's theory of the mechanistic nature of the mind through an analysis of two New Testament parables.¹¹³ Priestley recorded in a letter to Lindsey that he had 'found many steady Socinians and several Materialists' in the region.¹¹⁴ Others, however, were more resistant to Priestley's ideas: Micajah Towgood, minister of George's Meeting in Exeter and an Arian, who had been present at Jervis's ordination, withdrew his original request to print the ordination sermon as he imagined it was 'intended to support the doctrine of Necessity'.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ An extract from the letter is reproduced in Rutt I, i, 303. Rutt notes that his source was a copy of the original manuscript by Benjamin Mardon.

¹¹¹ Rutt, I, i, 303.

¹¹² Joshua Toulmin to John Sturch, 19 August 1778, DWL MS 12.45, ff.130-1.

¹¹³ See chapter 1.

¹¹⁴ The original letter from Priestley has not survived, however Lindsey transcribed a section from it in a letter of his own to William Tayleur, Royal Society MS 654, f. 16.

¹¹⁵ Theophilus Lindsey to William Tayleur, 17 July 1779, Royal Society MS 654, f. 16.

Lindsey served as something of a publicist for Priestley, keeping a network of correspondents across the country informed of Priestley's literary activities. In December 1777 Lindsey wrote to Tayleur recommending Priestley's *Disquisitions*.¹¹⁶ Tayleur subsequently read the work, but whether he was convinced by Priestley's arguments is unclear. In his reply to Lindsey he predicted, correctly, that Priestley's materialism would meet with forceful resistance as a result of its theological implications:

They who admit the true scriptural doctrine concerning death and the resurrection of the dead, and who attend to common appearances, would perhaps easily allow the probability of Dr. Priestley's hypothesis with respect to the nature of man, did it not strike at the root of the doctrine of the pre-existence of Christ.

On Priestley's doctrine of philosophical necessity, Tayleur was more overtly sceptical: 'I do not expect to see the subject cleared', he admitted to Lindsey, 'till learned men agree about the words *will, volition, willing, &c.* Dr. P. commends so highly Collins's tract, that I wonder he takes no notice of Dr. Clarke's answer to it'.¹¹⁷

A more detailed response to Priestley's necessitarianism and its theological implications can be found in a letter from James Wodrow to Samuel Kenrick.¹¹⁸ On 22 October 1784 Wodrow informed Kenrick that he had 'been reading last week D^r Priestley's book on Necessity which is a very clear & strong book on that side of the Question'. Wodrow had presumably not encountered any of the published responses to Priestley's argument; he told Kenrick of his surprise that 'nobody has answered it in England', conjecturing that 'the learned think the subject exhausted'. Wodrow had studied the history of the debate over the freedom of the will as a philosophy student under Hutcheson in the 1740s. He complained to Kenrick that he had found very little of novelty in Priestley's arguments, excepting the way in which Priestley had attempted to connect his necessitarianism with a mechanistic theory of the mind; in this respect, Wodrow told Kenrick, Priestley had 'added something to those who have gone before him & exhibited a more consistent and complete System than any other necessitarian'.

¹¹⁶ Ditchfield, 251.

¹¹⁷ Rutt, I, i, 315.

¹¹⁸ On the background to this correspondence see chapter 2.

Wodrow was inclined towards libertarianism. Although he had inherited a necessitarian position from Hutcheson, he had subsequently changed his mind (in the opposite direction to Priestley) to embrace the doctrine of philosophical liberty. Wodrow admitted, however, to being ‘apt sometimes to look upon it as a metaphysical nicety about which both sides are agreed if they understood one another or a Question out of the reach of the human mind which can never be decided’. Interestingly, Wodrow found Priestley’s attempt to anchor his necessitarian theory within a theological framework the most compelling aspect of the work; he told Kenrick that ‘D^r. P^r. chap^r. on Prescience & his connecting his necessity with religion & Piety pleased me better than //perhaps// any other part of the book’. However, Wodrow subsequently raises the problematic point that Priestley’s necessitarianism excludes any particular agency of the deity from the workings of the universe. He questions whether Priestley’s view that the divine being is the only agent in nature is, in effect, any different from conflating nature and the deity, whether Priestley’s God is any different from ‘the Nature about which the Atheists speak so much’. ‘If there really be an absolute invariable irresistible fatality’, Wodrow asked Kenrick, ‘what sort of Providence, care or agency continues to be exercised about the Universe by its maker?’ Woodrow continues:

His work //of Providence// is over & was from all eternity The machine once set a going can never go wrong & he seems to remain not as the supreme director & governor but[?] spectator of its invariable motions.¹¹⁹

Wodrow proceeds to quote a passage from Lucretius’s *De Rerum Natura* describing the separation between man and the deity.¹²⁰ The point he is making is, presumably, that Priestley’s theory, although intended to reconcile philosophy and revelation, could as

¹¹⁹ Wodrow to Kenrick, 22 October 1784, DWL MS 24.157 (84). Samuel Badcock had made a very similar point four years earlier, see Badcock, *A Slight Sketch*, 27-8. For a modern account of Priestley’s materialism in the context of Epicureanism see Matthew Niblett, ‘Man, Morals, and Matter: Epicurus and Materialist Thought in England from John Toland to Joseph Priestley’, in *Epicureanism in the Enlightenment*, ed. Neven Leddy and Avi Lifschitz (Oxford, forthcoming, 2009), 43-60, esp. 56-60.

¹²⁰ The passage that Wodrow quotes is from *De Rerum Natura*, II, ll. 646-65. It reads, in the Loeb translation, ‘For the very nature of divinity must necessarily enjoy immortal life in the deepest peace, far removed and separated from our troubles; for without any pain, without danger, itself mighty by its own resources, needing us not at all, it is neither propitiated with services nor touched by wrath’, Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, II, ll. 646-65, Loeb edn, trans. W. H. D. Rouse (London, 1924), 131.

easily lead to a form of philosophical deism, or even to atheism. In the final part of Wodrow's letter, he reflected on Priestley's attempt to distinguish his own theory from that of the Calvinists. Wodrow was here unimpressed: 'In the chapter on the Difference between his own Opinion and Predestination I am afraid he scarce does justice to the poor Calvinists'. He criticised Priestley for introducing the Calvinist positions on original sin, despite the fact that these were, strictly speaking, irrelevant to their defence of philosophical necessity. Like Toplady, Wodrow evidently thought little of Priestley's recourse to scriptural arguments; the arguments from Scripture in support of his own theory, Wodrow observed, Priestley 'very wisely neglects or gives up'.¹²¹

However, Lindsey's letters in particular do suggest that Priestley's ideas, particularly his theory of philosophical necessity, were, in the months following the publication of the *Disquisitions*, gaining converts among rational dissenters. In the letter to Tayleur, Lindsey continues to describe Priestley's necessitarianism as 'a doctrine to w^h. D^r Hartley's work has inclined many'.¹²² Priestley himself, in October 1778, observed that a 'great majority of the more intelligent, serious, and virtuous, of my acquaintance among men of letters, are necessarians'.¹²³ In April of the same year, he told the dissenting minister at Kendal, Caleb Rotheram (1738-1796), who thought differently to Priestley on materialism and necessity, that he had 'many respectable abettors'.¹²⁴ Early in 1778 Lindsey wrote again to Tayleur informing him that, at least according to Joseph Johnson, 'D^r Priestley's *Disquisitions* and Appendix have sold very well'.¹²⁵ Four months later in May 1778 Lindsey told William Turner that the *Disquisitions* 'continue to sell well, and are generally well received, much better than was expected'.¹²⁶

However, one very significant rational dissenter in Priestley's circle was not won over by Priestley's arguments. Both the most voluminous and the most critical of Priestley's correspondents was the dissenting minister Richard Price. Between May and

¹²¹ Wodrow to Kenrick, 22 October 1784, DWL MS 24.157 (84).

¹²² Ditchfield, 251.

¹²³ *Free Discussion*, 388.

¹²⁴ Rutt, I, i, 315. Rutt conjectured that Rotheram was the author of 'An Essay on the Distinction between the Soul and Body of Man', *New Annual Register* (1781) and 'a small tract' entitled 'The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity invalidated'. The latter work might have been *The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity briefly invalidated* (1781), published anonymously, but now attributed to the mathematician and surgeon John Dawson (1735-1820), Rutt, I, i, 314.

¹²⁵ Ditchfield, 252.

¹²⁶ Ditchfield, 257.

October of 1778 Price and Priestley exchanged a number of letters on the *Disquisitions* which were later published, along with the ‘Illustrations’ and three letters by Priestley to others of his antagonists Samuel Kenrick, John Whitehead, and Samuel Horsley, as *A Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism, and Philosophical Necessity* (1778). Before turning to these letters themselves, however, it is necessary to consider in some detail the prior development of Price’s own philosophical system.

Richard Price, Priestley, and the Scots

The philosophical work of Richard Price, although little studied by recent historians of philosophy, has received substantial critical attention.¹²⁷ In the following section I shall confine myself to two aspects of Price’s thought: firstly, I will show how Price developed a position fundamentally opposed to Priestley on the subjects of moral philosophy, the freedom of the will, and materialism, and then explain how these differences informed the debate between them in the 1778 correspondence; secondly, I will explore Price’s connections with the Scots in order to extend the picture of intellectual links between the Scots and the English rational dissenters developed in the previous two chapters.

Price’s principal contribution to eighteenth-century philosophy was *A Review of the Principal Questions and Difficulties in Morals* (1758).¹²⁸ The starting point for Price’s work on ethics is his opposition to Hutcheson’s moral sense theory, and here, at

¹²⁷ David Fate Norton and Manfred Kuehn refer briefly and dismissively to Price’s ‘dogmatic and outmoded platonism’ in their chapter, ‘The Foundations of Morality’, in Haakonssen (2006), vol. II, 941-86, 971. Much academic study of Price in the twentieth century was stimulated by the work of D. D. Raphael, who edited a reprint of the third edition of Price’s *Review* in 1948. A new impression of this edition was published in 1974. Raphael’s introduction provides a good summary of Price’s philosophical system: see Richard Price, *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*, ed. D. D. Raphael (Oxford, 1974), xiv-lit. The second impression contains a fairly extensive bibliography of secondary sources on Price published prior to 1974. The most important commentaries on Price’s philosophy since 1974 are D. O. Thomas, *The Honest Mind: The Thought and Work of Richard Price* (Oxford, 1977), especially chapters 2-4 which consider the theological, epistemological, and ethical aspects of Price’s philosophy; Rivers, vol. II, 227-37. See also John Stephens, ‘The Epistemological Strategy of Price’s *Review of Morals*’, *E&D*, 5 (1986), 39-50; ‘Conscience and the Epistemology of Morals: Richard Price’s Debt to Joseph Butler’, *E&D*, 19 (2000), 133-46; Nicholas Hunt-Bull, ‘Richard Price and Francis Hutcheson: Does a Moral Sense Theory make Ethics Arbitrary?’, *E&D*, 23 (2004-7), 24-44; Niblett, ‘Moral Philosophy, Republican Thought, and the Intellectual Culture of Liberal Dissent in England’, 58-94.

¹²⁸ A corrected second edition of the work appeared in 1769 and a third edition, with further corrections and an Appendix containing additional notes and a ‘Dissertation on the Deity’, in 1787. The third edition omitted the words ‘and Difficulties’ from the title. Quotations here will be from Raphael’s 1977 edition, unless otherwise stated.

least, Price and Priestley are on common ground. Like Priestley, Price objects to Hutcheson's theory because it grounds morality on a sense, and thus makes our knowledge of right and wrong dependent on 'an *implanted* and *arbitrary* principle'.¹²⁹ However, whereas Priestley was never explicitly clear, in any philosophical sense, about why he objected to an innate moral sense, Price explains his aversion to the theory in some detail. His problem is that grounding our ideas of right and wrong in a moral sense makes moral rectitude signify nothing in the objects themselves but only certain effects produced in us by the contemplation of particular actions. This makes virtue arbitrary in the sense that the opposite actions might have excited the same effects if God had only chosen to form us one way rather than another. For Price, this makes Hutcheson's theory wholly unsatisfactory. Rejecting the idea of the moral sense, therefore, he poses the question: 'What is the power within us that perceives the distinctions of *right* and *wrong*?', to which Price's own solution is 'the UNDERSTANDING'.¹³⁰ Here, again, it may seem as though Price and Priestley are pursuing a similar project in that they are both attempting to formulate a rational explanation of moral judgments in opposition to explanations grounded on a moral sense. However, it soon becomes clear that the way they go about this is radically different.

Whereas Priestley had attempted to refute the moral sense theory by placing a greater emphasis on the process of sense perception and by providing a rational and theologically grounded explanation of the workings of this process through his adoption of Hartley's theory of association, Price had attempted to break the link between morality and sense perception altogether, aligning moral judgments more closely with the rational processes of the mind itself. In the first chapter of the *Review*, Price develops his own concept of the understanding, which essentially constitutes a criticism of the whole Lockean system of epistemology. At the outset of his work, Price defines the understanding as 'the faculty within us that discerns *truth*, and that compares all the objects of thought, and *judges* of them'.¹³¹ However, the understanding, for Price, has a more extensive role than that of merely reasoning, in the sense of compounding, dividing, abstracting, or enlarging ideas previously in the mind. The understanding is capable of

¹²⁹ Price, *Review*, 14.

¹³⁰ *Review*, 17.

¹³¹ *Review*, 18.

generating wholly new ideas, and in this sense is distinct from either of the two Lockean faculties of sensation or reflection. Price contends that many of our most important simple ideas – among them he lists notions used in physics including substance, duration, space, infinity, contingency, and causation – are perceived intuitively by the understanding.¹³² He follows Hume in arguing that by observation we can infer only the constant conjunction of events, not a necessary connection between them; however, Price goes on to assert that an intuitive perception of the understanding leads us to the certainty that one event is the cause of another.¹³³ Similarly, for Price, sense experience can only discover the accidents and sensible qualities of things; it is only through an intuition of the understanding that we can discover the distinction between substance and accident. A good indication of the difference between Price and Priestley here is the way in which they respectively appeal to Newton's laws in support of their different epistemological systems. Priestley, as we have seen, constantly appeals to Newton to sanction his own empirical method. For Price, Newton's three laws of motion owe very little to experience, for no one has ever observed any portion of matter devoid of gravity, or any body that would acquire motion after the impressing of a new force upon it without any discoverable cause. Newton's laws must thus be attributed to a wholly different faculty, and one vastly superior to the faculty of sense.¹³⁴

To the power of the understanding Price also attributes our ideas of moral right and wrong. These are, in Price's scheme, simple ideas, perceived immediately by the mind, and for which no reason can be given. This is, of course, the antithesis of Priestley's own position. Whereas Priestley, as we have seen, traced the development of the conscience, or the moral sense, down to the experiences of pleasure and pain occasioned by sensations (and thus made moral ideas to be complex),¹³⁵ Price holds that our ideas of moral rectitude are intuitions of the understanding into the natures of the actions themselves, and thus that they have very little to do with sense perception. For Price, ideas arising from the powers of sensation and ideas arising from our intuition of the nature of things are of distinctly different kinds, and Price make a clear value

¹³² As Raphael points out, 'ideas', for Price, means both conceptions and real universals, *Review*, xvi.

¹³³ *Review*, 34.

¹³⁴ *Review*, 35.

¹³⁵ See chapter 1.

judgment about these two different kinds of knowledge. Although Price concedes that sensations of pleasure and pain accompany perceptions of vice and virtue, it is important to recognise that these are merely effects and not the perceptions themselves. If our ideas of right and wrong originate in the effects of sensation, then it is absurd, according to Price, to apply them to actions, these being of an essentially different nature to ‘modes of consciousness’ or the ‘feelings of a sentient being’, in exactly the same way that the idea of colour (being a secondary quality) is essentially different to the idea of body (being a primary quality).¹³⁶ Locating the source of moral rectitude in the effects produced in the agent thus leads to the conclusion that actions in themselves are indifferent to morality. This is certainly how Price would have thought of Priestley’s rejection of ‘real absolute evil’, since in Priestley’s scheme the rectitude of an action is subordinate to the happiness it produces in an agent. For Price it is undoubtedly true that, as Priestley holds, human beings desire happiness; however, this is not in itself enough to explain why humans approve or disapprove of certain actions. There must be something in the nature of the action, as opposed to something in its effect, which necessitates our approval or disapproval of it as rational beings. Furthermore, Price holds that if all actions are ‘*in themselves indifferent*’ it follows that the deity, who perceives this, cannot approve or disapprove of any of his own actions or of the actions of his creatures.¹³⁷ It is incongruous to presume, as Priestley does, that the deity pursues universal happiness as his end if there is nothing in the nature of that end which would engage any being to choose it. In other words, Priestley’s scheme makes the deity act irrationally (or, as Price terms it towards the end of the *Review*, ‘*contrary to his understanding*’) by pursuing universal happiness even though there is strictly speaking no reason why he should do so.¹³⁸

Price and Priestley had been acquainted with one another since 1766 when Price took Priestley as a guest to a meeting of the Royal Society in London.¹³⁹ The two men subsequently became friends and Price helped Priestley to gain membership of the Royal

¹³⁶ *Review*, 46. Hume had argued in the *Treatise* that virtue and vice ‘may be compar’d to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects but perceptions in the mind, Hume, *Treatise*, 469. Hartley had made a similar point, see chapter 1.

¹³⁷ *Review*, 71-3.

¹³⁸ *Review*, 238.

¹³⁹ Rutt, I, i, 55.

Society. They maintained a frequent correspondence which, in its early stages, focused largely on their shared interests in experimental science: Priestley sent Price detailed accounts of his experiments, and Price assisted Priestley with his scientific histories by acquiring materials for him and by reading drafts of the works.¹⁴⁰ Over time, the personal relationship between them deepened: in 1772 Price advised Priestley on his employment prospects with the Earl of Shelburne, with whom Price was well acquainted.¹⁴¹ Over the years of their friendship they came to share many common interests, including a commitment to the political principles of rational dissent. When Priestley read Price's *A Discourse on the Love of our Country* in 1789 he told Lindsey that he was 'moved even to tears'.¹⁴² The two also discussed theological questions: in 1772 Priestley requested Price to read a copy of the second volume of his *Institutes* prior to the work's publication.¹⁴³ However, whereas they were united by a concern to establish a rational basis for Christian belief, Price's and Priestley's theological and philosophical ideas diverged significantly. Price did not think very highly of Hartley's mechanistic psychology and did not follow Priestley in embracing Socinianism.¹⁴⁴ Price's own theological position he described in a letter to William Adams (1706-89), master of Pembroke College, Oxford, as 'a middle ground between it [Socinianism] and the Trinitarian and Calvinistic schemes'.¹⁴⁵ In the same letter he told Adams that he and Priestley 'differ[ed] much in Metaphysics and Divinity, but with perfect respect for one another'.¹⁴⁶

This mixture of disagreement and yet mutual respect characterises well the relationship between Price and Priestley. Priestley had pointed out his differences with Price regarding the origin of our ideas in the first appendix to his *Examination* in 1774.¹⁴⁷ The first and second editions of Price's *Review* were published before any of Priestley's works in philosophy. However, in the third edition of 1787, to which Price added an

¹⁴⁰ Peach and Thomas, vol. I, 37-40; 40-1; 42-4; 54-6; 87-8; 103-4; 113-14; 114-15; 116-17; 136-8.

¹⁴¹ Peach and Thomas, vol. I, 132-5; 135-6.

¹⁴² *Letters to Lindsey*, 10 December 1789. It is worth noting, however, that Price's and Priestley's different philosophical systems resulted in their adopting very different approaches to the theory of politics, see Thomas, *The Honest Mind*, 152-3.

¹⁴³ Peach and Thomas, vol. I, 146.

¹⁴⁴ On Price's attitude to Hartley see Peach and Thomas, vol. I, 268.

¹⁴⁵ Peach and Thomas, vol. I, 326. On Price's theology see his *Sermons on the Christian Doctrine* (1785).

¹⁴⁶ Peach and Thomas, vol. I, 327.

¹⁴⁷ *Examination*, 319-33.

appendix criticising new developments in ethical theory, he chose not to refer to any of Priestley's works. Price, though, had largely developed his own argument on ethics in opposition to two general positions, both of which could be ascribed to Priestley. The first of these is epistemological and relates to Price's criticism of empiricism. Price explicitly rejects Hume's idea that all our ideas are either impressions or copies of impressions; this Price considers ultimately destructive of all truth and subversive of our intellectual faculties.¹⁴⁸ Through his extensive footnotes to the *Review*, Price compares the debate between the empiricists and the rationalists of the eighteenth century to that between Protagoras and Socrates as depicted in Plato's *Theaetetus*. At the end of chapter I, he claims that the notion that our ideas concerning morality are derived from sense is by no means new to philosophy; he implicitly compares the ideas of Hume and other philosophers who attribute all our ideas to sense perception (among whom Hartley and Priestley ought to be included) with the relativism of Protagoras, who held that sense accounted for all science and thus denied any absolute and immutable truth. For Price, this position leads unavoidably to atheism since, if there is nothing permanent in the nature of things, nothing necessarily true, then the very idea of a mind or knowledge, and hence of the deity itself, is impossible.

The second position pertains to Price's objection to voluntarism. As D. O. Thomas has shown, Price inherited from Cudworth and Clarke an aversion to legislative or voluntarist ethics, the view that moral principles are grounded in an act of will (whether human or divine), and are thus external to the moral agent.¹⁴⁹ For Cudworth this had meant arguing against Ockhamite and Calvinist positions; Price was concerned with refuting the voluntarist theories of his own times, primarily those developed by Richard Cumberland, Locke, and, later in the century, William Paley. Early on in the *Review*, Price rejects Locke's idea that rectitude signifies merely the conformity of actions to '*the will of God, the decrees of the magistrate, or the fashion of the country*'.¹⁵⁰ The key point for Price concerns the nature of obligation. Whereas for Locke the divine will and the human desire for happiness are what obliges an agent to act morally, for Price the nature of this obligation is strictly rational. This point leads Price into a theological discussion.

¹⁴⁸ *Review*, 43.

¹⁴⁹ Thomas, *The Honest Mind*, 19-20.

¹⁵⁰ *Review*, 43.

In Price's scheme the moral law exists independently of, and is even binding on, the divine will. Price counters any theological objections to his position by differentiating, as had Doddridge, between God's will and God's nature.¹⁵¹ Rectitude is synonymous with the latter: 'the obligations ascribed to the Deity arise entirely from and exist in his own nature', so that 'the eternal, unchangeable LAW, by which it has been said, he is directed in all his actions, is no other than HIMSELF; *his own infinite, eternal, all perfect understanding*'.¹⁵² Having established this point, Price holds that virtue 'has a real obligatory power antecedently to all positive laws, and independently of all will'.¹⁵³ Right actions are obligatory independently of their influence on the happiness of an agent; wrong actions are forbidden irrespective of whether they are enjoined or not by any positive law.¹⁵⁴ Price's problem with deriving obligation from the divine will is thus that it entirely undermines the rational basis of virtue. He states that those who ground obligation in the will of God generally attribute the power to oblige to the attendant rewards and punishments. This is, of course, exactly Priestley's position. However, for Price, this subverts the independent nature of moral good and evil, as it implies that nothing can oblige except the prospect of pleasure to be obtained, or pain to be avoided.¹⁵⁵ This means that vice is, strictly speaking, merely a synonym for 'imprudence': that nothing is right or wrong any further than as it affects self interest.

In the first edition of the *Review*, Price defined his own ideas on the concept of obligation in opposition to those of the seventeenth-century moralist Richard Cumberland (1632-1718). In a footnote to the first edition, Price quoted at length from Cumberland's *A Treatise of the Laws of Nature*, as well as the translator John Maxwell's critical observations on the text.¹⁵⁶ Price attributes to Cumberland (arguably mistakenly) the view that 'obligation' signifies merely 'the *necessity of doing a thing in order to be happy*'.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵¹ *Review*, 87; see chapter 1.

¹⁵² *Review*, 111.

¹⁵³ *Review*, 105.

¹⁵⁴ *Review*, 105-6.

¹⁵⁵ *Review*, 106.

¹⁵⁶ *Review*, 114-116n. Price was using the 1727 edition of Cumberland's *A Treatise of the Laws of Nature* translated by John Maxwell.

¹⁵⁷ *Review*, 114. On Cumberland see Jon Parkin, *Science, Religion and Politics in Restoration England: Richard Cumberland's 'De legibus naturae'* (Woodbridge, 1999); Knud Haakonssen, 'The Character and Obligation of Natural Law according to Richard Cumberland', in *English Philosophy in the Age of Locke*,

Yet in the appendix attached to the third edition of 1787 Price added a note on a contemporary articulation of ethical voluntarism, William Paley's *Lectures on the Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785).

Interestingly, in the *Principles* Paley had characterised the moral sense in language very similar to that used by Priestley.¹⁵⁸ Those who maintain the existence of a moral sense, according to Paley, rely on 'innate maxims', 'a natural conscience', or hold that 'the love of virtue and hatred of vice are instinctive' or 'the perception of right and wrong intuitive'.¹⁵⁹ For Paley, as for Priestley, this is highly problematic in that it allows 'prejudices and habits' to be mistakenly identified as 'instincts of nature'. Paley cites Aristotle's 'fundamental and self-evident maxim' that nature intended barbarians to be slaves as an example of the pernicious consequences of allowing prejudices to assume the status of self-evident truths.¹⁶⁰ Instead, Paley attributes the development of our moral ideas to '*the process of association*'.¹⁶¹ Ideas of morality develop when an agent (acting from what is largely defined as a purely self-serving motivation) associates a mode of conduct beneficial to himself with 'a sentiment of approbation'.¹⁶² When the idea of the same conduct again arises in the mind the moral approbation will be fixed to it even in circumstances when this will occasion no private advantage. Paley is largely concerned to formulate an ethical system applicable to practical circumstances and as such he has little time for the kind of abstract reasoning favoured by Price. For Paley, human beings very rarely engage in 'any thing like a regular enquiry into the moral rectitude or depravity of what we are about to do', but are motivated to act more by habit than reflection. The

ed. M. A. Stewart (Oxford, 2000), 29-47. Haakonssen has pointed out that Price was misled by Maxwell's simplistic interpretation of Cumberland into reading Cumberland as a straightforward voluntarist (38-9n).

¹⁵⁸ On Paley see G. A. Cole, 'Doctrine, Dissent and the Decline of Paley's Reputation, 1805-1825', *E&D*, 6 (1987), 119-30; 'Ethics and Eschatology: Paley's System reconsidered', *The Reformed Theological Journal*, 47.2 (1988), 33-43; J. E. Crimmins, 'Religion, Utility and Politics: Bentham versus Paley', in *Religion, Secularization and Political Thought: Thomas Hobbes to J. S. Mill*, ed. J. E. Crimmins (London, 1990), 130-52; A. M. C. Waterman, 'A Cambridge "via media" in late Georgian Anglicanism', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 42 (1991), 419-36; D. L. LeMahieu, *The Mind of William Paley* (Lincoln, 1974); foreword, in William Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Economy* (Indianapolis, 2002).

¹⁵⁹ William Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785), 9-10.

¹⁶⁰ *Principles*, 16.

¹⁶¹ *Principles*, 14.

¹⁶² *Principles*, 12.

exercise of virtue thus signifies, less the performance of particular actions in particular circumstances, than the '*forming and contracting*' of certain habits.¹⁶³

In his discussion of moral obligation Paley attempts to formulate a synthesis of what he saw to be the three principal ethical positions: the rationalist (what is right is agreeable to reason and nature), the voluntarist (what is right is required by the will of God), and the utilitarian (what is right promotes the public good). He does this, in a similar way to Priestley, by subordinating rational criteria to the tendency of any particular course of action to promote happiness. In Paley's definition:

The fitness of things, means their fitness to produce happiness; the nature of things means that actual constitution of the world, by which some things, as such and such actions, for example, produce happiness, and others misery; reason is the principle by which we discover or judge of this constitution; truth is this judgement expressed or drawn out into propositions. So that it necessarily comes to pass, that what promotes the public happiness, or happiness upon the whole, is agreeable to the fitness of things, to nature, to reason, and to truth.¹⁶⁴

Paley's subsequent definition of obligation is expressly voluntarist: 'wherever the motive is violent enough, and coupled with the idea of command, authority, law, or the will of a superior, there I take it, we always consider ourselves to be *obliged*'.¹⁶⁵ The 'motive' Paley identifies as 'private happiness'; agents act according to egoistic motivations to promote their own happiness.¹⁶⁶ The practice of virtue is sanctioned by the promise of a proportional accession of happiness in the afterlife. The 'rule' for right action is the will of God; the deity 'wills and wishes the happiness of his creatures', so that to act in such a way as to occasion our own happiness is to act in conformity with the will of God.¹⁶⁷ Ultimately, Paley comes to identify virtue, as had Priestley, with utility:

¹⁶³ *Principles*, 37.

¹⁶⁴ *Principles*, 48.

¹⁶⁵ *Principles*, 50.

¹⁶⁶ *Principles*, 52.

¹⁶⁷ *Principles*, 60.

Actions are to be estimated by their tendency to promote happiness. – Whatever is expedient is right. – It is the utility of any moral rule alone which constitutes the obligation to it.¹⁶⁸

This ethical system is theologically sanctioned by a benevolent deity whose will can be deciphered, both from the Scriptures, and from the ‘predominant tendency of the contrivances’ of the natural world.¹⁶⁹ Paley’s account is here very similar to Priestley’s.

It might, at first, seem surprising that Paley and Priestley should arrive at such similar positions on ethics. Paley, despite being perceived by many within the Church as a dangerous latitudinarian (it was rumoured that Paley’s heterodoxy was the cause of his failure to obtain a bishopric), was, in other respects, a pillar of the establishment: Archdeacon of Carlisle, a senior Dean at Christ’s College, Cambridge, and, eventually, a defender of clerical subscription.¹⁷⁰ However, the similarity is partly explicable by Paley’s and Priestley’s shared intellectual influences. In his lectures on metaphysics at Christ’s College in the 1770s, Paley used Locke’s *Essay concerning Human Understanding*; in his lectures on the Greek New Testament he referred his students to Locke’s *The Reasonableness of Christianity*.¹⁷¹ At Cambridge Paley was on close terms with John Jebb, the future Unitarian, and, like Jebb, was a protégé of Edmund Law, then master of Peterhouse College and Knightbridge Professor of Moral Philosophy.¹⁷² In 1769 Paley was appointed chaplain to Law on the latter’s elevation to the bishopric of Carlisle; in 1774 he defended Law’s views on clerical subscription in the anonymously published *A Defence of the ‘Considerations on the Propriety of requiring a Subscription to Articles of Faith’*.¹⁷³ In 1776 Paley’s ‘Observations upon the Character and Example of Christ, with an Appendix on the Morality of the Gospel’ was printed privately and bound together with Law’s ‘Reflections on the Life and Character of Christ’ and distributed

¹⁶⁸ *Principles*, 61.

¹⁶⁹ *Principles*, 58.

¹⁷⁰ G. W. Meachley, *Memoirs of William Paley, D. D.* (Sunderland, 1809), 165.

¹⁷¹ *Memoirs of Paley*, 41-1.

¹⁷² See chapter 1.

¹⁷³ *Memoirs of Paley*, 32; 49-50

among the students at Cambridge.¹⁷⁴ Paley wrote a short biography of Law on the latter's death in 1787.¹⁷⁵

Paley's *Principles* was dedicated to Law, whose writings clearly exerted a strong influence over the work. Paley's definition of virtue ('the doing of good to mankind, in obedience to the will of God, and for the sake of everlasting happiness') is a quotation from Law's essay 'On Morality and Religion' prefixed to the fourth edition of William King's *An Essay on the Origin of Evil* (1758).¹⁷⁶ Law also thought highly of Paley's work, and through his connections with rational dissenters acted as an intellectual link between Paley and Priestley's circle. In 1783 Lindsey wrote to Tayleur with the news of a letter he had received from 'the old B^p of Carlisle'.¹⁷⁷ According to Lindsey's account, Law had noted in a postscript that 'Mr Paley's Lectures are growing on his hands, but he promises to get it out next winter, and I trust will be of considerable us[e] in turning the thoughts of the young men of our university to serious subjects'.¹⁷⁸ The influence of Hartley and Gay is also clearly discernible in the *Principles*, particularly in the sections on the formation of the moral sense through the process of association. Paley was also familiar with at least some of Priestley's works: in his 'On the Morality of the Gospel' he cited the second volume of Priestley's *Institutes* in support of the moral turpitude of the heathen philosophers.¹⁷⁹ Priestley appears to have thought fairly highly of Paley's writings. Although Priestley was unsurprisingly concerned about Paley's justification of clerical subscription in the *Principles*, he referred to Paley, shortly after the publication of the *Principles*, as an 'able' writer 'whose work is, in several respects, very justly admired in the Universities'.¹⁸⁰ Priestley referred to Paley's work of scriptural analysis, *Horæ Paulinæ* (1790), as 'that truly masterly piece of criticism'; in a later work, *Observations*

¹⁷⁴ *Memoirs of Paley*, 58.

¹⁷⁵ *Memoirs of Paley*, 93. The biography was first published in William Hutchinson, *The History and Antiquities of the County Palatine, of Durham*, 3 vols (Newcastle, 1785-94), vol. II, 216-217. It was afterwards published separately as *A Short Memoir of the Life of Edmund Law* (1800).

¹⁷⁶ *Principles*, 35; Edmund Law, 'On Morality and Religion', in King, *An Essay on the Origin of Evil*, 4th edn, xliii-liv.

¹⁷⁷ Ditchfield, 391.

¹⁷⁸ Ditchfield, 391.

¹⁷⁹ *Memoirs of Paley*, 68. See also James E. Crimmins, 'Paley, William (1743-1805)', *ODNB*. Paley also referred to Priestley's *Lectures on the Truth of the Jewish and Christian Revelations* (1794) and *The Evidence of the Resurrection of Jesus considered* (1791) in his *A View of the Evidences of Christianity*, 2 vols, 3rd edn (1795), vol. II, 307; 5th edn (1796), vol. II, 205.

