Journal of
Scottish Thought

1495 ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY PRESS

John Witherspoon's Ethics and 'Sir Isaac Newton's Bulldog'

Dafydd Mills Daniel
SCHOOL OF DIVINITY, UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS
demd1@st-andrews.ac.uk

Abstract

This article explores the consistency of John Witherspoon's ethics between Scotland and America by comparing Witherspoon's (in)famous satire of moderatism, Ecclesiastical Characteristics: Or, the Arcana of Church Policy *(Glasgow, 1753), with Witherspoon's 'Lectures on Moral Philosophy', delivered at Princeton from 1769. In doing so, it is the first article to draw attention to, and to assess, the fundamental role that 'Sir Isaac Newton's bulldog', Samuel Clarke, plays in both the Scottish* Arcana *and American 'Lectures'. Although scholars frequently debate whether there are 'two Witherspoons' – not least because Witherspoon's American 'Lectures' seem to borrow so heavily from his nemesis in Scotland, Francis Hutcheson – it is argued here that Witherspoon's ethics are consistently Clarkean as opposed to Hutchesonian, in Scotland and America. By investigating the constancy of Witherspoon's ethics, as underpinned by his consistent use of Clarke, in both the* Arcana *and 'Lectures on Moral Philosophy', this article claims that Clarke's ethical rationalism and Newtonianism are the key to interpreting Witherspoon's position on 'Ethics' in the 'Lectures', as well as appreciating the moral philosophical subtlety of his satirical language in the* Arcana.

Keywords: *John Witherspoon; Samuel Clarke; ethical rationalism and sentimentalism; the moral sense; Francis Hutcheson, Lord Shaftesbury, and the Moderate party; Newtonianism, necessity, and Gottfried Leibniz*

Introduction

> You can have no prospects of rising into a higher sphere of usefulness in the Church of Scotland, as far as I can understand from the present state of your ecclesiastical affairs. The present ruling faction are opposed to men of your character, and (if I am rightly informed) have marked you out as an object of their resentment for those very things which have made you so popular in America and, I may say, have procured your election to the College.[1]

The quotation above is from a letter Benjamin Rush wrote to John Witherspoon on 23 April 1767, as the opening salvo in what would become Rush's eight-month long cajoling of Witherspoon to accept the post of President of the College of New Jersey, now Princeton University.

I've opened with this quotation because it relates directly to an ongoing debate in Witherspoon studies, which is part of the wider context for the article below. With due reference to a similar debate in Adam Smith studies, let's call this debate 'the Witherspoon problem'. Just then as it was once common to problematise the relationship between Adam Smith's two published works, it remains common to problematise the relationship between the two Witherspoons: Witherspoon the conservative Calvinist who, in Scotland, led the orthodox 'Popular' party against what he called 'the enlightened' 'modern infidels' and Witherspoon the College President and revolutionary who, in America, became the only clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence. For proponents of 'the Witherspoon problem', the contrast between these two Witherspoons is so great that it can be marked in equally dramatic language; consequently, the American Witherspoon is variously described as more 'enlightened', 'liberal', 'moderate', 'optimistic', 'tolerant', and/or 'secular' than the Scottish Witherspoon.[2]

---

1 Benjamin Rush, 'To John Witherspoon', in *Letters of Benjamin Rush: Volume I: 1761–1792*, ed. Lyman Henry Butterfield (Princeton, 1951), 37.

2 See: L. Gordon Tait, *The Piety of John Witherspoon: Pew, Pulpit and Public Forum* (Louisville, 2001), 28; J. Walter McGinty, *"An Animated Son of Liberty": A Life of John Witherspoon* (Bury St Edmunds, 2012), 124–6; Mark A. Noll, *Princeton and the Republic, 1768–1822* (Vancouver, 1989), 40–3 and idem, 'The Irony of the Enlightenment for Presbyterians in the Early Republic', *Journal of the Early Republic*, 5.2 (Summer 1985), 149–75; George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (Oxford, 1994), 62–3; Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, and George M. Marsden, *The Search for Christian America* (Westchester, 1983), 88–94; Douglas Sloan, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal* (New York, 1971); Jonathan Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights, 1750–1790* (Oxford, 2011), 468; Henry Farnham May, *The Enlightenment in America* (Oxford, 1978), 62–3; Jennifer Herdt, 'Calvin's Legacy for Contemporary Reformed Natural Law', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 67.4 (2014), 431, 434. DOI: 10.1017/S0036930614000192; Gregg L. Frazer, *The Religious Beliefs of America's Founders: Reason, Revelation, and Revolution* (Lawrence, 2012), 40–6.

As 'the Witherspoon problem' questions the extent to which it is possible to reconcile the Scottish Witherspoon with the American Witherspoon, the lectures the latter delivered at Princeton feature prominently in discussions of the problem. Indeed, returning to the letter from Rush above, some scholars have insisted that, as the American Witherspoon contrasts so heavily with the Scottish Witherspoon, the former's lectures at Princeton must have been, at best a shock, and at worst a disappointment, for those who invited the latter to America.[3]

Of Witherspoon's Princeton lectures, his 'Lectures on Moral Philosophy' (hereafter LMP) have been used most frequently as evidence for 'the Witherspoon problem'. With respect to LMP, the argument for 'the Witherspoon problem' usually runs as follows:[4]

In Scotland, as we shall see below, Witherspoon criticised the Moderate party within the Scottish Kirk for its devotion to Francis Hutcheson's sentimentalist moral philosophy, not least his theory of a moral sense. According to the Scottish Witherspoon, Moderate Hutchesonianism was symptomatic of their preference for modern philosophy over traditional theology, and so for contemporary fashionable authors over the Bible. At the same time, Hutchesonianism underpinned Moderate utilitarianism in ethics; moderatism not only made 'the good of the whole' the grounds for moral distinctions and conduct, but trusted optimistically to the power and sufficiency of human reason and natural affections to achieve happiness in this world, in contradiction to traditional Calvinist teaching on fallenness and sinfulness, and faith over works. Consequently, the Moderates, under the influence of Hutcheson, were overly tolerant and liberal, in a dual sense: (i) they no longer believed in a distinctive and traditional Scottish Calvinist Christianity, as outlined in the Westminster Confession; and (ii) they thought that there was no need to restrain natural and worldly instincts and desires–instead, natural human sentiment should be encouraged but made polite and tasteful by being refined through a Shaftesburian gentlemanly education, which, in line with Hutcheson's translation of Marcus Aurelius, prioritised classical philosophers over the church fathers.

By contrast, in America, it has been argued by 'Witherspoon problem' scholars, that the American Witherspoon is now a Hutchesonian himself. Indeed, LMP have been described as 'plagiarism'[5] of Hutcheson's *A System of Moral Philosophy* (Glasgow, 1755). Not only does LMP follow Hutcheson's organisation of the study of moral philosophy, but the American Witherspoon repeatedly employs Hutcheson's theory of a moral sense, trusting optimistically that human beings have a natural sentiment for moral duty. At the same time, the American Witherspoon is not only optimistic about natural human affections, but the power of unaided human reason. At the beginning of LMP, Witherspoon admits that moral philosophy can be developed without the Bible, by reason alone, and that natural reason and revelation mutually illuminate each other. Consequently, LMP reveal the American Witherspoon as adopting the 'modern' and tolerant attitudes he had dismissed in Scotland as a feature of overly

3 See, for example: Frazer, *Religious Beliefs of America's Founders*, 40–6; Marsden, *Soul of the American University*, 62–3; May, *The Enlightenment in America*, 62–3.

4 Here I summarise and synthesise the arguments given by the scholars cited in footnote 2.

5 Jack Scott (ed.), John Witherspoon, *An Annotated Edition of Lectures on Moral Philosophy by John Witherspoon* (Newark, 1982), 27.

optimistic, anti-Calvinist 'enlightened' moderatism. For example, LMP privileges a range of contemporary philosophers, not least Hutcheson, over any discussion of Reformed theologians, scripture, or doctrine. Moreover, in LMP, the purpose of such a modern and liberal education is to provide the instruction Witherspoon's students need to secure 'the good of the whole' in this world by building the ideal political society–Revolutionary America–which has as one of its distinctive features religious toleration.

In this article, my aim is to mitigate against 'the Witherspoon problem' by arguing for moral philosophical consistency between Witherspoon in Scotland and America. In LMP, Witherspoon divides the subject of moral philosophy into the subdisciplines of Ethics and Politics.[6] Focusing on the former, I shall argue that Witherspoon's ethics in his American LMP is consistent with Witherspoon's ethics in his Scottish satire of moderatism, *Ecclesiastical Characteristics: Or, the Arcana of Church Policy* (Glasgow, 1753). I have chosen to compare LMP and the *Arcana* because the latter is not only where Witherspoon delivers a scathing critique of moderatism, but because returning to the quotation from Rush above, it was the *Arcana* that contributed to Witherspoon's eventual invitation to America. As such, if the *Arcana* is consistent with LMP, we have cut through 'the Witherspoon problem'.

Of course, this article is not the first to resist 'the Witherspoon problem',[7] but it does in a new way: by exploring the consistency of the Scottish and American Witherspoons' appeals to 'Sir Isaac Newton's bulldog', Samuel Clarke. This article is the first to discuss Witherspoon's references to Clarke in LMP in any detail (where Clarke's importance has even been ignored in modern editions of LMP), and the first to compare Witherspoon's appeals to Clarke in LMP with his invocation of Clarke in the *Arcana*.[8] Indeed, while Witherspoon's references

---

6 John Witherspoon, *Lectures on Moral Philosophy and Eloquence*, 3rd edn (Philadelphia, 1810), 8. Further citation given in the text.

