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Flesh Redeemed: Religious Materialism in Early Enlightenment Britain, 1640-1715

By

Samuel Robinson

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

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Professor James Grantham Turner

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Abstract

Flesh Redeemed: Religious Materialism in Early Enlightenment Britain, 1640-1715

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Samuel Robinson

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Berkeley

Ethan Shagan, Chair

This dissertation examines how early modern Britons came to deem the material world as worthy of attention, care, and redemption. It traces a broad current of philosophical and theological speculation regarding material bodies that began in the 1640s. In a series of case studies, I chart how a range of formulations regarding the nature of corporeal bodies and matter increasingly served as a resource for theological discourse, philosophical debate, and popular belief in the late seventeenth century. I argue that heterodox religious ideas in the mid-seventeenth century served as an engine of change, driving early modern Britons to rethink how divinity, the soul, and the material world interacted. By focusing on the relationship between divinity and earthbound corporeality, this dissertation reframes heterodox religious ideas, often relegated to the historical margins, as in fact generative of modern conceptions of the human body and the material world.

In the following study, I trace the material linkages that connected religious belief and early modern philosophies of embodied substance. The project follows changing early modern interest in the material world as a range of thinkers reconfigured the perceived interaction and interpellation of spiritual, corporeal, and divine substances. Redeeming the flesh—discovering the nature of the body and the means to God’s sanctifying grace—continually motivated a variety of investigations into the nature of body, soul, and spirit. But the Christian project of corporeal redemption drove early modern interests *beyond* the specific human body to engage with questions of cosmology, vitalism, and the nature of knowledge. This was part of a new willingness of early moderns to probe into scriptural mysteries to better understand the human body, but also to extend these questions to wider material processes and entities.

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Abbreviations

BL	British Library
Bodl.	Bodleian Library, Oxford
CUL	Cambridge University Library
FHL	Friends House Library
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> , ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, September 2013

Introduction

A Quest of a Substance

In 1650 Thomas Vaughan tried to understand both God and man through his vegetable harvest. Having trained in Oxford and “rambled over all those inventions which the folly of men called sciences,” the Welsh philosopher despaired over his inability to understand God. He initially reasoned that man’s created connection to God might allow, through introspection, some understanding of divinity itself. But he realized that man was fallen and had lost innate knowledge about the wider world. This led Vaughan to his garden where he “noticed a great many vegetables [growing] fresh and beauteous in their time.” The vegetables gave him pause. They led him to think about the origins of the plants: “When I looked back on their original, they were no such thing as vegetables.” Vaughan remembered that the plants had of course grown from a different form—seeds containing “præxistent matter” that had been vitalized into vegetables. Vaughan stumbled onto a new set of questions: What enabled this growth? Could one understand “being” through the changes and transmutations of life in the material world? Since God was “the only proper immediate agent which actuates this matter,” Vaughan extrapolated that it was necessary to understand God’s seminal relationship to creation more generally. Thus spurred, Vaughan declared he was “now in a quest of a substance”—a search for the vibrant connections between man, matter, and the divine. If the substance of the world could be determined, man might find a path toward divine redemption.¹

Vaughan’s quest epitomized a wider religious problem of embodied substance—a complex of questions, intellectual curiosities, and cultural anxieties regarding corporeal bodies and their relationship to God. Beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, a surge of intense religious and philosophical speculation into the nature of matter, spirit, soul, and God arose in early modern Britain. Scholars, ministers, and other writers became newly curious about the qualities, attributes, and connections between these substantial entities. This interest was part of a broader intellectual trend. In the middle decades of the seventeenth century, the nature of matter and spirit became subjects of unprecedented attention in Europe.² Mechanist philosophies, the development of novel scientific frameworks, new forms of religious imagination, and new spiritualisms all helped revise European worldviews and fracture the ecclesiastical institutions that mediated access to divinity. But this examination of body, spirit, and their relationship was particularly intense in early modern Britain, where political revolution unleashed an unprecedented avalanche of uncensored speculation and debate. Civil and political upheaval, new religious heterodoxies, and novel philosophical ideas reverberated across English religious culture. In these conditions, concern with material bodies spread beyond seventeenth-century Britain’s elite culture to include writers across the social spectrum. New ideas about the nature of the human body and its relationship to God permeated the print and manuscript record of early modern Britain.

This dissertation charts the emergence of this intellectual problem of embodiment in seventeenth-century Britain. It traces a broad current of philosophical and theological speculation

¹ Thomas Vaughan, *Anthroposophia Theomagica: Or a Discourse of the Nature of Man*

² Daniel Garber et al., “New Doctrines of Body and Its Powers, Place, and Space,” in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 553-623.

regarding material bodies that began in the 1640s. In a series of case studies, I chart how a range of formulations regarding the nature of corporeal bodies and matter increasingly served as a resource for theological discourse, philosophical debate, and popular belief in the late seventeenth century. I argue that heterodox religious ideas in the mid-seventeenth century served as an engine of change, driving early modern Britons to rethink how divinity, the soul, and the material world interacted. By focusing on the relationship between divinity and earthbound corporeality as seriously and creatively as the writers of the seventeenth century, this dissertation reframes heterodox religious ideas, often considered historically marginal or “radical,” as generative of modern conceptions of the human body and the material world.

Changes in early modern views of bodies and matter are often understood through historiographical concepts of Enlightenment, scientific revolution, and (until recently) secularization. In many of these narratives, materialist ideas function as a forerunner to the disenchanted secularism of more full-throated eighteenth-century Enlightenments. This narrative was made blunter when historians began to disaggregate the Enlightenment into nationalist contexts: scholars of early modern Britain saw England as precociously confronting the philosophical and intellectual implications of religious materialism. English materialism was an intellectual seedbed for later, more radical, critiques of religious and political orthodoxy on the Continent.³ Many of these ideas, held to be constitutive of “enlightened thought,” were predicated upon philosophical interrogations into the nature of substance. Indeed, J.G.A. Pocock has suggested that the very concept of “Enlightenment,” at least in the Anglo-American context, hinged upon debate over the nature of substance, in which metaphysical separations between the substances of mind, matter, and God were conservatively reinforced.⁴ More recent work on English philosophical materialism suggests that the materialist speculations in seventeenth-century England spurred “a radical and subversive new synthesis” that manifested across the Channel. So while debate has shifted back and forth about the political direction of these ideas (conservative, moderate, or radical), historians agree that period saw wide ranging interest into the nature of material, immaterial, and spiritual bodies.⁵

Yet these efforts to highlight English precocity rely upon constructed dichotomies and oppositions between learned philosophers and popular religion, as well as between “moderate,” “conservative,” and “radical” intellectual trajectories. This has obfuscated the extent to which concerns about embodiment were widely and explicitly confronted across the religious and intellectual culture of seventeenth-century England. Rather than continue to parse the intellectual trajectory of ideological labels, this dissertation outlines the broad problem of materiality that

³ Roy Porter, “The Enlightenment in England,” in *The Enlightenment in the National Context*, ed. Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 1-7; Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (New York: Norton, 2000), 4-9.

⁴ J. G. A. Pocock, “Enthusiasm: The Antiself of Enlightenment,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 60 (1997): 15-18, 21-23; Frederick Burnham, “The More-Vaughan Controversy: The Revolt Against Philosophical Enthusiasm,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35 (1974), 33-49.

⁵ Ann Thomson, *Bodies of Thought: Science, Religion, and the Soul in the Early Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2-3; see also Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3-13.

arose in English religious culture in the late seventeenth century. The project works temporally from the ideological upheaval of the English Revolution (1642-1660), when new religious ideas flourished in newfound freedom. It argues that much of the heterodox thought that arose in seventeenth-century Britain was not opposed to a secularizing process we might call “Enlightenment.” Rather, heterodox ideas increasingly conceived religion as a complex of problems relating to embodiment and materiality. Running through these materials is burgeoning curiosity about the nature of the divine and the relationship of God to the material world. These thinkers revised traditional Christian eschatology into a new materialist paradigm, adapting theologies of corporeal redemption to reflect changing intellectual culture. Thus, the ideas of seemingly marginal thinkers were constitutive and generative to the cultural and intellectual development of modern Britain.

Heterodox formulations of divinity not only stressed God’s existence within the physical bodies of the world, they also increasingly relied upon corporeal vocabularies and concepts. Vaughan’s “quest for a substance,” written during the English Revolution, occurred at a moment when the Christian project of corporeal redemption became materialized: heterodox writers newly understood the influence of immaterial substance—spirit, the human soul, God’s omnipresence—as a broader substantial experience of divine contact. Consider, as a brief example, the posthumous publication of the philosopher and Quaker, Anne Conway, whose 1690 *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy Concerning God and the Creatures* argued that the “distinction between spirit and body is only modal and incremental, not essential and substantial.” Her thought idiosyncratically blended Neoplatonic mysticism, Spinozist monism, and new chemical ideas. But it was unified by the strong assertion that Christian religion involved the literal redemption of the material human body. Conway wrote that many “regard these phrases as merely metaphors, when, in fact, they have a real and proper meaning without any figurative sense.” The world was not divided between matter and immaterial spirit; it was a materialized spectrum ascending toward divine perfection. The rehabilitation of the corporeal person was a substantial process of shedding physicality and realizing spiritual existence.⁶

In the following chapters, I trace the material linkages that connected religious belief and early modern philosophies of embodied substance. The project follows changing early modern interest in the material world as a range of thinkers reconfigured the perceived interaction and interpellation of spiritual, corporeal, and divine substances. As we will see, redeeming the flesh—discovering the nature of the body and the means to God’s sanctifying grace—continually motivated a variety of investigations into the nature of body, soul, and spirit. But the Christian project of corporeal redemption drove early modern interests *beyond* the specific human body to engage with questions of cosmology, vitalism, and the nature of knowledge. This was part of a new willingness of early moderns to not only probe into scriptural mysteries, but to extend these questions to wider material processes and entities. It is then emblematic that Thomas Vaughan’s attempt to understand the nature of God and man was predicated upon the observation of vegetables growing in the ground. His recognition of religious redemption and self-knowledge was, quite literally, rooted in the wider material bodies that interacted with the human corpus.

This is a story of religious materialism—a set of questions, paradoxes, and problems revolving around human substance and humanity’s vibrant connections with other material

⁶ Anne Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Allison P. Coudert and Taylor Corse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 41-44.

things. The project shows that understanding early modern ideas about the human body requires broader contextualization within changing conceptions of matter itself. The result is a religious history of the body, not as a matter of conflicting theological and secular impulses, but as the very place where ideas about matter were constructed.

* * *

In many ways, the fraught relationship between God and body, between divinity and matter, was foundational to Christian theology. The mystery of Christ's redeeming sacrifice entailed the literal incarnation of God into flesh. For much of the church's history, a radical act of corporeal transformation supported both Christian soteriology and liturgical practice. The Eucharist, a holy meal reenacting the Last Supper, consecrated bread and wine by declaring it into the material body and blood of God. This curious sacramental act, involving the transformation of substance itself, allowed human beings to partake in Christianity's seminal sacrificial moment. The embodiment of God, changed from bread into divine flesh, proffered spiritual redemption. Communion offered believers redemption to "man in his original." It was a central thread among the layers of corporeal and material engagements that defined the Christian religious project. And it created deep intellectual and cultural tensions.

As scholars have shown, the famous Eucharistic debates of the sixteenth century were an intensification of older problems regarding the communion sacrament. Conflict over the fraught materiality of the Eucharistic conversion did not begin with the reformations of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin. There was long-standing perplexity regarding a perfect, eternal God's engagement with corrupt, transient matter.⁷ Consistently at issue were the theological, ecclesiological, and social implications of the Eucharist's reenactment of the Incarnation and the lingering materiality embodied in the bread.⁸ A central sacrament of sanctification, the Christian rite placed great ontological and theological weight upon the materiality of the Eucharistic sacrament. Stephen Greenblatt has famously emphasized how the dramatic claim "this is my body," which turned the bread into the body of Christ, placed great pressure upon both matter and words. It stressed the very fabric of the Christian story. The holy meal's material remnant was particularly problematic: the bread was baked from plowed and milled grain, a human priest swallowed it, and, troublingly, the priest passed God's body through his intestines. "The problem of the leftover," this material vestige that defied consecration, forced Catholic theologians, medieval heretics, and Reformation evangelicals to vigorously contest the status of the material residue in the Mass—a debate encapsulated by the worry about what happened when a mouse ate the crumbs of the sacrament. In Greenblatt's formulation, the "mousetrap" of the Reformation

⁷ Robert Scribner, "Perceptions of the Sacred in Germany at the End of the Middle Ages," in *Religion and Culture in Germany (1400-1800)*, ed. Lyndal Roper (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 85-103; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 31-75; Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 328, 337-338; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400-c. 1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 91-107.

⁸ Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 173-76.

required evangelicals to plunge their imaginations into the descending flesh, “to dwell on the progress of the Host through the guts of a mouse.” This intestine horror helped evangelicals revise the materialist Eucharistic theology of the later middle ages into a *symbolic* representation of divine communion. Yet, as Greenblatt shows in his unpacking of Hamlet’s verbal snares, the problem of matter and its signification lingered through religious conflict of early modernity.⁹

During the seventeenth century heterodox Protestants dramatically extended the terms of the Eucharistic leftover. Man’s body itself became the mousetrap that must be negotiated for spiritual communion and regeneration. Take for example, Robert Norwood, a parliamentary army officer, who critiqued the Eucharist by arguing that merely eating material bread and wine could not be a true communion. Christ’s flesh and blood was a divine substance, Norwood argued, essentially different from man’s carnal body and impossible for unprepared humans to consume: “Nothing can feed or refresh that which is not of the same nature and essence with itself.” If there was to be communion with the divine, Norwood believed such a unity required internal changes to man’s “invisible nature.” Communion could not occur in terms of the outward flesh and bread; rather scripture’s discussion of the sacraments was to be “taken in reference to an inward, invisible power, nature, and essence.” We should not presume Norwood was speaking allegorically or metaphorically. He took this inward-looking communion seriously, and died fasting in an attempt to physically change his inward essence.¹⁰ This was a shift of theological pressure from the accidents of the bread to the body of the believer, a move that introduced new material tensions to religious experience. The body needed to be transcended, and yet the corporeal envelope remained the only place to know God through an intense, individual, non-corporate (and yet corporeal) contact between the material and immaterial worlds.

This problem was dramatically illustrated in the writings of Ann Bathurst, a foundational member of the Philadelphian Society, who expressed religious salvation in terms of corporeal purification. In her diary, “Rhapsodical Meditations and Visions,” Bathurst claimed that an illness heightened her spiritual sensibilities in 1659, precipitating a life of mystical visions and meditation.¹¹ Bathurst’s reception of divine presence was idiosyncratic in her intense emphasis upon the purification of her physical interior. In a vision, she wrote that the divine Trinity “opened my stomach and clasped themselves one in another and went into my stomach and closed it up again.” God removed the impurities of her gut and communed with her. Several days later, Bathurst had yet another vision in which Christ removed the impure elements of her body. Christ again opened her stomach and began cleaning her insides of vestigial, diabolic influence.

He took out my bowels, removing and cleaning them, and cast out the small dark spirits which were as the spawn of the great one that was cast out before and crept to the back to hide themselves. I desired and He commanded them to depart to their center of darkness. And when he had cleansed my bowels, he took oil, rubbing them with it between his hands.

⁹ Stephen Greenblatt, “The Mousetrap,” in *Practicing New Historicism*, ed. Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 136-62, esp. 140-51.

¹⁰ Robert Norwood, *The Case and Trial of Captain Norwood* (London, 1652), 18-19; Anonymous, *The English Hermite* (London, 1655), “The Publisher to the Reader.”

¹¹ B. J. Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 113-14; Bodl. MS Rawlinson, D. 1262, fos. 6-7.

Bathurst recalled she was made into an empty shell, containing only her lungs so that she could only breath in the Holy Ghost.¹² Yet her visions were still laden with corporeality: the human body rested central to the discussion of mystical connection with Christ, the status of the soul was equivalent to the purity of the flesh. This material ambivalence reconstructed, in new ways, the old Eucharistic worry about matter's contaminating effect on the divine. The "leftover" of contaminating corporeal stuff had expanded from the taint of divinized bread's peristaltic procession through the innards of mice and men, to the very substance of corporeal bodies—their material, non-spiritual, and dangerously corrupt physicality.

How then to describe this tension, the precarious risk that God's transcendent status might collapse into the messy corporeality of matter? In her recent exploration of late medieval theories and theologies of Christian materiality, Carolina Walker Bynum considers "paradox" as a basic interpretive principle of the art and corporeality of the late middle ages. Matter, particularly in relics, consecrated stuff, and artistic representation both offered and threatened pathways to salvation. There is then, Walker Bynum argues, a "paradox of creation itself: the presence of the eternal and immutable in the transient and corruptible."¹³ There is an alluring anthropological interpretation of religious materiality: all religion is fraught with material ambivalence. Yet we should be hesitant to ascribe Bathurst's vision, Norwood's starvation, and Vaughan's vegetable meditation as the manifestation of an anxiousness that was basic Christianity. Paradox implies an ahistorical conundrum. But there is still history happening here; specific historical circumstances contributed to these moments of acute physicality. There are intellectual genealogies that historians can trace for all three of these case studies. Vaughan's vegetable revelations can be situated in a genealogy of occult interest; Norwood's fasting communion can be cast as part of the radical Reformation; Bathurst's intestine visions can be situated in a longer genre of female mysticism. But all converged historically through a new sense of physicality and materiality as holding tremendous religious import. Their writings reflect a new corporeal emphasis that arose from the ideological upheaval of the English civil wars and interregnum.

* * *

Thomas Vaughan published his intellectual "quest" in 1650, the year after England saw the execution of its king, the establishment of a republic, and the high-water mark of sectarian Protestantism. He was part of an outburst of heterodox ideas in the 1640s and 1650s that has been subjected to a lengthy historiography. Much of this history situates the intellectual occurrences of the period in the context of causes and precipitating events of martial conflict and constitutional breakdown. Unorthodox and novel religious ideas have been continually cited in these narratives. As early as 1679 Thomas Hobbes's dialogue history of civil wars, *Behemoth*, described the period between 1640 and 1660s as "the highest of time," when England displayed "all kinds of folly that the world could afford." Chief among the problems that drove England into rebellion were those in favor of religious liberty, "who in the beginning of the Troubles were not discovered," but by the late 1640s, such "fanatics" had become apparent. In addition to seditious presbyterians, independents, and anabaptists, Hobbes mentioned the fringe groups:

¹² Ibid., fos. 51-53.

¹³ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 34-35, 219.

Diverse other sects as Quakers, and Adamites, etc. whose names and peculiar doctrines I do not very well remember, and these were the enemies, which arose against his Majesty from the private interpretation of Scripture exposed to every man's scanning in his mother tongue.

Hobbes began a historiographical tradition that cast such heterodox ideas of the period as “radical” religion, a populist coalition of puritan sectarianism that “arose against” the monarchy. This politicized accounting of unorthodox Protestantism continued into the eighteenth century in the hyper-partisan “Whig” and Tory” accounts of the conflict.¹⁴ And heterodox ideas continued to figure in the ideologically-oriented interpretations of liberal historians of the nineteenth century and twentieth century, like G. M. Trevelyan's conclusion that the Cromwellian revolution was “the result of political and religious thought and aspiration among men who had no desire to recast society or redistribute wealth.”¹⁵ In these historical narratives, the actual content of these writers, especially their ideas' potential to reconfigure how early moderns understood everyday life, mattered little. Instead religious ideas were merely one of several fissile fuels of fuzzy discontent that drove the more central political debate into constitutional revolution.

The pivot toward social history made unorthodox ideas of the mid-century newly relevant and central. The disciplinary willingness by historians like R. H. Tawney, Lawrence Stone, and Joan Thirsk to examine economic motivations in the seventeenth century staged the Marxian interpretation of Christopher Hill's *The World Turned Upside Down*. Hill reframed the undergrowth of ideas in the 1640s and 1650s as a “revolt within the Revolution,” a broad confrontation of normative religion, politics, and culture driven by real socio-economic concerns. In this Marxian interpretation the sources of heterodox religion were taken as a proto-proletarian revolt, the reflection of a “seething mobility of forest squatters, itinerant craftsmen, and building labourers, unemployed men and women seeking work.”¹⁶ Hill took seriously the ideas of the sectarian milieu, rehabilitating the work of popular religious and pseudo-philosophical expression—the Seekers, the Ranters, the Quakers, the Fifth Monarchists—as the earnest work of idealistic men and women.

Hill's tidy connection between the socio-economic conditions of the inflationary century and the political events of the 1640s simplified the relationship between economy and revolution.¹⁷ The social-political perspective tended to coalesce the varieties of heterodox thought into a singular politics of populist engagement. But many of the “radical milieu's” political goals were more complex than the sweeping indictments of the establishment. And revisionist historians worked in earnest to collapse both liberal and Marxian grand narratives by placing the ideological fabric of political division under intense archival scrutiny.¹⁸ These studies revealed a

¹⁴ See R. C. Richardson, *The Debate on the English Revolution* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1977), 33-51

¹⁵ G. M. Trevelyan, *English Social History* (London: Longmans, 1944), 253.

¹⁶ Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), 39.

¹⁷ See Keith Wrightson, *English Society: 1560-1680* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), 125-28; Keith Wrightson and David Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling, 1525-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 65-70.

¹⁸ Mark Kishlansky, *Parliamentary Selection: Social and Political Choice in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), Glenn Burgess,

surprising amount of political and religious consensus in early Stuart England. Revisionist critique of ideological explanations of the mid-century upheavals reached such a tenor that historians were admonished to look “not directly for the ‘causes of the Civil War,’ but for causes of the events which led to the Civil War.”¹⁹ This head-scratching verbiage outlined a wider historical approach that took a soft view of causality. The hard edges of the sectarian milieu were pushed back to the margins.²⁰

Recent decades have seen a careful return to the study of religion in the context of the mid-seventeenth-century crises. Even if the violence of the 1640s and the sectarian scrambles of the 1650s arose in fits of political contingency, historians continue to recognize plenty of ideological tinder for political discontent inherited from older post-Reformation questions of religious belief, doctrine, and ecclesiology. The puritanism derived from the Elizabethan settlements may have largely consisted of consensual debates in the halls of Oxbridge theological schools and episcopal debates over religious conformity.²¹ But moments of religious uncertainty were lightning rods of popular discontent, in which confessional divisions were expressed through bonfires and protest.²² If the strain of the post-Reformation was not a long-term ideological motor that propelled the English state toward constitutional crisis, then it provided, as John Morrill has argued, a rhetoric of religious militancy that shove legal debates into outright civil war and sectarianism.²³

If the magisterial nature of religious reform had long enabled political wiggle room for unorthodox ideas, the particular expressions of religious materialism emerged out of the specific religious tensions in the 1630s.²⁴ David Como and Peter Lake have framed the story of radical English Protestantism as a (mostly) London story of the structural collapse of an informal

Absolute Monarchy and the Stuart Constitution (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

¹⁹ Conrad Russell, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Clarendon Press, 1990), 24.

²⁰ Mark Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed: Britain 1603-1714* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 196.

²¹ Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967); Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 2-10; Stephen Brachlow, *The Communion of Saints: Radical Puritan and Separatist Ecclesiology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Robert Harkins, “The Dilemma of Obedience: Persecution, Dissimulation, and Memory in Early Modern England, 1553-1603” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2013).

²² Thomas Cogswell, “England and the Spanish Match,” in *Conflict in Early Stuart England: Studies in Religion and Politics, 1603-1642*, ed. Richard Cust and Ann Hughes (New York: Longman, 1989), 110-30; Peter Lake, “Anti-popery: the Structure of a Prejudice,” in *Conflict in Early Stuart England: Studies in Religion and Politics, 1603-1642*, ed. Richard Cust and Ann Hughes (New York: Longman, 1989), 181-210.

²³ John Morrill, “The Religious Context of the English Civil War,” in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 34 (1984): 167-68.

²⁴ For early radicalism example, see Karl Gunther and Ethan Shagan, “Protestant Radicalism and Political Thought in the Reign of Henry VIII,” *Past and Present* 233 (2007), 35-74.

“puritan underground.” Within this fluid network of personal interactions, exchanged manuscripts, and personal conversations, there were constant “fissiparous” antinomian tensions—the idea that the elect were free from the moral law outlined by scripture.²⁵ English antinomianism was likely endemic to English godly communities, created by the theological contradictions and psychological tensions of English Calvinism.²⁶ But the Arminian innovations of the late 1620s and 1630s placed new strain on these existing theological tensions.²⁷ For puritan ministers, the public denouncement of antinomians helped display to ecclesiastical and royal authorities that godly communities and ministers were not subversive radicals. But in so doing, informal disagreements were raised into open doctrinal conflict; puritans externalized theological tensions through the polemical excoriation of heretical stereotypes.²⁸ As the Calvinist consensus collapsed under the external pressures of Laudian innovation and episcopal discipline, godly ministers (especially in London) faced increasing dissatisfaction with traditional puritan devotion, leading to nascent sectarian divisions by the 1640s.²⁹

Interestingly, a new wave of heterodoxy studies came in the wake of dismissive historiographical criticism. Although strangely nominalist in his search for the definitive criteria of “Ranterism,” J. C. Davis’s provocative argument usefully criticized historians’ haphazard use of polemicized sources from the English Revolution.³⁰ Although overzealous in his attempt to “abolish the Ranters,” Davis pointed out that many of the boundaries and terms that classified heterodox thought were culturally constructed, rather than a reflection of coherent belief systems.³¹ The critique encouraged historians to consider the partisan nature of their sources as textual indicators of wider ecosystems of political, intellectual, and cultural discourse. Ann Hughes, for example, helpfully contextualized the heresiographical screeds of Thomas Edwards, sidestepping concerns about the literal accuracy of texts to explore the influence these

²⁵ Peter Lake and David Como, “‘Orthodoxy’ and Its Discontents: Dispute Settlement and the Production of ‘Consensus’ in the London (Puritan) ‘Underground,’” *Journal of British Studies* 39 (2000): 34-37.

²⁶ Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion & Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 119-33.

²⁷ Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590-1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Clarendon Press, 1987).

²⁸ Peter Lake, *The Boxmaker’s Revenge: ‘Orthodoxy’, ‘Heterodoxy’ and the Politics of the Parish in Early Stuart London* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 244-47.

²⁹ David Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-civil-war England* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 77-86.

³⁰ J. C. Davis, *Fear, Myth, and History: The Ranters and the Historians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), x, 128-29.

³¹ J. T. McGregor, Bernard Capp, Nigel Smith, B. J. Gibbons, “Fear, Myth, and Furore: Reappraising the Ranters,” *Past & Present* 140 (1993); J. C. Davis, “Fear, Myth, and Furore: Reappraising the ‘Ranters’: Reply,” *Past & Present* 140 (1993); Christopher Hill, “Abolishing the Ranters,” in *A Nation of Change and Novelty: Radical Politics, Religion and Literature in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Routledge), 154-55.

publications had on their surrounding political, cultural, and social environments.³² Historians have followed this tendency toward wider cultural and intellectual analysis, recognizing that *proving* literal belief in heterodox ideas is less fruitful than unpacking the chains of discourse and debate that ensue from religious provocation. For example, Sarah Mortimer's work on Socinianism in England uncovered how the writings of Socinus led to broader debates over the abilities of people to function as political agents.³³ Similarly, Paul Lim's monumental study on Antitrinitarianism recognized the fluid and polemical nature of the heresy to better survey wider debates over the theology of the Trinity and its epistemic and political implications.³⁴ These studies have heightened our awareness that seventeenth-century English religious doctrine was less normative and self-identified, and more the tangled result of theological debate, philosophical influences, and political imperatives.

* * *

This expanded set of historical methodologies allows us to revisit the unorthodox ideas that emerged from the English Revolution as part of a wider set of confrontations—a constellation of intellectual and cultural problems that we might call “material religion.”³⁵ As mentioned above, intellectual historians have framed unorthodox ideas as intellectual catalysts, prompting England's peculiar Enlightenment as reactive, conservative-minded theories of matter, a response to the ideological upheaval of previous decades.³⁶ But this also includes revitalized notions of “radical enlightenment” as a sea-change in intellectual life in late seventeenth-century Europe.³⁷ Moreover, historians have labored to reconstruct “radicalism” as a phenomenon that might include a wider, less elite intellectual culture. This work labored to reconstruct the connections between the natural philosophical ideas of the early Enlightenment and the religious

³² Ann Hughes, *Gangraena and the Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 76-81.

³³ Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

³⁴ Paul Lim, *Mystery Unveiled: The Crisis of the Trinity in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³⁵ This follows in the work of John Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2011); Christopher Ocker, “The Physiology of Spirit in the Reformation: Medical Consensus and Protestant Theologians,” in *Miracles Revisited: New Testament Miracle Stories and their Concepts of Reality*, ed. Stefan Alkier and Annette Weissenrieder (Göttingen: De Gruyter, 2013), 115-57.

³⁶ The classic example of this is Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987). See also: J. G. A. Pocock. “Conservative Enlightenment and Democratic Revolutions: The American and French Cases in British Perspective,” *Government and Opposition* 24 (1989): 81-105; J. G. A. Pocock, “Enthusiasm”: 7-28.

³⁷ Frances Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 1986) 22-25; Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3-13.

ideas that emerged from the English Revolution. Much of this has focused on criticism or discontent shared between populist religious writers and heterodox philosophers.³⁸ Recently, historians have followed an impulse to trace intellectual “influence” by mapping out heterodox genealogies’ perplexing ideas and idiosyncrasies.³⁹ The most rigorous of this intellectual cartography avoids reducing the complexity of early modern thought to a singular origin story. But it tends to conclude with nominalist caution—warnings about employing existing historical labels and vocabulary. It’s not quite clear what exactly we learn from this.⁴⁰

This project takes a different approach, generally avoiding the fraught historiography of “radicalism,” and instead reconnecting the linkages between religious and intellectual culture through the shared material anxieties that cut across ideological and philosophical boundaries. The dissertation reveals that the high-water mark of the English Revolution unleashed new approaches to a broad theological problem of materiality. I argue that the seemingly marginal varieties of Christianity in the mid-seventeenth century were, in fact, generative in central intellectual problems of embodiment. They contributed to a conceptual paradigm in which early moderns revised religion as a set of concerns about their embodied selves. This being the case, both learned academics of the period and the “popular spirits” of the seventeenth century were interested in the relationship between matter and spirit, as well as God’s relationship with the material world.

Amid a more general breakdown of the institutional controls over worship, print, and ideology in the 1640s, we find new interpretations of the Christian project of corporeal redemption—the means by which the human body was deemed fit for divine knowledge, salvation, and contact with God. In a word, the Christian project of corporeal redemption became literalized and materialized: heterodox writers increasingly understood the influence of immaterial stuff—such as the soul, or God’s spiritual presence, or thought—as a broader materialized experience of knowledge and divine contact. This new emphasis on God’s corporeal influence was a shift from doctrinal theology as epistemic process, into religion as a set of questions regarding godly existence, sanctified being, and purified relations. This plunge into the discussion of physicality and materiality was motivated by the acceleration of Protestant pluralism and compounded by the sense of urgency and eschatological immediacy that defined sectarian, millenarian, and utopian writings of the 1640s and 1650s. The rise of heterodox

³⁸ Scholars have intensively examined the rise of broad early-modern cultural discontent with Aristotelianism: Keith Hutchinson, “What Happened to Occult Qualities in the Scientific Revolution?” *Isis* 73 (1982): 235-36; James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 274-85; Ann Blair, “Mosaic Physics and the Search for a Pious Natural Philosophy in the Late Renaissance,” *Isis* 91 (2000): 32-58.

³⁹ For example, see the studies of Neoplatonism as a formative stage bridging Renaissance and Enlightenment: Ernst Cassirer, *The Platonic Renaissance in England* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1953), 52-58; William Huffman, *Robert Fludd and the End of the Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 1988), 96-109.

⁴⁰ For example, see recent studies of the influence of Jacob Böhme on English thinkers: Ariel Hessayon, “Jacob Boehme’s Writing During the English Revolution and Afterward: Their Publication, Dissemination, and Influence,” in *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme: Four Centuries of Thought and Reception*, ed. Ariel Hessayon and Sarah Apetrei (New York: Routledge, 2014), 77-97; Nigel Smith, “Did Anyone Understand Boehme?” in *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme*, 98-119.

varieties of Protestant thought is thus a key causal hinge in this dissertation. While there was great variation within this milieu, there was a widespread tendency to interpret questions of religion as problems existing directly within the material world. These ideas, often inchoate and unsystematic, still shared an eschatology of immediacy—the belief that divinity should be understood in the world, indeed within the human flesh, as currently manifested.

There are then two broad implications to this study. First, the project displays how religious ideas and theology are not in opposition to what we might call secular intellectual tendencies in the early modern period. Material religion bleeds across sources in the late-seventeenth-century archive, from the sectarian scrabble of Norwood, to the natural philosophical concerns of Vaughan. Religion did what it always does: it shaded into politics, culture, and social life. Secondly, my work suggests that if we want to understand how early moderns conceived their embodied selves, we need to investigate their interest in matter more generally. This speaks to the old historical problem of the relationship between early modern religion and the scientific revolution.⁴¹ To unpack the history of ideas about the body and corporeality, we need to dive into the often messy and idiosyncratic ways in which early moderns understood their relationship with other types of bodies and matter. The Christian project of corporeal redemption as it was understood in the seventeenth century drove investigations into matter itself. So in order to understand how early moderns conceived of the Enlightenment’s central religious and philosophical problems relating to God, the nature of matter, the nature of the soul, and the mind/body relationship, and we must listen to the sources’ acute and pertinent concerns with materiality in everyday religion.

* * *

Chapter Outline

This project is divided into two sections. Part 1, “Theories of Body, Soul, and Spirit,” analyzes new stresses placed upon traditional physical and metaphysical categories that were foundational to the nature of the human person. Through a combination of antagonism toward official ecclesiastical structures, new translations of mystical writings, and the rise of outspoken sectarian groups, the ancient Christian soteriology of corporeal redemption motivated novel investigations into the nature of body, soul, and spirit. Chapter One examines the foundations of this through the revolutionary rejection of a transcendent God. It explores increasing English amenability in the mid-seventeenth-century to new variants of divine omnipresence—theories that argued that God must be understood as existing directly within the material world. The chapter reconnects the theological and eschatological discontent that built during the 1630s and 1640s with the wider cosmological innovations that occurred earlier in the sixteenth century. Drawing upon mystical writings and an inheritance of Familist vocabularies, the radicals of the 1640s and 1650s made a crucial elision of revolution between changing scientific theories of cosmology and religious experience. By rejecting a localized, spatially “remote” God, early moderns ceased to understand religion as an exegetical exercise of glorifying doctrine or ritual ceremonies that bridged the distance to a transcendent divine. Rather right religion became a

⁴¹ Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth-Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 18-22.

process of recognizing, proclaiming, and sometimes joining with this immanent divine substance.

