

Rationalism, Sentimentalism, and Ralph Cudworth

MICHAEL B. GILL

Section 1

Moral rationalism is the view that morality originates in reason alone. It is often contrasted with moral sentimentalism, which is the view that the origin of morality lies at least partly in (non-rational) sentiment. The eighteenth century saw pitched philosophical battles between rationalists and sentimentalists, and the issue continues to fuel disputes among moral philosophers today.

The eighteenth-century rationalists took Ralph Cudworth to be one of their champions, and the sentimentalists of the period—Hume among them—agreed, placing Cudworth squarely in the opposing camp.¹ This view of Cudworth as moral rationalist was further solidified in 1897, when Selby-Bigge published his influential two-volume collection of the writings of the British moralists.² In his preface, Selby-Bigge explained that the first volume contained the writings of moral sentimentalists and the second volume the writings of moral rationalists. Cudworth appeared in the second—the rationalist—volume.

Passmore has argued, however, that we should not think of Cudworth as a moral rationalist.³ Proper attention to all of Cudworth's writings, Passmore maintains, reveals that his position was in important respects much closer to that of sentimentalists such as Hutcheson and Hume than it was to rationalists such as Clarke and Balguy.

Both characterizations of Cudworth are accurate, up to a point. The mistake is to think that Cudworth's overall philosophy falls neatly onto one side of the rationalist-sentimentalist distinction or the other.

Michael B. Gill is Assistant Professor of Philosophy, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721-0027, USA.
e-mail: gillm@u.arizona.edu

Part of the explanation for Cudworth's not fitting squarely into the rationalist or sentimentalist camp is simply that at the time he was writing, the distinction had not yet been sharply formulated.⁴ But Cudworth himself also vacillated. In certain works, he implied that passion is the leading player in the righteous life, and that rationality plays a relatively minor role. In other works, he implied that rationality is essential, and that passion is dispensable. Cudworth thus anticipated aspects of both sentimentalism and rationalism, and an examination of his views can shed valuable light on that later debate.

Perhaps most importantly, we can look to Cudworth to find the deepest common ground between the later rationalists and sentimentalists. For while Cudworth vacillated between a proto-sentimentalism and rationalist position, he always remained firmly and clearly committed to the idea that to live righteously consists of acting in accord with principles internal to one's own constitution; he always remained firmly and clearly opposed to the idea that to live righteously one had to depend on the assistance of some external force. And with Cudworth's goal of showing that morality originates in principles internal to each individual, both the rationalists and sentimentalists would agree.

In section two of this paper, I will explain the conception of morality implied by two sermons Cudworth gave in 1647.⁵ In section three, I will explain the conception of morality implied by Cudworth's posthumously-published *Treatise on Eternal and Immutable Morality*.⁶ In section four, I will explain how the proto-sentimentalist conception of morality in the 1647 sermons conflicts with the rationalist conception of TEIM. In section five, I will address possible lines of reconciliation between the sermons and TEIM. And in section six, I will ask why Cudworth may have expounded these two different positions and elaborate on what lies in common beneath them.

Before beginning, however, I need to make two preliminary points.

First, let me describe in broad outline the distinction between rationalism and sentimentalism that I will be working with. Rationalism, as I will understand it here, implies that a person can fully grasp morality by exercising his or her rationality alone. So according to this conception of rationalism, a being who is perfectly rational but possesses no non-rational sentiments whatsoever can apprehend morality, and a person whose non-rational sentiments are corrupted but whose rationality functions correctly can apprehend morality as well. Sentimentalism, in contrast, implies that a person can grasp morality only if he or she is at least partly determined by some non-rational—or sentimental—aspect of his or her constitution. So, according to sentimentalism, a being who is rational but possesses no sentiments could not fully apprehend morality, and a person whose sentiments are corrupt could not fully apprehend morality even if his or her rationality were functioning properly. That statement of the distinction between rationalism and sentimentalism is incomplete, of course, as it does not explain the difference

between reason and sentiment. One (broadly Humean) way of drawing this distinction is to say that reason has a representational function, in that it informs us of the nature of reality as it exists outside of our own minds, while sentiments are “original existences,” which do not inform us of things independent of our own minds. As I shall show in section three, Cudworth argued in TEIM that reason is that which informs us of propositions that we fully understand, that are necessarily true, that are self-contradictory to deny. If, in contrast, a mental item (e.g., an idea or motive) is not a fully intelligible, necessarily true, self-contradictory to deny proposition, then—according to Cudworth’s TEIM—that mental item must originate in some non-rational part of our constitution. So for Cudworth’s TEIM, moral rationalism is the view that we grasp morality through our understanding of necessary propositions, and moral sentimentalism is the view that our grasp of morality is based at least in part on some other aspect of our constitution.

Second, let me explain my comparison of TEIM and the 1647 sermons. One might object that the supposed conflict I find between TEIM and the 1647 sermons is not a real one because TEIM and the sermons deal with different topics.⁷ TEIM, so one might hold, deals with morality, while the sermons deal with religion, and since morality and religion are distinct from each other, it is perfectly consistent for Cudworth to hold that the former originates in reason alone while the latter requires sentiment. I think it is clear, however, that Cudworth did not draw a sharp distinction between morality and religion, and that as a result we should take TEIM and the sermons to be concerned with the same topic. For Cudworth claims in TEIM that the nature of God is “the first rule and exemplar of morality” (TEIM 150), and this claim is in line with the general intention of all the Cambridge Platonists to oppose those thinkers who separated morality from religion. The seventeenth-century thinkers who separated morality from religion did so at the expense of the former, contending that morality was an unimportant code of conduct, as peripheral in achieving salvation as etiquette or manners. But Cudworth, along with the other Cambridge Platonists, believed that to comprehend moral ideas is to partake of the mind of God (TEIM 26, 137, 150), which is also what he takes to be the essence of religion (Commons 377, 383; *Lincolnes* 26). This explains how Cudworth can move seamlessly in the sermons from Christian religion to Greek virtue, speaking as though the two things were one and the same (Commons 375). It is true that the rhetorical setting of the sermons makes it appropriate to emphasize the language of religion, and that the philosophical context of TEIM makes it appropriate to emphasize the language of morality. But the underlying topic of the sermons and TEIM is the same: righteousness and how it enables us to participate with the mind of God. And what I will try to show is that while TEIM tells us we can achieve righteousness and divine participation through rationality alone, the sermons tell us we can achieve it only through a non-rational passion.

Section 2

In 1647, Cudworth delivered two important public sermons, one to the Honourable Society of Lincolnes-Inne and one to the House of Commons. Both sermons were later published under Cudworth's supervision.

According to Cudworth's 1647 sermons, the biggest problem of the age was confusion about what is essential to religion, with many people concentrating all their energies on things that are not essential and neglecting the things that are. Crucially, Cudworth's sermons supported neither the Parliamentary nor the Royalist side of the civil war that was then brewing. His overriding message was that both sides were missing the point. Each was fighting to instate its own conception of religion and eradicate the other, but the things that separated the different conceptions were all inessential, religiously peripheral at best, while the hostility each side bore to the other violated the essence of religion.

At the very beginning of the Dedication of his Sermon to the House of Commons, Cudworth makes clear his intention to criticize those who believed that the religious differences of the day were worth fighting over. The purpose of his sermon, he starts out by saying, "was not to contend for this or that opinion, but only to persuade men to the life of Christ," without which "those many opinions about religion, that are everywhere so eagerly contended for on all sides . . . are but so many shadows fighting with one another" (Commons 370).

In his sermon before Lincolnes, Cudworth is equally clear in his criticisms of both sides of the raging religious disputes. There were some, he says, who contended that particular kinds of observance of the Sabbath and the Sacrament were essential to religion, and they were willing to fight for the cause of requiring them. And there were others who contended that such observances were superstitious, and they were willing to fight for the cause of eliminating them. But the truth is, it is essential neither to require such observances nor to eliminate them. One person can be truly religious while practicing them, while another person can be truly religious while not practicing them. Such things are indifferent, neither bad nor good. The one wrong reaction to such things is to take either their requirement or their elimination to be essential to religion.

So Cudworth's main goal in both sermons was to distinguish between what is essential to religion and what is inessential. He argues that the essential is the "inward" part of religion, which concerns the "heart," and that the inessential is the "outward" part, which concerns the "head" (Commons 378).

This heart-based inward religion Cudworth argues for in the sermons consists entirely of the "law of love" (Commons 404). And Cudworth takes pains to emphasize that this "law" is not an external command but an internal spirit of action. It is a "kindling" and "warming" principle of the heart (Commons 387) which "enliveneth and quickeneth . . . all our outward performances" (Commons

403). To be truly religious, in Cudworth's heart-based inward sense, is not to be in "outward conformity to God's commandments" (Commons 404) but to possess a certain kind of internal motivation or character, to have a certain kind of "temper and constitution of the soul" (Commons 380). It is not to perform particular actions but to have one's heart in the right place.

In line with his emphasis on the essential importance of the inward part of religion, Cudworth also repeatedly insists on the relative unimportance of the outward part. In the category of religiously peripheral outward things, Cudworth places specific churchly procedures and modes of worship, such as "habitual prayings, hearings, fastings" (Commons 403) and all other "*Rites and Ceremonies*" (Lincolnes 59). Cudworth acknowledges that these "external observances" (Lincolnes 60) may aid some people in their quest for religion and thus "be good, as subservient to a higher end" (Commons 403). But he believes that in themselves they are "*Indifferent*" (Lincolnes 59), there being "no intrinsecal Goodness at all in them" (Lincolnes 42).

In the category of peripheral outward things Cudworth also places theologically sophisticated doctrinal matters, such as the "infinite problems" concerning Christ's "divinity, humanity, union of both together, and what not" (Commons 373). Such "systems and bodies of divinity" may be "useful in a subordinate way," but on their own they cannot make one into a "true Christian" (Commons 374). For they concern only "dry speculations" and the "dead skeleton of opinions" (Commons 380), while true Christianity consists of character, motivation, a spirit of action.