7 See, for example: Gary L. Steward, *Justifying Revolution: The Early American Clergy and Political Resistance* (New York, 2021), Chapter 6; Daniel W. Howe, 'John Witherspoon and the Transatlantic Enlightenment', in *The Atlantic Enlightenment*, eds Susan Manning and Francis D. Cogliano (Aldershot, 2008), 61–79; Gideon Mailer, *John Witherspoon's American Revolution* (Chapter Hill, 2017); Kevin DeYoung, *The Religious Formation of John Witherspoon: Calvinism, Evangelicalism, and the Scottish Enlightenment* (Abingdon, 2020); David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids, 2010), Chapter 6; Daniel N. Robinson, 'Witherspoon, Scottish Philosophy and the American Founding', *Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 13.3 (2015), 249–64 https://doi.org/10.3366/jsp.2015.0107; Ned C. Landsman, 'Witherspoon and the Problem of Provincial Identity in Scottish Evangelical Culture', in *Scotland and America in the Age of the Enlightenment*, eds Richard B. Sher and Jeffrey R. Smitten (Edinburgh, 1990), 29–45; Richard B. Sher, 'Witherspoon's "Dominion of Providence" and the Scottish Jeremiad Tradition', in idem *Scotland and America*, 46–64; Peter J. Diamond, 'Witherspoon, William Smith and the Scottish Philosophy in Revolutionary America', in idem, *Scotland and America*, 115–32.

8 For example, none of the works cited in footnote 7 mention Clarke (except DeYoung where his name appears once as an aside), just as Thomas Miller does not comment

to Clarke in both the *Arcana* and LMP have received mostly either scant attention or been neglected all together, when Witherspoon's appeals to Clarke in LMP are mentioned, some scholars have made them evidence for 'the Witherspoon problem'.

According to J. Walter McGinty, Witherspoon's references to Clarke in LMP are 'most surprising', and 'a measure of his broadening outlook', when, with his move to America, he came to 'see' 'views' of which he was previously 'dismissive' in Scotland as 'less challenging to his own'.[9] Gregg Frazer thinks LMP provide evidence of a secularising, 'Enlightenment rationalist', shift in Witherspoon in America, and suggests that, if Witherspoon's recommendation of Clarke in LMP is meant seriously, it provides further evidence of that shift.[10] Similarly, L. Gordon Tait is uncertain with what to make of Witherspoon's references to Clarke when discussing, not LMP, but Witherspoon's Princeton 'Lectures on Divinity'. Tait implies that Clarke features on Witherspoon's recommended reading list so that an author with questionable views can be surrounded by such 'heavyweight opponents' as Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, and Isaac Watts.[11]

For McGinty, Tait, and Frazer, therefore, the American Witherspoon's references to Clarke are problematic, and so must be 'qualified' in some way or are to be greeted with surprise. Although I will argue here that Witherspoon's appeals to Clarke are neither surprising or qualified, it is possible to appreciate this scholarly reaction when considering the latter's reputation in Scotland and America.

In Scotland, Clarke was at the 'centre' of what David Sytsma describes as 'one of the most famous moments in 18th-century Scottish church history: the suspension of Prof. John Simson by the General Assembly in 1727'.[12] Simson, Professor of Divinity at the University of Glasgow, was successfully tried by the Scottish Kirk's General Assembly for teaching Arianism, under

---

on Witherspoon's references to Clarke in his edition of *The Selected Writings of John Witherspoon* (Carbondale, 1990). Jeffry H. Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic* (Notre Dame, 2005) is another leading work that does not mention Clarke. Scott (ed.), *Annotated Lectures*, 35–39 does comment on Witherspoon's use of Clarke but, like the discussions of Clarke and Witherspoon in McGinty, Tait, and Frazer addressed in this article, Scott underplays Clarke's significance, claiming Witherspoon's recommendation is 'qualified', not least because Scott misunderstands Clarke as a 'deist', 'Cartesian', and non-'Newtonian', when Clarke explicitly disavowed the first two categories, and, as we shall see, was committed to the latter. Otherwise, when Witherspoon's appeals to Clarke in the *Arcana* or LMP are mentioned they are usually brief. See, for example: Thomas Ahnert, *The Moral Culture of the Scottish Enlightenment, 1690–1805* (New Haven, 2014), 55, 115; John R. McIntosh, *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland: The Popular Party, 1740–1800* (East Linton, 1998), 169; Paul Russell, 'Wishart, Baxter and Hume's *Letter from a Gentleman*', *Hume Studies*, 23 (1997), 275, fn. 61.

9 McGinty, *Animated Son*, 124–5.

10 Frazer, *Religious Beliefs*, 40–6.

11 Tait, *Piety of Witherspoon*, 128.

12 David S. Sytsma, 'Reformed Theology and the Enlightenment', in Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Reformed Theology* (Oxford, 2020), 88.

the influence of Clarke's *Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity* (London, 1712)–a work that had already led to (unsuccessful) attempts to have Clarke censured by the Convocation of the Church of England. In his *Scripture-Doctrine*, Clarke appeared to suggest that scripture presents the Son as (in some way) subordinate to the Father, undermining traditional views of both the Trinity and Christ (not least the equal divinity of the Son with the Father qua Second Person of the Trinity, and so the complete divinity of Christ qua the Son-incarnate). Clarke defended Simson (and himself) from antitrinitarianism in a private letter to Philip Doddridge, commenting that Simson was only refusing 'to oblige himself to conform to all the scholastic ways of speaking, concerning some things, about which the Scripture is silent'.[13] In any case, given the association between Simson-Clarke on a point of heterodoxy, we can see why McGinty and Tait think Witherspoon's American appeals to Clarke are in need of explanation. Simson was tutor at the University of Glasgow to one of Witherspoon's chief targets in Scotland, Francis Hutcheson, and Simson's trial has been regarded as the starting point for the clearer division into moderate and orthodox parties within the Kirk. Moreover, while in his native Ireland, prior to his move to Scotland, Hutcheson commented in a private letter, 'Dr Clarks book I'm sufficiently informed has made several unfixed in the old principles, if not intirely altered them'.[14] Clarke does, then, seem a surprising figure for the erstwhile leader of the Orthodox party to appeal to, unless in a 'qualified' way.

The Scottish and American appeals to Clarke by Witherspoon remain surprising when we consider the fact that Clarke was also associated with the first attempts to censure Simson by what would become the orthodox wing of the Kirk. In 1717, following a libel brought by John Webster, Simson was officially reprimanded for 'tend[ing] to tribute to much to natural reason, and the power of corrupt nature'.[15] Again, it is not only the case that Clarke (along with John Locke, John Tillotson, and Anglican latitudinarianism more broadly) is regarded as a key influence upon Simson, but that the suspicion of prioritising reason over revelation was also a criticism that dogged Clarke.

A close friend of Isaac Newton's, Clarke had translated his *Opticks* into Latin in 1706, and, in his two series of Boyle Lectures (1704–1705), Clarke explored how a Newtonian view of the universe opposed both deism and atheism. In his 1704 Boyle lectures, Clarke also developed his *a priori* argument for the existence and nature of God; and, in his 1705 Boyle lectures, argued that fundamental truths, like fundamental religious truths, are known immediately and certainly by natural reason alone. In 1717, Clarke cemented his reputation as 'Sir Isaac

---

13 *Ibid.*, 88.

14 Cited by Robert Whan, *The Presbyterians of Ulster, 1680–1730* (Woodbridge, 2013), 11.

15 See: Anne Skoczylas, *Mr Simson's Knotty Case: Divinity, Politics, and Due Process in Early Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Montreal, 2001), Part 2; idem, 'Archibald Campbell's "Enquiry into the Original of Moral Virtue", Presbyterian Orthodoxy, and the Scottish Enlightenment', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 87.223 (April 2008), 68–100. DOI: 10.3366/E003692410800005X; Alasdair Raffe, 'University Divinity and Intellectual Innovation in Eighteenth-Century Scotland: The Case of John Simson (1667–1740)', in Mordechai Feingold (ed.), *History of Universities: Volume* XXXVI/2 (Oxford, 2023); Russell, 'Wishart, Baxter', 245–76.

Newton's bulldog' through the publication of the *Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, where (as we shall see below) Clarke not only defended Newtonianism from Leibniz's criticisms, but developed his defence of liberty of will in both God and human beings qua rational agents. Clarke's blending of scientific, ethical, and theological rationalism brought him many admirers across eighteenth-century Britain, Ireland, Europe, and America; at the same time, Clarke's rationalist moral and natural theology led to his association with religious radicalism.[16] In chapter 14 of the so-called 'deist's Bible', *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (London, 1730), Matthew Tindal claimed Clarke as a 'true deist'; as natural reason alone provides all human beings with certain knowledge of moral and religious truth, and, as personified in Clarke's friend Newton, is capable of unlocking the secrets of the physical universe itself, there is no need for Christian revelation. Meanwhile, Benjamin Hoadly took inspiration from his close friend, Clarke, in writing the sermon that led to the Bangorian controversy and brought down Church of England Convocation. Developing Clarke, Hoadly argued that Christianity is principally a moral, rather than doctrinal, religion: the intuitive power of reason ought to guarantee liberty of conscience on matters of faith and morality. Consequently, Hoadly, in Clarkean terms, not only rejected the need for the Test and Corporation Acts and denied the legitimacy of church authorities (like Convocation) to judge religious orthodoxy, but, by implication, undermined the notion and necessity of a visible, established church all together.[17]

The points above explain why Frazer suggests that either Witherspoon's references to Clarke are consistent with a secularising turn to 'theistic rationalism', or his recommendations of Clarke must have been 'qualified', so that he may not have 'intended' Clarke to have made 'such a lasting impression' on such Princeton students as James Madison.[18] As Frazer and Norman Fiering have pointed out, Clarke's works were a mainstay of university and seminary education in America.[19] However, for Noll, a key part of Clarke's appeal in America was his 'anti-Calvinism' and 'respect for the new science of the eighteenth-century'.[20] Thus, while

---

16 For Clarke's widespread (and often controversial) influence, see: J.P. Ferguson, *Dr. Samuel Clarke: An Eighteenth Century Heretic* (Kineton, 1976); Thomas C. Pfizenmaier, *The Trinitarian Theology of Dr. Samuel Clarke (1675–1729): Context, Sources, and Controversy* (Leiden, 1997); Wayne Hudson, *Enlightenment and Modernity: The English Deists and Reform* (London, 2009); Dafydd Mills Daniel, *Ethical Rationalism and Secularisation in the British Enlightenment: Conscience and the Age of Reason* (Basingstoke, 2020); John Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1989).

