Introduction
From learning to liberalism?

In 1706, England's freethinking firebrand Matthew Tindal published *The rights of the Christian church*, a scathing attack on all men of the cloth. One of the first priests to respond to Tindal was his former Oxford tutor, George Hickes, the country's greatest living historian and the éminence grise of the Anglican high church movement. He publicly corrected his pupil early the next year with 600 pages of angry erudition.[1] That summer, though, a friend handed Hickes a much pithier work, already thirty years old, called *A modest plea for the clergy*. Upon reading it, he was stunned. 'Had I come sooner to the knowledge of it', he later admitted, 'instead of writing against the *Rights* myself, I should have thought it sufficient to reprint it, with some application, and reflections, as an answer to that insolent book'. A new edition of the *Plea* appeared two years later, with a preface from Hickes. This book, he promised, was the perfect anti-dote to Tindal and his evil brethren. 'It was about the time *The modest plea for the clergy* was first published', Hickes recalled, 'that these enemies of the priesthood, growing numerous, grew also bold and daring'. Sensing the threat, this writer had set out to 'obviate' what many now regard as the founding provocation of the Enlightenment: the claim that since ancient times, 'the whole Jewish and Christian world have been abused by crafty priests'.[2]

In his quest the anonymous author of the *Plea* brandished weaponry he shared with his enemies. He relied on 'invincible strength of reason' and 'great variety of learning', both 'humane and divine', to defend the Christian ministry. 'If he will read no more', Hickes teased his reader, 'let him but read the second chapter', where the author had used Thomas Hobbes's own methods to defend the same priests the monster of Malmesbury had pilloried. This was a book, Hickes declared, 'which I desire the serious to compare with any of those, which the Deists, those disciples of Spinoza,

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[1] Hickes, *Two treatises.*   [2] Hickes, 'To the reader'; Bodl Ballard MS 12, f. 170.

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have published'. Hickes was announcing that in 1677, three decades before
Tindal even put pen to paper, and years before the Enlightenment is even
thought to have begun, the best freethinking of the age had been antici-
pated and parried in a tract so obscure that Hickes could not even discover
who had written it.[3]

Readers of the *Plea* could find in its pages not only the tools of the
church's enemies, but their very thoughts and sentiments. The tract rang
with alarm at the sloth and pretension of the nation's priests and prelates.
It cited their role in hastening England's horrific descent into civil war.
It nodded to Hobbes and other men who had discerned this and urged
drastic courses. Like *Leviathan*, it sought a lasting peace that all could
accept, whatever they thought about God, by pondering the nature of
religion and politics without reference to his plans. It affirmed that the
essence of every religion was the religion of nature. And for a moment,
it even granted that all priests were imposters. But then it asked: were
priests not a part of this religion of nature? Were they not essential to the
stability and improvement of society? After all, they were the performers
of sacrifices before the people, the teachers and scolders of the masses, and
the trusted counsellors of kings. They were at once pastors and politicians,
the ultimate governors of life.[4]

The *Plea* dared those who denied the divine pedigree of the priesthood
to deny its function. It dared them to deny that in a Christian society, the
prudent course was to sustain the belief that priests were Christ's successors
on earth, whether this was true or not. There is no doubt what Hickes
meant when he claimed that the *Plea* obviated the campaigns of Spinoza
and his brothers across the North Sea to put an end to clerical mind
control. These proposals simply did not follow from their stated premises.
They followed only, Hickes believed, from their true premise: the desire
of notoriously dissolute men like Tindal to destroy everyone who stood
between them and the objects of their lusts.

Since the shadowy author of the *Plea* referred to the clergy in the third
person, Hickes ranked him among the ablest laymen to defend the English
ministry since the Reformation. In fact, he was a fellow priest. His name
was Lancelot Addison.[5] The long-forgotten father of the Whig literary

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[3] Hickes, 'To the reader'. Compare Kors, *Atheism in France*. The secondary apparatus in the notes to
follow is by no means comprehensive. For additional bibliography and historiographical discussion,
see Bulman, 'Constantine's Enlightenment'; Bulman, 'Enlightenment for the culture wars'; Bulman,
'Hobbes's publisher and the political business of Enlightenment'.