Given the new possibilities of divine immanence and the dramatic increase in reference to God's spiritual engagement in the material world, Chapter Two takes "spirit" seriously as a conceptual category in revolutionary England. By examining the eschatological anthropologies of Seeker and Ranter writers of the 1650s, the chapter reconstructs how spirit did extensive intellectual and cultural work as a method of recognizing God's material engagement in the bodies of believers. The chapter responds to historiographies that have understood the heterodox spiritualisms of the seventeenth century as reflecting either the evacuation of ecclesiastical and political institutions that mediated spiritual presence, or as rendering God's spirit as materially unreal, a symbolic reflection of internalized mental states within the believer. This chapter pivots from these secularization narratives to emphasize the multivalent nature of early modern perceptions of divine spirit. This builds upon nascent scholarly interpretations of the English Reformation not as a complete break from medieval understandings of spirit as existential stuff, but rather as reconfigurations of spirit's operations and mechanisms within matter and material change. For the early moderns of revolutionary England, spirit was not just real; it was also surrounded by epistemological, anthropological, and physiological discourses.

The material linkages between God and creation were utilized to formulate new vitalistic theories of materiality. Chapter Three examines how English theosophy fused with natural philosophic inquiries into creation. The chapter examines the explosion of cosmogonic speculation in the 1640s, 1650s, and 1660s, as early moderns became concerned with the material processes of creation that preceded and enabled God's "fiat." Utilizing the Christian creation myth to investigate the primal material nature of "chaos" and the "abyss" frustrated the attempt to maintain boundaries between God's sanctifying being and the fallen corporeal stuff of matter. Genesis was a conceptual space in which the essential barriers between God and matter were indistinct. God's interaction with the first matter or "chaos" became the subject of a quintessentially early modern blend of theological and philosophical speculation.

Part 2, "Experiencing Religious Embodiment," delves into the theological and philosophical wreckage of God's fallen transcendence by exploring the lived experience of revolutionary religion. This perspective moves beyond anthropological theories and eschatological speculation to show how the problem of religious sanctification was reshaped by heterodox religious ideas of the English Revolution. Chapter 4 introduces the "problem of flesh"—the question of how man's fallen corporeal nature could contact, unify, and be redeemed by a perfect, omnipresent divinity. The chapter focuses on the experience of mystical vegetarians who were particularly sensitive to the spiritual and physiological disposition of the corporeal body. These vegetarians linked religious ideas about bodily purity to the dietary effects edible matter had upon the body's constitution. As scholars of early modern fasting and asceticism have shown, the consuming body remained a point of contact between religion, culture, and medical theory. However, English vegetarians expanded the focus of English culture beyond God and man to new concerns about the vital relationships between corporeal bodies. This peculiar literalization of divine contact motivated the investigation into edible matter's nature, functions, and affects.

Anxieties regarding the material world were reflected in more formalized sectarian groups. Chapter Five examines a moment in the early Quaker church when influential leaders questioned the two main epistemic supports for Protestant religion—theological doctrine as revealed through God's word in scripture and the ritual of religious practice. Focusing on the writings of Samuel Fisher and John Perrot, the chapter examines the attempt to create a truly immaterial

religion. Amplified by the experience of missionary work in non-Protestant polities, Quakers articulated a universalistic religion as divinized self-knowledge, a sort of anthropological recognition of God's presence. However, far from dismissing material mediations to the divine, the Quakers were forced to continually confront matters of ritual and doctrine as "matter," corrupting and obfuscating bodies that prevented divine knowledge. This was reflected in a number of unstable material ambivalences that led Quakers to pivot from iconoclastic actions such as book burning, hat service, and burial processes.

Chapter Six describes the Muggletonian sectarian group's theological and polemical efforts to recreate the transcendent distance between God and creation. The chapter argues that the Muggletonians were an anti-spiritualist reaction to the period's religious upheaval. Curiously however, reference to the corporeal body, and its relation to other material beings, became the Muggletonian means to reconstruct divinity as a meaningful concept for religious life and political order. While claiming divine inspiration, Muggletonians argued that God had a limited, contained, and "bodily" existence. The human person, a spatially demarcated and limited corporeal being, functioned as the basic reference for knowing the divine. This anthropomorphic understanding of God supported the idea that the world could only be understood through discrete packages of material meaning, bodies in which spiritualized matter was contained and evident to the senses. This corporealist metaphysics paralleled better-known efforts of spiritual disenchantment, such as Thomas Hobbes's emphasis upon the corporeal nature of the "person" as the anchor for authoritative claims of politics and religion. But this materialism did not entail disenchantment writ large. Rather it was a reconstruction of where metaphysical imperatives and ontological priorities previously denoted to "spirit" could reside.

The redemption of the corporeal body was a multifarious concern in a period when religious imperatives bled through most facets of political, social, and economic life. Concerns about the preparation of the body—the reception of religious knowledge, the purification of sin, and the regeneration of the flesh—permeated the intellectual culture of early modern Europe. This study suggests that the religious materialisms of early modern England were not swerves away from religion as a philosophical framework but rather an intensification of interest about the corporeal body that was continually debated and problematized, structuring new scientific, medical, and philosophical discourse. The spiritual regeneration of the body—how flesh might become spirit—spurred wider intellectual speculation and fierce interrogation into the capacious religious and philosophical categories of spirit and flesh. This sustained period of reinvention and idealization of matter and spirit made the boundaries between God and man more permeable. But it also encouraged new reckoning about what it meant to be human.

Chapter 1

The English Revolution and the End of Transcendence

If you want to study religion in revolutionary England, you have to mention Gerrard Winstanley, the English religious writer and political activist during the Commonwealth. Winstanley famously proclaimed the earth to be a “common treasury of livelihood to whole mankind.” This announcement in his January 1649 publication of *The New Law of Righteousness*, anticipated the dramatic tilling of the commons and wastes of Surrey, Buckinghamshire, and other locations in the home counties and the Midlands during the first year of the Commonwealth. Writing in the aftermath of seismic political events of the late 1640s, including the agitation of the Levellers, the purging of the Long Parliament, and the trial and subsequent execution of Charles I, Winstanley became the religious spokesman for these “Diggers,” and since the twentieth century his work has become central in the scholarship on the period.

Scholars have held Winstanley’s writings as quintessentially “early” modern. Recently the editors of *The Complete Works of Gerrard Winstanley* called the clothier-cum-sectarian the “foremost radical of the English Revolution,” a claim supported through his influence upon the grand histories of the twentieth century.⁴² Prominent among these is the work of Christopher Hill, who considered Winstanley and the Diggers his “seventeenth-century favorites” among the wide spectrum of seventeenth-century revolutionary thought.⁴³ For Hill, Winstanley’s thought and writings was “a remarkable imaginative feat” and translated the religious idiom of apocalypse “into a theory of rationalism and democracy.”⁴⁴ Before Hill, Perez Zagorin charted an even blunter Enlightenment telos to Winstanley’s thought, identifying within the Digger’s millenarian ideas “the transition between two classic types of utopian outlook.” Winstanley combined the chiliastic medievalism of those looking forward to Christ’s reign with a rationalistic communism, “abounding in plans and projects.”⁴⁵ Literary scholars hold Winstanley as formative in his prose of millenarian discontent that, while ephemeral in its direct political impact, is continually re-appropriated by a loosely leftist collection of historians and artists.⁴⁶

⁴² Thomas N. Corns, Ann Hughes, and David Loewenstein, “Introduction,” in *The Complete Works of Gerrard Winstanley*, ed. Thomas N. Corns, et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), vol. 1, 65.

⁴³ Christopher Hill, “Abolishing the Ranters,” in *A Nation of Change and Novelty: Politics, Religion and Literature in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1990), 190.

⁴⁴ Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), 118-19.

⁴⁵ Perez Zagorin, *A History of Political Thought in the English Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1964), 57.

⁴⁶ Corns et al., “Introduction,” *Complete Works*, 65-69; Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion, 1640-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); for vestigial artistic and cultural influences of seventeenth-century radicalism see Smith, *A Collection of Ranter Writings*, 2nd ed. (Pluto Press, 2013), viii-x, 1-2; Joad Raymond, “In 1649, to St. George’s Hill,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 75 (2012): 429-431.

Given his historiographical standing, it is unsurprising that revisionist historians attempted to marginalize Winstanley. For example, Mark Kishlansky's snarky dismissal of Winstanley's theological and socio-economic efforts ("a mid-life crisis of epic proportions") affirmed a broader reinterpretation of early modern revolution as the contingent breakdown of a consensus-oriented political culture, rather than the manifestation of deep-seated ideological conflict.⁴⁷ But even as grand, ideologically-driven narratives of the English Revolution withered, Winstanley remained a case study by which scholars tested the strength of various cultural and intellectual "influences": Joachimite schemas of revelation,⁴⁸ millenarian mysticism⁴⁹ (or not⁵⁰), the existence of the Ranters,⁵¹ the writings of Jacob Böhme⁵² (or not⁵³ [or perhaps?⁵⁴]), the Leveller idea of the "Norman Yoke,"⁵⁵ and early Quakerism.⁵⁶ Suffice it to say, historians have continually held Winstanley to be a man of his times.⁵⁷ Whatever their methodological or

⁴⁷ Mark Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed: Britain 1603-1714* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 196.

⁴⁸ Winstanley, *The New Law of Righteousness*, (London, 1649), 10-15; Morton, *The World of the Ranters: Religious Radicalism in the English Revolution* (London: Lawrence & Wishart: 1670), 126-128.

⁴⁹ George Sabine, ed. *The Works of Gerrard Winstanley* 2nd ed. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), 10.

⁵⁰ George Juretic, "Digger No Millenarian: The Revolutionizing of Gerrard Winstanley," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 36 (1975): 269-280.

⁵¹ J. F. McGregor, Bernard Capp, Nigel Smith, and B. J. Gibbons, "Fear Myth and Furore: Reappraising the 'Ranters'," *Past & Present* 140 (1993): 155-156 *et passim*.

⁵² B. J. Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought: Behmenism and its Development in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 125, 129-134.

⁵³ Ariel Hessayon, "Jacob Boehme's Writing During the English Revolution and Afterward," in *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme: Four Centuries of Thought and Reception*, ed. Ariel Hessayon and Sarah Apetrei (New York: Routledge, 2014), 85-86; "Winstanley and Boehme," *Cromohs (Cyber Review of Modern Historiography)*, 18 (2013): 11-21.

⁵⁴ Joad Raymond, "In 1649, to St. George's Hill," 440-441.

⁵⁵ G. E. Aylmer, "The Religion of Gerrard Winstanley," in *Radical Religion in the English Revolution*, ed. J. F. McGregor and B. Reay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 103-105

⁵⁶ James Alsop, "Gerrard Winstanley's Later Life," *Past & Present* 82 (1979), 73-81; John Gurney, *Brave Community: The Digger Movement in the English Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 219-222.

⁵⁷ This last sort of intellectual analysis, the gauging of various forms of "influences" through the corpus of radical writings tends to obscure more than it reveals. While close readings of radical writings have charted potential genealogies for perplexing ideas and idiosyncrasies, the usual result of this intellectual rigor is nominalist caution—for example, a reluctance to deploy labels such as "Ranter," "Behmenist," or "Gnostic." This chapter adopts a different approach, considering Winstanley as the first of several case studies in which the radical moment of the late 1640s and early 1650s, the high-water mark of the English Revolution, was part of a larger intellectual and cultural set of approaches to a broad theological problem.

ideological stripes, scholars use his considerable body of writings as a means of entry to the fraught political, religious, and social problems that faced early moderns in the middle decades of the seventeenth-century.

So it is perhaps *de rigueur* to begin an intellectual investigation of the period with Winstanley's take on a pressing theological and philosophical problem. In *The New Law of Righteousness* Winstanley condemned the idea of God's distinctive, transcendent existence. He declared that the English Calvinist doctrinal tradition, with its heavy emphasis upon scriptural exegetical tradition, created "a large distance between Christ and the bulk of mankind." He considered this to be the result of mainstream religion's textual literalism: "living in dipping and observation of Gospel-forms and types" forced believers to recognize Christ "as yet in one single person." English forms of worship, and its exegetical traditions of reverence, were erroneously created because God was "held forth at a distance to be our mediator."⁵⁸ Winstanley thus constructed God's Trinitarian mystery as a spatial problem. The singular nature of Christ, the Son within the Trinity, was problematic as it physically and epistemically distanced the believer from God:

This is Christ very remote. For though he ruled the whole creation, yet no single creature could discern or spy him out. He is in everyone and yet that single one knew him not. And therefore this one Almighty power began to make forth himself in visible descriptions before the creature, causing every creature to hold forth the light and power that is in them so that the mighty Creator may at length be known.⁵⁹

Reading the Bible allegorically, Winstanley argued that the fulfillment of God's divine plan bridged the conceptual distance between divinity and man. This process required recognizing the falsity of religious theologies that stressed divine transcendence: only by understanding God "in everyone" could believers experience the epistemic shift necessary for saving belief. A Christian, who "thinks God is in the Heavens above the skies; and so prays to that God which he imagine to be there and everywhere...this man worships his own imagination, which is the devil."⁶⁰

Characteristically, Winstanley represents a wider, unprecedented outburst of heterodox publications, expressing discontent with the notion of divine transcendence—God's eternal existence beyond the realm of creation. Amidst the populist, millenarian expectations spanning the years of the Commonwealth and Protectorate, roughly 1648 to 1656, a set of vocal Englishmen abandoned transcendent notions of divinity and idealized God as immanent and within the material world.⁶¹ Winstanley's reference to the singular, "Christ very remote," signaled discontent not only with inherited doctrines of divine transcendence, but also with

⁵⁸ Winstanley, *The New Law of Righteousness*, 10-11.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

⁶⁰ Gerrard Winstanley, *Truth Lifting Up His Head Above Scandals* (London, 1649) in *Complete Works of Gerrard Winstanley*, 414.

⁶¹ Winstanley's millenarian dismissal of transcendence was influenced, if not directly motivated, by the seismic political events occurring in England. The preface to *The New Law of Righteousness* was dated to the January 26, 1649, a few days before the execution of Charles I. Anticipating the end of "kingly power," the Digger spokesman foresaw the end of political hierarchy, political conflict, and the restoration of the earth as a communal resource. See Thomas N. Corns et al., "Introduction," in *Complete Works of Gerrard Winstanley*, 25-26.

cultural cosmologies that emphasized graduated hierarchies of substance, ascending from fallen matter to divine essence. Early moderns increasingly expressed the spatial aspect of transcendence through ideas that combined latent cosmological and soteriological concerns. The problem of transcendence thus informed pressing religious questions about God's relationship with the individual believer and the broader material world.

This chapter explores how revolutionary writers came to reject a remote God. It explores increasing English amenability in the mid-seventeenth century to several variants of divine omnipresence, theories that argued God must be understood as existing directly within the material world. For the radicals of the 1640s and 1650s, right religion became a process of recognizing, proclaiming, and sometimes joining with this immanent divine substance. During these years, radical spiritualists, those who aggressively proclaimed God's spirit to be manifest in the world, made a crucial turn in the theological and philosophical representation of divine presence in the world: God's transcendent distance above and distinct from the material world was collapsed into immanent formulations of divinity. God was not above and apart from the world, but somehow within the stuff and substance of the corporeal bodies of creation. These writers were thus sensitive to the increased strain upon Calvinist theological formulations of the transcendent *deus absconditus*, as well as to the revolutionary changes occurring in European cosmology. God existed within—or, even more radically, equivalent to—the material stuff of created nature and human bodies.

Stressing the mid-century critique of transcendence is important for the history of the mind-body problem, which would come to dominate philosophical speculations on the nature of knowledge from Descartes to Locke and beyond. The idealization of an immanent God demolished the metaphysical hierarchies dividing body, soul, spirit, and deity. Heterodox Protestants represented the created world as saturated with God's vitalizing spirit. Reimagining the body became newly possible. The chapter thus describes the conceptual efforts of radical thinkers between 1646 and 1653 to return "Christ very remote" back into the world. These writings contributed to what Paul Lim recently described as a "nontrinitarian collapse, or near-collapse, of the ontological distinction between Creator and creatures."⁶² However rather than focusing, as previous scholars have, upon the ideological and polemical linkages between divine immanence and spiritual libertarianism constructed by both antinomians and worried contemporaries, this chapter delves into the theological and philosophical wreckage of God's fallen transcendence.⁶³

⁶² Paul Lim, *Mystery Unveiled: The Crisis of the Trinity in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 72-75.

⁶³ For variations upon the liberationist implications of radical writings, see Norman Cohn, "The 'Free Spirit' in Cromwell's England: the Ranters and their literature," in *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), 287-330; Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (New York, 1972), esp. ; Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion, 1640-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 6-19; Jerome Friedman, *Blasphemy, Immorality, and Anarchy: The Ranters and the English Revolution* (Athens, Ohio, 1987), 78-94. For the revisionist and post-revisionist argument, see J. C. Davis, *Fear, Myth, and History: The Ranters and the Historians* (Cambridge: Cambridge

Transcendence and its Discontents

The radical writings of the English Revolution were an episode within a much longer intellectual history of a fluid and oft-changing dialectic relationship between ideas of divine transcendence and immanence. Numerous shifts, across time and place, have occurred within the religious, philosophical, and cultural representations of God's relationship with the material world. A host of Western commentators and actors have used, deployed, and co-opted these shifts as the basis for critique, institutional change, and political reformulation. The idea of divine immanence, in which God exists in organic totality and as an immediate element of people's lives, rests in continual tension with the notion of transcendence, that a divine telos is elevated and separate from the everyday and temporal. Transcendence meant that God's nature and power was independent of the material universe; it was not subject to physical laws and was mostly inaccessible to material creation. Reconciling the perfect eternal with the mutable material was severely tested by Christian notions of divine omnipresence. As Amos Funkenstein observed in his history of western science, omnipresence was a deep historical problem in Christianity: "the question of how God exists 'in things' seems to me to encapsulate, more than any other theological issue, the dialectics of divine immanence and utter transcendence."⁶⁴ God must be apart from the mutable, changing, created world—or else how is he an eternal, perfect, creating God? But he must also, at some level, participate in the temporal—or else whence creation? Or why bother with religion and the divine?

Given this dialectic, one could frame major philosophical and theological shifts as a deep, ahistorical intellectual negotiation—a series of attempts across history to strike a balance between pantheistic excess and transcendent austerity. This includes historic philosophical swings in favor of God's transcendent remove from the material world. Plato's idealization of the Forms, Hebrew monotheism, the Reformation critique of the Catholic Eucharist, Newtonian mechanism—all these intellectual moments understood the divine as elevated from the temporal realm, albeit in ways that reflected the philosophical needs of the historical moment. As Regina Schwartz concisely points out, "God or gods have left the world repeatedly."⁶⁵ But the divine has also *returned* to the world repeatedly—often in reaction to representations of transcendence. For example, Plato's stark division between the idealized Forms and the chaotic material world was followed by his successors, Plotinus and Proclus, who posited that the "emanations" from the Form entailed actual substantial connections between the being of the One and that of the world.⁶⁶ Gnostic heresies reacted against the transcendent monotheism of Mediterranean

University Press, 1986), 110-113, 128-9; Ann Hughes, *Gangraena and the Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 9-13.

⁶⁴ Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 49.

⁶⁵ Regina Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism: When God Left the World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 11-17.

⁶⁶ John Cooper, *Panentheism, the Other God of the Philosophers: from Plato to the Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 32-44.

Christianity of late antiquity through various pantheistic heresies.⁶⁷ In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas established a hierarchy of similitudes by which humans could understand God's ubiquity and his univocal relationship with all beings.⁶⁸ In these instances, the dialectic of transcendence and immanence shifted toward systems that realized God within a materialized immanence.

The middle decades of seventeenth-century England saw reactive movement in this dialectical process as specific historical factors precipitated the reconstitution of the relationship between God and created matter. Radicals of the 1640s and 1650s responded to problematic post-Reformation theologies predicated upon God's transcendence and subsidiary beliefs dependent upon God's existence above and beyond the material world of his creation. What made so many of the sectarian milieu "radical" was the stark manner in which they bluntly lowered God into the world, stripping down the contradictory propositions of divinity into an anguished relationship between body and spirit, God and creature. This was not always the "materialist pantheism," that historians used to define the radical edges of the sectarian moment; there were various formulations of divine immanence.⁶⁹ And while we should be cautious of the "sectarian blur" that J.C. Davis warns against, we can still affirm ideological tendencies across sectarian division during the revolutionary period—a wider effort to push back against the idea of *deus absconditus*.

The origins of seventeenth-century problems with transcendence were in the sixteenth century, during the formative years of religious reformation in Europe. Continental reformers appropriated nominalist ideas, i.e. that human knowledge could not rely upon material species or forms to understand God, placing interrelated restrictions upon how human minds approached God. First, this made human knowledge more reliant upon faith for religious certainty. As both Heiko Oberman and William Bouwsma argued, radical nominalism supported the intellectual suspicion of human reason in matters of religion.⁷⁰ The distinction between God and creation "made more pronounced the restriction on the speculative reaches of the human mind."⁷¹ Secondly, this epistemic shift severed God's material relationships to man through sacramental mediations. Both Lutheran and Calvinist traditions reaffirmed "commitment to an idea of God as radically purged from all material connotations, however abstract and remote."⁷² For Reformed churches the "real" efficacious material force of God in the sacraments was replaced by a system of spiritual remembrance and internal disposition—rituals like the Eucharist were no longer a

⁶⁷ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 35-49.

⁶⁸ Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*, 50-57.

⁶⁹ J.C. Davis, *Fear, Myth, and History*, 21-25; B. J. Gibbon, "Fear, Myth and Furore: Reappraising the Ranters," *Past & Present* 140 (1993), 181-184.

⁷⁰ Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 117-120; William Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 151.

⁷¹ Susan Schreiner suggests reformers relied upon Ockham's eradication of material species, preventing Thomist hierarchies of material analogies from serving as the vehicle to know God; *Are You Alone Wise?: The Search for Certainty in the Early Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 18-22.

⁷² Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*, 25.

moment in which God was made physically present (*hoc est enim meum corpus*); they became an occasion of memorialization and spiritual community.⁷³

The English Reformation experience, with its severe iconoclasm in England, had made the late medieval acceptance of divine manifestation within *materia* and *miracula*—relics, shrines, holy sites—subject to systematic destruction and criticism.⁷⁴ Reformers attacked the idea that divine power existed within localized material objects, the basis of late medieval saint and image cults, as superstitious and a repugnant to God’s nature.⁷⁵ Furthermore, the mainstream English version of classical theistic transcendence was mediated through the theological debates of the sixteenth-century reformations, especially regarding the relationship between the divine and ecclesiastical sacraments.⁷⁶ In the aftermath of the Elizabethan settlement, English Calvinists followed suit, formulating God as beyond humanity’s limited understanding and capacity for contact. Transcendence reinforced English puritanism’s soteriological belief that salvation could only come from God himself. During the “Calvinist consensus” of the Anglican church, ministers were keen to shut down divine interventions in the material world, especially the “papist” ritual rites of the Eucharistic Mass.⁷⁷ God’s existence within the temporal world threatened reformed Eucharistic formulations as an affront to divine dignity and potentially challenged royal prerogatives over the control of worship.⁷⁸ These confessional disputes during the post-Reformation sharpened puritan ideas about God’s existentially unified and elevated existence.

Anglican clergymen in the 1620s and 1630s used the idea of divine transcendence to highlight philosophical contradictions within Catholic theories of transubstantiation and ritual worship. These writers rehearsed the arguments leveled by early continental reformers against the Eucharist in the 1520s and 1530s.⁷⁹ Interestingly, they anticipated Winstanley’s language

⁷³ See for example Philip Benedict, *Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 35.

⁷⁴ See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality* (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 230-259; Eamon Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, C.1400-C.1580* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992); Ethan Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), chapter 5.

⁷⁵ For how this radical attack on material religion undermined local devotional life see Eamon Duffy, *The Voices of Morebath: Reformation and Rebellion in an English Village*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 93-101.

⁷⁶ For Cranmer and Ridley’s formative doctrines see A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, 2nd ed. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Press, 1989), 209-212.

⁷⁷ This consensus reached its first synthesis of puritan and conformist theological and ecclesiological tensions in the work of Richard Hooker; see Peter Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans?: Presbyterianism and English Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 145-181.

⁷⁸ For the late Henrician and Edwardian origins of this tension between Christian material life and iconoclastic church authority, see Diarmaid MacCulloch, description of the 1547 royal visitations to the Church *The Boy King: Edward VI* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 69-76.

⁷⁹ Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 173-176; Amy Nelson Burnett, *Karlstadt and the Origins of the Eucharistic*

about space and physical distance. For example, the Norfolk puritan Edmund Gurnay noted in 1619 that Catholic belief in transubstantiation was an impossible theological error given Christ's corporealized personhood. God's body as Christ could not simultaneously be in heaven and in the mouths of believers taking the Host. Gurnay questioned the logic "that the human body which thus is eaten, is always in the heavens notwithstanding."⁸⁰ Similarly, Thomas Gataker, a London clergyman and scholar of moderate Anglican views, argued in 1624 that if the Roman Catholic Church "will have Christ's body in the Eucharist, they must fetch it out of Heaven." Gataker's co-opted the idea of transcendence as a premise in the argument against the Mass's seemingly inconsistent notions of divine ontology.⁸¹ For Gataker, Anglican doctrine required philosophically coherent statements about corporeal entities. The certainty of God's circumscribed existence beyond the temporal realm was by reason of "the nature of all true bodies." Citing passages in the New Testament and the arguments of Augustine, he reasoned, bodies "must needs have a certain place, and they are so circumscribed with and confined unto that place that they cannot at the same time...be in any other place but it." Thus even the "glorified body of Christ" remained a body, and was therefore circumscribed and contained in heaven. It was absurd to believe God's body might exist simultaneously in the Eucharist host. Gataker concluded with an interesting admonition against overstating Christ's omnipresence, writing, "we must take heed that we do not so maintain the deity of the Man [Christ], that we overthrow the verity of his body." Philosophical consistency trumped other elements of Christology.⁸²

While critiques of the Catholic Eucharist were of course native to the Reformation, these Protestant writings were less a denial of the possibility of miracles through a blunt materialism (as Catholics argued), and more the reflection of a nascent metaphysical framework of corporeality. Anglican clergymen connected classical theologies of transcendence to a commonsense philosophy of corporeal consistency. Notions of divine power and ubiquity were subjected to classical Aristotelian ideas of space and place. As late as 1653 divines like Jeremy Taylor utilized traditional philosophical ideas to argue against the ubiquity of God's body and divine substance. Taylor, the Anglican bishop of the Irish diocese of Down and Connor, believed that the catholic sophistry also contained an insidious gnostic idea "that a body may be in many places and therefore may be in all, and that it is potentially infinite." Relying upon the Aristotelian notions that bodies could only exist in particular spatial dimensions, Taylor argued that Christ was always in heaven; otherwise his philosophical and theological distinctiveness was at risk of being misappropriated. He recognized, however, that Christ's corporeal distance from the temporal world made God aloof and distant from creation. Furthermore, New Testament

Controversy: A Study in the Circulation of Ideas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 91-141.

⁸⁰ Edmund Gurnay, *Corpus Christi* (London, 1619), 26.

⁸¹ "Gataker, Thomas (1574–1654)," Brett Usher in *ODNB*. Gataker was nominated in 1643 to the Westminster Assembly, but differed from the majority in favoring less rigid definitions of justification and presbyterian ecclesiology. In the 1645 and 1646, he would write several sermons inveighing against antinomianism, targeting out the writings of John Saltmarsh for particular criticism.

⁸² Thomas Gataker, *A Discussion of the Popish Doctrine of Transubstantiation* (London, 1624), 18-21. Gataker conceded that Christ's "truth (that is, his divine power)" was diffused across the world, but was vague as to what this power entailed.

references to Christ's continual presence *within* creation were potentially contradictory. So the Anglican bishop conceded that Christ might briefly descend from heaven in an "extraordinary co-migration, as a man may be said to dwell continually in London, and yet sometimes to go into the country to take the air."⁸³

This light-hearted description of Christ's omnipresence as a sort of country holiday or perambulation betrayed real anxiety felt by English laity and ministers hoping to provide religious solace. There was a soteriological problem with transcendence, one recognized even by Calvinist theologians. William Ames, the Cambridge puritan divine, whose Calvinist nonconformity led to exile in the Dutch Netherlands in 1610, outlined the issue in terms of grace. The primary duty of the Christian elect was to "come unto Christ" through worship and the recognition that salvation came through Christ's mediation. But Ames realized that Christians were faced with the daunting, unmediated distance that separated their fallen selves from the God-man. In a posthumously published exposition of St. Peter's epistles Ames wrote, "because by nature we are strangers and far remote from Christ, and salvation obtained by him...we are not perfectly conjoined." Religious practice, including prayers, sacraments, and scriptural exegesis, was "a continuation and renovation of this access unto Christ, and by Christ unto God." But these did not provide real essential mediation between God and man, only God could bridge the transcendent gap. While Christ was the means to salvation, access to the Godhead's saving grace was problematic for human believers as they were necessarily removed from God's heavenly existence.⁸⁴

Despite these rituals of access, the problem of transcendence—the theological, philosophical, and even emotional sense of unbridgeable distance between God and man—became a persistent worry for English early moderns in the mid-seventeenth century. Discontent with a God "far remote" was undoubtedly exacerbated by the personal and emotional strains caused by puritan "practical divinity." Studies of mainstream puritanism in post-Reformation England have revealed the power that English ministers exerted in their roles as conduits of scriptural interpretation and doctrinal exegesis. English puritanism, to quote Peter Lake, "did not shirk, indeed welcomed, the disruptive, discomfiting effects of protestant doctrine on the lives of individuals and on the life of the whole social organism."⁸⁵ Divine transcendence may have contributed to feelings of alienation. An anonymous writer remarked that he left the reformed mainstream because English Calvinism was too emotionally astringent. The idea of transcendence made the body of Christ "to be as far distant from the Sacrament as the heavens are from earth." He had been swayed by Catholic arguments for the real presence in the sacrament by the inadequacies of "presbyterian doctrine."⁸⁶ The same spatial language used to defend reformed theological doctrine also conveyed discontent with the idea of transcendence. "Christ remote" could not engage with the material religious needs of English worship and soteriological assurance.

⁸³ Jeremy Taylor, *The Real Presence and Spiritual of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament proved against the Doctrine of Transubstantiation* (London, 1653), 229-234.

⁸⁴ William Ames, *An Analytical Exposition of Both the Epistles of the Apostle Peter* (London, 1641), 42-43.

⁸⁵ Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 155. See also, Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 27-39.

⁸⁶ W. S., *Presbyteries Triall* (Paris, 1657), 235.

English divines were also keen to disrupt mystical efforts to interrogate God's manifestations in the material world, especially amid the antinomian creep of the 1620s and 1630s. Puritan ministers doubled down on ideas of transcendence and emphasized that God was a *deus absconditus* about whom little can be known. In print and pulpits they emphasized God's mysterious being above the temporal world. Such was God's transcendent nature, argued the puritan theologian William Twisse (1577-1646) in 1631, that it was beyond even the capabilities of human imagination to undertake it. He affirmed God's elevated nature, writing that God must first "translate us into a supernatural state, before we discern the things of God."⁸⁷ Andrew Willet (1562-1621), rector of Barley, Hertfordshire, made a similar point in 1633 by referencing Thomas Aquinas's epistemology. He argued that the human soul could only understand such things "as have their form in some matter." Corporeal significations were required for human minds to make sense of the world. The immaterial spiritual essence of God could therefore not be perceived by human senses or the mind.⁸⁸

Other Calvinists took an even harsher tone, stressing the absolute inability of human beings to understand the stuff of God. It was impossible, wrote the minister Thomas Morton of Berwick, that any finite creature – "growling here on earth in the muddle and mire of error and gross ignorance" – could comprehend the transcendent nature of the divine.⁸⁹ The separatist pastor John Robinson (1576-1625), no friend to the Stuart religious establishment, still lambasted "curious wits," who endeavored to "to depress and pull [God] down to their dwarfish conceptions." In a posthumously published treatise, Robinson cited Thales, and compared God to the sun: if God had created such bright bodies that humans could not fix their corporeal eyes upon it, "what marvel it is through the eye of understanding all men dazzle in the too curious contemplation of his infinite and infinitely glorious majesty itself?"⁹⁰ Knowledge about God was limited to scripture, which was to be approached through the guidance of trained ministers. Blinded by their own fallenness, antinomians attempted to say things about a transcendent God that were, quite literally, beyond human abilities.

Antinomians and the Cockleshells of God

There was, however, increasing discontent in the puritan underground with ideations of divine transcendence in the 1620s and 1630s. This anxiety manifested among the leaders of what Peter Lake and David Como have described as the "puritan underground," the English godly community of conversations, conferences, and informal arbitration of theological disputes.⁹¹ The

⁸⁷ William Twisse, *A Discovery of D. Jacksons Vanitie* (1631), 253. Twisse's comments came in an extended response to Thomas Jackson's Neoplatonic *Treatise of the Divine Essence and Attributes* (1628).

⁸⁸ Andrew Willett, *Hexapala in Genesin & Exodum* (London, 1633), 659.

⁸⁹ Thomas Morton of Berwick, *A Treatise of the Nature of God* (London, 1599), 36-39.

⁹⁰ John Robinson, *Observations Divine and Moral* (London, 1628), 2-4.

⁹¹ David Como and Peter Lake, "'Orthodoxy' and its Discontents: Dispute Settlement and the Production of 'Consensus' in the London (Puritan) 'Underground,'" *Journal for British Studies*, 39 (2000), 34-70. Como and Lake trace the roots of the theological upheaval in the 1640s to the breakdown of this informal system broke through external pressure from the Laudian regime.

notion of divine transcendence contributed to the broader sense that Calvinist theories of grace, election, and justification by faith were theologically incorrect and emotionally inadequate. Such sentiment helped encourage godly English to seek out perfectionist and antinomian ideas, as official hostility from ascendant Arminians reified puritan doctrinal structures.⁹² Ideations of the transcendent God encouraged antinomian critique. Take, for example, Samuel Gorton, a mystical preacher and eventual New England colonist. Having settled in Rhode Island in the aftermath of the 1636-38 Antinomian controversy in the Massachusetts Bay colony, Gorton dismissed Calvinist theological ideas because they were predicated upon erroneous conceptions of divine transcendence.⁹³ For Gorton, the Reformed idea of imputed, or “imaginary,” righteousness—the theory that God’s saving righteousness is alien to humanity and solely based upon God’s decrees—grew out of the erroneous belief that God was transcendent, “wholly absent and remote in another place.” This presumed distance separating man and God aligned with the soteriological errors of puritan theology. The Calvinist view of God was merely the “ark of tradition” based upon “the treasury of a carnal Christ, who is sometimes present with, and sometimes remote from his Church.”⁹⁴ God’s spatial remoteness from everyday life had led to the austere idea that God was utterly removed from humanity’s own justification and salvation.

The corporeal literalism of divine transcendence—the idea of God as physically elevated, “remote,” and removed—led to discontented reactions in English pulpits. Chief among these ministers was John Everard, whose dismissal of mainstream puritanism has been extensively reviewed by David Como. Everard’s criticisms of both Laudian and puritan ministers led to official scrutiny and imprisonment in the 1620s and 1630s. The London preacher would eventually be fined and imprisoned, with a hearing before the Court of High Commission before his death in the winter of 1640/1641.⁹⁵ But it is worth revisiting Everard’s idiosyncratic set of beliefs for its discontent with puritan theology; his thought anticipated the radical formulations of immanence during the Revolution.