¹⁸⁰ Priestley, *Defences of Unitarianism for the Year 1787* (Birmingham, 1788), 128.

on the Increase of Infidelity (1796), he commended ‘such rational and excellent defences of Christianity as Mr. Paley’s’.¹⁸¹ Lindsey also thought very highly of Paley’s work, and evidently understood him as advocating a similar theology to himself and Priestley. In the letter to Tayleur, Lindsey described Paley as ‘a sincere Christian, and most compleat Unitarian, and of the first abilities and a very worthy man’, despite his thoughts on subscription.¹⁸²

Price, however, unsurprisingly, did not think as highly as Lindsey and Priestley did of Paley’s theological and ethical system. He read the *Principles* on its publication in 1785 and told William Adams: ‘I have never read a book which has disappointed me more’.¹⁸³ He decided immediately to add a note to the third edition of the *Review* expressing his low opinion of Paley’s work. In ‘Note F’ of the 1787 appendix Price provided his readers with a summary of Paley’s moral philosophy. According to Price, Paley, dismissing both the rationalist and moral sense theories, had made our notions of moral distinctions to be ‘a kind of habits of thinking (or prejudices) which we derive from education and the circumstances in which we grow up to mature life’. For Price, Paley’s theory can be summarised by two propositions: ‘God’s command is the measure and standard of all duty’, and ‘the duty itself of obeying his command is the necessity of obeying it in order to avoid punishment’. As Price points out, this makes speaking of God’s will as righteous a tautology, since ‘to say that his will is a righteous will, is the same with saying that his will is his will’. Price was again explicit on his strong disapproval of Paley’s ethical system: ‘Never indeed have I met with a theory of morals which has appeared to me more exceptionable’.¹⁸⁴ It is almost certain that Price would have recognised in Priestley’s writings, particularly the *Institutes* and *The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity illustrated*, a very similar system of ethics to that developed by Paley.

In late 1787 Price sent Priestley a copy of the third edition of his *Review*, which included the comments on Paley’s theory. Priestley wrote to Price from Birmingham on 4 December 1787 thanking him for the work, and noting particularly the addition of ‘the

¹⁸¹ Priestley, *Letters to a Young Man, Part II* (1793), 155; *Observations on the Increase of Infidelity* (1796), 66.

¹⁸² Ditchfield, 391.

¹⁸³ Peach and Thomas, vol. I, 326.

¹⁸⁴ *Review*, 283.

argument *à priori*', presumably a reference to Price's appendix 'A Dissertation on the Being and Attributes of the Deity'. Priestley was characteristically frank in confessing his lack of sympathy with Price's ideas: 'you know it [the argument *a priori*] does not give me satisfaction'.¹⁸⁵ However, any explicit acknowledgement of the fundamental differences between their approaches is conspicuously missing. It seems somewhat remarkable that Price's clear aversion to Priestley's whole ethical system passes largely unmentioned in the correspondence between them. It was most likely Price's high regard for Priestley's personal character and abilities as a minister, scientist, and commentator on contemporary politics which prevented him from speaking about Priestley's ethical system with as much freedom as he had on Paley's writings. The similarly high esteem in which Priestley held Price presumably prevented him from discussing Price's ideas in the contemptuous manner he had reserved for the writings of Reid, Beattie, and Oswald. Badcock captured this paradoxical situation particularly well: 'In the partial eye of friendship', Price was, to Priestley, 'one of the wisest philosophers, though his philosophy is irrational; and the best of Christians, though his Christianity is absurd'.¹⁸⁶

Returning then to the 1778 correspondence between Price and Priestley, it is important to recognise that a fundamental epistemological difference lies behind Price's criticisms of Priestley's ideas and Priestley's responses to these criticisms. In chapter I section II of his *Review* Price had attributed the ideas of solidity and impenetrability to the faculty of the understanding. Price conceded (like Priestley) that actual experience yields very little evidence of the impenetrability of matter. However, for Price, this is not hugely important as experience is an inadequate foundation on which to ground absolute assurance. Even if it could be demonstrated by experiment that one body could not penetrate another, this would not prove it to be impossible; in fact, even if the experiment were performed a million times 'all that would appear to the senses in such experiments, would be the *conjunction* of two events, not their *necessary connexion*'. For Price, we arrive at the idea of impenetrability by strictly rational means. It is logically impossible that two atoms of matter 'continuing distinct and without the annihilation of either, *may* occupy the same space', and we are thus led necessarily to the idea of impenetrability.

¹⁸⁵ Rutt, I, i, 422. Priestley would go on to refute Samuel Clarke's *a priori* demonstration of the being of God, in letter XII of his *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever* (1780), *Phil. Unbeliever*, 175-95.

¹⁸⁶ Badcock, *A Slight Sketch*, 30.

Similarly, Price holds that our knowledge of the '*vis inertiae*' or '*inactivity* of matter' owes little to sense perception. The *vis inertiae* is 'rather a perception of reason, than an idea conveyed to the mind by sense'.¹⁸⁷ Price here points again to Newton's three laws of motion which, as we have seen, he regarded as intuitions of the understanding, rather than as facts derived from experience.

This same line of reasoning runs throughout Price's letters to Priestley, despite the fact that it is never clearly brought to the fore of the discussion. In the first communication, Price notes that Newton's three laws of motion 'appear to be *self-evident truths*'.¹⁸⁸ In the second communication, he acknowledges his opinion that 'we derive our ideas of the solidity of bodies, not so much from experience, as from another more important inlet of ideas, which I have endeavoured to show in the first chapter of my *Treatise on Morals*'.¹⁸⁹ Yet despite the importance of Price's epistemological system to the whole of his philosophical thought, Priestley only very briefly responds to this aspect of Price's ideas. In the first set of 'Illustrations', Priestley argues against the charge that to deny the *vis inertiae* overturns Newton's three laws of motion, that the former is by no means essential to the latter; Newton's laws are not self-evident truths, but are 'founded on certain *facts*' which could be shown to result as easily from Priestley's hypothesis concerning matter as from the traditional one.¹⁹⁰ Only in his 'Additional Illustrations' does Priestley explicitly acknowledge Price's claim that the idea of solidity is derived from 'another origin'.¹⁹¹ In response, he refers his readers to the third of his prefatory essays to *Hartley's Theory of the Human Mind*. Priestley had here argued that Hartley's theory had demonstrated how 'our external senses furnish the materials of all the ideas of which we are ever possessed', thus modifying Locke's contention that sensible ideas 'do not properly constitute' ideas of reflection such as judgment, power, duration, and space.¹⁹² In the course of the essay, Priestley refers specifically to Price's opinion that the ideas of solidity and impenetrability are derived from the understanding. Against this, Priestley appears to argue, although his point is unclear, that the idea of impenetrability is

¹⁸⁷ *Review*, 22.

¹⁸⁸ *Free Discussion*, 4.

¹⁸⁹ *Free Discussion*, 32.

¹⁹⁰ *Free Discussion*, 236.

¹⁹¹ *Free Discussion*, 378.

¹⁹² Priestley, ed., *Hartley's Theory of the Human Mind*, xxxi.

derived from experience: it is easy to conceive how a child, for example, may be led to the idea of impenetrability by pressing against any body that does not give way to him, or by observing bodies impinging against one another without ever coalescing into one. Priestley subsequently refers to the work of Boscovich and Michell to show that the impenetrability of matter has been disputed. Against the charge that the *vis inertiae* is essential to matter, Priestley argues that it is easy to conceive of matter with this power omitted.¹⁹³

The failure of the 1787 correspondence to explicitly acknowledge this fundamental difference between Price's and Priestley's epistemology must, in part, account for the repetitive and circular nature of the debate. This said, Price does effectively point out many of the weak points of Priestley's system. He highlights, for example, how Priestley is equivocal in his ascription of extension to matter, arguing that Priestley's contention that matter consists of nothing but powers is inconsistent with the position (at other points advocated by Priestley) that matter possesses the attribute of extension.¹⁹⁴ Price later points out that if, as Priestley holds, matter can only be defined in terms of force, then it follows 'not that we have no *souls* distinct from our *bodies*, but that we have no *bodies* distinct from our *souls*', in short, 'that all in nature is Spirit'.¹⁹⁵ In his second communication, Price observes that if matter possesses the powers of attraction and repulsion, then it must be capable of moving itself. This, however, Priestley cannot allow.¹⁹⁶ Price is also particularly critical of Priestley's materialist explanation of the doctrine of the resurrection. Price here argues that either Priestley must acknowledge that death does not naturally destroy the soul, and that what happens to it is no more than 'a suspension of the exercise of its faculties', or he is arguing, not for a resurrection, but for 'a *creation* of a new set of beings'.¹⁹⁷ The difference, for Price, is between the doctrines of the 'the *sleep*' and the '*non-existence*' of the soul after death, and there is 'no less than an infinite difference between the two'.¹⁹⁸ One key point to which Price frequently

¹⁹³ Hartley's *Theory of the Human Mind*, xxxviii.

¹⁹⁴ *Free Discussion*, 10.

¹⁹⁵ *Free Discussion*, 97; 98.

¹⁹⁶ *Free Discussion*, 26.

¹⁹⁷ *Free Discussion*, 71.

¹⁹⁸ *Free Discussion*, 81.

returns is that he could not (with Berington) accept that consciousness could be the result of an organised system of non-conscious parts:

It is inconceivable to me how any person can think that many substances united can be one substance or that all the parts of a system can perceive, and yet no part be a percipient being.¹⁹⁹

Priestley counters this objection only with the superficial response that a system, ‘though consisting of many beings or things, is nevertheless but *one system*’.²⁰⁰ Behind Price’s criticisms lay his fear that Priestley’s materialism was only one step away from outright atheism. Explaining his controversy with Priestley to Adams in February 1778, Price noted that Priestley had ‘got on very dangerous ground’.²⁰¹ For Price the assertion that the mental powers are no more than the brain and the nerves is analogous to saying that the deity may be no more than ‘the mass of corporeal substances which we call the *world*’.²⁰² Price shows how easily Priestley’s method of reasoning could be adapted to support the atheism of the *philosophes*:

The laws of nature seem to terminate in matter. But is it philosophical, in order to avoid multiplying causes, to conclude they have no other cause than matter itself; and with the French philosophers, to make nature the only Deity?²⁰³

However, despite Price’s ability to perceive some of the problems and contradictions inherent in Priestley’s materialism, the discussion did not prompt Priestley to advance any arguments significantly different to those outlined in the *Disquisitions*. In fact, many of the passages in the ‘Illustrations’ are reproductions verbatim from the original work.

The same could be said with regard to the discussion of free will and necessity. Again, Price’s emphasis on the intuitive capacity of the understanding underlies much of his reasoning on this point. Philosophical liberty is largely proved by the fact that ‘[we

¹⁹⁹ *Free Discussion*, 65-6.

²⁰⁰ *Free Discussion*, 66.

²⁰¹ Peach and Thomas, vol. I, 268.

²⁰² *Free Discussion*, 91.

²⁰³ *Free Discussion*, 90-1.

are conscious of it in ourselves'; Price admits that he can 'say nothing to convince a person who will declare that he believes *his* determinations do not originate *with himself*, or that he has no power of moving or determining himself'.²⁰⁴ Contrary to Priestley's assertion that an agent is always determined by motives, Price holds that an agent determines himself, albeit with a regard to motives; whatever certainty there is that a particular determination will follow from a particular motive, the determination is always the '*self-determination* of the mind'. Price upholds the distinction (which he attributes to Clarke) between 'the *operation* of *physical causes*' and 'the *influence* of *moral reasons*'.²⁰⁵ Price thus attempts to reformulate the question at the centre of the debate: what ought to be considered is not whether 'the views or ideas of being *influence* their actions' but 'what the *nature* of that *influence* is'. Whereas motives undoubtedly influence actions this influence is in no way '*mechanical* or *physical*'.²⁰⁶

Despite Priestley's repeated attempts to demonstrate the moral benefits of the necessitarian scheme, Price concludes that if man is not free, philosophically speaking, then 'there is an end of all moral obligation and accountableness'.²⁰⁷ Given Price's aversion to voluntarism, it is easy to see why Price would have objected so strongly to Priestley's attempt to show that virtue and vice are not absolute qualities of actions, and that to act virtuously, philosophically speaking, means no more than to act according to the dictates of benevolence and the will of God. Price's language here, it is worth noting, is as forceful as it had been in describing Paley's ethical system: Priestley's necessitarianism Price describes as a 'deadly potion'.²⁰⁸ Price himself, however, appears to have been acutely aware of the failure of his correspondence with Priestley to generate any original discussion on either of the topics of materialism or the freedom of the will. He apologises to Priestley for the fact that 'my desire to explain myself fully has led me to a redundancy of expression and many repetitions'.²⁰⁹ Later, Price admits to feeling 'some pain' on reflecting that 'much of this discussion is little more than a repetition of

²⁰⁴ *Free Discussion*, 135.

²⁰⁵ *Free Discussion*, 138.

²⁰⁶ *Free Discussion*, 143.

²⁰⁷ *Free Discussion*, 143.

²⁰⁸ *Free Discussion*, 354.

²⁰⁹ *Free Discussion*, 144.

Mr. Collins's objections on one side, and Dr. Clarke's Replies on the other'.²¹⁰ Even Lindsey, always the most enthusiastic promoter of Priestley's works, was less than adulatory when it came to the *Free Discussion*. Lindsey wrote to Tayleur in June 1778 with news that 'D^r Price and D^r Priestley's correspondence on D^r Priestley's late work' was soon to be published, but that 'a friend who has seen it, tells me he thinks it will be of too metaphysical a nature either to amuse or to edify the public very much'.²¹¹ Over three decades later, Price's biographer passed a very similar judgment: 'The subjects of this controversy (in their nature abstruse and unsatisfactory) do not in general either engage the attention or interest the feelings of the public'.²¹²

Before turning, in conclusion, to consider some of the wider responses to Priestley's controversial ideas it will be of interest to consider one further aspect of Price's intellectual world: his connections with Scottish thinkers. Since the publication of the *Review* in 1758, Price had been in contact with some of the leading philosophical and theological authors in Scotland. Price probably first met David Hume at a dinner at the home of the London based bookseller Thomas Cadell; Hume thereafter visited Price at Newington Green on at least one occasion.²¹³ In 1767 Hume wrote to Price in reply to a note Price had sent Hume, along with a copy of his *Four Dissertations* (1767), apologising for some censorious remarks he had made on Hume's comments on belief in miracles in the *Enquiry*. The letter testifies to the high esteem in which Hume held Price's philosophical talents: 'you, like a true Philosopher', wrote Hume, 'overwhelm me with the Weight of your Arguments'.²¹⁴

Price was also a correspondent of Thomas Reid. An extant letter from Reid to Price dateable to between 1772 and 1773 demonstrates that Price, like many of the English rational dissenters, was acquainted with the Professor of Divinity at Glasgow, William Leechman, who, Reid noted, thought very highly of Price.²¹⁵ In April 1775,

²¹⁰ *Free Discussion*, 351n.

²¹¹ Ditchfield, 262.

²¹² William Morgan, *Memoirs of the Life of the Rev. Richard Price, D.D. F.R.S.* (1815), 92.

²¹³ *Memoirs of Price*, 17. According to Morgan, on the occasion of this visit Hume 'candidly acknowledged that on one point Mr. Price had succeeded in convincing him that his arguments were inconclusive' (17). See also Peach and Thomas, vol. I, 45n. In March 1767 Price invited Hume to visit him at Newington Green, referred to his intention to visit Hume, and noted that he had called on Hume at London the previous autumn several times but had 'always had the mortification of missing you', Peach and Thomas, vol. I, 47.

²¹⁴ Peach and Thomas, vol. I, 45.

²¹⁵ Peach and Thomas, vol. I, 153-4.

following the publication of Priestley's *Examination*, Reid wrote to Price from Glasgow. Reid was, at this point, presumably unaware of the close friendship between Price and Priestley, judging at least by the candour with which he spoke on Priestley's recent work: 'I confess', wrote Reid, 'that in his late examination he seems to me very lame as a Metaphysician as well as in some other Qualities of more estimation'.²¹⁶ Reid continued to criticise what he perceived to be Priestley's misapprehension of basic epistemological concepts, most likely under the assumption that Price would have shared in his low estimation of Priestley's abilities:

What Light with regard to the powers of the Mind is to be expected from a Man who has not yet Learned to distinguish Vibrations from Ideas nor Motion from Sensation, nor simple Ideas from complex nor necessary truths from contingent.²¹⁷

The same letter testifies to Reid's high opinion of Price's talents as a metaphysician; Reid begins with the admission that 'I wish often to have the benefits of your Sentiments on abstract Subjects that occur to my thoughts'. The comments on Priestley are prefaced by a long passage in which Reid considers the metaphysical axiom that 'whatever we can distinctly perceive is possible'. As Reid correctly points out, this axiom is assumed by Price at several points in his *Review*. Reid, however, had a strong suspicion that it was fallacious 'owing to the ambiguity of the Word Conceive'.²¹⁸ According to Reid, all that can be properly meant by 'conceive' is to understand the meaning of a particular proposition, and we can certainly understand the meaning of a proposition that is false. If we mean by 'conceiving a proposition' something more specific, that is, 'conceiving a proposition to be true', then it follows that we can only mean 'judging it to be true'. Since judgment admits of degrees, the axiom ought to be restated as 'everything that appears to us to have any degree of probability however small is certainly possible', which, Reid says, is clearly false.²¹⁹ Reid subsequently appeals to Price's experience as a

²¹⁶ Peach and Thomas, vol. I, 194. The 'Qualities of more estimation' were presumably 'Meekness, good Manners and Candour', attributes which Reid thought Priestley would do well to learn from Hartley, 'his Paragon', or from Price himself.

²¹⁷ Peach and Thomas, vol. I, 195.

²¹⁸ Peach and Thomas, vol. I, 192.

²¹⁹ Peach and Thomas, vol. I, 193.

mathematician: mathematics affords many instances of ‘impossibilities in the nature of things’ which we may, at first, have conceived to be true ‘untill they were discovered by accurate and subtile Reasoning’. Thus, Reid infers, ‘although we are apt to conclude every thing possible which we don’t perceive to be impossible [...] in this we may be greatly deceived’.²²⁰

Reid requested Price’s thoughts on this matter, yet no letter in reply from Price has survived. However, Price certainly considered the point at some length. ‘Note A’ from the appendix subjoined to the 1787 edition of the *Review* begins with a reflection on a passage from the first edition of the work: ‘In every idea is implied the *possibility* of the existence of its object, nothing being clearer than that there can be no idea of an *impossibility*, or conception of what *cannot exist*’.²²¹ Price continues to explain that ‘DR. REID, in his very valuable work on the intellectual powers of man, contests this assertion’. However, Price continues to maintain the distinction between ‘supposing’ and ‘conceiving’ in refutation of Reid’s assertion that ‘conceiving’ is no different from ‘judging’: ‘There is no absurdity which I may not be directed to *suppose*’, says Price, ‘but it does not follow from hence, that there is no absurdity which I may not *conceive*’. Price also rejects outright Reid’s first premise, that to conceive of something means only to understand the meaning of a proposition. Price insists upon differentiating between ‘the *understanding of propositions*’ and ‘the *conception of objects*’; whereas it is certainly possible to understand a proposition which expresses an impossibility, it is impossible to have any real conception of this.²²² Conceptions, for Price, are concerned with objective states of affairs, and a conception of an impossibility is a conception of nothing.

This is not the only instance of Price refining his own philosophy in dialogue with Reid. A number of hasty alterations Price made to the texts of the second and third editions of the *Review* suggest that he came to call into question his original representative theory of perception under Reid’s influence.²²³ In section II, ‘*Of the Origin of our Ideas in General*’, for example, a passage in both the first edition of 1758 and the second edition of 1769 reads:

²²⁰ Peach and Thomas, vol. I, 194.

²²¹ *Review*, 279; the original passage is found at *Review*, 34.

²²² *Review*, 279.

²²³ These alterations have been pointed out by D. D. Raphael in his notes to his edition of Price’s *Review*. See *Review*, xvi.

If then we indeed have such ideas, and if, besides, they have a foundation in truth, and represent somewhat really existing correspondent to them, what difficulty can there be in granting they may be apprehended by that faculty, whose natural object is truth.²²⁴

In the third edition of 1789 the word ‘represent’ is replaced with the words ‘are ideas of’.²²⁵ Towards the end of the same section, a passage in the 1758 edition reads: ‘’Tis obvious, that the ideas now meant, presuppose certain subjects of contemplation, whose natures, connexions, and qualities they represent’.²²⁶ In the 1769 and 1787 editions the word ‘represent’ is again replaced with the words ‘are perceptions’.²²⁷ In section III, ‘*Of the Origin of our Ideas of Moral Right and Wrong*’, the assertion, in the 1758 edition, that the mind perceives ‘resemblances of [the] distinct and independent reality in things’ is replaced, in the 1769 edition, with the statement that the mind perceives ‘any distinct and independent reality’. The expression is omitted entirely from the 1787 edition. As I have shown in the previous chapter, it was exactly this kind of representative theory, what Reid had referred to variously as the ‘ideal system’ or the ‘doctrine of ideas’ – the theory ‘that we do not really perceive things that are external, but only certain images and pictures of them imprinted upon the mind, which are called *impressions* and *ideas*’ – which Reid had set out to refute in his *Inquiry*.²²⁸ That these changes to the *Review* were influenced by Price’s reading of Reid is clear from a note that Price added to the 1769 edition. A footnote in which Price attempts to distinguish between ‘ideas’ and ‘sensations’ is succeeded by the following comment:

It should be observed that I have all along endeavoured to avoid speaking of an idea as an *image* in the mind of the object we think of. It is difficult not to fall sometimes into language of this kind; but it may be misunderstood and abused. A writer of deep reflexion and great merit has charged it with laying the foundation of all modern scepticism.²²⁹

²²⁴ *Review*, 1st edn (1758), 41; *Review*, 2nd edn (1769), 37.

²²⁵ *Review*, 3rd edn (1787), 36.

²²⁶ *Review*, 1st edn (1758), 54.

²²⁷ *Review*, 2nd edn (1769), 52; *Review*, 3rd edn (1789), 51.

²²⁸ See chapter 2; Reid, *Inquiry*, vii. It is worth noting that Locke had warned in the *Essay* against mistaking ideas for ‘the Images and Resemblances of something inherent in the subject’, Locke, *Essay*, II, viii, 7. For a recent discussion of Locke’s adherence to a representative theory of perception see John Rogers, ‘Locke and the Objects of Perception’, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 85 (2004), 245-54.

²²⁹ *Review*, 2nd edn (1769), 54.

The reader is subsequently directed to Reid's *Inquiry*.

Price returned to the same point in 'Note C' to the 1789 appendix. He here reprints the above note followed by the comment: 'I am always mortified when I find, that my sentiments are different from those of the writer to whom I have just referred'.²³⁰ However, Price then goes on to charge Reid with annihilating all perception by claiming that there is no object of the mind. In order to challenge Reid's belief, as Price understood it, that the representative theory inevitably leads to scepticism, Price subsequently turns his attention to Hume. He accuses Hume of making a linguistic error in mistakenly defining an idea as the object itself, rather than the apprehension or conception of an object. According to Price, there is thus no need to dispense with the representative theory altogether. To the charge that, on this theory, we can have no certain knowledge of the external world, Price replies that '[all] ideas imply the *possibility* of the existence of correspondent objects'. He then follows Reid in arguing that 'our belief of the *actual* existence of the objects of sense, we may resolve [...] into impressions on our sense *forcing* belief at the moment of the impression, in a manner we cannot explain'.²³¹ In the final sentence, however, Price appears to argue for a kind of occasionalism.²³² He here suggests that 'the just answer to this enquiry' implies 'a presence of the Deity with us and dependence upon him more close and constant and necessary, than we are apt to suspect or can easily believe'.²³³ Price's final position thus remains somewhat inconclusive. However, his attempts to reformulate his ideas in the light of a close engagement with Reid's work is an interesting example of intellectual exchange between the two men, pointing again to the strong connections between the rational dissenters and the Scots.

One final example of this connection between Price and the Scots is a series of letters exchanged in the early 1780s between Price and James Burnett, Lord Monboddo. On 11 July 1780 Monboddo wrote to Price from Edinburgh. Like Hume and Reid,

²³⁰ *Review*, 280.

²³¹ *Review*, 280.

²³² I use the term in the sense in which it is defined by Stephen Nadler, that is, the doctrine that 'any complete explanation of a natural phenomenon must refer not just to its material antecedent conditions (matter and motion), but, more importantly, to the only being which can truly be called a 'cause' – God'. See Stephen Nadler, 'Doctrines of Explanation in Late Scholasticism and in the Mechanical Philosophy', in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1998), vol. I, 513-52, esp. 536-42. See also Nadler, 'Occasionalism and the Mind-Body Problem', in *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. M. A. Stewart, 75-95.

²³³ *Review*, 280.

Monboddo evidently held Price's abilities in high regard, and (like Reid) thought little of Priestley's ideas: 'You have combated very well', Monboddo told Price, 'Dr. Priestley's strange system of Philosophy, and stranger still of Christianity'.²³⁴ The ten extant letters between Price and Monboddo detail their subsequent discussion, over a period of four years, which covered the subjects of the soul, the nature of space and duration, liberty and necessity, the philosophical opinions of the ancients, and Newton's laws of motion. Monboddo sent Price copies of the early volumes of his *Antient Metaphysics* (1779-1799) through Thomas Cadell, which Price read and responded to in his letters.²³⁵ Price, in return, sent Monboddo a copy of his *Review*. During the course of the correspondence, Price alluded to his acquaintance with William Robertson (1721-1793), Principal of the University of Edinburgh, Adam Smith, and Dugald Stewart (1753-1828), Professor of Mathematics, and subsequently of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh.²³⁶ These connections demonstrate that Price, like his friend George Walker, was familiar with the most important contemporary developments in Scottish philosophy.

In the discussion between them, Price and Monboddo frequently allude to Priestley's opinions. In his first letter to Price, Monboddo listed a series of questions to Priestley to which he requested Price to procure an answer. In his reply, Price took the liberty to respond on Priestley's behalf, stressing the differences between his own and Priestley's sentiments: 'no two persons', he told Monboddo, 'can differ much more on most Theological and Metaphysical subjects, and yet we respect and love one another'.²³⁷ In his subsequent reply, Monboddo told Price that, although he did 'not reckon the Doctor an Atheist', he was concerned that 'his Opinions have a dangerous tendency that way'.²³⁸ In response to Price's statement that 'the machine' which Priestley had called man is not motivated by matter itself, but 'by the constant operation of the Deity whom he makes the only agent in nature', Monboddo admitted his surprise and inability to 'reconcile it to the Doctor's Words or Arguments'.²³⁹ In a somewhat convoluted

²³⁴ Peach and Thomas, vol. II, 61.

²³⁵ Price told Monboddo that although he did not always agree with the ideas expressed in the work, he had 'derived pleasure and instruction from reading it', Peach and Thomas, vol. II, 195.

²³⁶ Price added a note on the ethical theory outlined by Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* to the 1789 edition of the *Review* (281-2).

²³⁷ Peach and Thomas, vol. II, 67.

²³⁸ Peach and Thomas, vol. II, 77.

²³⁹ Peach and Thomas, vol. II, 67.

metaphor, Monboddo attempted to unravel the implications of Priestley's ascription of any real agency solely to the deity:

if our machine of Intellect does not go on of itself when once set agoing like a Clock, but is carried on by the immediate agency of God, then I think it is not properly a Machine, or if you will call it so, it is a Machine such as a Pipe upon which a Musician plays; and we can be no more answerable for our thoughts and actions, nor indeed are they ours any more than the Time is the Pipe's and not the Musician's.²⁴⁰

In this way, Monboddo extended Price's criticism that Priestley had reasoned away any meaningful idea of matter, to claim that, in Priestley's world, there is nothing that can meaningfully be called man. If even consciousness – in Priestley's system, the 'superstructure upon that part of us by which we breathe, and our Blood Circulates' – is 'likewise a kind of Pipe, which is played upon by the Supreme Being', then, argued Monboddo, 'God is literally speaking *All in all*, and there is properly speaking neither Man, nor Brute, nor Vegetable in this world'.²⁴¹ To this, Price replied that Priestley did 'indeed assert that the Deity is the *only agent* in nature' and concurred with Monboddo's opinion that Priestley was essentially arguing

that we are not properly responsible for our actions, that they are not really ours, and that the machine called man is only a kind of pipe [...] which is play'd upon by an invisible hand, his actions being no more his own than the tune is the pipe's.²⁴²

Notwithstanding the esteem in which Price was held by Hume, Reid, and Monboddo, however, his rationalist philosophy did not find many adherents among English rational dissenters in the last decades of the eighteenth century. Although none of these Scottish thinkers thought very highly of Priestley, it was Priestley's associationist ethical system, materialism, and necessitarianism which were fast becoming the predominant intellectual positions within rational dissent. The decline of rationalist

²⁴⁰ Peach and Thomas, vol. II, 77. 'Time', in this quotation, might be a incorrect transcription of 'Tune', which would make more sense in the context.

²⁴¹ Peach and Thomas, vol. II, 77.

²⁴² Peach and Thomas, vol. II, 90.

systems such as Price's and Taylor's coincided with the decline of Arianism as a viable theological position among the English rational dissenters.²⁴³ The most important centre for Arianism in late eighteenth-century England was probably Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, where Thomas Barnes (1747-1810) and Ralph Harrison (1748-1810) continued to preach the doctrine until the first decade of the nineteenth century.²⁴⁴ However, when Barnes and Harrison opened Manchester New College in 1786 it is unlikely that they taught much philosophy there.²⁴⁵ Price's 'intuitionist' ethics would have to wait until the late nineteenth century before it was taken seriously by anyone within rational dissent.²⁴⁶

Three responses to Priestley: Palmer, Dawson, and Berington

In the English literary world at large Priestley's *Disquisitions* elicited a constant stream of mostly hostile responses from its publication in 1777 until the early years of the 1790s. These took the form of published philosophical works, letters to periodicals, and even a number of extensively annotated satirical poems.²⁴⁷ A selection of these works has been analysed and evaluated by John Yolton, who has drawn attention to some of the more philosophically sophisticated, many of which were ignored by Priestley himself.²⁴⁸ Yolton's account evaluates the merit of Priestley's respective antagonists by assessing the extent to which they recognised and engaged with Priestley's redefinition of the traditional concept of matter. By this criterion, most of the responses fail to take into account the central issue at stake: that Priestley had fundamentally altered the nature of materialism by redefining matter as force rather than as solid particles. Yolton's narrative

²⁴³ Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1975), 476-8.

²⁴⁴ David L. Wykes, 'Harrison, Ralph (1748-1810)', *ODNB*; 'Barnes, Thomas (1747-1810)', *ODNB*.

²⁴⁵ Charles Barnes Upton (1831-1920), philosophy tutor at Manchester College between 1875 and 1903, wrote that at Manchester Barnes and Walker 'made a considerable point of psychology, which would naturally go along with their Arian Christology', but that philosophy did not 'take such a prominent place in the curriculum as it had done in the early dissenting academies', *The Life and Letters of James Martineau*, ed. James Drummond and C. B. Upton, 2 vols (London, 1902), vol. II, 258.

²⁴⁶ See epilogue.

²⁴⁷ *The Sadduce: a Poem occasioned by Several Publications, and particularly Disquisitions relating to Matter and Spirit* (1778); Alexander Bicknell, *The Putrid Soul, a Poetical Epistle to Joseph Priestley on his Disquisitions relating to Matter and Spirit* (1780); John Walters, *An Ode on the Immortality of the Soul: occasioned by the Opinions of Dr. Priestley* (Wrexham, 1786).

²⁴⁸ Yolton, *Thinking Matter*, 115-24.

is primarily useful in that it brings to light a number of neglected works. He outlines, for example, the argument of John Rotheram's *An Essay on the Distinction between the Soul and the Body of Man* (1781), and shows how Rotheram raises the important argument against Priestley that the theory of vibrations is unable to fully account for cognitive representation by explaining how vibrations come to refer to objects in the external world.²⁴⁹ However, Yolton does not take into account the denominational affiliations of Priestley's antagonists, or question how these affiliations affected their authors' philosophical views. The fact that Rotheram (1725-1789), Richard Shepherd (1731/2-1809), Richard Gifford (1724/5-1807), and John Caulfield were all clergymen of the Church of England is essential to understanding their commitment to refuting Priestley's materialism. Shepherd, who later became Archdeacon of Bedford, for example, was primarily concerned with exposing the errors in Priestley's materialist philosophy as a means to disproving his ideas on the pre-existence of Christ.²⁵⁰ Caulfield, Archdeacon of Kilmore between 1776 and 1801, devotes almost as much space to refuting Priestley's ideas from the evidence of Scripture as he does by recourse to more strictly philosophical arguments.²⁵¹ An analysis of Priestley's orthodox antagonists along denominational lines would be fruitful and would illuminate the complexities of the theological context essential to a more historically informed understanding of the debate. In this concluding section, however, I shall confine my focus to a selection of responses to Priestley's work written by a dissenter, a dissenter who conformed, and a Catholic.

Priestley's attempts to refute the ideas of Reid, Beattie, Oswald, and Price were part of a wider debate among rational dissenters, occasioned by their attempt to formulate philosophical foundations for their theology. Three book-length contributions to the discussion initiated by Priestley's writings on materialism and philosophical necessity are particularly worthy of analysis for the way in which they illustrate how writers from different denominational and theological positions challenged Priestley's claim to have laid a rational foundation for his religious beliefs. The first of these works is John

²⁴⁹ John Rotheram, *An Essay on the Distinction between the Soul and the Body of Man* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1781).

²⁵⁰ Rusticans Philalethes [Richard Shepherd], *Reflections on the Doctrines of Materialism and the Application of that Doctrine to the Pre-existence of Christ addressed to J. Priestley* (1779).

²⁵¹ John Caulfield, *An Essay on the Immateriality and Immortality of the Soul, and its Instinctive Sense of Good and Evil* (1778).