17 See: Dafydd Mills Daniel, 'Benjamin Hoadly, Samuel Clarke, and the Ethics of the Bangorian Controversy: Church, State, and the Moral Law', *Religions*, 11.11 (2020) https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11110599.

18 Fraser, Religious Beliefs, 46–51. Ralph L. Ketcham explores in detail the abiding influence of Clarke upon Madison, not least as a result of being introduced to Clarke as a student of Witherspoon: 'James Madison and Religion – A New Hypothesis', *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society*, 38.2 (June 1960), 65–90.

19 See Frazer, *Religious Beliefs*, 23–4; 70–2; Norman Fiering, *Moral Philosophy at Seventeenth-Century Harvard: A Discipline in Transition* (Chapel Hill, 1981), 296–300.

20 Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford, 2002), ii.

Clarke's status as a leading (as Noll puts it) 'ethicist'[21] in both Britain and America explains why Witherspoon at least cites him in his Princeton lectures on moral philosophy, just as Clarke featured on the curriculum at Harvard, Clarke's reputation as an unorthodox and liberal figure suggests either Witherspoon's references to Clarke are 'qualified', or, if unreserved, evidence for 'the Witherspoon problem'. Indeed, as an apparent bolster to this perspective, it is noteworthy, as J. David Hoeveler points out, that Thomas Clapp, President of Yale, refused a gift of books to the College because it contained Clarke's writings, and, with respect to Harvard, George Whitfield opined: 'bad books are become fashionable among the tutors and students. Tillotson and Clarke are read, instead of Shephard, Stoddard, and such-like evangelical writers'.[22]

Below, I shall argue that the American Witherspoon's references to Clarke in LMP are not 'qualified', but serious recommendations that reveal Clarke's influence upon Witherspoon's ethics. At the same time, I shall argue that the American Witherspoon's references to Clarke are not 'surprising' or evidence for 'the Witherspoon problem', because Witherspoon's appeals to Clarke in America are consistent with the appeals Witherspoon had made to Clarke earlier in Scotland. Section 1 below, examines Witherspoon's support for Clarkean ethical rationalism, over Hutchesonian sentimentalism, in both *Arcana* and LMP. Section 2, highlights Witherspoon's Clarkean, as opposed to Hutchesonian, understanding of the moral sense in both the *Arcana* and LMP. Finally, section 3, discusses Witherspoon's Clarkean, as opposed to Leibnizian, understanding of freedom and necessity in the *Arcana* and LMP. Each section argues for the consistency of both Witherspoon's ethics and his use of Clarke between Scotland and America.

1. Witherspoon and Clarke's 'Law of Nature'

Witherspoon's *Arcana* was written in the wake of the Inverkeithing Case, where the Moderate party, invoking the Patronage Act, successfully excluded Thomas Gillespie from clerical office for refusing to accept the settlement of Andrew Richardson as minister in Inverkeithing, as chosen by the parish patron, Captain Philip Anstruther.[23] A key theme of Witherspoon's satire, therefore, is that Moderate support for the privilege of the patron in Inverkeithing follows from their own aristocratic pretensions. As such, a Moderate clergyman '*must endeavour to acquire as great a degree of politeness in his carriage and behaviour, and to catch as much of the air and manner of a fine gentleman, as possibly he can*'.[24] In Witherspoon's satire, the Moderate pursuit of gentlemanliness informs and is informed by their devotion to

21 *Ibid.*

22 J. David Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind: Intellect and Politics in the Colonial Colleges* (Lanham, 2002), 76; 216.

23 See: Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh, 1985), 52–7; McIntosh, *Church and Theology*, 103–20; Mailer, *American Revolution*, 78–81.

24 John Witherspoon, *Ecclesiastical Characteristics: or, The Arcana of Church Policy*, 4th edn (Glasgow, 1755), 36. Further citation given in the text.

Hutcheson's sentimentalism. First, would-be gentlemen, like all gentlemen, are obsessed by fashion. Thus, the Moderates, who seek to have 'captivated the hearts of the gentry', are bound to eulogise the '*immortal*' Hutcheson: not only is he a fashionable, because 'modern', author, but he is developing the 'method' of 'lord Shaftsbury', whom the Moderates are bound to regard as 'inimitable' and 'divine', because he is eminently aristocratic (*Arcana*, 69, 39, 41, 17). Second, Hutcheson's sentimentalism is not just appealing to a would-be gentleman because it is fashionable, but because it reduces morality to fashion, and so cements the authority of aristocratic elites over the 'common people', as those who decide what is fashionable and so moral–'nothing can be more ridiculous, than to make a fixed standard for opinions, which change just as the fashion of clothes and dress' (*Arcana*, 24). Thus, while the Moderates directly asserted their aristocratic control over the church through patronage in Inverkeithing, Hutcheson's sentimentalism allows the Moderates, as a cultural elite, to cease control of the religious and moral life of Scotland as a whole. Consequently, Witherspoon makes it the first 'maxim' of moderatism that 'All ecclesiastical persons…are to be esteemed men of great genius, vast learning, and uncommon worth, and, by all means, to be supported and protected' (*Arcana*, 17).

It is while criticising the Moderates for relativising morality to aristocratic fashion, that Witherspoon makes two direct references to Clarke: one in the main body of the text, and one in a footnote. The former reads as follows:

> If any object, that this [the behaviour of Moderate clergyman] is not agreeable to the strict rules of veracity, I desire it may be remembered, that the present fashionable scheme of moral philosophy is much improved in comparison of that which prevailed sometime ago. Virtue does not now consist in *acting agreeably to the nature of things*, as Dr. Clarke affirms; nor in *acting according to truth*, which an old schoolmaster, one Wollaston, once wrote a book to prove;[25] but in *the good of the whole*; and therefore an illustrious and noble ends sanctifies the means of attaining it (*Arcana*, 51).

Note first of all that the above contains a contrast and a criticism. A contrast is made between Hutchesonian sentimentalism, the 'present fashionable scheme of moral philosophy' favoured by the Moderates, and old-fashioned Clarkean ethical rationalism 'which prevailed sometime ago'. And a criticism is made of the move from Clarke to Hutcheson; the latter resolves into a form of utilitarianism ('the good of the whole') that encourages individuals to feel justified in disregarding objective moral duties ('veracity' or truth-telling), while the former privileged 'strict rules' of morality where actions were defined as intrinsically right and wrong according to 'truth' and 'the nature of things'.

[25] William Wollaston, *The Religion of Nature Delineated* (London, 1722). In LMP, Witherspoon also closely associates Wollaston with Clarke: 'one author (Wollston Rel. of Nat. delineated) makes truth the foundation of virtue, and reduces the good or evil of any action to the truth or falsehood of a proposition. This opinion differs not in substance, but in words only, from Dr. Clark's' (LMP, 28–9).

The same contrast and criticism contained in the passage above also appears in LMP, where Witherspoon distinguishes between Clarkean and Hutchesonian moral ontology (what Witherspoon calls 'the foundation of virtue') and gives his preference for the former over the latter along the now familiar rationalist/deontologist and sentimentalist/utilitarian lines.

In LMP, Witherspoon refers to 'Dr. Clark' as 'one of the greatest champions for the law of nature'(LMP, 7) and as a paradigmatic example of someone who maintains:

> that virtue consists in acting agreeably to the nature and reason of things. And that we are to extract all affection, public and private, in determining any question upon it (LMP, 28).

In terms of moral ontology, Witherspoon describes Clarke's championing of the 'law of nature' as his commitment to the 'opinion' that 'the foundation of virtue' lies in 'the reason and nature of things', such that there is 'an essential difference between virtue and vice' (LMP, 28, 31). So, in other words, Witherspoon recognises Clarke as someone who believes in objective moral facts: that certain things are intrinsically right and wrong, and that their rightness and wrongness is determined by the nature of reality itself. In Clarke, 'reason' is 'the standard of virtue' because moral right and wrong are determined by reason qua an objective rational moral order, 'the reason and nature of things' (LMP, 27). Consequently, reason is 'the principle of virtue' because human 'sentiment or affection' (LMP, 27), as well as an action's consequences, can be abstracted from questions of an action's rightness: the answer to the question "Why is x right?" is that it is according to reason, which is to say, because it is right in itself. In order to convey his moral ontological outlook, Clarke drew an analogy between mathematical and moral truth and employed the language of 'fitness' (a term that Witherspoon also employs once in LMP, 31). That is, certain things appear to us to be either in alignment, or out of alignment, with the 'reason and right of the case' and 'the reason and nature of things'. 2 + 2 = 4 looks right, it looks to 'fit' reality, in a way that 2 + 2 = 5 just looks 'unfit' and wrong. Similarly, acting with injustice, for example, by punishing an innocent person, looks wrong or 'unfit', in a way that obeying the golden rule, and treating other people equitably, just looks right or 'fit'.[26]

In LMP, Witherspoon expresses his shared commitment to Clarke's moral ontology or 'law of nature'. He agrees that 'there seems to be in the nature of things an intrinsic excellence in moral worth' and 'in the nature of things a difference between virtue and vice' (LMP, 31, 33). Moreover, in LMP Witherspoon is aware that Clarke's objectivist moral ontology includes a rationalist moral epistemology (what Witherspoon calls 'the nature of virtue') and further signals his endorsement of such a moral epistemology.