Everard was personally motivated in his explicit rejection of a transcendent God, a deity both soteriologically and spatially removed from the material world. His sermons from between 1625 and 1636, posthumously published in 1653 as *Some Gospel-Treasures Opened*, reveal the minister’s simmering dissatisfaction with mainstream puritanism’s formulation of God’s transcendence. In a remarkable afternoon sermon, delivered in London at St. Giles Cripplegate, Everard recalled, “I remember that I was taught when I was a child, by my nurse, or by my mother, that God was above in Heaven.” Puritan ministers, whom Everard labeled “literal

⁹² David Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the emergence of an antinomian underground in pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 10-32.

⁹³ Gorton would be forced out of Providence in 1641 for ideas that smacked of Familism; “Gorton, Samuel (*bap.* 1593, *d.* 1677),” Carla Gardina Pestana in ODNB, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2007. For the theological milieu into which Gorton entered, see Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion and Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 231-241.

⁹⁴ Samuel Gorton, *Saltmarsh Returned from the Dead, in Amico Philalethe* (London, 1655), 10-12.

⁹⁵ Como, *Blown by the Spirit*, 221-225.

divines,” had actively propagated this myth for fear of the implications of the truth: God was indeed in heaven, “yet not more in heaven than he is in the earth.” The preacher concluded that all creation was capable of sharing, in some sense, a being with God:

God is not in every creature *as he is* in himself, but as every creature *can receive him*; as though it be true that the sea *flows into* all the *creeks* and *crannies* of the earth, yet not according to the fullness of the sea, though to every cranny and brook the sea is not sparing.

This was an immanent God, liberated from classical notions of space and place through a liquid notion of divine spirit. Creatures only contained small “crannies” of God in comparison to His oceanic divinity, but they still contained God. Everard declared that the Church Father St. Jerome had been wrong saying “it was an abasing of God to say he was in a mouse, in a toad, in the base creatures.” He admonished his listeners to abandon the childish ideas of transcendence and “eat the strong meat” of divine immanence. “For deny this,” Everard warned, “and you deny his infiniteness, his filing all places and all creatures.”⁹⁶

Everard also formulated a mystical critique of puritanism—that a “circumscribed” God, limited and contained above the world, prevented true religion. Such theology was akin to a foreign traveler who desired to see England, but refused to proceed past the coastline. Calling God transcendent in heaven was akin to seeing the “cockleshells that lie upon the shore, or the oyster shells, or the pebble stones that lie there,” and describing the entirety of England based upon that shoreline view. Puritan ministry could only bring English believers to “the suburbs of this our great God.”⁹⁷ There were central core religious truths that could not be learned by the literalism of puritanical scripturalism. Everard’s antinomian theology was not the rejection of scripture. Rather he reframed religious doctrine and practice as an internal experience of the elect *in this world*.

As Como has demonstrated, Everard’s antinomianism replaced the literal story of Christ’s ascendance as a process of self-abnegation, or a sort of internalized spiritual pilgrimage that recapitulated the New Testament. Everard’s remarkable system of divinity reinterpreted scripture as a vast “allegory or parable for something that happened within each individual believer.”⁹⁸ The believer needed to obliterate the will and unlearn the self through a sweeping away of external works through the virtue of the internal guidance of the spirit.⁹⁹ This allegorization was predicated upon the recognition of God’s immanent relationship to the created world. While Everard condemned the suburban scripturalism of the godly churches in favor of a “spiritual” interior form of religion, this did not evaporate God into merely a metaphor for some sort of awakened religious consciousness. Scripture might be encoded as a cipher for God’s omnipresence, but that did not make God less “real.” Everard said as much from his Cripplegate pulpit in the 1630s: “When thou look on any creature, though never so base, account and esteem it as thy brother.”¹⁰⁰ He explained this naturalist egalitarianism in another sermon, delivered privately in Kensington, “though God be in every creature, and as much in one creature as in another, yet the accidents in the creatures hide God from us.” Radical politics lay behind this

⁹⁶ John Everard, *Some Gospel-Treasures Opened* (London: 1653), 410, 418, Everard’s emphasis.

⁹⁷ Everard, *Gospel-Treasures*, 423-424.

⁹⁸ Como, *Blown by the Spirit*, 228-230.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 251-259.

¹⁰⁰ Everard, *Gospel-Treasures*, 420.

material egalitarianism, but also a philosophical statement of divine pantheism. Hidden behind the material accidents of the body, God's essential nature could be found within the created being. To be Christian was to realize that God inhabited the bodies of all creatures.¹⁰¹

Other English antinomians, disenchanted with the ontologically distant God, also searched for alternative ideas of God's immediate presence. This included Giles Randall, a heterodox preacher, whose translation and publication efforts framed questions of transcendence and immanence as questions of religious knowledge. Randall translated three mystical tracts of continental origin: Nicholas of Cusa's *De Visione Dei*, Benet de Canfield's *A Bright Star Leading to Christ*, both published in 1646, and the devotional guide *Theologia Germanica*, printed in 1648.¹⁰² A graduate of Lincoln College, Oxford, by the 1640s Randall was described by contemporary sources as a radical preacher. He was cited in the Star Chamber for preaching Anabaptism. John Etherington, Peter Lake's enigmatic antinomian boxmaker, claimed to have heard him give a Familist sermon in a house outside the Bishop's Gate, London—wherein Randall claimed “a man baptized with the Holy Ghost knew all things.”¹⁰³ Thomas Edwards, the presbyterian minister and heresiographer, complained in his *Gangraena* that in August of 1646, Randall gave a sermon in which he said all creatures contained “God in Christ.” Edwards accused Randall of the anti-ecclesiastical and heretical claim “that all the creatures and all actions are Sacraments.”¹⁰⁴ Such accounts give us some sense of his likely antinomian theological views, but they shouldn't distract us from his own thoughts and the ideas contained in his translations.

Randall presented divine transcendence as an epistemic problem for the finite created believer. Faced with the question of how believers might understand a God of absolute qualities, his translations were intended as devotional guides for the saint, providing insight into the problematic nature of epistemological contact between the human mind and the seemingly transcendent God. In prefatory remarks before his translation of Cusa's *De Visione Dei*, entitled *The Single Eye*, Randall wrote that God was “one simple, infinite, indivisible being.” Finite creatures struggled to comprehend the idea of God. Randall argued that this epistemic difficulty led to erroneous notions of transcendence. Men tended to “abstract him as they think from all things.” Paradoxically, elevating God into abstracted, unknowable transcendence led men “to confirm him within their own fancies and imaginations.” By lifting God out of the created world, the mind was forced to construct abstracted mimetic representations of the divine:

They deal with him as the people in *Isaiah* with their wooden gods, they hew, chop, shred, and cut off what seems good, and when it is brought to the idea of their own brain then it is God, and the rest they burn as not essential to that God they have shaped out of themselves.

Randall claimed that attempts to idealize God as transcendent had actually made the divine more vulnerable to corporeal idolatry. Ironically, the human condition meant that if God was conceived as removed from the temporal world, he became subject to the flaws of humanity's

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 293, 420.

¹⁰² Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, 116-117. Smith argues that Randall probably relied upon multiple manuscript translations by John Everard and Roger Brierley.

¹⁰³ Jean Dietz Moss, “‘Godded with God’: Hendrik Niclaes and his Family of Love” *Transactions of the American Philosophy Society* 71 (1981), 58-60; Como, *Blown by the Spirit*, 228-232; Lake, *The Boxmaker's Revenge*, 363-370.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Edwards, *The Third Part of Gangraena* (London, 1646), 25.

lower, material existence, i.e. “the idea of their own brain.” Instead, argued Randall, citing Romans 1:19, God existed “in the creation” and was “all in all” in the material world. Correct knowledge of God was to know “not God in image, but essence and substance.”¹⁰⁵ Given this need to understand God’s essential nature, how could human beings, constructed of finite matter and limited epistemological capacities, comprehend the infinite nature of the divine? For Randall, Cusa’s *De Visione Dei* was important because while “the infinite cannot be infinitely received by the finite,” Cusa’s tract explained how God was “so in the finite’s capability [to be known] *as finite and contracted*, giving himself forth in a wonderful manner.” God could make himself known within the finite capacities of man’s mind. Randall concluded, God “clothes himself with flesh, reason, sense, and the form and nature of a servant, who yet is above all and lord over all.”¹⁰⁶ The divine was, at its essence, an immanent infinite able to manifest within the finite.

Randall’s 1646 translation of *De Visione Dei* held this manifestation as predicated upon God’s epistemological totality.¹⁰⁷ While human sight varied depending upon “the affections of the organs and the mind,” Cusa argued that God’s absolute sight was not affected by such sensory contingencies. Divine vision comprehended “all manners of seeing” and was an epistemological unity: “seeing is not another distinct thing from hearing, tasting, touching, smelling, and understanding.” God’s unity of absolute vision functioned as unifying singularity, translated in Randall’s idiosyncratic prose as “the absolute reason, in which all alterity or otherness is unity or oneness, and all diversity is join-icity or self-sameness.”¹⁰⁸ God’s eye was a “glass” or reflective globe in which the sensible and supersensible were unified; Randall noted, “a glass, though never so little, will figuratively represent a great mountain and all things that are in the surface thereof.” God’s eye however was “an infinite being, a circle, nay an infinite sphere.” This infinite glass entailed divine immanence within creation: because God was “the cause of all visible things,” his sight contained and saw “all things in [their] causes.” The divine eye’s encompassing vision meant that God was “present to all things, and everything is present to that being, without which they cannot be.”¹⁰⁹ The 1646 translation visually represented the divine eye through a woodcut of a microcosmic circle on the frontispiece. God’s divine vision could not but see the unity of all existence, and through his recognition, all things were united in a singular divine existence. Given a perspective *sub specie aeternitatis*, one would see that God’s divine mind combined both material world and divine creator.

¹⁰⁵ Giles Randall, “The Epistle to the Reader,” in Nicholas Cusa, *Οφθαλμος Αχλυσ Or The Single Eye, Entitled the Vision of God* (London, 1646),

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, “Epistle to the Reader.”

¹⁰⁷ A manuscript in Cambridge University Library, MS Dd. 12. 68, contains a fragment of John Everard’s translation of Cusa’s *De Visione Dei*. The close identification between the fragment and Randall’s 1646 translations leads Nigel Smith to conclude that Randall had recourse to an Everard manuscript translation; *Perfection Proclaimed*, 114-115, 120-121.

¹⁰⁸ Cusanus, *The Vision of God*, 5-8.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 9, 42-43.



Figure 1 - Detail from frontispiece of *De Visione Dei*, 1646 translation

Randall's translation cautioned that any radical implications derived from his theories of visual immanence were structured and restrained by the body of Christ. Christ remained the "absolute mean," by which man was unified with God, anchoring Cusanus's mysticism to the orthodox soteriology of the Trinity: "Human nature is therefore most united to the mean, *yet it is not made the mean.*"¹¹⁰ Christ's body prevented the would-be mystic from dangerously claiming theosis, the idea that human beings could become like God to such a degree that they participated in the divine nature. Yet, the divine vision was of an absolute nature. God not only saw all existence, but necessarily contained the object of his vision within in the entirety of his infinite being. Cusa considered the relationship between the sensible and the supersensible as not one of proximity or distance. In *De Visione Dei*, nature became the metaphor for God's mind; God's perception drew the material universe into a single totality. Nature was not physically lower than God—a base or detestable declension from a perfect Creator—rather it's objective perception united creation into God as a valuable adjunct of universal truth. In the same way that language was an expression of human reason, material existence was an expression of divine perfection.¹¹¹

Böhme and the Collapsing Cosmic

Early modern concern with the spatial and corporeal aspects of God signals how the problem of transcendence extended beyond antinomian theologies. Theological discontent with transcendence, God's "peculiar" existence, coincided with seismic intellectual and cultural shifts in European cosmography. At the same time that theological formulations of divine transcendence were placed under increased strain by mystics and antinomians, the religious implications of the Copernican revolution were being realized in England. God's existence and location in the cosmos became another means of textually approaching the contradictions of an eternal, metaphysical God within the changing, physical world. Divine transcendence, the idea of

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 124-125. My emphasis.

¹¹¹ See Thomas Wilson Hayes, "Nicholas of Cusa and Popular Literacy in Seventeenth-Century England," *Studies in Philology* 84 (1987), 85-86; Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, 130-131.

God's distinctive, personal existence in the heavens, had gained significant philosophical support from the Aristotelian worldview—the “two storey” universe. The collapse of this system required new theological reconciliation. By the mid-seventeenth century, the problem of transcendence, “Christ remote,” blended the theological concerns of the post-Reformation with new anxieties introduced by the “new philosophy” and science. The cosmological lens of the transcendence problem focused upon the divine's relationship to matter. It shifted religion's theosophic concerns into an interrogation of the substance of God and its relationship to the bodies of man and creation.

In the Aristotelian schema, there were two realms, the physical and the metaphysical. The lower, sublunary realm was subject to time, change, and material flux; the upper cosmos was subject to uniform and circular laws of metaphysics. This was the cosmos licensed into Christianity by Aquinas's scholastic arguments and imagined by Dante as the cosmic metaphor for man's dual nature.¹¹² In the Christianized adaptation, the upper storey was the place of God's throne, literally above and beyond the material world. The German astronomer Peter Apian's oft-noted *Cosmographia* (1524) contained an illustration of this cosmos that situated the “coelum empireum” as physically beyond both the earth and its surrounding planets. The “habitaculum Dei et omnium electorum,” the dwelling of God and all his Saints, spatially transcended the material realm. It was, quite literally, above the world. The intermediary planets between earth and God were carried by ethereal or crystalline spheres, which nested against each other in translucent layers like a cosmic onion.¹¹³



Figure 2 - Peter Apian, *Cosmographia* (1524)

¹¹² Thomas Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution: Planetary Astronomy in the Development of Western Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 108-113.

¹¹³ Daniel Danielson, *Paradise Lost and the Cosmological Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 6-10.

To be sure, while the tidy two-storey universe was orderly and simple, it could induce a sense of claustrophobia. Man was “lodged down here, among the mire and shit of the world, bound and nailed to the deadest, most stagnant part of the universe,” complained Michel de Montaigne in his *Apology for Raymond Sebond*. “No wonder man’s imagination and knowledge was flawed and limited. Man was, Montaigne noted, curtailed to “the lowest storey of the building, the farthest from the vault of heaven.”¹¹⁴ But while human beings lived in the world of material flux, fickle passion, and physical corruption, the cosmology indicated a moral choice. Humans could follow their corporeal, bestial inclinations and live in sin, or they could develop their rational faculties and upwardly cultivate their spiritual souls. Even amidst the mutable, deteriorating world of bodies, one might hope for everlasting life in the ethereal, eternal heavens. In this sense, the Pauline formulation of man as conflicted container of sinful flesh struggling with the spiritual mind fit neatly within the cosmological hierarchy.

In the new Copernican universe, however, the distinction between the perfect heavens and the imperfect earth was collapsed. There is no need to rehearse the process by which astronomers and physicists strained the Aristotelian model through efforts to maintain or “save appearances,” i.e. to harmonize astronomical theory with observed physical phenomena. This extended series of negotiations—which began with Claudius Ptolemy’s spirographical epicycles, eccentrics, and equants, but continued into the late medieval period—resulted in the deterioration of coherence.¹¹⁵ Copernicus system rebuilt this coherence with his heliocentric model. The heavens, for Copernicus, were part of the same material field as the earth, subject to the same forces and changes. The impact of the new cosmology not only re-centered the universe around the sun, but shattered the separation between the sublunary and the heavenly realms.

This revolution had real, existential effects on early moderns. There were attempts to integrate the divine being into the heliocentric model. The astronomer Thomas Digges, the first English author to publically declare his support for Copernicus’s cosmological scheme, translated sections of *De Revolutionibus Orbium Caelestium* (1543) as an appendix to the 1576 edition of his father’s popular almanac, *A Prognostication Everlasting*.¹¹⁶ In the 1583 edition of *Prognostication*, Digges added an illustration of the schema, in which the “habitable for the elect” remained beyond the planets, but now amidst an endless orb of stars, “fixed infinitely up.” But this may have only increased a sense of isolation within the new model: the elect would find God, not at the top of a hierarchical cosmos, but stretching indefinitely outwards from the solar system at the edges of an infinite universe.¹¹⁷ As John Donne wrote in *An Anatomy of the World*, the new science undermined the wider cultural assumptions of European society:

And new philosophy calls all in doubt,
The element of fire is quite put out;
The sun is lost, and the earth, and no man’s wit
Can well direct him, where to look for it.
And freely men confess, that this world’s spent,
When in the Planets, and the firmament

¹¹⁴ Michel de Montaigne, *The Apology for Raymond Sebond*, trans, and ed. M. A. Screech, (London: Penguin, 1987), 16.

¹¹⁵ Danielson, *Paradise Lost and the Cosmological Revolution*, 14-26.

¹¹⁶ “Digges, Thomas (c.1546–1595),” Stephen Johnston in *ODNB*.

¹¹⁷ Leonard Digges, *A Prognostication Everlasting of Right Good Effect* (London, 1583), fo. 43.

They seek so many new; they see that this
 Is crumbled out again to his Atomies.
 'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone;
 All just supply, and all relation:
 Prince, Subject, Father, Son, are things forgot,
 For every man alone thinks he hath got
 To be a Phoenix, and that them can be
 None of that kind of which he is, but he.¹¹⁸

The “Great Chain of Being,” that hierarchical anchor of Christian worldview in which everything had its allotted place and relation, had been unmoored. The point here is not to chart a causal narrative of Copernicus’s influence in early modern English intellectual culture.¹¹⁹ Rather it is to show how changing notions of cosmography ran parallel to a broader destabilization of Christian notions of a transcendent divinity. This cosmological shift—one with immense social, political, and existential implications—heightened the broader theological issue of transcendence. If the heavenly sphere of the celestial kingdom was no longer conceptually viable, the nature of God’s relationship with the world required revision. Furthermore, shifts in cosmic understandings forced early moderns to reckon with the problems of divine transcendence and divine omnipresence in material terms. If the universe was simply matter-in-motion all the way up, where then was God’s “habitable”? Indeed, could there be God when the metaphysical had become encompassed within the realm of the physical?

The work of Jakob Böhme (1575-1624), a Lutheran shoemaker and mystic from Silesia, addressed this problem directly. Böhme’s major work, *Aurora* (trans. 1656) attempted to rehabilitate the Christian God in a cosmos without a metaphysical heaven. In 1656 John Sparrow produced a translation of *Aurora*, which was printed by John Streater for Giles Calvert’s press. This was part of a surge of interest in Böhme. The majority of the mystic’s treatises and letters were printed in English translation between 1645 and 1662 as a response to the rising sectarianism and infighting amidst the various godly churches. English translators saw Böhme as providing a universal vision of reformation through a blend of Neoplatonism, modified Aristotelian views of matter, and mystical approaches to Christian theology.¹²⁰ But Böhme’s unique blend of thinking also provided new insight into man’s basic soteriological needs, which still hinged upon the basic Pauline formulation of sinful flesh struggling with the “law of the mind.”¹²¹ Sparrow, Böhme’s English translator, believed that Böhme’s writings resolved the

¹¹⁸ John Donne, *An Anatomy of the World* (London, 1611), sig, B1r.

¹¹⁹ The Copernican system’s challenge to the Christian/Aristotelian worldview did not become more widely apparent until the second decade of the seventeenth century, in the aftermath of Kepler’s Neoplatonic theories of planetary orbit and Galileo’s telescopic observations. See Kuhn, *Copernican Revolution*, 209-225.

¹²⁰ Ariel Hessayon, “‘The Teutonicks Writings’: Translating Jacob Boehme into English and Welsh,” *Esoterica* 9 (2007): 141, 149, accessed May 10, 2016, <http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeIX/EsotericaIX.pdf>.

¹²¹ For the confessionalized context of Böhme’s mystical genesis, see Andrew Weeks, *Boehme: An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century Philosopher and Mystic* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 35-51. For the influence of Lutheran mysticism, see Russell H. Hvolbek, “Being and Knowing: Spiritualist Epistemology and Anthropology

ancient Pauline/Augustinian struggle between mind and body, the moralized anthropological division that paralleled Aristotle's two-storey cosmos. Sparrow wrote, Böhme's writings unveiled "how those secret things have proceeded to their being and manifestation from the infinite incomprehensibility." *Aurora* resolved the problem of the "omnipresent God" through an understanding of how "to distinguish Him from the Creature in every thing."¹²²

The heliocentric cosmos, as with Donne, dramatically unsettled Böhme's understanding of religion and society. The collapse of the Christianized cosmos occasioned a crisis for Böhme.¹²³ In an autobiographical aside in *Aurora*, Böhme wrote that he had shared in the belief of men that there was a localized, transcendent heaven "many hundred, nay many thousand miles distant from the face of the earth, and that God dwells only in that heaven." But, he became convinced of the truth of Keplerian astronomy: "the earth rolls itself about; and runs with the other planets, as in a wheel, round the sun."¹²⁴ The new heliocentric universe unsettled Böhme's sense of the world. He "fell into a very deep melancholy and heavy sadness," as he contemplated the "great deep of this world, also the sun and the stars, the clouds, rain and snow." What was man's place in the world, "in comparison of this great work and fabric of heaven and earth?" In an infinite universe, where was God's throne located? Finally, if the two-storey system was incorrect, how then to resolve the question of theodicy: "there was evil and good, as well in the elements as in the creatures, and that it went as well in this world with the wicked as with the virtuous honest and godly."¹²⁵ Böhme's work attempted to resolve both the inner, soteriological struggles created by the Reformation and the new metaphysical concerns arising from the heliocentric cosmographical model.

Böhme abandoned the idea of divine transcendence as formulated through medieval cosmography and post-Reformation theology—the idea, in his words, that heaven was "a round circumference and sphere, very azure of a light blue color, extends itself above the stars, supposing that God had therein his *peculiar being*, and did rule only in the power of his holy spirit in this world."¹²⁶ Given the collapse of the geocentric worldview, Böhme stressed that God could not exist in a specific, spatially distant place apart from mankind. He disagreed with Thomas Digges: God did not exist "in a peculiar, severed, or divided part and *place* in the Father, as the stars do in heaven." (57) Rather his being was "all in eternity." Böhme wrote, "if man's eyes were open he should see God everywhere in his heaven." Understanding the divine being revealed that the "Deity" was not transcendent and aloft from the created world: "Neither must thou think that the Deity is such a kind of Being as only in the upper heaven and that the soul, when it departs from the body, goes aloft into the upper heaven many hundred thousand miles off." (436) God was not distinct in space, rather he existed in "all things and who himself is all." Heaven was immediate and proximate to the human existence in this world.

from Schwenckfeld to Böhme," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 22 (Spring, 1991), 108-109.

¹²² John Sparrow, "The Preface to the Reader," *Aurora*, sig. A3r-A4r, sig. B3r.

¹²³ Craig Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire: A History of the Night in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2011), 67-70; Weeks, *Boehme*, 1-5.

¹²⁴ Jakob Böhme, *Aurora, that is, the Day-Spring, or Dawning of the Day in the Orient* (trans. 1656), 598.

¹²⁵ Böhme, *Aurora*, 425.

¹²⁶ Böhme, *Aurora*, 425.

Böhme wrote that if man were to speak of God, he must look to “nature” where the Deity was evident in the qualities and processes of life itself. Revelation allowed Böhme to understand “the whole body or corporeity of God, which is nature.” Unhindered by ontological distinctions and immanent with the cosmos, the shoemaker stressed the vast and encompassing nature of the divinized world: “the wideness, depth and height, also heaven and earth, and all whatsoever is therein and all that is above the heavens is together the body or corporeity of God.” Far from being transcendent, God was himself the cosmology. His natural body was the world. (44-46)

This heterodox immanence required modifications of the Trinity, the creedal basis for understanding God as “peculiar” beings. Böhme held that the “Ternary” existence of God did not imply separate persons, “that he is a severed part or divided piece as when two men stand one by another, where one comprehends not the other.” Rather, the Son was an empowerment of the Godhead, a sort of ultimate source or “the heart of the Father” provided the efficacious force of his powers. Böhme made the clever move of equating the Christ, the Son, with the solar Sun: “as the sun is a self-subsisting creature... which shines not from or out of all creatures, but in and into all creatures... so the son in the father is a self-subsisting person and enlightens all the powers in the Father.” (58-62) Allegory conveyed the material realities of the heliocentric cosmos: God the Father was the material substance of the world, the earth, stars, heaven, and “the whole deep between the stars.” Connecting the Son/Sun’s energy with the Father/deep was the Holy Ghost, a “motion” that contained the life and spirit of creation that extended throughout the cosmos. Through its universal influence, the Holy Ghost functioned as the vital basis for God’s immanence and, like the enlivening blood in human veins, Böhme wrote, “the Holy Ghost replenishes the whole nature and is the heart of nature.” (45)

Böhme managed to put the cosmological revisions of Copernicus in service to theosophic reformulations of the cosmos. For Böhme, all of nature was created out of God’s own being: “the indivisible divine life of the spirit is entirely present at every level, in every suborganism, in macrocosm and in microcosm, within every circle of the world.”¹²⁷ Böhme employed alchemical ideas and language to convey the relationship between natural matter and the spiritualized powers. In particular, *Aurora* described the divine substrate of this vitalized force within matter as the “salitter,” a potent divine substance that enlivened matter. Böhme wrote,

This heavenly salitter, or powers in one another, generate heavenly joyful fruits and colors; all manner of trees and plants, on which do grow the fair, pleasant, and lovely fruits of life. There spring up also in these powers and virtues, all manner of blossoms and flowers, with fair heavenly colors and smells.¹²⁸

In addition to the “salitter” of the divine powers, the “mercurious” of God formed minerals such as gold, silver, and iron. Böhme considered these powers to be a “divine music” by which all things “touch and stir one another and move on in another” providing the impetus by which “all things grow joyfully and generate very beautifully.” There was then still a division between the “dead earth” and God’s livening influence, but the sharp contrast between matter and God were complicated by a “divine pomp,” a cosmic dance of creative forces that brought forth “heavenly forms or shapes in the earth as also in man and beasts.” (79-80) Life was not material, but a mixture of corporeal stuff and immaterial forces that connected the fleshly and the divine. For example, a human being’s corporeal aspect was substantively indistinguishable from its spiritual

¹²⁷ Weeks, *Boehme*, 64.

¹²⁸ Böhme, *Aurora*, 78-79.

element. Böhme wrote, “for all the veins together with the light in thee—as also thy heart, and thy brain, and all whatsoever is in thee—make or constitute that spirit, and that is thy soul.” (70-71) The new recognition of the vastness of the cosmos required a revision of the stark transcendent divide that made up the basic theoretical assumptions of the two worlds—heaven and earth, spirit and flesh, soul and body.

For Böhme, and his English translators, the solution to understanding the immanent God and vitalizing spirit was the very experience of embodiment. To understand Christ, one “must once more look upon natural things.”¹²⁹ This system of immanent cosmology was (and remains) hard to understand. *Aurora* contained an incredible list of significations through which Böhme recast the divinized universe through “similitudes” to the corporeal body of man, reconstructing the cosmos as an anthropological entity, a spiritually living (and enlivening) being. Human flesh signified the earth which was “congealed and hath no motion” without external energies. The head with the brain, which was “grown on the body,” represented heaven and the affective powers of movement and air which traveled through the “fountain-veins or arteries of the flesh.” These arteries were themselves illustrative of the cosmic body. They represented the “deep between the stars and earth wherein fire, air and water qualify in an elementary manner.” The veins were “the powerful flowings out from the stars” that shaped and condition mankind. The liver was the water in the world “for from the liver cometh the blood in the whole body into all the members.” Even “the entrails or guts” signified the “consuming” metabolic processes of the stars, which digested astral powers to formalized the material species of creatures in nature.¹³⁰

To know a transcendent God required an intellectual paradigm in which the “remote” deity was could be understood as materially embedded within the created world. As continental mysticism adapted to the new theological and philosophical realities of an enlarged universe, Böhme’s corporeal macrocosm provided a this-worldly approach to knowing God. The human body was itself the means to understand the connections between the eternal God and the corporeal world. Yet *Aurora* did not simply allegorize Christian truths in order to elaborately disguise a naturalist pantheism. Neither was God’s corporealized immanence a mere metaphor for transcendent. Describing his philosophy, Böhme said his meaning was “heavenly and spiritual, yet truly and properly such.” He meant “no other thing, then what I set down in the letter.”¹³¹ The human body was a signifying technology, but one that symbolized the productive powers of God’s material embodiment. God’s spirit was literal, indeed physical. The divine substance, materialized within the heliocentric universe, remained present even as it conceptually expanded with Digges’s orb of stares “fixed infinitely up.” The body maintained intimate theosophic connection between man and God, even as the divine substance was extended into the far-flung reaches of the cosmos.

Conclusion

Let us conclude by returning to Gerrard Winstanley’s effort to lower “Christ very remote.” Winstanley admonished his readers in *The Saints Paradise* (London, 1648) to avoid understanding religion as occurring beyond earth:

¹²⁹ Böhme, *Aurora*, 58.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 47-49.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

So that you do not look for a God now, as formerly you did, to be a place of glory beyond the sun, moon and stars, nor imagine a divine being you know not where, but you see him ruling within you; and not only in you, but you see and know him to be the spirit and power that dwells in every man and woman; yea, in every creature, according to his orb, within the globe of creation.¹³²

There were, as historians have noted, political reasons for this formulation of God. Winstanley saw God's immanence as realizing a new, material egalitarianism.¹³³ But just as important to the political dimension was the expression of a pantheistic eschatology through which God's immanent spirit battled, and potentially transformed, the carnal flesh. Winstanley's allegorization of scriptural passages was coupled with this basic sense of God as a pantheistic force within creation. Do not look up and away from the world, Winstanley admonished his readers, but rather look around the physical world. "The whole creation of fire, water, earth, and air; and all the varieties of bodies made up thereof," wrote Winstanley, "is the clothing of God." God filled all things with his living spirit and substantial being.¹³⁴ The nascent English commonwealth was the moment when Englishmen recognized God's immanent existence and could usher into existence a new era of godly society.

The issues of divine knowledge and substantial relationships dovetailed on the problem of the "peculiar" or "distinctive" nature of God. Divine transcendence supported Christ's corporeal distinctiveness; it provided an element of philosophical consistency deployed in the service of theological doctrine (and polemic). The metamorphosis of God, the emphasis upon his omnipresence *within* created things re-casted the material world as a place of redemption and religious activity. The created universe could be redefined through the immanent presence of God, understood variably as a pantheistic unity (in which the material world was substantially equal to and constitutive of God), panentheistic vitalism (in which God existed through the world and enlivened it, but was not equivalent to it), or spectrums of divinized matter (in which matter was but one pole of a monistic substance that extended to the pure, spiritual divine). By abandoning God's peculiar existence in the eternal heavens, the material world, and its constitutive bodies, could be reimagined in new and startling ways. In their blunt rejection of traditional notions of divine transcendence, the heterodox ideas of the 1640s and 1650s created a new set of problems, centered upon the nature of the human body. If God was no longer distinctive, indeed was no longer a person, but rather an element within (or pantheistically equivalent to) material creation, what did this mean for ancient questions of salvation and theodicy? The dialectic between God's transcendence and immanence forced early moderns of the middle decades of the seventeenth century to reconsider questions of materiality, knowledge, and religious belief.

If the transcendent God had been lowered, then the ontological stakes of divine immanence had been raised. As we will see, the crucial ideological move of English radicals in the 1640s

¹³² Gerrard Winstanley, *Saints Paradise* (London, 1648), 85.

¹³³ Joad Raymond reminds us that Winstanley's prose, however multifarious in its religious and social ambitions, had tangible political effect: "For Winstanley, words articulated the path by which he arrived at real, transformative action, action that overturned the landscape;" "In 1649, to St. George's Hill," 431.

¹³⁴ Gerrard Winstanley, *Fire in the Bush: The Spirit Burning, Not Consuming, but Purging Mankind* (London, 1650), 1-2.

was to kick away the mediating barrier provided by the transcendent, “peculiar,” Christ, a medium that prevented the blasphemous claim that one *was* Christ. The material person of the saint replaced the remote Christ, the one Person of the Trinity. Paul Lim has studied aspects of this in his intensive study of the problem of Antitrinitarianism in seventeenth-century England, the proliferation of radical religion in the English Revolution often relied upon non-Trinitarian modes of discourse popular among Ranters, Seekers, and other sectarian groups. These groups removed the Christological barrier through a form of theosis in which one was “godded with God.”¹³⁵ However, this raised a new issue of the saint, embodied in sinful carnality, functioning as the site of an immanent divinity. If God existed immanently within man, including the obviously mutable flesh, how was his eternal perfection to be reconciled with the unredeemed flesh? Given the categorical difference between body and spirit, how did fleshly beings make themselves fit for spiritual knowledge and redemption?

Lowering the transcendent God into the material world made created matter itself the site and stage of an immanent divinity. This in turn created a new set of religious problems and anxieties. Ranters, seekers, and other heterodox writers of these tumultuous years made interesting efforts to reconcile the theological and philosophical inconsistencies unveiled when ontological distinctions between God and the created world (and man in particular) were erased. The following chapters will explore these attempts to show how spirit and matter were somehow simultaneously distinctive and related. This led to new ideas about the human corpus, but also extended anxiety beyond the human to other bodies—vital forms of matter that were newly important for questions that defined the religious and intellectual culture of early Enlightenment.

¹³⁵ Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 72-75.

Chapter 2

Flesh, God, and Spiritual Realism in the Age of the Ranters

For George Foster, spirit was real. In the early hours of 14 January, 1650 Foster began to have visions about the millennium and the end of the world. As he lay in his bed, God spoke to him about the political problems of the moment and that 1650 would see the end of the temporal powers of Parliament. Foster's visions reflected a virulently populist and egalitarian politics, sentiments reflecting the upheaval in the wake of the regicide, the quelling of the Agitator mutiny, and the imprisonment of Leveller leaders.¹³⁶ He predicted General Thomas Fairfax would lead the New Model Army as "instruments of God," overwhelming the reactionary armies of Parliament and creating a government that restored "freedom to the people." But the visions were not entirely focused on the political machinations surrounding the Army, Whitehall, and London. Foster's millennial visions hinged upon the final "revolution of all things" and entailed the reconstruction of the bodies of all people. For all Foster's political anxieties, he dwelled extensively on the material and immaterial qualities of man.