[T]he knowledge of Christ doth not consist merely in a few barren notions, in a form of certain dry and sapless opinions. . . . Christ came not to possess our brains only with some cold opinions that send down nothing but a freezing and benumbing influence upon our hearts. Christ was vitae magister, not scholae; and he is the best Christian whose heart beats with the truest pulse towards heaven, not he whose head spineth out the finest cobwebs. (Commons 378)

Here Cudworth is attacking scholasticism.⁸ And this is not the only place in the sermons in which he does so. Elsewhere he says, "Many of the more learned, if they can but wrangle and dispute about Christ, imagine themselves to be grown great proficient in the School of Christ" (Commons 374). And at other points, in clear reference to the scholastics, he ridicules both those who believe one needs "many school distinctions, to come to a right understanding" of Christ (Commons 379), and those who make skill at "subtilities" the "*alpha* and *omega* of their religion" (Commons 380). Scholasticism, as Cudworth saw it, engaged religion in syllogism and demonstration. But a person could be an outstanding practitioner of the forms of scholastic disputation and yet lack all love for his fellow man, while

someone else could be ignorant of all the rules of Aristotelian logic and yet possess a truly Christian spirit. What scholasticism teaches is thus neither necessary nor sufficient for true religion (Commons 375, 379).

We find, then, that Cudworth denigrates doctrinal “belief” and scholastic “speculation” because he thinks such things have no necessary connection to the motivating spirit of one’s actions. Such things occupy the head and not the heart, but it is only the heart that is essential to true religion.⁹ Attention to such things is, in fact, likely to be counterproductive, producing “*a bitter Zeal*” (Lincolnes 61) that draws one away from the true spirit of religion. Cudworth thus attacks “the distemper of our times,” which works “to scare and frighten men only with opinions and make them only solicitous about the entertaining of this and that speculation, which will not render them anything the better in their lives, or the liker unto God” (Commons 379). Or as he puts it in another gibe at scholasticism, “Christ came not into the world to fill our heads with mere speculations; to kindle a fire of wrangling and contentious dispute amongst us and to warm our spirits against one another with nothing but angry and peevish debates, whilst in the meantime our hearts remain all ice within towards God and have not the least spark of true heavenly fire to melt and thaw them” (Commons 378).

Cudworth’s rebuke to those battling over “*Ceremonial Observations*” and “systems and bodies of divinity” goes hand in hand with his exceedingly ecumenical view of religion. What is both necessary and sufficient for true religion, he believes, is an “inward principle” that is compatible with virtually any interpretation of Christianity. Indeed, Cudworth comes close to making the downright Pelagian suggestion that possession of this inward principle is compatible with a complete lack of distinctly Christian beliefs, claiming that one who “endeavors really . . . to comply with that truth in his life which his conscience is convinced of, is nearer a Christian, though he never heard of Christ, than he that believes all the vulgar articles of the Christian faith and plainly denieth Christ in his life” (Commons 378).¹⁰

Now what is crucial for the purpose of asking about Cudworth’s relationship to the debate between rationalists and sentimentalists is that the sermons’ emphasis on the internal motivational aspect of religion also leads him to dismiss the religious importance of propositional knowledge in general. Over and over again, he says that it is wrong to focus our religious energies on “speculations,” “beliefs,” “notions,” “knowledge,” “understanding” and other denizens of the “brain” and “head.” For none of these things “kindles,” “warms,” “enlivens” or “quicken” the “heart,” and within the heart lies the essence of religion. Cudworth strongly suggests, in fact, that possession of any kind of propositional knowledge—of any kind of knowledge that can be gained through discursive rational thought—is neither necessary nor sufficient for the “divine temper and constitution of the soul” that is the heart of true religion (Commons 380; cf. Commons 403–4, 406–7). As Cudworth puts it,

[T]here is a soul and spirit of divine truths that could never yet be congealed into ink, that could never be blotted upon paper; which [is] able to dwell or lodge nowhere but in a spiritual being, in a living thing, because itself is nothing but a life and spirit. Neither can it, where indeed it is, express itself sufficiently in words and sounds, but it will best declare and speak itself in actions. . . . Words are nothing but the dead resemblances and pictures of those truths which live and breathe in actions; and ‘the kingdom of God (as the apostle speaketh) consisteth not in word,’ but in life and power. (Commons 389–90)

The essence of religion is “a living principle in us” that cannot be captured by language (Commons 374). It is something that lies beyond the reach of discursive rational thought. For “words and syllables, which are but dead things, cannot possibly convey the living notions of heavenly truths to us. The secret mysteries of a divine life . . . cannot be written or spoken, language and expressions cannot reach them” (Commons 374–5).

So in the sermons, Cudworth elevates “heart” over “head” in a manner that leads him to marginalize propositional knowledge and discursive thought, claiming that in matters of religion such knowledge and thought can play a merely peripheral or non-essential role at best.¹¹ Indeed, the sermons at times come close to an outright condemnation of those whose primary focus is on rational thought, as such people (the sermons suggest) are liable to lose touch with the heart of religion by concentrating instead on matters that are neither necessary nor sufficient for true religiosity. But this is hardly what we would expect from a philosopher known as a “rationalist.” The sermons seem to be, rather, the work of someone who wants to insulate the essence of religion from the workings of the rational faculty.

Cudworth’s embrace of *mystery* in the “Sermon before the House of Commons” is further evidence of his desire to keep rationality at arm’s length. In that sermon, he repeatedly contends that the essence of religion is ultimately a “great mystery” and that all true Christians are “so many mystical Christs” (Commons 387, 390; cf. Commons 375, 380). Cudworth’s penchant to place “mystery” at the heart of religion is equally evident in his 1642 sermon “The Union of Christ and the Church; in a Shadow,” where he maintains that it is “certain” that Plato “did thinke there was contained some Mystically meaning concerning the Nature of Divine Love,” by which a man might “recover himselfe, and so by degrees work up himself again unto God, and be made perfectly one with him.”¹² The incompatibility between these endorsements of mystery and a robust confidence in the faculty of rationality stands out clearly when we attend to the word “mystery” itself. The original Greek meaning of “mystery”—of which Cudworth would have been well-aware—is a secret religious ceremony, closed to the public, open only to initiates.¹³ And while that sense of the word may not have been what

Cudworth intended, he must have had in mind the sense that evolved from it, which is (according to the OED) “a doctrine of faith involving difficulties which human reason is incapable of solving,” or “a matter unexplained or inexplicable; something beyond human knowledge or comprehension.” By ushering mystery into religion’s essential inner sanctum, Cudworth seems to be showing discursive rational thought the door.

Section 3

In contrast to the 1647 sermons, the *Treatise concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, which Cudworth probably wrote in the early to middle 1660s, seems to be a thoroughly rationalist tract. I categorize TEIM in this way not simply because it elevates to supreme importance something that is labeled “reason,” but rather because of the particular way that work characterizes both the rational faculty and the concept of morality. Let us look at those characterizations now, with an eye toward not only describing what Cudworth says but also understanding why he says it.

Cudworth tells us in the first chapter that the goal of TEIM is to show that if morality exists at all, it must exist *necessarily* (TEIM 16). TEIM seeks to establish, in other words, that morality will be real if and only if the moral categories—of good and evil, just and unjust, virtuous and vicious—are as “eternal and immutable” as the categories of logic and mathematics. So if what we think of as morality turns out to be based on merely contingent facts, then (according to TEIM) we will have to conclude that morality does not exist. We will have to conclude that our moral terms do not refer to anything real at all; we will have to conclude that everything we think of as morally significant is actually an illusion, a sham. Let us call this the “necessity of morals thesis.”¹⁴

From the necessity of morals thesis it follows that if morality is real it must originate in reason alone. For it is through reason and reason alone that we comprehend necessary truths (TEIM 134, 137). Reason is the faculty that discerns what is “necessary, firm, immutable, and adamant” (TEIM 137). It is the “power in the soul” that comprehends “that which absolutely IS and IS NOT” (TEIM 134). So if what we think of as morality turns out to originate in something that we cannot comprehend through the use of reason alone, then we will have to conclude that morality does not really exist.

The necessity of morals thesis—and the moral rationalism that follows from it—is part of a general epistemological position Cudworth holds. The general epistemological position is that something constitutes knowledge or science if and only if it is known to be necessarily true. This is an all-or-nothing epistemology in that it tells us that any belief that falls short of necessary understanding does not qualify as knowledge at all. All knowledge consists of necessary understanding, while beliefs

that do not achieve necessity are all equally “whiffling,” on an epistemic par with the most sottish of superstitions.

Cudworth, then, sets an exceedingly high standard for knowledge in general and morality in particular. It is a standard that most contemporary philosophers would reject, in its application to both morality and science. Mathematics and logic do have the kind of necessity TEIM longs for, but that does not mean (most contemporary philosophers would say) that anything that falls short of that necessity is fit for the epistemological scrap heap. There are other standards that may also be perfectly acceptable, even if they do not rise to the level of mathematical and logical necessity. Most of what is now called science, in fact—physics, chemistry, biology, etc.—lacks the kind of necessity characteristic of math and logic. But we do not feel compelled to say that because its principles lack logical necessity, the field of, say, biology is a complete sham. Indeed, most contemporary meta-ethicists think they would completely vindicate moral realism if they could show that our moral judgments can reach the epistemological standards of physics, chemistry, biology, and the like. Very few, if any, contemporary moral realists are still pining for a moral theory that looks like math and logic. But what typically passes today for moral realism would not have been good enough for the Cudworth of TEIM. To be real, according to TEIM, morality had to be eternal and immutable. It had to have the kind of necessity math and logic possess. Nothing less would do.

Why did Cudworth hold to the necessity of morals thesis? Why did he set such high standards for moral reality? We can go some way toward answering that question by noting that the general epistemological position of which the necessity of morals thesis is a part was common to many philosophers of the seventeenth century. Many seventeenth-century philosophers held that beliefs truly deserving the status of knowledge had to be necessarily true. Thus, many seventeenth-century philosophers held that our understanding of the natural world—if that understanding was ever to be worthy of the name of “science”—would eventually be based in laws that were necessary in the same way math and logic are. A putative science that lacked such necessary laws would be incomplete at best. So from the perspective of this seventeenth-century conception of knowledge, to show that morality is on an epistemic par with systems of logically non-necessary inductive generalizations would not be to do morality any favors, as non-necessary inductive generalizations would not qualify as science at all.