Palmer's *Observations in Defence of the Liberty of Man as a Moral Agent* (1779).²⁵² Palmer (1729-1790) had studied under David Jennings at the dissenting academy at Wellclose Square, afterwards becoming an assistant to John Allen at the Presbyterian New Broad Street Chapel, London, where he became pastor in 1759.²⁵³ In his theology, Palmer followed a similar trajectory to Priestley, abandoning the Calvinistic principles in which he had been educated and adopting Socinian views. Palmer and Priestley were well acquainted with one another; Priestley referred to Palmer in 1779 as 'an old acquaintance, whom I respect, and whom I believe to be actuated by the best views'.²⁵⁴

However, as the title of his book would suggest, Palmer disagreed with Priestley on the question of the freedom of the will. Palmer, like Priestley, was concerned to establish a rational basis for religious belief, and yet he felt, like Price, that the freedom of the will was a necessary prerequisite for this. In his *Observations*, he rehearsed many of the well-established arguments for philosophical liberty, Clarke, Wollaston, and Price all featuring prominently in the work. Palmer denies that the relationship between motives and volitions can be explained in the same way as the operations of cause and effect in the natural world on the grounds that the mind is immaterial and is therefore not subject to the laws of matter. He thus relies on the distinction between moral and physical necessity, arguing that although motives influence volitions, still the mind has the power of 'suspending and altering its determinations' and is 'free to deliberate upon, and in consequence of this to choose and determine the motives of its conduct'.²⁵⁵ Palmer goes on to claim that necessitarianism subverts the foundations of morality, adding to Price's criticisms that, in Priestley's 'scheme of necessity', there appears to be 'a real and great absurdity in prayer'.²⁵⁶ In response to Priestley's attempt to argue for necessity from Scripture, Palmer argues that there are just as many passages in the Scriptures 'which address mankind, as possessed of choice or agency'.²⁵⁷ To Priestley's attempt to differentiate his own philosophical necessity from Calvinism, Palmer counters that 'the

²⁵² The full title of the work is John Palmer, *Observations in Defence of the Liberty of Man, as a Moral Agent: in Answer to Dr. Priestley's Illustrations of Philosophical Necessity* (1779).

²⁵³ Alexander Gordon, 'Palmer, John (1729-1790)', rev. M. J. Mercer, *ODNB*.

²⁵⁴ Priestley, *A Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Palmer, in Defence of the Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity* (Bath, 1779), 2.

²⁵⁵ Palmer, *Observations*, 17.

²⁵⁶ *Observations*, 105.

²⁵⁷ *Observations*, 217.

two schemes bear a much nearer affinity to one another, than the Dr. is aware of', and that 'the practical influence [of Calvinism and philosophical necessity] must be very much the same', as in both systems 'man is the mere passive instrument of the divine will or agency'.²⁵⁸

Palmer's work is less important for the force or originality of its arguments, than for the fact that it appears to have been widely read among rational dissenters. Joshua Toulmin informed John Sturch that he had read the book, along with Price's letters to Priestley, whilst making up his own mind on the question of the freedom of the will.²⁵⁹ Thomas Belsham used the work in his philosophy lectures at the dissenting academies at Daventry and Hackney, and Andrew Kippis recommended the work in his summary of the debate over liberty and necessity in his notes to the 1794 edition of Doddridge's lectures.²⁶⁰ It was most likely this fact that led Priestley to reply to Palmer.²⁶¹ In his *A Letter to the Rev Mr. John Palmer, in Defence of the Doctrine of Philosophical Liberty* (1779) Priestley commented that the book had been 'a work of great expectation among many of our friends'; in the year following its publication, Palmer's *Observations* had, according to Priestley, 'been submitted to the perusal of persons of great learning and worth, who [...] think highly of it, and have recommended the publication, not only as excellent in itself, but as very proper to follow that of Dr. Price'.²⁶²

In Priestley's reply to Palmer, he reiterated his claim that to hold two different determinations of the will to be possible is essentially to claim that an effect can occur without a preceding cause. In response to Palmer's point on the distinction between moral and physical necessity, Priestley urged his antagonist to consider the evidence of fact, as opposed to the 'mere nominal distinctions of things'. Experience demonstrates that the will 'constantly and invariably decides according to motives'; the causal relationship between motives and the will is thus 'as absolutely certain as any truth in natural

²⁵⁸ *Observations*, 223; 230.

²⁵⁹ Joshua Toulmin to John Sturch, 14 February 1784, DWL MS 12.45, ff. 134-5.

²⁶⁰ HMO MS Heineken 2, 'Lectures on Moral Philosophy delivered by Mr Belsham'; Thomas Belsham, *Elements of the Philosophy of the Mind, and of Moral Philosophy to which is prefixed a Compendium of Logic* (1801), 233; 288; Doddridge, *Lectures*, ed. Kippis, 3rd edn (1794), vol. I, 59.

²⁶¹ Priestley appears to have done so slightly reluctantly: he admitted to Bretland in August 1779, after receiving Palmer's answer to him, that 'I wish I could engage somebody to read and answer these things for me', Rutt, I, i, 324.

²⁶² Priestley, *A Letter to Palmer*, 2.

philosophy'.²⁶³ In reply to Palmer's concerns on the moral effects of necessitarianism, Priestley again calls on his antagonist to judge from experience. The passage again hints at the prevalence of the necessitarian doctrine among Priestley's and Palmer's circle: 'Cast your eye over those of your acquaintance, and whom you know to be necessitarians, especially those who have been so early in life, and who are most attached to that doctrine', Priestley instructs Palmer, 'They are numerous enough to enable you to form some judgment of the practical tendency of their principles'.²⁶⁴ Priestley's private letters depict him attempting to stem the effects of Palmer's work by sending copies of his own reply to his correspondents. In November 1779, for example, Priestley told Cappe to expect a copy from Lindsey; in December he sent Caleb Rotheram, an acquaintance of Palmer's, a copy of the work.²⁶⁵

The next year Palmer replied to Priestley in his *An Appendix to the Observations in Defence of the Liberty of Man* (1780). He here reiterated the arguments in defence of philosophical liberty, and criticised Priestley's interpretation of Price's arguments. In April Priestley replied with *A Second Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Palmer* (1780), in which he requested his antagonist to produce some proof from fact of the existence of the self-determining power. The passage illustrates that Priestley thought of Palmer's and Price's recourse to our consciousness of the power of self-determination as being problematic in exactly the same way as Reid's, Beattie's, and Oswald's recourse to 'common sense': a 'merely imagined *feeling*, or *consciousness*' of the freedom of the will is wholly arbitrary; whereas 'one person may assert [it]', another, Priestley argues, 'who is certainly constituted in the same manner, may deny [it]'.²⁶⁶ Priestley subsequently challenges Palmer to reconcile free will with the divine prescience, cautioning his antagonist not to give up the latter lightly. Priestley is here explicit on what is at stake in the debate between Palmer and himself. In order for Palmer to retain both the divine prescience and the self-determining power he would, according to Priestley, be obliged to rank the former 'among the mysteries of faith, things to be held sacred, and not to be submitted to rational enquiry', in exactly the same way that 'many truly pious christians

²⁶³ *A Letter to Palmer*, 27.

²⁶⁴ *A Letter to Palmer*, 53.

²⁶⁵ Rutt, I, i, 328; 329.

²⁶⁶ Priestley, *A Second Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Palmer in Defence of Philosophical Necessity* (1780), 43-4.

do the doctrines of *transubstantiation* and the *Trinity*'.²⁶⁷ In other words, Priestley is suggesting that Palmer can retain both free will and divine prescience only if he sacrifices his conviction that all aspects of Christian doctrine can be rationally explained. In this way, he is positioning his own necessitarianism as the only rational basis for Christian belief, and suggesting that Palmer's libertarianism bears some relation to the irrational tendencies of Catholicism and Anglicanism.

The second response to the debate, Benjamin Dawson's *The Necessitarian: or the Question concerning Liberty and Necessity stated and discussed* (1783), was not directly a reply to Priestley's writings. However, it was undoubtedly informed by the arguments over the freedom of the will among rational dissenters in the 1770s.²⁶⁸ Dawson (1729-1814) is a fascinating character in relation to the rational dissenters, whose career illustrates well the complex affinities between Anglican latitudinarianism and rational dissent as it developed during the latter half of the eighteenth century.²⁶⁹ Dawson, in his early career, had followed a very similar trajectory to John Seddon, Robert Andrews, and George Walker: he entered the Kendal Academy with his brother Thomas Dawson (c. 1725-1782) as an exhibitor of the London Presbyterian Board in 1746 where he was taught by Caleb Rotherham; in 1748 he progressed to Glasgow University on the Dr Williams's foundation, graduating MA in 1750.²⁷⁰ He defended a thesis, *De summo bono*, which was published for the university by the Foulis press in 1750.²⁷¹ He then served as a dissenting minister at Congleton, Cheshire and at Leek, Staffordshire; following a brief period as a teacher he became assistant minister at St Thomas's Presbyterian Church, Southwark in 1757.

However, Dawson departed radically from this career trajectory: after one year at Southwark, he followed the example of his elder brothers Thomas and Abraham (1713?-1789) and conformed to the Church of England. In 1760 he became rector of Burgh,

²⁶⁷ *A Second Letter to Palmer*, 44.

²⁶⁸ The full title of the work is Benjamin Dawson, *The Necessitarian: or the Question concerning Liberty and Necessity stated and discussed*, in *XIX Letters* (1783).

²⁶⁹ For a full analysis of Dawson's career and relationship with Priestley see G. M. Ditchfield, 'Joseph Priestley and the Complexities of Latitudinarianism in the 1770s', in Rivers and Wykes, 144-72, from which many of the details of the following section are derived.

²⁷⁰ B. W. Young, 'Dawson, Benjamin (1729-1814)', *ODNB*. See also John Nichols, *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century consisting of Authentic Memoirs and Original Letters of Eminent Persons*, 8 vols (1817-58), vol. VI (1831), 860-9.

²⁷¹ Benjamin Dawson, *Dissertatio philosophica inauguralis de summo bono* (Glasgow, 1750).

Suffolk, a living which he held until his death. Despite his conversion to Anglicanism, Dawson retained his contacts with dissenters: in 1763 he accompanied his pupil Sir Benjamin Ibbetson to the Warrington Academy, where he became a member of the literary circle around John Aikin. Dawson's brother Obadiah remained a dissenter and was a member of Priestley's congregation at Mill Hill Chapel, Leeds. Once within the Church, Dawson positioned himself in the liberal, latitudinarian camp; he was a close associate of Francis Blackburne, and wrote prolifically between 1766 and 1773 in support of Blackburne's campaign to repeal compulsory subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles.²⁷² Dawson served as secretary to the Feathers Tavern Association and was one of the signatories to the petition which it circulated in 1771-2 for the abolition of compulsory subscription for university graduates and Church of England ministers.²⁷³

Dawson's *The Necessitarian*, written then some twenty years after he had abandoned dissent, is a philosophical dialogue consisting of a series of nineteen letters between 'Cleanthes' and 'Philemon'.²⁷⁴ The character of Cleanthes is a necessitarian; the thrust of his argument is very similar to Priestley's. He allows that man is free, in the sense that 'He doth as he will', and that 'what a man doth *voluntarily*, he doth *freely*'. However, he maintains that the will is always determined by motives.²⁷⁵ The character of Philemon, the libertarian, holds that the will is free, in the sense that although motives influence, they do not necessarily determine the will.²⁷⁶ For Philemon, the will is an active power which can choose 'to ACT, *forbear action, or continue action*'.²⁷⁷ Philemon has recourse to a number of arguments, many of which are very similar to those found in Price, Berington, and Palmer, in defence of his libertarian position. Firstly, Philemon argues that the 'experience and feeling' of free agency is the proof of its actual

²⁷² The most notable of these pamphlets was *An Answer to Letters concerning Established Confessions of Faith; being a Vindication of the Confessional* (1769).

²⁷³ *MR*, 13 (1818), 15-18. On the Feather Tavern Petitioners see G. M. Ditchfield, 'Feathers Tavern Petitioners (act. 1771-1774)', *ODNB*.

²⁷⁴ 'Cleanthes' was possibly named after Cleanthes of Assos (c. 330-230), a Greek Stoic who succeeded Zeno as head of the school at Athens. Dawson is also very likely alluding to Hume's empirical theist in the *Dialogues concerning Natural and Revealed Religion*; see chapter 4. 'Philemon' may allude to the recipient of the epistle from Paul in the New Testament.

²⁷⁵ Dawson, *The Necessitarian*, 10.

²⁷⁶ *The Necessitarian*, 10; 16.

²⁷⁷ *The Necessitarian*, 11.

existence.²⁷⁸ Secondly, Philemon argues that our ‘Consciousness of moral rectitude and depravity is [...] a plain proof of human liberty’ as ‘Conscience never applauds or condemns us for such actions as we consider ourselves under a necessity to perform’.²⁷⁹ However, through the succeeding epistolary exchange, Philemon comes to abandon his belief in the arguments supporting his libertarianism. Firstly, Cleanthes convinces him that the argument from experience is inconclusive; secondly, Cleanthes argues that it is solely the motive which constitutes the moral value of an action, and, therefore, that to break the link between motive and volition is to ‘annihilate the act, with respect to its *moral* nature’.²⁸⁰ Philemon subsequently comes to accept that ‘That which proceeds from an act must be as *real* and certain as the Act itself’, that it is not the consciousness of the goodness of an action which makes the act good, but rather ‘the Goodness or Worth of the Act’ which itself depends upon the determining motive, and thus that ‘an action can have no worth but on the supposition of a motive determining the Will’.²⁸¹ His conversion is complete when he declares that ‘the Foundation of Morality and Religion [...] rests secure upon the principle of NECESSITY’.²⁸²

Interestingly, this dialogue between Cleanthes and Philemon is preceded by a short preface, presumably in Dawson’s own voice, which anchors the debate between the two characters in a specific theological context. In the preface Dawson writes that the ensuing disquisition ‘originated from a theological debate concerning the Articles of the Church’, specifically article X (‘Of Free Will’) and article XVII (‘Of Predestination and Election’). Although it is not entirely clear whether this debate really occurred or whether it is a fictional context, Dawson elaborates by explaining that in the course of the debate the tenth and twelfth articles (both of which deny the free will of man) were selected by one of the company (a ‘prompt Arminian’) as ‘instances of *absurd* and *pernicious* doctrine’.²⁸³ Against this, it was argued, presumably by a more theologically orthodox respondent, that ‘necessity’ and ‘fatalism’ ought to be properly distinguished and that free will is, in fact, much nearer akin to necessitarianism. Furthermore, the advocates of

²⁷⁸ *The Necessitarian*, 16.

²⁷⁹ *The Necessitarian*, 17.

²⁸⁰ *The Necessitarian*, 55-6.

²⁸¹ *The Necessitarian*, 87; 89.

²⁸² *The Necessitarian*, 55-6.

²⁸³ *The Necessitarian*, iv.

free will have ‘not informed themselves of the true Calvinistic doctrine on this head’ and are mistaken in supposing that ‘the Church [of England] could possibly mean to set forth such pernicious, nay impious doctrine as they considered this to be’. According to Dawson’s narrative, the two disputants then decided to cease from theological discussion and to turn instead to ‘the open field of Philosophy’.²⁸⁴ Dawson is thus casting the dialogue between Cleanthes and Philemon as a philosophically grounded defence of the Calvinistic doctrine of free will enshrined in the articles of the Church of England. In this way, he is presumably attempting to show that Anglican doctrine on the question of the freedom of the will is rational, in the sense that it can be shown to be consistent with philosophical reasoning.

That Dawson should have been attempting to rationally justify certain of the articles of the Anglican Church is particularly significant considering the history of his relationship with Priestley. This relationship dates back to the early 1770s, and to the Anglican petition to relieve clergymen from compulsory subscription to the articles of the Church, a campaign with which, as I have shown, Dawson was prominently involved. As a dissenter, Priestley had no immediate interest in the success of the clerical petition. However, as a result of his friendship with Lindsey (who, at this point, was still an Anglican clergyman and a key figure behind the petition), Priestley came to follow the debates in the House of Commons and, eventually, to support the petitioners. In Priestley’s 1769 work, *Considerations on Church Authority*, a response to Archdeacon Thomas Balguy’s recent attacks on the ecclesiastical reformers, Priestley had enquired provocatively ‘who among the clergy, that read and think at all, are supposed to believe one-third of the thirty-nine articles of the church of England’, conjecturing that there was only a one in a thousand chance that Balguy himself believed in every article.²⁸⁵ The comment, although intended to support the reformers’ cause, evidently proved offensive to Dawson. Two years later, Dawson, in a series of ‘Remarks’ appended to his edition of John Jones’s *Free Thoughts*, responded to Priestley’s accusation by claiming that it was unfair and, moreover, that an individual’s belief or disbelief in certain theological

²⁸⁴ *The Necessitarian*, vi.

²⁸⁵ Priestley, *Considerations on Church Authority; occasioned by Dr. Balguy’s Sermon, on that Subject; preached at Lambeth Chapel, and published by Order of the Archbishop* (1769), 59.

doctrines was a matter for his own private conscience to decide: ‘to charge us’, replied Dawson,

with *not believing*, if we read and think *at all, one third* of what we have solemnly subscribed, is more than uncandid and indecent; it is to detract from our good name; it is to judge us too in a matter on which *man’s* judgment ought never to be given.²⁸⁶

News soon reached Lindsey that Priestley was planning to publish an attack on Dawson, which Lindsey feared would damage the cause of the Anglican petitioners. Priestley subsequently wrote to Lindsey to reassure him, noting, with more than a hint of sarcasm, that had he written against Dawson then it would have been intended to serve the petitioners’ cause by ‘setting in a strong light the evil and iniquity of subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles, in the case of a mind so enlightened as his’.²⁸⁷ Priestley’s comments make it clear that he despised Dawson for conforming to the Church of England, interpreting Dawson’s conversion to Anglicanism as a betrayal of the fundamental values of dissent.²⁸⁸ In the same letter to Lindsey, Priestley accused Dawson of subscribing to the Church merely in order to attain preferment; in his *A Letter of Advice* of 1773 Priestley reiterated this charge, acerbically labelling Dawson’s conversion a ‘dark transaction’, and adding that Dawson was guilty of contradicting himself by defending Socinianism in his publications whilst publicly subscribing to trinitarian articles.²⁸⁹ The fact that Dawson, in *The Necessitarian*, employed Priestley’s philosophical arguments to provide a rational foundation for Anglican doctrine would thus undoubtedly, assuming he ever encountered the work, have infuriated Priestley. Given the implications the work would have had for those familiar with its author’s and Priestley’s previous altercations, it is interesting that it was read by rational dissenters. Belsham used Dawson’s work in

²⁸⁶ Benjamin Dawson, ‘Remarks’, in John Jones, *Free Thoughts on the Subject of a Farther Reformation of the Church of England*, ed. Benjamin Dawson (1771), 149. On the background to Dawson’s use of the concept of ‘candour’ in this quotation see Alan Saunders, ‘The State as Highwayman: from Candour to Rights’, in Haakonssen (1996), 241-71.

²⁸⁷ Rutt, I, i, 168.

²⁸⁸ *Letters to Lindsey*, 7 September 1793.

²⁸⁹ Priestley, *A Letter of Advice to those Dissenters who conduct the Application to Parliament for Relief from Certain Penal Laws, with Various Observations relating to Similar Subjects* (1773).

his philosophy lectures at Daventry and New College, Hackney and Kippis recommended it in the additional references he added to his 1794 edition Doddridge's lectures.²⁹⁰

The third response to Priestley was by the Roman Catholic priest Joseph Berington. In 1779 Berington fulfilled his promise to outline at length his own philosophical system with the publication of his *Immaterialism Delineated; or, a View of the First Principles of Things* (1779).²⁹¹ The work is divided into two books: *Immaterialism Delineated*, in which Berington outlines at some length his own philosophical system, and an *Explanation of Materialism; or, Reply to Dr. Priestley's Disquisitions on Matter and Spirit*, in which Berington works systematically through each section of Priestley's text and offers a corresponding refutation of his arguments. Berington's work is worth considering here for two reasons: firstly, because it is one of the fullest responses to Priestley's materialist system, and, secondly, because Berington, like Palmer and Dawson, was keen to stress the rationality of his own religious belief. His work is thus a contestation of Priestley's claim that his materialist and necessitarian system laid the most rational foundation on which to ground Christian theology. Berington was most likely responding to British Protestant assumptions about Roman Catholicism when he opened the first book with the statement that:

The mind of a Roman Catholic may be as open to rational inquiry, and be as free to speculate on every subject placed within the reach of human investigation, as any member of the reformed churches: for his submission must be *rational*.²⁹²

Immaterialism Delineated is a long, densely written, and complex work which appears to have made little impact, either on Berington's contemporaries, or on subsequent intellectual historians.²⁹³ In the course of the text, Berington cites many British and continental philosophers and theologians, so that his own opinion is not

²⁹⁰ HMO MS Heineken 2; Doddridge, *Lectures*, ed. Kippis, 3rd edn (1794), vol. I, 209.

²⁹¹ On Berington's early philosophical career see chapter 2.

²⁹² Joseph Berington, *Immaterialism Delineated: or, A View of the First Principles of Things* (1779), vi.

²⁹³ Samuel Badcock compared the book disparagingly to the writings of the mystic Jacob Böhme, Badcock, *A Slight Sketch*, 19. The authors of the article on Berington in *The Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century British Philosophers* were presumably unaware of Berington's second philosophical work, vol. I, 83-4.

always easy to infer.²⁹⁴ What is clear is that Berington accepts, for the most part, Priestley's force theory of matter. Like Priestley, he holds that properties generally conceived as being inherent in body are actually effects derived from the action of bodies impressed on the senses.²⁹⁵ Whereas philosophers have considered '*solid extension*' as being an inherent quality of body, Berington thus holds that it is a 'general effect, or phenomenon, whose cause is the combined action of body impressed on a percipient being'.²⁹⁶ The '*essential and universal form*' of matter, Berington argues, is '*energy*' or '*force*'; the powers of attraction and repulsion are '*modes* of the original force impressed on all matter'.²⁹⁷ It is here worth noting that Berington differentiates his own criticism of Priestley's materialism from Price's: regarding '*the nature of matter particularly*', Berington says, his own and Price's ideas 'so widely differ [that] we must have seen many things in different points of view'.²⁹⁸ Where Berington differs from Priestley is in his rejection of the possibility that the force theory of matter could lead to a system of materialism. Berington maintains that the powers of attraction and repulsion ascribable to matter should be considered as 'really inherent in its [matter's] constituent uncompounded elements'.²⁹⁹ All that is '*real*' and '*positive*' in matter is thus '*simple*' and '*indivisible*'. These simple elements, which unite to form the complex substance of matter, are, in themselves, '*intrinsically immaterial*': 'They constitute matter, but are not matter itself: so, intrinsically they are not either solid, or hard, or extended, which appearances however they are calculated to exhibit'.³⁰⁰ Berington claims that he cannot conceive how Priestley can call himself a materialist after having 'spoiled *matter* of all its *materiality*'.³⁰¹ To Berington's understanding, the force theory of matter provides a foundation for 'a general system of *Immaterialism*'.³⁰²

²⁹⁴ Among his influences Berington claims James Harris, Pierre Sigorgne (1719-1809), Leibniz, and Bonnet.

²⁹⁵ Berington, *Immaterialism Delineated*, 76.

²⁹⁶ *Immaterialism Delineated*, 92.

²⁹⁷ *Immaterialism Delineated*, 37; 67.

²⁹⁸ *Immaterialism Delineated*, 435.

²⁹⁹ *Immaterialism Delineated*, 76.

³⁰⁰ *Immaterialism Delineated*, 143.

³⁰¹ *Immaterialism Delineated*, 222.

³⁰² *Immaterialism Delineated*, 143.

Just as the ultimate causes of sensation are simple and immaterial, so too is the mind that perceives them. Berington conceives of sensation within a divinely ordered system which is perpetually maintained by the active agency of the deity:

Every effect on my mind is harmonically generated by the energy of infinite power, referred to that preconcerted order, which subsists between us, and which connects my being and nature to the great cause, who made me, and who continues to support and actuate my mind.³⁰³

He thus relies heavily on a kind of occasionalism: there is no ‘real similitude’ between ‘the cause and the effect’ or between ‘the impression and its sensation’. However, the pre-established order ensures that ‘each effect is relatively *expressive* of its cause’.³⁰⁴ Berington dwells particularly on Priestley’s suggestion that the brain might be possessed of a percipient or sentient power in addition to its vibrating power; if this is true, says Berington, then Priestley has entirely failed to show where this capacity proceeds from.³⁰⁵ Whereas the materialist rather clumsily ‘superadds’ a new power which he supposes to inhere in the brain, the immaterialist holds that ‘the *sentient principle* is itself a substance *sui generis*, of an order superior to and distinct from the brain’.³⁰⁶ The reasoning powers are thus the properties of a simple, immaterial substance. Berington subsequently rehearses many of the arguments to show that consciousness is incompatible with the compounded nature of body, variations of which he had outlined in his original response to Priestley’s edition of Hartley.³⁰⁷

What Berington adds to his previous criticism is an analysis of Priestley’s attempt to demonstrate that materialism is sanctioned by the Scriptures. In response to the historical aspects of Priestley’s materialist thesis, Berington is more consistently historicist than Priestley in his approach to the language of the Scriptures and the early Church Fathers. Firstly, Berington argues that, although Priestley is correct to say that the words usually interpreted as ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’ do not convey, in their original usage,

³⁰³ *Immaterialism Delineated*, 29.

³⁰⁴ *Immaterialism Delineated*, 172.

³⁰⁵ *Immaterialism Delineated*, 151.

³⁰⁶ *Immaterialism Delineated*, 163.

³⁰⁷ See chapter 2.

abstract, metaphysical concepts, this does not necessarily mean that the early Christians thought of the soul as material. It is important to keep in mind, Berington argues, that ‘Oriental language, like every species of poetry, abounds singularly in images of sense’. It is therefore natural that ‘the expressions of the sacred writers’, even when they seem most to ‘lose sight of matter’, should ‘retain much of their native character’.³⁰⁸ The sacred writers and the early Fathers simply did not have words at their disposal adequate to the expression of ‘an *immaterial, simple, spiritual substance*’.³⁰⁹ The present metaphysical notion of ‘*Immateriality*’ is, undoubtedly, a modern thing, but this does not mean that it is any less true. In fact, the natural progress of language means that it is now more calculated to exhibit ‘a just and more adequate idea of the nature of God and of man’.³¹⁰ Berington essentially inverts Priestley’s narrative of how the pure Christian doctrine preached by the apostles was corrupted by the admission of oriental philosophy. Although ‘many philosophers and Christian fathers, educated in the schools of Heathenism [...] were too material in their conceptions of the divine and human natures’, Berington argues,

In process of time, as real Christianity gradually effaced improper associations, the ideas of mankind were simplified; they began better to discriminate between immaterial and material substance.³¹¹

Secondly, Berington argues that Priestley is simply wrong in much of his scriptural and patristic exegesis. He holds that the immaterial system is only strengthened by the fact that it coincides with the opinions of so many of the ancient philosophers. Furthermore, there are many biblical passages, says Berington, that cannot, ‘without the greatest violence’, be reconciled with Priestley’s materialist system.³¹² Drawing on the authority of Ralph Cudworth’s *Intellectual System* (1678) and William Warburton’s *Divine Legation of Moses* (1738-41), Berington sets out to show that, contrary to Priestley’s assertion, many of the early Christian authors did hold the notion of

³⁰⁸ *Immaterialism Delineated*, 300.

³⁰⁹ *Immaterialism Delineated*, 334.

³¹⁰ *Immaterialism Delineated*, 324.

³¹¹ *Immaterialism Delineated*, 401.

³¹² *Immaterialism Delineated*, 298.

incorporeal substance. The first Fathers were ‘not at all tinctured with the gross strain of Materialism, at least in the manner Dr. Priestley has represented them’.³¹³ Tertullian, for example, Berington argues, held an opinion similar to that of many modern philosophers that ‘the soul divested of all corporeal organs, is not susceptible of sensation and affection’.³¹⁴ Numerous passages in the writings of Aquinas ‘so precisely coincide with modern notions’, that they prove that his ideas on the nature of matter and spirit ‘were as clearly defined as the most accurate Metaphysician could desire’.³¹⁵

In a concluding letter to Priestley, Berington again attempted to emphasise the rationality of his religious convictions. Here he states that, although it was education that first made him a Catholic, it was a ‘most rational conviction’ that confirmed his belief. His subsequent statement again challenges Priestley’s claim to have formulated a rational philosophy which is compatible with Christian theology. ‘It has sometimes occurred to me’, Berington continues, in a fascinating aside,

that there can be no rational medium betwixt Catholicism and Deism. Were I not what I am; to-morrow, I think, I should be, what most men of learning, in the reformed Church, either are, or soon will be. Your own conscience will best explain my meaning. Socinianism is a very favourite opinion; will you tell me, how far that persuasion is distant from the Religion which a Socrates or a Plato, unassisted by any superior guidance, might have framed and delivered to mankind?³¹⁶

What Berington is doing in this passage strikes at the roots of Priestley’s project. Priestley, under the influence of earlier theologians such as Edmund Law, conceived of his own work in formulating and disseminating his Unitarian theology and his necessitarian and materialist philosophy as a continuation of the project initiated by the first Protestant reformers.³¹⁷ His attempt to purge Christian doctrine of its corruptions, and to bring Christian belief into a closer alliance with reason, stemmed from the same urge that drove the reformers to rescue true Christianity from the debased form of

³¹³ *Immaterialism Delineated*, 381.

³¹⁴ *Immaterialism Delineated*, 384.

³¹⁵ *Immaterialism Delineated*, 399.

³¹⁶ *Immaterialism Delineated*, 432.

³¹⁷ See chapter 1.

religion promoted by the Catholic Church. What Berington is essentially saying is that such a project is impossible; Protestantism will eventually lead to deism, and Socinianism is merely one step further along this path than, for example, Price's Arian theology.

The extract is worth comparing with a passage in a 1787 letter from Priestley, informing Lindsey of an incident related by John Coates, assistant minister at the Old Meeting in Birmingham.³¹⁸ Having recently returned from a trip to London, Coates had told Priestley of a comment made by Price: as Priestley related it to Lindsey, Price, 'in large company //in// which you [i.e. Lindsey] and D^r Kippis were present, said "he should not be suprised if I [i.e. Priestley] should become a deist"' and that D^r Kippis, as well as yourself, replied to him in my favour'.³¹⁹ Although Lindsey later discredited the report, it is indicative of the fear, within rational dissent, that Priestley's ideas were dangerously close to deism, and even to atheism. The advocates of the rationalist tradition, such as Price, and the Shaftesburian tradition, such as Wodrow, felt that Priestley's materialism and necessitarianism had become (or was close to becoming) incompatible with Christian belief. The fragility of this boundary between Socinianism and deism would come to the fore in Priestley's final attempt to clarify his rationalised form of Christianity in response to the writings of David Hume, and it is to this attempt that I shall now turn.

³¹⁸ This passage was cut from Rutt's edition: see Mills, 'Aspects of a Polymath', 33.

³¹⁹ *Letters to Lindsey*, 11 June 1787.

4. Defining rational religion: Priestley's response to Hume (1780-1782)

By the second half of the eighteenth century David Hume had come to replace the freethinkers of the early century – Toland, Collins, and Tindal – as the primary focus of Christian apologists. As we have seen in chapter 2, Reid, Beattie, and Oswald had concentrated much of their intellectual energies on attacking Hume's ideas, which they saw as a direct challenge to the foundations of Christian belief. In this they were not alone among their contemporaries: numerous authors from across denominational divides in Scotland and England attempted refutations of Hume's writings. It is important to stress that to almost all eighteenth-century thinkers, the only consequence of Hume's infidelity was immorality. Shaftesbury's rejection of the practical possibility of virtuous atheism in an influential passage from his *Characteristicks* held true for most authors in the second half of the century; significantly, Beattie quoted the passage from Shaftesbury in the sixth edition of his *Essay* printed in 1778.¹ William Rose's review of Hume's *Dialogues* in the *Monthly Review* for 1779 captured well the fears of the majority of Hume's eighteenth-century readers: if Hume's ideas on religion were true, then

the wicked are set free from every restraint but that of the laws; the virtuous are robbed of their most substantial comforts; every generous ardour of the human mind is damped; the world we live in is a fatherless world; we are chained down to a life full of wretchedness and misery; and we have no hope beyond the grave.²

Hume's own writings on the subject of religion have been assessed, debated, and reassessed many times over by his critics from the eighteenth century to the present day.³ Some of the most interesting recent work in this field has attempted to recover how Hume's ideas were responded to by his contemporaries.⁴ An understanding of the way in

¹ Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 2nd edn, 3 vols (1714), vol. II, 70-1; Beattie, *Essay*, 6th edn (1778), 407n.

² *MR.*, 41 (1779), 354-5.

³ For Hume's writings on religion see J. C. A. Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd edn (London, 1988); Rivers, vol. II, 308-29; M. C. Bradley, 'Hume's Chief Objection to Natural Theology', *Religious Studies*, 43.3 (2007), 249-70.

⁴ See, for example, James Fieser, *Early Responses to Hume*, 10 vols (Bristol, 1999-2003). Vols V-VI comprise a collection of contemporary responses to Hume's writings on religion. See also M. A. Stewart,

which his work was received among English rational dissenters is beginning to emerge. Isabel Rivers, for example, has shown that Hume's *Philosophical Essays* (1748) was incorporated into Philip Doddridge's philosophy lectures, and thus into the syllabuses at the liberal dissenting academies.⁵ Elsewhere, Rivers has examined a number of Hume's antagonists in light of their denominational affiliations, and explored how rational dissenters, including Rose, Price, and Priestley, attempted to formulate a response to Hume's scepticism.⁶ James Fieser has analysed in some depth Rose's and Samuel Kenrick's reviews of Hume's philosophical works, including their very different responses to his writings on religion.⁷

My aim in this chapter is not to add anything to the vast amount of criticism on Hume. Rather, it is, firstly, to contribute something to the existing accounts of the reception of Hume's writings among dissenters by examining how Hume's ideas were discussed in the Wodrow/Kenrick correspondence. This, along with the available literature on the reception of Hume, will develop a context for my second task, namely, to provide a detailed analysis of Priestley's attempt to formulate a rational defence of Christianity in response to Hume's scepticism. This will provide a more substantial account of Priestley's response to Hume than has previously been offered, and further extend my account of the relationship between the English rational dissenters and the Scots.⁸ Finally, I consider one extraordinary response to Priestley to emerge from within the intellectual culture of rational dissent: William Turner's *Answer to Dr. Priestley's Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever* (1782). I argue that Turner's reply to Priestley marked a significant turning point within rational dissent, in that it was the first work to argue against Priestley's ideas from a position that was, theologically and philosophically, more heterodox than Priestley's own. Moreover, Turner's book brought

'The Early British Reception of Hume's Writings on Religion', in *The Reception of Hume in Europe*, ed. Peter Jones (London, 2005), 30-42; James Fieser, 'Hume's Concealed Attack on Religion and His Early Critics', *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 20 (1995), 83-101.

⁵ Rivers, *The Defence of Truth through the Knowledge of Error*, 19-20. Doddridge had been told about Hume's work by his Anglican friend William Warburton, *Correspondence*, vol. V, 167. However, the reference to Hume in his lecture course might have been added by Ashworth.

