

Whichcote and the Cambridge Platonists on Human Nature:
An Interpretation and Defense

Abstract

We have long misconstrued and underestimated the originality of Whichcote's approach to human nature. This, in turn, has led us to underestimate the viability of his strategy for reconciling reason and faith. In this paper I present a new interpretation of Whichcote's view of human nature. I then test this interpretation by seeing how well it handles the "Supperaddition Problem" Michael Gill has recently raised against Whichcote's strategy for reconciling reason and Christianity. I argue that the present interpretation effectively resolves this problem. Throughout I focus on Whichcote's work, but what I say here can be applied to the Cambridge Platonists more generally. Related aspects of the work of Ralph Cudworth, John Smith and Henry More are considered.

I. Introduction

In the fragile, fledgling days of the English Enlightenment reason had no better friend than Benjamin Whichcote. More precisely put: reason had no more loyal *servant* than Whichcote. He made it perfectly clear that he was not content to have us merely befriend reason; he sought to convince us of reason's absolute sovereignty.

No one can *Command* his Judgment; Therefore every Man must *Obey* it.¹

If Reason does not *command*, it will *condemn*.²

The Reason of man's Mind *must* be satisfied; no man *can* think against it.³

Nothing without Reason is to be proposed; nothing against Reason is to be believed.⁴

These were daring statements made, as they were, at a time when the sovereignty of reason was a dangerous idea. No less a voice than Luther's had declared that, "it is the quality of faith that it wrings the neck of reason," for "reason is that all-cruellest and most

¹ Benjamin Whichcote, *Moral and Religious Aphorisms*, (Elkin Mathews & Marrot LTD., 1930). Entry 871, p. 98. (Hereafter, simply "*Aphorisms*," followed by entry # and page #.)

² *Aphorisms*, 98, p. 13.

³ *Ibid.* 942, p. 105.

⁴ *Ibid.* 880, p. 99.

fatal enemy of God.”⁵ Such grave sixteenth century pronouncements reverberated well into the seventeenth century and did so, in no small part, because the very air of Calvinist England provided it with such excellent acoustics.

To Whichcote’s contemporaries, the perceived threat manifested in a shape that is also readily recognizable today: If any and all beliefs must submit themselves to the authority of reason in order to establish their legitimacy, what would become of those beliefs man has long held most sacred? Reason’s claim to the throne appeared to challenge the rule of faith, and thus the sovereignty of God Himself. Of course, today, the loudest voices in the Western world will be those who see the roles reversed—those warning of a threat that faith poses to reason. The ascendancy has inverted, but the aggression continues.

This makes it all the more regrettable that Whichcote’s works have remained out of print, and their study out of fashion, for so long. For, while it is true that reason never had a better friend than Whichcote, neither did religion. The perceived conflict, he argued, is the product of distortion. It is a pernicious and powerful illusion, but an illusion just the same. Reason and religion are not at odds. In fact...

There is nothing so intrinsically Rational as Religion is; nothing, that can so Justify itself; nothing, that hath so pure Reason to recommend itself; as Religion hath.⁶

⁵ *D. Martin Luther’s Werke*, viii, ed. J.G. Walch (Weimar: Herman Boehlau, 1884) p. 2043. Charles Beard’s translation in *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century in its relation to Modern Thought and Knowledge* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1907) p. 163.

⁶ *Aphorisms*, 457, p. 52.

As he saw it, there is no contest between faith and reason for sovereignty because there is only one claimant to the crown.

To go against Reason is to go against God: it is the same thing, to do that which the Reason of the Case doth require; and that which God Himself doth appoint. Reason is the Divine Governor of Man's Life; it is the very Voice of God.⁷

What Whichcote sought to inculcate was that neither reason nor religion threatened the sovereignty of the other because the relation between the two is, if not an identity, then quite nearly so. Neither can fully flourish without the other.

Of course, few today are sanguine about the prospects of establishing even so much as a lasting *détente* between reason and faith let alone their vital interdependence. So, for those already inclined to regard Whichcote's project as quixotic what I say next will not help: Whichcote was no deist. By 'religion' he meant the *Christian* religion, complete with its appeal to *revelation* and its central, sacred *mysteries*.

It's been roughly 350 years since Whichcote's effort to secure the sovereignty of reason and religion was first launched and if history is to be the judge, then, obviously, we will have to agree that things did not work out as well as he hoped. In fact, one will be tempted to say that his philosophical ship ran aground sometime around 1740—roughly, when Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* was first setting sail. Confidence in both the reasonableness of human nature as well as religion took a noticeable dive thereafter. This is not to deny that excellent philosophers, ones whose works bear clear evidence of the

⁷ *Ibid.* 76, p. 11.

influence of Whichcote and his more talented students, the so-called “Cambridge Platonists,” continued to make a mark after Hume. But the attitude of collective hindsight has been that their project was a failure. Nor does hindsight appear to be refocusing. Of the Cambridge Platonists’ project, Frederick Beiser, for instance, writes, “In the end their identification of reason and faith remained purely programmatic, an ideal they could not realize in the face of recalcitrant Christian revelation.”⁸ And that, I’m afraid, rather neatly sums up the contemporary consensus.

Still, I am not convinced. What follows is a defense of Whichcote’s project. Defending his identification of reason and faith requires that we have an accurate interpretation of his account of human nature, for, as he saw it, only by pursuing the ancient admonition to “know thyself” could we come to a proper view of the nature of both reason and faith. Unfortunately, we have, understandably, tended to read Whichcote and the Cambridge Platonist’s works through the lenses we have been long grinding for reading the texts of their more familiar contemporaries. As a result our image of them has been distorted and consequently we have underestimated the originality of their approach to human nature. This, in turn, has led us to underestimate the viability of their strategy for reconciling reason and faith. Against the traditional model of Whichcote and the Cambridge Platonist’s view of human nature I will develop and defend an alternative. I will also test its viability by seeing how well it handles the serious challenge recently raised against Whichcote’s approach to human nature by

⁸ *The Sovereignty of Reason: The Defense of Rationality in the Early English Enlightenment* (Princeton, 1996) p. 177.

Michael Gill, what he calls the “Superaddition Problem.”⁹ I will argue that the alternative model I present effectively disarms this problem and that Whichcote’s approach to human nature and its relationship to both reason and faith deserves another look.

Throughout I will continue to focus on Whichcote’s works. However, I believe that what I say here in his defense extends to Cambridge Platonism in general, at least so far as to include the work of Henry More as well as Whichcote’s disciples, Ralph Cudworth and John Smith. I will, in fact, occasionally, draw on their works for illustration.

II. The Image of God Doctrine

Just getting a basic picture of Whichcote’s view of human nature together will occupy the bulk of this essay. But let’s start with the uncontroversial short answer: His approach to human nature is developed within the tradition of what I will call, following precedent, the “Image of God Doctrine” (IGD). One characteristic expression of this view is found in a once popular collection of Whichcote’s moral and religious aphorisms.¹⁰

Reverence God in *thyself*: for God is *more* in the *Mind* of Man, than in any part of this world besides; for we (and we *only* here) are made after the Image of God.¹¹

⁹ Actually, he refers to it as the “the problem of the superaddition.” See his “*The Religious Rationalism of Benjamin Whichcote*,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 37:2 (April 1999) p. 290. Hereafter simply “Gill (1999)” followed by page number. See also chapter five, “The Emergence of Non-Christian Ethics,” of Gill’s *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics* (Cambridge, 2006). Hereafter simply “Gill (2006)” followed by page number.

¹⁰ See W.R. Inge’s preface to the *Aphorisms*, p. iii.

¹¹ *Aphorisms*, 798, p. 89.

The claim that we are “made in God’s image” is clearly a metaphor. One that can and has been cashed out in different ways by different thinkers. To get at the crucial, distinctive aspects of Whichcote’s adaptation and development of this doctrine I’m going to proceed by presenting a series—but, certainly not an exhaustive series—of outline versions of the IGD. I’ll start with a fairly generic model, which I will cleverly label the “Generic Model.” I will then present two rival models of the IGD, both in different ways, promise to reconcile reason and religion; I begin with a “Rationalists Model” and then present a “Cartesian Model” of the IGD. As we will see, it is with the Rationalist Model of human nature that Whichcote and the Cambridge Platonists have traditionally been associated. And this, I will argue, is a mistake.

II.A. Generic Model

The IGD is a teleological view of human nature that takes its starting point from a rather simple piece of data drawn from a bit of commonsense psychology. Namely, that upon honest self-assessment man finds himself to be a chronically *restless* kind of being. The relentless pressure of desire is forever at work on us. ‘Desiring’ here is understood as *wanting*, i.e., *lacking*. And since this is a teleological view, this chronic restlessness should be seen as our primitive awareness that *we are not as we ought to be*. To be as we ought to be is to fulfill man’s “natural end” and so to achieve our end is to achieve “rest.”

Of course, since this is a theistic teleology of man, our end is God; our rest lies with Him. There are two key moves at this point. First, our end and rest lies with God in the sense that the way to satisfy this want is in the “imitation of God.” In other words, our job is to make ourselves as much like God as is possible. That is man’s natural state i.e., the

way we ought to be. The second key move is the claim that imitation of God is only possible because we were originally “made in His image.” With respect to this latter move there are then two further claims at work. First, there is something about us that is *divine* in nature. Second, in our present condition, however, this fact about us is not manifest because we have abused our inherently divine nature, debased it; we have “defaced the image of God in us.”

The upshot is that our current restlessness is then double-edged. Its immediate effect is the persistent suffering of unsatisfied want. This suffering is the result of our presently disordered nature, disordered by self-abuse. But this means that it is also our primitive awareness that we, at least latently, retain the image of God in ourselves. It is at once a sign that we are not as we ought to be and that we have in us a capacity for something infinitely better, a capacity for the divine.¹² The IGD takes our suffering to be an indication that it is our job to make the image of God in us manifest once again. This we do by bringing our divine potentiality back to actualization. Finally, call whatever is required to achieve this end “religion” and call the restoration of our proper state our “salvation.” Salvation is the “deification of man.”

The Platonic hue of the IGD will already be visible. God stands to us much as Platonic Form to instance. We are originally made by God in His image and if we live up to our true nature we “imitate” God. As with Form and instance, God is at once the source of our being and the nature of our being is entirely bound up with and dependent upon Him. We are not deities; we are merely *deiform*. Our nature is related to God’s in such a way that He, rather than something terminating within ourselves, is our proper

¹² Well, provided that ‘ought’ implies ‘can’, but more on this later.

end. What is “in” us in an *image*. That *of which* it is an image is not. So, while it is true that we are only deiform and not deities, it is also true that the relation between God and man is—as the analogy of an object and its image is designed to suggest—peculiarly intimate.¹³ As with instances and Forms, the more perfectly the instance imitates its Form the more fully the instance is said to “participate” with its Form. One who truly *is* as he *should be* will not only imitate God, but via this imitation will achieve something more; he will enjoy “participation” with the Divine Nature itself; he will “partake” of God. Only in achieving participation will man enjoy rest.