Foster's eschatology, his theology on the final destiny of man, was defined by a fascinating interpretation of man's Christian anthropology—the nature of man's basic composition and his relationship to an omnipresent God. The millennium entailed the general dissolution of man, forcing Foster to explain the relationships and functions of humanity's component substances. In describing God's separation of the wicked and the faithful, Foster wrote that humans consisted of three aspects: body, soul, and spirit. Bodies, being made of elemental stuff, permanently returned into the earth ("and there it continues"). But the soul, the vital force of the body, was part of God himself: "the soul, which is the life of the body, which life is my own invisible being returns to its center." Much like "a river running up and down the earth," the indwelling spirit of God flowed into and enlivened the soul. Foster wrote that upon death the soul reunited with God¹³⁷

The other immaterial substance in the body, "spirit," was decidedly more complex. Distinct from soul, spirit served as man's "conscience, that is compounded of reason, wisdom, and knowledge." But given Foster's exuberant eschatology, this mental aspect was not a distinctively immaterial, Cartesian *res cogitans*. Rather Foster understood spirit as subject to corporeal influence, suggesting man was a fraught continuum of spirit and flesh. He wrote, spirit "flows from flesh, and proceeds out of man, and yet it is not flesh, nor man." Although the spirit was of different stuff than flesh, it was still interwoven in a highly moralized complex. Indeed, Foster insisted the "hell" in which wicked spirits were tormented was not a separate cosmic sphere; rather it followed in the manner of Christ's casting of the devil into the herd of swine: hell was a transmigration into the bodies of noisy animals like hens and dogs. Such denigration was ontologically necessary. Foster noted matter-of-factly, "that a spirit is not capable out of a body, but in a body." At the end of the world, in Foster's view, the final judgment would be a process of embodiment. Spirit was materially present.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ George Foster, *The Sounding of the Last Trumpet* (London, 1650), 7-11, 17-18, 49.

For the normative context of "moderation" as an expression of equality, see Ethan Shagan, *The Rule of Moderation: Violence, Religion, and the Politics of Restrain in Early Modern England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 246-247.

¹³⁷ Foster, *Sounding of the Last Trumpet*, 47-48, 53.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

To be certain, the early modern concept of “spirit” was capacious in its discursive functions. Scholars of the period’s literature have shown how the rise of mid-century spiritualism reflected a new sense of interiority and individualized interpretation within English Protestantism. In this reading, the Revolution was a moment of expansive allegorical and analogous readings of scripture, downplaying literalism in favor of interpretations guided by the spirit.¹³⁹ This was especially the case for antinomians, those dismissive of the use of covenants and external ceremonial worship, as well as “seekers,” who rejected all forms of visible church in favor of the Holy Spirit’s new dispensation and perfection.¹⁴⁰ God’s language was “implicitly tropological,” with scripture containing metaphors that were pertinent to the particular politics of the person and the community.¹⁴¹ These “spiritual” interpretations provided “an internal description between that ‘interiorized’ perfect (and inspired) humanity and the external nature of the community or fellowship of believers at large.”¹⁴² This view considers such approaches to the spirit as problems of language and meaning, an attempt to internalize the practice of Christian religion and the exegetical institutions of the church as subjective processes.¹⁴³

This interpretation has folded much of mid-century spiritualism into two broader narratives of secular disenchantment. First, historians see radicals like Foster as undermining the consensual institutions that took spiritual presence for granted. Referencing invisible “spiritual” processes to justify religious claims is taken as evidence for the fracturing hyperpluralism unleashed by the Reformation.¹⁴⁴ Secondly, scholars have noted that the interiority of God made divine presence materially unreal. God’s “spiritual” presence was a symbolic reflection of internalized mental states within the believer.¹⁴⁵ Such symbolism, goes the narrative, encouraged

¹³⁹ This was a break from earlier puritan exegetical frameworks, which held that scripture should be understood literally with the power of the Holy Spirit guiding comprehension of the text. See James Grantham Turner, *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), v.

¹⁴⁰ Other heterodox groups embraced an intensified literalism. This included English Baptists fascinated with scriptural concordances and Thomas Tany, who became infamous for his eccentric Hebraic sectarian group. Ariel Hessayon, *‘Gold Tried in the Fire’: The Prophet Theaurau John Tany and the English Revolution* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), esp. 233-268.

¹⁴¹ For Christopher Hill, the importance of radicals rested in their reinterpretation of Christianity as a sort of this-worldly liberation theology. See Christopher Hill, “God and the English Revolution” *History Workshop Journal* 17 (1984): 19-20.

¹⁴² Most expansively analyzed by Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion, 1640-1600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 14-16, et passim.

¹⁴³ The radical writers of the English Revolution were part of a wider European current of “*experientia*” the desire for direct inner experience, which questioned established standards of religious certainty and raised inevitable questions of subjectivism. Susan Schreiner, *Are You Alone Wise? The Search for certainty in the early modern era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 209-259.

¹⁴⁴ Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012).

¹⁴⁵ Populist writers can thus be taken as a radical extension of older reforming impulses, including those which pushed for symbolic interpretations of God’s presence in the

psychological complexity and self-fragmentation, especially among Calvinist Protestants and puritan sects.¹⁴⁶ Europeans began to see the reality of Christian religion as an inward and individual phenomenon.¹⁴⁷ In both of these historical trajectories, radical forms of Protestantism gain their historical relevance as provocative deflations of the late medieval state's ideological hegemony and materialist religious culture. The Great Age of the Spirit is read as code for the great period of the disenchanting metaphor, a cipher we moderns read back into spiritualist accounts: when radicals claim to interpret religion "spiritually," it is taken as complete with winks and nudges. Scholars have assumed a virtual materialism was in service to populist forms of political theology. This presumption is wrong.

The "spiritual" presence of God was multivalent: it could be more than a metaphor. It signaled attempts to reconfigure spirit's operations and mechanism within matter and material change.¹⁴⁸ Spirit was not only real for early moderns; it was surrounded by epistemological, anthropological, and physiological discourses.¹⁴⁹ If we take spiritual stuff seriously as a form of material engagement, "radical" ideas complicate the teleological elision between spiritualistic Protestantism and a linear tendency toward secular modernity. Furthermore, an optic of spiritual realism reinvigorates the historical discussions on the heterodoxies that emerged during the English Revolution by noting that, despite their populist idiosyncrasies, these writers were addressing broader intellectual problems. These ideas and debates were a spectrum of reconfigurations about the flow, interpellations, and circulations of the divine substance. Writers like Foster were not simply collapsing the moral framework of Christian religion in an effort to justify a new political ideas of the world. Their radicalism went deeper in its attempt to re-envision the very nature of corporeal embodiment, recasting it as vitalized and divinized by an immanent God that took residence in the flesh.

Eucharist. For examples of this in the German Reformation context, most famously the 1529 "Marburg Colloquy," see Amy Nelson Burnett, *Karlstadt and the Origins of the Eucharistic Controversy: A Study in the Circulation of Ideas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 90-141.

¹⁴⁶ Jonathan Sawday, "'Mysteriously Divided': Civil War, Madness and the Divided Self," in *Literature and the English Civil War*, ed. Thomas Healy and Jonathan Sawday (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 127-143; Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion and Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 157-161.

¹⁴⁷ In Charles Taylor's interpretation, this inward relocation of transcendent mystery facilitated the construction of a "buffered" self, in which early moderns increasingly understood metaphysical and cosmic forces as internal epistemological transformations. *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

¹⁴⁸ This follows recent work suggesting that the reformations of the sixteenth century were not a complete break from medieval understandings of spirit as existential stuff. Carolina Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 19-36

¹⁴⁹ See Christopher Ocker "The Physiology of Spirit in the Reformation: Medical Consensus and Protestant Theologians," in *Miracles Revisited: New Testament Miracle Stories and Their Concepts of Reality*, ed. Stefan Alkier and Annette Weissenrieder (Gottingen: De Gruyter, 2013), 115-157.

This chapter builds upon the iconoclastic critiques of transcendence outlined in the previous chapter to argue that radical spiritualists were faced with a new set of intellectual challenges about the relationship between corporeality and divinity. Radicals did indeed draw upon the typological traditions of puritan exegesis, however this did not always entail the evacuation of Christian theories of being into modes symbolic representation. Rather the language of “types” was often in service to a this-worldly spiritual realism. For George Foster and his contemporaries spirit was real. It was a substance of debatable provenance and function, but one that had undoubted influence upon the religious status of the body and soul. Spiritualist writings bluntly dismissed philosophical subtlety in an effort to express theological and philosophical concerns about the nature of relationship between God, body, and spirit that permeated throughout broad swaths of English society. These early moderns collapsed traditional theological safeguards to address the central metaphysical issue of the Christian project—how a divine, immaterially perfect spirit unified and interacted with the mutable, eschatologically fallen corporeal world.¹⁵⁰

From Mysticism to Materiality: Internalizing Christ

Granting the reality of spirit for early modern radicals does not preclude recognizing their innovative exegetical and epistemological understandings of God. As we saw in the previous chapter, divine immanence resolved both cosmological and theological issues that were unanswered by transcendent formulations of God. But it raised new concerns about the spiritual regeneration of the flesh, the relationship between human and divine substance, and eschatological concerns about man’s ultimate destiny. Such theological issues, while never fully stabilized, had been controlled through belief in the mystery of the Incarnation, the Passion, and the Trinity. But, heterodox ideas strained inherited understandings of the triune God in the mid-seventeenth century. Antinomians and mystics were increasingly dismissive of Christ’s mediatory functions within the Trinity.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, the novel convergence of antinomian theology, continental mysticism, and changing cosmographies motivated a reinterpretation of the Christian mystical tradition: originally framed as resolving the problem of *knowing* divinity through the God-made-flesh, English writers revised mystical religion as addressing the problem of *existing* with and in God. In the heterodox circles of the English commonwealth, the emphasis upon immediate divine communion prioritized the religious problem of the flesh—God’s direct contact with the ensouled material body—over ecstatic religious knowledge.

This was the conclusion of the Anglican priest John Turner, who wrote at the end of the seventeenth century. Turner argued that the rise in radical sectarianism during the English Revolution began with the translations of “mystical theologues.” He was referring to Nicholas Cusa—“the adventurous determinations of the schoolmen, concerning the beatifical vision”—whose ideas are explored in the previous chapter. Turner wrote that the continental mystics lowered the divine essence “as an intelligible species to the intellect of the blessed.” By making

¹⁵⁰ As we will see in a later chapter, this theological concern staged a second problem, increasingly mutable over the second half of the seventeenth century—the relationship to immaterial and material qualities more generally, often understood by modern scholars as the mind-body problem.

¹⁵¹ Paul Lim, *Mystery Unveiled: The Crisis of the Trinity in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2012), 95-115.

God intelligible in his own mind, Turner explained that the divine became dangerously understood as influencing the being of the believer: “this species and the glorified understanding do not remain distinct things, but become identified; they do in effect affirm the soul to be transubstantiated into God.” The mystic’s knowledge of God thus allowed for unification *into* divinity. All it took was some rhetorical flourish for the sectaries of the 1640s and 1650s to transmute this idea into a literal, heretical thesis:

Seeing it's a matter of easy demonstration—that the knowledge which we shall enjoy of God in Heaven differs only in degree from that which we possess here—it will follow by a short harangue of discourse, either that believers have no knowledge of God at all in this life, or else that their souls become deified and essentially united to God by knowing him.¹⁵²

Of particular interest is the immediacy in which this enjoyment of God occurs. Indeed, it is the this-worldliness of mystical thought—“that which we possess here”—that unified for Turner a dangerous religious idea that cut across the sectarian demarcations of doctrine, creed, or personality. The radicals of the period had conflated mystical knowledge of God with the essential unification of the soul and the God.

Turner’s was a hostile account, but it contained kernels of truth. Importantly, these translations and “harangues” chipped away from the theological foundation of Trinitarian religion, especially the aspect of Christ as the sacrificial mediator between man and God. As Paul Lim has shown, the latter half of the seventeenth century experienced a crisis of the Trinity, in which the mystery of God’s triune nature was newly problematized as a locus of Trinitarian exegetical, polemical, and even judicial dispute.¹⁵³ As Turner suggested, much of this centered on the radical print milieu of the moment and, again, the translation efforts of Giles Randall. The same mystical impulse that inspired the publication of Nicholas of Cusa’s *Single Eye* in 1648 led to the translation and printing of Benet de Canfield’s *The Rule of Perfection* in the same year. Born in Essex as William Finch before converting to Catholicism and entering the Capuchin order as Benet de Canfield, *A Bright Starre Leading to, & Centering in Christ* (1646) contained Benet’s most ecstatic arguments for contemplating an accessible God.¹⁵⁴ This entailed the abnegation of the corporeal senses and the fleshly self. Benet wrote that a life of God required “unclothing” the corporeal senses, or a divine purification of the soul. The soul should be stripped “of all her forms and images of all things, as well created as uncreated, enabling her so

¹⁵² John Turner, *A Phisico-Theological Discourse Upon the Divine Being* (London, 1698), 220-221.

¹⁵³ Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 7-15, 72-85.

¹⁵⁴ Benet Canfield, *A Bright Starre Leading to and Centering in Christ* (London, 1646). Originally written as a work of counter-Reformation spirituality, the book exemplifies the wide source material of radical and Independent publications in the 1640s. Benet had translated the first two books of *The Rule of Perfection* into English; they were printed in 1609 and 1635. The third part was considered too dangerous for the popular reader as Benet felt approaching the text without the tutelage and guidance of a master would lead to dangerous, antinomian claims of personal perfection. The events of the late 1640s would prove him correct. His ideas, wholly de-contextualized from their monastic origins in the 1646 edition by Giles Randall, entered the antinomian and heretical milieu that was developing in the 1640s. See, Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, 136-137.

naked and simplified to contemplate without help or forms.”¹⁵⁵ This was not a physical type of self-abnegation. Rather the shift into an anti-formal perception was achieved by an “active annihilation” of the carnal imagination. This purged the mind’s reliance upon the intermediaries of reason and the senses that erroneously understood God through the sensory apparatus and conceptual formulations of the human mind:

’Tis therefore expedient that this active annihilation mediate to annihilate the acts of this practick love, which otherwise might hinder that enjoying, and raise so many middle walls between God and the soul.¹⁵⁶

The point was that formal forms of worship and meditation, “pratick love,” turned God into a very human abstraction. Believers erroneously relied upon their limited epistemological capabilities and should instead “resist sense” to behold “God without mean” and, as Benet phrased it, “die in God.” This meant refusing to think of God in a formal manner and refusing to think of his being in terms of transcendent elevation, personhood, or mimetic representation.¹⁵⁷ The source reveals a desire to remove the conceptual barriers that divided man and God, “the middle walls” that separated the mind and God.

While “annihilation” of the imagination could be construed as a perfectly orthodox warning about the mind’s inclination toward idolatry, it dangerously sidestepped the role of Christ as a mediator of divine grace. Spiritualist iconoclasm allowed the believer to worship without the images of the mind, enabling a direct, unmediated relationship with the divine. Other mystical translations emphasized self-abnegating practice, emphasizing the need for divine union over Christological focus. Randall’s 1648 translation of the Lutheran mystic devotional, *Theologia Germanica* admonished that religious knowledge required complete unity with God “the essence of all things which are the life of everything that lives.”¹⁵⁸ But this was predicated upon the dissolution of the self. True self-identification with God caused “the old man to be brought to nought.” This created a “deified man,” who was “endued with pure and unmingled love” and “illuminated and enbeamed with divine light.”¹⁵⁹

Given the antinomian implications to these theosophical theories— notions that man could gain direct knowledge on the nature of divinity—the translations assured the reader that Christ remained the crucial conceptual medium by which man’s limited mind understood an unlimited God.¹⁶⁰ For Benet, Christ was the contradiction that resolved the mysterious unification of Godhead and manhood. Christ was glossed as “God humaniz’d” in the 1646 English translation. Through faith in the Passion, argued Benet, “we find the glorious Godhead suited to our capacity.” But in Benet’s translation Christ’s historical existence was lost amidst his entirely mediatory functions. In and of itself, God was “a light inaccessible,” one that “dazzles the quickness of [man’s] sight.” Beholding God through faith in Christ and his Passion was akin to viewing the sun through the reflection of water in “a basin or some other vessel.” Given man’s

¹⁵⁵ Canfield, *A Bright Starre*, 49.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 111-112.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

¹⁵⁸ Anonymous, *Theologia Germanica. Or, Mystical Divinitie*, trans., Giles Randall (London, 1648), 73. The *Theologia* echoed the ideas of late medieval German mystics, including Meister Eckhart and Johannes Tauler.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 27, 67, 92.

¹⁶⁰ The *Theologia* translation claimed that deified men, those “endued, carried, and led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God and not subject to the law,” 60-61.

epistemological limits, the image of the Passion was the best one could do in this world: “So may we sat of the Godhead, which he that desires to see, must behold it in the Manhood wherein ’tis adapted to the sight of the soul.”¹⁶¹ Even the ecstatic *Theologia Germanica* held the deified man as “an imitator of Christ. The *Theologia* cautioned the believer that to avoid approaching God negligently or “by inordinate liberty,” for “this negligence was neither in Christ not any of his followers.”¹⁶²

Yet there was an undeniable desire to recast Christ as the metaphor for immediate mystical experience, one that was particularly acute in the underground of English antinomian and heretical writings. This was among the accusations leveled at the English Family of Love, a sect of sixteenth-century origins that mid-century heresiographers blamed for the rise of revolutionary heterodoxies. By the 1640s “Familists” had become almost stock characters in English heresiography. Ephraim Pagitt’s 1645 heresiology described Familists as followers of “one Henry Nicholas, born in Amsterdam.” They believed “that there is none other Deity belonging unto God, but such as men are partakers of in this life” and that “Christ is not one man, but an estate and condition of men.”¹⁶³ Other writers disparaged Familists as perfectionists, who believed unity in God allowed a libertine freedom from sin. *A Catalogue of the Severall Sects and Opinions in England*, versed Familism as a perfectionist fancy: “A perfect state, like Adam, is pretended.”¹⁶⁴

The strands connecting Familist theology and revolutionary heterodoxy were muddled. As Christopher Marsh has pointed out, one of the ironies of English Familism’s history is that its preferred description of “the Family,” chosen to imply community, cohesion, and a distinctive existence, came to be applied to radicals “covering a wide spectrum of theological and intellectual positions, with no intimate relation to one another.” Even the Presbyterian arch-heresiographer, Thomas Edwards, noted in his *Gangraena* that the English sects were not “simple and pure,” but rather a slew of confused and interweaving antinomian groups that threatened orthodox Calvinism.¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, orthodox critics depicted these ideas as flowing within a broad spiritual current, one that terrified the Calvinist theologians of the mid-seventeenth century. In 1648 the Scottish Presbyterian Samuel Rutherford claimed the Familist heresiarch “H.[endrik] N.[iclaes] wrote in dark and obscure terms, following much that wicked piece called *Theologia Germanica*, set out by Randall, 1646.”¹⁶⁶ From Rutherford’s perspective, the continental mysticism resurgent in the radical underground of the 1630s and 1640s, was part of a broader current of underground heterodox sentiment poised in dangerous antinomian

¹⁶¹ Benet, *A Bright Starre*, 227-228, 243. Furthermore, Christ prevented the delusions of those who might aspire to understand “the nakedness and sole contemplation of the Godhead.”

¹⁶² *Theologia Germanica*, 129-131.

¹⁶³ Ephraim Pagitt, *Heresiography: Or a Description of the Hereticks and Sectaries of these Latter Times* (London, 1645), 81-87. The sect so called “because their love is so great that they may join with any congregation,” were Nicodemites who concealed their true beliefs and publically misrepresented a false allegiance to orthodox doctrine.

¹⁶⁴ Anonymous, *A Catalogue of the Severall Sects and Opinions in England*, (1647).

¹⁶⁵ Christopher Marsh, *The Family of Love in English Society, 1550-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 236-237; Ann Hughes, *Gangraena and the Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 74, 101-102.

¹⁶⁶ Samuel Rutherford, *A Survey of the Spiritual Antichrist* (London, 1648), 55-56.

language. Naturally we need to be suspicious of such linkages, given their hostile provenance; but as historical work has shown, Familist writings by the German mystic, Hendrik Niclaes, provided some of the theological material for an antinomian subculture that arose in puritan circles in and around London during the 1620s and 1630s. These works were important, not as indications of socially demarcated sects, but rather as currents of thought and cultural spaces in which Familist ideas mingled with English puritanism.¹⁶⁷ These ideas remained relevant in the 1640s as the work of Niclaes, or “H.N.” as many of his manuscripts and tracts were attributed, likely motivated “perfectionist” theologies in Independent, antinomian, and sectarian circles.¹⁶⁸

Mid-century Familist writings removed Christological barriers by deconstructing belief in Christ as a bearer of God’s personal being. A strand of Familist thought emphasized the Trinity as an ontological unity, which blended God’s “essence” with the created world. The omnipresent energy of the divine was a diffuse ontological foundation for all substantive life. A collection of Familist letters, anonymous “Epistles” now held in the Cambridge University Library, taught that God was “an essential spiritual, immoveable being.” He was the spiritual power by which “all things are moved and stirred.” These letters understood the divine mystery within an inclusive, vaguely vitalist metaphysics. Even though God was “shut up in himself in his own substance,” the essential division between God and world was fluid and permeable. One epistle stressed that, in addition to his perfect heavenly existence, God also had a “natural being” as the vital life of all fleshly creatures. The letters stressed that all life gained its “breath” from this being, which reflected the diversity of life: “And this natural being is moveable, agitable, and, with all the souls and creatures which live therein, mutable or variable.”¹⁶⁹

This metaphysical emphasis upon God’s “natural being” subtly displaced Christ’s mediatory role, emphasizing that God united with humanity. The Familist epistles noted that God “flowed with the moveable humanity.” Christ’s Trinitarian function as an incarnated mean, the traditional tenet of God-made-flesh, actually existed within humanity more generally. Mankind in its totality was the essential intermediary in the universe, “placed betwixt the heavenly immoveable being and the moveable natural being.” For these Familists, God and man existed within a symbiotic relationship, one in which humanity was the manifestation of God’s “powers, wondrous acts, and omnipotence essentially in the life.”¹⁷⁰ As the locus of divine being in the world, the letters construed the incarnation in broadly Neoplatonic and vitalist terms: man had been made of the same earthy material as “bestial creation.” However, God’s emanations enlivened and saved this lower, earthly being: “the Deity made an effluence or outflowing with the Earth (named Man) and [misted] himself with the earthly humanity.” The letters equivocated

¹⁶⁷ David Como and Peter Lake, “‘Orthodoxy’ and its Discontents: Dispute Settlement and the Production of ‘Consensus’ in the London (Puritan) ‘Underground,’” *Journal for British Studies*, 39 (2000), 48-57; Peter Lake, *The Boxmaker’s Revenge: “Orthodoxy”, “heterodoxy”, and the Politics of the Parish in Early Stuart London* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2001) 178-182; Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil War England*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 7.

¹⁶⁸ Lake, *The Boxmaker’s Revenge*, 109-115,

¹⁶⁹ “Epistles Addressed to the Family of Love,” Cambridge University Library Additional Manuscript 2808 fos. 9v-10r (henceforth cited as “CUL MS Add. 2808, fos. 9v-10r”).

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 17r-18v..

regarding the antitrinitarian implications of this humanized God, noting that this divine effluence was “in some languages called Christus.”¹⁷¹

Other Familist sources reconfigured Christ as an indwelling aspect of an immanent God. Manuscript writings by the Dutch Familist Hendrik Janson, translated into English in the 1650s, considered Christ as an exemplar of God’s co-mingled spirit within the being of the believer rather than an element of the Trinitarian God. The manuscript’s translation of Janson’s Hebrew pseudonym “Hiël” as “the Coessential life of God” hinted at a theology of immanent theosis, in which God’s spirit was a unifying essence that permeated the world. In *The Mystery of the Eternity of Christ*, Hiël wrote that Christ prefigured an inclination in God to unite with humanity: “as the Christ of God is comprehended in the Being of his Father, so he desireth to incorporate and spiritualize the fallen humanity into the eternal being of his Father.”¹⁷² The deity’s desire for the incorporation of man blurred the division between the Godheads of the Trinity, as well as between God and man. Christ was the “in-speaking” of God, dwelling within the person and known through an inward and experiential meditation. Hiël wrote that man must “turn into himself and observe, taste, and feel in the innermost of his heart whither he has put on the Christ of God.” Belief in God was “a commotion or operation” within the body.¹⁷³ Given this corporealized manifestation, Hiël believed the inward operation of God in the self could only be recognized through self-abnegation and “the denial of all self ends or servitudes of the flesh.” The results of this purification Christ-like unification of man and the divine:

For when humanity and the deity are spiritualized and mutually united together, then they are like two sorts of wine, which are put into one vessel and are embodied or mixed together. And like as they cannot be separated again, each one by itself, so likewise the humanity and the deity (when they are united together) cannot be separated again from one another. Even as the Lord saith; what God hath joined together, that no man shall put asunder. For now where the Deity is, there also is the humanity, and where the humanity is, there is also the Deity.¹⁷⁴

Christ was not an historic example of divine mediation through the God made flesh. He was instead symbolic of the divine being that was spiritually diffuse, fluid, and shared in the bodies of all men.

Mystical works shifted soteriological emphasis away from the Christianity’s traditional faith in Christ, the incarnated God, as the vessel through which saving grace flowed. This was a moment of Christological contestation, in which the foundational belief in God’s distinctive and personal nature was strained and scrutinized, as early moderns reframed Christian religion as a form of praxis and epistemological refinement. There were certainly innovative exegetical maneuvers in these sources, textual strategies that have been richly analyzed as wider critique of “types” and “forms.” This blossomed in the 1630s and 1640s as scathing antinomian condemnations of puritan scripturalism, in favor of more figurative interpretations of Christ. But as Nigel Smith points out, “above all this is the profound presence of the spirit.”¹⁷⁵ The

¹⁷¹ “Epistles Addressed to the Family of Love,” CUL MS. Add. 2809, fos. 13r-13v.

¹⁷² Hendrik Janson, “The Mystery of the Eternity of Christ,” in CUL MS. Add. 2802, 22-23.

¹⁷³ Janson, “Mystery,” CUL MS. Add. 2802, 12-13.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 32-33, 85-87.

¹⁷⁵ Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, 133-135; Como, *Blown by the Spirit*, 228-238.

translation of these mystical sources, in both print and manuscript, indicates an intense desire for a different form of relationship and contact with divinity, as well as a willingness to weaken traditional Christological barriers to realize divine union and purity. As we will see, the literalization of divine immanence and spiritual indwelling would be accelerated in the ideological laboratory of English revolutionary upheaval.

Christ, Immanence, and the Radical Milieu

The idea of God and humanity as qualities “embodied or mixed together” developed within a religious and political context defined by general upheaval in mid-century England. Mystical ideas entered a shifting cultural environment, fertile in its abilities to disseminate heterodox thought to receptive audiences. The start of martial conflict in 1642 between king and parliament liberalized England’s print, as the civil war made the censorship regime increasingly dysfunctional. Even as parliament passed new regulatory measures for the press in 1643, it conceded that censorship had been “retarded through the present distractions” of civil war.¹⁷⁶ This allowed mystical ideas circulating in manuscript form, such as those expressed in the Familist letters, to find new life in print. As the decade wore on, the dizzying experience of parliamentary military victories and the continual failure to achieve a political settlement encouraged millenarian sentiment in this more liberated space.¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, the experience of sustained violence escalated the tenor of religious dispute, exacerbating diverging political and theological visions between the army and Parliament, as well as between the mainstream puritan churches and the proliferating sects.¹⁷⁸ The frustrations of the agitators within the New Model, while unable to coalesce into viable political movement of “popular spirits,” undoubtedly unchained the religious heterodoxy of Levellers and Diggers by 1649 and weakened attempts to create national theological consensus.¹⁷⁹ This context is important, but heretical and radical

¹⁷⁶ Even the parliamentary ordinance creating new regulatory measures for the press in 1643, conceded censorship had been “retarded through the present distractions” of civil war; cited in, William M. Clyde, “Parliament and the Press, 1643-7” *Library* (1933), 401-402.

¹⁷⁷ Bernard Capp, “The Fifth Monarchists and Popular Millenarianism,” in *Radical Religion in the English Revolution*, ed. J. F. McGregor and B. Reay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 165-90. J. C. Davis, “Living with the Living God: Radical Religion and the English Revolution,” in *Religion in Revolutionary England*, ed. Christopher Durston and Judith Maltby (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 19-41.

¹⁷⁸ Brian Manning, “The Levellers and Religion,” in *Radical Religion in the English Revolution*, ed. J. F. McGregor and B. Reay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 83-90; Ann Hughes, “‘The Public Profession of these Nations’: the National Church in Interregnum England,” in *Religion in Revolutionary England*, ed. Christopher Durston and Judith Maltby (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 93-114.

¹⁷⁹ Mark Kishlansky’s foundational work highlighted the intricate narrative of negotiations with Parliament regarding material grievances, indemnity, and Irish service as far more important than the Leveller conflict of 1647-1648, and stressed the “harmony of heterogeneous political and religious beliefs” within the New Model.” It is

forms of spiritualism were also newly confronting existing tensions *within* English Christian theology. Primed by antinomian critiques of scriptural literalism and divine transcendence, radical spiritualists began to dismantle the Christological barriers that prevented claims of an immanent divinity unified within man.

At the knife's edge of this tendency were the infamous "Ranters" and the striking penumbra of pamphlets, radical treatises, and blasphemy cases that surrounded the notorious sect. Historical understanding of this group has changed over the decades. Early scholars of the movement argued that the importance of the Ranters lay in their attempt to defang the archaic moral imperatives of Christianity, notably "abolishing" the concept of sin.¹⁸⁰ The root of Ranter religion, in this account, was the belief that God existed in all things. But this pantheism was combined with a plebian materialism that dismissed orthodox beliefs in personal immortality within Heaven or Hell. In this extreme form, divine immanence justified radical politics of moral and political liberation. So identifying God with man and the natural world "might lead to a mysticism which found God [in] everyone: equally it might lead to a virtual materialism which in practice dispensed with him altogether."¹⁸¹ Expressions of spiritualism teeter precariously in the historiography as the wholesale dismissal of spiritual reality. And support for such claims often rest upon the wave of sensational anti-Ranter pamphlets published during the winter of 1650-1651. This incredible series of cheaply printed, often anonymous pamphlets constructed the Ranters as a secret sectarian group that co-opted mystical pantheism to justify an array of libertine and immoral behavior. To note just one example of many, in 1650 an anonymous tract claimed the Ranters lauded those "who tipples deepest, swears the frequentest, commits adultery, incest, or buggers the oftenest, blasphemes the impudentest."¹⁸² Alternatively constructed as pseudo-Gnostics,¹⁸³ hyper-sexual Familists,¹⁸⁴ or simply irreverent plebes,¹⁸⁵ the Ranters in these pamphlets were extreme. Ranters hid in the urban anonymity of alleyway households, seedy taverns, and other marginal places: "near the pissing conduit in Cheapside" or "about Shoemaker's alley."¹⁸⁶ These pamphlets held ludic and comic undertones; readers were likely

indisputable however, that the experience of violence amplified the ideological tenor of the conflict, impacting several radical authors. *The Rise of the New Model Army* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 179-182.

¹⁸⁰ Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), 130-147.

¹⁸¹ A. L. Morton, *The World of the Ranters: Religious Radicalism in the English Revolution* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970), 70-71, 74-75.

¹⁸² Anonymous, *The Ranters Declaration* (London, 1650), 2.

¹⁸³ For examples, see Anonymous, *The Ranters Recantation* (London, 1650), 2-3; Anonymous, *The Ranters Religion* (London, 1650), 4-5.

¹⁸⁴ Gilbert Roulston, *The Ranters Bible* (London, 1650), 2; Anon. *Ranters Religion*, 5-6; see also David Cressy, "The Adamites Exposed," in *Agnes Bowker's Cat: Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 271-276, 279-280.

¹⁸⁵ Anonymous, *The Routing of the Ranters* (London, 1650), 4; John Reading, *The Ranters Ranting* (London, 1650), 1-2.

¹⁸⁶ J.M., *The Ranters Last Sermon* (London, 1654), 3; Anonymous, *The Routing of the Ranters*, 2-4.

meant to feel a tabloid blend of comedy and disgust. Most certainly, the pamphlets construe theologies of immanence as a means to libertine ends.

Such sources have been rightly scrutinized for their accuracy. J. C. Davis provocatively attacked the historiographical reliance upon these pamphlets, concluding that the Ranters described in these sources were not a real religious group, but merely a “projection of the fears and anxieties of a broader society.”¹⁸⁷ Ranters reflected the cultural and religious concerns of the Interregnum—and maybe a bit of business savvy on the part of pamphleteers, who exploited the social and religious upheavals of the moment to sell cheap print. In the wake of Davis’s historiographical intervention there was determined pushback from historians of seventeenth-century radicalism, but this broad response often continued the anachronistic attempt to rend static the fluid ideas and identities of early modern heterodoxy.¹⁸⁸ More valuable was the work of post-revisionists, who recognized the value of polemical claims not so much as bearers of truth, but as textual entities that reveal the contours of religious confrontations and the wider meaning of particular religious beliefs.¹⁸⁹ An historical text, and the ideas contained therein, bears a historical agency of its own.¹⁹⁰ In the following sections of this chapter, I make little claim that the Ranters were a significant sectarian presence at the high-water mark of English religious turmoil. Instead of approaching the Revolution’s most radical moment through various sectarian lenses, these middle sections focus upon the radical critique of Christ’s functions as mediator of grace and religious belief and the Ranter idealization of the flesh as transformed by an immanent God. I am less concerned with categorizing “Ranters” than pointing out how “ranterish” formulations of divine immanence contributed to the wider milieu’s understanding of historically specific religious problems. I see these sources not as indicators of formal organization or a received body of doctrine, but as a cultural expression of an acutely felt problem of divine mediation and contact with the person. They were an attempt to reconcile the moralized nature of Christian ontology with the desire to understand religion as substantively efficacious within the person. This approach credits the Ranter writings as a real attempt to resolve an historical specific religious problem, while recognizing their populist political preoccupations and the unsystematic, indeed often incoherent, nature of their thought.

¹⁸⁷ J. C. Davis, *Fear, Myth, and History: The Ranters and the Historians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 128-129.

¹⁸⁸ These historians accepted the validity of Davis’s curiously nominalist attempt to pare down to the “core” of the alleged sect. The ensuing conversation thus lingered frustratingly upon semantic efforts to pin down the definition and criteria by which we might pin down the meaning of a “Ranter.” See Christopher Hill, “Abolishing the Ranters,” in *A Nation of Change and Novelty: Radical Politics, Religion and Literature in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1990), 152-190; J. F. McGregor, Bernard Capp, Nigel Smith, B. J. Gibbons, “Fear, Myth and Furore: Reappraising the ‘Ranters’,” *Past & Present* 140 (Aug., 1993), 155-194.

¹⁸⁹ Anne Hughes, “The Meaning of Religious Polemic,” in *Puritanism: Transatlantic perspectives on a seventeenth-century Anglo-American Faith*, ed. Francis J. Bremer (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1993), 203.

¹⁹⁰ Anne Hughes, *Gangraena and the Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford, 2004), 10-12 et passim; see also Peter Lake and Michael Questier, “Introduction,” in *The Anti-Christ’s Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (Yale, 2002), esp. xxvii.