It follows from Clarke's analogy between mathematical and moral truth that he also employed an analogy with sight as part of his rational intuitionist moral epistemology. That is, in both moral and mathematical truth right and wrong are determined by reason; it is because human

[26] Samuel Clarke, A *Discourse Concerning the Being and Attributes of God, the Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Religion*, 10th ed. (London, 1767), part 2.

beings have been created with reason, in the image of God, that we are able to 'see' with our reason the essential difference between both mathematical truth/error and moral right/wrong:

> [such moral truths as the golden rule] are so notoriously plain and self-evident, that nothing but the extremest [sic] Stupidity of Mind…can possibly make any Man entertain the least Doubt concerning them. For a Man endued with Reason, to deny the Truth of these Things; is the very same Thing…as if a Man that understands Geometry…should…perversely contend that the Whole is not equal to all its Parts…[27]

So, according to Clarke, human beings cannot avoid giving our 'immediate' and 'universal' 'assent' to certain basic mathematical and moral truths upon the mere use of reason. Witherspoon signals his support for Clarke by describing our encounter with both theoretical/mathematical and moral/practical truth in the same terms.

When it comes to theoretical truth, Witherspoon obliquely references (Reidian) commonsense philosophy, and not only describes it in Clarkean terms, but invokes common sense to defend, against Hume, the *a priori* principle Clarke had made fundamental to human reason, and foundational to human reasoning about the nature and existence of God: 'that every thing that exists must have a cause'.[28] According to Whitherspoon:

> …there are certain first principles or dictates of common sense, which are either simple perceptions, or seen with intuitive evidence. These are the foundation of all reasoning, and without them, to reason is a word without meaning. They can no more be proved than you can prove an axiom in mathematical science (LMP, 42).

And just as Clarke drew an analogy between self-evident mathematical and moral truth, Witherspoon maintains that the theoretical axioms we intuit as self-evidently correct are analogous with the practical axioms we intuit as self-evidently right. As Witherspoon puts it, we have 'simple perceptions of our duty', which 'reason teaches us' (LMP, 33, 24). These 'perceptions of duty' are 'simple' in the sense that their rightness is an unanalysable or irreducible nonnatural quality that we just 'see'; 'reason teaches us' that they are right because they are right in themselves according to the 'reason and nature of things', and their intrinsic rightness cannot be explained or proved with reference to other (super)natural qualities, such as happiness or divine command (LMP, 30–4).

In LMP, Witherspoon distinguishes Clarke's rationalist and objectivist moral ontology and epistemology, as outlined above, from 'Hutchinson' and 'Shaftsbury'. According to Witherspoon, 'Dr Clark, and some others, make understanding or reason the immediate principle of virtue', and 'make reason the standard of virtue, particularly as opposed to inward sentiment

---

27 *Ibid.*, 31–2.

28 *Ibid.*, part 1; David Hume, A *Treatise of Human Nature*, eds David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford, 2000), 1.1.3.

or affection' (LMP, 27). By contrast, 'Shaftsbury, Hutchinson, and others, make affection the principle of' (LMP, 14) virtue, and by:

> found[ing] virtue upon affection, particularly Hutchinson, Shaftsbury and their followers, make the moral sense the rule of duty, and very often attempt to exclude the use of reason on this subject. These authors seem also to make benevolence and public affection the standard of virtue, in distinction from all private and selfish vices (LMP, 27).

As the above indicates, in LMP Witherspoon often switches between, and so muddies the meaning of, such phrases as 'standard', 'rule', and 'foundation' of virtue. However, when employing such terms, Witherspoon is simply trying to express the moral ontological and epistemological differences between Clarke's rationalism and Hutcheson's and Shaftesbury's sentimentalism.

Epistemologically, Hutcheson and Shaftesbury 'exclude the use of reason'; they prefer to think that our knowledge of moral distinctions derives from a sense, like our sense of taste or beauty, where this sense does not react to, or have a 'regard' for, things that are sweet or sublime, but responds to things that 'promote the general happiness' (LMP, 27–8, 31). In doing so, Hutcheson's and Shaftesbury's moral sense not only approves as moral any actions that it perceives to possess the quality of 'public happiness', 'the general good', or 'universal utility', but draws human beings to pursue moral qua benevolent actions by exciting the 'natural' 'disinterested' 'affection or sentiment' for 'benevolence' that all human beings possess (LMP, 28–32).

In LMP, Witherspoon points to limits in Hutcheson's and Shaftesbury's sentimentalist moral epistemology when compared to Clarke's rationalist one. Witherspoon explicitly contrasts 'Clark' and 'Hutchinson' on the question of whether moral duty is known by reason or sentiment, and highlights his agreement with 'Clark': 'reason…often controul[s] and alter[s] sentiment; whereas sentiment cannot alter the clear decision of reason', so that the immediate moral intuitions of conscience–when 'my heart dictates to me any thing to be my duty'–can be corrected by 'the deductions of reason' (LMP, 28). As such, Witherspoon insists, 'there is no occasion to join Mr Hutchinson or any other, in their opposition to such as make reason the principle of virtuous conduct' (LMP, 21). Moreover, Witherspoon alludes to Hutchesonian and Humean criticisms of Clarkean ethical rationalism (see below), raising the question of whether the 'faculty' of the 'understanding' only has 'truth' as its 'object' rather than 'good' (LMP, 14). In response to this question, Witherspoon defines 'truth' in Clarkean terms ('discovering things as they really are in themselves, and in their relations one to another') and asks rhetorically (in line with Clarke's notion of freewill: see below) 'how can' 'the understanding' have 'nothing to do with good or evil' if 'the choice made by the will seems to have the judgement or deliberation of the understanding at its foundation' (LMP, 14). So, in line with Clarke, Witherspoon makes an analogy between goodness and truth, and identifies reason or the understanding as that through which we recognise goodness and truth qua 'things' in their proper 'relations' (LMP, 13–4). Indeed, Witherspoon distinguishes between 'the light of nature' and 'the law of nature' (LMP, 6), a distinction I tentatively suggest he derived from John Balguy, a devoted follower of

Clarke, whose works Witherspoon also recommends in his LMP. Balguy developed his light/law distinction to defend Clarke from Tindal's appropriation of Clarke as a 'true deist' (see above). According to Balguy,[29] Clarke never argued that human reason or 'the light of nature' is perfect or infallible, even though 'the law of nature', of 'right reason' itself, is perfect and infallible; instead, for Balguy, following Clarke, It is the responsibility of human beings to ensure that 'the light of nature' closely follows 'the law of nature', but mistakes are bound to be made given the limitedness and fallenness of our rational powers. Similarly, Witherspoon maintains, in Balguy-esque language, that we must 'distinguish between the light of nature and the law of nature'; the former is that which 'we can or do discover by our own powers', but the accuracy and normative force of such light is always measured by whether it 'can be made agreeable to reason and nature' qua the objective 'law of nature' itself (LMP, 6).

As Witherspoon's use of the law/light of nature distinction indicates, he was aware, in LMP, of how the epistemological differences between Clarkean rationalism and Hutchesonian sentimentalism are 'intimately connected' (LMP, 26) with ontological differences. In Clarke reason is the 'rule of duty' and the 'standard of virtue'; right and wrong are known by reason, because it is reason which determines the 'essential difference' between right and wrong. In Hutcheson and Shaftesbury, the moral sense is the 'rule of duty', which means, for them, the 'standard of virtue' is not rationally perceived, and rationally determined, intrinsic rightness but 'the good of the whole'; right and wrong are known by the moral sense, because the moral sense approves as moral those actions which maximise happiness. For Witherspoon a central issue with such a sentimentalist moral epistemology and ontology is:

> What is most remarkable in this scheme is that it makes the sense of obligation in particular instances give way to a supposed greater good. Hutchinson (LMP, 28).

For Witherspoon (like Clarke and Balguy), our moral faculty (which Witherspoon terms 'conscience or moral sense' in LMP) approves acts of benevolence, not because of the benevolence per ce, but because such acts are perceived as intrinsically right. By prioritising the benevolent quality of actions over the intrinsically right quality of actions, Hutcheson reduces moral sense to the perception of an action's utility and not, as Witherspoon puts it, our 'sense and perception of moral excellence, and our obligation to conform ourselves to it in our conduct' (LMP, 21). Indeed, for Witherspoon the problem is not simply that Hutcheson misunderstands the quality of moral actions that conscience or moral sense perceives and approves, but, as such, encourages individuals to override any 'sense of obligation' they may have for particular actions if it is not obvious how that action promotes happiness. While Witherspoon (again like Clarke and Balguy)[30] maintains

---

[29] John Balguy, A *Second Letter to a Deist*, in idem, A *Collection of Tracts Moral and Theological: Placed in the Order wherein they were first published* (London, 1734), 282–83.

[30] Clarke, *Discourse*, part 2, 53–60; John Balguy, *The Foundation of Moral Goodness, Part I*, in idem, *Tracts*, 50–6, 76–80.

that pursuing the happiness of others, as part of our duty to others, is an intrinsically right moral duty, he insists we must remember that it is not only acts of benevolence that we perceive to be intrinsically right. If we go to the 'excess' of making 'universal utility' the 'ultimate' moral 'rule' we will start to behave immorally as we allow ourselves to 'violate particular obligations with a view to a more general benefit', and so may end up trying to justify doing that which is intrinsically wrong, such as lying, for a supposed greater good (LMP, 32, 134). In Witherspoon, as in Clarke and Balguy, we cannot rank our moral duties, known immediately and as intrinsically right within conscience, by allowing 'the good of the whole' to 'supersede' the full range of 'the particular principles of duty which he [God] hath impressed upon the conscience' (LMP, 33).

