The philosopher-priest: the clerical personae of Samuel Clarke and Joseph Butler (draft)

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Introduction: explaining the philosophical sermon

In a series of lectures given as Professor of Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres at the University of Edinburgh, the New Kirk minister Hugh Blair praised as exemplary and ground-breaking Joseph Butler’s sermon ‘On the Character of Balaam.’ ‘It is the striking accuracy of moral characters that gives the chief power and effect to a preacher’s discourse,’ he wrote; and such sermons ‘as are wholly characteristical’ are ‘perhaps the most beautiful, and among the most useful sermons of any.’¹ Later, however, in Blair’s review of English pulpit oratory, Butler received less favourable comment: ‘Had Bishop Butler, in place of abstract philosophical essays, given us more Sermons, in the strain of those two excellent ones which he has composed upon Self-deceit, and upon the character of Balaam, we would then have pointed him out as distinguished for that species of characteristical Sermons which I before recommended.’² That Butler received such disapproval for his abstract and philosophical sermons is not surprising. As James Gow has noted, towards the middle of the eighteenth century the art of homiletic rhetoric increasingly explored how appeal to imagination and sense could be used to move audiences more effectively, shifting the sermon further away from the formal argumentative style of a dissertation or treatise.³ Indeed, several decades before Butler first published his Fifteen Sermons preached at the Rolls Chapel (1726), Gilbert Burnet, Lord Bishop of Sarum, had remarked in his influential Discourse of the pastoral care

I am grateful to Ian Stewart for commenting on an earlier draft of this paper.

¹ Hugh Blair, Lectures on rhetoric and belles lettres, 3 vols. (Dublin, 1783), II, 305; my thanks to Dr. James Gow for drawing my attention to Blair’s Lectures.
² Blair, Lectures, II, 319.
(1692) that ‘too close a thread of reason, too great an abstraction of thought...are suitable to very few auditories, if to any at all.’

Butler’s Sermons have been subject to a steady stream of analytic commentary by philosophers, particularly since William Whewell and Henry Sidgwick gave some of Butler’s ideas prominence in their own moral philosophical investigations in the nineteenth century. Or at least select Sermons have garnered attention: as Professor Schneewind notes, ‘some of the Sermons contain so much good philosophy that it is easy to ignore the others.’ Such an assessment of what counts as ‘good philosophy’ is informed, of course, by the kinds of topoi and argumentation which today are considered philosophical. Thus, as Schneewind points out, Butler’s discussion of God as the greatest human good is usually ignored, while his analyses of benevolence and the autonomy of conscience have received considerable attention. But even in the case of these sermons, analytic commentators have generally ignored the fact that Butler was writing sermons. Professor Schneewind argues that in fact the homiletic form is important for understanding the theoretically incomplete nature of Butler’s ethical views. Butler’s primary aim ‘in reflecting on the issues of moral philosophy was to lead those he addressed to improve their behaviour.’ This recognition is important and correct, and indeed it should be said that the aim of much early modern moral philosophy was to lead those addressed to improved behaviour. The distinction drawn by David Hume between the painter of morals and the anatomist appears to have been a novel distinction to make and could be regarded at the time as something of an artificial demarcation, which he himself crossed in choosing the form of the polite essay after the poor reception of the Treatise. In any case, the sermon was in the early modern period one of the primary points of contact between the clergy and the souls whose care and cure defined their office. And one of the two main divisions of homiletic topoi was the practical, under which rubric the minister was to devote his efforts exclusively to the reformation of

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4 Burnet, Discourse, 14th ed. (London, 1821), 221.
5 Schneewind, The invention of autonomy (Cambridge, 1999), 342.
6 Schneewind, Invention of autonomy, 342.
behaviour. Given that most who wrote on the homiletic art in the late seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth thought nice and abstract reasoning to be inappropriate and ill-advised, what is surprising is precisely that Butler chose the philosophical essay as the rhetorical form of his practical sermons.

The puzzle is not solved by pointing to a set of personal interests in philosophical topics which drifted into Butler’s performance of his public office. It is clear that Butler had an interest in the philosophical issues of the day from an early age, as his correspondence with Samuel Clarke over questions raised by Clarke’s Boyle Lectures (1704-5) and his dissatisfaction with the Oxford curriculum attest. Yet Butler took his pastoral office seriously, and was quite self-consciously abstract in his Sermons, recognizing in the preface to the second edition of the Sermons (1729) that ‘the title of Sermons gives some right to expect what is plain and of easy comprehension’ rather than ‘Discourses so abstruse as some of these are.’ It is helpful to note, as Christopher Cunliffe has, that in the early eighteenth century the Rolls Chapel ‘attracted a sophisticated congregation receptive to the careful and reasoned discourses that Butler preached to them,’ but this is not the whole story. I will explore here how certain shifts in Anglican moral theology beginning in the second half of the seventeenth century opened a space, however briefly, for (re-)positioning philosophical ethical inquiry, as modelled by ancient ‘heathen’ philosophers, as a crucial if limited constituent of practical divinity.

This has to do in part with the familiar story of the increased emphasis on the ‘reasonableness’ of Christianity in the self-definition of the established Church of England against the threats of nonconforming Calvinists, freethinkers, and the Church of

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8 See Burnet, *Discourse*, 210-225; and John Wilkins, *Ecclesiastes, or, The art of preaching* (London, 1646), 16-17.
Rome, in the process of which reason came to be envisioned as a neutral arbiter of religious claims. Yet as Justin Champion has argued, the debates between churchmen and freethinkers turned not simply on the evaluation of the truth of religious beliefs but also and more importantly on the issue of who had the social and political authority to define religious orthodoxy and demand the belief of the people. Closely related was the authority by which the clergyman laid before his parishioners their moral and religious duties. As Ian Stewart has argued in an important study of the works of Isaac Barrow, the construction of that authority in the pulpit such that it remained both reasonable and authoritative, as a sacerdotal mediation between Christ and his body, was one of the central preoccupations of Restoration sermon writing. What shifted the balancing of this persona between an appeal to reason and an emphasis on its sacerdotal authority to a persona whose authority was conceived primarily in terms of philosophical virtue and acuity was a certain stance on the idea of moral obligation and moral law and the relation of divine revelation to that law. Joseph Butler, and before him Samuel Clarke, were committed to exploring and defending the idea that practical reason obligates independently of God’s promulgation of moral law and that the end of religion was to enable humans to know and live according to that law. Accordingly, they exercised their clerical office not simply, and in many instances not at all, in terms of a sacerdotal

14 Ian G. Stewart, ‘Isaac Barrow: Authorised Reason and Reasonable Authority of a Scholar-Priest,’ Ph.D. diss. (Cambridge, 1998), chs. 3 and 4. My thanks to Dr. Stewart for making this available to me.
15 For the present purposes, I will ignore the differences between Clarke and Butler on the issue of how reason obligates. Stephen Darwall argues in The British Moralists and the Internal ‘Ought’ (Cambridge, 1995) that Clarke held reason to oblige in as much as the conclusion of a practical syllogism is necessary, and so what obligates, properly speaking, is a normative order metaphysically independent of rational agency; Butler, on the other hand, held that it is our capacity to engage in practical reasoning which constitutes the obligating authority of practical judgements. But Clarke may have been closer to Butler than is usually acknowledged; cf. Darwall, British Moralists, 248, with Schneewind, Invention of Autonomy, 318-9: ‘Clarke
authority but rather as fulfilling the aim of the ancient philosopher in training humanity in the use of reason. Clarke in particular provided an explicit defence of the priesthood as superseding ancient philosophy in providing a public office for the tasks of philosophy, as against the private and unauthorized position of the philosopher in ancient society, a position which he argued to have marred the very content of ancient philosophizing.

I. Practical divinity and the idea of a natural law

The personae of the priest and philosopher have historically shared a conceptual and practical territory governed by the idea of the soul’s well-being, a concept whose investigation was often initiated through an analogy to the idea of bodily health. Martha Nussbaum provides an interpretation of Hellenistic moral philosophy according to its therapeutic aims in responding to human misery and articulating ethical rules from human needs and aspirations; and Pierre Hadot has drawn attention to ancient philosophy as comprised first and foremost of a commitment to live philosophically, to engage in spiritually transformative philosophical discourse and exercises in order not only to make discoveries about the good life but as itself basic constituent of that life. Hadot has also sketched how the Church Fathers adopted the conceptual vocabulary and the spiritual techniques of ancient philosophy thus understood, interpreting philosophical exercise according to Christian doctrine and approaching the scriptures not simply as revelation but as revealed philosophy. For her part, Nussbaum excludes Augustine (and, by consequence, most theologically centred moral philosophies) from the Hellenistic model of medical moral philosophy, since, she argues, Christian doctrine makes the standard of ethical conduct to be God’s will, a norm external and not structurally accessible to the human, rather than deriving norms from an experientially derived notion of human well-being (just as the norms of health and of the medical art are derived from an investigation of physical well-being, the only access to which is human

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experience). But in the *Confessions* (397-400), Augustine clearly frames his recovery to spiritual well-being in the supernatural conversion of his will towards God against the background of a life of restlessness, misery and dissatisfaction caused by his misplaced love. Importantly as well, his moment of conversion had been prepared by philosophy, both by turning him towards a love of wisdom (*philosophia*, as Augustine notes) through Cicero’s *Hortensius* and later away from the sensualist materialism of the Manichees towards the spiritual through the neoplatonists, and also by failing to provide an adequate means of reaching the unity with the divine that neoplatonism took to be the end of philosophy.

