Deism in Enlightenment England
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Theology, politics, and Newtonian public science

JEFFREY R. WIGELSWORTH
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Halifax, Nova Scotia
Abbreviations, dates, and quotations

### ABBREVIATIONS

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Add.</td>
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<td>All Souls</td>
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<td>BL</td>
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<td>CUL</td>
<td>Cambridge University Library, Cambridge</td>
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<td>KSRL</td>
<td>Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas</td>
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<td>LPL</td>
<td>Lambeth Palace Library, London</td>
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<td>Royal Society of London</td>
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### DATES

All dates are given with the assumption that the year began on 1 January even though during the period of this study, England celebrated New Year’s Day on 25 March.

### QUOTATIONS

In this book the original spelling, underlining, and italics found in quotations from published and manuscript material are preserved. However, for the sake of clarity, some abbreviations have been silently expanded. All biblical references are taken from the King James Version.
Introduction: the importance of deist theology

When I wrote my treatise about our Systeme I had an eye upon such Principles as might work with considering men for the beliefe of a Deity & nothing can rejoyce me more then to find it usefull for that purpose'. Sir Isaac Newton wrote this assessment of his own work in 1692 to Richard Bentley, classical scholar, deliverer of the inaugural Boyle Lecture, and future Master of Trinity College, Cambridge. That someone had found the apologetic purpose which was encoded within his Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica (1687) pleased Newton greatly. However, not everyone who read the Principia and saw theology lurking among the geometrical diagrams appeared to be as friendly to religion as Newton might have wished. During his presidency of the Royal Society, Newton reportedly visited a ‘Club of Unbelievers, at the Grecian Coffee-house’ and advised them that Christianity was a demonstrable fact and would not be undermined by their books and pamphlets. Those Newton had gone to see were some unnamed deists, who frequented the Grecian.1

Years later Bentley would be face to face with the same perceived problem of deism when a trial for atheism took place at Cambridge University in 1739. A fellow of Caius College with the unlikely name of Tinkler Ducket had been greatly intrigued with the materialist arguments found in Samuel Strutt’s 1732 book A Philosophical Enquiry into the Physical Spring of Human Actions and the Immediate Cause of Thinking. In his book Strutt, about whom we know next to nothing, hoped to refute the ‘unphilosophical notion’ that people were composed of both matter and soul. To bolster his arguments, Strutt referred readers to ‘what has been already so successfully offer’d on that Head’ by ‘the learn’d’ John Toland in Letters to Serena. Toland was also the author of Christianity not Mysterious, the book which is seen as initiating the entire deist controversy in England, from about 1696 to 1742. Strutt further suggested, using arguments provided by another deist, Anthony Collins as support, that because natural philosophers did not know the precise make-up of matter, no one could conclude exactly what properties it did possess and that perhaps our souls and our thoughts were material. To his future detriment, Ducket had written an enthusiastic letter on Strutt’s book to an acquaintance, the Reverend Stephen Gibbs, in October 1734. The letter found its way to Cambridge.
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authorities and an excerpt was published in The Gentleman’s Magazine. In the incrimination sections Ducket advised Gibbs that he had become an atheist and named Strutt’s book as the ‘infallible Guide’ that had led him along the path of unbelief. A clear pronouncement of atheism and, what was worse, atheism caused by a book inspired by the works of Toland and Collins was cause for great concern at Cambridge and only confirmed the fears of those who had predicted such consequences of deism.

The trial to strip Ducket of his fellowship and expel him from the university began in February 1739 and took place at Bentley’s residence in Trinity College. His presence at the trial and the testimony that would be offered provide insight into contemporary concerns regarding deism. Indeed, Bentley saw materialism as one of the key aspects of deism, the result of ‘truly idiot evangelists’ and as the first step towards atheism. Once the proceedings were under way, Ducket readily acknowledged that he had written the letter to Gibbs. He did, however, deny a related charged of attempting ‘to seduce one Mary Richards, by telling Her, That all Religion was a Forgery of People in power &c’. The court further alleged ‘That upon Her telling him He should be damn’d for such practices, without Matrimony, . . . He reply’d, That Matrimony was only Priestcraft, That to avoid any ill Consequences, Such as Child Bearing &c. He had a sovereign Remedy which were drops to avoid Child Bearing.’ In a final attempt to woo the young woman, Ducket apparently told her that the ‘Favour he ask’d was an act of Benevolence’. Ducket admitted that he believed ‘Matrimony was Priestcraft’, but conceded nothing else. When the questioning returned to the contents of the letter to Gibbs, Ducket denied that he was ‘Intent [on] Seducing [Gibbs] to Atheism’. Furthermore, Ducket refuted the charge ‘That he ever attempted to seduce others into Atheism and into any wicked or Erroneous opinion, by Prophane and Blasphemous Writings and Speeches’. The sentence, delivered on 23 March 1739, came as no surprise. It was ruled that the charges ‘had been fully proved’ against Ducket and that expulsion was the correct punishment for a man who seemed determined to spread atheism amid the Cambridge community. The accused made a final attempt to persuade the court to reconsider its verdict. He ‘spoke with a good grace’ that ‘Reason was the Sovereign Guide of all Mankind: That Freedom of Thought and Private judgement were the Right of Every one’. The impassioned plea fell on deaf ears and the sentence stood as delivered.

These two episodes illustrate nicely the contemporary and frequent modern perception of deism and deists in England. Deists seemed to be godless, enemies of Newtonian philosophy, and a disruptive force in society. Were they really? This book is an attempt to offer an answer.

Any study of deism must be sensitive to conceptions of eighteenth-century intellectual thought, otherwise known as Enlightenment. Indeed, depictions of deists often reflect conceptions of the Enlightenment. Current scholarship is
questioning the existence of a monolithic Europe-wide intellectual movement identified as the Enlightenment. What has come to be recognised in light of new work into the uniqueness of national experiences and settings in the eighteenth century is that the definitive article is no longer an appropriate descriptor. An early advocate of this view, J. G. A. Pocock, has commented recently that ‘I have no quarrel with the concept of Enlightenment; I merely contend that it occurred in too many forms to be comprised within a single definition and history’; he proposed that we do better to think of ‘a family of Enlightenments’ rather than ‘the’ Enlightenment. One of the results of this school of thought is the promotion of an English or British Enlightenment, a claim that a generation ago would have been met with scepticism if not outright hostility. While they may have sowed the seeds for the more famous French Enlightenment, events in England ought not to be reduced to mere stage preparation for outcomes across the Channel. Having identified this epoch in English history, scholars are attempting to describe exactly what an English Enlightenment entailed. Roy Porter has argued that, in contrast to older views of Enlightenment that depicted it as anti-church, anti-religion, and bordering on atheism, English Enlightenment took place within a great deal of piety. What is more, he writes that English intellectuals were ‘likened to the mixed clientele talking, talking, talking in a hot smoky and crowded coffee house; men sharing broad convictions and sympathies but differing, and agreeing to differ, on matters dear to their hearts’. Brian Young agrees and has advocated ‘clerical Enlightenment’ as the proper description of the English Enlightenment. A similar position has been taken by Frederick C. Beiser. In short, the promotion of reasoned arguments and the improvement of the human condition that characterise Enlightenment took place in England within a religious framework.

If Enlightenment in England is being re-evaluated in terms of the importance of religion to the era, then it is also time to reconsider English deists, a group that figures prominently in both the older and new historiography. Traditional views of deists frequently depict them as champions of the freedom that has led to our modern world and as forerunners of atheism, often being tied approvingly to the latter designation. When their arguments failed to gain a beachhead in England, it is claimed, deists’ notions were exported across the Channel to France, where they served as a stepping stone to French Revolution and the creation of modernity. For example, one author claimed that ‘The deists have long been buried and their works often burned or suppressed, but their spirit is very much alive today and many of their opinions and arguments are still valid.’ Another commented that ‘it is only right and proper that we should keep in remembrance some at least of the gallant little band of pioneers who by their labours and sacrifices made our freedom possible’. While these assessments date from the 1930s, little has changed in depictions of deists, as may be seen in Peter Gay’s celebrated
scholarship when he described the Enlightenment as ‘the rise of modern paganism’, with the deists as key players. Gay claimed that ‘for most of his recorded history man has been a religious animal. After deism, and partly because of it, he was no longer.’8 Deists were enemies of an establishment that attempted to shout them down and with the volume of its voice endeavoured to keep humanity within the bonds of religion and superstition.

Similarly, in more recent accounts of the English Enlightenment deists are portrayed as existing in opposition to the conservative establishment. John Redwood, in one of the first books that adopted the concept of an English Enlightenment, claimed that deists were unable to mount an effective challenge to monarchs and church and could only hurl ridiculing insults at that which they hoped to topple. James A. Herrick agreed in his study of deists’ rhetoric and concludes that they wrote for a ‘literate though not well-educated urban audience’.9 In other words, deists did not elevate themselves out of some English Grub Street gutter. Likewise, Young and Pocock argue that deists had ‘radical separateness’ from the rest of England’s intellectuals.

Such views assume a dichotomy between conservative English Enlightenment figures and deists. This interpretation has been argued most forcefully by Jonathan Israel in two sizable monographs: *Radical Enlightenment* and *Enlightenment Contested*. Israel takes the position that deists existed in a ‘Radical Enlightenment’ that contained the ideals that we have traditionally associated with Enlightenment in general, and that the radicals were opposed to what he calls the ‘Conservative Enlightenment’, composed of the individuals whom we usually see as defining Enlightenment, such as John Locke and Isaac Newton. Conservatives defended church and crown and all the trappings of the establishment while radicals sought to topple the establishment and champion human freedom and toleration of differences. His books were not the first to take the position that deists opposed Newtonian natural philosophy. We may trace the view to Margaret C. Jacob in her books *The Newtonians and the English Revolution, 1689–1720* and *The Radical Enlightenment*, in which she argued that English deists (she calls them ‘Freethinkers’) were hostile to the established political order supported by Latitudinarian Churchmen and Newtonian philosophy. To subvert this system, deists constructed alternative schemes of nature to dismantle Newton’s philosophy and the society upon which it rested.10 This interpretation has gained widespread acceptance, and one of the clearest articulations asserts that deists ‘were very active and hostile critics of Newtonian philosophy and theology in general’.11

But what if deists wanted to be a part of the so-called Conservative Enlightenment and their writings were just as theologically minded as those produced by others? What if it was by trying to gain footholds in the establishment, and not destroy it, that deists raised the ire of those who wrote against them? When we consider closely the writings of the deists, both published
and unpublished, many of the assumed truisms of their politics and natural philosophy do not withstand close scrutiny. With ‘Enlightenment’ in England changing its meaning, then it is time to revisit what it meant to be deist in this environment. This book is such an undertaking.

Accepting Porter’s characterisation of the eighteenth-century English intellectual climate, we return to the Grecian coffee-House. London’s coffee-houses were the sites of more than warm drink; they also specialised in conversation, debate, and dispute. The informal atmosphere and large open tables with benches, rather than private booths, encouraged discussion of the day’s most pressing issues, be they political, theological, or natural philosophical. For example, fellows of the Royal Society frequented the Grecian, where they might surround themselves with those who shared an interest in the natural world. In this respect, coffee-houses were a microcosm of the newly expanding marketplace of ideas made possible by the lapse of the Licensing Act in 1695. Coffee-houses were also the sites of lectures on natural philosophical theories. Public science, as the phenomenon of disseminating natural philosophy is known, involved both presenters and authors, who created a commodity for witnesses and readers. Regarding this symbiotic relationship, Steven Shapin has argued that science ‘always bears a relation to the culture of which it is part, and culture demands for its understanding careful attention to the social context. As the audience for science is part of its cultural definition . . . the nature of the audience arises from the particular social context’. Consequently, those who held an interest in, or sought to understand, natural philosophy did so within the cultural context of which they were a part. The age of deism in England was saturated with views of God that informed the day-to-day lives of all people. As J. C. D. Clark argues, early modern English society was a confessional state and remained so until the mid-1800s. Justin Champion has likewise urged historians to be sensitive to the importance of theology as a ‘destabilising factor’ in the political and social lives of Britons because politics and religion ‘were inherently intertwined projects’. Linda Colley further suggests that religion – specifically a shared sense of Protestantism – was critical in forming early modern British identities. Deists were not immune.

English deists were part of the audience for public science. This was acknowledged at the time by Newton’s friend and ousted successor to the Lucasian Chair of Mathematics at Cambridge, William Whiston, who believed that Newton’s writings could be dangerous in the wrong hands, suggesting that deists had unfortunately found much support in these ‘wonderful Discoveries’. In a later work, Whiston named the specific deists he found to be most troubling in this regard: ‘Collins, Tindal, Toland, Morgan, and Chubb’. Because the public arena in which the learned assessment of natural philosophy took place was also composed of political and theological assumptions, a contribution to any area would have some bearing on the other two. The same
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deists about whom Whiston worried also addressed the day’s politics, as Edmund Burke’s much later account of the initial chaos of the French Revolution confirms. Burke repeated the same list of deists when he happily wrote that they had been relegated to ‘lasting oblivion’ but had once been politically troublesome. The deists identified by both Whiston and Burke were the political gadfly and polemical writer John Toland (1670–1722), the country gentleman and justice of the peace Anthony Collins (1676–1729), the Oxford legal scholar and All Souls fellow Matthew Tindal (1656–1733), the physician and one-time Dissenting minister Thomas Morgan (d. 1743), and the former candle maker turned philosopher Thomas Chubb (1679–1747). While Toland is the best-known of the five, the others wrote as contemporaries and successors, and their works reveal much about what it meant to be a deist in the English Enlightenment.

It is these five whom we will examine in this book as we reconstruct their arguments about nature and politics with the goal of building a picture of deism in England. Since both of these intellectual endeavours were intimately linked to conceptions of God and assumptions regarding divine power, I will emphasise theology to a greater extent than has been the case in previous studies of deists. With this being so, it is important to define exactly what is meant by ‘theology’ in order that it not be confused with ‘religion’, which consists of practices and behaviours. To do so requires that we briefly outline medieval developments in learned circles. With the rediscovery of Aristotle’s works in the early thirteenth century, a melding of ancient philosophy with Christian thought brought an intellectual rigour to the study of things divine, different from contemplation of the divine, which characterised earlier intellectual efforts. As Roger French and Andrew Cunningham have described it, ‘Theology was the application of Scientia to the understanding of the nature of God and the Christian religion’. ‘Scientia’ described knowledge gained through the seven liberal arts taught in medieval universities, divided into the Trivium (Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric) and the Quadrivium (Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy). Theology was the study of God through the use of philosophical techniques. Even if one never mentioned chapters and verses from the Bible in any writings, or identified with any recognised confession, one might still practise theology.

If one was to understand God and God’s actions philosophically, one also had to know the power that God possessed at any moment. Thus, theology and knowledge about God’s power (potentia dei) were directly linked. Generations of scholars had wrestled with issues of God’s power and continued to do so into the eighteenth century and the Enlightenment. Beginning with medieval theologians, the power God held might be described as potentia dei absoluta or potentia dei ordinata, the absolute or ordained power of God respectively. The former took the view that God had the ability to override anything
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(short of producing a logical contradiction) that had been done, while the latter position held that God was bound by his past actions and could not undo what had been done. This does not mean that God had two powers but that God’s power might be understood in two ways. At first this may seem a trivial difference but as Francis Oakley describes it, conclusions drawn regarding God’s power ‘extended to matters pertaining to epistemology, philosophical theology, natural philosophy, ethics, and civil law no less than to canon law, sacramental theology, and the theology of justification’. Those who emphasised potentia dei absoluta held that God does not have to maintain the present order of the universe or rigorously obey the laws of nature, and that as a result the best knowledge that one may hope for about the natural world is probabilistic because God may at any moment change things. God may not actually do this. Nonetheless, He always wields the power to do so. Conversely, adherents to a potentia dei ordinata position believed that God’s action in the world and its consistent operation could be known with certainty because God would never change what had been done, and present conditions, such as the orbit of planets or white snow, would continue. One view conceived of a world built on contingency and the other a world founded on necessity.

Deists may be described as emphasising potentia dei ordinata rather than potentia dei absoluta. This belief underscored all deists’ positions. It is not that deists developed a view of God to legitimise their views in politics and natural philosophy; rather their collective view of God and shared theology led to their political and natural philosophical positions, a subtle but importance difference. Their God was knowledge-sharing and predictable in action and, through constant compliance with the laws of nature, provided a proper model for earthly governments, which must always comply with the laws of nations. This view placed our five deists alongside their contemporaries with regard to the analogy of the natural world and civil rulers. Porter noted the importance of this when he concluded that in the English Enlightenment social harmony had ‘to be seen to be anchored in the larger order of nature’.

A deist conception of God leading to the formation of an identifiable deist theology may seem at first counterintuitive for a group of people who are frequently described as godless. In spite of the recent conclusion of Herrick, who has asserted that the view of deism ‘as theological rationalism centred on a God who set the universe in motion and then stepped away – though persistent, is no longer tenable’, it remains a common assessment that deists believed God abandoned the world once creating it. Moreover, deists are often presented as being at best indifferent to religion, or at worst atheists. As Caroline Roberts succinctly put it, deists ‘certainly paid nothing but lip service to any religious belief’. David Berman contends that Anthony Collins, John Toland, and other deists were really atheists. The problem with such conclusions
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is the underlying assumption that having no identifiable religion equates to having no belief in God and no theology. In part this is because traditional views of the Enlightenment, such as the classic characterisation of the era by Peter Gay and others, remain persistent. On the basis of the above definition, however, it is evident that one can hold a conception of God and from that construct a specific theology and yet not practise what modern eyes would recognise as a religion. In this book we will see that deists in England absolutely believed in a particular view of God and this led to a deist theology. This theology, in turn, supported both their political and their natural philosophical writings. While S. J. Barnett is correct in his assertion that there never was a practised deist religion, in that Toland, Tindal, Collins, Morgan, and Chubb or their followers did not meet on Sundays to worship their deist God, it does not mean that these five men did not share a theology, as this book attempts to demonstrate.

When challenges to deism are stripped of their rhetoric, only incompatible notions of God remain. Commencing with Edward Stillingfleet’s A Letter to a Deist in 1677, competing conceptions of God lay at the heart of disputes between deists and their critics, even if this is not always recognised. Stillingfleet, the future Bishop of Worcester, outlined points of agreement between himself and deists concerning God. The divine being was perfect, the creator of all, and worthy of our prayers. Where Stillingfleet parted ways with deists was in his acceptance of the New Testament as coming from God via the Apostles and that it was predicted in the Old Testament. Deists accepted neither prophecy nor the active God who imparted it. Two decades later Matthias Earbery, nonjuror and Jacobite, agreed that deists denied God the ability to intervene in the Creation. By the early eighteenth century, Charles Gildon, himself a reformed deist, claimed that ‘if the true Notion of GOD, and his Attributes were spread, and fix’d, this Bane of Humane Society wou’d Vanish’. Thus correct conceptions of God would apparently halt deism. In the Rehearsal for 12 February 1707 the editor Charles Leslie, a nonjuror minister whose anti-deist work Gildon claimed had converted him from the heresy, commented that deists evaluated God’s power in terms of human reason and in so doing constrained God’s omnipotence. After the deist controversy had peaked in the mid-1740s, writers who looked back upon it concurred with their predecessors. The anonymous author of A Letter to the Deists (1751) told deists that their heresy ‘obviously results from the relation you stand in to God’, which separated them from the rest of religion. John Leland DD, a nonconformist minister in Dublin, who produced a three-volume history of deism, also identified conflicting notions of God as one of deism’s key elements. Finally, when Newton released the second edition of the Principia in 1713 complete with the famous General Scholium as an appendix, the characterisation of God found there was set against the image of God offered by deists.
Introduction

It is not my intention in this book to provide a comprehensive study of deism writ large. Indeed, such a history has yet to be written. My more modest goal is to present a portrait of deism in England by examining the writings, through an often close reading, of five specific deists and to demonstrate the crucial importance of theology to their work. With the focus in this book being on the deists themselves, I will not be engaging with every opponent of deism. To do so would require a separate study. Thus, critics will be employed when their writings help us better understand our five deists and their place in eighteenth-century England. While there has been recent attention paid to English deists in terms of rhetoric, natural religion, and historical argument, no collective study that aims to incorporate all their diverse scholarship has been produced. To do so is one of the aims of this book. I also attempt to remove deists from the sidelines of intellectual debates in early modern England and place them where they belong: squarely in the centre alongside other political and natural philosophical authors. While Justin Champion did this for Toland with respect to politics, he did not address natural philosophy. What is more, Toland is by far the most studied of all deists. Five monographs and numerous articles have been dedicated to his massive corpus of writings. By confining scholarly study of deism solely to the writings of this one man, historians are ignoring other figures whom his contemporaries found just as troublesome. This is especially true when we consider that Toland died in 1722 and yet deism continued to flourish in the work of Collins, Tindal, Chubb, and Morgan for at least another twenty years. Even before Toland’s death his prominence in theological arguments had waned and his critics, such as the future Bishop of London Edmund Gibson, to name only one, were already turning their attention to these other four men. Nonetheless, Toland does figure prominently in this book, especially in the first two chapters. In part this is out of necessity. He simply wrote more – both manuscript and published works – than did the other deists. Toland was, and still is, the face of deism in England. As such, in the following pages he often will be used a touchstone against which to compare the writings and views of the other deists. However, an accurate account of deism cannot be found within the writings of Toland alone.

Chapters 1, 2, 4, and 6 discuss how deists addressed problems of contemporary importance: Jacobites, Whig–Tory divisions, the succession of the crown, the Sacheverell affair, the War of the Spanish Succession, the split of Whigs in 1718, the Bangorian Controversy, and the South Sea Bubble. Each of these chapters opens with a brief account of the era’s political issues as a means of introduction and as a reminder that deists lived within these episodes. Amid these events I consider deists’ theologies and political theories. We see that deists did not exist solely in a radical subculture, nor can their writings be dismissed as mere political ridicule. None of our deists wished
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to overthrow the institutions of government as Israel has claimed. Chapters 3 and 5 demonstrate how these five deists understood natural philosophy on the basis of the theological and political outlook we will build in the surrounding chapters. Deists lived within an age fascinated with Newtonian natural philosophy. As did many others in eighteenth-century England, they attempted to understand what Newton had written. To this end, we focus on the products of public science, books, lectures, and sermons as the yardstick against which to consider deists’ writings on this topic. When considering Newton directly, we will be concerned with the contents of the Opticks, especially the queries, which had a much greater impact on the learned discourse of the age, owing to its English prose composition, than did the more famed Principia. Deists did not differ greatly from their contemporaries in these topics.

Like others of their age, deists interpreted contemporary events within a specific theological outlook, and in this respect they were the same as everyone else existing in England’s pious Enlightenment. They may have been radical in their theology in that it was different than that held by their opponents, but this did not make them revolutionary or wanting to initiate a secular revolution. This book will reveal that the five deists examined within the following chapters endorsed the institutions that characterised the establishment in England: the monarchy, the Church of England, and Newtonian natural philosophy. Far from being the heralds of modernity, they wished to participate in the very institutions that they supposedly sought to destroy.

NOTES


2 Samuel Strutt, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Physical Spring of Human Actions and the Immediate Cause of Thinking (London, 1732), pp. 1–3, 4–8; The Gentleman’s Magazine, 9 (April 1739), 203.


4 CUL MS Ee.vi.43, fols. 6r–12v.


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24 John Byrne, Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism (London: Routledge, 1989); Herrick, The Radical Rhetoric of the English Deists; Champion, The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken. Throughout this book ‘deist’ refers only to English deists and not the more radical French variety. Failure to distinguish between English and French deism is one of the leading causes of confusion and permits unfounded depictions of the people we will be discussing as more radical and godless than the evidence suggests.

Introduction


26 Jacob, The Radical Enlightenment; Redwood, Reason, Ridicule and Religion.
Throughout the 1690s England was a nation still struggling to interpret the turbulent political events of 1688–89 and the resulting Revolutionary Settlement. When James II was deemed by Parliament to have abdicated the crown and William, Prince of Orange, and his wife Mary Stuart, daughter of James, were installed as king and queen, many issues regarding the governance of England remained at best unsettled and at worst divisive. The immediate concern related to what form the new government would take: constitutional or divine right monarchy, Low or High Church. Even more problematic, James did not fade away quietly. He made a last stab to hold his throne in 1690 with the support of the French King Louis XIV, to whose court he had fled. The Battle of Boyne, in late August, was a decisive victory for William and marked the end of James’s best chances to retain the English crown.

Religion, and defining the Church of England, was perhaps an even more pressing issue. James’s steadfast Catholicism had thrown the country into revolution, but the securing of Protestantism under William and Mary did not end the debate. The Act of Toleration (1689) had protected some rights for Dissenters but these were few because the Test and Corporation Acts (1673, 1661), banning them from public office, remained in force. Those Tories who reluctantly had turned their backs on the Stuarts did not flinch from their demands that England enforce the terms of the Coronation Oath Act (1688), especially that portion describing the confession of England as ‘the protestant religion established by law’. Toleration would mean that Dissenters were exempted from the punishments of the Clarendon Code, although the Code would still be in effect. This uneasy peace satisfied few. Dissenters and moderate Latitudinarian Churchmen alike argued that the Church of England ought to include all Protestants and not to be used as a tool of separation and exclusion in society. This stood in strong opposition to High Churchmen, some of whom refused to participate in the new religious arrangement and would
not swear allegiance to William and Mary, claiming that while James lived the oaths given to him could not be abrogated. These nonjurors, though relatively small in number, will appear frequently in this history of deism. Indeed, we will see that the popular view of deism is mostly a characterisation created by them. The fear of High Churchmen that too much religious tolerance posed both political and religious threats to England was seemingly confirmed in 1693 when a young John Toland sailed for England. It was against this backdrop of religious uncertainty that our deists wrote and in their own way attempted to help England chart a new course in politics and theology.

TOLAND ATTRACTS INTEREST IN OXFORD

Before Toland returned from Leiden in August 1693, he had solicited letters of introduction to the philosopher John Locke from Philippus van Limborch, theologian at the Remonstrant seminary in Amsterdam, and Benjamin Furly, a Quaker who conducted a learned salon at his home. These were men with whom Locke had associated during his self-imposed exile (1683–88) after the attempts to exclude James II from the crown had failed. Toland also spent time with them, though perhaps not with the closeness he claimed. Toland had ‘boast[ed] of an intimate friendship contracted with me’, as Limborch remembered in a letter to Locke sent years later; ‘I wonder what moves a man whom I have never seen, and about whom I know nothing, to boast falsely of having had familiar conversations with me.’ Toland also declared a friendship with Jean LeClerc, theologian at the Remonstrant seminary and editor of the journal Bibliothèque universelle et historique. Limborch revealed to Locke that Toland had met LeClerc only twice and that at one of those meetings Toland had been rebuffed in his attempts at conversation. Despite some misgivings, Limborch wrote to Locke in 1693 that if Locke were to meet Toland he would find him ‘not at all a servile Character’. Furly too recommended Toland to Locke and asked if Locke knew ‘some free ingenious English Gentleman that might have occasion for a Tutor in his family’ and in this way secure employment for Toland. Locke did not. Toland then left London for Oxford, where he would spend much time in the Bodleian and surrounding coffee-houses. To many of his contemporaries Toland seemed a promising young scholar, though exhibiting some unorthodox views. However, this promise went unfulfilled because impolite behaviour coloured many of his interactions.

Edmund Gibson, future Bishop of London (1720–48), kept a close eye on Toland in Oxford in early 1694 and sent frequent reports to Arthur Charlett, Master of University College, Oxford, and soon to be chaplain to William III (1697). Persistent accounts of Toland’s irreligious actions troubled Gibson,
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specifically reports of his ‘burning a Common-Prayer-book’. A few weeks later Gibson sent Charlett some biographical details on Toland in which he came across as anti-bishop, if not anti-priest. More curiously perhaps, Toland had reportedly performed ‘Wonders by some Secret arts, and so seduced a number of Young Students’. Gibson stated he would ‘Enquire further into’ this unsubstantiated claim of Toland’s magic and continued his narrative by outlining how as a young man, Toland had travelled from Edinburgh to London and endeared himself to the wealthy benefactor of Dissenters Dr Daniel Williams, who arranged for Toland to study in Leiden to train (unsuccessfully) as a Presbyterian minister. Toland intrigued Gibson so much that he dispatched several persons to collected information and advised Charlett that ‘What you have at present is only’ the result of ‘sudden recollection: I am encouraged to expect Several other particulars from second thoughts and a little enquiry’. What Charlett decided to do with the information and what action might be taken against Toland, Gibson left to Charlett, ‘to make what use of it and in what manner you please’.

Charlett, in turn, described Toland’s conduct in Oxford to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Tenison, in October 1695. As Gibson had hoped, swift action was taken against Toland, whose behaviour had become ‘so publick and notorious here, that the late Vice-Chancellor ordered him to depart this place, wch he accordingly promised to do, and did for some time’, but following a brief absence he returned. During his second stay in Oxford, witnesses described ‘upon Oath, of [Toland’s] Trampling on ye Common prayer book, talking against the Scriptures, commending Commonwealths, justifying the murder of K[ing] C[harles] 1st, [and] railing against Priests in general’. What was worse, Toland claimed friendships with ‘great men’ and ‘pretended to great Intrigues and correspondencies, and by that means abused the names of some very great Men’. This ‘insolent carriage’ left Toland ‘contemptible, both to y’ Scholars and Townsmen’. Moreover, Toland reportedly prophesied that ‘he should be a member of Parliament’. Thus, even before he began a career as polemical author, Toland was well known, though perhaps not in a manner he would have wanted.

Others in and outside Oxford also attempted to trace the origins of Toland, whose presence in that city was the source of much consternation. One correspondent identified only as Mr Anderson wrote to George Ashe, Bishop of Derry, in September 1694. Anderson had it on good authority that Toland was the ‘Bastard sone of Knoughton Tolan’d a priest in the Parish of Devagh [and] Left this County about ten years agoe’ and that he had a light complexion and dark hair and spoke fluent French. Regarding Toland’s religion, Anderson claimed that ‘he was a great Searcher after Religion and that he said he tried all Sorts’. Within days of receiving this letter, Ashe passed the information to the nonjuror Henry Dodwell, whose future writings on the soul
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would cause great controversy. In addition to what he had been told, Ashe related to Dodwell that Toland 'has been in Rome & Leyden & Esteamed a very airy talkative man; I can procure you several other particulars relating to him, if there be occasion'. Dodwell seemed satisfied with this account and Ashe sent him no more letters regarding Toland.

TINDAL’S BELIEF IN GOD

In 1694, while Toland was causing concern and frustration, Mathew Tindal, another Oxford resident, described the conditions he believed necessary for holding any truth. Tindal was possibly born in 1653, or even as late as 1657. His parents were both wealthy, and his father, John Tindal, was a minister. Though we know little of his early life, he entered Oxford in the 1670s and studied with George Hickes, who became a nonjuror. Tindal received a law fellowship to All Souls College in 1678 (which he held until his death in 1733), and earned a BCL in 1679 before proceeding DCL in 1685. In the same year as Tindal received his doctorate, James II sent emissaries to Oxford in an attempt to convert the fellows to Catholicism. Tindal was convinced by the arguments, though critics suspected that his conversion was a matter of convenience and a means to become warden of the college. When Tindal failed in his bid to become Warden of All Souls in 1687, he also lost his Catholic enthusiasm, for he converted to Anglicanism in 1688, taking the sacrament on 15 April 1688, the earliest possible occasion. In addition to his legal responsibilities in Oxford, he had a civil law practice in London. On 7 November 1685 he was admitted one of the advocates of the Arches Court of Canterbury, an appeal court for the Archbishop of Canterbury.

As part of his anti-Trinitarian writings, composed in answer to the work of the Bishop of Gloucester, who had attempted to demonstrate the reasonableness of the Trinity, Tindal argued that one cannot believe anything which is beyond one’s intellect. This condition extended to knowledge of God, about whom we cannot believe more than ‘we can conceive of him’. We are, Tindal noted, able to form an idea of God as a perfect and eternal being. To suggest then, however, that this notion applied simultaneously to three beings was something he viewed as blasphemous. Despite outlining these rules of belief, Tindal revealed that many orthodox theologians ‘thunder it from their Pulpits, that Matters of Faith are above Reason, and that God has a Right to require of us to believe on his Word what we do not apprehend or understand’. Tindal countered that ‘The Ideas’ we have of ‘God’s Eternity, Infinity, Omnipresence, Omniscience, and all that we are required to believe concerning them’, God has ‘made us capable of having a clear and distinct Idea’s of’. This stance was continued in his characterisation of God,
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who is infinitely happy in himself, could have no other motive in creating man, but to make him happy in this Life, as well as that which is to come; and accordingly if mankind would follow those Rules that are prescribed by God in order to their behaviour towards one another, in what happy, blessed, and flourishing State would they be in?16

Thus God did not demand anything for Himself. This view had strong political and religious implications.

Stephen Nye, a Socinian in Oxford, reacted to Tindal’s assertions in 1695. While he supported Tindal’s unitarian leanings, he rejected Tindal’s apparent reliance on human reason because ‘there are some things which will never be explain’d while the World stands’.17 This view confirmed the opinion of Jonas Proast, High Churchman, former chaplain of All Souls, and companion of nonjurors, who claimed to have overheard Tindal once say ‘that there neither is, nor can be, any revealed religion’, implying that reason was all one needed in matters of religion.18 This one piece of supposed heresy, as we will see, is not indicative of Tindal’s view on religion, which he did not wish to eliminate from the human condition.

In addition to the theological tracts of 1694, Tindal wrote two books which outlined his political theory while articulating the duties citizens owed to one another. With An Essay Concerning the Laws of Nations, and the Rights of Soveraigns, Tindal characterised the general laws of nations as the rules ‘observed by Nations in the entercourse with one another’. These rules allowed for the mutual prosperity of nations; they were the spirit of co-operation codified. The laws had their origins in a more basic relationship because the ‘Law of Nations’ and the ‘Law of Nature’ were the same. As Tindal explained, the law of nature ‘is nothing else but that mutual Aid and Assistance, which by reason of their common Necessities one Man owes to another, without the observance of which Mankind could not well subsist’. The welfare of individuals, guarded by their government, brought forth the advancement of nations. To refer to these individuals collectively, Tindal suggested the term ‘Bodies Politick’ and described relations as the ‘Law of Nations’.19

While in the book Tindal discussed political obligations in the abstract, its origins lay in a concern which was very real. Following the Revolution of 1688–89, the nation had an exiled king in James II. The threat of his return remained a constant fear during the reign of William and Mary. It was no idle worry. In the winter of 1691–92 (Ailesbury Plot) and again in 1694 (Lancashire Plot) two schemes to restore James II were discovered and thwarted.20 To loyal Jacobites who refused to accept the legitimacy of another ruler of England while a Stuart monarch lived, James II still held authority. Tindal attempted to undermine this position by explaining that there was no precedent by which ‘a deposed Prince’ could construct a legislative court in the ‘Judication in another King’s Dominion’. Once a ruler had been deposed by the inhabitants of a
nation who acted for the collective good, that ruler no longer wielded any power in his former kingdom. He ‘that loseth his Empire, and can no longer protect People, or administer Justice, dwindles into a Robber or Pirate, if he grants Commission to take the Goods or Ships or any Nation; and they that accept Commission from him, ... cannot be reckon’d as Members of a Civil Society’, Tindal explained. This assessment was particularly timely because in late 1692 James II had arranged for ships to attack English vessels in a failed attempt to undermine the nation’s commerce. Tindal spoke with authority on the subject of maritime law. In addition to his training in common law, and having made a name for himself as a lawyer in several high-profile cases in the early 1690s, he had served the new Protestant government as Deputy Judge Advocate of Their Majesties’ Fleet from 30 May to 8 November 1689. His performance on this and other political duties likely earned him a yearly pension of £200, although contemporaries suggested an alternative reason for payment, which we will consider in chapter 6. Siding with other civil lawyers who argued in favour of prosecuting the crews of these Jacobite ships as pirates, Tindal concluded that any actions taken in support of the former ruler were illegal and contrary to the law of nature.

The second political work Tindal that produced in 1694 continued his arguments in favour of William III and the religious settlement. An Essay Concerning Obedience to the Supreme Powers, and the Duty of Subjects in all Revolutions attempted to persuade people to act for the good and prosperity of the community of which they were members. Collective good was to take priority over personal prejudice. The role of government, like the providence of God, was ‘The Care of other Peoples Safety’. In this governments were to bind the individuals into a kind of commonwealth composed of the ‘Body Politick’, which acts for the best interest of that society. In Tindal’s phrase, ‘Governments will have all the Power which is necessary for the Ends of Government, by the Peoples giving them that Power.’ Those who are governed hold the real power in society; they are active participants in the nation.

Not surprisingly, in his political writings Tindal was indebted to John Locke. Indeed, in early 1697 he would send Locke a copy of An Essay Concerning Obedience to the Supreme Powers along with a letter advising the famed philosopher that ‘I have got more tru[e] and useful knowledge by your writings than all the books I ever read.’ Of particular interest to Tindal, who sought a precedent for supporting William III while shunning James II, was Locke’s position that government by consent of the people was a consequence of the law of nature. To conduct oneself in compliance with this regulation, Locke argued, meant acting in a manner which best preserved the common good. Moreover, Tindal agreed with Locke that lingering support for both James II and passive obedience threatened the stability of England after 1689.
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by the collective will of those who are governed, was, Tindal argued, to be at
war with the monarch and to exist outside the law of nature. Tindal set his position against alternative forms of governance, specifically Tory-promoted passive obedience. It was ‘very evident, That whatever Rights or Liberties men did not part with to their Governors, those they have still retained in themselves; and no person can have a right to their Obedience in those things wherein they have given him no right to command’, he wrote. What was more, passive obedience had only one outcome: the creation of ‘Tyranical Governments’. Subjects might acquiesce their rights only where it improved the public good, and not for the benefit of one particular group (or political party). Once more, Jacobites were Tindal’s target. It was they who wished to install a deposed monarch who threatened to enslave the nation in Catholicism and destroy Protestant freedom. Since the restoration of Charles II in 1660, which had brought with it the Clarendon Code of religious legislation, was, Tindal explained, ‘(as I think no Protestant can doubt it) to the disadvant-
age, and against the good and interest of the Nation, it must be a sin’. As Jacobites acted against the law of nature and had to be fought at every oppor-
tunity, so too did any doctrine that threatened the public good. Timely events like the fear of Jacobite rising and actual Jacobite plots were often the impetus for deists’ writings and presentation of their theologically minded politics.

POLITICS AND MYSTERY IN RELIGION

As Tindal challenged Jacobites and defended the Revolutionary Settlement, Toland too was writing in Oxford. Aside from cultivating a reputation as a braggart, Toland became known around the university as a ‘man of fine parts, great learning and little religion’, who was composing a book ‘to show, that there is no such thing as Mystery in our Religion’. Others too knew of the forthcoming work. Shortly after returning to England Toland had sent some papers to an unknown correspondent, who was asked to pass them to John Freke, lawyer, Whig pamphleteer, and friend of both Locke and the late first Earl of Shaftesbury. Toland, it would seem, was attempting to secure Whig connections, if not employment, by alerting Freke to his talent with the pen. Freke was not impressed with what he read and in late March 1695 brought Toland’s papers to the attention of Locke. After considering the manuscript pages, Locke replied with simple thanks. Freke had expected a more detailed critique and penned another letter in an attempt to draw this out of Locke, who continued to view silence as the best answer concerning Toland. This silence was soon to be replaced by shouts of anger when Toland published the book, which was the cause of much gossip in Oxford.

There is much to consider in Toland’s Christianity not Mysterious, or a Treatise Shewing That There is Nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason, Nor above it
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that no Christian Doctrine can be Properly Call’d A Mystery (1696). Toland first released the work anonymously in late 1695. However, wishing to capitalise on the notoriety generated by the book, which anonymity prevented, he affixed his name on the title page and in advertisements for the second edition, which appeared in June 1696.31 He opened by describing the atmosphere of religious tolerance as he saw it. Such was ‘the deplorable Condition of our Age, that a Man dares not openly and directly own what he thinks of Divine Matters, tho it never so true and beneficial, if it but very slightly differs from what is receiv’d by any party, or that is establish’d by Law’. Notwithstanding the promises of religious peace following 1689, Toland believed that things had not improved in spite of the fact the Toleration Act should have signalled a Protestant victory over the tyranny of Catholicism and ushered in an era of individual rights versus enforced obedience. It was unfortunate, wrote Toland, that official doctrine and party allegiances coloured the religious canvas of the nation and prevented the spirit of the Act from flourishing. Forces of conformity were so restrictive that, he claimed, all Dissenters must ‘keep perpetual Silence’ regarding their beliefs.32 This was nowhere more evident than in the question of mysteries in religion, which, Toland charged, had been created by priests in an attempt to secure their privileged position in society as the sole interpreters of God’s words. In order to protect their status, priests opposed all honest enquiry into religion, branding as atheists all those who attempted to enquire. Toland identified such clerical actions as ‘priestcraft’ and assured his readers that it was this practice that he combated and not religion itself, and he would frequently identify himself as a Protestant Dis- senter.33 Purveyors of priestcraft, Toland explained, were supported by a certain political element which viewed deviation from orthodoxy as dangerous to the welfare of the nation, which was secured only through conformity. In the book Toland hoped to reveal that mysteries had no rightful place in religion and in so doing allow people to think for themselves and become, in Tindal’s phrase, the body politic. Religious and political divisions harmed the country and hindered individual freedom. As he explained, ‘If you be Orthodox to those, you are a Heretick to these. He that sides with a Party is adjudg’d to Hell by the Rest; and if he declares for none, he receives no milder Sentence from all.’34 This atmosphere of conformity had forced Britons to accept mysteries in religion for fear of being an outcast. Forced belief, however, was not true belief.

The God described in Christianity not Mysterious, and indeed the God who underlies Toland’s entire corpus of writings, reveals Himself and His plan in a manner which is knowable to humanity. Such a conception of God was probably a reaction against opinions expressed to the contrary by the Anglican apologist and canon of Christ Church, Oxford, Robert South. Prior to the composition of Christianity not Mysterious, South had preached a sermon entitled...
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‘Christianity Mysterious, and the Wisdom of God in Making it so’, which argued that God had delivered a religion ‘full of mysteries’. For South, God demanded that people must believe things even if they did not understand them. Conversely, Toland claimed that God ‘endu’d us with the power of suspending our judgment about whatever is uncertain, and of never assenting but to clear Perceptions’. What cannot be known with certainty need not be known; it is unimportant. Toland’s God does not trick or lie but is bound by goodness not to deceive. Thus, ‘Whoever reveals anything, that is, whoever tells us something we did not know before, his words must be intelligible, and the Matter possible. This rule holds good, let God or Man be the revealer’. This constraint did not diminish God’s power; it was an acknowledgement of divine righteousness. God may indeed act in a contrary manner, but His love for humanity prevents it.

Regarding the Bible, Toland wrote that the New Testament is thought to contain many things which we cannot know without revelation. Moreover, even if things were revealed, they might exceed the limits of our faculties. Toland replied that the Bible contained nothing ‘but what is fully discovered to us, and what we fully comprehend’. We know God by our reason, and so too do we know His revelation. In cases where the meaning of revelation was obscure, Toland believed it must be dismissed because ‘all matters reveal’d by god or man, must be equally intelligible and possible’. God was immutable and His words self-consistent. This axiom included miracles, which, as Toland explained, must not be contrary to reason, which was a bright light dispelling ‘all Darkness’ and exploding ‘forged Miracles, [and] unreasonable Mysteries’. For Toland, whenever God provided a revelation, it conformed to human understanding.

Toland differentiated between important and unimportant knowledge in religion, politics, and (as we will see) natural philosophy, by borrowing terms from Locke’s Essay Concerning Human Understanding. Specifically, he claimed to have distinguished in the model of ‘an excellent modern Philosopher, the Nominal from the Real Essence of a thing’. The unnamed philosopher was indeed Locke, according to whom real essences made a thing what it was by virtue of its internal structure. Real essences, however, could never be known; neither human senses nor microscopes were powerful enough to penetrate into the microstructure of things and reveal real essences. As Locke had put it, our knowledge comes ‘short of the reality of things’. He hypothesised, and Toland accepted, that ideas, and hence our knowledge, come from sensation and reflection upon it. One’s reason was the mental contemplation of the agreement or disagreement of ideas. All that could be studied therefore were nominal essences, names representing observed properties; concepts used to group things, not necessarily corresponding to the unknown real essences. Toland concurred with Locke that God provided humanity the capacity to know
only nominal essences (necessary knowledge); God did not command the understanding of real essences (needless knowledge). ‘Nothing can be said to be a mystery’, Toland claimed, ‘because we are ignorant of its Real Essence, because, since it is no more knowable in one thing than in the other, and it is never conceiv’d or included in the ideas we have of things’. Thus, all knowledge that God deemed necessary for people to know would be communicated by Him in plain language in one of two divinely authored tomes: the Bible (book of scripture) or the natural world, often referred to as the book of nature. Mysteries were unknowable real essences and therefore needless knowledge.

The same reasoning extended to natural philosophical investigations. Toland explained that ‘I understand nothing better than this Table upon which I am now writing: I conceive it divisible into Parts beyond all imagination; but shall I say it is above my Reason because I cannot count these parts not distinctly perceive their Quantity and Figures?’ He believed that his table was composed of tiny particles of matter in spite of the fact that he had never seen them. ‘The reason’, he clarified, ‘is because knowing nothing of Bodies but their properties, God has wisely provided we should understand no more of these than are useful and necessary for us; which is all our present condition needs.’ Just as he had never seen God, Toland was confident that he knew some divine attributes because ‘As for God, we comprehend nothing better than his attributes. We know not, it’s true, the Nature of that eternal Subject or Essence wherein infinite Goodness, love, knowledge, power and Wisdom coexist; but we are not better acquainted with the real Essence of any of his creatures.’ People knew as much about the structure of tables as they did about God, who ensured that all necessary knowledge of Himself and of nature would be within the intellectual capacity of those who sought it. This picture of God contrasts sharply with that offered by theologians such as South and other High Churchmen, who characterised God as ‘inconceivable in his purposes, and inexpressible in his attributes’ and ‘too high for our speculations, and too great for our descriptions’. Their God was not bound to aid humanity in learned endeavours as Toland and our other deists believed.

THEOLOGICAL ATTACKS ON CHRISTIANITY

Toland’s timing was his own worst enemy. Christianity not Mysterious appeared at the height of the Trinitarian Controversy, in which High Churchmen attempted to move against their Low Church or Latitudinarian counterparts for supposedly being followers of the Socinian heresy. Founded in Poland during the Radical Reformation by Laelius Socinus and his nephew Faustus Socinus, Socianism was a unitarian religion that proposed that nothing in the Bible contradicted reason, though aspects of it might be above reason. What
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is more, the Bible contained no real mysteries; difficult and obscure passages were tests of the reader’s faith, as only a true believer would be able to penetrate the dense text. Socinians also denied the doctrine of predestination, arguing that it made God the author of sin. The heresy established itself in England during the 1640s, quickly becoming a feared spectre among the orthodox. Denials of predestination threatened the Calvinist theology of the English Church and placed limits on the doctrine of God’s arbitrary power in which opponents of Socinianism and deism secured so many of their beliefs. Moreover, the Socinian characterisation of Christ as originally human and not divine denied the doctrine of the Trinity. The problem was that Latitudinarians such as the Bishop of Salisbury, Gilbert Burnet, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Tillotson were accused by High Church theologians such as Francis Atterbury of using excessively liberal interpretations of the Trinity in their sermons and seemed to tread dangerously close to Socinianism. Toland found himself caught up in this wave of High Church sentiment.

Daniel Defoe, Peter Browne, Edward Stillingfleet, and Atterbury himself, among others, believed Toland was guilty of Socinianism, not to mention holding a Low Church attitude. Opponents were not, however, consistent in their use of the term and there were several different meanings of ‘Socinian’ in England. Toland’s critics seemed most concerned with the application of reason to religion and the denial of biblical mysteries as deism’s key Socinian traits. When we consider the words of John Biddle, one of the earliest Socinians in England, we see the similarity between Toland’s and the Socinian position on mysteries:

God, who has all Men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of His Truths, has made his Revelations so intelligible, as to make it plain and easy to all Men, as well to idiots, as to the most subtle Philosophers. Therefore it is, God never uses any Term to teach us his Mysteries, but what we have a clear and distinct idea of.

Critics could also point to Toland’s associations during his time in Oxford as further evidence of his Socinian sympathies. It is likely that around 1694 he had spent some time with Stephen Nye, the most notorious Socinian in Oxford. However, Nye’s criticism of Toland’s later works, and those of Tindal, makes it unlikely that the two were close. What is certain is that in the minds of High Church authors, deists and Latitudinarians were one and the same.

Whigs could see their adversary in the same light. The Bishop of Worcester, Edward Stillingfleet, also coloured Toland a Socinian. He asserted that Toland had demonstrated how Locke’s philosophy led to a denial of belief where one could not form clear ideas. Stillingfleet further argued that Toland and Locke were allies in this endeavour. Toland did agree with Locke that ideas came from sensation and the reflection upon it, and that we cannot know real essences. In the case of substance, it was ‘we know not what’ that caused
our sensations of nominal essences. In denying certain knowledge of substance, Stillingfleet believed that Toland and hence Locke were denying the Trinity. Peter Browne, the future Bishop of Cork and Ross (1710), who first came to notice for his answer to *Christianity not Mysterious*, agreed with Stillingfleet when he noted that we know that God is spirit and not material. If one accepted the outcome of Toland’s work and denied an ability to know substances, then this assertion would not hold true. Alternatively, Stillingfleet retorted that we must be able to form some ideas that do not come from the senses. Locke’s method, Stillingfleet stated, led only to knowledge of appearances, not of reality. The bishop and Locke exchanged several pamphlets on the issue as Locke attempted to distance himself from Toland.48

Toland’s use of Locke would, in later years, bring him into conflict with the Reverend Francis Hare DD, Whig and future Bishop of Chichester (1731–40). Despite Hare’s past actions, which indicated some sympathy for deviation in orthodoxy – namely his attempts to shelter the Arian Samuel Clarke from Convocation in 1714 – he believed that Toland’s writings were dangerous. In 1720 he challenged Toland in the postscript to the fourth edition of his *Church Authority Vindicated* by claiming that ‘Mr. Toland . . . has some resemblance to . . . Mr. Locke, (who . . . is often quoted to support Notions he never dreamed of)’.49 Toland answered the accusation in a letter published in the *Post Man* on 2 February 1720 in which he responded that ‘I have never named Mr. Locke in any Edition of that Book’. Toland also hoped that Locke’s own denials of partnership with him would be sufficient to dispel any thoughts to the contrary.50

The platonist John Norris also stated that Toland was a Socinian. According to Norris, people like Toland either ‘Humanize God, or Deify themselves and their own Rational Abilities’. As a way to cure his errors, Norris suggested that Toland read and reflect upon Robert Boyle’s *Things Above Reason* (1681).51 Though now known mainly for his natural and experimental philosophy, in his own day Boyle was an admired lay theologian. As Stillingfleet wrote to him, ‘Your great Name is deservedly placed, not only for Your deep search into nature, but your successful pains in vindicating the Honour of Religion.’ Boyle’s apologetic reputation continued to increase after his death through his bequeathing money to ‘Preach Eight Sermons in the year for proving the Christian Religion ag’ notorious infidels (viz) Atheists, Theists . . .’, known as the Boyle Lectures.52 Among his many religiously minded books were *Of the High Veneration Man’s Intellect Owes to God* (1685) and *Some Physico-Theological Consideration About the Possibility of the Resurrection* (1675). In these works Boyle repeatedly described human understanding as severely limited and totally unable to comprehend God. Foretelling some of Norris’s arguments against Toland, Boyle claimed, ‘how great an effect and mark of ignorance, as well as presumption, it is, for us Mortals to talk to God’s Nature and the Extent
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of His Knowledge, as of other things we are able to look through, and to Measure’.53 Boyle had composed Things Above Reason to challenge Socinians by demonstrating the many things that are above human reason and must be accepted entirely on faith. Humanity’s inability to understand the entirety of Scripture, and indeed the entirety of nature, Boyle argued, emphasised our absolute dependence on divine revelation. If we cannot understand what God has revealed, the fault lies with us and not with God. Norris agreed with Boyle’s position by claiming that opponents of Christianity placed their intellectual limitation upon God and ‘go about to comprehend and determine what God can, and ought to do’.54

Jean Gailhard, author of The Complete Gentleman (1678), agreed that Toland was Socinian in his thinking and mistaken in his conclusions. Gailhard too emphasised the weakness of human reason. ‘We do not destroy our Reason’, he wrote, ‘when we submit and make it subordinate to Scripture, for humans must depend upon divine reason, or else ‘tis blasphemously to deny there is more of and better Reason in God than in Man’. The limits of human reason, Gailhard proposed, invariably made some thing mysteries and Toland’s conclusions false. ‘Certainly the finite cannot know the infinite’, Gailhard wrote in frustration, ‘but as much, and in such a degree, and the Infinite is pleased to communicate himself . . . and as Man is capable to receive’.55 For Gailhard the question was one of limitations. As a finite being in his thinking and understanding, Toland could not possibly know anything about the infinite mind of God. Edmund Elys, a nonjuror, who had formerly been imprisoned in 1659 under suspicion of being an enemy to the Commonwealth, agreed with Gailhard and attacked Toland’s assumption that we know God’s attributes. Elys alleged that Toland’s views were created in conceit: ‘[A] due Reflexion upon the true IDEA OF GOD in his [Toland’s] own Soul, and in the Soul of all Men, in the Contemplation whereof we may easily discern this Truth, that the several divine Attributes are several Significations or Manifestations of the one Being absolutely Infinite and incomprehensible’.56

Not all writers in deism approved of Gailhard’s approach. The country parson and Whig propagandist William Stephens rebuffed his ‘Flourish of wild Rhetoric’. In Stephens’s opinion, Gailhard had greatly exaggerated the dangers of Socinianism because not ‘one of a hundred . . . knows any thing of Socinus’. He also found the link between Socinianism and deism highly dubious.57 While Stephens was no friend of deism, he and Toland had a relationship. In 1717 he trusted Toland to ensure that his book was published. While there is no record of Stephens publishing any work around this date, we may glean a hint of its contents from the letter of enquiry he sent to Toland. The work was a political one, which addressed the rights of Protestants at the hands of Parliament. Perhaps Toland had, Stephens surmised, waited to print the work until Parliament was ready to deal with the issue. If Toland felt it
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appropriate to deliver the manuscript to the printer, Stephens requested ‘two dozen copies to give to my acquaintances’. That Stephens entrusted Toland with the publication of his work suggests that the two were at least acquaintances, though the extent of their friendship remains speculative. In 1696 Stephens composed his own anti-deist tract, *An Account of the Growth of Deism in England*, in which he linked the growth of deism in England to foreign travel among young men such as Toland. But it was the prevalence of prejudice in religion, which prevented toleration of all Protestants under the banner of an English Church, that allowed deism to gain a foothold in the nation. Rigid definitions of Church and doctrine had created disaffected critics like deists and fuelled radical dissent. Writers who, like Gailhard, would not allow difference of opinion to exist in religion, were a particular target. Stephens submitted that an elimination of prejudice within the Church of England would halt deism. Toland and Tindal would have agreed.

