CHAPTER 1

# *Introduction*
## *The Nature of Atheism and the Assurance of Atheists*

### a The Nature of Atheism

My Lord, if any heere can proove there is a God, I will beleeue it.

So, it was claimed, an unnamed 'atheist' 'openly and impudently' challenged Richard Bancroft, Bishop of London, at a London court in 1599.[1] It is a striking statement, bold, provocative and enticing. Unfortunately, it is impossible retrospectively to elucidate it. The episode was recorded in passing, in connection with the controversy over the exorcisms carried out in the late Elizabethan period by the Puritan cleric, John Darrell. The author was one of Darrell's sympathisers, who referred briefly to the incident in order to illustrate how atheists like this should have been the target of Bancroft's zeal, as a means of criticising him and other members of the establishment for their persecution of Darrell for his supposed gifts.[2] Sadly, however, this passing reference is all that we will ever know about it.

Yet it introduces the issue that lies at the heart of the current volume. In contrast to the man who confronted Bancroft, about whom we know virtually nothing, there are a handful of cases in the early modern period where we are fortunate enough to have full information about the views and milieu of 'atheists', men who launched an explicit attack on the Christian religion and offered an alternative, irreligious view of the world. In two instances, these involved trials: one of the student Thomas Aikenhead, whose case was decided by the Scottish Privy Council and who was executed for his atheist views in 1697; the other of the youthful cleric Tinkler Ducket, who was arraigned before the Vice-Chancellor's court at the University of Cambridge in 1739. The third example involves the medical savant Archibald Pitcairne, who flourished in Edinburgh at the

[1] *The Triall of Maist. Dorrell* (Middelburg, 1599), p. 88.
[2] Marion Gibson, *Possession, Puritanism and Print: Darrell, Harsnett, Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Exorcism Controversy* (London, 2006), esp. pp. 66–8.

same time as Aikenhead and who left behind him an extraordinary dialogue, *Pitcairneana*, which advocates a fully atheistic viewpoint. In these rare instances, sufficient evidence survives to provide the basis for a detailed case study of the episode involved, and this is provided in various of the chapters that follow, using the micro-history approach that I have already fruitfully adopted in various articles and books.[3] From these examples, one arguably learns much about the rationale and setting of the irreligious views to which the individuals in question gave expression. Moreover, such fully documented cases may be supplemented by tantalising clues concerning other, more shadowy figures who we will encounter in the pages that follow, and by similar accusations made against better-known individuals like Christopher Marlowe in Elizabethan England and the Earl of Rochester after the Restoration.

Such men were undoubtedly responsible for assertive, destructive statements of anti-Christian sentiment, which make it is easy to understand why contemporaries thought it appropriate to use the term 'atheist' to describe them. We may start with Marlowe's view 'that the first beginning of Religioun was only to keep men in awe' or his knowing assertion that the Jews knew best who to crucify.[4] We continue to Rochester's opinion that devotions were 'the Inventions of Priests, to make the World believe they had a secret of Incensing and Appeasing God as they pleased', and his scepticism about the Bible and the 'boldness and cunning' of those responsible for it.[5] Then there are Aikenhead's gibes against 'the History of the Impostor Christ' and his dismissal of the Old Testament as 'Ezra's fables', which achieved real notoriety during the Enlightenment.[6] We also have his confident assertion that Christianity would be extinct by 1800.[7] In the case of Tinkler Ducket, he gloried in reaching 'the Top, the *ne plus ultra*' of atheism and spoke with great assurance about the views that he had held while he was an atheist.[8] The climax is represented by the fully atheistic position with real coherence and sophistication put forward in

[3] For a brief account of the rationale, see Michael Hunter, *Science and the Shape of Orthodoxy: Intellectual Change in Late Seventeenth-Century Britain* (Woodbridge, 1995), Introduction, esp. pp. 1–2, 11–18; *The Decline of Magic: Britain in the Enlightenment* (New Haven and London, 2020), esp. pp. 4, 167–8.

[4] Constance B. Kuriyama, *Christopher Marlowe: A Renaissance Life* (Ithaca, 2002), p. 221.

[5] Gilbert Burnet, *Some Passages of the Life and Death of the Right Hon. John Earl of Rochester* (London, 1680), pp. 53, 72–3.

[6] See Noel Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 383–6; this volume, pp. 97–8, 121.