[4] See, for example, Gorski, *Disciplinary revolution*; Headley *et al.* (eds), *Confessionalization in Europe*;
Foucault, *Security, territory, population*, 87–283; Foucault, *Religion and culture*, 135–52.

[5] For confirmation see, for example, *PSJ*, 3rd edn, 'Books lately printed for William Crooke'.

giant Joseph Addison (of *Tatler* and *Spectator* fame), he was baptized in
1632 in the north of England, where he went to school while his country was
ravaged by war. After the killing of the king he made it to Oxford, where
he became a master of arts shortly before the death of Oliver Cromwell.
Forced out of the university after he failed to secure a fellowship at his
college and publicly insulted the puritan dons, he preached in the Anglican
underground and travelled in Spain and France. In 1663 he moved further
south, across the straits of Gibraltar, to serve as chaplain to England's
first African colony, Tangier. He lived there for seven years, attempting to
convert North Africans to Christianity and observing what he could.

On his return to England Addison settled into a lowly living in Wilt-
shire, began to write, and rose to leadership in the church on the strength
of his pen. In 1683 he was named dean of Lichfield, and the next year
archdeacon of Coventry, but his hopes for a bishopric were dashed by the
Glorious Revolution. He remained an active but frustrated presence in the
church and the Tory party until his death in 1703.[6] His oeuvre totalled
thirteen works besides the *Plea*. They ranged from studies of the Jews and
Muslims he encountered in the Maghrib to a volume of devotional poetry
he composed in his deanery. Nearly all of his scholarly and pastoral pur-
suits were also political interventions. Hickes almost certainly knew about
Addison, since they had both been promoted in the heyday of the Tory
Revenge. Had he been able to identify the late dean as the author of the
Plea, Hickes could have referred to scores of other moments in Addison's
career that played to his point that freethinking was apparently thriving
but intellectually stillborn.

Whatever his ignorance about who wrote the *Plea*, and whatever the
partisan fury that drove his esteem for it, Hickes had done well to return
the book to public view. It lay bare a series of facts that both he and his
enemies were usually reluctant to admit, and the liberal-minded historians
of the past two centuries have been even less willing to acknowledge.
The thoughts, concerns, and practices that enabled the famous learned
rebellions of the late seventeenth century immediately fuelled an attempt
to quell them. This had been possible because the freethinkers' tools had
not been invented by dissidents, but long cultivated by the establishment.
And it had been plausible because these tools, and the norms that governed
their use, were compatible with both dreams of freedom and fantasies of
authority.

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[6] Hamilton, 'Addison, Lancelot'.

In the decades that followed, these facts were occasionally recalled but eventually forgotten. Today, it is hard to imagine that a book like the *Plea* ever existed. The civic humanism and classic liberalism that prospered in the world Hickes inhabited have maintained a firm grip on the interpreters of that world. Despite all the ghastly counter-examples of modern history, it still proves tempting to assume that humanistic innovation automatically fosters ethical citizenship and freedom of all sorts, especially in unfree societies like early modern England.[7] Liberals on the right and the left, whether political theorists or laymen, tend to believe that the human sciences born in this era were not only largely consistent with liberalism, but bound to produce it.[8] Historians usually concur. The overwhelming consensus is this: in John Locke's England, intellectual advances and progressive ideas about church and state went hand in hand. In the days of grasping monarchs, domineering priests, and confessional states, the relativistic ideas and irenic concerns about religion and politics that founded the scientific study of both naturally spurred demands for freer religion, freer speech, limited government, and the expansion of civil society. In other words, the raw materials of early Enlightenment culture were inseparable from struggles for emancipation.[9]

England's Enlightenment has thus been taken to be the intellectual face of its Glorious Revolution. Most see it as the child and protector of 1688, pious and conservative by both English and continental standards: it may have had a radical wing, but it mostly defended the Whig constitution and refused to go further.[10] Others trace England's Enlightenment back to the reign of Charles II. For them it was a precursor to 1688, the brainchild of Hobbes, Harrington, and Locke. But in structure it looks much the same, a mix of moderation and extremes. It was an affront to the establishment, but tame by Spinozist standards. Its radicals were anticlerical, impious, and republican, but not quite irreligious.[11] Even its most polite proponents,