A common cry heard from the raucous margins of heterodoxy in the later 1640s was the description of Christ as a “type or figure” of a humanized divinity. Such was the phrase used by the nonconformist preacher Richard Coppin, originally an Episcopalian, who became an itinerant preacher in the Thames River Valley during the civil wars.¹⁹¹ At some point in the later 1640s he was preaching around Rochester, Kent, where the presbyterian minister William Sandbrooke was appointed “to preach down the blasphemies of Rich. Coppin and his besotted and begotted followers.”¹⁹² This was not a singular incident as Coppin was constantly in trouble for his views. During the Interregnum he was tried for blasphemy in courts up and down the Thames River valley in Worcester, Oxford, and Gloucestershire. Formal judicial punishment did not occur until December of 1655 when he was imprisoned for six months in Maidstone, Kent for blasphemy.¹⁹³

In the autumn of 1649, his three-part *Divine Teachings* appeared, published in London by Giles Calvert. In the books, Coppin stressed that Christ, the historical Son, was a precursor to the divine essence’s absorption of the human being: Christ provided a model of divine theosis in which man took on the Godhead. “Had not his image, Jesus Christ, died in the second Adam,” wrote Coppin, “human nature could not have grown up to such a stature and such a fullness as now it is advanced to in the Godhead itself.” In this sense, Christ the God humanized, provided atonement in its literal sense—the “making of one” in which human beings’ carnal distinctiveness was dissolved into spiritual unity.¹⁹⁴ Coppin thus replaced the distinctive Christ *qua* historical instance of God-man for an allegorical Christ symbolizing divinity’s accessible quality. Man could—through the acceptance of the spiritualized “Christ”—be made into a “complete union of God, Christ, and the Saints together, Christ in the middle.”¹⁹⁵

Coppin’s revision of Christ into “type,” or a symbolic prefiguration of the divinized saint, was extremely provocative, but it was not unique. These typologies extended beyond sectarian boundaries. Others accused of holding these “strange opinions,” included the heterodox minister, John Pordage of Bradford, Berkshire, who claimed, “Jesus Christ was not God, and that he was a Type.” Christ had only been a personified pattern of God, a facsimile or “a shadow, and not the substance.”¹⁹⁶ In other words, Christ was merely a metaphor for the believer’s substantial transformation into godliness. Others who were still willing to concede Christ’s historicized personhood believed he was now spiritualized. The millenarian Thomas Royle noted, “the history of the Scriptures [...] were mightily taken with the person of Christ, and with those fleshly privileges he carried about while he was in the body.” But Christ’s present manifestation would not be “external to the body” of the believer. All would “be made partakers of the divine

¹⁹¹ “Coppin, Richard (*fl.* c. 1645–1659),” Nigel Smith in ODNB, ed. Lawrence Goldman, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Coppin had contact with Abiezer Coppe, who wrote the preface to *Divine Teachings* (London, 1649), “An Additional and Preambular Hint.”

¹⁹² Anthony Wood, *Athenæ Oxonienses* (London, 1692), 149.

¹⁹³ Morton, *World of the Ranters*, 97-98.

¹⁹⁴ Richard Coppin, *Advancement of All Things in Christ in Divine Teachings* (London, 1649), 7-9. This third book of *Divine Teachings* has separate pagination.

¹⁹⁵ Richard Coppin, *Antichrist in Man Opposeth Emmmanuel or God in Us*, in *Divine Teachings* (London, 1649), 38.

¹⁹⁶ John Pordage, *Innocencie Appearing, through the Dark Mists of Pretended Guilt* (London, 1655), 81.

nature.”¹⁹⁷ Similarly, Winstanley considered Christ as precursor stage to God’s millennial immanence: “Even so, that single body [Christ] is a type: that the same spirit that filled every member of that one body should in these last days be sent into whole mankind.”¹⁹⁸ These typologies subordinated the historical god-man Christ to Christ’s omnipresent spirit. For Coppin, God’s spiritual omnipresence implied material presence. He wrote that God “planted the image of eternity, the image of the divine being” within the world and the “flesh of the Saints.”¹⁹⁹ This was not allegory: there was a direct ontological connection between the being of God and that of human beings. Coppin’s God dwelled in human beings and sustained them:

God dwells in us as in a cloud of darkness, and is himself the substance of us. Though he lie hid at the bottom of us, as the substance of an oak lies hid in the oak, though the oak hath cast of its leaves, so the holy seed which is God himself shall be the substance of us.²⁰⁰

Furthermore, God comprehended all things, including human beings who contained the spirit of God. This unity with mankind was predicated upon God’s necessarily singular being. Coppin insisted God was “all in one and so is in everyone,” entailing a complete unity of mankind and the Spirit. “God,” he wrote, “cannot be divided or broken asunder as to be some in this man or some in that man; to be a little here or a little there.” Rather, the preacher held that God was “perfect in one, who is complete and full in himself and is himself and can be nothing but himself.” The divine’s unity with mankind was predicated upon a monistic immanence, in which “the same God which dwells in one, dwells in another, even all.”²⁰¹ Deconstructing the Christological barriers that had mediated (and thus distributed) the saving grace and fellowship of God allowed Coppin to coherently claim that God had an equal presence in the bodies of men.

That same year, 1649, similar ideas were expressed by the New Model army chaplain Joseph Salmon, who argued in a tract entitled *Divinity Anatomized* that God’s historical embodiment in Christ was an inferior prefiguration to the later indwelling spirit.²⁰² Salmon’s exact origins are obscure; but he described his religious trajectory as following the usual route to sectarian heterodoxy: a movement in stages from episcopacy, to presbyterianism, to independency, to the sects. Salmon’s spiritualist thoughts were likely composed in 1650 while he was imprisoned in Coventry for blasphemy.²⁰³ “As an exact pattern and full compendium of all the glory and

¹⁹⁷ Thomas Royle, *A Glimpse of Some Truths To Be Made Known In These Last Times*, (London, 1648) 4.

¹⁹⁸ Gerrard Winstanley, *The New Law of Righteousness Budding Forth* (London, 1649), 9.

¹⁹⁹ Coppin, *Advancement of All Things*, 13-14.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

²⁰¹ Coppin, *Glorious Mystery of Divine Teachings in Divine Teachings* (London, 1649), 8-9.

²⁰² Joseph Salmon’s first publication, *A Rout, A Rout: Or Some Part of the Armies Quarters Beaten Up* (London, 1649), was intended for a martial audience: the “Fellowship (of Saints scattered) in the Army.” The work responded to the officer crackdown on the Leveller-Agitators in the New Model. Salmon warned the army Grandees that the Lord was “coming forth to rip up your bowels, to search your hearts,” 4.

²⁰³ “Salmon, Joseph (*fl.* 1647–1656),” Nigel Smith in *ODNB*. By his own account in his 1651 abdication of Ranterish opinions, *Heights in Depths*, Salmon described a period of

happiness of the Christian,” Christ was a representative image or type representing an early version of the fully spiritualized Christian. He thus relegated Christ as a “carnal similitude” or precursor for the “fullness of God” manifested within the flesh of man.²⁰⁴ Religion was not a set of practices to access Christ’s saving grace. Rather for Salmon it was a transformative process in which the Saint was transformed the unitary functions of the God’s spirit. These claims contrasted the external manifestation of the Godhead in Christ with the immanent divinization of the Saint. The former army chaplain considered himself as evidence for this paradox. In the preface to *Divinity Anatomized* he claimed his writings reflected the discovery of truth “which is wrought in me” and that he had had “seen, heard, tasted, and handled of the mystery of life.” Salmon’s experience led him to claim that the mystery of Christ was “God in flesh... manifesting or discovering himself in our flesh and nature.”²⁰⁵

This corporeal manifestation entailed the spatial delocalization of the divine. Salmon argued that God was formally indistinct. “God is not bound to any one manner of evidence,” he wrote, since the divine could not be contained within any “limitable quality.” God was “not tied to any way, form, or manner” in terms of his manifestation to his people. Echoing similar critiques of a distinctive transcendence, Salmon described this in the spatial terms of heaven’s location. “Why then,” asked Salmon “have we such carnal thoughts of heaven, as thinking it either to be some local paradise where God resides or else very far from us?” Salmon asked provocatively whether heaven “is anywhere more local than in the saints?” It was within the saint that God was “daily discovering himself” and giving the “powerful influence” of his presence. He concluded, “the kingdom of Heaven is within you.”²⁰⁶ Salmon unpacked the divine being out from the formalized body of Christ. The evidence of God could not be “bound” to any single formal phenomena.²⁰⁷ Yet critiquing the transcendent idea of God did not mean abandoning the literal presence of the divine. Even as Commonwealth authorities cracked down on his perceived blasphemies, Salmon doubled down on God’s real immanence. Forced through his imprisonment in 1651 to abdicate views about the moral freedom of the saint, “which rendered me most vile and ugly in the sight of all men,” Salmon remained adamant that God existed within the material world. God was a pure being, vitalizing all creation as “that secret blood, breath and life that silently courses

ecstatic seeking in the late 1640s followed by a time when he “became a mad man... tumbling in [his] own vomit.” Continuing the emetic metaphor, Salmon noted his ideas in *Divinity Anatomized* upset “the weak stomachs of many.” But he was ambivalent in recantation: “if they were well chewed (and not so suddenly swallowed without relishing the nature of them) they would be better digested then they are.” *Heights in Depths and Depths in Heights* (London, 1651), 10-19, 33-34.

²⁰⁴ Joseph Salmon, *Divinity Anatomized*, in *A Collection of Ranter Writings: Spiritual Liberty and Sexual Freedom in the English Revolution*, ed. Nigel Smith (London: Pluto Press, 2014), 187.

²⁰⁵ Salmon, *Divinity Anatomized*, 171-172, 174-175, 187.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 179-181.

²⁰⁷ The extremely antinomian implication of this divine manifestation was a moral freedom from “the outward law.” The Saint was “the true libertine... one that walks in the spirit, is led by the spirit... he is free in all his actions.” Acting in God, the Saint was free from the rules of the carnal law, having ascended into a higher, passive existence determined by the spirit. Salmon, *Divinity Anatomized*, 195, 197-198.

through the hidden veins and close arteries of the whole creation.”²⁰⁸ Salmon, maintained the close spiritual and corporeal relationship between God and creation, even when forced to condemn practical antinomianism’s spiritual liberty and inversions of accepted moral behavior.²⁰⁹

These claims flattened Christ’s theological mediation into metaphorical, or perhaps allegorical, proxy for the real and immediate change within the body and soul of the believer. There was not much Christ left in Coppin and Salmon’s form of Christianity. There was then, as A.L. Morton has argued, a strong mystical aspect to the Ranter sources, recasting traditional Christian dogma into interpretive rubrics for direct religious knowledge from an accessible, omnipresent divinity.²¹⁰ But this impulse went beyond the mystical dismissal of traditional ecclesiastical mediations to destabilize the very theological foundation of Christian religion—the penitential sacrifice of the God-made-man as the necessary grace for salvation. If Christ was the “fleshly tabernacle” of God, to use Milton’s phrase, then the history of the Son merely displayed a contemporary form of divine contact within the flesh of the Saint. This was more than mystical knowledge; for the spiritualists of the late 1640s, religion was a question of the nature of God’s direct enrichment of man’s substance, coursing through “hidden veins and close arteries.” Religion was divinity anatomized.

“Flesh be Made Spirit”: Ranter Spiritualism

How then did an immanent immaterial spirit, containing God’s perfect qualities as an eternally divine Creator, reconcile with the mutable, flawed, and obviously corporeal being of man? Ranters addressed the great ontological weight of divine immanence by revising the moralized metaphysical categories of “flesh” and “spirit.” We see this explicitly in the writings of Jacob Bauthumley, a shoemaker from Leicester who fought in the civil wars and rose to the rank of quartermaster in the parliamentary armies. In 1650, while still in the army, Bauthumley wrote *The Light and Dark Sides of God*, a spiritualist pamphlet with striking expressions of God’s omnipresent existence. For his efforts, Bauthumley was punished for blasphemy in March of 1650. His sword broken over his head and he was cashiered from the army. The Quaker William Dewsbury recalled that Bauthumley was also “burned through the tongue in the army for setting forth a book called the light and dark sides of God.”²¹¹ George Fox encountered the shoemaker in 1650 after his punishment in the village Swannington, northwest of Leicester, and

²⁰⁸ Salmon, *Heights in Depths*, 24, 38-39.

²⁰⁹ Interestingly, another alleged Ranter, Abiezer Coppe, when forced by imprisonment to recant his beliefs in January of 1651, insisted on the truth of divine immanence, that “God Christ is in the creature.” While disowning the belief that God dwelled exclusively in the human creature, he maintained an ostensibly orthodox version of divine immanence: “I live in that sound and orthodox opinion of omnipresency,” *A Remonstrance of the Sincere and Zealous Protestation of Abiezer Coppe* (London, 1651), 4.

²¹⁰ Morton, *World of the Ranters*, 70-71, 74-75.

²¹¹ “William Dewsbury to George Fox, 1654,” Friends House Library, Swarthmore Manuscripts, 3. 22 (Henceforth cited as “FHL SW. MS. 3. 22.”)

described him as “a great Ranter.”²¹² *The Light and Dark Sides of God*, which precipitated Bauthumley’s mutilation in the spring of 1650, described God as an immanent being that permeated through the world, but with particular intensity in the flesh of man. The shoemaker articulated a belief that closely approximated a vital pantheism, the belief that God was not only omnipresent, but the actual being and essential spirit that enlivened the universe. He wrote that while he had once conceived of God as having “personal being and presence in one place more than another,” but he had come to realize that God was not an elevated transcendent being. God was not circumscribed into any single location, but existed within the entirety of all created beings:

I see that God is in all Creatures—man and beast, fish and fowl, and every green thing from the highest cedar to the ivy on the wall—and that God is the life and being of them all, and that God doth really dwell, and, if you will, personally, if he may admit so low an expression in them all, and hath his being no where else out of the creatures.²¹³

This emphasis upon God’s universal indwelling also entailed a singular divine existence; Bauthumley carefully noted that God was not “so many distinct being.” Rather all creation was “but one entire being.” There was not “the least flower or herb in the field, but there is the divine being by which it is that which it is.”²¹⁴ Despite the formal distinctions between men, beasts, and trees, all things existed within a singular being of God.

The divine being’s pervasive omnipresence created an interesting contradiction that Bauthumley struggled to reconcile in *The Light and Dark Sides of God*. He wrote, while God was “pleased to dwell in flesh, and to dwell with and in man, yet He is not flesh, nor doth the flesh partake of the divine being.” Faced with the reconciliation of divinity and flesh, Bauthumley waffled semantically: God resided within the flesh, but he was not constituted by flesh; God maintained some distinction from the substance of the material world. The shoemaker phrased this in various ways. God was not *of* flesh, but he was “pleased to live *in* flesh and, as the Scripture says, he is *made* flesh and he *appears* in several forms of flesh.”²¹⁵ Bauthumley recognized that divine residence within an ontologically inferior, material world introduced a new set of intellectual problems. The existence of a perfect, immaterial God within the obviously mutable and imperfect corporeality of the world presented a theological conundrum.

For Bauthumley this was resolved (somewhat weakly) through the distinction between flesh and spirit, and through the eschatological expectation of the world’s end. Although God lived in flesh, the world would end when he retracted his being—“and so all things shall come to nothing that are below him.” The millennium would usher in a final transcendent substance, in which God would “cease to live in the human nature,” but would eternally continue as unified spirit. The formal distinctions and differentiations of material bodies would dissipate. In Bauthumley’s

²¹² Morton, *World of the Ranters*, 96-97. By the end of the Protectorate, Bauthumley had become respectable enough to be appointed a sergeant-at-mace for Leicester and after the Restoration was appointed library keeper for the town. See “Bothumley, Jacob (1613–1692),” Nigel Smith in *ODNB*.

²¹³ Jacob Bauthumley, *The Light and Dark Sides of God* (London, 1650), 4.

²¹⁴ Bauthumley, *Light and Dark Sides of God*, 5-7. Although Bauthumley believed there was a material equivalence between all flesh: “there is no difference betwixt man and beast.” He did qualify, however, that God appeared more gloriously in man.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 7-8. My emphasis.

words, “the divine being never dies; though the clothing dissolve and come to nothing.” Man’s flesh would perish, but the soul—which Bauthumley described as the “substance, which is God”—would return into the essential spirit of the divine being.²¹⁶

Bauthumley certainly sounds like the case study par excellence of a libertine Ranter: God was “glorified in sin,” wrote Bauthumley, “as contraries set together illustrate one another.” The sinful nullity or “dark side” of God served to heighten and accent the brightness of the light, hence the tract’s title. It was likely this view that led the commanders of the New Model to cashier the shoemaker-quartermaster and bore through his tongue with a hot piece of metal. But Bauthumley’s hamartiology, his theory of sin, was again predicated upon the uneasy reconciliation of divine and corporeal qualities. The fraught relationship between flesh and spirit collapsed the moralized differences between spirit, soul, and body. Bauthumley described sin as “nothing,” lacking any sort of substantial influence upon the religious nature of a creature. Sin was “rather primitive than positive, we call it and give it a being, though indeed in itself it hath none.” It was instead an inward “deficiency in the creature.”²¹⁷

Bauthumley wondered, if “all men grant [the soul] is immortal and came from God pure and undefiled,” how then could the soul then sin, or become subject to the torments of hell? While the soul “was infused into the body, yet I am sure it was not of the body, nor could the flesh be capable of such a thing as we call union with the spirit.” The division between divine and material extended to the “distinct and formal difference” between the soul and body. Since the soul was derived directly from the being of God, indeed in Bauthumley’s phrasing “is no other but of God, and if I may say further without offense, it is God,” it was another problematic node within God’s existential relationship with the created world. God’s blurry relationship with the material body paradoxically reinforced the divine’s essential distinctness. While divine spirit enlivened flesh, it could not itself be influenced by fleshly corruption. Bauthumley wrote, “how flesh should defile a spirit I cannot imagine, being that I am sure, and as every man will grant, that no effect can be produced beyond its cause.” Unlike George Foster, Bauthumley considered the vital soul, part of God’s being, as equivalent with the human mind (“the understanding, reason, judgment, will, and affections.” As a part of God, it could not be “infected with sin.” Flesh could not defile spirit.²¹⁸

The relationship of divine soul and corporeal flesh was a one-way flow of divine substance emanating from God. Bauthumley’s peculiar combination of vitalizing immanence and dualist ontology denied transformation between the substances, while claiming that God’s spirit inundated the flesh. The Resurrection would unveil man’s basic dualist qualities. He described all fleshly creatures as substantially homogenous, flattening man’s distinctive place in the created world:

I really see that the flesh of man and of all other creatures differ not anything in the nature of them indeed, in respect of the kind and manner. Some flesh is of men, some of beasts, and some of fishes, but as flesh none of them are capable of any more glory than one another, all being of the same mold and coming to the same end, and though the spirit in them, or whatsoever is God in them, return to their original, which is God, and

²¹⁶ Ibid., 8-9.

²¹⁷ Bauthumley, *Light and Dark Sides of God*, 36-37.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 49-52.

so lives in him again. Yet the fleshly part returns to dust from whence it came.²¹⁹

Bauthumley was reading Christian texts allegorically: he understood scripture as “spiritual and inward.” But this did not make these two qualities of “flesh/carnal” and “spirit” into mere modes for biblical understanding. Rather Bauthumley understood the divide as an ontological issue, a matter of substances and their nature, and he applied this concern back upon the text of scripture. He insisted it was “ridiculous” to assert that the corporeal flesh could be converted into a “spiritual body.” This bucked metaphysics.²²⁰ But Bauthumley’s quasi-vitalism sat uncomfortably with his emphasis upon the stark moral and substantial divide between flesh and spirit. There are echoes here of a Gnostic, perhaps Manichean, dualism, an emphasis upon the dramatic metaphysical division between God and man.²²¹ His attempt to reconcile divine immanence pushed the categories of spirit and flesh to a conceptual breaking point. Faced with this tension between spiritual and corporeal qualities, the shoemaker was forced to punt to eschatology, relieving the ontic pressure upon the flesh through the expectation of personal dissolution.

Alternatively, we might read all this metaphysical hairsplitting as bad-faith theology. Such a reading would consider the curious emphasis on flesh and spirit as an effort to erode Christian moral imperatives through logical acrobatics. Lawrence Clarkson, an itinerant preacher and alleged Ranter, seems a case study for such a reading. Clarkson wrote that sin was merely imagined: “it is but imagination... the very title, ‘sin,’ is only a name without substance, has no being in God, nor in the creature... It is not the body, nor the life, but the imagination only.”²²² Sin lacked substantive being. His short religious tract, *A Single Eye*, was reported in the House of Commons for encouraging “abominable practices” and motivated in part the Blasphemy Act of 1650. The House resolved to burn all copies of the tract.²²³ But Clarkson’s perfectionist dismissal of sin was embedded within an intense interest in the relationship between corporeality and divine contact. His religious ideas, most certainly a form of libertine antinomianism, still worked within the larger eschatological and anthropological tensions faced by contemporary writers.

²¹⁹ Bauthumley, *Light and Dark Sides of God*, 57-58. Given that man’s flesh was essentially corporeal and different from God’s spirit, Bauthumley insisted it was “ridiculous” when men asserted “that the corporal body shall be made a spiritual.”

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 54-55, 57-58, 69. The phrasing on these pages is somewhat ambiguous, but Bauthumley confirms the substantial divide in terms of vision further below: “I always took God to be a spirit and invisible, and that no created fleshly things was able to see him. I cannot imagine then how Job’s eyes, which were and should be in a visible form and shape, should be capable of such a divine invisible vision.”

²²¹ For a neo-Gnostic interpretation, see Jerome Friedman, *Blasphemy, Immorality and Anarchy: The Ranters and the English Revolution* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1987), 19, 70.

²²² Laurence Clarkson, *A Single Eye: All Light, No Darkness; Or Light and Darkness One* (London, 1650), 9.

²²³ ‘House of Commons Journal Volume 6: 21 June 1650’, in *Journal of the House of Commons: Volume 6, 1648-1651* (London, 1802), 427-428, 474-475. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/commons-jrnl/vol6/pp427-428> [accessed 19 June 2016].

Clarkson differed in his conclusions, but not in his formulation of religion as a material negotiation of fleshly and spiritual qualities.

Clarkson was certainly a man of his times. He left the Church of England in 1630 on a typical antinomian religious trajectory, passing through presbyterian and independent congregations before falling in among various sectarian groups in London, Suffolk, and Norfolk.²²⁴ His autobiography, *The Lost Sheep Found*, recounted an eventful life during the civil wars and revolution. He joined Parliament's eastern association army in 1644 as a preacher before being baptized near the Tower of London. By the late 1640s he made contact with a group of pantheistic antinomians known as "My One Flesh" through the radical publisher, Giles Calvert.²²⁵ His religious opinions were in a "constant state of flux," reflecting a blend of "mechanic preacher" homiletics, opportunism, and receptiveness to unorthodox ideas. Indeed, by the end of the Interregnum he was maneuvering (unsuccessfully) to become leader of the sect that would become known as "Muggletonians."²²⁶

A Single Eye, a tract published in the summer of 1650, is the fullest extant expression of Clarkson's religious thinking during his phase as "captain of the rant."²²⁷ The book's key textual metaphor was Isaiah's prophecy that God "will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight." (Isa. 42.16). Since God's omnipresence and omnipotence was the source of all power—"that the power of light, life, and salvation cometh from God"—Clarkson provocatively maintained that God must also be the source of all "powers" of darkness, i.e. evil and sin:

Yea, it was the power of God as is recorded: I form light, I create darkness, I form peace, I create evil. So that let it be a power, whatsoever, in whomsoever, whether in flesh or spirit, wicked or Godly, it is the power of God, yea came from God. So that in time, he will make this power of darkness a power of light.

God necessarily contained this seeming contradiction of plural and opposed powers, the power to create and uphold both light and darkness. Clarkson further illustrated this point through the metaphor of a mountain stream: "although these [powers] be distinct, in reference to their several operations, as two streams run in contrary ways, yet they are but of one nature and that from one fountain."²²⁸ Ostensibly sinful behavior was redemptive insofar as its substantive origin was sourced in divine omnipotence. This "monistic impulse" meant that sin was an imagined projection.²²⁹

²²⁴ Clarkson wrote that his leaving the Church of England coincided with his abandonment of his belief of God's anthropological transcendence: "that my God was a grave, ancient, holy old man, as I supposed sat in heaven." Laurence Clarkson, *The Lost Sheep Found* (London, 1660), 6.

²²⁵ Accused of sexual impropriety while "dipping" several women, Clarkson famously replying to several court examiners, "Surely your experience teaches you the contrary, that nature has small desire to copulation in water." *Ibid.*, 15, 24.

²²⁶ Clarkson, *Lost Sheep Found*, 4-12; Barry Reay, "Laurence Clarkson: An Artisan and the English Revolution," in *The World of the Muggletonians*, ed. Christopher Hill, Barry Reay, and William Lamont (London: T. Smith, 1983), 167-186.

²²⁷ Clarkson, *Lost Sheep Found*, 25-28.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 6. Also expressed retrospectively in Clarkson, *Lost Sheep Found*, 28.

²²⁹ Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, 248-250.

Much as contemporary radicals, like Bauthumley and Foster, Clarkson believed salvation was not an elevation of the saints, “consisting of flesh and bone,” into heaven. He denied this entire schema of Resurrection. Man’s fleshly body could not go “to a local place called Heaven,” which would be counter to its nature, like birds living under water or “fish in firmament.” Resurrection for Clarkson was self knowledge: “take a full view of what the body is made of, whether a visible body consisting of flesh and bone, or invisible body, consisting of the sensitive within this body.” Unlike Bauthumley, he dismissed the moralized dualisms of Christianity, arguing that redemption was the realization that the moralized divisions between body and spirit were imaginary. Spirit and flesh were coextensive. Clarkson argued, “the corrupt senses must put on incorruption,” creating an epistemological shift within the person: “till acted that so called sin, thou art not delivered from the power of sin, but ready upon all the alarms to tremble and fear the reproach of thy body.”²³⁰ Sin itself resolved deceptive tendencies of the imagination. One gained “purer” eyes to recognize the spiritual singularity that bound the world together through God’s power:

So that I say, till flesh be made spirit, and spirit flesh—so not two, but one—thou art in perfect bondage. For without vail, I declare that whosoever doth attempt to act from flesh, in flesh, to flesh, hath, is, and will commit adultery. But to bring this to a period, for my part, till I acted that so called sin, I could not predominate over sin, so that now whatsoever I act is not in relation to the title, to the flesh, but that eternity in me.²³¹

This inversionary religion functioned as a sort of extreme epistemological activation, allowing the individual believer to recognize the monistic interconnection of all spiritually infused flesh.²³² The recognition of sin’s non-existence, collapsed the divisions between spirit and flesh. This enabled the ability to recognize that “all creatures are but one creature and this my form, the representative of the whole creation.”²³³ The transcendence of godly spirit was dissolved within the fleshly world and centered by the corporeal form of the saint.

The Ranters’ blending of millenarian, Leveller, and antinomian variations of divine immanence, reflect specific theological tensions created by the antinomian critique of transcendence and the desire for unmediated and transformative contact between man and God. Divine immanence placed pressure onto traditional ideas of heavenly transcendence. Of course, these ideas had political resonance. The Ranters’ striking revisions of the human self through perfectionist anthropology elicited a strong response from Parliament and Presbyterian ministers.²³⁴ The prominence of the spirit/flesh antithesis within spiritualist sources was less the

²³⁰ Ibid., 13-14.

²³¹ Clarkson, *A Single Eye of Light*, 14.

²³² Similarly, the alleged Ranter Abiezer Coppe considered his antics as having a similar transformative effect. Sin and other transgressive behaviors allowed the believer to recognize the monistic interconnection of all spiritually infused flesh. It was, Coppe famously argued, through “based things,” such as swearing, sexual impropriety, and improper impositions on elites, that one arose “out of the flesh into spirit.” See Abiezer Coppe, *A Second Fiery Flying Roule* (1649), 7-8; Coppe, *Some Sweet Sips of Some Spirituall Wine* (London, 1649), 2-3.

²³³ Ibid., 14.

²³⁴ Paul Lim has helpfully contextualized this “anti-antinomian backlash” in the wider Trinitarian controversies of the period; *Mystery Unveiled*, 109-115.

blossoming of a populist occult subculture in southern England, than it was the confrontation with historically specific consequences of specific religious cultural tendencies toward the divine immanence. Nor was it the upwelling of centuries-old radical sentiment, a populist culvert forced underground by the authorities of orthodox English Protestantism. As Nicholas McDowell reminds us, Ranter beliefs were the product specific cultural and historical contexts rather than the “efflorescence of an autochthonous folk irreligion.”²³⁵ Moreover, it does not matter whether there were two, or twenty, or two thousand Ranters. Far more important is how their ideas reflected a broader problem of religious culture that prompted interesting, if idiosyncratic, attempts at reconciling the qualities of God within the flesh.

The radical spiritualists of the English Revolution interrogated the moralized division separating the metaphysical categories of flesh and spirit. This was a dual effort to rehabilitate the body as a site of an immanent, perhaps pantheistic, divinity, and to reformulate God as embedded into, not removed from, the material stuff of the world. By saturating the flesh with spirit, Ranters exploded traditional theological concepts, most especially sin, that constructed the material body as inherently fallen through sin. But by magnifying the fraught divide between flesh and spirit, radical writers struggled to understand the points of contact between spiritual and material qualities. Eschatology, the ultimate fate of man, was redeployed, but without its traditional theological functions as a signal of otherworldly locals of heaven and hell. Rather, the end of man functioned as lens for understanding the nature of man and his composite qualities—flesh, soul, spirit, life. Ranters stripped eschatology of its transcendent teleology; salvation now entailed the conversion of flesh into spirit or the subsuming of soul into the divine essence. Spiritual imperatives were reframed as a problem of substance and the embodiment of the human self.

Mystical Literalism and PseudoChristi

The problem of the flesh extended beyond the “Ranter core,” into a range of heterodox, formulations of the indwelling spirit. Bauthumley and Clarkson’s obsessive interest in the relationship of spirit and flesh was felt more broadly within the religious culture and lived experience of populist Protestantism. Other writers of the Interregnum were similarly reflective about the material anxieties latent in Christian Protestantism and the implications of an immanent God. What did it mean to live in flesh if God existed within it? There was a wider interest in this question, as well as the direct, this-worldly rehabilitation of the moralized flesh. If we move past the search for the “existence of some sort of movement” or socially cohesive religious orientation, we can recognize a wider confrontation of religious materialism in the aftermath of the English civil wars.²³⁶ Of course, we should be cautious in our reconstruction of the ideological fascia that bound together disparate individuals; both contemporary polemicists and modern historians undoubtedly strained source evidence into untenable proofs of sectarian influence. While this was expressed in differing ways, there was shared interest in addressing the questions of God’s material influence upon the body and the desire for literal transformation of the self by means of divine contact upon the corporeal body.

²³⁵ Nicholas McDowell, *Radical Imagination: Culture, Religion, and Revolution, 1630-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 11.

²³⁶ B. J. Gibbons, “Fear, Myth and Furore,” 178-180.

There were similarities between the materialism of the Mass and the spiritual literalism embedded in radical Protestant claims of divine union. The Independent divine, Thomas Goodwin, reflecting on “the absurdities of those ranting opinions” that had arisen during the Revolution, decried the heresy of divine immanence.²³⁷ This idea made creatures into “pieces and parcels of God himself.” Goodwin’s hostile account stressed that this spiritual pan(en)theism was understood as real and substantial:

They say, the visible appearance is indeed as of creatures, but really, materially, and substantially, they are all but God. So as I may rightly express this opinion of theirs, they would make a transubstantiation of the great God, such as the papists (though they in a contrary way to this) make a transubstantiated Christ. For what say they, but that the creatures, or elements of bread and wine, are changed into the substance of the body and blood of Christ substantially; yea, into Christ himself, soul and body present, and lying veiled under the appearance of bread and wine. But these men would have the divine essence of God transubstantiated into the outward appearance of several shapes of creatures, the substance of which is God, lying, as they would have it hidden under that outward visibility.²³⁸

For Goodwin this was all so much bunkum—the result of diabolic “fancies.” But suggests even hostile contemporaries granted the realism of pantheistic ideas. The danger of these ideas was not that they evacuated God into a spiritualized metaphor, but that they framed creation as a trichotomy of flesh, soul/mind, and divine essence.²³⁹ Henry More, the famous anti-enthusiast, agreed that spiritualists believed union with God was “real and physical deification,” before sneering that such claims were “a sign they are stark naught.”²⁴⁰

The point, however, was that such claims literalized the reconciliation of divine immanence with natural creation by blending the properties of divinity with those of man’s material substance. So when in 1652 the former parliamentarian officer Robert Norwood described mystical contact with God in the language of transubstantiation, he meant it literally. Norwood argued that eating material bread and wine could not be a true communion. Christ’s flesh and blood was a divine substance, essentially different from man’s carnal body, and thus impossible for unprepared humans to consume. Norwood wrote, “nothing can feed or refresh that which is not of the same nature and essence with itself.” Communion with the divine, required internal changes to man’s “invisible nature.” Communion could not occur in terms of the outward flesh and bread. Rather scripture’s discussion of the sacraments was to be “taken in reference to an inward, invisible power, nature, and essence.” Norwood took this inward-looking theology

²³⁷ For discussion on the likely revolutionary context of Goodwin’s collected work, (as opposed to interpreting them as the product of Restoration disillusionment despite their posthumous publication between 1682 and 1704), see Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 115-117.

²³⁸ Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D. Sometime President of Magdalene College, Oxford*, ed., James Nichol (Edinburgh, 1863), vol. vii, 3-4.

²³⁹ Much as early reformers criticized the Mass as illogically breaking into pieces and parts the unitary being of God, so Goodwin accused spiritualists of crumbling “the invisible simple nature of God into little fragments and parcels.” *Works*, 3-4.

²⁴⁰ Henry More, *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness* (London, 1660), 14-15.

seriously: the soldier began an extreme fast in an attempt to change his inward essence, apparently dying in the process.²⁴¹

The physically efficacy of divine contact was dramatically evident in the spiritual diary of Ann Bathurst, an early member of the Philadelphians, a mystical group with panentheistic ideas. She expressed a continual interest in divine contact as a specific form of corporeal purification.²⁴² As noted above, Bathurst claimed in her diary, “Rhapsodical Meditations and Visions,” that she developed heightened mystical sensibilities in 1659 after an illness led to a religious crisis.²⁴³ In so doing, she followed in a well-established mystical and visionary idiom, which crossed confessional lines and which saw divine contact as a means of transformative union. To use just one illustrative example, this mystical unionism is well-known in the writings of the Spanish Carmelite friar, John of the Cross, whose reflections in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, posited that God’s being “sustains every soul and dwells in it substantially.” John illustrated this with the example of rays of sunshine upon a smudgy window. If the stains and grime on the window are not wiped away, the window will be less illuminated by the sun’s light. “The extent of illumination is not dependent upon the ray of sunlight but upon the window,” John reasoned. “If the window is totally clean and pure, the sunlight will so transform and illumine it that to all appearances the window will be identical with the ray of sunlight and shine just as the sun’s ray.” Resolving the problem of religious union required work upon the self. For John of the Cross, the efficacious influence of the supernatural relied upon the habits and godly dispositions of the person.²⁴⁴

While Bathurst shared in this older ambition toward supernatural purity and union, a crucial shift occurred. Mystical contact had become hypostatical, i.e. pertaining to substance, rather than epistemological and relating to religious knowledge. With a remarkably erotic sensibility, Bathurst’s visions outline how Christ purified her flesh by continually entering, filling, and satisfying her physical body.²⁴⁵ This culminated in September of 1679 when Bathurst had a rhapsodic series of visions in which Christ incorporated himself into her flesh, revealing a uniquely English idiom of realism. She emphasized the corporeal obstructions to divine union and the consequent need for purification of the interior flesh. Bathurst wrote that the divine Trinity “opened my stomach and clasped themselves one in another and went into my stomach and closed it up again.” God removed the impurities of her gut and declared his communion with her. Several days later, Bathurst had yet another vision in which Christ removed the impure

²⁴¹ Robert Norwood, *The Case and Trial of Captain Norwood* (London, 1652), 18-19; Anonymous, *The English Hermite* (London, 1655), “The Publisher to the Reader.”