[7] See pp. 98, 122. It is also worth noting the associated case of the apprentice, John Frazer, accused of expressing various irreligious opinions, 'And when asked what religion he could be off that held such principles he answered of no religion at all but was just ane Atheist', p. 111.

[8] See pp. 162, 166–7.

*Pitcairneana*, attributed to Archibald Pitcairne and presented in Chapter 7. Whereas the viewpoint presented there was clearly carefully thought out, some of the other recorded statements may not have been so systematic. Nevertheless, it is easy to understand the outrage that such incendiary utterances were bound to cause in the deeply theistic culture in which they were expressed, and the term 'atheist' well summarises their aggressive and confrontational manner.

Yet it needs to be emphasised at the outset just how rare such examples are. Obviously, the judicial execution of Aikenhead illustrated the dangers of publicly expressing such views, and others were clearly well advised to be more discreet in putting forward opinions of this kind. Yet the fact of the matter is that assiduous research has failed to bring to light more than scattered examples of other figures who fall into a similar category. The earliest work to be published in Britain which openly argued for a fully atheist position came out only in 1745: this took the form of a book titled *The Origin of Moral Virtue and Religion Arraigned*, of which Roger Maioli has recently discovered an apparently unique copy once owned by Horace Walpole, and which he has tentatively attributed to Lord Hervey.[9] Atheists in the early modern period turn out to be extremely hard to find.

This makes it all the more paradoxical that concern about the threat presented by atheism dominated the thought of British, as of European, intellectuals throughout the early modern period. Famously, the French Minim monk Marin Mersenne claimed in 1623 that there were 50,000 atheists in Paris alone, a claim that was echoed by Robert Burton in his encyclopedic *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621 and subsequent editions).[10] There are comparable estimates as far as Britain is concerned. From the claim of the Elizabethan littérateur Thomas Nashe, that 'There is no Sect now in *England* so scattered as Atheisme' to the view of the Calvinist divine John Edwards in 1695 that 'there is scarcely a Town where there are not some that may justly be reckon'd in this number', contemporaries were unanimous in their sense of the scale and perniciousness of the threat

[9] See Roger Maioli, 'The First Avowed British Atheist: Lord Hervey?', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 54 (2021), 357–79. This supersedes the earlier claim by David Berman that the first openly atheist book was Matthew Turner's *An Answer to Dr Priestley's Letter to a Philosophical Unbeliever* (1782) (see Berman, *A History of Atheism in Britain: From Hobbes to Russell* (London, 1988), pp. 110–20), unless *The Origin of Moral Virtue* was in fact ironically intended, a possibility that Maioli does not discuss.

[10] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. T. C. Faulkner, N. K. Kiessling and R. L. Blair, 6 vols (Oxford, 1989–2000), III, 405. For Mersenne's statement (and his removal of it from later editions of the book in question), see Adam Horsley, *Libertines and the Law: Subversive Authors and Criminal Justice in Early Seventeenth-Century France* (Oxford, 2021), p. 59 and n. 149.

that they faced.[11] Volume after volume poured from the press expounding and excoriating the supposed atheist menace, and this literature has been the subject of intense scrutiny by modern scholars.[12] It was also for this reason that the great scientist Robert Boyle made provision in his will for the endowment of what proved to be a highly influential series of Lectures 'for proving the Christian Religion against Atheists and Theists [i.e., Deists] descending no lower to any Controversies that are among Christians'.[13]

How, therefore, is this major discrepancy between the scale of concern and the evidence of actual irreligion to be explained? Here, various points need to be made. In the first place, it is necessary to understand that 'atheism' was at the same time a concept – almost an abstract one – and potentially a description of a phenomenon. For Richard Hooker in his classic *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1593–7), 'affected Atheism' was 'the most extreme opposite to true Religion', and it is important to appreciate the role of antitheses in early modern thought, the need to evoke and elaborate contrary positions to explicate and make sense of deeply held beliefs.[14] This has been demonstrated with particular clarity by Stuart Clark in his magisterial study of witchcraft, who has made clear the extent to which contemporaries used inversion to understand the witches' sabbat and related phenomena, elaborating a world of misrule to illustrate the virtues of order. As James I succinctly put it, 'since the Devill is the verie

[11] Thomas Nashe, *Works*, ed. R. B. McKerrow, 2nd ed., 5 vols (Oxford, 1958), II, 121–2; John Edwards, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Several Causes and Occasions of Atheism* (London, 1695), p. 132.