Not all his critics identified Toland as Socinian. Thomas Beverley in *Christianity the Great Mystery* (1696) answered Toland’s suggestion that whenever God reveals anything it must be entirely comprehensible by claiming that ‘Revelation is a Manifestation of God to his Intellectual Creatures from the Secret of his own Purpose, and Deeps of his Council towards them.’ Ironically, Beverley’s admonishments to Toland came during his own explorations (from 1689 to 1700) into the mysteries of prophecy, in which he had repeatedly tried and failed to determine the Second Coming.

Beginning in early November 1697, Toland responded to his opponents. Where God’s demands on humanity were concerned, he remained unrepentant. Any person, he argued, who ‘employs his Reason to the best of his Ability to find out Religious Truth, in order to practise it, does all that God desires’, because God ‘will not command Impossibilities’. This was true because God had provided humanity with reason as the only means to ‘distinguish Truth from Falshood’. Thus the use of reason – and reason without priestly guidance – must lead to truth in religion. Against charges of Socinianism, Toland made specific answers. He could not understand how he was deemed a Socinian because *Christianity not Mysterious* contained an explicit refutation of Socinian Christology. Moreover, he denied the existence of actual Socinians in England. As further proof of his innocence, Toland quoted from *The Agreement of the Unitarians with the Catholick Church*, a work which referred specifically to Stillingfleet’s characterisation of him.

I know not what it was to his Lordship’s purpose to fall upon Mr. Toland’s Book... if he would needs attack the Book, he should have dealt fairly... I dare to affirm Mr. Toland does not know his own Book in the Bishop’s Representation of it... Do we offer this Book against the Trinity of the Realists? Was it written with Intention to serve us? Does it contain any of our Allegations from Reason, against the Trinity... We desire him to answer to the Reason in our own Books against the
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Trinity of the Tritheists. But to these he says not a word, but only falls upon Mr. Toland’s Book; in which, or for which we are not in the least concern’d.63 Toland found some measure of satisfaction in this passage because he included it in two more publications in an attempt to refute charges of Socinianism. While he still denied being one, Toland noted the irony that suspected Socinians ‘have been juster to me than my pretended Orthodox appeasers [sic]’. It was perhaps this treatment that prompted Toland to write a tract advocating toleration towards and fair treatment of Socinians.64 Despite his best efforts, he would be plagued by charges of Socinianism throughout his life.

In Vindicus Liberius (1702), written in response to the Lower House of Convocation, called in February 1701 to deal with the Trinitarian Controversy and proceeding (unsuccessfully) against Christianity not Mysterious, Toland defended his argument that we know as much about God as we do about any other part of the Creation. He repeated that his purpose was merely to show that we knew not the real Essence of anything in the World, let alone of GOD: that Things were only known to us by their Properties, yet that we not had not a distinct View even of all the Properties of any Thing at once: that every Pebble and Spire of Glass being in many of their Properties, and altogether in their Essence, above our Understanding, nothing ought to be peculiarly call’d a Mystery on this Account, since every Thing was so.

Moreover, from the above statement, he concluded that ‘nothing is a Mystery because we know not its Essence, since it appears that it is neither knowable in it self, . . . So I declar’d my self fixt in the Opinion that what infinite Goodness has not bin pleas’d to reveal to us, we are sufficiently capable to discover our selves, or need not understand it all.’65 Toland maintained that, everything being equally mysterious, we have the same level of knowledge concerning God as we have of the Creation. This was not a defect in human reason; rather, it was what God intended. People must recognise that those things that God wishes to be known (nominal essences) will be known and that some things will remain unknowable (real essences). What is more, things that seem above human reason are neither important nor necessary for this life or for a proper Christian existence.

UNFULFILLED EXPECTATIONS OF CHRISTIANITY NOT MYSTERIOUS

Toland returned to his native Ireland in early March 1697 eager to capitalise on the fame (or infamy) which Christianity not Mysterious had brought him. His aim was to become secretary to John Methuen, the new Whig Lord Chancellor.66 Not waiting to be offered a job from Methuen, Toland boasted
of his expected position. He chose a volatile time in which to insert himself into the midst of Anglo-Irish politics. In 1697 the Irish Parliament would ratify the Treaty of Limerick, which had ended William III’s campaigns in the nation. What is more, cheaper woollen exports, which competed with those from England, were soon to cause political tensions as the English Parliament raised the spectre of punitive duties. A month after Toland’s arrival, William Simpson, a Baron of the Exchequer, advised him that

Mr. Methuen as well as all your other Friends agree in censuring your Conduct. Since you come to Dublin. They say you have acted a part very different from what was given you to be & that it was no way fit for a private man who [has] no public employment, . . . to pretend to any at present, nor to own any hopes or Expectation of any.

Toland’s claims of political employment, Simpson further scolded him, drew ‘Censure upon your self’, but more importantly cast suspicion upon all Whigs. In this case discretion would be the better part of valour. According to Simpson, several people had complained directly to Methuen regarding Toland.67 An anonymous letter sent in June 1697 also warned Toland that his actions bore on both him and those with whom he wished to become associated. His boastful behaviour and unfounded claims of political favour ensured that Methuen provided him with nothing.68

In 1697, the Dublin philosopher and Member of the Irish Parliament William Molyneux advised Locke that Toland had been in that city for a short while. However, Molyneux told Locke that ‘all here are mightily at a Losse in Guessing what might be the Occasion of Mr. T[oland] coming at this time into Ireland. He is know[n] to be of no fortune or [employment]. . .’. While Methuen, Simpson, and others were dismayed by Toland’s public actions, they may have been partially supporting him. Their letters allude to some debt repayment on Toland’s behalf. Molyneux’s comments, however, demonstrate that this was kept tightly under wraps. Soon after dispatching his initial letter, Molyneux enjoyed a visit from Toland, who spoke at great length of an intimate friendship with Locke.69

Locke replied with thanks for Molyneux’s account and the news of Toland’s goodwill towards him. There was reason for caution, however. Toland, Locke feared, had a ‘great value of himself’, which the philosopher hoped did not prevent Toland’s scholarship from becoming useful. After receiving this assessment and spending more time with Toland, Molyneux concurred with Locke. He did not think, he reported to Locke, that Toland’s ‘management since he came this Citty has been so prudent; He has raised against the Clamours of all Partys; and this not so much by his Difference of Opinions, as by his Unreasonable Way of Discouraging, propagating, and Maintaining it.’ He complained further that ‘Coffee-house and Publick Tables are not proper
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Places for serious Discourse relating to the Most Important Truths’. Moreover, Toland’s actions had shown the tendency about which Locke warned, which ‘disgusts many that many otherwise have a due Value for his Parts and Learning’.70 Despite Molyneux’s request that Locke correct Toland’s impudent behaviour in Dublin, the aged philosopher refused and opined that Toland would ignore ‘my friendly admonishments’. Moreover, if Molyneux believed that he owed some kindness to Toland because of a perceived obligation to Locke, he was mistaken. ‘For, if I did recommend him’, Locke told Molyneux, ‘you will find it was only as a man of parts and learning for his age...therefore, whatsoever you shall, or shall not do for him, I shall no way interest my self in.’71 Thus Locke washed his hands of Toland and urged his compatriot to do the same.

The Irish authorities were also keenly interested in Toland. Rumours concerning the contents of his book raised the suspicions of the Committee of Religion, and an investigation soon followed. Toland recounted the events in a later publication. The title alone of Christianity not Mysterious was enough in many cases, he argued, to convict him of heresy. He was surprised at this treatment because, as he repeated, the Revolution of 1688–89 had guaranteed the freedom to enquire into religion. Such arguments did not halt the investigation. On 14 August 1697 the book was ‘brought before them’. After deliberating for three weeks, the committee ruled that it contained ‘Several Heretical Doctrines contrary to the Christian Religion and the establish’d Church of Ireland, [and will] be publickly burnt by the hands of the Common Hangman’. This sentence was carried out on 11 September at ‘the Parliament-House Gate, and also in the open Street before the Town-house’. Moreover, it was ruled that Toland himself should be taken into custody and prosecuted. Toland noted that he went quickly to England.72 On 14 September politicians in England were alerted to his flight from Ireland. The Irish peer Sir Richard Coxe outlined the events in a letter sent to the Whig MP Robert Harley, the man with whom Toland would have much contact, and advised him that ‘Toland made his escape to England, where he had best stay’.73 While Toland would travel much during his remaining days, he never returned to the land of his birth.

Francis Atterbury and the Political Control of Religion

Defenders of a strong English Church were greatly troubled by the implications of Toland’s and Tindal’s description of government and religion. One of these authors was Francis Atterbury, High Church Tory, Jacobite, future Bishop of Rochester, and mastermind behind the Atterbury Plot to return the Stuart monarchy (1720–22). In 1697 he argued that at no time since the beginning of Christianity itself had there been greater need for Convocation,
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The ecclesiastical court of England. The reason was the perceived growth of heresy in the nation, especially the denial of mysteries in religion. Toland’s *Christianity not Mysterious* revealed the need for corrective action in religion because it embodied all the heresies about which Atterbury worried. Just as those in Oxford found Toland’s actions unacceptable, so too did Atterbury. Irreligious words were bad enough to bring discord to England, but irreligious behaviour required immediate action.

For too long, Atterbury suggested, heresies had existed under the mistaken cover of toleration, which succeeded only in diluting the Church of England. Convocation, meeting at regular intervals, would halt the foreboding spread of unbelief by acting as a ‘great fence against these Mischeifs’. What was more, legislative elimination of deism would save the souls of the laity and restore belief in revelation which Atterbury saw to be in decline. The Revolution of 1688–89 had, Atterbury advised readers, brought a mistaken notion of the role of the king in matters of religion. There were some who were ‘pleas’d in all Companies to admire and celebrate a Prince of no Religion, as the best of Governours’. This was especially critical because the Church of England and its religion took priority over that of the nation’s rulers. While monarchs came and went, the religion of England must remain uncorrupted. Atterbury noted further that the Church of England contained the men of best quality even if a heretical sect might boast larger numbers. Therefore, William III must call Convocation as often as Parliament, to defend the church from its enemies.

Despite Atterbury’s best hopes, Convocation failed when it attempted to bring charges against Toland in 1701. Edmund Gibson related the events in another letter to Dr Charlett. On 9 April the Lower House had asked the bishops in the Upper House to consider their request to censure Toland for composing *Christianity not Mysterious*. A disappointed Gibson, mimicking the mood of Atterbury and the Lower House in which he sat, related the response to the query. ‘As to Mr. Toland’s Book’, the bishops answered ‘that they had consulted Learned Council about ye power of Convocation to censure Books in general and that in particulars, without y’ King’s Licence first obtain’d’. Since the expiration of the Licensing Act in 1695, authors, printers, and booksellers no longer needed permission to sell books. The Upper House, more specifically the Whig Latitudinarian bishops, concluded that no legal precedent existed to censure Toland or his book. The perceived association between Whigs and deists would be long-lasting.

**THE POWER OF MAGISTRATES AND FREEDOM OF THE PRESS**

In the same year as Atterbury wrote his defence of religious unity enforced by governmental law, Tindal composed *An Essay Concerning the Power of*
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Magistrates, and the Rights of Mankind, in Matters of Religion. This likely only served to confirm Atterbury’s fear. Tindal submitted that ‘Government is from the People, who had a Right to invest the Magistrate with a Power in those Matters of Religion which have an Influence on Humane Societies, but not in others that are meerly Religious, or have no such Influence.’ Members of a nation must be free to choose the form of worship which seems best to them and their conscience because ‘Compulsion is directly contrary to the Honour of God’. Since the welfare of society is built upon the welfare of its individuals, no one person may impose views on another, be they religious or political. The only true law of nations was the protection of individual happiness.

Only God was a legitimate dispenser of laws. This was the God whom Tindal had described in his past works, happy in Himself and wishing only to impart this happiness to humanity. What was more, God did not give rulers the right to ‘interpret for others his Law, or to impose on them in what sense they must understand it’. Like Toland, Tindal submitted that reason was the only yardstick with which to judge the merits of any particular belief or position. To do otherwise and blindly submit to authority, be it political or ecclesiastical, ‘highly offends God’. This ran directly counter to Atterbury’s High Church Tory sensibilities.

On the basis of the above conditions of natural law and the providence of God, Tindal concluded that no Dissenter should be forced to conform occasionally to the Church of England by passing a Sacramental Test in order to maintain a political office. He explained that if Dissenters held ‘no Opinions destructive to the Government, disown all Foreign Power, acknowledge the King to be Rightful and Lawful, and contribute equally to the support of the Government’ then a government had no right to ‘deprive them of the Privileges of their Country’ because ‘their Consciences will not permit them to receive the Sacrament after the manner of the Established Church’. So long as Dissenters, including our deists, observed the laws of the nation and acted in the best interest of their fellow countrymen, it did not matter what their hearts held true regarding religion. He also reminded readers that in the eyes of Parliament, Dissenting churches were legal and ought to have the same rights as the Church of England. To restrict or regulate one’s relationship with God, Tindal stated, was to act tyrannically. Just as God does not impose His will on the Creation, so too must rulers or governments not impose beliefs on political subjects.

During the late 1690s Toland composed many defences of his Christianity not Mysterious. He held fast to his belief that reason was the only guide in intellectual matters, including those of religion. People come to a religion by use of their reason, which compares various ideas about it gained by reading. Therefore Toland noted that absolute freedom of the press was the only way to allow differing opinions about religion to circulate. In the model offered...
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by theologians such as Atterbury, such variety of religious thought would be halted by legislation. As an alternative, Toland submitted that it was ‘wholly owing to Printing, that Knowledge is become, not only much more diffusive, but that a great deal of more useful Knowledge has been discovered in a short time since that Invention, than in many Ages before’. A free press, Toland continued, ‘depends on this single Question, Whether we ought to be free, or Slaves in our Understandings’.

Toland continued that people must realise that God desired them to use reason to determine truth in religion. Those who opposed an unrestricted press, he believed, erroneously concluded that it encouraged ‘Atheism, Profaneness, and Immorality, as well as Sedition and Treason’. However, Toland dismissed these labels as the accusations of priests who wished to maintain their illegitimate hold on religion. In contrast, Toland claimed that printing was ‘design’d by Providence to free Men from that Tyranny of the Clergy they then groan’d under’. Freedom of the press also improved knowledge in natural philosophy. For example, ‘an excellent Discovery in Nature may be hindred from being publish’d, on pretence that ’tis inconsistent with Religion’. Such a case was found in the example of Galileo and the Earth’s motion, a favourite episode recounted by our five deists.

Proposals for complete liberty of publishing proved worrisome for critics of deism. In late 1728 William Wake, then Archbishop of Canterbury, in his only recorded criticism of deism, commented to Jean-Alphonse Turrettini, professor at the academy in Geneva, on the most efficient way to halt the heresy. He suggested that the cause of deism’s apparent foothold in England was the manner of composition employed by deists. Their ‘way of writing is exceedingly pleasing to the younger sort of Atheists, who have neither piety, nor judgement to restrain them’. Books therefore lay at the root of the controversy. More exactly, it was books seemingly written to inflame prejudices rather than to persuade with sound arguments. The solution was obvious, and Wake concluded that polemical replies were not a proper response. More effective would be action taken against authors. No doubt Wake had in mind the fate suffered in Ireland by Toland’s *Christianity not Mysterious*.

**Toland on Parliaments and Standing Armies**

In July 1698 Parliament was dissolved in accordance with the Triennial Act (1694). During the ensuing election, and prior to the resumption of Parliament in December of the same year, Toland composed a pamphlet urging voters to choose ‘fit and proper’ representatives. Chief among his worries was the danger of re-electing ‘Members that are in Places’. The election of 1698 came on the heels of the Treaty of Ryswick, which ended the Nine Years War (1689–97), and the recognition of William III as the rightful King of England.
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by Louis XIV, which temporarily eased worries over Jacobites. Questions of financing the war had dominated sessions of Parliament and allowed those who voted to support William’s war effort to hold favour with the monarch. Among these politicians were the Whig MPs of the so-called Junto – John Somers, Edward Russell, Thomas Wharton, and Charles Montagu – who controlled the purse strings of the nation by dominating the Commons and the Lords. As J. H. Plumb has argued, these Whigs left behind their former collective experience of the Exclusion Crisis and replaced Lockean-style republican theories of governance with methods to consolidate their hold on power. Opposed to the Junto Whigs was a coalition led by Robert Harley, himself a Whig (now part of the ‘Old Whigs’ and soon to be Tory), who wished to limit the discretionary power of government and make it accountable to taxpayers. Joined in this cause of opposition were Tories and some radical Whigs who hung true to the republican political philosophies of their predecessors including Locke, James Harrington, and Algernon Sidney. Thus, when Toland composed *The Dangers of Mercenary Parliaments* (1698), he did so to challenge the Junto Whigs while assisting Harley, who was undoubtedly supporting him under the table.85

Toland proposed that restoring place-men (MPs who held crown offices or ‘places’) to the House of Commons would undermine the original intent of the institution. Parliament, he wrote, had been historically ‘the best Security imaginable to his Majesty’s Honour and Royal Dignities, and the Subjects Liberties, Estates, and Lives. This being the nature and true design of a Parliament, let us now see whether a House of Commons, full of Officers and Court-Pensioners, will answer those noble and laudable Ends’. Members of Parliament were to be faithful to the interests of those who elected them, not to the crown, nor their party leaders. Toland asked whether a House of Commons filled with place-men could ever vote freely. Independence of elected officials was the only way to defend the liberty of the English people.

As proof of the dangers involved in a Commons filled with place-men, Toland turned to the nation’s history. First, he cited the example of King Charles II, who, with Parliamentary support, tied England to French interests in the Third Anglo-Dutch War (1672–74) against Continental Protestants. ‘By this means the Honour of England was prostituted’, Toland asserted, ‘and our Natural and Naval Strength betray’d with which, like Samson, we should easily have broken all the Cords that Europe, or the whole World could have made to bind and enslave us, had not this Parliament made a Sacrifice of all to the Charms of a French Dalilah.’ Why did this happen? Toland argued that it was the ‘slavish Doctrine of Passive Obedience and Nonresistance’, which superseded the reason and the consciences of men who knew better than to support a popish king in a popish cause. Men must be free to vote and act in the best interest of Protestant England.86
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In the following year (1699) Toland contributed to the standing army controversy with *The Militia Reform’d: or, an Easy Scheme of Furnishing England with a Constant Land-Force, capable of prevent or to subdue any Foreign Power*. William III’s desire for halting French ambitions from the Continent had turned England into a military nation with all the necessities this entailed. While the need for an army during the Nine Years War was obvious, the usefulness of maintaining it in the post-1698 era raised many concerns. Further complications arose from the Declaration of Rights, to which William agreed in 1689. By the terms of the document, an English monarch could not raise a standing army without Parliamentary approval. The Whig Junto stood shoulder to shoulder with William, who believed that any decrease in a peacetime army would encourage French aggression. The opposition of financially conservative MPs was again led by Harley, who argued that standing armies raised the power of the king at the expense of Parliament and threatened the liberty of the people, who would be forced to live alongside soldiers on active duty. Following Harley’s lead, Parliament reduced the army to 10,000 in 1697 and then to 7,000 in 1698. And in 1699 William’s own Dutch Guard was sent home. Opponents suggested that for an island nation, the Royal Navy and a militia of Englishmen, rather than foreigners, was a more than sufficient safeguard. This too was the line adopted by Toland.

Toland entered this latest political debate by noting the advantages of living in England, where a man might ‘speak as freely as he thinks’. Within this context, he felt duty-bound to publish his thoughts regarding a standing army. In spite of this promise of total freedom, the political scene in England was perpetually polarised. As he had commented in *Christianity not Mysterious*, party divisions harmed the nation: ‘he’s a Whig whom you love, and he that you hate’s a Tory; and so on the contrary, as you happen to be engag’d in either Party’. He countered that true Britons ‘can be of no Faction, nor consequently for excluding any from sharing the Blessings of that Liberty they are willing to support’. It was in this guise that Toland composed his political works generally and his assessment of standing armies specifically. He agreed with Harley that a properly maintained fleet provided much of the nation’s security. Nevertheless, English ambitions necessitated a more complicated system of defence. Participation in international relations required a kind of standing army. Toland advocated a model based on his reading of Cicero’s outline of the Roman militia: a body composed of citizen landowners. With this scheme he hoped to empower the English people in their defence of Protestant sensibilities against the aggressive French and their Catholicism. The literary support for Harley’s position earned Toland his further, but still covert, patronage.

In late March 1700 readers of the *Post Man* were alerted to a forthcoming publication by Toland which again concerned the political climate:
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OCEANA of James Harrington and his other works, some whereof are now first published from his own Manuscripts’, edited by Toland. The finished book was personally expensive for Toland, who paid £30 to have it published. This was hardly a trifling sum, if £1 in 1700 is worth roughly £120 today. Toland covered this amount through the sale of the publication rights from his other political works. For example, the bookseller Bernard Lintott paid him £20 for the right to print The Art of Governing by Parties, £10.15.0 for Anglia Libera, and £5.5.0 for Vindicus Liberius; all of these appeared in 1701 or early 1702. Despite the cost of the Harrington edition, Toland hoped to use the book to advance his political career by dedicating it to London’s government. He was willing to mortgage his present for potential future political gain. James Harrington had come to prominence in 1656, during Oliver Cromwell’s rule, with a depiction of the ideal commonwealth of Oceana in the book of the same name. The intent of the work was to demonstrate that in a true republic – where the power is held by the people or their elected representatives – military power belongs to the citizens. Harrington argued that a militia of citizens created, in the phrase of J. G. A. Pocock, a ‘commonwealth of participatory virtue’ in the nation. This ideal had found a home in Toland’s arguments for a standing militia. Clearly articulating support for views held by Harley, who was in a position to enact them, Toland advanced his desire for the commonwealth described by Harrington.

Toland’s dedication to ‘The Lord Mayor, Aldermen, Sherifs, and Common Council of London’ advised the dedicatees that ‘every Society is in a languishing or flourishing condition, answerable to the particular Constitution of its Government’. The happiness of any society, in this case of Londoners, was a direct reflection of the goodness of the laws which governed them. That the inhabitants of this great city expressed satisfaction in their present condition, Toland asserted, was proof of the righteousness of London’s government. The key to all this was the propagation of liberty, which was ‘the true Spring of [London’s] prodigious Trade and Commerce’. Total freedom, like the kind advocated in his other works, led to economic prosperity. Thus any philosopher who promotes such a stance must promote the good of the nation. Here Toland attempted to advance his own usefulness to the aldermen and mayor. He praised the climate of religious freedom in London. Toleration in the city allowed people to follow their reason in religion and worship God as they thought fit. By not enforcing conformity, Toland believed that London encouraged its citizens to focus their attentions on wealth and commerce, rather than issues of doctrine. Religious freedom, such as that which Toland advocated in his political works, had financial benefits.

At least one alderman was impressed with Toland. Sir Robert Clayton, Director of the Bank of England and former Mayor of London, entered a motion in May 1700 to reward him for the kindness he had shown to the ‘Mayor &
Alderman in dedicating Harrington’s Works to them’. Toland had corresponded previously with Clayton over the death of Clayton’s nephew, whom he had known during his days in Oxford. Another alderman retorted that similar motions in the past had come to nought because ‘the City was poor, and had no money for such uses’. Furthermore, it was asked why Toland, a man who ‘had printed a very bad book’, should be rewarded when other authors, who had written ‘a good sermon’, received nothing. The sticking point seemed to be Christianity not Mysterious, which continued to plague Toland’s efforts at overt political reward. The alderman did, however, note that Clayton himself ‘had enough of his own, and he was willing to join in recommending Mr T case to Sir R. own generosity’. Not surprisingly, ‘the Matter was dropped’. Toland would now have to seek other avenues of advancing his desires for a political career, which he hoped Christianity not Mysterious would spark. However, Tindal’s fellowship and pension ensured that he was now less dependent on the sale of his works or the generosity of patrons to continue his writings on politics and theology.

CONCLUSION

The arrival and subsequent coronation of William III were a cause for both great optimism and trepidation in the realms of English religion and politics. John Toland’s actions and publications reflect his belief that the Revolutionary Settlement of 1689 would remove the veil of mystery from the Church of England and usher in an era where politics would be freed from party sentiment. He hoped that this environment might provide him a chance to participate in the nation’s governance. Political issues were also high on the agenda of Matthew Tindal, who wrote strong defences of the new king and harshly against the Jacobites and High Church Tories, whom he saw as impediments to the advancement of England under William. Both Tindal and Toland anchored their interpretations of 1689 with similar conceptions of God and theological beliefs. The non-mysterious action of God ought to serve as model for the government of England. Conservative such as Francis Atterbury, Robert South, and Edmund Gibson feared the outcome of 1689 and pointed to the writings of Toland and Tindal as evidence of the danger posed by permitting too much toleration in matters of religion.

There were concerns of greater national interest when Toland attempted to gain the favour of London’s government in 1700. Princess Anne, daughter of James II and successor to the English throne, buried her last child in July of that same year. That Anne suffered another loss was not surprising, but the premature passing of her only living offspring set questions of succession into the foreground of political discussions. While William now had to determine the line of succession which would follow the death of Anne, he
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also was worried about the health of another monarch: Carlos II of Spain. Carlos was childless and had willed his kingdom to the Duke of Anjou, grandson of Louis XIV. War with France over their ambitions in Spain seemed certain when Carlos died on 21 October. Once again, deists would insert themselves into these impending political events and use theology as the basis for their arguments.

NOTES


7 Bod. Ballard MS 5, fol. 27, Edmund Gibson to Dr. Charlett, 9 April 1694.

8 Bod. Rawlinson MS D. 923, fol. 314r, Gibson to Charlett, n.d.

9 Bod. Ballard MS 5, fol. 47r, Gibson to Charlett, 13 June 1694. See also fol. 48r.


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24 Tindal to Locke, 10 January 1697, in *Correspondence of John Locke*, 5: 749.


26 Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, bk 2: 343.


29 A.A. to John Toland, 4 May 1694; For Mr. Toland, 30 May 1694; in *A Collection of Several Pieces of John Toland*, 2 vols. (1729; facsimile reprint, New York, 1977), 1: 295, 312.

30 John Toland to ***, January 1694, in *Several Pieces of John Toland*, 2: 204; John Freke to Locke, 29 March 1695; Locke to Freke, 2 April 1695; in *Correspondence of John Locke*, 5: 318, 324.

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32 John Toland, Christianity not Mysterious, or a Treatise Shewing That There is Nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason, Nor above it that no Christian Doctrine can be Properly Call’d A Mystery (London, 1696), p. iv.


34 Toland, Christianity not Mysterious, p. 2.


36 Toland, Christianity not Mysterious, pp. 20, 33, 43.

37 Toland, Christianity not Mysterious, p. 28; H. F. Nicholl, ‘John Toland: Religion without Mystery’, Hermathena, 100 (1965), 64.

38 Toland, Christianity not Mysterious, pp. 41, 130, 132, 150, 151; Toland, A Defence of Mr. Toland, pp. 4–5.

39 Toland, Christianity not Mysterious, p. 84. By 1696 there were three editions of the Essay; references are to the first edition, giving page number followed by book, chapter, and section, numbers.


41 Toland, Christianity not Mysterious, p. 85.

42 Toland, Christianity not Mysterious, pp. 76, 88.

43 South, ‘Christianity Mysterious’, in South, Sermons Preached on Several Occasions, p. 382.


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46 John Biddle, An impartial Account of the Word Mystery, as it is Taken in the Scripture in The Faith of One God, Who is Only the Father; and of One Mediator between God and Men, Who is only the Man Christ Jesus (London, 1691), p. 23. On the similarity of Toland and Socinians see Sullivan, John Toland and the Deist Controversy, pp. 274–6.

47 Sullivan, John Toland and the Deist Controversy, pp. 106–7; Champion, Republican Learning, pp. 204–7.


50 The Post Man, 30 January to 2 February 1720. See also BL Add. 4465, fol. 57r–8r. Hare replied in the Daily Courant (5 February 1720) but did not alter his position.


53 Robert Boyle, Of the High Veneration Man’s Intellect Owes to God; Peculiarly for His Wisdom and Power (London, 1685), p. 112.

54 Norris, An Account of Reason and Faith, p. 9.

55 Jean Gaillhard, The Blasphemous Socinian Heresie Disproved and Confuted with Animadversions upon a Late Book Call’d Christianity not Mysterious (London, 1697), pp. 316, 323; Champion, Republican Learning, pp. 71–2.


58 BL Add. 4465, fol. 12, William Stephens, Archdeacon of Surrey to Toland, 27 May 1717.


60 Thomas Beverley, Christianity the Great Mystery: In Answer to a late Treatise, Christianity not Mysterious (London, 1696), p. 28. See Thomas Beverley, The Prophetic History of the Reformation; or the Reformation to be Reformed in that Great Re-Reformation: That is to be 1697 (London, 1689); Thomas Beverley, A Most Humble Representation in a Further Review (London, 1698).
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62 John Toland, An Apology for Mr. Toland, In a Letter from Himself to a Member of the House of Commons in Ireland; written the day before his Book was resolv’d to be burnt by the Committee of Religion (London, 1697), pp. 26, 41.

63 Toland, An Apology for Mr. Toland, pp. 42–3.


65 Toland, Vindicus Liberius, p. xix.


67 BL Add. 4292, fols. 27r–v, William Simpson to John Toland, 20 April 1697.


69 Molyneux to Locke, 6 April 1697; Molyneux to Locke, 27 May 1697; in Correspondence of John Locke, 6: 83, 133.

70 Locke to Molyneux, 3 May 1697; Molyneux to Locke, 27 May 1697; in Correspondence of John Locke, 6: 105–6, 132, 133.

71 Locke to Molyneux, 15 June 1696, in Correspondence of John Locke, 6: 143, 144.

72 Toland, An Apology for Mr. Toland, pp. 14, 22, 24.


75 Atterbury, A Letter to a Convocation-Man, pp. 5, 7, 22, 23, 26, 33.


78 Tindal, Power of Magistrates, p. 18.


80 Tindal, Power of Magistrates, pp. 168, 170, 171.

81 Toland, A Letter to a Member of Parliament, pp. 4, 1, 12.

82 Toland, A Letter to a Member of Parliament, pp. 5, 18, 22, 30.
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86 Toland, Mercenary Parliaments, pp. 1, 2–3, 6.


89 John Toland, The Militia Reform’d: or, an Easy Scheme of Furnishing England with a Constant Land-Force, capable of prevent or to subdue any Foreign Power; and to maintain perpetual Quiet at Home, without endangering the Public Liberty, 2nd ed. (London, 1699), pp. 4, 8, 9, 19; Daniel, John Toland, p. 130; Evans, Pantheisticon, p. 47.


92 Toland, The Oceana, pp. i, ii, iii–iv.

93 Champion, Republican Learning, pp. 99–100; Daniel, John Toland, p. 213; Evans, Pantheisticon, p. 47.

94 Bod. Ballard MS 4, fol. 54, Thomas Tanner to Dr Charlett, 6 May 1700.
Although William III had been seen as a providential gift from God to secure Protestantism in England upon his arrival in 1688, he was never a greatly loved monarch. His death in 1702, tragic at the age of fifty-one though it was, did not stir the nation into a collective outpouring of grief. William’s final years had been marked by anticipating war with France – over the succession in Spain – and determining a method to finance it. As per the Act of Settlement (1701) Queen Anne, daughter of James II, came to the throne after a lifetime as a princess who harboured no expectation of the crown. Events had propelled her to a position which had seemed entirely out of reach. Her marriage to Prince George of Denmark, although resulting in many pregnancies, failed to produce a surviving heir. Thus the question of English succession had occupied William’s last months and would be a constant worry for many during Anne’s reign. It was this uncertainty, during the rage of party characteristic of the period, which provided John Toland with his best opportunity for political advancement. Our other deists too commented on and attempted to find a place within the fast-moving events of the day through their political writings.

**POLITICAL PARTIES AND SUCCESSION OF THE ENGLISH CROWN**

February 1701 saw yet another publication from Toland. The Art of Governing by Parties took up themes which had permeated his previous works, specifically the division in the political landscape caused by Whig and Tory allegiances. Such a perpetual separation of persons was, Toland asserted, the first step towards the establishment of a tyrannical government in England. He noted that William III had attempted to create a kingdom of political cohesion, with one party not promoted at the expense of the other, but that, nevertheless, a
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A fractured electorate had emerged. This divisiveness ran counter to the true duties of the English subject, whom Toland characterised as always ready to assist the nation with money or arms. The combined efforts of citizens working towards the betterment of the nation had existed, Toland believed, until the later years of the Stuart monarchy, specifically the reign of Charles II, when party politics fully entrenched themselves in England. Toland further suggested that political parties were based upon religious exclusivity. However, this arrangement contradicted the natural constitution of people who ‘desire a Liberty of Worshipping in a Way which they believe to be the most acceptable to the Deity’. Consequently, to overcome the nature of humanity, each political party depicted itself as the guardian of the true religion, the one most pleasing to God.3

When emphasising stereotypical differences between parties and Dissenters did not have the desired outcome for High Church politicians of creating fear and intolerance in the nation, Toland believed that they then explicitly linked any theological belief other than High Anglican to subversive political ideologies, specifically commonwealthism. Thus all those who deviated, even slightly, from the Church of England in their worship of God were made into commonwealthmen, with all the implied negative connotations which went with the characterisation: they were seen as regicides and limiters of monarchical power. Despite the irony that Parliament existed to secure English rights, Toland noted that in this body, one finds the same ‘political Factions’ which divide the nation. To remedy the situation where sitting ministers were susceptible to coercion from the other members of their party, Toland proposed annual Parliaments. With such a situation there would be no incentive to act in party interests, rather than those of their constituents, because every year MPs would have to return to the electorate and account for their votes in the Commons. He ended the book with a call to abolish ‘those fatal Distinctions of Whig and Tory’ and to tolerate ‘one another in Religion, where we cannot agree’.4 This was the ideal condition in which to live and be governed. While rhetorically passionate, Toland associated with Whigs and would call himself a Whig, even though not all Whigs were pleased to have Toland as one of their own; thus his rants against parties should be read as what they were: attacks on Tories and High Churchmen.

Later the same year, in the third week of June, Toland published a book which would change his life and redirect the focus of his political ambitions.5 In *Anglia Libera; or the Limitation and Succession of the Crown of England Explain’d and Asserted*, Toland articulated his support for the Act of Settlement and for the House of Hanover as the heirs to the English crown. He began by once more defining the ideal of society in which all persons abided by the ‘Rules and Laws, which are the Measure and Standard of every Man’s Actions’. Without this arrangement, rulers would have no checks on their actions because they...
could ‘abolish tomorrow what has bin solemnly establisht to day’. There could be no rules of behaviour in a nation where the monarch could not only abolish his own laws, but also do away with the example provided by God, who always acted for the betterment of humanity. Conversely, predictable government, acting in accordance with the common good, in the model of God, was the best way to ensure the nation’s health.

Toland then described the events through which England had ceased to be the free nation he advocated and had drifted dangerously close to the alternative he feared, and he placed the blame at the feet of James II, who had ‘forfeited his Right to the regal Government of these Nations by a notorious Neglect of his Declaration when he ascended the Throne’. Chief among James II’s crimes had been the imposition of Catholicism, and in this, he had not acted in the best interest of those whom he governed and thus had voided his claim to the throne. To prevent a repeat of this unfortunate episode in England’s past, Toland praised the Act of Succession, which would prevent any possible return of ‘Roman Idolatry’ by excluding Catholics from wearing the English crown. Toland further wrote that those who opposed the succession were agents of the Pope even if they did not recognise themselves as such. The Act was the logical continuation of the Revolution of 1688–89, in which William and Mary had brought peace to England by securing Protestantism, and this would be continued by the Hanoverians. Toland concluded by asking that the ‘Names of the Princess Sophia and her Issue be inserted in our public Prayers, with the rest of the Royal Family’. Passing the governance of England to Protestants from Hanover would restore England to its rightful place at the head of Protestant Europe and allow it to act as a buffer against France and the Pope. Therefore, Toland submitted that the Act of Succession did more than secure Protestantism in England: it secured the safety of all Europe.

On the basis of the contents of Anglia Libera and at the urging of his secret benefactor Robert Harley, Toland accompanied the mission in July 1701, led by Lord Macclesfield, to present the Act of Settlement to the Electress Sophia. Before he arrived on the Continent, Toland’s reputation had preceded him. The famed natural philosopher and privy councillor at Hanover, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, received a warning from Baron Schütz, envoy to Queen Anne, that English bishops hated Toland, as did many ministers of state. Furthermore, Schütz hoped that Leibniz would encourage Sophia to keep her distance from this controversial figure. Despite this caution, Toland was able to gain access to Sophia, her family, and Leibniz himself.

Prior to departing for Hanover, Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, feared that Toland might display the same impolite behaviour that he had shown in Oxford. Shaftesbury was grandson to the first Earl of Shaftesbury, who had taken a leading role during the unsuccessful attempt to exclude James II from the throne. The new earl too had a predilection for
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politics and served as an MP from 1695 until ill health forced his retirement in 1698. He frequently supported young men of promise and did so for Toland even though, according to Thomas Birch’s later recollections, Shaftesbury ‘never had any great opinion of him’. It was through Shaftesbury that Toland had originally met Harley. Any friendship between Toland and Shaftesbury became strained in 1699 when Toland published a draft of his patron’s *Inquiry Concerning Virtue* without permission. Shaftesbury reacted by buying all copies and temporarily withdrawing himself from Toland. As Birch described the incident, Toland ‘made this ungrateful Return for many favours, which he had need’. Though the two would eventually break, Shaftesbury had not yet abandoned Toland. He reminded the impetuous young man that ‘You are now in a great Scene of Affairs and Providence has assign’d you a great Part in them’. Now that Toland was participating in national politics, Shaftesbury advised him to abandon the conduct which had ended his ambitions with Methuen in Ireland. Indeed, more than Toland’s personal reputation depended on his actions.

I hope you will remember that as you are the more rais’d, you are the more bound to preserve a Character such as becomes a Man who supports the Cause of Religion, Liberty and Vertue, and that it is not only your own and a few Friends’ Reputation that is hazarded but that your Native Country and the Lovers of it as well as all those of right Principles whom you represent to persons abroad, all these are engag’d with you and their Fame and Reputation in the Protestant World and amongst that Free People where you are known, does in a great manner depend on your Behaviour.

The advice went unheeded.

Toland used the opportunity in Hanover to discuss his philosophy and politics with the royal family. Such matters received notice in England. Sophia herself related to the Duke of Newcastle that Toland had ‘made me a faithful representation’ of the role Newcastle had played in securing the Act. Newcastle, a close friend to Shaftesbury, was a Whig and a great land magnate; he would become Lord Privy Seal under Queen Anne. This mention of Newcastle to Sophia was probably an attempt to gain the duke’s favour, as was the dedication to him in *Anglia Libera*. Both attempts failed. Before leaving Hanover, Toland provided a copy of that book to Sophia, who enjoyed his conversations and thanked him with some paintings of the Hanoverian family and other items.

Toland returned to England with even greater admiration for the Hanoverians and a new target for his political ambitions. After the Lower House of Convocation failed in its attempt to bring action against *Christianity not Mysterious* in 1701, Toland responded in *Vindicus Liberius*. The book was also a platform from which Toland praised the Hanoverian court. He began
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by decrying the accusations that he was the atheist which critics had made him out to be. Furthermore, he readily acknowledged that he was a commonwealthman, but not in the subversively negative manner alleged by the clergy. Rather, he claimed that he was ‘wholly devoted to the self-evident Principle of Liberty, and a profest Enemy to Slavery and arbitrary Power’. What was more, Toland stated, in the manner of Matthew Tindal, that the power of government truly comes from society and, therefore, governments must earn the trust of those whom they govern. To those who accused Toland of advocating a democracy in England, he was unambiguous in his reply: ‘in every Thing I ever wrote, having never bin for a Democracy, which I think to be the worst Form of a Common-wealth, tho a thousand Times better than any Sort of a Tyranny’. Toland portrayed himself as a Whig and claimed that all true Whigs shared his beliefs. Both he and Whigs supported Sophia and the House of Hanover because she and her kin would enact the descriptions of government that he desired. As a companion piece, Toland had also issued a brief pamphlet urging William to invite the Hanoverians to England so that they might become acclimatised to the nation they would potentially rule. This would be especially important should some unfortunate accident befall the sitting monarch. When a riding accident claimed the life of William III, Queen Anne, the last Stuart monarch, ascended the English throne in March 1702.

On 10 March 1702, two days after William’s death, Toland dispatched a letter to Shaftesbury requesting an introduction to Lord Halifax (Charles Montagu), who had recently been acquitted by the Lords for his part in the Partition Treaties with France over the fate of Spain, following the expected death of Carlos II. Halifax had been a member of the Whig Junto under William and served as Chancellor of the Exchequer 1697–99. Despite siding against the Junto during the 1698 election and the debates over the standing army, Toland desired that Shaftesbury recommend him to Halifax and present the peer a copy of an unnamed book, perhaps Anglia Libera or Vindicus Liberius. Anticipating a prompt reply to his request, Toland advised Shaftesbury that he would wait for Halifax outside of his Lordship’s home or at the Grecian coffee-house. The turbulent events of the day delayed Shaftesbury acting upon Toland’s request. As he put it in a belated letter to Halifax, ‘I promised the person who sent this enclos’d to me, that I would present his Book to your Lordship and afterwards himself: but in this confusion of affaires I forgot both’. Once again Toland’s attempts at advancement met with little success and failed to secure any permanent position.

THE WHIG OBSERVATOR AND SACHEVERELL
Deists were not the only critics of High Church politics. On the first day of April 1702, less than one week into the reign of Queen Anne, Whig supporters
launched a political periodical in the form of a twice-weekly newspaper, the *Observer*. While the day’s news occasionally found a place in the *Observer*, it was mainly concerned with advancing a Whig programme and attacking Tory positions like those held by Henry Sacheverell. The High Church Tory and political sparkplug in 1709–10, Henry Sacheverell DD, worried about Whigs and their seemingly lenient stance towards Dissenters such as Toland and Tindal. In a speech given at Oxford in 1702 and subsequently published as *True Character of the Low-Churchman*, Sacheverell argued that Low Churchmen, particularly the Whig Latitudinarian variety, might claim ‘to be of the Communion of the Church of England’, but they had ‘tender regard to weak Brethren’. Such brethren included the deists. Passive obedience towards God and monarchs was, Sacheverell suggested, the only way to ensure the peace of England. Otherwise, people would see themselves as ‘Judges of the Legality of Princes Actions, and every slip or misconduct a Forfeiture of their Crowns’. Monarchs ruled by the desire of God, not by the whim of those over whom they govern. The divine right of kings and passive obedience found a powerful advocate in Sacheverell as did those who wished to end what they saw as the widespread heresy of deism. By rejecting obedience towards authority and replacing it with belief measured against reason, Sacheverell urged readers to see deists, and all those who did not explicitly challenge them, as a destabilising force in England.

In late September, the *Observer* considered the supposed threat and dangers of allowing the continuation of religious diversity in England. Differences in religious worship of Britons were so insignificant, the editor concluded, that ‘Pride on one hand and stubbornness on the other are the chief causes or our Religious Feuds and Animosities’. Failure to permit freedom of conscience and force one’s beliefs upon another sat at the heart of the matter. Even in the case of Catholics, their confession was not the real issue. Rather, the reason why they were excluded from government positions was that their ‘Opinions were contrary to the well Being of Humane Societies’. The Catholic disposition to religious exclusion, suggested the paper, threatened the religious freedom upon which England’s constitution was supposed to rest. Toland and Tindal would have agreed.

Turning to the working of the human mind, the *Observer* argued that ‘Persecution is a forcing of the Mind to a Consent, to what the mind has an utter Aversion to comply withal’. The nature of the mind rendered any means to cajole people into a certain confession ineffective. Just as Toland and Tindal had asserted, one cannot force belief upon another person. Like our deists, the paper claimed that the blame for such attempts to undermine religious freedom in England lay in the practise of priestcraft. In a mock dialogue, an analysis of priestcraft began by noting its ‘Mischiefs’ which had done more damage to England that any of that wrought by France. However, unlike the
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‘Oafs’ who inhabited popish countries and permitted themselves to be led by scheming priests, Britons employed their reason and would not believe priestly lies. Reason, therefore, was the best defence against the imposition of priestcraft. To readers acquainted with deist writings, all this sounded familiar.

Referring specifically to Sacheverell, the paper’s editors addressed the conception of passive obedience that was all the rage in Tory coffee-houses. After debating the issue for several paragraphs, the Observer concluded that passive obedience was synonymous with slavery. What was more, the paper suggested that if any person were to accept passive obedience as a way of life, that person would have the same rights before the king that animals have on the estates of country gentlemen. Certainly, as Tindal had argued, English subjects wished more for themselves than existing as voiceless possessions of a monarch.

DIFFERING POLITICAL LIVES OF DEISTS

After his attempts to secure government patronage had failed, Toland sailed to the Continent. His timing was certainly influenced by the potential turn for the worse in England’s attitude towards Dissent that occurred in 1702. The coronation of Queen Anne ushered in a new political and religious climate that was characterised when the future Archbishop of Canterbury William Wake urged England’s divines to ‘write and preach’ until the waters of religion were ‘calm again’. Toland eventually turned up in Utrecht in mid-August of 1703, and his claims of association with important men travelled with him. This came to a head soon after his arrival. Toland’s connection with Harley and the positions he supported raised the suspicions of the latter’s political rivals, the Duke of Marlborough and Sidney Godolphin. Marlborough dispatched agents to Utrecht to assault Toland, who would later describe the ‘brutal violence that was us’d against me’ to his friends. The beating did not have the intended effect of keeping him out of English politics. Indeed, Toland viewed his bruises as badges of honour and proof that his work was worrying those who would limit personal freedom and institute governments based on religious exclusion. True to his words of defiance, Toland returned to England when the Tory ministry of Nottingham and Rochester failed in 1704, and a Whig triumvirate, composed of Harley, Godolphin, and Marlborough, took its place. He arrived expecting Harley’s patronage, only to be dismayed when he found Harley employing Daniel Defoe’s literary skills. Harley, who was then Secretary of State, learned of Toland’s arrival from an anonymous informant. What troubled the author of the letter was the rumour that Toland was ‘hard at work with his pen’. William Nicolson, Bishop of Carlisle, learned of Toland’s return during a supper conversation with Edmund Gibson, who had never lost his fascination with Toland. Afterwards Nicolson met with
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the Archbishop of Canterbury who ‘assured [him] of Mr Toland’s being out of Countenance at Hanover’, owing mainly to ‘his Knavery’. The news eased the three men’s worries over Toland’s potential political influence, albeit only temporarily.

While Toland was a political irritant and sometimes covert champion of Harley, Anthony Collins lived above such squabbles. In 1704, the same year as Toland returned to England, Collins purchased Hunters’ Comib, a country estate. During the three years he lived there Collins ‘was visited several times by Queen Ann[e’s] Noblemen and Ladies of Quality who took delight in walking in his fine gardens’. What was more, several ‘Gentlemen of the County’ urged Collins ‘to represent them in Parliament as the Knight of the Shire (but would not be prevailed on)’, as Richard Dighton, a one-time servant, recalled. Where Toland coveted government patronage, Collins declined it. However, Collins still played a role in the political issues of the day.

Also in 1704, Tindal re-entered the public sphere with a treatise encouraging freedom of the press. Restraint on publishing was, Tindal argued as had Toland, mistakenly defended on religious grounds. It had been argued by those who supported controls on the press that people needed to be protected from heretical publications which might lead them astray. Against this claim, Tindal reminded readers that God desired Christians to use their reason to arrive at the truth of religion: specifically that God does not demand impossibilities and is perfectly happy in Himself. Restriction on the publication of theological works was based on the view that humanity was unable to find its own way to God. Reason, not regulations, would allow readers to determine truth and reject falsehood. Moreover, Tindal asserted that any religion which feared honest investigation cannot be the true faith, because the foundation of Protestantism ‘is built on the natural Right every one has of judging for himself in matters of Religion’ and demands total freedom of the press. Tindal argued further that such doctrines as passive obedience seemed to have convinced many that they had no right to question either politics or religion. Even if one accepted such a principle in matters of religion, it had to be rejected when matters turned to government actions because an unrestricted press would ‘keep a Ministry within some tolerable Bounds, by exposing their ill Designs to the People’. Tindal concluded by noting that in England, unlike other nations where it was a ‘Crime to talk, much more to write about State-Matters’, people had the right, if they did not deny it, not to be enslaved by government.

Having failed to find further government patronage – covert or otherwise – Toland once more turned his attention to England’s potential future rulers in the Hanoverian court. His Letters to Serena (1704) contained, as we will see, a natural philosophy based on self-moving matter – derived in part from Isaac Newton – which was also tied to a political goal. By composing the work for
Sophia Charlotte, Queen of Prussia, whose intellect received constant praise in his accounts of Hanover, Toland attempted to establish a position next to persons of inevitable political importance by presenting himself as an authority in the natural philosophy of the nation that Sophia and her family would rule. Indeed, when the Electress Sophia died in 1714 Toland lamented that his chance of a life of ease at court died with her. In the preface Toland addressed Sacheverell's recent characterisation of Low Churchmen in a book that Sophia Charlotte had personally sent to him. He decried Sacheverell's attempts to draw him into religious disputes and referred the queen to ‘the Satisfaction I gave in Vindicus Liberius concerning the Exceptions taken at Christianity not Mysterious’. Toland here attempted to rescue his reputation from its English characterisation, specifically that found in Sacheverell’s and similar Tory writings, and to present himself to Sophia Charlotte as one who had suffered at the hands of others.32

Toland’s zeal to act as a kind of English spokesperson for the Hanoverians led him to publish a further account of the potential benefits their rule would bring to Britain. Though it was published in 1705, An Account of the Courts of Prussia and Hanover contained letters composed in late 1702 which described Toland’s impressions of Hanoverian governance. He began by describing the laws by which a king ought to preside over the nation. Monarchs guide their subjects in the same way as ‘God himself preserves the World by the Oppositions of Heat and Cold, of Gravity and Levity, of Hard and fluid Bodys, whence proceeds the admirable Harmony of all things’. Just as Tindal had argued a decade earlier, Toland agreed that God’s immutable laws of nature applied equally to governments and the motion of planets. God established order and did not arbitrarily interfere; rather He guided and directed the world to achieve the goal of human happiness – therefore so too should earthly monarchs. In Europe there was no better place than Hanover, and the same condition could also exist in England should Hanoverians succeed to the crown. Key to their enviable management was ‘the intire Liberty of Conscience which all good Christians enjoy in this place’. There was, Toland believed, no forced religious conformity in Prussia: people were permitted to find their own way to God and the form of religion which seemed best. Prussia, therefore, promoted the religion advocated in Christianity not Mysterious. Toland then went on at some length lauding Sophia Charlotte’s erudition. Her desire for learning influenced her choice of political advisors, a practice Toland admired. ‘I need but name Monsieur Leibniz for an Example, who is here a Privy Counsellor’, he wrote, although he conceded, ‘I cannot agree to his Metaphysical Notions.’ This subtle challenge to the advice provided to Sophia Charlotte by Leibniz was another attempt by Toland to obtain a court position for himself. Through the claimed association between his work and Newton, who was then engaged in the priority dispute with Leibniz over the calculus,
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Toland may have been attempting to drive a wedge between Leibniz and the Hanoverian court by asserting that he was a philosopher at home in English learned circles and not the divisive force that Leibniz would be if he travelled to England with them.