The last point above returns us to the consistency between LMP and the *Arcana*. In the *Arcana* reference to Clarke cited above, Hutchesonian sentimentalism enables Moderate clergyman to justify lying (disregarding the 'strict rules of veracity') whenever that means is justified by a utilitarian end: 'the good of the whole'. In LMP, Witherspoon explicitly criticises 'Hutchinson' for encouraging the view that an individual can break a 'vow' made to God, or 'lie', so long as doing so maximises happiness (LMP, 130, 134). Similarly, in the *Arcana* and LMP, Clarkean rationalism and Hutchesonian sentimentalism are not just critically compared, but the latter is presented as a self-conscious movement away from the former. In LMP, Witherspoon notes that Hutcheson's approach to ethics differs from 'Clark' and 'most English writers of the last age'. In the *Arcana*, Hutchesonian sentimentalism is the new 'fashionable' 'scheme of moral philosophy', which the Moderates regard as an 'improvement' upon a now old-fashioned scheme of moral philosophy that 'prevailed' 'sometime ago'. Consequently, 'the present generation' is no longer 'formed' 'upon' Clarke's rationalist 'acting agreeable to the nature of things', but:

> Mr. H[utheson]n's doctrine, that virtue is founded upon instinct and affection, and not upon reason; that benevolence is its source, support, and perfection; and at all the particular rules of conduct are to be suspended, when they seem to interfere with the general good (*Arcana*, 68).

Of course, in the *Arcana*, the movement from the old-fashioned Clarke to the fashionable Hutcheson has an added satirical edge. In the reference to Clarke cited at the beginning of this section, it is not simply that the Moderates are 'good of the whole' utilitarians rather than intrinsic rightness rationalists because Hutcheson has made it fashionable to be so, but that Hutcheson's 'fashionable scheme' of 'moral philosophy' prioritises the happiness of those who are 'fashionable', and so makes what is good for the 'illustrious and noble' synonymous with 'the good of the whole' (*Arcana*, 51). In other words, Witherspoon is suggesting that the Moderates' Hutchesonian sentimentalism is not even authentic utilitarianism: they have no genuine interest in the pursuit of general happiness, but, rather, Shaftesburian gentrification, in which the happiness of the 'refined' is pursued at the expense of the 'vulgar'. This further aspect of Witherspoon's criticism points us towards the other appeal to Clarke in the *Arcana*, discussed below.

2. The Moral Sense: Witherspoon and the 'Numscull' Clarke

> For, though some of their doctrines are changeable, by reason of the essential difference of persons, things, and times; yet, during the period of any doctrine, I have no where known stronger, or severer dogmatists as appears from their neglect of farther enquiry, and sovereign contempt of all opposers. In a certain university, about seven years ago, (how it is now I cannot tell,) if a man had spoken honourably of Dr. Samuel Clark, it cannot be conceived with what derision he was treated by every boy of sixteen, who was wiser than to pay any regard to such a numscull, an enemy to the doctrine of the necessity, and wholly ignorant of the moral sense (*Arcana*, 42 fn).

In referring to Clarke as 'numscull' because 'ignorant of the moral sense', Witherspoon is alluding to the fact that Hutcheson and Hume (as well as Kames: see below) developed their respective theories of the moral sense in explicit opposition to Clarke. Hutcheson and Hume rejected Clarke's language of 'fitness' and his mathematical analogy.[31] For them, Clarke's language of 'fitness' is morally irrelevant; it is 'fit' to use a sword for stabbing, whether one is wounding a rival or protecting a stranger, why is the latter morally 'fit' and not the former? Similarly, mathematical truths are potentially uninteresting *is* facts, in what way is there an analogy between mathematics and morals where I may find the former 'dry' and dull but experience an overriding *ought* when it comes to the latter? As Hutcheson put it, Clarke's mathematical analogy cannot explain why I have a greater affection for, and sense of delight in, counting up 'felicities' rather than counting up stones; and, as Hume more famously put it, there is a gap between mathematical *is* and moral *ought*. Rather than Clarkean fitness, it is much better to think in terms of a moral sense analogous with our sense of beauty, which explains both (1) why all human beings approve benevolent actions as moral, upon experiencing the feeling of admiration for them whenever we see them; and, (2) why all human beings have an affection exciting us to act benevolently, because we experience a drive to do that which we most admire as moral.

In order to appreciate Witherspoon's satire of the moral sense and his use of Clarke in the passage above, it is helpful to refer to a second reference to the moral sense in the *Arcana*. Here Witherspoon rhetorically employs Hugo Grotius, and presents him, like Clarke, as a proponent of objective moral duties, which enable the individual to resist state or ecclesiastical authority. Grotian moral duties do not derive their authority positively from the state or church but from, as Witherspoon puts it, in Clarkean language, 'what were once called the eternal, no less, and immutable laws of morality' (*Arcana*, 54). In seeking absolute authority

[31] See: Francis Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, ed. Aaron Garrett (Indianapolis, 2002), 136–79; Hume, *Treatise*, 2.3.3, 3.1.2 and idem, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, in *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, eds L.A. Selby-Bigge, with P.H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975), V.2, IX.1, Appendix I.

over Scottish morality and religion, the Moderates must reject the moral objectivism of Grotius, like that of the 'numscull' Clarke. As such, the Moderates employ Hutchesonian sentimentalism to dismiss the idea that 'moral virtue' is 'immutable', or 'stiff and rigid', it now conforms to whatever is the prevailing 'taste' of the aristocratic elite, and so is 'yielding as water, and like iron hot from the furnace, can easily be beaten into what shape you please' (*Arcana*, 54). Thus, Witherspoon remarks sarcastically, it is 'some pity that so fine a genius as Grotius did not flourish somewhat later, or that the moral sense was not started a little earlier, and so that great man preserved from falling into so gross a blunder' (*Arcana*, 54).

In the *Arcana*, therefore, Hutcheson's moral sense represents the move from rationalism and moral objectivism to sentimentalism and moral relativism; a move which represented an opportunity for the Moderates, as an elite group, to egotistically and dictatorially relativise moral right and wrong to whatever makes them happy–to whatever they deem to be most beautiful, pleasant, and so good. Returning to the analogy Hutcheson had made between the moral sense and the sense of beauty, Witherspoon is critical of how Hutcheson's 'modern' sentimentalist philosophy makes 'a great analogy between the moral virtues…and the fine arts': 'most of the present reigning expressions upon the subject of morals are borrowed from the arts, as *beauty*, *order*, *proportion*, *harmony*, *decency*, etc.' (*Arcana*, 22). As a result, Moderate churchmen 'scatter' these same 'phrases' throughout 'their sermons'; indeed, they make it a 'maxim' of moderatism that 'sermons' ought 'to be composed by the rules of poetry' (*Arcana*, 41, 32). For Witherspoon, such poetic sermons are 'unintelligible' to the 'common people', but that is precisely what the Moderates want. Ordinary people may 'hate' the Moderates because they cannot understand their 'refined' learning, but such hatred is a species of resentment for intellectual and social superiors, and so precisely the hatred the Moderates aristocratically strive after; it is how they appear 'learned', and so 'endeavour to please those of high rank' by making themselves 'very unacceptable to the common people' (*Arcana*, 33, 41, 61, 27).

Returning to Witherspoon's appeal to Clarke, then, it is understandable why he should appear as a rhetorical device in the *Arcana*. Of course (so Witherspoon's satire goes), Clarke will be derided within universities under the influence of moderatism. Clarke is one of the 'opposers' of Moderate authority because his 'reason and nature of things' prevents right and wrong from being reduced to gentlemanly 'fashion' and 'taste'. While Clarke believes in the 'essential difference' between right and wrong, known immediately and intuitively by all human beings on the basis of their natural reason and conscience, the Moderates only believe in 'the essential difference of persons, things, and times' (*Arcana*, 42 fn). Clarke can be dismissed as old-fashioned and a 'numscull' for never having heard of the moral sense, one of Hutcheson's and Shaftesbury's 'modern discoveries', in the same way ordinary people can be dismissed for never having heard of the moral sense either: neither Clarke or ordinary people are relevant to contemporary moral and religious life in Scotland because neither have had the 'peculiar privilege' of going through the most up to date gentlemanly education.

Now, it might be objected that while the quotation certainly makes it (contra McGinty) not 'surprising' that Witherspoon should refer to Clarke in America, in the same way he had already invoked him in Scotland, there is still a Scottish/American inconsistency: in Scotland, he satirises 'the moral sense'; in America, as noted previously, Witherspoon employs the term

'moral sense', using it (like both Joseph Butler and the later Hutcheson) synonymously with 'conscience'. However, the above quotation is, in fact, consistent with LMP: in it, Witherspoon is satirising a Hutchesonian sentimentalist moral sense not his LMP Clarkean rationalist moral sense or conscience.

In LMP, we have seen how Witherspoon contrasts 'Clark' and 'Hutchinson' on the question of moral ontology and epistemology. In LMP, Witherspoon also critically compares Clarke and Hutcheson on the question of moral normativity (what he calls 'the obligation of virtue'), and again gives his preference to the former over the latter.