Of course that historical fact only raises another, deeper question, which is *why* seventeenth-century philosophers set such high standards for knowledge in the first place. I cannot provide a full answer to that question, but I think we can gain some insight into it by attending closely to the specific philosophical context of Cudworth’s use of the necessity of morals thesis in TEIM.

Cudworth’s main opponents in TEIM were those who believed that morality originates in the commands of a being with great power. These command

theorists fell into two camps: the English Calvinist voluntarists, who held that morality originated in the commands of God; and the Hobbesians, who held that morality originated in the commands of the sovereign. Now as Cudworth construed them, both these theories implied that the crucial morality-originating commands were purely arbitrary, entirely dependent on the will of the commander.¹⁵ The commander (whether God or sovereign) could just as easily have made all the things that are now moral immoral, and all the things that are now immoral moral. For before the commander issued his commands, moral reasons did not exist and so there was no non-arbitrary reason for him to command one thing rather than another. According to the English Calvinist voluntarists, for instance, before God made murder immoral and promise-keeping moral, murder and promise-keeping had no moral status whatsoever. Moral status—the categories of good and evil—did not exist. God’s decision to prohibit murder and command promise-keeping must, therefore, have had nothing moral to recommend it. It was a purely arbitrary decision, one that He might as well have made by flipping a coin. Similarly, according to the Hobbesian version, a sovereign can decide on a whim to outlaw one thing and mandate another, and that decision will have just as much moral force as the very opposite decision would have had if he had decided to make it. Rightness and wrongness, on Cudworth’s interpretation of the Hobbesian view, are functions simply of the sovereign’s arbitrary will. If the sovereign says to do one thing, then it is right to do so; if he says not to do it, then it is wrong. And there is no moral reason whatsoever that the sovereign should say one thing rather than the other.

So, as Cudworth construed them, the command theories implied that morality consists exclusively of groundless stipulations and posits. To be moral, according to these theories, is to live by those groundless stipulations and posits. It is to obey arbitrary dictates, to follow rules for no reason other than that one has been told to do so. If these theories were true, according to Cudworth, we would all be in the position of children who, upon asking why they are supposed to do something, are told, “Because I said so, that’s why.”

Now most of us believe there is more to being a fully-functioning moral agent than simply doing what one has been told to do for no other reason than that one has been told to do it. It might be okay for me to tell a child to do something “because I said so,” since the child might not have the capacity to understand the real reasons. But we tend to think that an adult person, one who is a moral agent in the true sense, will have the capacity to understand, and that that capacity will play a role in her decision-making. To act morally, a person has to perform an action not simply because she has been told to but because she herself understands the rightness of the action. Moral conduct, we tend to think, cannot exist without moral reasons. A person who acts simply out of blind and fearful obedience will thus not be conducting herself truly morally at all.

This idea that one's internal reasons for action are more important than one's mere external behavior shines like a bright light through all of Cudworth's thought. It underlies his pleas for religious tolerance in that he holds that the state should not enforce certain practices or rituals since outward conformity to such rules would be neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for true religiosity. It underlies his conception of the afterlife and reward and punishment, in that he holds that heaven and hell are essentially not places but states of mind consisting of an awareness of one's own inward character. And it underlies his belief that the command theories of Hobbes and the voluntarists would lead to the complete annihilation of morality. For, if Hobbes or the voluntarists were right, the only reason we would have to perform certain actions is that an all-powerful being would punish us if we did not. But such fearful obedience bears no resemblance whatever to the moral understanding that alone can ground true moral agency.

We can see, then, why Cudworth claims in TEIM that morality could be real only if Hobbesianism and voluntarism are false. But that still does not fully explain the necessity of morals thesis, which holds that morality is real only if it is necessarily true, possessing the same certainty as mathematics. Why couldn't moral understanding consist of ideas less certain than math but still more intellectually respectable than blind obedience? Couldn't something be a good reason for action even if it did not have the necessity of mathematics? Why did Cudworth think that mathematical certainty and uncomprehending obedience were the only two options, that if morality could not achieve the former, it would inevitably collapse into the other? Was he guilty of posing a false dilemma?

It is true that in TEIM Cudworth did not consider the possibility that moral judgments could achieve the same kind of justification as the claims of contemporary chemistry and biology, which do not possess the necessity of logic and mathematics but are epistemologically quite respectable nonetheless. But he did consider the possibility that morality originates in sensation or empirical experience (even if he could not have had in mind the kind of sophisticated bodies of knowledge that we today think of as the physical and life sciences).¹⁶ And he had reasons for rejecting that possibility (which he associated with Protagoras and Hobbes) that were fundamentally the same as the reasons, just examined, for his rejection of command theories of morality.

One's own sensations are not the same as the commands of another. In TEIM, however, Cudworth argues that one's sensations are crucially like voluntarist and Hobbesian commands in that they defy understanding. Just as it is impossible for us to discover any reason for the commands the voluntarist God or Hobbesian sovereign issues (at least insofar as Cudworth interprets voluntarism and Hobbesianism), so too is it impossible for us to discover any reason for the sensations we experience. Our sensations are things that just happen to us. They are mere occurrences, brute facts. We might be able to correlate some of these brute facts with

others of them, but we cannot understand why they occur. Our awareness of them will always remain on the same plane, as it were, on the surface. The case is the same with Cudworth's interpretation of the voluntarist conception of God. Even if, on the voluntarist conception, we could learn all of God's commands, we could never understand why he issued that set of commands rather than another set. And we could never understand God's commands because there is no understanding to be had. Beneath God's commands there does not exist any intelligible space at all. The same is true, Cudworth thought, about the brute facts of sensation: like the commands of a voluntarist God, they are inherently groundless, incapable of being truly understood.

Of course Cudworth did not know of the sentimentalist moral theories that would later be expounded by Hutcheson and Hume. I believe it is pretty clear, though, that Cudworth of TEIM would have said that moral sentiments, or the deliverances of a moral sense, are just as impenetrable to our understanding as mere sensations and arbitrary commands. TEIM implies that sentiments are things that happen to us, brute facts, not ideas we can understand. According to TEIM, therefore, sentiments cannot ground the reality of morals, since acting on them is just as disengaged from moral understanding as is acting from mere sensation or from fear of an arbitrary commander.

Section 4

But what of the spirit of God about which Cudworth enthused in his sermons from 1647? Is this spirit—this influence upon the heart—the kind of thing that can be understood in the manner TEIM requires? Or does it have the same status as arbitrary commands and mere sensations? Can Cudworth's argument in TEIM embrace the spirit of his sermons, or does TEIM imply that the sermons would undermine the reality of morals no less than Hobbes or the voluntarists? I believe that the sermons do not cohere with TEIM. If we hold to the necessity of morals thesis of TEIM, we must reject the picture of religion painted by the sermons. To make clear the conflict between the two, however, we need first to say a bit more about TEIM's understanding of understanding.

Cudworth believes, as we have seen, that to have knowledge of something is to understand that it is necessarily so. And to have such an understanding we must comprehend the essential nature of a thing (TEIM 62). Cudworth also maintains that we can never comprehend the essential nature of things that exist outside of our minds, for we can only experience such external things' effect on us, not how they are in and of themselves (TEIM 57–60). That is why sensation can never produce knowledge, because “sense itself is but the passive perception of some individual material forms, but to know or understand, is actively to comprehend a thing by some abstract, free and universal reasonings” (TEIM 58).

What, then, can we know? What essential natures can we comprehend? We can know and comprehend only what is “written within” our minds (TEIM 60). So if we have any knowledge—if there is anything whose essential nature we understand—it must be of what is internal to us. Thus, all the objects of science, all the truths that reason can discover, must originate in the “inward and active energy of the mind itself” (TEIM 73). Or as Cudworth puts it, “[T]he primary and immediate objects of intellection and knowledge, are not things existing without the mind, but ideas of the mind itself actively exerted, that is the intelligible reasons of things” (TEIM 76). All that we can ever know, according to Cudworth, are our own innate ideas.

Because Cudworth believes that we can have knowledge only of innate ideas and not of things that impress us from without, it is vitally important to him to prove that innate ideas exist, that the empiricist view of the human soul as *carte blanche* is mistaken. For if the empiricists are right and we do not possess innate ideas, then Cudworth will have to conclude that it is impossible for us to have knowledge of anything at all. Much of TEIM is thus devoted to an attempt to prove that we do have innate ideas, that the anti-innatist empiricist view cannot account for certain undeniable facts.

What does Cudworth have in mind when he speaks of an innate idea? He provides numerous examples, and it must be said that it is not always clear if there are any coherent organizing principles controlling his disparate lists. But the examples that come up time and again are: “*Nihil potest esse et non esse eodem tempore* [Nothing can be and not be at the same time],” “*Aequalia addita aequalibus efficiunt aequalia* [Equals added to equals make equals],” and “*Nihil nulla est affectio* [No effect results from nothing].”¹⁷ And the example that he uses most frequently by far—the one that plays the leading, if not the sole, role in his arguments for innatism—comes right out of Euclid: “the geometrical theorem concerning a triangle; that it hath three angles equal to two right angles” (TEIM 118). Each of these ideas, Cudworth tells us, is an example of a “universal axiomatical truth” (TEIM 118) or “scientific theorem or proposition” (TEIM 122). Each of them we know to be necessarily true. And each of them must have originated not in external sensation but from the active vigor of the mind itself.

But these ideas do not look anything at all like the spirit of religion Cudworth glorifies in the sermons. For in the sermons, Cudworth tells us that the spirit of religion cannot be “congealed into ink” nor “blotted upon paper”—it can be neither expressed in “words and syllables” nor “written or spoken.” The spirit is something that “language and expressions cannot reach.” But the theorems and propositions of TEIM congeal into ink and blot onto paper very well. Words and syllables seem custom-made for their expression. Indeed, most of them even have their own Latin names.

