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Introduction: English Protestant moral theory and regeneration

In his 1618 sermon, Lancelot Andrewes, the Conformist Bishop of Winchester, admonishes his listeners that the fear of divine punishment can prevent apostasy: "This fear to suffer evil for sin, *malum poenae*, makes men fear to do the evil of sin, *malum culpae*; what they fear to suffer for, they fear to do."[1] In 1643, the English Puritan divine, William Ames, outlines for the reader a pragmatic remedy of bridling sin: "If he consider the misery of those, that obey not God, for he is the servant of sinne, to death . . . If he alwayes set before his eyes the threatnings against, and the vengeance which is prepared for the disobedient."[2] Despite their doctrinal allegiances – Andrewes is a late apologist for the Elizabethan Settlement, Ames a covenant theologian – both theologians are devoted Pauline evangelists. To invoke the prospect of damnation and a wrathful, punitive God seems like a reversion to Old Testament moralism, the legalistic tenets of which are supposedly displaced by the comforts of the Gospel. Pauline theology holds, for example, that sinners are justified by Christ's sacrifice, after which they fulfill moral law out of responsive love rather than servile fear.

Presumably Andrewes and Ames are directing their advice to penitents as well as reprobates: Andrewes's sermon is delivered before King James I; Ames's advice appears in a rather arid treatise on conscience. But even if they are addressing their views exclusively to unregenerate sinners, both theologians would be expected to follow standard Pauline practice by arguing that sinners should acknowledge an inability to obey moral law. Such an acknowledgment is the initial soteriological step in preparing the heart for a bestowal of unmerited grace. Yet Andrewes's and Ames's primary concern is to rouse in reprobates and converts alike a servile fear of disobeying God's precepts. While neither theologian makes the Pelagian or Arminian argument that righteousness is conditional on the fulfillment of divine law, both suggest that damnation may very well follow from moral transgression.

One expects that this threat of punishments would be complemented by a system of enticing rewards. And so it is. Later in the century, Jeremy

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Taylor, the "holy living," latitudinarian theologian, concludes in *Unum Necessarium* (1655) that "the first cause of an universal impiety is, that at first God had made no promises of heaven. He had not propounded any glorious rewards, to be as an argument to support the superior faculty against the inferior, that is, to make the will choose the best and leave the worst . . ."[3] If we combine Andrewes's and Ames's *malum poenae* with Taylor's calculus of rewards, we have an approximation of Blaise Pascal's rational-choice model of Godly conduct. If one asks a rational-choice theorist a fundamentally normative, ethical question – "Why should I be good?" – the answer would invariably be, "Because obedience is economically sound." Nothing in such a response recommends that one uphold moral law out of reverence for God's unconditional will, or that a love of divine goodness should be pursued for its own sake. Why would Reformed theologians – Andrewes, Ames, Taylor – erect such a system of rewards and punishments, a system that, even under the rubric of Pascal's Jansenism, hardly establishes fit criteria of piety? Surely Lord Shaftesbury was not the first to realize that such a means-end basis of devotion fails to provide an acceptable motive to virtue: "If the desire of life be only through the violence of that natural aversion to death, if it be through the love of something else than virtuous affection . . . then it is no longer any sign or token of real virtue."[4]

Moral Identity argues that such tensions between mercenary and disinterested virtue issue from a more systemic problem of integrating English Reformed soteriology (defined as the theory or doctrine of salvation) and ethical practice. My fundamental claim is that early modern theologians were often unable to incorporate a coherent theory of practical morality into their soteriological accounts of justification and sanctification. Justification describes a forensic change in the status of the sinner following Christ's redeeming sacrifice. The sinner is "imputed" righteousness by justification, meaning that his sinful legacy has been erased by Christ's saving intervention. The conceptual features of justification, thorny enough on their own terms, emerge as self-evident axioms when compared to the murkiness of sanctification. In its barest outline, sanctification describes the partial renewal of ethical character through a process of integrating a regenerated "new man" with a residually sinful "old man." The difficult questions center on the precise relationship among sanctification, virtue, and grace. To what extent does sanctification increase over time? Does such an increase in sanctifying righteousness mark a gradual perfection of already-imparted virtue? If so, is the moral agent responsible for ethical self-mastery, or does each ethical achievement require a quickening infusion of

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grace? And to what extent is grace like a habit or virtuous disposition of character?