A distinctive feature of Clarke's ethical rationalism is the claim that we not only immediately and self-evidently 'see' intrinsic rightness as an objective quality of particular actions and states of affair, but that the perception of intrinsic rightness is itself a necessary and sufficient motivation for moral action. That is, the perception of moral duty includes the motivation to perform the duty perceived, and, in proto-Kantian terms, a moral agent is an agent who is motivated to do their duty from no other motive than their duty's intrinsic rightness. Thus, Clarke, and Balguy following him, distinguished between our 'original obligation' and 'additional motivations' for moral action.[32] Our 'original obligation' is the 'intrinsic worth' of the moral action, rather than such 'additional motivations' as self-love, utility, and divine command. And for any action to count as moral it must be performed with 'intention' of 'rectitude'; that is, with the intention of fulfilling our 'original obligation' to the moral law because it is right in itself. Witherspoon, likewise, makes the distinction between our 'primary obligations of virtue as founded upon its own excellence' in distinction from such 'secondary motive[s]' as 'rewards and punishments', 'fear' of divine authority, considerations of our own or others' 'happiness' (LMP, 36). Moreover, in line with the Clarke and Balguy, Witherspoon is clear that actions, 'become by their intention and application either good or bad', so '[i]t is not enough that it ['a good action'] be materially good, the time must be proper, and the intention laudable' (LMP, 66). So, for Witherspoon, like Clarke and Balguy, 'it is not enough' that the action performed 'materially' or objectively fulfils the moral law; the relevant action must have been performed from a 'laudable' 'intention', which is the intention that arises 'from a sense of obligation', from 'an intrinsic excellence in moral worth, and an indelible impression of it upon the conscience' (LMP, 67, 25, 31).

Despite the Scottish Witherspoon satirising the term 'moral sense' and the American Witherspoon employing it, the latter is consistent with the former when he describes 'moral sense or conscience' in what he regards as Clarkean as opposed to Hutchesonian terms: as our perception of an 'original' or 'primary' obligation to do that which is right because it is right in itself. Indeed, just as the Scottish Witherspoon had criticised the Hutchesonian moral sense for conflating morality with beauty and the study of ethics with that of 'poetry' and the 'fine arts', we find the same rhetoric appearing in LMP, where the American Witherspoon makes it clear that his moral sense, contra Hutcheson's, can never be conflated with a sense of beauty. 'The various theories upon the principles of beauty…are of much importance on the subject of taste and criticism, but of very little in point of morals': our 'senses' of '[o]rder, proportion,

[32] Clarke, *Discourse*, part 2, 42–3, 64, 70; Balguy, *Foundation, Part I*, 68–9, 83; *Foundation, Part II*, 183–5.

simplicity, intricacy, uniformity, variety', and 'harmony' may 'enter' into discussions of the 'fine arts' and poetry', and concern 'the principles of beauty and gracefulness', but to confuse them with the moral sense qua 'sense of obligation' is akin to making 'Lord Shaftsbury's' mistake of 'putting imagination in the place of reason', and conflating 'moral excellence' with 'the pleasures of the imagination' (LMP, 20, 22). In LMP and the *Arcana*, Hutcheson's moral sense is criticised for replacing Clarkean 'reason' with Shaftesburian 'taste', where this leads to both ontological and motivational problems in ethics. Ontologically and epistemologically, the problem is, as we have seen, act utilitarianism and relativism: right and wrong are no longer defined, and known, by their 'intrinsic' 'moral excellence', but can be relativised to whatever an individual (or, as in Witherspoon's *Arcana*, an empowered group of individuals) happens to find most beautiful and pleasurable qua for 'the good of the whole'. Motivationally, the problem is psychological hedonism; the primary motivation for moral action is not an individual's (or group of individual's) sense of an action's intrinsic rightness, or even really that it is for 'the good of the whole', but the self-gratification of acting in whatever way an individual (or group of individuals) happens to feel is most pleasurable to their 'imagination' and 'sense of beauty'. Once again, then, Witherspoon's moral sense in LMP is consistent with his criticisms of the moral sense in the *Arcana*, where the former, like the latter, is critical of Hutchesonian sentimentalism for deriving moral duty from a sense of beauty rather than beauty from a Clarkean sense of intrinsic moral duty:

> It is so far from being true, that there is no more in virtuous action than a superior degree of beauty, or a more noble pleasure, that indeed beauty and sweetness of virtuous action arises from this very circumstance – that it is a compliance with duty or supposed obligation. Take away this, and the beauty vanishes as well as the pleasure (LMP, 25).

3. Clarke's Necessity for Witherspoon

Above, I have argued that although the American Witherspoon uses the term 'moral sense' this is consistent with the Scottish Witherspoon who satirised Clarke as a 'numscull' due to being 'wholly ignorant' of 'the moral sense'. Indeed, the 'Clark' 'numscull' passage in the *Arcana* reveals further points of consistency between the Scottish and American Witherspoons.

In the relevant passage from the *Arcana*, cited above, Witherspoon not only refers to Clarke as a 'numscull' because he is 'ignorant' of the moral sense, but because he is 'an enemy to the doctrine of necessity'. Although there are only two direct appeals to Clarke in the *Arcana*, this reference to 'necessity' highlights further indirect appeals to Clarke in both the *Arcana* and the later LMP.

In LMP, as noted, Witherspoon is critical of Hutcheson and Shaftesbury for 'mak[ing] the good of the whole our immediate principle of action' (LMP, 33). One of the 'excesses' associated with such a view is that it encourages us to 'violate particular obligations with a view to a more general benefit' (LMP, 32). In doing so, human beings, despite our limited reason, are 'putting ourselves in God's place', because we (incorrectly and arrogantly) think we know

which actions will contribute to the overall happiness better than God and the 'principles of duty which he hath impressed upon conscience' (LMP, 33).

However, Witherspoon notes a second 'excess' to which supposing 'universal virtue' to be 'universal utility' 'has sometimes led'; namely, 'the fatalist and necessitarian schemes' (LMP, 32). Witherspoon does not go into detail about this second 'excess' in LMP; however, what Witherspoon is criticising here connects with, and makes sense in light of, his criticisms of necessity in the *Arcana*. Indeed, it is necessity as criticised in the *Arcana*, and as mentioned as an excess in LMP, which makes sense of another otherwise opaque aside in LMP:

> As to the whole, I believe the universe is faultless and perfect, but I am unwilling to say it is the *best* possible system, because I am not able to understand such an argument, and because it seems to me absurd that infinite perfection should exhaust or limit itself by a created production (LMP, 33).

The above is an oblique reference to the *Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, which Witherspoon gives as recommended reading in LMP. In the *Correspondence*, and his earlier Boyle lectures (also recommended reading in LMP), Clarke offered Newton's theory of gravity as proof that God is constantly active in his creation. In this sense, gravity is, as Newton put it, a 'continual miracle'[33] because it is evidence of constant divine agency in the world: gravity is God continually 'preserving' and 'sustaining' his creation. At the same time, from Clarke's Newtonian perspective, gravity illustrates why the distinction between miraculous and non-miraculous is unhelpful when thinking about divine agency; much better to think in terms of God's 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' activity in the world. What we commonly call miracles are extraordinary events which surprise human expectations, but God is no less active when preserving the normal physical order of the universe itself; God works ordinarily in the world to sustain it through gravity, and he works extraordinarily in the world to save it through the incarnation and atonement.[34]

Clarke's Newtonian emphasis upon God's free and constant agency led Leibniz, in his correspondence with Clarke, to dismiss Newton's 'miraculous' gravity as 'occult':[35] the best of all possible worlds, made by the best of all possible gods, is analogous with a machine, because it will function orderly and mechanistically without the need for any correction by its creator. According to Leibniz, if God has to intervene constantly in the world he created, it means that it is not the 'best' that it can be, and if the world is not the 'best' that it can be, then the God that made the world is not the 'best' of gods either.

---

[33] 'Memoranda by David Gregory (1694)', cited by Peter Harrison, 'Newtonian Science, Miracles, and the Laws of Nature', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 56.4 (October 1995), 531–53.

[34] Clarke, *Discourse*, part 1, 24–5, 62–79, 222, part 2, 14; idem, *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, ed. H.G. Alexander (Manchester, 1956) 22–3, 115–20.

[35] See: Gottfried Leibniz, *Leibniz-Clarke*, 'Fifth Reply'; Alan E. Shapiro, 'Newton's "Experimental Philosophy"', *Early Science and Medicine*, 9.3: *Newtonianism: Mathematical and "Experimental"* (2004), 200–10.

In response to Leibniz's criticisms, Clarke accused him of locking God out of his own creation:[36] if the world functions perfectly and mechanistically without God, then we no longer have the personal God of Christianity but the impersonal 'prime mover' of deism. At the same time, Clarke insisted that Leibniz's world-machine not only separated God from his creation but ended up mechanising both God and human beings.[37] It is here that Clarke accuses Leibniz of failing to make a distinction between 'physical necessity' and 'moral necessity'; a distinction which Clarke had already established in his Boyle Lectures, and which he would also emphasise, in the same year as the publication of the *Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, against Anthony Collins, in his *Remarks Upon A Book, Entitled, A Philosophical Enquiry Concerning Human Liberty* (London, 1717).

In the *Correspondence*, Leibniz's world functions by a series of inevitable physical causes that God has preestablished, so that everything that happens in the world happens for a 'reason sufficient' to cause and to explain it, even if that reason is only known by God as perfect reason.[38] However, as Leibniz also describes reason as the 'cause' of God's activity it seems to Clarke that Leibniz places God under the same physical necessity as the world he has made. For example, in order to emphasise divine freedom, Clarke suggests that certain contingent features of the world can be explained voluntaristically,[39] where the planet earth is positioned in absolute space; the number of planets in the universe, the number of human physical senses, the decision to create the world in the first place–all these are purely a matter of divine fiat. Not so for Leibniz. These features of reality cannot be random or a matter of mere will. God must always have a 'reason sufficient' to explain what he does, and the sufficient reason inevitably causes the relevant action in a perfectly rational agent. And, as for God, mutatis mutandis, for human beings–as human beings are rational agents made in God's image, whenever we have a sufficient reason to act, that reason necessarily causes the relevant action.