Another feature of TEIM's account of reason sharpens the difference even more. This additional feature is reason's universal, *public* nature, or the view that the objects of reason are literally identical for everyone everywhere.

Cudworth believes that even though the innate ideas that are the objects of reason "exist only in the mind" (TEIM 125), they are nonetheless "exactly the same" for everyone (TEIM 131). And when he says these ideas are "exactly the same" for everyone, he does not mean merely that the ideas have the same content, but rather that each person's rational faculty has as its object the very same *public* things.

Cudworth's argument for rationality's public nature starts from the claim that the objects of reason are "fixed and immutable" (TEIM 122). We all realize, for instance, that the essence of a triangle has always been and will always be exactly the same. This follows from the necessity of the essential characteristics of a triangle, which as we have seen is just what the first feature of Cudworthian reason involves.

Cudworth next points out that our particular individual minds are not "fixed and immutable" in the way that the essence of a triangle is. For one thing, there was a time before our particular individual minds ever existed, and yet there never was a time when the essence a triangle did not exist (TEIM 127). There are, as well, times when we "do not actually think" the truths of a triangle, and yet the truths still exist at all times nonetheless, possessing "a constant and never-failing entity . . . whether our particular minds think of them or not" (TEIM 127). These truths, however, are purely intelligible, and as such can exist only within a mind. They "are things that cannot exist alone," but must inhere in some intellect, for they are nothing but "modifications of mind" (TEIM 128).

So, the objects of reason have an eternal and immutable existence, and those objects can exist only within a mind. But all of our particular created minds are temporal and mutable. We must conclude, therefore, that there is some other mind that is eternal and immutable and which is forever and always thinking of all the objects of reason. This mind, of course, is none other than God. As Cudworth explains,

Now the plain meaning of all this is nothing else, but that there is an eternal wisdom and knowledge in the world, necessarily existing which was never made, and can never cease to be or be destroyed. Or, which is all one, that there is an infinite eternal mind necessarily existing, and that actually comprehends himself, the possibility of all things, and the verities clinging to them. In a word, that there is a God, or an omnipotent and omniscient Being, necessarily existing, who therefore cannot destroy his own being or nature, that is, his infinite power and wisdom. (TEIM 128)

All the objects of reason exist always in the mind of God. And when we exercise our rational faculty, we gain access to those objects. Each of us, moreover, gains access to the very same objects, for each of us, through the use of reason, participates with the mind of God itself. God's mind is thus the public arena in which the rational thought of everyone is conducted. As Cudworth writes,

Moreover, from hence also it comes to pass that truths, though they be never so many several and distant minds apprehending them, yet they are not broken, multiplied, or diversified thereby, but that they are one and the same individual truths in them all. So that it is but one truth and knowledge that is in all the understandings in the world. Just as when a thousand eyes look upon the sun at once, they all see the same individual object. Or as when a great crowd or throng of people hear one and the same orator speaking to them all, it is one and the same voice, that is in the several ears of all those several auditors. So in like manner, when innumerable created understandings direct themselves to the contemplation of the same universal and immutable truths, they do all of them but as it were listen to one and the same original voice of the eternal wisdom that is never silent. (TEIM 131–2)

So according to Cudworth, when we truly understand something—when we have real knowledge—we participate with the mind of God. This is a very significant idea, for several reasons.

First of all, it points toward a deep explanation of the necessity of morals thesis and the general seventeenth-century epistemological position of which that claim is a part. The general epistemological position, recall, was that knowledge or science consisted only of necessary truths; the necessity of morals thesis, according to which morality is real only if moral categories are necessary features of reality, is Cudworth's application of that claim to morality. The seventeenth century philosophers who held to the general epistemological position seemed to believe that the mind of God knows almost no contingency. God's understanding of the most important things, these seventeenth-century philosophers believed, is always perfect, and to understand something perfectly is to understand why it has to be the way it is. It follows, then, that if we are participating with the mind of God, our understanding will be perfect too. So if our knowledge is God-like, and if God-like knowledge consists of necessary understanding, our beliefs can constitute knowledge only if they too contain necessary understanding.¹⁸ This is why math and logic were, for many seventeenth century philosophers, such perfect models for science—because our understanding of the fundamental mathematical and logical principles is so full and complete that God himself could not improve upon it. TEIM explains as clearly as any seventeenth century work this idea that to

do math and logic—or, indeed, to understand anything at all—is to become one with the mind of God. TEIM thus develops a position that unites epistemology, theology, and morality, a position according to which the exercise of rationality is nothing less than a sacrament, a way truly to partake of the Divine.

Cudworth's claim that whenever we attain true understanding we participate with the mind of God is also significant because it allows him to draw the conclusion that when we attain true understanding we participate with the minds of one another. Cudworth is thus able to provide an account of the universal or public nature of reason. He is able to explain how rationality enables us to understand each other's thought—how we are able to “confer and discourse together . . . presenting[,] perceiving one another's meaning” (TEIM 131). Everyone, for instance, is able to comprehend Euclid's theorems and discuss them with others, no matter where or when he or she lives. But this would be impossible unless everyone had in mind the same geometric ideas, unless all of us geometers were truly of one mind. As Cudworth puts it,

Whereas it is plain that the subject of this theorem [that a triangle has three angles equal to two right angles] is such a thing as every geometri-
cian, though in never such distant places and times, hath the very same
always ready at his hand, without the least imaginable difference. And
they all pronounce concerning the same thing. (TEIM 118)

So, reason, as Cudworth conceives of it in TEIM, is universal or public in that its objects are the same for everyone. These objects are publicly accessible intellectual items which everyone can simultaneously apprehend. Or as Cudworth puts it, “[W]henever any theoretical proposition is rightly understood by any one particular mind whatsoever, and wheresoever it be, the truth of it is no private thing, nor relative to that particular mind only” (TEIM 137). In the sermons, however, Cudworth repeatedly insists that the spirit of religion is a mystery, that there is something irreducibly mysterious about Christ's kindling of our hearts. And to be mysterious or mystical is specifically *not* to be publicly accessible. It is to be something about which all people *cannot* “confer and discourse” together. The problem of reconciling the sermons and TEIM thus seems to be irresolvable.¹⁹ And when we look closely at the kind of moral theory TEIM paves the way for, this problem only worsens.

Now, it might seem that TEIM is not much concerned with morality, its title notwithstanding. For the bulk of the book is given over to arguments for the existence of innate ideas, and the particular examples of innate ideas are usually geometric and non-moral. It might seem, consequently, that the goal of TEIM is to defend an epistemological position that initially has little if any bearing on the issue of righteousness.

It has to be said that it is rather odd that a book entitled “A Treatise concerning eternal and immutable morality” has in it so little that is specifically about morality. It is more of a work in epistemology in general than in moral philosophy in particular. But the epistemology is clearly tied to a view of morality, and it is easy enough to infer the latter from the former. Let me explain now the substantial view of morality implied by TEIM’s epistemology.

Cudworth’s ultimate goal, he tells us in the first chapter of TEIM, is to show that we can and do have moral knowledge. In order to show this, he first has to explain what knowledge is, for moral knowledge (as he conceives of it) is one part of knowledge in general. Thus, in TEIM, he argues that to know something is to understand the necessity of it. He also argues that we can understand the necessity only of what is internal to our own mind, and that as a result we can have knowledge only if we possess innate ideas. It then becomes necessary for Cudworth to establish that innate ideas do in fact exist in the human mind. And the example of geometry is supposed to establish exactly that. But this still leaves a crucial job undone. For although the example of geometry shows that we can have knowledge (that our minds are not completely incapable of knowing, as they would be if they really were blank slates), it does not show that we have knowledge of morality. The fact that our geometric ideas pass epistemic muster does not on its own imply that our moral ideas do.

Cudworth himself makes it clear that TEIM leaves undone this job of establishing that our moral ideas are objects of knowledge. That job, he says in the final chapter of TEIM, is something that he “shall show afterwards” (TEIM 145). TEIM has shown, he says, that since persons do have some innate ideas of necessary truths arising from within their own souls (as the example of geometry proves), it is possible for them to have knowledge. But showing this general fact about the human soul is only prefatory work to the more specific task of showing that our moral ideas are actually objects of knowledge. TEIM, in other words, disposes of one preliminary objection to the claim that we have moral knowledge—the objection being that we are incapable of having any kind of knowledge at all. But TEIM does not positively establish that we do have moral knowledge itself. As Cudworth puts it (once again in the final chapter of TEIM),

Wherefore since the nature of morality cannot be understood, without some knowledge of the nature of the soul, I thought it seasonable and requisite here to take this occasion offered and to *prepare the way to our following discourse* by showing in general that the soul is not a mere passive and receptive thing, which hath no innate active principle of its own, because upon this hypothesis there could be no such thing as morality. (TEIM 145; italics added)

So, Cudworth sees TEIM as prolegomena to a work that will explain “the nature of morality.” TEIM demonstrates that “if there be anything at all good or evil, just or unjust, there must of necessity be something naturally and immutably good and just,” while the discourse to follow TEIM will “show what this natural, immutable, and eternal justice is, with the branches and species of it” (TEIM 16).

What will this later work look like? What kind of “discourse” will explain “the nature of morality” and show “the branches and species of it”? It’s hard to say for sure. Cudworth’s voluminous unpublished manuscripts suggest various pictures, and it seems that many more of his manuscripts—including “a discourse concerning Moral Good and Evil” or “Natural Ethicks”—have been lost.²⁰ But the arguments in TEIM give us very strong reason to believe that the sequel would be a moral geometry that starts from self-evident moral axioms and moves on to demonstrations of specific moral duties. TEIM implies, in other words, that the way to establish that we have moral knowledge is to explain clearly and distinctly what our moral ideas are and to show that they are just as certain and undeniable as geometry. A work that explains morality in this way would establish the truth of morality in the same manner that Euclid’s principles established the science of geometry.²¹

The idea that the true moral theory would parallel Euclidean geometrical theory is evident in Samuel Clarke, John Balguy and (oddly enough) in Book IV of John Locke’s *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. Most relevant to our discussion of Cudworth, however, is the fact that both Benjamin Whichcote and Henry More—Cudworth’s closest friends and philosophical comrades—also clearly endorse the geometric model of moral philosophy.

