CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE
HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

RALPH CUDWORTH

A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality

with

A Treatise of Freewill

CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

The main objective of Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy is to expand the range, variety and quality of texts in the history of philosophy which are available in English. The series includes texts by familiar names (such as Descartes and Kant) and also by less well-known authors. Wherever possible, texts are published in complete and unabridged form, and translations are specially commissioned for the series. Each volume contains a critical introduction together with a guide to further reading and any necessary glossaries and textual apparatus. The volumes are designed for student use at undergraduate and postgraduate level and will be of interest not only to students of philosophy, but also to a wider audience of readers in the history of science, the history of theology and the history of ideas.

For a list of titles published in the series, please see end of book.

RALPH CUDWORTH

A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality

WITH

A Treatise of Freewill

EDITED BY

SARAH HUTTON

University of Hertfordshire

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521473620

First published 1996

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Cudworth, Ralph, 1617–88.
[Treatise concerning eternal and immutable morality]
A treatise concerning eternal and immutable morality; with, A
treatise of freewill / Ralph Cudworth; edited by Sarah Hutton.
p. cm. – (Cambridge texts in the history of philosophy)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0 521 47362 4 (hardcover). – ISBN 0 521 47918 5 (pbk)
1. Christian ethics – Anglican authors – Early works to 1800.
I. Hutton, Sarah, 1948– . II. Cudworth, Ralph, 1617–88.
Treatise of freewill. III. Title. IV. Title: Treatise of freewill.
V. Series.
BJ1241.C8 1996
241–dc20 96–10996 CIP

ISBN-13 978-0-521-47362-0 hardback
ISBN-10 0-521-47362-4 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-47918-9 paperback
ISBN-10 0-521-47918-5 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2005

Contents

Acknowledgements

There are three particular debts of gratitude which I would like to express: first to Erik-Jan Bos, for his assistance in preparing the text of *Freewill*; secondly to the University of Utrecht, for it was during my tenure of the Belle van Zuylen Visiting Professorship that the main groundwork for this edition was done. Last, but not least, I am grateful to the University of Hertfordshire for allowing me leave to take up the Belle van Zuylen chair.

Abbreviations

AT *Œuvres de Descartes*, ed. C. Adam and P. Tannery, rev. B. Rochot (Paris, 1964–76)

TIS Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London, 1678)

EIM Cudworth, *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* (London, 1731)

CSM *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff and D. Murdoch, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1984–91)

Introduction

Ralph Cudworth is a philosopher who spans the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. In an age of intellectual ferment, when the strident new philosophies of the seventeenth century announced their modernity by repudiating the past, Cudworth is a figure of continuity. This is symbolized by the fact that one of his major philosophical works, his *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, was published in the eighteenth century (1731), while the only major work published in his lifetime, his *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678), is steeped in the humanistic scholarship of the Renaissance. If the former has ensured that philosophers still pay some attention to Cudworth even today, the latter has helped deter them from close acquaintance, for Cudworth's reputation for learning has gone before him. The encrustation of erudition which clogs the pages of his *True Intellectual System of the Universe* has resulted in his being set aside in this century as an antiquarian.

None the less, modern neglect of Cudworth belies the enduring legacy which his writings enjoyed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries both at home and abroad. He was held in high regard by many, including John Locke, John Ray, Shaftesbury, Price and Reid. His *System* was reprinted twice, in different formats, in England in the eighteenth century.[1] In 1733 Johan Lorenz Mosheim published a Latin translation of Cudworth's works in Germany. Mosheim delayed publication of his translation in order to be able to include *A Treatise*

[1] First in an abbreviated version by Thomas Wise with the title, *A Confutation of Atheism* (London, 1706, repr. 1732), and then in a complete edition by Thomas Birch (London, 1743, repr. 1839).

Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality, thereby ensuring a European-wide diffusion for *The Treatise* alongside Cudworth's *True Intellectual System*.[2] Selections from his works were published in French translation in Jean Le Clerc's *Bibliothèque choisie*, whence they became the centre-piece of a debate between Le Clerc and Bayle. Cudworth's doctrine of 'Plastic Nature' continued to be discussed in France through the Enlightenment and well into the nineteenth century.[3] An Italian translation of Cudworth's works by Luigi Benedetti was published in Italy in 1823.[4] Continuing interest in Cudworth in nineteenth-century Britain can be gauged from the publication of an edition of his *System* and *Treatise* by John Harrison in 1845, and the printing of one of his unpublished manuscripts as *A Treatise of Freewill* by J. Allen in 1838. Ever since Martineau's discussion of Cudworth in 1886, there has been a succession of short discussions of and extracts from *Eternal and Immutable Morality*. The most important study of Cudworth this century, J.A. Passmore's *Ralph Cudworth: An Interpretation* (1951) focuses on those writings not published in his lifetime, *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* and the unpublished manuscripts on free will.[5]

Cudworth is chiefly remembered today as a leading member of the group of seventeenth-century philosopher theologians now known as the Cambridge Platonists. This group includes such figures as Nathaniel Culverwell (d. 1651), John Smith (1618–52) and Peter Sterry (d. 1672), as well as the other philosopher of the group after Cudworth, Henry More (1614–87). Their sobriquet derives from the fact that they were all educated at Cambridge and they all, to different degrees, drew on the philosophy of Plato and his followers in preference to the Aristotelianism of the schools. As a group they are characterized more by a common outlook than a rigid set of doctrines. Their liberal theological temper was matched by a broadly syncretic approach to philosophy. Their insistence on the importance of reason in matters of religion was

[2] *Systema intellectualis huius universi* (Jena, 1733, repr. Leiden, 1773). For this edition, Mosheim also translated Cudworth's sermons and printed his university dissertation, *Dantur boni et mali rationes aeternae et indispensabiles* (Cambridge, 1651).