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7   For background, see Grafton and Jardine, *From humanism to the humanities*, xii, xiv, 22–8, 66, 138–49, 196–200.
8   For a broad overview, see Collins, 'Early modern foundations of classic liberalism'.
9   Marshall, *John Locke, toleration and early Enlightenment culture*, esp. 517.
10 Young, *Religion and Enlightenment*; Porter, 'Enlightenment in England'; Pocock, 'Clergy and commerce'; Pocock, 'Post-puritan England'; Pocock, 'Conservative Enlightenment'; Pocock, *Barbarism and religion*, esp. I, 7–8, 21–7, 53–4, 298; V, xi, 16–18; Pocock, 'Historiography and Enlightenment', 85; Porter, *Enlightenment*; O'Brien, *Women and Enlightenment*. At points Pocock and Young seem to entertain the notion that the English Enlightenment first took root among 'latitudinarians' in the Restoration church: Pocock, 'Clergy and commerce', 530–31; Pocock, 'Conservative Enlightenment', 86–7; Young, *Religion and Enlightenment*, 11.
11 Champion, *Pillars of priestcraft shaken*; Marshall, *John Locke, toleration and early Enlightenment culture*.

the so-called 'latitudinarians', sought to place the church under the thumb of the state and relax the yoke of conformity.[12] Both period portraits sit well with a wider consensus among scholars: the European Enlightenment clearly began as a profound threat to priestly power, even if sometime afterwards it was co-opted and corrupted by the old regime.

There is no place in this story for Addison's *Plea*. And in the master narrative of politics to which this history of ideas has been wedded, there is no place for Addison. The account of later Stuart England that prevails today honours not the Whig constitution as a whole, as it used to, but toleration, the religious tenet of that constitution and the cultural tenet of liberalism. It is a tale of dialectics and dichotomies. It renders the later seventeenth century the site of an epochal conflict between intellectually innovative proponents of increased religious freedoms and intellectually ossified opponents of those freedoms. The fact that this was indeed a period of fitfully expanding religious liberties has encouraged the notion that the period witnessed a struggle for and against them.[13] The mere existence of Addison and his *Plea* suggests the need for a less Manichean account. The intellectual facts of Addison's life clearly clash with the dominant narrative, but so do the political ones. He was a stern conformist among Christians at home, but he was an ecumenical tolerationist in Africa. He even wanted to formally welcome the Jews back to England.

As it turns out, Addison is only the beginning of the problem. The dominant view of the period cannot be salvaged by adding nuance, or by noting an exception to the rule that Anglican conformists were benighted reactionaries.[14] Among the leaders of the church, apparent exceptions like Addison *were* the rule. The *Plea* was and is obscure not because it was a solitary, eccentric work of genius that everyone preferred to ignore, but because it was an ordinary specimen in a church that teemed with creativity.

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[12] Marshall, 'The ecclesiology of the latitude-men'; Rivers, *Reason, grace, and sentiment*, I, 25–88; Jacob, *Newtonians and the English Revolution*; Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, 36–58; Cragg, *From puritanism to the Age of Reason*, 61–86; Pocock, *Barbarism and religion*, I, 53.

[13] Examples abound. See Harris, *Restoration*, esp. 54–6; Goldie, 'Priestcraft and the birth of Whiggism'; Goldie, 'The theory of religious intolerance'; Harris, *Politics under the later Stuarts*, 40–74; Marshall, *John Locke, toleration and early Enlightenment culture*; De Krey, *London and the Restoration*; Knights, '"Meer religion" and the "church-state" of Restoration England'; Goldie, *Roger Morrice*; Sowerby, *Making toleration*. For more secularist liberal accounts, see Pincus, *1688*; Patterson, *Long Parliament of Charles II*.