[12] Most recently, see Kenneth Sheppard, *Anti-Atheism in Early Modern England 1580–1720. The Atheist Answered and His Error Confuted* (Leiden, 2015). A general account is provided by *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, ed. Michael Hunter and David Wootton (Oxford, 1992). For earlier studies, see D. C. Allen, *Doubt's Boundless Sea: Skepticism and Faith in the Renaissance* (Baltimore, 1964); G. E. Aylmer, 'Unbelief in Seventeenth-Century England', in *Puritans and Revolutionaries: Essays in Seventeenth-Century History Presented to Christopher Hill*, ed. D. H. Pennington and Keith Thomas (Oxford, 1978), pp. 22–46; Berman, *History of Atheism*. See also Sarah Ellensweig, *The Fringes of Belief: English Literature, Ancient Heresy, and the Politics of Freethinking, 1660–1760* (Stanford, 2008) and Roger D. Lund, *Ridicule, Religion and the Politics of Wit in Augustan England* (Farnham, 2012). For France, see Horsley, *Libertines and the Law* and the works by Alan C. Kors listed in n. 16.

[13] Quoted from the memorandum in the hand of Gilbert Burnet which clearly represents the original notion for the lectureship in *Robert Boyle by Himself and His Friends*, ed. Michael Hunter (London, 1994), p. xxv. In Boyle's will, the rubric was slightly elaborated to include 'Pagans, Jews and Mahometans': see Michael Hunter, *Boyle: Between God and Science* (New Haven and London, 2009), pp. 240–1.

[14] Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, ed. A. S. McGrade, 3 vols (Oxford, 2013), II, 13.

contrarie opposite to God, there can be no better way to know God, then by the contrarie'.[15]

Much the same is true of atheism, as has been illustrated most brilliantly by Alan Kors in relation to late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century France, where he has argued that, in the course of deploying such tactics, a whole armoury of atheist arguments was forged by orthodox thinkers. In Kors's words, such authors knew that there 'had to be an "atheism" in the form of atheistic argumentation, whether or not there were any minds who actually held to or proselytized for such a point of view . . . If atheism in that sense did not exist, the members of the learned world would have had to invent it'.[16] There is a real sense in which the word was used in the period almost as an abstraction, a theoretical concept to describe a godless universe which, however unthinkable in practice, it was frighteningly possible to construct by means of the inexorable logic encouraged by scholastic modes of thought. The matter was well summarised by the English divine Thomas Barlow in a letter to Robert Boyle in which, discussing the assertion of another cleric, John Turner, that Descartes was an atheist (a claim often made at the time, which was as often refuted), Barlow explained: 'I suppose he does not meane, that Des Cartes is a profess'd Atheist, soe as to deny the beeinge of a Deity; but that it will follow from his avowed principles, that there is noe God'.[17]

On the other hand, the ancillary term 'atheists' was also used to describe people whom it was claimed actually held such views, and herein arises a degree of complication. There were those who denied that any 'true' atheists existed, including men against whom atheist accusations were made. Thus, Bishop Gilbert Burnet recorded how the Earl of Rochester 'professed often to me, That he had never known an entire *Atheist*, who fully believed there was no God', while John Wagstaffe, a Restoration freethinker who had to respond to accusations that he was an atheist, not only denied this but went on: 'Nor did I ever meet with an Atheist in all

[15] Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons. The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997), p. 137.

[16] Kors, *Atheism in France 1650–1729. Volume 1: The Orthodox Sources of Disbelief* (Princeton, 1990), p. 81. See also his *Naturalism and Unbelief in France, 1650–1729* (Cambridge, 2016) and his ancillary study, *Epicureans and Atheists in France, 1650–1729* (Cambridge, 2016). For the related argument that apologists like the Boyle lecturer Samuel Clarke effectively sold the pass on religion by conducting their defence of it almost wholly in philosophical rather than theological terms, see Michael J. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven and London, 1987); see also his *Denying and Disclosing God: The Ambiguous Progress of Modern Atheism* (New Haven and London, 2004).