⁶ Rivers, 'Responses to Hume on Religion by Anglicans and Dissenters', 691-95.

⁷ James Fieser, 'The Eighteenth-Century British Reviews of Hume's Writings'; 'Beattie's Lost Letter to the *London Review*', *Hume Studies*, 20.1 (1994), 73-84.

⁸ On Priestley's response to Hume see Popkin, 'Joseph Priestley's Criticism of David Hume's Philosophy'.

to the fore the vexed question of whether atheism and virtue were really incompatible, and provided an answer to this question very different to Shaftesbury's.

Wodrow and Kenrick on Hume

As I have shown in chapter 2, one of the many fascinating aspects of the correspondence between James Wodrow and Samuel Kenrick is their discussion of a number of contemporary works of Scottish philosophy. One of the authors who features most frequently in this discussion is David Hume. On 8 April 1751 Kenrick wrote to Wodrow of his 'assiduity to accomplish y^e Debt I owed you' in reading through Hume's essay 'On Liberty and Necessity'.⁹ The letter records a fairly detailed, and at points highly comical, account of Kenrick's study and assessment of the work:

I sat me down, I scratched my noddle I perused Mr Hume's Essay on Liberty and Necessity; wherein you know he reconciles what He imagines have been by y^e learned esteemed insuperable Difficultys inexplicable intricacys strange contradictions, by all y^e thinking world ever since y^e origin of Philosophy to this enlightened Day.

Despite acknowledging Hume's declared intention to reconcile the debate over liberty and necessity, Kenrick clearly understood the essay as a criticism of the libertarian position. Notwithstanding his opinion that the argument is 'ushered in, & childishly repeated wth a good deal of vanity', Kenrick finds Hume's argument 'plausible enough'. He emphasises the theological implications of the text, not explicitly drawn out in Hume's essay, commenting specifically on the work's potential to overturn the foundation of the 'boasted liberty & independence' inherent in Arminian doctrine and its potential assertion that 'orthodox' [i.e. Calvinist] doctrine has 'true Philosophic Truth' on

⁹ Kenrick to Wodrow, 8 April 1751, DWL MS 24.157 (7). Kenrick was most likely reading the essay as it appeared in Hume's *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding* (1748), two second editions of which were published in 1750 and 1751. However, he does not indicate this in the letter. 'On Liberty and Necessity' was originally published, in a different form, in Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739). On the differences between the discussion of liberty and necessity in the two texts see Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity*, 66-8.

its side.¹⁰ Kenrick concludes that, ‘To one of my circumstances who has not opportunity to sift y^e matter to y^e bottom’, ‘y^e thing appears highly probable’, adding that he ‘sh^d be glad of your own, or your bright companion’s notion of what this Gentleman advances’.¹¹

On 21 January 1752 Wodrow responded with an account of his own reading of Hume’s *Political Discourses* (1752).¹² Wodrow opens his account of the text by commenting approvingly on the work’s stylistic qualities:

One after having read such a book finds himself pleased and Entertained (much in the same way as by a modern romance) from the Propriety of the language & Harmony of the Periods & the novelty & oddness of some of the thoughts.

He continues to describe the tendency of these stylistic effects to generate ‘scepticism’, somewhat curiously equated by Wodrow with the term ‘modesty’:

He discovers more modesty or if you please Scepticism in this than in the former work indeed the subjects give more scope for it as some of them are of such a kind that you make think as you please about them & the world will not think of you a bit the worse.

This leads Wodrow to a further description of the often disconcerting effects of reading Hume’s writings: ‘His arguments & reasonings never or seldom produce any solid conviction //but// leave the mind some way loose & more uncertain than when you begun’.¹³ Wodrow’s response here is fairly typical.¹⁴ He continues with an impressionistic description of the reading experience in which he imaginatively compares reading Hume to the observation of a popular children’s game:

¹⁰ On the similarities in rhetorical strategy between Hume’s essay ‘Of Liberty and Necessity’ and Calvinist theological works see James A. Harris, ‘Hume’s Use of the Rhetoric of Calvinism’, in *Impressions of Hume*, ed. M. Frasca-Spada and P. J. E. Kail (Oxford, 2005), 141-59.

¹¹ Kenrick to Wodrow, 8 April 1751, DWL MS 24.157 (7).

¹² A transcription of this letter by M. A. Stewart has been published in James Fieser, ed., *Early Responses to Hume’s Life and Reputation*, 2 vols (Bristol, 2003), vol. I, 7-9.

¹³ Wodrow to Kenrick, 21 January 1752, DWL MS 24.157 (16).

¹⁴ Compare this, for example, with William Adams’s statement that Hume’s philosophical writings could be characterised in the same words that Hume had used to describe Berkeley’s arguments: ‘They admit of no answer; and produce no conviction: their only effect is to cause that momentary amazement and irresolution and confusion, which is the result of scepticism’, William Adams, *Essay on Mr. Hume’s Essay on Miracles* (1752); Hume, *Enquiry*, 155n; Rivers, vol. II, 287.

He uses an argument to establish a point then he throws out some thing on the other side which overturns all he said & leaves you just as you were, then he sets it up; then down with it & at the end you don't know what to think. Did you ever see our children throw at their Pin-Cocks. A pin for a throw at that cock there – you missed it you Dog you – another throw. Hollow, over he goes on his back – Set him up again, let me have another broadside for my own cock. Hume's reasoning brings always to my mind some match of this kind.¹⁵

Wodrow's description of reading Hume resonated strongly with Kenrick. Encouraged by his friend's assessment, Kenrick responded two days later with a similar account of his own experience of reading Hume's *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751). Kenrick here develops the derogatory implications of describing Hume's reasoning as child's-play:

when I read I am entertained & instructed with particulars, I understand 'em; But when I finish a section or the whole, I lose the aim or proper Effect – I see two or three childish pieces of affectation but I can easily overlook these for the sake of other things of greater worth – To tell you the truth I had walk'd ab^l my room above an hour thinking on this matter.

However, in the same letter he informs Wodrow of the 'strange doubting humour I have been in of late (formed from y^e learned productions of H –)'.¹⁶ As M. A. Stewart has noted, there is little extant evidence of Hume's influence on eighteenth-century religious belief.¹⁷ However, some of the social effects of Hume's writings are alluded to in the letters. In addition to these accounts of the two men's private reading experiences, the letters refer to the role of Hume's writings in promoting deism among ministers of the Church of Scotland. Commenting on the relatively small number of deists amongst the Scottish clergy in January 1769, Wodrow informed Kenrick that there were 'A few about Edr. in East Lothian & in the Merse by reading Dd. Hume's books and by their conversation & connexions with him & his friends'. To this he added: 'you may add a

¹⁵ Wodrow to Kenrick, 21 January 1752, DWL MS 24.157 (16).

¹⁶ Kenrick to Wodrow, 23 January 1752, DWL MS 24.157 (17).

¹⁷ Stewart, 'The Early British Reception of Hume's Writings on Religion', 30.

scattered Clergyman or two here & there in other parts of the country who has happened to get his education among that set of people'. Interestingly, Wodrow contrasts his forecast of the relatively slow spread of deism with a prediction that Socinianism will increase rapidly. He told Kenrick that 'it is my apprehension that most of the men of learning & freedom of thought among the clergy both in Scotland & in most Protestant countries in Europe will soon become Socinians'.¹⁸

It is here worth recalling Wodrow's comparison of Hume and Adam Smith.¹⁹ Whereas Woodrow had cautiously expressed his opinion that Smith's writings on ethics could be reconciled with Christianity, the 'licentious tendency' of Hume's writings was obvious.²⁰ Hume's ideas were incompatible with Christian belief. In this respect, Wodrow's and Kenrick's response to Hume provides a useful context in which to approach Priestley's understanding of Hume's ideas. As we shall see, in some important respects Priestley responded to Hume in a similar way to Wodrow and Kenrick. However, perceiving the threat of Hume's ideas, he made a more sustained attempt to respond to the intellectual content of Hume's arguments, and it is to this response that I shall now turn.

Priestley's *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever* (1780)

Priestley most likely conceived of his *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever* during his trip to the continent with Shelburne in the mid-1770s. Relating his travels in his *Memoirs* over a decade later, he recalled that 'all the philosophical people' to whom he had been introduced at Paris were 'unbelievers in Christianity, and even professed Atheists'. Making no secret of his own Christian beliefs, Priestley must have appeared something of an anomaly to his continental acquaintances: he was told by some of them that he was 'the only person that they had ever met with, of whose understanding they had any opinion, who professed to believe in Christianity'. Yet, inquiring further into their own beliefs, Priestley soon concluded that 'they had given no proper attention to it and did not

¹⁸ Wodrow to Kenrick, 25 January 1769, DWL MS 24.157 (45).

¹⁹ See chapter 2.

²⁰ Wodrow to Kenrick, 10 July 1759, DWL MS 24.157 (33).

really know what Christianity was'.²¹ It was not only in France that Priestley associated with such philosophical unbelievers: 'a great part of the company' whom Priestley met through Shelburne in England were also unbelievers in Christianity. It was his discussions with members of Shelburne's coterie which led Priestley to think that he could 'combat their prejudices with some advantage' and provided him with the stimulus to begin the first volume of the work.²²

Like others of Priestley's metaphysical works, early drafts of the *Letters* were circulated among his correspondents and subsequently revised in light of their comments. A letter from Priestley to Joseph Bretland of October 1779, for example, indicates that Bretland had advised Priestley on the contents of the first letter. The same letter, and another to Newcome Cappe, demonstrates that others, including Lindsey, John Jebb, and Price, read a draft of the work before it was published.²³ This early draft would evolve into the work eventually published in 1780 as a result of two significant publications of the late 1770s: David Hume's autobiographical 'My Own Life' (1778), and his *Dialogues concerning Natural and Revealed Religion* (1779). The first of these, Hume's autobiography, was a brief and fairly self-deprecating account of Hume's literary career. It was published with a letter from Adam Smith to William Strahan, in which Smith described the serenity and fortitude Hume had displayed in the face of his imminent demise, and famously described Hume as 'approaching most nearly to the idea of a perfectly wise man, as perhaps the nature of human frailty will admit'.²⁴ Smith's letter was an important contribution to the debate over Hume's personal character, which was underpinned by the eighteenth-century doubt as to whether an unbeliever in Christianity

²¹ Priestley wrote to Lindsey from Paris on 21 October 1774 informing him that 'I am here in the midst of unbelievers and even Atheists. I had a long conversation with one, an ingenious man, and good writer, who maintained seriously that man might arise, without any Maker, from the earth. They may despise me; I am sure I despise and pity them', Rutt, I, i, 254. See also Priestley to William Graham, Rutt, I, i, 255. Whilst on the continent Priestley visited the home of the atheist philosopher Baron d'Holbach, at whose house Shelburne was 'a frequent guest'. He would also have met the pamphleteer André Morellet (1727-1819), who visited Shelburne at Bowood in 1772. See Alan Charles Kors, *D'Holbach's Coterie: An Enlightenment in Paris* (Princeton, 1976), 105; Edmond Fitzmaurice, *Life of William, Earl of Shelburne, afterwards First Marquess of Lansdowne. With Extracts from his Papers and Correspondence*, 3 vols (1876), vol. II, 231-4; 254-9.

²² Rutt, I, i, 199.

²³ Rutt, I, i, 327. See also Rutt, I, i, 333; 328.

²⁴ Hume, *The Life of David Hume* (1777). See Rivers, vol. II, 261-2.

could live a virtuous life.²⁵ The second of these works, Hume's *Dialogues*, had most likely been largely completed by 1751.²⁶ However, on the advice of friends among whom he had circulated a manuscript of the work, Hume had decided not to publish it during his lifetime, primarily in order to avoid provoking the clamour against his perceived infidelity. He revised the text towards the end of his life and left detailed instructions in his will for the work's posthumous publication. The *Dialogues* was eventually published in 1779, three years after Hume's death, by his nephew (Adam Smith, Hume's first choice of a publisher, having thought it unwise to undertake Hume's request).

Hume's death at the height of his literary reputation occasioned renewed interest in his work. As I have observed before, Priestley, in 1774, had claimed that he was 'truly pleased with such publications as those of Mr. Hume', as they had occasioned the subject of religion to be 'more thoroughly canvassed, and consequently to be better understood than it was before'.²⁷ However, by 1780 Priestley and Lindsey evidently felt that Hume's views on religion had been taken seriously enough by some to warrant a response. In a letter of 1779 to Cappe, Priestley stated that it was his reading of Hume that had led him 'to write a series of "Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever"'.²⁸ Lindsey, in a letter to William Tayleur, described Priestley's *Letters* as 'something that he [i.e. Priestley] had written against Mr Hume's piece of Natural Religion'.²⁹ The same letter is interesting in that it shows that Lindsey thought of Hume as a deist, rather than an atheist. He told Tayleur: 'Mr Hume allows that there is intelligence and wise design in the first cause, but denies his Benevolence'. For this reason, Lindsey explained, 'his book may hurt [...] some minds that read it'. He continues: 'I shall be glad to see this objection particularly answered'.³⁰ It is as a response to Hume's ideas, directed towards those likely to be affected by Hume's criticisms of natural religion, that Priestley's eventually published work ought, primarily, to be understood.

²⁵ See Fieser, ed., *Early Responses to Hume's Life and Reputation*, 2 vols (Bristol, 2003). On some of the orthodox responses to Smith's letter see Rivers, vol. II, 262-4. George Horne's *Letter to Adam Smith* (1777) is one of the most famous.

²⁶ J. C. A. Gaskin, Introduction to David Hume, *Principal Writings on Religion including Dialogues concerning Natural and Revealed Religion and The Natural History of Religion* (Oxford, 1993), xviii.

²⁷ *Examination*, 193.

²⁸ Rutt, I, i, 328.

²⁹ Ditchfield, 311.

³⁰ Ditchfield, 311.

This said, however, it is worth noting that, except in the title of the work, Priestley does not mention Hume until the ninth of the fourteen letters of which the book is comprised. It is thus likely that the main section of the work was written, and that Priestley had formulated the substance of his defence of theism, before he had read Hume's *Dialogues*. The first eight letters of Priestley's work are dedicated to outlining his system of natural religion: the proofs, from nature, for the being and attributes of God. Variations of most of Priestley's arguments here can be found in his earlier works, particularly the first volume of the *Institutes*, however the *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever* constitutes their most systematic expression. In the first letter Priestley reiterates his theory of knowledge, what he terms 'the natural ground of evidence' or 'the assent that we give to propositions of all kinds'.³¹ This is largely derived from chapter III, section II of Hartley's *Observations on Man*, 'Of Propositions, and the Nature of Assent'.³² Priestley here distinguishes between two different kinds of propositions: those founded on demonstration, such as the propositions of geometry and algebra, and those founded on observation, such as the truths of natural philosophy. The principles of natural religion are generally of the latter class: that is, although they cannot be demonstrated *a priori*, they can be proved by evidence to the extent that our conviction of them 'shall hardly be distinguishable, with respect to its strength, from that which arises from a demonstration properly so called'.³³

In letter II, '*Of the direct Evidence for the Belief of a God*', Priestley applies this method of reasoning to outline his version of what is now usually referred to as the argument from design. This is not, of course, in any sense original: the design argument stretches back at least to Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*, with which Priestley was familiar, and was common currency in the eighteenth century, finding expression in authoritative texts such as John Wilkins's *The Principles and Duties of Natural Religion* (1675), which was widely used in the education of clergymen, and Joseph Butler's *The Analogy of Religion* (1736), the arguments and language of which Priestley's own work parallels at

³¹ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 6-7.

³² Hartley, *Observations*, vol. I, 324-67. Referring to this letter, Priestley told Bretland: 'It is all on the principle of the association of ideas. Mr. Locke's doctrine, of the coincidence of ideas, will not do for all cases', Rutt, I, i, 327.

³³ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 10.

several points.³⁴ The argument from design, in Priestley's account of it, runs something as follows. The constant observation that 'chairs', 'tables', 'houses', and 'books' are not made without men lays the foundation for an association of the ideas of these objects with the idea of men as the makers of them. This association becomes established in the mind so that whenever we see a chair, a table, a house, or a book we have no doubt – even if we do not see when or how they were made – that 'some men or other *did* make them'.³⁵ Likewise, our experience of observing birds build nests, spiders make webs, or bees build honeycombs leads us to associate the ideas of these objects with the ideas of the animals that made them. This, Priestley holds, is largely the origin of our more complex idea of causation: as a man necessarily advances in the habit of generalising his ideas, 'he calls chairs, tables, nests, webs, &c. by the general term *effects*, and men, animals, &c. that produce them, by the term *causes*'. Priestley then instances the slightly different, and somewhat problematic, example of our constant observation that one plant proceeds from another, and one animal from another 'by natural vegetation, or generation'. According to Priestley, although the parent plant or animal is commonly referred to as a 'cause', the word is, in this instance, used in a less proper sense as the plant or animal has 'no design' in producing its effect, and no '*comprehension* of the nature or use of what they produce'.³⁶ For one thing to be the '*proper cause*' of another it is necessary for it to be 'capable of comprehending the nature and uses of those productions' of which it is the cause. The constant observation of this conjunction of causes and effects leads us to internalise the maxim that 'wherever there is a fitness or correspondence of one thing to another, there must have been a cause capable of comprehending, and of designing that fitness'. To the possible objection that this empirical account of causation opens the door to relativism Priestley responds that:

³⁴ Priestley told Lindsey in September 1787 that he had nearly finished reading Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*, commenting 'If it was well translated, & read by unbelievers, it would have a good effect, in shewing the miserable uncertainty the heathens were in on such an important subject', *Letters to Lindsey*, 9 September 1787. On Wilkins's *Natural Religion* and its use in the eighteenth century see Isabel Rivers, "'Galen's Muscles": Wilkins, Hume, and the Educational Use of the Argument from Design', *The Historical Journal*, 36.3 (1993), 577-97. For Priestley's reading of Butler see chapter 1.

³⁵ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 11.

³⁶ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 13.

The experience and observations of all men, without exception, are so much alike, that such associations of ideas as these must necessarily have been formed in all their minds, so that there is no possible cause of any difference of opinion on the subject.³⁷

Priestley then proceeds to the specifically theological aspect of his argument. Granting the validity of the previous explanations, it ought to be acknowledged that:

If a table or a chair must have had a designing cause, capable of comprehending their nature and uses, [then] the wood, or the tree, of which the table was made, and also the man that constructed it, must likewise have had a designing cause, and a cause, or author, capable of comprehending all the powers and properties of which they are possessed, and therefore of an understanding greatly superior to that of any man, who is very far, indeed, from comprehending his own frame.³⁸

Even if we were to allow that the species of man had no beginning, it would not follow that ‘it could be the cause of itself’; for ‘the idea of a cause of any thing implies not only something prior to itself, or at least cotemporary with itself, but something capable at least of comprehending what it produces’.³⁹ For the same reason,

All the species of brute animals, and the world to which they belong, and with which they make but one system, and indeed all the visible universe (which, as far as we can judge, bears all the marks of being *one work*) must have had a cause, or author, possessed of what we may justly call *infinite power and intelligence*.

It is thus possible, Priestley claims, to show from ‘the most irresistible evidence’ and from ‘the strongest analogies possible’ that ‘the world must have had a designing cause, distinct from, and superior to itself’. We might just as well claim that ‘a *table* has not a designing cause’ as that ‘the *world*, or the *universe*, considered as one system, had none’.⁴⁰

³⁷ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 15.

³⁸ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 15-16.

³⁹ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 17.

⁴⁰ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 18.

In letter III Priestley considers four common objections to his basic theistic hypothesis. Firstly, he attempts to answer the argument that if we accept that the universe requires an intelligent cause then, for the same reason, we could argue that ‘that intelligent cause must require a superior intelligent cause, and so on *ad infinitum*’.⁴¹ To avoid this infinite regression, it could be alleged, it is surely simpler to say that the universe had no cause than to say that the cause which produced it had none. Priestley answers this with a logically fragile train of reasoning. Firstly, he holds that it is a self-evident truth that something must have existed from eternity (otherwise nothing could have existed at present); secondly, he argues that this original being must be capable of comprehending itself and therefore must have been ‘necessarily *uncaused*’. Thirdly, he argues that a being capable of comprehending itself may be called ‘*infinite*’, and that ‘we may, perhaps, be authorised to say’ that an infinite being, unlike a finite being, does not require a cause. Priestley’s cautious wording in this third part of his argument is part of his attempt to negotiate the difficulty of the fact that he is discussing truths which are, strictly speaking, ‘above our comprehension’ as finite creatures.⁴² As we have seen time and again in Priestley’s writings, it is crucial for him that the doctrines of religion are in no sense contrary to reason. Priestley is here at the limits of what can be understood by the human mind, and yet he is at pains to stress that these truths are not irrational or mysterious in any way. This leaves him in what is arguably a paradoxical position: although the conclusions we reach about an uncaused, infinite being are, by their nature, ‘above our comprehension’, we are, says Priestley, ‘*compelled*’ into them by ‘the plainest and the most cogent train of reasoning’; although it may be said to be ‘*above* our reason’ to comprehend ‘how this original being, and the cause of all other beings, should be himself uncaused’, it is ‘by no means properly contrary to reason’.⁴³

Whereas Priestley had been forced to rely on a partly demonstrative proposition in the first part of his argument, he is afterwards keen to show that his conclusion can be reached by empirical reasoning. That there is ‘an uncaused intelligent being’ follows as a necessary conclusion from our experience of ‘what does actually exist’.⁴⁴ Here, however,

⁴¹ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 20.

⁴² *Phil. Unbeliever*, 22.

⁴³ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 23.

⁴⁴ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 23.

Priestley soon runs into problems. He holds that from experience we learn of the existence of ‘such things as are incapable of comprehending themselves, are finite, and [that] therefore require a cause’. Although this experience provides us with an analogy for judging of other finite things, ‘it by no means furnishes any analogy by which to judge concerning what is totally different from any thing to which our experience extends’.⁴⁵ Priestley’s purpose here is to show that although we are right to say that all finite things require a cause, we are wrong to extend this rule to things ‘infinite’ and ‘not destitute of original self-comprehension’ because we have had no experience of infinite things. It is thus wrong to say that the cause of the universe requires a cause. The problem, of course, is that in the process of refuting one argument, Priestley has seemingly undermined his original argument for the existence of a God by denying the grounds for the analogy between what we observe of finite causes and what we infer about the origin of the universe as a whole.

The second point which Priestley attempts to refute is the argument that ‘a *whole* may have properties which the parts have not’; whilst each part of the universe might require a cause, it could be argued, it does not necessarily follow that the whole universe does.⁴⁶ This objection to the design argument is, in some ways, particularly problematic for Priestley, as it bears some resemblance to his own argument for the materiality of man. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Priestley had relied strongly on the idea that just because the individual parts of the brain are not capable of thinking, this does not mean that the brain conceived as a system of parts cannot think. In response to the objection, Priestley relies on the analogy between our experience of objects in the world and our assumptions about the universe as a whole in an attempt to demonstrate the manifest contradiction of the proposition that an arrangement of ‘*caused beings*’ could constitute an ‘*uncaused one*’:

To say, that the whole universe may have had no cause, when it is acknowledged that each of its parts, separately taken, must have had one, would be the same thing as saying that *a house* may have had no maker, though the walls, the roof, the windows, the doors, and all the parts of which it consists, must have had one.

⁴⁵ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 24.

⁴⁶ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 26.

He subsequently points out, bizarrely given his earlier writings, that such a conclusion would clearly contradict ‘what we may call our *common sense*’.⁴⁷ Priestley then attempts to differentiate his own argument on the mind of man from this objection to his theism. Whereas ‘*thinking*’ and ‘*materiality*’ are merely different, ‘*caused*’ and ‘*uncaused*’ are contradictory. Thus whereas in the first case it is not impossible that the former could result from the latter, in the second case it clearly is. However, Priestley, again, soon runs into problems. Firstly, he states, in attempting to invalidate the theory that intelligence in the universe could result from the arrangement of the sun, the earth, and the other planets, that the universe is ‘so unlike the uniform composition of a *brain*, that the argument from analogy entirely fails’. Again, this seems to inadvertently undermine his earlier argument for the being of a deity: it is difficult to see how, if the analogy between the human mind and the universe as a whole ‘entirely fails’, Priestley’s earlier analogy between a house or a table and the universe could be at all meaningful. Secondly, Priestley, albeit hypothetically, allows the supposition that ‘all that is *intellectual* in the universe, should be the necessary result of what is not intellectual in it’. Even if this were the case, argues Priestley, ‘there should still be what has been sometimes called a *soul of the universe*’; this hypothesis is, to Priestley’s mind, essentially theistic and ‘would be a real foundation of religion’.⁴⁸ Despite the fact that Priestley quickly dismisses this supposition (‘our imagination’, he says, ‘revolts at the idea’), he is here facing the same problem he had come up against in the *Disquisitions*: that everything in the universe *is* the divine power, and thus that the deity itself might be material.⁴⁹

The third point which Priestley considers in letter III is the objection that his argument leads to a species of anthropomorphism: that ‘as all the intelligence we are acquainted with resides in the brains of men and animals’, then the deity, ‘if he be a being distinct from the universe, and intelligent, must [...] have in him something resembling the structure of the brain’.⁵⁰ To this Priestley responds that the fact that the deity and the human mind possess intelligence does not necessarily mean that they are similar in other respects. He draws on examples from natural philosophy to illustrate the point that ‘Many

⁴⁷ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 27.

⁴⁸ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 28.

⁴⁹ See chapter 3.

⁵⁰ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 28.

things have common properties that are very dissimilar in other respects'.⁵¹ Steel and air, for example, are both possessed of the property of elasticity; however, by means of sense perception, we would not be able to find any similarities between these two substances. Here Priestley hints at how he might have attempted to resolve the problem concerning the relation of the deity to the physical world by drawing on an analogy from his research in natural philosophy. There are many intangible powers in nature – Priestley lists as examples gravitation and repulsion – which can act, even in places occupied by other bodies. Just like these powers, Priestley conjectures, 'the divine power [...] may penetrate, and fill all space, occupied or unoccupied by other substances, and yet be itself the object of none of our senses'.⁵²

Fourthly, and finally, Priestley considers the argument advanced by the atheists of antiquity that 'the universe might have been formed by the *fortuitous concourse of atoms*, which had been in motion from all eternity, and therefore must [...] have been in all possible situations'.⁵³ Against this Priestley argues, slightly more convincingly, that the ancient philosophers had only a confused notion of what an atom really was. 'Atoms', according to Priestley, can only mean 'solid particles of matter [...] which, however small, are perfectly compact' and must therefore 'consist of parts that have strong powers of attraction'.⁵⁴ As we have seen in the previous chapter, it is this force of attraction, rather than body itself, which, for Priestley, constitutes anything like the 'essence' of matter.⁵⁵ There is thus no reason why, from experience, we ought to conclude that 'these small masses of matter could have those powers without communication *ab extra*'.⁵⁶ We might just as well, according to Priestley, claim that magnets or even human beings were 'originally existent' as we might claim that atoms, properly understood, could have come into existence without an external cause.

Having defended, to his satisfaction, the argument for the existence of a God against the most commonly advanced objections, Priestley moves on in letters IV-VIII to consider what can reasonably be affirmed – 'what the *actual phenomena* of nature

⁵¹ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 29.

⁵² *Phil. Unbeliever*, 30.

⁵³ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 31.

⁵⁴ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 27.

⁵⁵ However, as I have shown, Priestley is at other points sceptical about our ability to comprehend the essence of anything. See chapter 3.

⁵⁶ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 31.

compel us to admit' – about the attributes of God.⁵⁷ Having proved that there must be a self-existent being, Priestley argues that we 'cannot help concluding' that this being must be infinitely powerful, infinitely intelligent, omnipresent, eternal, unequalled, and unchanging. These qualities, to which he afterwards refers as the 'primary attributes of the deity', he holds as largely self-evident once we have accepted the arguments in favour of the being of God.⁵⁸ He then attempts to illustrate a number of arguments to prove the benevolence of the deity. Priestley's first step here is to draw out the teleological aspects of his design argument. In letter V he states that the marks of design in the system of nature prove conclusively that the author of nature had 'some *end* in view'.⁵⁹ It is evident, for example, that the end of plant and animal life is health and vitality. Taking it for granted that a state of health is a state of enjoyment, it is thus evident that the intention of the maker must have been the happiness of his creatures. Here again, Priestley's optimistic assessment of the human condition comes to the fore. He argues that in order to ascertain the intention of the creator, we ought to consider not only the 'actual state of things' but the '*tendencies* of things in the future'.⁶⁰ As we have seen before, Priestley considered the course of human history as a progress towards perfection; he here cites advances in medicine, governance, and religion in support of this belief.⁶¹ Since these advances ought to be attributed to divine providence, they afford yet another example of the divine benevolence.

In letter VI Priestley counters the objection that the existence of pain and death weighs against the idea that the deity desires the happiness of his creatures. Death, by allowing for a '*succession of creatures*, of each species', makes the 'sum of happiness [...] upon the whole, greater'.⁶² It is much more desirable that there should be a succession of individuals as this enables the whole species to advance more quickly towards maturity. The consistence of pain with the divine benevolence is explained, for Priestley, by Hartley's theory of association. Pain, in Hartley's system, is a necessary part of the formation of ideas in the minds of children; it is only by experiencing the pain

⁵⁷ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 27.

⁵⁸ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 47.

⁵⁹ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 50.

⁶⁰ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 58.

⁶¹ See chapter 1.

⁶² *Phil. Unbeliever*, 68.

occasioned by falls or burns, for example, that children can develop the necessary caution against these occurrences.⁶³ Against the objection that a ‘pure and perfect benevolence’ might have fashioned a ‘different original constitution of nature, in which evils might not have been necessary’, Priestley holds that there are no grounds on which to assert that this would even have been possible ‘within the limits of infinite power itself’.⁶⁴ Furthermore, Priestley argues that a system where the deity acts by ‘laws, or general methods’ is preferable to a hypothetical world in which the deity creates men ‘with all the feelings and ideas that are acquired in the course of a painful and laborious life’.⁶⁵ General laws allow for the exercise of wisdom both in God and in man; the present world, in Priestley’s scheme, allows for the formation of man in preparation for his future existence.

For Priestley proving the benevolence of the deity is the key to proving all of his moral attributes. Justice, mercy, veracity, and all other qualities of a moral nature are, philosophically considered, ‘only modifications of benevolence’.⁶⁶ A being truly benevolent will thus necessarily act in accordance with the principles of justice, mercy, and veracity, because only by acting in this way could he promote the happiness of the moral agents subject to his governance. Accepting that the deity is benevolent, therefore, is a sufficient proof that he deals with moral agents justly. We can thus be certain that virtuous or vicious actions will be rewarded or punished accordingly in an afterlife, even if, in this world, the wicked might, ‘in some cases, derive an advantage from their vices’.⁶⁷ However, in addition to this assurance, there is, according to Priestley, independent empirical evidence of the moral government of the world: primarily, the observable truth that, in the majority of cases, ‘virtue gives a man a better chance for happiness than vice’.⁶⁸ This very simple truth is largely the foundation of the moral aspect of Priestley’s natural theology: a system where the pleasure or pain occasioned by natural occurrences is fixed by the deity, in such a way as to effect the general happiness of his creation:

⁶³ Locke, *Essay*, II, vii, 4 and II, xx are also a key precedent for Priestley’s ideas on this subject.

⁶⁴ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 72.

⁶⁵ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 73.

⁶⁶ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 79.

⁶⁷ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 83.

⁶⁸ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 84.

It cannot, therefore, but be, that virtue must, upon the whole, lead to happiness, and vice to misery; and since this arises from the constitution of nature, and of the world, it must have been the intention of the author of nature that it should be so.⁶⁹

In letter VIII Priestley advances the evidence, from natural religion, for the future existence of man. He here relies solely on one argument. Accepting that things are evidently in a progress to some better state, there is, says Priestley, ‘some reason’ to expect that ‘this *melioration* will go on without limits’. At various points in the previous four letters Priestley has asserted that we can be reasonably sure that the deity is infinitely benevolent. He here appears to take the infinite benevolence of the deity for granted and argues that, ‘as exact and equal government arises from perfect benevolence’,

we cannot [...] but be led by this analogy to expect a more perfect retribution than we see to take place here, and, consequently, to look for a state where moral agents will find more exact rewards for virtue, and more ample punishments for vice, than they meet with in this world.⁷⁰

Priestley himself is willing to admit that this is far from conclusive: the argument from analogy is not ‘so strong as to produce a *confident expectation* of such a future state’, but produces only ‘a *wish* for it’. His subsequent conjecture that ‘this wish itself, being produced by the analogy of nature, is some evidence of the thing wished for’ does little to conceal the essential weakness of the analogy.⁷¹ Notwithstanding this, however, Priestley goes on to assert that the natural evidence of the moral government of the world is so strong that even ‘those who are properly atheists, believing that nothing exists besides the world, or the universe’ ought to determine their conduct in accordance with it. This is an exceptional passage in that, in opposition to the widely held contemporary belief, it implies that an atheist could be virtuous. Priestley then goes on to claim, extraordinarily, that there may ‘be a *future state*, even though there be no God at all’.⁷² Just as we have no real knowledge of how the human species came into being, ‘our *re-production* may be as

⁶⁹ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 87. Again, see Locke, *Essay*, II, vii, 3-6.

⁷⁰ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 96.

⁷¹ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 97.

⁷² *Phil. Unbeliever*, 99.

much within the proper course of nature, as our original production'.⁷³ This is part of Priestley's attempt to describe in naturalistic terms the doctrines of his theology, and a part of his overall design to make the teachings of religion palatable to philosophically minded readers. He concludes this section with another analogy between theology and natural philosophy, comparing the hypothetical 'dissolution of a human body by putrefaction, and the recovery of it' to the 'total solution of a piece of metal in a chymical menstruum' which was once thought to be an absolute loss of it.⁷⁴

It is worth noting that Priestley's attempt to find evidence from nature for a future state marks a change in the arguments he had previously advanced in support of Christianity. In his *Institutes* Priestley had asserted that a future state was a doctrine of revealed, not natural, religion. His reason for doing so in this case was to deny the orthodox argument that an immaterial and thus immortal soul, deducible from reason, was sufficient evidence of a future state. It was on exactly this point that Berington, as we have seen, had criticised Priestley for weakening the arguments for natural religion.⁷⁵ One possible explanation for this change in Priestley's sentiments is that, after the publication of Hume's *Dialogues* in 1779, he felt that strengthening the arguments for natural religion had become a more pressing task.