Not entirely certain of Hanoverian favour, Toland was forced by his desire to find employment to hedge his bets. This is evidenced by two notes he sent to the third Earl of Shaftesbury in late October 1705. He opened the first by referring to the letter Shaftesbury had sent prior to his trip to Hanover with the Act of Settlement delegation in 1701 and assured the earl that he held no animosity towards him. Attempting to distance himself from his past reputation, Toland alerted Shaftesbury to the fact that he was ‘not sauntering any longer in Coffeehouses’. He then dismissed his critics with the claim that they did not know the real Toland. Following this letter, he dispatched another to Shaftesbury in which he claimed that ‘I am now in some manner altering my Circumstances: for what my Lord Somer’s Ministry, wou’d not give me, and what I wou’d not ask my Lord Nottingham’s Ministry, the present Ministry unsought has offer’d, and I am willing to accept.’ As to the exact nature of the appointment with Harley, Toland would not reveal it, but he promised Shaftesbury a complete account if he would agree to a meeting. At the very least Toland hoped that this new status would allow him to ‘begin on clear ground’ in the opinions of others. There was some truth in Toland’s boasts to Shaftesbury. In early January 1707, the Jacobite and frequent correspondent to St Germain John Netterville wrote to Harley to advise him that Toland’s claims of service to the minister were a frequent topic of discussion in political circles. Netterville related a meeting he had had with a nonjuror, who ‘asked me if I had an interest in serving Toland’ and described Toland as ‘Harley’s champion’. Later that month, Harley admitted to Lord Raby, English Ambassador in Berlin, that he had indeed employed Toland on various occasions.

Toland’s acquaintances also attempted to repair his damaged reputation. One Elisha Smith wrote to Thomas Hearne, antiquarian, nonjuror, and at this time Assistant Keeper of the Bodleian, in early 1706 with just such a goal. After relating the many conversations he had with Toland, Smith advised Hearne that perhaps the public had been too harsh in condemning Toland as a heretic. I think myself oblig’d to vindicate him from ye mistaken prejudices ye [world] has received concerning his Religion Since ye Publication of his first Book Xtianity not Mysterious he is very sensible of it & has confessed to me that those were only his Juvenile Thots at 25 & waits only for an opportunity to Convince Yr world how much they have mistaken him from that Book.

What was more, Smith assured Hearne that he firmly believed Toland to be a man of religion. Hearne was unmoved and in later correspondence
characterised Toland as a ‘Sorry Wretch’. First impressions of Toland remained lasting impressions. Indeed, in his recollections Hearne described him as a man of ‘vile principles, which he took all opportunities of instilling into young Gentlemen’.

**NEWSPAPERS AND FURTHER WHIG–TORY CONFLICT**

As might be expected, the Tories did not reply with silence to the Whig *Observator* or to the growth of apparent irreligious literature such as that authored by Toland and Tindal. They answered one newspaper with another, and the *Rehearsal* was launched on 5 August 1704, edited by the High Church nonjuror Charles Leslie. The paper conducted its political polemic as a dialogue, frequently pitting the Tory ‘Countryman’ character against the Whig ‘Observator’ character. In an issue of early February 1705, ‘Countryman’ lobbied for legal action against those who advanced heresy, both secular and sacred. Both God and monarchs demanded loyalty from their subjects, and when irreligious thinkers (that is, Whigs) refused this expectation, the government was right to enact punishment. The paper noted that even Scotland had the sense to execute blasphemers. England ought to follow this example with heretics who seemed to threaten the established political and religious order. Tories were clear in stating which group of heretics they found most troubling. In the guise of the ‘Observator’, the paper characterised the position of their opponents: ‘We Whiggs, who are Deists...as to our Common Designs against the Church and Crown’. The Tory view was that deists were Whigs and Whigs were deists; both groups threatened the nation and religion Tories sought to cultivate. The ‘Observator’ encouraged the conclusion by provocatively stating that if such people could not find a place in the existing order, then they would seek to create ‘a Government all of Deists, and have no Religion at all’.

Whig authors replied to these accusations with rebuttals in the *Observator*. The editor asked his adversaries, ‘pray, Gentlemen, when has the Church been in Danger since Her Majesties Happy Accession to the Throne?’ If Tories continued to regard Dissenters generally or deists specifically as a danger, they must, the *Observator* demanded, provide more proof than empty rhetoric. The English Church was, since 1689, the paper reminded its readers, ‘the Church of Christ, and then it is a Church of Peace, of Love, of Union and Moderation’. It was not the church of the ‘Tories, exclusive and intolerant.

Later that same year, the *Observator* asserted that the only difference ‘betwixt the Church and Dissenters, in Point of Religion, was concerning some Rituals and Modes of Worship, which they esteem’d as Humane Ceremonies, and which the Church impos’d as Terms of Communion’. Therefore, Whigs seemed to argue that no important doctrinal issues separated Dissenters from
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communicants in the Church of England. Only in acceptance of some ceremonial practices did the two confessions deviate. This outward expression of faith ought not to be used as a weapon to divide the nation. 'Now', the Observer continued, 'the Case of the Dissenters and that of the nonjurors is as different as any two contraries can be. The Dissenters disagree only in a Religious capacity; the nonjurors deny both the Civil and Religious Authority of the Kingdom; they are Enemies both to Church and State.' Whereas Dissenters were true English subjects who accepted the legitimacy of the current monarch and the future succession, nonjurors accepted neither the religious settlement nor the current monarch. This point received further support in a later edition of the Observer, which copied the dialogue style of its rival by using the name Countryman to refer to Tories. 'Master, what you say is true', Countryman confessed to Observer, 'The Nonjuors are all of 'em Papists, and [Charles] Lesley in his last Rehearsal has declar'd himself to be so.' Despite their pleas to the contrary, it was nonjurors, rather than Dissenters, who posed the real threat to English religious and political stability. Attacks on Dissenters and deists, it seemed, were merely a diversionary tactic.

During the early eighteenth century, Tories and High Churchmen formed a chorus cry of 'Church in Danger' to alert the nation to their belief that Dissenters, and especially deists, were irrevocably damaging the English Church with their calls for tolerance and comprehension. Francis Higgins, an Irish preacher, was a particularly strong supporter of halting the writings of deists and others he saw as heretics. On 26 February 1707 Higgins preached a sermon at Whitehall addressing this issue, in which he attacked the deist doctrine of following one's conscience in matters of religion and not accepting anything by virtue of tradition. Against this proposition, Higgins replied 'a great many Actions, flowing from the Dictates of an erroneous Conscience, tho' performed with the warmest Zeal, and heartiest Sincerity, will be found not perfect before God.' Taking a common line of response, Higgins cautioned readers that God's demands upon them were not open to interpretation, only to compliance. Fearful of heretics further propagating irreligion in England, he hoped to warn the unwary to be suspicious of certain books which promoted atheism under the guise of sincere enquiry into religion.

Chief among such books were Henry Dodwell's work on the soul, which we will examine shortly, and Toland's Christianity not Mysterious. Indeed, Higgins noted that Toland's book was so heretical that it was burned in Ireland. If England failed to take similar actions with such blasphemy, the nation risked divine retribution. He cautioned that people should not imagine that 'because God is pleas'd to give us Glorious Success against our Enemies Abroad; and to Bless us with a Pious Queen at Home', this means that 'he is at Peace with us'. The same providence which secured Protestantism in England would, Higgins suggested, exact a hard lesson upon people who did nothing to stop
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desium. There was simple reason why deism went unpunished in England. Higgins revealed, and Sacheverell would repeat in 1709, that deists hid behind ‘Great Men’. These unnamed politicians prevented proper and speedy action against ‘such thriving, and fatal Mischiefs’. Though he mentioned no one by name, this accusation was probably a reference to Toland’s relationship with Harley and was certainly against the stance that Whigs were believed to be taking with Dissenters in such publications as the *Observer* and in the 1701 Convocation. Deists were fully integrated in contemporary political discourse.

The reaction against Higgins’s polemic was swift. One S. White replied that ‘Mr. Higgins, and the Party he expouses, would make the World believe they are the only Respecters of Majesty.’ He continued that Tories demanded passive obedience not only to the monarch and the church, but also to any doctrine that their party hold as truth. While White did not defend the present state of the English Church, he refused to believe that it was as rife with unbelief as Higgins had claimed. He did, however, agree that Toland was a ‘Plague’ infecting the Church of England. In spite of their shared hatred of Toland, White and Higgins parted company over the influence that they believed Toland and other deists had in matters of religion in England. Toland, as White characterised him, frequently dispensed blasphemy but was ‘not own’d by our Church as a Member, and I believe lays claim to none’. Toland was an non-associated polemical writer who spoke for himself; in White’s words, ‘upon Examination, I believe it would be found, that not one in a Thousand ever heard of [his] Name, [or] saw [his] books’. Thus White submitted that Toland was more ghost than substance and ought to be ignored with silence, not used to fan the flames of division in English politics or religion.

Another reply to Higgins, issued anonymously, had a similar thesis. The author wrote that Queen Anne’s design had been ‘to render all her People Easy, Safe, and Happy, as well as in their Religious as Temporal concerns’. In this atmosphere of official tolerance, it was amazing to think that anyone would be unhappy. Nonetheless, Higgins and his fellow Tories were, the author claimed, a prime example of this group. Under the seemingly benign task of ‘instilling into the people’s minds, the true Principles of Religion’, Higgins instead promoted ‘Scandal, Sedition and Discord’. This was most true in the characterisation of Toland: ‘If Mr. Higgins knows that Toland has offended since he came to England, he would do well to prosecute him.’

Unsubstantiated accusations carried no weight even among those who did not support deism.

As we saw with William Stephens, attempts to drive a religious wedge among the English people were met with same strong replies that Tories used to tie deism to a Whig platform. At least a few nonjurors and Tories saw the partial failure of this approach. The 12 February 1707 edition of the *Rehearsal*
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changed tactics and focused its agenda on refuting ‘The Men of Rights’ who argued for government by consent rather than divine right. ‘They are’, the paper continued, ‘such Dissenters as the Atheists. Not so Good as the Deists or Heathen, as I have before shew’d. For no Deist or Heathen ever had so Contemptible a Notion of God, as to set the People above Him, and make him Govern by an Authority DERIV’D from Them. The Men of the Rights are Dissenters from God, and all Reveal’d Religion’. While deists were bad, republicans were worse and Tories now sought to identify Whigs with these political extremists.\(^49\) Whigs were equally skilled at political mudslinging. The headline of a mid-April edition of the *Observator* claimed that ‘High-Churchmen are Papists.’\(^50\)

While England’s newspapers debated deism, Toland again travelled to the Continent in early 1707 with the intention of meeting Sophia and her family. While abroad, he wrote Harley to express his disappointment at not having obtained a permanent position within the English government. He was sure that after two years of waiting now he would receive ‘some preferment’ because ‘my Lord Treasurer was pleased to promise I should be taken care of’. What was more, as he attempted to persuade Harley, ‘I think I may without fearing the least imputation of vanity, look on myself as much more deserving . . . and great deal more capable in all respects, than several in the long list of such as have been employed.’ As to the rumours of his planned actions during his trip, Toland assured Harley that ‘I am not going nor shall go either to Berlin or Hanover, nor upon any account or errand whatsoever relating to these Courts, as some foolish people might insinuate to you.’\(^51\)

Not one to let a promise stand in the way of his personal political advancement, Toland failed to keep his word. After spending a few weeks in September in Düsseldorf at the court of John William, Elector Palatine, he requested a letter of recommendation to Sophia so that he might be welcomed again at her court. William asked ‘without any delay, to receive the said Toland into your mighty protection and powerful patronage’. If she did this service, William predicted, Sophia would not regret it because ‘in return of all the distinction and kindness at any time show’d him, [he] will imploy all, possible care and zeal to render your Dilection and to your Electoral family such valuable Services as may most amply deserve your Favour’.\(^52\)

Harley learned in October 1707 from Erasmus Lewis, MP and Under-Secretary of State, that Toland was indeed in Berlin and, what was worse, claimed to be acting on behalf of the English government and Harley specifically. Sophia herself was suspicious of Toland’s unexpected arrival and requested an explanation from her contacts. The Bishop of Spiga obliged her and related ‘in what way the person who calls himself Toland succeeded in getting from his E. H. my master the letter which he has present[ed] to you on his part’. The bishop detailed how Toland had described himself as
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the greatest and the first promoter of the succession, and the man who drew out
the deduction of the rights of your E. H., he had since been at the Court of Hanover,
where he had been regaled with I do not know how many medals of high price;
but that, being extremely well received by your E. H. (as one might well believe),
he had had long and secret conferences with your Highness, and had taken long
walks with you. This had made him a great many enemies, as well in Hanover as
in England.53

Toland’s claims of favour with politically great persons were as boastful now
as they had been thirteen years earlier in Oxford and were bringing him
the same results.

Leibniz too composed a description of Toland’s arrival in Hanover and why
the Elector Palatine might wish to support Toland, which Leibniz dispatched
to Raby at the end of December. William belonged to the Catholic House of
Palatinate-Neuburg, and under his rule and that of his brother Charles III
Philip Calvinists were being increasingly exiled and barred from participat-
ing in government.54 By sponsoring Toland to the potential future ruler of
England, Leibniz believed that the Elector was attempting to appear friendly
to Protestants. This hypothesis was seconded from Berlin in a letter written
by William Ayerst DD, who held various diplomatic positions on the
Continent, to Arthur Charlett of Oxford, who like Gibson remained fascinated
with Toland. The letter advised him that ‘Mr. Toland I moan has lately been
here coming from ye Palatine Court whose proceedings against ye Protestants
we hear Mr. Toland ha s...defended & receiv’d great gifts for his pains’.55

For Toland and William it was a mutually beneficial relationship of patron
and penman, a simple business agreement. Like others, Leibniz related that
Toland claimed a close relationship with Harley and had implied ‘that he is
employed by the Ministers, and that he has relations with even the Duke of
Marlborough’.56 Leibniz believed it to be unlikely.

THE RIGHTS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH ASSERTED
AND THE SPECTRE OF IRRELIGION AT OXFORD

While Ayerst related his dismay over Toland’s actions in Berlin, he also lamented
the work of another deist, telling Charlett that ‘The noise [of] Mr. Tyndal’s
Book has reach’d hither & one of the King’s chaplains has been talking to me
about it.’ He complained that Oxford University seemed to be doing little to
restrict Tindal, whom Ayerst described as ‘Another of y’ Same race’ as Toland.57

The book in question, The Rights of the Christian Church Asserted, was perhaps
Tindal’s most infamous until 1730 and the release of Christianity as Old as
the Creation. His decision to publish The Rights anonymously did little to pre-
vent him being identified as the author. Bernard Gardiner, High Churchman
and Warden of All Souls College, Oxford (since 1702), was particularly irritated
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by the contents of the work and by the fact that it had been written at his college. He wrote to Archbishop Tenison on 3 November 1708 to advise him, ‘I hear there is proof offer’d by a person who transcrib’d ym, yt many pages of y’ Rights of y’ Church were written by Dr. Tindal: if my power will reach to take [it] upon Oath I will hear it.’ Moreover, in a letter of 1709 the third Earl of Shaftesbury agreed that Tindal was the most likely author and, despite reservations about some of the contents, claimed that the book ‘gave me great satisfaction’.

Gardiner was as good as his word. During the composition of the book, Tindal had employed John Silke as a copyist. Under examination on 28 October 1710, Silke painted a more sinister picture and related the main arguments of the book. He advised his examiners that Tindal argued that the Church of England ought to have no more power than that wielded by ‘other Private Companys, and Clubs’. Moreover, ‘all Ecclesiastical Power has no other foundation than the Consent of the Society’, and the ambition of priests ‘cou’d only be Satisfied with an Absolute Power’. The process of transcription encompassed the years 1699–1702, when Silke was ‘then Servitor of All Souls College’. He hinted at having little choice in the matter.

He did several times Inscribe every chapter together with the Preface & contents of Each Chapter of a Book now publish’d & Entitl’d The Rights of the Christian Asserted; except some few Additions and Alterations wch as he believes were made since that time: and this Depponent further saith that he transcribed it by the order of Dr. Matthew Tindal.

Before the book appeared in print, Silke ‘did Copy the Whole Book as the prepar’d for the Press; particularly the Propositions above written by the Order of the Doctor, part of Which were dictated to the said deponent from the Doctor’s own mouth; and part was transcrib’d from original Papers which the said Deponent well knows to be written by the hand of the said Doctor Matthew Tindal’. This accusation confirmed what opponents of deists believed: they were determined to corrupt those around them through their books. In the present case, Tindal appeared to use his position as a fellow of All Souls to nurse heresy in a servitor, a student who depended upon the funds provided by his social superiors. Silke published his own account of the episode in 1735 – two years after Tindal’s death – as The Religious, Rational and Moral Conduct of Mathew Tindal. In the book he attempted to distance himself from a man whom he described as ‘that great Apostate and Corrupter of the Principles and Morals of the Youth of the present Age’ and an atheist. This episode may have been what the Reverend Thomas Tanner, former chaplain of All Souls and future Bishop of St Asaph, had in mind when he complained in 1717 about the college’s sullied reputation. The college had, he lamented, ‘furnish’d’ the nation with ‘all sorts of Freethinking’. Nevertheless he hoped that
people would realise ‘that we are not all quite corrupted’. Despite Gardiner’s dismay over All Souls having provided the location in which Tindal composed his book, no official action was taken against him. Tindal’s former tutor at Oxford, the nonjuror George Hickes, no doubt spoke for many when he wrote, ‘I am sorry to understand... there is no disposition at Oxford to prosecute the Deist scribe Dr Tindal... to convict him of being the author of the Rights.’ Although Tindal would suffer no punishment, the same cannot be said of the book itself, which was burned in March 1710 by order the House of Commons.

The Rights of the Christian Church Asserted began by taking up the debates over the safety of the English Church. Tindal went over the well-worn ground of discussing who were the best churchmen: High or Low. His conclusion, which he would elaborate in the body of the work, was that ‘they who raise the greatest Noise about the Danger of the Church, are the greatest Enemies to it’. Authority over the church, Tindal argued, began with ‘her Majesty’s Goodness and Tenderness’ and not with doctrines which constrained this authority. In other words, he characterised the constitution of the church as that enshrined by the monarch and not by the bigotry and intolerance of High Churchmen.

The monarch’s duty to provide an atmosphere free of prosecution for her subjects was a frequent theme in Tindal’s past works on government and continued here. In exchange for this promise of protection, the ruler received the consent of those over whom he or she governed. This was certainly the case in 1688–89. With the same Lockean language that he had employed previously, Tindal explained that ‘the only Right a Conqueror has, is built on the Consent of those, who by their former Governor’s being no longer able to protect ‘em, were reduc’d to a State of Nature, and consequently at liberty to pay Obedience to the Conqueror, upon his taking ‘em into his Protection.’ Thus, when James II’s Catholicism abrogated his duty to safeguard Protestantism in England, his right to rule was forfeit. William and Mary’s promise to allow Protestantism to flourish provided them with the consent of the body politic.

Jacobites threatened the stability of England because ‘never did any Men more grossly and notoriously sacrifice the Ends of Both Civil and Ecclesiastical Government’. Support for James II was seen as the same as support for Louis XIV, the Pope, and encouraged the cloud of Catholicism to increase its shadow of darkness over Europe. Any true lover of England, Tindal stated, must support the Protestant succession and religious settlement. Nonjurors and Jacobites were therefore one and the same; both groups refused to accept the legacy of 1688–89. Turning further back in history for support, Tindal related that in Queen Elizabeth’s reign there was no ‘Notion of Passive Obedience’ to hinder the nation from viewing itself as at the head of, and as protector of, a European Protestant community. In this same tradition was Queen Anne,
who extended ‘her Favour to all her People’. This was also the model found in Tindal’s notion of God. What was more, Anne ‘can distinguish True Religion from Priestcraft, and will not suffer her Power to be made subservient to the ill Purposes of a Party [the Tories], whose restless Malice is never to be satisfy’d, without treading on the Necks of all who are not as bigotted as themselves’.

Tindal then used the example of the soul to demonstrate how priests imposed themselves on matters of religion over which they had no claim. He suggested that everyone is ‘bound to do all he can for saving another’s Soul, and therefore most things which the Clergy are oblig’d to perform are the duty of every Man’. By making the care of the soul something which was only their providence, priests assured themselves a privileged place in society, whereas, in reality, the soul was indeed an important aspect of life, but its care was entrusted to all people.67

Defences of this work continued along the same lines. Tindal replied to critics like the Reverend William Law, himself a High Church Tory, who had refused to swear allegiance to George I and who had stated that ‘we can have no notions of God, but such that are mysterious and inconceivable’. Tindal countered that he believed it was very near to atheism to worship a God whom one did not understand. People must be free to worship God as they saw fit.68 Since God created humanity with the power to know Him, Tindal expected that all people would come to hold the correct view of God if given the chance to explore their beliefs. What prevented the propagation of correct views was precisely those who depicted God as mysterious and unknowable. As proof of his thesis that God would not impose Himself on humanity, Tindal noted that ‘God, after he had accepted the Political Government of the Jews, wou’d reign no longer over ‘em than they were willing’. Humanity was free to find its way to God because ‘God wou’d not reign over the Jews, till they had agreed to the Covenant . . . because, by his Law of Nature having allow’d Mankind a Right of chusing their own Governors, he wou’d not as King deprive ‘em of a Right which he had before as God given ‘em in common with the rest of the World’.69

Daniel Waterland DD, who was Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, an Anglican theologian, and a champion of Trinitarianism, disputed Tindal’s assertion by arguing that ‘God does not want our leave for the making of a law, neither needs he to wait for our acceptance, to render it valid’. For Waterland it was not up to humanity to accept or reject God’s laws. People have an obligation to obey God, not to enter into a contractual relationship with the creator of the universe. To do as Tindal advocated would ‘bring down the laws of God to the lusts and passion of corrupt man, and to find some pretext or other for taking off religious restraints, that they may be at liberty to follow their pleasures, and to do only what is right in their own eyes, instead of attending to the voice of God’.70
Tindal's book received many further refutations and challenges. Even Jonathan Swift considered a response but it never proceeded past the planning stages. Tindal replied to numerous rebuttals with *A Defence of the Rights of the Christian Church*. The chief target of this work was William Wotton FRS, spokesperson for the ‘moderns’ in the famed ‘Battle of the Books’, who had composed *The Rights of the Clergy in the Christian Church* to persuade readers that Tindal’s notions were nothing more than empty words composed by a deist. In response Tindal mostly repeated his arguments and further revealed his indebtedness to Locke. Governments, as Tindal described them, were encouraged by their subjects to oppose tyranny and arbitrary power in all its forms. Just as God does not act arbitrarily and outside the bounds of established laws of nature, earthly rulers may not act outside the laws of nations. Turning to Locke’s *Second Treatise on Government*, Tindal wrote that there are two laws which ought to govern humanity: ‘the Honour of God and the Good of Mankind, which are in effect the same’. Once consent has been removed, any person who clings to the dictates of a past government becomes a barrier to the current happiness of a nation. Such was the plight of Jacobites, non-jurors, and those High Churchmen who refused to permit any diversity of religion in England. Tindal argued that the events of 1688–89 had made their views obsolete.

Twenty-two years after the event, in 1730, Francis Fox, Vicar of St Mary’s, Reading, wrote to Edmund Gibson. He reported that Tindal’s book had been criticised by some who feared its potential subversive nature, but ‘others had not so bad an opinion of them’. What was more, Fox recalled that ‘I believe there are but few in these Parts, who have been hurt by the late endeavours to promote Infidelity. I do not know of any one.’ While it might seem, from a reading of Wotton’s and similar accounts, that deism was a rampant and immediate danger, it was not perceived so by all contemporaries.

During these events Tindal was irritating Gardiner in other ways. In early 1708 Gardiner had written to Gibson about the disruptive activities of one of the law fellows, namely Tindal. After apologising to Gibson for troubling him with a matter which was, at this time, of little importance outside Oxford, Gardiner proceeded. There were, he explained, ‘new attempts wch are daily made upon y e Statutes [of the university]’. The chief danger posed by this movement by some of the younger fellows was the proposal to remove the requirements for the fellows to be in holy orders and resident in the college. The warden advised Gibson that ‘Dr. Tindal shelters himself in y’ Band’. Gardiner then sought advice on how best to deal with the problem and requested that Gibson keep this matter close to his chest because he did ‘not desire it may goe farther’.

The issue of the requirements for fellows at All Souls lasted from 1702 to 1720. It became more than a local concern in 1709 when Gardiner attempted
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to compel William Blencowe, code-breaker to the government, who was living in London and had been a fellow of All Souls since 1703, to take orders and reside nearer Oxford. Blencowe, who was the grandson of the famed mathematician and statesman John Wallis, asked for assistance from Lord Sunderland, from whom he often received his official duties, who then interceded with Gardiner. Archbishop Tenison also worked on behalf of Blencowe in Sunderland’s name. Gardiner decried governmental interference with his operation of All Souls and his desire to maintain a godly environment there. What was worse, other fellows were following Blencowe’s example, and refusing to take orders. Gardiner stood firm in his demands. That same year these fellows planned to have a bill introduced in the House of Commons which would eliminate the requirement for fellows of All Souls. There was outcry and fear, even from moderate churchmen, that the removal of such a requirement would undermine theology at Oxford. Queen Anne herself became involved when she ruled, following the recommendation of the Attorney-General and Solicitor-General, that Blencowe’s duties did not prevent him from taking orders. The bill was never tabled in the Commons, and Blencowe committed suicide in 1711 when it seemed that he would never be exempt from the statutes following the Tory resurgence in 1710. However, some contemporaries sneered that his depression was caused by reading too much Tindal.

By March 1709 Gardiner’s frustration over Tindal’s participation in the movement reached a new level. The Tory MP for Warwick and former All Souls fellow Dodington Greville advised Gardiner that the ‘design’ to remove the requirements for holy orders ‘has been in agitation this 3 years, for about that time, Dr. Tindal came to me with those fallacious arguments’. Greville, who held strong High Church sympathies and great regard for his alma mater and was later interned there in the chapel, proceeded to tell his former warden that Tindal’s optimism that the fellows’ motion would pass in the Commons was unfounded because the bill would not be introduced during the current session, and even when it was there was ‘very small grounds to hope for success’. On the same day Gardiner also received a letter from William Bromley, former Tory MP for Oxford, who adopted a more anxious tone than did Grenville, believing ‘that however unreasonable’ the attempts to rewrite the statutes at All Souls, ‘it is probable they will now prevail’. Although his frets turned out to be for nought, Bromley’s worried reaction is hardly surprising from the man who had introduced all three Occasional Conformity bills into Parliament. Shortly after these letters, Tindal, like other fellows who wished to protest against the requirements for residency and holy orders, applied for and was granted a temporary leave of absence from the college. We know that he continued his work with the fellows in their mission because his name is included in a surviving register used at one of their meetings. Indeed, both
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he and Blencowe, whom he probably called a friend, took their leaves from All Souls on the same day on at least two occasions. What is more, in 1716 Tindal would publish Reasons for the Repeal of that Part of the Statutes of the Colleges in the University of Oxford and Cambridge which Requires the taking of Orders under a Penalty. However, by this time of this rearguard action the war had been lost.

Toland’s Continuing Political Boasting

At the same time as All Souls faced the fellows’ challenge, Lord Raby wrote to Leibniz. The subject remained Toland’s behaviour. Raby related to Leibniz that Toland claimed to be in possession of a ‘letter from Madame the Electress’ and that he used it to give ‘himself no small airs’. Toland also continued to claim that he was in the employment of the English government. Frustrated by this perpetual boasting, Raby advised Leibniz that he had initiated an end to it by dispatching a report to Harley. Erasmus Lewis passed the letter to Harley and related that Raby had strongly urged Lewis to ‘acquaint [Harley] with the great injustice done [him] by Mr. Toland’. In reply to Raby’s reports, Harley had stated that he and Toland were not friends and that he had even tried to prevent Toland from leaving England. Raby hoped (no doubt with Leibniz’s support) that Harley’s disavowal of Toland would finally halt his vanity and self-promotion. Better still, perhaps Toland would return to England.

Toland’s manners also placed him in further ill standing. In another letter to Charlett, Ayerst described Toland’s brief stop in Berlin at the end of March. Toland had arrived with the hope of getting a reward for ‘a Book he intends to write in praise of this court’, but his service to the Elector Palatine cast him in a suspicious light. The Hanoverian court ‘despis’d so mercinary a Pen yt cou’d write in favour of ye Elector Palatin’s Persecuting ye Protestants, & put him off’. Toland’s practice of supporting himself as a quill-for-hire had cost him seriously in this case. This episode marked the end of his association, limited though it was, with the Hanoverians. Indeed, when George I succeeded to the English throne in 1714, he and his advisors explicitly prohibited Toland from appearing at court.

Toland’s frequent statements about Harley’s patronage and political favour raised the suspicions of other English politicians, especially those who sparred with Harley for position. During August 1708, when Toland was in the Netherlands, Marlborough and Godolphin kept close tabs on him because if he was indeed in Harley’s service, it behoved them to keep abreast of their rival’s overseas activities. Marlborough reported that some of the ‘honest men’ in the Netherlands ‘had a mind to send’ Toland out of their country. By November 1708 Godolphin was worried over rumours that Toland was coming home and had been amassing material for another book. Purportedly the
incomplete manuscript attacked Marlborough, but nothing substantive could be obtained on this account. Should it be true, Godolphin urged Marlborough, he should ‘judg whether you could not take some measures...for watching him, and for seizing his book, and papers, or finding out his printer, so as that you may bee master of what villany he is doing there’. In the last letter between the two politicians regarding Toland, Marlborough wrote, ‘Mr. Toland does no ways surprise me, for I know him to be a villian, and governed by a very mallicious man, [Robert Harley] and is maintained by him in Holland as a spy. I have had an account of his behaviour in the courts of Jarmany [Germany] this last winter.’81 It seems that some took Toland’s asserted political connections at face value.

Back in England during March and April, the Observator began describing party allegiances in the same language Toland had used years earlier. ‘The Denominations of Whig and Tory’ had, the paper noted, ‘lost the original idea which gave rise to them’. Whereas during the Exclusion Crisis and the formation of party loyalty, the Whigs and Tories had explicit goals and positions which one might use to characterise the members, current party labels had lost their original definitions. This blurring made it impossible to ‘know who are real friends to the Protestant Religion, British Liberties, and the Protestant Succession, but to observe Mens Actions’.82 The position was carried further in a later edition which stated, ‘Good Christians and Patriots not to be known now by the names of Whig and Tory’.83 The strongest admonishment carried by the paper was directed at the Whigs, many of whom had abandoned their founding ideals: ‘many of those who call themselves Whigs, [have] gone off from those honest Principles, and yet they are very angry with us for saying they are Whigs of a modern Stamp, and they are guilty of the same Practices for which they justly accus’d the Tories’.84

**CONCLUSION**

Determining who would succeed William III occupied the minds of many during the early years of the eighteenth century, even after the Act of Settlement set the matter to rights, at least on paper if not in practice. John Toland joined the debate early in 1701 with his *Anglia Libera*, in which he supported the passing of the crown to the House of Hanover. His Hanoverian enthusiasm and pro-Whig arguments, which appeared in several publications made him the topic of political gossip abroad and the target of many High Church Tories at home. Tories increasingly identified deist politics and theology as indiscernible from the Latitudinarian Whig platform. The appearance of the Observator would have done little to calm these fears. Polemicists such as Francis Higgins and the Rehearsal newspaper mounted the Tory response. From his college base in Oxford, Matthew Tindal argued for freedom of the press and
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an English Church free from priestly corruption. Tindal’s involvement in debates at All Souls College regarding the requirements for fellows reflects the great extent to which deism and national politics were intertwined.

This college matter demonstrated how fragile the religious peace in England was. It would not last past the end of 1709. As one witness to the events of that year recalled, ‘in 1709 we looked forward with Pleasure; Peace; . . . and in Safety from the Disturbers of Europe, were what we thought ours: lives probably secured of, and what we might certainly have depended upon, had we been worth those Blessings; but how Sudden was that bright scene changed’. Like others who found themselves awash in these happenings, our deists sought to help England chart a course into smoother political and theological waters which avoided the waves caused by High Church policies. Before considering this, however, we turn to deist natural philosophy to see how depictions of the same God who endorsed honest investigation into religion, and decried those who touted passive obedience, led to the creation of world-views that had self-moving matter at their base.

NOTES


2 The Post Man, 15 February 1701.

3 John Toland, The Art of Governing by Parties (London, 1701), pp. iii, v, 2, 6, 7, 8.


5 The Post Boy, 19 June 1701; Post Man, 21 June 1701.

6 John Toland, Anglia Libera: or the Limitation and Succession of the Crown of England Explain’d and Asserted (London, 1701), pp. 1, 2, 6, 7, 13.

7 Toland, Anglia Libera, pp. 22–3, 29, 106, 141, 144.


10 BL Add. 4254, fol. 187r, and see also fol. 186v.

11 TNA PRO 30/24/21, fol. 231, Shaftesbury to Toland, 21 July 1701.
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12 Sophia, Electress of Hanover, to the Duke of Newcastle, 10 October 1701, in Portland, 2: 180.
15 John Toland, Reasons for Addressing His Majesty to Invite into England Their Highnesses the Electress Dowager and the Electoral Prince of Hanover (London, 1702), pp. 1, 7.
17 BL Add. 7121, fol. 61, Toland to Shaftesbury, 10 March 1702; fol. 59, Shaftesbury to Halifax, after 10 March 1710.
20 Observator, 26 September 1702.
21 Observator, 30 September 1702.
22 Observator, 2 October 1702.
23 Observator, 18 September 1703.
25 BL Add. 4465, fol. 3r, Utrecht, 17 August 1703; Brian W. Hill, Robert Harley: Speaker, Secretary of State and Premier Minister (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 92–5. Toland’s beating is also mentioned in a letter from Dr. William Stratford to Edward Harley, second Earl of Oxford, 14 July 1726. Stratford recalled that Toland was ‘cudgelled most severely by some of Marlborough’s ruffians’. See Portland, 7: 441.
28 BL Add. 4282, fol. 242r, Richard Dighton to Pierre Desmaizeux, 14 March 1730/01.
29 Matthew Tindal, Reasons Against Restraining the Press (London, 1704), p. 3.
30 Tindal, Reasons Against Restraining the Press, pp. 8, 9, 13.
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34 Toland, *An Account of the Courts of Prussia and Hanover*, pp. 10, 18, 56, 55.

35 TNA, PRO 30/24/20, fol. 105, Toland to Shaftesbury, 22 October 1705.

36 TNA, PRO 30/24/21, fol. 237, Toland to Shaftesbury, n.d., after 1705.


38 Bod. Rawlinson MS C. 146, fol. 47; Rawlinson MS D. 401, fol. 30.


41 *The Rehearsal*, 10 February 1704/05.

42 *The Observer*, 23 June 1705.

43 *The Observer*, 29 September 1705.

44 *The Observer*, 6 March 1706.


49 *The Rehearsal*, 12 February 1706/07.

50 *The Observer*, 12 April 1707.

51 Toland to Harley, 16 May 1707, in Portland, 4: 408, 410.

52 BL Add. 4295 fol. 15, [Elector Palatine] to Sophia, Dowager Electress of Hanover, 27 September 1707.


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56 Leibniz to Lord Raby, 29 December 1707, in Kemble (ed.), State Papers and Correspondence, pp. 462–3.

57 Bod. Ballard MS 27, fol. 37v.

58 All Souls Appeals and Visitors’ Injunctions, vol. 1, fol. 72r, item 87a, Gardiner to Archbishop Tenison, 3 November 1708. A second draft of the letter is item 87b.


60 BL Add. 22083, fols. 31–41.


63 Bod. Ballard MS 4, fol. 134r, Thomas Tanner to Charlett, 16 September 1717, written from All Souls.

64 Bod. Ballard MS 12, fol. 103r, George Hickes to Charlett, 10 August 1708. See also fol. 95r, Hickes to Charlett, 3 June 1707; Stephen Lalor, Matthew Tindal, Freethinker: An Eighteenth-Century Assault on Religion (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 16.


72 Tindal, A Defence of the Rights of the Christian Church, pp. 165, 168.
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73 LPL MS 1741, fol. 63r, F. Fox to Edmund Gibson, 12 May 1730. Fox also discussed Tindal’s book in fol. 62r, Fox to Gibson, 30 April 1730.

74 Midgley, University Life in Eighteenth-Century Oxford, pp. 41, 116; Bod. Tanner MS 24, fol. 208r.

75 Bod. All Souls MS DD b. 16, fol. 13v, Gardiner of All Souls, to Dr Gibson, 12 January 1707/08. Gibson may not have done as Gardiner wished: according to an entry in William Wake’s diary for 10 May 1708 Gibson visited Wake and the two ‘had a long Conference about the present state of the Church’. See LPL MS 1770, fol. 61v.


78 All Souls Appeals and Visitors’ Injunctions, vol. 2, fol. 26, item 234; fol. 84, item 102. Tindal’s and Blencowe’s leaves of absence are recorded in All Souls Warden’s MS 9 (unfoliated), entries for 29 January 1708 and 13 November 1710; Lalor, Matthew Tindal, 98–9.

79 Erasmus Lewis to Harley, 29 May 1708, in Portland, 4: 491; Lord Raby to Leibniz, 17 January 1708; Lord Raby to Leibniz, 24 April 1708; both in Kemble (ed.), State Papers and Correspondence, pp. 464–5, 466.

80 Bod. Ballard MS 27, fol. 41v, Ayerst to Charlett, 31 March 1708, Berlin.


82 The Observator, 24 March 1708.

83 The Observator, 10 April 1708.

84 The Observator, 28 April 1708.

85 Bod. MS Eng. C. 3191, fol. 22r, Jo Worcester to Edmund Gibson, 9 December 1741.
Chapter 3

Matter, motion, and Newtonian public science, 1695–1714

“The manner, in which Sir Isaac Newton has published his philosophical discoveries, occasions them to lie very much concealed from all, who have not made the mathematics particularly their study’, concluded Henry Pemberton, editor of the third edition of the Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica (1726), regarding the contents of a book he knew better than perhaps only Newton himself. Newton’s refusal to explain his Principia, and in later years his Opticks, to a public that hung on his every word created an opportunity for others. Public science was born as a response to this demand. Indeed, it was through the products of public science – coffee-house lectures, church sermons, and books for a general readership – that most interested people came to know Newton’s work.¹

There was more at stake than the production of accurate, yet commercially viable, accounts of esoteric mathematics. Newton himself explained the issue in a letter to Richard Bentley during their correspondence. ‘Gravity’, he advised the Cambridge scholar, ‘must be caused by an agent acting constantly according to Certain laws, but whether this agent be material or immaterial is a question I have left to ye consideration of my readers’. The workings of nature testified to the existence of God, but the exact being of God remained uncertain. The Scottish mathematician Colin Maclaurin agreed in his An Account of Sir Isaac Newton’s Philosophical Discoveries, in Four Books (1748), where he claimed that ‘natural philosophy is subservient to purposes of a higher kind, and is chiefly to be valued as it lays a sure foundation for natural religion and moral philosophy; by leading us, in a satisfactory manner, to the knowledge of the Author and Governor of the universe’. However, he warned that ‘False schemes of natural philosophy may lead to atheism, or suggest false opinions, concerning the Deity and the universe’. Despite his public diffidence, Newton and his compatriots envisaged an immaterial, all-powerful, and active God at the head of the universe. William Whiston worried that others who
embraced Newtonian philosophy might not share this conception of the divine author of nature. He feared that seemingly irreligious thinkers might appropriate Newton’s work to support a universe in which Newton’s God had no place. Chief among those Whiston saw as capable of such an act were our deists, who he claimed had found support from ‘Sir Isaac Newton’s wonderful Discoveries’. The Tory nonjuror Roger North too was sceptical of the conclusions that might be drawn from Newton’s philosophy. Unlike Whiston, North faulted Newton because he believed that the Principia had fostered an atmosphere where ‘we find all our Second, third, & fourth hand philosophers all ways harping upon certain words’. Newtonian philosophy, it seemed, allowed heretics to advance their thoughts by attaching them to the credentials of a man whose work was greatly admired.

Contemporary attempts to understand what Newton had written in the Principia and in the various editions of the Opticks form the context for considering the writings of deists on matter and motion. What is more, in outlining the philosophy of nature constructed by our deists, we see how responses to deists figured prominently in the advancement of public science. It also becomes apparent that deists and authors of public science were not entirely different in their presentations. Our deists were not hostile to Newtonian philosophy, as is generally believed, but were critical of the conception of God which they believed served as its foundation. Here politics and natural philosophy collide. Deists viewed the unpredictable God of the Newtonians as the God of the Tories and High Churchmen. Alternatively, our deists separated Newton’s laws of motion and conception of gravity from Newton’s active God who guided them, and replaced that God with the God of their theology. The Bishop of Worcester, Edward Stillingfleet, who composed one of the first anti-deist works in England, confirmed this when he claimed that natural philosophy might be used as a weapon in the deist arsenal. He asserted that deists attributed ‘too much to the Mechanical Powers of Matter and Motion’ and assigned an undignified role to God as mere conservator of the universe rather than its active ruler. Newtonians like Samuel Clarke, Whiston, and others believed that the deist separation of the Newtonian God from natural philosophy led only to atheism and, what was worse, threatened to associate Newton with deism, as North asserted and Whiston feared.

Newton’s Opticks: Or, a Treatise of the Reflections, Refractions, Inflections & Colours of Light (first edition 1704) set the tone for much of the learned natural philosophical discourse in eighteenth-century England. As a result we are well served by considering some key themes from the various editions, specifically those which surfaced in deist writings. The book was an expanded version of Newton’s ‘New Theory about Light’, a paper which he had sent the Royal Society in 1672 and published in the Philosophical Transactions in February of that year. The premise of both works was that light had been
misunderstood. In opposition to previous interpretations, Newton asserted that ‘Light it self is a Heterogenous mixture of different refrangible Rays’. That is, light was composed of immutable coloured rays, which differed in their refractive indices but which when combined formed visible white light. In the *Opticks* Newton asserted more confidently what he had stated in the *Principia*, that matter was particulate and exceedingly rarefied. What was more, the component parts of matter could recombine to form any other piece of matter, without suffering ill effects from the transformation. At the end of the 1704 edition Newton appended sixteen queries in which he suggested that light itself might be a material body composed of very small particles, though he did not declare this as a fact. He also expounded on the possible interaction of light and other types of matter. Newton remained cautious in asserting conclusions because ‘to determine more absolutely, what Light is, after what manner refracted, and by what modes or actions it produceth in our minds the Phantasms of Colours, is not so easie’. Many later readers disregarded Newton’s hesitation.

A Latin edition of the *Opticks*, translated by Newton’s close friend Clarke, appeared in 1706. Appended to it were new queries (numbered 17–23, later renumbered 25–31) which further considered the cohesion of particles and the nature of light. The most important of these queries as far as contemporaries were concerned were those numbered 21 and 23. The former speculated, ‘Are not the Rays of Light very small Bodies emitted from shining Substances?’ Though the particles of light were imperceptibly small, they were material bodies. All reactions involving light could be interpreted as reactions between pieces of matter. Light particles also possessed an active power, by which ‘or [by] some other Force, stir up Vibrations in which they act upon, which Vibrations being swifter than the Rays, overtake them successively, and agitate them so as by turns to increase and decrease their Velocities, and thereby put them into those Fits’. Query 23, later renumbered as the well-known query 31, continued the investigation. ‘Have not’, Newton asked, ‘the small Particles of Bodies certain Powers, Virtues, or Forces, by which they act at a distance, not only upon the Rays of Light for reflecting, refracting, and inflecting them, but also upon one another for producing a great Part of the Phaenomena of Nature?’ Matter, thus, seemed to have an inherent power of attraction closely connected to the action of light. As P. M. Heimann and J. E. McGuire have commented, eighteenth-century readers would have interpreted a ‘power’ in matter in terms of what it might do ‘in virtue of its intrinsic nature’ and with respect to some ‘extrinsic circumstances’. It is therefore reasonable to expect some persons to have concluded that these particles had the inherent power of motion. This conclusion was strengthened by Newton’s further comment that ‘Bodies act upon each other by the Attractions of Gravity, Magnetism, and Electricity.’ As he
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had done previously. Newton did not speculate on the cause of the attractions. And yet clearly attraction had something to do with the materiality of light. Newton discouraged materialist views of nature by reminding his readers that ‘By this Principle alone there never could have been any Motion in the World. Some other Principle was necessary for putting Bodies into Motion; and now they are in Motion, some other Principle is necessary for conserving the Motion’.8

The second English edition of the Opticks (1717) included yet another batch of queries (numbered 17–24) between the previous two sets from the editions of 1704 and 1706. These most recent musings addressed a pervasive aether. Query 17 theorised that light ‘excited’ waves in the surrounding ‘aetherial medium’. In turn, these waves might be responsible for certain motions. One might conclude therefore that light imparted action to matter. In query 18 Newton conjectured on the properties of the aether itself. He asked, ‘is not this medium exceedingly more rare and subtile than the Air, and exceedingly more elastick and Active? And doth it not readily pervade all Bodies? And is it not . . . expanded through all the Heavens?’9 Thus during much of the eighteenth century Newton could be read as supporting a view of nature that was predicated on motion propagated through a material medium and originating with the action of light.

MATTHEW TINDAL AND THE MATTER OF THE TRINITY

Newton and his disciples were not the only ones concerned with these issues. Among our deists Matthew Tindal first considered the properties of matter in his published writings on the Trinity in 1695. Conceptions of matter had implications for Trinitarian and anti-Trinitarian theologies, as Stillingfleet’s argument against Toland and John Locke demonstrated. In presenting what he viewed as the difference between God and Christ – self-existence versus created being – Tindal employed an analogy. ‘Suppose’, he posited, ‘that there was some Matter self-existent, and some other Matter not self-existent, and the Nature of the one were not any way different from the Nature of the other, would they not be both equally Perfect?’ Matter, he continued, depended on nothing for its continued existence and had existed since the Creation. Moreover, all matter was identical regardless of how it was created. Any change in matter was not actual corruption or generation; rather, it was due to alteration in its motion and position. The ‘Laws of Motion’ guided matter and were responsible for its outward appearance.10 Tindal then claimed that his query regarding the Trinity remained indeterminate at this stage. However, one may see where he was heading with his reasoning: two deities, one created and the other self-existent, were equal; neither depended on the other for continued existence.
Tindal next examined the Trinity in terms of the Sun and the emanations of the Sun (i.e. light) standing in for God and Christ. Using the universe as a template with which to consider the Trinity was not unique to Tindal. The astronomer Johannes Kepler used a similar scheme in his writings. For Kepler, the Sun – the most noble body in the heavens – was indeed God, who guided the motion of planets from His location at the centre of Creation. Tindal’s analogy followed from the earlier conclusions regarding matter: rays of light ‘no way depend on the Sun for their Being or continuance in Being, except the Sun by creating Power makes them’. Even if, as some natural philosophers had posited, light was ‘parts of the Aether set in motion by the Sun, they no more depend on the Sun for their Being or continuance in Being, than the Sun does on them’. Once released from the Sun, light acted as a material body, with its speed and position directed by the laws of motion. Tindal then asserted that Christ’s existence was not therefore tied to God’s existence, just as light was not tied to the Sun. With this brief exploration into natural philosophy, we can outline Tindal’s conception of matter and motion in the late 1690s. The universe contained matter, which altered its composition as a consequence of motion. Matter was not created or destroyed but only moved into different configurations, creating different appearances in a universe designed by God to run in accordance with the divine laws that He, as the divine craftsman, established.

Tindal continued to expound upon natural philosophy and, in 1704, wrote that free access to the subject was an example of humanity’s ‘natural Right in all matters of Learning and Knowledge’. Information about the universe, its construction, and its operation – like important information about religion and God – must be freely available to those who seek it. Tindal lamented that this seemed not to be the case in his day. Those who controlled truth in natural philosophy, like those who controlled religious truth, used it to advance themselves and their initiates. The only way to alter the situation, Tindal suggested, was to eliminate all restraint on publishing. Anyone who examined nature should be able to present the results of her or his thinking on such matters.

JOHN TOLAND’S LETTERS TO SERENA

In the same year as Tindal argued for an unrestricted press, John Toland published his initial theory of nature’s workings. Though he had made passing references to the particulate structure of matter in Christianity not Mysterious, his first detailed thoughts on the subject appeared in the fourth and fifth chapters of his Letters to Serena (1704). Shortly before its publication, Anthony Collins wrote expectantly to Locke advising him that Toland’s forthcoming book should be as entertaining as Newton’s Opticks. During his time on the Continent, Toland had frequently debated natural philosophy with Gottfried Wilhelm
Leibniz and Sophia Charlotte, Queen of Prussia. *Letters to Serena* was the result. Toland himself confirmed this in the preface when he declared that Serena was ‘a very real Person’ and not a literary device. As the queen was potentially heir to the House of Hanover that stood to succeed to the English throne, Toland’s desire to present his erudition must be seen as highly political.13

Toland began by stating his belief that matter was homogeneous and made up the entire universe. Individual bodies or particles of matter did not exist; they were mental abstractions. These imagined systems of matter, which Toland claimed had been created by mathematicians, led to untenable conceptions of nature. The most obvious of these fallacies was the belief in space that existed without matter. ‘For my part’, he wrote, ‘I can no more believe an absolute Space distinct from matter, as the place of it; than that there is an absolute Time, different from the things whose Duration are considered.’14 The contrary was true only if one supposed, with these unnamed mathematicians, that space existed without matter or that time existed apart from that which was timed. Thus Toland charged mathematicians with confusing definitions of a thing with the reality of a thing.

Although Toland never mentioned any specific mathematician by name, we may be certain that he had Leibniz in mind. During their debates in March 1702 conducted through Sophia Charlotte, Leibniz had urged him to contemplate that something other than matter existed in the universe. The subject quickly turned to the soul and incorporeal matter.15 In their discussions Toland maintained a Lockean epistemology and stated that the question was whether there existed anything in our mind that did not come from our senses. He agreed that there was a faculty in the mind upon which ‘sensible things act’; what this faculty might be he did not know, though it was believed to be part of the soul. The only way to determine an answer was to consider the nature of human souls, but Toland lamented that such an enquiry was impractical because ‘one does not in the least know the soul by itself, but only by the body, and consequently by the senses and sensible things’. This was analogous to his statements about space, which, he claimed, we cannot conceive independently. He then told Leibniz that because of this we have no certain proof that the soul and body are distinct. He continued to explain that ‘if after my death, I am a soul, this will no more be me, since I am a soul and a body, that is to say, a man, which one cannot say of a soul’.16 Such a conclusion would be found in Toland’s own epitaph, which read, in part:

His spirit is join’d with the aithereal father
From whom it originally proceeded,
His body yielding likewise to nature
Is laid against in the Lap of its Mother.
But he’s frequently to rise to himself again,
Yet never to be the same Toland more.17
While he lived Toland believed he was both matter and spirit, but once he died he was neither.

The queen enjoyed the philosophical debates between Toland and Leibniz, first in person and then in correspondence, and requested that Leibniz respond. There was more at stake for Leibniz than answering this royal desire. He hoped to accompany the Hanoverians to England should they succeed to the throne, and, what is more, he desired to maintain his position as court philosopher. Should Sophia Charlotte or her mother, the electress, believe what Toland was telling them, which was the antithesis of Leibniz’s own views, the German philosopher would have no role in a future English court. Perhaps with this in mind, Leibniz advised Sophia Charlotte that while he had enjoyed Toland’s letter, he did ‘not entirely share the opinion of its author’. The business at hand was, as Toland had stated, whether anything other than matter existed in the universe and whether it alone acted on the senses. Regarding the latter part of the query, Leibniz asserted that numbers and shapes are compared and considered in the soul in a manner entirely different from that employed by the external senses. He referred to this faculty of thought as part of a larger immaterial sense, which he identified as the ‘natural light’. It was through this, he told Toland, ‘that one may recognise also the axioms of mathematics’.18

In response to the second part of this dispute – do incorporeal substances (specifically, the soul) exist? – Leibniz did not delay in stating that certainly ‘there is some substance separate from matter’. Matter alone, he argued, could not account for the present state of Creation, nor could it explain our ability to reason and think mathematically. An immaterial God must have guided matter to form the universe just as the soul directed human thought. Leibniz further claimed that one cannot conceive of matter without immediately thinking of its immaterial companion.19 There was more at stake than an incompetent natural philosophy. Toland’s account threatened to challenge the place of God and the eternal salvation of those who accepted his heretical writings. Leibniz hoped to make this clear to Sophia Charlotte.

Toland refused to accept any of Leibniz’s arguments, and in Letters to Serena he wrote that mathematicians often supposed the very things they seemingly discovered, such as the existence of space independent from matter. Mathematicians had no difficulty in proving what they were predetermined to find, he argued, and their hypotheses came before their facts. To counter their systems, he directed readers to Isaac Newton’s sage advice on method – ‘Observation and Facts’ – to which he had been exposed during his studies in Edinburgh.20 Ironically, as we will see shortly, Newton himself argued for the existence of absolute time and space. Nevertheless, Toland endorsed the method of the Principia: to seek instruction from nature and not from hypotheses. We know that he remained an adherent of this method from the notes
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he wrote in the margins of a copy of Martin Martin’s A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland (1716). He shared the book with his friend and benefactor Robert Molesworth during 1720 and 1721. Toland was especially critical of Martin’s tendency to relate fanciful stories from the history of Ireland, such as that of a whale eating three sailors from a ship’s crew. He described this practice of acceptance without investigation as ‘unworthy a fellow of the Royal Society’. What was more, Martin had ‘five or six times relied on others in things Curious enough, but which are in everyone’s power to experience’. Thus he was ‘a very poor Philosopher’.21 Only through observation did one act correctly in issues of natural philosophy.