Augustine’s thought is thus not adequately described by a sharp distinction between divine will and human experience; rather, Augustine articulated the confluence of supernatural grace and human philosophical exercise described in the *exemplum* of his own moral experience by locating the human and human experience within an onto-theological framework. Thomas Aquinas attempted to provide a similar structure for medieval Christianity’s encounter with Aristotelian philosophy, arguing that humans were directed by philosophy itself ‘to God as to an end that surpasses the grasp of [their] reason,’ and whose attainment could therefore be effected only through the supernatural means of revelation and grace. For Aquinas, such special grace does not displace but presupposes the work of natural practical reason; grace perfects nature, and the ends attained through political education and moral philosophical investigation have their proper though limited sphere as ultimate terrestrial ends within the overarching theological vision of the greatest human good as divinely provided in eternal beatitude.

This ‘medieval synthesis’ was, of course, not without its tensions. As Hadot points out, the idea of a revealed wisdom, while not absolutely foreign to ancient

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21 Augustine, *Confessions*, III.iv(8); IV.i(1)-xxxii(27).
philosophy, was certainly not central. For the present purposes, we might notice that in Augustine’s *Confessions*, while Augustine himself is prepared for acceptance of Christian doctrine and conversion through neoplatonic meditation, his mother Monica is able to achieve the same ascent towards the divine without having been philosophically trained. Christianity is for Augustine quite clearly ‘platonism for the masses.’ One of Aquinas’ arguments for the need for a sacred doctrine in addition to the philosophical disciplines was that even those truths necessary to salvation ‘such as reason can know...would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors.’ We might redirect Nussbaum’s critique of Augustine away from theological ethics *tout court* to the *persona* which Christianity, with its guiding notion of the universality of salvation, required of its ministers. From the point of view of ancient philosophy, there is a vast difference between whether one acted on the basis of accepted authority or from knowledge gained through rational discourse. (This is one of the central questions at issue in Plato’s *Republic*, and it also lay behind the stoic insistence that only the sage was truly virtuous.) The assimilation of the philosopher to the minister of Christian doctrine thus becomes problematic, even if we acknowledge that much philosophical training in the Hellenistic schools required a kind of catechising by way of meditation on bodies of philosophical doctrine. As Hadot argues, ancient philosophical pursuits were driven by the ideals of living and thinking according to reason, and dialectical engagement with oneself and with others; on the Christian view, catechism into creedal beliefs was not structurally tied to the exercise of rationality and dialectic as its end, and an individual’s salvation was secure in belief alone, regardless of whether or not that individual had the capacity for their faith to seek understanding.

Christian doctrine addressed the issue in at least two ways. The first was simply to insist on the central role of the *mysteria fidei* in the transformation of Christian

26 Contrast the experience of Augustine and his mother at Ostia in IX.x(24-25) with the neoplatonic exercises described in VII.x(16) and VII.xvii(23).
27 See Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy*, 252, referring to Augustine’s *De vera religione*, and, of course, to Nietzsche’s preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*.
28 *Summa Theologicae*, Ia.1.1
29 See Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 89-93, 101-8, 207-8. This is a simplification of the very complex absorption of ancient philosophical ways of life by early Christians, which Hadot carefully traces.
character, simultaneously emphasising the sacerdotal nature of the Church as the mystical body of Christ and of the priest as mediator between Christ and his body. The second was to make central to the Christian life the virtues of *oboedientia* and *humilitas*. In this context, there lay the potential for Christian ethics to be understood as consisting primarily, if not entirely, in obedience to the word of God, with the understanding that a humble desisting of attempts to provide a rational justification of its demands, to pretend to the mind of God, was an expression of pious obedience and a recognition of the severe limits of fallen human rationality. This was certainly the intention and effect of much Reformation thought, which excoriated as vain-glorious the pagan pursuit of virtue. By figuring natural law almost exclusively under Paul’s notion of the just condemnation of fallen humanity and its correlate in the experience of despair, Reformation moral theology tended to exclude the Thomist understanding of natural law as describing a process by which the human could achieve a level of perfection in its being, one which was both completed by supernatural grace and which revealed, through philosophical inquiry, the necessity of such grace for the ends of human life. In the structures of English evangelical Calvinist thought and rhetoric, salvation is always achieved in spite of radical moral turpitude and only through the efficacy of Christ’s imputed righteousness. Infused righteousness and sanctification were to follow, of course, but the cure of the soul was primarily understood in a conceptual context in which the spiritual was opposed to the ‘carnal reason’ of the natural human estate.

It is, of course, not the case that there was no place for moral philosophical investigation within Calvinist confessional contexts. As Ian Hunter has shown, the sharp independence of theology and philosophy in Calvinist university curricula in Germany allowed for the autonomous development of philosophical disciplines according to the presuppositions and modes of knowledge appropriate to their objects. Furthermore, the pursuit of such disciplines was considered by some Calvinist educators as instrumental in

regaining a limited view of divine wisdom after the Fall. It is within the context of this separation of natural law from theological study that the modern natural law tradition was articulated, beginning in the work of Hugo Grotius, as a philosophical inquiry into the conditions for the possibility of sociability. As distinct from the Thomist tradition of natural law, the modern natural lawyers saw themselves as working outside of the discipline of theology, in part as an attempt to provide a grounding for ethics which would not succumb to the sectarian strife tearing post-Reformation Europe apart. The question of the ultimate human end, which according to Christian doctrine was fully revealed only in the scriptures, was bracketed by modern natural law, and with it the whole sectarian controversy about the proper means to that end, whether faith and works, or faith alone.

While such modern natural law theorists as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke have received considerable attention in the history of English moral philosophy, the theological contexts of English natural law theory have yet to be fully explored. The further issue of the extent to which the various ways of structuring the relation between natural law theory and moral theology were worked out in the formation and exercise of a clerical persona in the second half of the seventeenth century is too large a topic to be explored exhaustively here. In general, however, the overwhelmingly hostile reaction to Hobbes’ philosophy, combined with the need many clergy felt to redress the ‘seditious’ evangelical Calvinist use of the authority of scripture in the moral and political domain, led English divines to separate moral theology and moral philosophy less sharply than either the modern natural law tradition or evangelical Calvinist casuistry did. At the same time, any incorporation of moral philosophy into moral theology occurred within a framework which recognised as fundamental to the clerical persona the office and authority of Christ. Meric Casaubon submitted that it was a ‘question, and the

34 Still helpful, but somewhat dated now, is H.R. McAdoo, The Structure of Caroline Moral Theology (London, 1949).
resolution of it of some consequence’ whether ‘any set Speech publickly delivered…tending to reformation of life…may be called Preaching.’ If that were the case, then properly the authorization to preach already existed ‘among the Romans and Graecians.’ But Causabon argued that although Christian preaching still involved ‘moral discourses and exhortations,’ yet they are ‘not properly Preaching…except they be grounded upon Christ, whether as a Priest, or a Prophet, or a King, in the authority of his commands, the obligation of his example and sufferings, and the excellency of his rewards.’

The authority to preach, then, was thus premised on Christ’s mediatory and legislative roles, and, as John Wilkins urged, the preacher was to re-enact Christ’s presence in the pulpit: ‘the most generall and effectual matter for a Preface [in a sermon] is…to perswade the hearers that it is the word of God which is spoken to them, which concerns their everlasting happinesse, and is able to save their souls; That the Ministers do but stand in Christs stead; That our receiving or despising of them shall be reckoned as done unto Christ himself.’

The question, which was central to the definition of post-Restoration orthodoxy, was how to impersonate the divine authority of Christ while avoiding the excesses of Popish tyranny in the cure of souls. At least four main approaches to articulating the relationship of moral philosophy and moral theology in the exercise of the clerical persona can be identified in the second half of the seventeenth century.

The first was a rearticulation of the Thomist natural law tradition. Nathaniel Culverwell, an associate of the Cambridge Platonists, wrote his *Elegant and Learned Discourse of the Light of Nature* (1652) as a defence of the principle of right reason against those evangelical Calvinists who, ‘if you do but offer to make a Syllogisme…strait way cry it down for carnal reasoning.’