Despite the lack of any explicit reference to Hume in the first part of Priestley's work, it is significant that most of the arguments in the first eight letters had appeared, at various points, in the mouths of the characters in Hume's *Dialogues*. In the course of the debate between the characters in Hume's work, Cleanthes (Hume's empirical theist) had voiced some of the defences of natural religion discussed above. In Part II, for example, Cleanthes outlines a more concise version of the argument from design (termed by Cleanthes the 'argument *a posteriori*') to that developed at some length by Priestley.⁷⁶ Cleanthes also shares Priestley's optimism on the general prevalence of happiness: against Demea's bleak depiction of human life in Part X, Cleanthes exclaims that 'fact and experience' prove conclusively that 'Health is more common than sickness: Pleasure than pain: Happiness than misery. And for one vexation that we meet with, we attain,

⁷³ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 100.

⁷⁴ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 104.

⁷⁵ See chapter 2.

⁷⁶ Hume, *Dialogues*, 45.

upon computation, a hundred enjoyments'.⁷⁷ Cleanthes's summary of the moral implications of his theism is also very similar to Priestley's position: in Part XII he tells Philo that 'genuine theism'

represents us as the workmanship of a Being perfectly good, wise, and powerful; who created us for happiness, and who, having implanted in us immeasurable desires of good, will prolong our existence to all eternity, and will transfer us into an infinite variety of scenes, in order to satisfy those desires, and render our felicity complete and durable.⁷⁸

Likewise, some of the criticisms of Cleanthes's position voiced by Philo (Hume's sceptic) and Demea (Hume's rationalist and – at other points, and somewhat incongruously – mystical theist) correspond to the hypothetical objections considered by Priestley in letter III. In Part IV of Hume's work, for example, Philo questions Cleanthes's claim that an immaterial being must be the cause of the material world, by asking why we should not then enquire into the cause of that immaterial being: 'If the material world rests upon a similar ideal world', argues Philo, 'this ideal world must rest upon some other; and so on, without end'.⁷⁹ In the same section, Demea claims that Cleanthes is essentially advocating a species of anthropomorphism by insisting on the similarity of the human mind and the divine, corresponding to the third possible objection answered by Priestley in letter III.⁸⁰

Yet it is not until letter IX that Priestley finally comes to consider Hume's work directly. It is clear from his comments here that he had perceived the thrust of Hume's intentions. Priestley interpreted Philo as voicing 'the sentiments of the writer', and understood Philo's eventual acceptance of the theistic argument in Part XII as disingenuous: 'though the debate seemingly closes in favour of the theist', noted Priestley, 'the victory is clearly on the side of the atheist'.⁸¹ However, in its response to Hume, Priestley's work is, again, problematic. The first point to note is that Priestley,

⁷⁷ *Dialogues*, 102.

⁷⁸ *Dialogues*, 126.

⁷⁹ *Dialogues*, 63-4.

⁸⁰ See David M. Holley, 'The Role of Anthropomorphism in Hume's Critique of Theism', *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion*, 51.2 (2002), 83-98.

⁸¹ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 108-9.

although he acknowledged that Hume's writings had undoubtedly had 'a considerable effect in promoting the cause of atheism', persisted in refusing to take the metaphysical aspects of Hume's thought entirely seriously: 'With respect to *Mr. Hume's metaphysical writings* in general', Priestley informed his imagined correspondent, 'my opinion is, that, on the whole, the world is very little the wiser for them'.⁸² This partly explains the fact that when he finally does turn to Hume's ideas on religion, Priestley is, at points, unwilling to dignify his antagonist with a serious response. In considering Philo's speculations on the possible origins of the world, for example, Priestley notes that they are 'unworthy of a philosopher, and miserably trifling on so serious a subject', and thus require 'no particular animadversion', even though they investigate the necessary consequences of Cleanthes's (and Priestley's) insistence that we can infer about the deity only from what we observe of the natural world. In this respect, it is interesting that Priestley characterises Hume's writings in terms very similar to Wodrow and Kenrick. He describes Hume's prose as being 'wire-drawn' and merely 'literary' in character, as opposed to writings concerned with 'the *pursuit of truth*' or 'the advancement of virtue and happiness':

In many of his *Essays* (which, in general, are excessively wire-drawn) Mr. Hume seems to have had nothing in view but to *amuse* his readers, which he generally does agreeably enough; proposing doubts to received hypotheses, leaving them without any solution, and altogether unconcerned about it. In short, he is to be considered in these *Essays* as a mere *writer* or *declaimer*, even more than Cicero in his book of Tusculan Questions.⁸³

In a similar way, Priestley later describes Hume's objections to the arguments for the benevolence of the deity as 'mere cavilling'. The allusion to childishness found in both Wodrow's and Kenrick's responses to Hume recurs in Priestley's account: after

⁸² *Phil. Unbeliever*, 106.

⁸³ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 106-7. 'Wire-drawn' in the eighteenth century was most often used in a derogatory sense: Berkeley, for example, refers to the 'wiredrawn Distinctions, and prolix Sophistry of the Schoolmen', George Berkeley, *Alciphron: or, the Minute Philosopher in Seven Dialogues*, 2 vols (1732), vol. I, 391. The most common eighteenth-century meaning of 'amuse' is to beguile, delude, cheat, deceive, *OED*.

criticising Hume for evidently not having read Hartley's *Observations on Man*, Priestley notes that 'Compared with Dr. Hartley, I consider Mr. Hume as not even a child'.⁸⁴

This said, however, Priestley does make some attempt to engage with aspects of Hume's scepticism. He tells his imaginary correspondent that he will 'recite what I think has the most of the appearance of strength, or plausibility, in what Mr. Hume has advanced on the atheistical side of the question'.⁸⁵ This, once again, emphasises Priestley's commitment to the idea that atheistic ideas ought to be engaged with, and locates him firmly within a rational dissenting tradition which can be traced back to Doddridge's academy lectures.⁸⁶ Yet, in response to Hume's criticisms, he merely reiterates the arguments he had made in the earlier letters. Priestley's fundamental problem is that he largely ignores what is arguably Philo's most forceful criticism of Cleanthes's theistic position: that the analogy upon which all inferences about the deity necessarily depend within an empiricist theological framework is essentially a very weak one. It is this point which Philo makes at some length immediately after Cleanthes first outlines the argument from design in Part II of the *Dialogues*; here, Philo argues that 'the dissimilitude' between the universe and a house is 'so striking' that 'the utmost Cleanthes can 'pretend to' is 'a guess, a conjecture, a presumption concerning a similar cause'.⁸⁷ The same point underpins Philo's statement towards the end of the work that observations pertaining to the natural world, although not necessarily inconsistent with a theological explanation, cannot provide a foundation for inferences concerning a wise and benevolent deity such as Cleanthes argues must exist.⁸⁸ Priestley's failure to recognise this point is made even more explicit by the various contradictions in his own account, some of which I have explored above.

It is only in letter X that Priestley does respond to this aspect of Hume's argument. Here, in considering Hume's contention in the eleventh of his *Philosophical Essays* that we cannot, from natural religion, infer a future state, Priestley notes Hume's insistence on the 'total *dissimilarity* between the Divine Being and other intelligent

⁸⁴ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 124.

⁸⁵ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 109.

⁸⁶ Rivers, *The Defence of Truth through the Knowledge of Error*; Mills, 'Joseph Priestley's connections with Jews and Catholics', 182.

⁸⁷ Hume, *Dialogues*, 46.

⁸⁸ *Dialogues*, 107.

agents'.⁸⁹ In response to this, Priestley argues that the deity is not 'in Mr. Hume's sense, an *unique*, of a genus or species by himself', but 'is to be placed in the general *class of intelligent and designing agents*, though infinitely superior to all others of that kind'.⁹⁰ This, however, obviously contradicts Priestley's earlier statement, in refutation of the idea that the deity requires a cause, that experience does not provide us with an analogy with which to judge of infinite things.

It is also interesting to note how Priestley attempts to fit Hume into a tradition of Scottish philosophy. As we have seen already, Priestley himself associated this Scottish tradition with an arbitrary recourse to 'instinctive' principles in order to account for the origins of certain ideas more philosophically explained by Hartley's theory of association.⁹¹ In letter XIV, for example, '*An Examination of Mr. Hume's Metaphysical Writings*', Priestley censures Hume's attempt in the fifth of his *Philosophical Essays* to explain why we receive a stronger conception of an idea when we are led from one idea to another by resemblance, contiguity, or causation: 'Unable to account for this', says Priestley, Hume 'ascribes it to an *instinct of nature*'.⁹² Priestley is here explicit on what this kind of argumentative procedure reminds him of: Hume, he says, 'might just as well have done what Drs. Reid, Beattie, and Oswald, did afterwards, viz. ascribe the sentiment of *belief itself*, as well as that which is the *cause of belief*, to an arbitrary instinct of nature'.⁹³

Responses to Priestley's *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever*

Some of the problems with Priestley's response to Hume may explain why a number of readers of the first drafts of the *Letters* among Priestley's correspondents advised him to delay publication of the work. In November 1779 Priestley had told Cappe that Lindsey and John Jebb had thought the *Letters* 'too metaphysical' and had advised him not to

⁸⁹ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 136.

⁹⁰ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 137-8.

⁹¹ See chapter 2.

⁹² *Phil. Unbeliever*, 197; Hume, *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding* (1748), 82; 91. Priestley slightly obscures Hume's original meaning in this passage.

⁹³ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 197.

publish it.⁹⁴ In January 1780 Lindsey told Turner that Priestley had not published the *Letters* at an earlier date because of the ‘too abstruse metaphysical cast of the former part of it’.⁹⁵ However, these concerns did not appear to strike Priestley’s admirers. Samuel Kenrick read Priestley’s *Letters* in 1781; his response, detailed in a letter to Wodrow of 15 April, is particularly interesting for its conspicuous lack of any engagement with the theological and philosophical arguments outlined in Priestley’s work. Kenrick clearly understood the book as, primarily, a response to Hume: he told Wodrow that it was ‘in the form of a l’ to a young gentleman, who seems to have been a disciple of Hume’s with regard to infidelity’. More specifically, he interpreted the work as a riposte to Adam Smith’s attempt to defend Hume’s personal character in his letter to Strahan: ‘I am glad to find’, Kenrick told Wodrow, ‘that he [Priestley] has given a challenge to Dr Adam Smith who has spoken so highly of Hume’s Wisdom and Virtue to defend his admired friend’. In this sense, it is clear that Kenrick understood the debate as being as much about Hume’s personal reputation as about the philosophical cogency of his ideas. Kenrick saw Priestley as issuing a challenge to Smith to defend the comment he had made in his adulatory letter: he told Wodrow that ‘if the last Dr [i.e. Smith] do not step forth as the guardian of his friend’s reputation, it must be presumed he is either afraid of his antagonist, or of the validity of the cause’.⁹⁶ Wodrow too was by no means unsympathetic to the work. Despite subsequently acknowledging his preference for Reid, he told Kenrick in June 1787 that he had read Priestley’s *Letters* at Edinburgh and ‘liked it much’.⁹⁷

However, another of Priestley’s respondents was much less receptive and did focus closely on the book’s argument. Matthew Turner (*d.* 1789?) published his *Answer to Dr. Priestley, on the Existence of God* anonymously in 1782. Turner’s book is significant because it was the first response to Priestley to emerge from within the intellectual culture of rational dissent which adopted a line of argument more heterodox than Priestley’s own. In fact, Turner’s book was nothing less than an explicit avowal of

⁹⁴ Rutt, I, i, 328.

⁹⁵ Ditchfield, 311.

⁹⁶ Kenrick to Wodrow, 15 August 1781, DWL MS 24.157 (72).

⁹⁷ Wodrow to Kenrick, 15 June 1787, DWL MS 24.157 (130).

atheism.⁹⁸ In many ways Turner's *Answer* represented exactly what Priestley's critics, such as Berington and Price, had most feared. It pursued the empirical lines of reasoning advocated by Priestley one step further, and in doing so it excluded any notion of a deity from a coherent explanation of the natural and moral system of the world. It also seized on Priestley's suggestion that an unbeliever in Christianity could be virtuous, and used this concession to deny outright the expediency of grounding ethics in any kind of theological system.

Little is known about Turner's early life: he was a surgeon and a chemist at Liverpool, who developed a friendship with the pottery manufacturer Josiah Wedgwood (1730-1795) in the early 1760s. It was most likely through Wedgwood's partner, Thomas Bentley (1731-1780), the porcelain manufacturer, that Turner first met Priestley.⁹⁹ Between 1762 and 1765 Turner delivered a course of lectures on chemistry and pneumatics at the Warrington Academy. However, it is clear from a letter Turner wrote to John Seddon accepting the post at Warrington on 16 March 1762 that he was acquainted with Priestley and Seddon prior to commencing his duties at the academy.¹⁰⁰ It is thus likely that Priestley and Turner became fairly well acquainted: Priestley attended Turner's lectures at Warrington, and, according to his own testimony, was largely indebted to Turner for introducing him to the study of chemistry.¹⁰¹ The question of the authorship of the *Answer to Dr. Priestley* has been the subject of some speculation. The source of the attribution to Turner was a note added to the American edition of Priestley's *Memoirs* by Thomas Cooper (1759-1839), describing Turner as a 'professed Atheist' and a 'republican'.¹⁰² However, as David Berman has correctly pointed out, the text contains two separate voices: the 'Answer', a central analysis of Priestley's arguments purportedly conveyed to the compiler of the book by his unnamed 'friend', is framed by an advertisement, a prefatory address, and a postscript, the last two of which are signed by someone identifying himself as 'William Hammon'.¹⁰³ This has led Berman to conjecture that the book was actually the work of two authors: William Turner, the author of the

⁹⁸ David Berman has argued that the book was the first overt declaration of atheism in Britain: David Berman, *A History of Atheism from Hobbes to Russell*, 2nd edn (London, 1990), 110-20.

⁹⁹ Rutt, I, i, 60.

¹⁰⁰ Matthew Turner to John Seddon, 16 March 1762, HMC MS Seddon 1, f. 74.

¹⁰¹ Rutt, I, i, 76.

¹⁰² Rutt, I, i, 76. On Cooper see chapter 5.

¹⁰³ Berman, *A History of Atheism*, 112-16.

‘Answer’, and an unknown ‘editor’.¹⁰⁴ If Berman’s thesis is correct, then it is possible that the unknown editor was Turner’s friend Bentley.¹⁰⁵

However, the question of the authorship of the work is less interesting than the rhetorical strategy which the framing device enables. Much as in Hume’s *Dialogues*, the presence of more than one authorial voice allows the work to express different and contradictory ideas about religion. It is likely, in fact, that the narrative was structured in such a way for this express purpose: the work makes a radical statement rejecting Christian belief, whilst simultaneously qualifying this statement by purposely limiting the scope of its analysis. In the advertisement to the work the editor assures his readers that the ‘question here handled is not so much, whether a Deity and his attributed excellencies exist, as whether there is any Natural or Moral proof of his existence and of those attributes’.¹⁰⁶ In this way, he clearly limits the scope of his enquiry to natural religion: ‘Revealed knowledge is not descanted upon; therefore Christians at least need not take offence’.¹⁰⁷ In the prefatory address the tone becomes much more polemical. The editor there goes on to state that by reading Priestley’s letters and the answer that his friend had written to them, his ‘scepticism’ in religion was changed into ‘atheism’. Here he is explicit in his acknowledgement: ‘when I am asked, whether there is a God or no God’, he writes, ‘I do not mince the matter, but I boldly answer there is none, and give my reasons for my disbelief’.¹⁰⁸ At another point he states:

¹⁰⁴ Priestley himself assumed that the book was the work of two authors: Priestley, *Additional Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, in Answer to Mr. William Hammon* (Birmingham, 1782), xiii-iv. Martin Priestman, in *Romantic Atheism: Poetry and Freethought, 1780-1830* (Cambridge, 1999), 12-43, follows Berman in ascribing the work to two separate authors. In my own analysis I shall use ‘the editor’ to refer to the voice of the advertisement, preface, and postscript, and ‘Turner’ to refer to the voice of the central analysis of Priestley’s book.

¹⁰⁵ Bentley had been educated at the Findern Academy, Derbyshire. He was one of the founding Trustees of the Warrington Academy, and a co-founder of the Octagon Chapel, Liverpool, for which he wrote a liturgy. Bentley was a close friend of Turner’s. Two facts about his life suggest that he might have been the editor of the reply to Priestley. Firstly, despite his connections with dissent, it is clear that Bentley was known to his contemporaries as an unbeliever: Priestley recorded in his *Memoirs* that Bentley was ‘an unbeliever in Christianity’, and that this difference in their opinions was often the subject of their conversations. Secondly, Berman’s thesis that there are two, separate authors is grounded largely on internal stylistic evidence: he notes that the author of the prefatory address and the postscript is distinguished by ‘a fondness for Latin quotation’ (114). Alison Kelly’s account of Bentley in the *ODNB* notes his classical education and fluency in French and Italian. See Rutt, I, i, 60; ‘Alison Kelly, ‘Bentley, Thomas (1731-1780)’, *ODNB*.

¹⁰⁶ Matthew Turner, *Answer to Dr. Priestley’s Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever. Part I* (1782), v.

¹⁰⁷ *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, v.

¹⁰⁸ *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, xix.

As to the question whether there is such an existent Being as an atheist, to put that out of all manner of doubt, I do declare upon my honour that I am one. Be it therefore for the future remembered, that in London in the kingdom of England, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty-one, a man has publicly declared himself an atheist.¹⁰⁹

This is very likely to be a response to a passage in Philip Doddridge's popular work of practical divinity, *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* (1745). In chapter XI Doddridge had challenged his infidel reader to sign a dated memorandum of his renunciation of Christianity, confident that even '*many a Man, who would be thought a Deist*' would never dare.¹¹⁰ However, it is worth noting that, despite these unflinching avowals, the editor afterwards repeats the insistence of the advertisement that he is discussing only natural religion: he promises Priestley that, as soon as the latter publishes a defence of revealed religion, he will 'hold [him]self open to it'.¹¹¹ In this way he qualifies, at least nominally, his declaration of unbelief. In an attempt to define more specifically what he means by atheism, the editor goes on to align himself with the opinions of Hume, Helvetius, Diderot, and D'Alembert. As Martin Priestman has argued, the positions subsequently expressed, both in the preface and in the answer, were undoubtedly informed by these thinkers.¹¹² However, they are also very close to Priestley's own ideas. Despite their widely divergent conclusions, it is significant that the lines of reasoning pursued by Turner and Priestley were essentially very similar.

In the final passage of the prefatory address the editor begins to outline the philosophical basis of his atheism. From this it is clear that he shared both Priestley's belief in the power of reason and his commitment to empirical principles: 'Against my feeling and my experience', he states, 'I cannot argue, for upon these sensations is built all argument'.¹¹³ Like Priestley the editor concludes from the observation of nature that

¹⁰⁹ *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, xvii.

¹¹⁰ Philip Doddridge, *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul: Illustrated in a Course of Serious and Practical Addresses* (1745), 99-100. On Doddridge's work see Isabel Rivers, 'Dissenting and Methodist Books of Practical Divinity', in *Books and Their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Isabel Rivers (Leicester, 1982), 127-64, esp. 142-5. I am grateful to Professor Rivers for drawing my attention to this allusion.

¹¹¹ *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, xx.

¹¹² Priestman, *Romantic Atheism*, 14-15.

¹¹³ Turner, *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, xxvii.

there is ‘a principle of intelligence and design’ in the universe. Where he differs from Priestley is in his denial that this principle is ‘extraneous from itself’.¹¹⁴ He subsequently compares this intelligent principle – what he calls the ‘*vis naturæ*’, or ‘the perpetual industry, intelligence and provision of nature’ – to ‘the properties of gravity or any elastic, attractive or repulsive power’.¹¹⁵ As we have seen, Priestley had made exactly this analogy in his *Letters*, and in the *Disquisitions* had actually equated the attractive and repulsive forces with the divine power, notwithstanding his denial that these forces were in any way a part of the deity itself.¹¹⁶ Priestley’s rather tenuous distinction on this point is given short shrift by the editor: he insists that the creative designing principle is, like these other properties, inherent in matter. Whereas systems, such as Priestley’s, which ascribe this designing principle to an ‘extraneous foreign force’ make ‘the universe and all other organised matter a machine made or contrived by the arbitrary will of another Being’, the editor’s own system ‘admits no other God or designing principle than matter itself and its various organisations’.¹¹⁷

The editor next draws attention to Priestley’s contentious suggestion that the existence of a future state of rewards and punishments is possible even if we allow the possibility that the deity does not exist. This leads him on to one of the central questions his preface is attempting to address, namely, ‘whether immorality, unhappiness or timidity necessarily do or naturally ought to ensue from a system of atheism’, or, put another way, Pierre Bayle’s question of ‘whether honesty sufficient for the purposes of civil society can be insured by other motives than the belief of a Deity?’¹¹⁸ Like Bayle, and unlike, of course, the vast majority of his contemporaries, the editor believes that virtuous action is consistent with atheism. What is particularly significant here is that he explains morality in very similar terms to Priestley, except, of course, with the important distinction that he omits the necessity of a belief in the deity. According to the editor’s system, ‘There is nothing in fact important to human nature but happiness, which is or ought to be the end of our being’; ‘self-happiness’ is consistent with, indeed is a necessary condition for, the happiness of all, since ‘we cannot individually be happy

¹¹⁴ *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, xxvii.

¹¹⁵ *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, xxviii.

¹¹⁶ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 30; *Disquisitions*, 2nd edn, vol. I, 41.

¹¹⁷ *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, xxviii.

¹¹⁸ *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, xxvi-ii. The editor cites Bayle’s *Penseés diverses sur la comète* (1680).

unless we join also in promoting the happiness of others'.¹¹⁹ Morality is still closely linked with the hope of rewards and the fear of punishments. However, this is no longer, as in Priestley's scheme, a divine sanction, but a starkly secular one: 'men of low minds [...] will always have their religion or pretence of it', 'but I am mistaken', the editor declares, 'if it is not the gallows or the pillory that more govern their morals than the gospel or the pulpit'.¹²⁰

In the 'Answer' constituting the main body of the text an even more penetrating criticism of Priestley's position is developed. Here Turner begins by questioning one of Priestley's fundamental assumptions. According to Turner, Priestley's conviction that the universe is an 'effect' is 'a *postulatum* without concession and without proof'.¹²¹ The universe might just as well be a cause. If the universe has existed from all eternity, as Priestley allows that it probably has, then it is surely more rational to ascribe design to what Turner calls the 'energy of nature', than to ascribe it, as Priestley does, to 'some other extraneous Being'.¹²² Turner returns to Priestley's equivocal position on the relationship between matter, the forces which act upon it, and the deity. Following Priestley's own rules of reasoning, there is no reason for him, according to Turner, to 'suppose gravity, elasticity and electricity to have been imprest [sic] on bodies by a superior Being, and not originally inherent in matter'. It could only be in order to 'favour his own hypothesis of a Deity' that Priestley should adhere to his own theory rather than, for example, Hume's conjecture that 'motion might as well as other powers and properties have been originally inherent in matter'.¹²³ This, of course, makes Priestley guilty of the philosophical fallacy which he declaims so fervently against in others: positing causes which appearances do not strictly necessitate.

Turner also points out the paradox at the heart of Priestley's argument: the fact that he continually emphasises that all our knowledge is derived from our experience of finite causes and yet holds that we can infer from this knowledge that there is an infinite cause. Turner mocks Priestley's paradoxical claims, his own convoluted syntax mimicking the specious reasoning of his antagonist:

¹¹⁹ *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, xxxi.

¹²⁰ *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, xxxiii.

¹²¹ *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, 15.

¹²² *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, 28.

¹²³ *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, 32.

He [Priestley] goes on with his career of words to argue about an unseen being with another whom he will allow to have no idea of the subject and yet it shall be of no avail in the dispute, whether he has or no, or whether he is capable or incapable of having any.¹²⁴

Like Hume's character Philo, he also recognises that the analogies at the heart of Priestley's arguments are fallacious: 'Neither is there any analogy between the works of art, as a table or house, and of nature, as a man or tree'.¹²⁵ He continues in a tone of thinly muted sarcasm to enquire of Priestley 'whether there is not some difference between a table and the world?'¹²⁶ In response to Priestley's arguments for the benevolence of the deity, Turner charges Priestley with projecting human qualities and aspirations onto an imaginary divinity. In a powerfully destructive passage he writes:

The whole of this is absurd; but when the Doctor begins to feel enthusiasm he is like the rest of the ecclesiastical arguers. They reason themselves into imaginary Beings with more imaginary properties and then fall down and worship them. God is said to have made man in the image of himself. If he has done so, man is up with him, for he in return makes God in his own image. Much as the imagination of one man differs from another, so differs the God of each devotee. They are all idolaters or anthropomorphites to a man; there is none but an atheist that is not the one or the other.¹²⁷

The charge of 'enthusiasm' would have particularly stung Priestley, given that his attempt to formulate a rational defence of Christianity was, in part at least, an attempt to distinguish true Christianity from 'enthusiastic' and irrational beliefs.

What is again significant about the 'Answer' is that it draws attention to some of the dangerous consequences of Priestley's reasoning. Turner focuses specifically on Priestley's contention that 'there may be a future state though there be no God, because

¹²⁴ *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, 48-9.

¹²⁵ *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, 33-4. It is clear from this section, and others, that Turner was familiar with Hume's *Dialogues*: he continues 'Hume observes that the former works are done by reason and design, and the latter by generation and vegetation, and therefore arguing from effect to causes, it is probable, that the universe is generated or vegetated' (34). See Hume, *Dialogues*, 78-82.

¹²⁶ *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, 34.

¹²⁷ *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, 20.

he [Priestley] reasons it may be in the course of nature'.¹²⁸ However, if this is true then 'the course of nature may be as it were without a God', and thus there is 'no *natural* proof of a Deity'.¹²⁹ In fact, throughout out the 'Answer' Turner is concerned to show that morality and religion should be separated. He is adamant that religion is not an adequate foundation on which to ground moral judgments: to 'support still the efficacy of religion in making men virtuous is to oppose metaphysical reasoning to the truth of fact'.¹³⁰ He argues that 'It were better to seek another support for morality than a belief in God'.¹³¹ Although he does not attempt to outline a complete secular theory of morality, he essentially 'naturalises' Priestley's own natural theology. In other words, he takes many of the arguments which Priestley advances to prove God's benevolence and shows that these hold good, even when the existence of the deity is denied. For example, if, as Priestley argues, 'virtue tends to happiness', then there is no reason why 'a sensible atheist' should not 'hold it right to be virtuous'.¹³² Significantly, Turner here refers back to the reports of Hume's death: 'Who could wish an end better or more happy than that of Mr. Hume, who most certainly was an atheist'.¹³³ Turner agrees with Priestley that the 'true principle most commonly seen in human actions' is 'the natural inclination of man for pleasure', however it is 'philosophy' and not 'religion' which can reconcile this inclination with morality. Even if there is no God it does not necessarily follow that 'the world which man inhabits is either fatherless or deserted', for:

The wisdom of nature supplies in reality what is only hoped for from the protection of the Deity. If the world has so good a mother, a father may well be spared, especially such a haughty jealous, and vindictive one as God is most generally represented to be.¹³⁴

Priestley replied to Turner's tract five months later with his *Additional Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, in Answer to Mr. William Hammon* (1782). The substance of

¹²⁸ *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, 24

¹²⁹ *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, 25.

¹³⁰ *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, 45.

¹³¹ *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, 25.

¹³² *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, 26.

¹³³ *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, 27. It is worth noting that Hume never declared himself an atheist.

¹³⁴ *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, 47. Note that Turner's description of a 'fatherless' world echoes Rose's language in his review of Hume's *Dialogues*, see above.

his argument was an attempt to prove that the universe could not be an ‘*uncaused being*’.¹³⁵ He relies heavily on the assumption that a cause must be capable of understanding an effect; the reason why an eye, an animal, or any other part of the physical universe cannot have been uncaused is, says Priestley, ‘that they are not capable of comprehending themselves’.¹³⁶ He continues:

If any being whatever bear the marks of design, there must exist somewhere a mind capable of that design; and if it be not capable of it itself, we must look for it in some other being.¹³⁷

Priestley largely ignores Turner’s (and Hume’s) criticisms of the analogical aspects of his argument. His insusceptibility to these criticisms largely stems from his inability to conceive of the natural world within anything but a teleological framework. He persists in the comparison between a ‘*telescope*’ and an ‘*eye*’ because they are ‘equally mere *instruments*, adapted to a particular purpose’. They both, therefore, ‘prove the existence of what we call a *mind*, capable of perceiving that end or purpose, with a power of providing that means, and of adapting it to its end’.¹³⁸ To Turner’s provocative suggestion that the only thing which hinders ‘a series of finite causes to be carried back *ad infinitum*’ is that ‘the reasoner or contemplator of the course of nature is tired’, Priestley dogmatically replies that ‘the mind will always revolt at the idea of going back *ad infinitum*, through an infinite succession of mere finite causes’.¹³⁹

Interestingly, Priestley censures as ‘manifestly disingenuous’ Turner’s claim that his sustained attacks on the arguments for natural religion were not to be interpreted as a denial of the doctrines of revealed religion.¹⁴⁰ However, Priestley seemingly endorses Turner’s assertion of the independence of the two when he attempts to convince Turner that a belief in revelation *is* compatible with Turner’s atheistic beliefs. In an extraordinary passage Priestley urges that, as long as Turner admits ‘an *intention*, or *design*, in nature’,

¹³⁵ Priestley, *Additional Letters*, ix.

¹³⁶ *Additional Letters*, 27.

¹³⁷ *Additional Letters*, 29.

¹³⁸ *Additional Letters*, 19.

¹³⁹ *Additional Letters*, 28; Turner, *Answer to Dr. Priestley*, 37.

¹⁴⁰ *Additional Letters*, 12.

then he ‘cannot exclude the idea of what we call *character*, and proper *personality*, whether it belong to a being distinct from the visible universe, or to the visible universe itself’. Admitting this, ‘the whole system of revelation may follow’, even though Turner has denied all of the natural and moral arguments for the being of a God.¹⁴¹ The passage exemplifies Priestley’s equivocal position in relation to the authority of natural religion: the fact that, at points, he appears to lay so much stress upon it, whilst, at others, he asserts its proper subordination to the doctrines of revelation. This same notion had led Priestley to close his letter on Hume’s *Dialogues* by repeating in earnestness what Philo had concluded ‘by way of cover and irony’: that a ‘person seasoned with a just sense of the imperfection of natural reason will fly to *revealed truth* with the greatest avidity’.¹⁴² Priestley’s earlier, bold accusations that Thomas Reid and William Enfield were, in different ways, guilty of ‘scepticism’ on account of their cautious approach to the powers of human reasoning, sit uneasily with his claim here to be, in Philo’s words, ‘a philosophical sceptic’ as an essential step to being ‘a sound and believing christian’.¹⁴³

These two passages are also, perhaps, indicative of the turn that Priestley’s intellectual career would take after 1782. Priestley’s personal letters indicate that he had begun to turn away from metaphysics by the early 1780s. In April 1780 Priestley told Bretland that he was undecided as to whether it would be ‘worth while’ to publish a second edition of his *Disquisitions*; he admitted that he had ‘not looked over it since it was published’ and had given up reading his antagonists’ responses to the work.¹⁴⁴ In April 1782 he told Toulmin: ‘The call for the “Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever” has not been considerable’. In this letter the alacrity which Priestley had characteristically shown for controversy is conspicuously lacking: he told Toulmin that he would ‘perhaps’ reply to the answer he had just received from Turner.¹⁴⁵ In October of the same year, Priestley told Caleb Rotheram that he had seen through the press what would be ‘probably a last edition’ of the *Disquisitions* and treatise on necessity: ‘I think I have now quite done with these metaphysical subjects’, Priestley continued, ‘and shall confine

¹⁴¹ *Additional Letters*, 48.

¹⁴² *Phil. Unbeliever*, 133.

¹⁴³ *Phil. Unbeliever*, 133.

¹⁴⁴ Rutt, I, i, 333.

¹⁴⁵ Rutt, I, i, 358.

myself to philosophy [i.e. natural philosophy] and theology'.¹⁴⁶ Following his election as minister to the congregation at the New Meeting House, Birmingham in 1780, Priestley held to his word, immersing himself in the study of early Christian history. Between 1782 and 1794, when he left England permanently for North America, he produced three major, multi-volume works: *An History of the Corruptions of Christianity* (1782), *An History of Early Opinions concerning Jesus Christ* (1786), and *A General History of the Christian Church* (1790), all of which were concerned with proving the Unitarian nature of primitive Christianity. It is important to note, however, that to Priestley himself, this would not have been a radical shift in interests. Priestley conceived of his science, his philosophy, and his theology as all part of one, essentially religious, intellectual project. His turn to the study of Scripture and the patristic authors was a turn to the study of revealed, rather than natural religion; however, as we have seen in chapter 3, revealed religion had played an important role, even in his more strictly philosophical works.

Moreover, notwithstanding his claims to the contrary, there is some evidence to suggest that Priestley had intended to continue his metaphysical project. As early as 1775 Priestley told Cappe that he had made 'many observations on human nature, with a view to the illustration of Hartley's theory'. These observations concerned 'the conduct of the human mind and happiness' and were 'intermixed with observations on education'; Priestley told Cappe of his intention to 'publish them altogether as one work' at some point in the future.¹⁴⁷ In November 1776 Lindsey told William Turner, in what was most likely a reference to this project, that Priestley was 'in earnest, set down to his great metaphysical work', noting his 'great expectations' of the book on the grounds of the 'clearness of his views of things, and art of making difficult things easy, and from his thorough comprehension of Hartley'.¹⁴⁸ Priestley worked sporadically on this manuscript for as long as sixteen years. In the late 1780s, notwithstanding his earlier comment to Rotheram that he had 'quite done' with metaphysical subjects, he was evidently still at work on the project. A letter of 1787 records him requesting Lindsey to procure books from the London bookseller Samuel Hayes which Priestley required for the purpose of collecting 'facts concerning human nature' to aid his plan to 'illustrate and extend'

¹⁴⁶ Rutt, I, i, 365.

¹⁴⁷ Rutt, I, i, 274.

¹⁴⁸ Rutt, I, i, 294.