Toland sought support for his philosophy several times in Letters to Serena through a claimed affiliation with Newton. Ironically, Newton’s natural philosophy and theology necessitated the existence of absolute space and time. In a manuscript composed around 1695 Newton had stated that ‘Time and Place are common affections of all things without which nothing whatsoever can exist. All things are in time as regards duration of existence, and in place as regards amplitude of presence.’ Space and time were, therefore, results of being, characteristics of existence. This condition applied equally to God, as Newton confirmed when he referred to the divine being by the Jewish term makom, ‘the substance essential to all places in which we are placed and (as the Apostle says) in which we live [and move] and have our being’. He cautioned, however, in the ‘General Scholium’ appended to the second edition of the Principia in 1713, that God ‘is not eternity and infinity, but eternal and infinite; he is not duration and space, but he endures and is present’. It was obvious that space existed independent of human thought and material substance because, if all matter were destroyed, absolute space and time would continue to exist because God existed.22

Despite these seemingly irreconcilable differences, Toland claimed that Newton’s words were ‘capable of receiving an Interpretation favourable to my opinion’. All that was required to have his and Newton’s philosophy mesh together was to modify the definition of matter by accepting what Toland knew to be true: matter had self-motion. The first step was to deny void space. It was ‘to help sluggish Matter to Motion that this Space (as the room of its action) was principally devis’d’, Toland asserted, ‘but matter not being inactive, nor wanting to have Motion continually impressed by an external Agent, Space may be exterminated from Philosophy, as useless and imaginary’. Though Newton had argued for real space, he had nevertheless, Toland believed, hinted that ‘perhaps no one Body is in absolute rest’. What was more, Toland suggested that Newton’s view ‘ought to be denominated from the Title he has given to the first Book of his Principles, viz. Of the Motion of Bodies’, which meant that he did not believe bodies to be truly motionless.23 It was in these statements that Toland saw himself and Newton as not very different; he merely
had been assertive where Newton had been cautious. Notwithstanding Toland’s praise of Newton and his citing him as a methodological model, scholars often see Toland, and other deists, as hostile to Newton. This interpretation originated with Margaret C. Jacob, who claimed that Toland’s anticlerical stance was tied to his theory of self-moving matter which he supposedly used to challenge Low Churchmen who had wedded their Anglican theology to Newton’s natural philosophy in an attempt to create a stable providential world-view in politics. But Toland’s desire to undermine the existing political structure of England, as we have seen, is far from clear. Moreover, his words in *Letters to Serena* are not those of a critic, but rather those of an admirer of a philosopher who, as Pemberton commented, purposely made his works obscure.

Toland next addressed the reality of an inherent force of motion, specifically ‘What sort of Being it is; where it resides in Matter or without it; by what means it can move Matter; how it passes from one Body to another; or how it is divided between many Bodys while others are at rest, and a thousand other such Riddles.’ When philosophers could not find such a force in nature, Toland lamented, they retreated to supernatural agency. Such scholars turned to an occasionalist understanding. Toland found this interpretation improbable. It was more likely that God had, at the Creation, impressed motion on to matter which was then ‘sufficient for the future’. Such unnamed philosophers made God an imperfect craftsman who had to tinker continuously in the world.

Toland then defined what he meant by motion and noted that philosophers ought to distinguish ‘motion’ from the force of motion:

> motion is only a Change of Situation, or the successive Application of the same Body to the respective Parts of several Bodies... motion is nothing different from the Body it self, nor any real Being in nature, but a mere mode or Consideration of its Situation, and the effect of some Force or Action without or within the Body.

Condemning again the strategy of mathematicians, he stated that they assumed the existence of a force and accepted the reality of motion without considering its origins. The practice of natural philosophy deserved better. Any attempt to explain the present constitution of things must begin with first principles. Toland believed that his proposed system of natural philosophy avoided this pitfall and preserved divine dignity. In describing his innovation, he began by distinguishing between motion and ‘Action’, which he believed had been confused in previous systems.

> I wou’d have this motion of the Whole be call’d Action, and all local Motions, as direct or circular, fast or slow, simple or compounded, be still call’d Motion being only several changeable Determinations of the Action which is always in the Whole... I deny that Matter is or ever was an inactive dead Lump in absolute Repose, a Lazy and unwieldy thing.
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In other words, Toland argued that the motive force, in his terminology 'Action', was inherent in the universal matter, which filled all the Creation. The phenomena of local motions were perceptions of the alterations of matter witnessed by an observer. The 'Action' of the whole explained the motion of the particular. What was more, matter could not be rightly understood without it, and nothing in the universe could be explained, without 'this essential Action'.

This was precisely the kind of conclusion drawn from his work that Newton wished to discourage. He wrote as much to Bentley, who in 1692 delivered the first Boyle Lectures, which incorporated Newtonian mechanics to demonstrate the divine construction of the world. Prior to publishing the lectures, Bentley sought clarification on some key points. 'So then gravity may put ye planets into motion', Newton advised him, 'but without ye divine power it could never put them into such a circulating motion...I am compelled to ascribe ye frame of this Systeme to an intelligent agent.' More importantly, Bentley had written 'of gravity as essential to & inherent to matter: pray do not ascribe that notion to me, for ye cause of gravity is what I do not pretend to know'.

For Newton, gravity was an aspect of divine activity in the world, and it could never have arisen on its own in the material universe that Toland described. Newton's view of God would not permit it, while Toland's required it.

Following Newton's methodology of observation, Toland claimed to have determined the self-motion of matter from nature itself and described his efforts as those of a 'humble Interpreter' of God's Creation. He was cautious, however, not to claim more than he believed could be known concerning motion. This meant restricting the content of his book to proving that matter was extended and active, but not speculating about the method by which it operated. Toland did not wish to become entangled in the disputes for which he had admonished mathematicians. To accomplish this goal, he returned to the epistemology advanced in *Christianity not Mysterious*, specifically Locke's conception of essences. He explained that 'if activity ought to enter into the Definition of Matter, it ought likewise to express the essence of it'. Because this was an overlooked part of matter's definition, he claimed that matter had been only half defined in the past. The correct definition of matter led to correct understanding of its nature because 'Matter can no more be conceived without Motion than without Extension, and that the one is inseparable from it as the other', whereas incorrect, or incomplete, definitions of matter had supposed 'that motion is extraneous to Matter'. Just as priests had created mysteries in religion, philosophical authority prevented the acceptance of inherent motion in matter. Indeed, in the second edition of *Christianity not Mysterious* Toland concluded that knowledge based on the mysteries of religion led to acceptance of similar practices in natural philosophy: 'Mysteries in religion are but ill argu'd from the pretended Mysteries of Nature; and that
such as endeavour to support the former by the latter, have either a design to impose upon others, or that they have never themselves duly consider’d of this Matter."31

To those who might not accept his assertions, Toland asked what sort of matter could be described without reference to constant motion. It would be, he replied, deprived of all colour, heaviness, texture, and other qualities because ‘all these depend immediately on motion’. In stating that discernible features of objects depended on the qualities of matter on which they were built, though departing from many on the ultimate source – namely inherent motion – Toland followed contemporary understanding and distinguished between primary and secondary qualities. Philosophers like Robert Boyle and many others argued that things such as colour were secondary qualities of matter which resulted from the particular arrangement and movement, that is, the primary qualities, of its particles to produce the sensation we know as colour.32

In an attempt to provide a complete natural philosophy, Toland next sought to explain gravity and planetary orbits. In the same way as he described local motion, he stated that gravity depended ‘on the Constitution and Fabrick of the Universe’. Gravity was the product of the entire universe, as was the ‘Action’ which underlay perceived motion. To suppose that individual pieces of matter had gravity in themselves was the same as believing that ‘the Wheels, and Springs, and Chains of a Watch can perform all those Motions separately which they do together’.33 The universal matter as a whole produced the effects that we identify as gravity. As Toland had claimed, it was clear that actual separate particles did not exist, for if they did, these particles would be the same as bits removed from a watch: able to do nothing until they were inserted back among the other pieces. The same was true of the universe: it was a harmonious interconnected system. Motion and gravity were the same: ‘Action’ propelled both motions. Gravity and motion were thus nominal essences supported in some unknown way by the real essence of ‘Action’, which Toland claimed we could not know. In his agnostic stance over the real cause of motion, Toland once more sought refuge in Newton’s Principia, though his active matter was certainly not Newton’s. While Newton claimed that the problem in natural philosophy was that we do not know what caused the force of motion, Toland suspected that it was ‘Action’. Force then, as interpreted by Toland, became the observable aspect of ‘Action’. By suggesting ‘Action’ as the real essence of motion and thereby solving the problem posed by Newton, he asserted, ‘I would flatter my self, that I had done something towards it in this letter.’ These are hardly the words of one who wishes to undermine Newtonian philosophy.34

Continuing to appropriate the language of Newtonian forces, Toland described the orbit of the Earth. The facts that the centripetal force of gravity
always drew the Earth, and all its matter, into orbit around the Sun and that the centrifugal force was always too weak to overcome the attraction of the Sun implied that the Earth, together with everything upon it, was never truly at rest. Toland saw the constant motion of the Earth as evidence of the constant motion of the universe and the matter of which it was composed. Thus Newton’s conception of centripetal force became for Toland evidence of inherent continuing motion. Gravity, like other motions, was a result of the ‘Action’ of the universe, be the ‘Physical Causes what you please’. Toland never attempted to determine the causes of motion. Such information, like the mysteries of Scripture, was not needed for this life. Just as ‘Action’ was inherent in our idea of matter, gravity was inherent in our idea of the material universe. Armed with his conception of material space, which was the location of gravity combined with the constant action of the centripetal force of universal gravitation, Toland believed he had accounted for all phenomena in the universe.

THE PUBLIC SCIENCE REACTION TO TOLAND’S SELF-MOVING MATTER

Letters to Serena was available for sale in early May 1704 and refutations soon followed. Toland’s position on space seemed for many readers to be uncomfortably close to that held by Thomas Hobbes and Spinoza, the bugbears of atheism for many early modern English thinkers. A generation earlier Hobbes had claimed that time and space were ‘nothing but Ideas & Phantasms happening internally to [the philosopher] that imagineth: Yet they will appear as if they were externall and not at all depending upon any power of the Mind.’ He had also claimed that only material bodies had real existence. The conclusion that many contemporaries drew from this assertion was that God too was material. Spinoza went further and claimed that the only substance in the universe was God and that various perceived parts were merely modes of God. During his educational sojourn in the Netherlands in the early 1690s Toland had learned Spinoza’s philosophy. While he agreed with Spinoza that matter was extended and occupied all space, with no parts truly separate, he believed that Spinoza had failed to define the motion of matter and had thereby offered an incomplete account. What is more, he found it unpardonable that Spinoza had not ‘so much as insinuated’ that motion was one of matter’s defining features. The result was an inadequate account of nature and of God.

The role that Toland assigned for God did appease some critics. In the Deist’s Manual, which appeared within six months of Letters to Serena, Charles Gildon, the reformed deist, critic of Alexander Pope, and in the words of one historian ‘a poor hack-writer’, considered Toland’s natural philosophical claims. Gildon
wrote that he had been very suspicious of Toland’s hypothesis of matter and motion, especially its potential to remove God’s activity in the world, until he had read further into the work. Toland had, wrote Gildon, ‘remov’d the Cause of my Answering him, by owning [matter’s] Creation, and supposing that God, with its other Properties, endu’d Matter with [motion] likewise’.39 Toland’s appeal to God’s creative power in making self-moving matter did not satisfy all his readers. Humphry Ditton, a nonconformist instructor in mathematics at Christ’s Hospital Mathematical School and public lecturer in experimental philosophy at the Marine coffee-house, used the entire preface of his The General Laws of Nature and Motion (1705), a popularised account of Newton’s natural philosophy, to dismantle Toland’s theories.40 Though he was certain that Toland had to be joking in Letters to Serena, Ditton remained suspicious because while ‘Infinite necessarily-self-moving Matter may serve to entertain an Atheist’, it also allowed no place for the active God, who he believed governed the Creation. The Astronomer Royal, John Flamsteed, approved of Ditton’s answer to Toland and commented that the preface ‘which is ye best wrote of any I have seen of a long time is a Special Answer to Mr Toland who contends in his lettre that motion is essential to matter which [Ditton] ridicules most judiciously’.41

In late November 1704 Samuel Clarke’s Boyle Lectures from that year appeared in print. Toland’s natural philosophy received special attention in A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God. Indeed, the table of contents informed readers that on page 46 one could find ‘Mr. Toland’s pernicious Opinion of Motion being essential to Matter, confuted’.42 Clarke refuted Toland’s presentation of the ‘Conatus to Motion’, or matter’s endeavouring to move. In his words, conatus ‘cannot be essential to any Particle of Matter, but must arise from some external cause; because there is nothing in the pretended necessary Nature of any Particle, to determine its motion necessarily and essentially’. Without some guidance, Clarke continued, the inherent motion of matter would have no plan of movement and would, therefore, be paralysed. The only external cause that he would entertain was God, the self-existing original creator of all things. Deists like Toland who denied this truth held inaccurate pictures of God.43 The motive behind Clarke’s answer to Toland was his use – in Clarke’s mind misuse – of Newton’s natural philosophy. Both Newton and Clarke understood space as the location of God, a consequence of His being. Their shared theology developed while Clarke translated the Opticks into Latin at Newton’s request. In later years, Whiston recollected that Clarke’s theological positions were ‘generally no other than Sir Isaac Newton’s Philosophy; tho’ frequently applied by Dr. Clarke, with great Sagacity, and to excellent purposes, upon many Occasions’.44 For Clarke, Toland’s notion of space was practically atheism and had to be quickly refuted lest others see Newton as an advocate for a material godless universe. This was not an
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unfounded fear. The High Churchman John Hutchinson was suspicious of Newton’s conception of immaterial forces, which he suggested reduced God to the soul of the world. After discussing Newtonian philosophy personally with Toland, Hutchinson was convinced that the *Principia* was compatible with, and provided support for, deism by reducing God to a mere enactor of motion.45

Less than a month later William Wotton FRS, spokesperson for the ‘moderns’ in the famed ‘Battle of the Books’, also answered Toland. Wotton presented his work in epistolary form with the title *A Letter to Eusebia: Occasioned by Mr. Toland’s Letters to Serena*. Wotton, like Clarke, was uneasy about Toland’s attempt to apparently remove God from the operation of the universe and to ‘root the Belief of all Religion out of the World’.46 Wotton, however, was no enemy to natural philosophy; properly understood it served as a testament to God’s power. Beginning by dismissing Toland’s notions as the ramblings of an atheist, Wotton considered the presentation of matter’s attributes found in *Letters to Serena*. Where Toland argued that one could not think of matter without also immediately thinking of extension and motion, Wotton replied, ‘For God’s sake what do’s the Man mean? Have not you and I, madam, an Idea of Rest as well as of Motion? Can we conceive a Body to lye Still in a place as well as to shift it?’ He then stated, ‘I can conceive of Mr. Toland without thinking of Learning or Christianity, but I cannot conceive of thinking that he is a Man.’ He continued that one could certainly mentally divide motion from matter, and that unless Toland had better arguments, it would never be evident that motion is essential to matter. If matter was everywhere infinite and identical as Toland claimed, Wotton drew his readers to the implications of the assertion: ‘There is no real Difference between one Man and another, between Mr. Newton and Mr. Toland.’ Should anyone not be convinced by his refutation, Wotton directed her or him to Clarke’s *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*.47 Years later Toland reflected on Wotton’s characterisation of him, and dismissed the approach: ‘certain men will neither allow themselves nor others to commend any thing in one from whom they differ’. Because Wotton disagreed with some of his philosophical notions, Toland accused Wotton of refusing to see anything of merit in *Letters to Serena* because prejudice unfairly coloured the reading.48

Clarke delivered the Boyle Lectures again in 1705 and published them as *A Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion*. The divine origin of gravity and motion maintained pride of place. The universe, Clarke stated, proved the existence of an active Newtonian God. In more explicit terms, ‘All things that are *Done* in the World, are done either immediately by God himself, or by created Intelligent Beings: Matter being evidently not at all capable of any *Laws or Powers* whatsoever, any more than it is capable of Intelligence; excepting only this One *Negative Power*, by which he meant
Newton's inertia. Writers like Toland, and later Collins, who ascribed the effects of nature to nature itself or some inherent power were simply wrong. As Clarke put it, 'all those things which we commonly say are the effects of the *Natural Powers of Matter, and Laws of Motions*; of *Gravitation, Attraction*, or the like; are indeed (if we will speak strictly and properly) the effects of *Gods* acting upon Matter continually and every moment'. Depictions of God's power remained at the root of this ongoing dispute.

This further underlay many subsequent defences of Newtonian natural philosophy in the face of increasing deist writings on the topic, as the case of George Cheyne illustrates. A Scottish-born physician who learned Newtonian philosophy from a fellow Scot, Archibald Pitcairne, Cheyne was an imposing man who weighed more than 30 stone. He is best known as the author of the *English Malady* (1733), a study of cures for melancholy. In *Philosophical Principles of Religion: Natural and Revealed*, he followed Clarke's example and declared that the universe as described by Newton revealed the presence of a wise and active creator. As he put it, nature was nothing less than 'the Perfect and Wise Production of Almighty God'. Addressing writers like Toland, he stated unequivocally 'that no Particle of Matter, nor any Combination of Particles, *that is*, no Body, can either move of themselves or of themselves alter the Direction of their Motion'. Passive matter demonstrated the need for an external cause of Creation and movement. Cheyne saw his book as demonstrating the existence of God. It was important, however, that one describe the correct God.

The period 1704–06 saw several further Newtonian tracts both by Newton himself, as in the second English edition of the *Opticks*, and by his followers. One of the most well-known of these works was initiated in October 1703 when an advertisement in the *Post Man* solicited subscribers for *Printing Lexicon Technicum Magnum: Or an Universal English Dictionary of Sciences*. Its author, John Harris DD, had delivered the Boyle Lectures in 1698 and served as Secretary to the Royal Society in 1709–10. He was also a renowned public lecturer in natural philosophy, specifically those facets dealing with mathematics, which he conducted at Session House, St Margaret's Hill, before moving to the Marine coffee-house in late 1701.

*Lexicon Technicum* was based on the work of Newton. However, Harris lamented the fact that the release of the *Opticks* occurred too close to the publication of his book for him to incorporate material from that newest of Newton's books. Under the heading of 'Attraction' Harris wrote the following.

"**Attraction**, is the drawing of one thing to another. Whether among the Operations of Natural Bodies one upon another, there be any such thing as *Attraction*, properly so speaking, is a Question that hath been much debated amongst Philosophers... However the word is retained by good Naturalists, and in particular, by the Excellent Mr. *Isaac Newton* in his *Principia*."
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Harris’s uncertainty mimics Newton’s: we know that bodies attract one another; we do not know how this is done. As Harris notes, Newton satisfied himself with a mathematical description of the force. Referring to ‘Bodies’, Harris suggested that they were usually defined as being solid and extended and furthermore ‘according to his excellent Philosophy the Ideas of a Body is, that which is extended, solid and moveable’. Toland had stated a similar definition himself. Where Toland differed, and it was no trivial difference, was in his notion of ‘moveable’. He saw the third aspect of matter as the ability to obtain self-motion, whereas Harris agreed with Newton and claimed that ‘moveable’ referred to the ability of matter to be acted upon to alter its inertial state. Harris followed this book with a second volume in 1710, which we will consider shortly.

ANTHONY COLLINS AND NEWTONIAN NATURAL PHILOSOPHY

The contents of Anthony Collins’s library testify to his keen interest in natural philosophy. After he died, his stock of nearly 100,000 volumes was auctioned off at St Paul’s coffee-house over several nights in 1731. Among the books listed for sale were Boyle’s Works, twenty-five volumes from the Paris Academy of Sciences, a complete set of the Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society (1665–1727), editions of Newton’s Opticks and Principia, Francis Bacon’s Works, Robert Hooke’s Micrographia, Pierre Gassendi’s Philosophia, and many others. Collins also subscribed to a number of contemporary attempts to popularise Newtonian philosophy: Henry Pemberton’s A View of Sir Isaac Newton’s Philosophy (1728), both volumes of Harris’s Lexicon Technicum (1704, 1710), and other similar books. He deeply admired Newton’s philosophy and eagerly anticipated the release of the first edition of Opticks in 1704. He and Locke exchanged letters in which Collins related his enthusiasm for this new work by Newton.

Also that same year John Norris, who had been very critical of Toland’s writings, released the second volume of a two-volume work titled An Essay Toward the Theory of the Ideal or Intelligible World. Collins wrote to Locke that he was annoyed with Norris’s conclusion that animals were unthinking material machines, calling it an unfounded hypothesis. The proper question, he told Locke, was ‘whether God can supperadd to matter a power of thinking’. Norris, however, agreed with Norris that animals were material, but claimed that they had thoughts. Indeed, he was as certain of this fact as he was ‘of Mr: Norris’s thinking’. In the third week of March 1704, Collins again wrote Locke alerting him that the relationship between thought and matter was continuing to occupy his time. Locke replied that men like Norris ‘seem to me to decree rather than to argue’. They insisted that animals were material
and devoid of thought because their hypothesis that thinking was the provision of an immaterial substance demanded it. Moreover, thought was not evident in the known properties of matter, extension and solidity. Locke cautioned that Norris did not draw the correct conclusion from this premise, namely that thought did not belong to extension or solidity. This was not the same as stating that matter cannot possibly have a power to think. Collins replied with thanks and claimed that Locke had ‘made me understand my own thoughts better then I did before’.58

Shortly after this exchange Collins made his first public foray in natural philosophy with an extended dispute with Clarke, fresh from his two Boyle Lectures in which he had rebuked Toland’s excursion in natural philosophy. Collins and Clarke were drawn into their protracted pamphleteering by the nonjurant divine Henry Dodwell, who in 1706 published his views on the soul. The full title of Dodwell’s book reveals much of its contents: An Epistolary Discourse, proving from the Scriptures and the First Fathers, that the soul is a principle Naturally Mortal, but Immortalized actually by the Pleasure of God to Punish or Reward, by its union with the Divine Baptismal Spirit, wherein is proved that none have the power of giving this Divine Immortalizing Spirit since the Apostles but only the Bishops. Dodwell believed that at Creation, God gave Adam Afflatus – the breath of life – which provided humanity with a living soul. God also added pnoe – his divine breath – which qualified this soul for immortality. After the Fall, God removed Afflatus, making humanity and the soul mortal. He allowed pnoe to remain at his discretion. Thus at death the soul still qualified for immortality, but without the breath of life the soul was continued only by the desire of God; it had no natural tendency to immortality. One could escape the inevitable destruction of the soul through baptism conducted by a priest who was ordained within an episcopal church. Foreseeing problems with his proposition, Dodwell reminded readers that he did not consider the soul dependent on the body for its existence. Rather, he claimed that the soul was continued ‘from the Divine Flation’. He continued that it was ‘God’s pleasure to continue all Souls to the Day of Judgement’.59 God might indeed do so, but He was in no way bound to do it. Moving away from arguments based on God’s power, Dodwell supported his position by examining the soul as a created substance. As a creation of God, the soul depended entirely upon Him, for its existence, as did all other created entities. Dodwell viewed his book as a testimony to the absolute power of God.

The reception of Dodwell’s initial book and its later defence were mixed. Not surprisingly, nonjurors embraced the special powers reserved for bishops.60 Others were not impressed. The Archbishop of Dublin commented, ‘I have read Mr Dodwell’s Preliminary defence, & am a little out of patience wth it.’61 Clarke expressed his concerns over the book directly to its author in a pamphlet. This was not Clarke’s first experience with Dodwell; he had seen the
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name before in the work of Toland. In 1699, Toland had turned to Dodwell for support for his view that since the doctrines of the church were established in AD 360 at the Council of Laodicea, they were not divine. The response to Toland had made special mention of Dodwell.62 Perhaps Clarke identified Dodwell as sympathetic to the deist cause because Dodwell’s position on the soul closely paralleled that of one of the types of deist – those who denied the immortal soul – a view Clarke advanced in his second Boyle Lecture.63 The pamphlet to Dodwell began, ‘Sir, It is a Thing of very ill Consequence, when Men of great Reputation in the World for Learning...advance new and crude Notions, and extravagant Hypotheses.’ Though he admitted that Dodwell had never made this claim, Clarke feared that people of ‘loose Principles and vicious Lives’ would see the title and draw the erroneous conclusion that the soul perished when the body died. He further advised Dodwell that only material substances were mortal and that the soul was certainly not material. Moreover, since matter was a conglomerate of particles and thought was an individual power resulting in an individual consciousness, thought must be located within an indivisible immaterial substance such as the soul.64

Clarke ensured that Dodwell saw the pamphlet by leaving a complimentary copy at a bookshop frequented by him, and Dodwell wrote in thanks for the unexpected gift. Dispensing with pleasantries, Dodwell took exception to Clarke’s critique, telling him that he knew of ‘no Atheist in England, that can take advantage from the primitive Doctrine of Natural Mortality’. In reply, Clarke wrote that he had not written the pamphlet out of disrespect for Dodwell as a person. However, ‘this last Book of your’s, was Judged by all Serious men of all Parties...to be of dangerous Consequences’. Clarke’s chief concern lay in his belief that Dodwell’s seeming denial of an afterlife would be used to justify lives lived with no expectation of divine retribution or reward for actions on earth.65

Clarke’s fears about the potential dangers of Dodwell’s book were soon confirmed. In a brief pamphlet Collins defended Dodwell’s right to publish any description of the soul that he thought fit. Why Collins chose to defend the writings of a High Churchman is uncertain, though his desire to encourage uncensored debate on important intellectual topics certainly played a role. Drawing on his letters with Locke, he claimed that the ‘principal Argument for the Natural Immortality of the Soul is founded on the Supposition of its Immateriality’. If the soul, the location of our thinking, was immaterial, it must be immortal. The problem was, Collins pointed out to Clarke, that one needed to prove absolutely that the soul was immaterial. ‘By Soul’, Collins wrote, ‘I suppose Mr. Clarke means a Substance with a Power of Thinking, or, as he expresses himself, with an Individual Consciousness.’66 As to how matter might think, Collins suggested, as had Toland, that a system of matter might collectively have powers, such as thought, that its individual parts did not.
Clarke replied that ‘it is both absolutely false in Fact, and impossible and a direct Contradiction in the Nature’ because a system of matter was nothing more than the sum of the motion of its parts. If a material system did think, what happened if it came apart? Would there then be as many thoughts or motions as there were pieces? Turning to the example of the specific power of gravity, Clarke stated explicitly that it was not inherent in matter ‘but only an Effect of the continual and regular Operation of some other Being upon it’.\(^6\) Following the same Newtonian line in his refutation of Toland, he maintained that gravity proved divine action in the universe.

Collins’s rejoinder reminded Clarke that they lived in England, a nation which allowed people to examine freely the opinions of others. Therefore important questions, such as the nature of the soul and matter, were suitable topics for public debate and not to be silenced. Collins then considered Clarke’s position and asked what had to be true prior to accepting it. One had to prove not only that ‘Consciousness is an Individual Power’ but also that it was not a result of a ‘Union of different kinds of Powers’. By demonstrating what he viewed as the unfounded premises in Clarke’s view, Collins believed, he was participating in an intellectual debate, the kind he endorsed in his other writings. For Clarke to be able to state with certainty the nature of the soul, he must know all the powers and properties of matter. Collins countered that until we knew the entire workings of nature, the being of the soul and thought must remain indeterminate. Turning to gravity, Collins told Clarke that he must prove that matter possessed the same powers, or a lack thereof, as it had possessed as a system, for otherwise the objection would be rendered impotent.\(^6\) If one considered the entire material world, it was evident that all the particles of matter contributed to the overall power of the system. Collins then stated, ‘By Power I understand, in the Question between us, An actual Ability to make or receive any Change, to act or be acted upon.’ Collins believed that Clarke must accept this definition as granted between them. Where he and Clarke were certain to part was in their respective conceptions of gravity. Like Toland, Collins saw gravity as inherent in matter. He explained that ‘Matter gravitates by virtue of Powers originally placed in it by God, and is now left to itself to act by those Original Powers’, and described God as a skilled craftsman who did not need to attend perpetually to gravity in a universe that was unable to run on its own.\(^6\) Just as God did not miraculously intervene in matters of religion, He did not do so in matters of natural philosophy.

Clarke’s next pamphlet dismissed Collins’s objections as ‘wide of the main Question’. Until Collins could prove with certainty that matter could think, Clarke believed the debate settled in his favour. Regarding his adversary’s notion of gravity, he took tremendous exception and exclaimed that it was ‘a great Mistake’ because things could not move themselves. In what he hoped would be his last word on the subject, he wished Collins to contemplate this
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and realise the futility of his position. Despite Clarke’s fervent desire to the contrary, however, Collins penned another response, which restated his arguments and claimed that the real question was not whether a stone moves when its support is removed; rather it was ‘whether another Being, or a Being distinct from Matter, does continually impel it, either immediately or mediately’.

Matter moved because of the action of some other being, but whereas Clarke claimed this being was immaterial, Collins asserted that one could not make that assumption. In a further similarity to Toland, Collins claimed that all matter was in physical contact; there was no void. Consequently, gravity required the continual connection of matter. Surrounding bodies passed gravity to those particles that they encircled in the system of the universe. For Collins this was a certain example of a power residing in a system of matter when it did not exist in individual pieces.

‘I have’, wrote Collins, ‘often admired that Gravitation should be esteemed a Matter of such Difficulty among Philosophers’, for he believed it was clear that perpetual motion of matter caused gravity. Matter moved because the particles surrounding it moved. Where Toland employed ‘Action’ to account for gravity, Collins suggested that gravity should be thought of as one specific aspect of matter’s constant motion. Collins too sought authority for his position in the writing of Newton and quoted from the *Principia*. ‘[T]he Incomparable Sir Isaac Newton’, he wrote, ‘is of Opinion, That Several Phenomena of Nature may depend on certain Forces, whereby from Causes (or Powers) yet undiscovered, the Particles of Bodies are mutually impelled against each other, and cohere according to regular Figures.’ If Newton himself did not know the cause of forces in nature, then Collins felt justified in offering whatever description he believed accounted best for the observed phenomenon.

Clarke responded with frustration: ‘In my last Reply I persuaded myself I had set the Question between us in so clear a Light, that there would have been no need of any new Debates.’ Nonetheless, he proceeded to chastise his adversary for not being ‘well acquainted with Natural Philosophy’. If it had been otherwise, Collins would surely have known that ‘it has been demonstrated even Mathematically, that Gravitation cannot arise from the Configuration and Texture of the Parts of Matter, and from the circumambient impelling Bodies’. Clarke then directed Collins to reread Newton’s *Principia* and the queries at the end of the *Opticks*. He also believed that Collins’s arrogance had exceeded his intellect. How could it be otherwise? Collins had, in one brief passage, discarded the entirety of Newton’s system. This mistaken notion of gravity, like Toland’s, was bad enough, but more troubling was the co-opting of Newton’s name into the enterprise. Clarke accused Collins of implying to readers that ‘this great Man is of your Opinion in the present Question’. Furthermore, Clarke charged Collins with purposefully misrepresenting Newton, who had specifically refuted conceptions of gravity like Collins’s by
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noting that what Newton meant by ‘force’ and ‘power’ was not what Collins believed. Such words did not mean (as you did by Powers originally placed in Matter by God) to signify the Efficient Cause of certain determinate Motions of Matter, but only to express the Action itself by which the Effect is regularly produced, without determining the immediate Agent or Cause. Newton described the effect of gravity; he did not attempt to determine its cause. In a final attempt to reveal Collins’s mistakes, Clarke described Newtonian space, of which matter occupied only a tiny fraction. As a result, ‘the great Phenomena of Nature cannot possibly depend upon any Mechanical Powers of Matter and Motion, but must be produced by the Force and Action of some higher Principle’.

Vacuous space and a paucity of matter necessitated that motion and gravity resulted from something other than matter. For Clarke and Newton this extra cause was God.

During the dispute Collins wrote to John Trenchard, Whig propagandist and with Thomas Gordon co-editor of the Independent Whig and Cato’s Letter. The date of the letter (9 May 1707) places it between Clarke’s last pamphlet and Collins’s next reply. Collins advised Trenchard, ‘If [Clarke] means only to tell me as he argues with me, That my reasoning is false, absurd, inconclusive, inconsistent &, for whosoever writes against another must by writing against him suppose him in the wrong & must consequently use such expressions without intrenching on ye rules of decency & civility.’ That is, Clarke did not have to agree with Collins so long as he maintained a civil tone. Deists encouraged these debates. Collins was, however, disappointed in Clarke’s actions prior to the latest pamphlet, specifically the ‘boasts beforehand, and talking of his having caught me at an advantage now that the dispute turns upon points of Mathematicks and Natural Philosophy’. Despite Clarke’s claims to the contrary, Collins felt confident in his understanding of the material. Indeed, he suggested that he and Clarke did not differ very much. ‘But what Question in Mathematicks are there in dispute between us?’ he asked Trenchard, ‘As for Gravitation I doubt not to defend what I have said which amount to no more than this: That matter can only move but when [it] is impelled.’ The only apparent difference was in whether the impeller was material or immaterial, inherent or external. To Clarke this difference could not have been more important.

In his final work of the controversy, Collins described how thought might result from material action: ‘I observe, that Thinking is an Action that begins not in us, till we are operated on by external material Objects, that act on us by Motion and Contact.’ As Toland had suggested to Leibniz and Sophia Charlotte, Collins argued that we have no ideas until we encounter them through the senses. Therefore, thought must be the result of matter and motion. He stated that it was well known that all matter was the same and that our perceptions of ‘Smells, Tastes and Sounds, &c.’ result from the interactions
of matter in our minds to produce the phenomena of these secondary qualities. Why could the same process not cause thought? He then claimed that he understood space differently from Clarke. Perhaps space was the place of matter, and the one could not be considered apart from the other; moreover, one could have a vacuum without describing it as space without matter. In this view, space did not exist as a reality, but only as an abstract concept. Contrarily, for Clarke as for Newton, space was the place of God’s being. To defend his alternative view, Collins turned to the writings of Robert Boyle. It is evident that he held Boyle’s work in high regard, for his library held thirty-two books by him. On the basis of his reading of the air-pump experiments, Collins believed that Boyle had defined a vacuum as ‘a vessel out of which the air is exhausted, . . . by which he understands not a space wherein there is no Body at all’. Thus Collins asserted that gravity might be caused by a system of matter, even in a vacuum, and concluded that until Clarke was able to demonstrate that a total vacuum existed in nature, ‘he will not be able to prove, that material Impulse is not the Cause of Gravitation’.

Clarke’s reply contained no new arguments but restated his position. Collins did not respond, and the debate that lasted from 1706 to 1708 and occupied some 400 pages came to an end. Despite their often heated debate, the two literary combatants were not perpetual enemies but occasional dinner companions. During 1711 Collins and Tindal would meet Whiston and Clarke to discuss theology and other topics of interest at the home of Lady Caverly and her common-law husband Sir John Hubern. According to Whiston the four had ‘friendly debates about the truth of the Bible and the Christian Religion’. The conversations ended when Whiston stopped attending, not on account of the deist company, but because he had learned that Caverly and Hubern were not married and he could not condone their living arrangement.

Observers identified Collins’s pamphlets as epitomising what was thought to be the deist position on the soul. This assessment is seen in The First Principles of Modern Deism confuted (1707). The author, John Witty, Rector of Lockington, composed the book as a reaction against Collins – a fact he acknowledged in the preface – because ‘the Doctrine[ ] of the Immortality of the Soul’ was one of bases of Christianity. To deny this was to deny religion itself. What was more, he identified Collins as one of the same club that had produced The Rights of the Christian Church Asserted (by Matthew Tindal). Shortly after Francis Higgins had refuted Toland’s theology and Dodwell’s description of the soul, the Tory political newspaper The Rehearsal also contemplated the deist account of the soul. The publication date (24 May 1707) suggests an attack on Collins. After telling readers that deists were ‘too many now among us’, the editorial claimed that it ‘is the Common Opinion of the Deists . . . and which they make their Comfort, That the Soul of Man Dies with the Body, like the Flame of a Candle when it is put out, and that there is no Future Account, nor any
Rewards or Punishments'. With no fear of eternal damnation, the newspaper claimed, deists had no secure foundation for morality. While neglecting their personal salvation was bad enough, what was worse was that their immorality threatened to undermine the English nation, or so the paper suggested following Higgins’s assessment earlier the same year. Deists, *The Rehearsal* continued, knew that they acted contrarily to the rest of Britons. Nevertheless they delighted in the difference. A deist ‘when he came to Die . . . had this Ejaculation, and said, If there be a God, a Heaven or a Hell, I am a Miserable Creature – But I much Doubt it. Behold here the utmost Hopes and Expectations of a Deist.’81 This Tory characterisation of deists was certainly a motivating factor in Henry Sacherevell’s infamous sermon of 1709.

Even after Clarke and Collins ceased their polemics, the effect of their respective works was long-lasting. The populariser of Newtonian science and mathematical instructor Ditton, who had challenged Toland’s notion of matter nearly a decade earlier, appended a specific refutation of deists’ conception of material souls in *A Discourse Concerning the Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (1712). Regarding the notion of thinking matter, Ditton claimed that to accept it, one must accept self-moving matter, which ‘at once destroys all, that the world has ever call’d by the name of NATURAL PHILOSOPHY’.82 His reasons were Clarke’s, namely that Newtonian natural philosophy prohibited both material souls and self-moving matter. What was more, he proposed that acceptance of thinking matter was the first link in the chain of heresy and unbelief.

In 1727, nearly twenty years after Collins first defended Dodwell, John Maxwell, popularise of Newtonian science and chaplain to the peer Lord Carteret, produced *A Treatise of the Laws of Nature*, a new translation of Richard Cumberland’s *De Legibus Natuarae* (1672). We know that both Collins and Clarke saw this edition because they, along with Newton, are listed as subscribers. As an appendix, Maxwell included an account of the dispute between Collins and Clarke in which he argued that the soul was an immaterial substance entirely different from the material body. The work followed the path established by Clarke’s pamphlets. Even the main reasons levelled against Collins found a new home in Maxwell’s appendix: ‘The Soul, therefore, whose Power of thinking is undeniably one individual Consciousness, cannot possibly be a material Substance.’83 In *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed*, the book identified by many historians as signalling the philosophical death-knell of deism, Joseph Butler, Bishop of Durham, reprinted selections from the Clarke–Collins controversy. Butler sided with Clarke and stated that ‘Consciousness is a single and indivisible power, it should seem that the Subject in which it resides, must be so too.’84 His reasons were Clarke’s: matter is divisible, and thus cannot be the location of an indivisible power such as thought.

Perhaps the most unique writings on deists and the soul to be born in reaction to Collins and deists generally were those which appeared in Richard
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Steele’s Guardian during 1713, its only year of existence. Steele, essayist, playwright, promoter of public science, and future MP, had started the Guardian as an organ of Whig political polemic to counter the various Tory papers. The editor was Steele himself in the guise of Nestor Ironside, ‘an old man who gives sound advice to people; indeed he is the guardian of this people, though not their leader’. Steele would also refute Collins’s Discourse of Free-Thinking in the Guardian, for which he received the gratitude of a reader who claimed to have been present at a meeting of free thinkers and was much disturbed by what he heard. His stance regarding deists may explain why he composed the following astonishing tale in the Guardian on 21 and 25 April.

The story was purportedly narrated by a man who had spent much time travelling on the Continent. Before he returned to England a friend of the man showed him a ‘little Amber Box of Snuff’ and ‘made me a present of it, telling me at the same time, that he knew no readier way to furnish and adorn a Mind with Knowledge in the Arts and Sciences, than the same Snuff rightly applied’. His friend told the author that Descartes had rightly discovered ‘the Pineal Gland, to be the immediate Receptacle of the Soul’, where it acted on the body through nerves. Then the story turned bizarre. The snuff possessed the ability to separate ‘the Soul for some time from the Body, without any Injury to the latter’. Once a person was a disembodied soul, he or she might enter the mind of any other person through the pineal gland, in order to learn the knowledge contained there. After telling Steele of his immaterial adventures, the correspondent claimed that during one particular excursion he happened to be present during the initial planning ‘of a certain Book in the Mind of a Free-thinker’, which had taken place at the coffee-house frequented by our deists and by fellows of the Royal Society.

The tale continued a few days later:

On the 11th Day of October in the Year 1712, having left my Body locked up safe in my Study, I repaired to the Grecian Coffee-house, where entering the Pineal Gland of a certain eminent Free-thinker, I made directly to the highest part of it, which is the Seat of Understanding, expecting to find there a comprehensive Knowledge of all things Humane and Divine; but, to my no small Astonishment, I found the Place narrower than ordinary, insomuch that there was not any room for a Miracle, Prophecies, or Separate Spirit.

This was satirically composed physical proof of what theologians could only hint at, namely that the understanding of a deist was smaller than that of orthodox thinkers. Perhaps if their minds could be sufficiently expanded, deists would see their mistakes and recant their heresy. The investigation of the interior workings of a deist mind continued as the correspondent moved to the imagination. There resided ‘Prejudice in the Figure of a Woman standing in a Corner with her Eyes close shut, and her Fore-fingers stuck in her
Ears; many Words in a confused Order, but spoken with great Emphasis, issued from her Mouth’. Deists refused to employ their imaginations to consider things which might expand their understandings. Such things included divine providence and religious mysteries. Before ending the letter, the author submitted that these conditions were not present in just one deist, for he had gone ‘round the Table, but could not find a Wit or Mathematician among them’. Steele thanked him for the unusual account and suggested tongue-in-cheek to his readers that a potential medical cure existed for the disease of deism.87

NEWTONIAN PHILOSOPHY BECOMES MORE MATERIALISTIC

Views of motion and gravity similar to those suggested by Collins became less controversial as the eighteenth century advanced. In late May of 1710 John Harris released the second volume of the Lexicon Technicum. A comparison of the explanations given to terms like ‘Attraction’ and ‘Body’ reveals the alteration in contemporary understandings of Newton’s natural philosophy over a period of six years between the first and second volumes. One important difference was the pride of place given to the term ‘Attraction’. Harris wrote that he had provided readers with ‘a further Account of that most amazing Property, the Attraction of the Particles of Matter one towards another, first discover’d by that Incomparable Mathematician and Philosopher Sir Isaac Newton’. He then reported how Newton had long considered the question of particulate attraction and that the Latin edition of Opticks included several important queries on this subject, which would reshape current views in natural philosophy. After relating Newton’s discovery that the force of attraction among the particles which form observable bodies varies inversely with respect to the size of the body, Harris considered the attractive power of light:

Wherefore the Rays of Light, being the least of all Bodies we know, must needs have the greatest and strongest Attracting Force; and how very strongly those Particles do Attract . . . Now such a prodigious Force of Attraction in the Rays of Light cannot but have wonderful Effects in those Particles of Matter, with which they are joyned in the Composition of Bodies; and must cause that those particles Attract one another, and that they are moved variously among themselves.88

These material bodies of light contained certain powers of attraction, which could be transferred to other bodies and in turn cause them to be attracted to one another. Light seemingly held the key to many mysteries in natural philosophy. Where volume 1 contains an entry on ‘body’, in volume 2 this heading is replaced by ‘particles’. Particles of matter are hard, solid, and in possession of an attractive power. Thus by 1710 Newtonians seemed to be
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concerned with particles of matter and the power of a material light. Indeed, on the basis of Harris’s work, the materiality of light became an accepted fact.89

In 1713, the same year as Collins’s Discourse of Free-Thinking, William Derham’s Boyle Lectures for 1711 and 1712 were published as Physico-Theology. Derham was a graduate of Trinity College, Oxford, and a fellow of the Royal Society, and was ordained in 1682 prior to becoming Rector of Upminster in Essex (1689–1735). He was a friend of Newton and John Ray, the famed author of the The Wisdom of God as Manifested in the Works of the Creation (1691), which served as a kind of template for his own catalogue of natural wonders that might prove a divine artificer. In addition to works on natural history, Derham published several articles in the Philosophical Transactions on astronomical and meteorological topics. Physico-Theology was widely reprinted, with a fifth edition appearing within seven years of its initial publication. Derham followed in the footsteps of Ray and more recently of Clarke by asserting that natural philosophy might well serve theology.

We are, however, concerned with Derham’s thoughts on light and gravity. Following the interpretation found in Harris, he stated, ‘I take Light to consist of material Particles, propagated from the Sun, and other luminous Bodies.’90 He cited both Newton and Boyle as holders of this view. Turning to gravity, Derham described it as ‘the Tendency which Bodies have to the Center of the Earth’. Like others of his age, he used Newton as his guide: ‘According to the principles of the Newtonian (the most rational of any) Philosophy, the cause of Gravity, is that universal Law of Matter, imprinted on it at its Creation by the infinite Creator, namely Attraction: Which is congenial with all the Matter in the Universe; to Bodies and Compound, Solid and Fluid, in the Heavens, and the Earth.’ In language which might have come from Toland, Tindal, or Collins, gravity is seen to operate in terms of a ‘Law’ which was ‘imprinted’ on all matter at Creation. Where Derham deviated from the deists is seen most readily in Astro-Theology, his third set of Boyle Lectures, delivered in 1714 and published the following year. After advising readers that Newton ‘doth not pretend to assign’ a cause to gravity, Derham concluded that we find answers in ‘the Wisdom and Power of the GREAT AUTHOR of All Things’. However, this was not the predictable knowledge-sharing God of the deists. As Derham explained, our duty to God is to ‘revere and fear him at all Times’.91 No deist would have characterised God in this way.

THE LIBERTY OF THE SOUL: CLARKE AND COLLINS ONCE MORE

In 1714, nearly a decade after his initial debate with Clarke, Collins again addressed the workings of the mind to answer the question of whether it operated by material or immaterial means. In A Philosophical Inquiry Concerning
Human Liberty, he asserted that people were determined in their actions by a certain amount of necessity; but he was quick to assure readers that this did not mean that people had the mere mechanical action of clocks. He explained that a person was a necessary agent ‘because all his actions have a beginning. For what ever has a beginning must have a cause; and every cause is a necessary cause.’ If something could originate without a cause, then, Collins claimed, the world could have come into being without any cause, an atheistical conclusion of which he wanted no part. All known action in the universe, celestial and terrestrial, plant and animal, was determined by some immutable sequence of causes. Since matter acts only upon matter, and as he demonstrated in the previous exchange with Clarke, thought was material because the causes which enact our necessity of action must be material too. Humanity was determined to act in such a way as to increase happiness and avoid pain, Collins argued. If this were not true, then ‘there would be no foundation for rewards and punishments, which are the essential supports of society’. Consequently, the interaction of material causes on the human mind made us necessary agents predisposed to act for the common good. Thus one did not need an immortal soul to have morals.

Not surprisingly, Clarke rejected Collins’s ideas entirely and was sure he had seen similar views before ‘in the Papers which lately passed between Me and the Learned Mr. Leibniz’. During their celebrated correspondence, Leibniz claimed that ‘God has forseen everything; he has provided a remedy for everything before-hand; there is in his works a harmony, a beauty, already pre-established’. In other words, God had established all causes at the Creation. Clarke countered that the Creation operated by ‘the mere will of God’ and that any other interpretation ‘would tend to take away all power and choosing, and to introduce fatality’. In this latest threat to correct conceptions of God’s unlimited power, Clarke acknowledged that Collins presented the material in ‘such a Light, as may possibly deceive unwary Persons, whose Thoughts have not been much conversant upon so nice a subject’. The same reason also underlay Clarke’s rebuttal to Dodwell and his previous exchange with Collins: it was not the soundness of the arguments but the conclusion that might be drawn from them.

Clarke believed that Collins opened his work with a contradiction. To suggest that humans were necessary agents was to suggest the impossible. If people were acted upon by immutable and necessary causes, then they would cease to be agents because only agents possessed the ability to initiate motion. Despite Collins’s claim to the contrary, Clarke submitted that a necessary being acting by necessity was no better than a clock. Indeed for Clarke, freedom of action was the basis of religion. In his examinations for the degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1709, one of his theses was that ‘all religion supposes the freedom of human actions’. People must have the freedom to choose religion
responsibly because forced religion would not have the ability to encourage moral actions.94

Before contemplating a reply to Clarke, Collins discussed the possibility with his close friend Pierre Desmaizeaux in May 1717. ‘You make a right judgement of Dr. C’s book’, Collins told him, ‘It is very peevish & haughty; and full of misrepresentations from one end to the other.’ This was the same assessment he had given Trenchard regarding Clarke’s tone in the Dodwell dispute. Collins seemed genuinely surprised that a learned discussion should take on such a personal note. He would not, however, be drawn into a mud-slinging contest. ‘I will take no hasty measures in this matter’, he wrote to Desmaizeaux, ‘and will most certainly outdo him in civility & good manners’. And yet he was considering a reply.95

After focusing his attention on other matters, Collins returned to questions of human necessity, and little more than a year later, in June 1718. Drawing Collins back into the subject was Desmaizeaux’s forthcoming collection of writings by Leibniz, Clarke, and Newton. Desmaizeaux had asked Collins if he would like to include a rebuttal to Clarke in the book. Despite the fact that he had been composing the work since July 1717 and had a ‘reply to Dr C in loose papers’, Collins declined the invitation and answered, ‘Let not the collection of Leibniz & Clarke Papers &c. now printing in Holland wait for my reply to Dr. Clark. If I do any thing more, it shall be by way of addition to my Inquiry, in a third edition of it.’96 It was ironic, Collins mused, that Clarke had brought religion into their debates and made him ‘an enemy & himself a friend to it’, when Clarke himself was deemed by many to be ‘an Enemy to Religion’. This was undoubtedly a reference to Clarke’s retracted heretical writings on the Trinity. Collins could forgive this blind spot in Clarke’s arguments, but he continued to be irritated by the tone of the writings. This uneasiness was the reason why Collins was reluctant to answer Clarke. He would not provide his adversary with a ready-made platform to ‘act the bigot against me; for what he says in the close of his Remarks shows that he will act the bigot to serve his purpose, as much as his other writings sho[w] that he does but act that part there’.97 Deists welcomed intellectual debates, but shrank from petty bickering.

In spite of Collins’s initial reluctance to answer Clarke’s criticism, others had no such restraint. John Trenchard and his literary partner Thomas Gordon considered Clarke’s reply to Collins’s notion of liberty and necessity in their series Cato’s Letters: or, Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religious, and other important Subjects.98 The publications had originated as a critique of the government following the South Sea debacle of 1720. The issue in question appeared on 12 January 1722 with the title ‘Of Liberty and Necessity’. Trenchard and Gordon suggested that the real issue in the debate between Clarke and Collins was that of whether someone could ‘do a voluntary Action without a Design to
do it, and without any Reason or Motive for doing it, then Matter without Understanding has a self-moving Power'. They further argued that Collins had perhaps been partially correct in arguing for a necessary component to human actions. This was true because ‘the Mind of Man can be only a secondary Cause, [and] must be acted upon by other Causes; that God alone is the first Cause or Principle of all Motion; and that the Actions of all other Beings are necessarily dependent upon Him’.99

They then noted that Clarke, who was identified as a ‘very great and justly celebrated Author’, had advocated the position that ‘Man has Self-moving Power’. Though Clarke had only supposed this to be the case, nevertheless he had insisted that Collins account ‘for what no Man yet has accounted for, and yet every Man sees to be true’, namely that matter and soul are distinct substances. Clarke should ‘kindly to have let us into that Secret himself’, they suggested. Like Collins, they urged Clarke not to be so quick in his criticism of others because, while he was correct that the soul and thought put a body into motion, ‘how these Effects are produced, we are wholly in the dark’. Trenchard and Gordon admonished Clarke for demanding of others what he could not do himself.100 Collins could not have made a better demand upon Clarke for civility.

Other respondents restricted their criticism of Clarke’s latest answer to Collins directly to Clarke himself. John Clarke, master of the grammar school at Hull (and no relation), wrote to him on 29 May 1717. This was not the first comment that John Clarke had offered on a Newtonian response to Collins. In his copy of William Whiston’s Reflexions On An Anonymous Pamphlet, Entitled, a Discourse of Free Thinking he criticised the treatment of Collins found in its pages. According to John Clarke’s notes, Whiston had paradoxically endorsed ‘the justness [of Collins’s] definition of the subject, and also the correctness of his mode of treating it; yet you say that his pamphlet contains some indirect censures on the conduct of Priests’. Perhaps if priests ‘in all ages were more careful of their conduct, they need not feel much anxiety for what the world may say of them’. He ended by suggesting that a better answer to writers like Collins was silence rather than provocation.101 In this latest reaction to a rebuttal of Collins, John Clarke wrote to Samuel Clarke to engage in a ‘fair and impartial Enquiry’ on the subject of human freedom. He then proceeded to side with Collins’s view that some necessity exists in human actions: ‘It does not appear to me so absurd a Supposition, that pleasure or pains, Reasons, motives, and Arguments, tho’ mere abstract notions, should in some Cases be the physical, necessary, and Efficient Causes of Actions.’102 He argued that passions might result in both physical action and impressions upon the mind. That is, passions cause action by necessary relations, though John Clarke did not elaborate his theory and Samuel Clarke did not respond.
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Unlike Collins, whom he once characterised as ‘a good sort of man, but an absolute fatalist’, Thomas Chubb believed in complete human liberty. He described agency in people as the same thing as the ‘active Faculty or Power of Self-motion, and the same intellectual Faculty which excites to and directs that Motion’. This power found in the soul was entirely immaterial. People were entirely free and might act in any way they wished. Chubb, however, reminded his readers that God might impart wisdom to humans through a revelation, though ‘this does not affect his Liberty, nor give him any new Agency’. Not even God could detract from human freedom. In a later publication, Chubb repeated that humanity was ‘capable of Motion or Action’ and that this ability led them to be moral creatures. For Chubb, people were moral because their freedom allowed them choice other than a moral one. Because people used their freedom to make choices for the betterment of humanity, they were indeed moral.