Culverwell followed in particular the sixteenth-century Jesuit theologian Francisco Suarez replicated the teleological ordering of natural law towards moral theology in arguing that ‘the Light of

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35 Casaubon, *The Question, to whom it belonged Anciently to Preach* (London, 1663), 3-5; and see also the discussion in Stewart, ‘Isaac Barrow,’ 126-7.
Reason is an Ascendant Light’: natural reason is a preparative for grace but is on its own insufficient to attain the supernatural end of participation with the divine nature.\(^{39}\)

Culverwell thus granted right reason considerable capacity in discovering the good while insisting that its proper exercise would open onto a recognition of its limitations in fully comprehending and realising its aims. In the pulpit, it was perhaps Isaac Barrow who exemplified this view of right reason as providing a hierarchical structure for ordering of natural knowledge and revealed doctrine. As Ian Stewart argues, Barrow developed in his sermons a view of reason as oriented towards the acceptance of revelation and the enjoyment of God under a proper regime of moral and intellectual discipline, and could therefore claim that his clerical authority was reasonable and his reason authorised.\(^{40}\)

Robert Sanderson’s series of lectures on conscience and obligation, given as Regius Professor of Divinity in Oxford, suggested a second way of integrating right reason and moral theology into a clerical persona. Like Culverwell, Sanderson argued against the stricter evangelical Calvinists in defining a rightful space for the ‘light of nature’ as the ‘\textit{most immediate Rule of the Conscience}.’ That Scripture was not the adequate rule of Conscience, as some Calvinists maintained, Sanderson argued by noting that since the ‘proper end and design’ of scripture was ‘to bring us to a supernatural end’ due to the insufficiency of the ‘light of nature,’ it is therefore ‘not [alone] sufficient to enable us to form a right judgement’ of ‘whether [actions] be \textit{good or evil}, lawful or unlawful.’ Unlike Culverwell, however, Sanderson’s analysis carved out natural law and moral theology into two distinct disciplines, one addressing the supernatural and the other the natural. But, on the other hand, it is clear that Sanderson saw right reason as concerned with the will and the virtues, not just external action.\(^{41}\)

Those students in divinity who took in his lectures would thus have understood practical divinity as speaking in two different voices in the two different spheres which the discipline addressed: ‘we are always to remember, that \textit{reason} has more to do with \textit{practice} than


\(^{39}\) Culverwell, \textit{Discourse}, 184-98.

\(^{40}\) See Stewart, ‘Isaac Barrow’, chs. 3 and 4; it bears further investigation as to how this plays out in Barrow’s homiletic analysis of ethical topics.

with the matters of faith, because the mysteries of faith lie more above the reach of a natural understanding, than the common offices of human life." In cases of conscience, the practical divine would have to possess the capacity to discriminate between what pertained to the sphere of scripture and faith and what was to be adjudicated by reason, and would therefore have to be educated in both areas.

Jeremy Taylor, one of the most important moral theologians of the Restoration, departed from Sanderson in ways which tended to undermine the relative autonomy of reason in its own terrestrial sphere, and which denied, more or less entirely, the importance of the development of right reason in the Christian life as a preparative for the dispensations of grace. Following Aquinas, Sanderson had argued that a rule of conduct revealed through practical reason could be taken as a law promulgated by God through the instrument of human reason. However, responding to Cicero’s definition of the law of nature as ‘that right reason which is consonant to nature,’ Taylor wrote that no one could be sure ‘that any thing is a law of Nature, because it seems to him hugely reasonable.’ ‘If we inquire after the law of Nature by the rules of our reason,’ he continued, ‘we shall be uncertain as the discourses of the People, or the dreams of disturbed fancies.’ Thus, although the ‘Conscience is...principled by creation’ in terms of the basic and universal principles of conduct, ‘it is instructed or illuminated in the regeneration,’ and the only sure guide in determining how to live and act was provided by ‘Christ our lawgiver who hath revealed to us all his Father’s will.’ For Taylor, all moral action resolves into obedience to God’s will: ‘He that does all that he does, because he supposes God commands him or allows him, and abstains from all things from which he does abstain, only because God hath forbidden those things, this mans intentions are right, and his actions pointed to a proper end. For then every act is an act of obedience, and that is love, and that is the great instrument of the glorification of God.’

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42 Sanderson, Lectures, IV.36. Richard Cumberland’s De legibus naturae disquisitio philosophica (London, 1672) is an example of Anglican natural law theory pursued independently of theology.
43 Sanderson, Lectures, IV.24-25.
45 Taylor, Ductor Dubitantium, I.i.II.20; II.i.I.54, 59.
46 Taylor, Ductor Dubitantium, IV.ii.I.8, italics added; see also II.i.IV.9.
The ‘only’ is important here, for it highlights the way in which the exercise of practical reasoning understood either in a scholastic vein as a crucial development and fulfilment of human potentiality, further perfected by the theological virtues, or as a necessary secular investigation into morality, is ruled out by Taylor almost entirely in favour of immediate obedience to revealed divine law. The only thing we need to judge of in matters of conscience is how far we ‘serve God with honesty and heartiness.’ To do otherwise would be to do as the Romanists do and ‘stand upon terms with [God], and study how much is lawful, how far they may go, and which is their utmost step of lawful.’ Sanderson had qualified the ‘Rule of Conscience’ in terms of its virtues, independent of their connection with the ‘Rule of Faith,’ as ‘what a pious and prudent man may lawfully do or omit, as the nature of things requires.’ And in discussing Suarez’ gloss on Aquinas’ definition of law as an ‘ordinatio rationis ad bonum commune ab eo qui curam habet Communitatis, Promulgata,’ Culverwell had insisted on the importance of the qualification of the ordinatio as aiming at the good, which, he argued, could only be the case in as much as the will followed the intellect. Thus, issues of will, promulgation and legislation aside, Culverwell concluded with Plato that ‘Reason is so beautiful, as that it wins and allures, and thus constrains to obedience.’ Taylor sided with William of Ockham, however, and argued that ‘every thing is good or bad according as it is commanded or forbidden by God, and not otherwise....all measure of good and evil in the intercourses of Men wholly rely upon the law of God, and are consequent to his will.’ The purpose of insisting on this was, he noted, ‘that we look no further for the tables of the law of Nature, but take in only those precepts’ revealed to us by Christ.

Taylor determined the natural law and right reason in such a way so as to exclude the exploration of secular practical reason as not only unnecessary but in fact harmful in terms of the aims which Christian revelation defined. His practical divinity is a third and very influential approach to structuring the relation between philosophy and theology in ethics. Taylor’s work was intended as a popularised manual for cases of conscience, addressed to both students of practical divinity and laypeople. Herbert McAdoo has

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50 Taylor, *Ductor Dubitantium*, II.i.1.58, 59.
indicated that popular moral theology in the late seventeenth century took more from Taylor and his sustained emphasis on holiness above ‘mere’ moral duty and on the importance of the specifically Christian therapeutics of the liturgy and the sacraments than from Sanderson’s more ‘traditional’ moral theology.\textsuperscript{51} John Spurr puts Taylor’s work in practical divinity alongside \textit{The Whole Duty of Man}, the Anglican Church’s unofficial catechism, and notes as well the emphasis Restoration piety placed on the liturgy and the sacraments.\textsuperscript{52} The extremely popular \textit{Whole Duty of Man} prefaced its weekly spiritual meditations with a discussion of the diseases of the soul to persuade the reader ‘of the necessity of performing [their duty],’ but this was done entirely in terms of Christian doctrine with nothing of what might be called philosophical elucidation as to ‘the nature of things,’ as Sanderson had qualified the proper sphere of practical reason.\textsuperscript{53}

A fourth approach can be seen in writings of the controversial latitudinarian party of the Church. Edward Fowler asserted that Christian revelation and Christian doctrine consisted of a republication of the laws of nature discovered by ‘the heathens’, but with ‘such mighty \textit{helps} afforded to enable us, and such infinitely pressing \textit{motives} and \textit{arguments} to excite us to the practice of them,’ a task in which the heathen philosophers had failed miserably in relation to their contemporaries.\textsuperscript{54} Like Culverwell and Sanderson, Fowler was arguing against evangelical Calvinists, and he referred explicitly to the philosophical arguments of ‘the heathens’ to argue that holiness, understood as ‘a disposition towards the obedience of the positive and natural laws of God,’ and not faith alone, was the end of the Gospel since this was the highest end which could be conceived.\textsuperscript{55} Thus, the clergy, ‘Christ’s ministers and representatives,’ were to ‘subordinate everything they do, by virtue of their Sacred Function...to promote \textit{Holiness},’ and this involved ‘exhortations with the most prevalent and inforcing Motives; the most rational and convincing Arguments.’\textsuperscript{56}

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\item \textsuperscript{51} McAdoo, \textit{Structure}, 140, 147; the terms of characterisation are McAdoo’s.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Spurr, \textit{The Restoration Church of England, 1646 - 1689} (New Haven, 1991), 279-375.
\item \textsuperscript{53} \textit{The Whole Duty of Man}, in \textit{The Works of the Author of the Whole Duty of Man} (London, 1682), I, sig. A.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Fowler, \textit{The Design of Christianity} (London, 1671), 134-5; see also Simon Patrick, \textit{Advice to a Friend}, (London, 1673), which structures a series of philosophical and Christian therapeutics around ancient philosophical conceptions, mainly Stoic and Platonic, of the soul’s health.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Fowler, \textit{Design}, 11, 108-14, 213, 221-7, 262.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Fowler, \textit{Design}, 253-4.
\end{itemize}
To some extent, this did involve the cultivation of a philosophical *persona*.

Gilbert Burnet made the writings Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius and Cicero required reading for the conscientious practical divine in the ascetic training of his mind and habits (‘they must be read and weighed with great care, till one is become a master of all the thoughts that are in them’).\(^{57}\) This spiritual training was central in turning the cleric’s habits of thought away from the things of this world towards eternity, and some latitudinarians would draw on this training to counsel their parishioners in their conduct of life.\(^{58}\)

Arguably, however, the exercise of latitudinarian clerical authority was not oriented towards the pursuit of philosophical inquiry. The helps which Fowler indicated Christianity had brought to the pursuit of virtue centred largely on Christ as God-made-flesh, as sacrifice and redeemer, as moral example and as spiritual head of the Church and on the promises of mercy and supernatural help through the Holy Ghost;\(^{59}\) and recent studies of the latitudinarians have emphasised the extent to which they, like others in the Restoration Church, developed a Eucharistic theology similar to Taylor’s.\(^{60}\)

Latitudinarian sermons tended not to explore and develop the sphere of practical rationality (unless to offer, now infamously, various self-interested motives for the practice of religion and virtue).\(^{61}\) To take but one example among many: in his sermon ‘Of the great duties of natural religion, with the ways and means of knowing them,’ John Tillotson argued that natural religion was a matter of pacifying God, and that two of the main ‘duties of pacification’ were justice and mercy. How were we to know in what these duties consisted? By a kind of natural instinct, which Tillotson identifies with conscience, and by ‘the convenience of things to our nature; and by their tendency to our

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\(^{57}\) Burnet, *Discourse*, 170-1.