[3] Luisa Simonutti, 'Bayle and Le Clerc as Readers of Cudworth: Elements of the Debate on *Plastic Nature* in the Dutch Learned Journals', *Geschiedenis van de Wijsbegeerte in Nederland*, 4 (1993), 147–65. See also Paul Janet, *Essai sur le médiateur plastique de Cudworth* (Paris, 1860).

[4] *Sistema intellettuale del mondo*, 5 vols. (Pavia, 1823).

[5] Passmore accepted that British Library, Add. MSS 4983, 4984, 4985 and 4988 attributed to Cudworth were by him, but internal evidence does not, to my mind, bear this out.

harnessed to a tolerant religious outlook. While their academic learning ran deep, it went hand in hand with an emphasis on practical morality and serviceable knowledge.

Cudworth: life and writings

Cudworth was born in Aller, Somerset, in 1617, where his father, also called Ralph, was a minister. His father died when he was young and he was brought up by his stepfather, John Stoughton. In 1632 Cudworth was admitted pensioner at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, where his father had been a fellow, and where he was himself elected to a fellowship in 1639. Cudworth was to remain a member of the University of Cambridge for the rest of his life. His early academic career coincided with the turbulent years of the Civil War and its aftermath. Although he did not share the rigorous Calvinism for which Emmanuel College was noted, he appears to have had sympathy for the Parliamentary cause. The year 1647 was a turning point in his career. In that year he preached a sermon to the House of Commons, and was appointed Master of Clare Hall and Regius Professor of Hebrew. Seven years later he became Master of Christ's College. During the interregnum he evidently enjoyed the patronage of Cromwell's secretary of state, John Thurloe, whom he advised on suitable candidates for 'civill employments'. He was consulted by Cromwell on the question of the readmission of the Jews to England. In 1656 he was nominated to advise parliament on a new translation of the Bible. His link to the republican regime of the Commonwealth did not prevent him from retaining his position as Master of Christ's and as Professor of Hebrew at the Restoration, posts which he held until his death in 1688.

Cudworth had several children. None of his sons survived him – one died on an expedition to India.[6] It was his daughter, Damaris, later Lady Masham, who became guardian of his philosophical legacy. Not only did she inherit his papers, but she took it upon herself to defend her father against his critics, including Leibniz. She was also the only one of his children to become a philosopher in her own right. As such she embodies the link between Cudworth and the Enlightenment, for

[6] Cudworth's daughter, Damaris, told Locke of the departure of her brother for India in 1684. See E.S. de Beer (ed.), *The Correspondence of John Locke* (Oxford, 1976), letter 731. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, notes that one Charles Cudworth died in India in 1684.

she became a friend of John Locke and proponent of his philosophy.[7] It was Lady Masham's connection with Locke that led indirectly to the happy accident of Cudworth's manuscripts being mistaken for papers of John Locke's. As a result they were acquired by the British Museum (now the British Library).[8] According to Edward Chandler, the first editor of *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, it was at the behest of Lady Masham's son, Francis Cudworth Masham, that the treatise was published in 1731.

The one work which Cudworth published in his lifetime, his magisterial *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, is an anti-determinist treatise, which seeks an accommodation of theology and philosophy. It is in large part devoted to a philosophical refutation of atheism, and a demonstration of the true idea of God as essentially good and wise. This was originally conceived as a work containing three books, of which the second and third were to deal, respectively, with the existence in nature of moral absolutes, and with freedom of the will – the subject matter of the two treatises in the present edition, *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* and *A Treatise of Freewill*. In his Preface to *The True Intellectual System*, Cudworth admits to having been surprised at how long the first book turned out to be.[9] But he defends its coherence as a single volume, in spite of the fact that he had not completed his original project. And he points out that Book I of his *System* touches on the themes projected for the second and third books. Thus Cudworth's treatises of *Morality* and of *Freewill* stand in integral relation to his *True Intellectual System*, for not only do they overlap at some points with the latter but, in all probability, they constitute the basis of the books on morality, liberty and necessity, originally intended for inclusion in *The True Intellectual System*.

According to his Preface to *The True Intellectual System*, Cudworth certainly intended to publish the unfinished parts of his philosophical project.[10] The question why he never completed his *System* and never published any of the manuscript works is impossible to answer satisfactorily. In the case of *Eternal and Immutable Morality*, there is

[7] See Luisa Simonutti, 'Damaris Cudworth Masham: una lady della repubblica di lettere', in *Studi in onore di Eugenio Garin* (Pisa, 1987), pp. 141–65, and Sarah Hutton, 'Damaris Cudworth, Lady Masham: between Platonism and Enlightenment', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 1 (1993), 29–54.

[8] See the Preface to Allen's edition of *A Treatise of Freewill*.

[9] *TIS*, Preface, sig. A3[4].

[10] *TIS*, Preface, sig. A3[5].

evidence that he thought his work had been undermined by Henry More's publication of his ethical treatise *Enchiridion ethicum*.[11] And the manuscript evidence of his work on *Freewill* suggests that he could not decide on a suitable format for presenting his argument: the three manuscript treatises on the subject overlap considerably with one another, and could not have been intended for publication together. Lack of industry was certainly not the problem. In addition to the writings mentioned, he also prepared a monumental commentary on the Book of Daniel, which has still not been published.[12] So busy was he with his studious projects that the ecclesiastical visitors of the Parish where he had a living complained in 1686 that he neglected his Hertfordshire living.[13] It is sometimes suggested that it was Cudworth's duties as Master of Christ's College which distracted him from completing his projects. But public duties did not prevent other contemporaries of his from publishing books. On the other hand, according to his friend and colleague, Henry More, it was pressure of college and domestic business which prevented him from publishing a second volume in 1678.[14] It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that a combination of native caution along with political and ecclesiastical factors served to exacerbate his painstaking and prolix manner of argument, and thereby delay publication.