Collins’s reply to Clarke eventually came despite his initial diffidence. He was confident of success because prior to publishing, he had ‘had a dispute with an Ingenious [but unidentified] man & a great friend of Dr. Clarke on the Subject’ and, after ‘showing him my Paper, which he took with him out of my Library’, claimed that he was unable to engage the man in debate, because his former opponent had abandoned all objections in light of the material he read. Collins’s timing was impeccable. A Dissertation upon Liberty and Necessity was published in 1729, the year in which both he and Clarke died. The reply began by suggesting that the question of whether humanity was ‘an Agent or Patient’ remained unanswered: neither Clarke nor he had been able to settle the issue. Still skating around the issue of explicit material souls, Collins tellingly wrote, ‘the Soul is so constituted, as to be affect[ed] by Material Objects’. However, he cautioned, we know not the qualities of matter, material or immaterial. But we do know, he conceded, that ‘the Soul is Acted upon by Ideas as Matter is by Matter’ and that this unbroken sequence of causes negates complete human liberty, as he had originally argued.

The Present State of the Republick of Letters carried a eulogy for Clarke which asserted that it was his excellence in natural philosophy ‘which enables us to determine the questions concerning Liberty and Necessity’. The same issue also contained a review of Collins’s Dissertation upon Liberty and Necessity. The reviewer wondered why a subject so long discussed should have had ‘no demonstration convincing enough, to gain universal assent to either side of the question’ of whether people be necessary agents. Collins was commended for his clear presentation of material, but his arguments would only convince readers who could not ‘readily discern the Truth’. In spite of Collins’s arguments to the contrary, the reviewer claimed that it is ‘impossible for [people] to pay any proper Worship to God, without doing it by Intention, Choice and Will’. Collins’s failure to accept this axiom revealed that he was ‘greatly blinded
with prejudice’ in the matter. In a closing remark, the reviewer urged him to reconsider carefully the writings of Clarke, ‘the greatest Master of Reason that ever liv’d’.107 We do not know whether Collins took this advice.

CONCLUSION

By juxtaposing the writings of our deists on natural philosophy with those of better-known popularisers of Newtonian science, we are able to see that the two were not vastly different. Where Toland, Tindal, and Collins differed from Ditton, Harris, and others was in their conception of God as governor of the universe. However, as we will see, the difference between deist and non-deist presentation of contemporary natural philosophy becomes almost indistinguishable near the middle of the eighteenth century. It is also worth noting at this stage that many of the views advanced by our deists are not reducible to one representative example. Though Toland and Collins suggested that the soul might be material and that only material matter acts in the world, Chubb embraced an immaterial soul. Tindal seems not to have explicitly adopted one position or the other. He did, however, see unfounded appropriation of the soul’s care as a defining aspect of priestcraft. Collins believed that humanity’s actions were necessitated by an immutable sequence of causes acting upon the mind. On the other hand, his fellow deists proposed that total human freedom was the basis for the liberty enjoyed by all Britons. In spite of the fact that not all deists would not have agreed with Collins, many saw his writings as emblematic of deism. As we have seen, it is not the case that he spoke for all his brethren in this matter. Any accurate picture of deism or deists, therefore, is found not in the writings of theological and political opponents but in those of the individual deists themselves. Indeed, they were more than owners of a meaningless pejorative designation hurled at them by the godly.108 One of the most vocal opponents of deism was Henry Sacheverell DD, who in 1709 created much controversy with his inflammatory oratory, to which we now turn.

NOTES


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3 BL Add. 325548, fol. 42r.


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14 Toland, Letters to Serena, pp. 161, 182.
17 BL Add. 4295, fol. 76.
19 Leibniz, Philosophical Papers and Letters, p. 552.
23 Toland, Letters to Serena, pp. 183, 213, 201–2; Newton, The Principia, p. 410.
24 Jacob, Newtonians and the English Revolution, pp. 228, 238.
26 Toland, Letters to Serena, p. 140.
28 Isaac Newton to Richard Bentley, 17 January 1693, in Correspondence of Isaac Newton, 3: 240.
30 Toland, Letters to Serena, pp. 165, 168.
31 John Toland, Christianity not Mysterious, 2nd ed. (London, 1696), p. 89.
33 Toland, Letters to Serena, pp. 184, 185.
34 Toland, Letters to Serena, pp. 208, 233–4.
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35 Toland, Letters to Serena, p. 208.
38 Toland, Letters to Serena, pp. 144, 138, 145.
42 The Post Man, 28 November 1704; Samuel Clarke, A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God: More Particularly in Answer to Mr. Hobbs, Spinoza, and Their Followers (London, 1705), table of contents.
43 Clarke, A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God, pp. 46–7, 123, 156.
Newtonian public science, 1695–1714


53 John Harris, Lexicon Technicum: or, an Universal English Dictionary of Arts of Sciences, 2 vols. (London, 1704, 1710), vol. 1, preface; and ‘Attraction’.

54 Harris, Lexicon Technicum (1704), ‘Body’.


56 Collins to Locke, 18 November 1703; Locke to Collins, 22 November 1703; Collins to Locke, 16 February 1704; all in The Correspondence of John Locke, 8: 123, 126, 158.


58 Collins to Locke, 21 March 1704; Locke to Collins, 24 March 1704; Collins to Locke, 30 March 1704; all in The Correspondence of John Locke, 8: 249, 254–5, 258; Norris, Ideal or Intelligible World, 2: 1–57.

59 Henry Dodwell, An Epistolary Discourse, proving from the Scriptures and the First Fathers, that the soul is a principle Naturally Mortal, but Immortalized actually by the Pleasure of God to Punish or Reward, by its union with the Divine Baptismal Spirit, wherein is proved that none have the power of giving this Divine Immortalizing Spirit since the Apostles but only the Bishops (London, 1706).

60 Bod. MS Eng. th. C. 46, fol. 207r.

61 BL Add. 32096, fol. 75, Archbishop of Dublin to Archdeacon of Baynard, 1 November 1707.


64 Samuel Clarke, A Letter to Mr. Dodwell, in Works, 3: 721, 722, 730, 747. The work was popular, with a second edition appearing within a month of the initial printing. See The Post Man, 6 April and 7 May 1706.

65 BL Add. 4370, fol. 1v–r, Henry Dodwell to Samuel Clarke, 22 May 1706; BL Add. 4370, fol. 21v–r, Clarke to Dodwell, 1706. Underlining in original.

66 Anthony Collins, A Letter to the Learned Mr. Henry Dodwell; Containing Some Remarks on a (pretended) Demonstration of the Immateriality and Natural Immortality of the Soul, in Mr. Clarke’s Answer to his late Epistolary Discourse, &c., in Samuel Clarke, Works, 3: 750.

67 Samuel Clarke, A Defence of an Argument Made use of in a Letter to Mr. Dodwell, To prove the Immateriality and Natural Immortality of the Soul, in Clarke, Works, 3: 759.
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75 KSRL MS G23:14, fols. 54v, 46r, Anthony Collins to John Trenchard, 9 May 1707. Underlining in original.


81 *The Rehearsal*, 24 May 1707.


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87 The Guardian, 21 (25 April 1713).
89 Cantor, Optics after Newton, pp. 31, 32–3; Heimann and McGuire, ‘Newtonian Forces’, 236.
95 BL Add. 4282, fols. 129v, 130r, Collins to Desmaizeaux, 5 May 1717.
96 BL Add. 4282, fol. 137v, Collins to Desmaizeaux, 1 July 1717; BL Add. 4282, fol. 150r, Collins to Desmaizeaux, 17 June 1718. The work was published as Recueil de Diverses pieces, sur la Philosophie, la Religion Naturelle, l’histoire, les Mathematiques, &c. par mrs. Leibniz, Clarke, Newton, & autres Autheurs Célèbres, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1720).
97 BL Add. 4282, fol. 150r.
98 Collins had also stayed with Trenchard at least once. See KSRL MS G 23:15, fol. 50, Thomas Rawlins to William Simpson, 6 July 1709.
100 [Trenchard and Gordon], Cato’s Letters, 4: 55, 56.
101 John Clarke, A Note to Wm––. Whiston. M.A. on his publication of the foregoing “Reflections on an anonymous Pamphlet, entitled A Discourse of Free-Thinking”, in Reflexions On An Anonymous Pamphlet, Entitled, a Discourse of Free Thinking (London, 1713), flyleaves at end of book. This copy is owned by Steve Snobelen, and I am grateful to him for a transcription of these notes.
102 BL Add. 4370, fol. 19r–v, John Clarke to Samuel Clarke, 29 May 1717.
105 Thomas Chubb, Scripture-evidence Consider’d, in a View of the Controversy Betwixt the Author and Mr. Barclay’s Defenders (London, 1728), pp. 10–11, 12.
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106 BL Add. 4282, fols. 180v–181r, Collins to Desmaizeaux, 28 August 1721; Anthony Collins, A Discourse on Liberty and Necessity... with some Remarks upon the Late Reverend Dr. Clarke’s Reasoning on this Point. And an Epistle Dedicatory to Truth (London, 1729), pp. 1, 3, 11, 13.


108 In this I agree with David Pailin, whose study of ‘natural religion’ yielded many different meanings of a term that scholars have assumed was ubiquitous rather than nuanced. See his ‘The Confused and Confusing Story of Natural Religion’, Religion, 24 (1994), 199–212.
Chapter 4

The spectre of High Church: politics and theology, 1709–19

Queen Anne’s husband, Prince George of Denmark, died in October 1708. For the queen, whose health had never been robust, the added strain left her susceptible to manoeuvring on the part of her ministers – Whigs temporarily regained the royal ear. Whig resurgence, however, was short-lived as the continuing expense of participating in the War of the Spanish Succession frustrated both Anne and tax-hating Tories such as Robert Harley. Tories saw encouragement for the Whig-supported war and the financing of it as tied to support for Dissenters because many Whigs seemed to embrace a Latitudinarian stance towards religion, which meant a wide comprehension within the Church of England. Many High Church Tories feared that such a religious policy would mean encouragement for more radical heresies like deism. As an example of this political changing of the guard, Harley, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, replaced the Whig Lord Treasurer Sidney Godolphin in early 1710. The elections following the upsurge of Tory sentiments after the Sacheverell affair secured Harley’s position until Anne’s last days in 1714. It was amid these events that our deists wrote and in some cases attempted to advance themselves.

Deism and Reaction to Henry Sacheverell and the Sermon of 1709

Without question the most important and dramatic event of 1709 for both politics and religion in England was the sermon that Dr Henry Sacheverell delivered on 5 November before the Lord Mayor and aldermen of London. *The Perils of False Brethren, both in Church, and state* was a venomous attack on Whigs and those who Sacheverell believed allowed too great toleration in religion. Rumours throughout 1709 generated fear that the Whigs planned to revoke the Test Act and allow Dissenters, perhaps even deists, to hold
government and university positions. This worry was no doubt fuelled by the recent events at All Souls College. As had Francis Higgins two years earlier, Sacheverell hoped to halt the ‘Dangerous, and Encroaching Mischief, that now with Impunity walks up and down thro’ this Distracted Kingdom’. Sacheverell chose his venue as a direct challenge to those who claimed that the ‘Pulpit is not a Place for Politicks’. Such persons, he argued, were attempting to deceive the pious into thinking that religion had no place in the governance of England. A prayer scribbled by Sacheverell around the same time reveals the importance that he placed on removing deviance from the church. Christians, he wrote, lived inside the being of God and as such owed Him correct worship.

Sacheverell sensed conspiracies against the Church of England and warned against the ‘FALSE BRETHREN’. These persons, he proclaimed, promoted doctrines contrary to Scripture and repugnant to the Church of England. They included not only deists with their calls for a ‘Neutrality in Religion’ but also proponents of natural philosophy, who, Sacheverell believed, ‘explain the Great Credendi of Our Faith in New-fangl’d Terms of Modern Philosophy’. What was more, these false brethren destroyed the integrity of the Church of England by eroding its exclusive membership and doctrine. It was, he suggested, evident that Latitudinarians would admit all variety of Dissenters into the church and ‘render it the most Absurd, Contradictory, and self-inconsistent Body in the World’. Sacheverell feared that the Church of England would then become a mixture of communicants. Only High Churchmen and those who refused differences of worship in the church were true brethren, as were many in the Tory party who supported them.

Not surprisingly the Whig aldermen refused to offer Sacheverell the traditional thanks for the performance. Despite not receiving the endorsement of the London city council, Sacheverell published his sermon, and it was ready for sale on 25 November. Within one month some 50,000 copies had been printed (it is estimated that 250,000 people had read it), and Sacheverell himself became a celebrity. With the clamour from the sermon increasing and Tories feeling heightened support from Sacheverell’s followers, Whig politicians spent the winter of 1709–10 deciding on a plan to contain the groundswell of Tory enthusiasm. Lord Sunderland ordered the Justices of the Peace in Middlesex to act against authors of ‘Seditious Libels’ that were being set against the queen and government and were meant to appeal to the ‘inferior sort of people’ who could not see that Sacheverell and his followers were mere rabble-rousers. The government concluded that legal action against both the sermon and its author was warranted. The impeachment proceedings began in March 1710 but led to a riot on the first day, with the crowd shouting ‘High Church and Sacheverell’ and threatening anyone who did not wish ‘God bless you’ to their champion. Others ‘saith that Sacheverell did deserve to be made a king of’, according to surviving accounts. The following morning, and
for the next three weeks, a patrol of guards maintained order on London’s streets. The measure was ultimately successful, but the £10,000 cost of peace was widely resented.

Though reaction to the sermon was fast and furious, generating scores of polemics on both sides of the debate, we are concerned with those publications bearing most directly on deism. At least one anonymous author suggested that Sacheverell had overplayed the threat posed by deists as a way to generate discord in the nation and set the stage for a Tory resurgence. ‘The Doctor’s Pupil and young Clergymen’, the author suggested, seeking ‘to distinguish themselves by Ill-nature and Railing’, needed to create a smokescreen of deception in order to manufacture the conditions of their promotion. Similarly, the calls of the ‘Church’s Danger from Atheists, Deists, and Socinians’ was little more than a means to ‘screen their Champion Doctor from the just Censures of the People’. While the anonymous author agreed that deism was deplorable, he questioned why there was such an uproar over the ‘comparatively, few among us chargeable with deism’. The question regarding the exact threat posed by deism, and atheism more generally, was debated at the highest levels of the English Church – though behind closed doors rather than in Sacheverell’s public forum. In early January 1710 William Wake, Bishop of Lincoln (Archbishop of Canterbury from 1716), had ‘a long Conference upon the present state of Atheism’ at Lambeth with the bishops of Norwich and Leicester.

In his response to Sacheverell, John Toland challenged the issues raised in the sermon and once more celebrated the potential Hanoverian succession because, as he explained in a letter to Leibniz, perhaps written in an attempt to smooth over the ill feelings he had created during his previous visit to the Continent, Sacheverell’s intent had been ‘the defeating of the Succession in the House of Hanover’. He began by classifying the political divisions of Whig and Tory in England. Whigs were ‘zealous Sticklers for Civil Liberty, and Sworn Enemies to Ecclesiastical Tyranny’. Conversely, Tories ‘do not willingly admit of any Toleration in matters of Religion; or of any checks upon the will of the Sovereign’. Sacheverell fell into this latter group. Whigs offered peace through personal liberty and religious toleration, while Tories offered forced conformity. Sacheverell’s sedition brought discord to England and, this being the case, Toland stated, the doctor’s life ought to be forfeit. However, the same liberty and toleration that Toland found so commendable in the present and future government ensured that Sacheverell was in no real danger. He concluded by pledging that he would ‘ever be a good Whig in England’ and a constant opponent of passive obedience. To men like Sacheverell, Charles Leslie, and readers of the Rehearsal, such a statement only confirmed what they already believed to be true: deists were Whigs, and Whigs encouraged heresy.
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In his contribution to the Sacheverell controversy, Matthew Tindal argued that High Churchmen were becoming Presbyterian in their principles and arguments. That is, the same High Churchmen who had previously preached passive obedience to the monarch were now seemingly advocates of an ecclesiastical government. Tindal was amazed that this seemed to be the case, because if ‘any thing had been fix’d, one would have thought it had been the Aversion of High-Church to Presbyterian Principles’. Following 1689, ‘the Clergy have sworn to defend and assist; and consequently without direct Perjury, can’t claim any Power but what is deriv’d from the Crown’. However, in what was probably only the first sortie in the form of Sacheverell’s sermon, this promise had been abandoned by many High Churchmen who desired a government which was ‘subject in all Church Matters to the Jurisdiction of the Clergy’. Thus Tindal asserted that High Churchmen – among whom he included his former Oxford tutor George Hickes – were traitors to the peace that had been delivered by William and Mary.

Sacheverell himself responded to both the clamour his sermon had caused and his impeachment by the House of Lords in March 1710. He called himself a tool of the Whigs, saying that they had used his words for their own gain against the Tories. Moreover, he defended his sermon by claiming that it was no different from those spoken by ‘Our First Reformers’, who wished to correct what they viewed as a church that had lost its way. No sincere Christian, Sacheverell wrote, could have taken offence at what he directed ‘against Hypocrites, Socinians, Deists, and such as, under the Umbrage of That Act, which permits Protestant Dissenters, and those Only to serve God, every Man in his Own way, think themselves at Liberty to be of no Protestant Congregation, of no Religion at all’. The spectre of deism was indeed troubling to men like Sacheverell.

ANTHONY COLLINS’S FREETHINKING GOD

During this year of controversy Anthony Collins entered into the political and religious debates engulfing England. In A Vindication of Divine Attributes (1710) he claimed that the nature of God and providence was ‘one of the most difficult Questions in all Philosophy’. Nevertheless, he believed that a ‘clear and distinct Method of Reasoning’ could clear up the matter. God was known through his attributes, from which Collins derived the following description: ‘an Eternal, Immaterial, infinitely Perfect Being; and more particularly that he is infinitely Wise, Powerful, Just and Good’. One knew that this was the nature of God not only from Scripture but also from observing ‘the Parts of the Universe’. For Collins, the Creation demonstrated the being of God through an argument from design. Deists and their critics referred to this version of natural theology taken to the extreme as ‘natural religion’. Through natural religion one
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knew all the dictates of Christianity and the demands of God from reason and the operation of nature. If we have an idea of God as just and good, as Collins believed is evident from Creation, God must actually be just and good. Because the predictable natural order of things reveals a consistent God, there is no need for priests or divine revelation.14

Critics of Collins such as the philosopher and future Bishop of Cloyne, George Berkeley, challenged this picture of a benevolent deity by arguing that it belittled the true image of God by denying ‘Him to be an observer, Judge, and rewarder of human actions’. For Berkeley, God as a dispenser of rewards or punishments was the foundation of correct Christian behaviour because one would not live a moral life without fear of divine retribution. An anonymous review of Collins’s work that appeared in later years in the Grub-Street Journal, a weekly paper of political satire, described Collins as ‘a man of incredible self-love, and proneness to write’ whose purpose was none other than ‘a means to settle infidelity upon a sure and lasting basis’.15

Though not precisely connected to the Sacheverell affair, Collins’s Priestcraft in Perfection and its subsequent defence, both composed in 1710, must be seen as part of the reaction to it. Indeed, the tone of the two works closely parallels that taken by Toland and Tindal. What is more, newspaper advertisements offered both Collins’s book and another tome by Sacheverell as a package deal.66 Priestcraft in Perfection attacked those who claimed that the Church of England and its priests held the final say in controversies of faith. Restriction of faith and enforcement of official doctrine were, Collins asserted, the final say in controversies of faith. He then proceeded to remind readers that the Articles were established during Convocation in 1562 and subsequently revised at Convocation in London in 1571. After relating the content of the true Articles, Collins questioned the legitimacy of the Twentieth Article: ‘the Church hath a power to decree Rites and Ceremonys, and Authority in Controversys of Faith’. In spite of the fact that it had been included in all printed editions of the Articles since 1617, Collins called it ‘a perfect Forgery’ which had ‘never pas’d either the Convocation of 1562 or the Convocation of 1571 nor was it . . . ratify’d by Parliament’.68 For Collins, who argued the necessity of government by the consent of those who were governed, the insertion of an arbitrary article which was not endorsed by the people of England, through their elected representatives, was certainly a design to limit freedom in the nation.

As proof of his accusations, Collins claimed to be in possession of two different editions of the Articles from the sixteenth century, neither of which
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contained the infamous Twentieth Article. Supported by these documents, which probably were copies of the articles actually passed by Convocation, Collins concluded ‘how uncertain Tradition is’ in matters of religion. Any appeal to tradition alone was the refuge of those who wished to control the belief of another. Reason and freethinking, as Collins would later argue, were thus the only rightful tools one ought to use to determine the truth of a religious doctrine; anything else must be discarded. As he explained, ‘Let Religion (which signifys Man’s Duty to God) stand on those Reasons which must of Course occur to every body, without the assistance of Forgery from the Priests’. There was only one theologian from England’s past who Collins believed had advanced a true notion of religion: William Chillingworth. In 1638 Chillingworth had published *The Religion of Protestants, A Safe Way to Salvation*, in which he foresaw an approach to faith which our deists embraced some seventy years later: God communicated all doctrines needed for salvation in clear terms, which are understandable by everyone. Collins believed that his work was following this same path.

The backlash against *Priestcraft in Perfection* was severe. Many refutations asserted that Collins’s goal was to demonstrate that the Church of England was founded on neither recorded tradition nor God’s providence. In the face of this reaction, Collins composed *Reflections on a Late Pamphlet, Intitled Priestcraft in Perfection* to silence his critics. He repeated that his purpose was to ‘prove that the clause of the Churches Power was not contained in the imprinted Books of Articles’. What was more, English law recognised only those Articles which were agreed upon in 1562. The only doctrines contained in the legitimate Articles were those addressing the Sacraments and not articles relating to ‘such Doctrines as were not Fundamental or the Essence of Christian Faith’. Nothing in the Articles sanctioned by Parliament, submitted Collins, contained any statements regarding the supposed authority of the church over the faith held by individuals in England and their consciences.

FRANCIS ATTERBURY AND THE NONJUROR RESPONSE TO COLLINS

Following the release of these two works by Collins there was an orchestrated nonjuror and High Church response. The architect of the challenge was Francis Atterbury, who dedicated many hours to a reply. Also involved were a circle of nonjurors associated with Sir Thomas Thynne, first Viscount of Weymouth. Though the work was never published, the events surrounding it remain important because they are closely associated with the aftermath of the Sacheverell affair and reveal the eagerness of nonjurors to answer deists. After the trial, in which Sacheverell was found guilty but given a lenient punishment, he toured England and encouraged the Tories in passive obedience.
Fresh from his frustration with Tindal’s actions in Oxford, William Bromley wrote enthusiastically to Atterbury on the resurgence of High Church sentiment around the university: ‘Our ringing of bells in this neighbourhood, and particularly at Coventry, began yesterday, and has continued all this day and evening. Lord Leigh has fired his guns three times . . . as part of Dr. Sacheverell’s entertainment.’ Dodington Greville, another veteran of the All Souls events, no doubt approved of Bromley’s attitude because he himself had voted against Sacheverell’s impeachment. Bromley himself benefited from the change of political climate. He would be elected again to the Commons and subsequently (on 23 November 1710) to the post of speaker, and would eventually succeed Greville as representative for Warwick in 1727.24

During the autumn of 1710 Atterbury wrote to George Harbin, who was the author of several pro-Jacobite tracts in addition to being chaplain and librarian to Viscount Weymouth, to make initial plans for the reply to Collins.25 ‘If you shall be within, Saturday in y e Even, about 7 a Clock’, Atterbury advised Harbin, ‘or if You will be so kind as to call . . . I’ll either wayt upon you at my Ld Weymouth’s, or meet...a s  You shall Appoint; being very desirous of a quarter of an hour Conversation with You.’ After the meeting, Harbin wrote to Atterbury lending his support for the project. Atterbury replied with thanks and continued that there was no person in the kingdom with more sense than Lord Weymouth. Weymouth, who owned an estate at Longleat, Wiltshire, had sworn an oath to William and Mary but nevertheless supported many non-jurors. Upon the accession of Queen Anne he was made a Privy Councillor, and on 12 June 1702 he was appointed joint commissioner of the Board of Trade and Plantations. He retired from the board in 1707, but continued to act in politics, albeit behind the scenes, by supporting High Church Tories. Though not explicitly involved in the work, Weymouth provided a location for several of the planning sessions. In the letter, Atterbury requested that Harbin contact Mr Walton, Rector of Polster in Wiltshire, for ‘ye printed book of ye Articles in Latin A.D. 1571’ because it would go a long way in clearing up matters brought about by ‘ye Reflections on Priestcraft &c’. The challenge issued by Collins would require ‘The Helps from all Hands . . . & shall be then fully acknowledg’d’. To this end Atterbury advised Harbin that he was waiting ‘upon Dr. Jenkins for yr Books’. Robert Jenkins, fellow of St John’s, Cambridge, was a nonjuror who received a DD around 1709 and shortly thereafter was living in the home of Weymouth.

The reply continued to take shape, though not always smoothly. Atterbury wrote in frustration to Harbin that no more could be added to the forthcoming work until Harbin came to see him. A short time later, Atterbury related that advertisements for the book were composed and ready for the press: ‘After wth no Delay shall be used, but y’ Work immediately set about’. Unfortunately for Atterbury, life interrupted his zeal for retribution: his wife and other family
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members had ‘been dangerously ill’ and he was forced to direct his attention elsewhere. The end of the project came through lethargy and the appearance of Hilkiah Bedford’s *The Hereditary Right of the British Crown* (1710), which defended the nonjuror position. Atterbury was keen to see Bedford’s book and requested that Harbin determine when it was to appear. Harbin, however, seemed to have lost his initial enthusiasm for the reply to Collins. Atterbury wrote to him to question why ‘I have called more than once at Lord Weymouth’s without finding You, and asking when the books detailing the sixteenth-century Convocations would arrive and ‘when I may be allowed to take them into my hands’. Until this occurred, the reply to Collins would be stalled. Moreover, should Harbin perchance meet Bedford, Atterbury would be pleased to enjoy a visit from him and to see ‘an old Book or two wch he cites’. Harbin did obliged Atterbury with a visit. However, the design had not proceeded and was to end shortly. In the last letter concerning the matter, Atterbury related to Harbin that he had shown Bedford all the material gathered thus far. After a discussion with Bedford, who was about to be tried and ultimately imprisoned for *The Hereditary Right*, and noting some similarities in argument between that book and his forthcoming one, Atterbury had second thoughts about proceeding. However, he did advise Harbin that he still would like to see the ‘ye 2 Books of 1571’ and hoped after his trip to Cambridge to ‘find You in S. James’s Square at my Return towards y e Close of next Week’. No further meetings took place and the reply to Collins simply faded away.

ENDING THE WAR OF THE SPANISH SUCCESSION

The election of 1710, which followed the Sacheverell affair, returned a Tory majority. Harley’s star was again on the rise: Queen Anne made him Chancellor of the Exchequer and later Lord Treasurer after creating him Earl of Oxford. He had gained the queen’s ear through his new-found belief that government had to be above the party divides which had caused the Sacheverell affair. This stance, however, did not prevent the removal of Whigs from the government. While he had publicly lamented the Sacheverell affair, Toland seized the opportunity these events provided and wrote a letter of support to his former patron. From Leiden, Toland sent ‘Congratulations on Harley’s happy return to the management of affairs and the disgrace of his enemies, confidently predicted and wished for by the writer’. After waiting a little less than a year with no improvement in his situation, Toland reminded Harley, now Earl of Oxford, that it seemed strange that a person of his own obvious skills and ‘experience in foreign Courts (to mention no other qualifications) should not be found useful in some things to so learned as well as so politic a Minister, to whom I have been gaining all the credit abroad that was
possible'. By December 1711 he wrote with a stronger tone of urgency and worry that Oxford might believe reports of his supposed misconduct. He feared that he had been ‘abandoned as it were in my greatest need’. If this was not the case, Toland urged Oxford, he should ‘rid me of these doubts this evening’. Oxford replied with concern over reports of Toland’s actions and associations on the Continent: specifically, the rumours that Toland was making statements against the proposed peace with France which would end the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–13).

In spite of Toland’s belief that Oxford shared his view that government without party distraction was most desirable, events and rivalry forced Oxford’s hand in another direction. From at least 1708 onwards, Tories were growing tired of Marlborough’s land war and were encouraging a naval policy. They also wished to scale back, if not end outright, England’s participation in the war effort even if it meant abandoning the Grand Alliance against France. Conversely, Whig politicians cried, ‘no peace with Spain’, meaning that there should be no treaty until French troops were driven out of Spain. In addition to this pressure, Oxford battled for government leadership with Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke, who was supported by the High Church Tories and who pressed Oxford into a more conservative platform. As a consequence of these factors, in late 1711 Harley opened secret negotiations with Louis XIV designed to end England’s participation in the war. When details of the negotiations broke, the Duke of Marlborough became furious. The motion to support the peace without securing Spain barely passed the House of Lords. In January 1712 Anne created twelve new peers who would vote for the Treaty of Utrecht when the time came in 1713.

Against this background, Toland wrote to Oxford on 7 December 1711. After claiming not to know who had revealed his distaste for the government’s plans with France, he conceded that ‘I am sure that all my acquaintances are unanimous in their sentiments’ against the proposed peace, specifically ‘any peace that gives up Spain and the Indies to a Prince of the house of Bourbon, or to any French Prince whatsoever’. Toland continued that his only true friend in this matter was ‘the house of Hanover’. Not specifically scolding Oxford, he asked him to ‘consider whether it be advisable in any ministry to carry on a thing so perfectly disgusting to the next successor’. Among the potential members of the Grand Alliance who would be left to battle the French alone were the German allies, led by Prince George of Hanover. The prince feared that a separate peace between England and France meant an end to the Hanoverian succession and the proclamation of James III as King of England. To dispel these fears, Toland suggested that he should be sent ‘privately this minute to Hanover’, where he would ‘clear up some things there’. Much to Toland’s chagrin, Oxford ignored his volunteer role in international diplomacy.
Toland was not the only member of his circle dissatisfied with the measures the government undertook to end the War of the Spanish Succession. His fellow Irishman and part-time benefactor Robert Molesworth thought England’s actions reprehensible. Molesworth confided to his wife that the peace was ‘a bad one, as I look upon any to be, which leaves Spain and the Indies in French hands, so that I am upon all accounts very disconsolate’. To ease his melancholy, Molesworth had ‘invited and [was] promised the company of Dr. Tindal for 2 months’. Little less than two months later Molesworth’s expectation was fulfilled. He had come to notice after 1688 when he and his associates worked to ensure that the promises of the Revolution came to fruition. On the request of William III, Molesworth had travelled to Copenhagen to secure Danish troops for the Seven Years War against France. Political appointments continued to find him: he served in Anne’s Privy Council and with the Board of Trade and Plantations under George I. Upon his return from Denmark, Molesworth was dismayed at the lack of public engagement in political matters in England. He composed *Account of Denmark* (1694) to outline what he saw as the correct form of a commonwealth. The similarity of his politics to that of Toland and Tindal ensured that the three men associated with each other. Molesworth met Toland through Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl Shaftesbury, and knew Tindal by reputation at least by 1697, though the letter to his wife indicates a closer relationship.

While he was in Naples to ease the strain that asthma placed on his constitution, the third Earl Shaftesbury kept a close eye on events in England. He also continued his association with our deists, especially Anthony Collins. Writing on 12 January 1712 to Pierre Coste, Huguenot refugee and tutor of his son, Milford Ashley Cooper, Shaftesbury told Coste that the visit he had paid to Milford was appreciated. Shaftesbury further thanked him for introducing Milford to Collins. Despite Collins’s reputation, which was soon to explode with his *Discourse of Free-Thinking*, Shaftesbury viewed him as a suitable companion for his son. Indeed, in another letter also sent in 1712, he referred to him as ‘my worthy friend’.

Toland began 1712 as he had ended 1711, with repeated requests for Oxford’s patronage. He asserted that Oxford’s reputation as a supporter of the Hanoverian succession was being eroded. After suggesting a model for the composition of board members for the earl’s recently commissioned South Sea Company (an equal division of Whigs and Tories to ‘silence all clamours’), Toland offered to secure Oxford’s character abroad for a reward: ‘Two hundred pounds a year, quarterly paid, is the utmost I expect, and for which I want nothing but your commands to do acceptable service.’ Also volunteering to spy in his name, Toland hoped that this would finally secure the position he coveted. The outcome was predictable: Oxford ignored Toland and ended whatever relationship still existed between them.
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The Discourse of Free-Thinking

In 1713 England signed the Treaty of Utrecht, William Wake hoped for peace in the Church of England, and Anthony Collins released his most famous book, A Discourse of Free-Thinking. The timing was probably no coincidence, with the Tories feeling confident and Sacheverell having escaped with a slap on the wrist. To a thinker like Collins it seemed that the religious climate in England was about to become very cool indeed to notions of toleration and freedom of thought. He reminded readers of the dangers that resulted from repressive control of religion; the cure for this was freethinking, which, he wrote, ‘is upon experience the only proper means to destroy the Devil’s Kingdom among Men’ because the perception of Satan’s activity in the world increased in proportion to the decline in freethinking. He turned to history to encourage readers to bear in mind that during the reign of Charles I it was common to think that people were ‘posses’d by the Devil’. This acceptance of supernatural corruption in England could be proved, since ‘great numbers of Witches have been almost annually executed in England . . . when upon the Liberty given and taken to think freely, the Devil’s Power visibly declin’d’. The rise in reason and the decline in superstition had lasted in the nation until very recently. Collins thought that political events conspired to bring demons, witches, and Satan back into the collective mind of Britons in order to fortify the declining position of bigoted priests. Since ‘the Reign of Dr. Sacheverel, when the Clamour against Free-Thinking began to be loudest, the Devil has again resum’d his Empire’. Collins also noted that Sacheverell had stated in the speech delivered at his trial, that passive obedience to authority was the only way to remain consistent and in good standing with the Church of England. Such a view was the very antithesis of the deist position.

The Discourse of Free-Thinking further articulated Collins’s thoughts on God and divine nature. Like Toland, he believed that if ‘the Knowledge of some Truths be requir’d of us by God; . . . then we have a right to know’. Divine goodness, according to Collins, ensured that people would have access to these things. This was the case because ‘God being incapable of having any addition made either to his Power or Happiness, and wanting nothing, can require nothing of Men for his own sake, but only for Man’s sake . . .’. God acted only for the benefit of humanity though not everyone accepted or acknowledged this. Some, whom Collins identified as ‘Superstitious men’, were not content with this description of God, preferring instead to believe in ‘God as demanding’. Freethinking sought to correct this view. In his criticism of Collins, the Newtonian William Whiston took issue with this characterisation. He claimed, ‘We have here Superstition and Religion perpetually confounded’. Like Berkeley, he countered that fear of God led to morality because where no fear existed, one had no motive for morality. What is more, Whiston argued
that Collins’s broad label of superstitious believers coloured in a poor light the ‘Embracers of true Religion, which consists in the Love and Fear of God, the Dependence on his Providence, the Hopes of his Rewards, and the Dread of his Punishments’.44

God asked only that people sought truth, which He did not cloak in mystery. That people did not know this to be the case was the fault of priests, whom Collins, like Toland, accused of creating mystery in religion. Priests could not, Collins claimed, lead people to truth in religion because it would undermine their authority. As further defence of their place in institutional religion, priests decried as heretics and atheists those who attempted to determine for themselves a true path in religion.45 Robert Wodrow, Scottish minister and Kirk historian, though he did not endorse Collins’s philosophy, partially approved of the Discourse of Free-Thinking, arguing that it exposed those who sought to impose religious conformity.46 Conversely, Richard Steele, Whig propagandist, used his own political newspaper, the Guardian, to take Collins to task. Steele argued that Collins had ‘the most apparent Prejudice against a Body of Men, Whom of all other a good man would have been most careful not to violate, I mean Men in Holy Orders’.47 It was just this sort of admiration that Collins sought to eliminate.

Collins further suggested that new natural philosophical methods and discoveries heralded the beginning of an age in which the true being of God as good, just, and a dispenser of knowledge would be accepted. The ‘Restoration of Learning’ encouraged Collins’s optimism. Before this instauration humanity was under the thumb of priestcraft and a ‘prodigious Ignorance prevail’d’. Moreover, ‘It was by gradual Progress in Thinking, that Men got so much knowledge in Astronomy, as to know that the Earth was of an ordicular Figure, and that it moves about the Sun.’ The true nature of the universe became known when people were able to cast aside superstition; the true nature of God would similarly be known. Natural philosophy served as an example of what a free-thinking mind might accomplish. Collins asked what ‘Absurdities prevail’d in Morality, Astronomy, Natural Philosophy, and every other Science’, prior to the advance of freethinking. In one of the earliest articulations of conflict between science and religion, he considered the case of Galileo. For asserting something that Collins and his contemporaries knew to be a fact, namely the orbit of the Earth, the Italian mathematician was placed under house arrest.48 His fate was a prime example of freethinking restricted by priests. At least one critic, however, saw Collins’s linking of freethinking to natural philosophy as ‘a most dangerous piece’ which had much in common with alchemy. A generation earlier alchemy had informed the natural philosophies of Boyle and Newton. By the eighteenth century, however, it was something to ridicule. A correspondent wrote to Robert Wodrow to suggest that Collins’s
freethinking was ‘nothing better than the delusions of the pretenders to seek the philosopher’s-stone’.49

Richard Bentley, classical scholar and promoter of an apologetic purpose in Newton’s work, strongly opposed Collins by arguing that the ‘free’ in freethinking was thinly veiled cover for what Collins had really meant, ‘Which in fact will be found to carry much the same Notion as Bold, Rash, Arrogant, Presumption, together with a strong Propension to the Paradox and the Perverse’. Like critics of Toland, Bentley believed that Collins had equated the human mind with God’s. What was more, he defined what he viewed as the true dictates of freethinking: ‘Christianity an imposture, the Scripture a forgery, the Worship of God superstition, Hell a fable, and Heaven a dream, our Life without providence’.50 For his efforts, Bentley received several letters of thanks and a special Grace from the University of Cambridge. In part the certificate stated that he had performed an ‘eminence service to the Christian Religion, and the Clergy of England, by refuting the objections and exposing the ignorance of an impious set of writers, that call themselves Freethinkers – May it please you that the said Dr. Bentley, for his good service already done, have the public thanks of the University.’51

Despite the further charges of theologians like William Carroll, rabid critic of Locke’s philosophy, who argued that Collins’s view of God undermined divine power and choice,52 Collins continued to explore God’s nature. He described the ability to obtain knowledge of God as analogous to gaining knowledge in natural philosophy. The key in both enterprises was distinct ideas, a position no doubt gained from Collins’s frequent contact and correspondence with his friend Locke.53 ‘When we use the term GOD’, Collins wrote, ‘the Idea signify’d thereby, ought to be as distinct and determinate in us, as the Idea of a triangle or a square is, when we discourse of either of them; otherwise, the term GOD is an empty sound.’ This was not easy. Collins conceded, ‘I would not hereby be thought to suppose, that the Idea of GOD is an adequate Idea, and exhausts the subject it refers to . . . or that it is easy to form in our Minds . . . or that it does not require a great comprehension of Mind to bring together the various Idea’s that relate to GOD . . . All these I grant.’ Despite the difficulty, a correct notion of God was possible; one achieved this notion by thinking freely. Collins asked why theologians who depicted God as a mystery even bothered to write about Him. As he had done before, he turned to natural philosophy and claimed that when such thinkers as Pierre Gassendi, René Descartes, and Isaac Newton addressed questions of natural philosophy they did so by accepting only what their clear ideas permitted. In the same way, the nature of God remained unknowable to those who refused to accept that distinct ideas of God were possible: God never hid from those who sought Him.54
Collins was abroad prior to, and immediately after, the publication of *A Discourse of Free-Thinking*. Some contemporaries suggested that he feared the reception of the book.\(^5\) This story must have gained much currency, for after Collins died, his friend of twenty-six years, the Huguenot refugee and literary scholar Pierre Desmaizeaux, sent a corrective account to Thomas Birch in an attempt to defend his late friend’s reputation. Having recently come across a ‘Memorandum among my papers’ which explained Collins’s travel motives, Desmaizeaux advised Birch that Collins had been to Holland twice, once in ‘March 1711, and became acquainted with Mr. Le Clerc, and other learned men. – He returned to London in November following . . . with a promise to his friends in Holland, that he would pay them a second visit in a short time.’ This promise and the fulfilment of it on 2 January 1712, Desmaizeaux concluded, ‘shews how incredulous is the story that he went into Holland for fear, &c’.\(^5\)

Although it turned out that Collins had nothing to fear from publishing his book, the same could not be said for some others who were involved in the printing and selling of the work. George Berkeley noted in a letter of 26 January 1713 that ‘There is lately published a very bold and pernicious book entitled *A Discourse of Free-Thinking*. I hear the printer of it is put into Newgate . . . ’\(^5\) The fallout from the book reached a bookseller on 10 April 1713, when one John Baker and others were questioned ‘as to their knowledge of the authorship of certain pamphlets’. *A Discourse of Free-Thinking* figured prominently in the enquiry.\(^5\) Proceedings began on 4 June 1713 against Baker, who claimed to have received the ‘Copy of the Book Intituled a discourse of ffree Thinking’ after it was ‘left at this Deponents house by a strange Porter’. He believed that ‘Mr. Collins is the Author of the same’ and therefore sought a second opinion on the book and its contents. After receiving a favourable review of the book, he proceeded as he would with any other work. Despite Baker’s plea of ignorance as to the inflammatory nature of the *Discourse of Free-Thinking*, he lost the case.\(^5\)

Collins acknowledged the trouble his book might cause to those who sold it. In early 1717 he sent Desmaizeaux to London with nearly 130 copies of *Discourse of Free-Thinking* to be sold by a bookseller whom he identified as Mr Robinson. Desmaizeaux was to agree upon a price and upon what percentage would be reserved for Collins. However, the author had an idea of what his book was worth: he Collins counselled Desmaizeaux that the bookseller ‘ought to give me a shilling a piece for all he sells; and he may sell them for 15 pence a piece. If you think both prices too dear for a book of ten sheets, you may set them lower.’\(^6\) Baker’s fate did not escape Collins’s notice, for he cautioned Robinson ‘never to have above 3 or 4 of my Books
The spectre of High Church

of Freethinking to lye in his Shop at a time, and not to publish them in any
publick manner'.

When he did return to England in October 1713, Collins found himself
attacked by Jonathan Swift, who presented him as a spokesperson for the Whigs
and the Discourse of Free-Thinking as a piece of Whig propaganda. Swift wrote
in the persona of Collins and claimed to have simplified the original text so
that it might be easily understood by all readers. The result was a biting satir-
ical account of both deism and politics. Wrapped in his Whig guise, he wrote
that the party had ‘failed, by all their political arguments, to re-establish their power’,
and that the leaders had determined that the best strategy for advancement
was through an attack on the established religion defended by the Tories.
He continued that ‘clergy, who are so impudent to teach the people the doc-
trines of faith, are all either cunning knaves or mad fools; for none but artificial,
designing men, and crack-brained enthusiasts’. This was a particular sticking
point for Swift, who wished to defend the clergy from such perceived sedition.
He was also mindful of the charge that Archbishop King had given him in
1711, that it was Swift’s duty as a DD to make useful contributions to his pro-
fession. He ended the book by claiming that the best freethinker, and by
implication Whig, was he who denied the greatest number of these doctrines;
thus he Swift painted Collins and Whigs as atheists.

THE START OF THE HANOVERIAN AGE

The year 1714 witnessed the start of the Hanoverian age in England and also
the end of whatever lingering relationship existed between Toland and the
Earl of Oxford. In The Grand Mystery Laid Open (1714), Toland wrote that the
Protestant succession was secured through the efforts of the entire nation.
The biggest threat to preserving Protestantism in England was the potential
return of the Stuarts at the hands of the Jacobites. Queen Anne’s promise
to reward anyone who brought the ‘Pretender to Justice’ demonstrated the
seriousness of the risk. The MPs in Commons and the peers in the House
of Lords offered similar incentives to prevent a Stuart resurrection.
Related to this worry were the efforts of High Churchmen to divide Protestants
and prevent them from offering a united front against the popish ambitions of
the Pretender and a French crown, who wished to see England subsumed under
a papal see. The only remedy to this current situation was an English Church
that did not exclude any Protestants, regardless of minor confessional differ-
ences. This church, Toland explained, would be the ‘Bulwark of the Reforma-
tion’, and as such could resist ‘All the Emissaries of Rome, and the Tools of
France, or the Pretender (chuse which you will)’ who encouraged the creation
of tensions in the nation as prelude to invasion. Toland also stated that a real
danger lay in allowing one MP, who had ‘the purse and the prerogative at
Deism in Enlightenment England

his disposal’, to control the fate of the nation for the benefit of his party.\(^{67}\) Here he certainly meant Oxford, who had championed the peace with France in 1711–12.

That same year (1714) Toland also published *The Art of Restoring. Or, the Piety and Probity of General Monk In bringing about the Last Restoration*, in which he compared the end of the Cromwellian Commonwealth with the present political situation with Oxford standing in for George Monck. So corrupt had government become, Toland claimed, that only a person’s attitude towards the French identified her or him as a friend or enemy of England and of the Hanoverian succession.\(^ {68}\) Jacobites lurked behind all current attempts to cast doubt upon the succession, he suggested. Indeed, they were the only party in England who stood to benefit if James III ascended the throne. For Toland the Treaty of Utrecht proved that Jacobite agents sat in the government. Once again he had in mind Oxford, who had been in contact with the Pretender and who had been rumoured to agree to reverse the Act of Settlement if only the Stuart claimant would renounce Catholicism. As far as Toland was concerned, Oxford had revealed his true Jacobite colours. To him the Hanoverians were true defenders of Protestantism. He further claimed that the only support that Harley had for his platform was from ‘Irish Papists and Scottish Jacobites’. Against this impending Catholic usurpation, Toland urged every Briton to ‘lay aside their insignificant Piques, and all unite for the Preservation of their RELIGION and LIBERTY, which entirely depend (under God) upon maintaining the SUCCESSION, as is established by so many Laws in the serene Electoral House of HANOVER’.\(^ {69}\)

In contrast to observers like Toland, who saw the accession of the Hanoverians as desirable, others viewed George I as bringing with him the demise of the English Church. One Jacobite composed a poetic epitaph:

[![Under this marble Stone Lyes Burried Mother Church
A mother truly venerable
... Stab’d by her own Children... She fel sick 1641
Recover’d 1660
Relaps’d 1688
Expir’d 1714 Aug" ye 1st"
May she Lye in peace waiting
for a joyful Resurrection.](image)

In another work the same author described the conditions by which the church continued in its death and by which it might be saved:

How Long O ye God is’t Decreed
You’l be Deaf to my pittyful moan
That my Church and my children shall Bleed
And a fforeigner sit on my Throne.
The spectre of High Church

The solution was pure Jacobitism.

The Only way to save us
And Keep our Church with Steeple
Is to Call in
our Rightful King
The father of his people
Let him come
Let him come
Let him Let him Let him come
here's his health
here's his health
Heaven send him quickly home.

These hopes appeared to be realised and then were just as quickly crushed in 1715 when the Earl of Mar raised the Royal Standard in Scotland. The English government was caught by surprise by this audacity, but then so too were the Jacobites, who failed to organise themselves into an effective rebellion. More important, perhaps, to the impotence of the '15 was the disinterestedness of the French regency established after the death of Louis XIV that same year. Despite the military failure of the aborted attempt to secure James III on the British throne, the affair did ensure that fear of future Jacobite rebellion remained a powerful political tool for Whigs, who could tar all their opponents as Jacobites.

In the wake of the failed Jacobite coup, readers of the Post Man in mid-January 1717 learned that Toland had produced yet another work addressing contemporary politics. The State Anatomy of Great Britain. Containing a particular account of its several interests and parties, their bent and genius was a description of the political landscape in England. It also offered unsolicited advice to George I on which of the two parties was likely to support his reign. Remaining true to past descriptions of Hanoverian monarchs as best embodying the characteristics of an ideal government, Toland believed that for George I ensuring 'the Happiness, Ease, and Prosperity of his people, shall be the chief care of his life'. To fulfil this potential, George needed to choose advisors and ministers who shared this vision. The best candidates were Whigs, who promoted liberty, while the Tories were 'abetors of Tyranny'. Toland then characterised the ill feelings that nonjurors and many Tories held for foreigners including, of course, George I himself.

In explicit contrast to the Tory High Churchmen, Toland assured the new king that all variety of Dissenters including deists were faithful to him. In spite of this, the Test Act still prohibited all but communicant Anglicans from holding any civil office. Toland urged George I to consider that the Act was, in effect, 'a Political Monopoly' designed to ban Dissenters from political office. Those who supported the Act also cried 'Church in Danger', even though
Dissenters represented no religious threat, if even a political one. Dissenters were Whigs, and, by preventing their holding of major positions, the Tories and High Churchmen ensured these positions for themselves. Ironically, Toland asked readers to consider that the real threat to England came from the very people who claimed to safeguard its religion. ‘Of all dangers to the Church of England’, he claimed, ‘much the greatest arises from Forswearsers and the Nonswearers [nonjurors].’ How could the monarch trust anyone who refused to swear allegiance to him while at the same time holding fast to oaths given to the Stuarts who would make England a Catholic state if given the chance? Toland’s arguments attracted many readers, both supporters and critics; within a month of the book's initial release advertisements alerted potential buyers that the eighth edition was ready for sale.

Toland’s fear over nonjurors, Tories, and the potential spread of Catholicism was a timely one. During early 1717 government ministers received several reports concerning potential subversives. Robert Walpole, First Lord of the Treasury, heard from one correspondent that ‘there is mischief a working within this Kingdom’. Walpole needed to be alerted that a group of English papists was actively encouraging a Catholic government: ‘I humbly pray that all such wicked attempts may prove abortive and that our King and Constitution, may ever Remain in lastly under the Divine Protection.’ James Stanhope too received letters in late March and early April detailing Jacobite conspiracies. An anonymous author warned him that ‘many Jacobites...dayly Resort to Confere together about ye Pretender whom they call their Lawful King, I think it my Duty to inform your Honour’. Critics of Toland’s *State Anatomy* included Daniel Defoe, who announced that his rebuttal had ‘anatomiz’d’ Toland’s book. Defoe, a constant opponent of deism, characterised Toland as ‘as heterodox in Politicks, as he is in Religion’. Among the dangers posed by Toland’s book, he suggested, the greatest was the call to open England to foreign Protestants, who certainly would bring their various religions with them. Defoe also doubted Toland’s claim to be a Christian. Rather, he depicted him as a religious relativist who would have England allow ‘a Turkish Mosque in the City of London’. While Dissenters wished toleration for all Christians, he believed, Toland exceeded this goal and ‘desire[d] Toleration for all Religions’. This generosity, he noted, did not extend to Catholics, for Toland urged that ‘we should root out Popery with all imaginable Diligence’. In addition to this contradiction, Defoe feared what a ‘Monster of Cruelty and Injustice would this Man make the Church of England! The Truth is, the Differences are the greatest Moment that Differences not Doctrinal can be; and such as of which it must be said, they CANNOT be accommodated; no never.’ Thus the only purpose that Toland could have with this book, Defoe suggested, was to initiate ‘a treasonable Conspiracy against the Liberty, Safety, and Peace of the People of Great Britain’.
Until he died, Defoe continued to oppose the writings of men like Toland and Collins.79 Toland replied to Defoe and his other critics with a second volume of *The State Anatomy of Great Britain*, which was ready for sale in early April 1717 along with the ninth edition of volume 1.80 He asserted that his only purpose was to demonstrate ‘from what fallacies and mistakes, from what wrong principles and pestilent projects, proceeded all the opposition to his Majesty and his illustrious family’. Toland labelled those who challenged this goal as nothing more than ‘Coffee-house-Politicians’, that is, the same ones who had attempted to sully his reputation so many years earlier. Against his critics’ description of him, Toland assured readers that ‘none is more persuaded of RELIGION. But I hate PRIESTCRAFT, and that is my crime’. While refusing to claim any denomination, and stating that everyone ought to ‘Safely enjoy his own’, Toland promised that a published description of his religion would appear in the near future. Despite this elusiveness, he maintained that he was a ‘member of the National Church’.81 When he finally declared a confessional allegiance in 1720, the result was hardly enlightening. ‘Religion pure and perfect’, he wrote, ‘as it was originally taught, without the corrupt additions and alterations of ignorant or interested persons, I both profess and recommend.’82 Even in moments of proclaimed clarity, Toland remained a mystery.