Many of these questions derive from scholastic metaphysics, and I can assure the reader that any neo-scholastic inquiries into these matters will be restricted to chapter 3, on the subject of Richard Hooker's distinction between habitual and active righteousness. The bulk of this study instead focuses on the various non-scholastic compromises the theology and literature of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England make when confronted with the aporias of sanctifying righteousness. When faced with offering a user-friendly, pragmatic means of reordering the will and disciplining conduct, theologians and writers often supplement their soteriological views with a prudential "ethics" of shame, servile fear, and mercenary virtue. I put the term "ethics" in quotes to emphasize that these alternatives or accommodations of sanctifying righteousness are not normatively ethical, that is, they do not belong to any strain of ethical theory – natural law ethics, deontology, situation ethics – that might be easily reconcilable with devotion. Early modern theologians time and again accept that an appeal to ethical egoism and rational self-interest is often the most efficient means of binding conduct in both the sacred and secular kingdoms.

It should be noted that early modern theologians were not significantly departing from tradition in emphasizing a system of rewards and punishments. Historically, Christian moralists across denominations have unembarrassedly relied on calculating hedonism as a pragmatic moral device. Augustine typically preaches hell in his youthful sermons: "So from the things people are afraid of in this time, they should work out what they really ought to be afraid of. I mean, they're afraid of prison, and not afraid of *gehemma*? Afraid of the inquisitor's torturers, and not afraid of hell's angels? Afraid of torment in time, and not afraid of the pains of eternal fire?"[5] Augustine insists, however, that the threat of sanctions should serve merely as the opening act in the ongoing drama of salvation: "Fear of punishment makes a person do the works of the law, but still in a servile manner."[6] Similarly, Jonathan Edwards justifies the hellfire and brimstone of his imprecatory sermons – for example, the memorable image of God holding sinners "over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider" – by claiming that such evangelical awakenings are necessary prompts to less compromised forms of virtue.[7]

Early modern references to mercenary virtue stand out because they strain against some of the cherished precepts of the Pauline Renaissance in England: an emphasis on the purity of intention grounding virtuous action, and the displacement of pure *agape* and disinterested neighbor-regard by

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caritas or self-interested love. The difference between late-sixteenth through mid-seventeenth century sermonizing on virtue and late-seventeenth century high church latitudinarianism illustrates the pull in pre-Restoration Protestantism between religious theory and moral practice. When they preach hell, late-seventeenth-century latitudinarians like John Tillotson and Edward Stillingfleet argue against their English Calvinist predecessors that the center of theology should be practical morality rather than self-scrutiny. This shift to "holy living" theology, underwritten by a greater emphasis on sanctification than justification, affords Restoration theologians the license to preach the virtues of social utility rather than clean consciences. Earlier Protestant theologians, by contrast, attempt the more burdensome task of integrating a morality of external behavior with a theology of justifying righteousness. Given the reality of moral backsliding and the inadmissibility of sanctified moral progress, forms of calculating hedonism serve as practical safeguards throughout the stages of the *ordo salutis*, rather than simply as lures during the earliest stage of conversion.

Much of this book, then, will attempt to reconstruct the Reformed theory of sanctified morality, giving particular attention to soteriological paradoxes and blind alleys in relation to moral *praxis*. It will be helpful at the outset to establish what sanctification is not by briefly outlining its ethical alter ego – Aristotelian *hexis* – the classical bogey that so exercised the imagination and polemic of Reformed theologians from Luther to Puritan divines like Richard Sibbes and Richard Baxter. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle draws a distinction between the intellectual and moral virtues, the former acquired by instruction and experience, the latter, like crafts, the result of habituation: "Moral virtue comes about as a result of habit, whence also its name *ethike* is one that is formed by a slight variation from the word *ethos* (habit). From this it is also plain that none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature, for nothing that exists by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature."[8] Moral virtues, acquired by repetition, are contrasted with natural endowments such as the senses, which are "possessed" as potentialities before they are used. The moral virtues belong to the categories of potentiality or power, states of mind or disposition called *hexeis*, variously translated as "states," dispositions," or "habits." Actions which proceed from virtuous habits are not simply actions one does repeatedly and inattentively; they require a certain degree of "virtuosity" and need to be performed with skill and care.