Hartley's theory.¹⁴⁹ However, all plans for this work were abandoned after the Birmingham riots of 1791.¹⁵⁰ In his *Appeal to the Public* (1791), published in the wake of the riots, Priestley recorded the irreparable loss of a manuscript consisting of 'Illustrations of Hartley's doctrine of Association of Ideas, and farther observations on the Human Mind', which would 'probably have been the most original, and nearly the last, of my publications'. Of the several volumes of 'hints and loose materials', Priestley informed his readers, not 'one scrap was recovered'.¹⁵¹ In addition to this lost work, Priestley pursued one more metaphysical project. In the early 1790s he persuaded his bookseller Joseph Johnson to issue a new edition of Anthony Collins's *Inquiry* in an attempt to further promote his own necessitarianism.¹⁵² A letter to Lindsey of 17 October 1790 indicates that William Frend (1757-1841), who was actively promoting Unitarianism in the University of Cambridge, had agreed to write a tract to accompany the work along with Priestley's preface.¹⁵³ The tract, however, never appears to have materialised.

James Dybikowski is thus, in part, right that the development of Priestley's 'system of ideas' spanned a fairly brief period between 1774 and 1780, and that by 1780 Priestley's 'intensively creative philosophical period was largely over'.¹⁵⁴ However, it is important not to impose our own systems for categorising knowledge onto Priestley's more synoptic world view. His later works in theology were, to Priestley's mind at least, a continuation of these metaphysical works. To continue my own narrative of the development of the philosophical ideas of the rational dissenters, however, I shall now return to the dissenting academies, and to Priestley's younger contemporary, Thomas Belsham. In 1774 Unitarianism had begun to develop a more substantial institutional structure following the opening of Lindsey's chapel at Essex Street in London. By 1787 Priestley could refer to Lindsey's chapel as 'the head quarters of unitarianism'.¹⁵⁵ In the 1780s, following Priestley's move to Birmingham, Unitarian doctrine found a more

¹⁴⁹ *Letters to Lindsey*, 1787.

¹⁵⁰ Rutt, I, i, 274.

¹⁵¹ Priestley, *An Appeal to the Public, on the Subject of the Riots in Birmingham* (Birmingham, 1791), 38.

¹⁵² *A Philosophical Inquiry concerning Human Liberty. By Anthony Collins, Esq. Republished with a Preface, by Joseph Priestley* (1790); *Letters to Lindsey*, 18 August 1790.

¹⁵³ *Letters to Lindsey*, 17 October 1790.

¹⁵⁴ Dybikowski, 'Joseph Priestley, Metaphysician and Philosopher of Religion', 86.

¹⁵⁵ *Letters to Lindsey*, 17 June 1787.

secure foothold in the provinces. By 1791 Priestley could write to Lindsey of his desire to found a second and ‘proper unitarian Chapel’ at Birmingham.¹⁵⁶ In the last two decades of the eighteenth century, further provincial societies were formed through the efforts of a younger generation of Presbyterian radicals: William Christie (1750-1823) and Thomas Fyshe Palmer (1747-1802) in Scotland, William Turner (1761-1859) at Newcastle, Harry Toulmin (1766-1823) at Monton and later Atherton near Manchester, and William Frend at Cambridge. However, as I shall now demonstrate, in these years it was left largely to Belsham to transform Priestley’s philosophical system into an academic syllabus that would underpin the theological ideas of the emerging Unitarian movement.

¹⁵⁶ *Letters to Lindsey*, 23 December 1791.

5. The reception of Priestley's ideas in the liberal dissenting academies (1781-1796)

I began this thesis by considering the evolution of Priestley's ideas in the Daventry and Warrington dissenting academies. We have seen how these ideas evolved through Priestley's engagement in the 1770s and early 1780s with the writings of Reid, Beattie, and Oswald (chapter 2), with Price, Berington, and Palmer (chapter 3), and with Hume (chapter 4). By the early 1780s Priestley had fully formulated his mature philosophy of religion. In an attempt to trace the diffusion of these ideas through the intellectual culture of rational dissent from the 1780s onwards I shall now return, once again, to the academies. This final chapter examines how Priestley's ideas made their way into the philosophy syllabuses taught at Warrington, Daventry, and New College, Hackney between 1781 and 1796. I focus on a series of lecture notes from Warrington, most likely dating from the early 1780s, before proceeding to examine the career and writings of Thomas Belsham. Belsham was undoubtedly the most important figure in relation to philosophy and rational dissent in the last two decades of the century. However, very little attention has been devoted to his work in this respect.¹ Drawing on Belsham's extensive published and manuscript works, I show how he developed Priestley's philosophy of the 1770s and early 1780s into a series of lectures which formed the core of the philosophy syllabus at New College, Hackney until its closure in 1796. In the course of this analysis, I pay particular attention to Belsham's treatment of the Scottish philosophers, drawing to a conclusion my survey of the intellectual ties between the English rational dissenters and the Scots.

As we have seen in chapter 2, Reid's, Beattie's, and Oswald's books were all held in the Warrington Academy library. However, it is interesting, and perhaps surprising, that the extant records appear to indicate that although the library held copies of Priestley's works on linguistics and natural philosophy by 1775, his philosophical works (the *Disquisitions*, the correspondence with Price, and the *Institutes*) were not added to the catalogue until after 1786 when the library had been transferred to Manchester New

¹ See Thomas Madge, *On the Character and Writings of Thomas Belsham. Extracted from the Monthly Repository for February 1830* (1830), esp. 30-2; Sell, *Philosophy, Dissent and Nonconformity*, 77-80.

College.² The Warrington Academy library did, however, hold a copy of Caulfield's *An Essay on the Immateriality and Immortality of the Soul* (1778), one of the several hostile responses to Priestley's materialism written by Anglican clergymen.³ Yet from a set of extant notes it is possible, to some extent, to reconstruct the philosophy lectures delivered at Warrington in the late 1770s or early 1780s, and to show that Priestley's materialist theory was discussed in these lectures.⁴ The first reference to Priestley in the notes comes mid-way through a commentary on Part III, chapter 4 of Isaac Watts's *Logick, or, the Right Use of Reason in the Enquiry after Truth* (1725). Here the lecturer considers the problem of retaining a clear and distinct meaning when assigning names to 'Modes or abstract Ideas'. These words are often difficult to understand as they are frequently used in very different senses and, in some cases, 'the affectation of science' has, according to the author, 'led men to frame words without any distinct ideas'. It is in the example given to demonstrate this point that the first reference to Priestley occurs:

Let any one only reflect for a moment what long controversies have of late been written upon the subject of materialism. Let him consider that Spinoza and his followers denied that there was any thing in the universe but matter, that Berkely denied there was any matter in the universe, that Berkely's theory has been controverted by many writers ever since, and that Doctor Priestley is again introducing materialism and he will be convinced that the word matter and all the words that have rela[t]ed to it are not clearly understood by the several opponents and that we have not thoroughly considered the origin of language or the art by which the Mind separ[a]tes its complex Ideas and affixes names to its several perceptions.

The reference is presumably to Priestley's redefinition of matter as something possessed only of the property of extension and of the powers of attraction and repulsion, in opposition to the traditional understanding of matter as a solid, impenetrable, and inert substance possessed only of a *vis inertiae*.

² *A Select Catalogue of Books in the Library of the Warrington Academy*, 6; 12; MS Misc 24 (iv).

³ HMO MS Misc 24 (i); see chapter 3.

⁴ These lectures might have been delivered by William Enfield. For more on the authorship and dating of the lectures see appendix II. All subsequent references are to HMO MS Seddon 6.

The second reference to Priestley in the notes occurs in the course of a discussion of Doddridge's proposition 83: 'To enquire into the most considerable arguments to prove the immateriality of the soul'.⁵ Following a brief preamble in which the lecturer asserts that man can intuitively discern two distinct substances within himself, the commentary on Doddridge's lectures begins at scholium 6, approximately half way through Doddridge's lecture 95. The lecturer follows Doddridge closely in arguing, against the notion that if brutes are possessed of perception then they must be immortal, that 'immateriality does not imply immortality as to the Brutes'.⁶ He subsequently follows Doddridge through scholia 8 and 9, in which Doddridge argues that although it is not demonstrable that the soul is immaterial it is at least possible and even highly probable that it is. To Doddridge's reference in scholium 9 to the theory of a 'vehicle of the soul' the lecturer adds that the subject of consciousness or thought 'must be ver[y] different from gross Body', and that if the mind is material then it must be 'some more subtil kind of matter which lodges some where in the Brain and which matter may be a monad incapable of division'. To the references listed in Doddridge, which include Wollaston and Cudworth, the notes add that Zeno (334-262), the Greek neo-Platonist Hierocles, and 'The Rabbis' held something like this position. The lecturer then copies almost verbatim from scholium 10 ('As to the opinion the heathen Philosophers entertained on this subject there is room for debate'), which marks the end of the lecture in Doddridge's textbook.⁷ A passage in the notebook then reads 'I shall conclude with giving you an account of Plato's arguments for the Immateriality of the Soul', after which follow six numbered points ending with the words: 'These arguments are founded on good sense'.

Subsequently, the lecturer points out the difficulties with arguing for the immateriality, and from this for the immortality, of the soul from the divisibility, the inertness, or the solidity of matter. In this way, the lecturer is following in the pedagogical tradition associated with Doddridge by outlining the arguments against the orthodox position.⁸ The section begins by suggesting that the argument that the soul is

⁵ Doddridge, *Lectures*, 205.

⁶ *Lectures*, 208.

⁷ *Lectures*, 209.

⁸ Rivers, *The Defence of Truth through the Knowledge of Error*, 4.

immortal because it is immaterial, and that it is immaterial because it could not be composed of an infinitely divisible substance such as matter, is problematic as far as the infinite divisibility of matter 'is only in imagination and not in reality'. The lecturer then moves on to make a similar point in relation to the argument for the immateriality of the soul from the inertness or solidity of matter, where the second reference to Priestley's works is introduced:

As to the opposite Qualities of body and mind these have been principally argued from the inertness and solidity of matter – For inertness and activity one would imagine could not reside at the same time in the same subject. But the immateriality would not help us because some very acute Philosophers have denied that Quality in matter, and if so matter and mind may be the same, which whoever should assert ought not to be called a materialist – D^f. Priestley who espouses this notion is so far from affirming the soul to be matter according to the common sense of matter that he does not suppose there is any such thing as matter in this view – His definition of matter is not that it has a vis inertiae he makes its essence to consist in an attractive and repul[sive] quality. Now there cannot be attraction witho[ut] activity he denies therefore the vis inertiae and the solidity and impenetrability of matter and therefore his opinion comes nearer to Berkeley. He chuses indeed to use the old Terms and so calls the soul immaterial.

This passage is interesting because it illustrates that, like Seddon at Warrington in the 1760s, and like Merivale at Exeter in the early 1770s, the tutor using Doddridge's lectures at Warrington in the late 1770s or the early 1780s updated the references to include contemporary philosophical works. The passage illustrates that it was Priestley's redefinition of the concept of matter and the ways in which this redefinition affected the traditional argument for the immateriality of the soul that most strongly affected the Warrington lecturer.⁹ Subsequently, he argues that as there is so much debate concerning the nature of matter it is impossible to determine whether the soul is immaterial or not. Nevertheless, this ought not to affect the argument for the soul's immortality, for it is still possible to show that the body and the mind are two distinct substances. At this point he refers the students to 'some of the late answers to D^f Priestley', which assert, against

⁹ The fact that he states that Priestley 'calls the soul immaterial' is also very interesting.

Priestley's position, that the unity of consciousness and the ability of the mind to compare ideas necessary to the faculty of judgment prove that consciousness cannot be the result of an organised system of matter. Given that Caulfield's *Essay on the Immateriality and Immortality of the Soul* was in the academy library, it is not improbable to assume that this was one of the 'answers' which the lecturer had in mind. He then suggests several further arguments which prove that matter and spirit are two distinct substances, including 'the power of the mind to form abstract ideas' and 'the diff[erence] between the Ideas and the mind employed about those Ideas'. From this, he concludes decisively that 'gross body is not the thinking power within us', and that 'that which thinks, judges, and form[s] abstract Ideas is not the same with body'. This is qualified slightly by the observation that 'whether we allow them [body and mind] to be the same substance and only different modes is ano[the]^r thing'. The notes conclude with 'one or two arguments for the immortality of the soul independent on its being material or immater[ial]'. These seem to follow the argument that the perfection of the universe of God requires that every being should exist which can possibly exist; thus, it is impossible that 'any moral agent should cease to exist', the happiness of the whole creation requiring that he should not be destroyed.

If the evidence of these notes is at all representative, then Priestley's ideas were clearly not endorsed in the philosophy lectures at Warrington. However, it ought to be remembered that the pedagogical method in the liberal dissenting academies meant that the opinions and preferences of the tutor would not necessarily be adopted by the students. The fact that Priestley's ideas were discussed at Warrington means that students would have encountered his works in an educational environment where they were free to decide for themselves on philosophical and theological disputes. In some cases students clearly did adopt Priestley's ideas. William Turner (1761-1859) for example, who had studied at Warrington under Aikin and Enfield between 1777 and 1781, and who thus most likely encountered Priestley's ideas in the philosophy lectures at Warrington, stated his belief in the theological and metaphysical views associated with Priestley at his ordination into the dissenting ministry in 1782.¹⁰ Furthermore, Turner's eldest son

¹⁰ *A Sermon delivered at Pudsey in Yorkshire, Sept. 25, 1782, by the Rev. Philip Holland. An Address on the Nature and the Propriety of Ordination, with Questions proposed by the Rev. Joseph Dawson, and the*

William Turner (1788-1853) went on to become a tutor in mathematics, natural philosophy, and mental and moral philosophy at Manchester College, York in 1809. In his lectures at Manchester College, Turner, according to one of his pupils Edward Higginson (1807-1880), ‘always adhered closely to the Hartleyan philosophy, and ardently followed it into all its applications to mind and morals’.¹¹

The philosophical career of Thomas Belsham

By far the most important figure in relation to the diffusion of Priestley’s ideas in the dissenting academies was Thomas Belsham. Belsham (1750-1829) had been a pupil under Aikin at Kibworth in 1757-8 and under John French at Ware and Wellingborough. In 1766 he entered the Daventry Academy, then headed by Caleb Ashworth, where he would, presumably, have followed a course not dissimilar to that undertaken by Priestley fourteen years earlier.¹² On completing his course in 1770, Belsham was selected as assistant tutor at Daventry, lecturing in Greek, and subsequently in mathematics, logic, and metaphysics until 1778, when he left Daventry to become minister to the Independent congregation at Worcester. It was most likely whilst a tutor at Daventry that Belsham had discovered Priestley’s metaphysical writings. A letter Belsham wrote from Worcester to Timothy Kenrick (1759-1804), who had succeeded him as tutor in mathematics and natural philosophy at the academy, illustrates that he had begun studying Priestley’s necessitarian philosophy. At this stage, however, Belsham, like Joshua Toulmin, had yet to make up his own mind on the question.¹³ He told Kenrick that he was not ‘a confirmed necessarian’ but rather ‘an inquirer into the subject’, acknowledging ‘many difficulties’ which he did ‘not well know how to solve’.¹⁴

In 1781, following the retirement of Thomas Robins (1732-1810), Ashworth’s successor at Daventry, the Coward Trustees invited Belsham to return as divinity tutor

Answers by William Turner, Jun. (Wakefield, 1782), 51-4. On Turner see R. K. Webb, ‘Turner, William (1761-1859)’, *ODNB*. For a brief account of Turner’s years at the academy see Stephen Harbottle, *The Reverend William Turner: Dissent and Reform in Georgian Newcastle upon Tyne* (Leeds, 1997), 14-18.

¹¹ *Life and Letters of Martineau*, vol. II, 261. See also John Kenrick’s biography of Turner, *CR*, 10, new ser. (1854), 132-7; Edward Higginson, *Eternal Life, the Gift of God in Jesus Christ* (1854).

¹² See chapter 1.

¹³ On Toulmin see chapter 3.

¹⁴ Thomas Belsham to Timothy Kenrick (c. 1779), quoted in Williams, *Memoirs of Belsham*, 171.

and minister to the Independent congregation. Following a brief period of agonised indecision, Belsham, somewhat reluctantly, accepted the offer. Belsham treated his new role as a religious duty and chose to return to Daventry only because he was convinced that his decision would best serve the interests of the dissenting cause. In a letter to Samuel Heywood (1753-1828) Belsham outlined his conviction that the purpose of the academy should be to prepare candidates for the dissenting ministry; the same letter includes an outline of the syllabus which illustrates that under Belsham the course of study at Daventry was broad, encompassing classics, Hebrew, geography, logic, mathematics, ethics, pneumatology, natural philosophy, anatomy, oratory, divinity, ecclesiastical history, and homiletics.¹⁵

On returning to Daventry, Belsham made some substantial adjustments to the theological syllabus which would prove influential in shaping the doctrinal beliefs of a new generation of dissenting ministers. As far as concerns his own theological beliefs, Belsham had more or less retained his adherence to the system he had encountered in the 1760s as a student in Doddridge's lectures; he was, in his own words, 'evangelical' in his principles, adhering to Samuel Clarke's Arian position on the pre-existence of Christ.¹⁶ However, conscious that theological debate had moved on since Doddridge's day, specifically that Priestley's and Lindsey's controversial Unitarianism – 'the question concerning the simple humanity of Christ' – had been 'scarcely glanced at in Doddridge's lectures', Belsham determined to draw up a new course of lectures for his students on commencing his duties as divinity tutor.¹⁷ The subsequent narrative of his own conversion to Unitarianism is well known.¹⁸ Belsham, as he himself related it, collected all the texts from the New Testament treating of the person of Christ; these he supplemented only with the comments of 'one or more learned and approved Trinitarian, Arian, or Unitarian expositors', omitting any interpretive comments of his own in order

¹⁵ An extract from the letter is reproduced in Williams, *Memoirs of Thomas Belsham*, 224-6.

¹⁶ Thomas Belsham, *Memoirs of the Late Reverend Theophilus Lindsey* (1812), 285; *A Calm Inquiry into the Scripture Doctrine concerning the Person of Christ; including a Brief Review of the Controversy between Dr. Horsley and Dr. Priestley and a Summary of the Various Opinions entertained by Christians upon this Subject* (1811), v.

¹⁷ Belsham, *Memoirs of Lindsey*, 287.

¹⁸ Belsham, *Calm Inquiry*, v-x; *Memoirs of Lindsey*, 285-91. The description of Belsham's conversion from his *Memoirs of Lindsey* was reproduced in Madge, *On the Character and Writings of Belsham*.

to provide his students with an unbiased view of the subject.¹⁹ Despite his assumption that this method of analysis would demonstrate the invalidity of the Unitarian arguments, Belsham, to his initial dismay, inadvertently converted many of his most able students to Unitarianism. Although Belsham himself initially remained resistant to Unitarian ideas, the process of teaching these lectures for the next seven years gradually led him to abandon his own beliefs in the divinity and pre-existence of Christ. He eventually came to embrace Priestley's and Lindsey's Socinian theology, of which he would become the most vocal expositor and defender in the last decade of the eighteenth, and the early decades of the nineteenth centuries. Eventually feeling himself no longer able to continue as divinity tutor at Daventry as a result of the alteration in his theological beliefs, Belsham resigned his office in January 1789.

Yet alongside these changes he made to the theological aspect of the syllabus at Daventry, Belsham innovated radically in his teaching of philosophy.²⁰ Belsham's letter to Heywood provides further details of the philosophical component of the Daventry syllabus: logic was taught in the first year; 'the doctrine of the Human Mind', 'the Divine existence and attributes', and 'the first principles of Ethics' in the second; 'a comprehensive system of Ethics, connected with the discoveries and precepts of Revelation' was taught in the third year.²¹ Some record of the lectures delivered by Belsham at Daventry is available from a set of lecture notes belonging to Nicholas Thomas Heineken (1763-1840), a student at Daventry between 1780 and 1785.²² Heineken's notes, which can be dated to approximately 1783, show that Belsham used

¹⁹ Belsham, *Calm Inquiry*, vi-vii; see also *Letters Lindsey*, 4 May 1789.

²⁰ Wykes, 'The Contribution of the Dissenting academy to the emergence of Rational Dissent', 137. Wykes notes that Belsham's innovations were introduced in 'the final two or three years of his tutorship at Daventry'. However, the dating of MS Heineken 2 (see below) suggests that these innovations may have been made earlier.

²¹ Williams, *Memoirs of Thomas Belsham*, 224-6.

²² The notes are now held in the library at HMO. They were received by the college in 1840 following Heineken's death. Dennis Porter observes in the library catalogue that the notes might have been written by Heineken or by a different student who passed them on to him. The first notebook, 'Lectures on Electricity', is dated Daventry 1783, although Porter notes that the hand of MS Heineken 2 looks different to this. MS Heineken 3, which contains notes of lectures on natural philosophy, includes a dedication on the flyleaf from Benjamin Penn, a student at Daventry between c. 1779 and 1783. Approximately half of the notes in MS Heineken 2 are in shorthand but the titles, headings, references, and nearly all of lecture 5 are written out in longhand. Heineken studied at Daventry between 1780 and 1785 under Robins and Belsham. He went on to become a dissenting minister at Ware in Hertfordshire, Brentford, Gainsborough, and Bradford. Although he was an Arian on leaving Daventry, he later came to embrace Unitarian opinions. See *CR*, 7 (1840), 699; 750-2.

Doddridge's textbook in his philosophy lectures, but that, like the lecturers at Warrington, and like Savage at Hoxton and Merivale at Exeter, he updated the arguments with references to contemporary works.²³ In fact Heineken's notes appear to be a record solely of Belsham's additions, presumably explained by the fact that Doddridge's book was easily available to consult in a printed edition.²⁴ The notes suggest that these additional references were heavily influenced by Priestley's writings of the 1770s. Heineken's shorthand notes to lecture 4, for example, 'A brief view of the doctrine of Animal Spirits', contain the headings 'vibrations', 'Association & abstract ideas', and conclude with the statement 'Newton, Hartley & Priestl//e//y, solve these phænomena. doctrine vibrations'. Heineken's notes to lecture 5 contain an inquiry into whether the faculties are innate or acquired in which Belsham refutes the theory of innate ideas and shows how the faculties of memory, imagination, judgment, passion, and volition can be explained using Hartley's theory of association. The remaining notes contain several references to Hartley's *Observation on Man*, and to Priestley's *The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity illustrated*, and to Dawson's, Palmer's, and Price's replies to the work. Lecture 29 appears to have covered the topic of materialism: among the shorthand notes it is possible to make out the words 'vis inertia', 'immaterialists', 'and 'Dr Priestley'.²⁵

Soon after Belsham's resignation from Daventry he was invited to become professor in divinity and resident tutor at New College, Hackney, which had been founded three years previously in 1786 in the wake of the closure of the academy at Hoxton. By this stage Belsham was well acquainted with Priestley; the two men corresponded and visited one another frequently. Priestley was particularly interested in Belsham's career as divinity tutor at New College; he had encouraged Belsham to accept the post and in November 1789 told Belsham: 'I rejoice exceedingly at the accounts I hear from several quarters of your reception in the Academy, and the prospect it affords

²³ Assuming that the plan in the letter to Heywood was carried through, then Heineken would not have studied any philosophy in the final two years of his course (1784 and 1785). If the notes were written by Heineken himself, then they would most likely date from his second or third year at Daventry. A reference in the notes to Benjamin Dawson's *The Necessitarian* (1783) would therefore make 1783 the only year in which they could have been written.

²⁴ On the title page of the notebook is written: 'Lecture on Pneumatology delivered by Mr Belsham vol 1', and on the second page 'Addition to Doddridges lectures by T Belsh-', HMO MS Heineken 2.

²⁵ HMO MS Heineken 2.

of your being eminently useful there'.²⁶ A month earlier, Priestley had informed Lindsey of his intention to give Belsham a copy of the first volume of his *A General History of the Christian Church* (1790), which he hoped Belsham would use in the lectures he was soon to deliver in ecclesiastical history. In the same letter Priestley requested Lindsey to send a copy of his *An History of Early Opinions concerning Jesus Christ* (1786) to Belsham for the Academy library.²⁷ It is clear that Priestley saw Belsham's appointment at Hackney as a way of spreading the theological and philosophical principles of the emerging Unitarian movement: commenting on Belsham's appointment in a letter to Lindsey of 1789, Priestley enthused: 'It [i.e. New College] will be an Unitarian Academy, do what they will'.²⁸

Once again, Belsham's innovations in his teaching of theology at New College were paralleled by innovations in the philosophy syllabus. Belsham's philosophy lectures, which survive (with important differences) in both manuscript and printed editions, mark a significant turning point in the kind of philosophy that was taught at the liberal dissenting academies.²⁹ Belsham's lectures updated the course of philosophy outlined in Doddridge's textbook by bringing into the academy syllabus developments in British philosophy since 1750. What is particularly interesting is that whereas Belsham ostensibly retained the objective and inquiring method of Doddridge's lectures – he writes in the preface of his intention to 'state the evidence on both sides with fairness and impartiality' – the tone of the lectures is markedly more dogmatic.³⁰ Whilst Belsham acknowledges his intent to 'do justice to the opinion of others', he admits to regarding himself as under no 'obligation to conceal his own'.³¹ In fact, Belsham's opening declaration of his commitment to impartiality is seemingly contradicted two pages later by his statement that:

²⁶ Williams, *Memoirs of Thomas Belsham*, 407-8; Priestley to Belsham, 18 November 1789, DWL MS. 12.12, ff. 109-10.

²⁷ Priestley to Belsham, 21 October 1789, DWL MS. 12.12, ff. 101-2.

²⁸ *Letters to Lindsey*, 3 April 1789.

²⁹ Belsham's lectures were printed as *Elements of the Philosophy of the Mind, and of Moral Philosophy. To which is prefixed a Compendium of Logic* (1801). The manuscript edition of part of these lectures is held at HMO, catalogued as MS Belsham 34.

³⁰ Belsham also writes of his desire 'not to influence his pupils to adopt his own opinions, but to excite in them a spirit of inquiry, and to assist them to think, and to judge for themselves', *Elements*, i.

³¹ Belsham, *Elements*, ii.

The doctrine of Association, opened by Locke, improved by Gay, matured by Hartley, and illustrated by the luminous disquisitions of Dr. Priestley, the author regards as established beyond the possibility of controversy, in the judgment of those philosophers who have studied, and who understand it.³²

Furthermore, the vast scope of the references which had been such an important aspect of Doddridge's course is considerably narrowed in Belsham's lectures: Belsham generally confines himself to modern, British writers and the majority of the references are to authors working in the tradition of Locke and Hartley.³³

Belsham's printed lectures, published in 1801, are divided into three sections: a prefatory 'Compendium of Logic', 'Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind', and 'Elements of Moral Philosophy'.³⁴ It is worth noting that, despite Belsham's declaration of his commitment to Hartley's theory of the association of ideas, the system of epistemology outlined in the first of these three sections is not merely a repetition of Priestley's and Hartley's sensationalism. In the introductory 'Compendium of Logic' Belsham states, in notably un-Priestleian language, that 'All reasoning is founded upon intuitive principles'.³⁵ He follows Locke in identifying ideas of reflection as a different class of ideas to those derived wholly from sensation and defends this position against Hartley's contention that the former are merely a more complex species of the latter.³⁶ There is also evidence that Belsham had engaged with some of the criticisms of empiricist ideas in Reid's and Price's writings; it is worth noting in this respect, for example, his observation that our ideas are 'supposed, though erroneously, to be

³² *Elements*, iii.

³³ Approximately one third of the references in the book are to the works of Locke, Hartley, or Priestley. Other authors whose work is frequently referenced include Samuel Clarke, Isaac Watts, Philip Doddridge, Jonathan Edwards, William Duncan (1717-1760) (Professor of Philosophy at Marischal College, Aberdeen), Richard Price, Thomas Reid, Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802), William Godwin (1756-1836), and Thomas Cooper.

³⁴ Belsham states in the preface to this printed edition that '[t]he following sheets contain the substance of a course of lectures, which the author delivered to his pupils', *Elements*, i.

³⁵ *Elements*, v. It is worth noting that there is one exception to this. In the second edition of the *Disquisitions* Priestley added a section '*The Objection from CONSCIOUSNESS more particularly considered*' in which he asserts that we know 'by intuition' that ideas derived from sense perception are variously connected with each other: *Disquisitions*, 2nd edn, 132-3; see also *Disquisitions*, 2nd edn, 134. This is presumably derived from Locke; however, it appears to be incongruous with Priestley's epistemology as outlined in *Examination* (see chapter 2) and *Phil. Unbeliever* (see chapter 4).

³⁶ *Elements*, viii-ix.

representations of things'.³⁷ However, Belsham is careful to differentiate his own system from that of Price. In his discussion of the power of intuition Belsham confines the function of the intuitive faculty to 'the reception of the relation between two ideas by the immediate inspection of the mind'.³⁸ He undoubtedly has Price in mind when he clarifies this definition by noting that 'Intuition is not a distinct mode of knowledge', rather, intuitive propositions are 'general inferences from the most obvious sensible appearances'.³⁹ Belsham also importantly reiterates Locke's and Priestley's assertion that 'of *real essence* we know nothing; only that in different substances they must necessarily be different' and that 'our ideas of substances extend no farther than to their properties; how these properties are combined we know not'.⁴⁰ If Priestley's ideas on epistemology are wholly derived from Hartley, then Belsham, at least in this opening section of the work, is a Lockeian.⁴¹

However, when Belsham comes to consider the question of innate ideas in the second part of the book his Lockeian stance is coloured with Priestley's polemic. In 'Elements of the Philosophy of Mind' Belsham states that the advocates of the hypothesis of innate ideas – and the references here make it explicit that he is thinking of Reid, Beattie, and Oswald – 'do not attempt to reason upon it [the hypothesis], or to bring evidence in support of it'.⁴² Instead they 'assume it as a fact' and 'if any objection be proposed, it is silenced by an authoritative appeal to common sense'.⁴³ Belsham subsequently dedicates over thirty pages to explaining the doctrine of the association of ideas and the theory of vibrations in opposition to this hypothesis. To association can be ascribed 'all intellectual, moral, and abstract ideas of every description'; our ideas of 'solidity, duration, virtue, cause [and] effect' can all be 'resolved into simple ideas of

³⁷ *Elements*, xxvi. It is also possible that Belsham may here be thinking of a passage in Locke's *Essay*, II, xviii, 7-8; see chapter 3.

³⁸ *Elements*, xxxii-iii.

³⁹ *Elements*, xxxiii.

⁴⁰ *Elements*, xii.

⁴¹ It is worth noting here that in his lectures Belsham corrects Priestley's idiosyncratic translation of Newton. In the section headed '*Rules of Philosophising – Philosophical Hypothesis*' Belsham states Newton's rule thus: 'First, that no more causes of phenomena are to be admitted than what are real, and sufficient to explain appearances', *Elements*, 5. On Priestley's translation of the passage see chapter 3.

⁴² *Elements*, 14.

⁴³ *Elements*, 14.

sensation'.⁴⁴ In fact, Belsham here contradicts the emphasis which he had placed on a Lockean epistemology in the opening section of the work. He notes in the course of a series of 'Remarks' on the 'Origin of Assent to various Classes of Propositions' that what 'Mr. Locke calls ideas of reflection' are 'in fact nothing more than very complex ideas of sensation'.⁴⁵ It is also worth noting the role which, in Belsham's mind, the 'Scotch philosophy' had come to assume as a body of thought antagonistic to the doctrine of the association of ideas. Throughout Belsham's account, Hartley's system is frequently contrasted with the recourse to inexplicable instincts promoted by the Scots. In the course of a comment on Hutcheson's theory of morals in the manuscript edition of the lectures, for example, Belsham notes that Hutcheson's system is 'not explaining a phenomenon but giving it up as inexplicable. How different from D^r Hartley's'.⁴⁶ At one point in the printed text Belsham notes that neither 'Dr. Reid or any other of the Scottish metaphysicians [...] perfectly comprehend Dr. Hartley's doctrine in its full extent'.⁴⁷ In a section considering the generally accepted belief that the same qualities in external objects produce the same sensations in different persons, Belsham notes that 'The Scotch philosophy pleads that the belief of this fact is instinctive'. A paragraph later, considering the proofs of the existence of the material world, Belsham comments that the 'Scotch philosophy again refers us to instinctive conviction, a doctrine already sufficiently exploded'.⁴⁸ In a later section on memory, in which Belsham attempts to explain the faculty along associationist lines, he notes that 'we are to judge of the credit due to memory by experience, and not, as the Scotch philosophy teaches, by instinct'.⁴⁹ What this suggests is that Belsham, following Priestley, was attempting to define the philosophical principles that he thought proper to underpin rational dissent in opposition to contemporary Scottish thought.

It is worth pausing briefly here to recall Seddon's moral philosophy lecture delivered at Warrington in the late 1760s.⁵⁰ As we saw in chapter 1, Seddon there, in the course of a discussion of man's propensity to the truth, had posited a distinction between

⁴⁴ *Elements*, 27.

⁴⁵ *Elements*, 126.

⁴⁶ HMO MS Belsham 34, 12V.

⁴⁷ Belsham, *Elements*, 35.

⁴⁸ *Elements*, 130.

⁴⁹ *Elements*, 135.

⁵⁰ See chapter 1.

actions proceeding from reason and actions proceeding from ‘impulse and passion’, listing among the latter actions motivated by the ‘parental [and] conjugal affects and the amor Patriæ’.⁵¹ It is interesting to contrast this with Belsham’s statement in a section from his lectures on the ‘*Origin of the Affections*’: ‘SOME of the AFFECTIONS, besides what are called the natural appetites’, Belsham there notes, ‘are commonly believed to be instinctive, and therefore take the name of NATURAL. Such are the parental, filial, and fraternal affections. Also the love of truth and virtue’.⁵² Belsham subsequently argues that these affections are ‘states of pleasure and pain’ and are thus ‘evidently excited by external objects’; these ‘can only affect us by association’, therefore, ‘all the affections are the result of association’.⁵³ Belsham continues to argue that

it would be easy to analyse the conjugal, parental, and fraternal affections, patriotism or the love of one’s country, benevolence, the love of truth and virtue, the love of God, &c. and [...] to prove that all the affections of the human mind are the effect of association, and not of instinct.⁵⁴

Belsham’s point, of course, is to show that even so called ‘natural’ affections are not instinctive but can be explained by the doctrine of association. The difference between his own account and that found in Seddon’s earlier lecture reflects the way in which the philosophy lectures at the academies had changed in the intervening years under the influence of Priestley’s campaign to promote Hartley’s theory of association and his attack on the rationalist and the Shaftesburian advocates of innate ideas.