²⁴² B. J. Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 113-114.

²⁴³ “A volume closely written, of rhapsodical meditations and visions by Mrs. Ann Bathurst,” Bodl. MS Rawlinson, D. 1262, fos. 6-7.

²⁴⁴ Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, trans., *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross* (Washington D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1979), 115-118.

²⁴⁵ While the idea of the female mystic serving as a vessel for the divine was by no means novel, the apolitical and mystical nature of Bathurst’s writings may have allowed her to employ sexual imagery with greater freedom than contemporary women writers. See Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-century England*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 116-117.

elements of her body. Christ again opened her stomach and bowels and began cleaning her insides of vestigial, diabolic influence:

Having rubbed them and oiled them a second time, he looked to see if they were so clear as to be seen through. And took the end of one up and, a cruet of oil being by him, he poured it in till all the inside of the bowels were oiled also.

Bathurst was quite literally made into a fit vessel. Christ worked through her anatomy, cleaning her liver, spleen, and heart, removing impure organs and gall. Bathurst recalled she was made into an empty shell, containing only her lungs so that she could only breath in the Holy Ghost.²⁴⁶ Bathurst's intestines were made spiritually pure, purified by God himself. But mystical contact with God again revealed the rehabilitative challenge of divine contact with the corporeal body. The worry over about matter's contaminating effect on divinity shifted the theological pressure of divine contact upon the very body of the believer. The body needed to be purified, and yet the corporeal envelope remained the only place to know God through an intense, individual contact between the material and immaterial worlds.

Bathurst's mystical union was generally quietist in tenor, but other, more vocal sectarian groups understood divine contact in ways that would become more public and tumultuous.²⁴⁷ The early writings of George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends, shared Bathurst's mystical literalism and described God's influence as embedded in corporeal transformation. As Fox's peripatetic mission through the Midlands picked up momentum in 1647, he experienced a corporeal transformation to reflect the Lord's "openings" into his soul. The death of a local man in Mansfield prompted a simulacrum of Christ's resurrection in Fox's body:

There was one Brown, who had great prophecies and sights of me upon his death-bed. He spoke only of what I should be made instrumental by the Lord to bring forth. [...] When this man was buried, a great work of the Lord fell upon me, to the admiration of man, who thought I had died; and many came to see me for about fourteen days. I was very much altered in countenance and person, as if my body had been new molded or changed. While I was in that condition, I had a sense and discerning given me by the Lord [...] I saw into that which was without end, and things which cannot be uttered, and of the greatness and infinitude of the love of God, which cannot be expressed by words.²⁴⁸

In becoming a divine instrument Fox considered his body as changed to reflect his prophetic status, albeit temporarily. But other cultic groups that arose in England during the Interregnum also featured the corporeal transformation of the flesh. In 1649 William Franklin, a rope-maker in London's Stepney parish, declared that his old body had been transformed: "that the body and nature of Franklin, born in Overton, conceived in sin and brought forth in iniquity, the Lord had destroyed." Humphrey Ellis, a minister from Winton who recorded the affair as well as the ensuing Quarter session and Assize court proceedings, described Franklin as "well esteemed in

²⁴⁶ Bodl., MS Rawlinson, D. 1262, fos. 48, 51-53.

²⁴⁷ During one of Bathurst's visions she inquired what the Lord's intentions were for the English nation and was told promptly not to concern herself, "implying that I was to attend to my inward teachings and not to look our after national concerns or the public affairs of the world." Bodl., MS Rawlinson, D. 1262, fo. 15.

²⁴⁸ George Fox, *The Journal of George Fox*, 8th ed. (London, 1891), 20-21.

times past, as a civil man, diligent in his calling, honest in his dealings.” However, Franklin considered his corporeal transformation as granting him messianic status. Declaring, “that which he now hath is a new body,” Franklin abandoned his wife and three children and took up with Mary Gadbury, a married woman from Watling prone to fits of ecstatic behavior. They developed a small cult of followers, who testified that Franklin’s corporeal transformation was not a metaphor for his new spiritual existence; rather it was the physical reconstitution of his body.²⁴⁹ During a quarter session examination in January 1650 one of Franklin’s followers, Margaret Woodward, described in detail the transformation of Franklin’s flesh:

His flesh was clean scraped away, and his skin and bone hanged together; and his skin likewise very suddenly fell off from him, and that he had nothing left but the hair of his head, and, of that, one hair was not diminished; and afterwards new flesh came again as a young child.²⁵⁰

Franklin’s new spiritual flesh allowed several of his followers to also renounce their old bodies. Mary Gadbury, who adopted a maternal role among Franklin’s cult followers, literally acted out Galatians 4.19, “saying in general that she did travail in birth till Christ were formed in them.” According to Ellis, when a person became convinced of Franklin’s divinity, Gadbury experienced a sort of spiritual labor, complete with birthing pains. Brought before a quarter session court for examination, officials were continually frustrated by the cult’s refusal to acknowledge their names, occupations, and place of living. Members claimed that as their fleshly bodies had been recreated, so had their names, familial relations, and habitations. Ellis noted that cult members reckoned their age in terms of weeks since their spiritual birth through Gadbury. One woman told justices of the peace she was “but a babe of a week old.”²⁵¹

While the referencing “spiritual” interpretations of Christian religion gave sanction to fragmented, often incoherent, practices, there was shared literalism to popular cultic practice of the period.²⁵² The reenactments of incarnation and resurrection staged by false messiahs and self-proclaimed prophets of the Interregnum relied upon a this-worldliness that was analogous to the materialized flesh/spirit conflict articulated by Bauthumley, Clarkson, and others. These ideas, however inchoate, shared in an eschatology of immediacy—the belief that divinity should be understood in the world, indeed within the human flesh, as currently manifested. Franklin’s new flesh, his spiritual marriage to Gadbury, and the spiritual birth of their followers emphasized that the cosmic drama of the divine occurred within earthly existence. Indeed, fleshly transformation rearticulated the radical idea of Christ as “type” by staging the believer’s body as itself the site for the manifestation of religious truths. As Ariel Hessayon has shown in an expansive study of TheaurauJohn Tany, striking forms of cultic practice were not the result of senseless fanaticism

²⁴⁹ Humphrey Ellis, *PseudoChristus: Or, a True and Faithful Relation* (London, 1650), 6, 11.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 12-16, 21, 35.

²⁵² At the March 1650 Assize sessions Gadbury denied that she was guilty of adultery with Franklin. She had married Franklin in a spiritual and not carnal manner. Gadbury’s defense led to mockery from the court as she claimed she had accompanied Franklin not in an uncivil way, but as a “fellow-feeler of her misery.” Members of the assize court laughed at this phrase, “some saying, ‘Yea, we think you companied with him as a fellow-feeler indeed’.” *Ibid.*, 50-51.

or mental illness.²⁵³ We should thus avoid unhelpful characterizations of these sources as expressions of fanaticism or the “lunatic fringe,” and instead recognize them as populist confrontations of the eschatologically fraught contacts between flesh and spirit. Rather the intellectual and cultural anxieties and problems of the moment conditioned the form and experience of ecstatic prophecy and the literal personification of God.

Conclusion

Woven into the sources of England’s radical religious moment was a strident attempt to reconstruct the other-worldly imperatives of Christian religion into the material problems of embodiment. These texts share a consistent desire to understand divine knowledge and grace *through* the irredeemable flesh. How could one contact the perfect immateriality of God within the fallen material? We hear repeatedly an over-realized eschatology, in which arguments about the being of God blurred into questions about the nature of man and the trichotomous contact between flesh, vital soul, and divine spirit. The radical typologies that eroded the Trinitarian barriers localizing God’s substance, also dismissed Christ as a precursor, symbol, or proxy, for pan(en)theistic embodiment. This placed new emphasis upon the physical and metaphysical qualities within man, blurring the separation of divinity and anthropology.

The importance of this interrogation extended beyond the sectarian politics in the 1640s and 1650s. The problem of the flesh influenced philosophical framing of the mind-body problem. Let us conclude with one final example by returning to the writings of John Turner, the Anglican priest mentioned at the outset of the chapter. Turner was certainly no heresiarch or radical, but in his work we see how the religious anxieties of the flesh seeped into discussion of material and immaterial relationships more generally.²⁵⁴ Writing in 1698 Turner had the benefit of hindsight, but in his defense of natural religion, *Phisico-Theological Discourse Upon the Divine Being*, he worried that English spiritualism had distorted the relationship between of God and man in ways that paralleled the philosophical mind-body problem.

Turner was particularly concerned with the nature of divine contact with the human soul and body since it frustrated his efforts to display Christianity as aligned with man’s natural rational abilities. God spiritual influence was not metaphorical or moral, but had real effects upon the

²⁵³ Ariel Hessayon, ‘*Gold Tried in the Fire*’. *The Prophet Theaurau John Tany and the English Revolution* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). As we will see in chapter five, Tany and another psuedochrist, John Robins, would become the formative foils for another inchoate sectarian group, the Muggletonians, who articulated a corporealist theology in opposition to these cults’ appropriation of an immanent, “infinite” Holy Spirit.

²⁵⁴ A parish priest of royalist sentiment, John Turner ensured his Tory patronage by providing publications in support of the Stuart regime, while also maintaining continual written overtures, touting the ecclesiastical superiority of the Anglican Church. In a 1683 published dedication to George Jeffreys, then Lord Chief Justice, Turner described his fellowship at Christ’s College and status as a “hospitaller of St. Thomas” as owing to King Charles II’s prerogative, *A Discourse of the Divine Omnipresence and its Consequences* (London, 1683), sig. A3r; the next year he dedicated Turner dedicated his account of the treachery of the Rye House Plot to the future James II. John Turner, *The History of the Whiggish-Plot* (London, 1684), sig. A2r-sig. A2v.

body: there was “a physical efficacious operation of the spirit of God,” wrote Turner, that made the mind “vigorous and affective” through the “dissipation of those fuliginous vapors that obnubilate the mind.”²⁵⁵ Interestingly Turner compared the problem of mystical union to the impenetrability of the mind/body complex. “This mystical union of the soul of the true believer with Jesus Christ,” was of the same category as the philosophical issue of the interaction of mind and body—the other “mystical incorporation” of the rational soul with the human body:

How this [union] can be is a knot too hard for human
reason to untie. How a pure spirit should be cemented to an
earthly clod, or an immaterial substance coalesce with bulk,
is a riddle that no hypothesis or philosophy can resolve us
about.²⁵⁶

Yet Turner noted most people simply accept the unity as true, despite being “perfectly nonplussed” as to how they connected. But if the reality of the mind/body connection was granted, then the unknown nature of God’s “immediate union of believers with Christ” could not be dismissed because it was incomprehensible. In other words, if the existence of “common unions” were accepted (even when not understood), the unknowable nature of divine union did not force a reasonable person to “renounce the belief of it.”²⁵⁷ God’s interaction with the saint signaled comparison to the more basic contact between soul and body, and between spiritual and material stuff. For Turner, the problem of the flesh paralleled questions about the nature of material and spiritual stuff, and the qualitative and functional relationship between these substances.

This intellectual negotiation was more complicated after the Revolution. Turner noted that God’s efficacious contact had encouraged radical theories of divine communion, what he labeled a “*contactus* or conjunction of substance with the Deity.” Recall from above that, for Turner, belief in this *contactus* had encouraged the claims of Nicholas of Cusa and other “mystical theologues,” whose writings were the point of entry into the heretical underground of mid-seventeenth century England: “from them the Weigelians and Familists borrowed their magnificent language of being Godded with God, and Christed with Christ.”²⁵⁸ This was, of course, unoriginal as polemic. But it made the project of natural theology more difficult in regards to the nature of man, the “amphibious creature allied in his constituent parts, both to the intellectual and material worlds.” If the relationship between spirit and body was, in Turner’s words, “a knot too hard for human reason to untie,” the radicals of the Interregnum slashed through it with extreme theologies of immanence, cultic practices, and mystical transformations.

²⁵⁵ Turner, *A Phisico-Theological Discourse Upon the Divine Being*, 210-211.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 213-214.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 216-218. “Now if common unions, of whose reality and existence we are so well assured, be nevertheless, with respect to their nature, not only so unknown, but unconceivable; we may lawfully presume, if there lie nothing else against the immediate union of believers with Christ, save that it cannot be comprehended, that this is no argument why we should immediately renounce belief of it.”

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 220; see also, Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 96-97. The idea of the *contactus* had, in Turner’s account, spread from Greek Platonists, to Arabic philosophers, to the ascetic, Origen, who disseminated the idea to “ancient monks.” Turner implied that the *contactus* had fermented unseen in medieval monasteries before blossoming in the writings of continental mystics.

Not surprisingly, Turner's Anglican sensibilities recoiled from these destabilizing claims. But he had no real response for differentiating acceptable and heterodox varieties of immaterial contact. He could only weakly suggest that his readers "philosophize sedately," recognizing the reality of God's indwelling spirit while avoiding the blasphemy of substantial union with God.²⁵⁹

For early moderns in the seventeenth century the theological imperative to redeem the flesh became central to the more general relationship between material bodies and immaterial qualities. As such, the problem of the flesh long outlived the ephemeral moment when the world seemed turned upside down. As we will see in following chapters, the anxieties raised by man's fraught materiality, not only cut across sectarian lines and the boundaries of orthodoxy, but also through the partitions of historiography that have isolated the study of English heterodoxy from the intellectual history of early Enlightenment.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 221-22.

Chapter 3

Dark Materials: Theosophy and the Origins of Matter

Having made his way through the gates of Hell, Satan, John Milton's great antihero of *Paradise Lost*, confronts the abyss of chaos. Satan stands before "a dark illimitable ocean without bound." It is a realm without dimension or quantifiable space, a fluid and violent liminality devoid of time and place. This is the "hoary deep" from the first passages of Genesis, the seething waters upon which God's spirit moved and formed the world. Satan famously negotiates his way through this realm, convincing Chaos and Night to let him pass. These ancient beings do not so much rule the abyss as watch over its anarchy and warring "embryon atoms." Milton describes this abyss:

The womb of nature, and perhaps her grave,
Of neither sea, nor shore, nor air, nor fire,
But all these in their pregnant causes mixed
Confus'dly, and which thus must ever fight,
Unless the almighty maker them ordain
His dark materials to create more worlds²⁶⁰

There is something undoubtedly fearsome in this account, particularly as Satan proceeds by convincing Chaos that his revenge on man will expand the discordant realm. Traditional interpretations of the poem held Milton's indeterminate abyss was insidiously evil, disharmony made manifest that opposed and threatened formal creation. In this reading, Milton drew upon a deep western tradition of dualism that placed matter outside of (or at least distant from) God's spiritual dominion.²⁶¹ Literary scholars have complicated this account, arguing that Milton's views on God's relationship to first matter were decidedly more complex. These studies reread the Deep as a conceptual space of potentiality, "an indeterminate material principle whose complex disorder persists dynamically in any order."²⁶² The realm of Chaos was part of a wider cosmogony that complicated the ethical divisions between fallen matter and God. Milton departed from the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, the idea that God created the world from nothing, in favor of *creatio ex deo*, in which matter was derived from the being of God himself.²⁶³ In *De Doctrina Christiana*, Milton argued the original matter "was not an evil thing, nor to be thought of as worthless." Rather, the chaotic first matter "contained the seeds of all subsequent good." It was the physical stuff that God ordered and made beautiful. God's supreme power and goodness, what Milton styled "heterogeneous and substantial virtue" was located beyond the being of God and that it extended into materiality itself.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁰ John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), Book 2: 890-1010.

²⁶¹ A. B. Chambers, "Chaos in *Paradise Lost*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24 (1963): 65-69; Regina Schwartz, *Remembering and Repeating: Biblical Creation in Paradise Lost* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

²⁶² John Rumrich, "Milton's God and the Matter of Chaos," *PMLA* 110 (1995): 1041; Dennis Danielson, *Paradise Lost and the Cosmological Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). 33-35.

²⁶³ Rumrich, "Milton's God," 1041; Danielson, *Cosmological Revolution*, 35.

²⁶⁴ Rumrich, "Milton's God," 1037.

Milton is the most famous example of a wider reconstruction of the meaning laden within the opening moments of genesis. During the seventeenth century, early moderns became concerned with the material process of creation that preceded and enabled God's "fiat." Unpacking the creation myth into cosmogonical speculation necessarily frustrated the formal divisions between God's sanctifying being and matter. During the seminal moments of the cosmos, the boundaries between a transcendent divinity and immanent materiality are necessarily collapsed. This chapter explores how the opening moment of genesis was a pregnant conceptual space in which the essential barriers between God and matter were indistinct. Divine stuff and mundane corporeal stuff were necessarily connected in terms of their basic essential being. English theologians had thus attempted to block speculation into the mechanism of divine creation and the nature of God's being. However, God's interaction with the first matter or "chaos" became the subject of a quintessentially early modern blend of theological and philosophical speculation by theologians, philosophers, alchemists, and writers. The revived interest in "chaos" relied upon theories of "*creatio ex deo*," the theological theory that materiality co-existed with or emanated from divinity itself. *Ex deo* theories were facilitated through reference to chemical mechanisms, which combined religiously oriented alchemical and theosophical vocabularies. By the mid-seventeenth century, cosmogony theories became a forum for debate over the nature of God's spiritual relationship to the material world. Theories regarding the origins of the world thus provided the speculative foundation for the rehabilitation of theories regarding the relationship between spiritual immateriality and worldly materiality.

Speculation about the origins of matter contained a cluster of larger philosophical and theological questions. The revival of cosmogony was motivated by new, immanent formulations of God's being and interaction with the material world, described in the previous chapters. In turn, the idea of a divinely enlivened universe supported immanent theologies by idealizing the Holy Spirit and liminal forms of ethereal stuff as material intermediaries between God and creation. But the reconstruction of the material linkages between God and creation did not just aid in the formulation of new vitalist theories of nature. It was also a new means of rehabilitating the human body as a site of divine activity and influence. The very composite stuff of the flesh was reformulated as emerging from the being of God.

Genesis as Cosmogony

Late Elizabethan and early Stuart intellectual society inherited a deep resistance to efforts to understand the mysterious relationship between God and the created world. English writers considered God's mysterious being as beyond this world; transcendence made God aloof from efforts to probe into the connections between the divine and the material. The divine relationship with matter had long been examined in the medieval church through problems of *materia* and *miracula*, instances in which God's body revealed itself through wondrous displays within material objects and sites. Manifestation of divinity in matter was common, indeed quotidian, and medieval theologians and philosophers worked hard to reconcile God's relationship to *materia*.²⁶⁵ In the iconoclastic context of Protestant England, however, localized instances of

²⁶⁵ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 230-259.

divine matter were systematically attacked and destroyed.²⁶⁶ Throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries English clergymen and intellectuals continually dismissed speculation over the nature of God's essence and his substantial relationship with the created world. Formulations of God's relationship to the world were either distanced through a Calvinist emphasis upon transcendent inaccessibility or dismissed through reference to the unknowable "mystery" of God.

Many argued that God's pre-creation mystery was fundamentally unknowable. The being of God, his substance and essential nature, was necessarily mysterious. Such sentiments were often expressed within the Calvinist theological framework that suffused the Elizabethan and Jacobean church. English Calvinism, an admittedly contested historical concept, was generally dismissive of the sorts of speculative inquiries that might question the nature of God's essence and his mysterious relationship to materiality.²⁶⁷ William Burton (c. 1545-1616), a minister in Norfolk and later Bristol, argued in a printed catechism that speculative philosophers could not have wisdom regarding God since such knowledge was reserved to the elect. But even the elect could not have perfect knowledge, which was exclusive to God's being and nature. "His wisdom is his very essence, that is, his very Godhead or God himself," wrote Burton, "and that is inconceivable as the scriptures do testify."²⁶⁸ William Fulke (1536-1589), a presbyterian theologian and master of Pembroke College Cambridge, claimed that God was eternal, unchangeable and the same throughout all time. In his exegesis of the revelations of John of Patmos, Fulke argued that even the eschatologically minded John refused to "speak of the incomprehensible essence of God, of which the sophisters do foolishly and childishly babble many things."²⁶⁹

Other thinkers suggested that while God's relationship to matter was possibly conceivable, it could certainly not be understood through the human mind's fleshly capabilities. A 1577 translation of Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) emphasized that while man lived in the imperfections of the corruptible flesh, "no man shall behold the essence of God." It was only when man was "clarified" through the ascent of the soul that the human mind could understand God in the "fullness of his divinity."²⁷⁰ Similarly, Thomas Morton of Berwick wrote that God's essence was of an infinite, perfect nature. It was impossible for any finite creature – "growling here on earth in the muddle and mire of error and gross ignorance" – to comprehend the nature of

²⁶⁶ Eamon Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, C.1400-C.1580* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992); Ethan Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), chapter 5.

²⁶⁷ Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: the rise of English Arminianism c. 1590-1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); Peter White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic: Conflict and Consensus in the English Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Sean Hughes, "The Problem of 'Calvinism': English theologies of predestination, c. 1580-1630" in *Belief and Practice in Reformation England*, ed. Susan Wabuda and Caroline Litzenberger (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 229-249.

²⁶⁸ William Burton, *Certain Questions and Answers Concerning the Knowledge of God* (London, 1591), 38-39.

²⁶⁹ William Fulke, *Praelections upon the Sacred and Holy Revelation of S. John* (London, 1573), 9-10.

²⁷⁰ Heinrich Bullinger, *Fit, godly, and learned sermons* (London, 1577), 615.

the divine. Since the divine essence could not be known through the senses and did not resemble any physical object, Morton concluded that human beings could not convey to their imaginations any sort of image of God. Attempting to probe into God's "very form and essence" was not fit for Christian thinkers who should "be rather sober and modest than hot and hasty in pursuing the knowledge of the divine essence."²⁷¹ Andrew Willet (1562-1621), rector of Barley, Hertfordshire, echoed this idea in his voluminous works of biblical exegesis. Parroting Aquinas, Willet argued that the human soul could only understand such things "as have their form in some matter." Corporeal significations were required for human minds to make sense of the world. The immaterial spiritual essence of god could not be perceived by the senses or the mind.²⁷²

Skepticism of speculative divinity extended beyond the ecclesiological boundaries of the English church. The separatist pastor John Robinson (1576-1625) emphasized, "the essence of God is known only to himself." He lambasted "curious wits," those who endeavored to "to depress and pull [God] down to their dwarfish conceptions." Citing Thales's comments on the futility of divine science, Robinson wrote that the deeper philosophers searched into the nature of God's being, "the more unsearchable it appeared." Such inquiries were like gazing at the sun. If God had created such bright bodies that humans could not fix their corporeal eyes upon it, "what marvel it is through the eye of understanding all men dazzle in the too curious contemplation of his infinite and infinitely glorious majesty itself?" Robinson concluded that, given God's infinite nature and mankind's epistemological limitations, Christians could only know God through faith and trust in scriptural revelations.²⁷³

Given God's unknowable nature, most English theologians confirmed that the mechanism of creation was unknowable beyond the scriptural text. The puritan theologian William Perkins (1558-1602) affirmed in *A Golden Chain* (1600) that God made all of creation from nothing. This *ex nihilo* process was "without motion, labor, or defatigation." God's effortless creation from nothing was ontologically necessary. Perkins argued that the alternative was that matter had come from the essence of God, which was impossible since God's essence "hath no parts, it is not divisible." Therefore, God must have framed creation "not of any matter, but of nothing." This point helped induce humility in man. Look back upon your ancestors, Perkins admonished, "let them look whence they came first, namely as Abraham saith of himself, of dust and ashes." Every man's first beginnings were of dust and nothingness. Perkins argued this was should help "move us to true humiliation in our selves." Man was made by God, but there was nothing of him *from* God. Creation was a divine condescension.²⁷⁴

Even as Calvinist ideas and ecclesiastical tendencies were challenged by Arminianism, *ex nihilo* theories remained favored within official channels of theology. The Laudian minister John Swan's treatise on the creation of the world, *Speculum Mundi* (1635), explicitly insisted that the world "in respect of its essence [is] finite." Reason was sufficient to show that all things "are of themselves frail and fading." Given the corrupting and finite nature of the world, Swan argued, it made little sense to argue that the world was eternal and without a beginning.²⁷⁵ Swan (1605-1671) supported his reasoning with linguistic analysis of the Hebrew used in the book of

²⁷¹ Thomas Morton of Berwick, *A Treatise of the Nature of God* (London, 1599), 36-39.

²⁷² Andrew Willett, *Hexapala in Genesis & Exodum* (London, 1633), 659.

²⁷³ John Robinson, *Observations Divine and Moral for the Furthering of Knowledge and Virtue* (London, 1628), 2-4.

²⁷⁴ William Perkins, *A Golden Chain* (Cambridge, 1600), 221-222.

²⁷⁵ John Swan, *Speculum Mundi* (Cambridge, 1643), 1-3.

Genesis. He noted that the word “bara,” to create, signified creation out of nothing. Had Moses described the creation using the Hebrew words “yatzar” (to form) or “asha” (to make), Genesis might have implied a fashioning of pre-existent matter. Instead, Swan reasoned that “bara” implied that a divine creation from nothing was most appropriate. This forced one to understand that God “must needs stand aloof when we speak of creation. God was transcendent, “above nature” and it was through “certain supernatural means” beyond the ken of man that God enacted the creation.²⁷⁶

Cultural and theological formations emphasizing God’s transcendent remove from creation tended to reinforce *ex nihilo* cosmogony. For example, the poet Lucy Hutchinson, eager to dismiss the “Platonick dreams” and “poetic fancies,” dismissed anything that was not “kept on record / In the Creator’s own revealed world.” Accordingly, she maintained God’s transcendent remove from the “rolling spheres” that would eventually “be again into their chaos whirl’d / At the last dissolution of the world.” God’s ethereal residence in heaven was kept apart from the world. God called forth creation from the “rude congestion” of the earth.²⁷⁷ As Swan put it pithily, “the matter first God of nothing drew / And then adds beauty to that matter new.” In the same fashion as Perkins, he advocated humble and non-speculative belief. The manner of creation was “rather to be believed than comprehended of us.”²⁷⁸

Yet this humility was eroding. By the first decade of the seventeenth century, alchemical theories were already complicating the *ex nihilo* doctrine of creation. In a 1605 preface to the translated works of the French Paracelsian Joseph Duchesne, Thomas Tymme, a rector at Hasketon in Suffolk, described alchemy as having “concurrence and antiquity with Theology.” Creation was a “divine alchemy,” the operation of God’s spirit by which terrestrial existence was set into motion. Tymme was forceful in claiming that alchemy was not about the transmutation of metals and greedy magicians tinkering at length to change base metals into gold. Instead alchemy was the “chyrurgical hand” of God involved “in the anatomizing of every mesenterial vein of whole nature.” This was the process by which the very substances of nature gained a foundational backbone as matter. Through alchemy God had brought creation into existence. Thus, the alchemical discipline as a science within natural philosophy gave knowledge about nature and natural change.²⁷⁹

Tymme wrote that the opening verses of Genesis depicted God moving upon “an indigested chaos or mass.” Chemistry provided a language for describing the process of Creation. Arguing that a chemical version of creation had “concurrence and antiquity” with theology, Tymme wrote that God utilized a chemical process of “extraction, separation, sublimation, and conjunction” to order and arrange created matter. While this formulation did not unify divine substance directly with matter, the chemistry of distillation and sublimation complicated formal divisions of substance in his chemical perspective. Tymme wrote that God inspired all living creatures with “that spirit of life.” But this spirit was not an immaterial infusion of vitalistic force. Rather he described God’s life-giving spirit as a “hypostasis” of salt, sulphur, and mercury, playing upon

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 41-43

²⁷⁷ Lucy Hutchinson, *Order and Disorder: Or the World Made and Undone* (London, 1679), 6-10; attributed to Hutchinson by David Norbrook, “Hutchinson, Lucy (1620–1681),” in *ODNB*.

²⁷⁸ Swan, *Speculum Mundi*, 42-44

²⁷⁹ Thomas Tymme, *The Practice of Chemical and Hermetical Physic* (London, 1605), i-iii.

the term's multiple medical, philosophical, and theological meanings. The life-giving hypostasis bestowed on the chaos paralleled the Trinitarian unity of the divine persons and was derivative upon Greek notions of a material substratum beneath change and generation. While God was immaterial spirit, the hypostasis life-spirit was material. Tymme's account made differentiating between categories of spirit and material problematic. Vital life was a formulation of material stuff; living creatures "compacted" and "mingled" out of inchoate materials and the hypostatic spirit to make a single body.²⁸⁰

Other "theophysical" investigations pondered the origins of the first matter. Timothy Willis speculated in *The Search of Causes* (1616) that alchemical transmutations facilitated the first moments of material causation.²⁸¹ A pugnacious Paracelsian, Willis (1560-c.1620) described the world before creation as a "chaos of possibilities." When the spirit of God moved upon the unformed waters, the divine motion "created in them spiritualness and natural motion." As God moved upon the liquid surface, Willis believed that the fluid chaos "thereby became more spiritual, active and stirring." God's movement conveyed not just energetic kinesis but matter's foundational passivity, its susceptibility to become acted upon. From this divine motion, activity reacted in a chain through the waters of the abyss: "from thence the other waters in that deep received their dower in the like virtues in proportion." God enlivened and activated matter, but he also pacified it and made it receptive to motion and change.²⁸²

These initial material changes were a chemical process of distillation. The primal movement of the Holy Spirit caused heat to move within the chaos, enabling the rarefaction of matter into more refined forms. Viewing creation as part of a causal, chemical chain, Willis considered the movement of the Spirit as the first force in the world: "The Spirit was moved, motion breeds heat, heat causeth rarefaction or subtlety, and subtlety is the perfection of Spirit in every kind." The chain of motion, heat, and distinction transmuted the unformed chaos into a "universal matter," itself the building block for distinctive formal bodies. Willis concluded this was the means by which "nature travailed with the burden of this wonderful birth in her womb and, as it were, sat hatching her eggs." The Spirit conveyed kinetic potentiality into the chaos thereby allowing distinctive bodies to proceed into being, "formed and well-shaped out of the shell of darkness."²⁸³

Chemical language supported the cosmology of the Elizabethan alchemist Simon Forman.²⁸⁴ The alchemically inclined magus-physician argued that given Scripture's emphasis upon water, creation was a process of condensation. The "chaos" that preceded the creation of the world was "breathed forth" by God into a "world of water." This water was itself a "condensate" that

²⁸⁰ *ibid.*, i-ii.

²⁸¹ Willis was literally pugnacious. He was cited for misbehavior at Oxford and summoned before a council for "mutinies, debates, and discords" while accompanying Francis Drake's voyage to the West Indies. In 1619 Willis allegedly had his head broken by "a pot or candlestick" while quarrelling with a Catholic recusant. "Willis, Timothy (b. 1560, *d.* in or after 1620)", John H. Appleby, in *ODNB*.

²⁸² Timothy Willis, *The Search of Causes Containing a Theophysical Investigation of the Possibility of Transmutatory Alchemy* (London, 1616), 6, 9-10.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

²⁸⁴ For Forman's intellectual relationships to the wider medical culture of Elizabethan England, see: Lauren Kassell, *Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London: Simon Forman: Astrologer, Alchemist, and Physician* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 5-10.

resulted from God's "Fiat" and provided the liquid substance that was shaped into all the formal things in the universe. From his condensed breath the spirit of God extracted and formalized the distinctive creation.²⁸⁵ Forman meant this literally. When God uttered the word "fiat" there was a thick mist or "smoke cloud" that emanated from the power and wisdom of God. Spiritual immateriality became material stuff. Forman noted pragmatically that fluid transitions between spiritual incorporeality and materiality were easily seen in the winter. Creation was "as the breath of man in a cold morning which ascendeth and with cold thickens and becommeth water, and after by art is congealed into earth."²⁸⁶ However, for Forman the example implied that immaterial, non-extended things such as intention, will, or "the power and wisdom of God" could also be made material. Early modern semantic slippages allowed theo-alchemical speculation.

Forman did not leave this first creative moment uninvestigated, but substantially connected and illustrated the divine origin of the first matter of the world. The condensation of God's breath not only connected matter directly to divinity, it linked God substantially to matter and implied an element of physicality to the divine. The ensuing condensate, "that mighty chaos," was a liquid world of "dark obscurity" that contained "all forms, things, and creatures bundled up together." The formalization of this stuff from inchoate obscurity required the refinement and filtration of the Deep into discernable bodies. Forman argued that this divine formalization was mimicked in the human procedure of distilling heterogenous liquids in a laboratory: "A man taketh a great pot and fills it with water, honey, oil, wine, verjuice, milk, and such like liquid things." When the pot was set upon a fire Forman noted that, as in God's formalization of chaos, the distiller would discover "lost dregs which may be congealed into a thicker or harder mass out of which again, also a man may draw or make diverse other things and forms."²⁸⁷ So it was for God's chaos as forms were extracted out of the refined chaos. For Forman, chemical change implied fluidity between spiritual stuff and material stuff. There was continuity not only between different types of matter (liquid could become solid), but also between the seemingly immaterial and material.

In the writings of the late Elizabethan and Jacobean alchemists, creation was a material process of chemical separation and confluence. Spiritual transactions could be understood in physical terms as "condensations," "vibrations," and "emanations." The boundaries between extended matter and spirit were blurred in an alchemical paradigm that stressed a material spectrum running from gross, inchoate heterogeneity to refined, spiritual purity. These categories (and their ethical and soteriological implications) still existed, but Tymme, Willis, and Forman weakened the transcendent separation between God and matter.

Occult Qualities

Alchemical speculations into the nature of the abyss drew upon earlier efforts to better understand the occult properties of nature. Beginning sixteenth-century Germany and Holland, occult qualities—the insensible mechanisms of change, force, and movement—were increasingly investigated and theorized as operative forces in the larger cosmos. Such concerns provided both the impetus and the theoretical justifications for alchemical and theosophic speculations into

²⁸⁵ Bodl., MS Ashmole No. 802, fo. 1r-2v.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, fo. 8r.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, fo. 1v-2r.

divine materiality. Alchemical medical writings became optimistic that the mysteries of the divine could be understood using the conceptual tools available to early moderns. Although such sentiments had long been contained within the mystical tradition's desire for spiritual purification, part of the long tradition of *gnosis*, early modern physician's combined the revelatory *episteme* of mysticism with notions of scientific *techne* to achieve communion with God. These writers held that sharpened understanding of God's being and nature enabled productive and therapeutic relationship to creation.²⁸⁸ The "eye of understanding" was of course fallible and fallen, but there were hints and clues to God's nature *within* the material world if the humble (and reformed) believer was willing to temper his speculation through rigorous natural philosophical study.