[17] Barlow to Boyle, 29 November 1684, in *The Correspondence of Robert Boyle*, ed. Michael Hunter, Antonio Clericuzio and Lawrence M. Principe, 6 vols (London, 2001), VI, 93.

my life, as to my own knowledge; and therefore am apt to believe, that those who are recorded such in History, were rather reputed then, real Atheists'.[18] Other contemporaries agreed that the word could be used as a term of abuse, like the Latitudinarian divine Joseph Glanvill, who claimed that 'the Charge of *Atheism*, is like the bolt of one that throws *hard words* in *haste*, and without aim or judgment' – though this did not prevent him from frequently using the accusation himself.[19]

Glanvill's claim has been echoed by modern authors such as Leonard W. Levy, who has argued that 'the term "atheist" was little more than a dirty word', or Margaret C. Jacob, who has claimed that this and similar words 'were bandied about so much that they lost all useful meaning'.[20] Indeed, it is easy to understand the frustration concerning our knowledge of the nature and extent of the atheist threat in the period expressed by David Berman in the first book-length study of its subject, *A History of Atheism in Britain: From Hobbes to Russell* (1988). As he there pointed out concerning George T. Buckley's promising-sounding *Atheism in the English Renaissance*, published in 1932 and reprinted in 1965: 'Despite his title, Buckley is unable to find any atheism during the period', and Berman continued:

> A similar judgement can be passed on John Redwood's study of the period 1660 to 1750, *Reason, Ridicule and Religion* (London, 1976). Throughout the book we read of the 'atheist scare', 'atheist question', 'atheist plot'; but the author never examines the simple but central question: Were there any avowedly atheistic books published in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries?[21]

It did not help that, for much of the twentieth century, a powerful historiography prevailed which denied that atheism existed at all in the sixteenth century, by extension also throwing doubt on the validity of the concept in relation to the seventeenth. This was associated particularly with the influential polemic by the annalist historian Lucien Febvre, *Le*

[18] Burnet, *Some Passages*, p. 22; Wagstaffe, *The Question of Witchcraft Debated*, 2nd ed. (London, 1671), pp. 151–2, quoted in Hunter, *Decline of Magic*, p. 41.

[19] Glanvill, *Plus Ultra* (London, 1668), sig. A7. For his use of the accusation, see Hunter, *Decline of Magic*, pp. 19, 24, 28–9, 39, 41, 103–4.

[20] Leonard W. Levy, *Blasphemy: Verbal Offense against the Sacred, from Moses to Salman Rushdie* (New York, 1993), p. 279; M. C. Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution 1689–1720* (Hassocks, 1976), p. 202.

[21] Berman, *History of Atheism*, p. 46, n. 37 ('there' is accidently misprinted as 'they'). It is perhaps worth pointing out that Redwood's *Reason, Ridicule and Religion: The Age of Enlightenment in England 1660–1750* was reprinted in 1996 with some of its more egregious misprints and other infelicities corrected, though its overall thrust is unchanged.

*problème de l'incroyance au XVIe siècle: La religion de Rabelais* (1942), translated into English in 1982 as *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*. This is undoubtedly a brilliant and thought-provoking book, but it could be argued that in it Febvre was himself guilty of the kind of anachronistic thinking that he castigated in others in his presumption that the only possible route to atheism was post-Cartesian philosophy and science. As David Wootton has pointed out, the combination of Febvre's influence with a reaction against 'Whig' history and an increased scrupulousness concerning evidence led to a diffidence on the part of historians about labelling figures in the past as atheists, almost as if this were a form of character assassination.[22]

On the other hand, the argument that atheists were non-existent is not only at odds with the proliferation of anti-atheist polemic in the period that has already been described; it was also specifically countered by contemporaries themselves. A clear example is provided by the Cambridge divine Ralph Cudworth in his magisterial work, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678). In the concluding paragraph of his 'Preface to the Reader', Cudworth wrote:

> We are not Ignorant, That some will be ready to condemn this whole Labour of ours, and of others in this Kind, Against *Atheism*, as altogether Useless and Superfluous; upon this Pretence, that an *Atheist* is a meer *Chimæra*, and there is no such thing any-where to be found in the World. And indeed we could heartily wish, upon that condition, that all this Labour of ours, were *Superfluous* and *Useless*. But as to *Atheists*, These so confident *Exploders* of them, are both Unskilled in the *Monuments* of *Antiquity*, and Unacquainted with the Present Age, they live in; others having found too great an Assurance, from their own *Personal Converse*, of the *Reality* of Them.[23]

Cudworth's allusion to 'the *Monuments* of *Antiquity*' provides us with one crucial clue. There was a sense of contemporaneity with the classics, and a proclivity to cross-reference to them at every point, which needs to be borne in mind: as Alan Kors has pointed out in relation to French writings in the period, 'it is difficult to exaggerate the "presence" in early-

[22] David Wootton, 'New Histories of Atheism', in Hunter and Wootton, *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, pp. 13–53 (pp. 15–21). See also his important studies, 'Lucien Febvre and the Problem of Unbelief in the Early Modern Period', *Journal of Modern History*, 60 (1988), 695–730; 'Unbelief in Early Modern Europe', *History Workshop Journal*, 20 (1985), 82–100, and *Paolo Sarpi: Between Renaissance and Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983).