Although he enjoyed the patronage of the influential Finch family (his *System* is dedicated to the Lord Chancellor, Heneage Finch), and retained his mastership of Christ's College at the Restoration, his links with the republican regime of the interregnum were not forgotten.[15] Furthermore, his liberal theological temper was one which was out of tune with that of the Restoration ecclesiastical regimen: although he remained a member of the re-established Church of England, his extreme latitudinarianism, his theological leanings towards the het-

[11] See J. Crossley and R.C. Christie (eds.), *The Diary and Correspondence of John Worthington*, 3 vols., (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1847–86), vol. II, pp. 157–73.

[12] London, British Library, Add. MS 4987. According to Birch, Cudworth originally intended to publish this in 1658.

[13] MS Tanner 30, fo. 45. Cited in J. Spurr, *Restoration Church of England, 1646–1689* (New Haven, Conn., 1991).

[14] Henry More to Edmund Elys, 2nd June 1678. E. Elys, *Letters on Several Subjects* (London, 1694), pp. 28–9.

[15] M.H. Nicolson, 'Christ's College and the Latitude Men', *Modern Philology*, 27 (1929–30), 35–53. On the Restoration reaction to latitudinarianism in Cambridge, see John Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1989).

erodox ante-Nicene father, Origen, and his strong millenarianism probably did not endear him to his peers in the Church hierarchy. While his anti-Hobbism may have counter-balanced his latitudinarianism in the eyes of Restoration Church hierarchy, his historico-philosophical method was soon to be regarded as outmoded.[16] Whatever the theological politics of Cudworth's position, in philosophical terms, Cudworth kept his finger on the pulse of new developments in philosophy: in addition to addressing the philosophy of Descartes and Hobbes, *The True Intellectual System* contains a refutation of Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (1670).

Although *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* was not published until 1731, it probably circulated in manuscript before then. Its publication history therefore gives it a somewhat unusual position in relation to the history of philosophy because it was published in a very different context from that of its original production. It was retrieved from manuscript obscurity by Edward Chandler, Bishop successively of Lichfield and of Durham, and published at a time of lively debate on ethical rationalism, the nature of moral obligation and the foundations of moral certainty, a debate which was sparked by Samuel Clarke's Boyle lectures.[17] When Cudworth wrote *Eternal and Immutable Morality*, the Church of England had still not reached a satisfactory accommodation with religious dissent. It had not worked out the latitudinarian compromise, which took it into the eighteenth century. The political upheavals of the Civil War and interregnum were fresh in people's memories, as were the theological debates occasioned by the predestinarian Calvinism which characterized establishment Puritanism of those years. On the philosophical front, Cartesianism was still a relatively new phenomenon, as was the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, who already bore the brand of atheist materialist. The Royal

[16] A decade after the publication of *TIS*, Cudworth's erudition met its match in Richard Bentley, who neatly exposed Cudworth's lack of historical and philological rigour in his *Epistola ad Millium* of 1691. See A. Grafton, *Defenders of the Text* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), pp. 15–17. On the abandonment of the Platonizing *prisca sapientia* by the next generation of theologians, see S. Hutton, 'Henry More, Edward Stillingfleet and the Decline of *Moses atticus*', in R. Kroll, R. Ashcraft and P. Zagorin (eds.), *Philosophy, Science and Religion in England* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 68–84.

[17] Clarke's Boyle lectures were given in 1704 and 1705, and published as, respectively, *Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God* (London, 1706) and *A Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation* (London, 1707).

Society, founded in 1660, was in its infancy. John Locke had not yet made his mark as a philosopher, and Isaac Newton (1642–1727) was still a young Cambridge don. When *Eternal and Immutable Morality* was eventually published, the Hanoverian succession was already into the second generation, monarchical government and Protestant ascendancy thereby secured. Thinking theologians had had to face a new philosophical challenge in the form of Locke, whose *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) had swept aside the traditional grounds of religious apologetics and the innatist epistemology that underpinned it. Newton was assured a place in the pantheon of the great and the good, his scientific theories having been put to the service of Anglican apologetics in the face a new enemy, deism. Cudworth, the rational apologist for religion who was convinced overwhelmingly of the importance of philosophy for theology, re-appeared at a time when the philosophers seemed to have successfully undermined religious belief. Cudworth, who had sharpened his arguments on the flintstone of Hobbes in the 1670s, re-emerged into debates that could be traced back to the challenge of Hobbist relativism. He emerged alongside the ethical rationalists, Clarke, Balguy and Price, that is, as a posthumous participant in the debates on the foundations of morality whose terms he had helped to shape. His first editor, Edward Chandler, indicated the relevance of the *Treatise* to eighteenth-century issues, as he observed in his Preface to the 1731 edition:

> It is well known, that the loose principles, with regard to morality, that are opposed in this book, are defended by too many in our time. It is hoped also that the new controversies springing up, that have some relation to this subject, may be cleared and shortened by the reasons herein proposed.[18]

In order to understand how *Eternal and Immutable Morality* could find a place in such a different world, it is important to recognize that the Cambridge Platonist label which attaches to Cudworth does not denote a mystical movement isolated from the pressures of the time, nostalgically taking refuge in the idealism of Plato and the arcana of Plotinus. On the contrary, the Platonism of the sobriquet extends to the philosophical core of Plato's dialogues and represents only one aspect of the philosophical formation of the group with which Cudworth is

[18] *EIM*, p. xi.

associated. The Cambridge Platonists were well acquainted with developments in seventeenth-century philosophy and science. They were whole-hearted Copernicans, who had read Bacon and respected Galileo and Harvey. It was a Cambridge Platonist (Henry More) who was the first proponent of Cartesianism in England. Cudworth read and criticized not just Descartes, but Hobbes and Spinoza as well. The philosophy of spirit which More and Cudworth formulated was not a retreat from modernity, but a contribution to contemporary debates about the viability of the mechanical philosophy.[19] Cudworth's arguments for the natural basis of morality are directed against the materialism and ethical relativism of Hobbes. Although he denied that the mind was a *tabula rasa*, his epistemology contains some striking parallels to John Locke.