[14] The most sophisticated and widely cited intellectual portraits of conformist Anglicans would have them devoted to scholastic philosophy and theology, 'the *ipse dixit* of the Fathers', the 'anti-heretical and anti-schismatic literature' of the Middle Ages and the Reformation, and pre-Civil War political theory. See Goldie, 'The theory of religious intolerance', quotation on 335; Goldie, 'Political thought of the Anglican Revolution'; Goldie, 'John Locke and Anglican royalism'; Marshall, *John Locke, toleration and early Enlightenment culture*, 195–466, quotation on 213.

Its author is obscure not because he is an undiscovered gem, but because he was flanked by a series of truly exceptional divines who often exceeded him in their erudition and pious activism. Even worse, Addison's inconsistent stance on religious liberty made him not anomalous but ordinary among the English elite at large. His friends and his enemies mostly sided with both freedom and restraint as it suited their broader objectives – the things that truly divided them. Addison and nearly every single one of his contemporaries in early modern Europe saw toleration as a political tactic, not a political principle. It was much more a mode of power than a prop to freedom.[15]

Once all these facts are assembled, the usual story of later Stuart England no longer seems tenable. There can be no conflict between innovators and ossifiers with innovators on both sides, and there can be no conflict for and against religious liberties when hardly anyone in the period seems to have been willing to consistently countenance them. It is also impossible to redeem the existing consensus about the English Enlightenment, the English church, and revolutionary England itself by making vague references to 'Anglican rationalism' or by arguing that the occasionally open-minded, irenic outlook of priests like Addison merits them a place on the liberal side.[16] A description of this period that renders figures like him intelligible must be holistic and open-ended, free of liberal (and illiberal) dialectics and denouements. It must be driven by less loaded questions about the combination of ubiquitous piety and creeping modernity in revolutionary England that has always fascinated its students. One such question worth special attention is this: how did such a fervently Protestant and overwhelmingly Anglican establishment come to accept for good the idea that civil stability is more important than religious uniformity?

The acceptance of this idea was driven not by a clarion call for increased religious freedoms, but by a desperate cry for peace, one in which pleas for tolerance were barely audible, and calls for conformity continued to ring out loud and clear. Accordingly, the event that holds the key to explaining the emergent priority of civil stability in England is not its second revolution, but its first. The entire period between the execution of Charles I and the death of Anne was in many ways a post-revolutionary era. England's elites,

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[15] Walsham, *Charitable hatred*; Shagan, *Rule of moderation*, 288–325; Murphy, *Conscience and community*; Hunter, *Secularization of the confessional state*; Parkin and Stanton (eds), *Natural law and toleration*. For a broader view, see Brown, *Regulating aversion*.

[16] Contrast Trevor-Roper, *Crisis of the seventeenth century*, 179–218; Trevor-Roper, *Catholics, Anglicans, and puritans*, 40–119, 166–230.

like their contemporaries all across Europe, were living in the shadow of
internecine bloodshed. They were preoccupied with the basic question
their own civil war had posed: how was it possible to reconstitute the
relationship between faith and politics in order to avert another descent
into chaos? They realized that this was a moment in which brittle reaction
had no place. For the most part, they came to contend with one another
not over whether England should move beyond the cultural, religious, and
political arrangements that had torn it apart, but over the way in which it
should do so, and over which people and practices were holding back this
forward motion.[17] The conflicts of the later Stuart era were not battles for
and against intellectual innovation, religious freedom, or progress. They
were struggles among rival visions of modernity.[18]

There is no better way to appreciate this than to look again at the most
apparently backward force of the age. The Restoration Church of England
was the largest, most complex institution in Britain, and it dominated insti-
tutions of learning. Yet it remains curiously neglected and misunderstood.
The two best available models for describing it are drawn from interpretive
frameworks invented by the partisans of later Stuart politics. One seeks to
grasp the extent to which the church was unified in outlook and action
in this period, as its apologists claimed it was.[19] The predominant model,
by contrast, tends to describe the church as its Whig and puritan enemies
portrayed it: enamoured with hierarchy, driven by angry zeal to persecute
its enemies, and divided between a reactionary, thick-headed, 'high church'
majority and a more progressive, 'rationalist', 'latitudinarian' minority.[20]
The ultimate reason why the church is now thought to have been over-
whelmingly hostile to every novelty that occurred under its watch is that
its leadership worked tirelessly to convince their contemporaries that it
was. And the ultimate reason why the church has long been described as
essentially coercive, domineering, and moribund is that its enemies were

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[17] On stronger understandings of worldly betterment in later eighteenth-century Britain, see
Spadafora, *Idea of progress*.