This sanguine belief in the human capacity to understand the divine being was often articulated amidst discontent with natural philosophical epistemologies that obscured natural knowledge. Understanding the relations between spiritual causes and material change was foundational to God's relationship with matter, but occultist writers were increasingly dissatisfied with classical, particularly Aristotelian and Galenic, theories of matter. Occultists often framed their work as a return to ancient Neoplatonic or hermetic writings, but this reformation of knowledge was embedded within a deep dissatisfaction with Renaissance utilization of classical theories of materiality and cosmology. These writings thus contained a strong sentiment that Aristotelianism and Galenism, contained in both humanist and scholastic theories of matter, were insufficient theoretical tools for engaging in natural philosophy and speculative theology.²⁸⁹

In early modern Europe, medicine was the first field to experience this alchemical shift toward material theories of interrelated and interconnected substances. Medicine contained methodological overlap with speculative theology. Similar to intellectual inquiries into the problems of creation, generation, and resurrection, medicine was (and to a certain extent remains) interested in conceptualizing how invisible causal forces create material change. Crucial in this shift were the writings of the German physician Theophrastus Paracelsus (1493-1541), who created ideological upheaval in the field through his vocal critiques and revisions of classical theories of disease and treatment. Largely because of his atrociously caustic and arrogant personality, Paracelsus remained a marginal thinker in his lifetime, forced into a peripatetic lifestyle throughout Germany. However, his ideas would influence English medical thought both directly and mediated through the interpretations of other physicians and natural philosophical writers.²⁹⁰

Paracelsus targeted Galenic therapies that had regained prominence through the new emphasis on Greek medicine that accompanied the Renaissance celebration of the classics. Paracelsus framed many of his own ideas of medical treatment in direct opposition to the

²⁸⁸ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 268-271.

²⁸⁹ Keith Hutchison, "What Happened to Occult Qualities in the Scientific Revolution?" *Isis* 73 (Jun., 1982), 235-236.

²⁹⁰ Allen G. Debus, *The English Paracelsians* (New York: Watts, 1966); Quentin Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 196-197; Andrew Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550-1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 35.

Grecian revival in Renaissance medical theory. His writings are marked with a deep dissatisfaction regarding the causal reasoning beneath Galenic therapies. In his foundational text *Paragranum* (1530), Paracelsus outlined his medical theories and expressed opprobrium for Galenic medicine's unquestioning empiricism. In his commentaries on Hippocratic aphorisms, Paracelsus described Galenic medicine as without "any theory, but only experience. This acts as a laxative; that acts to constipate; but what it was and how it was acted thus remained hidden."²⁹¹ Galenists might prescribe effective treatments, but the deeper causation of effective medical treatment was itself ignored.

For Paracelsus, contemporary medical theory was plagued by an unthinking pragmatism. In characteristic scatological terms, Paracelsus condemned the Galenist physicians for knowing "what is conducive to the brain, the head, the mother, for shitting and crapping. But you do not know what is conducive to the disease." The invisible mechanisms of contagion remained uninvestigated. Galenists, understood polemically by Paracelsus as "Ethnics," might prescribe seemingly efficacious treatments but they could not target the causal force by which disease enacted material change. The Galenic reason for prescribing any reasoning of treatment was "if it helps, it helps."²⁹² But Paracelsus argued that the therapeutic foundations for medical theory remained unquestioned. For the materialist Galenists, pragmatic formalism masked causal ignorance.

Paracelsian medical theory argued that proper treatment required understanding the "entire being" of diseases. Paracelsus laid new emphasis on the authority of nature, arguing that natural philosophical knowledge led to effective medicine. This required an intense, totalist form of knowing. Medicine "must be conducted in such a way that one's eyes encompass the understanding and so that the thunder of [philosophy] resounds in one's ears like the Rhine waterfall." This "philosophy" was nature itself manifested in terms of micro- and macrocosmic interrelations. Beneath Paracelsus's medical theory was the cosmological belief that "things are in the human being in the same way that they are outside." Proper medicine thus required looking beyond the human body to the causal principles of the larger world.²⁹³

For Galenists the causal process by which medicine enacted unseen material change remained unquestioned. Paracelsus suggested that astronomy provided the expanded observational palette needed for proper therapy. Astronomy was a "higher" philosophy, a study of "parentes microcosmi" or the larger cosmos of the stars, sky, and heavens that was reflected in the smaller body of man. This relationship between micro and macro, internal and external, had divine origins. "For the hand that separated light from darkness, the hand that created heavens and earth," Paracelsus argued, "also made the lower within the microcosmos, taking it from what was above and encompassing it inside the skin of the human being – everything that heavens encompass." This literalism sounded odd even to early modern ears, yet there was a logic behind this hermetic linkage as the astral macrocosm provided a form of sight within the human body: "for as long as he remains enclosed in his skin and no one can see into it and the actions within it are not visible." The astral macrocosm provided a means of looking within the enclosed body, a proxy-empirical compensation for the inability to see through the skin.²⁹⁴ Paracelsus realized

²⁹¹ Paracelsus, *Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, 1493-1541): Essential Theoretical Writings*, trans. Andrew Weeks (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 8.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 217-219.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 111-113.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 177-181.

unknowable spiritual forces that enacted material change by claiming that they could be understood through proxy, by reference to the astrological processes of the broader world.

The crucial interconnection between the heavens and the earthly body unveiled the “entire being” of occult qualities and supported a broader, and idiosyncratic, system of alchemical medicine, one that drew upon notions of chemical sympathies and astral influences. For example, Paracelsian concepts such as the “limbus,” a sort of primate matter within human beings that incorporated the essence of heaven and earth, complicated the seemingly obvious divisions between the earth, man, and the heavens.²⁹⁵ But the larger importance was theoretical. The core division between manifest and occult qualities was collapsed into a single paradigm of material and semi-material astral influence. Andrew Weeks has noted that the Paracelsian paradigm with its ubiquity of spirits and interweaving essences collapsed “cosmic, metaphysical, clerical, and academic hierarchies with a single stroke.” The universe was not categorically divided into types of substances; rather a multiplicity of “entia” connected the higher and lower realms of the cosmos.²⁹⁶ Formal divisions between objects were complicated and the substances demarcated by the Aristotelian “form” deemed nonsensical. Such thinking questioned many of the ontological divisions that buttressed the divine’s transcendence and substantial difference from material creation. For Paracelsus, the Great Chain of cosmic being was replaced by a unity of inter-penetrating forces. There were elemental, astral, and divine influences that shaped the materials of a divinized uni-verse. Employing the language of chemistry toward the ambitions of theosophy, Paracelsus defended these influences as knowable and thus, to an extent, measurable and controllable.

In the late sixteenth century, English admirers of Paracelsus resituated the alchemist’s anti-Aristotelianism into a post-Reformation narrative. In his 1585 genealogy of Paracelsian medical theory, *The Difference Between the Ancient Physic... and the Latter Physic*, Richard Bostocke (c. 1535-1605) framed the entire classical tradition as a usurpation of an earlier Abrahamic knowledge, with particular opprobrium leveled at Aristotle and Galen. Bostocke argued that there was an ancient tradition dating from Adam’s “divine revelation” in which the first man was “endowed with singular knowledge, wisdom, and light of nature.”²⁹⁷ This knowledge was passed down through the Abrahamic family into Egypt where it became preserved in the hermetic tradition.²⁹⁸ This art was rejected by Aristotle who “contrary to his master Plato, [referred]

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 181-183.

²⁹⁶ Andrew Weeks, “Radical Reformation and the Anticipation of Modernism in Jacob Boehme,” in *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme: Four Centuries of Thought and Reception*, ed. Ariel Hessayon and Sarah Apetrei (New York: Routledge, 2014) 44; Andrew Weeks, *Paracelsus: Speculative Theory and the Crisis of the Early Reformation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 70-75, 150-152.

²⁹⁷ Richard Bostocke, *The Difference Between the Ancient Physic, First Taught by the Holy Forefathers... and the Latter Physic Proceeding from Idolaters, Ethnics, and Heathen* (London, 1585), Chapter 10, sig. F4r.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., Chapter 10, sig. F5v-F7r. Bostocke wrote that while many of the Egyptians held to “vain and superstitious” ideas, some did not. Many, like Moses “were contented with the simple order of Nature.” Bostocke wrote that Hermes Trismegestus lived “in Egypt not long after Moses” and adopted a Mosaic natural philosophy. Far from being pagan, Trismegestus gained his name from anticipating Christ “because he held opinion of God near agreeable with the right doctrine of the Trinity.”

natural causes of effects only to certain elementary qualities.”²⁹⁹ Despite his Neoplatonic heritage, Bostocke did not frame Paracelsus as an *ad fontes* classicist; rather Paracelsus represented a pivot away from Grecian heathenism. The German physician’s Neoplatonism was actually an extension of the Protestant reforming impulse into medicine and philosophy.

He was not the author and inventor of this art as the followers of the Ethnics, [Galen and Aristotle], do imagine... no more than Wycliffe, Luther, Oecolampadius, Zwinglius, Calvin etc. were author and inventors of the Gospel and religion in Christ’s church when they restored it to his purity according to God’s word.³⁰⁰

Bostocke did not view Paracelsus as the creator of a new philosophy and physic, but rather as a restorer of natural philosophy’s preeminent role within the canon of speculative theology. Aristotle had derailed philosophy and corrupted the divine genealogy of knowledge with the “heathenish” ideas of Greek materialism. So alchemy’s curious blend of occult and experimental knowledge ran parallel to the Reformation purification of religious doctrine.

The tendency to define alchemically oriented natural philosophy in opposition to heathenish Grecian materialism continued into the early seventeenth century. The occultist physician Robert Fludd (1574-1637) would describe the “philosophy of the Grecians” as erected upon a foundation of “mundane wisdom.” Greek philosophy was a false alternative to Christianity, one adopted by philosophers who adored and followed “their Master Aristotle as if he were another Jesus rained down from heaven.” Lacking belief in Christ, Greek philosophy could not understand the true nature of the material world, which required belief in an immanent divinity as the cause and “cornerstone” for the vital existence of created beings. This motivated Fludd’s frustration with the “Christian Peripatetick” who refused to express an “essential reality” and relied upon distinctions and evasions to avoid positing a singular theory for the operation of the cosmos. The crux of the issue was that Aristotelians did not consider there to be a single “catholic and invisible agent” in the world, but rather “an infinity of essential agents,” forms, powers and qualities that acted and operated of themselves. God was not present essentially, but rather acted virtually through these agents and secondary causes. For Fludd the emphasis upon multiple manifest causes were “protean Peripatetical distinctions.” The inability to ground philosophy in absolute truth was “a nose of wax” that could be changed depending upon the particular desires and inclinations of a philosopher. Lacking the acknowledgement of a divine essence within the natural world, there could not be consensus within Christian philosophy.³⁰¹

Fludd was sensitive to the broad cynicism that oriented the mainstream theological approach to the divine being. In *Mosaical Philosophy* (trans., 1659), Fludd recognized the difficulty for intellectuals to raise their thoughts from “the confused labyrinth of the creature unto the bright essence of the Creator.” The mystery of God was a “radical subject” for human minds, requiring biblical guidance but also the recognition of the “two-fold meaning” contained within Scripture. He thus framed inquiries into God’s substance as resting within a disciplinary division of labor. The writings in the bible held two senses: a spiritual and a literal. These two senses corresponded to mankind’s spiritual and material divisions. While Scripture contained passages and guidance

²⁹⁹ Ibid., Chapter 15, sig. H2v.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., Chapter 19, sig. H7v-H7r.

³⁰¹ Robert Fludd, *Mosaical Philosophy* (London, 1659), 28-29.

that allowed the “mystical interpretations” of priests and theologians, the text also expressed the “created realities” of the material world, the subject of philosophy.³⁰²

This division within the text of scripture represented a core methodological difference between theology and philosophy. Theology, which worked from Scripture’s spiritual sense, made its demonstrations *a priori*. The theologian “should begin his inquisition from the formal center or middle point and so proceed unto the circumference.” By using deductive reasoning from divine principles to understand the rest of the world, the theologian could develop theories to guide the study of created matter. Natural philosophers, however, worked from circumference to center, or “from the external of the creature or organ *quasi demonstratione à posteriori*, to dive and search into its internal center.” The material creation was the subject through which philosophers could understand divinity. The task of the philosopher was a descriptive process that worked from outward creation to the central essence of divinity: “The hidden central monady or punctual unity of a globe is, after diligent inquiry, found out by moving from the circumference by the semi-diameters and then attaining by degrees unto the middle and secret point which serveth as a formal prop or essential cornerstone to the whole spherical fabric.” One could, if guided by Christian tenets, move slowly through the study of the created world into larger claims about the Creator.

By illustrating this division of labor, Fludd hoped his work would not be “sinisterly judged” as detracting from theological inquiry. The physician framed his inquiries as part of a biblical tradition of science in the service of religion. There was, he noted, precedent for his “Mosaical philosophy.” Namely, the speculative inquiry into the nature of God conducted by the “theophilosophical patron St. Luke” and the “wise physiologist Solomon.”³⁰³ But Fludd was also pragmatic. If the divine will was acted out in the created world, why refuse to investigate what was common knowledge for Christian sensibilities? The subject of natural philosophy, the temporal world, was “animated by angelical influences.” Given these vitalizing forces, the true philosopher acknowledged that his science proceeded “radically” from God’s influence in the material world. Fludd suggested that the connective chain of being allowed the philosopher to “pierce with a mental regard into the Eternal light.” The philosopher could know God through his material influence in the world.

Finding the Divine Center

Cosmological concerns over the nature of Creation continued into the mid-seventeenth century. Indeed, the ideological upheaval of the English Revolution gave impetus to speculation over the origins of the world. Charles Hotham (1615-1672), the son of the baronet and parliamentarian officer Sir John Hotham, articulated an alchemical vision of creation *ex deo* in the late 1640s. As a fellow at Peterhouse, Hotham had articulated and defended “the Teutonic philosophy” of Jakob Böhme at a university commencement debate on the origins of the soul at Cambridge in March of 1647. The debate had centered on the rival theological theories. Did God “infuse” the soul into the creature “in the instant of creation”? Or was the soul indigenous to created humanity, having its origin in the seed of the parents?³⁰⁴ Hotham’s arguments in the

³⁰² Ibid., i-ii.

³⁰³ Ibid., ii-iii.

³⁰⁴ Charles Hotham, *An Introduction to the Teutonic Philosophy* (London, 1650), 8.

debate were digested in *An Introduction to the Teutonick Philosophy*, published in English in 1650. It contained Hotham's reconciliation of traduction, the theory that the soul was derived wholly from the seed of the parents, with the rival idea that God created and infused each individual the soul. Hotham's views on the soul are interesting in themselves, but more important for our purposes was the intellectual framing he used to support his ideas. The debate became an opportunity for Hotham to outline a Böhmenist cosmogony reliant upon alchemical ideas to reconcile traductionism and God's involvement in the creation of the soul.³⁰⁵

Hotham's writings mediated the theosophic efforts of Jakob Böhme, the Lutheran mystic noted above. Elements of Böhme's thinking had entered into English translation in the 1640s but it was during the Interregnum that his major works *Signatura Rerum* (1651) and *Aurora* (1656) were printed in translation by the publishing house of Giles Calvert. Böhme was very much an inheritor of the spiritualist epistemological and anthropological tradition that developed within German Lutheranism through the writings of Caspar Schwenckfeld (1489-1561) and Valentine Weigel (1533-1588). Similar to these earlier spiritualists, Böhme articulated a theosophy of spiritual enlightenment requiring non-mediated forms of connection to a divine reality. The mystic's work stressed a detachment from ecclesiological forms of knowledge involving undue ceremony and formalism, an abstention from rational structures of understanding, and a receptive silencing of the self in the face of the divine spirit's exogenous influence. However, Böhme was unusual in his attempt to situate the relationship between God and man in explicit, continually cosmic terms. Indeed historians have noted that Böhme's theosophy, described by the shoemaker as divine revelation, should be understood as a product of the scientific revolution and the cosmology of the Copernican revolution and new science.³⁰⁶

Böhme's cosmic interests led to an interesting configuration of the creation moment. He argued that the material world was an essential part of the divine being: the natural world, in its materiality, was an external manifestation of the divine body. This differed from contemporary theories of God's univocal existence *qua* extended matter, famously articulated by Spinoza: "except God, no substance can exist or be conceived."³⁰⁷ Böhme was less radical, maintaining the ontological distinctiveness of God's spiritual essence. He argued instead that the divine body was the corporeal world itself. In *Signatura Rerum* (1651), Böhme charted this process by which the eternal divine essence extended itself into matter. Creation began with God's mysterious existence as "an abyssal eye that standeth and seeth in the Nothing." God existed within himself as a deep totality of absence. But within this nihilist mystery was a willfulness, a "longing after manifestation." This desire was "egressive," tending toward outward movement, and it led God to make "a form in the spirit, viz. formings of the infiniteness of the mystery." This seminal

³⁰⁵ "Hotham, Charles (1615–1672)", Richard L. Greaves, in *ODNB*. For Hotham as an English interpreter of Böhme, see Nigel Smith, "Did Anyone Understand Boehme?" in *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme*, 107-108; Rhodri Lewis, "Of 'Origenian Platonisme': Joseph Glanvill on the Pre-existence of Souls," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 69 (2006): 271-272.

³⁰⁶ Russell H. Hvolbek, "Being and Knowing: Spiritualist Epistemology and Anthropology from Schwenckfeld to Böhme," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 22 (Spring, 1991), 108-109; Craig Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire: A History of the Night in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 67-70

³⁰⁷ Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 230-234.

spiritual form was the Trinity, a shape or contoured demarcation of the spiritual functions of the divine. Nature was the external manifestation of this spirit's active willfulness, the "external nature" or "corporeal essence" of God. God was a spirit and "[as] subtle as a thought or will," but the natural world was "a manifestation or external birth of the inward spirit and essence in evil and good."³⁰⁸ God's ontological center was of course spiritual, but his outward self was creation itself. God existed corporeally *within* the cosmos.

This immanence entailed that creation was not an *ex nihilo* process. In *Aurora* Böhme questioned those that considered the creation as an actual materialization from nothingness.

Many authors have written that heaven and earth were created out of nothing. But I do wonder that among so many excellent men there hath not one been found that could yet describe the true ground [of this creation], seeing the same God, which now is, hath been from eternity. Now where nothing is, there nothing can come to be. All things must have a root, else nothing can grow.³⁰⁹

The material world had existed alongside God from all eternity and was an external manifestation of God's mysterious being. Matter was the result of the divinity's fruition into its current tripartite spiritual form.

Hotham's 1650 publication recognized that Böhmenist ideas were the subject of considerable criticism, especially during the Cambridge traduction debate. In a dedicatory to John Arrowsmith (1602-1659), the vice-Chancellor of the university, Hotham noted that several of his ideas expressed during the debate had been judged heretical. So he prudently placed some critical distance between himself and Böhme, noting that the "Teutonic" ideas were not his own and that he "stood aloof from peremptory assent." Despite asking pardon for any errors, he criticized dogmatic scholars who curtailed "the world's freedom with fire, faggot, and thunder." Indeed, Hotham asked for additional liberty, comparing himself to "those Seekers" who, distrusting the known deceits of reason, "walk unfettered in the quest of truth" through unbeaten paths to knowledge. Hotham's "Teutonick" tendencies were framed by skepticism toward scholastic methodologies. He noted that "more souls have crept to the throne of wisdom" through "right-opinion" than through the "cart-rope of irrefragable syllogisms." Hotham echoed other theosophical writers by grounding knowledge directly upon religious orientation, expressed in his language as a mediation between two islands of "exceeding danger": the rocks of sheep-like acquiescence to church doctrine and obstinate atheism. Hotham thus embodied the parallel impulses of theosophic and alchemical thought in the seventeenth century, coupling cynicism toward Aristotelian structures of knowledge with a forthright desire for the direct investigation of divine truths. While Hotham professed that he did not think the mysteries of religion should be "rudely unravelled," he conceded that the study of divine philosophy had "sucked me in from my childhood." Discussion of "even the highest matters" could be modestly disputed, if conducted soberly amongst the learned.³¹⁰

Hotham opposed the scholastic notion that creation was "a framing of something of nothing." He disagreed with Swan's linguistic analysis of Genesis. The Hebrew word for creation had no such original signification, but rather meant "perpetually eternal." Hotham articulated a theory of

³⁰⁸ Jakob Böhme, *Signatura Rerum. Or, the Signature of All Things* (London, 1651), 13-14.

³⁰⁹ Böhme, *Aurora*, 438.

³¹⁰ Hotham, *Teutonic Philosophy*, sig. A8v-A9v.

immanent cosmogenesis, collapsing even chemical spectrums of distinction between God and matter. For Hotham, chaos or the “Deep” was a “space-infinite,” a pseudo-being through which God existed both within and without the potential pre-materiality of the cosmos. God literally was the pre-created chaos; he was “an infinite immeasurable space, in every imaginable point whereof dwelt the whole Deity.” Although it was not quantifiable, Hotham wrote that the pre-creation space was “not purely nothing.” For example, an infinite line might elude quantification, but it was still there, stretching ad infinitum. Indeed, it was this unquantifiable pseudo-materiality that functioned as a vast potentiality and immanent pre-creation “in which God was able to create so many worlds.” Because the Deep lacked all sense of quantification and dimension it could function as a space for God’s infinite qualities.³¹¹

The Deep was a liminal space. God dwelt within its infinite space, yet the space was not quite God himself. Despite its immeasurable nature the Deep was still potentially divisible and thus different from the necessarily indivisible and unquantifiable essence of God. Thus, Hotham conceived of the Deep as “the Body of the Deity, or more fitly, the eternal habitation of the Godhead.” Much like the human soul, this pre-substance body separated matter from God’s spiritual essence while maintaining that the two were deeply connected. Yet this meant that the liminal space, God’s body, was the first matter. Hotham described this matter as a primal God-stuff and as both material and indistinct. It was a conflicted pre-substance that violently resisted formalization into distinctive bodies. Hotham speculated this “joint strife,” the push and pull to and from substantiality, was an anguished material conflict, “gnawing the bowels of the first matter.” Hotham helpfully suggested the chemical process of corrosion, “especially the dissolution of iron with the oil of vitriol,” as a “visible resemblance” of this primal abyss.³¹² He conceptualized the Deep as a place of turbulent transmutation, reminiscent of a violent chemical reaction dispersing “rancid fumes” throughout a laboratory.³¹³

The Creation of Genesis was God’s containment of these violent forces of “contracting, curdling, and constringing” through “the friendly wrestling of the beams flowing from the Center of the Deity.”³¹⁴ These wrestling beams emanated from the divine spiritual essence and “becalmed the raging Deep.” This “majestic light” filled the infinite space of the abyss, restraining the violent potential of the chaos. The idea of “beams” or “majestic light” again allowed Hotham to use the division of body and spirit place God’s essence apart from the abyss. But the distinction was hazy. Hotham stressed the world was divine. Its “omnipresent Center is the eternal unity, whose body and soul is the Abyss and its spirit is the divine wisdom.”³¹⁵ So while some element of God was distinctly intangible, there was a part of God, a nascent corporeality, which was co-existential with the material of the world. Indeed, the actual process by which God formalized the perpetual chaos, the transition from raging abyss to defined and substantial creation, was metabolic:

³¹¹ Ibid., sig. C5v-C6r, 30-34”.

³¹² Ibid.,34-36.

³¹³ Ibid.,37-38. Hotham writes that while creation ordered the chaos, part of this deep violent flux was also contained in a separate internal sphere. He accounted this sphere of eternal flux as “truly Hell,” the place where God would eventually retire during the Apocalypse.

³¹⁴ Ibid.,39.

³¹⁵ Ibid.,40.

He digested those particles or atoms of crass matter (congealed by the constringing force of the Abyss) into one body, or (if we may speak with the Copernicans) into several opaque spheres, separating them from the fluid matter.³¹⁶

The divine digestion ordered and formalized “the enflamed dark matter.” The division of opaque spheres meant that God’s digestion of the chaos separated into heaven and earth. Form was ushered in through a reordering of the eternal matter into substantial existence. The world was made a fit seat for God’s ordered divinity.

The divine abyss complicated the substantial distinction between God and created matter. Indeed, both divinity and matter were of the same eternal stock. Hotham relied upon these ideas for the Cambridge Traduccean debate. He concluded that Scripture’s description of God breathing or infusing life into Adam simplified the process for human understanding. It was a “descending to our mean capacities.” God was not to be imagined like a man tempering clay or kneading and breathing into dough. The idea that God was in a human figure, distinct from the world was “a posture ridiculous for us to fancy.” Instead, Hotham thought it probable that man arose through something akin to fermentation. God impregnated the earth with a quintessence. This seed, “nourished in the womb of some dark cave,” grew into the dimensions of the human body. When he finished cooking, the first man “broke through the dark entrails of the earth” as a chicken hatching from an egg.³¹⁷ By formulating the abyss as an immanent precondition for the moment of Creation, Hotham could maintain that the materials of the soul were contained within the cosmos without abandoning the divine as the ultimate source of the human essence. The material world, much like material man, did not arise from nothing, but rather existed within eternal principles of chaotic materiality and divine wisdom.

The same year that Hotham’s thoughts were published, Thomas Vaughan, a natural philosopher, alchemist, and brother to the poet Henry Vaughan, published his own speculations on the creation. Vaughan used the speculative moments before Creation to elaborate upon the cosmogonous implications of the Trinity. The Trinity was not just a state of divine existence, but the process of God made manifest and the primal transformation of spiritual into material. Vaughan proposed that the Trinity served as the cosmogonous schema for the entire creation. God the Father was a supernatural foundation, “the supercelestial sun” that powered the formation of material bodies. The Father functioned as an energetic source, driving the creative process. Christ’s personification of divinity represented the formalization of the divine as Vaughan held God the Son to be “the pattern in whose express image [the creatures] were made.” The Holy Ghost was the agent that extended this formalization into the material world. It was a “*spiritus opifex*,” the divine aspect that “framed the creature in a just symmetry to his type.”³¹⁸ The tripartite God was best understood as a movement from self-containment into dramatic extension. Vaughan thus speculated that Creation was an expansion from God’s initial insulated existence. God was “wrapped up and contracted in himself.” Creation was an emanation outward “from the center to the circumference.” Indeed, Vaughan thought that the

³¹⁶ Ibid., 48-49.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 62-63.

³¹⁸ Thomas Vaughan, *Anthroposophia Theomagica: Or A Discourse of the Nature of Man and his state after death; Grounded on his Creator’s Proto-Chimistry* (London, 1650), 6-7. See also, Deborah Harkness, *John Dee’s Conversation with Angels: Cabala, Alchemy, and the End of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 188.

“Fiat” moment was not a literal creation, but rather was “an emanation of the word.” The divine light “pierced the bosom of the matter,” structuring or perhaps crystallizing an “idea or pattern” within the “primitive waters like an image in glass” of the first matter. This pattern was the blueprint by which the Holy Ghost would build and frame the material world. Vaughan was explicit. This idea was “a pure influence of the Almighty” and impressed itself into “the vital, ethereal principles a model or pattern by which the body is to be framed.”³¹⁹

Although Vaughan thought of creation as the conveyance of “idea” into an inferior matter, he equivocated regarding the nub of the issue: whether the primordial matter itself was created *ex nihilo* or had been coexistent with God’s pre-fiat self. Vaughan argued such a determination required “a man were illuminated with the same light that this chaos was at first.” Yet, Vaughan was inclined to believe that all matter was indeed a production of the divine. He speculated that if matter was created by God, it was “the effect of the divine imagination,” an act producing a “passive darkness” to serve as the subject of the divine will. The injection of the Holy Spirit’s seminal “divine heat” into first matter caused “the coagulation of the seminal principles to a gross, outward fabric.” God’s creation was a materialization of divine potentiality.³²⁰

Vaughan was on firmer territory discussing how the Holy Spirit constructed the world, what he termed the “gross work or mechanic of the Spirit.” The Holy Spirit was “the hands of the divine spirit by which he did work upon the matter.” Citing the apocryphal hermetic writer Trismegistus, Vaughan described this first matter as a “*tenebrae deorsum ferebantur*” (darkness driven downward). These *tenebrae* were the “fuliginous spawn of nature” or a “horrible, confused qualm.” The Spirit extracted out of this mass “a thin spiritual caelestial substance” that became the basis for the bodies of angels, the heavens, and “intellectual essences.” From this point, the rest of creation followed in a series of extractions, eductions, and condensations that led to air that filled the space between matter and heaven and fueled the respiration of creation. Within the remaining chaos - earth, “an impure sulfurous substance” - was separated from the “phlegmatic” water. By separating earth from water, the land was “exposed to the “caelestial influences” that imparted heat and life. The divine spirit thus “made them fit for future productions,” allowing the further creation of corporeal life possible.³²¹

Vaughan’s thinking avoided using neo-Platonic hierarchies to understand the divine production of matter. It was important to stress that a transcendent deity did not apply abstract form onto the matter. Vaughan’s notes for the 1651 publication *Lumen de Lumine* claimed that a speculative empiricism, reminiscent of Paracelsus’s astral analogies, provided theological knowledge. “There is no true science or knowledge,” Vaughan argued, “but what is grounded upon sensible particular substances or upon that sensible substance out of which all particular substances are made.” Vaughan’s emphasis on the senses was curious. While “particular substances” were manifest to human observation, a primordial first matter that rested at the root of specific types of stuff obviously was not. But like the spring harvest, change and

³¹⁹ Vaughan, *Anthroposophia Theomagica*, 7-9. Vaughan thought that this “appearance of the Idea” in the first matter could be “excellently manifested in the magical analysis of bodies.” He appeared to suggest that the “fiat” moment could be recreated by “he that knows how to imitate the proto-chemistry of the spirit.” By the “separation of the principles, wherein the life is imprisoned.” Vaughan was vague but suggested one “may see the impress of [life] experimentally in the outward, natural vestments.”

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 10-12

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 12-15.

transmutation supported Vaughan's speculation about the chaos. The natural world allowed one to "see [that] out of one specifical root grow several different substances: leaves, flowers, fruit, seed." Platonic forms, abstract universals that guided the production of specific substances were "empty imaginary whimsies," human abstractions projected artificially upon the world's material universal nature.³²² Growth, transmutation, and formal bodies were not the product of platonic ideals or Aristotelian telos. Rather they were a direct, continual working of spiritual process inherent to matter governed change.

Vaughan's creation *ex deo* was a direct positioning of God as basic constituent influence within matter. Working to guide the "universal root" inherent within objects in nature was a divine presence. The Holy Spirit's taming of the chaos revealed there was "in nature a certain spirit which applies himself to matter and actuates in every generation." This intrinsic principle represented a fundamental spiritual reality that was encapsulated within the very substantial nature of extended matter.³²³ Divine activity existed and persisted through matter. In *Anima Magica Abscondita* Vaughan echoed the ideas of Ficino and Agrippa, generalizing this spiritualist vitalism as a means of thinking about active materiality more generally. Motion was a crucial phenomenon in the world. It was the principle by which "animals have their progress outward," the heavens are moved, the sea moves in flux, and the bodies on earth are "subject to alteration, that is to generation and corruption."³²⁴ Given that the cosmos was enlivened by the Trinity, Vaughan argued that matter itself was "merely passive" and that the inward spirit was the "universal spirit," an organizational principle guided by God. While this "animi mundi" was not God himself, neither was it distant from God. Vaughan wrote that the anima was a "mere instrumental agent," a motive spiritual property that was "guided in her operations by a spiritual metaphysical grain, seed, or glance of light." This *spiritus opifex* ordered the chaos as a metaphysical "seed" of organizational properties that descended from "the first father of life." God used this spirit to support creation "with living eternal influences which daily and hourly proceed from him." Far from being a distant, transcendent deity, Vaughan's God was a divinity diffused throughout an enchanted world, where the "flux of immaterial powers" explained the miraculous and theological formulations explained the nature of corporeal change. Thus when Vaughan described how the spirit functioned in nature, he returned to the language of alchemical creation and fluidity. Matter was passive but the spirit worked "as the Potter hath his clay or the limner his colors," exercising "chemistry in several transmutations" to produce sinews, veins, blood, and flesh. The "symmetry of the compound" proved that the agent of this spirit was "a most regular mathematician" and proof that all operations in the world "proceed from nothing but a divine intellectual spirit." There was a divine spirit that permeated the world, enacting change and functioning as the motive force for all creation.³²⁵

Hotham and Vaughan's occult writings indicate a mid-century willingness for theology to influence material philosophies and vice versa. As Fludd had before, Vaughan realized that some would question his "use of Scripture to establish physiology." But he was adamant that secrets, both physical and spiritual, could be discovered there. Scripture was a text of natural philosophy,

³²² BL Sloane MS 630, fo. 200-201. See also Thomas Vaughan, *Lumen de Lumine* (London, 1651), 17.

³²³ Thomas Vaughan, *Anima Magica Abscondita, or a Discourse of the Universal Spirit of Nature* (Oxford, 1650), 8-9.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 13-16.

or more accurately, Christian theology encompassed the study of nature, particularly the interaction between spiritual and material principles. It was no surprise then that the centerpiece of Christian theology was an incarnation, a materialization of spiritual divinity in which “the Divine Light united to matter.” Given its fundamental concern with the relationship between spirit and matter, God and creature, Christianity was the “only true religion.”³²⁶ Its teachings contained broader philosophies that necessarily lent themselves to theosophy, the study of how corporeal creatures might gain direct knowledge of God. Religion facilitated natural knowledge which in turn clarified the means by which man was intimately connected on a material level to God.

This naturalized theology persisted beyond the Interregnum. Despite the increased intensity of mechanistic philosophy’s assaults upon spiritualist ideas after the Restoration, mystical philosophies of materiality were espoused into the 1680s, 1690s, and beyond. The Philadelphians, a group of religious mystics that coalesced around the theosophic ideas of Dr. John Pordage and the visions of the mystic Jane Lead, were particularly receptive to the philosophical ideas of the mid-century. Based in Bradford and later London, the Philadelphians avoided the sectarian rejection of the English church. Rather they were united by the view that God’s spirit was immanent in the world and the individual soul. Heavily influenced by Böhme’s cosmology and mystical spiritualism, the Philadelphians used the Creation moment to support their broader mystical theology. Lead and others used cosmogony to explicate the nature of the material God and pinpoint the mechanisms by which God was made material.

In her mystical work, “An Alarum for Making the New Heaven and New Earth in Man,” (c. 1688-1690) Jane Lead framed discussion on the nature of the human soul by describing Genesis. Lead was not an alchemist, but she utilized chemical language in her mystical pronouncements. For Lead creation was a naturalization of spirit, a process of condensation in which the immaterial became gross and visibly substantive. She explained that the variety of spiritual forces in the world arose “after a natural way of operation.” While these spirits were originally unified with God “as one Spirit” after the moment of “Fiat” they rarefied into a variety of substances. Lead held that the primordial spirit for all substance in the world was “darkness,” a heterogeneous potentiality that held the motive force of fire, “the original spirit of life in all things.” The fiery darkness began a chemical process of solidification: “from which fire came air, and air being condensed produceth water, and water condensed makes a gross earth; all being but one and in one spirit of air (or airy substance).”³²⁷ Lead’s seminal substance echoed mid-century *ex deo* theories that emphasized the creation as a causal chain and implied less of an ontological distinction between material and immaterial substances than a spectrum of spiritual stuff, differentiated only by various levels of solidification.