Whichcote develops his system of morality in several related sermons.²² He begins from the claim that all of morality is grounded in the self-evident principle that actions be “fit and just” or “fair and equal.” Whichcote does not spend much time explaining this principle of fitness, probably because he thought of it as so obvious and fundamental that it neither needed nor admitted of explanation. He does provide some glosses, though, maintaining in a couple of places that the principle of fitness “consists in this; the congruity and proportion between the action of an agent and his object. He acts morally that doth observe the proportion of an action to its object; that is, he doth terminate a due action upon its proper object” (Whichcote II.236).²³ In a similar vein, Whichcote says that all moral actions are instances of “giv[ing] every one their own” (Whichcote II.52).

Whichcote does not leave matters at this very general level of fitness, however. He goes on to derive from that general principle specific rules of conduct, formulating “demonstration[s] in morals, that [are] as clear and as satisfactory as any demonstration in the mathematicks” (Whichcote IV.307). The first things he derives are four general tenets. They are:

1. To reverence and acknowledge the deity. 2. To live in love, and bear good will towards one another. 3. To deal justly, equally and fairly in all our transactions and dealings each with other. 4. To use moderation and government of ourselves, in respect of the necessaries and conveniences of this state. (Whichcote IV.351)

From these four tenets, Whichcote proceeds to demonstrate three general classes of duties: Godliness, duties to God (from 1); Righteousness, or duties to others (from 2 and 3); and Sobriety, or duties to self (from 4) (Whichcote I.383–4). Whichcote claims to show how these duties imply particular rules that dictate details of how one ought to conduct oneself in matters of worship, speech, contracts, diet, and the running of a household, including instructions on how parents are to treat their children, husbands are to treat their wives, masters their servants, and men their dogs and horses (I.253–5; II.218–9; IV. 351–61).

More develops his moral system in the *Enchiridion Ethicum*, which he first published in 1668.²⁴ He begins by presenting twenty-three “Moral Noemata” or “Noema’s” (More 21). These Noemas, More tells us, fill the same role in the study of morality that “first undeniable Axioms” fill in “Mathematical Demonstrations” (More 20). They are “Axioms . . . into which almost all the Reasons of Morality may be reduced” (More 20) or self-evident general moral propositions from which specific moral duties may be derived. The Noemas consist of definitions of good and evil (Noemas I and II), descriptions of the degrees of which good and evil admit (III, IV, VII, VIII, IX), methods for maximizing the ratio of good to evil (V, VI, X, XI, XII, XIII, XVIII, XIX), various statements of the Golden Rule (XIV, XV, XVI), and basic ethical claims (“Tis good to obey the Magistrate in things indifferent” [XX], “Tis better to obey God than Men” [XXI]).

After presenting his Moral Noemas, More goes on to derive from them extensive lists of duties and virtues, such as those of justice (More 112–25), prudence, sincerity, patience (More 98–108), temperance and fortitude (More 133). More attempts to bring these derivations down to very specific levels (just as Whichcote does), claiming, for instance, to have established the particular duties that are owed to magistrates, different family members, and private men who are equals (More 123–5). More makes it clear, moreover, that in deriving these duties he takes himself to be conducting a kind of moral science analogous to geometry (More 81), one that consists of demonstrations of eternal and immutable ethical truths (More 115).

The moral system of More’s *Enchiridion* fits perfectly with the epistemology of TEIM. For the moral noemas at the foundation of that system are purported to have the same status as the innate ideas Cudworth presents as the foundation of other branches of knowledge. And the demonstrations that proceed from More’s noemas purport to have the same structure as the proofs of geometry, which is Cudworth’s paradigm for a science.

In addition to the philosophical confluence of Cudworth's TEIM and More's *Enchiridion Ethicum*, there is extra-textual evidence that More's ethical system is just the kind of thing Cudworth himself planned to produce. The extra-textual evidence consists of several letters from Cudworth and More to John Worthington (all the relevant parts of which are quoted in Birch, xiii–xv). They describe a quarrel that took place between Cudworth and More in 1664–65. Cudworth says in the first letter that in the previous year he had begun a discourse on “Good and Evil, or Natural Ethicks,” and that More had strongly urged him to complete and publish the work. But eight months later, to his dismay, Cudworth learned that More himself “had begun a discourse on the same argument,” a discourse that More calls his *Enchiridion Ethicum*. Cudworth talked with More about the matter, showing, as More put it, “disgust, &c.” and contending “that if I [More] persisted in the resolution of publishing my book he [Cudworth] would desist in his.” Out of deference to Cudworth, More agreed to “desist, and throw his into a corner,” although clearly he was not happy about it, as he had by this time finished “all but a chapter.” Unfortunately, Cudworth did not publish his discourse promptly, although he had told More that “he had most of it then ready to send up to be licensed that week.” And so, a few months later, More went ahead and proceeded to publish his book, even though he realized that doing so could very well “disgust Dr. Cudworth, whom I am very loath any way to grieve.” Of course we cannot be sure of the reason for Cudworth's disgust (nor can we know whether his discourse on natural ethics, which has since been lost, really was ready to be “set to the press,” as he told More). But it seems to me that the best explanation of Cudworth's reaction is that he thought that the *Enchiridion* would steal his thunder—that by publishing the *Enchiridion*, More would gain credit for ideas that actually belonged to Cudworth. The fact that Whichcote, Cudworth's other close friend and philosophical comrade, *also* presented a view of morality modeled on geometry makes the idea that TEIM coheres with a geometric model of morality yet more likely still.²⁵

So, I think there are very strong philosophical, textual, and historical reasons for taking Whichcote's ethical demonstrations and More's *Enchiridion* to be the logical extensions of TEIM. I should point out, however, that this claim would be denied by both Passmore and Darwall (and probably by Sarah Hutton as well [see TEIM xxv and 145]). Passmore and Darwall (and probably Hutton) would reject the claim because they believe that Cudworth's unpublished manuscripts show that he did not think ethics was rational in the geometric, demonstrative way that More's *Enchiridion* and Whichcote's demonstrations imply (Passmore, 51–68, Darwall, 116–7). To Passmore and Darwall's interpretations, let me offer the following two responses.

First, even if Passmore and Darwall are right in holding that some of the unpublished manuscripts conflict with my claim, that does not prove that when

Cudworth was writing TEIM he did not believe that he was paving the way for a system of ethics that consisted of geometric-like theorems and demonstrative proofs. Cudworth wrote a great many things over the course of his philosophical career, and they do not all cohere. Any Cudworth commentator will have to contend with his seemingly contradictory statements, and this is especially true when we take into account all the handwritten unpublished notes that Cudworth jotted throughout his lifetime. I have tried to argue that the rhetorical framing, the leading examples, and the deep philosophy of TEIM—the skin, flesh and bones of the work—implies that a system of ethics will consist of geometric-like theorems and demonstrative proofs. If there are manuscripts that conflict with that implication, then I believe we have no choice but to chalk them up to Cudworth's inconsistency. I do not believe a geometrically rationalist interpretation of TEIM can be dismissed simply because there are other writings of Cudworth's that conflict with it. Nor do I think we should dismiss TEIM simply because those other writings exist.

Second, the manuscripts do not speak as clearly against the geometrically rationalist interpretation as Passmore and Darwall suggest. Passmore, in particular, overstates the "sentimentalist" parts of the manuscripts, ignores some of the obviously innatist parts (compare, for instance, Passmore, 53 with Cudworth's ms. 4981, p. 104), and quotes heavily from ms. 4983, which may very well have not been written by Cudworth at all (see Darwall, 146). Moreover, both Passmore and Darwall's interpretations rely to a large extent on Cudworth's statements about human free will, which is the main topic of many of the manuscripts. But there are two big problems in trying to interpret TEIM's conception of morality through the prism of Cudworth's statements about human free will.

The first problem is that the manuscript statements on free will are so multifarious and confusing that they strongly suggest that Cudworth himself was never completely satisfied with any single position. Cudworth was greatly vexed by the question of free will, and he tried to answer it in many different ways, over the course of many years. That some of these attempts seem incompatible with a demonstratively rational ethics should not be taken as evidence that he never thought a demonstratively rational ethics was possible, since he himself was trying out and changing and abandoning ideas on free will throughout his career.

The second problem is that in the manuscripts Cudworth frequently makes a claim that appears to draw a sharp divide between human free will and TEIM's conception of morality. The claim is that God does not have free will. Free will only belongs to imperfect, human beings. If we were perfect, as God is, we wouldn't have free will (see, for instance, TEIM 185–6 and 177–8; and ms. 4979, 20–1 and 102/106, and ms. 4982, 130–1). But the entire structure of TEIM is built on the idea that God understands all of morality, and that we participate with the mind of God when we understand morality. TEIM argues, in other words, that there is an isomorphism, or perhaps identity, between our conception of morality and

God's conception of morality, that when we recognize morality our minds are in the same kind of state that God's is (see also ms. 4982, 109). Cudworth makes it clear that the morality that is the subject of TEIM *does* belong to God—that God is moral. Indeed, he tells us in TEIM that the nature of God is “the first rule and exemplar of morality” (TEIM 150). This seems to me to make it very difficult to draw any conclusions about TEIM's conception of morality from the manuscripts' statements about uniquely human (emphatically non-God-like) free will. And it also seems to me to make very questionable the claim that the manuscripts on free will constitute the drafts of the sequel to TEIM, insofar as God is the exemplar of TEIM's conception of morality, while free will is something that does not belong to God. Another way of explaining the difference between TEIM and the manuscripts on free will is in terms of the distinction Cudworth explicitly draws between, on the one hand, the “hegemonic of the soul,” which is what he identifies as human free will, and, on the other hand, our “necessary understanding” (TEIM 180) or the “speculative power of contemplating . . . whatsoever is and is not in nature, and of the truth and falsehood of things universal” (TEIM 193–6). The manuscripts on free will are an examination of the hegemonic. But in TEIM, Cudworth makes it clear that morality (if it is a real thing at all) is something that we discern through the use of our “speculative power” or “necessary understanding.” We should, consequently, expect the sequel to TEIM (which will explain the nature of morality) to consist not of an examination of the hegemonic but rather of deliverances of our “necessary understanding” or “speculative power.”