A word of caution about the way that ‘rest’ is being used here is in order before moving on from the Generic Model of the IGD. ‘Rest’ is being used in a teleological context. So rest should not be confused with *indolence*, a simple privation of activity. If it were to be understood in that sense, simple annihilation of either the desire or the desiring entity would bring rest. ‘Rest’ here means *satisfaction of a want*, so given our understanding of ‘want’ as ‘lack’ we should understand ‘satisfaction’ to mean *fulfillment of a lack*. With that in mind, two further, inter-related points should be made: First, being in such a state of rest is completely compatible with being in a state of “activity.” Second, the concept of satisfaction has an essential normative element to it. As for the first point,

¹³ Cf. Plato, *First Alcibiades*:

Socrates: Did you ever observe that the face of the person looking into the eye of another is reflected as in a mirror; and in the visual organ which is over against him, and which is called the pupil, there is a sort of image of the person looking?...Then the eye, looking at another eye, and at that in the eye which is most perfect, and which is the instrument of vision, will there see itself...But looking at anything else either in man or in the world, and not to what resembles this, it will not see itself. ...Then if the eye is to see itself, it must look at the eye, and at that part of the eye where sight which is the virtue of the eye resides. ...And if the soul, my dear Alcibiades, is ever to know herself, must she not look at the soul; and especially at that part of the soul in which her virtue resides, and to any other which is like this. (Jowett trans.)

the idea is simply that if an entity's natural condition is to be in some particular state of activity and it currently is not, then it has a want that is not satisfied. As for the second point, simply note that not just anything that removes the pain of wanting counts as satisfaction of the want.¹⁴ So to bring the two points together: if, for example, an entity's original, natural state is to be engaged in some particular mode of activity, then not just any old activity will do if it is to satisfy its desire to return to its original, natural, i.e., *proper*, state of being. Indeed, to foreshadow a bit, one should recall that in Christian teleological metaphysics the nature of God's being is commonly conceived of as *actus purus*.

II.B. Rationalist Model

Let's now turn to a development of the Generic Model in the form of the "Rationalist Model." The moniker is mine, but little else is. All the component parts of this model of the IGD are, at least implicitly, common property among many scholars. However, many of its parts can be found explicitly developed and effectively deployed in Edward Craig's *The Mind of God and the Works of Man* under the label, the "Similarity Thesis."¹⁵ In that well-known work, Craig convincingly argues that the Similarity Thesis both exerted a pervasive force on and was vigorously pursued by many of the best and most influential minds of the early modern period. He identifies the driving idea behind this variant of the

¹⁴ The point was memorably made by Wittgenstein in connection with Russell's behaviorist, de-normativized account of satisfaction in *The Analysis of Mind*: "I believe Russell's theory amounts to the following...If I wanted to eat an apple and someone punched me in the stomach taking away my appetite, then it was the punch that I originally wanted." *Philosophical Remarks* (Chicago, 1975) entry 22, p. 11.

¹⁵ See Chapter One. "The Mind of God," *passim*, (Oxford, 1987). Hereafter simply "Craig" followed by page number.

IGD and thus this intellectually intense period of Western culture as the belief that the key point of similarity between God and man, the aspect of man that by its very nature is divine, is his *rational* faculty; man's capacity for the divine is his capacity for *reason*. And as God is traditionally either identified or otherwise inextricably united with "truth," and as reason is traditionally man's distinguishing and most exalted capacity for coming to know the truth, it is in the acquiring of knowledge through the exercise of reason that we can hope to most closely imitate and participate in the divine.

- Craig's Quality-Quantity Distinction

Of course, given man's limitations, the prospects for imitating God in point of *quantity* of knowledge look dim. But as Craig points out, that is not the relevant metric:

[W]hen we think of human knowledge as it is *intensively*, when we think, that is, of the quality of our grasp of those truths which we see most clearly and know most certainly: here one may speak of a perfection in cognition upon which not even God can improve.¹⁶

What is the idea here? We are commonly advised to turn our attention to classical, Euclidean geometry. Here, via my rational faculty, the mind is occupied with objects that are *eternal* and *immutable*. Triangles do not come into existence at some time and go out of existence at another and unlike, e.g., a cake in the rain, the properties of a triangle are subject to no decay, no change of any kind. A three-sided, closed, plane figure timelessly

¹⁶ Craig, p. 19.

has three interior angles. The largest interior angle is timelessly opposite the largest side, etc.

- Lovejoy on Reason and Rest

To better flesh out Craig's idea about the quality of some of our knowledge, I think it helps if we pick up a couple cues from A.O. Lovejoy's classic, *The Great Chain of Being*.¹⁷ First, we should note that the special *quality* of this knowledge is a function of its relation to *necessity*. In the exercise of reason I find I have a capacity, a particular means for coming to believe certain facts about these timeless, immutable, properties that allows me to grasp not only their truth but the *necessity* of their truth. If we rightly grasp the grounds of a triangle's properties, not just what they are but *why they absolutely must be what they are*, we achieve a perfectly clear understanding of this aspect of reality, why it must *be* as it is. Our knowledge, within this tight limit, is as exactly as good as it gets; it is as good as God's. The quality of this knowledge is literally divine because it is in such acts—i.e., actualizations of the potential of the intellect—that the latently divine in us becomes manifest. Having thus identified the nature of our relation with the divine this affords a clear view of the Rationalist Model's distinctive understanding of the nature of man's "restlessness," "rest," and "participation." Our connection with the divine is through our intellect. By its very nature, the intellect is a *reason-seeking* sort of thing. Thus, the reason-seeking intellect of man—that within us which persistently demands to know *why?*—is the ultimate source of our restlessness. Given its nature, the intellect can

¹⁷ *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea*. The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard 1933 (Harvard University Press, 1936). See especially chapter v "Plentitude and Sufficient Reason in Leibniz and Spinoza."

only find rest where it can discover absolute necessity. Clarke, in his *Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*, explains:

When it appears that an absolute necessity in the nature of things themselves is the reason and ground of their being what they are, we must necessarily stop at this ground and reason; and to ask what is the reason of this reason which is the nature of things the last of all reasons, is absurd.¹⁸

Clarke's point can then be put together with the idea that the source of our restlessness is ultimately based in the intellect. When it hits upon the bedrock of absolute necessity, the reason-seeking restlessness of the intellect is not merely stopped, but properly satisfied; the restless need to know why, achieves its final end. In doing so, it sees the fact in question with, quite literally, divine clarity. It knows the proposition in question to be true because it fully grasps why it *must be*.

- Craig's Insight Ideal: Participation as Contemplation

At the center of the Rationalist Model is what Craig would call the "Insight Ideal."

[When man] is compared to God in point of his ability to acquire a certain type of knowledge, the thought very naturally follows that its acquisition is itself a moral value, something that we have an obligation to pursue. In doing so, we ourselves approach more nearly to perfection; for since it is such items of knowledge that,

¹⁸ Quoted in Lovejoy p. 148.

amongst other things, compose the mind of God, it follows that in acquiring them we approach more nearly the divine state, the summit of all good. So that when the Image of God doctrine is worked out in terms of our cognitive faculties, the result readily supports a contemplative or scientific ethic in which knowledge...appears as a good in itself and does not have to be justified in terms of its application....No mention is made of how we act or what we do. It is where we *look*, what we *see*, which makes up our worth.¹⁹

Of God's traditional three qualities, His omnipotence, His omniscience and His benevolence, this model emphasizes God's omniscience. "[I]tems of knowledge," we are told, "compose" the mind of God. Thus, "in acquiring them we approach more nearly the divine state." In acquiring knowledge we better resemble God.

There are some notable scholastic overtones to this aspect of the Rationalist Model. The locus of our union with God is our "rational faculty" which is conceived of here as a *cognitive* faculty, what the scholastic tradition would refer to as the "speculative intellect" as opposed to the "practical intellect" and the descendent of which in the early modern period tends to get labeled "pure reason" or "pure intellect." The exercise of the act of the intellect that provides for union is best characterized as "cognition" and Craig, in the spirit of this tradition, understands the nature of intellectual cognition via a *perceptual* model, in particular, via a *visual* perceptual model. In light of this, what I propose is that Craig's Insight Ideal should be understood as the Rationalist Model's take on the nature of *participation*. As in the scholastic tradition, participation with God is via

¹⁹ Craig, 22.

the “Beatific Vision” or the “Vision of God.”²⁰ So the sense in which we participate with the Divine is by “acquiring” items of knowledge and we acquire them in the sense of “grasping” them intellectually. Grasping is modeled of the kind of relation we participate in when we achieve veridical visual perception of an object. So, given this, it is quite natural to think of the nature of participation as a state of intellectual *contemplation*. It is a sort of holding before the “mind’s eye” of an intellectually crystalline object. This is participation as contemplation.

- The Rationalist Model’s Standard Problems

Thus laid out, I expect the average believer would find this version of the IGD and its notion of participation unsatisfying, perhaps even disturbing. I’ll mention just three causes for concern. First, given man’s limitations, we can expect participation to be at best a transitory, fleeting state not available to all and only rarely available to a few. After all, intellects vary and in even the most disciplined and healthy, attention soon flags.

Of course, it may be rejoined that better things await us. We can expect very little in our present embodied state. Certainly it is common enough to blame the body for the limitations on our intellect and our attentive exercise of it. The body is subject to all sorts of unruly, noisy passions and we can only contemplate the truth so long as we are not distracted by the pain of hunger or the fear of losing the contents of our 401K. Only when we have finally paid that cock to Asclepius will our intellect be free to fully engage in and enjoy some nice, uninterrupted, beatific contemplation.

²⁰ See K.E. Kirk’s magnificent study, *The Vision of God: The Christian Doctrine of the Summa Bonum*. Bampton Lectures for 1928 (London: Longman Green and Co., 1931). See especially VII.iii.

But will we fare better disembodied? It is hard to see just how, and that's our second problem. God, it seems, has been turned into the cold deity of the mathematicians. That which "composes" Him, those "items of knowledge," are by their nature abstract and impersonal sorts of things. Given which, what kind of satisfaction is there to be had in achieving one's final end? On this model of the IGD, the essential motivational force of man is the push of need to answer the rationalist's 'why'. The satisfaction we can hope to enjoy is only the kind that the logical 'must' can supply. At best, it is merely the satisfaction that comes with completing a good, solid inference. I don't doubt that many may still remember the first time they understood the proof of the Pythagorean theorem as an intellectually moving, even beautiful experience. Still, it will be hard to imagine singing with any conviction a hymn in anticipation of something conceived along the lines of an eternal geometry high.

Moreover, notice that the nature of our union with the divine, so conceived, seems rather abstract and impersonal too. Our third problem is that not much of *me* seems to be involved in this union, certainly not my memories, my sentiments, my concerns, etc. If all that participates is my "rational faculty," then exactly what of my individuality remains when I am finally disembodied? True, my rational faculty might find satisfaction, rest, here, but do *I*? My rational faculty seems to be at best a *part* of me, not that to which I am identical. The nature of my participatory union seems to abstract me away from myself.²¹

²¹ These worries should remind the reader of the worries surrounding Avicenna's and then Averroes' highly contentious views about the relation of the "active intellect" and "passive intellect" to the individual.