[18] Contrast the similar positions of Pincus, *1688*; Pocock, 'Conservative Enlightenment', 85, 87, 91;
McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment*.

[19] Spurr, *Restoration Church of England*, is by far the best treatment within this category. Fully aware
of the diversity and tensions within the church, Spurr nevertheless tended to sideline them, partly
in an attempt to counter the usual Whiggish or secular liberal account (see, for example, 163–4).

[20] Rose, *Godly kingship*, provides a great deal of evidence for the inadequacy of this model but
appears to retain it (see esp. 131–2). The most recent defence of it is Tyacke, 'From Laudians to
latitudinarians'. For devastating criticisms, see Spurr, '"Latitudinarianism" and the Restoration
church'; Ashcraft, 'Latitudinarianism and toleration'. Use of the term 'high church' is at least as
untenable and misleading before the reign of Anne, and again in the Georgian period.

keen to make it seem so. Both campaigns have succeeded brilliantly to the present day.

A better understanding of Anglicanism in later Stuart England would be guided by the views of neither its enemies nor its advocates.[21] Tindal, of course, was partly right about the clergy. They guarded their privileged place in society and helped to make Charles II's reign a spectacle of persecution and repression. Yet close scrutiny of their public pitches and pastoral practice reveals that from the Restoration onwards, neither state violence nor the rusty political theology often used to justify it were central to their vision for the future. Their agenda is best described not as an angry drive against heterodoxy that emerged from an intellectual backwater, but as a novel scheme for civil stability and moral improvement drawn from the cutting edge of learned culture. The Anglican Enlightenment was the church's primary response to England's post-Civil War predicament.

This can only be appreciated by combining a more holistic view of English culture, religion, and politics with a more global view of English history itself. The contingency of the church's support for persecution and its leading position in intellectual life only come into view once the insular framework of most writing about ideas, religion, and politics in later Stuart England is jettisoned. When this moment in English history is studied with close attention to its colonial, European, and transcontinental dimensions, crucial environments for early modern knowledge production appear, and religious history takes on a comparative dimension. Only then is it possible to properly evaluate the pastoral, political, and scholarly activity of men like Addison. Achieving this sort of perspective, though, is a project in itself. It demands the integration of a large body of historical writing on three seventeenth-century topics that are usually treated in isolation: the

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[21] Whig and anticlerical views on the church and its role in politics are echoed in a legion of recent studies. For important examples in otherwise excellent scholarship organized around attempts to contextualize the thought of canonical, Enlightened Whig thinkers, see Champion, *Pillars of priestcraft shaken*; Marshall, *John Locke, toleration and early Enlightenment culture*; Marshall, *John Locke: resistance, religion and responsibility*; and the series of seminal articles by Mark Goldie cited above. In 'Priestcraft and the birth of Whiggism', 212, Goldie acknowledges this problem and notes that it can only be remedied by a study like the present one. The confessionally driven literature is also voluminous and various. Works partial to the Laudian and Arminian traditions include Cross, *Oxford movement and the seventeenth century*; Tavard, *Quest for catholicity*; McAdoo, *Spirit of Anglicanism*; Bennett, 'Patristic tradition in Anglican thought'; Chadwick, *Mind of the Oxford movement*. Works friendlier to the Calvinist or 'Reformed' strain within the Stuart church include Allison, *Rise of moralism*; Hampton, *Anti-Arminians*. A more liberal treatment is Avis, *In search of authority*.

history of European scholarship, the history of England, and the history of
England's fledgling empire.[22]