Now, Darwall argues that the manuscripts make it clear that Cudworth drew a crucial distinction between the speculative understanding and practical reason, and such a distinction seems incompatible with a system of geometric-like moral demonstrations (Darwall, 136). But while Darwall does identify places in which Cudworth draws this distinction, there are also passages in the manuscripts that *equate* the speculative and practical (ms 4979, 19–21; ms 4981, 108; ms 4982, 36–7). Moreover, whatever else the speculative-practical distinction is, it is not, for the Cudworth of TEIM, a distinction between morality (which we typically think of as practical) and geometry (which we typically think of as speculative). For one of the main epistemological points in TEIM is that our ideas of both morality *and* geometry are innate, *both* arising from the active vigor of our minds themselves. It seems, in other words, that Cudworth is pulling geometry onto the active side of the mind, rather than distinguishing between (practical) morality and (speculative) geometry. And then he is claiming that we should have confidence in the reality of morality because we have already seen that we can have confidence in the reality of geometry.

But if I am right in thinking that in TEIM Cudworth is arguing for a conception of moral knowledge modeled on Euclidean geometry, then it becomes very difficult to see how to reconcile TEIM and Cudworth's sermons. For while the moral

geometry for which TEIM paves the way is essentially discursive, propositional, and public, the spirit of religion upon which the sermons insist is essentially intuitive, inexpressible and mysterious. TEIM's *raison d'être* is to show that morality is a branch of knowledge or "theoretical truth" (TEIM 141). But the sermons come very close to dismissing the religious importance of knowledge and truth altogether.

Section 5

One might object, however, that there are ways of reconciling the sermons' claims about the importance of love and TEIM's claims about the importance of understanding. The difference between the sermons and TEIM, one might object, is merely one of emphasis, with the former focusing on one aspect of the moral and religious life and the latter focusing on another, completely consistent aspect.

One might argue, for instance, that TEIM intends to show only that the existence of morality requires the existence of eternal and immutable moral natures, and not that the only way for a person to become moral is through knowledge of these natures.²⁶ Perhaps Cudworth thought that a person could be fully moral without possessing demonstrable knowledge of the moral natures, which would mean that the sermons' description of a moral life that does not necessarily involve demonstrable knowledge could be consistent with TEIM's description of the demonstrable truth of morality.

In response, let me first acknowledge that Cudworth does make comments that suggest that he sometimes thought that his emphasis on passion in the sermons and on rational necessity in TEIM fit together in just this way (see TEIM 9, 181; but for a seemingly contrary view, see *Lincolnes* 5–6). But the central positions for which he argues in the sermons and TEIM do not admit of this sort of reconciliation. For in both the sermons and TEIM, Cudworth is attempting to describe the highest goal of a human life. He is attempting to describe the greatest good to which human beings can aspire. In both the sermons and TEIM, moreover, Cudworth maintains that when human beings achieve that highest goal or greatest good, they become one with God (*Commons* 377, 383 and *Lincolnes* 26; TEIM 150). Now, in the sermons, he says that achieving the highest good and becoming one with God is an essentially non-rational matter; it is a matter of feeling a certain kind of love, not of possessing any kind of propositional understanding (*Commons* 375, 380, 387, 389–90; and *Lincolnes* 49). But in TEIM, he implies that achieving the highest good and becoming one with God is an essentially rational accomplishment; it is the result of understanding the eternal and immutable truth of certain propositions (TEIM 128–32, 137). That is not to say that TEIM implies that the highest good we can achieve has nothing to do with conduct and character. When he was writing TEIM, Cudworth probably thought that when one understands the eternal and immutable truth of moral propositions, one will

inevitably be motivated to act in a morally appropriate way (see TEIM 145). But what TEIM does imply is that the motive to act in a morally appropriate way can be based entirely on a purely rational understanding of ethical propositions. The sermons maintain, in contrast, that the God-like motivation to which we should aspire can never arise from rational understanding alone.

Another way one might try to reconcile TEIM and the sermons is to attribute to Cudworth the view (not uncommon in Christian thought) that purity of heart is required before one can see the truth.²⁷ The sermons, then, could be taken to describe the kind of pure heart one has to have before one can understand the highest moral truths, and TEIM could be taken to describe the moral understanding a person with a pure heart can eventually achieve. I do not believe, however, that such a reading fits either the sermons or TEIM.

The sermons may contain comments that suggest that only a person with purity of heart can grasp the highest religious truths. But a grasp of the highest religious truths, as the sermons conceive of things, is not the same as the rational, demonstrative science of TEIM. To grasp the highest religious truths, in the sermons, seems to be identical to possessing purity of heart itself (Commons 323–4, 379–80, 392–3, 406; *Lincolnes* 31). The sermons do not suggest that religious understanding is an operation of the mind that is distinct from possessing of purity of heart; they do not suggest that purity of heart is merely a necessary pre-condition of correctly conducting demonstrations of which a science of morals is supposed to consist. (I take it, by the way, that when Christians say one must have purity of heart in order to see the truth, they do not typically mean by “truth” the kind of demonstrable science of which geometry is a prime example; I take it that when Christians say someone has seen the light, they do not typically mean that she has come to understand the logical necessity of a proposition.)

TEIM, moreover, never suggests that only those with purity of heart can understand the truths that constitute the axioms of moral science. In TEIM, rather, Cudworth maintains that the truths that constitute the axioms of moral science are self-evident, and he seems to think they are self-evident to *all* humans, not only to those possessing purity of heart (TEIM 126, 140–1). Indeed, TEIM’s constant comparison with geometric theorems makes it seem quite unlikely that Cudworth meant to imply that a person would need purity of heart before she could understand moral truth, insofar as an understanding of geometry does not seem to depend on a person’s first possessing purity of heart. The moral science Cudworth describes in TEIM is supposed to be accessible to all people—to every rational being *qua* rational being, independent of the state of her passions. (The moral problem is that people do not always act in accord with what they know to be right.)

A comment from the introduction to the *True Intellectual System of the Universe* suggests that Cudworth was not entirely unaware of the tension between an exalta-

tion of necessary understanding (as advanced in TEIM) and an insistence on the ultimate importance of “the fleshly tables of our hearts” (Commons 404). TIS is Cudworth’s attempt to defeat all atheistic arguments and provide a comprehensive demonstration of the existence of God. The ultimate purpose of the book is to strengthen its reader’s commitment to religion. But in the Preface, Cudworth acknowledges that the rational argumentation of which TIS consists is neither necessary nor sufficient for a commitment to God and religion. He writes,

Nevertheless, it will not follow from hence, that whosoever shall read these demonstrations of ours, and understand all the words of them, must therefore of necessity be presently convinced, whether he will or not, and put out of all manner of doubt or hesitancy, concerning the existence of a God. For . . . mere speculation, and dry mathematical reason, in minds unpurified, and having a contrary interest of carnality, and a heavy load of infidelity and distrust sinking them down, cannot alone beget an unshaken confidence and assurance of so high a truth as this, the existence of one perfect understanding Being, the original of all things. As it is certain also, on the contrary, that minds cleansed and purged from vice may, without syllogistical reasonings and mathematical demonstrations, have an undoubted assurance of the existence of a God.²⁸

It seems that in making such a statement immediately preceding 800 pages of “syllogistical reasonings and mathematical demonstrations,” Cudworth himself manifests a certain ambivalence about the importance of rationality. The bulk of TIS seems to imply that it is crucially important to religion to show that it is fully rational. But the Preface suggests that the sorts of things we can discover through the use of reason, because they have no necessary connection to our emotional core, are not crucially important to religion after all.²⁹

Section 6

What explains the difference between the sermons and TEIM? How can we account for the fact that in the sermons Cudworth places the heart at the center of righteousness, and that in TEIM he puts the head there instead?

One possibility is that Cudworth consciously changed his mind, that he believed in the heart-based view of righteousness in 1647, but that by the time he wrote TEIM he had come to reject that proto-sentimentalism in favor of a more rationalist view. But while this possibility fits with some of the evidence, it does not fit with all of it.³⁰ It is far from clear, that is, that in arguing for a rationalist position in TEIM, Cudworth was consciously intending to repudiate his earlier, proto-sentimentalist views.

I think we can be more confident in saying that the difference between the sermons and TEIM is due at least in part to the fact that Cudworth's positions were defined as much by what he was opposed to as by what he was in favor of. Cudworth was at times a polemic writer. He often had as his goal the refutation of specific views held by his contemporaries.³¹ In his attempt to show that one view was mistaken, Cudworth was sometimes inclined to travel quite far in one direction. In his attempt to show that another view was mistaken, he was sometimes inclined to travel quite far in another direction. And the destination he arrived at when attacking one view was sometimes rather different from the destination he arrived at when attacking another. Thus, in the sermons, Cudworth's desire to discredit scholasticism may have generated a philosophical momentum that pushed him toward an emphasis on the passions that left little room for reason. And, in TEIM, his goal of defeating the English Calvinist brand of voluntarism may have generated a philosophical momentum that pushed him toward an apotheosis of reason that left little room for the passions.

There is, however, one belief that underlies both of Cudworth's positions. It is the belief that what is essential about morality and religion is accessible to every human being simply in virtue of his or her human nature. Cudworth consistently held, that is, that every human being had within his or her own soul all that was needed in order to achieve the height of virtue and righteousness.