In moral philosophy Belsham followed Priestley in attempting to ground ethical judgments in Hartley’s theory of association. He explains in the preface, again in a somewhat dogmatic tone, that:

The Theory of Morals, defended in this work, is that which necessarily follows from the Hartleyan Theory of the Mind, and from the doctrine of the Association of Ideas. And the author has endeavoured, briefly, to point out the errors into which eminent writers who

⁵¹ HMO MS Seddon 6.

⁵² Belsham, *Elements*, 206.

⁵³ *Elements*, 207.

⁵⁴ *Elements*, 210.

have adopted a different theory have fallen, in their attempts to explain the nature of virtue, of the moral sense, and of moral obligation.⁵⁵

In the final section of the book, ‘Elements of Moral Philosophy’, Belsham begins his account of morals by stressing the link between virtue and happiness: ‘virtue’ is defined as ‘THE TENDENCY OF AN ACTION, AFFECTION, HABIT, OR CHARACTER, TO THE ULTIMATE HAPPINESS OF THE AGENT’; ‘vice’ as ‘THE TENDENCY OF [AN] ACTION, AFFECTION, HABIT, OR CHARACTER, TO PRODUCE MISERY, OR TO DIMINISH ULTIMATE HAPPINESS’.⁵⁶ He responds to Price’s objection to this definition – that it could sanction ‘pernicious’ and ‘horrible’ actions as long as a degree of ‘advantage’ or ‘pleasure’ could be shown to result from them – by arguing simply that ‘Injustice, malignity, and the like, never can, in the present constitution of things, tend to happiness’.⁵⁷ Like Priestley, Belsham then attempts to sanction this theory of morals theologically by stressing the benevolence of the divine will. Inferring, by analogy with the faculties and feelings of the human mind, that it is ‘happiness alone’ which gives value to the existence of an infinite being, Belsham holds that the felicity of the deity ‘is the result of the uncontrouled exercise of infinite benevolence’ and that the divine rectitude ‘consists in its undeviating conduct to this most important end’.⁵⁸ To act virtuously is thus to act in a way which produces the greatest amount of happiness, which is also to act in accordance with the will of God. In the succeeding section, Belsham attempts to show how benevolence and self-interest can be reconciled by arguing that all actions are performed at first from an interested motive, and that these actions, repeated over time, generate affections, or ‘tendencies to perform the action independent of the advantage to be derived from it’.⁵⁹ From this Belsham is able to summarise his theory of morals in a phrase reminiscent of Paley: ‘benevolence is the *rule*, and self-interest the *obligation*, of virtue’.⁶⁰ In his subsequent discussion of moral obligation, Belsham argues that, in the order of our

⁵⁵ *Elements*, v.

⁵⁶ *Elements*, 371.

⁵⁷ *Elements*, 373; Price, *Review*, 183.

⁵⁸ *Elements*, 374.

⁵⁹ *Elements*, 376.

⁶⁰ *Elements*, 374.

conceptions, the obligation to act in accordance with self-interest is antecedent to the obligation to act in conformity to the will of God and to reason.⁶¹

In his discussion of the moral sense, Belsham describes the development of the faculty in very similar terms to Hartley and Priestley. At the outset he defines the moral sense as:

THAT FACULTY, AFFECTION, OR STATE OF MIND, WHICH EXCITES AN INSTANTANEOUS, DISINTERESTED APPROBATION AND LOVE OF WHAT IS CONSIDERED AS VIRTUE, AND DISAPPROBATION AND ABHORRENCE OF WHAT IS CONSIDERED AS VICE, WHEN PERCEIVED IN OURSELVES OR OTHERS.⁶²

Preserving the format of Doddridge's lectures, Belsham then outlines the arguments advanced by those who claim that the moral sense is instinctive and those who claim that it is acquired. However, here again, Belsham's own perspective overwhelms any urge he might have towards objectivity; the 'diversity' and 'even contrariety of the dictates of the moral sense in different ages and countries' is an 'insuperable objection' against the arguments that it is instinctive.⁶³ Belsham then gives his own Hartleian definition of the formation of the faculty:

The MORAL SENSE is an affection of mind, the origin and progress of which is similar to that of other mental affections, generated by the impression of external circumstances; interested in its commencement, and gradually purifying itself in its course, till in its highest and most perfect state it becomes completely disinterested.⁶⁴

Hence the idea of 'right' is not, as Price would argue, a simple idea, but 'that complex idea or feeling which is generated by the COALESCENCE OF ALL THOSE AFFECTIONS, and their correspondent expressions, to which the term RIGHT has been applied'.⁶⁵ As in Priestley's account, this leads Belsham to stress the malleability and hence the ultimate

⁶¹ *Elements*, 383. Belsham argues that the antecedency of obligation can be conceived either in relation to the order of time, the order of conceptions, or the force of obligation.

⁶² *Elements*, 384.

⁶³ *Elements*, 384.

⁶⁴ *Elements*, 385.

⁶⁵ *Elements*, 387.

perfectibility of man; because the moral sense is not innate but ‘originates in education’ it can be ‘corrected, improved, and confirmed, as men advance in life’.⁶⁶

Belsham concludes the third part of the book with a survey of the various accounts of virtue and moral obligation advanced by the major seventeenth- and eighteenth-century moralists. Belsham’s list of figures from the end of the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century is fairly predictable: Clarke, Browne, Butler, Hutcheson, Wollaston, Cumberland, Rutherford, Hartley, Price, and Hume. To this he adds an account of the ethical theories developed since the 1760s in the works of Reid, Smith, Paley, Thomas Cooper, Thomas Gisborne (1758-1846), and William Godwin (1756-1836).⁶⁷ Following a summary of each author’s ethical theory Belsham states a list of objections, most of which stem from Belsham’s conviction that most previous moralists have failed either to link virtue and happiness or to take into account the theory of the association of ideas. To Clarke’s rationalism, for example, Belsham replies that it effectually severs the link between virtue and happiness to the extent that a moral agent might, by the practice of virtue, actually ‘diminish his own happiness and that of others’.⁶⁸ In his objections to Price’s theory Belsham is more explicitly critical than Priestley had been: Price’s account he describes as ‘obscure and unintelligible’, his philosophy ‘does not indeed profess to explain any thing, but refers to a kind of infallible judge within, the dictates of which appear in fact to be very different in different persons’.⁶⁹ Interestingly, Belsham’s response to each of the Scottish moral philosophers is characterised by his criticism of their reliance on the theory of innate ideas. Hutcheson’s whole theory is ‘founded upon the supposition that the Moral Sense is an instinctive principle’ and is thus ‘refuted by every argument and fact, which proves that affection to be the result of education and habit’.⁷⁰ Reid, who ‘warmly patronizes the

⁶⁶ *Elements*, 388.

⁶⁷ Cooper is another figure whose career it would be interesting to pursue in relation to the diffusion of Priestley’s philosophical ideas. In 1787 he published *Tracts Ethical, Theological and Political* which contained essays on ‘Moral Obligation’, ‘Whether the Deity be a Free Agent’, and a ‘Sketch of the Controversy on Materialism’, the first and the last of which were read before the Manchester Philosophical Society in the 1780s. Cooper’s ideas were largely, although not wholly, derived from Priestley. See Udo Theil’s introduction to the 2003 reprint of Cooper, *Tracts, Ethical, Theological and Political* (Bristol, 2003).

⁶⁸ *Elements*, 420.

⁶⁹ *Elements*, 423.

⁷⁰ *Elements*, 421.

doctrine of instinctive principles’, is clearly wrong as long as Belsham’s own account of the mind is assumed to be correct.⁷¹ Smith’s idea of ‘Sympathy’ is merely ‘the same principle with Dr. Hutcheson’s Moral Sense, and Dr. Clarke’s and Dr. Price’s Reason’; that is ‘it is judging of virtue and vice in another, by our own standard of right and wrong’. Since ‘our moral perceptions are neither instinctive nor infallible, they cannot be an accurate criterion of virtue’.⁷² Hume’s ‘*natural benevolence* or *humanity*’ is ‘but another word for moral sense, sympathy, &c.’; he thus ‘falls into the common error of supposing it to be an instinctive affection’.⁷³

Belsham is most sympathetic in this survey to Cumberland’s conception of a natural law founded in benevolence; Cumberland’s definition of virtue and his attempt to reconcile benevolence and self-interest, Belsham states, ‘coincides with that which has been stated in these papers as the true theory of morals’.⁷⁴ He also gives a favourable account of Hartley, who, he states, defines virtue in terms of compliance to ‘the will of an infinitely benevolent divine Being’, and to those writers who followed Hartley in their ethical theory, namely Cooper and Gisborne.⁷⁵ It is here, however, that the differences between the printed version of these lectures and the manuscript edition is most interesting. In the manuscript edition Belsham credits, not Cumberland, but Rutherford with coming closest to expressing the true theory of morals.⁷⁶ This suggests that Belsham changed his opinions about the relationship between the dual motives of rational self-interest and benevolence. The other significant difference relates to Belsham’s attitude towards Paley’s ethical theory.⁷⁷ In the manuscript edition Belsham begins his account by stressing the essential similarity between his own and Paley’s systems: ‘It is evident that this [i.e. Paley’s] definition of the nature & obligations to human virtue coincides nearly with that in these lectures’. Here it is only Paley’s choice of language in his description of

⁷¹ *Elements*, 421-2. Belsham is more explicit on the connection between Reid’s and Hutcheson’s moral theories in the manuscript edition of the lectures. There he states that ‘D^f Reid expressly avows himself an advocate for the doctrine of the moral sense, and the philosophy of instinctive principles very nearly coincides with the hypothesis of D^f Hutcheson and is open to the same objections’, HMO MS Belsham 34, 13R.

⁷² Belsham, *Elements*, 429.

⁷³ *Elements*, 430.

⁷⁴ *Elements*, 427.

⁷⁵ *Elements*, 433.

⁷⁶ HMO MS Belsham 34, 15R. Compare this with what Belsham says at *Elements*, 427.

⁷⁷ I am grateful to Professor Rivers for drawing my attention to this difference between Belsham’s printed and MS lectures. On Paley see chapter 3 above.

moral obligation to which Belsham objects: ‘the term violent is not strictly proper when applied to motive as it seems to imply compulsion’. To Paley’s markedly voluntarist concept of obligation, Belsham adds that ‘there is such a thing as obligation in honour, interest, expedience, prudence, equity, &c in which the will of a superior has no concern’.⁷⁸ The same modification of Paley’s voluntarism is reiterated in the printed edition.⁷⁹ However, there Belsham is much more critical of Paley’s use of the word ‘violent’: ‘a *violent motive*’, writes Belsham, ‘is a phrase scarcely intelligible’ since the ideas of will and compulsion or external force are incompatible.⁸⁰ Belsham’s statement in the manuscript that his own and Paley’s theories are similar is omitted entirely from the printed text; instead, Belsham states that, ‘even as a definition of human virtue’, Paley’s account is ‘incorrect and inadequate’.⁸¹ His objections to Paley’s theory are, firstly, that it does not allow even for the possibility that those who disbelieve in the existence of God or the doctrine of a future life can be virtuous in any sense, and, secondly, that it places too much emphasis on self-interest and so fails to recognise that moral habits and affections which have become wholly disinterested can be virtuous.

The final point to note about Belsham’s lectures is the way in which they marked a change in emphasis in the topics discussed as part of the philosophy course. As we have seen in chapter 1, moral philosophy dominated the philosophy syllabuses at the Northampton, Daventry, and Warrington academies. A substantial part of Doddridge’s lectures were devoted to moral philosophy; and the same topic provided the subject matter for all of John Taylor’s published philosophical works. In Belsham’s lectures this predominance is diminished slightly, reflecting the shift in the wider philosophical debate, both among rational dissenters and among British society at large, occasioned by Priestley’s writings of the late 1770s. Whereas the final book on moral philosophy comprises some seventy-eight pages of the printed edition of Belsham’s lectures, ninety-one pages, well over a quarter of the long second book, are dedicated to his discussion of the question of liberty and necessity.

⁷⁸ HMO MS Belsham 34, 18R.

⁷⁹ Belsham, *Elements*, 436-7.

⁸⁰ *Elements*, 436.

⁸¹ *Elements*, 435.

Here the debate is unsurprisingly couched in Priestleian terms: the question in dispute between the libertarians and the necessitarians is ‘Whether volition can take place independently of motives’. Whereas the libertarian holds that ‘in the same previous circumstances, and with views and inclinations precisely the same, a different choice may be made’, the necessitarian maintains that ‘there can be no difference in the choice without a correspondent difference in the previous state of mind’.⁸² Belsham subsequently outlines the arguments advanced by both sides, adding to the relevant sections from the writings of Clarke, Locke, Hartley, Edwards, Hume, Price, Reid, Beattie, Priestley, Palmer, and Dawson references to later contributions to the debate by Alexander Crombie (1760-1840), John Gregory (1753-1821), and Belsham’s brother William Belsham (1752-1827). Once again, Belsham’s veneer of objectivity slips at various points in his account. The question of whether motives are the ‘physical’ or the ‘moral’ causes of volitions (which – as we have seen – had been fundamental to Berington, Price, and Palmer) Belsham, following Priestley, dismisses as ‘trifling’ and ‘merely verbal’.⁸³ After listing the arguments on both sides of the debate, Belsham proceeds to detail the arguments against philosophical liberty. Most of these are derived from Priestley: philosophical liberty supposes an effect without a cause, and thus, by denying the strongest argument for the being of God, leads to atheism; it is dangerous to virtue and inconsistent with moral discipline; it is inconsistent with the prescience of the deity. He then continues to state and answer the principal objections to philosophical necessity. Here, again, the arguments are largely derived from Priestley. Interestingly, Belsham here equates philosophical liberty with ‘common sense’, suggesting that both are irrational and un-philosophical. He writes that ‘the existence of philosophical liberty in human agents is favoured by superficial views of human nature’; this, ‘in the language of the Scotch philosophers, is the appeal to common sense; the dictates of which according to their system, are authoritative and infallible’.⁸⁴

Chapter XI of the second book is dedicated to the question of materialism.⁸⁵ Belsham outlines the arguments of both the materialists and the immaterialists, before

⁸² *Elements*, 230.

⁸³ *Elements*, 241.

⁸⁴ *Elements*, 299-300.

⁸⁵ *Elements*, 330-44. See also HMO MS Belsham 5, a series of notes on Priestley’s and Price’s theories of matter which appears to have been the basis for some of the sections in this chapter.

proceeding to state and then answer the principal objections against the materialist position. Again, nearly all of the arguments are derived from Priestley. However, Belsham, as in the first section of the book, is keen to emphasise the Lockean epistemology underpinning Priestley's ideas. He notes at one point, for example, that 'we know nothing of real essences'; that our 'knowledge of the coexistence of various properties and powers in the same substance, is acquired only by observation and experience'.⁸⁶ In the course of his definition of 'solidity' Belsham observes that the word is 'unconnected with any positive idea' and 'expresses no more than the unknown cause of *resistance*', subsequently referring his students to Locke's *Essay*.⁸⁷ Perhaps the sole modification of Priestley's ideas in this section relates to terminology. In his opening definitions Belsham notes that the materialists are so called 'with some impropriety of expression'.⁸⁸ He later clarifies this remark by stating that the materialists' 'denial of solidity and inertia reduces matter, very nearly, to the commonly received notion of spirit', so that 'Dr. Priestley's hypothesis may with as much propriety be called spiritualism as materialism'.⁸⁹ Priestley himself had, of course, left his work open to this interpretation. In anticipation of a possible objection to his theory he had written in the *Disquisitions*: 'If they say that, on my hypothesis, there is no such thing as matter and everything is spirit, I have no objection'.⁹⁰

Here, once again, it is worth stressing the difference between Belsham's lectures and the lectures delivered at Warrington earlier in the century, some account of which I have given above. In his concluding 'General Remarks' Belsham observes that the controversy concerning the immateriality of the soul was once 'considered as of great importance' as 'it was presumed that what is immaterial must necessarily be

⁸⁶ Belsham, *Elements*, 332.

⁸⁷ *Elements*, 335.

⁸⁸ *Elements*, 331.

⁸⁹ *Elements*, 343.

⁹⁰ It would be interesting to follow up this way of interpreting Priestley's ideas. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in his *Biographia Literaria*, described how Priestley had 'stript matter of all its material properties; substituted spiritual powers; and when we expected to find a body, behold! we had nothing but its ghost!', *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 23 vols (Princeton, 1983), vol. VII, *Biographia Literaria*, 133. On Coleridge's reaction to Priestley see epilogue. Seamus Perry, reading Priestley through Coleridge's interpretation, describes Priestley's 'immaterialism' as 'theistic' and compares his metaphysics to Berkeley's. See Seamus Perry, *Coleridge and the Uses of Division* (Oxford, 1999), 119.

incorruptible'.⁹¹ In other words, the soul's immateriality comprised the central argument in support of the doctrine of a future life. In Belsham's account, of course, this is no longer the case. The evident materiality of the soul (at least in the sense in which Priestley had redefined matter) is another proof that we cannot infer our own immortality from reason alone; any hope of a future life is grounded solely in the doctrine of a resurrection outlined in the Scriptures.⁹² This leads Belsham to refute many of the arguments which in the lecture delivered at Warrington were advanced as conclusive. As we have seen, the lecturer at Warrington argued, in support of the soul's immortality, that the perfection of the moral creation necessitates the impossibility that 'any moral agent should cease to exist'.⁹³ In direct contradiction to this Belsham argues:

It cannot be proved to be an act of injustice, that a being should be brought into existence to answer some important and beneficial purpose under the divine government, and that after passing through a variety of scenes diversified with pleasure and pain, but in which happiness predominates upon the whole, when the end for which he was created is accomplished, he should cease to exist.⁹⁴

Whereas the Warrington lecturer had cited Plato's arguments for the immateriality of the soul, and had concluded that these arguments were 'founded on good sense', Belsham contests that 'the arguments for the soul's immortality in the *Phædo* of Plato' prove nothing more than 'the deplorable ignorance and perplexity of the strongest minds when destitute of the light of divine revelation'.⁹⁵ Priestley's influence then, by the end of the 1780s, had fundamentally altered the nature of the arguments advanced in support of Christianity in the lectures at the most important of the liberal dissenting academies.

This influence was to become instituted in the academy syllabus through Belsham's tenure at New College, Hackney between 1789 and 1796. During these years Belsham educated a generation of dissenting ministers in the theology and metaphysics of Locke, Hartley, and Priestley. Among the students educated under Belsham at Hackney

⁹¹ Belsham, *Elements*, 342.

⁹² *Elements*, 350.

⁹³ HMO MS Seddon 6.

⁹⁴ *Elements*, 350-1.

⁹⁵ *Elements*, 354.

Charles Wellbeloved (1769-1858), John Corrie (1769-1839), David Jones (1765-1816), John Jones (c. 1766-1827), Jeremiah Joyce (1763-1818), and John Kentish (1768-1853) all went on to contribute significantly to the development of early nineteenth-century Unitarianism.⁹⁶ Between 1789 and 1796 the empiricist tradition was effectively secured as the predominant intellectual position within rational dissent. This paralleled the rise to prominence of a Socinian theology: when the Unitarian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge was set up in 1791, it was established on a narrowly Socinian basis.⁹⁷ The statement of the first general meeting asserted: ‘there is one mediator between God and man, the MAN Christ Jesus’, and repudiated the worship of Christ as ‘idolatrous’.⁹⁸

However, by this stage, at least according to the story most often told, rational dissent was already in decline.⁹⁹ The reaction in England to the outbreak of the French Revolution had resulted in the increased persecution of the rational dissenters. The dissenters’ campaign to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts, which had been gaining in momentum in the last decades of the century, was not to resurface until the second decade of the 1800s. In the same year that Priestley’s house and laboratory were destroyed in the Birmingham riots, Richard Price died. Priestley left England permanently in 1794, Andrew Kippis died in 1795, and in 1796 New College, Hackney closed, due to exhausted funds.¹⁰⁰ This transitional period of rational dissent requires further study, particularly in relation to its changing intellectual culture. However, it seems likely that 1796, if not 1791, marked the beginning of the long decline of Priestley’s influence within rational dissent.

⁹⁶ I am indebted to Stephen Burley for this information about the students at New College, Hackney under Belsham.

⁹⁷ Watts, *The Dissenters*, 476.

⁹⁸ Unitarian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and the Practice of Virtue, *Unitarian Society* (1791), 2.

⁹⁹ Watts, *The Dissenters*, 482-90.

¹⁰⁰ McLachlan, *English Education under the Test Acts*, 253-4.

Epilogue: philosophy and rational dissent after 1796

What happened to the influence of Priestley's philosophy among rational dissenters after the dissolution of New College, Hackney in 1796? To ascertain whether Priestley's ideas permeated the syllabuses at any of the other liberal dissenting academies would require further research which must remain beyond the scope of this thesis. It is hard to imagine that Priestley's ideas would not have been discussed at the other academies. However, it seems unlikely that Priestley's philosophical writings would have been instituted in the curriculum in anything like the way they had been at Hackney under Belsham at the most significant liberal dissenting academy at the end of the eighteenth century: Manchester New College (1786-1803). Thomas Barnes, divinity tutor 1786-1798, his assistant Ralph Harrison, and George Walker, divinity tutor 1798-1803, were all Arians and were unlikely to have been sympathetic to Priestley's philosophical and theological ideas. Walker, as I have shown in chapter 2, developed his own system under the influence of Lord Monboddo; Priestley wrote of Barnes in April 1789 that he was 'an enemy to all free inquiry'.¹ However, this is likely to have changed at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In 1803 Charles Wellbeloved, who had studied at Hackney under Belsham and been an assistant to Cappe at York, succeeded Walker as divinity tutor and the college moved to York, where it would remain until 1840. In 1809 William Turner (1788-1853) joined the staff as tutor in mathematics and natural philosophy, and in 1810 John Kenrick (1788-1877) was appointed as tutor in classics. Judging from the later recollections of James Martineau, a student at Manchester College, York between 1822 and 1827, the legacy of Priestley and Belsham comprised the core of the philosophy syllabus at this time.² It is also likely that Priestley's ideas would have been incorporated into the syllabus at the third Exeter Academy, which was reopened by Timothy Kenrick and Joseph Bretland in 1799. Bretland was, as I have shown in chapter 3, theologically and philosophically much closer to Priestley than either Walker or Barnes; Kenrick had been Belsham's assistant at Daventry between 1781 and 1784 and was a committed Unitarian.³

¹ Priestley, *Letters to Lindsey*, 3 April 1789. See also *Life and Letters of James Martineau*, vol. II, 258.

² James Martineau, *Types of Ethical Theory*, 2 vols, 3rd edn (Oxford, 1889), vol. I, viii-ix. See also Higginson, *Eternal Life, the Gift of God in Jesus Christ*; *CR*, new ser., 10 (1854), 132-7.

³ See chapter 5.

However, the impact of the academy was not extensive: it closed in 1805 and in the six years it was open only eleven students passed through the whole course.⁴

But what impact did this teaching have? Despite the fact that academy tutors, and no doubt many individual ministers and laymen, continued to teach and to study the theological and philosophical tradition shaped by Priestley until well into the nineteenth century, this tradition would not be inherited and developed by any significant thinker within rational dissent. Broadly speaking, those who emerged from within the intellectual culture of rational dissent to produce significant works of philosophy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries went down one of two routes: they either developed secular accounts of ethics and epistemology, or they attempted to ground a belief in Christianity on a wholly new kind of philosophical system. Of those in the former group, the work of William Godwin and William Hazlitt (1738-1820) would merit further investigation in connection with their indebtedness to the philosophical traditions of rational dissent.⁵ Of those in the latter group, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) and Henry Crabb Robinson (1775-1867) provide very different, but equally interesting case studies of the ways in which rational dissent after Priestley would renew its intellectual culture through an engagement with very different traditions in philosophy and theology, particularly those being developed in Germany.⁶

A very brief survey of the career of Coleridge illustrates well the fate of Priestley's intellectual legacy and brings together some of the strains of thought I have been discussing in this project. As an undergraduate at Jesus College, Cambridge in the mid-1790s, Coleridge had come under the influence of Priestley's protégé, William Frend. In the heady atmosphere generated at Cambridge by the publication of Frend's

⁴ Alan Ruston, 'Bretland, Joseph (1742-1819)', *ODNB*; Alexander Gordon, 'Kenrick, Timothy (1759-1804)', rev. S. J. Skedd, *ODNB*.

⁵ Godwin, whose father had studied under Doddridge at Northampton, was a student at the Hoxton Academy under Kippis and Rees. Hazlitt studied at Hackney under Priestley and Belsham. On Hazlitt as a philosopher see *Metaphysical Hazlitt: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. Uttara Natarajan, Tom Paulin, and Duncan Wu (London, 2005). Duncan Wu's contribution, 'The Road to Nether Stowey' (83-97), discusses Hazlitt's links to Coleridge and the Unitarian philosophical tradition. Interestingly, Jonathan Bate finds antecedents for Hazlitt's *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1803) in 'several Scottish Enlightenment thinkers (Hume, Hutcheson, Smith) and an ultimate source in Shaftesbury's theory of disinterested affection', Jonathan Bate, 'Hazlitt, William (1778-1830)', *ODNB*.

⁶ Crabb Robinson studied at the dissenting academies at Devizes and Wattisfield between 1786 and 1789. On his dissenting background see Timothy Whelan, 'Henry Crabb Robinson and Godwinism', *Wordsworth Circle*, 33.2 (2002), 58-69. On his engagement with the German tradition see Henry Crabb Robinson, *Essays on Kant, Schelling, and German Aesthetics*, ed. James Vigus (forthcoming, London, 2009).

polemical tracts and his subsequent trial and dismissal from his teaching position, Coleridge had imbibed many of the theological and political ideas associated with Unitarian dissent.⁷ This evidently included a thorough engagement with the philosophical writings of Hartley and Priestley: in 1794 Coleridge told his friend, the young poet Robert Southey, ‘I am a compleat Necessitarian – and understand the subject as well almost as Hartley himself – but I go further than Hartley and believe the corporeality of thought – namely, that it is motion’.⁸ Coleridge’s 1794 poem, ‘Religious Musings’, illustrates a youthful attempt to fuse this materialistic psychology with a universe animated by the deity and in a millenarian progress towards perfection. Priestley himself has a walk-on part towards the end of the poem – ‘Lo! Priestley there, patriot, and saint, and sage’ – where he appears as one of the privileged ‘Co-adjutors of God’ ushering in ‘Love’s wondrous plan’ in the company of Milton, Newton, and Hartley.⁹ By 1797 Coleridge had become something of a ‘rising star’ within the Unitarian movement.¹⁰ The success of the theological lectures he delivered at Bristol in 1795-6 led to his being asked to preach to dissenting congregations around the city; with the help of his friend, the Unitarian minister John Prior Estlin (1747-1817), he very nearly entered the dissenting ministry, seriously considering an offer to replace John Rowe as minister to the Unitarian congregation at Shrewsbury.¹¹

However, Coleridge’s enthusiasm for Unitarianism was not to last. In the very different intellectual climate brought about by the perceived failure of the ideals of the French Revolution, Coleridge was to vehemently renounce his Unitarianism. In 1806 he told George Ficker, in a passage which mirrors in reverse (both in its pessimism and in its scriptural exegesis) Priestley’s account of his own theological development thirty years earlier,

I was for many years a Socinian; and at times almost a Naturalist, but sorrow, and ill health, and disappointment in the only deep wish I had ever cherished, forced me to look

⁷ See Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (Oxford, 1988), 84-117.

⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 5 vols (Oxford, 1956), vol. I, 137.

⁹ *Collected Works*, vol. XVI, *Poetical Works: Poems (Reading Texts)*, ed. J. C. C. Mays, 247-8.

¹⁰ James Gillman, *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (1838), 155.

¹¹ Rosemary Ashton, *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Critical Biography* (Oxford, 1996), 118.

into myself; I read the New Testament again, and I became fully convinced, that Socinianism was not only not the doctrine of the New Testament, but that it scarcely deserved the name of a religion in any sense.¹²

Furthermore, Coleridge turned forcibly against Priestley's and Hartley's mechanistic account of perception, and eventually rejected the whole empiricist philosophical tradition, which he came to see as contributory to the decline of religious belief. In the course of his extensive and well-documented search for new conceptual frameworks in which to anchor his religious convictions, Coleridge introduced to England aspects of contemporary German idealist thought, in particular that of Kant and Schelling, the study of which he had begun at the University of Göttingen in 1799. He also attempted to reinvigorate the Christian-Platonic tradition, drawing on the writings of the seventeenth-century Cambridge Platonists, as well as on Plato, the neo-Platonists, and Christian mystics such as Jacob Böhme and William Law.¹³ Under the influence of these traditions, Coleridge was to devote four chapters of one of his most widely-known works, *Biographia Literaria* (1817), to demonstrating the inability of the Hartleian theory of the association of ideas to provide a coherent account of perception.¹⁴ In chapter 8 of the same work Coleridge argued, against Priestley and other materialists, that 'as materialism has been generally taught, it is utterly unintelligible'.¹⁵ In a series of public lectures delivered at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in London in 1818-19, Coleridge outlined a forceful criticism of contemporary materialist thought.¹⁶ A fascinating passage in a letter to Thomas Poole of February 1801 demonstrates that the programme of extensive philosophical reading undertaken by Coleridge in the late 1790s and early 1800s was intimately connected with his rejection of his Unitarian heritage: respecting some letters he had written on the 'supposed Discovery of the Law of Association by Hobbes' – an attribution similar to that often repeated by Priestley – Coleridge told Poole that:

¹² *Collected Letters*, vol. II, 1189.

¹³ *Collected Works*, vol. VII, *Biographia Literaria*, 151. See also James Vigus, *Platonic Coleridge* (Oxford, 2008).

¹⁴ *Collected Works*, vol. VII, 89-128.

¹⁵ *Collected Works*, vol. VII, 135; see also 291.

¹⁶ *Collected Works*, vol. VIII, *Lectures 1818-1819*, ed. J. R. D. J. Jackson, 507-49.

Since I have been at Keswick, I have read a great deal / and my Reading has furnished me with many reasons for being exceedingly suspicious of supposed Discoveries in Metaphysics. My dear Poole! Plato and Aristotle were great and astonishing Geniuses, and yet there is not a Presbyterian Candidate for a Conventicle but believes that they were mere children in Knowledge compared with himself & Drs Priestly & Rees, &c –¹⁷

Many other passages from Coleridge's marginalia evince the disdain with which he eventually came to think of Priestley's philosophy. In his copy of the Anglican clergyman William Sherlock's *A Vindication of the Trinity* (1690), for example, Coleridge contrasted the erroneous, yet more sophisticated, arguments of 'the philosophic Unitarians' of the seventeenth century, such as Andreas Wissowatius (1608-1678), with those of 'their degenerate successors, the Priestlians & Belshamites'.¹⁸ Interestingly, many of Coleridge's comments reproduce almost verbatim some of the criticisms of Priestley's ideas I have surveyed in the preceding chapters. On reading the Baptist minister Andrew Fuller's *The Calvinistical and Socinian Systems examined and compared* (1793), for example, Coleridge noted, as had Augustus Toplady, that Priestley's Socinianism and Fuller's Calvinism were 'in essentials both the same'. Echoing Lord Monboddo in his letter to Price, Coleridge criticised both systems for annihilating man and dissolving everything into the agency of the deity: 'it is all God; all, all are but *Deus infinite modificatus*'.¹⁹ By this stage in his career, Coleridge had long rejected such implications of his youthful necessitarianism: in his copy of G. E. Lessing's *Sämmtliche Schriften* (1825-8), he wrote 'it is scarcely possible for an expanding Mind to rest in Unitarianism as taught by Priestley!'²⁰

Coleridge's experience ought not, of course, to be taken as characteristic of the trajectory of British Unitarianism. By 1805 Coleridge had come to believe in the centrality of the Trinity, and his legacy was inherited, not by dissent, but by the Anglican Broad Church movement. It could be argued, moreover, that Coleridge was at most only ever on the fringes of dissent; many Unitarians, Coleridge's friend Estlin, for example, or

¹⁷ *Collected Letters*, vol. II, 675. See also Coleridge's 'philosophical letters' to Josiah Wedgwood, vol. II, 677-703. Priestley claimed that Hobbes was the first to outline the true doctrine of philosophical necessity, see chapter 3.

¹⁸ *Collected Works*, vol. XII, *Marginalia: Part 3*, ed. H. J. Jackson and G. Whalley, 6.

¹⁹ *Collected Works*, vol. XII, 801-2.

²⁰ *Collected Works*, vol. XII, 671.

the editor of Priestley's works John Towell Rutt (1760-1841), preserved Priestley's philosophical and theological heritage well into the nineteenth century.²¹ The significance of Coleridge's experience lies in the fact that it parallels that of a figure who would become hugely influential in the course of nineteenth-century Unitarianism: James Martineau.

Martineau (1805-1900) was thoroughly immersed in the tradition of British rational dissent. He was born into a Presbyterian family in Norwich; as a child he worshipped at the Octagon Chapel, once home to John Taylor, which by the early years of the nineteenth century had moved towards Unitarianism. He attended the school of the Unitarian minister Lant Carpenter (1780-1840) at Bristol, and afterwards trained for the dissenting ministry at Manchester College, York under Wellbeloved, Kenrick, and Turner. Here, he was introduced to the Priestleian philosophical and theological tradition and became, in his own words, 'an enthusiastic disciple of the determinist philosophy'.²² Upon graduating, he became minister at the Eustace Street Presbyterian meeting house, Dublin, moving, in 1832, to the ministry of the Paradise Street Chapel, Liverpool. Here, he published the influential and widely read *The Rationale of Religious Inquiry* (1836), which invoked Locke in arguing, against an unquestioning acceptance of the infallibility of the Scriptures, that 'reason is the ultimate appeal, the supreme tribunal, to the test of which even scripture must be brought'.²³ However, around this time Martineau began to question, like Coleridge before him, the efficacy of Priestley's metaphysical system. In a revealing letter of 1840 to the American Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing (1780-1842), Martineau reflected on the intellectual heritage Priestley and Belsham had bequeathed to British Unitarianism. He told Channing:

their influence has practically determined the whole form of our theology, and what is more to be lamented, the general spirit of our religion. No one can well owe a deeper debt of gratitude than I do to the writings of Priestley, to which I attribute not only my first call to the pursuit of religious philosophy, but the first personal struggles after the religious life. For many years I was an ardent admirer of his school, and I should think

²¹ On Rutt's role as a Unitarian publicist see Mills, 'Aspects of a Polymath'.

²² *Life and Letters of James Martineau*, vol. II, 262.