[23] Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London, 1678), sig. ***2v. Cudworth went on to assert his ancillary aim of helping in 'the Confirmation of *Weak, Staggering,* and *Scepticall Theists*'.

modern minds of classical and patristic thought'.[24] This has more recently and fully been demonstrated in relation to the English state of affairs by Dmitri Levitin in his *Ancient Wisdom in the Age of the New Science* (2015), which has illustrated how passionately Cudworth and others revisited the literature of antiquity in their lengthy discussions of matter theory and related topics, and their pursuit of a view of nature that was at the same time safe and compatible with orthodox Christianity.[25]

On the other hand, Cudworth speaks equally knowingly of his acquaintance with 'the Present Age', including his '*Personal Converse*' with those who espoused opinions of the kind that caused him concern, and this presents us with more of a challenge. In order to understand this, and particularly his reference to views orally expressed, we need to look more deeply and imaginatively at his and his fellow authors' usage in order to understand the phenomenon in question and how it related to trends in the thought of the period more generally. In particular, it may be argued that the accusation of atheism could be used to denote extremes in the styles of naturalistic and secularist explanation that, in a less extreme form, were pervasive in the thought of the time, and this is a topic which it is particularly important to understand.

Thus, in his 1669 attack on atheism, the politician and author Sir Charles Wolseley had no doubt that a crucial factor in the growth of irreligion had been 'The general revival of, and the great applause that hath, of late, been given to such Philosophical notions, as broadly and directly lead this way'.[26] He was clearly referring to the flourishing new science of the period, and it is noteworthy how defensive in tone the writings on behalf of the new philosophy in the late seventeenth century often were, notwithstanding the deep piety of many of its practitioners. 'I cannot deny, but that some *Philosophers*, by their carelessness of a Future Estate, have brought a discredit on *Knowledge* itself', wrote Thomas Sprat in his *History of the Royal Society* (1667), and a concern about the potentially irreligious connotations of the study of nature was echoed by the scientists themselves.[27] Even Robert Boyle was anxious to show 'that, if I be a Naturalist, 'tis possible to be so, without being an Atheist, or of Kin to it'; he was equally clear in hoping that his work, *The Christian Virtuoso*

[24] Kors, *Atheism in France*, p. 197.
[25] Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom in the Age of the New Science. Histories of Philosophy in England, c. 1640–1700* (Cambridge, 2015), esp. ch. 5.
[26] Wolseley, *The Unreasonablenesse of Atheism Made Manifest* (London, 1669), p. 37.
[27] Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society of London* (London, 1667), p. 375. For background, see Hunter, *Science and Society in Restoration England* (Cambridge, 1981), ch. 7.

(1690–1), would demonstrate 'That there is no Inconsistence between a Man's being an Industrious *Virtuoso,* and a Good *Christian*'.[28] This placed an even greater premium on the Boyle Lectures that Boyle founded to use scientific findings to attack irreligion, an objective with which Richard Bentley and his successors obligingly complied.[29]

More broadly, accusations of atheism reflected concern about an overwhelming this-worldliness, an appeal to commonsensical values and to sceptical, reductionist principles. Here, a case in point is provided by John Wagstaffe, the very figure whose denial of the existence of atheists was quoted earlier in this chapter. Wagstaffe was a typical example of the culture of 'freethinking' that flourished in the Restoration period, and his book, *The Question of Witchcraft Debated* (1669), well illustrates the deflationary, rather cynical discourse that was often the target of atheist accusations like that made against him. Wagstaffe took the view that witchcraft beliefs had deliberately been promoted by rulers and priests in antiquity and the Middle Ages, the entire superstructure of such beliefs being encouraged by human deceit and misapprehension, 'the folly of some, or the knavery of others'.[30] He thus well exemplified the attitude excoriated by Joseph Glanvill, who took the view that 'those that dare not bluntly say, *There is NO GOD*, content themselves, (for a fair *step*, and *Introduction*) to deny there are *SPIRITS*, or *WITCHES*'. In Wagstaffe's case, he also held other questionable opinions, even expressing the view that 'the various Religions that have been in the world, are more than enough to convince one, how absurd and ridiculous the wisest of men are in matters of Opinion or Belief'.[31]

In terms of religious doctrine, it is hardly surprising that atheist accusations were often made against those who challenged Christian orthodoxy by espousing a religion that appealed to reason, rejecting components of doctrine which were seen as incompatible with this. A case in point are the Socinians, a radical group which originated in sixteenth-century Italy before becoming established in Poland and then spreading first to the Netherlands and thence to England, who argued for a scaled-down,

[28] Boyle, *Works*, ed. Michael Hunter and Edward B. Davis, 14 vols (London, 1999–2000), II, 389; XI, 283.