We can begin to understand, even from this brief account of Aristotelian *hexis*, why Reformed theology exclaimed so loudly against classical virtue theory. The young Luther pointed out that morality is a fruit (and sign)

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rather than efficient cause of grace: "For he is not righteous who acts righteously, as Aristotle says, and we are not called righteous when doing righteous deeds, but when we believe and trust in God."[9] The experimental Puritans of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries take up Luther's anti-Aristotelianism. In his *Cases of Conscience*, William Perkins "confute[s] the errours of the wisest heathen philosophers" by arguing that virtue is not a "habite of mind, obtained by custom, use, and practice," but a "gift of the Spirit of God and a part of the regenerate, whereby a man may live well."[10] Later in the century, Richard Sibbes, another leading Puritan divine, explains the tension between piety and classical virtue in more provocative terms:

> Now the spirit guides us not immediately, but it works a habit in us . . . And when that is wrought, the Spirit guides us to every particular action . . . [we] have need of grace for every particular action. And herein the soul is like to the air . . . So a man is no wiser in particular actions than God will make him on the sudden . . . so all our wisdom, all the direction we have to lead our lives as becomes Christians, it comes from Christ, it comes from grace; not only the disposition, but likewise every particular action . . . It was a proud term the philosophers had, as I said, sometimes they called their moral virtues habits; and if we consider them merely as they are in the person, they are habits, but indeed they are graces . . .[11]

While some Puritan brethren argue that God sanctifies by renewing man's corrupted faculties of will and reason, that is, by working through secondary causes and the created orders, Sibbes implies that morally approbative acts are efficiently caused by ongoing deliveries of grace. Sibbes thus makes scant allowance for a gradual development of ethical character even following conversion. To the extent that God does not renew human faculties, Sibbes's view of sanctification approximates a theory of ethical occasionalism: God seems to provide the unmediated force impelling each morally creditable act.[12] We will see that this commonly articulated, occasionalist view of the relationship between grace and virtue – provocative in its own right – offers little in terms of a practical regimen of shaping conduct.

These tensions between classical ethics and Reformed theories of grace have not gone unnoticed by modern historians. In his work on Lutheran theories of education, Gerald Strauss recognizes that all sixteenth-century Lutheran educators had trouble forging a motivational link between habitual virtue and divine grace. The term they invoked, "einbilden," was meant to suggest an internally guiding "imprint" or impression left by grace. Yet, as Strauss notes, divine imprinting failed to explain precisely how practical moral education might be introduced into the economy of salvation: "Torn between their trust in the molding power of education and their admission

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that the alteration of men's nature was a task beyond human strength, they strove for success in their endeavors while conceding the likelihood of defeat."[13] Gilbert Meilaender, dedicated as he is to reconstructing a coherent Lutheran theory of virtue, ultimately agrees with Strauss: "The tension between these several views of virtue cannot, I think, be removed from the Christian perspective. Its theoretical resolution lies in the narrative Christians tell and retell . . . in which God is graciously at work transforming sinners into saints . . . The theoretical resolution explains but does not remove the tensions of the practical life."[14]

Recent work on early modern theology has suggested that Reformed theologians attempted to resolve such tensions by invoking the Lutheran-Calvinist doctrine of the two kingdoms. As is well known, Luther distinguishes a temporal regiment, the realm of social ethics, from a spiritual regiment, the realm of grace and salvation. Calvin argues similarly that the *forum externum* should be distinguished from the *forum conscientiae*.[15] The Reformed doctrine of the two kingdoms has recently been appropriated by modern theologians and literary critics to help resolve tensions in Richard Hooker's *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, as well as Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* and George Herbert's poetry and prose.[16] Yet I will be arguing that, in relation to Reformed soteriology and morality, the two kingdoms doctrine raises more problems than it resolves.

To the extent that all theological treatises of sanctification recur to the language and rhetoric of different strains of virtue theory, we would be wrong to argue that early modern theologians maintained a disjuncture between the spiritual and moral regiments. In fact, rather than designate the temporal or social kingdom as the ethical realm proper, the most considered early modern versions of the two kingdoms doctrine align each realm with a distinctive form of morality: social or civic ethics in the secular kingdom, and an ethics of neighbor-regard and forbearance in the Christian kingdom.[17] Yet, as a number of early modern theologians themselves argued, even this distinction fails to account for the precise ways in which selected individual virtues, prudence, for example, overarch both realms. Thus Ames will argue against Reformed neo-Aristotelians – Philip Melanchthon and Bartholomaeus Keckermann – that "they say that theology is concerned with the inward affections of men and ethics with outward manners – as if ethics, which they consider the prudence which governs the will and appetite, had nothing to do with inward affections, and theology did not teach outward as well as inward obedience."[18] Ames finds the entire two kingdoms framework reductionistic, particularly the internal-spiritual, external-ethical division. Along with Ames and other early modern

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theologians, I will be arguing that the two kingdoms doctrine figures as something of a red herring in accounts of Protestant ethical theory. The real issue, implicitly raised by Ames's suggestion that theology teach "outward things," is the difficulty of finding a place for ethics in the *ordo salutis*, a challenge facing all theologians and literary authors who set out to theorize the relationship between justification and sanctification.