When reading Cudworth it is important to recognize that he was a theologian as well as a philosopher. For Cudworth philosophy and theology are intimately interconnected. His theological priorities interact with his philosophy in a number of ways. First of all, like the other Cambridge Platonists, he accorded reason a significant role in religion. As a religious apologist he employed philosophical argument in support of the fundamentals of religious belief. Secondly, he was profoundly aware of the theological implications of philosophical positions – for instance, he argued that materialism undermines morality and leads to atheism. Conversely, he saw that theological doctrines had implications for philosophy: he was especially critical of voluntarism, that is the doctrine that the divine will is the fundamental determinant in God's government of the world. Against the voluntarists he maintained that 'there is a nature of goodness, and a nature of wisdom antecedent to the will of God, which is the rule and measure of it' (p. 187). To subordinate divine wisdom to God's will among the divine attributes destroys certainty and leads to scepticism. This was a position which Cudworth maintained against theologians and philosophers alike. Apart from a minor figure mentioned in *Eternal and Immutable Morality*, Joannes Szydlovius, he does not name his Calvinist opponents; but he could well have had in mind Cambridge theologians like William

[19] See A. Gabbey, 'Cudworth, More and the Mechanical Analogy', in R. Kroll, R. Ashcroft and P. Zagorin (eds.), *Philosophy, Science and Religion in England* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 109–21. T. Gregory, 'Studi sull'atomismo del seicento: III, Cudworth e l'atomismo', *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*, 46 (1967), 528–41.

Perkins (1558–1602) and Anthony Tuckney (1599–1670). The philosopher whom he criticizes for attributing too much to the divine will is Descartes. The concomitant of Cudworth's theological anti-voluntarism is his insistence on the freedom of the will.[20] This is a tenet which he shares with the other Cambridge Platonists, and other liberal opponents of hard-line Calvinists, in particular the Dutch Arminians. This emphasis on freewill is probably indebted to Erasmus. It also accounts for Cudworth's admiration for Origen. Furthermore, Cudworth's concern with seventeenth-century theological issues explains not just his interest in the problem of freewill, but the fact that his writings on the subject address the issue in scholastic terms, debating topics such as indifferency of will, and whether it is the will or understanding that decides how we should act.

The dominant themes of Cudworth's writings are ones which racked the Church in England in his youth: debates about freewill and predestination had been such hot topics that they were proscribed by royal proclamation in 1626. The apparently intractable theological problems of the pre-Civil War acquired a new edge with the appearance of challenging new philosophical forms of determinism: the mechanical philosophy of Hobbes and Descartes, and the material pantheism of Spinoza. For Cudworth, philosophical determinism was the counterpart of predestinarian voluntarism in theology. Not only did he, like Henry More, see these philosophies as having atheistical implications, but also as having implications for moral conduct. Against the relativism of Hobbes he argued that goodness and the principles of morality are absolute. As he put it in one of his unpublished treatises on freewill, 'one of y^{e} greatest Arcanums both in Phylosophy and Morality' is 'y^{t} there is in Nature an *αὐτὸ ἀγαθόν* and Ipsum Bonum an absolute good and perfection which is y^{e} standard and measure both of Power and Liberty and also wisdome' (Add. MS 4979, fol. 38).

One difficulty in reading Cudworth and assessing his philosophy is that he often presents his philosophical arguments in antique dress, citing precedents from ancient philosophy and arguing against particular classical philosophers. None the less, it is also important not to be

[20] On divine will and providence, see F. Oakley, *Omnipotence, Covenant, and Order* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1984); A. Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* (Princeton, N.J., 1986); M. Osler, *Divine Will and the Mechanical Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1994). Also, V.J. Bourke, *Will in Western Thought* (New York, 1964).

deceived into thinking that Cudworth was a mere antiquarian, or at best a doxographer. To those inducted in twentieth-century approaches to philosophy, it seems strange to discuss issues in contemporary philosophy by examining ancient philosophy – yet this is precisely what Cudworth does in the case, for instance, of Protagoras, whom he presents as a materialist relativist and treats in *Eternal and Immutable Morality* as a kind of stalking horse for Thomas Hobbes. Underlying Cudworth's approach is his conviction that truth is one and that philosophy is a unified system through which to arrive at knowledge of the truth: 'it is but one truth and knowledge that is in all the understandings in the world' –

> when innumerable created understandings direct themselves to the contemplation of the same universal and immutable truths, they do all of them but as it were listen to one and the same original voice of the eternal wisdom that is never silent, and the several conceptions of those truths in their minds, are but like several echoes of the same *verba mentis* [conceptions] of the divine intellect resounding in them. (see below, p. 132).

So, while Cudworth was receptive to contemporary philosophy, he did not accept its claims to novelty, but underlined its continuity with the past. As Passmore put it, Cudworth's view of philosophical debate was that

> the contestants might change their name, or might improve their technical apparatus, but they could not seriously modify the fundamental structure of their arguments. He was impressed by the recurrence of certain patterns of philosophical controversy; he was not impressed by the claim of his contemporaries that they had shaken themselves free from tradition in order to embark upon an enterprise quite novel, in a manner untrammelled by the errors of the past. In an age which insisted above all upon originality, he insisted upon the importance of tradition.[21]

Cudworth's understanding of philosophical tradition was one very much moulded by the Renaissance notion of *philosophia perennis*, or perennial philosophy. Among the figures who did much to shape the history of philosophy attaching to this idea was, first of all, Marsilio Ficino, who construed it rather as a *prisca theologia*, or ancient theology, a pagan tradition of revealed truth derived from Moses and imparted by

[21] J.A. Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth, an Interpretation* (Cambridge, 1951), p. 13.