\(^{58}\) On the use of ancient philosophical concepts in latitudinarian practical divinity, see Patrick, *Advice*, and his *Hearts Ease, or, A Remedy against all Troubles, with A consolatory Discourse particularly directed to those who have lost their Friends and dear Relations* (London, 1671); see also the discussion in Jeremy Schmidt, *Melancholy and the care of the soul: religion, moral philosophy and madness in early modern England* (Aldershot, forthcoming, 2007), ch. 4.


\(^{61}\) On appeal to hedonistic self-interestedness in latitudinarian sermons, see Margaret Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution* (Ithaca, 1976), and the more cautious assessments in Spellman, *Latitudinarians*, 118-9, and Reedy, *Bible*, 125.
happiness and interest.’ But what our nature, happiness and interest are is not considered in any detail.\textsuperscript{62}

Furthermore, sounding a commonplace defence of revealed religion, Fowler asserted that ‘what the Heathens took pains for, and by the exercise of their Reason learnt, we have set before our eyes, and need but read it in order to our knowledge of it.’ It is unclear if and to what extent Fowler would have included moral truths here, although among the helps and motivations given in Christian revelation were the doctrines of the immortality of the soul and of eternal rewards and punishments.\textsuperscript{63} But such considerations tended to construe ethics as primarily a matter of obedience to the written divine law, and this was especially the case where the capacities of reason were put into question, as in Taylor’s moral theology. Using a strategy similar to Fowler’s in defending revealed Christianity, John Locke expressed serious doubts as to whether unaided reason could on its own establish a system of ethics in \textit{The Reasonableness of Christianity} (1695). In examining the systems of the ancient heathen moral philosophers, Locke concluded that ‘tis plain in fact, that humane reason unassisted, failed Men in its great and Proper business of \textit{Morality}. It never from unquestionable Principles, by clear deductions, made out an entire Body of the \textit{Law of Nature}. And he that shall collect all the Moral Rules of the Philosophers, and compare them with those contained in the New

\textsuperscript{62} Tillotson, \textit{The Works of the Most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson}, 12 vols. (London, 1742-4), VI, Sermon CII, ‘Of the great duties of natural religion, with the ways and means of knowing them.’ My claim that the latitudinarians did not develop or explore practical rationality in any detail must be understood as a preliminary to more detailed investigation of their sermons. But see Isabel Rivers, \textit{Reason, grace and sentiment}, vol. 1, \textit{Whichcote to Wesley} (Cambridge, 1990), 77-88.

\textsuperscript{63} Fowler, \textit{Design}, 137-42, 152-6. Fowler noted that the Christian idea of a heavenly reward was seemed to be presaged by Epictetus and by certain Platonists and Pythagoreans. For Fowler, however, this does not provide a point of contact between moral philosophy and moral theology but rather indicates that the ancient heathens had absorbed certain Hebrew ideas. As Sarah Hutton notes, Edward Stillingfleet also took up the notion that the pagan Greek and Romans possessed fragments of a \textit{prisca theologica} in his \textit{Origines Sacrae} (1662), figuring such knowledge under the providence of God in preparing the world for the Gospel, as Samuel Clarke was to argue (see section III below; and Hutton, ‘Edward Stillingfleet, Henry More, and the decline of \textit{Moses Atticus}: a note on seventeenth-century Anglican apologetics,’ in Richard Kroll, Richard Ashcraft and Perez Zagorin (eds.), \textit{Philosophy, Science and Religion in England, 1640-1700} (Cambridge, 1992): 68-84). But in significant contrast to Stillingfleet’s argument that the Greeks were among the worst corrupters of a common theological tradition, Clarke tends to give ancient philosophy more credit, for the purpose of refiguring the \textit{persona} of the cleric as philosopher.
Testament, will find them to come short of the *Morality* delivered by our Saviour, and taught by his Apostles.  

Here we return to the basic problem of the idea of revealed wisdom, for in what sense was an ethics derived from the authority of scripture the same as an ethics consisting of conformity to reason? The questions broached by Spinoza and the freethinkers in the late seventeenth century had to do precisely with whether the knowledge imparted by Christian doctrine was knowledge or indeed credulity. The freethinkers charged that unless the doctrines contained in the scriptures could be demonstrated to be true, an acceptance of them would be only the acceptance of the authority of the priest. But if the teaching contained in the scripture was declared to be true on the evidence of reason exercised properly according to its first principles, there was therefore no need for revelation.  

In the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (1670; first translated into English in 1689), Spinoza argued that the end of Scripture and instituted religion is to cultivate moral obedience to a Divine lawgiver where the majority of people are unable to attain the blessedness of the philosophical life. According to philosophy, blessedness consists only in the knowledge of God as the highest human good deduced with certainty ‘by the mere power of the understanding and logical order.’ The divine law which the philosopher followed in their conduct of life was not properly to be thought of as a law at all; rather, the action and thought of the philosopher is ruled by their reason knowing the mind of God, and they were thus not involved in the heteronomous relation of lawgiver and subject, legislation and obedience, which the concept of law entailed. It was, and had to be, an article of faith and not reason that happiness could be achieved by obedience to an external law, as religion promised.

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The disagreement between this view and seventeenth-century natural law theory went down to the roots, as almost all natural law theorists before the eighteenth century took as axiomatic that the idea of a moral law implied a structure of authority and due subordination outside of which it could not be considered obligatory or binding.\(^67\) Locke thus argued against the deist that even if the ‘Moral Precepts of the Gospel’ were known to ancient heathen philosophers, ‘mankind might hearken to it, or reject it, as they pleased; Or as it suited their interest, passions, principles or humours. They were under no Obligation: The Opinion of this or that Philosopher, was of no Authority.’ By contrast, Christ was ‘manifestly sent from God, and coming with visible Authority from him,’ and should therefore ‘as a King and Lawmaker tell [humankind] their Duties; and require their Obedience.’\(^68\) According to Locke, Christ’s divine authority was evidenced by his miraculous signs and wonders. At the same time, his teachings were consonant with reason, and his authority was therefore reasonable. But to the deists, this seemed like equivocation: either reason was authoritative, and Christ’s authority derived from the reason of his teachings, or, as Hobbes had it, authority defined what was ‘reasonable.’ The apologist of historic Christianity could not have it both ways, and from the point of view of Spinoza’s *Tractatus*, Locke was merely exposing the divide between the philosopher and the priest by revealing the nature of religious ethics as fundamentally heteronomous.

After the 1690s, any defence of the clerical *persona* as consisting, in Ian Stewart’s phrase, in ‘authorised reason and reasonable authority’ had to respond both to the freethinker’s claims as to the sufficiency of reason in discovering moral norms and obligating to their performance and to arguments for its insufficiency, such as those of Locke and Taylor.\(^69\) And it had to do so in a social context of debate in which the

\(^{67}\) See Culverwell, *Discourse*, 53: ‘Reason as ‘tis now does not binde in its own name, but in the name of its supreme Lord and Sovereigne, by whom Reason lives, and moves, and has its being;’ and Sanderson, *Lectures*, IV.5: ‘when therefore we ask, what that is which obliges the Conscience to do her duty? we intend principally to ask, *Who is the Lord of the Conscience*, that has a right to impose laws upon it, to which she is bound to conform?’ See also Pufendorf, *Duty*, I.3.10. Richard Cumberland is an important exception here, and, importantly, he was a significant influence on Samuel Clarke: see Darwall, *British Moralists*, 80-108.

\(^{68}\) Locke, *Reasonableness*, 195, 198.

\(^{69}\) Cf. Darwall’s statement of a similar problematic involving a tension between autonomy and authority in late seventeenth-century theories of ethical obligation, without reference to the freethinking debate: Darwall, *British Moralists*, 110.
authoritative persona of the university-trained scholar-priest no longer held the status and power it had had among the ruling elite. It was now being challenged by a laic intellectual culture which, increasingly familiar with the terms of philosophic debate in publicised discussions of Sociniansim, Hobbism and Spinozism, demanded argument rather than assertion of virtue, authority and office. Because of this lapse of hierarchical social power, the bare claim by the clergy to have determined the insufficiency of reason grew less acceptable, and the existence of properly supernatural ends could not be taken for granted in defending supernatural revelation against notions of happiness which claimed to be adequately defined without reference to eternal beatitude. Furthermore, the separation of natural law from theology sanctioned by Sanderson among others had led to the formulation within Anglican intellectual circles of the idea that unaided practical reason can provide substantive ethical rules and obligating force, most notably in the work of Richard Cumberland. But if such theories were accepted, the latitudinarian defence of revealed religion and the clerical order seemed to falter. On the other hand, if the adequacy of reason were challenged, it seemed hard to avoid the conclusion that the authority of the clergy to provide ethical instruction and training was grounded on the assertion of divine authority, the legitimacy of which was precisely what was in question.