DOGMATIC THEOLOGY, LITERARY ETHICS

One of the fundamental methodological arguments of this study is that the tensions between early modern ethical theory and practice make themselves felt most prominently in the literary treatments of ethics – in the sixteenth-century works of Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser, and in the seventeenth-century poetry and prose of John Donne, George Herbert, and John Milton. Since literary texts place characters in approximately real ethical quandaries, they uniquely expose the limitations of the theoretical apparatus found in dogmatic theology – the sermons, treatises, and ethical handbooks published during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In isolating the literary realm as the roiled meeting place of dogmatic theology and ethical practice, I follow those modern ethicists who have turned to literary contexts as a means of supplementing the analytical barrenness of early modern (and modern) ethical theory. Colin McGinn recommends, for example, that "some attempt should be made to come to terms with the embeddedness of the ethical in the fictional . . . We will need to mingle the general and the specific in ways that are not typical of the orthodox ethical treatise. Above all, questions of character assume far greater prominence when ethics is approached in this way, since fictional works are all about the interaction between character and conduct."[19]

Moral Identity begins by looking at literary inquiries into the relationship between classical ethics and piety in Sidney's *Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* and Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Book II. The theological background for these texts includes the doctrinal works of the early English Reformers, notably William Tyndale, John Bradford, and John Frith; Theodore Beza's *Confession of Faith*; and occasional sermons by leading Elizabethan Puritans, including Henry Smith, Richard Rogers, and Richard Greenham. While these texts, published roughly between 1520–90, all make passing reference to the relationship among justification, sanctification, and morality, the most extensive English Calvinist treatments of sanctifying righteousness emerge between the end of the sixteenth century and early decades of the seventeenth century, including William Perkins's *Golden Chaine* (1592), Thomas Tuke's *Highway of Heaven* (1609), Thomas Taylor's *Progresse of Saints to Holinesse* (1630), and John Preston's *Saint's Qualification* (1637). As late sixteenth-century texts, Sidney's *Arcadia* (1580–93) and Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Book II (1590) address soteriological and moral issues that are just beginning to be fully theorized in early modern theology.

The conduct of most of the principals in Sidney's *Arcadia* is governed by a heteronomous ethics of shame that seems to be classical in origin. I argue, though, that a preoccupation with shame runs throughout the theological writings of the period, much of which draws from the early English Reformers' assumption that personal assurance of election is ratified by public, third-party appraisals of moral conduct. The early English Reformers, who do not emphasize the role of conscience or a "reflex act" in order to discern personal assurance, construct a spectator theory of morality, which in its extreme manifestations renders assurance parasitical on public reputation. Sidney's *Arcadia* points out not only the limitations of this theological shame ethic to bind conduct, but the limitations of a number of alternative classical and theological ethical options as well, including Aristotelian behaviorism, an ethical system of guilt and conscience, and a purely Christological ethics of grace. The *Arcadia* is notable for pointing out the flaws of nearly all of the prevailing and emergent ethical systems theorized in sixteenth-century theology.

Spenser continues Sidney's search for a robust, comprehensive ethical system that can successfully merge theory and conduct. Unlike Sidney, though, Spenser focuses more specifically on the relationship between Aristotelian *hexis* and sanctifying righteousness, a distinction that is often described by Spenser's critics in less technical terms as the two orders of nature and grace. As a number of critics have noted, Guyon, the Knight of Temperance, seems to forsake his classical training in virtue, ultimately emerging as a regenerated hero by the time he destroys the Bower of Bliss. I will be arguing, though, that Spenser suggests that both orders of nature and grace are unable to effectively direct practical conduct. He thus invokes a third order of Mosaic law to compensate for the perceived limitations of the Aristotelian and Pauline alternatives.