succeeding generations of philosophers. Also important for constructing this pedigree of ancient wisdom was the third-century historical doxography of philosophy, Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Philosophers*, the Greek text of which had been recovered and translated by Ambrogio Traversari in 1472. In addition to offering a model for the history of philosophy, this was an important source of Epicurian thought and Stoicism. Besides using Diogenes Laertius as a source, Cudworth also draws on Sextus Empiricus, whom he uses both as a source of sceptical arguments and as a means of supplementing his knowledge of ancient philosophy from sources other than Aristotle and Plato. It is Cudworth's treatment of all philosophies as participants in *philosophia perennis* that enabled him to write about Cartesianism in *Eternal and Immutable Morality* as a modern manifestation of Democritean atomism. Likewise, in *The True Intellectual System*, Hobbes is seen as a materialist after the model of Anaximander, and Spinoza as a hylozoist. In *Eternal and Immutable Morality* the debate with Hobbes is set up, through a discussion of Plato's *Theaetetus*, in which Protagoras figures as an ethical relativist and materialist to boot. It might be added that Cudworth interprets Plato with one eye on Sextus Empiricus, a factor which distinguishes his reading of Plato from that of his Renaissance forebears. Cudworth was conscious of the difference between his interpretation of Platonic philosophy and that of the great translators and editors of Plato in the Renaissance, Marsilio Ficino and Jean de Serres, who, he notes, wrote before the recovery of corpuscular philosophy.[22]

Another important element in Cudworth's philosophy is Stoicism. Although he was highly critical of many aspects of Stoicism (such as the doctrine of repeated cycles of existence of the world), Cudworth is indebted to the Stoics for key terms in his conceptual vocabulary. This is most strikingly evident in the two treatises reproduced here, that is to say, in his epistemology and his moral psychology. Three examples might be singled out for particular mention: first of all his use of the Stoic concept of the common notions (*koinai ennoiai*) or innate principles of knowledge in the soul. He also adopts the Stoic term *prolepsis*, or 'anticipation', for the innate properties of the mind whereby it is predisposed to understand the world. The key concept in his account of freewill is that of the autonomy of the individual soul to

[22] See below p. 37.

direct its actions towards the good. The term he adopts to express this concept of 'self-power' is the Stoic *hegemonikon*, denoting the ruling principle of the soul.[23] In Cudworth Stoicism is blended with Platonism: for example, he integrates the Stoic common notions with the Platonic theory of recollection (*anamnesis*); in his account of the operations of the soul he deploys the terminology of Plotinus; and it was from Plato that he derived his term *ectype* to express the relationship of the physical order to the intellectual. Cudworth undoubtedly found a precedent for combining Stoicism and Platonism in the early Church Fathers, notably Origen. His debt to Patristic thought is borne out by his use of the term *schesis*, a key term in his epistemology, which he uses in the Patristic sense of 'relation' rather than the ancient Greek sense of 'condition' or 'habit'.

A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality

In 1664 Cudworth told John Worthington that he was working on a treatise of 'Natural Ethicks ... which I began above a year agoe'.[24] This information suggests that *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* was probably begun around 1662. The ethical position which Cudworth takes in the treatise is strongly anti-relativist. At the beginning he argues for the existence of moral absolutes, that good and evil, justice and injustice, as well as 'Wisdom, knowledge, and understanding are eternal and self-subsistent things', existing independently of the mind and of the physical world. This is a position which Cudworth had maintained from an early point in his academic career. (In 1644 he had defended the thesis that the principles of good and evil are eternal and indispensable.)[25] The main emphasis of *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* is, however, epistemolo-

[23] Although Cudworth's application of Stoicism is far more developed than theirs, other Protestant theologians had employed the terms 'common notions' and 'prolepsis' in their discussions of the rational soul, most notably Philip Melanchthon. Their source was probably Cicero. See J.E. Platt, *Reformed Thought and Scholasticism* (Leiden, 1982). In antiquity, Stoic epistemology was taken up by several of the later Platonists, such as Antiochus of Ascalon (b. 130 AD). See J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (London, 1977), chapter 2. On Stoicism, see J.M. Rist, *The Stoics* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1978).

[24] See Worthington, *Diary and Correspondence*, vol. II, p. 158.

[25] 'Dantur boni et mali rationes aeternae et indispensabiles', published in 1651 (British Library, Thomason Tracts).

gical: the treatise contains the fullest discussion of innatist epistemology to emanate from England in the seventeenth century.

The treatise is divided into four books. The first of these poses the fundamental question asked by Socrates in Plato's *Euthyphro*: whether God wills things because they are good, or whether things are good because God wills them. Cudworth's position is that God, being supremely good, wills things because they are good. After a brief history of the opposing view, where he groups Hobbes with Protagoras and Epicurus, he denies that right and wrong are relative notions, and that the principles of right and wrong are conventional in their basis. He also argues against those who, like Descartes, found the principles of right and wrong, as well as truth and falsehood, in the will of God. Instead, he argues that moral principles are such by nature and not by authority; that they are founded in the goodness and wisdom of God, not the will of God.

The second book continues the argument for the immutable nature of all things by dealing with the sceptical issues implicit in the philosophy of Protagoras as represented in Plato's *Theaetetus*. Cudworth argues that Protagoras' sense-based epistemology and his subjective principle that 'man is the measure of all things' destroy all certainty and undermines the basis of morality. He then gives an account of the 'mechanical or atomical philosophy' of Descartes and Gassendi, which he sees as a revival of ancient doctrines, and which explains all things in terms of the primary properties of corporeal extension (shape, size, position and motility), deduced by reason and not from sense impressions. In Cudworth's view, the mechanical philosophy gives an intelligible account of the natural world, because it is coherent and accessible to reason.

In the third book Cudworth commences the account of his epistemology with a discussion of sense knowledge. Here his debt to Descartes is most apparent, particularly in his distinction between sense and intellect, in his account of the relation of soul to body, and in his discussion of sense perception. Cudworth's reservations about sense knowledge are consistent with the underlying Platonism of this thinking. He argues that knowledge derived from the senses is not true knowledge. Sense impressions are received passively. The data acquired in this way can only furnish us with particularities and superficial appearances. Moreover, the senses do not perceive external objects as

they are, but, according to the mechanical hypothesis, they represent them as movements or impressions of one kind or another. Such data have to be processed by the mind before they can be understood. Knowledge is produced actively from within the mind, not received passively from without. A sensation is 'a passion in the soul', the result of corporeal movements, and perceptible by virtue of the 'natural sympathy' which the soul has for the body. Such impressions are involuntary: that is, the soul has no control over them. At best sensation is 'a certain kind of drowsy and somnolent perception' of the soul (p. 56). Although Cudworth regards sense-knowledge as inferior to knowledge generated by the mind, his position is not anti-empiricist. On the contrary, he specifically acknowledges the adequacy of the senses for providing knowledge of the external world and of the body, as well as for assisting the mind in framing hypotheses (see below, p. 57).