II.C. Cartesian Model

Another early modern model of the IGD that holds out hope of making sense of the claimed interdependency of reason and religion is the Rationalist Model's rival, the Cartesian Model. Initially, it might seem perverse to describe something called the "Cartesian Model" as a *rival* to the Rationalist Model. If anything, use of the word 'rationalist' will immediately stir thoughts of Descartes. But beyond the mere draw of nomenclature, the obvious reason for aligning Descartes with the Rationalist Model is that he might well seem like the paradigm advocate of the "Insight Ideal." A cluster of facts conspires to support this impression. First of all, it is hard to even describe the Insight Ideal without slipping in to the Cartesian language of "clear & distinct ideas." The choice of such vision-apt adjectives, combined with the fact that Descartes tells us it is the "*pure intellect*" alone that "*perceives*" these ideas clearly and distinctly makes it hard to resist thinking of Descartes as fundamentally in-line with the Rationalist model's ideal of participatory contemplation via a kind of peculiarly perspicuous intellectual vision.

Beyond this obvious point of resemblance to the Rationalist Model, there's a second that might initially escape notice because, in contrast with his Aristotelian predecessors, Descartes is famous for downplaying the importance of teleological considerations. While this is certainly true when it comes to Descartes' attitude toward our thinking about the material realm, things are quite different when it comes to the mental. In fact, one tempting way to read the entire structure of the Cartesian method is as permeated by an assumption of the Rationalist Model's take on the teleological nature of man. The *Meditations* take their start in restlessness and the intention to satisfy that restlessness. Descartes begins by confessing his long-standing, nagging awareness of the fact that *he is*

not as he ought to be. In the intellectualist spirit of the Rationalist Model, he locates the source of this discomfort via the recognition of his failings qua *cognitive* being. The driving problem of the *Meditations* is that he is aware that in the past he has harbored false *beliefs* and consequently has very good reason to believe that he does so at present. In part, the work is presented as a meditation because he believes that every sane, honest person who joins him in reflection will agree that this is true of themselves as well; we are all deficient believers. Of course, this recognition of short-coming would be fruitless (it certainly would not have yielded the *Meditations*) if it was not accompanied by the realization that this is no mere *privation* we suffer from but a positive *lack*.²² So, as with all versions of the IGD, honest self-assessment is double edged; the bad news of reflection is accompanied by good. The good news is that in recognizing our short-coming as believers, one thereby also acknowledges the possibility of a better state: one in which we are free, as far as is possible, of such imperfections. So long as there is some way forward, a way to both purge false beliefs and keep from acquiring new ones, there is hope for us.

The third reason to be tempted to see Descartes as working within the tradition of the Rationalist Model is the familiar fact that Descartes' internal rehab project builds upon the epistemic security of the "cogito." Descartes champions a particular view of the essential nature of the self—the self as *res cogitans*. Cognizing is not just one of the things that I do; it's what I am. I am a "thinking thing." In light of which, we are not surprised when, in the "Fourth Meditation" Descartes seems to be telling us that the proper measure of the perfection of a finite mental substances like ourselves is how

²² This point is left implicit in the "First Meditation" but is made explicit in the "Fourth Meditation."

accurately our beliefs reflect the facts of the world. Taken together, a picture emerges of a philosopher who would not only build upon, but seek to improve the Rationalist Model by *identifying* man with the “rational intellect.” True, this is a revisionary view of the self, but it is one that the advocate of the Rationalist Model can gladly get behind because it avoids one of the model’s standard problems. On Descartes’ account, it is not some *part* of me that is divine, but my *essential nature* that is divine. Thus, it is *I* that may participate in God, not merely some faculty in me.

The fourth and final point unites and reinforces the first three reasons to think of Descartes as working within the tradition of the Rationalist Model. According to Descartes, those ideas of which it is our job to achieve clear and distinct perception are *innate*. In saying they are innate Descartes means to suggest that they, in some sense, *compose, constitute* the *mind* itself. They are the very stuff of the mind, its bricks and mortar. Our job, if we are to be as we ought to be, is to achieve a clear and distinct grasp of them. One way to read Descartes is as attempting to show that if we are to fulfill our natural end and restore/achieve our proper state we must pursue the Cartesian method. We must engage in what the Neoplatonic philosophers called “reversion”; we must turn the mind onto itself.²³ In making our innate ideas manifest we can purge false beliefs in us, thereby remaking ourselves as we ought to be. In making our innate ideas manifest we make the innate God-like structure of the mind itself manifest. From this perspective it is very tempting to see the Cartesian method as nothing less than Descartes’ prescribed means for restoring the image of God in us.

²³ We will return to the topic of reversion in § V.

- Cartesian Modal Voluntarism

As tempting as it is to put Descartes in the Rationalist Model tradition, it is a mistake because Descartes is a modal voluntarist.²⁴ As he sees it, we have to accept that God sets the modal truths by an act of will. The largest angle of a triangle subtends its largest side. We perceive this clearly and distinctly. We cannot conceive it being otherwise. We cannot help but assent to it. But, according to Descartes, that does not license the inference that even God could not have made it otherwise. That, the modal voluntarist insists, would be to conceive of God's will as constrained. But God is omnipotent; His will cannot be constrained in any way. To say that I clearly and distinctly perceive that α is to say I find that my will is *absolutely bound to assent to α* . We encounter the modal truths as a species of *limitation on our will*. I find that it is impossible (even under the supposition of the evil demon) for me to do otherwise. I consider the modal proposition in question and I find that my will bows before it.

Descartes' commitment to modal voluntarism means that he is no friend of the Insight Ideal, the heart and soul of the Rationalist Model. "Clarity" and "distinctness" are not hallmarks of participation with the divine intellect. If they were then the reason-seeking intellect would have achieved rest in achieving clear and distinct perception. That the intellect has not been satisfied is nicely laid bare by the fact that, in the "Third Meditation," Descartes finds need for a proof that God is no deceiver in order to know that he can trust his clear and distinct perceptions.

²⁴ But I should say that it is not a mistake that Craig makes, however. He too presents Descartes as working with a different conception of the IGD. (See Craig, pp. 23-27) Our models of Descartes' IGD mostly overlap but do diverge. I will not pursue the points of similarity and difference.

Descartes should not be seen as attempting to strengthen and improve the Rationalist Model, but rather as developing a competing picture of the nature of man. Where the Rationalist Model turns our focus on the intellect, Descartes' approach to the IGD centers on the will. Indeed, in the "Fourth Meditation," Descartes identifies the will, not the intellect, as that faculty by which we most resemble God.

It is only the will...which I experience within me to be so great that the idea of any greater faculty is beyond my grasp; so much so that it is above all in virtue of the will that I understand myself to bear in some way the image and likeness of God.²⁵

The will, considered as a faculty, i.e., considered in-itself, is a power either to "affirm or deny, pursue or avoid."²⁶ So considered in-itself it is without limitation, and thus, in Descartes' estimation, if anything, it is that in us which most resembles God. But, of course, in man the will comes packaged with an intellect, which is to say it comes *constrained*.

The real nuts and bolts of Descartes' view of the mind are to found in the "Fourth Meditation." It's there that Descartes first gives his novel account of the nature of the essential activity of finite mental substances, *judgment*. Traditionally, the will's role in judgment was limited to the ability to command the intellect to make a judgment; the act of judgment itself was an act of the faculty of the intellect. But Descartes tells us, "I

²⁵ *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol II. Translated by Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch. (Cambridge, 1984) p. 40. Hereafter simply "PWD," followed by volume and page number.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

[attribute] the act of judging, which consists solely in assent, that is in affirmation or negation, not to the perception of the understanding, but to the determination of the will.”²⁷ This pioneering move has many implications, but for our purposes I want to draw out its implications for the concept of “rest.” For while Descartes’ version of the teleology of the mental realm does allow for a sense of rest, it is rest “voluntarist-style.” Again, we find that what puts the Cartesian model so deeply at odds with the Rationalist Model is that this is rest without *contemplative participation*. The special place he gives the will combined with his modal voluntarism means that Cartesian *rest* should not be conceived of as the achievement of union with God’s intellect.

However, contemplative participation is not the only conceivable form of rest. Cartesian rest takes the form of *satisfaction of one’s epistemic duty*. I find that my will bows before clear and distinct ideas. The pure intellectual beauty of these ideas, their clarity and distinctness, elicits my assent. But it is the so-called “Trademark Argument” that assures me that I, the meditator, can trust my clear and distinct perceptions and so I can trust that I have not violated my intellectual obligations when I assent before them. It is not that I see in the content of the ideas themselves that these conform to eternal and immutable laws of reason and that that is why I assent. Rather, they have the Divine Lawmaker’s seal upon them, “clarity and distinctness.” Could the King have authorized different laws and thus different ideas have carried the seal? I can’t deny the possibility. But neither can I affirm it.²⁸ The salient point is that I simply *cannot* refuse them assent.

²⁷ *PWD*, II.307. See also Anthony Kenny’s, “Descartes on the Will,” reprinted in his *The Anatomy of the Soul*, (Blackwell, 1973) p. 88.

²⁸ On the importance of the wording of this point, see Jonathan Bennett’s *Learning from Six Philosophers*, vol. 2, chapter 24, “Descartes’ Theory of Modality.” (Oxford University Press, 2001).

Once the intellect perceives them clearly and distinctly, the will capitulates. That's just a fact about my nature, my nature as a finite mind with a finite, i.e., constrained will.²⁹

We are, of course, accustomed to thinking of Descartes primarily in terms of his division of reality into the conscious and the non-conscious, into that which enjoys awareness, and that which does not. This makes it easy to conceive of the Cartesian “thinking thing” on the model of a passive contemplator, a subject of perception. This is not entirely off-base. My present point is limited simply to the claim that it is also true that embedded in Descartes’ work is a more active view man, a view of man as a *thinker* of thoughts, rather than merely a subject or locus of thoughts. In Descartes’ work there is evidence of movement toward of a view of man as something whose primary mode of being is deeply tied to his status as an *agent*. This is something that the Rationalist Model does not capture nearly as well.

Obviously, this will add to the attraction of the Cartesian Model of the IGD over the Rationalist Model especially when considered against the latter’s standard problems. But the cost is heavy. The chief attraction of the Standard Model is that the Insight Ideal encourages us to see God’s nature as intelligible. But the centrality of the Cartesian Model’s modal voluntarism leaves us with a particularly impenetrable kind of negative theology. If God is not bound by the laws of logic then we will be drawn toward an especially dark reading of that scripture, “[M]y thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways, my ways.”³⁰ On the Cartesian Model, God’s ways are opaque to our intellect.

²⁹ Provided the “Trademark Argument” succeeds.

³⁰ Isaiah, 55:8.