According to Clarke, a reason-as-cause Leibnizian perspective ignores the fact that God and human beings, in order to be agents, must have 'liberty of will' according to our own 'self-moving power'.[40] That is, God and human beings might know the rational thing to do but we must also always will or choose to act according to reason. As Clarke put it, divine and human agents are not 'machines' or 'clocks', in which whenever the 'balance' is heaviest on the side of reason they inevitably act in a particular way without a self-conscious decision.[41] Reason is not a cause of activity in rational agents, but the opportunity for rational agents to will or choose to behave rationally. Consequently, reason does not function in rational agents as a 'physical necessity' but a 'moral necessity'. Admittedly, God, having freely chosen to create the world in a particular way, must then govern it in a particular way; and it is the case that God qua 'infinitely *Good*…must have an unalterable disposition to *do* and to

36 Clarke, *Leibniz-Clarke*, 14.
37 Clarke, *Leibniz-Clarke*, 'Fourth Reply', 'Fifth Reply'.
38 Leibniz, *Leibniz-Clarke*, 11–2, 19–20, 36–45.
39 Clarke, *Leibniz-Clarke*, 'Second Reply',
40 *Ibid.*, 'Fourth Reply', 'Fifth Reply'.
41 *Ibid.*, 45.

communicate good or happiness'.[42] However, the necessity God is under is moral and not physical. God always freely chooses to will according to his nature, and to act according to reason in the creation and sustaining of his world, but this is 'a necessity, not of nature and fate, but of fitness and wisdom; a necessity consistent with the greatest freedom and most perfect choice'.[43] Similarly, when it comes to human agency, human beings must always freely choose to act according to reason, to the extent that human beings may know the rational and moral thing to do but will or choose its contrary. The only necessity in human action is a 'moral necessity' which collapses into the tautology that so far as a human being aims to be rational in their behaviour they must necessarily choose to act according to reason.[44]

Returning to Witherspoon and the quotation above from LMP, in it, Witherspoon is signalling his agreement with Clarke over Leibniz when it comes to God's free agency; the latter's '*best* possible system' places the world under a mechanistic and fatalistic scheme that 'limit[s]' God's power over, and involvement with, his own 'created production' (LMP, 33). In doing so, the American Witherspoon is consistent with the Scottish Witherspoon, who had already expressed his agreement with Clarke over Leibniz when it comes to both human and divine free agency in the *Arcana*. Indeed, as Maxim VI of moderatism in the *Arcana* makes clear, for Witherspoon, it is because the Moderates have become Leibnizian mechanistic fatalists under the influence of Hutcheson and Shaftesbury that they approach Clarke as their 'enemy' and render him a 'numscull':

> It is not only unnecessary for a moderate man to have much learning, but he ought to be filled with a contempt of all kinds of learning but one, which is to understand Leibnitz's scheme well; the chief parts of which are so beautifully painted, and so harmoniously sung by lord Shaftsbury, and which has been so well licked into form and method, by the late immortal Mr. H[utcheso]n (*Arcana*, 38–9).

Without the context of Clarke's influence upon Witherspoon, it may seem puzzling that Witherspoon should associate the arch-rationalist, Leibniz, with the Moderates he is criticising as arch-sentimentalists. However, the association arose following the publication of Lord Kames' *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (Edinburgh, 1751). Appearing, at first anonymously, in 1751, Kames' book, with the Inverkeithing Case, provides the immediate background for Witherspoon's *Arcana*. In his *Essays*, as part of what has been described as an optimistic Christian Stoicism,[45] Kames insisted that human freewill is an 'illusion': everything in creation, including human action, is determined by a benevolent God towards the end of universal happiness. Consequently, whatever we experience in this world as our own or another person's apparently wilful immoral and negative actions must, in fact, positively contribute to the eventual end of divinely determined happiness. Crucially, as a feature of his

---

42 Clarke, *Discourse*, part 1, 107.

43 *Ibid.*, 64.

44 Clarke, *Leibniz-Clarke*, 99.

45 Sher, *Church and University*, 179; James A. Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity: The Free Will Debate in Eighteenth-Century British Philosophy* (Oxford, 2005), 100.

determinism, Kames had not only developed his own theory of the moral sense, but explicitly rejected Clarke's distinction between physical and moral necessity.[46] No wonder, then, when Witherspoon's gives a list of essential reading for every 'Moderate man', he not only describes this 'catalogue', in deliberately ironic terms, as 'necessary and useful', but most of the books listed are either those which criticised Clarke's distinction between physical/moral necessity, or are those in response to which Clarke had developed that distinction:

> *Leibnitz's Theodicee, and his Letters, Shaftsbury's Characteristics, Collin's Enquiry into human liberty, all Mr H[utcheso]n 's pieces, Christianity as old as the Creation, D[udgeo]n's best Scheme,*[47] *and H[ume]'s Moral Essays* (*Arcana*, 41–2).

As consumers of all this anti-Clarkean literature, the Moderates, in the *Arcana*, have fallen victim to the very 'fatalist and necessitarian schemes' Witherspoon will criticise as an 'excess' in LMP. Thus, according to what Witherspoon describes as the Moderate's 'Athenian [as opposed to Athanasian] Creed':

> I believe in the beauty and comely proportions of Dame Nature, and in almighty Fate, her only parent and guardian…I believe that universe is a huge machine, wound up from everlasting by necessity…in a progressive motion towards the zenith of perfection…that I myself am a little glorious piece of clock-work, a wheel within a wheel… swinging hither and thither by the different impulses of fate and destiny…I believe that there is no ill in the universe, nor any such thing as virtue absolutely considered; that those things vulgarly called *sins*, are only errors in the judgement, and foils to set off the beauty of Nature…that the whole race of intelligent beings, even the devils themselves, (if there are any), shall finally be happy; so that Judas Iscariot is by this time a glorified saint, and it is good for him that he hath been born (*Arcana*, 44).

In the above quotation, we can see how Witherspoon considers human agency and accountability to be threatened, precisely because Moderate sentimentalism is Leibnizian rather than Clarkean, and so thinks (returning to Clarke's own language in the *Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*) that both human beings and the world function by 'clock-work'.

---

46 Henry Home (Lord Kames), *Essay on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*, ed. Mary Catherine Moran, Part 1, Essay 3 (Indianapolis, 2005).

47 William Dudgeon, *A View of the Necessitarian Or Best Scheme* (London, 1739). In his works, Dudgeon proposed an anti-Clarkean, deistic and deterministic, philosophy, which was opposed by 'the Scottish Clarkean', Andrew Baxter, not least in his *Some reflections on a late pamphlet called, The state of the moral world considered* (Edinburgh, 1732) (a reply to Dudgeon's *The State of the Moral World considered; or a Vindication of Providence in the Government of the Moral World* (London, 1732)) and *An Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul; wherein the Immateriality of the Soul is evinced, from the Principles of Reason and Philosophy* (London, 1733). Dudgeon's views led to unsuccessful attempts to have him censured by the Kirk. See: Russell, 'Wishart, Baxter', 245–76.

In this Moderate 'creed', all human beings have to do is passively surrender to their 'impulses', 'swinging hither and thither', because human impulses are organised by 'fate and destiny'. We need not think about what we do, or be accountable for what we do, because there is no such thing as sin or virtue (as Clarke would have it) 'absolutely considered'. Instead, whatever actions to which we allow our impulses to guide us, whether they seem sinful or 'absolutely' wrong to us or not, will be for the best, because the 'huge machine' of both nature and human nature is organised by 'necessity' towards its inevitable 'zenith of perfection'.

Moreover, in the above 'creed', just as Clarke was concerned that Leibniz's world qua machine locks God out from his perfectly and mechanistically ordered creation, Witherspoon presents the Moderates' Hutchesonian sentimentalisms as a form of necessitarianism that makes God unnecessary all together. God is not the personal 'parent and guardian' of the world, there is only 'almighty Fate', and so there is no need for a Christian God to act to save human beings from sin, because there is no sin. Instead, the world is Lucretian or Epicurean (or what Clarke criticises as Spinozistic in his Boyle Lectures); the world is itself 'everlasting', and everlastingly works to its own perfection without either the creative, sustaining, or saving work of God.

Now, it is here that Witherspoon's use of sin and necessity in the *Arcana* points to a fundamental consistency with LMP: just as the American Witherspoon recognised the how moral ontology, epistemology, and normativity are 'intermixed' (LMP, 26), the Scottish Witherspoon had already made physicalist necessitarian metaphysics both the consequence and foundation of Moderate worldliness in ethics.

In the *Arcana*, the Moderates are criticised for reducing morality and religion to fashion and 'social duties', and for making 'the good of the whole' whatever promotes aristocratic taste and privilege. But, of course (so Witherspoon's satire goes), if this necessarily determined physical world is all there is, then 'Shaftsbury', and the Moderates following him, are right to focus on this-worldly beauty and refinement, because they directly concern 'the good of the whole', in ways which 'saving souls', 'future judgement, heaven and hell' (*Arcana*, 29) do not; if this world is ultimate reality–'the whole'–then whatever attitudes appear to be the most worldly must be those which promote 'the good of the whole'. The 'common people' may 'vulgarly' talk of sins, and expect aristocratic persons to restrain their impulses, with a view to their immortal 'souls'–in the same way that they might expect Judas and the devils to be punished for their objective evil–but this is because they make 'errors' of 'judgment', from not being 'refined' enough to admire the 'beauty of Nature'. As Witherspoon puts it elsewhere in the *Arcana* (again, in deliberately ironic Clarkean terms), the 'natural respect we owe to those in great and high stations' follows from 'an original and essential difference between gentry and common people' (*Arcana*, 48). To expect aristocrats–or Judas and the devils–to restrain themselves or to behave differently is to ask them to behave unnaturally, and to misunderstand that their this-worldly actions and ends are fatalistically and mechanistically 'wound-up' and 'obliged' by Dame Nature towards the 'meridian of glory' of all that which is, ultimately, not spiritual but only physical.