Book IV is the longest of the treatise, longer than the first three put together. In it Cudworth elaborates his theory of knowledge in order, he says, 'to confute scepticism or fantasticism' (the materialist view that reduces all knowledge to sense experience). Much of this section is an expansion of arguments sketched at the end of the *True Intellectual System*. Cudworth distinguishes two types of perception: one belongs to the lower part of the soul as a passive receiver of corporeal impressions; the other is a higher 'energy' of the soul, which reflects on itself and its own ideas, and compares the intelligible components of data received via the senses (what he calls the 'scheses' of external objects). All knowledge, he argues, involves the activity of mind; 'knowledge is an inward and active energy of the mind itself' (p. 73). The mind is furnished with the concepts (*noemata*) needed for arriving at knowledge. 'The mind', Cudworth writes, 'cannot know anything, but by something of its own, that is native, domestic and familiar to it' (p. 74). Cognition entails anticipation: Cudworth employs the Stoic term *prolepsis* but links it with Plato's theory of *anamnesis*, for knowing involves recollection (rather as when one recognizes the face of a friend in a crowd). But this is not simply a process of matching the ideas in the mind against external objects. Not all knowledge is external in its origins: many ideas (e.g. wisdom, honesty and justice) are generated by the mind itself. Knowledge is acquired deductively, not inductively: the mind, to use Cudworth's expression, *descends* towards particulars; and, in compre-

hending the external world, the mind perceives not the external appearance of things but the relational constants which reveal their immutable essences.

To illustrate the activity of the mind, as opposed to the passivity of the senses, Cudworth employs several key images: first a clock reflected in a mirror, seen by an eye, and seen by an eye attached to the mind (p. 85). In the first it is merely reflected; in the second case, the eye registers the colours as well. But it is the mind which registers the disposition of the parts and their function. By perceiving the relationship between them (for which Cudworth uses the Greek term *schesis*), the mind can recognize the object as a clock and not just a conglomerate of colours and metals. Similarly, words on a page of a book are just inky scrawls to an animal or to an illiterate (p. 99), but to someone who knows how to read, the words have meaning. The argument has an aesthetic dimension: to an animal music is mere sounds, to the rational listener these sounds are harmonious. The beauty of a beautiful landscape or picture is lost on animals, but apparent to the human mind.

Knowledge of the external world is possible because the world is intelligible, it bears 'the stamp of intellectuality'. Cudworth illustrates this by extending his book analogy to become the metaphor of the book of nature: the literate mind could not read meanings in a book unless they had first been put there. Likewise, the natural world, in its orderliness and in the disposition of its parts, contains meaningful signatures, the meaning having been placed there by the creator. Another analogy which Cudworth employs for this is architectural (p. 92): a palace is not a pile of bricks but an architecturally designed edifice. The order and relationship of the parts which make it a structure rather than a fortuitous heap of rubble are both evidence that there was a designer and are what makes it identifiable as a building to the observer. This example also illustrates the general Platonic principle at the heart of Cudworth's philosophy, that mind precedes the world, and that reality and true being belong to the metaphysical rather than the physical order of things. Cudworth expresses the relationship of true being to the created world, the world of sense, in classically Platonic terms of archtype and ectype, form and copy.

The view that mental or intellectual being is more real than material being is consistent with Descartes' assertion that the soul is more knowable than body. It does, of course, raise the question of the

ontological status of the ideas, or 'conceptions of the mind'. Cudworth insists that they are not derived from body. Nor do they exist independently; rather, they are modifications of mind or intellect. He denies that they are merely figments of the human brain, and marshals a number of arguments, drawn chiefly from geometry, to demonstrate the independence of concepts from the physical world and sense experience. For example, he argues that it is possible to deduce the nature of a triangle without seeing one, by the application of Euclidean principles. Such conceptual entities are not the products of individual minds, but are the same in all minds. So absolute is their independence of the human mind and of the physical world, that they would be the same were the world to be destroyed and created anew. The mind of which conceptual entities may truly be said to be modifications is the divine mind, whence they derive their veracity, constancy, eternity and universality, and whence the human mind derives its capacity for knowledge. It is in this sense, therefore, that the human mind can be described as participating in the divine mind. And our knowledge of the external world entails a projection of ideas on to the world, leading Cudworth to the proto-Berkeleian formulation, that 'corporeal qualities' are nothing more than 'our own shadows, and the vital passive energies of our own souls' (p. 148). Furthermore, if conceptual entities belong to true being, every clear conception is true, and nothing which is false can be clearly conceived as existing. Thus the essence of truth is clear intelligibility. Although Cudworth in this way adopts the Cartesian principle of the clarity and distinctness of ideas as the criterion of certainty, he rejects as sceptical Descartes' supporting argument based on the truth of our faculties. It would, he argues be impossible even for God to construct the human mind so that it perceives falsity as true – just as it would be impossible for God to make contradictions true.