III. Whichcote and the Rationalist Model

Traditionally, it is within the framework of the Rationalist Model that Whichcote's work has been interpreted.³¹ It must be granted that there is a ready way to align Whichcote with the Rationalist Model via his views about the relationship among morality, religion, and reason. It can be presented in two steps. First, Whichcote sees *morality* as the very substance of religion,

No man is as God made him, or as God will take pleasure in him; who is not Renewed and Restored by the Moral part of religion; and the Moral part of Religion is Final to the other.³²

According to Whichcote, much of what we often associate with "religion," manners of worship, ritual, church organization, etc., simply are not basic to religion. Rather they belong to religion to the extent that they serve some instrumental function in support of the moral part of religion. Whichcote was regarded as a "latitudinarian" about such instrumental matters. For the most part, people may reasonably differ about correct manners of worship, etc. So long as we agree in morals, we should approach the rest with an attitude of tolerance.

Fortunately, when it comes to morals, the true heart and soul of religion, agreement is well within our reach. This brings us to the second step in connecting Whichcote to the

³¹ If we were to extend Stephen Darwall's highly original treatment of Cudworth to Whichcote, then his interpretation would be something of an outlier that would have to be dealt with separately. See Chapter 5 of Darwall's *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought'* (Cambridge, 1995).

³² *Aphorisms*, 415, p. 48.

Rationalist Model: his moral rationalism. Whichcote's moral rationalism is rooted in his metaphysics of morals. As he sees it, "Morals have their foundation, in the *Nature* of God; and the matter of them is necessary and unalterable."³³ Understanding the relation that Whichcote sees between moral realism and God's nature requires understanding the importance he placed on rejecting the theological voluntarism that was at the heart of the then ascendant Calvinist theology.

Whichcote and Calvin, both agree with one of the basic tenets of the IGD: man is not as he ought to be. They also both agree that this is not and cannot be true of God. "In God, it *is* always infallibly as it *should be*,"³⁴ Whichcote writes, and Calvin would agree. But they differ as to why this is true. This difference makes all the difference. Whichcote insists that, "God only can say, 'He will because He will' because his Will is always in conjunction with Right."³⁵ But Calvin will reject the second half of that claim on the basis of his theological voluntarism:

God's will is so much the highest rule of righteousness that whatever he wills, by the very fact that he wills it, must be considered righteous. When, therefore, one asks why God has so done, we must reply: because he has willed it. But if you proceed further to ask why he has so willed, you are seeking something greater than God's will, which cannot be found.³⁶

³³ *Ibid.* 1121, p. 130.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 937, p. 104.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 413, p. 48.

³⁶ *Institutes of the Christian Religion* III.xxii.2 (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1960).

God's will is the *origin* of those laws that bind us. His will *by its very nature* cannot be constrained. Acts are not intrinsically right or wrong, rather, some act is right or wrong *because* God wills it so. To think otherwise is to imagine that there is something to which God's will is answerable. So where the Rationalist Model, via the Insight Ideal, gives priority to God's *intellect* in our conception of Him, Calvin's theological voluntarism gives priority to His *will*.

Whichcote sees this as a fundamental mistake, one he inveighs against repeatedly.

Good and Evil are not by positive Institution; are not things arbitrary; or during any pleasure whatsoever; but Just Right and Holy, Wicked Impious and Profane, are so by their own nature and quality. If we understand this, as we ought; we abide in the Truth: if not we are Self-flatterers; and live in a Lye. Things are as they are; whether we think so or not: and we shall be judged by things, as they be; not by our own presumptuous Imagination.³⁷

God does not because of his Omnipotency, deal Arbitrarily with us; but according to Right, and Reason: and whatever he does, is therefore Accountable; because Reasonable.³⁸

The power of God's will does not extend to the ability to determine what is good and what is not. Rather, "some things must be good in themselves: else there could be no Measure, whereby to lay-out Good and Evil."³⁹ Consequently,

³⁷ *Aphorisms*, 116, p. 15.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 417, p. 48.

Will cannot be the first rule: because will is changeable; and, if you change Will, Good and Evil wou'd change. If there were no Difference in things, there cou'd be no Inconsistencies. There is Difference in things themselves; antecedent to all use of Power and Will. This is Fundamental to Religion and Conscience.⁴⁰

In the spirit of a good Christian Platonist, Whichcote's understanding of God's nature gives His *goodness* and His *intellect* priority over His *will*. God's power flows from His nature and so God cannot change His nature. Since "[m]orals have their foundation, in the *Nature* of God," it follows that even God is not able to alter them.⁴¹

So Whichcote conceives of the facts of morality as enjoying exactly the same standing as the Rationalist Model accords those of geometry and arithmetic. All but the modal voluntarist will refuse to agree that God cannot make a square triangle. The rest will simply say that nothing with more than one right angle can be a triangle because having such a property is incompatible with the intrinsic nature of a triangle. God, being omniscient, knows that. So there is no possibility of His willing to make an impossible object. Likewise, Whichcote will deny that it is any constraint on God's will that what is good is *absolutely, necessarily, immutably* so. It is the intrinsic nature of an act of wanton cruelty that makes it morally repugnant and its moral repugnancy is what makes it absolutely incompatible with God's intrinsic nature. It is because God is wholly good and omniscient that he wills for us to abjure cruelty.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 273, p. 33.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 333, p. 40

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 1121, p. 130.

Moreover, as with the truths of geometry, reason allows us to perceive the moral facts.

The Rule of Right is, the Reason of Things; the Judgment of Right is, the Reason of our Minds, perceiving the Reason of things.⁴²

As with the geometric truths, when the reason-seeking intellect perceives these truths it finds rest, for it finds that “the intellectual nature is necessarily and unavoidably under an obligation to [them].”⁴³ It finds satisfaction in them by perceiving their necessity. Thus, we can have “demonstration in morals that [are] as clear and satisfactory as any demonstration in mathematics.”⁴⁴ When it comes to morality “these are things that are self-evident; no sooner is a man told of them, but he knows them to be true.”⁴⁵ Our knowledge of moral truths is via the exercise of reason and it is knowledge of the fundamental structure of reality because it is knowledge of the deepest, unalterable nature of God Himself. The exercise of reason gives us a glimpse of the Divine Nature from the divine perspective.

Whichcote summarizes, “Morals may be known by the Reason of Things; Morals are owned, as soon as spoken; and they are nineteen parts in twenty, of all Religion.”⁴⁶

⁴² *Ibid.* 33, p. 5.

⁴³ “The Moral Part of Religion Reinforced by Christianity,” in *The Works of the Learned Benjamin Whichcote*, vol. II, p. 237. New York: Garland, 1977) A Garland reprint of the (J. Chalmers) 1751 edition. All references to Whichcote’s sermons will be to this edition. Hereafter simply “*Works*,” followed by volume number, then page number.

⁴⁴ *Works*, IV, p. 307.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* II, p. 238.

⁴⁶ *Aphorisms*, 586, p. 68.

This, of course, puts the kibosh on any hopes of assimilating Whichcote's view of the IGD to the Cartesian Model. The grounds of Whichcote's rejection of theological voluntarism align him against Cartesian modal voluntarism—as his pupil, Cudworth, clearly saw. Against Descartes' claimed need to secure the reliability of our clear and distinct perceptions, Cudworth writes, “No man ever was or can be deceived in taking that for an epistemological truth which he clearly and distinctly apprehends, but only in assenting to things not clearly apprehended by him, which is the only true original of error.”⁴⁷ This, *pace* Passmore, is not to “oppose Descartes by Cartesianism[;]” it is to attack the very heart of the Cartesian Model of the IGD.⁴⁸ And this Cudworth learned from Whichcote.

In light of the preceding we can grant that it is with justification that Whichcote and, indeed, the rest of the Cambridge Platonists have traditionally been tied to the Rationalist Model via the Insight Ideal.⁴⁹ Here, for example, is the influential voice of Ernst Cassirer,

In seventeenth-century England the philosophers of the Cambridge Circle are almost the last to represent...the spirit and ethos of pure contemplation. For justification they can appeal to that thinker who is their real leader and teacher as well in metaphysical speculation as in moral conduct. All action, Plotinus had

⁴⁷ Ralph Cudworth, *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, vol. I (London: 1678) p. 208.

⁴⁸ J.A. Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth: An Interpretation* (Cambridge, 1951) p. 9.

⁴⁹ Now, it has to be admitted that a few scholars have been tempted to align the Cambridge Platonists with Descartes. But this is because they do not take into account his modal voluntarism. Passmore is a conspicuous instance. It is Cudworth that he aligns with Cartesianism. Passmore is, in effect, just placing Descartes within the Rationalist Model via the Insight Ideal and so thereby places Cudworth there too.

taught, entangles us in the world and subjects us to its sham and magic, of which pure theory alone is free. True happiness does not lie in action, but in insight[.]⁵⁰

Cassirer's "ethos of pure contemplation" is, of course, the "scientific ethic" of Craig's Insight Ideal.

As for Craig himself, his overall aims and space constraints limit the amount of attention he gives the Cambridge Platonists, but he says enough to make his opinion clear. He takes the Cambridge Platonists to be prime examples of philosophers working within the tradition of the Rationalist Model.

[A] rich source to which attention should at least be drawn is the work of the Cambridge Platonists, where the approximation of human reason to the reason of God is a recurrent theme, and where we even find the near-mystical...suggestion that under favorable circumstances, they actual merge.⁵¹

⁵⁰ *The Platonic Renaissance in England*, translated by James P. Pettegrove, (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1953), p. 50.

⁵¹ He proceeds to quote Richard Price's take on Cudworth:

According to Dr. Cudworth, abstract ideas are implied in the cognoscitive power of the mind; which, he says, contains in itself virtually...general notions of things, which are exerted by it, so unfold and discover themselves as occasions invite and proper circumstances occur. This, no doubt, many will freely condemn as whimsical and extravagant. I have, I own, a different opinion of it; but yet, I should not care to be obliged to defend it. It is what he thought Plato meant by making all knowledge to be Reminiscence; and in this, as well as other respects, he makes the human mind to resemble the Divine; to which the ideas and comprehension of all things are essential, and not to be derived from any foreign source. [*Review of the Principle Question of Morals*, (Oxford, 1948) pp. 30-1]

If we look to more recent scholarship we find this traditional interpretation continues to dominate. The most recent, extended discussion of Cambridge Platonism is to be found in Michael Gill's work on Whichcote and Cudworth.⁵² Gill makes self-conscious use of Craig's approach. In fact, one way to read his discussion of Whichcote and Cudworth is as picking up where Craig left off, both fleshing out and pursuing the consequences. In the following it is Cudworth who is the immediate object of discussion, but what Gill says here accurately reflects his take on how Whichcote sees things as well.

God is a geometer. ...The feature of God that dominates...is His perfect understanding of eternal and immutable truths. ...To be God-like involves possessing perfect understanding. ...[W]hen we fully comprehend the necessary truth of a theorem, we have in our mind an idea of the theorem that is exactly the same as the idea of it that exists in the mind of God. Our moments of absolute certainty unite us with God.⁵³

As Gill then pithily puts it, "Geometry is a sacrament."

- The Superaddition Problem

With Gill on our minds, let's now turn to his Superaddition Problem (SAP). It is a perfectly straightforward problem that, if not successfully countered, presents a serious challenge to Whichcote's strategy for reconciling reason with the Christian religion.