Scholasticism and the English Calvinist brand of voluntarism both denied the universal accessibility of virtue and righteousness. Scholasticism implied that the highest truths could be accessed only through the Aristotelian method and university learning. The English Calvinist brand of voluntarism implied that the truth could be accessed only through the revealed word that had been spoken to some of humankind, but not to all. And Cudworth was thus compelled to try to defeat both of these positions. In the sermons, when attacking scholasticism, he argued that each of us can grasp what is essential about religion without academic training. In TEIM, when attacking the English Calvinist brand of voluntarism, he argued that each of us can grasp what is essential about morality without the external assistance of the revealed word.

Now it turns out that Cudworth's rejection of voluntarism is in certain respects inconsistent with his rejection of scholasticism. The love of the sermons and the rationality of TEIM are not the same thing; if we achieve righteousness through one of them, then we do not achieve it through the other. But from the perspective of trying to establish the universal accessibility of righteousness, these differences might have been relatively unimportant. In the eighteenth century, these differences would appear to be highly significant indeed, but that may be a testimony to Cudworth's having already fought the good fight against those who denied universal accessibility. Rationalists and sentimentalists agreed that there is within every human soul something that provides access to righteous-

ness. Their disagreement was about what that something is. What I have tried to show here is that roots of both their agreement and disagreement lie within the thought of Cudworth.

NOTES

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1 See, for instance, Richard Price, *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), 20; and David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd ed. revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 197.

2 L. A. Selby-Bigge, *The British Moralists* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), xxxii.

3 John Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth, An Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 51–78.

4 Some might object that it is historically irresponsible to read the eighteenth-century distinction between rationalism and sentimentalism back into Cudworth's works, as Cudworth was unaware of the distinction and may very well have rejected it had he known of it. In response, let me offer three reasons for thinking that it is worthwhile to discuss Cudworth's works in light of the distinction between rationalism and sentimentalism. First of all, the eighteenth-century philosophers did take the distinction to be critical, and if it turns out that the distinction is one that Cudworth straddles, then learning this will, at the very least, help us gain sight of the differences between what was crucially important to seventeenth-century philosophers and what was crucially important to eighteenth-century philosophers. Second, the eighteenth-century distinction between rationalism and sentimentalism does have historical antecedents in seventeenth-century debates in which Cudworth played vital roles. I believe, specifically, that there is a clear line of influence from Cudworth's attacks on scholasticism to eighteenth-century sentimentalism, and from Cudworth's attacks on voluntarism to eighteenth-century rationalism. And tracing these historical lines of influence will inevitably involve comparing Cudworth's views to the views of later philosophers. Third, the distinction between rationalism and sentimentalism is a real one. There is a real and significant difference between believing that morals originate entirely in reason and believing that non-rational aspects play an essential moral role. And even if Cudworth himself did not maintain this distinction, it still is one against which his position on morality can be measured. Perhaps Cudworth wanted to locate the origin of morality in some human principle that bridges reason and sentiment. But just because he *wanted* to do it does not mean he *succeeded* in doing it. There are conceptual reasons to doubt that rational certainty and effective force can originate in one and the same thing (reasons that Cudworth himself points to). And if Cudworth advances a position that implies that these doubts can be overcome, then his success at this endeavor is something we need to evaluate.

5 The two sermons by Cudworth are: “Sermon Preached before the Honorable House of Commons at Westminster, March 31, 1647,” in *The Cambridge Platonists*, ed. Gerald R. Cragg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 369–407 and “A Sermon preached to the Honourable Society of Lincolnes-Inne” (London: J. Flesher, 1664). All references to the “Sermon Preached before the Honorable House of Commons” will be abbreviated in the text as “Commons,” and all references to the “Sermon preached to the Honourable Society of Lincolnes-Inne” will be abbreviated in the text as “Lincolnes.”

6 Ralph Cudworth, *A Treatise concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality with A Treatise of Freewill*, ed. Sarah Hutton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). All references to this work will be abbreviated in the text as “TEIM.”

7 A different but related worry is that I am illegitimately ignoring others of Cudworth’s works, such as the *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, *A Treatise of Freewill*, and the unpublished manuscripts. I discuss some of these works in sections four and five below, but I must acknowledge that I may not have done justice to all of Cudworth’s voluminous writings. See note 25.

8 That Cudworth aimed at such a target is easy to understand, given that scholasticism still had a strong hold over much of Cambridge University in the 1640s, and that he had been exposed at Emmanuel College to some of the strongest criticisms of it.

9 I do not mean to imply that Cudworth’s rejection of scholasticism is equivalent to, or in and of itself implies, the rejection of moral rationalism. Many moral rationalists rejected scholasticism, and Cudworth continued to reject it even while writing his most rationalist works. My point is that, in the sermons, Cudworth used his attacks on scholasticism as a launching pad for a more general dismissal of the importance of propositional thought as a whole. Perhaps this shows that when Cudworth was delivering the sermons, he had not yet fully realized that the syllogistical reasoning he associated with the scholastics was not the only conception of reason one could have.

10 Cudworth exhibits Pelagian tendencies in the sermons not only in holding that pagans could achieve salvation, but also in holding that the spirit of love that is the essence of religion can come entirely from within each individual. The proper spirit has not been “POURED and BLOWN *into men* by God” (Lincolnes 31–2; cf. Lincolnes 40); each person can, somehow, activate the spirit on his or her own. Cudworth also exhibits clear Pelagian tendencies in TEIM, where he apotheosizes reason within every individual. Indeed, I believe that the Pelagian view that every human has within himself the resources to achieve the height of righteousness (without the absolute need of external assistance) is the deepest position to which Cudworth remained committed throughout his life. In the sermons, Cudworth says that it is a passion within us that enables us to achieve righteousness. In the sermons, he says that it is reason within us. But in both works, he insists that righteousness is internally accessible to all.

11 John Smith, another of the Cambridge Platonists, makes similar proto-sentimentalist claims in his “True Way or Method of attaining to Divine Knowledge,” an essay that at times bears a striking resemblance to Cudworth’s “Sermon preached before the House of Commons.” See *The Cambridge Platonists*, ed. C. A. Patrides (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 128–9. For discussion of Smith, see J. B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 199–202.

12 Ralph Cudworth, *The Union of the Christ and the Church; in a Shadow* (London: Richard Bishop, 1642), 23.

13 See Frederick C. Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 179–83, for a penetrating analysis of the Cambridge Platonists' philosophical engagement with religious mystery. For further discussion of Cudworth's view of the "mystery" of the Trinity in his *True Intellectual System*, see Richard Popkin, *The Third Force in Seventeenth Century Thought* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 340–1. See also John Smith's "True Way" in *Patrides*, 133–42.

14 In my "On the Alleged Incompatibility between Sentimentalism and Moral Confidence," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 15 (1998): 411–40, I discuss the role the necessity of morals thesis plays in Balguy, Price, and Kant's criticisms of moral sentimentalism, and how sentimentalists might respond to those criticisms.

15 I am discussing Cudworth's conceptions of voluntarism and Hobbesianism. It is important to note, however, that Cudworth may have not have had the most balanced conceptions of these views. When he is attacking voluntarism, Cudworth often seems to have in mind the English Calvinist variety of William Perkins; Cudworth's arguments might not apply as readily to the views of someone like Pufendorf, whose view is more sophisticated and amenable to the use of human reason than Perkins's (see Schneewind, 8–9, 21–36, 119–40 for a very helpful account of seventeenth-century voluntarist views). When he is attacking Hobbesianism, Cudworth does not seem to consider the possibility that Hobbes's laws of nature might themselves be eternal and immutable, nor that the decisions of a Hobbesian sovereign might be controlled by moral considerations (for discussion of these issues, see David Gauthier, "Hobbes: The Laws of Nature," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 82 [2001]: 258–84 and Tom Sewell, "Hobbes and the Morality Beyond Justice," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 82 [2001]: 227–42). But even if Cudworth's conceptions of voluntarism and Hobbesian are oversimplified, I believe that there remains a crucially important core difference between Cudworth's view of morality in TEIM and that of the voluntarists and Hobbesians. In TEIM, Cudworth maintains that our grasp of right and wrong can be the same as God's or the sovereign's; reason enables us to learn about right and wrong in the same way that God and the sovereign do. Voluntarists and Hobbesians, in contrast, hold that there is a lawgiver (God or sovereign) whose relationship to right and wrong differs in a significant way from ours. Right and wrong, for voluntarists and Hobbesians, depend on a lawgiver in a way that they do not depend on each of us; but, for Cudworth, there is no fundamental difference between our relationship to right and wrong, and the relationship between God or sovereign and right and wrong.

16 For further discussion of Cudworth's epistemology, see Passmore, 29–29.

17 TEIM 142, 139, 129, 124, 118–20, 80

18 For an excellent discussion of the seventeenth-century view that we can in some subjects gain a certainty equivalent to that of God's, see Edward J. Craig, *The Mind of God and the Works of Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 13–68. Craig traces this idea through Galileo's *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*, Descartes's *Meditations*, and Leibniz's *Discourse on Metaphysics* (although Craig also points out that he had neglected "one exception which Leibniz makes: existential propositions [apart from 'God exists'] are not analytic, even to God" [Craig, 61]).

19 My reading of TEIM conflicts in some respects with the interpretation in Stephen Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal "Ought"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 119–47. What Darwall claims is that Cudworth is an “autonomist internalist,” which means that Cudworth believes that moral obligation consists of “the motives of a self-determining agent” (Darwall, 109). As Darwall puts it, “In fact, however, Cudworth made a fundamental distinction between purely speculative intellect and *practical* mind, and asserted that ethical propositions are made true or false by the nature of the latter. This is only implicit in the sole work Cudworth published during his lifetime, the massive tome *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*. But it is explicit in the *Treatise*, even if it is not directly relevant to that work’s main aims” (Darwall, 114).

I believe Darwall’s internalist autonomist reading of TEIM runs into several problems. First of all, it seems to me that Darwall misconstrues Cudworth’s claim that immutable entities exist entirely within mind (Darwall, 123–4). For while Cudworth does say this, Darwall underplays the extent to which Cudworth argues that the mind in which the immutable entities exist must be the *mind of God*. The immutable entities, mind-dependent though they are, necessarily have an existence independent of *human* minds. This seems to me to imply that morality, which consists of immutable entities, cannot be constituted by the motives of human agents, since it necessarily has an existence independent of human minds.