The ethical purpose of *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* resides in the fact that it supplies two major aspects of the theory of mind which underpin Cudworth's ethics. As he put it, 'the nature of morality cannot be understood without some knowledge of the nature of the soul' (p. 145). First of all, his metaphysical realism enables him to argue for a fundamental connection between the principles of morality and the principles of knowledge. If mind and intellect are 'first in the order of nature', conceptual entities must have more reality than material ones, and justice and morality, as modifications of mind, are

more 'real and substantial things than the modifications of mere senseless matter'. Secondly, with regard to epistemology, Cudworth denies that the principles of morality can be deduced from sense knowledge. Accordingly he rejects the model of the mind as *tabula rasa*, and argues that only an innatist epistemology can provide knowledge of good and evil, just and unjust. There is a third, psychological, aspect of Cudworth's theory of mind, which is not dealt with in this work, but is treated in his writings on freewill. Cudworth prepares for this at the end of *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* when he asserts that moral principles are, like immutable ideas, 'anticipations', and that these are not 'mere intellectual forms', but derive from what he calls 'some other more inward and vital principle'. He does not elaborate on what this principle might be beyond describing it as 'a natural determination to do some things and avoid others' (p. 145). This is a formulation which corresponds to his concept of the will as *hegemonikon* in *A Treatise of Freewill*, where it is linked to the life-sustaining function of the soul. This underlines the continuity between both treatises, and confirms that *Eternal and Immutable Morality* is more of a prologue to a larger treatise on ethics than the discussion of ethics that the title implies.

A Treatise of Freewill

The three draft treatises on 'Liberty and Necessity' continue the same project as *Eternal and Immutable Morality* by taking the discussion forward to more obviously ethical questions. They all deal with the problem of moral responsibility, and with the psychology of autonomous action. They can be described as psychological both in the old sense of giving an account of the soul, and in the more modern sense of discussing mental factors which affect behaviour. For the will is the ruling principle which co-ordinates the functions of the soul and directs the actions of the individual being.

The only one of these treatises to be published, that printed here as *A Treatise of Freewill*, is the shortest of the three. As in the case of the other two, much of it is taken up with technical discussion, theological as well as philosophical. Chapters 18–27 deal with the objections of determinists to the freedom of the will, especially those of Hobbes but also of Pomponazzi and various unnamed others. And chapter 3 raises

difficulties connected with a deterministic position – many of them drawn from Origen. In his concept of freewill as a power of the soul, combining the functions of intellect and volition, Cudworth dispenses with traditional faculty psychology, which divided the will from intellect as separate faculties of the soul. He is thus able to sidestep the two main opposing traditions concerning the relationship of reason and will in Western theology: the Thomist view, according to which the will follows the directives of the intellect, and the voluntarist position of Scotus and Ockham which subordinates intellect to will. In his critique of the doctrine of the indifference of the will he undoubtedly had Suarez and his followers in mind, although he does not name his theological opponents.

For Cudworth, moral behaviour is not shaped by external incentives and disincentives, but is founded on the principles of virtue innate to the soul. Cudworth conceives of the will as the self-determining power of the soul which predisposes it towards the good. This drive towards the good is the spring and motivation of all action. In *Freewill* it is described as a kind of premonition, 'a certain vaticination, presage, scent, and odour of one *summum bonum,* one supreme highest good transcending all others' (p. 174). In the manuscripts he also uses the term 'instinct'. This innate tendency towards goodness may be compared on the one hand to Henry More's concept of a 'boniform faculty' and to Shaftesbury's moral sense. It is this idea of the will as a bias towards the good which underlies his lengthy attack on those who argue that the freedom of the will is a 'liberty of indifference'. In Cudworth's view the liberty of the will is the prerequisite for moral responsibility. We cannot be blamed for what we do out of necessity any more than a watch can be blamed for not working properly. The fault in each case rests with the external cause, whatever forces us (in the first case), or the maker of the watch (in the second). The root concept of the treatise is that of the will as *hegemonikon*, or power of self-determination. Without power to direct our own actions, we would be little better than puppets, 'dead machines moved by gimmers and wires' (p. 195). The *hegemonikon* is not just the foundation of moral responsibility (that which earns us 'praise or blame'), but it is a principle of individuation: it is the freedom to act for oneself which also defines the self. It means that 'men have something in their own power, add something of their own, so that they can change themselves and determine themselves'

(p. 163). The *hegemonikon* individuates not only by differentiation from others, but by co-ordinating the functions of the soul. Cudworth conceives of the will as a unitive power of the soul. It is 'the soul as reduplicated upon itself, and self-comprehensive' (p. 185). As co-ordinator and director of the various appetites and functions of the soul, the will is the whole person. As he puts it in one of the manuscript treatises 'On Liberty and Necessity', it is the unifying soul which constitutes the self, 'denominates the whole man as such', and 'determines all y^{e} passive capability of every man's nature, and makes every man such as he is' (Add. MS 4979, fol. 6). The will is especially identifiable with the individual person in the sense that it is the indelible mark of our humanity. Since it is that which predisposes the soul towards the good, it is therefore the means to improve the soul, to increase the perfection of the soul: it is 'a self-promoting, self-improving power' (p. 185). Although, for Cudworth, freewill is therefore a crowning attribute of human beings, as he argues in chapter 13, it is none the less a mark of human imperfection, since only imperfect beings require perfecting (see chapter 17). For this reason, since God is perfect, freewill cannot properly be ascribed to Him.

A Treatise of Freewill is the shortest of Cudworth's three writings on freewill. These elaborate a number of important elements that are only implicit here, in particular the practical and social aspects of his ethics. The unpublished manuscripts make clearer the practical dimension of Cudworth's moral theory, that it is 'Action that gives denomination to a Persone' (Add. MS 4981, fol. 16). In all three treatises the central element is goodness rather than duty. And goodness is a disposition of the whole person, 'ye inward dispositions of ye Mind & Will' (4980, fol. 10). The good as such is not defined here, that having been done in *The True Intellectual System*. There Cudworth writes unequivocally that the good is God. God is, he says referring to Plato, '*The very Idea or Essence of Good*' (*TIS*, p. 204). This is a definition that Cudworth repeats elsewhere, for example in the sermon he preached before the House of Commons in 1647, where he states 'That God is also God, because he is the highest and most perfect good', and that 'he is Essentially the most perfect *Good*'.[26] In identifying the good with God, Cudworth underlines the religious dimension of his philosophy. In

[26] Patrides, pp. 101–2.