⁵² In addition to the works already mentioned see also his "Rationalism, Sentimentalism, and Ralph Cudworth," *Hume Studies* 30: 149-81.

⁵³ Gill, (2006) p. 107.

Whichcote, as we saw, tells us that morals make up “nineteen parts in twenty of religion.” It is time to pursue the twentieth part. In addition to the moral part of religion there is also the “instrumental” part. Unlike the moral part of religion these things are not discoverable by pure reason alone. Take, for example, a famously controversial case—especially at the time—the Eucharist. Whichcote would say that consideration of the nature of the ritual act itself and the nature of man will not result in reason coming to the conclusion that “the intellectual nature is necessarily and unavoidably under an obligation to [it].”⁵⁴ Rather, we have it on the authority of the bible that this act is part of religion. Now, one can make a case that the Eucharist serves an instrumental function to morality. One might, for example, appeal to the way it can contribute to the experienced unity of a congregation and the way this can contribute to the commitments to the moral norms of that community, etc. The point however, is that the act in-itself does not fall within the realm of morals. We should tolerate differences of opinion here because here we are not dealing with “things that are self-evident,” things that “no sooner is a man told of them, but he knows them to be true.” If demonstrative certainty were within everyone’s reach on this matter there would be no deep divide over the importance of the Eucharist to Christian worship. It could be settled by appeal to the geometry of the Eucharist. Here a certain degree of latitude and an attitude of tolerance are called for.

However, in addition to both the instrumental and moral part of religion, Whichcote holds that there is one “grand institution.” And like the moral part, it is indispensable to

⁵⁴ *Works*, II. 237.

religion, Christ. To the moral part of religion, he writes, “the gospel superadds the going to God in and through Jesus Christ.”⁵⁵

Now it is clear enough why Whichcote believes that Christ is necessary for our salvation.⁵⁶ Our salvation lies in our partaking of God, our union. However, standing in the way of our participation with God are two inter-related facts: The first concerns our need for *union* with God and the second our need for *forgiveness* from God. The first problem is that even though we are made in God’s image, the differences between us are significant enough to bar participation. Unlike God, we are finite by nature. (So, for instance, participation in His immortality should be outside our nature.) The problem, then, is to understand how, given our inherent differences, human nature and Divine Nature can be united. The second problem concerns forgiveness. Not only do man and God significantly differ in terms of inherent nature, man has made himself repugnant, even contrary, to the Divine Nature by sullyng himself with sin. So what is required for our participation is not merely the union of Divine and human nature, but the manner of union must be such as to bring about *reconciliation*. God’s forgiveness is necessary.

Now, of course, Christians claim that this reconciliation has been brought about. With respect to the matter of union, they claim that God brought this about via the creation of a “middle-person,” one who is both fully Divine and fully human, Christ. About *how* the person of Christ unites these two natures Christians, typically, will have nothing to say. The orthodox view is that this is a mystery. The central point is that in reconciling the

⁵⁵ *Works*, II. 62.

⁵⁶ See “The Mediation of Christ the Grand Institution of God.” Discourses XLIII, XLIV, XLV *Works*, II. pp. 285-338.

two the possibility of participation is opened. This orthodox view is Whichcote's view as well.

In the Incarnation of Christ, we understand, God in conjunction with humane Nature; and this strengthens our Faith that humane Nature may be conjoined to God eternally.⁵⁷

But there is still the matter of forgiveness. Again, Christianity tells us that Christ is not only a middle-person but that he is also a *mediator*. Not only does Christ unite the Divine and unsullied human nature within himself, he also acted as a mediator on our sullied behalf by sacrificing himself in payment for our sins. In doing so He secured a means for us to achieve reconciliation with God. Christians claim that because of this act, God will grant forgiveness to those who believe in Christ.

But there's the rub. It will be immediately clear that belief in Christ is incompatible with the Rationalist Model. The most obvious problem is that belief in Christ requires believing in the Incarnation and that requires belief in a mystery. But how can the rational intellect oblige one to believe in a mystery?

With that granted, however, three points should be addressed with regard to calling it a "mystery." First, saying that it is a mystery does not mean that (i) we see it to be impossible. It is one thing not to know how or if something is possible and another to know that something is impossible. I know that it is impossible for a square to be round. I may be deeply puzzled as to how human nature and Divine Nature can be united, but that

⁵⁷ *Aphorisms*, 306, p. 36.

is quite different, in fact, incompatible, with believing it to be impossible. Secondly, in saying that it is a mystery, Whichcote means that (ii) no amount of human reasoning on the matter will lay the metaphysical nature of this union clear to our intellect. This is not to say that it is something that is, by its nature, unintelligible. Finally, that point should also be distinguished from the claim that (iii) no amount of reasoning will reveal that if we live up to all our moral duties that God, by his nature, is obliged to grant salvation/deification to us. The difference between (ii) and (iii) is that we might grant (ii) yet deny (iii). We might admit that reason cannot show us how the union between human and divine nature is possible while, at the same time, holding that consideration of God's nature, namely that he is the height of all goodness allows one to know that if we fulfill our moral duties, God will grant salvation through deification. *How* He reconciled human and His own nature would remain a mystery, but not *that* He did it. Whichcote denies (i) and accepts both (ii) and (iii). God's divine goodness includes justice. While justice does not *necessitate* punishment for wrongdoing, neither does it *necessitate* forgiveness. The most we can say is that because God's goodness is so great, it is reasonable to believe that such a being would provide for recovery of His lapsed creation. As Whichcote puts it,

[T]hough reconciliation was wrought by Christ, it was contrived by the wisdom and goodness of God: his goodness did move God to find out a way : he had it first in his thoughts : it is the glorious product of infinite wisdom and goodness in conjunction. And if it be lawful to compare God's works with one another, it is far more glorious work to reclaim a lapsed creature than to make a creature out of

nothing : for there is nothing so much of goodness in it. To make that that was miserable happy, is the work of infinite grace, and goodness and compassion.

Thus you see, the business of reconciliation is both acceptable to God and man.⁵⁸

So, in short,

1. Sin is Pardonable; 2. God hath a right to pardon; 3. It is very credible, God will pardon those who repent.⁵⁹

But regardless of its credibility, this is to admit that no act of reason, as conceived of by the Rationalist Model, can *oblige* the intellect to believe in Christ. Yet, despite the impotence of the rational intellect in such matters Whichcote still holds that we *must* believe in Christ if we are to partake of God. And so, at this point, you will be anticipating Gill's objection. On the supposition that our deification requires that we believe in Christ, what happens to the identification of reason and religion? We must believe in Christ, but the 'must' here would not seem to be the logical 'must' of the Rationalist Model. Certainly, the evidence for Christ's existence does not fit the specifications of the Insight Ideal. Gill writes,

When we fully exercise our rational faculties we become God-like. But God is as certain of religion as one can possibly be about anything. If therefore, our understanding of religion is truly God-like, then we too will be as certain of it as

⁵⁸ *Works*, II.275.

⁵⁹ *Aphorisms*, 1156, p. 135.

one can possibly be. Thus religion will be entirely “clear” and “intelligible” to our rational faculty.⁶⁰

But assurance of Christ’s existence is something we have on the basis of biblical testimony and, as Gill says, “It is difficult to see how the need to accept Christ can be self-evident and demonstrably certain if we require the historical narrative of the gospel to learn of it.”⁶¹ The upshot would seem to be that believing in Christ would serve to make ourselves *less* God-like. Understandably, Gill concludes that “Whichcote’s profoundly theistic view of human nature is ultimately incompatible with the belief that is fundamental to his Christianity.”⁶²

IV. Whichcote and the Cambridge Platonists Against the Rationalist Model

It seems clear to me that if Whichcote is working within the tradition of the Rationalist Model, then the SAP presents a serious difficulty. However, it also seems clear to me that he is not. The reason is quite simple: *It is one thing to know what one ought to do, but it is another thing to act on that knowledge.* As jejune as this point is, everything hangs on it because it is central to Whichcote’s understanding of the IGD. As he repeatedly insists,

The things of God are not made ours, by a mere Notion and Speculation; but when they become in us a vital Principle, when they establish in us a State and

⁶⁰ Gill, (1999) p. 281.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 290.

⁶² *Ibid.* 271.

Temper, when the things of God are Grounds and Principles of suitable Operations.⁶³

Whichcote rejects the Insight Ideal. True: “Religion is...the being as much like God as Man can be like him[.]”⁶⁴ True: knowledge plays an indispensable role in religion. If we are to actualize the image of God in us, religion requires that we first *know* what our proper condition is. To *be* as we ought to be we must *know how we ought to act* in order to change ourselves from our current condition to our proper condition. However, *we must also then act on that divinely perspicuous knowledge.*

The Notion of *Faith in God*, comprehends in it *Fidelity to God*.⁶⁵

Knowledge is necessary, but not sufficient for a man to be religious.

If there be no knowledge, there is no *Beginning* of Religion; if there be no Goodness, there is no *Sincerity* of Religion; but a Contradiction to it; by “*holding the Truth in Unrighteousness.*”⁶⁶

Where the Rationalist Model emphasizes God’s *intellect* and thus presents the Insight Ideal as capturing the nature of our participation with God, Whichcote emphasizes God’s

⁶³ *Aphorisms*, 132, p. 17.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 381, p. 45.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 922, p. 103.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 4, p. 1.

goodness. “*Goodness* is the proper Notion of God.”⁶⁷ And “[t]o believe there is a God; is to believe the existence of all possible Good and Perfection; in the Universe.”⁶⁸ And it is, of course, *moral* goodness that Whichcote regards as the highest form of the good. Reason perceives the good. And since the good is the very nature of God Himself, my intellectual recognition of the good is, in one sense, participation with God. But as Whichcote says,

Reason is the *first* Participation from God; and Virtue is the *second*.⁶⁹

Reason is the *first* because reason is “the very Voice of God.”⁷⁰ As rational beings we are the only creatures who can hear this voice; reason is what allows us this first participation. But reason is also *merely* the first. Reason is “the Divine Governor of Man's Life”⁷¹ but the Governor can only *command*. It is left to us to *fulfill*, those commands.

The *first* act of Religion, is to *Know* what is True of God the *second* act is to *Express* it in our Lives.⁷²

The first participation without the second is “holding the truth in unrighteousness,”

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 787, p. 88.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 70, p. 10.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 633, p. 73.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 76, p. 11.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.* 219, p. 27.

and that, Whichcote tells us, is to put one's self in "*contradiction*" to religion. To be truly religious is to *imitate God in His moral perfections*.

Religion, which is in Substance our Imitation of God, in his Moral Perfections of Goodness, Righteousness, and Truth; is that wherein our *Happiness* doth consist.⁷³

A man is made as truly holy by morals as he is made sound by Health and strong, by strength. We must *be* in our measure, degree, and proportion, in respect of moral perfections of Holiness, Righteousness, Goodness and Truth; what *God is* in his highth, excellency, and Fulness. *For in all moral perfections, God is imitable by us*; We may resemble God: God is communicable to us; We may partake of Him.⁷⁴

It is not enough to study the things of Religion in order to be religious anymore than it is enough to study the rules of soccer to be a good player. Whichcote urges, "Let us study to *be* That, which we call Religion; to *be* it, and to *Live* it."⁷⁵ To *be* religious requires *action*.