It is in the context of this dilemma that the arguments of Samuel Clarke in his second Boyle Lecture (1705) should be understood. Clarke argued that while practical reason is both substantive and authoritative, and the practice of virtue defined human perfection, education into that reason depends on the existence of a social structure of authority which reason itself had proved incapable of establishing. The setting up of this structure was what Christ had accomplished. Subsequently, the clerical persona took up

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71 This, in any case, would explain the apparent de-emphasis of Thomist and Platonic notions of the good as superseding terrestrial goods and even virtue itself, but the subject bears more investigation.

the virtues and aims of what Clarke identified as the ancient philosophical project of bringing humanity to the law of their reason (including, significantly, some of the theological virtues), but was able to fulfill these aims because of the authorisation and institutionalisation of the philosophical office through the revelation of Christ.

II. Samuel Clarke on the office of philosopher

Clarke argued both that the duties to God, neighbour and self perfective of our nature could be known through unaided reason and that they obligated in virtue of their rational necessity, independently of their legislation by God, on the one hand, and that a supernatural republication of morality was still necessary, on the other. Clarke argued both that the duties to God, neighbour and self perfective of our nature could be known through unaided reason and that they obligated in virtue of their rational necessity, independently of their legislation by God, on the one hand, and that a supernatural republication of morality was still necessary, on the other. Clarke argued both that the duties to God, neighbour and self perfective of our nature could be known through unaided reason and that they obligated in virtue of their rational necessity, independently of their legislation by God, on the one hand, and that a supernatural republication of morality was still necessary, on the other. Clarke argued both that the duties to God, neighbour and self perfective of our nature could be known through unaided reason and that they obligated in virtue of their rational necessity, independently of their legislation by God, on the one hand, and that a supernatural republication of morality was still necessary, on the other. Clarke argued both that the duties to God, neighbour and self perfective of our nature could be known through unaided reason and that they obligated in virtue of their rational necessity, independently of their legislation by God, on the one hand, and that a supernatural republication of morality was still necessary, on the other.

The deist Matthew Tindal later asserted that Clarke had provided for the deist cause an impressively strong case for the sufficiency of natural reason, one which thoroughly undermined Clarke’s own defence of revelation. But for Clarke, the need for revelation stems as much from the problem of how the social authority of reason is to be established as from questions relating to the adequacy of reason as such. For Tindal, it is the heteronomous relation implied in education which is at the root of superstition and vice; for Clarke, it is quite the opposite: education into rationality is needed in order to correct the overwhelming tendency of humankind to neglect their duties to inquire into ethics.

Thus, although Clarke claims to demonstrate that our moral duties to God, our neighbour and to ourselves are both deducible through rational inquiry, he argues as well that from ‘a prodigious Carelessness, Inconsiderateness and Want of Attention,’ from an ‘Evil Education’ and confirmed superstitions, and from an uninhibited love of material pleasure, ‘very Few are able, in reality and effect, to discover’ the truths of natural religion and moral duty ‘clearly and plainly for themselves.’ There is no mention here of the idea of original sin; this is a Fall of humankind naturalised by citation of Cicero, Plato and others on the prevalence of vicious education and the great difficulty in ‘making Men

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73 Clarke, *Discourse on the Unalterable Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation* (1706), in *The Works of Samuel Clarke* (London, 1737), II, 608, 613–4. (Hereafter, references to the *Discourse* will be in the text, abbreviated as DUO). The target for much of this discussion is Thomas Hobbes’ voluntarist claim that good and evil were only defined by positive institution.

74 Tindal, *Christianity as Old as Creation* (London, 1730), 387–8.

Good.’ At this point in the argument of the Discourse, Clarke concludes that ‘most men have great need of particular Teaching and much Instruction, not without some weight of Authority, as well as Reason and Perswasion.’ And what this demanded was in fact the establishment of ‘an Order or Succession of Men, whose peculiar Office and continual Employment it may be, to Teach and Instruct People in their Duty.’ The marginal note advertises ‘the great Use and Necessity of an Order of Preachers,’ and Clarke remarks that the modern prevalence of correct belief about God, the afterlife and the nature of our religious duties proceeds in large part from ‘this excellent Institution’ (DUO, 652-6). He was clearly referring to a regular and institutionally established order of clergy, and his Discourse was as much an apology for revealed religion as it was for the priesthood.

The priest is thus introduced not by way of Christ as priest, king or prophet, as Meric Casaubon had figured the role, but in terms of taking up and fulfilling the role of the ancient philosopher. After arguing for the need for an order of teachers, Clarke continued by admitting that ‘there have indeed in almost every Age been in the Heathen world, some Wise and Brave and Good Men, who have made it their Business to study and practise the Duties of natural religion Themselves, and to teach and exhort Others to do the like,’ among whom he lists Job, Abraham, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. That the philosophers were unable effectually to reform the opinions and manners of their countrymen was indicated, Clarke suggested, by the pessimism (and quietism) expressed in the Republic: ‘“a good Man...seeing the whole World round about him filled with all manner of Wickedness, [would] be content if, preserving his single Self from Iniquity and every evil Work, he can pass away the present Life in Peace, and at last Die with Tranquillity and good Hope.”’

There were several reasons for this failure. To begin with, there were very few philosophers, and many of these concerned themselves with purely speculative matters without any bearing on ethics. Moreover, many philosophers did not exemplify the life of virtue that would have been attractive to those sincerely seeking the good, and even those philosophers who both inquired into morality and sought to live by it produced ‘rather speculative and learned, nice and subtle Disputes; than practical and universally useful Instructions.’ Indeed, ‘their very Profession and manner of Life led them to make

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76 Clarke’s translation of The Republic, vi, 496d-e.
their Philosophy rather an Entertainment of leisure time, a Trial of Wit and Parts, an Exercise of Eloquence, and of the Art and Skill of good Speaking; than an Endeavour to reform the Manners of Men, by showing them their plain and necessary Duty.’ Finally, echoing Locke, Clarke argued that those who did ‘prove and explain to Others, with sufficient clearness and plainness; such as are the most obvious and necessary Duties of Life; they have not yet had Authority enough to enforce and inculcate upon Men’s Minds with so strong an Impression, as to influence and govern the general Practice of the World’ (DUO, 656-666).

Clarke was arguing that philosophy had to be instituted as an office, a public role defined by a set of duties, privileges, virtues and limitations. That philosophy was not an authorised office in the ancient world was emblemised by the death of Socrates at the hands of his countrymen, and indicated also by the apparent ‘recreational’ nature of much ancient philosophical discourse (DUO, 658). Clarke insisted that the true philosophy was not simply devotion to speculative rational inquiry but was properly defined according to the threefold spheres of duty that defined ethics more generally, orienting the philosopher’s enquiry simultaneously towards the divine, themselves, and their neighbour. And such expectations of philosophy served to highlight the paucity of philosophy in the pre-Christian age.

Philosophers indeed, that called themselves so, there were enough in every place, and in every Age. But those who truly made it their business to improve their Reason to the height, to free themselves from the Superstition, which overwhelmed the whole world; to search out the Obligations of Morality, and the Will of God their Creator; to obey it sincerely themselves, as far as they could discover it by the Light of Nature, and to encourage and exhort others to do the like: were but a very few names (DUO, 659).

For Clarke, the entity by whose authority the role of the philosopher-priest was to be established as a public service and his duties enabled to be carried out was much

77 I am much indebted here to Conal Condren’s analysis of early modern philosophy as an office in ‘The persona of the philosopher and the rhetorics of office in Early-Modern England,’ in Condren, Gaukroger and Hunter, The Persona of the Philosopher, 101-138, as also, more
broader than the ancients would have conceived it. It was in fact God, and the public was the City of God. Clarke argued for the necessity and use of an order of teachers, but from whose perspective was such an order necessary and useful? From the human point of view, obviously, in being able to fulfil the ends for which we were intended; but that we were intended for living in conformity to reason introduced for Clarke the notion of God as both creator and governor of rational beings. In arguing for the certainty of an afterlife in which virtue is rewarded and vice punished, Clarke asserted that it is ‘absolutely impossible, that the whole View and Intention...of an infinitely Wise and Just and Good God’ in rational beings ‘endued with such noble Faculties, and so necessarily conscious of the eternal and unchangeable Differences of Good and Evil...should be nothing more than to deep up eternally a Succession of new Generations of Men; and those in such a corrupt, confused, and disorderly State of Things as we see the present World is in; without any due and regular Observation, of the eternal Rules of Good and Evil’ (DUO, 646). Thus, that there had been ancient teachers of wisdom and virtue could be considered providential in God’s just and good government of a weakened and helpless humanity (DUO, 657). But it was only when the task of philosophy in teaching moral virtue was universally revealed as providential, as necessary and useful for our care, that it would to have its due weight and authority among humankind. That is, it was only when the Kingdom of Heaven was revealed to humanity in the person and teaching of Christ that philosophy could become what Clarke argued was a true love of wisdom. In order to be anything more than the secluded lifestyle of a very small elite, in which context it failed to fulfill its aspirations and ends, the persona of the philosopher required becoming institutionalised as an office through revelation.