Toland’s desire to appear congenial to George I and his new ministry is also revealed in his unpublished scheme to regulate English newspapers. Though he had championed an unrestricted press in 1698, when it suited his purposes, defending George I – as the first Hanoverian king – was now more important. It was, he suggested, time to ‘put the public Newspapers under some better regulation’, especially after their attacks on the government and the king’s person. As many papers seemed to conceive themselves having a ‘special privilege, to the damage of the King and Subject’, Toland believed that guidelines must be established, not to end freedom of the press but to halt seditious journalism. To this end, he proposed an Act restricting periodical publishers to the use of licensed paper. This Act, Toland proposed, would end the ‘distracting plague of those Journals, which are the Scandal of this King George’s reign’. Throughout the manuscript he repeated that he remained a defender of the free press, but that the protection of the Protestant monarch had to come first.83

**THE EMERGENCE OF THOMAS CHUBB**

The early reign of George I also saw Thomas Chubb emerge as a proponent of the views advanced by Toland, Tindal, and Collins. Like Toland, Chubb initially identified himself as a ‘Member of the CHURCH of England’. He
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was born to a family of artisans in Salisbury. According to a contemporary,
‘Mr. Chubb’s Person was not stately, he was both short and fat.’ Through
his father, Henry, Chubb received basic instruction in mathematics. The
necessities of money meant that he had no other formal education before start-
ing an apprenticeship as a glove-maker in 1694 at the age of fifteen. After
completing his training, he remained with his master until his diminishing
eyesight provoked a change of profession. In 1705 he worked as a tallow-
chandler with John Lawrence, a family friend. Around 1711 the debating society
which Chubb had initiated in 1705 among his friends discussed Whiston’s
Primitive Christianity Revived. The Arianism presented in the book held a great
attraction for Chubb, who then in 1714 wrote The Supremacy of the Father Asserted
in support of it. Whiston himself was impressed with the work and ensured
that it saw publication over the winter of 1714–15. On the strength of its recep-
tion, he brought Chubb to London, where he introduced him to Samuel Clarke
and secured a place for him with his own patron Sir Joseph Jekyll, MP and
Master of the Rolls, who ‘allow’d [Chubb] an annual Salary’. As Chubb became
more deistical in his thought and writings, Whiston withdrew from him and
advised Jekyll to do the same. When Jekyll died in 1738, Whiston wrote with
approval that ‘Mr. Chubbe is not in the will which I am not sorry for’.84

Chubb began The Supremacy of the Father Asserted by citing John 3.16 (‘For
God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son’) and concluded
that ‘The Son received his Being and Existence from the Father, as the first Supreme
free Cause of that Being and Existence; consequently He is inferior and Subordinate
to the Father’. He discussed various other biblical passages such as John 5.26
(‘For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to hath
life in himself’), leading readers to the same conclusion that the ‘Son is Inferior
and Subordinate to the Father’.85

In later years Chubb found support for his unitarian views in the post-
humous theological publications of Isaac Newton, particularly the works
on chronology. He was not alone in his esteem of Newton’s effort in writing
history. A contemporary review praised Newton’s work, stating that ‘the
same judgement, accuracy and penetration, which distinguish all his other
performances, are no less conspicuous in this’.86 Although much has been
written on Newton’s theology, Chubb’s use of it (and as we will see, Thomas
Morgan’s too) has been overlooked.87 After noting with admiration Newton’s
‘greatly superior skill in history, chronology, &c.’, Chubb briefly discussed
Newton’s work on the context surrounding the prophecies in Daniel and con-
cluded that nothing in the events described can support the notion of Jesus
being the Messiah.88 Such a conclusion confirmed the fears of orthodox theo-
logians who saw in Newton’s work sympathies towards Arianism and similar
heresies. As Arthur Young, future Prebendary of Canterbury (1746–48) and
Vicar of Exning in Suffolk (from 1748), wrote of Newton’s theology: ‘I am so
The spectre of High Church

sorry to see Principles so favouring the Schemes of the Deists, with so great a name affix'd to them.89

In a separate work published in 1718 Chubb described the state of human knowledge and God's demands upon it. God, he wrote, did not leave people in a state of debt where salvation is concerned; humanity does not have to work off divine bonds. Rather, he argued, 'Justification is wholly of Grace, arising from the merciful Goodness of God, the Lawgiver; so this Favour is vouchsafed to obedient Believers'.90 Those who believed in the one true God did all that He required. For Chubb, God would never make an impossible belief, or mysterious knowledge, a necessary condition of salvation. He also described this image of God in his private correspondence. In a letter to Dr Cox Macro DD, theologian at Cambridge, dated 6 October 1718, he discussed this very issue. Referring to the authors of the New Testament, he argued that they did not write 'by Divine Inspiration, according to the Vulgar Use of that Expression, that is, that the Minds and Pens of the Writers were not under such a Divine Movements in the Writings those Histories'. In reality they wrote with the same abilities that God granted everyone. The Apostles were able to convey the 'Particulars of this good News' because the message was 'short, plain and easy to be understood, and which a man of Honesty and ordinary Capacity could not easily mistake'.91 Chubb knew that some might take offence at his views. The clergyman and classicist Thomas Morell DD, for example, reacted strongly to such claims when they appeared in print and concluded that Chubb wished nothing less than to undermine the traditional authority of all the Apostles.92 Mindful of such concerns, and especially worried about what his acquaintance Clarke might think, Chubb wrote again to Macro advising him that 'if I am in any error in relation to that Subject of it I shall gladly receive information and retract it, when it appears to me. If Dr. Clark has been misinformed be pleased to set him right.' We do not know whether Macro pointed out any errors to Chubb, who published the letters virtually unaltered in 1734.93 Whereas Toland and Collins would antagonise Clarke, Chubb was friendly with the Anglican theologian, another example of the diversity of deists.

COLLINS'S POLITICAL LIFE AND DIVISIONS IN THE WHIG PARTY

While Chubb was writing about the being of God in 1718, Collins had settled into life as a country gentleman in Essex, where he held the posts of Justice of the Peace and Deputy Lieutenant. His decision to accept the further position of treasurer of the county was greeted by the 'great joy of Several Tradesmen', who had been swindled by the previous Treasurer. When Collins could not secure immediate repayment, he supported the most destitute of them 'with
his own private cash, others he promised interest for their money, till it cou’d be raised to pay them. In the year 1722 the debts were all discharged . . . by his care and management in that affair.94 The demands of public service prevented Collins from devoting more time to his books. He wrote to Desmaizeaux requesting that a meeting between them and another man be postponed because he was ‘at present, and shall be for some time, so much engaged in publick business, as Justice of Peace and Commissioner of Taxes (which are settling always during the months of April and May) and as Treasurer of the County (an office that I have accepted of at the request of the Justices met at the last quarter sessions).95

Nevertheless, dedication to county business did not divert Collins’s attention entirely from the day’s theological and political dramas. On 1 July 1717 he addressed the recent dispute surrounding the Bishop of Bangor, Benjamin Hoadly. The Bangorian Controversy had begun months earlier when the bishop preached a strongly Erastian sermon, ‘My Kingdom is not of this World’, before George I. Contained in the sermon were repudiations of the claims posed by any earthly institution regulating the manner of worship most pleasing towards God and a denial of the authority of priests as sole interpreters of Christianity. The result was a pamphlet war in which Whigs and Tories and Low and High Churchmen disputed the proper relationship between church and state, resulting in the closing of Convocation (it would not meet again until 1852), the institution that many Whigs believed had fanned the flames of the dispute.96

Commenting on these events, Collins advised Desmaizeaux that the real question underlying the controversy related to the laity, whom he described as the ‘Calves and Sheep of the Priests’. Even though Hoadly had published a strong critique of his Discourse of Free-Thinking, Collins applauded the bishop’s effort to remove the burden of priestly authority from England.97 It pleased him to see the clergy involved in a controversy treating one another ‘with y’ same vile’ contempt that they ‘always used towards the laity’. Drawing on arguments he had made in published works, Collins hoped that these priestly actions would open the eyes of those who had doubted the arguments of his books. Moreover, at the very least, some people might be convinced ‘that the Priests mean nothing but wealth & power and have not the least notion of those qualities for wth the superstitious world admired them’.98

On matters of politics, Collins relied somewhat on the reports which Desmaizeaux sent him from London. ‘I return you thanks’, Collins wrote, ‘for your detail of Political news. In return I can send you some from hence. The country does nothing but attend business for the men of London.’99 Like other more traditional country gentlemen of his day, he seems to have been suspicious of the new moneyed men of London who generated their wealth through trading in stocks and investments, rather than the ownership of land.
Despite his clear Whig leanings, Collins associated with Tory gentlemen. On one occasion in late February 1718, a discussion concerned the bill renewing the Mutiny Act, which was certain to pass. For his information Collins relied on reports from Desmaizeaux and from Toland, who was visiting him at that time. The matter at hand seemed to be some uncertainty posed by the implementation of the Act. Chief among Tory concerns were the number of soldiers which would comprise the existing standing army and an inserted clause making desertion punishable by death, which was unnecessary during peacetime. From Collins’s manuscripts it seems that some Tories also feared that soldiers might be billeted at their estates or turn poachers. ‘I met yesterday with Some Gentlemen of the Tory Party at a certain Lords house’, Collins related to Desmaizeaux, ‘whence upon my relating to them the progress made in the bill till Saturday night, one of them said What! then soldiers may come into our Parks and steal our Deer without being liable to be prosecuted at law &c?’ Eager to alleviate such fear, he replied that the gentleman had misunderstood the intent of the legislation. The bill, he assured them, ‘had no relation to the matter suggested, that it repealed no law for the securing property; and then parted the case to them. My Lord did me the justice to say, he must confess the matter was as I had parted it.’ There were other persistent rumours regarding the Act which, Collins advised Desmaizeaux, were propagated by ‘Inferior people’. Speculation was rampant that ‘it is a bill to quarter the army upon the Tory Innkeepers’. It is not clear whether Collins was able to halt this rumour as well.

Tory and Catholic grievances again found Collins’s ear in June 1718. With the nation engaged in the War of the Quadruple Alliance (1718–20), military financing relied heavily upon the Land Tax. Inhabitants of south-eastern counties such as Essex felt the burden of taxation more acutely than they had under previous systems of taxation such as Ship Money. The problem was that rents derived from land did not rise as fast as did the demands of the Land Tax. Consequently, the same piece of land produced less revenue for its owner than it had done in earlier years. Collins recorded that many Catholic Tories came to him complaining that they believed that their assessments were ‘double according to the value entered in [past registries]’. Catholics were indeed taxed at twice the regular rate as a punitive measure for not refuting their allegiance to the Pope. Collins described these frustrated landowners as ready to abandon, in protest, the label of ‘Honest Quiet Harmless Poor Papists’, to which all Catholics had sworn following the failed Jacobite rebellion on 1715. He was unsure, however, what this threat to renounce the oath would actually entail.

As Collins was promoting Whig policies in the countryside, Whigs in the Commons were becoming divided. In 1718 the party split badly over the direction in which George I was taking England’s foreign policy, particularly in the
Baltic. Siding with the monarch were Lord Stanhope and Lord Sunderland, who were now opposed by a faction led by Robert Walpole and his brother-in-law Charles Townshend. Tindal publicly supported Sunderland and those who stayed close to George I. In *The Defection Consider'd, and the Designs of those who divided the Friends of the Government, set in a True Light* (1718), he chastised the Walpolean Whigs. At first he claimed he was reluctant to write about these affairs but that a ‘due Regard for the Publick’ had forced him to comment upon the ‘late Behaviour of certain Persons, whom, before I was very much esteem’d’. Here he meant Walpole himself. Prior to the split, Tindal believed that the Whigs were well placed to ‘promote the common Good’. However, ‘to see Things take a quite different Turn, and the Hopes of good Men miserably frustrated, must provoke the Indignation of all’. Such defection could only harm the party and encourage Jacobites, who ‘began to look on their Game as lost, and think it in vain any longer to strive against the Stream, have Now, their Hopes reviv’d, and are wonderfully elated; and ev’ry where declare, that the Whiggs will do That for them’. A political house divided could not withstand the danger of Jacobites or the posturing of Tories. Thus, Tindal asserted, the opposition Whigs harmed both the party and the nation. What was worse, if the Whigs in defection no longer wished to be identified as Whigs, they must then be Tories. To survive this crisis, they must become ‘happy as to have such Leaders, who are as much above Fear . . . and inspires a whole Party’. Tindal, as we will see, meant Lord Sunderland.

Collins too kept abreast of these political events in London. He correctly predicted the outcome that followed the resignation as Lord Chancellor of William Cowper, who joined Walpole’s Whigs in April. ‘Upon the news’, he once again wrote to Desmaizeaux, ‘my thoughts were immediately fixd on my Lord Parker; who (as I also hear from good hands) will certainly succeed him . . . unless he insists on too high terms.’ In May 1718, Sir Thomas Parker (Earl of Macclesfield, 1721) did indeed become Lord Chancellor and Keeper of the Great Seal. Parker had a keen interest in learning – he initiated closer ties between Cambridge and George I – and held a reputation as a patron of worthy scholars. Accordingly, Collins urged Desmaizeaux to contact him. In June, Toland too requested an introduction to Parker, a man to whom it had ‘never been my good fortune to be known’ but who he understood was a ‘solid philosopher’. During this same year Collins tracked and approved of the tactics England had employed in the War of the Quadruple Alliance. The war had England siding with France against Spain in an attempt to preserve the peace reached with the Treaty of Utrecht. Collins advised Desmaizeaux that the Alliance was the best way to secure ‘a happy conclusion’ to the threat posed by Spanish unrest. Collins’s view is not surprising given that he saw in King George I a man with whom ‘I have always concurred in Politicks’. These
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were hardly the words of someone who wished to undermine the existing political system.

**THE FREE-THINKER**

In March 1718 a new periodical appeared which defended the concept of freethinking and attempted to remove it from the too frequent connotation of heresy and sedition, which opponents of deism sought to solidify. Nevertheless, the *Free-Thinker* and its editor Ambrose Philips shared a goal with our deists: the removal of superstition from the nation. In the initial issue, Philips assured readers that ‘To Think Freely is not to Think at Random: It is not to think like a Fool or a Madman; but like a Philosopher.’ This concept was crucially important because it formed the ‘Foundation of all Human Liberty’. As proof, Philips cited the example of Newton, who employed ‘the whole Force of his Genius to penetrate farther into the Mysteries of Natural Causes, than most of his Predecessours; and has made him capable to unfold some Perplexities in Philosophy, which were thought too intricate for the Wit of Man’. Newton was, however, only the first step, a prototype for others to follow. It was entirely possible that future freethinkers, if given proper support and intellectual climate, would supersede even his genius: ‘who knows what amazing Discoveries some Second Newton may make hereafter, excited by the Example, and enlightened by the Knowledge, of the First’. To opponents of deism this link between natural philosophy and freethinking confirmed Henry Sacheverell’s claims in 1709 that heresy found support in the new philosophies of nature.

**THOMAS MORGAN’S UNITARIANISM**

Sharing this goal of removing restrictions on thought was the physician and deist Thomas Morgan, who was born in Wales and educated at the Dissenting Bridgewater Academy. Morgan had been ordained a Presbyterian minister on 6 September 1716 and would later take a post with a congregation in Marlborough. Around 1720 he studied medicine, earning the degree of MD, although not much is known about his medical training. It was during his participation in the 1719 Trinitarian debates among nonconformists at Salter’s Hall that Morgan initially outlined his ideas on God’s nature. Using the work of the Newtonian and Anglican Samuel Clarke as support, Morgan endorsed a unitarian position, arguing ‘That God is One, or, that there is but One only Living and True God’. Seven years earlier, Clarke had published *Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity* (1712), in which he presented every New Testament reference addressing the Trinity. He then outlined in fifty-five propositions the doctrine resulting from these passages. For Clarke, Scripture proved a
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singular Arian-like God. After threats of censure from Convocation in 1714, he ‘acknowledged the Eternal Generation of the Son, and promise[d] not to write or speak any more on the Subject’. Unlike Whiston, Clarke did not become a martyr for unitarian theology. As had Clarke, Morgan urged Britons to embrace what he viewed as the biblical doctrine of the Trinity. He referred readers to Deuteronomy 32.39 (‘I am he and there is no god with me’) and Isaiah 43.10 (‘I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me’) and 44.6 (‘I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God’). Morgan saw the notion of a three-figure God as untenable and unscriptural. In his words, ‘The Supposition of a Duality, or Plurality of Gods, necessarily implies a Repugnancy or Contradiction; for these Two (or more) Gods would be equal or alike in all Perfection.’ Here he had in mind theologians such as Daniel Waterland. To make Waterland’s Trinity a reality, Morgan claimed, two non-identical substances having ‘incommunicable Properties’ must come together and form one single substance, while at the same time retaining their original qualities. Morgan could never accept this; it was unreasonable. What is more, he advised Waterland, ‘I think it must be evident to common Sense, that your Hypothesis is really a Contradiction’. For Morgan, as for Chubb, God was absolutely singular. Those who held contrary views and presented the truth of the Trinity as a certain fact, Morgan dismissed as ‘Tritheisticks’. Around 1726 he would lose his congregation through such a statement in favour of Arianism.

Morgan desired free enquiry into religion. He saw ‘systemical Orthodoxy and Church Authority’ as the chief barriers to this goal. Particularly troubling for him were those who ‘came out with such an Air of Assurance, and apear’d to me so directly calculated to discourage all rational Freedom of Enquiry in Matters of great Importance’. Aside from the popish qualities that such a position assumed, Morgan chastised people who would halt intellectual debate and restrict the use of reason in all matters, but especially those of such importance. Referring specifically to the notion of the Trinity – though no doubt he had in mind other issues too – Morgan stated, ‘I long for a Time when . . . Bigotry and Enthusiasm shall give Place to Charity, and a rational Freedom of Enquiry.’ People ought to look for notions of God in the Bible and not rely on the words of priests, whom Morgan accused of replacing Scripture with their own mistaken Trinitarian conceptions. An undated poetical assessment of Morgan’s position was composed by one Dr Williams of Cambridge and dedicated ‘To The Moral Philosopher’, a reference to the title of Morgan’s three-volume treatise.

Receive, brave Heroe, all your due Applause!  
The Matchless Champion of a Matchless Cause.  
Both Fiends & Foes unite to raise thy Name:  
Deists with Glee uncommon sound thy Name;
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And grateful Christians echo back the same.
The breasts of both with joy exultant glow:
Those, at your dreadful & dead-doing Blow:
These, that to Morgan they a Champion owe.116

Williams seems to support Morgan’s effort to cleanse Christianity of unfounded tradition and priestcraft, as his description of ‘grateful Christians’ would indicate. Moreover, Morgan is presented as the chief spokesman for deism, who has gained fame at the hands of supporters and detractors alike. Whether one agreed or disagreed with Morgan, one could not ignore him.

CONCLUSION

The decade encapsulating English theological politics during 1709–19 was indeed turbulent, and our deists figured prominently in these events. They did not sit on the margins; rather they contributed to the discourses which analysed contemporary politics along with other observers. These began with Henry Sacheverell’s infamous attack on Latitudinarian Whigs and the replies from our deists. John Toland answered the venomous rhetoric by restating the merits of Whigs, who offered the nation security, rather than Tories, who brought with them only division and discord. Matthew Tindal penned a similar response when he referred to High Church Tories like Sacheverell as turncoats from the peace brought by the events of 1689. Political controversies continued to inspire deists’ publications. The Bangorian Controversy, the ending of the War of the Spanish Succession, and the split of the Whigs in the House of Commons all exemplified this nicely. The second decade of the eighteenth century saw Anthony Collins begin to emerge as the most visible deist in England, and Toland decline from that position, which he had held since the mid-1690s. We saw this also in the previous chapter with Collins’s writings on the soul. Along with Collins, the same years brought Thomas Chubb and Thomas Morgan on to the political and theological stage. Morgan quickly built a reputation as a deist to be reckoned with, as Dr William’s poem indicates. As had Toland and Tindal before them, these three deists secured their political and religious tracts with an image of God shared with their two predecessors. Politics occupied much of Collins’s time, and both his actions in the countryside and published writings reveal the degree to which he was plugged into the heartbeat of the nation. The politics advanced by all our deists during this period was Whig even if the theology that underlay the deist position was perhaps more extreme than that with which many Whigs would have been comfortable.

Deist fortunes seemed on the rise in 1718 when the Whig ministry of Stanhope and Sunderland introduced a bill repealing the Occasional Conformity and Schism Acts, which had been enacted under the Tory government of
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1710–14. Despite opposition to the measure, including Walpole’s, the Act was passed in 1719; however, the other Acts preventing Dissenters from holding office remained in effect. Moreover, when Walpole came to power he refused to allow religion to become a governmental distraction and did not promote the programme of toleration of the former administration. This strategy was cemented in 1723 when Walpole chose Edmund Gibson as his religious advisor. While Parliament debated the implications of ending the ban on occasional conformity, our deists continued their attempts to describe the natural world.

NOTES

2 Henry Sacheverell, *The Perils of False Brethren, both in Church, and state* (London, 1709), p. 3; Bod. MS Don e 16, fol. 32r–v, Sacheverell’s copy of extracts from the Book of Common Prayer.
4 BL Add. MS 61610, fol. 81, Lord Sunderland to Chairman of the Sessions of the Justice of the Peace for Middlesex, 15 April 1710; fols. 83–120v, Sacheverell testimony, 2–8 March 1710.
5 Holmes, *The Trial of Doctor Sacheverell*, pp. 72–9, 156–76.
7 LPL MS 1770, fol. 90r, Wake diary, 2 January 1710.
9 John Toland, *Mr. Toland’s Reflections on Dr. Sacheverell’s Sermon Preach’d at St. Paul’s, Nov. 5 1709* (London, 1710), pp. 2–3.
10 Toland, *Mr. Toland’s Reflections on Dr. Sacheverell’s Sermon*, pp. 12, 13, 15.
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16 The Post Man, 11 March 1710.
18 Collins, Priestcraft in Perfection, pp. 11, 12.
19 Collins, Priestcraft in Perfection, pp. 18, 20, 46, 47, 48–9.
22 James O’Higgins provides the references for this material but does no more than note its existence. See Anthony Collins: The Man and his Works (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), pp. 136–7.
24 Mr Bromley to Dr Atterbury, 23 September 1710, in The Epistolary Correspondence, Visitation Charges, Speeches, and Miscellanies, of the Right Reverend Francis Atterbury, D.D. (London, 1783), p. 28.
25 Bennett, The Tory Crisis in Church and State, p. 174.
26 BL Add. 32096, fols. 86–99, letters of Francis Atterbury to Dr G. Harbin, n.d.
28 BL Add. 32096, fols. 100v–101v, Atterbury to Harbin, n.d.
30 Toland to Harley, 22 August 1710, in Portland, 4: 572.
31 Toland to the Earl of Oxford, 6 June 1711; Toland to the Earl of Oxford, 3 December 1711; both in Portland, 5: 4, 120.
33 Kishlansky, Monarchy Transformed, p. 333.
34 Toland to the Earl of Oxford, 7 December 1711, in Portland, 5: 126.
35 Portland, 5: 127.
38 Shaftesbury to Pierre Coste, 12 January 1712, from Naples, in Anthony Ashley Cooper Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713) and ‘Le Refuge Francais’ – Correspondence, ed. Rex A. Barrell (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1985), p. 200; Shaftesbury to Thomas Micklethwaie, 29 March 1712, in The Life, Unpublished Letters, and Philosophical Regimen of Anthony,
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40 LPL MS 1770, fol. 128r. Wake diary entry, 31 December 1712.
41 Anthony Collins, A Discourse of Free-Thinking, Occasion’d by The Rise and Growth of a Sect call’d Free-Thinkers (London, 1713), p. 27.
43 Collins, Free-Thinking, pp. 6, 37–8.
47 The Guardian, 14 March 1713.
48 Collins, Free-Thinking, pp. 8, 14.
51 CUL MS Mm.1.53, fol. 210r. See also Richard Bentley, The Correspondence, 2 vols. (London, 1842), 2: 482, 499–500, 515.
55 BL Add. 4221, fols. 329r, 330v.
56 BL Add. 4313, fol. 69r–v, Desmaizeaux to Thomas Birch, 20 January 1735/36.
57 George Berkeley to John Percival, 26 January 1712/13, in The Works of George Berkeley, 8: 58.
58 TNA SP 34/21/15A, fols. 28–32.
59 TNA SP 34/34, fol. 121–2.
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60 BL Add. 4282, fol. 129r, Collins to Des Maizeaux [Desmaizeaux], 5 May 1717.
61 BL Add. 4282, fols. 127v–128r, Collins to Des Maizeaux [Desmaizeaux], 26 April 1717.

65 Swift, Mr. C——ns’s Discourse of Free-Thinking, p. 192.
68 John Toland, The Art of Restoring, Or, the Piety and Probity of General Monk In bringing about the Last Restoration (London, 1714), p. viii.
70 BL Add. 28095, fols. 61, 62r–63v.
72 The Post Man, 19 January 1717.
76 The Post Man, 26 February 1717.
77 TNA SP 35/8, fol. 28r–v; C. Maxwell to Robert Walpole, 3 February 1716/17; TNA SP 35/8, fol. 34, letter to Stanhope on Jacobite actions, 1716/17; fol. 170, Jn. Murgatroyd to Stanhope, 8 April 1717.
79 Defoe, An Argument Proving, pp. 77, 81, 87, 95.
80 The Post Man, 9 April 1717.
81 John Toland, The Second Part of the State Anatomy, &c (London, 1717), pp. 7, 8, 22, 23.
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84  Leicestershire Record Office, Glenfield, Barker MS: Whiston Papers, fol. 125v, Whiston to George Whiston, 30 September 1738.
88  Thomas Chubb, *The Posthumous Works of Mr. Thomas Chubb*, 2 vols. (London, 1748), 2: 147 (Ma) (the page numbers for this section are out of sequence with the rest of the book).
91  BL Add. 32556, fols. 134r, 137r, Thomas Chubb to Dr Cox Macro, 6 October 1718.
92  BL Burney MS 522, fols. 3, 6v, Thomas Morell’s notes on Thomas Chubb.
93  BL Add. 32556, fol. 140, Thomas Chubb to Dr Cox Macro, 18 July 1719; Thomas Chubb, *An Enquiry concerning the Books of the New Testament, whether they were written by Divine Inspiration in Four Tracts* (London, 1734).
94  BL Add. 4221, fol. 329r.
95  BL Add. 4282, fol. 228, Collins to Desmaizeaux, n.d. (c. 1718).
97  See Benjamin Hoadly, *Queries Recommended to the Authors of the Late Discourse of Free Thinking* (London, 1713).
98  BL Add. 4282, fol. 137r, Collins to Desmaizeaux, 1 July 1717.
99  BL Add. 4282, fol. 139r, Collins to Desmaizeaux, 8 December 1717.
100  BL Add. 4282, fol. 141r, Collins to Desmaizeaux, 25 February 1717/18.
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102 BL Add. 4282, fol. 141r–v.
107 BL Add. 4282, fol. 145v, Collins to Desmaizeaux, 23 April 1718.
108 BL Add. 4465, fol. 16, Toland to Mr. C***, June 1718. We know that Parker saw some of Toland’s works and was not impressed: see BL Add. 4295, fol. 27r, John Chamberlayne [FRS] to Toland, 21 June 1718.
109 BL Add. 4282, fol. 157r–v, Collins to Desmaizeaux, 19 December 1718.
114 Philalethes [Morgan], *The Friendly Interposer*, pp. 8–9; Thomas Morgan, A Letter to the Reverend Dr. Waterland, occasion’d by His Late Writings in Defence of the Athanasian Hypothesis (London, 1722), pp. 9–10; Thomas Morgan, *The Nature and Consequences of Enthusiasm Consider’d, in some short Remarks in the Doctrine of the Blessed Trinity* (London, 1719), p. 34.
116 BL Add. 5822, fol. 92r.
Chapter 5

Matter, motion, and Newtonian public science, 1720–41

By the time Sir Isaac Newton died in 1727 contemporary enthusiasm for natural philosophy had ensured that it had crossed the threshold of the rooms at the Royal Society to become firmly established as part of a national discourse. We need only look at the newspapers of the day to see how far natural philosophy had captured imaginations and created a market niche. Advertisements offered consumers the opportunity to hold the world figuratively in their hands. Pocket globes and larger models contained ‘the newest Observations, communicated to the Royal Society at London, and the Royal Academy’. Such natural philosophical instruments also became popular decorations in fashionable London homes. One advertisement ran throughout 1717 offering ‘Cheap, curious, useful and instructive Ornaments for Rooms, Staircases, &c. being 19 new Maps neatly and correctly done... including the latest Discoveries and Observations of the Royal Societies in London and Paris’.

Of course, natural philosophical books written for a general audience continued to see many printings. Those who were excluded from Royal Society meetings could purchase, for a subscription of twenty-five shillings, an abridged set of the Philosophical Transactions for the years 1700 to 1720. For readers with a Continental eye, Memoirs of the Royal Academy of Sciences in Paris Epitomized allowed a glimpse at developments across the Channel. We may note the enormous popularity of these kinds of work from notices placed around 1720 to announce auctions of the libraries of deceased persons, which made specific references to the natural philosophical books contained in them. Public lecturers continued to compete for patrons. By 1718 three distinct sets of lectures delivered by William Whiston and Francis Hauksbee, by John T. Desaguliers, and by Benjamin Worster with his partner Thomas Watts all offered instruction in ‘Mechanical, Hydrostatical, Pneumatical, and Optical Experiments’. In addition, various courses on chymistry and anatomy and lectures in Gresham College ensured that any interested party with the means
Newtonian public science, 1720–41
to do so had ample opportunity to immerse herself or himself in natural philosophy. It is into this arena of public science that I have sought to place deists’ writings on natural philosophy.

JOHN TOLAND’S PANTHEISTICON

Pantheisticon: or the Form of Celebrating the Socratic-Society (Latin edition 1720; English edition 1751) was John Toland’s second attempt at composing a natural philosophy and contains his final view of God and providence. Recently it has been demonstrated that he appropriated the term ‘pantheist’ from the work of Joseph Raphson, mathematician and fellow of the Royal Society, who had used it to describe God’s relationship with the Creation. In De spatio reali (1697) Raphson had claimed that space was an attribute of the divine first cause of Creation; thus anything in space was within God. According to Raphson, Jewish theologians ‘maintained a certain universal substance, material as well as intelligent, fashioning all things that exist out of its own essence, whence they have received the name pantheists’. This ‘universal substance’ penetrated everything, but was different from ordinary matter.3

Toland embraced Raphson’s characterisation of pantheists and added that they believed that ‘the Force and Energy of the Whole, the Creator and Ruler of All, and always tending to the best End, is GOD’; he further defined them as unconcerned with theological disputes and believing that the opinions of others can never harm them so long as they follow their reason.4 Toland here still maintained the image of God as one who operated for the best ends of humanity and not for Himself; God is an ally in humanity’s search for obtainable knowledge. God is eternal and everlasting, He is the author of all things, and humanity exists in His presence. This was neither unique nor radical; William Whiston and Newton himself, quoting Acts 17.28, also believed that ‘in God we properly live, move, and have our being’. So too did the infamous preacher Henry Sacheverell.5 However, the similarities ended there. Whereas Toland’s God might be material, that of his challengers was pure spirit. In 1720 Toland’s conception of God had reached its final stage: God placed all meaningful truths about the universe and Himself within the capacity of the human intellect.

Some years earlier, during one of his visits to Hanover, Toland had discussed his changing notions of God with Leibniz. ‘You frequently refer, Sir’, Leibniz advised him, ‘to the opinion of those who think that there is no other God or Eternal Being than the World itself,... But this opinion, which you yourself profess to reject, is as pernicious as it is unfounded.’ Though he would direct his criticism specifically at Newton’s claim that space was God’s sensorium, opinions such as Toland’s may also have been what Leibniz had in mind during his famed correspondence with Clarke when he wrote,
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‘Natural religion itself, seems to decay (in England) very much. Many will have human souls to be material: others make God himself a corporeal being.’

The conception of matter and motion contained in *Pantheisticon* is both similar to and different from that described in *Letters to Serena*. Toland continued to believe that the universe was an infinite whole with no void space. Individual bodies were seen as such by ‘their peculiar Attributes, although, with Regard to the Whole, there were no Parts really separate’. There was also a guiding principle that created ‘Harmony of the infinite Whole’ and ensured the perfect order regulating the whole universe. This guiding principle was God, not ‘separated from the *Universe* itself, but a Distinction of Reason alone’, whom Toland further described as the ‘Force and Energy of the Whole, the Creator and Ruler of All, and always tending to the best End.’ In other words God was the ‘Action’ that Toland had outlined in *Letters to Serena*.

Unlike *Letters to Serena*, where Toland noted that individual pieces of matter were mental abstractions of the universal matter, *Pantheisticon* contained the suggestion that matter was composed of individual particles packed so closely together that there was no void. These particles were ‘most simple, and actually indivisible, infinite too in Number and Species, and that all Things are made out of their Composition, Separation, and various Mixture, but with proper Measures, Weights, and Motions’. Moreover, Toland claimed that by denying the existence of a void, he escaped the fault of the ancient philosopher Epicurus, who had to invoke chance and fortune to account for the coming together into substances of atoms in an absolute vacuum. He also referred to Newton in this vein. Whereas he once saw Newton’s work as complementing his own natural philosophy, Toland now viewed Newton as the most able spokesperson for those philosophers who maintained the existence of a real void space: ‘Whoever feeds his Fancy with these Notions, let him consult the great *Newton*.’ As he had done earlier, Toland argued that ‘universal Action’ was at the root of all motion. It was transmitted from one body to another, never decreasing. While there were individual motions, these were aspects of Action. Toland explained that everything was ‘in Motion, and all Diversities whatsoever [were] so many Names for particular Motions’, but with ‘not one single Point in Nature being absolutely at rest, but only with regard to other Things’. Thus for Toland motion was the true state of matter, and rest existed in a relative sense only.

Toland next considered the origin of material things. He believed that the notion of four elements (earth, air, fire, and water) was unable to account for the constitution of the universe. What is more, and considering the construction of trees, ‘the organic Structure of Seeds could not be formed out of any Course of Atoms, or any Species of Motion whatsoever’. A seed contained, in Aristotelian language, the *potentia* of becoming a tree. Toland saw this as fulfilment of purpose. He also stated that the same principle applied to
animals. Things resulted from a kind of organic growth from first principles into their end product and would later be combined to form visible objects. Toland again contradicted what he had stated in *Letters to Serena*, notably that bodies appear differently to observers because of the motion of their identical particles and the sensations this motion causes in us. In *Pantheisticon* he posited that things were built up from dissimilar substances. He explained that ‘Chymists demonstrate, that such Bodies are cemented by a manifold growing together of several Substances.’

Toland incorporated geology and natural history into *Pantheisticon*, and it is beneficial to consider his experience with these subjects. Edmund Gibson and he had a greater association than might be imagined. During June and July 1694 they had discussed natural history. In 1695 Gibson would issue a new edition of William Camden’s *Britannia*, a sixteenth-century geographical and historical account of Britain. To accomplish this task, he relied upon the talents of many scholars including Toland, who was to guide the section of the book concerning Ireland. Arthur Charlett later remembered that Toland ‘courted’ Gibson, who ‘very little valued his Learning to which [Toland] so much pretended’. The two unlikely partners did not remain together for very long. When he initially arrived in Oxford Toland met and befriended Edward Lhwyd, antiquarian and Keeper of the Ashmolean. The two men had many conversations about geology, but Lhwyd confessed to a friend that Toland was ‘not conversant in these studies’ and yet endeavoured to ‘perswade’ them as to his abilities. Like others who met him, Lhwyd described Toland’s behaviour in mid-June 1695 with displeasure: he was ‘eminent for railing in coffee houses against all communities in religion, and monarch’. Despite sharing intellectual interests with men such as Gibson and Lhwyd, Toland ruined these relationships with unrestrained vanity and self-promotion.

In *Pantheisticon* Toland integrated his Oxford geological studies with his modified natural philosophy. He noted that veins of a sort are evident in stones, through which an ‘Aliment’ moves to provide ‘the Nutriment, and finally, an Exhalation passes through thin and hidden Pores’. Just as the flow of blood provides nourishment for living creatures, ‘Aliment’ does the same for less obviously living matter. Indeed, the same ‘Aliment’ was also present in blood. Noting the variety of minerals and gems, Toland stated that there was no reason to believe that ‘they were less actuated with Life, than the Teeth and Bones of Animals’. Of those who would scoff at his notion of minute pores and a vitalising agent in nature, Toland requested that they consider their bones, which grow and are brought nutrients via ‘imperceptible Conduits’. He explained the presence of certain materials in specific locations and not
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in others by the amount of nourishment available in a particular place. His universe was an organic one in which all components of it grew and lived.13

Toland proposed that his conception of an organic universe explained the observed phenomena better than did competing theories, which defined matter by extension alone. In contrast, he argued that ‘Infinite, simple, and dissimilar Substances, or the primary Bodies of infinite Species, moveable and indivisible, make all the Mixtures of all Things, of which they themselves are the eternal, unexhausted, and immutable Matter.’ These bodies can only be what they are. That is, ‘there can be no Division, much less Permutation of the first Bodies’. Toland concluded that there could not be any true destruction in the universe. Particles only change places into new configurations.14

Some years after the publication of Pantheisticon an anonymous assessment appeared in the History of the Works of the Learned, a periodical which addressed a variety of contemporary literature. The reviewer referred to it as ‘a ridiculous Latin Piece... by that despicable Knight-Errant in the Cause of Infidelity, John Toland’. In an assessment reminiscent of that offered by William Wotton against Letters to Serena, the reviewer claimed, Toland’s purpose was ‘in Words only to say there is a Deity, but in fact it is destroying his Existence’. The fear was that these writings might corrupt ‘the unwary and the Half-learned’. There was more at stake than wrong-minded conceptions of matter and motion: it was a battle to place the proper view of God in the hearts of Britons.15

Some modern scholars view Pantheisticon as an atheistical work and a last stab at the establishment that had denied Toland a place by demonstrating that atheism could find support in the same doctrines of matter and motion that men like Boyle and Newton believed demonstrated divine providence.16 Where those two philosophers saw God’s direct and continuing handiwork in the operation of the universe, Toland presented self-moving matter, which existed in accordance with Newtonian physics, as a godless alternative. Toland individually, however, offered a different view. He wrote his only known explanation of the Pantheisticon in a letter to a former Cambridge fellow, Barnham Goode, in October 1720. By the time he had composed the book Toland’s attempts at an English political appointment had come to nought. Moreover, he was destitute following his ill-fated investment in the South Sea Company. He was living in a tiny rented room with his books stacked on chairs.17 Referring to his losses, he wrote, ‘I think it the wisest course, at least the most becoming a Pantheist (who ought to be prepared for every caprice and reverse of fortune) to leave this national affair to the consideration of the Parliament, which alone can redress its own mistakes, and punish the miscarriages of the managers.’ He had not lost faith in established politics or its institutions. His attitude was also consistent with the philosophy of Pantheisticon: things are built, broken, and built again, and nothing is truly destroyed. The same might be said of Toland’s fortune: it was gone now, but perhaps it would be
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restored. Toland further advised Goode that ‘as to F. P. in the Epistle before the Pantheisticon, let him know that it Signifies no more than Felicitatem precatur’. That is, one prays for happiness or success. This would seem to cast doubt on a hypothesis of Toland’s atheism and support scholars such as Justin Champion, who claim it is unlikely that we can dismiss Toland’s public assertions of Christian belief as ‘insincere and contrived’.18

The uniqueness of the world-view that Toland advanced in Pantheisticon is minimised when we consider the 31 December 1720 issue of John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon’s Independent Whig, where the authors suggested that

Every Thing in the Universe is in constant Motion, and where-ever we move we are surrounded with Bodies, everyone of which must, in a certain degree, operate upon themselves and us; and it cannot be otherwise, that in the Variety of Actions and Events, which happen in all Nature, but some must appear very extraordinary to those who know not their true Causes: Men naturally admire what they cannot apprehend, and seem to do some of Credit to their Understanding, in believing whatever is out of their reach to be Supernatural.

This description is strikingly similar to Toland’s, portraying all of nature as operated by the interaction of matter moving in accordance with established rules. As Toland had also claimed, ignorance of these rules forced some philosophers to find explanations in direct divine guidance. Finally, a proper knowledge of natural philosophy allowed formerly extraordinary events to be understood in terms of the rules of motion. By casting a wide net for the context of deist writings we see that they engaged with topics of interest and offered solutions that did not differ greatly from those of their contemporaries. In fact if Toland had been writing later in the eighteenth century, he might well have been seen as one of the founders of the philosophical movement identified as Enlightenment Vitalism.19

ANTHONY COLLINS AND DEIST SUPPORT OF PUBLIC SCIENCE

Anthony Collins greatly admired public lectures on natural philosophy. Though he was debating with William Whiston at length over the meaning of prophecy in 1724, he appreciated Whiston’s efforts to disseminate Newtonian philosophy. He also praised Whiston as an accomplished scholar with ‘great designs for the improvement of philosophy, and for the welfare and trade of his country: as appears by his attempts to explain the philosophy of Sir Isaac Newton, and by his other works in mathematicks and physicks, but above all, by his attempts to discover the longitude’.20 Whiston did more than promote Newton’s work in such publications as New Theory of the Earth (1696) and Newton’s Mathematick Philosophy More Easily Demonstrated (1716); he encouraged
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participation in the endeavour. After he had been banned from Cambridge for Arianism, Whiston began a career as a public lecturer in mathematical philosophy in 1712. His lectures were very popular and attracted large audiences. For example, the solar eclipse of 1715 provided Whiston with an excellent opportunity to generate income by offering instruction on how best to observe the phenomenon and understand it. The Post Man carried Whiston’s advertisements, which alerted interested parties that he had created a ‘universal Astronomical Instrument for the easy Calculation and Exhibition of Eclipses, and of all the Celestial Motions’. As the date of the eclipse neared, advertisements reminded readers that he intended ‘to observe the great Eclipse next Friday over the North West Piazza in Covent Garden. Tickets are delivered out at his own house in Crosstreet near Covent Garden.’ In the week leading up to the event, Whiston adjusted the contents of his lectures to focus on eclipses.

Whiston’s attempts to find a method to determine longitude at sea, which Collins also admired, were similarly a public exercise. Whiston and his partner, Humphrey Ditton, petitioned Parliament on 19 April 1714 to create a reward for the successful method of finding longitude. Ditton and Whiston believed that observing the difference between the flash of cannon shots and the resulting sound would allow ships at sea accurately to determine their location. Newspaper advertisements told Londoners that ‘there will be every Saturday Night that is tolerably clear, a Ball of Fire thrown up from Black Heath about a Mile high, and that the time will be exactly at 8 a clock’ and asked observers to ‘make and communicate their Observations as to its Azymuth, Altitude and the time it is visible every where, and to avoid, as far as they can, looking thro the thick Air of London’. These experiments, though ultimately unsuccessful, carried on from 1714 to 1717. Collins saw these efforts in increasing public understanding of natural philosophy, Newton’s specifically, as benefiting all Britons. Moreover, freethinking encouraged the open discussion of natural philosophy. As a result, it was also advantageous for the nation.

THOMAS MORGAN’S MEDICAL PRINCIPLES

In 1725 Thomas Morgan joined the growing ranks of Newtonian enthusiasts with his initial publication on natural philosophy, which centred on a theory of medicine. The title, Philosophical Principles of Medicine, was an allusion to Newton’s Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy. This was not the only affinity that Morgan’s book bore to Newton’s. Morgan began by outlining the known Newtonian laws of motion:

Law 1: All Bodys will for ever continue in their State of Rest, or of uniform direct Motion, unless they are compell’d to change that State by some external impress’d Force. Law 2: The Alteration of Motion is ever proportional to, and in the same
given Direction with the impress'd Force that cause it. Law 3: Re-Action is ever equal, and contrary to Action; or the mutual Actions of any two Bodys upon each other are always equal, and in contrary Directions.

No one could have mistaken Newton’s influence. And no one was supposed to with Morgan’s claims in the preface that good natural philosophers began with an understanding of nature derived from observation coupled with skill in mathematics, the method by which Newton made his discoveries. Moreover, a prefatory poem composed by Samuel Bowden, a nonconformist physician and poet, described Morgan’s achievement:

Such was the Path immortal NEWTON trod,  
He form’d the wondrous Plan, and mark’d the Road

and a few lines later,

Mature in Thought, You NEWTON’s Laws reduce  
To nobler Ends and more Important Use.23

Like our other deists, Morgan saw a correct understanding of motion as essential for any scheme of natural philosophy. Next ‘to the Knowledge of God, of our Duty to him’, he claimed, ‘the Knowledge of the Principles and Laws of Motion’ was the most useful. Motion, he explained, could be accounted for by the action of certain forces, the strength of which would vary as the square of the time, in proportion to the quantity of matter, and would decrease as the reciprocal square of distances between bodies. Like Newton, Morgan denied that the force referred to a physical cause. Rather, it described ‘the Quantity and Direction of the Motion generated and produced by them’. Those who misunderstood this concept, he argued, risked misinterpreting Newton’s work. Indeed, this was seen in ‘people pretending to Philosophy’ who argued that gravity was ‘an essential and intrinsick Power’ in matter. It is interesting that Morgan, though he was a deist and shared both theological and political opinions with Toland and Collins, here criticised their interpretation of gravity as a power inherent in matter. He explained that his depiction of gravity and motion ought to be accepted because its source was none other than ‘The wonderful and incomparable Author of the Principia’.24

Having relayed the cause of motion as an immaterial force, Morgan proceeded, as had Newton, to describe its physical effects. He assigned the motion in the seas and the atmosphere to the action of the Sun and Moon by means of ‘Perturbations’. Just as large-scale alternations are caused by the Sun and Moon acting through an aether, smaller alterations ‘must necessarily be impress’d upon the Blood and animal Fluids, and produce very sensible and considerable Effects in animals Bodys’. This effect resulted from motion being impressed through the action of gaseous ‘aethereal Fluids’, which interacted with fluids, both bodily and oceanic, by means of the ‘Pores and Interstices’ which all fluids have. These pores allowed a ‘continual Communication between
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the Atmosphere or external Air, and the Air included or contain’d in such Fluids’. Morgan concluded that physicians cannot, therefore, be ignorant of the laws of motion and the construction of matter. Since the human body operated by means of fluids, he suggested that the cure to any disease must begin with knowledge of motion. He then considered the nature of the aether. Using book 2 of the Principia as his source, Morgan stated that ordinary air ‘is a compressible and expansive Fluid; whose Density is ever proportional to its Compression’. From this analogy he concluded that aether must act in a similar manner.\(^2\) Motion was therefore caused by a force interacting with the all-pervasive aether.

NEWTONIANISM OF THE LATE 1720s

In addition to those produced by our deists, the 1720s saw many new public science writings concerning Newton. A reviewer for The Present State of the Republick of Letters commented, in 1728, that despite Newton’s lack of interest in making his Principia easily read, ‘as it is now translated, [it] may be very useful to a great many who understand neither Latin nor Mathematicks well enough to read the other’. Contemporary enthusiasm for Newton fuelled such English translations, the reviewer explained. That same year Henry Pemberton, physician and editor of the third edition of the Principia (1726), produced A View of Sir Isaac Newton’s Philosophy, one of the most popular accounts of Newtonian philosophy; owners of the book included the diarist Thomas Hearne and the author Henry Fielding. Newton himself approved of the work and had personally subscribed to twelve copies.\(^2\) Pemberton noted that the manner in which Newton had published his philosophical discoveries ‘occasions them to lie very much concealed from all, who have not made the mathematics particularly their study’. Past controversies had made Newton uneasy about being too simplistic in presenting the contents of the Principia. As Derham related, Newton was a man ‘who abhorred all Contests,. . . And for this reason, namely to avoid being baited by little Smatterers in Mathematicks, he has told me, he designedly made his Principia abtruse; but yet so as to be understood by able Mathematicians, who [he] imagined, by comprehending his Demonstrations, would concur w[i]th him in his Theory.’\(^2\) Admiring Newton were left to themselves to understand the Principia. To aid the task, Pemberton submitted that works such as his and those by Harris, Derham, and others were the best means to disseminate Newton’s discoveries.

Pemberton nevertheless cautioned that reading books and reflecting on them was not a sufficient method in natural philosophy. This was because ‘we can conclude nothing concerning matter by any reasoning upon its nature and essence, but that we owe all the knowledge, we have thereof, to experience’. That is, we must observe and enquire, refusing tradition and authority as guiding
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principles. Pemberton stated that matter might appear ‘to lie at rest, [though] it really preserves without change the motion, which it has common with our selves: and when we put it into visible motion, and we see it continue that motion; this proves, that the body retains that degree of its absolute motion, into which it is put by our acting upon it’. All things are in motion, even if we do not perceive them as such. Newton, who ‘discovered that the celestial motions are performed by a force extended from the sun and primary planets, follows this power into the deepest recesses of those bodies themselves, and proves the same to accompany the smallest particle, of which they are composed’. A force, within light emanating from the Sun, caused planetary motion and also allowed particles of matter to adhere to one another. While Newton had refused to speculate on the manner of this interaction, he did state that light was a material substance. It was possible to infer that gravity might likewise have a material cause.28

Samuel Clarke’s younger brother, John Clarke DD, chaplain to the king, Boyle Lecturer for 1719 and 1720, and Dean of Sarum (1728–57), produced his own lay account of Newtonian philosophy: A Demonstration of Some of the Principle Sections of Sir Isaac Newton’s Principles of Natural Philosophy (1730). He greatly admired Newton, who, he claimed, composed ‘the most compleat Piece that ever was wrote’ on natural philosophy. He then presented the known qualities of matter. It was ‘impenetrable, [as] we gather by our Senses, and not by Reasoning; for all those that we feel upon, we find by Experience are impenetrable, and from thence we conclude that Impenetrability is the Property of all Bodies whatsoever’. Moreover, ‘all Bodies are moveable, and continue of themselves, either in that State of Rest or Motion which they are once in, by some sort of Powers’. Knowledge of the properties of matter – extension, hardness, and mobility – were inseparable and ‘the Foundation of all Philosophy’.29

MATTHEW TINDAL AND THOMAS CHUBB ON LIGHT AND LAWS OF MOTION

In the same year as John Clarke described Newton’s conception of matter for general readers, Tindal again addressed the natural world in part of his Christianity as Old as the Creation (1730). Like Collins, he noted the accepted view that the Sun remained stationary while the Earth and other planets circled it. For Tindal this was yet another example of his belief that ‘Scriptural and Philosophical Account of natural things seldom agree’. If people desired true pictures of the world they must adopt a Newtonian method and examine for themselves the wonders of nature and not permit their understanding to be determined by some outside authority, be it secular or sacred. The order of things in the universe revealed human nature and the relation in which
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humanity stood to God; hence ‘the Religion of Nature’ takes in every thing that is founded on Reason and the Nature of Things. This natural order was, as Tindal noted in his previous writings, composed of matter and motion. Thus knowledge of matter and motion was knowledge of God. Moreover, nature also

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teaches Men to unite for their mutual Defence and Happiness, and Government was instituted solely for this End; so to make this more effectual, was Religion, which reaches the Thoughts, wholly ordain’d; it being impossible for God, in governing the World, to propose to himself any other End than the Good of the Governed: and consequently, whoever does his best for the Good of his Fellow-Creatures, does all that either God or Man require.30

This view nested neatly with his political views. Just as God acted for the common good of Christians and did not impose Himself on them, governments too must act for the collective good.