²³ James Martineau, *The Rationale of Religious Enquiry, or the Question stated of Reason, the Bible, and the Church; in Six Lectures*, 3rd edn (1845), 64.

myself a castaway if I ever ceased to admire his extraordinary powers, and venerate his faithful use of them.

However, Martineau continued:

I feel persuaded that his metaphysical system is incapable of continued union with any true and deeply operative sentiments of religion; that it is at variance with the characteristic ideas of Christianity; and will spontaneously vanish whenever our churches become really worshipping assemblies, instead of simply moral, polemical, or dissenting societies.²⁴

Martineau's career from this stage onwards can be characterised in part by his attempt to formulate new philosophical positions to replace the tradition he had inherited from Priestley and Belsham. When Manchester College moved back from York to Manchester in 1840 Martineau was appointed Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy. His 'Introductory Lecture' and appended 'Syllabus', printed as one of the *Introductory Discourses* to mark the opening of the session in 1840, indicate how the intellectual culture of rational dissent had changed forty years on from the closure of New College, Hackney. Locke still featured prominently in the syllabus, and there was still, interestingly, an emphasis on Scottish philosophy. However, something of Doddridge's broad and non-dogmatic approach had been restored. In his lecture, Martineau stressed that to 'introduce [his students] to the works, to interpret the difficulties, to do honour to the labours, to review the opinions, of the great masters of speculative thought in every age and in many lands, [would] be an indispensable portion of [his] duty'.²⁵ The students were to read Plato and Aristotle, and, significantly, were introduced to the work of Kant and Hegel. At York, Martineau co-edited a journal, the *Prospective Review*, in which he began the process of reconstructing the ethical and epistemological foundations of his theism. Interestingly, many of these ideas were forged in dialogue with the writings of

²⁴ 'James Martineau to William Ellery Channing', quoted in J. Estlin Carpenter, *James Martineau Theologian and Teacher: A Study of his Life and Thought* (London, 1905), 184-5. Carpenter dates the letter to between 18 July and 7 September and notes that it was transcribed in Mrs. Martineau's diary (183).

²⁵ *Introductory Discourses delivered in Manchester New College, at the Opening of the Session of 1840* (1841), 16.

Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Price, and, above all, Butler.²⁶ Again in the footsteps of Coleridge, Martineau was later to spend several months studying in Germany. At Berlin he attended the philosophy lectures of Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburgh (1802-1872), reading Hegel and rediscovering the works of Plato and Aristotle, the effects of which he would later refer to as a ‘new intellectual birth’.²⁷

In 1853 Manchester New College relocated to London in the wake of financial difficulties. At his inaugural lecture on his appointment to the chair of philosophy in 1854, Martineau cast himself as heir to the rich philosophical tradition of rational dissent. In the course of his address he touched on many of the figures who have featured prominently in my own preceding narrative:

I meet here those with whom a respect for philosophy is an inheritance and a necessity; who cannot but honour a study conquered for them by the sagacious genius and illustrated by the noble truthfulness of Locke; whose earnest meditations both of thought and piety have been in the companionship of the pure-minded Hartley; who are not less conscious than I am myself of unspeakable obligations to the versatile, comprehensive, and guileless Priestley; and on whose shelves you rarely miss the acute and thoughtful volumes of Dr. Price. When I remember how largely the divinity of Dr. John Taylor, of Norwich, was affected by the studies which belonged to him as Ethical Tutor at Warrington, and how closely the name of Enfield is preserved in conjunction with that of Brucker, and in general how much our freer theology owes to the just balance of critical research and speculative reason, I feel that there are pledges in the past for a worthy appreciation here of philosophical pursuits, and am resolved not to endanger that wholesome predisposition by immoderate and untenable claims.²⁸

However, he follows with a note of caution:

At the same time there is danger as well as honour in belonging to a class rich in noble antecedents; danger of mistaking the heritage committed to our trust: – of cherishing with faithful pride the particular judgments delivered to us from the past, and letting slip the

²⁶ See Carpenter, *James Martineau*, 289-302.

²⁷ Carpenter, *James Martineau*, 314-23.

²⁸ On Taylor see chapter 1; on Enfield’s translation of Brucker see chapter 2.

habits of severe activity, the fresh hopes of truth, the resolve to take a master's measure of the time, which saved our predecessors from merely repeating the symbols of an earlier age.²⁹

By this stage in his career, notwithstanding his paeon, Martineau had long abandoned the sensationalism, necessitarianism, and materialism associated with Priestley and Belsham. The account of his own intellectual development which formed the preface to his *Types of Ethical Theory* (1895), drawn up towards the end of his life from the lectures he delivered at London, reads like a conversion narrative. He talked of being, during his years as a student at Manchester College, 'inevitably shut up in the habit of interpreting the human phenomena by the analogy of external nature', and of 'serving out successive terms of willing captivity to Locke and Hartley, to Collins, Edwards, and Priestley, to Bentham and James Mill'.³⁰ Martineau's reaction against this tradition – his 'apostasy' as he referred to it – he characterised as primarily ethical: 'It was the irresistible pleading of the moral consciousness which drove me first to rebel against the limits of the merely scientific conception'.³¹ It is fascinating to note how closely Martineau's account of his own experience echoes Belsham's account of his conversion to Socinianism one hundred and six years earlier.³² In fact, it is certainly possible that Martineau had Belsham in mind when he described the process by which, during his years as a philosophy tutor at Manchester College, his own opinions changed gradually through the experience of teaching: 'the same text books were still in use', he recalled, 'but in effect, I was educating myself out of a school into which I supposed that I was educating others'.³³

Even a superficial survey of Martineau's extensive work in moral philosophy ('a mixture of exposition and of search') must, unfortunately, remain beyond the scope of this project.³⁴ However, in conclusion to my own account of the theological and philosophical ideas of the rational dissenters of the eighteenth century, I would like to

²⁹ James Martineau, *Essays, Reviews and Addresses*, 4 vols (1890-1), vol. IV, 20.

³⁰ James Martineau, *Types of Ethical Theory*, vol. I, viii-ix.

³¹ *Types of Ethical Theory*, vol. I, xii.

³² see Chapter 5.

³³ *Types of Ethical Theory*, vol. I, xi.

³⁴ *Types of Ethical Theory*, vol. I, xvii.

briefly recall the three intellectual traditions available to that generation which I referred to in the introduction to this thesis: the empiricist, the rationalist, and the Shaftesburian. It is a testimony to the lasting influence of the eighteenth-century rational dissenters that Martineau's *Types of Ethical Theory* concludes with an analysis of these same three traditions, reclassified in Martineau's terminology as the 'hedonist', the 'dianoetic', and the 'aesthetic' ethical schools. In Martineau's account of the first, Priestley and Belsham have been effaced entirely: the flow of ideas is traced from Hobbes through Hartley, Bentham, and Mill to Martineau's contemporaries Alexander Bain (1818-1903) and Charles Darwin (1809-1882). His account hinges on his criticism of the fundamental claim of this ethical tradition: his assertion that it is impossible 'to effect the transition from the cogency of personal pleasure and pain to that of others' pleasures and pains'; that it is 'but a sophistical slip of thought which carries the Utilitarian from the principle 'Each for his own happiness' to that of 'Each for the happiness of all''.³⁵ In Martineau's account of the second (the tradition to which he himself was most sympathetic), it is interesting to note that Price has been restored as the 'chief representative' of a tradition including Cudworth and Clarke. Looking back to Price's 1758 *Review*, Martineau found in Price's distinction between '*Speculative Reason*' and '*Moral Reason*' an exact coincidence with the antithesis of 'Theoretical and Practical' knowledge he had discovered in Kant.³⁶ In his account of the third tradition, represented by Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, Martineau (as had Doddridge before him) defended Shaftesbury against the charge that he grounds ethics on a narrowly conceived sense. He emphasises the rational aspects of Shaftesbury's thought, stressing the relation which Shaftesbury's concept of the moral sense has to the understanding and the will.³⁷ His eulogy to Hutcheson recalls the sentiments expressed in the Wodrow/Kenrick correspondence: 'A generous philosophy became in him a generous personality'.³⁸ What is significant in this analysis is that Priestley's and Belsham's achievement – the result of their campaign from the mid-1770s to the mid-1790s to make the empiricist tradition the predominant intellectual position within rational dissent – had, by this point, been effectively undone.

³⁵ *Types of Ethical Theory*, vol. II, 334-5.

³⁶ *Types of Ethical Theory*, vol. II, 478.

³⁷ *Types of Ethical Theory*, vol. II, 506.

³⁸ *Types of Ethical Theory*, vol. II, 524.

A comprehensive analysis of Martineau's ideas would, of course, necessitate a more thorough focus on their historical context. Martineau's writings need to be understood both against the background of the theological divisions within nineteenth-century Unitarianism, and in the context of wider nineteenth-century religious and intellectual history. However, this very brief survey of his career illustrates well the gradual process by which Priestley's philosophical legacy was superseded within British rational dissent. Although his theology undoubtedly continued to find adherents during this period, there was no one among the Unitarians with the intellectual capacity of Martineau to inherit the empiricist tradition from Belsham as Belsham had done from Priestley at the end of the eighteenth century. In a sense, Priestley's critics of the previous generation were proved right: Priestley's empiricism became incompatible with religious belief. His religious philosophy was too intertwined with a biblical literalism which to the nineteenth century seemed naïve. To trace the influence of Priestley's philosophical writings further, it would be interesting to investigate the reception of his ideas in North America or in Germany.³⁹ In nineteenth-century Britain, Priestley was revered as an experimental scientist but was largely forgotten as a philosopher of religion.

My aim in this thesis has not been to argue for the enduring relevance of Priestley as a philosopher or as a theologian. Rather, it has been to illuminate an episode in eighteenth-century intellectual history. I have illustrated how Priestley's philosophical and theological ideas were developed within an intellectual culture of rational dissent, and were then diffused through this culture through Priestley's and Belsham's work as author, polemicist, and teacher. My survey of the writings – in books, essays, lectures, reviews, and private letters – of some of the previously overlooked figures from within

³⁹ Priestley appears in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) as a Samson-like empiricist 'tearing down two such pillars of all religion as the freedom and immortality of our soul'. However, Kant soon dismisses Priestley as 'a well-meaning man' but one who 'could not find his bearings as soon as he left the field of theory and nature', Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge, 1998), 646-7. Arthur Schopenhauer was also aware of Priestley's theories of materialism and philosophical necessity, see Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, 2 vols (London, 1969), vol. II, 52; *Parerga and Paralipomena*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, 2 vols (Oxford, 2000), vol. I, 183. In *The World as Will and Representation* Schopenhauer appears to suggest that Kant might have plagiarised Priestley's theory of matter. The reception of Priestley's thought in Germany has occasioned some recent commentary on his ideas by German scholars, for example, Manfred Durner, "'Immateriality of Matter" Theorien der Materie bei Priestley, Kant und Schopenhauer', *Philosophisches Jahrbuch*, 103.2 (1996), 294-322, which I have been unable to consult. On Priestley's influence in America see J. D. Bowers, *Joseph Priestley and English Unitarianism in America* (Philadelphia, 2007).

this intellectual culture has shed some light on the way in which these ideas were debated and understood in their historical and, most importantly, in their theological contexts. The thesis will, I hope, have demonstrated to historians of eighteenth-century religious dissent the rich philosophical tradition generated by the rational dissenters' attempts to formulate metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical foundations for their emerging theological beliefs. I hope it will have demonstrated to historians of eighteenth-century philosophy the necessity of engaging with the period's theological debate in order to formulate a fuller interpretation of its philosophical writings. If Priestley does not deserve a place in the canon of eighteenth-century philosophers, then his work should remain of interest to us as an example of the complex interactions between the philosophical and the theological discourses of the period. A better understanding of these interactions might fruitfully illuminate the writings, not just of Priestley, but of other authors who are and who will remain in the philosophical canon.

Appendix I: ‘DWL MS L.57 (10)’

‘General Scheme of Business’

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
I] Messrs Moore Blake Gellibrand Cutler	Evid of Christianity (10) CA	Schemes (10) CA	Evidences of Christianity (10) CA	analysis Or homil (10) twice in a fortnight	Evid of Xty (10) CA	Jewish Antiquity (10) CA
II] Messrs White Mercer Robins Scholefield Jackson	Philosophy (10) Mr. Clark	Ethics (10) Mr. Clark	Philosophy (10) Mr. Clark	Orations theses (10) once in a fortnight	Ethics (10) Mr Clark	Jewish Antiquity (10) CA
III] Messrs Holland Alexander Bunyan Priestley Rollestone	Algebra 11	Pneumat 11	Algebra 11	Orations 1 in a fortnight reading	Pneumat (11) reading	Reading

The above is a reproduction of a document held at DWL among a selection of miscellaneous papers from the New College collection. The document is a timetable from the Daventry Academy, established in 1751 following the death of Doddridge at Northampton. ‘CA’ stands for Caleb Ashworth, the tutor, and ‘Mr. Clark’ is Samuel Clark, the sub-tutor. From a number of marks on the bottom left hand corner of the document it is evident that Clark was also the tutor of the algebra class taken by the students in class III. The document is torn at the bottom along the fold of the page and it is likely that there was another year group listed below the three shown, as the course at Daventry was four years long at this period. The timetable proves that in the early years at Daventry Ashworth and Clark adhered closely to the syllabus followed by Doddridge at Northampton, with philosophy, ethics, and divinity constituting the core of the syllabus.

‘Pneumat’ is pneumatology, the study of spirits or spiritual beings; ‘Schemes’ is schemes of divinity; ‘analysis’ is scriptural analysis; ‘homil’ is homiletics, or the art of preaching. The document can be usefully compared with the extract from Joseph

Priestley's journal from 1754, which indicates that this syllabus was supplemented by lectures in anatomy, most of which appear to have been given by Clark.¹

Dating

The minutes of the Coward Foundation indicate that Priestley was admitted as a student at Daventry on 10 November 1752.² In his *Memoirs* Priestley wrote that he was 'excused all the studies of the first year, and a great part of those of the second'.³ This suggests that when Priestley entered the academy in 1752 he joined the second year class towards the end of the year, completing the final seven months of the term until the end of the academic year in May. Thus, assuming the year group denominated III on the timetable is the second of the four years, this would date the document to between November 1752 and May 1753. Priestley's *Memoirs* also confirm that John Alexander and Henry Holland were in his class, and that Nathaniel White and Radcliffe Scholefield were in the class above him.⁴ This confirms that class II is the third of the four years and class I the final year. In his *Memoirs* Priestley also referred to Thomas Taylor as being in the class below him, again suggesting that there was originally a class IV on the document, which has since been lost.⁵

Of the other students listed in Priestley's year, Henry Holland had been at Northampton between 1750 and 1751, where he had presumably completed the first year class, and moved to Daventry in 1751. John Alexander had been at Northampton since 1750, and in 1751 moved to Daventry. Matthew Rollaston is listed in the CSI as being at Northampton since 1750, and presumably also moved to Daventry in 1751. John Bunyan was at Daventry until 1753. The minutes of the Coward Foundation record in April 1753 'A letter of Mr. Ashworth's being laid before the Trustees wherein he complains of the great extravagance & misbehaviour of John Bunyan one of the pupils under his tuition', and note the subsequent order 'that the said John Bunyan be dismissed the Academy but

¹ On 9 May 1754, for example, Priestley recorded a 'lecture upon the larynx with Mr. Clark', Rail and Thomas, ed., 'Joseph Priestley's Journal', 59.

² DWL New College MSS CT.1 Coward Trust Minute Book, May 1738 – Nov 1778, 139.

³ Rutt, I, i, 13.

⁴ Rutt, I, i, 25-6.

⁵ Rutt, I, i, 27.

that his exhibition be paid up to Lady day next'.⁶ This presumably explains why Bunyan is not mentioned in Priestley's journal of 1754.

Of those students listed in year II (the third year), Nathaniel White entered Northampton in 1749 and had left the academy at Daventry to begin his ministry at the Old Meeting house in Hinckley, Leicestershire by 1753. The minutes of the Coward Foundation indicate that on 9 November 1753 it was 'ordered that the sum of £8 be given to Mr Nath^l White as a poor dissenting minister'.⁷ It is therefore likely that White left after completing the third year without taking the classes of the final year; however, this is somewhat problematic as White is referred to by Priestley in his journal on 26 April 1754. Samuel Mercer had been at Northampton between 1749 and 1751, was at Daventry between 1752 and 1754, and began his ministry at Tockholes, Lancashire in 1754. Thomas Robins had been at Kibworth school under John Aikin, presumably in 1749, at Northampton between 1750 and 1751, and entered Daventry in 1751. The CSI records that Robins began his ministry in Stretton-under-Fosse in Warwickshire in 1755; however, a note in the minutes of the Coward Foundation on 11 October 1754 'that £6 be given to the Revd Mr Robins Minister of Stretton in Warwickshire as a poor dissenting minister' indicates that he must have been at his ministry by 1754. Radcliffe Scholefield had been at Northampton between 1750 and 1752, and at Daventry between 1752 and 1754. He was at Whitehaven in Cumberland between 1757 and 1772. William Jackson entered Northampton in 1750.

Of those students listed in year I (the fourth year), William Blake was at Northampton from 1749, was admitted to Daventry in 1752 and began his ministry in Crewkerne, Somerset in 1754.⁸ Priestley's journal records that William Blake left the academy on 30 April 1754. Joseph Gellibrand was at Northampton in 1749. Priestley's journal records that Gellibrand left the academy on 29 April 1754. Henry Cutler was at Northampton in 1749.

⁶ DWL New College MSS CT.1 Coward Trust Minute Book, May 1738 – Nov 1778, 141.

⁷ DWL New College MSS CT.1, 144.

⁸ The CSI records the year as 1740 although this is likely to be a mistake.

Appendix II: ‘HMO MS Seddon 6: problems of dating and authorship’

MS Seddon 6 is a bound volume held among the collection at HMO, comprising eighteen separate notebooks, each of about fourteen pages, containing notes in longhand on theological and philosophical topics.¹ Since the mid-nineteenth century the volume has been attributed to John Seddon, and is thought to be a series of lectures delivered at the Warrington Academy between 1767 and 1770.² However, this dating and attribution is problematic. Although the manuscript might be a copy of an earlier set of lecture notes by Seddon it contains at least some material added after Seddon’s death in January 1770.

What is clear is that the notes form a series of lectures on philosophy and theology, most of which are modelled very closely on Doddridge’s lectures. It is well known that Doddridge’s text book was used at the liberal dissenting academies, including Warrington, until the early nineteenth century.³ Several of the notebooks in MS Seddon 6 are labelled with references to propositions or definitions corresponding to those in Doddridge’s lectures; the references to page numbers among the notes indicate that the lecturer was working from a printed volume, most likely the 1763 edition by Clark. Each of the notebooks, excepting one, is numbered, but they do not appear to be in any numerical order. Assuming that they once comprised a continuously numbered sequence, a number of books are now missing. The content of the books further suggests that the sequence is incomplete; several of the notebooks appear to begin mid-way through the discussion of a particular topic and there is at least one reference to an earlier discussion which does not appear to have survived.⁴ Among the eighteen surviving notebooks thirteen relate to specific lectures on philosophy or theology from Doddridge’s course. The remaining five contain notes for lectures on language and logic, the references in which indicate that the lecturer was using Isaac Watts’s *Logick: or, the Right Use of Reason in the Enquiry after Truth* (1725), which had been used by Doddridge at Northampton and by Ashworth and Clark at Daventry. Each of the lectures modelled on Doddridge comprises a commentary on one or two propositions or definitions and their

¹ One of the notebooks, ‘No 34’, contains some notes in shorthand.

² Denis Porter, *A Catalogue of Manuscripts in Harris Manchester College Oxford* (Oxford, 1998), 259.

³ Rivers, *The Defence of Truth through the Knowledge of Error*.

⁴ See for example the first page of the notebook labelled ‘No 12’.

subsequent corollaries and scholia from Doddridge's lectures. However, in some of the notebooks Doddridge's text serves only as a starting point for a discussion which introduces the students to developments in the subject occurring after Doddridge's death in 1751.

The notebooks themselves are undated, yet a label inserted loosely between the first notebook and the binding reads 'Manuscript Lectures of the Rev. John Seddon First Rector of Warrington Academy A.D. 1767-70 Presented by H.y Arthur Bright'. It is also noted that Henry Bright donated the volume to the Renshaw Street Chapel in Liverpool in 1857. According to Bright's account, the volume was discovered among a selection of papers at a cheesemonger's shop in Liverpool in the 1850s.⁵ The volume is one of five collections of lecture notes attributed to Seddon now held at HMO. The other four consist of two volumes of lectures on language and two volumes of lectures on oratory delivered at Warrington 'on Dr. Priestley's leaving the Academy'. Both of these can be confidently attributed to Seddon. They are both listed in manuscript catalogues of the Warrington Academy library which were probably drawn up in 1786 when the library was transferred to Manchester College. The first of these can be dated from internal evidence to 1767.⁶ The volume of philosophical and theological lectures is listed among the sources in 'Appendix I' of Herbert McLachlan's *English Education under the Test Acts* (1931), and is briefly described in his *Warrington Academy: Its History and Influence* (1943).⁷ McLachlan notes that in the 1930s the notebooks were in the library of the Ullet Road Church in Liverpool, which has since been dissolved, and confirms that the notebooks were written by Seddon himself.⁸

From the surviving accounts it is difficult to ascertain exactly what subjects Seddon did lecture on during his years at Warrington.⁹ However, it seems clear that

⁵ Henry A. Bright, 'A Historical Sketch of the Warrington Academy', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 11 (1858-59), 1-30, 15.

⁶ Porter, *A Catalogue of Manuscripts in Harris Manchester College Oxford*, 258-9; *MR*, 8, second series (1813), 290. McLachlan, *Warrington Academy*, 66-7.

⁷ McLachlan, *English Education under the Test Acts*, 280; *Warrington Academy*, 66.

⁸ McLachlan, *English Education under the Test Acts*, 280.

⁹ It is clear from the MS Minute Books of the Trustees and Committee at HMO that Seddon did lecture on moral philosophy at Daventry at some point in 1760, see chapter 1. However, in Bright's account of the Warrington Academy he mentions only that Seddon lectured on oratory and grammar, Bright, 'A Historical Sketch of the Warrington Academy', 15. To this McLachlan, on the evidence of MS Seddon 6, adds that

Seddon's duties as a tutor were not his principal role at the academy. Seddon was the first secretary of the Warrington Trustees, a driving force behind the founding of the academy, and the first Rector, with responsibility for student discipline. Seddon's surviving correspondence from the 1760s, now held at DWL and HMO, indicates that Seddon was occupied during these years with acquiring subscriptions for the academy and with the administration of student affairs.¹⁰ He was away from Warrington for short periods in the late 1760s, as, for example, in December of 1768 when Seddon was in Bolton, between March and April of 1769 when he was in Leeds, York, and Hull, and in August of the same year when he was in Hereford.¹¹

Despite Bright's and McLachlan's assertions that the notes were written by Seddon, a number of passages in the notebooks make both the dating of 1767-1770 and the attribution of the lecture notes to Seddon problematic. Firstly, the lectures on philosophy and theology are clearly in a different hand to those on language and oratory. There is also no mention of any lectures on philosophy or theology in any of the extant Warrington library catalogues. Secondly, the notebooks contain some references to works published after 1770, and thus too late to have been known to Seddon. The notebook labelled 'No 11', for example, contains a reference to Priestley 'introducing materialism'.¹² It is certainly possible that Seddon could have discussed with Priestley his ideas on the nature of matter and his Hartleian epistemology at Warrington in the 1760s.¹³ It was Seddon who introduced Priestley to John Canton (1718-1772), through whom the latter met Benjamin Franklin and became a fellow of the Royal Society.¹⁴ However, it is difficult to see in what sense Priestley could be said to have been 'introducing materialism' before the year 1775, when he published the prefatory essays to his edition of *Hartley's Theory of the Human Mind*. According to Priestley's own account of his intellectual development, it was not until 1774 that he 'first entertained a serious doubt of the truth of the vulgar hypothesis [i.e. the theory that man is composed of two

Seddon lectured on theology and philosophy from Priestley's resignation in 1767 until his sudden death in January of 1770, McLachlan, *English Education under the Test Acts*, 222.

¹⁰ See DWL MS 38.103; HMO MS Seddon 1.

¹¹ DWL MS 38.103 (112; 124-7).

¹² See chapter 5.

¹³ See chapter 1.

¹⁴ See John Seddon to John Canton, 18 December 1765, *CR* (1861), 44-5.

entirely distinct and independent principles]’.¹⁵ Even stronger proof for a later dating of the lecture notes can be found in the notebook labelled ‘Prop 83’. Towards the end of the notebook there is a reference to ‘some of the late answers’ to Priestley’s materialist theory.¹⁶ The earliest ‘answer’ to Priestley’s materialism which I am aware of and which the author could possibly have been referring to was James Seton’s letter published in the *London Review* in 1775.¹⁷ However, it is much more likely that the comment in the notebook is a reference to the more developed responses to Priestley’s ideas published in the late 1770s. The earliest of these was Berington’s *Letters on Materialism* (1776).¹⁸ This would date the notebook to, at the earliest, 1776. However, the majority of the responses to Priestley’s materialism did not appear until 1778. Between 1778 and 1781 at least five book-length replies to Priestley’s materialist theory were printed.¹⁹ The fact that the author refers to ‘answers’ (in the plural) indicates that he had seen at least two of these works which, even if he was aware of Berington’s reply, makes the earliest possible date 1778.

One further piece of evidence for a later dating is a slip of paper inserted loosely in the volume. On one side the paper reads ‘Dod Pt 2 Metaphysics No P 32’, and on the other ‘Dod 77 Jan 28.81’. This is probably a reference to Definition 32, which comes in Part II on page 77 of Doddridge’s lecture course. Of course, it is impossible to know when this paper was inserted into the volume. However, it does appear to be in the same hand as the lectures. ‘Jan 28.81’ might well be the date, 28 January 1781, on which this passage was studied.

To account for these problems I propose the following hypothesis, which I adopt in discussing these lectures in this thesis: at least some of the notes now catalogued as MS Seddon 6 are copies of an earlier set of lectures drawn up by Seddon (explaining how they came to be among his papers and came to be attributed to him) made in the late 1770s or early 1780s by one of his successors at Warrington, to which were added the extra references to Priestley’s works. This could possibly make the author of the notes

¹⁵ *Disquisitions*, xiii. Alan Tapper argues that Priestley’s early materialism derives from his encounter with Reid in 1774, Alan Tapper, ‘The Beginnings of Priestley’s Materialism’, 73-81.

¹⁶ See chapter 5.

¹⁷ *London Review*, 1 (1775), 525-9. See Yolton, *Thinking Matter*, 117-8.

¹⁸ See chapter 2.

¹⁹ See chapter 3 for details of these works.

either Enfield, who succeeded Seddon as minister at the Cairo Street Chapel and as tutor and Rector *Academiae* at Warrington in 1770, or Clayton, who succeeded Aikin as divinity tutor in 1781, where he remained until the dissolution of the academy in 1783.²⁰ It is also possible, however, that the notes were written up and the references to Priestley added by a student; there is some evidence that it was common practice at Warrington for students to copy lectures from dictations or from shorthand notes borrowed from the tutors.²¹

That the notes now comprising MS Seddon 6 contain an amalgamation of an older source and material added at a later date seems apparent from a closer analysis of the notebook labelled 'Prop 83'. This is probably the sequel to another notebook on the same subject which has since been lost: the notes begin in mid-sentence ('and that is that...') and, following a brief preamble, the commentary on Doddridge's lectures begins at scholium 6, approximately half way through Doddridge's lecture 95. The lecturer then follows Doddridge's text closely through lecture 95, until a passage in the notebook reads 'I shall conclude with giving you an account of Plato's arguments for the Immateriality of the Soul' after which follow six numbered points ending with the assertion: 'These arguments are founded on good sense'.²² It is reasonable to assume that in an earlier document this point marked the end of a section, given that it corresponds to the end of a lecture in Doddridge's textbook and that the notes refer to the six arguments from Plato as a conclusion. However, in MS Seddon 6 there follows a further six pages of text in the course of which the references to Priestley occur.²³

It is difficult to even conjecture as to who might have added these notes on Priestley to MS Seddon 6. However, a number of facts, including the interest in Priestley's theory of matter, suggest that it might have been Enfield. Having compared the hand of a letter written by Enfield to the Trustees of the Academy dated 7 January 1788 it is certainly not inconceivable that at least some of the notebooks comprising MS

²⁰ On Enfield and Clayton see chapter 2.

²¹ See, for example, Benjamin Vaughan to John Seddon, 25 July 1767, DWL MS 38.103 (99), in which Vaughan speaks of Priestley's lectures on Oratory and Criticism which he and another student had copied. See also McLachlan, *Warrington Academy*, 56.

²² MS Seddon 6. See chapter 5 for a fuller account of this lecture.

²³ See chapter 5 for details.

Seddon 6 could be in Enfield's hand.²⁴ In 1788 Enfield described having 'spent many years in preparing lectures for the instruction of my Pupils'.²⁵ As with Seddon, it is difficult to ascertain exactly what Enfield taught at Warrington.²⁶ However, some of the textbooks which Enfield prepared during his years at the academy would have made him particularly qualified to have inserted some of what appear to be additions to MS Seddon 6. In 1781 Enfield published a translation of the *Elements of Geometry* from the French work by Jean Joseph Rossignol (1726-1807). In addition to the fact that there is a strong emphasis on geometry in the commentaries on metaphysics and logic in MS Seddon 6 there is, on the fourth page (verso) of the notebook labelled 'No 4', a geometrical diagram almost identical to that found on page 86 of Enfield's translation.²⁷ In 1791 Enfield published his abridgement and translation of Brucker.²⁸ He seems to have begun work on the translation in the late 1780s, however, according to McLachlan, the translation had its origin at Warrington where Enfield 'borrowed from the original work in drawing up a course of lectures for his students'.²⁹ The references to Zeno, Hierocles, and the Jewish Rabbis as holding a similar theory concerning the unity of the body and the soul found on the sixth page (verso) of the notebook labelled 'Prop 83' can all be found in Enfield's translation of Brucker.³⁰ Enfield was also familiar with the theory of matter developed by Priestley. Enfield's own *Institutes of Natural Philosophy*, which,

²⁴ William Enfield to the Trustees of the Warrington Academy, 7 January 1783, DWL MS 93.A (4).

²⁵ DWL MS 93.A (4).

²⁶ McLachlan states that Enfield lectured on reading, speaking, composition, *belles lettres*, geography, and commerce, McLachlan, *English Education under the Test Acts*, 222. According to a 'Report of the State of the Warrington Academy, by the Trustees, at their Annual Meeting' of 28 June 1770 Enfield was responsible for languages, commerce, and history, Bright, 'A Historical Sketch of the Warrington Academy', 16. Bright notes that Enfield undertook the mathematics lectures following George Walker's resignation in 1774, Bright, 'A Historical Sketch of the Warrington Academy', 17; this is confirmed in John Aikin jnr's biographical account of Enfield printed with his *Sermons on Practical Subjects*, 3 vols (1798), vol. I, xii. In the preface to Enfield's *Institutes of Natural Philosophy, Theoretical and Experimental* (1785) he refers to classes in Natural Philosophy which he had taught at the Warrington Academy. McLachlan also states that Enfield took over the natural philosophy and the mathematics classes from Walker, *Warrington Academy*, 72.

²⁷ See Enfield, *Elements of Geometry translated from the French of J. J. Rossignol* (1781), 86; 'No 4', HMO MS Seddon 6.

²⁸ See chapter 2.

²⁹ William Enfield to Nicholas Clayton, 2 May 1787, Nottingham Record Office 920 NIC 9/12/1; William Enfield to Nicholas Clayton, 22 April 1788, Nottingham Record Office 920 NIC 9/12/9; McLachlan, *Warrington Academy*, 72.

³⁰ William Enfield, *The History of Philosophy from the Earliest Periods: drawn up from Brucker's Historia critica philosophiæ*, 2 vols (1791), vol. I, 395 (for Hierocles); vol. I, 333-4 (for Zeno); vol. II, 220 (for the Jews). For details of the references in MS Seddon 6 see chapter 5.

according to McLachlan, contained the substance of his teaching at Warrington on Natural Philosophy, open with a definition of matter ('Matter is an extended and solid substance'), to which is added the following scholium:

Extension and Solidity are discovered to be properties of matter by the senses. Both by the sight and touch we perceive material substances to have length, breadth and thickness, that is, to be extended: and from the resistance which they make to the touch, we acquire the idea, and infer the property, of solidity. It is unnecessary here to inquire whether solidity necessarily supposes impenetrability. Natural Philosophy, being employed in investigating the laws of nature by experiment and observation, and in explaining the phenomena of nature by these laws, has no concern with metaphysical speculations, which are generally little more than unsuccessful efforts, to extend the boundaries of human knowledge beyond the reach of human faculties.³¹

Enfield's comment on the futility of 'metaphysical speculations' here echoes his remarks on the fruitlessness of trawling through 'the refinements and subtleties of metaphysics' made over a decade previously as part of his criticism of the syllabuses at the dissenting academies.³² However, the passage, particularly the query whether 'solidity necessarily supposes impenetrability' and the description of the ways by which the properties of a substance are derived solely through sense perception, suggests a familiarity with the theory of matter espoused by Priestley in his *Disquisitions*. Although there is no direct evidence of Enfield being familiar with Priestley's work, he did read Robert Young's *An Examination of the Third and Fourth Definitions of the First Book of Sir Isaac Newton's Principia, and of the Three Axioms or Laws of Motion* (1787) in 1787 and discussed the work in a letter to Nicholas Clayton.³³

Ultimately, however, it is probably impossible to say definitively who added the notes on Priestley to MS Seddon 6. Nevertheless, the notes show that Priestley's ideas on matter were discussed, not long after their publication, as part of the philosophy lectures at the Warrington Academy. The comments in MS Seddon 6 illustrate that at Warrington the theological and philosophical implications of Priestley's ideas had been well

³¹ William Enfield, *Institutes of Natural Philosophy, Theoretical and Experimental*, 1.

³² Enfield, *Remarks*, 34. On this work, see chapter 2.

³³ Nottingham Record Office 920 NIC 9/12/1.

understood and that a critical response to them was being developed. Even if the attribution to Seddon is incorrect, the notes provide interesting information on the lectures delivered at Warrington at some point prior to 1783, and provide substantial evidence concerning the connections between the Scottish universities and the English liberal dissenting academies.³⁴

³⁴ See chapter 1.

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