- Natural Knowledge & Divine Knowledge

In addition, it essential that we be as careful as the Cambridge Platonists were to

⁷³ *Ibid.* 708, p. 81

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 442, p. 51. [Emphasis added to "For in all moral perfections".]

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 385, p. 45.

distinguish two senses of “knowledge” that the Insight Ideal conflates. We must distinguish “natural knowledge” from “divine knowledge.” Natural knowledge is what Whichcote is referring to when he refers to the knowledge that may be had by “mere Notion and Speculation,” e.g., geometric knowledge or knowledge of basic moral facts. This kind of knowledge is to be distinguished from “divine knowledge.” This is the knowledge one can only have when religion has “become in us a vital principle.” This knowledge is not to be thought of as an intellectual awareness of some state of affairs had via the perception of the reasoning faculty in us. It is a kind of knowledge that can only be had through the *self-awareness* enjoyed by someone who *acts as reason, the “voice of God,” dictates*.

We’ve already seen basis for the distinction in Whichcote’s works, but there is unmistakable evidence that he effectively inculcated the importance of this distinction to his students. It is, for instance, the central subject of Cudworth’s discourse “The Manifestation of Christ and the Deification of Man”⁷⁶ and also his famous “Sermon Preached before the House of Commons.”⁷⁷ For instance, from the latter:

[I]t is but the Flesh, and body, of Divine Truths, that is printed upon Paper; which many Moths of Books and Libraries, do onley feed upon; many Walking Scheltons of knowledge, that bury and entombe Truths, in the Living Sepulchres of their souls, do onley converse with: such as never did any thing else but pick at the mere Bark and Rind of Truths, and crack the Shells of them. But there is a

⁷⁶ Reprinted in C.A. Patrides, *The Cambridge Platonist* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1970) pp. 62-76. Hereafter simply “Patrides,” followed page number.

⁷⁷ Patrides, 90-127.

Soul, and Spirit of divine Truths, that could never yet be congealed into Inke, that could never be blotted upon Paper...being able to lodge nowhere but in a Spirituall being, in a Living thing; because it self is nothing but Life and Spirit. Neither can it, where indeed it is, expresse it self sufficiently in Words and Sounds, but it will best declare and speak it self in Actions[.]⁷⁸

But it was, not surprisingly, in the work of Whichcote's student, John Smith, where this crucial aspect of Cambridge Platonism found its most eloquent expression. Smith regarded the distinction between natural and divine knowledge as so important that it forms the subject of the opening chapter of his *Select Discourses*, "The True Way or Method of Attaining divine knowledge."⁷⁹ He begins the chapter by explicitly connecting, like Cudworth, divine knowledge with *action*.

We shall...as a prolegomenon or preface to what we shall afterward discourse upon the heads of divinity, speak something of this True Method of Knowing, which is not so much by *Notions* as *Actions*; as Religion it self consists not so much in *Words* as *Things*.⁸⁰

He then draws the distinction between divine as opposed to natural knowledge that we have just been describing.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 108.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 128-44.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 128.

...It is but a thin and airy knowledge that is got by mere Speculation, which is usher'd in by Syllogisms and Demonstrations; but that which springs forth from true Goodness, is "more sacred than any evidence" as Origen speaks, it brings such a Divine light into the Soul, as is more clear and convincing than any Demonstration.⁸¹

He proceeds to explain that divine knowledge can only be had from the *first-person* perspective.

The Soul itself hath it sense, as well as the Body: and therefore David, when he would teach us how to know what Divine Goodness is, calls not for Speculation but Sensation. Taste and see how good the Lord is. That is not the best and truest knowledge of God which is wrought out by the sweat of the Brain, but that which is kindled within us by an heavenly warmth in our Hearts. As in the Body it is the Heart that sends up good Blood and warm Spirits into the Head, whereby it is best enabled to its several functions; so *that which enables us to know and understand aright in the things of God must be a living principle of Holiness within us.*⁸²

Divine knowledge is only to be had from the first-person perspective in reflection on the self to the extent that one acts in accord with the demands of morality. It will terribly mislead if we model this kind of knowledge, as the Rationalist Model does, on veridical visual perception of a spatially distant object. That will leave us in the passive perceiver's

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 130.

⁸² *Ibid.* 129

seat, always some distance from our object and so, always separated from our proper end. Divine knowledge is *first-person experiential* knowledge of the *self*. It is the experience of a self's return to its proper state, the image of God. Again, from Smith,

We want not so much *Means* of knowing what we ought to do, as *Wills* to do that which we may know. But yet all that Knowledge which is separated from an inward acquaintance with Vertue and Goodness, is of a far different nature from that which arises out a true *living sense* of them, which is the *best discerner* thereof and by which alone we know the true Perfection, Sweetness, Energie and Loveliness of them, and all that which is “neither spoken or written,” that which can no more be known by a naked Demonstration, then Colours can be perceived of by a blinde man by any Definition or Description which he can hear of them.⁸³

Divine knowledge necessarily requires natural knowledge of what is morally right, but divine knowledge is a kind of self-knowledge that can only come when we *manifest* our true nature.

Turning, just briefly, from Whichcote's students to his wider intellectual circle, we find that, on this head, Henry More's pursues the exact same points that they do:

Now I affirm this pleasure to arise from a Sense of Virtue; and it is erroneous to think the Fruit of Virtue should consist in Such imaginary knowledge as is gotten by bare Definitions of Virtue: for this amounts to no more, than if a man would

⁸³ *Ibid.* 139.

pretend to know the Nature of Fire from the bare Picture of Fire, which can afford no Heat. All kind of Vital Goods (as I may take the liberty to call them) are by our Life and Senses to be judged of, and enjoyed. And Virtue is in it self an inward life, not an outward shape, or to be discovered by the Eye. According to that memorable Saying of Plotnius: *If you ever were the thing it self, you may then be said to have seen it.*⁸⁴

Of course, as we saw in section (III), much of what Whichcote says about the nature of our knowledge of morals so perfectly harmonizes with the tone and content of what the Rationalist Model says about the nature of our knowledge of certain “scientific” facts that it is then tempting to see Whichcote as advocating for the Insight Ideal of participation. The only difference being that instead of emphasizing the quality of our knowledge of certain scientific facts, Whichcote tends to emphasize the quality of our knowledge of moral facts. But this clearly mistakes the point of Whichcote and Cambridge Platonists emphasis on the quality of knowledge of morals. They are not advocates of Cassirer’s “ethos of pure contemplation.” They clearly reject Craig’s “contemplative or scientific ethic” wherein “no mention is made of how we act or what we do” in which, “it is where we *look*, what we *see*, which makes up or worth.” And it is not true, as Gill’s suggests, that “[t]he feature of God that dominates...is His perfect understanding of eternal and immutable truths.” God is not so much the ideal geometer as he is the *ideal moral agent*. “A rule in practice is a notion incarnate,” writes Whichcote.⁸⁵ To imitate God in His moral perfections means making the reason-revealed, eternal and

⁸⁴ Henry More, *Enchiridion Ethicum*, English translation of 1690. (The Facsimile Text Society, 1930) I.ii.9.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 177, p. 22.

immutable laws of morality *incarnate* in us, by *acting* on them—by *actualizing* them in ourselves. This implies a very different view of human nature of and thus of the nature of end, participation with God. Virtue is the true sacrament, not geometry.

V. The IGD: Cambridge Platonist Model

So it is a mistake to assimilate Whichcote's view of the IGD to the Rationalist Model. Is it then to be assimilated to the Cartesian Model? In the past, some have been inclined to connect Cambridge Platonism with Cartesianism.⁸⁶ While Descartes' work does not appear to have been much on Whichcote's mind, the same cannot be said for the other Cambridge Platonists. Henry More was an early, influential advocate of Cartesianism, and Cudworth often discusses and praises Descartes' work in a number of different contexts. The problem, of course, is that modal voluntarism lies at the heart of the Cartesian Model of the IGD and this, as we already know, is deeply incompatible with Whichcote's rejection of theological voluntarism.

However, we have seen one place in which Whichcote's approach makes contact with the Cartesian Model. I said that Descartes' model of the IGD had the advantage of giving greater place to seeing man as an *agent* than did the Rationalists Model. And we have just seen that at the heart of Whichcote's rejection of the Rationalist Model was his emphasis on the importance of man's agency in the imitation of God. I believe what we find in Whichcote is an approach to the IGD that points the way toward reconciliation of the more attractive aspects of both the Rationalist Model and the Cartesian Model without

⁸⁶ See fn. 48

incurring the distinctive costs of either. If so, then we should recognize a third model of the IGD, the Cambridge Platonist Model. Again, we will have to settle for an outline.

- Whichcote on the Nature of Power

A good place to start is to return to Whichcote's rejection of theological voluntarism and consider the way that this reflects his view of the nature of *power*. First, it is important to recognize that, as Whichcote sees it, it is not the pride of place that the Calvinists give *power* in their understanding of God's nature that is the problem. For even Whichcote, in conceiving of God as essentially a perfect moral *agent*, is conceiving of God's nature primarily in terms of power. For both Whichcote and Calvin, it is fair to characterize His nature as "*actus purus*." However, Whichcote objects that in giving priority to the notion of God's *will* in their understanding of His nature they mischaracterize the *true nature of power*.

It is the greatest Power; to Transact all, within the Measure and Compass of Reason and Right.⁸⁷

And again,

Wisdom and Power are Perfections, only as they are in conjunction with Justice and Goodness.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 120, p. 16.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 261, p. 32.

Whichcote's concern is that the way that the Calvinists emphasize the idea of *God's will* leads one to the mistake of thinking of goodness and justice as somehow *external* to the nature of power. This, in turn, leads to the belief that if one gives goodness and justice priority over will in their conception of God, this will be tantamount to seeing goodness and justice as *confining* God's use of His will and, so, His power. Goodness and justice are then seen as *constraining* God's ways. But Whichcote is keen to convince us that such a view of the nature of power represents a dangerous mistake.

True Liberty, as well as Power, is always in Conjunction with Right and Good. It is Licentiousness and Weakness that are separated from it. It is not Power; to be arbitrary, in the Use of Power: nor Liberty; to be irregular, (without Rule and Law) in the use of Liberty.⁸⁹

Goodness is not a constraint on power because it is not external to the nature of power; Goodness is the essence of power.⁹⁰ Against Calvin's claim that "God's will is...the highest rule of righteousness," Whichcote responds,

The Law of Righteousness, is the Law of *God's Nature*, and the Law of His Actions.⁹¹

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 383, p. 45.

⁹⁰ Thus one only really exercises power when one acts as one ought. Changes of other kinds are not acts of power, properly speaking. This, I believe, is a very important point, especially when it comes to the question of the so-called "interaction-problem" as it applies to the Cambridge Platonists version of dualism. I simply can't take the matter up here. It would require, among other things, delving into Cudworth's manuscripts on free will.