religion as in morals, he advocated a *lived* goodness, not a theoretical goodness: 'the *Life* of divine truths is better expressed in Actions than in Words'.[27] The good conceived by Cudworth is not merely a metaphysical entity. Even when defined in terms of the deity, it unfolds into moral principles that entail the idea of practical action. This goodness, 'in which the Essence of the Deity principally consists', comprises on the one hand 'Benignity' and on the other hand the fountainhead of morality:

> it comprehends Eminently all *Vertue and Justice*, the *Divine Nature* being the *First Pattern* hereof; for which cause *Vertue* is defined to be, An *Assimilation to the Deity*. *Justice* and *Honesty* are no *Factitious* things, made by the Will and Command of the more Powerful to the Weaker, but they are *Nature* and *perfection*, and descend downward to us from the Deity. (*TIS*, p. 205)

Cudworth's emphasis on the primacy of goodness among the divine attributes, and his insistence on an ethics of action, a lived Christianity guided by the right disposition of heart and mind, place him firmly alongside the other Cambridge Platonists. Although he shares much with his Cambridge-Platonist colleagues, his philosophy is the fullest and most developed treatment of the outlook and ideas which they had in common.

Cudworth's philosophy is often treated as a historical curiosity, even among those who have taken the trouble to read him. It is tempting to argue that he had no appreciable impact, on the grounds that his *System* was never completed and his other writings were either never printed or were published posthumously. The argument that the content of *Eternal and Immutable Morality* and *Freewill* was not available to Cudworth's contemporaries or immediate successors might seem compelling until one acknowledges the possibility of manuscript circulation of Cudworth's writings, and also the fact that the basics of Cudworth's position in these treatises were available in the writings he published in his lifetime. Although Cudworth is prone to wordiness, he is a thoroughly self-consistent thinker, whose posthumously published writings develop themes and positions enunciated in earlier writings. In his *True Intellectual System* he anticipates the ethical position he elaborates in *Eternal and Immutable Morality* and gives an indication of the main

[27] ibid., p. 108.

points of his account of will. For example, in the *System* he asserts that 'the Differences of *Just* and *Unjust*, *Honest*, and *Dishonest*, are greater *Realities* in Nature than the *Differences* of *Hard* and *Soft*, *Hot* and *Cold*, *Moist* and *Dry*' (*TIS*, p. 858). His second sermon preached before the House of Commons attacks externalist accounts of moral obligation in terms which anticipate the phraseology of *Eternal and Immutable Morality*, 'as if *good* and *evil*, *just* and *unjust* (as some philosophers dreamed) were not *φύσει* but *νόμῳ* and *δόξᾳ* only, had no reality in nature, but depend on certain laws, enforced by outward punishments or mere opinions'. In the last part of the *System*, Cudworth adumbrates the epistemology more fully stated in *Eternal and Immutable Morality*: that knowledge is eternal (*TIS*, p. 826) and that mind precedes things (p. 859). He talks in terms of *ectype* and *archtype* (p. 853) and denies that the mind is a *tabula rasa* (p. 861). He attacks 'a Modern Atheistick Pretender to Wit' (i.e. Hobbes) for reducing mental processes to local motion of corporeal particles, and refutes Protagoras' claim that man is the measure of all things, and that all knowledge is sense-knowledge (*TIS*, p. 852). Cudworth's account of the will is embryonic in the *System*, as compared with his manuscript writings on the subject, but he employs the same terminology for the same fundamental concepts that he describes in *Freewill*. He insists that there can be no system of morality without freewill (*TIS*, p. 869); conceives of freewill as a form of self-activity, using the term *autokinesis* (as opposed to *heterokinesis*) to express the idea of the soul's autonomy or 'self-active power'. Against the Hobbesian account that memory 'is nothing but *Fading* and *Decaying Sense*, and all our *Volitions* but Mechanick Motions caused from the *Actions* or [in]trusions of Bodies *upon us*', he denies that

> Mental *Conceptions* [can] be said to be the Action of *Bodies* without and the meer *Passion of the Thinker*; and least of all [are] *Volitions* such, there being plainly here, something *ἐφ' ἡμῖν*, *In our own Power*, by means whereof, we become a *Principle of Actions*, accordingly deserving *Commendation* or *Blame*, that is, something of *Self-Activity*. (*TIS*, p. 851)

Over forty years ago Passmore noted Cudworth's importance for Locke and more recently Stephen Darwall has re-opened the question of Cudworth's relationship to Kant, by noting parallels between the two. Cudworth certainly deserves attention for his possible impact on these and other philosophers. But he also deserves attention in his own

right. By making important statements of his philosophy available in a readable modern edition, I hope to increase the likelihood of Cudworth being read on his own terms, as well as to lay the ground for a redrawing of the historical account in such a way as to re-integrate Cudworth into the philosophical developments of the early Enlightenment.

Chronology

1617 born in Aller, Somerset.
1632 enters the University of Cambridge as a student at Emmanuel College.
1635 graduates BA.
1637 Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*.
1639 graduates MA and is appointed to a fellowship at Emmanuel College.
1641 Descartes, *Méditations*.
1642 outbreak of Civil War.
1644 abolition of the Church of England.
ejection of Cambridge dons who refused to subscribe to the covenant imposed by Parliament.
Descartes, *Principia philosophiae*.
1647 appointed Master of Clare Hall and Regius Professor of Hebrew; preaches a sermon to the House of Commons.
1649 execution of Charles I.
1651 Cudworth becomes DD.
Hobbes, *Leviathan*.
1652 Hobbes, *De corpore politico*.
1653 Oliver Cromwell becomes Lord Protector.
1654 appointed Master of Christ's College (a post he held until his death).
1655 advises Cromwell on the re-admission of the Jews to England. Meets Menasseh ben Israel.
1660 restoration of the monarchy, and re-establishment of the Church of England.
1667 Henry More, *Enchiridion ethicum*.
1670 Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*.
1678 *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* published.
Cudworth installed prebendary of Gloucester.
'Popish Plot'.
1688 dies.