[29] For recent studies see Pierre Lurbe, 'La réfutation de l'athéism par Richard Bentley', in *La question de l'athéism au dix-huitieme siècle*, ed. Sylvia Taussig and Pierre Lurbe (Turnhout, 2004), pp. 157–72, and Paul C. H. Lim, 'Atheism, Atoms, and the Activity of God: Science and Religion in Early Boyle Lectures, 1692–1707', *Zygon*, 56 (2021), 143–67. On the genre of physico-theology as a whole see now Kaspar von Greyerz, *European Physico-Theology (1650–c. 1760) in Context: Celebrating Nature and Creation* (Oxford, 2022).

[30] Hunter, *Decline of Magic*, ch. 1, esp. p. 38. [31] Ibid., pp. 24, 39.

rationalistic religion, denying both the Trinity and the divinity of Christ. In the view of John Edwards, there was a definite '*Atheistick* Tang' to Socinian views, and, from the early seventeenth century onwards, those who held such opinions were widely attacked as dangerously undermining the key precepts of the Christian faith.[32]

This was equally true of the movement in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England known as Deism, which has been the subject of extensive and ongoing scrutiny.[33] Undoubtedly, those described as Deists – such men as Charles Blount, John Toland and Anthony Collins – represented an extreme attack on accepted Christian principles which was often perceived at the time as a highroad to atheism. Indeed, Richard Bentley in his Boyle Lectures accused such men of fomenting overt irreligion, arguing that 'to avoid the odious name of *Atheists*, [such thinkers] would shelter and screen themselves under a new one of *Deists*, which is not quite so obnoxious'.[34] There is in fact some ambiguity concerning the extent to which certain of these men, notably Collins, might be accused of being actual, if concealed, atheists, a vexed question which it is probably in retrospect impossible to resolve.[35] On the other hand, matters are complicated by the breadth of usage of the word 'Deism', since those frequently described as Deists held a wide range of doctrines. Indeed, there is a sense in which both contemporaries and historians have used the term as a kind of 'fudge', 'a matter of convenience

[32] Edwards, *Some Thoughts*, p. 64. See H. J. McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1951); Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge, 2010); Paul C. H. Lim, *Mystery Unveiled; The Crisis of the Trinity in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2012).

[33] For some of the principal studies see R. E. Sullivan, *John Toland and the Deist Controversy* (Cambridge, MA., 1982); Justin A. I. Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church and England and its Enemies, 1660–1730* (Cambridge, 1992) and *Republican Learning: John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture, 1696–1722* (Manchester, 2003); Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660–1780*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1991–2000), II, ch. 1; Wayne Hudson, *The English Deists: Studies in Early Enlightenment* (London, 2009) and *Enlightenment and Modernity: The English Deists and Reform* (London, 2009); and Jeffrey Wigelsworth, *Deism in Enlightenment England: Theology, Politics and Newtonian Public Science* (Manchester, 2009). The Deists also figure in Jonathan Israel's magisterial *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford, 2001); see also his *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity and the Emancipation of Man 1670–1752* (Oxford, 2006) and his *The Enlightenment that Failed: Ideas, Revolution and Democratic Defeat 1748–1830* (Oxford, 2019), esp. ch. 5.

[34] Bentley, *Works*, ed. Alexander Dyce, 3 vols (London, 1836–8), III, 4.

[35] See esp. Berman, *History of Atheism*, ch. 3, Pascal Taranto, *Du déism à l'athéisme: La libre-pensée d'Anthony Collins* (Paris, 2000) and Giovanni Tarantino, 'Collins's Cicero, Freethinker', in *Atheism and Deism Revalued: Heterodox Religious Identities in Britain, 1650–1800*, ed. Wayne Hudson, Diego Lucci and J. R. Wigelsworth (Farnham, 2014), pp. 81–99.