No single volume can present this novel understanding of the English
church, the early Enlightenment, and later Stuart England in an exhaus-
tive fashion. But a series of vignettes from Addison's life and times can
certainly serve to sketch it. To follow Addison and his friends from
England to Europe to Africa and back again is to encounter each dimension
of the early Anglican Enlightenment in turn. A single narrative becomes an
organic platform for a thematic sequence. The major episodes in Addison's
career immediately open up into a series of case studies in colonial, cultural,
intellectual, religious, and political history. The temporal progression of
his work as a missionary, orientalist, apologist, and administrator charts
a path from knowledge and empire to ideology, ministry, and conflict.
Exactly the same movement is sustained when Addison's oeuvre is read
four times in succession, in a different register on each occasion. Techni-
cal, conceptual, ideological, and topical readings yield information about
scholarly practices, foundational ideas, pastoral and political agendas, and
public interventions. These two general procedures – the merger of narra-
tive and thematic arcs and the iterative analysis of texts – make it possible
to bring together a series of topics that are integrally related but usually
kept separate, all within the reach and rhythms of a single life.

If one considers the set of available lives and the extant evidence for
each of them, it is hard to think of a better person around whom to build
such a study. Addison's life foregrounds some of the most important and
neglected aspects of Anglican scholarship in the later seventeenth century
and its role in English and European history. His work in Oxford and the
Maghrib exposes the intimacy of intellectual innovation with the dilemmas
of civil strife and the imperatives of churches, states, and empires. The
literary fruits of Addison's African tenure shed light on the single most
important realm of learning for the religious and political struggles of his
time: the study of the past. This was where Europeans most often sought an
epistemological, rhetorical, and practical edifice of order and security after
a century of bloodletting. By grappling with the crisis of historical truth
that consumed the energies of so many of their contemporaries, Anglicans
were able to grace their schemes for the reconstruction of English society
with strong claims to credibility. Addison's work abroad also showcases

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[22] For additional bibliography and corroborating argument on the history of scholarship front, see
Levitin, 'From sacred history to the history of religion'.

Europe's consequential encounter with global diversity in the seventeenth
century. In particular, it draws attention to travelling scholars' attempts to
understand the great Islamic polities of the day and the Jews and Muslims
who inhabited them. These extremely important but understudied areas
of early modern inquiry contributed to the emergence of elite secularity
and enabled Europe's creative response to that condition.[23] In the course
of their own orientalist efforts, Anglicans made crucial contributions to
comparative religion and politics, two of the nascent disciplines of the
early Enlightenment.

Yet the lessons of civil war and empire did not simply spur new ideas.
In the Church of England, violence and expansion also inspired new styles
of pastoral and political practice. Addison's writings on Christian, Jewish,
and Islamic piety invite a reconsideration of the liturgical, theological, and
devotional commitments of leading Anglican divines in the aftermath of
the English Revolution. His published works divert attention from eccle-
siology, 'political thought', and religious coercion, topics that have inap-
propriately dominated scholarship on the established church, in favour of
more basic pastoral concerns. The church's mundane pursuit of its ministry
was what ultimately guided its attitudes to more overtly political problems.
Addison's career at home also reveals how the propagation of the faith and
the practice of worship were persistent sources of both consensus and ten-
sion. For the church's leading defenders, the implications of war, revolution,
and religious pluralism were always fairly clear, but never clear enough. As
a result, the dynamism of Restoration churchmanship gradually exposed
divisions within the pastorate amid the pressure of events. After 1687, as the
church was forced to commit itself year after year to a competitive pastoral
marketplace, its internal tensions were slowly forced into the open. They
eventually became public conflicts. Addison's career is an ideal platform for
examining all this at play in the most important political moments in later
Stuart history. He seems to have appeared prominently and revealingly at
nearly every critical juncture between his return from Africa and his death
in 1703: the 1672 Declaration of Indulgence, the resurgence of Anglicanism
at Charles II's court, the Popish Plot, the Tory Revenge, the Anglican Revo-
lution, the Moral Revolution, and the Trinitarian Controversy. Along with
an account of the religious settlement of Tangier, these fraught moments

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[23] On elite secularity, see above, xiii. The understanding of secularity employed here is compatible
with the institutional secularity emphasized in Casanova, *Public religions in the modern world*;
Sirota, *Christian monitors*. It ought to be contrasted with the relativization theses of Worden, 'The
question of secularization'; Knights, *Devil in disguise*, esp. 5, 7, 180; Knights, *Representation and
misrepresentation*, esp. 6, 29, 219.