In the third chapter, I shift attention away from sixteenth-century literary depictions of ethical quandaries and toward a consideration of the internal ambiguities found in the ethical theories of the most influential Conformist and Puritan theologians of the late-sixteenth through mid-seventeenth centuries: Richard Hooker's natural law theory; Lancelot Andrewes's narrative ethics; William Perkins's theory of conscience in relation to personal assurance; and Richard Sibbes's affective ethic of spiritual love.

In their quest to integrate soteriology and morality, each of these theologians is forced to address two governing ethical questions to which I will often return throughout this study: a "normative" and a "behavioral" question. All ethical systems posit a "source of normativity," an ultimate ground or justificatory reason for moral conduct.[20] Kant described the search for normativity as a regress to the unconditioned, a point beyond which one can no longer ask, "Why should one be good?" To this fundamental normative question, different ethical systems yield specialized responses. An apologist for Christian voluntarism would answer the question, "Why should one be good?" with the answer, "Because it is God's will." For most voluntarists, the interrogative regress ends there, since the answer to the logically succeeding question – "Why should one obey God's will?" – often just reaffirms the necessity of Godly obedience.

Yet, early modern theologians realize that the circularity of voluntarist normativity often proves unsatisfactory in practice. They are thus willing to entertain alternative or subsidiary sources of normativity. Each of the theologians treated in chapter 3 offers a distinctive response to the second regress of our normative question, "Why should I obey God's will?" Hooker responds that God's intentions are consistent with natural laws; natural laws describe human propensities; and so to obey God's will is to follow one's natural inclinations. Perkins argues that we should obey God's will because our (renewed) consciences dictate that we act accordingly. Sibbes suggests that we should obey God's will because the new covenant demands that we owe God responsive love. Andrewes, as we have begun to see, at times argues that Godly obedience helps to avoid damnation and likely secures salvation.

But the normative *why* question is routinely supplemented with a behavioral or *how* question. After positing the grounds of morality, theologians are faced with explaining the enabling means by which one can meet the requirements of the distinctive moral system under consideration. And the nature of the answer to the behavioral question – a question about the proper forms of moral education – is dictated by whatever action-guiding source is offered by the answer to the normative question. Hooker and Perkins, for example, are moral internalists: they believe that, respectively, the apprehension of natural laws or the exactions of conscience will naturally condition praiseworthy action. This sounds counter-intuitive to modern ears, but it is consistent with the Socratic notion that if one truly

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understands the nature of the good, one naturally pursues the good. To the extent that Hooker and Perkins offer pragmatic ethical therapies or educational regimens, they assume that cognitive training can dispose the intellect in the right direction. They thus partially avoid the problem of integrating Protestant notions of grace and a behavioral system of reconditioning the will. Sibbes's love ethic, which derives from Luther's theory of *agape*, is also a form of moral internalism. Yet Sibbes is less confident that the reception of God's effulgent love will motivate conduct after the manner of obligating natural laws or a supervisory conscience. So he supplements his love ethic with the form of occasionalistic ethics described above. Since Andrewes does not postulate an internally binding normative source, he at times resorts to the system of rewards and punishments also described above.

In terms of the early modern textual archives in which we find such tensions played out, there is a fundamental difference between the compromises one finds in the sermonizing, on the one hand, and the prose and poetry of Sidney and Spenser, on the other hand. When the dogmatic or more systematic theologians attempt to integrate theology and social practice they seldom view such maneuverings as compromises; that is, the theologians do not assume the critical stance or meta-ethical distance from system-building that one finds in sixteenth-century literary ethics. When we get to chapters 4 through 7, though, the relationship between theory and practice, or ethical system and ethical context, becomes more complicated, since Donne, Herbert, and Milton each inhabits the roles of both theologian and poet.

In chapter 4 I argue that Donne subjects the standard early modern distinction between filial and servile fear to one of the most exhaustive analyses of his time. While filial fear ordinarily describes the fear of defecting from election, servile fear describes a slavish fear of punishment and damnation. As theologian, Donne accepts the Calvinist distinction. As reflective poet, however, Donne acknowledges the extent to which his awareness of his decaying, fallible body inspires servile fear in spite of his sense of election. We find in Donne's poetry and prose neither an endorsement nor critique of Reformed theories of morality, but rather an unresolved play between dogmatic theology and bodily praxis. For Donne, the consolations of theology continually bump up against his fearsome, damnable, body in pain. In his inimitable way, Donne posits his anatomy as a fundamental source of normativity.

As George Herbert's critics have recently noted, Herbert seems to keep religious concerns distinct from ethical concerns, the former appearing in