To Socrates' Euthyphro dilemma Whichcote and the rest of the Cambridge Platonists pursue a Neoplatonic response: goodness and righteousness are *constitutive* principles of God's nature; they are the very substance of God's ways. Therefore, it makes no sense to conceive of them as constraints.

- Reversion without Voluntarism

With this point in mind, let's return to that aspect of Cartesianism which, via appeal to the notion of "reversion," I described as Neoplatonic in nature, i.e., the Cartesian Method. First, a few points about the concept of reversion: In a Neoplatonic system, reversion is a form of activity reserved for *simple, self-active* beings. Rather than setting out on what would be, at this point, a tedious digression through the labyrinths of Neoplatonism in order to get at the necessary aspects of the notion of reversion, let's exploit a shortcut. For present purposes we can think of the nature of the activity of reversion along the lines of the nature of "immanent causation" as it is presented in Roderick Chisholm's well-known work on "agent-causation."⁹² A key idea, you'll recall, is that in cases of immanent causation, it is the *agent itself* which is the cause of some change, and not some *state* or *property* of the agent. However, to better capture the nature of reversion we must add two points. First, we have to emphasize that the activity is directed toward the entity itself not some other entity nor, since agents are simple, is it

⁹¹ *Aphorisms*, 401, p. 47.

⁹² One should think here, primarily, of his view as expressed in his early work on agent-causation as represented in "Human Freedom and the Self." [Reprinted in *On Metaphysics* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1989).]

directed toward some *part* of themselves. What brings about change is the *agent itself* and what is changed is also the *agent itself*.⁹³ The immanent power of reversion is the power to bring about *self*-change. The second point is that, the immanent causal power of reversion is goal-directed. It is teleological in nature. The “goal” or “end” toward which this activity is ultimately directed is that from which it derives its own being. In the present context, reversion will be directed toward the image of God in oneself and, since man stands to God much as instance stands to Form, the immanent activity of reversion is ultimately directed toward that from which man derives his being, God.⁹⁴

Such a conception of immanent causation was implicit in the picture I painted of the Cartesian Method. It is the *self* which Descartes *identifies* as the thinking thing—as opposed to some *part* of the self, for example, the “speculative intellect.” And the Cartesian Method requires that this thinking thing revert upon itself qua thinking thing. It must uncover within itself the innate ideas that compose the true nature of the thinking subject. In the Cartesian system, reversion involves acting upon one’s self in such a way as to make the self’s innate ideas manifest. This takes the form of achieving “clear and distinct perception” of them. In doing this we make the innate God-like structure of the mind itself manifest and so restore the self to its proper condition and thus enjoy

⁹³ Although it may bring about changes in other things as a kind of secondary effect, a point we can ignore in the present context.

⁹⁴ Compare Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, propositions 31-34.

Prop. 31. All that proceeds from any principle reverts in respect of its being upon that from which it proceeds.

Prop. 32. All reversion is accomplished through a likeness of the reverting terms to the goal of reversion. [Cf. the IGD]

Prop. 33. All that proceeds from any principle and reverts upon it has a cyclical activity.

Prop. 34. Everything whose nature it is to revert reverts upon that from which it derived the procession of its own substance. [translated by E.R. Dodds, 2nd edition (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004) pp. 35-7.]

participation with God via a kind of inward directed, intellectual perception, i.e., “contemplative participation.”

Of course, this was the picture I presented before spoiling everything by dragging Descartes’ voluntarism into it. This meant that we had to re-conceive satisfaction of the goal of Cartesian reversion from that of achieving participation with God’s intellect to something more akin to satisfaction of our divinely-dictated epistemic duty. This we do by bringing the will back within its proper, i.e., voluntaristically-determined, constraints. The goal of Cartesian reversion is more like submission of our will to the will of God than it is like participation with His intellect. On the one hand, this had the advantage of putting agency and the fulfillment of duty forefront in participation, but on the other hand, it left God’s nature and ways opaque to the understanding.

With what we now know about Whichcote’s view of the IGD we can see him as pursuing reversion without voluntarism. The primary object of our agent-power is the fulfillment of our duty. But the shape of our duty is not determined by tracing rules which the arbitrary will of God has stamped upon the mind like a trademark. Rather they are directed toward the imitation of God, whose image is “in the mind” in the sense that it *is* the true structure of our mind. The first object of this power is the recovery of this image; “know thyself.” This structure, as the Platonic philosophy would have it, has been distorted by its descent into its present condition. Now, Whichcote’s Calvinist contemporaries explained this descent and subsequent distortion by appeal to the biblical account of man’s initial fall, and the mystery of original sin. They, in turn, emphasized man’s impotence to rectify the situation. *God’s grace* does all. Though, as we will see, Whichcote agrees that grace plays a necessary role in our participation with God, but he

rejects the Calvinist emphasis on the sufficiency of grace as a kind of “moral occasionalism,” if you will, that easily devolves into a principle destructive of the basic end of religion. He sees the Calvinists’ emphasis on the power of God’s grace and the doctrine of “unconditional election” (a.k.a. “predestination”) as destructive of morality. It is “Such an Explication of *Grace*, as sets men at liberty in *Morals*; [and] ‘Makes void the Law through Faith.’”⁹⁵ Thus, against the Calvinists’ doctrine of unconditional election he writes,

Do not think, God has done any thing concerning Thee; before thou camest into Being: whereby thou art determined, either to Sin or Misery. This is a falsehood: and they, that entertain such thoughts, live in a Lie.⁹⁶

Consistent with this he insists that ‘ought’ does imply ‘can’: “When God commands the Sinner to Repent; this supposes, either that he *is* Able; or that God will *make* him so.”⁹⁷ And so, Whichcote emphasizes, not the first fall, but the “second fault.”

The ground of man's Misery is not the *first* Fall but the *second* Fault; a Lapse upon a Lapse: for a second Sin, is not only *Another* of the same kind; but a Consummation of the first.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ *Aphorisms*, 592, p. 68.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 811, p. 91.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 516, p. 59.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 525, p. 60.

Whichcote's view of the essential nature of the self is less as a "thinking thing" and more as a *moral agent*. As he says, "Man, that is a Moral Agent, must be Morally dealt withal."⁹⁹ This, of course, implies that he is also a thinking thing for, given his approach to the metaphysics and epistemology of ethics, a moral agent must be a rational agent. However, giving priority in our conception of ourselves to our moral agency brings out—when considered alongside his take on the true nature of power—that what power we properly have is a power to bring about change with regard to the improvement of our *moral* condition, change toward better imitation of God.

In Morals it is most true; that every Man hath himself as He useth Himself: for we work out of ourselves[.]¹⁰⁰

Thus the activity of reversion is directed toward the imitation of God's moral perfections, the image of which is within us.

There is a natural Propension in every thing to *return* to its true state; if by violence it has been disturbed: should it not be so in Grace, in the divine life? Virtue is the health, the true state, natural complexion of the Soul: he, that is Vicious in his practice, is *diseased* in his mind.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 734, p. 83.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 341, p. 41.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* 34, p. 5.

The Neglect or Abuse of ourselves, is the true Original of all Sin: and to prevent or rectify such Defects and Pravities of mind in morals as arise from such Neglect or Abuse; is to be *Religious*.¹⁰²

Religion is the narrow path of reversion; it is the path of recovery.

Religion is a true Friend to Humane Nature: in the first instance, it doth Uphold and conserve; in the next, it doth Repair and Recover and Restore the Principles of God's Creation, lost in Man by ill-use, or neglect of Himself.¹⁰³

- Divine Knowledge and Restlessness

To round out our sketch of the basics of the Cambridge Platonists model of the IGD, we must revert back from where we began: man's restlessness and its satisfaction.

Whichcote identifies the lack of divine knowledge as the source of man's restlessness. As he says, "*Using and Enjoying is the true Having.*"¹⁰⁴ The experiential self-knowledge that is enjoyed when one practices religion provides a taste of the enjoyment of having properly satisfied the ultimate source of man's restlessness: his want of participation with God.¹⁰⁵ Thus, Whichcote writes,

¹⁰² *Ibid.* 31.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 948, p. 105.

¹⁰⁴ *Aphorisms*, 196, p. 24.

¹⁰⁵ "What is *Morally Good*," Whichcote says, "is so suitable to the Nature of Man; that Motion in Religion cannot but be with *Pleasantness*. (Aphorism, 15, p. 3) I note, but will not here pursue the point that it is misleading to set the Cambridge Platonists on one side or the other of the infamous Rationalists/Sentimentalists divide of early modern moral theory. Much like Butler, they would tend to treat the division as something of a mistake.

God Created Man with a Vast Capacity of Receiving, and (answerably hereunto) with a Restless Desire of, greater good; than the Creature can afford.¹⁰⁶

The Reasonable part of Man hath a peculiar Reservation for God; and its Happiness is, in its Employment about God.¹⁰⁷

To which Cudworth adds,

Man being made to know God; hath a Sense of his own Privation, in the loss of so great and universal a Good as GOD is. For he is made happy in the Enjoyment and miserable in the Loss of Him. And tho' Diversions and other Enjoyments, may give some Entertainment, for a while; yet when a Man strays at Home or returns to himself by Consideration, he feels an inward Perplexity in himself; because some necessary Good is wanting to him.¹⁰⁸

There is no bit of information that one can acquire through reasoning, no matter how strict, no matter how clear and distinct, that will resolve *this* perplexity. And there is nothing one in possession of divine knowledge can say to another, no bit of information they can convey, that will give the other what he lacks. Knowledge of the Good, which is knowledge of God's own nature, must be made a vital principle in the agent. Only then is

¹⁰⁶ *Aphorisms*, 860, p. 97.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 265, p. 32.

¹⁰⁸ *Patrides*, 74.

divine knowledge possible. Unlike the knowledge grasped via the intellect, divine knowledge is thus not properly *communicable*; it is knowledge that can only be had by way of *participation*. To put it even more Platonically, one must become as pure an instance of the Good as possible. Only then, through self-knowledge, will one have divine knowledge of God's essential nature.

VI. Resolving the Superaddition Problem

We have now quite nearly everything we need to see how the SAP is resolved. First, let's remind ourselves just what the problem is. Here is one of Gill's apposite formulations:

...Religion includes only those things each of us can determine through the use of his rational faculty alone, but Whichcote's claim that we must accept that Christ died for our sins seems to imply that religion includes the belief in an event as related to us in an externally delivered document, which belief we could never come to through the use of our rational faculty alone.¹⁰⁹

For convenience sake, let's restate the SAP in following form:

- a. Religion includes only those things each of us can determine through the use of his rational faculty alone.

¹⁰⁹ (Gill, 290)

- b. That Christ died for our sins is something we have only on the basis of an externally delivered document.
- c. We could never come to the belief that Christ died for our sins [hereafter simply “belief in Christ”] through our rational faculty [speculative intellect] alone.
- d. Therefore, a belief in Christ is not a part of religion.