Clarke thought that the need for philosophy to be backed by heavenly authority was confirmed by the fact that ‘the generality of the Heathen World...were so fully persuaded, that the great Rules for the Conduct of Humane Life, must receive their Authority from Heaven; that their chief Law-givers thought it not a sufficient recommendation of their Laws, that they were agreeable to the Light of Nature; unless

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generally, to Stephen Gaukroger’s and Peter Harrison’s essays in the same volume: ‘The persona of the natural philosopher,’ 26-51; and ‘The natural philosopher and the virtues,’ 327-369.
they pretended also, that they received them from God’ (DUO, 668). The invocation of divine authority in political considerations was also a favourite trope in the freethinking attack on priestcraft, and was taken to reveal the true nature of religion as civil theology, an effective and indeed necessary political tool.\textsuperscript{79} From Clarke’s perspective, however, the pretence of ancient lawgivers was a perverted form of the virtues of hope and humility which most ancient philosophers possessed and which the deists were apparently lacking. Citing Plato and Cicero, Clarke argued that ancient philosophers, unlike deists, were themselves fully aware of the limitations of the philosophical method they practiced in the task of reforming humankind and thus admitted the need for divine intervention: “Whatever, saith [Plato], is set right and as it should be, in the present Evil State of the World; can be so only by the particular Interposition of God.”\textsuperscript{80} Moreover, Clarke argued, the ancient philosophers would have been disposed towards the acceptance of any ‘Doctrine...accompanied with just and good Evidence of its being such a Revelation.’ Philosophical inquiry was in fact inseparably linked to the virtue of hope, for, according to Clarke, it is ‘agreeable to the natural Hopes and Expectations of Men, that is, of Right Reason duly improved’ to believe ‘that God would not always leave Men wholly destitute of so needful an Assistance, but would at some time or other actually afford it them ‘considering the manifold Wants and Necessities of Men, and the abundant Goodness and Mercy of God,’ and ‘to Hope for some Favour of this kind’ (DUO, 671).

The fact that the deist failed to accept the Christian revelation as such a body of teaching was evidence of a flaw, both intellectual and moral, indicating that the deist could not be considered a philosopher at all:

The Truth, at the bottom is plainly This. All the great Things that Modern Deists affect to say of right reason, as to its sufficiency in discovering the Obligations

\textsuperscript{78} See here Sermons LX and LXI, ‘Of the Catholic Church of Christ,’ in Works, I, 369-87; Sermon CXIV, ‘In what the Kingdom of God consists,’ in Works, I, 723-8; and Sermons XXXIII and XXXIV, ‘Of the Kingdom of God, in Works, I, 197-215.

\textsuperscript{79} See Champion, Pillars of Priestcraft.

\textsuperscript{80} Clarke, DUO, 665-9, quoting Plato, The Republic, VI, 492e; cf. the more accurate translation in Plato, The Republic, trans. G.M.A. Grube and C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis, 1992), which rightly emphasises that the ‘evil state of the world’ is rooted in a certain kind of political education, which the construction of a good constitution may address: ‘You should realize that if anyone is saved and becomes what he ought to be under our present constitutions, he has been saved—you may rightly say—by a divine dispensation.’
and Motives of Morality; is only a Pretence, to be made use of, when they are opposing Christianity. At other times, and in reality, they have no hearty regard for Morality....At least, in the Manners of most of them, ‘tis too plain and apparent, that absolute Libertinism is the thing they really aim at (DUO, 671-2).

In a sermon entitled ‘A Virtuous Mind the best Help to understand True Religion,’ Clarke noted that while faith was generally regarded as an act of understanding, and thus not in the power of our will, it was more properly understood as intellectual assent stemming from an act of the will ‘consisting in Simplicity and Unprejudicedness of Mind.’ And, in an Augustinian vein, Clarke noted that pride was especially to be regarded as a stumbling block to this disposition of will, as ‘it promotes contentious Disputes about needless Intricacies...which confound and darken the plainest Truths.’

As Clarke saw it, then, the moral doctrine of Christ and the external signs of its divine provenance answered to the failure of ancient philosophy to establish its social authority. Subsequently, the ministers of that doctrine took up the task of philosophy in bringing people to the truth, but now within the context of the office assigned to them by Christ in the kingdom of God, the existence of which, while it could be inferred from philosophical considerations, had been authoritatively revealed through Christ. Clarke argued additionally that the whole of the truth as revealed in Christian doctrine was not available to reason alone, and although Clarke insists that once ‘our Duty is thus made known to us, ‘tis easy not only to see its agreement with Reason, but also to begin and deduce its Obligations from Reason’ (DUO, 670), he provides no account of rationality to explain to how this could be the case. It was clear, however, that rationality was defined for Clarke by the possession of certain moral virtues, and that these virtues provided the ground for claiming the privilege and duties of the philosopher. As the deists recognised,

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82 See Clarke, Sermon LXXXIX, ‘Of the Power and Authority of Christ,’ in Works, I, 558-64. This is a Trinity Sunday sermon on Matt. 18.18-20, the ‘Great Commission.’ Importantly, Clarke’s sermon emphasises that Christ’s power and authority was transferred to his disciples mainly in their function as teachers, whose teaching consisted of the truths necessary to moral perfection Clarke laid out at length in his homiletic work as a whole.
in claiming this ground of virtue the cleric was relegating to himself the public authority to define rationality, and Tindal therefore sought to figure truth as attested only through reason rather than through the tokens of moral conduct, and reason itself as a capacity which was to be properly exercised by the individual outside of the discipline of any institution, ecclesiastical institutions in particular, and answerable only to the individual conscience.\textsuperscript{83} For Clarke, conscience, or practical reason, needed first to be instructed, and this need implied institutions which were inevitably hierarchical and which therefore involved submission to authority, albeit with the end of becoming rational.\textsuperscript{84}

The divine commissioning of the cleric as moral philosopher, as it was a constituent of God’s revelation to humanity of his just government and providence, dissolved one of the central problems of ancient moral philosophy, which Clarke saw as both theoretical and practical. Although the ancients recognised that virtue is ‘\textit{wise and reasonable},’ and ‘\textit{is unquestionably worthy to be chosen for its own sake},’ even without any expectation of Reward; yet it does not follow that it is therefore entirely \textit{Self-sufficient}, and able to support a Man under all kinds of Sufferings, and even Death itself, for its sake; without any prospect of future recompense.’ The Stoics were brave, Clarke wrote, but wrong to conclude that in the state of the world as we find it, virtue is ‘\textit{able of itself to make a Man happy}.’ What ancient moral philosophy needed, but lacked, was both an explanation of why virtuous behaviour did not lead to happiness in this life and, more importantly, certain knowledge of an afterlife in which virtue and vice would receive their proper reward. The ‘Wisest of the Antient Heathens’ thought such a future distribution of justice probable, but not certain. Only God’s revelation through Christ provided certain knowledge of the afterlife.\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{83} Tindal, \textit{Address}, 44-5, 67. See also the discussion in Spurr, “\textit{Rational Religion}”, 879-80.
\textsuperscript{85} Clarke equivocates here. For that this knowledge be available to us is in fact required by God’s goodness, as it is for our good in attaining our ends as the rational beings he created, and by God’s justice, because of the demands of the moral law which he places on us as the subjects of his government. It was therefore, according to Clarke, ‘in general deducible, even demonstrably,’ from considerations of divine and human nature. See Clarke, \textit{DUO}, 629-30, 643-8, 652, 662, 664.
But considerations of the afterlife, while vindicating right reason’s dictates, also tended to transform the considerations of that reason from what is wise and reasonable to what is commanded under pain of disobedience and prospect of reward. Clarke admitted, perhaps with his moral psychological account of humanity in mind, that ‘speculative Reason, wanted still some more sensible Authority’ to make practical truths ‘of more Force and Efficacy in Practice’ (DUO, 657-666). Consideration of God’s will as the secondary source of obligation ‘strongly confirms, and in practice most effectually and Indispensably inforces [eternal moral Obligations] upon us.’ Ancient philosophers had access to that will only through ‘such abstract and subtle Reasonings, as the generality of Men had by no means either Abilities or Opportunities to understand or be duly affected by,’ whereas ‘the Doctrine of Morality, which is the Rule of Life and Manners, ought to be plain, easy and familiar, and suited fully to the capacities of all Men’ (DUO, 637, 672). In fact, Clarke suggests that there was a link between the elitism and seclusion of ancient philosophy and its emphasis on wisdom, beauty or reasonableness of virtue, as opposed to its obligatory nature. The persona of the ancient philosopher as involving a private pursuit replicated itself in the ethical teaching of the ancients; likewise, the persona of the philosopher as cleric, duty-bound as a mediator between God and the people, would replicate itself in emphasising ethics as obligation to God (DUO, 664). Indeed, on Clarke’s account of the obligatory nature of practical reason, it was unclear why the ancient philosopher would not have emphasised the binding nature of ethical norms rather than their reasonableness or wisdom, otherwise from consideration of their private persona. But, on the other hand, Clarke never attempted to explain how someone whose capacity disabled them from understanding the reasons for ethical rules could be obliged only through the secondary and additional promulgation of natural law as divine law, leaving a residual tension in his account of the priestly persona.