The conspicuous anti-voluntarism of TEIM also seems to me to be a problem for Darwall’s autonomist internalist reading, as the anti-voluntarism seems to imply that morality cannot consist of the motives of any agent. Darwall acknowledges that TEIM’s anti-voluntarism seems to conflict with his reading, but he says that there are passages in TEIM that nonetheless show that Cudworth was an autonomist internalist (Darwall, 113–4). I am not sure, however, how Darwall explains away the numerous anti-voluntarist passages of TEIM. It seems to me that these passages remain problems for his interpretation. I am also not sure how Darwall explains away the numerous passages that argue that morality consists of claims that have the same kind of necessity as geometric propositions. These also seem to me to remain problems for Darwall’s interpretation. And given that these anti-voluntarist and geometric-like passages constitute the bulk of the book, I think there is some reason to question Darwall’s interpretative strategy of reading Cudworth as an autonomist internalist on the basis of the four passages he cites: I.ii.4 (TEIM 19–21), I.ii.6 (TEIM 21–2), IV.vi.4 (TEIM 144–5) and IV.vi.13 (TEIM 150).

But let us now turn to an examination of the four passages Darwall cites. The first two—I.ii.4 and I.ii.6—appear in a chapter that opens with some of the strongest anti-voluntarist claims in all of Cudworth’s writings. Cudworth starts this chapter, that is, by arguing that morality has an existence entirely independent of all will—that the essential character of everything (moral as well as non-moral) is eternally and immutably fixed by nature, not by any will whatsoever. After making these anti-voluntarist claims, however, Cudworth is compelled to address a specific question: how can a person be obligated to obey just civil authorities when they prescribe laws that are fair but not eternally and immutably just (e.g., why are we obligated to drive on the right side of the road, given the fact that there is nothing in the eternal and immutable essential nature of driving on the left that is unjust?)? How can something that is in itself morally indifferent become, through the command of a law-giver, morally obligatory?

The sentences Darwall emphasizes are part of Cudworth's response to this question (Darwall, 119–21). And what Cudworth says is that a person is obligated to obey such "positive" laws when he and the law-giver are in a relationship of "natural justice and equity," i.e., when the law-giver has got his position of prescribing laws to the subject justly and not merely as a result of brute power (TEIM 18–21). So when Cudworth is speaking in this chapter of "obligation," he is not necessarily speaking of morality in general. He is, rather, speaking specifically of the obligation to obey civil laws prescribed by a just civil authority. When he says that obligation is based on the "intellectual nature of him that is commanded," he is not necessarily saying that morality in general consists of the motives of each moral agent, but only that the obligation to obey positive civil laws is grounded in the fact that there exists between subject and magistrate a relationship that accords with "natural justice and equity." It is true that Cudworth also says in these passages that we are obliged to do what is "naturally good" by "the intellectual nature" (TEIM 20). But "the intellectual nature" that obliges us to do what is "naturally good" does not seem to be *our* intellectual nature, but rather *the* intellectual nature, i.e., the nature of reality as it exists eternally and immutably, independent of our particular minds.

The next passage Darwall cites is TEIM IV.vi.4, which he takes to be a clear indication that Cudworth drew a distinction between the theoretical and practical aspects of the mind (Darwall, 126–7). Now I am not entirely sure how this distinction is supposed to work, but it seems to me that in this passage Cudworth is *not* distinguishing between geometric and moral propositions—that whatever else is going on in this passage, Cudworth is here adhering to the view (promulgated throughout the rest of TEIM) that geometry and morality have the same epistemological and metaphysical status. This is because in this passage Cudworth is summarizing prior arguments that were intended to show that our geometric ideas, because they give us real knowledge, are innate, arising from the active vigor of our minds. Cudworth is saying, in other words, that just as he has shown that our geometric ideas can achieve the status of true knowledge, so too he will show—and in just the same way—that our moral ideas can achieve the status of true knowledge. His point is that we will be able to have confidence in the reality of morality because he will show that morality is just like geometry.

The final passage Darwall cites is TEIM IV.vi.13 (Darwall, 127–8). Darwall claims to find in this passage evidence of Cudworth's distinguishing between God's relationship to triangularity and God's relationship to morality. I must confess that I just do not see the basis for this claim. In the paragraph immediately preceding IV.vi.13, Cudworth seems to be talking about all knowledge, moral and geometric. And in the sentence Darwall quotes, Cudworth says that the mind of God is "the first original and source of all things," which seems to me to suggest that He has the same relationship to all things. And as Darwall himself points out, his reading makes it unclear "why God would have to exist in order for there to be moral truths" (Darwall, 128). Yet Cudworth says in this very passage that "it is not possible that there should be any such thing as morality, unless there be a God" (TEIM 150). Because of these interpretative difficulties, I am reluctant to attribute autonomist internalism to Cudworth on the basis of TEIM alone.

Darwall goes on to say, however, that the best evidence for his autonomist internalist reading of Cudworth occurs in the manuscripts on free will. I discuss the manuscripts in section four.

20 Thomas Birch, "An Account of the Life and Writings of Ralph Cudworth, D.D.," in Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1846), xiii.

21 I believe that my reading of TEIM as prolegomena to a moral geometry coheres well with Jane McIntyre's view that Cudworth is committed "to a metaphysical order with a moral structure" that is "not a pure expression of autonomist internalism" (McIntyre, unpublished manuscript).

22 I discuss Whichcote's views in more detail in my "The Religious Rationalism of Benjamin Whichcote," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 27 (1999): 271–300.

23 Benjamin Whichcote, *The Works* (first published in 1751 [London: J. Chalmers]; reprinted in 1977 [New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.]), volume II, 236. Hereafter references to this work will be abbreviated in the text as "Whichcote," with the first (Roman) numeral denoting volume number and the second (Arabic) numeral denoting page number.

24 All references to More are to Henry More, *Enchiridion Ethicum, The English Translation of 1690*, translated by Edward Southwell, reproduced from the first edition by the Facsimile Text Society of New York, 1930. Hereafter references to this work will be abbreviated in the text as "More." For an excellent discussion of More's *Enchiridion*, see Schneewind, 202–5.

25 I must acknowledge, however, that in the first twenty-five pages or so of one of his unpublished manuscripts, Cudworth does seem to be very hostile to the idea of moral demonstrations (see Additional Manuscript 4982 in the British Library; hereafter all references to Cudworth's unpublished manuscripts [abbreviated in the text as "ms.,"] will be to the manuscripts on free will in the British Library, Additional Manuscripts 4978–83). In those pages, Cudworth does not sound at all like someone who would construct a system of morality (such as More's *Enchiridion*) modeled on Euclidean geometry. In fact, these passages, with their hostility to speculative reason, look to me to be remarkably similar to Cudworth's sermons from 1647. I am tempted, consequently, to date them to the 1640s or 1650s, fifteen or twenty years prior to the time that Cudworth probably wrote TEIM. But Passmore claims that an analysis of the handwriting establishes that Cudworth wrote these passages toward the end of his life, in the 1680s (Passmore, 110–2). So I can only say that I do not have any satisfactory way of explaining away the seeming contradiction between my reading of TEIM and the beginning of ms. 4982.

Passmore admits that he has read Cudworth selectively, and notes that "there are obvious dangers in a policy of selection; but Cudworth must somehow be rescued from his own wordiness. No doubt other Cudworths could be hewn out of the great mass of his work" (Passmore, vii). I suppose I have also read Cudworth selectively; perhaps that is inevitable. And maybe the Cudworth I have hewn answers to Cudworth's texts no better than Passmore's or Darwall's. The biggest difference between our interpretations is that I place more weight on the most conspicuous strands of TEIM, while they place more weight on certain of the manuscript passages. It is only fair to point out, however, that neither the manuscripts nor TEIM were published in Cudworth's lifetime. TEIM, no less than the manuscripts, was either a work in progress or a trying-out of ideas that Cudworth did not ultimately deem fit for publication.

- 26 An anonymous reader for *Hume Studies* pointed this possibility out to me.
- 27 An anonymous reader for *Hume Studies* (different from the reader referred to in the preceding note) pointed this possibility out to me.
- 28 Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London, J. Walthoe, 1743, xxxvii).
- 29 For similar worries, see More, pp. 1–2, 8–9, 16, and More’s (unnumbered) “Epistle to the Reader.” In my “Shaftesbury’s Two Accounts of the Reason to be Virtuous,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38 (2000): 529–48, I try to show that Shaftesbury manifests a similar ambivalence about whether morality originates in reason or sentiment.
- 30 I have two reasons for thinking Cudworth might have consciously changed his mind. First, between the writing of the sermons and TEIM, he may have been exposed to some philosophically strong arguments for rationalism (see Beiser, 184–219). Secondly, shortly after Cudworth delivered his sermon to the House of Commons, the Civil War exploded into a larger and more violent phase, and Cudworth may have come to see his proto-sentimentalist views in the sermons as too similar to those of the radicals and extremists who were threatening law and order. But there are also two reasons for thinking that Cudworth did not change his mind. First, in his 1644 dissertation *Dantur rationaes boni et mali aeternae et indispensabiles*, Cudworth expressed anti-voluntarist views that can be taken to be early versions of the main points of TEIM. And secondly, according to Passmore’s dating of the unpublished manuscripts, Cudworth continued to emphasize the heart’s essential role in righteousness right up until the end of his life (Passmore, 110–2). (I discuss in more detail the question of whether and why Cudworth might have changed his mind in *Good or Evil: The Human Nature Question and the Early Modern British Moralists*, manuscript in progress.)
- 31 Cudworth’s polemic goals are worth noting, because he has at times been dismissed as an “antiquarian’s antiquarian,” i.e., as nothing but a philosophical excavator who spent his life digging ever deeper into old texts that had little relevance to matters of his day (or ours). This is very far from the truth. Cudworth’s thought was in intense interaction with the intellectual movements and political events of his time.