Whichcote, of course, wants to claim that belief in Christ is a necessary part of religion. But that will not seem possible in the face of the SAP. So the question is how might Whichcote or, for that matter, the rest of the Cambridge Platonists respond?

Before looking at their answer, it will help to better specify just what is required for a “belief in Christ.” The SAP focus our attention on three necessary conditions, two of which we’ve already discussed. One would have to believe,

C₁. ...in the existence of a “middle-person,” that forms a (to us, mysterious) personal union of Divine and human nature.

C₂. ...that this person also *reconciled* fallen man to God (i.e., “died for our sins”).

And if, as Whichcote says, “the gospel superadds the going to God in and through Jesus Christ,” then it seems one would have to believe,

C₃. ...that *Jesus* is the person of C1 and C2.

The first thing Whichcote and the Cambridge Platonists might say in answer to the SAP is that we have already seen good reason to reject (a). That premise is designed to fit the Rationalist's Model of the IGD. Consequently, it fails to reflect the importance to religion of *acting* as reason dictates. This in turn, treats only what is known through the rational faculty as a part of religion and therefore fails to recognize the distinctive nature of divine knowledge and the essential role that the reflective faculty plays in it.

But does this really shut down the SAP? Why can't one simply weaken the problematic premise, (a), by removing 'alone' from it. In other words, the advocate for the SAP might simply grant a pair of points: first, that divine knowledge is a part of religion and second, that it is not knowledge had by the rational faculty *alone*. Both *action* and *reflection* will also be required for divine knowledge. But granting this doesn't undercut the SAP because the only way any given belief can be an object of divine knowledge is if it first an object of the rational faculty. It has to be something that that faculty perceives with "self-evident demonstrative certainty." So, for instance, suppose I grasp via my speculative, rational intellect the truth of *p* where *p* is some claim regarding how I should act in order to act virtuously. I see the truth of *p* with perfect clarity and believe it with unshakeable certainty. I then act in accordance with this perception. At this point there is then a new item of knowledge. Via reflection, I will now know something more than just the truth of *p*, I will know *what it is like to act in accordance with p*. This is something that cannot be grasped by the rational intellect

alone. However, (b) and (c) are still true. Belief in Christ enjoys only biblical support; it isn't something whose self-evident truth can be grasped by the rational intellect.

Consequently, it isn't even a candidate for divine knowledge.

This line of response will not work because an object of divine knowledge need not even be a *possible* object of the rational intellect. Again, suppose that I grasp that *p* is true via the rational intellect. So, I know that *p* and thus, in acting on *p* I come to know something else in addition, *what it is like to act on p*. The latter, we can grant, is item of divine knowledge. Let's call it *q*. Note, however, that *q* is not an object of the rational intellect. It is first person, experiential, knowledge. It is an object of the faculty of *reflection* alone.

We might leave things there. (a) will be false because although, I cannot have divine knowledge without the *operation* of the intellect, an object of divine knowledge is not properly an object of faculty of reflection alone. But there is a more important point to make: premise (b) falls with premise (a). To see why, we must keep two things in mind: the reversionary nature of virtue and the impotence of the unaided immanent power of virtue to restore and the fallen state of man. Recall that reversion is a kind of activity unique to *simple, self-active* entities. It is the *agent itself* that brings about the change (rather than some state/part within the agent) but it is also the *agent* that is changed. The agent is both the cause of the activity and the object of the activity.¹¹⁰ Thus, the agent that brought about moral action is himself changed *internally*. The change wrought is not limited to the change of going from a state of not having (yet) brought about the action to a state of having brought it about. Nor is the change limited to a state of not (yet)

¹¹⁰ Though it need not be the only object of the activity.

knowing *q* to knowing *q*. Above and beyond all this, the agent will undergo the *restoration of his divine nature and will enjoy participation with God*. And of this, the agent will enjoy divine knowledge.

Importantly, the speculative intellect will not see why this must be so. *Why should there be participation?* Again, both union and reconciliation of the Divine and human natures are necessary for participation. As far as the rational intellect can see, the unaided immanent activity of virtue alone lacks the power to produce the internal changes in the agent necessary for participation. Consequently, the speculative intellect lacks the power to move the agent to believe that such participation is actual.

However, reflection may tell another story. If the Cambridge Platonists are right, then despite that lack of the kind of demonstrative evidence the intellect requires to move us to a belief in participation, one can have divine knowledge of its actuality within oneself. What's more, this kind of knowledge is, as Smith put it, "more clear and convincing than any demonstration" and by comparison "[i]t is but a thin and airy knowledge that is got by mere Speculation, which is usher'd in by Syllogisms and Demonstrations."¹¹¹

Thus, premise (b) is false because one who is in possession of divine knowledge does not have it merely on testimony that C1 and C2 are true. The Cambridge Platonists are claiming that we can have divine knowledge of both of these facts because the condition necessary for and constitutive of divine knowledge is nothing less than having *Christ formed in oneself*. This is the full force of what it means to participate with God through the mediation of Christ. In acting as Christianity demands, one becomes a Christian and thus one knows Christ because they have formed Christ within themselves.

¹¹¹ *Patrides*, 130.

As to *know Christ*, to have *Christ formed in us*, to *be in Christ*. ...I will tell you what these mean plainly, that every body may understand. It is no more than to be a good, honest *Christian*, i.e., to follow the plain directions of our Lord and Saviour, to live according to his rules, and to endeavour to be in his spirit, and this is to *know Christ*, to have *Christ formed in us*, and to *be in Christ*. (II.82).

Just as Whichcote tells us that,

The things of God are not made ours, by a mere Notion and Speculation; but when they become in us a vital Principle, when they establish in us a State and Temper, when the things of God are Grounds and Principles of suitable Operations.¹¹²

So likewise, he tells us,

Christ is not so little, as a Name and Notion: He is a Nature, and Spirit, and Life in us.¹¹³

And that,

¹¹² *Ibid.* 131, p. 17.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 344, p. 42.

We partake of the Death of Christ; by passing into the *Spirit* of Christ. The great work of Christ in Us lies, in implanting his own Life in the lapsed degenerate souls of Men. Christ is not to be as in Notion or History; but as a Principle, a Vital Influence.¹¹⁴

Contra the suggestion of premise (b), the principle form of a belief in Christ is not the intellect's assenting to the occurrence of a historical event related to us by an external document. The principle form of a belief in Christ is active in nature. According to the Cambridge Platonists, the Gospels do not simply *assert* that we are saved through Christ and then demand that we believe it on the authority of *testimony*. Rather they say that we can have experiential knowledge of the fact. "Taste and see how good the Lord is," as Smith says. The Gospels also tell us how we can achieve this knowledge. Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life." We are to repent of our sins, ask forgiveness for them, and demonstrate fidelity to God by sinning no more against his moral law. If one does this, the Cambridge Platonists claim, they will discover from the first-person, experiential reflective standpoint that something extraordinary has happened to them: *recovery*. They will find the image of God in them restored and so will be able to enjoy participation with God. But, again, if the intellect alone considers the facts it will not grasp how the Incarnation can be achieved. It will remain a mystery. It certainly will not see that it *must* have been achieved. Nor will it find that God's goodness logically implies that He must supply for our recovery and forgive those who repent and sin no more. In short, it will not see in the immanent power of virtue alone anything that could bring about either *union* with God or *forgiveness from God*. However, reflection provides divine knowledge of the

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* 742, p. 84.

attainment of both. One will experience the grace of reconciliation because in following Christ's ways they find *Christ form in themselves* and *in the person of Christ there is both union and reconciliation with God*. The condition of enjoying divine knowledge is the condition of having Christ formed within oneself. Again, borrowing from Plotinus, "If you ever were the thing it self, you may then be said to have seen it." One will have divine knowledge of God's grace acting in accord with the immanent power of virtue so as to produce participation with the Divine. According to the Cambridge Platonists, the object of the reversionary activity of religion is, quite literally, the formation of the Christ within oneself.¹¹⁵ To the extent that one succeeds in doing this belief in both C₁ and C₂ will be backed by the authority of reflection.

This leaves C₃, the belief that *Jesus* was Christ. On this point, reflection is, of course, silent. So, of this we cannot have divine knowledge. It is a historical claim, relayed to us through testimony.

But from our present perspective this would not seem to present much of a problem. After all, testimony is evidence. And even more importantly, to one already in possession of knowledge of C₁ and C₂, that testimony will be credible.

Of course, this is to grant that no argument can force one to a belief in Christ and coming to the belief will certainly not be the work of a moment. Regardless, this means that there is nothing essential to the Christian religion that runs afoul of Whichcote's commitment to the sovereignty of reason. Again, we must not saddle him with the narrow conception of reason of the Rationalist Model of the IGD. His position is quite different.

¹¹⁵ Thus, the Cambridge Platonists' view of the nature of reflection and the kind of experience involved in divine knowledge should not be conflated with the more famous, but far less radical "moral sense" theories of later early modern thought. But this is large topic that cannot be pursued here.

Nothing without Reason is to be proposed; nothing against Reason is to be believed.”¹¹⁶

Respecting the sovereignty of reason does not demand that we make ourselves utterly passive before the intellect.

We are not to submit our Understandings to the belief of those things that are *contrary* to our Understanding. We must have a Reason, for that which we believe *above* our Reason.¹¹⁷

In all, the picture that emerges from Whichcote and the Cambridge Platonists’ model of the IGD is that to the extent that we follow reason and act on our perception of the morals truth, the more powerfully we will be drawn into a life-long activity, *Christianity*. This activity is also called “belief in Christ.” But because the nature of this belief is such that it requires fidelity it is better called “*faith* in Christ.” In acting as we ought, we make ourselves receptive to faith in Christ by working to form Christ in ourselves. Thus, Whichcote concludes,

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* 880, p. 99.

¹¹⁷ *Aphorisms*, 771, p. 87.

True Reason is so far from being an Enemy to any matter of Faith; that a man is disposed and qualified by Reason, for the entertaining those matters of Faith that are proposed by God.¹¹⁸

VII. Conclusion

In all, it would seem that Whichcote and Cambridge Platonists see the relation between Christianity and morality as a kind of positive feedback cycle built into the basic structure of our moral psychology. The stronger our commitment to morality becomes, the more firm our faith in the possibility of our ultimate salvation and deification becomes. The stronger our faith in our salvation and deification becomes, the more firm our commitment to morality becomes.

To this we might add one final point: it is no great wonder that the harmony Whichcote insisted upon between reason and faith is not so readily visible to all.

*Did Christians live according-to their Religion; They would do nothing, but what Truth, Righteousness, and Goodness do; according to their Understanding, and Ability: and then one man would be a God unto another.*¹¹⁹

Living as he did amidst the many horrors of the religious wars of the seventeenth century, he was all too aware of what people can do to one another in the name of Christianity. From all reports, it seems that this knowledge, in conjunction with his intractable faith in the deeply buried, but still living divinity at the heart of human nature,

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 64, p. 9.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* 27, p. 5.

gave rise to a powerful, benevolent passion that animated the entirety of his life, one that also, as if by procession, appears to have kindled a similar passion in many of those who came to know, as the old saying would have it, *that of God in him*.