Writing in a similar vein a year after Tindal’s magnum opus, Thomas Chubb described the laws that he believed guided both nature and humanity. These natural and immutable laws were ‘founded’ in ‘the Reasons and Fitness of Things’, which comprised the Creation. Their substance was obedience to God combined with correct behaviour towards one another. By fulfilling this divine request, Chubb suggested, we did what was necessary to satisfy God. Key to the maintenance of the natural order was the proper motion of all the parts found in this order. Just as a machine needed correct motion to function properly, a nation needed the right motion of all its citizens. That is, people achieved correct motion within society when they acted for the common good, with their government ensuring this took place. We know the law of nature through an examination of the Creation, a study of the divine design of the world. Chubb concluded that ‘While the Heavens declare the Glory and Wisdom on God, they [also] shew the Rectitude of his Nature.’31

MORGAN’S MECHANICAL PRACTICE OF PHYSICK

Conceptions of matter and motion in relation to God continued to hold Morgan’s interest. A decade after he published Philosophical Principles of Medicine, Morgan issued a continuing account in The Mechanical Practice of Physick (1735). An anonymous reviewer of the work noted that this ‘is not the first book which we owe Dr. Morgan; he has already made himself known by several pieces, in the way of religious controversy: he also obliged the publick with a former work in the physical way; but, we know not how it happens, Dr. Morgan is more read as a divine, than as a physician.’ Though previous generations had used ‘Physick’ interchangeably with ‘natural philosophy’, Morgan used the term in the modern sense of ‘physician’ and as a synonym
for the practice of medicine.32 The book was a platform from which he argued that medicine could be reduced to the general laws of motion, as Newton had treated celestial phenomena. That this seemed not to be more widely accepted as the proper goal of medical discourse, Morgan suggested, was due to lack of clarity in physick that had prevented its practitioners from realising the reality of certain substances like a Newtonian aether. In assigning blame, Morgan pointed an accusatory finger at the ‘enthusiastic Chymists, such as Paracelsus, Van Helmont, and others’, who had ‘carried the Art of Healing beyond all human Judgement and Comprehension’. Among the others whom Morgan chastised, and noted on the title page, was the Dutch physician Herman Boerhaave. Boerhaave, who early in his career did adapt Newtonian mechanics to the study of medicine, had by 1732 made it the goal of physicians to find knowledge of individual bodies rather than general laws of explanation. Indeed, such researches, into ailments of the blood for example, were couched in chymical terms such as ‘putrefaction’ and ‘stagnation’. Moreover, as Rina Knoeff describes it, Boerhaave ‘hardly ever spoke of the forces of attraction, but ascribed individual characteristics to non-mechanical entities like effluvia’, which was the most subtle part of the ‘juices of the animals’ existing in the nervous system. To remedy what Morgan viewed as a defective approach, he encouraged readers to throw off this and similar ‘incomprehensible Jargon, and to reduce the Practice of Physick to the known Laws of Motion and Mechanism’.33

Morgan believed that increased knowledge of the action of disease, which he described as its motion, was greatly important in physick. The key task in this quest consisted of determining the movement of diseases inside the body and then finding the corrective motion of the curative agent. Previous attempts to advance a theory of cures were, he asserted, based on occult qualities that had no regard for the laws of motion. As Newton had demonstrated, matter, motion, and the action of forces described the operation of the world; thus Morgan claimed that there was no place for any other properties in a true account of physick. However, he conceded that second-rate physicians had provided entertainment for Britons by ‘furnishing every English Family with Books to quack upon’.34

Morgan advanced his theory by once more aping the format of the Principia in listing various propositions, their proofs, and finally the conclusions that might be drawn from them. He also borrowed from the queries to the Opticks in a manner similar to Pemberton and Derham. Substances which act to cure disease, he believed, entered the body as fluids but might act only once they had been ‘reduced to an exceedingly fine and imperceptible Vapour.’ Once a medicine was ingested it entered the stomach, where the natural heat therein began a process of rarefaction. Experimental philosophers, noted Morgan, had proved that heat was capable of dissolving, resolving, and diffusing materials that were
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formerly solid. Thus both the operation of the stomach and the initial process of cures could be known by observable experimentation.35

A correct understanding of fluids and their motion was thus essential in physick. Morgan described the pressure of fluids as a constant force exerted in a confined vessel regardless of the duration of the containment. This being so, he concluded, ‘Pressure in Fluids is a very different and distinct Law of Nature or Principle of Motion’. This was a difficult theory because even the ‘great and incomparable Newton, tho’ he discovered this Law of Fluidity, and the Effects of it, yet did not at least plainly and expressly distinguish it from the general Law of Gravity’. Morgan conceded, however, that Newton’s gravity did account for the pressure of fluids, but that one had to ensure the correct implementation of gravity. As he explained, ‘the uniform and instantaneous Velocities produced by Pressure, are the same with the accelerated Velocities last acquired by the perpendicular Descent of Bodies from the same Heights, through which such Pressure is propagated’.36 Morgan then returned to specific bodily functions, chiefly the circulation of blood. He argued that the velocity of blood was continually decreasing as its distance from the heart increased. Conversely, the nearer the blood came to the heart, the greater its motion. Such a pattern was modelled on the planets, which moved faster at perihelion than at aphelion. The opposite view, Morgan claimed, was held by many eminent physicians who, according to his account, presented this conclusion as an unresolvable paradox. In advancing his criticism, he asked readers to consider a cone. Taking the heart as the narrow end, he asked how the pressure of a fluid which originates at the smaller end can possibly have the greatest pressure at the end with the largest area. It was, he concluded, a fact that ‘the Impetus or Momentum of the Fluid must be as the Velocities, or as the Sections inversely’, just as the planets obeyed the inverse square law.37

As for the motion of animal bodies, including humans, Morgan suggested that ‘the original active Force is intrinsically in the Solids, and the Fluids only act as they are acted upon’. The ingested solids and fluids were made vaporous by the heat of the stomach. The vapour acted like an aether and initiated motion in the body by means of pores in the fluids, such as blood. How these forces operated Morgan claimed not to know. Indeed, he noted that much of the problem with previous schemes of physick resulted from fruitless searches for such causes. A true physician ought to be satisfied with observable facts and to relate these to known laws of nature, such as Newton’s law of gravity, and to known phenomena, such as matter and motion. As Newton had claimed, and Morgan accepted, ‘hypotheses, whether metaphysical or physical, or based on occult qualities, or mechanical, have no place in experimental philosophy’. Not all of Morgan’s readers were convinced of his commitment to this strategy, however. An anonymous reviewer described the work as an unproven hypothesis: ‘I hope better of Dr. Morgan’, the assessment began,
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‘but this he may be assured of, the publick will pay little regard to his inferences, unless the facts from which they are drawn be specified.’

In his work Morgan was following the well-established footsteps of other Newtonian devotees, including Boerhaave, whom he now refuted. Stephen Hales DD, FRS, in his *Hæmasticks* (1733), had also adopted the experimental style of Newton’s *Opticks* to analyse the motion of the blood, revealing an active immaterial energy in blood as its vitalising agent. What is more, the Scottish physician Archibald Pitcairne also treated the movement of blood like that of any other fluid and applied the same mathematics to it that described the flow of water. In spite of this unacknowledged pedigree, Morgan’s account of fluid dynamics drew a strong rebuttal from Bryan Robinson, anatomical lecturer at Trinity College, Dublin. Robinson believed it was Morgan and not Newton who was mistaken when it came to the description of fluid motion. He issued the challenge in a published letter to the physician and populariser of Newtonian philosophy George Cheyne, a man he described as a ‘Person of Candour and Judgment, and throughly acquainted with Philosophical Subjects’. Robinson advised Cheyne that the mistakes in Morgan’s treatise could be attributed to ‘his not having duly attended to what Sir Isaac and I delivered concerning these Motions’. Thus he believed that Morgan’s thesis could be dismissed with little difficulty.

What could not be as easily written off were Morgan’s suggestions regarding the interaction of aether with blood. Robinson was particularly aggravated by Morgan’s comments regarding the twenty-fourth proposition of his *Animal Oeconomy*, which had been published the previous year. That work had also begun with a discourse on the motion of fluids through cylinders, in which Robinson, like Newton, claimed to have ‘avoided Hypotheses, and explained the Laws which obtain in human Bodies by Reason and Experiment’. The passage in question stated: ‘The Life of Animals is preserved by acid Parts of the Air mixing with the Blood in the Lungs.’ Rather than Morgan’s aether interacting with the pores in the blood as the impetus to motion, Robinson advanced the notion of acid particles combining with blood as the proper explanation.

Robinson claimed to have extrapolated his conclusion from a series of unspecified experiments conducted by Newton. We may be certain to which experiments Robinson referred. In 1692 Pitcairne had visited Newton prior to taking up his post as medical lecturer at Leiden, where his students included Cheyne. Newton had given Pitcairne a short treatise entitled ‘De natura acidorum’ which demonstrated the action of acid particles. It was subsequently published in 1710 as a preface to the second volume of Harris’s *Lexicon Technicum*. Harris stressed the importance of the document by claiming that ‘it contains in it the Reason and of the Ways and Manner of all Chymical Operations, and indeed of almost all the Physical Qualities, by which Natural
Bodies, by their small Particles, act one upon another. In the treatise Newton argued that particles of acid contained ‘a great Attractive Force’ and that ‘By their Attractive Force also, by which they rush towards the Particles of Bodies, they move the Fluid and excite Heat.’ From this Robinson concluded that acid, as Newton demonstrated with Harris’s support, activated other substances to motion.

Robinson outlined his theory by stating ‘first, that a constant Supply of fresh Air is necessary to preserve the Life of Animals; secondly, that fresh Air preserves Life...by the very same Power...whereby it preserves Fire and Flame...and thirdly, that Air preserves Fire and Flame...and consequently the Life of Animals, by its acid Particles’. While much of what Robinson advanced was compatible with Morgan’s writings, the last premise is where they deviated. One could produce a flame without air, Robinson claimed, as he informed readers that a mixture of spirit of nitre (an acid) and various oils could ignite. Furthermore, it was possible to maintain the flame ‘in a Mixture of common Sulphur and Nitre’. Thus Robinson concluded that air must preserve a fire ‘by means of its acid Particles. There is no way of proving this Inference to be false, but by proving there are no acid Particles in the Air’. Morgan’s response, according to Robinson, was to claim that ‘Acids will check and extinguish Fire sooner than common Water’. Robinson did not acknowledge this as a worthy rebuttal. He concluded that he ‘wish’d Dr. Morgan had considered my Animal Oeconomy with a little more Temper and Care’. There Robinson explained that ‘When Animals are deprived of the Acid of the Air’, their pulse decreased rapidly. However, Robinson did not demonstrate how he was able to differentiate the lack of air from the lack of acid particles.

As had Robinson, Morgan formed his response as a letter to Cheyne, whom he called a ‘very proper and competent judge of the matter in debate’. The question at hand was, as Morgan explained to Cheyne, whether he or Robinson had ‘most mistaken Sir Isaac Newton’. Morgan was not the only Newtonian expositor concerned with these issues. In using Newtonian philosophy, especially book 2 of the Principia, to describe the workings of machines (in this case a human machine) Morgan was following the example of John T. Desaguliers, who was deeply immersed in demonstrating the empirical reality of Newton’s mathematics. Desaguliers too was interested in calculating depictions of fluids in pipes, specifically those he undertook at the behest of his patron, the Duke of Chandos, who in 1721 sponsored an unsuccessful scheme to redirect Uxbridge Water near London. Repeating his previous arguments for the flow of water, Morgan advised Cheyne that:

"[T]here seems to be something in this case that Dr. Robinson, as great a master as he is of Sir Isaac Newton, has not sufficiently considered. It is certain, that when water flows in canals or pipes, and runs out of a greater section into a less...the velocities must be every where reciprocally as the sections, or equal quantities must..."
flow through every section in the same time... it is evident that water thus communicating and flowing through pipes... does not observe the law of accelerating gravity, since that has no regard at all to any sections or communication of fluids, but an accelerating perpendicular descent only.46

It is worth reminding ourselves that Cheyne had written against Toland’s interpretation of Newton. Nevertheless, Morgan considered him the appropriate mediator for his dispute with Robinson even though Morgan, as we saw, agreed with much of Toland’s theology. This example demonstrates, if only in this one case, that we ought to be careful in drawing sharp distinctions between Newtonians and their perceived enemies. Robinson did not respond to Morgan’s latest challenge and Cheyne never reacted to either man’s attempt to draw him into their dispute. It seems clear that, by 1738, Morgan believed motion resulted from the interaction of the aether and matter.

Following his Mechanical Practice of Physick, Morgan considered the laws of nature in the first volume of his Moral Philosopher (1737). He stated that all persons contained knowledge of these laws, which were imprinted upon their wisdom and reason. However, access to this latent knowledge required assistance. Some, who were vain and full of conceit for their own abilities, denied the necessity of this condition. Morgan claimed that just as we must have divine guidance – which is never refused – to determine religious truths, the same held for truths about nature. The guide that he chose to lead people to correct understanding of the law of nature was Newton’s Principia, which, he maintained, contained many ‘Truths, and such as are necessarily founded in the Reason of Things; and yet, I think, none but a Fool or a Madman would say, that he could have informed himself in these Matters as well without [it], and that he is not at all obliged to such Master or Teacher’.47 Correct conceptions of nature were within the capacity of all people; one needed only the right instruction.

Morgan then described the material world as a system of bodies void of all thought and intelligence. Matter had no powers in itself, only the ability to be acted upon. As Morgan denied God the will to intervene in the ordinary workings of the Creation, the world must operate by means of immutable laws. However, the moral world – the world of human actions—was ‘capable of Intelligence, Will, and Choice’ and therefore it was ‘impossible to govern the moral World by the Laws of necessary, extrinsic Force, as it would be to govern the natural world, or System of Bodies, by the Laws of intelligent Self-Motion’. God governed both worlds by means of His ‘constant, uninterrupted Presence, Power, and incessant Action upon both’.48

Morgan also hoped to refute those who might suggest that matter, once it had been created and put into its natural order, no longer required ‘any farther Presence, Power, or Operation of the first Cause’. Here he further deviated from deists like Toland and Collins, who had stated and hinted, respectively,
that matter has no need of outside guidance. ‘But if these natural, inherent and essential Principles, Properties, or general Laws, can sustain and govern the World without God’, Morgan stated, ‘or without the continued Agency of the first Cause; I would fain know why they might not have created the World at first, or why they may not be as well supposed to have been eternal, necessary, and independent of any Cause at all.’ By denying an external cause of motion, philosophers potentially eliminated God from Creation, as Morgan desired to show. Morgan himself believed that God acted in strict conformity with the laws of nature. As he explained, the continuation of motion was ‘an Effect of God’s presence, Power, and Action’. By removing God from a universe operating by chance and impact, Morgan claimed, these thinkers could never answer the following question: ‘Are these natural, essential and inherent Properties of the Bodies themselves, or are they the regular Effects of some universal, extrinsic Cause acting incessantly upon the whole material System by such and such general Laws and Conditions of Agency?’ Any due consideration of these issues would reveal the impossibility of purely materialist accounts of the Creation and reveal the truth of Newton’s philosophy and the immaterial forces on which it was built.

In the third volume of The Moral Philosopher (1740), Morgan noted with approval the widespread knowledge and acceptance of Newton’s natural philosophy. While the best way to learn this work was from direct engagement with the Principia itself, Morgan acknowledged that this was not easy. Therefore the majority of interested parties knew Newton’s work through the efforts of others who explained the dense mathematics in a more accessible way. As did Collins, Morgan praised those who diffused this knowledge throughout the nation. However, this was not the most efficient way to learn, as ‘It must be own’d, that this Way of receiving Truth from Authority has its Use, and may be of great Advantage to the Bulk of Mankind. But then it must be allow’d too, that this is a more imperfect Ground of Truth.’ One placed great trust in those who popularised the original philosophy. This explained Morgan’s earlier caution in the matter of choosing one’s intellectual guides.

MORGAN AND THE POWER OF LIGHT

In 1741 Morgan advanced his last theory concerning motion and its origin in Physico-theology; or, a Philosophico-moral Disquisition Concerning Human Nature, Free Agency, Moral Government, and Divine Providence. He began by describing matter as a substance that could do nothing except be acted upon. Therefore motion as the cause of all occurrences in nature had to be ‘owing to some extrinsic active Power or Energy’. Established laws regulated motion, which he called ‘mechanical Powers, Forces or Actions of Bodies’. Chief among these
properties of motion was gravity. Morgan described the ultimate cause of gravity as ‘no other but the supreme, universal Agent, Author, Governor and Director of all Nature, or God himself’. And yet, he proposed, one might be able to describe how God worked through gravity. As he continued his investigation in natural philosophy, Morgan found that light (‘the visive Element’) was a substance not ‘endued with Gravity, Resistance, Pressure, or any other mechanical Power’, and yet it ‘actuated and exerted all the mechanical Powers of Bodies’. Thus Morgan posited that light, which pervaded all Creation and acted as a fluid, might be the active aethereal medium responsible for motion, which he had discussed in earlier works. He reported that the pressure of fluids is related to, and analogous with, the power of gravity, because, he argued, since the force of gravity and fluid pressure may be described by a square-root ratio they must have the same cause. He then concluded that gravity, which as he noted was a power not inherent in bodies but affects them with respect to their situation in the Creation and their proximity to other bodies, must be ‘continually exerted thro’ the whole Creation’. This would, Morgan assured his readers, seem clear ‘if it can be prov’d, that there is actually in Nature a material Substance or elementary Fluid, which is not affected with any of these mechanical Properties’. Having set the stage, Morgan then revealed the existence of such a fluid, namely light. He regarded the investigation of light as a difficult, yet crucial, topic. While he followed the lead of Newton, whom he praised as a ‘Man of the most elevated and uncommon Genius’, he believed that Newton had not exhausted the study of light. What Newton had proved with certainty was that light was a material substance. From this premise, Morgan suggested that ‘Fire and Light are essentially...the same, and that Fire is nothing else but condensed Light’. This conclusion was important because he described fire (along with air) as one of the two ‘Counterforces’ in nature. Thus light was an active force.

Morgan outlined the sensible properties of light, focusing particular attention on the fact that the ‘luminous Rays are in a continual vibrating Motion’ as proven by ‘Sir Isaac Newton’s Observations and Experiments’. In spite of this motion, neither light nor the material with which it interacted was adversely affected. The ‘General Scholium’ added to the second edition of the Principia (1713) supported Morgan’s statements. In it Newton had repeated that all bodies move freely in space without resistance. He also concluded that ‘A Few things could now be added concerning a very subtle spirit pervading gross bodies and lying hidden in them; by its force and actions, the particles of bodies attract one another at very small distances and cohere when they become contiguous...and light is emitted, reflected, refracted, inflected, and heats bodies; and all sensation is excited.’ ‘Any one but moderately acquainted with the Newtonian Theory of Light’, Morgan confidently claimed, ‘must see the Reason and Necessity of what I have observed and
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advanced.’ Morgan believed he knew what Newton did not: the nature of the unnamed subtle substance. This medium was evenly spread through all nature and was composed of the ‘very smallest and last Divisions of Matter’. From this Morgan concluded ‘that all other Bodies or material Substances whatever are immersed in this universal Fluid as the common Medium and Vehicle of all their Actions’. To demonstrate this claim, he presented the results of an experiment performed with a magnifying glass. He focused light from the Sun into a beam which possessed the power to cause combustion in items such as tobacco and pieces of oak or, if sufficiently intense, to melt gold. This proved that fire was ‘nothing else, but elementary Light’; it was ‘an Element sui Generis, and not subject to the mechanical Laws and Properties of other Bodies, or Material Fluids’. It moved through space suffering no resistance and operating in ‘a purely immechanical’ manner. At last Morgan had proved the existence of aether.

Morgan’s understanding of light was certainly due to trends in contemporary views of Newton. Morgan, like Collins, had subscribed to Henry Pemberton’s View of Sir Isaac Newton’s Philosophy (1728). In this book Pemberton wrote, concerning the power of nature, that ‘Sir Isaac Newton has in general hinted at his opinion concerning it; that probably it is owing to some very subtle and elastic substance diffused through the universe, in which such vibrations may be excited by the rays of light’. Is it surprising that Morgan proposed that motion was caused by light? What is more, Pemberton’s demonstration of the motive power of light and fire as seen through the use of a magnifying glass was exactly the aforementioned one employed by Morgan himself.

Contemporary reviewers of Physico-theology confirmed that little novelty could be found in Morgan’s pages. One complained, ‘Our Author has taken Care to say very few Things in this Book, which may not be found in others.’ The reviewer did, however, note that Morgan’s purpose had been to ‘Defend the cause of God’, for which he could expect ‘no Thanks or Favour’. Morgan’s critics would ‘make him (alas poor Man) an Atheist, for demonstrating the Being, Providence, continual Presence, incessant Agency and Concurrence of the Deity in all the Works and Ways of Nature; and an Infidel, for not believing what they themselves could never understand and explain’. The editor of The History of the Works of the Learned concluded that ‘we cannot but approve of Dr. Morgan’s Impartiality, and take a Pleasure in Obliging him, so long as he maintains the Character (as we hope he always will) of a genteel and candid Disputant’. Having demonstrated the existence of a medium (active light) that propagated motion throughout the Creation, Morgan followed Newton’s example in claiming that he did not know ‘How this immechanical Fluid acts upon other Bodies, and exerts and determines their mechanical Powers’. Though he refused to
speculate, he did know that it was not by any mechanical power. He could, however, articulate the laws that governed its action and by which ‘an intelligent Being, who is a Governor and Director of Things, has determined and declared, he will act’. That is, one could observe the physical results – the movement of material bodies in accordance with the laws of motion – of the actions performed by the immaterial medium or elemental light. This was the correct method in which to proceed because it was the method followed by the ‘great Philosopher, Newton’.58 Morgan cautioned against concluding that the existence of such laws meant that God did not act in the universe or that He gave matter a power of self-motion. Morgan hoped to impart to his readers an admiration for the direction of nature, as it operated ‘by general Laws, such as being constantly and steadily acted upon and kept to, may obtain and secure the best Order and Constitution of Things’. This unalterable picture of Creation was more worthy of God, Morgan argued, than contrary views that required the ‘Author of Nature, to suspend his Laws, or alter his prescribed Rules and Measures of Actions, by frequently interposing on particular Incidents and Emergencies’. God never suspended the laws of motion or nature. The world would continue to operate as it always had. Any other conclusion ‘would be unworthy of God, as the Creator and Governor of the World, and the universal Cause, Preserver, and Director of Nature’.59 Toland, Collins, Tindal, and Chubb could not have said it more clearly and they would certainly have readily agreed.

CONCLUSION

By 1741 deists were no longer out of step with contemporary understanding of Newtonian philosophy. Indeed, they were helping to create this understanding. Morgan’s work both incorporated and anticipated contemporary views of Newton. A material aether received considerable attention in the years after the publication of Physico-theology. In his History of the Royal Society (1744), Thomas Birch included two letters by Newton to Boyle and Henry Oldenburg, then Secretary to the Royal Society, written in 1679 and 1676 respectively and describing Newton’s early researches into aether, which in the middle of the eighteenth century seemed new and innovative. In these letters Newton suggested to Oldenburg that all of nature ‘may be nothing but various contextures of some certain aetherial spirits of vapours condensed, as it were, by praecipitation, much after the manner, that vapours are condensed’. He then advised Boyle that aether might cause gravity because bodies will ‘get out and give way to the finer parts of aether below, which cannot be without the bodies descending to make room above for it to go out into’. Thus aether seemed a key component of the operation of nature. This view continued to find supporters in 1743 when Robinson published A Dissertation on the Aether
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of Sir Isaac Newton, in which he argued that the phenomena of nature were caused by a spiritual aether, which filled the universe and had both ‘Activity and Power’. This position bears striking resemblance to that advanced by Morgan, though Robinson’s aether was spirit and Morgan’s was the material light of the Opticks. Notwithstanding this difference, eighteenth-century Newtonianism was shaped by appeals to aethers and material fluids and predicated upon the materiality of light. The materiality of light was posited by Morgan and to a different extent by Toland; both built upon the observation and experimentation championed by all our deists. This emphasis on observation was probably tested when Tindal and Toland watched their personal fortunes vanish in the South Sea Bubble, to which we now turn.

NOTES


2 The Post Boy, 14, 19 January 1719/20, 9 July 1720, 28 January 1721, 4 March 1721, 13 April 1721, 2 May 1721, 7 November 1721, 12 December 1721.


5 William Whiston, A New Theory of the Earth (London, 1696), p. 6; Bod. MS Don e 16, fol. 3av.

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7 Toland, Pantheisticon, pp. 16, 17, 18.
8 Toland, Pantheisticon, pp. 19, 20, 21.
11 Edward Lhwyd to Lister, [6–16 June] 1695, in Gunther (ed.), Life and Letters of Edward Lhwyd, p. 278. Gibson and Lhwyd were frequent correspondents; see Bod. MS Ashm. 1829, fols. 75, 80, 129, 154.
13 The History of the Works of the Learned, January 1740, pp. 296–7, 299, 305.
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24 Morgan, Philosophical Principles of Medicine, pp. 5, 8, 28, 31, 32.
25 Morgan, Philosophical Principles of Medicine, pp. 80, 82, 95. Morgan’s source was Principia, bk 2, prop. 18: ‘Given the law of the centripetal force, it is required to find in every place the density of the medium with which a body will describe a given space.’ (Isaac Newton, The Principia: Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy, trans. I. Bernard Cohen, Anne Whitman, and Julia Budenz (1726, 3rd ed., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 686).
34 Morgan, The Mechanical Practice of Physick, pp. 2, 3, 4.
37 Morgan, The Mechanical Practice of Physick, pp. 78, 79.
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40 Bryan Robinson, A Letter to Dr. Cheyne, Containing An Account of the Motion of Water Through Orifices and Pipes; And an Answer to Dr. Morgan’s Remarks on Dr. Robinson’s Treatise of the Animal Oeconomy (Dublin, 1735), pp. 1–4, 31.
42 Robinson, A Letter to Dr. Cheyne, p. 47.
46 Morgan, A Letter to Dr. Cheyne, p. 13.
53 Morgan, Physico-theology, pp. 29, 30.
55 Morgan, Physico-theology, pp. 31, 41, 45, 46.
58 Morgan, Physico-theology, pp. 56, 58, 298.
59 Morgan, Physico-theology, pp. 76, 77.
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Chapter 6

The age of Walpole: politics and theology, 1720–41

Robert Walpole was the most renowned and yet most reviled political figure in England during the early eighteenth century. He seized the opportunity which events – and his return to government following the failure of the Peerage Bill (1719) – provided and charted a course through the turbulent political waters in the wake of the South Sea Bubble in August of 1720. Within two years both of his chief rivals, the earls of Stanhope and Sunderland, would be dead, and Walpole would stand alone at the helm of England’s government.1 Following the successful returns of the 1722 election, the Walpolean Whigs, styled the ‘Robinocracy’ by critics, turned England into a state dominated by a single party; for the next twenty years, they would rule the nation through bribery, patronage, and a certain amount of paranoia over Jacobitism. This chapter outlines the theological and political writings of our deists, which were conceived during a period of what J. H. Plumb famously described as political stability, broken only by the quickly crushed resurgence of Jacobite fears during 1722–23 with the Atterbury Plot and the Cornbury Plot in 1733–34.

THE SOUTH SEA BUBBLE AND POLITICS OF 1720–21

On the first day of April 1720, Matthew Tindal sent a letter of support to Lord Sunderland. In addition to approving of Sunderland’s politics in staying close to George I rather than joining Walpole in opposition, Tindal certainly remembered that the peer had come to aid of the fellows of All Souls in their challenge with the warden, Gardiner nearly a decade earlier. Tindal wrote that he was dismayed to read the daily attacks on the ministry, and he told Sunderland that a carefully considered reply ought to be forthcoming. He offered to write just such a work and was prepared to ‘employ my studies in the Summer as your Lordship shall direct’. Impressing upon Sunderland his loyalty, Tindal ended by emphasising that ‘the persons I chiefly attack may
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be a proof of what regard I have for your interest’ and that he would wait patiently for an answer. While no explicit reply exists, Tindal did receive a summons to meet with an unnamed government minister in late September. Clearly, he wished to be involved in England’s government and saw the royal interest as compatible with his own.2

As Tindal was attempting to ingratiate himself with Sunderland, John Toland, like many of his age, sought to participate in the frenzy of financial speculation which had seized England. In June 1720 he urged Robert Molesworth to help him invest in the South Sea Company. Toland was probably very self-assured when he wrote to Molesworth, because four days earlier he had received a piece of fan mail in which the author commended his ‘heroick Spirit in defending y’ divine Truths against the . . . World enchanted by Prejudices & Popish witchcraft’.3 At some date, approximately mid-to-late September, as Toland explained the situation to Molesworth, he had the opportunity to secure a subscription in the South Sea Company for £1,000. However, the directors had just ruled that only an MP might subscribe for that amount. With time being of the essence and knowing that Molesworth was his ‘honest patron’, Toland used Molesworth’s name in place of his. More to the point, ‘there was no other way of Securing my Subscription but by a Parliament man’s name, and I my self wou’d not be shelter’d by any name but yours’. Toland was confident that a profit was the certain outcome of the venture.4

When September came, Toland was true to his word and with Jean de Fonvive – Huguenot refugee and since 1698 sole owner of the Whig newspaper The Post Man – as the active partner, he bought the stock. Fonvive recorded the details of the transaction: ‘Mr. John Toland had a Subscription of one Thousand pounds in the third money Subscription to the South Sea, under the name of the Right Honourable Lord Viscount Molesworth and that I John de Fonvive made the first payment of one Thousand pounds upon condition that the said Mr. Toland and I should go halves in the profits.’5 The optimism of the note was short-lived. Like many others, Toland was ruined when the bubble burst and by 30 October 1720 had lost everything. However, as he explained to a friend, such were the fortunes of life. Toland related that in regard to the events which captured the nation and threatened to topple the government, ‘I injoy as profound tranquillity, as if living in Arabia’. The matter was best left to ‘the consideration of the Parliament, which alone can redress its own mistakes, and punish the miscarriages of the managers’.6

Toland also commented upon the events leading to the South Sea fiasco in a letter sent to Molesworth in January 1721, which contained ‘an account of the rise or fall of stocks’, but explaining, ‘there has been of late so small variation, & particularly so little prospect of their rising, that it was not worth
The age of Walpole

while to give anybody the least trouble about them’. There was, however, a
way in which the stock might increase. If speculation had caused the crash,
then public speculation might bring about a rise. Toland advised Molesworth,
‘my Lord if you think it your own or the interest of the Kingdom y’ they should
rise, let it be known (as every man’s speech a vote is quickly made publick)
that you prefer the felicity of your Country’.

Not waiting for others to take action, Toland conducted his own investiga-
tion and sent the results to Molesworth, who sat on the committee charged with
enquiring into the affair. The picture painted was one of knowing corruption
among many of the directors of the company. To reach his conclusion, Toland
told Molesworth, he had read scores of documents belonging to the directors.
Despite his best efforts, however, he had been unable to view all the personal
recordings of the directors, ‘nor yet in their minutes, any order given for
selling of Stock’. Nevertheless, an absence of evidence did not dissuade his
speculation. ‘A Cabal is Suspected’, he claimed, ‘and Company’s money was
made use of to buy their stock, I take it to be a heinous crime in those who
were the promoters of such a design.’

Like Toland, Tindal had been seduced by the lure of easy money in the South
Sea Company. The two men also shared the same fate following the burst of
the Bubble. Tindal sought redress from the highest levels of government, and
on 2 August 1721 he once more wrote to Sunderland telling him that ‘After
all the Parliament had done for the relief of the Sufferers by the South Sea,
I find I am a loser of about 900 in the Redemables.’ He felt some reluctance
in asking for assistance, considering ‘how very generous you have already been,
to help me at this pinch if I could think of any other means’. This is a tantalis-
ing allusion. Did Tindal mean that he had written on behalf of Sunderland
previously, perhaps even in the case of The Defection Consider’d – the work
chastising the Walpolean Whigs for abandoning the government of George
I? Contemporary gossip claimed that Sunderland had been responsible for
Tindal’s £200 yearly government pension, which had been granted to him
not because of his legal service to the crown in 1689 but because Sunderland
had been pleased with his various pro-Whig pamphlets. Such an inter-
pretation would be consistent with the previous letter, in which Tindal again
offered his service to Sunderland. Yet it must be kept in mind that following
Sunderland’s death and the start of Walpole’s reign in the Commons, Tindal
would write in support of what became known as the Robinocracy. We should
not overemphasise this point because Tindal’s other choice was the Tory
opposition. Not wishing for an absolute handout, he assured Sunderland that
he had future means to repay any money advanced him. However, he was
unsure as to when he might be able to capitalise on it because the ‘materials
by me for a book which you’d go near to make me whole, but I am afraid the
publishing it wou’d, not be proper at this juncture, since it wou’d, being far bolder, make a greater noise then even the Rights of the Church did’. Although he did not mention a title for the book, we may reasonably speculate that Tindal meant Christianity as Old as the Creation since of all his publications from this point on it was the only one of a theological nature and the one which caused the expected stir.

At the same time as Toland’s detective work sought the cause of his financial ruin and Tindal worried about recovering his losses, the political and religious ideals that they, and our other deists, advocated found a new outlet. The Independent Whig (January 1720–January 1721) was the brainchild of Thomas Gordon and John Trenchard. Gordon was a Scottish lawyer who went into partnership with the Irish-born Trenchard in 1719. The two men were critical of the direction in which the nation was being taken by the corruption of the clergy and of High Churchmen who had politicised religion as a means to establish an exclusionary confession in England. William Wake, nevertheless, dismissed the paper’s influence in the nation, concluding that it ‘pose[d] a very harmless Enemy to the Clergy and Religion’ and ‘is of little moment’. With the inaugural issue Gordon and Trenchard claimed a pedigree for their publication from the example of Ambrose Philips’s Free-Thinker, which they described as ‘a useful as well as a fine Paper’ especially for its treatment of ‘Superstition and Enthusiasm’.

The Independent Whig proceeded in its short run to advance sentiments that might have come from the personal pens of Toland, Collins, and Tindal: ‘Religion was designed by Heaven for the Benefit of Men alone.’ Moreover, ‘It was most agreeable to the infinite Goodness and tender mercies of God, to make every Thing he requires of us, weak Men, obvious and clear.’ Gordon and Trenchard proposed further that ‘the Bible is so plain as to all necessary Truths, that he that runs may read; and a Day-Labourer cannot fail of finding Truth that searches it there’. The two editors claimed that one of their goals was to demonstrate that ‘the All-Powerful God is not a whimsical Being, that governs his Creatures by Caprice, and loads them with arbitrary and useless Burthens, which can serve no good purpose in Nature’. This was the same depiction of God found within the writings of our deists, and it further associated deists with a Whig political programme. It is likely that Collins did more than merely watch the debates. He himself may have authored a number of essays in the Independent Whig which criticised priests. Moreover, the deist association did not end with Collins. At least one contemporary believed that Gordon too was ‘surely a Deist; for I heard him . . . speak very foolishly and wickedly against Christianity, and a future state’. Within a year the Independent Whig ceased publication, but the concerns it raised would continue to be advanced by our deists. Gordon and Trenchard maintained their criticism of restrictive religion in Cato’s Letters.
Toland’s Death and Memorials

In March 1722 Molesworth wrote that it had been quite some time since he had received a letter from Toland. Despite the break in their correspondence, he assured Toland that any request for assistance would not fall upon deaf ears. He then alerted his long-time friend that ‘I am Embarked in a good affair no Less than Standing for Westminster. I have Employed all my Friends . . . I am sorry you are not in a state of Health to do me service. Believe me when I tell you shall [do] as I do.’ Evidently, Toland still held some worth as a political writer. Toland replied that he ‘was never a careless Correspondent’ and certainly not in his dealings with Molesworth. Nor was his silence due to ‘not needing assistance of my friends’, but rather to his ‘almost incessant pains, and very extraordinary weakness’. With regard to Molesworth’s decision to enter the political arena once more, Toland offered his best wishes.  

Toland died on 11 March 1722, though contemporary interest in his work did not die with him. Within two months, the bookseller William Mears offered for sale a collection of his theological writings prefaced by a life of the author by the bookseller Edmund Curll. On the basis of the biographical details which Toland had included in many of his works, Curll promised a faithful account. In contrast to others who wished to vilify Toland, Curll suggested that ‘the Reputation of our Author hath received so great a Brightness from his own Pen, that it needs no auxiliary Light to increase its Lustre’. Similar praise had followed the description of Toland’s edition of Harrington’s writings, which was certainly one of his ‘Labours for the Good of his Country’. Not all of the biography was rosy. Curll conceded, with regard to Christianity not Mysterious, that the ‘Piece made a great Noise in the Republick of Letters, and was attacked by several considerable Pens’. However, the overall tone of the work was quite sympathetic. Curll believed that Toland had been unfairly criticised for advancing opinion and encouraging discussion. This continued with the inclusion of an anonymous letter:

As you have often remarked, the Clamours against his Writings, were wholly undeserved, and proceeded chiefly from those Upstarts who envied his Learning, from some insolent conceited Priests, or from those bigotted Enthusiasts who never read them, or could not have understood them if they had.

It ended simply: ‘Let him that is free from Sin, cast the first Stone.’

Anthony Collins too noted Toland’s death, but not with much sympathy. His letter to Pierre Desmaizeaux on 15 March was without emotion as he wrote that ‘I find by the Papers, that Mr Toland dyed on Saturday last at Putney. If that be so, I desire the favour of you, if you have an opportunity, to inquire & learn if the Books which I have lent him may be got.’ The books included a ‘very valuable collection of tracts, not to be met with, and what I want and
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must buy again. If I cannot recover my own.' Two of the works had been in Toland’s possession since at least 1716.16 When Desmaizeaux released his collection of Toland’s unpublished manuscripts in 1726, at least one member of Robert Harley’s family paid attention. William Stratford ensured that Harley’s son, Edward Harley, the second Earl of Oxford, was aware of A Collection of Several Pieces of Mr John Toland. Referring to Edward’s father, Stratford told the young earl that in ‘the second volume I meet with someone to which I was not wholly a stranger, though I did not think it had gone quite so far. I fancy your uncle could explain somewhat there to you.’ While Toland’s efforts for Harley were not unknown, the extent seems to have surprised many. Stratford revealed his feelings clearly when he wrote, ‘I think I own it dangerous as well as improper for anyone to deal with such cattle, upon any terms of any occasion.’ Moreover, Edward was not to believe the picture of Toland found within the pages of the collection, because Desmaizeaux had purposely omitted many documents which tended to cast Toland in an unfavourable light.17 While this was probably not an uncommon view of the Collection, the anonymous review in The Present State of the Republick of Letters took a more moderate tone. The reviewer complained that it was ‘the common effect of prejudice against those who differ from us too widely, either in Religion or Politicks, to strip them at once of every commendable quality. This seems to have been very much Mr. Toland’s Case’. What was more, Toland’s writings, though apparently riddled with heresy and error, revealed him to ‘have been a Gentleman of great natural parts, and acquired knowledge’. Thus the posthumous anthology ‘deserve[d] the attention of the learned’.18 In death Toland received what he wanted in life: a fair assessment of his work which encouraged its inclusion in the republic of letters.

ANTHONY COLLINS ON PROPHECY

In that same year, the nonjuror Richard Coxe lamented what he viewed as the persistent denial of religious mysteries in England. His chief concern was the rejection of the Trinity, but he addressed other attempts to remove the unknowable from Christianity. Coxe knew that the tone of his work was important: ‘the more shocking it may be to Hereticks, the more They will decry it’. Only with reasoned arguments offered to their opponents did nonjurors, like Coxe, and High Churchmen believe they could restore ‘the Church of God’. It seems that the inflammatory rhetoric of Sacheverell was no longer the chosen weapon with which to battle against deists; rather the orthodox combatants chose the strategy of their antagonists and engaged in the learned debate that deists had always wanted.19

Toland’s death, as Coxe’s lament indicates, did not end the efforts of deists to advance their views. During the mid-1720s Collins debated with William
Whiston on the subjects of providence and prophecy. We begin with *A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (1724), a work that Collins’s friend John Trenchard had referred to as an entertaining ‘thunder-stroke’ in recent debates over religion. Collins stated that revelations were built upon other revelations and that Christianity was constructed on ‘prophecy as a principle’. Though he did not deny that prophecy occurred, he stated that the only true meaning which could be assigned to a prophecy was a literal one fulfilled at the time of the original prophet and not at some date in the future. There was no predictive aspect in prophecy – it could not prove a revealed Christianity. Only if an ancient prophetic statement in the Old Testament was interpreted allegorically did Collins believe that it could be seen to predict events in the New Testament. This was unacceptable to Collins, who stressed the ‘obvious and literal sense’ of prophecy. The introduction of allegory into religion, Collins wrote, originated among pagans, who believed religion was a mysterious thing which could not be plainly discussed. Therefore ‘it was never simply represented to the people, but was most obscurely deliver’d and valid under allegories, or parables, or Hieroglyphicks’. This was the birth of priestcraft.

The second half of Collins’s book concentrated on Whiston’s strategy for prophetic interpretation, as did the two-volume follow-up work, *The Scheme of Literal Prophecy Considered* (1726). Whiston is an interesting figure. He succeeded to the Lucasian Chair of Mathematics at Cambridge on Newton’s recommendation, but then lost it after he was banned from the university in 1710 for publicly avowing the Arian-like theology that he shared with Newton and Clarke. He spent the remainder of his days giving public lectures in natural philosophy and religion. Like Newton, he saw prophecy as certain proof of the Christian religion and asserted that there was also a moral element to prophecy. In a manuscript treatise on the subject, Newton wrote that prophecy was to ‘guide & direct’ the church ‘in the right way, And is not this the End of all Prophectick Scripture?’ He further admonished those who ‘shall turn Scripture from the plain meaning to an Allegory or to any other less naturall sense . . .’ because ‘Truth is ever to be found in simplicity, & not in y’ multiplicity & confusion of things’. It is evident that Newton took some interest in Collins’s thoughts on prophecy, for the only deist work in his library was his *Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*. Likewise, Whiston’s guidelines for prophetic interpretation stated, ‘The obvious or literal sense of Scripture is the True and Real one, where no evident reason can be given to the contrary.’

Collins and Whiston both agreed that allegorical meanings of prophecy were to be rejected in favour of single literal fulfilment. Where the two differed was in the temporal location of this fulfilment. Whiston believed that all prophecies literally predicted Christ and were thus fulfilled during Jesus’ lifetime, while
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Collins maintained that fulfilment occurred only during the life of the prophet. For Collins, Whiston’s notion of the literal was merely another form of allegory. On Whiston’s method, he commented that ‘to confute Mr. W’s hypothesis effectually, I observe, that he is not able, . . . to restore any citations of prophecies made from the Old Testament and said to be fulfill’d in the New, as to make them obviously, and literally, and agreeably to the context where he places them, relate to the purposes, for which they are cited authors of the New Testament’.26 In defence of his views Whiston presented some 300 examples of literally fulfilled prophecy. He claimed of these that ‘The main Aim of most of the Prophecies of the Old Testament, was the coming of the Messias, and the Circumstances and Characters of him and his Kingdom.’ Against this assertion, Collins replied that a single real example would have sufficed. Whiston countered that the reason why Old Testament prophecies do not obviously foretell the coming of Christ is that the text has been corrupted. Here he also followed Newton, who believed that the original religion – consisting of ‘two great commandments of loving the Lord our God with all our heart & soul & mind, & our neighbours as ourselves’ – was ‘propagated by Noah to his posterity’ before ‘they revolted’ and ‘ceased to be his [God’s] people’.27 Any product of religion, including the Bible, produced since this deviation was inherently corrupt. To rectify this fault Whiston proposed a new edition and translation of the Bible. Collins was suspicious of the endeavour because ‘a bible restor’d, according to Mr. W’s Theory, will be a mere WHISTONIAN BIBLE’.28 For prophecy to have any value at all, Whiston and Newton agreed, it must contain future predictions. While Collins did not deny that prophecy occurred, he maintained that it did so in the distant past and in no way supported arguments in favour of a supernatural element to religion.

The Accession of George II

When the first Hanoverian monarch took the throne in 1714, protest and predictions of divine retribution were minor, but a sense of uncertainty followed George I’s every step. Thirteen years later, when his son, the Prince of Wales, became George II, the coronation might well be described as a non-event. Even those who still viewed the crown as a Stuart one saw their cause as hopeless and resigned themselves to the facts. The year was also a time for reflection and, perhaps, a chance to renew the righteousness of the nation by refuting the arguments posed by our deists. John Maxwell, prebendary of Connor and chaplain to Lord Carteret, who had also made an early English translation of Newton’s *Principia*, produced a new edition of Richard Cumberland’s *De Legibus Naturae* (1672) titled *A Treatise of the Laws of Nature*. Included in the book was a political essay titled *Concerning the City, or Kingdom of God in the Rational World, and the Defects in Heathen Deism*. With this short treatise Maxwell
examined the politics of human existence. At the head of any society was God, active and providential. Any other conception of God, he argued, such as acknowledging ‘God, or universal Mind, considering him only Naturally, as the Soul of the World, and not Politically, as the supreme Governor thereof’, failed to provide adequate foundation for that society and could produce only atheism or deism. Governors, in the image of God, provided laws and enforced them. In contrast to the views of our deists, these laws originated in the ruler, not in nature and the order of things, nor were they the result of contractual obligations between ruler and those ruled.29

Samuel Chandler, also writing in the year of George II’s coronation, issued a further admonishment to deists. Chandler came from a Dissenting family and was educated at the Bridgewater Academy. His father, Henry Chandler, who was a Dissenting minister at Hungerford and then at Bath, had the dubious honour of composing the preface to the sermon preached on the occasion of Thomas Morgan’s ordination as a Dissenting minister.30 Though the work was titled Reflections on the Conduct of the Modern Deists, In their late Writings against Christianity, indicating a wide net of criticism, Chandler composed it as a response to Collins’s Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion. This was a calculated decision because he believed that Collins had attempted to ‘set himself at the head of those who seem to deny the truth of Christianity, and who endeavour to subvert the foundations on which it is supported’. Not entirely critical, Chandler did admit that he was ‘firmly persuaded’ that deists had a right to think for themselves and publish their views on religion. Moreover, ‘They would have the press open to everyone, so would I. They would be allowed to argue against Christianity: I hope no one will ever attempt to hinder them. But this is not all they seem to want; they would have a farther liberty to insult, and revile, as well as argue against Christianity.’ These concession aside, he could not accept that ‘Christianity contains some maxims and principles destructive to liberty, and is a religion that requires it self to be supported by violence and force.’31 Deists had simply gone too far in their desire for intellectual freedom, and this excess had rendered what beneficial remarks they did make unacceptable to the majority of Britons.

The year after George II became king, Thomas Chubb offered an examination of the authority of civil government in matters of religion with his Some Short Reflections on the Ground and Extent of Authority and Liberty, with Respect to Civil Government. In contrast to Maxwell, Chubb held that much of morality is found in and arises from ‘the nature of things’. In the case of society, its moral direction, or common good, is derived from the inherent nature of society. Accordingly, ‘those who have the Reins of Government in their Hands, should make the common Good the governing Principle of their Actions, thro’out their Administration’. Humanity is ‘designed and constituted for Society’ where people desire to be happy under natural and mutual obligation
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to it and to each other. Chubb continued that as a consequence of this constitution, society may ‘have no Demand upon any Individual, but in those Cases which it is for the publick Good’. In the matter of religion, which Chubb emphasised was a personal relationship between believer and God, ‘Governors have no Authority’ because ‘they have no Right to oblige or restrain’ anyone who is acting as he or she thinks most pleasing to God. The Favour of God, he wrote, ‘and the Happiness of another World, are what Society can neither give, nor secure, nor take away from any Individual.’ To do otherwise would be to act as a tyrannical government and one unworthy of ruling in England. Chubb urged George II to heed this advice.

Four years later, Chubb described two celebrated anniversaries from England’s history as a means to illustrate his theory of governance. He could hardly have chosen two more charged dates: 30 January (the execution of Charles I) and 5 November (the defeat of the Armada, the Gunpowder Plot, and William’s arrival). Regarding the latter, he explained that ‘the publick good ought always to be preferred . . . as the end and design of Government, is not to give princes an absolute dominion over the liberties and properties . . . but only to constitute them guardians of the [happiness of society]’. In the case of 1688–89, the public was not served by a Catholic king, and therefore the national welfare demanded a revolution in the name of the common good. As for 30 January, Chubb was sorry to see that it had generally been used by certain members of the clergy to preach the doctrine of passive obedience. He focused on the recent controversy following Sacheverell’s sermon and noted with satisfaction that passive obedience had been much often less invoked since ‘the house of Hanover has been happily settled upon the British throne, than heretofore’. Obviously, as he put it, 30 January and 5 November ‘are founded upon two contradictory and incompatible principles’. One offered light, the other darkness. The anniversary of 5 November allowed Chubb to provide his readers with a tangible example of ‘how we ought to behave under a vicious prince, who wickedly abuses the trust reposed in him, by attempting and endeavouring to undermine and destroy the common happiness . . . so, this anniversary point out to the members of society, how they ought to act, when the common happiness is in apparent danger’. In a later work, he again addressed this date and disassociated it from any divine act of special providence by suggesting that an effective English fleet had done as much to safeguard the Prince of Orange’s arrival as any supposed action taken by God.

In his private papers Edmund Gibson considered views on government and religion, which were very near, if not identical, to those published by Chubb. ‘No Government is wisely contriv’d, in which Religion is not consider’d as one branch of the Institution,’ wrote Gibson. In direct challenge to Chubb’s alternative view, he continued that ‘[the Supreme Legislative Powers in every Country, have a Right, as that are entrusted with the Publick welfare, to Establish
and Encourage that Religion which they believe to be true, and to appoint such Forms of Worship and Services, as are judg’d, upon mature deliberation, to be agreeable to the nature and precepts of it.’ Where Chubb saw protection of personal worship as a cornerstone of good government, Gibson judged a government negligent which did not regulate religion as it saw fit for the betterment of the nation. What was more, those who challenged the nation’s orthodoxy threatened the ‘civil establishment’ and needed to be prosecuted on that account. For Chubb, had he ever seen these writings, Gibson’s views would have only confirmed the need for his.

COLLINS’S FINAL WORK AND HIS DEATH

Collins’s final work, *A Discourse Concerning Ridicule and Irony in Writing* (1729), was a historical study of ridicule concentrating on religious writings. Collins saw in England a special case where literature that ridiculed its subject formed part of the common discourse. His book was a challenge to the suggestion that imprisonment was appropriate for those who laughed at and made fun of English laws. Collins reminded his adversaries of the use made by ridicule in attacks on Catholicism and popery in past ages, specifically Erasmus’s *Praise of Folly*. Moreover, he noted that Anglicans had often mocked Puritans and Dissenters. Thus turnabout was fair play in challenges to orthodoxy. Besides, he wrote, no one complained about the rhetorical strategy except its victims.

The return of the monarchy to England in 1660, Collins asserted, had brought with it legislative limits on dissent as well as ridicule. He hoped the eighteenth century would be more tolerant of those who followed their reason, who sought truth in matters of religion, and who challenged with farce and satire what seemed unreasonable. Like Toland and Chubb, Collins saw the reign of the Hanoverians as an opportunity to remake England and the English Church into the bastions of toleration which they desired.

On 13 December 1729 Collins died, after a long and painful ordeal with kidney stones. However, his health had been poor since 1723, when his son (also Anthony) died. Collins’s letters reveal the depth of his despair as his son fought a losing battle with the illness that finally claimed him. Though he had remarried in 1724, taking as his wife Elizabeth Wrottesley, the daughter of Sir Walter Wrottesley, he ‘never enjoyed a good state of health’. News of Collins’s death, according to Desmaizeaux, came ‘to the grief of all his Family but especially those who had been Eye Witness to most of his Actions near 30 years’. Zachary Pearce, Vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields and future Bishop of Rochester, relayed on 17 December a report of Collins’s last words to Lord Macclesfield: ‘I am told that his dying words were to this effect, “I have endeavoured to serve true Religion and my Country, and I hope that I shall go to a place where I shall find others that have done the same.”’
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Some observers agreed with Collins's assessment of his own life. Almost nine months to the day after his death, The Universal Spectator contained an 'Essay on the Rural life'. The author, Henry Stonecastle of Northumberland, Esq., lamented the increasing absence of country gentlemen in England. As an example of what was being lost with the extinction of this breed of man, Stonecastle wrote,

Such was Collins, he had an opulent Fortune descended to him from his Ancestors . . . He lived on his own Estate in the Country . . . he always oblig'd his Family to a constant Attendance of Publick Worship; as he was himself a man of the strictest Morality, so he never suffer'd any Body about him who was deficient in that Point; he exercised a universal Charity to all sorts of People, without any Regard either to Sect of Party; being in the Commission of the Peace, he administered Justice with such Impartiality and Incorruptness . . . he was indulgent to his Children, hospitable to his Neighbours, and kind to his Servants.

He was at a loss to determined which of Collins's characteristics would be most missed after his death: 'the Parent, the Magistrate, the Gentleman, or the Scholar'\(^41\). Conspicuous by their absence, however, are 'deist' and 'heretic'. Moreover, that Collins was praised as a model gentleman suggests that he acted in concert with, rather than against, the national interests, a defining aspect of the English gentleman.\(^42\) This is evidence that Collins acted for the benefit of England rather than wishing to undermine the political establishment, as has often been suggested.

A former servant of Collins's, Richard Dighton, wrote to Desmaizeaux in mid-March 1731 alerting him to this edition of The Universal Spectator. Though Dighton was pleased to see such a favourable account of his late master, he lamented the fact that memory of Collins seemed to be vanishing. 'I hope to live', he wrote, 'to See something come from you that will be a lasting Monument to the Character of that Great Man, I mean his Life which I am told you are now about to write. I hope it is true, I dare day Sr. you agree with me that 'tis pity such an Honest & great man as he was should be quite forgot & no body is so able to doe it as your self.'\(^43\) While it is unclear to which impending life of Collins Dighton referred, as no contemporary book-length biography exists, it is likely to have been the entry contained in Bayle's Dictionary, which Desmaizeaux greatly expanded.

TINDAL'S CHRISTIANITY AS OLD AS THE CREATION

In 1730, the year after Collins died, the work Tindal had alluded to in his 1722 letter to Lord Sunderland finally appeared. Christianity as Old as the Creation refined Tindal's characterisation of God, who 'has given Mankind sufficient Means of knowing what he requires of them'.\(^44\) This divine gift had existed since the
The age of Walpole

Creation but was not always acknowledged or accepted. As Collins had also suggested, we know by observing the world around us ‘that there is a God; or, in other words, a Being absolutely perfect, and infinitely happy in himself’. The reference to happiness revealed that God did not conceal His intentions from those who sought them. Repeating earlier conclusions, Tindal claimed that ‘God can require nothing of us, but what makes for our Happiness; so he, who can’t envy us any Happiness . . . can forbid us those Things only, which tend to our Hurt; and this we are as certain of, as that there is a God infinitely happy in himself, infinitely good and wise.’ Simon Browne, one-time pastor of the congregation in the Old Jewry, London, rebuked Tindal by asserting that ‘It is becoming of God to honour himself, to expect honour from his rational creatures, to approve those who pay it, to dislike and be displeased with those who [do not].’ Where Browne viewed God as jealous and demanding, Tindal, like Toland and Collins, argued that those things necessary for this life are clear and known to everyone.