III. Sacerdos and ethics in the Anglican Church

Whatever the tensions in Clarke’s articulation of the clerical persona, in the intellectual context of the Anglican Church the fact that Clarke insisted that moral obligation was always a matter of both following reason and (secondarily) the divine will meant that he had already gone to far towards deism, according to some of his contemporaries. Daniel
Waterland, master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, and later Royal Chaplain, noticed in a review of Clarke’s posthumously published *Exposition of the Church-Catechism* (1729) that Clarke seemed to have drained the sacraments of their supernatural efficacy. In explaining the benefits of the Eucharist, the catechism advertised the ‘strengthening and refreshing of our Souls by the Body and Blood of Christ, as our Bodies are by the Bread and Wine,’ and Clarke had glossed this with the statement that ‘as Impenitency is the Death, and the Sins are the Diseases of the Soul, so a Habit of Virtue is its Health and Life, and religious Acts are its Food and Nourishment.’ 86 ‘True in a certain Sense,’ wrote Waterland, ‘but not very well fitted to our present Purpose: For the *Catechism* is here speaking, not of the Efficacy of Habits of Virtue to Salvation (which after all are Conditions only, and have not proper Efficacy) but of the Force and Power of the Great Atonement.’ The worthy receiving of this atonement through the Eucharist ‘supposes, or takes in Virtue, moral Virtue, with it, and goes far beyond it, uniting us to Christ, which moral Virtue alone never can do; for it is by Faith, by Grace, that we are saved.’ Clarke laid all the emphasis on our moral and religious effort in being worthy of the sacrament, Waterland worried, reducing the efficacy of the sacrament to our moral effort, and treating properly religious acts as means to a moral end.

I know not how to approve what the Exposition says...of the Two Sacraments, in common with other positive Institutions, that they have the Nature only of Means to an End, and that therefore they are never to be compared with Moral Virtues....Moral Virtues are rather to be consider’d as a means to and End, because they are previous Qualifications for the Sacrament, and have no proper Efficacy towards procuring Salvation till they are improv’d and render’d acceptable by these Christian Performances.87

Waterland rightly understood that Clarke’s approach to the sacraments was rooted in his commitment to the notion that reason obligated by its own force. Positive religious institutions commanded by God such as baptism or the Eucharist correspondingly had to be explained in terms of being means towards the ends which reason could comprehend,

and Clarke understood human ends as consisting ultimately in moral perfection. In his second Boyle lecture, Clarke had thus argued that ‘those positive and external Observances, (the Two Sacraments,)...are instituted in the Christian Religion, as means and assistances to keep Men stedfast in the practice of those great and moral Duties which are the weightier Matters of the Law.’ And to defend them as means, he argued that baptism, far from being a mysterious or superstitious ritual, was a solemn admission ‘into his Profession...intitling him to all the Privileges, and charging him with all the Obligations, which belong to the Members of that Society.’ Likewise the Eucharist was a commemoration ‘with all Thankfulness [of] the Love of their greatest Benefactor,’ and the humble renewal of the ‘Obligations and Promises of Obedience to him’ (DUO, 675). Waterland argued that ‘moral virtues, strictly so called, look no higher than the temporal happiness of society,’ whereas ‘moral virtues evangelized, or improved into Christian duties,’ are ‘chiefly to qualify the observers of them for a much more blessed and more enduring society hereafter.’ Indeed, ‘the love of God is the stock or stem, out of which all other virtues spring forth.’ But this entailed that ‘the will of God...is our immediate rule to go by, and is the ground and measure of all obligation. Unerring wisdom has reasons by which it constantly steers; and we cannot doubt but where God lays the greatest stress, there are the greatest reasons.’ The notion of ‘obligation antecedent to all law is a contradiction and flat absurdity.’ Thus, ‘so long as Adam obeyed the positive precept, his obedience was an exercise of self-denial, faith, hope, and love of God....What other virtues could those be instrumental to? There could be no greater.’

Waterland was moreover deeply critical of Clarke’s stress on natural reason in theological inquiry. Clarke had asserted in his Exposition that whatever is fundamental to salvation would be evident to the ‘honest careful mind.’ This phrase denoted the virtues which Clarke thought were prerequisites of rational inquiry, but Waterland declared that ‘any Jew or Deist may proceed upon [such a principle], and say, that the proofs upon

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87 Waterland, Remarks upon Doctor Clarke’s Exposition of the Church-Catechism (London, 1730), 81.
which the Christian revelation rests (miracles and prophecies) ought to be so plain, that no honest and careful mind, though of mean capacity, can be in danger of mistaking.’

‘Upon the whole,’ he concluded, ‘I should think it much better to say, that whatever can be proved to be taught in Scripture, and in the first and purest ages, as of necessity to salvation, is now also necessary to all Christians, but in such a degree as they are capable of knowing or doing it.’

This was, of course, a defence of the clergy as a body with both the expertise and the authority to determine the question for others. Clarke had also argued that the clergy were to have authority in teaching the necessary beliefs, but had sought to make transparent and self-evident the basis of that authority in part by describing it in terms of the role of ancient philosophy in moral education and by making it accountable to the virtues required in the exercise of that role. This meant dismissing as irrational and unfit to determine matters of truth those who did not possess these virtues, and the danger was that heterodox opinion would be dismissed out of hand as the product of a vicious temperament. In any case, Clarke thought that he had a neutral basis for establishing the authority of the clergy, since recognition of the philosophical virtues did not depend on the supernatural revelation which deism made contentious; furthermore, since revelation was the only way of giving philosophy and the philosophic virtues authoritative weight in the moral education of humankind, Clarke inferred that recognition of the need for revelation was part of the very wisdom of philosophy in seeking to fulfill its duties and ends. Waterland, on the other hand, deplored this move to a neutral ground in natural religion and pagan philosophy. In a sermon entitled ‘The Wisdom of the ancients Borrowed from Divine Revelation,’ he noted that ‘Pagan morality was much improved after Christianity appeared; as may be seen by the writings of Seneca, Epictetus, Plutarch, and Marcus Antoninus,’ many of whom had, according to Clarke, exemplified wisdom and morality as such. High churchmen such as Daniel

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89 Waterland, Remarks upon Dr. Clarke’s Exposition of the Church Catechism, in Works, V, 388.
90 To his credit, then, when the deist William Woolston was imprisoned for blasphemy, Clarke attempted continuously to gain his release on the grounds that both the laws of England and the Christian religion required the exercise of tolerance and liberty of conscience. Clarke may have been sensitive to the issue as his own opinions on the person of Christ had been censured as heterodox. See Gasciogne, Cambridge, 137.
91 Waterland, Works, VIII, 1-36; Clarke, DUO, 661.
Waterland would continue to insist that the sacerdotal nature of the Church and the clergy was premised solely on the power of the Holy Spirit, arguing further that the substance of belief was dictated by the adherence to creeds and beliefs whose meaning had been determined by the Church Fathers, rather than opening the doors to so-called rational inquiry into the articles of belief. And accordingly he and others would also insist that Christian obedience all but replaced the moral virtues which Clarke took to be the substance of the Christian religion.

IV. Bishop Butler: an enlightenment of sermons

It is a testimony of the influence that Clarke had on Anglican intellectual culture that the only controversy his younger friend Joseph Butler stirred up was the charge that he placed emphasis on the external forms of religion at the expense of its content and truth, and that he died a crypto-Catholic, for in his Fifteen Sermons Butler argued that, far from morality being obligatory only through its being God’s will, the conscience was self-authorising and was for all practical purposes the sole source of obligation. Clarke had argued that not all individuals would be able to grasp arguments from reason, and also that, in any case, a more ‘sensible’ authority was needed besides practical reason alone. Butler attempted to guide his parishioners through an analysis of the principles of human action which revealed that the exercise of practical reason provided its own authority.

The methodology used in this task required close attention and was, as I have indicated, quite off the mark from the point of view of the aims and ends of the sermon as they were understood at the time: it was argumentative, explicitly raising objections and dealing with philosophical interlocutors rather than attempting to motivate its audience directly; and its conclusions in particular sermons were often negative, clearing the grounds of misunderstanding rather than articulating a positive framework for personal application. But far from apologising about the difficulty of his sermons, Butler saw his

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92 Gascogne, Cambridge, 125.
93 See Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, s.v. ‘Joseph Butler.’
94 In understanding the nature of Butler’s argument, I owe much to Darwall, British Moralists, 244-83.
task not simply in terms of motivating his auditors to virtuous behaviour, but precisely as one of motivating his listeners to reason. As he opens the preface to his Sermons:

Though it is scarce possible to avoid judging, in some way or other, of almost every thing which offers itself to one’s thoughts; yet it is certain, that many persons, from different causes, never exercise their judgment, upon what comes before them, in the way of determining whether it be conclusive, and holds. They are perhaps entertained with some things, not so with others; they like, and they dislike: but either that which is proposed to be made out be really made out or not; whether a matter be stated according to the real truth of the case, seems to the generality of people a circumstance of no consideration at all.95

It was due to this lack of intellectual inquiry that the ‘religious and sacred attention, which is due to truth, and to the important question, What is the rule of life? is lost out of the world.’ ‘I have often wished,’ he added a little later, ‘that it had been the custom to lay before people nothing in matters of argument but premises, and leave them to draw conclusions themselves.’96 This indeed would have been a radical renovation of the sermon. As it stands, Butler did leave a great deal of the task of practical reasoning to the listener.