Thus, in the *Arcana*, Clarke-Leibniz forms a rhetorical part of Witherspoon's opposition to moderatism as materialistic in two interrelated senses; it is materialistic because it reduces morality to this-worldly fashion and happiness, and because it is a species of materialism that

reduces nature, including human nature, to passively determined matter. Understood in this rhetorical context, the Clarke-Leibniz of the *Arcana* is not only consistent with the 'Ethics' of LMP, but helps to clarify another aspect of LMP: Witherspoon's support for a Newtonian method in moral philosophy:

> Yet perhaps a time may come when men, treating moral philosophy as Newton and his successors have done natural, may arrive at greater precision. It is always safer in our reasonings to trace facts upwards, then to reason downwards, upon metaphysical principles (LMP, 141).

Almost without fail in 'Witherspoon problem' scholarship referenced in this article, whenever Witherspoon's endorsement of a Newtonian method is mentioned, it is also emphasised that Hutcheson and Hume had made a Newtonian method the explicit hallmark of their approach to ethics and the 'science' of 'human nature'.[48] So, either scholars directly state or imply that Witherspoon's use of 'Newtonian', like his use of 'moral sense', is evidence of his American shift towards Hutcheson. However, the inspiration for this Newtonian method comes from the very work of Newton's that Clarke translated into Latin, the *Opticks*, and is consistent with the cue Clarke took from Newton's gravity in both his Boyle Lectures and the *Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*. In the latter, Clarke insists that Leibniz fails to accept or realise the import of Newtonian gravity because he relies on 'hypothesis' rather than inference from Newtonian experiment, which is to say, 'bear assertion, without proof'.[49] As there is a tendency only to cite the first sentence from Newton's own description of an available method for moral philosophy, I give a fuller quotation below:

> And if natural philosophy, in all its parts, by pursuing this method, shall at length be perfected, the bounds of moral philosophy will be also enlarged. For so far as we can know by natural philosophy what is the first cause, what power he has over us, and what benefits we receive from him, so far our duty towards him, as well as that toward one another, will appear to us by the light of nature.[50]

Consequently, it seems only fair to say that Witherspoon's reference to Newton in LMP should be understood in a Clarkean as much as an Hutchesonian sense, particularly when we think of his use of Clarke-Leibniz against Moderate materialism in Scotland, and how this mirrors Witherspoon's concern for New Light idealism in America.

---

48 The full title for the first edition of Hutcheson's *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue in Two Treatises* (Glasgow, 1725), and Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (London, 1739–40), read, respectively: Being An Attempt to introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning Into Moral Subjects' and to 'introduce a Mathematical calculation in Subjects of Morality'.

49 Clarke, *Leibniz-Clarke*, 52, 116.

50 Isaac Newton, *Opticks* [1721], Query 31, in *Newton: Philosophical Writings*, revised edition, ed. Andrew Janiak (Cambridge, 2014), 187.

That is, part of the wider context for LMP, as noted by contemporary scholarship,[51] is Witherspoon's opposition to the New Light Berkeleyan idealism that had come to dominate Princeton under the influence of Jonathan Edwards. Witherspoon opposed such idealism, not least because it denied the physical reality of God's creation, and so both our common-sense experience of matter as real, and scripture, which speaks of God's physical creation of the material world. But where Witherspoon sought to combat the extreme of idealism at Princeton, he obviously wished to avoid collapsing into the opposite extreme of materialism he had already countered in Scotland. Consequently, just as Witherspoon appealed to Clarke to resist the latter extreme in Scotland, he continued to appeal to Clarke to combat the former extreme in America. In the *Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, Clarke's Newtonianism opposes idealism, because it emphasises the real existence of inert matter qua a physical reality created by God as dualistically distinct from himself, and mind more broadly; at the same time, Clarke's Newtonianism emphasised the constant activity of the divine mind as necessary to put, and to keep, inert matter in motion. Thus, while McGinty suggests that Witherspoon's description of God as not just the creator but the continual and constant 'preserver' of the world in LMP is a concession to Berkeley and the New Lights,[52] we can appreciate that such language is consistent with, and evidence for, the ongoing and (again contra McGinty) not 'surprising' influence of 'Sir Isaac Newton's bulldog' upon Witherspoon as he moved from Scotland into America.

Conclusion

> Tho' he [Witherspoon] is & always was a most excellent Preacher yet he retains the same calvinistick principles he had when he left this Country was surprized at the alteration in ^the^ theological sentiments of men in Britain— found them all either Socinian or Calvinists said there was not now such a man as Dr. Clark to ^be^ met with or Mr. Baxter[53] in which however he is much mistaken but I know he has a good Oppinion [sic] of both these men & his principles as to the Trinity not far from Clark's.[54]

Having begun this article with a quotation, I thought it appropriate to end with one. This letter was sent from James Wodrow to Samuel Kenrick on December 7th, 1784, and not only, like the earlier one from Rush, helps to cuts through 'the Witherspoon problem'–it also provides

---

51 See, for example: Noll, *Princeton and the Republic*, chapter 4; Morrison, *American Republic*, chapter 3; McGinty, *Animated Son*, chapters 5 and 7; Mailer, *American Revolution*, chapter 4.

52 McGinty, *Animated Son*, 85.

53 Andrew Baxter, 'the Scottish Clarkean', see footnote 46.

54 I am most grateful to Emma McLeod for drawing my attention to this letter, taken from the forthcoming second volume of *The Wodrow-Kenrick Correspondence*, which will follow on from the already published first volume: *The Wodrow-Kenrick Correspondence, 1750–1810*, vol. 1 (1750–83), eds Matrin Fitzpatrick, Emma Macleod, and Anthony Page (Oxford, 2020).

useful justification for this article's core aim: to explore Clarke's importance for Witherspoon, and to highlight the consistency of Witherspoon's ethics, as underpinned by a consistent use of Clarke, in both Scotland and America.

In focusing on the appeals to Clarke in LMP, this article adds weight to scholars who have drawn attention to the difference between Witherspoon's and Hutcheson's moral sense in LMP, where, for the former, this includes an emphasis upon rational, as opposed to aesthetic, intuition. Currently, scholars have mentioned Joseph Butler and Scottish common-sense philosophy in general, and Thomas Reid in particular, as key influences upon Witherspoon in LMP, that help to explain the differences between his moral sense and Hutcheson's.[55] One implication of this article is that Clarke deserves to be considered as a leading influence upon Witherspoon's ethics and theory of a moral sense in LMP. Certainly, where Jennifer Herdt claims that there is a 'Witherspoon problem' because the American Witherspoon is more optimistic about the intuitive power of human reason, and Daniel Howe states (without mentioning Clarke) that confidence in rational intuition is, in fact, an abiding feature of Witherspoon's thought, Witherspoon's consistent use of Clarke in Scotland and America is support for Howe's claim.[56]

Relatedly, there is another point lurking in the above, although it falls outside the scope of this article. In section 2, I noted that Witherspoon urges a duty/beauty distinction against Hutcheson in LMP. This distinction is not only consistent with the criticisms Balguy had made of Hutcheson (again drawing us to Balguy as another possible influence upon Witherspoon in LMP), but is a distinction Hutcheson had himself emphasised in his *System*, in an apparent concession to such critics as Balguy.[57] Consequently, highlighting Witherspoon's use of Clarke in LMP, need not deny or obfuscate the importance of Hutcheson's *System* for LMP. Instead, it encourages us to remember that Hutcheson, not least according to Hume, is often regarded as shifting his position on the moral sense, in a more rationalist direction, within, and in the build up to, his *System*.[58] As such, if there is an inconsistency in what Witherspoon

---

55 See, for example: Scott, *Annotated LMP*, 33, 3738; Diamond, 'Scottish Philosophy in Revolutionary America', 115–32; Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind*, 123–26; Knud Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: From Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1996), 334–5.

56 Howe, 'Transatlantic Enlightenment', 61–79; Herdt, Herdt, 'Calvin's Legacy', 431, 434.

57 See: Francis Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy: In Three Books*, reprint (Cambridge, 2015), I, I.4.

58 See, for example: David Hume, 'To Francis Hutcheson, Jan. 1743', *Letter 19* in J.Y.T. Greig (ed.), *The Letters of David Hume* (2 vols, Oxford, 2011), I, 47; John D. Bishop, 'Moral Motivation and the Development of Francis Hutcheson's Philosophy', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 57.2 (April 1996), 277–95; Michael L. Frazer, *The Enlightenment of Sympathy: Justice and the Moral Sentiments in the Eighteenth Century and Today* (Oxford, 2010), 31–2; Daniel Carey, 'Francis Hutcheson's Philosophy and the Scottish Enlightenment: Reception, Reputation, and Legacy', in Aaron Garrett and James A. Harris (eds), *Scottish Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century* (2 vols, Oxford, 2015), I, 51–3.

criticised as Hutchesonian in Scotland, and adopted as Hutchesonian in America, the inconsistency need not be Witherspoon's, but Hutcheson's.

When it comes to the *Arcana*, Witherspoon's appeals to Clarke not only help to mitigate against 'the Witherspoon problem' by highlighting the common use of Clarke in the *Arcana* and LMP, but also help us to better understand the moral philosophical concerns and subtleties that inform Witherspoon's satire. Indeed, although it again falls outside the scope of this article, the above helps to draw our attention to, and to contextualise, something else that would seem 'surprising' without it. Witherspoon is followed by other Popular party supporters, such as George Anderson and Andrew Moir, in appealing to Clarke-Leibniz when opposing the Moderates in general, and Hutcheson, Hume, and Kames in particular.[59] Thus, 'Sir Isaac Newton's bulldog' is not just an important reference point when assessing the Scottish and American Witherspoons, but when analysing orthodox responses to moderatism in Scotland more broadly.

[59] George Anderson, *An Estimate of the Profit and Loss of Religion, Personally and Publicly Stated: Illustrated with References to Essays on Morality and Natural Religion* (Edinburgh, 1753), 45–53; [Andrew Moir], *A Letter to the Author of the Ecclesiastick Characteristicks, or Arcana of Church Policy* (Glasgow, 1754), 8–9.