Like his fellow deists, Tindal accused ‘designing priests’ of constraining the right of people to think freely in religion. He called this imposition by men who wished to preserve their importance ‘priestcraft’ and directed his critical comments against it. The only priest that he accepted was God, who would never have left the care of His religion in the hands of ‘a self-perpetuating, self-regulating body of men’. Tindal took to task those who presented alternative descriptions of God and was especially critical of Catholics in this regard. ‘The Popish Priests’, he wrote, ‘are so far from giving the People any just idea of God, that they represent him as an arbitrary and tyrannical Being, imposing the highest pain, the practice of ridiculous Ceremonies, and belief of absurd Doctrines.’ This view of a God who withheld knowledge and punished with an arbitrary will any person who gave offence was what Tindal sought to overturn. God was not a being to fear but rather admire; His desire was happiness in those who worshipped Him. Those who suggested otherwise, believing that God favours a certain denomination while damning another, made Him a tyrant and unworthy of worship.

Tindal’s chief opponent in this argument was the late Samuel Clarke (he had died in 1729), against whom he directed an entire chapter in *Christianity as Old as the Creation*. In the second of Clarke’s Boyle Lectures, which secured his reputation as a Christian apologist and populariser of Newton’s mathematics, he wrote that deists ‘have just and right Notions of God and of all the Divine Attributes in every respect; who declare they believe that there is One, Eternal, Wise Being; the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things’. Nevertheless, these same deists refused to believe any revelation from an active God, preferring to measure the divine intellect against their own. Contrary to such notions, Clarke stated ‘That the same God who Created all things by the Word of his Power, and upholds and preserves them by his continual
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Concourse, does also by his All-wise Providence perpetually govern and direct the issues and events of the World, and of all, even the smallest things, that are therein. This God was also unlimited in power and action. As he explained, ‘The Self-Existent and Original Cause of all Things, is not a necessary Agent, but a Being induced with Liberty and Choice.’ Clarke presented a Newtonian view of God and one he shared with Whiston, who similarly claimed that God ‘is a Free Agent, no way limited by any Necessity or Fate, but acting still by Choice, and according to his own good Pleasure.’ Both men suggested that one needed only to admire the natural world to know that the image of God they presented was correct. Nature, thus, was to be interpreted within correct theological assumptions because deists argued that the same world also proved their view of a reasonable, consistent, and knowledge-sharing God. Theology was the lens through which nature was observed and interpreted.

Tindal further commented on what he viewed as Clarke’s defective notion of God. ‘Can a Being be denominated merciful, and good, who is so only to a few; but cruel, and unmerciful to the rest?’ he asked. For Tindal the answer clearly was no. James Foster, a nonconformist minister at Barbican Chapel who had had sided with the Arian advocates during the Salter’s Hall conference, defended Clarke against Tindal’s assault by placing the differing understanding of God’s message not with the divine author but with the human recipients. He explained that ‘God did not design all mankind, tho of the same species of being, for equal happiness; because they have not the same capacities, nor the same advantages, nor an equal probability of obtaining the highest, that their rational nature may be capable of.’ Though God may indeed communicate in the clear language that Tindal supposed, not every person is able to understand it. Even if this were not the case, Foster argued, God might wish to communicate with some people and not with others, as is His right. This was a God who engaged in ‘the free distribution of his favours, in dispensing which, he may act with what variety, and make what difference he pleases.’ Foster’s view was directly opposed to that advanced by Tindal, whose God would not allow some to receive ‘favours’ at the expense of others; divine goodness did not permit selective salvation.

The Trinitarian champion Daniel Waterland also read Foster’s book with interest and confided to Edmund Gibson that ‘It is grave, and in the main rational’. Waterland’s reading notes, inserted into his copy of Tindal’s Christianity as Old as the Creation, reveal that he agreed with Foster regarding the disposition of God’s providence. Some people were more able to comprehend divine communication than were others. ‘Reason’, Waterland wrote in the margins, ‘is an excellent gift: But Sometimes bestowed upon fools: that make no use of it.’ However, Waterland did not approve of the concessions Foster made in showing the errors in Tindal’s writings, which Waterland’s notes indicate he read side by side with Christianity as Old as the Creation.
Chief among Waterland’s concerns was that Foster gave up the doctrine of the Trinity. While Waterland decried the work of deists, some answers to them, like those by unitarian thinkers such as Clarke and Foster, were not welcomed by all churchmen. To win the battle against deism but lose belief in the Trinity was no victory.

Waterland also dealt with another critic of Tindal who seemed to do more harm than good. Conyers Middleton, who was a divine, graduate of Cambridge University, and librarian at that institution, responded in 1731 to Waterland’s Scripture Vindicated, which was an attack on Christianity as Old as the Creation. In A Letter to Dr. Waterland; Containing Some Remarks on his Vindication of Scripture and its following defences, he argued that what Christianity really needed was not more inflammatory polemics like the kind that Waterland seemed set upon, but rather the destruction of ‘those senseless systems and prejudices, which some stiff and cloudy divines will needs fasten to the body of Religion, as necessary and essential to the support of it’. The result would be a simple and ‘pure original religion’ and one that was impervious to Tindal’s criticism, which Middleton saw as not being entirely wide of the mark. Rising to Waterland’s defence was Zachary Pearce, who saw Middleton’s willingness to abandon things such as an allegorical reading of Scripture as going too far in making accommodations to deists in a misguided attempt to bring peace to the Church of England. Others went further in their reaction to Middleton and claimed that his book should be burned publicly, the same fate which befell Toland’s Christianity not Mysterious.

For his part Middleton believed he had no reason to apologise to his fellow churchmen and wrote to Edward Harley, Earl of Oxford, that men like Waterland claimed to encourage debate of ideas but only in so far as the content conformed to what they already believed. However, in another letter Waterland did tell the earl of a desire to make his work more acceptable to the orthodoxy. Middleton did, as it turns out, have some sympathy towards at least one of our deists. In August 1733 he wrote to Oxford that while on a trip through the south-west of England, he hoped to ‘spend one day philosophically at Salisbury in a great conversation with [Thomas] Chubb; whom...I had great inclination to be acquainted with from the like of his writings. But I was disappointed of that pleasure by his being abroad.’ Waterland summed up his feelings on these matters in comments he made to Gibson: ‘defenders of Religion’, he wrote, meaning Foster and we may assume Middleton, ‘will do us no service. They are the men I am most afraid of.’ There were no black-and-white distinctions between deists and their opponents; the differences are perhaps best characterised as shades of grey.

Tindal’s comments on revelation were entirely consistent with his thoughts on God. ‘We are not required’, he wrote, ‘to believe more of God than we can conceive of him.’ As for revelation, if it took place, it did so within rules
established by God. Tindal described this regulation as the ‘Law of Reason’ and stated that it was ‘antecedent to any external Revelation’. Revelation must conform to human reason, otherwise it would be useless. Again Waterland refuted Tindal on this matter, in another letter sent to Gibson. No such law had ever existed, he advised Gibson, and ‘No absolutely perfect Law can be grafted upon any thing but the promise of immortality which nature knows not of, which takes not within natural light.’ Only God may provide unbreakable laws; any laws found in nature are entirely contingent.58

As for reports of historic revelation, where witnesses no longer lived, Tindal was very suspicious. How, he asked, may we trust the stories of revelation or miracles from so long ago? The ‘very Nature of Probability is such’, he replied, ‘that were it only left to Time itself, even that wou’d wear it quite out; at least if it be true what Mathematicians pretend to demonstrate, viz. That the Probability of Facts depending on human Testimony, must gradually lessen in proportion to the Distance of the Time when they were done.’59 To support this position Tindal turned to John Craig’s Theologiae Christianae Principia Mathematica (1699). A Scottish mathematician, Craig had endeavoured to determine a likely date for the Second Coming by using mathematics to chart the decline in belief of historic testimony and thus arrive at a date when faith in Christ would no longer exist. Tindal was particularly interested in the pages containing the results of Craig’s calculations ‘that after 3150 years from the birth of Christ the probability of his written history will vanish’.60 For him this was certain proof that human testimony was a poor foundation for Christianity and belief in historic miracles.

A generation earlier others foresaw the potential danger of Craig’s work. Gibson wrote to Hans Sloane, then Secretary to the Royal Society, in October 1699 on this issue. He urged the inclusion in the Philosophical Transactions of a paper that stressed the reliability and consistency of human testimony ‘by a very good friend; who was accidentally lead to satisfie himself about it by the Publication of a late Book’. The anonymous author of the tract had also used mathematical proofs to demonstrate that human testimony would survive intact even over great periods of time from the original event. Gibson believed that the article would confute ‘a late wild and dangerous hypothesis that has given much advantage to Deists and Atheists’. Other observers believed that Craig’s book was in the same league as Toland’s Christianity not Mysterious. In March 1701 the Tory Francis Atterbury advised an acquaintance that the book was being inspected along with Toland’s by the Lower House of Convocation.61 If testimony was reliable, then the miraculous events described by the Apostles could not be dismissed solely on the basis of temporal distance as deists maintained.

This tactic continued to find adherents among enemies of deism. Joseph Butler, Bishop of Durham, in his Analogy of Religion (1736) later commented...
that are many accounts ‘of miracles wrought in attestation of Christianity, collected by those who have writ upon the subject; it lies upon unbelievers to show, why this evidence is not to be credited’. Charles Leslie had rehearsed such arguments in A Short and Easy Method with the Deists (1697), where he affirmed that one must accept biblical miracles because many pagans were converted to Christianity ‘upon the Conviction of what themselves had seen, what had been done publicly before their Eyes, wherein it was impossible to have Impos’d upon them’. Leslie’s fellow nonjurors approved of his approach. A commonplace book with entries by Hilkiah Bedford, fellow of St John’s College, Cambridge, records that, in accordance with Leslie’s arguments, historical accounts contained in Scripture should be accepted as fact because they were composed during the lifetime of Christ, when other witnesses would have quickly revealed any falsehoods in the writings. Deists, Bedford argued, could provide no answer to this critique.

Tindal’s image of an immutable and knowledge-sharing God provoked many readers. Simon Browne contended that Tindal’s presentation made God a slave to the Creation. Moreover, God would be a very poor legislator if He could never change his mind or alter what He had previously done. John Leland supported this position when he claimed that ‘God may require Things afterwards, which he did not actually require at the Beginning, and that supposing an Alteration in the Circumstances of Mankind, it may by highly agreeable to his Wisdom and Goodness’. Whereas Tindal argued that this view made God an incompetent artist, William Law countered that He ‘is not an arbitrary Being, but does that which the incomprehensible perfections of his own nature, make it fit and reasonable for him to do’. Similarly, Foster refuted Tindal’s analogy between God’s government and earthly rulers. ‘[T]here is’, he challenged, ‘no arguing from earthly governments to God’s government of the world; and what would be tyrannical in the one, may be very wise and fit in the other.’ Such challenges had no effect on Tindal, who held that God was consistent and predictable in his governance.

**THOMAS CHUBB ON PROVIDENCE AND REvelATION**

Like Collins and Tindal before him, Chubb remarked on the contemporary acceptance of the Copernican heliocentric world-view, which had replaced the Ptolemaic geocentric outlook. When Chubb dismissed arguments against him that he claimed were based on blind adherence to tradition he countered that ‘Suppose the reasons, upon which the Ptolemaick system of astronomy was grounded had obtained universal assent; would that system have been well grounded, because the reasons upon which it is grounded had been universally admitted? And ought universal opinion to have determined the judgement of Copernicus, against the strongest and most obvious reasons to the contrary?
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Surely, not. When people are permitted to use their reason to consider the reality of things, unfounded philosophical schemes do not survive. Chubb then suggested that same was true in matters of religion, where natural philosophy provided a proper method on enquiry. George Wightwick, minister to a congregation at Kingston upon Thames, did not agree that God adapted His messages to human intellects. He claimed that Chubb’s position was a ‘piece of stupidity and folly’ and that one could only ‘pretend to vindicate it’. He stressed that those who suggested that ‘God reveals nothing to us, but what our weak and shallow reason is able perfectly to comprehend’, do a great disservice to the ‘infinite wisdom of God’.

In Human Nature Vindicated (1726) Chubb stated, ‘God does not require Men to do what they cannot do: He is not such an unreasonable Task-Master, as to require Bricks when there is not Materials for making them.’ God would never, he continued, require the impossible from humanity. Those who argued the contrary position were mistaken and perhaps motivated by personal gain. Humanity was never ‘unfairly dealt with’ and it was an insult to God that He should require duties that humans cannot perform. Chubb’s work on this and other subjects found a public audience. An anonymous full-page editorial in Fog’s Weekly Journal (9 January 1731), a High Church periodical, conceded that Chubb had made some good points regarding God’s relationship to humanity, but that nevertheless Chubb had exaggerated the merits of human reason. The author concluded that ‘Man, tho’ originally created perfect, is, by some Means or other, now become defective.’ The literary paper The Present State of the Republick of Letters also considered Chubb’s position on reason and religion. The reviewer believed that Chubb had purposely ‘taken a great deal of pains to exalt reason in opposition to revelation’. The anonymous critic challenged this suggestion in an attempt to reassert the importance of revelation and the necessary aid of divine guidance.

TINDAL’S DEATH AND THE CONTROVERSY REGARDING HIS WILL

Matthew Tindal died on 16 August 1733, after an attack of gallstones. The following month, the physician and All Souls graduate Pierce Dod provided an account of his last moments: ‘The same vanity which seduced him to be so much out of the way most part of his life continued with him to the last, and he was as proud of dying hard as ever he was to be reputed a Top Free Thinker.’ Though Dod spoke harshly of Tindal’s final thoughts, the two had shared several experiences at All Souls College. Like Tindal, Dod had been compelled by Gardiner to take orders. Dod, however, took his case directly to Archbishop Tenison, and despite Gardiner’s protests a hearing was conducted at Lambeth Palace. Eventually Dod avoided orders by taking a medical degree.
rather than an MA. Tindal and Dod had some personal association with one another: both were present during one of the fellows’ organisational meetings. Despite his unwillingness to become a divine, which he shared with Tindal, Dod believed that Tindal had gone too far in his theological assertions. Not everyone agreed with Dod’s assessment of Tindal’s life. An epitaph which appeared in The Bee claimed that despite his seemingly irreligious writings, Tindal ‘possessed in the highest degree of the most valuable virtues – namely, The Love of his Country, the Love of Merit, and the Hatred of Oppression’.

Controversy, which seemed Tindal’s constant companion while he lived, continued to follow him even after his death. The terms of his will and the ownership of manuscripts caused a bitter confrontation first in private and then in a public dispute conducted in the Grub-Street Journal for the better part of two years. The episode began when the bookseller Edmund Curll published a copy of Tindal’s will in October 1733. Less than a month later, a letter was printed in the Grub-Street Journal which challenged the legitimacy of the document in addition to denying the truthfulness of the will’s only heir. The unnamed beneficiary was Eustace Budgell, for whom Tindal had acted as patron and who had at some point borrowed £2,000 from him. The disputed passage of the will reproduced by Curll stated that Tindal had bequeathed Budgell ‘the Sum of two thousand one hundred Pounds... my Strong Box, my Diamond Ring, and all my Manuscript-Books, Papers, and Writings’.

Included among the manuscripts purportedly given to Budgell was the second part of Christianity as Old as the Creation. Budgell was killed in 1737, the victim of a boat accident, and no complete second volume has ever surfaced. Only a partial introduction of the book exists which circulated around 1732. Tindal’s nephew Nicholas Tindal, who ironically had a long and successful career in the English Church, refused to believe that his uncle had forsaken his entire family in favour of Budgell. Nicholas raised his doubts in the Grub-Street Journal, which recorded on 6 December 1733 that he found the will ‘contrary to what his uncle had lately told him’. Budgell replied that the will was genuine. The editor of the Grub Street Journal was also uncertain as to the will’s authenticity and questioned why Tindal would have misspelled his own name three times and why he apparently gave away £800 more than he was reportedly worth. There was, the editor wrote, ‘some secret mystery in this affair’. On 17 January 1734 the saga continued. Nicholas had gone to Budgell’s home and demanded to see the will. When Tindal’s strongbox was opened, not £2,100 was present but only £1,100. Nicholas, ‘who before suspected foul play, was now by this information and other circumstances, strongly confirmed in his suspicions’. While the dispute continued into March 1734, the will was ultimately proved a forgery, though not before Budgell threatened
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to take his case directly to Robert Walpole. However, with the Excise Crisis occupying his time, it is unlikely that Walpole would have cared very much about Budgell or his claimed inheritance.76

The debate over the authenticity of Tindal’s will was not the only deist matter that found its way into the pages of the Grub-Street Journal in the mid-1730s. In the number for 25 September 1735 an anonymous poem titled ‘On the Deists Scheme of Fitness’ satirised and refuted the deist conceptions of God and providence. The unknown poet claimed that

Some daring Wits have raised an impious scheme
   To laws and rules subjecting the Supreme
They, with no sacred fear or rev’rence aw’d,
   With obligations wou’d restrain their God;

New arguments are not found here. Once more deists are portrayed as attempting to destroy belief in God as omnipotent and unrestrained by His Creation and replace this deity with an organising principle in nature.77 While our deists never stated this position explicitly, this characterisation is important in that it portrays a popular understanding of deism. With such depictions in periodicals, there can be little wonder that deism was perceived as a threat.

CHUBB ON MIRACLES AND PROVIDENCE

As did Tindal, Chubb refused to accept that God did not offer His message freely to all people. It was unreasonable, he claimed, ‘that God should make a species of creatures capable of future bliss or torment, and that he should pre-ordain a few of that species to a state of unspeakable and eternal happiness, and the rest of them to a state of extreme and eternal misery’. God, as conceived by Chubb, had no interest in propagating misery. Caleb Fleming, Dissenting minister and rumoured Socinian, responded by claiming that the fault of partial reception of God’s religion did not reside with God. The divine message was perfectly presented; however, only the righteous received divine instruction. Those who do not receive it must be wicked; the defect lay with the recipient.78

In his discussions of miracles in the late 1730s Chubb separated divine providence into two types: ‘particular’ and ‘general’. God had created the world as an act of particular providence. The way He continued to act in the Creation to preserve its regular operation in accordance with divine laws was an example of general providence. As part of the original act of particular providence, God had made His perpetual righteousness part of His general providence.79 Thus, once God established the universe, He did not alter or interfere in its operation. He maintained a steady-state universe. The alternative view, ‘that God should be frequently and almost perpetually immediately
interposing as aforesaid’, was, Chubb argued, ‘a supposition that is greatly unlikely’.80 If God needed to interfere in the Creation He would be revealed as a defective craftsman.

Thomas Johnson, one-time master of Chigwell Grammar School, refuted this claim by reversing Chubb’s argument. He replied that ‘God is perfectly free as to acting or not acting at all, so to every Manner of Action; and by his being perfectly free I mean, that he is not determined by anything ab extra.’ Where Chubb saw God as good because He would not alter the Creation or impose impossibilities on people, Johnson held that God was great because of His unlimited power of action. Critics like Johnson might have been the people whom Chubb had in mind when he noted that orthodox thinkers were quick to tar as enemies of religion or atheists those who did not blindly agree with them.81 In this Chubb followed the precedent of Toland, Collins, and Tindal.

Chubb believed that God retained the power of particular providence, though divine goodness greatly restricted its use. This was the theme of a letter he sent in 1745 to William Bowdoin, a Boston merchant. Only in extraordinary cases would God interpose in the normal operation of the universe and override general providence. The sole example that Chubb could provide of such an event was a comet crossing into Earth’s atmosphere, the path of which God would have to alter in order to save humanity. Years earlier, William Whiston had identified exactly this extraordinary celestial event as the physical cause of the Mosaic flood. Chubb had read Whiston’s account, but dismissed the comet as an instance of particular providence and concluded that ‘such interposition is not consonant to that method of providence by which the Solar System is governed’. He suggested that the comet must have been a naturally occurring phenomenon in a universe poorly understood. That God did not divert the comet, which resulted in the flood, proved that He will not intervene in the regular operation of the universe.82 If God did not use special providence to prevent the flood, it was unlikely that He would act in the world for other concerns. The universe operated within the unchanging laws of nature and so too did divine providence. Examples of supposed miracles were, Chubb claimed, attributable to the normal operation of nature, which was not fully understood.

Chubb also discussed divine providence in a letter he sent in 1723 to the physician James Jurin, Secretary to the Royal Society. Jurin was an advocate of inoculation against smallpox and used quantitative results to support his position. He solicited reports of inoculation from various locations in England to compose his evidence. Part of the controversy surrounding inoculation originated from the opinions of theologians who saw the prevention of illness as interfering with God’s plan. As one critic put it, ‘Let the Atheist then, and the Scoffer, the Heathen and the Unbeliever, disclaim a dependence upon
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Providence, dispute the Wisdom of God’s Government, and deny Obedience to his Laws: Let them *Inoculate*, and be *Inoculated*, whose Hope is only in, and for *this Life*! Such a view of providence was exactly what Chubb hoped to discredit with his works. His wish to advance this goal probably explains his letter to Jurin. After relating the inoculation results for Sarum, Chubb advised Jurin that the practice had ‘inflamed the angry passions, & sturd up the bitter ... [and] bigotted high churchmen’. He continued that these critics say the practice is blasphemous, and diabolical; it is distrusting providence, and taking the power out of God’s hand; it will draw [down] divine judgement, and for the proof of this point, they are so Stupid as to urge, that god has begun to show his displeasure against it & us by that great mortality that is amongst us, tho not one that has been in y’ practise, has fallen by it. This and a great deal more they Say, but reason they do not, upon the Subject.

As Chubb would tell Bowdoin some years later, God did not intervene in the regular operation of the world. The universe ran according to order established at Creation. Moreover, just as ‘what is Called Posesion [sic] of Devils in the new Testament was no other in Fact but Distraction or Madness’, Chubb hoped that a sufficient amount of reasoning on smallpox would prove it to be just another disease and not God’s direct punitive action. The letter also demonstrates that Chubb perhaps wished to become part of the community at the Royal Society. People rarely sent letters simply to communicate information. As Andrea Rusnock has concluded, correspondents ‘sought to prove themselves by association with a fellow of the Royal Society or by presentation of credentials signifying trustworthiness’. Though Jurin never acknowledged the letter, it is likely that Chubb sent it as a means to bring himself to his attention by supplying important information and siding with him in the debates with his theological enemies. Jurin’s silence may be explained with another letter in which he criticised Collins’s writings, calling him a heretic; perhaps Jurin did not wish for association with a deist like Chubb.

In his published works Chubb continued to address divine providence and questioned whether or not all miracles came directly from God. He believed that the answer ‘must remain undetermined’. God had, Chubb wrote, created various invisible beings with powers that might seem miraculous. The existence of these creatures made divine authorship of any miracle uncertain. However, he asserted that any miracle tending for the good of humanity and consistent with human reason probably came from God. Nevertheless, the most famous miracle of all, the resurrection of Jesus, could not with absolute certainty be attributed to God. Chubb conceded, however, that He was probably the cause. Nonetheless, he stated, ‘A skilful surgeon or physician, by a timely interposition, has sometimes prevented death.’ Caleb Fleming again took issue with Chubb on this point; though he did not specifically answer
how physicians performed seemingly miraculous feats, he stated that the ‘raising of a dead person to life, is an effect plainly above the natural ability or inherent power of any creature whatsoever’. It was up to Chubb to prove to him that any other creature could produce life from death. For Fleming, Chubb’s argument was an example of natural philosophy proceeding into areas for which it had no credentials: some things were simply a matter of faith and could not be accounted for in terms of natural processes.

Following his endorsement of the practices found at the Royal Society, Chubb borrowed from Newton’s posthumous Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel, and the Apocalypse of St John (1732) to support further the proposition that we do not know the purpose of prophecy. Chubb noted that ‘Sir Isaac Newton’s valuable discovery of the laws of gravitation, may, perhaps, be equally as useful to Christianity, as his discovery of the sense of prophecies, whilst it remains indeterminate what is the Christian revelation.’ Until we know the true use of prophetic writings, Newton’s method of simplicity ought to suffice for hermeneutical efforts. As we saw with Collins, this meant that only literally fulfilled prophecy was to be accepted as fact. Newton’s authority was to be accepted because of his success in natural philosophy. Just as Newton’s explanation of natural phenomena sufficed to account for the workings of a universe that was poorly understood, his strategy of biblical interpretation was to be preferred to more complicated schemes. Truth in the physical world was analogous to truth in the spiritual world: one could know divine communication with the same degree of certainty as one knew the underlying causes of the world. In both cases, Newton was an excellent guide. What was more, Newton’s work was rendering a formerly mysterious universe comprehensible.

In his works, Chubb also considered the relation of the soul to organised religion. He suggested that a person ‘contains a Body fitly organised’ and ‘that this Body is actuated by a Mind, whose principal Faculties are Intelligence and Activity’. Though he did not explicitly identify the mind as an aspect of the soul, he seems to have held it as such. The idea of humanity originated in our idea of its composition, which came from our senses, ‘the Effect or Produce of Nature, and not of a supernatural Influence’. We knew the body and, by extension, the mind and soul in the same way as we knew any other aspect of the Creation – without divine assistance. What was more, our soul was not harmed by a careful and honest investigation into the present state of Christianity. This enquiry, even if it led to a rejection of institutionalised religion, could not mean the ‘Death of their Souls’ because, as Chubb had stated in previous works, God encouraged all people to think for themselves.

Waterland was greatly troubled by Chubb’s notions. Writing to Gibson, who was by this time Bishop of London, he claimed that Chubb had clearly composed this latest work so that it was ‘fitted to deceive’ readers. Waterland
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described how its ‘first part is extremely confident, and irreverent, and indeed profane, to talk so freely of [G]od, and to make his own Imaginations the measure of divine wisdom. His other part about positive duties is loose and fallacious all the way.’ However, the problem lay in the fact that Chubb knew enough philosophy to write books containing a certain level of sophistication, which made quick responses difficult. As Waterland lamented to Gibson, it would take ‘something of a metaphysical Head to unravel him clearly and distinctly. He should be answered, and well answered.’ Although he was too busy to undertake a rebuttal personally, Waterland hoped one would be forthcoming. A little more than a month later, and with no reply to Chubb yet in print, he wrote again to Gibson. He suggested that when one replied to deists care needed to be taken because ‘It is impossible to do any good against them but by confuting them, or to confute them without exposing them, or to expose them without making them angry, as they are very... conceited.’

‘The Author’s Farewel to His Readers’, which proceeded Chubb’s Posthumous Works, contained his final thoughts on God. He asserted that God was bound by the rules of right and wrong, though, like Tindal, he did not reveal whether these existed prior to God or were created by Him. Nevertheless, these rules dictated God’s actions, including those of the Apocalypse, at which time ‘God will judge the world... not by capricious humour, and according to arbitrary will; but by, or according to the eternal rules of right and wrong’. God will act justly, not arbitrarily. Chubb did have supporters. Upon his death, one contemporary commented, ‘So died Mr. Thomas Chubb, in the Sixty-eighth Year of his Age. A Man of profound Judgement, of uncommon Perspicuity, of unblemished Honesty and Simplicity of Life, of courteous Manners and benevolent Dispositions to his Fellow-Creatures.’

THOMAS MORGAN’S IMAGE OF GOD

We can form a correct image of God through reason by examining ourselves, Thomas Morgan suggested as he entered the theological debates of the 1720s which our deists had done so much to stimulate. Morgan asserted that we may ‘form an Idea of God, or a Being of infinite absolute Perfection, only by attributing all the limited finite Perfections we find in our selves to God in an infinite Degree, and removing from Him whatever we conceive as implying any Thing of Weakness, Defect, or Imperfection’. Thus he eliminated all the apparatus of institutional religion, doing away with priests and indeed with any mediation between the believer and God. He found support for his views not in theological writings but, as Collins did, in natural philosophy: the ‘Method of forming our Ideas of spiritual intelligent Beings, had been so clearly and demonstratively explain’d and accounted for by the new
Philosophers, upon the *Principles of Reason*. Indeed, during his examination for ordination as a Dissenting minister in 1716 Morgan had specifically cited his ‘general Survey of this stupendous Fabrick of the Universe’, in which the planets were ‘retain’d in their proper Orbits, and kept perpetually revolving about their respective centres’, as one of the chief reasons why he believed in God and wished to become a minister.94

Challenges to Morgan became increasingly bitter and personal. The non-conformist minister Philip Doddridge described Morgan’s work as ‘detestable, inconsistent, immoral, & insolent’.95 Similarly, in a work that Doddridge called ‘among the best Books our age has produced’, John Leland, nonconformist minister in Dublin, dismissed Morgan’s notions as ‘ridiculous Superstitions, that proceed upon an entire Ignorance, or wilful Misrepresentation’ by a man who had no ‘regard to Decency or his own Reputation’. Leland held that God might intervene in the Creation at any time, for any reason. Only by equating the human mind to God’s, he believed was Morgan able to arrive at his conclusions. Similarly, an anonymous reviewer for the *Grub-Street Journal* called Morgan’s works ‘most tedious, immethodical, enthusiastical jumble of infidel cant, false history, mirepresentations, vain repetitions, and impertinence’.96

As to the clarity of God’s message, Morgan sided with our other deists in arguing that God did not wrap His words in riddles. Critics saw this too. An anonymous reviewer of his work lamented that Morgan had much in common with the positions advanced by Chubb. This is confirmed by considering Morgan’s writings on providence and revelation. Despite admitting that he did not know precisely what a revelation from God might entail, Morgan claimed that God would never suspend the normal and regular operation of the universe to enact it. ‘Such a Supposition’, he wrote, ‘would be unworthy of God, as the Creator and Governor of the World, and the universal Cause, Preserver, and Director of Nature’.97 If God could alter the Creation at will, then people could not know the order of nature with the certainty that Morgan demanded. He further commented that the world operated as it had done in the past and as it would for all eternity. This was true because God governed the world through a constant ‘uninterrupted Presence’. God’s role was that of a preserver. Morgan did not wish to remove God from the Creation but rather to eliminate the view of God as arbitrary and reactionary. As support for his position, he ironically cited Samuel Clarke as holding a complementary view: ‘The excellent and truly learned Dr. Samuel Clarke, in his Book of natural and reveal’d Religion, having clearly prov’d, that there must be an eternal, immutable Rule of Rectitude, natural Relation of Things, and moral Fitness of Actions.’98 While Morgan read Clarke as a potential ally, the two differed greatly, as we have seen. Clarke believed that human reason was too weak and corrupt to comprehend the divine plan, let alone to know whether
the natural order was immutable. What is more, while Clarke did claim that God’s will acted ‘in constant conformity to the eternal Rules of Justice’, he viewed God as active and unlimited in action. The rules to which Morgan referred were God’s rules and could not be comprehended by human reason. The present order of things did not constrain God, who was ‘a Being induced with Liberty and Choice’.99

To those who would suggest that ‘the Scripture itself represents the great Doctrines of the Christian Revelation under the Notion of Mysteries, and consequently that we must believe Mysteries, or not believe the Scriptures’, Morgan replied that ‘a Mystery, in the Scripture Notion of it, signifies something that depends so entirely on a Divine Testimony, that it could never have been known or discovered by Humane Reason . . . but then, I say, that when once a Thing is revealed, or made known, it ceases to be a Mystery, for it cannot continue to be a Mystery’. That is, once something is revealed it is no longer a mystery. Those who presented Scripture as mysterious and unknowable in its entirety were mistaken and perpetuated falsehood upon all Christians. They were wrong, Morgan believed, because nothing delivered from God would be unknowable. God would never ‘require more of us than he has given, tho’, perhaps, he may punish us for pretending to more’.100

John Chapman, Archdeacon of Sudbury (from 1741), was not convinced by Morgan’s assessment of God’s providence. He was concerned that Morgan’s insistence that the world operated by immutable laws diminished God’s power, even if God Himself enacted these laws. Repeating Clarke’s arguments against Toland and Collins, he asked Morgan to consider that ‘the Principles of the best Philosophy, that the present uniform, regular Course of Nature (as it is commonly stiled) is every moment sustain’d by the continual Action upon Matter, either of God himself, or subordinate Beings appointed by Him’. This criticism is somewhat curious in that Morgan actually stated the identical position. Chapman, however, wished Morgan to accept that God may intervene in this order at any time. Morgan’s image of God could not allow this. To further support his refutation, Chapman drew upon the work of another Boyle Lecturer, the Bishop of Norwich, John Leng. In his Natural Obligations to Believe the Principles of Religion, and Divine Revelation, Leng concluded that the denial of divine revelation ‘is the very Point upon which those who can truly be called Deists, begin to divide from such, as believe a divine Revelation’.101 This denial led only to atheism.

Like Chubb, Morgan too found support for his assertions in Newton’s posthumously theological writings. Newton, he believed, had shown that ‘however dark and obscure the prophetick Parts of the [Bible] may be, yet the Doctrines contained in it are very clear, and cannot easily mistaken’.102 This was an example of the power of human understanding and proof that God did not hide the meaning of Scripture from those who sought it.
who, as we saw, composed several anti-deist and anti-unitarian tracts, believed Newton’s theological writings to be dangerous, and Chubb’s and Morgan’s use of it probably confirmed his fears. He wrote to the Cambridge don Dr Zachary Grey complaining that ‘I have been sorry that no one yet has undertaken a just Answer to Sir Isaac Newton’s 14th Chapter relating to the Prophecies of Daniel... That Prophetical way & managing this Debate in the Side of Arianisme, is a very silly one.’ Grey took this call to heart and composed a rebuttal to Newton’s work the following year. In his book he claimed that Newton’s genius in mathematics had led to a kind of intellectual arrogance that encouraged Newton to venture into topics for which he was not qualified. He was particularly worried that Newton’s work might provide support to the deists.103

In his answer to Morgan’s hermeneutical strategy, Chapman also dusted off the threat of Socinianism that had been raised against Toland. While he never mentioned the heresy by name, the works Chapman used against Morgan were directly from the dispute. Noting, with approval, the earlier writings of Robert Boyle and John Norris on the subject, Chapman advised Morgan to consider that revelation might ‘lye beyond and above our Reason either to discover or comprehend, it is strictly demonstrable, that in that case no Objections will lye from Reason against them, and Revelation evinc’d by other mediums must carry it and command our obedience’. He also specifically asked Morgan to read Boyle’s Things Above Reason to rectify his ill-conceived theology. In the section to which Chapman drew Morgan’s attention, Boyle discussed ‘those things I have still’d Unconceivable, our Ideas are but such as a moderate attention sufficies to make the mind sensible that she wants either light or extent enough to have a clear and full comprehension of them’.104 Though Boyle, linked to Anglican apologetic sermons through the Boyle Lectures, had composed these words a generation and a half earlier, and against a different foe, Chapman believed that the view still had a role to play in Gregorian England. While heresies rose and faded, responses to them remained consistent. The nature of God and His relationship to the Creation, and the extent of human reason, remained pressing issues in Enlightenment England and sat at the heart of the deist controversy.

**POLITICS IN MORGAN’S PHYSICO-THEOLOGY**

Morgan’s *Physico-theology or, A Philosophico-moral Disquisition Concerning Human Nature, Free Agency, Moral Government, and Divine Providence* (1741), which as we saw described his final theory of matter and motion, contained a consideration of proper government based on a notion of humanity who desired only to preserve its well-being. God impressed this goal within every person and provided her or him with reason to obtain it. In tandem with
reason went ‘Liberty of human Actions, viz. in a Power of suspending the Judgment and consequent Choice and Pursuit, in order to a thorough Examination, and till proper Evidence shall appear, and the carrying the Assent no farther than the Evidence, Perception of Truth’. Morgan argued that it was thus self-evident that freedom of thought was the foundation of proper religion. Were it not so, humanity would consist of ‘necessary beings’ or ‘mere passive’ sufferers who relied upon others to think for them.105

Any form of government which supported these conditions and sought to secure the happiness and peace of the nation was desirable. Conversely, governments which did not encourage independent thought and the arrival at truth through an individual’s use of reason were to be resisted. As Morgan put it, ‘Men in Society ought to be considered either in a State of Peace or War, as having their Interests and Happiness mutually connected, or inconsistent with, or repugnant to each other.’ One of the chief causes of conflict within a society was secular intrusion into matters which concerned a believer and God. This intermixing between ‘divine and human Government, or between Theocracy and Civil Polity’ was unfounded because Morgan, like Chubb, argued that human governments cannot regulate a person’s heart or beliefs.106

Nevertheless, Morgan acknowledged that his views were not widely accepted. He hypothesised that wrong notions of religion began in a person’s early education and continued into adulthood. Such misguided persons demanded adherence to the views they learned and would ‘look upon as dangerous Intruders’ the views of all those who did not form part of their education. They did not examine their beliefs but simply took them as granted. They were blind followers, not of reason, but of prejudices. Party allegiances further curtailed a person’s desire for total freedom of religion. Morgan explained that ‘Should a Man make Religion a Matter of Choice and free Enquiry, he must be in great Danger of Apostasy from his Party.’ Such forced conformity was never a part of the original Christianity, he advised his readers. Did Christ and the Apostles describe a correct form of worship or regulate dress or any ‘outward Modes or Forms in which God was to be acceptably worshiped’?107 Religion, argued Morgan, as did all our deists, was a personal relationship between an individual and God, who encouraged honest enquiry.

CONCLUSION

Robert Walpole’s government fell in 1742 following his refusal to support a European war when it seemed that English prestige demanded it. When he finally entered the War of Jenkins’ Ear and the War of the Austrian Succession (1739–48), poor performances initiated enquiries in the Commons. In the face of mounting opposition, Walpole accepted a peerage as the Earl of Orford and left the Commons for the last time in February 1742. While England
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deleaded with yet another European war, deism as a perceived threat to political
and theological stability faded from the collective mindset of the nation. Though
anti-deist writings kept the heresy alive for decades, it was essentially forgotten.
Indeed, while he described the early stages of the French Revolution, Edmund
Burke asserted, ‘Who, born within the last forty years, has read one word of
Collins, and Toland, and Tindal, and Chubb, and Morgan, and that whole race
who called themselves Freethinkers?’ Burke was right. Though deism con-
tinued to find advocates after Morgan died in 1743, these new followers failed
to inflame passions as their predecessors had.
From around 1750 England faced the Seven Years War, the American and
French revolutions, and an expanding empire. The worrisome destabilising
democratic sentiment that would turn France upside down was finding new
advocates in England and ensured that arguments over prophecy and human
reason took a back seat to this new threat. Also important were emerging
changes in England’s character. Peter N. Miller has described how in the early
eighteenth century notions of the ‘common good’ obtained through the
maintenance of a unified confessional state were replaced by the principle of
the protection of the individual. As he puts it, ‘the development of a notion
of the individual that demanded more of governors, or rather, demanded that
governors stay clear of more peoples’ lives, and implicitly denied the political
nature of much personal belief and practice’ secured a new notion of ‘common
good.’ Our deists would certainly have welcomed this transformation.
It would be wrong to ignore religious factors in detailing the decline of
deism. James E. Herrick and others have suggested that orthodox Christianity
had many combatants who saw skilful answers to deists as the key to their
advancement within the Anglican Church, and that sheer numbers simply
overwhelmed the deists, who were drowned in a sea of pro-Anglican pam-
phlets and books. Deists were silenced by the very establishment that they
wished to be a part of. One contemporary observer saw things slightly dif-
ferently and suggested that the reason why interest in deism faded among
churchmen was that another problem had challenged the English Church with
more urgency. In a poetic assessment, John Potter, author of an anti-deist
book, cited the rise of Methodism as the cause of deism’s demise.
The Deists and the Christians
on Many knotty Questions
With Learned Altercations
Have long amused the Nation
And to give out we are loath
The Deists say the Bible
Is most absurd and Idle
Tis full of Contradiction
And therefore but a fiction
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And not a Rule of Truth.
The Christians say the Meaning
Wants nothing but Explaining
To make it all agree Sir
In perfect Harmony Sir
But How could ne’r be shown:
Now whilst this War was Waging
The Methodists came raging."

One apparent religious threat replaced another and theological concerns and sensibilities continued to play a role in the intellectual scene of the day.

Some overall conclusions are now apparent regarding deists’ conception of God and politics. Firstly, deists clearly believed in a God who created the universe and enacted certain relationships between Himself and humanity. People could know, with certainty, what God required of them because important knowledge was within the capacity of all people to know. Secondly, deists did not deny miracles or divine providence. They did, however, reject that miracles would be contrary to reason. Only Morgan seems to have denied the possibility of God acting in the Creation in a manner outside of its regular operation. Thirdly, deists did not accept that God stepped away from the Creation. Rather, God’s continuing predictable action in the world conformed to eternal truths, which deists knew by their reason and the order of things. These consistencies existed in both the natural philosophical and political realms.

It is true that many of those who challenged deists and their conception of God were nonjurors and High Church Tories, which suggests an element of political opposition to their refutations and implies that the deists’ controversy was little more than a particularly colourful facet of Whig and Tory rhetoric. This is partially true, for many High Church nonjuring Tories saw in deists everything that they feared in Latitudinarian Whigs, although we should not draw this line too sharply. Dissenters, and certainly Whigs, who sided politically with deists also challenged their conception of God. What is more, orthodox theologians, known Socinians, and suspected Arians all composed refutations of deists. The Newtonians Clarke and Whiston wrote against particular deists. But it is also clear that Chubb and Morgan believed Clarke’s tracts, and Newton’s posthumous works might support their positions. Because deists attracted rebuttals from across the political and religious spectrum, scholars ought to be reluctant in assigning categories of pro- and anti-deist solely on the basis of these allegiances. Despite the variety of their politics, the timing of their writings, and their specific targets, most critics were united in a view of God. Their God was all-powerful, unrestrained by His laws, and entirely mysterious. Expounded upon by the pens of the High Churchmen and nonjurors, this view of God was translated into a conception of divine-right monarchs who demanded passive obedience and who were not
bound by the very inherent laws of nations that the deists claimed ought to
guide governments.

Conversely, our deists argued for an accountable government which ruled
by contractual consent given by those who were ruled. As God must always
act in accordance with the laws of nature, the monarch must rule within the
boundaries of national law. Deists argued that the same God who acted only
for the benefit of humanity, and never Himself, provided the correct model
of government, which must place the well-being of citizens before its own
designs on maintaining power. They were not alone in their views. As our
analysis of contemporary newspapers and periodicals has demonstrated,
deist-like views were also on the agendas of other politically minded Britons
of a Whig bent. Rather than viewing deists as a group who wished to destroy
the present system of government, we should more accurately see them as
desiring a place within a system that they believed needed some modification
but hardly wholesale destruction.

NOTES

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pp. 95–6.

3 BL Add. 4465, fol. 20, Martin Eagle to Toland, 20 June 1720.

4 BL Add. 4465, fols. 21r–22r, Toland to Molesworth, 25 June 1720.


6 BL Add. 4295, fol. 20r, Toland [‘Philagathus’] to Barnham Goode, 30 October 1720.

7 BL Add. 4465, fol. 23r.

8 BL Add. 4465, fols. 48r–50r; John Carswell, The South Sea Bubble, rev. ed. (Stroud:

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10 Bod. Ballard MS 3, fols. 83r, 84r, Wake to Charlett, 4 February 1719/20, 9 February
1719/20; Independent Whig, 20 January 1720.

11 Independent Whig, 27 January 1720, 10 February 1720, 17 February 1720, 25 May 1720,
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13 BL Add. 4465, fols. 27r, 29r, Molesworth to Toland, 1 March 1721/22, and Toland to Molesworth, 2 March 1721/22.

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15 To Mr. *****. 13 March 1721/22, in The Theological and Philological Works of the Late Mr. John Toland, pp. 91–2.

16 BL Add. 4282, fols. 190, 118.


19 Bod. MS Eng. th. c. 28, fols. 17, 109r, 139; MS Eng. c. 27, fols. 59, 87–90.


22 Collins, A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons, pp. 39–40, 84, 90.


28 Collins, Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons, pp. 103, 225.


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33 Thomas Chubb, *An Enquiry Concerning the Grounds and Reasons, or What those principles are, on which two of our anniversaries solemnities are founded: Viz. That on the 30th of January, being the day of martyrdom of King Charles... and that on the 5th of November, being the day of our deliverance from Popery* (London, 1732), p. 8.
34 Chubb, *An Enquiry... two of our anniversaries*, pp. 11–13, 14–15, 29.
36 Bod. MS Eng. d. 2405, fols. 42–3, 45, 48.
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Conclusion: radical no more

In a classic article Steven Shapin described the interlocking spheres of intellectual enquiry in early modern England. Theology, politics, and natural philosophy overlapped, he wrote, ‘because they were connected in legitimations, justifications, and criticisms, especially in the use of conceptions of God and nature to comment upon political order’. It is these relationships that I have sought to present in this book by reconstructing the intertwined erudite endeavours of John Toland, Anthony Collins, Matthew Tindal, Thomas Chubb, and Thomas Morgan. These were the deists specifically named by William Whiston and Edmund Burke. While there were undoubtedly other persons in England whom we may call ‘deist’, that both Whiston and Burke identified the same men is a sign that the writings of these five were particularly important. What is more, they were active from the beginning of the deist controversy when Toland published Christianity not Mysterious in 1696 until Morgan published Physico-theology in 1741. At this point the perceived threat of deism is acknowledged to have declined in Britain.

In creating this account it was necessary to proceed as if completing a jigsaw puzzle: each piece was firmly positioned before we placed its neighbour. We began with the theological outline of the puzzle, proceeded to the interior, and set the political pieces, which form the bulk of deist tracts, and finished with natural philosophy. No piece fitted without those surrounding it. The construction of this picture forces a reconsideration of the generally held view of English deists, beginning first with the assumption that they were opponents of Newtonian philosophy, as has been claimed by many scholars and most recently by Jonathan I. Israel in his multi-volume study of the Enlightenment. As I have shown in this book, Toland at no point wrote negatively regarding Newton. He did, however, suggest that Newton’s work might support a materialist world-view. In Pantheisticon, he presented Newton as a worthy foil. Collins used Newton as support for his claim that so long as the cause of gravity remained unknown one could create other explanations that seemed reasonable. He also actively supported public lectures and popular books of Newtonian philosophy. Tindal, on the other hand, never mentioned Newton in his works at all, though his writings reveal similarity to those composed by promoters of public science. Yet Chubb, for his part, clearly endorsed Newton’s theological tracts. Morgan was undeniably favourable to Newton’s natural philosophy and strategy of prophetic interpretation. Such
a depiction is in keeping with Brian Young’s recent conclusion that in the English Enlightenment, ‘No simple demarcation of attitudes to Newton and Newtonianism can be constructed by the historian’.4

What is more, the radical disposition of deists’ world-views is lessened when we look at their contributions to natural philosophical discourse in conjunction with those produced by their contemporaries. By contemporaries I mean neither Newton nor Robert Boyle, but rather people like themselves who sought to understand the new philosophies and then share that understanding with an eager public. This is why we have focused on purveyors of public science. It was our deists’ unfortunate happenstance to have composed accounts of nature that conflicted in various ways with that offered by Newton. This same fate befell Robert Hooke, who is emerging only now from the historical shadow cast by Newton as the hero of the Scientific Revolution. Writers who provided alternative theories and explanations to those of Newton were, by their very disagreement with Newton, often viewed as radical, or so some scholars would have us believe.

Though auditors heard the same contemporary accounts of nature, they listened with different ears. Despite the best hope of Colin Maclaurin, who argued that correct natural philosophy led to a correct image of God, readers could still absorb Newton’s natural philosophy through the filters of their existing political and theological assumptions and draw conclusions from his work that Newton would not have recognised. This is also true of our deists. They accepted Newtonian mechanics but not the active and unpredictable God who Newton and his closest followers believed ruled the universe. Our deists held that God ensured important truths about the world – specifically, its continuing predictable action – and that a detailed understanding of its parts and workings was entirely knowable to those who sought it, which in turn allowed them to claim a level of certainty in their natural philosophy absent from that of their critics. This was a direct outcome of their theological assumptions and cannot be explained in any other way. The same theology also guided their political positions. It would thus seem that S. J. Barnett’s conclusion that ‘No one has yet been able to demonstrate any consensus in deist religious outlook, an identifiable deist programme, or consistent intellectual links based upon it’ must be rethought.5 As has been asked by one historian recently, ‘What was God doing in the eighteenth century?’6 It is evident that notions of God continued to provide the same foundation for the learned investigations of the day as had been the case for previous generations, and that the Enlightenment in England was guided by theology even for deists whom previous scholarship described as having had no serious commitment to theology. Such persons were not David Berman’s atheists.

In this book we have seen that deists were not modern. Nonetheless, generations of Enlightenment historians have positioned them as the founding
fathers of what has been traditionally defined as the movement leading to the French Revolution and modernity. In *Radical Enlightenment* Israel located English deists as part of a Europe-wide movement, the goal of which was to topple monarchy and usher in an era of secularisation – in short to create our modern democratic world. To build this image, he relied heavily upon critics of deists and the assessment of later Continental Enlightenment figures eager to construct a philosophical lineage for themselves. However, if we look at deists without casting an eye forward towards revolution in America and France, many of the assertions presented in such an interpretation do not withstand close scrutiny. In his desire to present the forest, Israel overlooked the trees. An accurate picture of deism or deists in England is found not in the writings of theological and political opponents but in those of the deists themselves, even if this means that seamless histories of deism must be replaced by detailed accounts of individual deists. It is unlikely to be the case that our five deists foresaw how their works would be used by others. We need only look to the reaction of Newtonians like William Whiston and Samuel Clarke – to the use of their master’s natural philosophy by our deists – to see that what a author thought was the message of her or his work was not always the message that was read.

In *Enlightenment Contested* Israel softened his picture of deists, in that he accepted somewhat that they had limited endorsement of monarchy. However, he still maintains that these thinkers were opponents of mainstream ideologies. Conversely, I have argued that deists were full participants in the political and natural philosophical discourse of eighteenth-century Britain, and that shifting political circumstances were the impetus for many of the writings we have examined. Deists did certainly wish to remake the Church of England without the priestly corruption that they believed was flourishing in the institution. This is not the same as wanting its wholesale destruction; nor does it make them subversive radicals bent on destroying existing governmental institutions. The evidence demonstrates that Toland coveted a government position from Robert Harley and others, as did Tindal from Lord Sunderland. Collins agreed with many royal policies and was a popular and successful county treasurer and Justice of the Peace, positions that were just as political as that of a Member of Parliament. Chubb and Morgan similarly wrote in favour of the newly secured Protestant succession and urged government to comply with a deist theological outlook. Not one of these men advocated removal of the monarchy or anything like a modern democracy.

Too often when historians have addressed deism in England, Toland has been presented as the only example, the microcosm, if not the archetype, of deism itself. As did Toland, so did the deists. I hope to have called into question the validity of these stories by considering the work of four other deists, especially the writings they produced in the years after 1714 when Toland’s
influence had started to diminish and it was Collins who became the best-known deist in England. By examining deists through the dual lenses of post-1689 politics and post-*Principia* natural philosophy, we see that deism was more than the characteristics demonstrated by Toland, whose own desire to establish himself in political circles directed many of his writings in ways not seen the other deists. Tindal and Collins, for example, enjoyed an official intimacy with politics that Toland coveted. A collective study of deists, rather than of some ubiquitous ‘deism’, reveals that well-worn generalisations about these thinkers must be reconsidered. To do otherwise is to lose the nuances evident in the work of English deists. These men were individuals who, though sharing many theological, political, and natural philosophical beliefs, need to be treated as such and not subsumed into the persona of Toland. Remember that Morgan wrote against the type of natural philosophy advanced by first Toland and then Collins. Chubb too participated in natural philosophical controversies of the day, but in a manner dissimilar to other deists. His accounting of inoculation results demonstrates this nicely. Where we may usefully continue to speak in terms of generalisations with respect to English deists is in the conception of a predictable and immutable God that formed the basis of their theology and directed their political and natural philosophical positions.

If my portrait of deism is accepted, then a reassessment of deism in England is necessary – especially in light of the characterisations of the English Enlightenment as clerical and strongly religious as offered by Young, J. G. A. Pocock, and others. Young was certainly correct when he noted that it is vital for scholars to ‘open up discussions of England’s Enlightenment in terms other than those derived from the analysis of freethinking criticisms of Christianity, an approach which has dominated recent attempts at understanding this important but profoundly complex subject’. I began this book with a similar goal of questioning the historical validity of deist opposition to Church and crown as a true characterisation of the English Enlightenment. As we have seen, deists fit into depictions of the English Enlightenment that eschew traditional moorings and that emphasise that any separation of Enlightenment and Conservative Enlightenment is very flexible. As Young has written, ‘the very penetrability of these boundaries demonstrates the essentially religious basis of much eighteenth-century speculation in England’. Not only orthodox clerical scholars were part of this theologically guided environment influenced by the political events of the day, but so too were deists. It is here that Young’s conception of a ‘clerical Enlightenment’ occurring within a pious nation, as Roy Porter has put it, needs to be expanded to include our deists, who were not separate sideline critics existing in their own ‘Radical Enlightenment’ which sought to undermine the pillars of the establishment. In an age of public science, national and international political intrigues, and increasing – if
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begrudging – religious tolerance, deists sought to have their voices heard in a nation that they hoped to make better for having listened.10

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