Importantly, Butler regarded the first three sermons ‘Upon Human Nature’ not as developing a specifically Christian account of virtue, but as explicating the view of the ancient moralists that ‘virtue consists in following nature and vice in deviating from it,’ with the particular aim of explaining, against Shaftesbury’s account of virtue, how virtue would be obligatory even where virtuous acts were not in the ‘interest or happiness...of such a creatures as man.’ Except for the question of the duty to forgive, Butler does not contrast ancient ethics with Christian teachings (Butler, Preface, 11-12). Indeed the first of the sermons ‘Upon Human Nature’ begins by arguing that the bonds of caritas which held together the early Christian community, expressed by Paul under the image of belonging to one body under Christ, no longer had the same force in exhorting the contemporary Christian community to godly behaviour. According to Butler, this

95 Butler, Sermons, Preface, 2.
96 Butler, Sermons, Preface, 2.
historical difference led to consideration of ‘our being God’s creatures, and virtue being
the natural law we are born under, and the whole constitution of man being plainly
adapted to it,’ as ‘prior obligations to piety and virtue, than the consideration that God
sent His Son into the world to save it, and the motives which arise from the peculiar
relations of Christians, as members one of another under Christ our Head,’ however
much ‘it is manifest that Christians at the time of the revelation, and immediately after,
could not but insist mostly upon considerations of this latter kind,’ primarily because
their adherence to Christ’s teaching had really constituted them as a distinct and
persecuted social body.\(^97\) Moreover, in contrast to Clarke, Butler bracketed the questions
of a future life and divine sanctions in discussing the efficacy of the conscience’s
obligating authority.\(^98\)

The purpose of insisting on the authoritative nature of conscience within the
hierarchy of the principles of human action was not merely for the sake of academic
disputation with other philosophers. It was rather primarily practical. Butler was
intending to cultivate a high degree of moral perfection in his audience by encouraging
them to exercise and develop their practical reasoning:

The...reason of insisting so much upon this natural authority of the principle of
reflection or conscience is, that it seems in great measure overlooked by many,
who are by no means the worse sort of men. It is thought sufficient to abstain
from gross wickedness, and to be humane and kind to such as happen to come in
their way. Whereas in reality the very constitution of our nature requires, that we
bring our whole conduct before this superior faculty; wait its determination;
enforce upon ourselves its authority, and make it the business of our lives, as it is
absolutely the whole business of a moral agent, to conform ourselves to it. This is
the true meaning of that ancient precept, *Reverence thyself.*\(^99\)

Emphasising the authoritative position of conscience in the constitution of human nature
was in this way a means of reviving ‘religious and sacred attention’ towards inquiring
into the ‘rule of life.’ Indeed, increasingly aware of the embattled and unfashionable

place of the Church in English society, Butler came to regard churches as, in his striking phrase, ‘standing memorials of religion to unthinking men.’

Butler may have severely underestimated the difficulty that an individual would be faced with once they began to investigate for themselves the rule of life, suggesting that ‘the rule of life within’ is self-evident once it is ‘honestly’ attended to. But his sermons ‘Upon Human Nature’ were in large part conceived as necessary preliminaries to moral inquiry, showing the seriousness of the task from consideration of the conscience as that which makes us human. Furthermore, as a whole, the Sermons did provide more substantive concepts in that inquiry, introducing the audience to the idea of thinking about their desires and passions teleologically in terms of the ends for which they were intended, and thereby initiating more developed thinking about happiness and the good than were provided by what Butler regarded as the sloppy logic of a popular philosophy which, following Hobbes and Mandeville, resolved all virtue into self-love. Besides this, it is clear as well that Butler regarded ‘incapacity and ignorance’ as favourable to error and vice, while ‘knowledge and improvement contribute, in due course, to the...general prevalence of true religion’ (and here we must remember that for Butler, true religion included natural religion and thus moral truth). These statements take place in the context of a defence of charity schools, a project which had the explicit design of, in modern terms, social control of the poor; but Butler’s comments pertain to education in general, and his argument for charity schools is precisely that the reasons why the rich need education hold just the same for the poor: it is for the instruction and exercise ‘in what will render them useful to society’ and ‘in what is suitable to the highest relations in which we stand, and the most important capacity in which we can be considered,’ which for Butler are interrelated aims which pertain to all humans regardless of rank.

That Butler thought the rule of life self-evident indicates perhaps that in his earlier homilies preached at Rolls Chapel he may have assumed his audience to have the requisite education, both moral and intellectual, regarding the goods of society and God

99 Butler, Sermons, Preface, 8-9.
102 See especially Sermon I, ‘Upon Human Nature.’
that prepared them to understand more precisely, through theoretical inquiry, the nature of the moral life and to provide rational justification for the duty to consult one’s conscience in all matters of life, much as Aristotle assumed the moral education of the polis in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. In any case, all of this serves to emphasise that Butler saw his function as bishop primarily in terms of teaching, and that to this duty of teaching, the philosophic persona was central. Butler regarded the fashionable attitude of scepticism towards the possibility of moral motivation as lazy thinking. As he put it in his ‘Charge to the Clergy of Durham’ in 1751, even good people who are inclined otherwise ‘are too apt inconsiderately to take for granted, that things are really questionable, because they hear them often disputed.’

For the Bishop, the cure for his thoughtlessly sceptical age lay in the rigours of philosophical inquiry. It may be that Butler thought his congregation at Rolls Chapel sophisticated enough to follow (and enjoy) his sermons; but it also seems that he thought that they tended to adopt opinions rather haphazardly, without thinking them through within the context of their own experience of the moral life. Butler himself cultivated a rather retiring and cautious social personality, avoiding polemic and controversy, and indeed, to the frustration of subsequent scholars, ordered the destruction of all his manuscripts on his death. But this was not just his personality; it was also his persona, for the life of thought in which he himself was engaged can be understood as an example both to the clergy for whom he was responsible as Bishop—this is clear from the ‘Charge to the Clergy of Durham’—and also to parishioners themselves, as is clear from the stated intentions of his *Fifteen Sermons*.

Did Butler consider that not all persons might have the capacity to live a life of thought? This consideration was for Clarke of considerable importance in defining the office of the philosopher-priest, and the knowledge which that office demanded in order to fulfill its ends. Butler seems somewhat uneasy about his philosophical persona in the ‘Preface’ to the *Fifteen Sermons*: ‘as the best auditories are mixed, I shall not set about to justify the propriety of preaching, or under that title publishing, discourses so abstruse as some of these are.’ In light of this, that later he was to urge the necessity and indeed

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105 See Cunliffe, “The Spiritual Sovereign.”
obligation on the part of the governing class to provide some level of education for the poor against worries that such education would lead to sedition and insubordination is suggestive, and might be read as a desire to provide on a broader basis the kind of education which Butler assumed of his auditory in writing his philosophical *Sermons*.

**Conclusion**

I began by noting the anomaly of Butler’s philosophical *persona* in the context of the aims and subsequent limitations of the sermon genre as these were conceived in the late seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth. These demanded that the sermon be easily followed and readily applicable, and therefore seemed to rule out philosophical discourse from the pulpit. In exhorting listeners to good behaviour, the late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century minister was aided in keeping his sermon simple and applicable by a moral theology which resolved questions of conscience into the principle of obedience to the rules of the Gospel rather than reasoning about and ordering goods, or understanding the rationality of virtue. Against the dominant moral theological and natural law traditions of the late seventeenth-century, Samuel Clarke premised obligation on the ability of reason to come to determinate judgements about good and evil, the conclusive nature of which motivated the individual’s will independent of divine sanctions. According to Clarke, the office of the clergyman could be understood according to the failed ends of ancient philosophy, as educating humankind into practical rationality. For his part, Butler chose the *persona* of the philosopher for his sermons ‘Upon Human Nature’ because he thought that the obligation to defer to conscience in all action was entailed by the hierarchical structure of human motivation and was thus, in a sense, an obligation to oneself, not obedience to another. Thus, although the content of conscience may be elucidated by revelation, as Butler argued at length in *The Analogy of Religion* (1736), its authority over us was binding irrespective of revelation. The gentile’s ‘law unto themselves’ of Romans 2.14 could thus be properly understood *via* the ancient philosopher’s notion of virtue as being what accords with nature, and the question of why we should follow nature or the law was not answered by rules derived from God’s word but by philosophical inquiry into the structure of the self.
High Church Anglicans argued that Clarke’s ethics undermined the nature of the sacerdos as traditionally understood, and, more recently, the eighteenth-century Anglican Church has been characterised as generally lacking true piety and spirituality. It is true that Clarke and Butler took from the latitudinarians the notion that revealed religion was intended as a help in the achievement of natural, though God-given, human ends and aims, and it was the occlusion of the mysteria fidei which regarded properly supernatural ends that bothered those like Waterland. I have suggested here, however, that both Clarke and Butler were attempting to integrate philosophy into the context of supernatural revelation, much as Aquinas had attempted in his medieval setting, and before him Augustine in the context of late antiquity. For Clarke and Butler, moral philosophical investigation was no longer teleologically oriented towards the science of sacred doctrine in quite the same way as it was for Aquinas, however; the supernatural did indeed tend to be conceived of as subordinate to natural law and natural religion. But neither Butler nor Clarke would not thought of this as a denigration of the sacred function of the Church. What natural law and natural religion required in order to achieve their aims was a structure of authority which only God’s grace could provide. Philosophy had been assigned a crucial position in that sacred calling, the care of the soul; and Clarke and Butler would have regarded themselves as philosophers only in as much as they were vehicles of divine grace.

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107 See McAdoo, Moral Theology, 147.