This was important for two reasons. First, the end of days would be the reversal of the process of condensation, a rarefaction of matter back into the primordial darkness. The apocalyptic moment was God’s withdrawal of his quintessential spirit from the world ushering in the material world’s “natural return again to its original qualifications.” The end of the world was a violent return of matter into its seminal spiritual qualities. The material world would deteriorate back into fire, water, air, and ultimately darkness since these forces were “forsaken by its governing Spirit that afore qualified them.” Secondly, given these eschatological implications of the “natural” operation of spirit, it was also important that man recognize the original cosmic

³²⁶ Ibid., 27-28.

³²⁷ Williams Library MS, II. d. 28, fos. 11-12.

unity of matter. Man's soul was "but of the same airy substance as...the soul of the world." Recognizing the original material unity of the world facilitated a personal theosophical and mystical unity with the divine. The first darkness also exemplified the damnation of the ungodly. Those who did not cultivate their souls into the divine spirit through the practice of religion would "naturally return" back into the primordial elements, "a dark, raging fire."³²⁸

This pre-creation story contributed to Lead's construction of a larger Böhmenist cosmology. She argued that God's spirit was "but one spirit throughout the universe comprehending all things in itself." An implication of God's immanent spiritual substance was that his body encompassed both immaterial and material: "He composed and created all things in and from his said spirit...both invisible pure spiritual bodies and visible gross earthly bodies in this world." Employing the Paracelsian idea that there were seven celestial signatures in the universe, Lead held there were seven spirits in the world that were themselves components of a broader divine spirit. Lead understood this spiritual composite in material terms: "all which above said seven spirits, being but one spiritual substance, may easily be apprehended in one spirit of air." Through respiration God materially inhabited his creatures, who drew him into themselves and their bodies as they breathed. Furthermore, the heterogeneous spiritual substance, being composed of a variety of qualities, was the basis for both good and evil. This was evident in the composition of man as Lead wrote that the spirits produced "various sorts of invisible good and evil spirits in the heavenly and worldly part of man and many sorts of visible, gross, worldly bodies as worms, lice, etc. which continually breed more or less in him."³²⁹

The resurgence of *creatio ex deo* in the late seventeenth century blurred the ontological divisions between spirit and matter. We have noted the deep dissatisfaction occult thinkers expressed with Aristotelianism, an emphasis upon a more fundamental reality of spiritually penetrated matter that preceded the distinction of types of substances through external forms. By depicting Creation variously as competing chemical processes, infinite pseudo-materiality, *spiritus opifex*, or coagulated spirit theo-alchemical thinkers constructed an "intrinsic principle" that was resident in matter enabling growth, change, regeneration, and connection to God. By embedding the mechanical, ethical, and theosophic qualities of spirit so deeply within matter itself, the boundaries between these categories were difficult to maintain. So we can also see that Creation was a place of speculation linked to a broader understanding of the material world. Early moderns, even enthusiasts, generally supported their claims through reference to their experience of the natural world around them. This curious, often idiosyncratic, blend of religious belief and natural observation was readily deployed in the speculative gap of the Creation moment. Given the conceptual fluidity of the chaos and the divine "fiat," theological imperatives could be reshaped to fit the changing needs of the intellectual milieu.

Liminal Substance and Material Mediations

It was this very difficulty, the breakdown of metaphysical distinctions between spirit and body, that allowed seventeenth-century writers to move beyond the Creation moment to articulate broad vitalistic theories of materiality. Given the interrelationship and interpenetration between "subtle" spiritual stuff and "gross" corporeal matter, new alchemical theories supported

³²⁸ Ibid., fos. 12-13.

³²⁹ Ibid., fos. 45-48.

worldviews that considered the active, life-giving principles of God to be infused in nature. This chapter concludes by exploring several expressions of this seventeenth-century vitalism. The *creatio ex deo* framework of God's created relationship to matter, provided new vocabularies to describe various types of material mediations that connected the divine with physical, natural, and worldly substance.

Given matter's contiguous relationship to divine spirit, alchemists argued that all matter, even inanimate stuff, was infused with a divine life force. For example, in a letter to the Scottish courtier, David Ramsey (d. 1642), the alchemist A.S. argued that matter was a living substance. Matter was "not dead, but living; not gross, but the element earth invisible in essence, but visible in process, a matured matter in all thing." Corporeal stuff was a vitalized substance that was essentially enlivened, a concept evident during change and motion ("invisible in essence, but visible in process"). According to the alchemist, a materially quintessence was "the internal form, motion, and stirrer up of all things... the spirit that quickens the flesh or body."³³⁰ Given the blurry ontological division between spiritual stuff and material stuff, matter was often described as inherently volatile. William Freeman, a self-proclaimed "student in physic and astrology and the more occult sciences," described nature as "an instrument in God's own hand, animating, vivifying, and causing all things and bodies sublunary to fructify and increase."³³¹

This vitalism literally grounded divine influence. Geological formations, semi-solid stuff that permeated the earth, often served as a place where the divine could influence the material world. This could take any number of formulations. Glossing the cryptic hermetic writing, "Tabula Smaragdina," the antinomian John Everard (1584-c.1640) wrote that there was "one universal matter and form of things" and that this single substance was differentiated only by accident achieved through "that great mystery of rarefaction and condensation."³³² The animating power of the world was but one variety of this substantial spectrum. "The glue of this world, wrote Everard, "is the mean between the spirit and body." He noted that this matter was a sulfur or "transparent oil" that mediated immaterial and material substances.³³³ In 1652, Vaughan compiled similar vitalistic theories from the (likely misattributed) writings of "Rosicrucian" Raymund Lull (c. 1232-c. 1315). Utilizing the Hermetic relationship between the macro and microcosm, Vaughan/Lull conjectured that the world's minerals served as a "womb" or "matrix" for the influence of the stars. The astral heavens were an aethereal tool that allowed God to influence the world while remaining distant from the gross materiality. The first matter, a salt that was purified by supernatural agents was the receptacle for these astral forces:

It's most certain that God works by the ideas of his own mind and the ideas dispense their scales and communicate them daily to the Matter... Seeing then that the visible heavens receive the brightness of the spiritual world and this Earth the brightness of the visible Heavens, why may not we find something on Earth, which takes in this Brightness and comprehends in itself the powers of the two superior worlds? Now if there be such a subject to be found. The subject then is Salt I have spoken of

³³⁰ Bodl., Ashmole MS No. 1440, fo. 165.

³³¹ Bodl., Ashmole MS No. 1807, fo. 61a. The occultist also wrote that Nature could become "suffocated." If the matter was "excrementious," Freeman noted, "therein lies the production of monsters."

³³² Bodl., Ashmole MS 1440, fo. 196.

³³³ Ibid., fo. 200.

formerly. It is the body of the universal spirit. It is the Sperm of Nature, which she prepares for her own light as if we should spare oil for a lamp. A strange substance it is, but very common and of some philosophers most properly called *salina vireos et mirabilis*.³³⁴

While not himself the universal spirit of the world, God's ideas were "daily" materialized through the influence of the stars upon salt. The salt matter was "purified by a supernatural agent."³³⁵ The anima mundi was thus a material combination of penetrating astral influences and receptive geological formations. This theory linked the heavenly planes with the earth, reconciling God's transcendent essence as immutable and eternal divinity with the notion of his spiritual influence as immanent in the world.

Vaughan's utilization of Lull was similar to Jacques de Nuisement's consideration of salt as a liminal substance that indicated divine influence in the world. Nuisement's *Traitez du Vray Sel, Secret des Philosophes et de l'Esprit Universelle du Monde* published in 1620, was translated into English manuscript by mid-century.³³⁶ Nuisement's treatise hoped "to show and prove the world itself to be a living creature full of soul and life." What enabled this "pregnant and teeming vitality" was the "vrai sel," a salt that was the means by which the Anima Mundi was "corporified." The "continual agitation" and "incessant motion" in the world was evidence of universal and perpetual life contained within natural matter. The "vital spirit" rested upon Nuisement's belief that spiritual substance was a quintessence "separated from bodies as from a crass and gross matter," but infused throughout the world. Blending astrological, alchemical, and Neoplatonic ideas, Nuisement declared the earth was a "receptacle of superior influences" from the stars and served as "bubbling source and streaming spring" of vitality that spread throughout the material world. Matter was passive "obedient, flexible, buxom," but it was "mixed with sense and vegetation." This "teeming vitality" was a universal type of substance, a salt that was incorporated by the influence of spiritual heat and coagulation. This spirit provided the vigor and power that sustained organic life.³³⁷

While qualitatively different from other matter, Nuisement's spiritual quintessence, the true salt, functioned in material ways. When it was "heated and chaffed" by the energy of the sun it could gather and bestow life into the different species of creation. The salt was what ancients personified as "the old Demogorgon," an instrument of divinity to conduct life into matter. It was space where "the meditation and cogitation of God hath produced whatsoever is created." The salt was not quite spirit, nor was it simply material. Its vitalistic functions blurred the division between extended matter and spiritual essence. It was, in Nuisement's translator's phrasing, an "occult spirit" that could be drawn from the material world if one could distill the corporeal bulk of "gross matter."³³⁸

There was then, for Nuisement, a basic liminality in matter. While the alchemist maintained traditional categorical divisions between willful soul/intellect and corporeal substance, he argued

³³⁴ BL Sloane MS 630, fo. 173.

³³⁵ BL Sloane MS 630, fo.173.

³³⁶ William Newman, *Gehennical Fire: The Lives of George Starkey, an American Alchemist in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), 211-213.

³³⁷ BL Sloane MS 2172, fos. 132r-133v; a manuscript copy of the English translation is also in the Ashmole papers; Ashmole MS 1446, fos.1r-116r.

³³⁸ BL Sloane MS 2172, fos. 132v-135v.

that the vital spirit mediated between these two metaphysical categories of stuff. The corporeal world contained within its body “an hidden Spirit and in that spirit a soul which cannot be accounted to the body.” There was thus a “great distance” of material quality between the ensouled spirit and the “gross” body. Filling this ontological gap “required a third participant of both natures, namely a spirit-body or body-spiritual.” The “vray sel” was a mediator between the two extremes, a functional space between body and spirit that had “such affinity to the one and other that in him they may both together meet and be assembled.” This spirit was a “quintessence” or “occult spirit” that was the active agent “infused in the world. Nuisement analogized this mediation between the “lumps and mass” of corporeal stuff and the “agile purity” of spirit to the “interposition of Jesus Christ.” For Nuisement, Christ’s reconcilment and rapprochement between human beings and God represented the means by which the body-spiritual served as “the common agent or cement and solder” for the infusing of spirit into body.³³⁹

By the late seventeenth century, this vitalist impulse to materialize and geologize spirit reached a zenith with the writings of Francis van Helmont. A Flemish Paracelsan, van Helmont was part of the intellectual circle that surrounded Anne Conway and was resident at Ragley Hall during the 1670s.³⁴⁰ In 1682, the chemist physician Daniel Foote transcribed a collection of van Helmont’s alchemical and theological “Observations.” In these reflections van Helmont outlined a cosmology of deep interconnected vitalization through the pragmatic terms of a Fleming. He noted that upon digging into the earth of the Low Countries, a person would eventually reach quicksand, “in which a man turning himself in a small motion may easily sink even up to his armpits.” Frightening indeed, but van Helmont did not consider quicksand as limited to the low-lying areas of Europe; nor was its primary purpose destructive. While quicksand existed in pits, wells, and mine shafts, it also could be found throughout the world beneath forests and cornfields and in the “tops of the highest rocks and mountains.” A liquid subsoil was ubiquitous. It was “the foundation of the earth, being everywhere under it.” In the same manner as Nuisement’s salt, van Helmont’s quicksand vitalized the life of the world as everything resting above the sand was “a living product” of the water conducted by the soil.³⁴¹

The quicksand represented a liminal substance in which the boundaries between liquid and solid were permeable. This allowed nutritive functions to pass through seemingly impermeable boundaries. The quicksand’s water thus created a singular life force throughout the layers of stone in the world. Water permeated and nourished the seemingly solid land, creating “one great living being out of which do spring innumerable multitude of particular and individual lesser living beings.” Yet quicksand’s liminality, like the “vray sel,” was cosmic. Just as the “constant circulation of water” supplied the lifeforce of the world, quicksand was itself “supplied by the return of some luminous spiritual being coming into the vacuity of the water.” These spiritual influences were the light of the stars and the liquid soil was a place where astral forces could be mediated into the physical world. Van Helmont held that astrally-vitalized quicksand caused “all the motion that is in the earth, as the motion of a man proceeds from the air he attracts by breathing into his belly.” The great respiration of the cosmos occurred in these liminal conceptual spaces. Van Helmont’s quicksand indicated a continued willingness to equate

³³⁹ Ibid., fos. 134v-135r.

³⁴⁰ Alison Coudert, “A Quaker-Kabbalist Controversy: George Fox’s Reaction to Francis Mercury van Helmont,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 39 (1976), 179.

³⁴¹ BL Sloane MS 530, fos. 5-7.

materiality with the passive acceptance of spiritual influence. The liquidity of quicksand was crucial here. It was an example in which rock and stone, things that were usually durable, impermeable, and formal, became subject to flux, movement, and penetrating forces. The inert substance of stone became a carrier of water providing life to the earth that it touched.³⁴²

Van Helmont's world vision was one of fecund interconnection, of material stuff functioning with spirit-like influences, of vitalist unity where the hills literally were alive. It was within this vitalist paradigm that van Helmont placed God's influence. God was omnipresent and all comprehending. Furthermore He was not aloof from his work, but "always creating, forming, and making." God used "beams" to fulfill his will. Thus the world and "this sphere of quicksand and water" was the place "in which the Creator hath placed his Tabernacle." Through liminal substance God enacted spiritual influence in material ways. As is evident, van Helmont did not think of the relationship between spirit divinity and matter as one of essential difference. Rather he observed that "matter and spirit differ only gradually and are mutually convertible." Indeed, the key alchemical processes of rarefaction and condensation could enact such conversions both naturally and artificially. Van Helmont's vitalism rested upon the alchemical notions of liminal substances and the astrological theory. The "beamings and emanations" of God were the stuff from which created life was constructed and enlivened. This included man. The religious imperatives of knowing God through religious worship could be formulated as an ontological process, as those "created out of [God's] beams must have the powers of fulfilling the will of the Creator, of returning again to the original of their being, and being united therewith now to the Creatures." Religion required recognizing that man, like all matter, was the stuff of God.³⁴³

Conclusion

The rise of *ex deo* theories of creation and vitalist materialities suggests an alternative framework for thinking about how early moderns understood the relationship between God and the material world. Seventeenth-century alchemical and theosophic thought sought to rediscover God in the matter of the world. Far from excluding the divine from human philosophy of the natural world, there were philosophers who combined natural philosophic speculation with religious imperatives. In addition, these thinkers were heavily influenced by the Reformation's effect upon the genealogy of knowledge. Ancient Greek philosophy was recast as a moribund atheism manifested in a superficial scholasticism. Culminating in the vitalistic discourse of the late-seventeenth century, alchemical and theosophic speculation aimed to show that God's spirit was immanent in the world and that this relationship complicated anthropologies that stressed the division between the fleshly world and the divinized spirit. Indeed, the very categories of body and spirit were stretched to the breaking point as chemical vocabularies were deployed to reconcile the metaphysical divisions between spirit and body.

We can conclude by returning to John Milton, who famously suggested that the early chapters of Genesis offered new conceptual possibilities for the redemption of man. In *Paradise Lost* (1667), Milton suggested that man's material nature not only allowed for physical regeneration, but also the cosmic possibility of transcendence. The poet imagined the prelapsarian world as a moment in which material changes were effected naturally within a

³⁴² Ibid., fos. 5-7.

³⁴³ Ibid., fos. 18-19.

ceaselessly transforming, feeding, concocting, and incorporating cosmic body.³⁴⁴ In Milton's vision, the elements of the first world digested themselves in vital cycle: the earth and sea sustained the air, which fed the heavens, which in turn imparted vital light and heat back to the earth. All things, not just "intelligential substances," contained the ability to "concoct, digest, assimilate, / And corporeal to incorporeal turn."³⁴⁵ This entailed that *material* change did not imply *essential* change; matter could become spirit. Indeed there were only different material varieties of the same metabolic stuff.

Milton's own theological beliefs accorded with the prelapsarian world of *Paradise Lost*. The poet believed that the first matter had originally emanated from God, in opposition to *ex nihilo* theories that God had created the world from nothing. Milton was optimistic that gross matter could be materially regenerated; in *De Doctrina Christiana* he considered the original *ex deo* matter as a "seminarium" containing within it the potential for conversion into ethereal spirit. Milton reasoned that God could not have produced bodies "unless there had been some corporeal power in his own substance." As a philosophical principle, God needed to contain the most humble, crass matter—otherwise, from whence material creation? This spirit-matter continuum had radical theological implications: as the stuff of God corporeal matter in itself could ascend into spirit.³⁴⁶

The radical conceptual possibilities provided through Milton's view of matter provided radical possibilities for reconceptualizing the spiritual redemption of man's flesh. This religious philosophy was evident in Adam's and the angel Raphael's dinner together in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Suggestive of his angelic materiality, the ethereal Raphael digested his meal with "real hunger" and concoctive heat in the same way that "th'empiric alchemist" converted drossy metals into gold. Spiritual stuff was but one end of an ontological spectrum with corporeal stuff; God shaped matter into various forms out of the same substance. Raphael explained that man might eat himself into angelic perfection. Men differed from angels "but in degree, of kind the same." The angel concluded on a hopeful note:

Wonder not then, what God for you saw good,
If I refuse not, but convert as you,
To proper substance; time may come when men
With angels may participate, and find
No inconvenient diet, nor too light fare:
And from these corporal nutriments perhaps
Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit,
Improved by tract of time, and winged ascend
Ethereal...³⁴⁷

³⁴⁴ Regina Schwartz argues that Milton transcended the post-Reformation framework of Eucharistic debate: material change was not effected by legalistic priests changing the essences of edible substance, but a natural occurrence, *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism: When God Left the World* (Stanford, 2008), 59-70.

³⁴⁵ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book V, 395-433.

³⁴⁶ John Milton, *De Doctrina Christiana* in *The Complete Works of John Milton*, Vol. 8, trans. John K. Hale and J. Donald Cullington, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 291-295.

³⁴⁷ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book V. 491-499.

Adam could become spirit because his very substance contained the ability to become rarefied into something more pure and ascendant. Part of a single continuum of substance, it was ontologically possible for mankind, or at least for prelapsarian Adam, to ascend into angelic purity. For the early moderns on the far side of the Fall, digestion provided a ladder to angelic purity. Matter was still the stuff of God and, as we will see in the following chapter, man might reconstitute himself into spirit “improved by tract of time.”

Chapter 4

The Problem of Flesh: Vegetarianism and Edible Matters

There were two vegetarian hat-makers living near London in the second half of the seventeenth century. In the 1650s Roger Crab and Thomas Tryon, English haberdashers with heterodox religious beliefs, both foreswore animal meat. Blending medical concern over food with moral and metaphysical concerns, these writers believed vegetable diet redeemed the human body for godly existence. They argued that the consumption of meat made the body unhealthy and prone to disease. More importantly, eating flesh reinforced the fallen and carnal nature of man. By eating meat, a person became “fleshly,” oriented toward ephemeral desires and opposed to God’s spiritual purity. Crab, who claimed in 1655 to have medically treated over one hundred people, admonished patients that consuming meat and drinking strong liquors “would inflame their blood, venom their wounds, and increase their disease.” Eating flesh opposed nature, “the workmanship of a pure God.”³⁴⁸ Thomas Tryon also warned of the “poisonous juices of unclean food.”³⁴⁹ For his part, Tryon abstained from flesh, fish, and rich drinks, limiting his food to bread and fruit. “My clothing was mean and thin,” recalled Tryon in his memoirs, “for in all things self-denial was now become my real business.” Abstemious living and vegetable food made the senses “clear-sighted” and created a “harmonious correspondence” between soul and body.³⁵⁰

Of course Christian abstention from food has an ancient history, rooted in the devotional practices of the early church.³⁵¹ Caroline Walker Bynum has shown that in the medieval church food was a natural target for “the ascetic impulse—the desire to defy corporeal limits by denying bodily needs.”³⁵² It is not surprising then that historians have framed the corporeal impulse toward spiritual purification in the 1650s as a medieval hangover—a curious revitalization of an older asceticism enabled by the social breakdown of the English Revolution.³⁵³ Alternatively,

³⁴⁸ Roger Crab, *The English Hermite, or, the Wonder of this Age* (London, 1655), 4.

³⁴⁹ Thomas Tryon, *The Way to Health* (London, 1683), 67.

³⁵⁰ Thomas Tryon, *Some Memoirs of the Life of Mr. Tho. Tryon* (London, 1705), 26-31.

³⁵¹ Prominent in the hagiographies of the early church was the idea of “heroic fast,” that situated the control of food and consumption within a wider cosmic struggle. See Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 47-49.

³⁵² Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 34, *passim*.

³⁵³ Such is the thinking behind Jerome Friedman’s consideration of the radical religious heterodoxy in the 1650s as a revival of Gnostic thought, *Blasphemy, Immorality, and Anarchy: The Ranters and the English Revolution* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State Press, 1987). See also B.J. Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 114-115, who considers Tryon and Roger Crab (along with most of the heterodox writers of the seventeenth century) as reflecting older occult thinking inflected through the work of Jakob Böhme. Ariel Hessayon has noted the lack of social connections to link Crab with the Behmonism of Samuel Pordage and the Philadelphians, “Crab, Roger (c.1616–1680),” Ariel Hessayon in *ODNB* (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

historians have framed Crab and Tryon as precociously modern, anticipating the disciplined teetotalism of nineteenth-century political reformers and the rise of modern sensibilities regarding the treatment of animals.³⁵⁴ But these narratives, perhaps struggling with the strangeness of the sources, downplay the intrinsic historical importance of seventeenth-century vegetarianism, framing it either as a signal of the lasting importance of medieval worldviews or as a premature expression of modern proletarian political sentiments. The English vegetarians of the seventeenth century thus reflect a disjunctive problem in early modern historiography, a struggle to reconcile the religious fervor of the long Reformation with the formative ideas of a secularizing modernity. I take an alternative approach, highlighting the vegetarians' intrinsic importance as revealing early modernity's broader concerns with the spiritual and physiological disposition of the material body and new interest in the vital relationships connecting the human body with other material entities.

Crab and Tryon were uniquely concerned with the material force of food. They were fascinated by the influence of food upon the body and mind. In many ways, they anticipated Jane Bennett's theory that edible matter contains an intrinsic vitality, a material agency or capacity to exert force and create effects within the body. Motivating the self-denial of early modern vegetarians was a strong sense that food had—to use Spinoza's term—conative abilities, the capacity to persist inside the body and affect change within human physiology, psychology, and religious behavior.³⁵⁵ Historians have examined the effects of fasts in terms of social, scientific, and gendered discourse, but have largely missed the intellectual and cultural significance of edible matter itself.³⁵⁶ The English vegetarians are historically relevant less for what they *did not* eat, and more for their lengthy discussions about the material influence of the food that they *did* eat. Their writings suggest that understanding early modern ideas about the body requires broader contextualization within changing conceptions of matter itself.

The history of English vegetarianism in the late seventeenth century is one of sustained religious anxiety about the material body. But the nature of this concern changed between 1655 and 1720. Heterodox early moderns began to conceptualize the human body as a field in which other types of matter were active in shaping health, disposition, and spirit. Vegetarianism in seventeenth-century England actually encouraged (and was encouraged by) broader changes in the cultural understanding of the consuming body. It displays a shift from radical modes of Christian contempt for the body to a more worldly care for the self. The chapter argues that English vegetarianism was not a static curiosity of heterodox thought. Rather it was enmeshed in

³⁵⁴ See Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution: The English Revolution of the 17th Century*, rev. ed. (1958; repr., New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 314-322. For early modern responses to animal cruelty see Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 290-292.

³⁵⁵ Jane Bennett, "Edible Matter," *New Left Review* 45 (2007): 133-136; Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, pt. 3, proposition 6.

³⁵⁶ The optic of the fasting female body has led to important contributions to our understanding of the fraught religious and political problems of the later seventeenth century. See Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women*, 80-81; Simon Schaffer, "Piety, Physic and Prodigious Abstinence," in *Religio Medici: Medicine and Religion in Seventeenth-century England*, ed. Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 1996), 171-203; Jane Shaw, *Miracles in Enlightenment England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 98-118.

broader intellectual questions relating to scriptural exegesis, anatomical functions, and philosophies of matter. Comparing English vegetarians over time uncovers a transformation in how early moderns approached, both intellectually and practically, the fundamental religious division between the corporeal and the spiritual.

The Uxbridge Hermit

Roger Crab's striking account of his life, vegetarian diet, and theological beliefs was published in the 1655 pamphlet, *The English Hermite*. Like many religious men of the Revolution who entered the deregulated public sphere of pamphlets, polemics, and religious tracts, Crab (c.1616-1680) was of humble origins. He had been a haberdasher, specializing in the production and sale of hats, with a shop in Chesham, Buckinghamshire. Crab had fought for parliament during the civil wars. He was wounded—in his own words, “cloven to the brain in the late war for the parliament against the king.” He ran afoul of his own army's leadership, probably agitating for the Levellers. Oliver Cromwell gave him “sentence to death in the Field.” Crab somehow avoided capital punishment, but was imprisoned continually by Commonwealth authorities for breaking the Sabbath.³⁵⁷ In the early 1650s he sold off his possessions and moved to Uxbridge, west of London, where he built a cottage. A letter published in the August 1652 edition of the newsletter, *Mercurious Democritus*, confirms that Crab moved to the Uxbridge area by the summer of that year. The letter claimed “a Crabbed cavelling fellow,” who worked as a barber, horse doctor, and hat-maker, was disturbing ministers near Uxbridge.³⁵⁸ The tract's publisher advertised Crab's existence as an “unparalleled kind of life”; the hermit refused to eat meat and abstained from prepared drinks such as beer, ale, or wine. Crab considered the consumption of a creature's flesh to be “a sin against his body and soul”; he thus lived on roots, herbs, cabbage, and grass.³⁵⁹

There was scriptural reasoning behind Crab's vegetarianism, as the haberdasher hoped to bring worldly eating habits in line with biblical precepts. Abstaining from flesh followed in the practices of Christ and was “exemplary from the Prophet Daniel,” who had refused to defile his body with the Babylonian “king's meat” and instead consumed pulses. Additionally, there were Old Testament injunctions regarding sacrifice. Since God found repugnant the sacrifice of any animal that had fed upon flesh, Crab concluded that believers should avoid the “practice of dogs and wolves.”³⁶⁰ If predators were unacceptable to God as a sacrifice, men should make themselves a fit sacrifice to God by avoiding meat and rich foods. These Old Testament practices aligned with the temperance of Christ, a life of denial and humiliation that would undo the false

³⁵⁷ Crab, *English Hermite*, sig. A2v-r, 4; Roger Crab, *Dagons Downfall* (London, 1657), 26-27.

³⁵⁸ Crab, *English Hermite*, sig. A1r-A2v; *Mercurious Democritus* (Aug. 4-11, 1652), 148-149. The seemingly obvious pun (at least to modern readers) of the “hermit crab” was not used in reference to Roger Crab. According to the OED, the informal name for the terrestrial crustacean was not in use until the 1735-1736 edition of the Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions*. This edition referred to Caribbean land crabs in borrowed shells as “like an hermit in his cell,” *Philosophical Transactions*, 39, 114-115.

³⁵⁹ Crab, *English Hermite*, 2-3.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

righteousness of the flesh and its ungodly lifestyle.³⁶¹ But Crab's vegetarianism was motivated less by systematic scriptural exegesis—there are many scriptural moments that condone the eating of meat—than it was “eisegesis,” the process of reading meaning into a text.³⁶² His interpretation of scripture was enabled by the specific historical circumstances of the Commonwealth, a religious milieu in which it was common for laymen to justify their ideas through direct spiritual inspiration.³⁶³ Crab largely justified his vegetarian self-denial by claiming God had “enlightened” Crab's understanding:

Which [enlightenment] causes me to withdraw from what I have done; and instead of strong drinks and wines, I give the old man a cup of water; and instead of roast mutton and rabbits and other dainty dishes, I give him broth thickened with bran and pudding made with bran and turnip leaves chopped together and grass. At which the old man (meaning my body) being moved, would know what he had done, that I used him so hardly.³⁶⁴

Crab's body was “the old man,” an unruly corpus that required mastery and conquest by his spiritual soul. His body was representative of fleshly existence writ large, a broad set of cultural practices that indulged material desires and exacerbated England's political problems. This enlightened vegetarianism encouraged an Augustinian division of the self between flesh and godly soul that was common in the theologies and religious writings of many radical groups during the English Revolution. By eating flesh one became “fleshly.” Carnal desires—the need for meat, fine clothes, and heavy drink—revealed man's deviation from a natural prelapsarian existence in which the body was filled by God's indwelling spirit and sustained by simple foods. Salvation required a dramatic self-overcoming in which the “old man” was replaced with a new form of vegetal godliness.³⁶⁵

Crab's vegetarianism vividly displayed the problem of the flesh that faced the radical religious writers of the English Revolution. In the ideological upheaval of the English civil wars, marginal and non-elite writers, following antinomian and anti-ceremonial tendencies within puritan congregations and communities, argued that mediating religious institutions—such as the official ecclesiastical hierarchy, church ceremony, and scriptural exegesis—were incapable of truly understanding God and religious truth.³⁶⁶ During the heady months that followed the

³⁶¹ Crab was aware of passages in scripture that allowed eating meat, citing 1 Timothy 4.3 and Matthew 15.11. He held that following the letter of such passages “must needs be without the spirit of sanctification,” *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁶² See James Grantham Turner, *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), v.

³⁶³ Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion, 1640-1600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), esp. ch. 2. J. C. Davis, a revisionist, also recognizes the influence of the “living God” on personal religious experience, “Radical religion and the English Revolution,” in *Religion in Revolutionary England*, ed. Christopher Durston and Judith Maltby, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 31-35.

³⁶⁴ Crab, *English Hermite*, 2.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁶⁶ For the radical milieu, see Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), 73-78; Barry Reay, “Radicalism and Religion in the English Revolution: An Introduction” in *Radical*

execution of Charles I in 1649, when the “world was turned upside down,” these writers continually insisted that God was “manifest in the flesh,” that the saint’s body was spiritualized by the indwelling spirit.³⁶⁷ Radical religion required direct, immanent spiritual inspiration and complete communion between the believer and the divine. But how could this union occur?

A brief review of contemporary radical writings reveals a persistent concern over how divine qualities could be known through the flesh. Heterodox writers continually addressed this issue of God’s corporeal manifestation within the body. Given the categorical difference between body and spirit, how did fleshly beings make themselves fit for spiritual knowledge and redemption? Laurence Clarkson, the notorious Ranter, explained the problem with typical flourish in 1650: “till flesh be made spirit and spirit flesh, so not two but one, thou art in perfect bondage.”³⁶⁸ Other radicals stressed that physical change must precede spiritual regeneration. Richard Coppin, an itinerant preacher in the Thames river valley, argued in 1649 that God had “sown the image of himself in the fleshly part of this world.” To have a “spiritual discovery” the flesh needed to die and be changed into a “new nature.”³⁶⁹ Others claimed that divine communion required the abnegation of the material self. Joseph Salmon, a chaplain in the New Model Army, wrote that in order for the divine spirit to “comprehend the mind of the creature,” it needed to “consume and destroy all that [was] contrary to God.” God was a “refining spirit” by which a person was reduced to a unified existence in God. A divine alchemy emptied the soul of the material self and “[transformed] it into its own spiritual nature.”³⁷⁰ A cult in Southampton took ideas about corporeal transformation seriously. William Franklin, a rope-maker brought before local justices of the peace for blasphemy, claimed his body had been physically reconstituted as Christ. Franklin’s followers deposed in court that his body had been reconstituted: “his flesh was clean scraped away, and his skin and bones hanged together, and his skin likewise very suddenly fell off from him... and afterwards new flesh came again as a young child.”³⁷¹

Religion in the English Revolution, ed. J. F. McGregor and Barry Reay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 4-8. For the longer history of antinomianism, see Peter Lake, *The Boxmaker’s Revenge: ‘Orthodoxy,’ ‘Heterodoxy’ and the Politics of the Parish in Early Stuart London* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 179-183; David Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 38-59; Theodore Dwight Bozeman *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion and Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 1-6.

³⁶⁷ Gerrard Winstanley, *The New Law of Righteousness* (London, 1649), p. 76.

³⁶⁸ Laurence Clarkson’s solution to the problem (perhaps the most radical injunction to spiritual libertinism in revolutionary England) was that “the corrupt senses must put on incorruption.” He argued that the body must be sacrificed into sin in order for it to be delivered from the power of sin: one needed to act out a sin in order to free it from the imperatives of the flesh, *A Single Eye: All Light, no Darkness* (London, 1650), 13-14.

³⁶⁹ Richard Coppin, *Divine Teachings: The Exaltation of All Things in Christ* (London, 1649), 14-15.

³⁷⁰ Joseph Salmon, *Divinity Anatomized* (London, 1649) in *A Collection of Ranter Writings*, ed. Nigel Smith (London: Pluto Press, 2014), 174-175.

³⁷¹ Humphrey Ellis, *Pseudochristus: or a True and Faithful Relation* (London, 1650), 39.

It was within this ideological context that Crab suggested digestive discipline as the solution to the problem of the flesh. The consumption of meat literally reconstituted the body as fallen carnality. Crab therefore disciplined “the old man (meaning my body)” by denying it food that reinforced the flesh’s innate corruptions. Crab described his body’s reaction to vegetarian discipline in martial terms: having attacked the flesh, “so the wars began... my fleshly members rebelled against the law of my mind and had a shrewd skirmish.” Crab, weakened from the meager diet, became sick with the flux. But God, “well pleased with the battle,” sustained the haberdasher through the dysenteric crisis. His body recovered and became “more humble,” willing to be sustained with leaves, mallows, and grass. This was a dangerous attack upon the material body. While Crab survived his transition from “the organs of flesh” to a life of vegetarian Christianity, others were less lucky.³⁷² The prefatory matter in *The English Hermite* suggested that Robert Norwood, a former cavalier officer for the parliamentary forces, died “being inclining” to Crab’s views on diet.³⁷³

New translations of continental writings in the 1640s also motivated vegetarian asceticism by raising the epistemological stakes of the digestive process. Contemporary hermetic writings emphasized the cosmic nature of digestion; man was the ensouled center of an array of astral, immaterial, and divine forces that influenced the body’s disposition. Indeed, Crab wrote that his dramatic battle against the flesh was partly due his “having found out that my body was governed by the inclination of my body from the starry heaven.”³⁷⁴ One such tract advocating this was George Whittington’s 1649 English translation of *Astrologie Theologized*, a hermetic work by the sixteenth-century German spiritualist Valentine Weigel.³⁷⁵ *Astrologie Theologized* relied upon the Paracelsian medical synthesis of the macro-microcosm with astrological influence. Man’s basic relationship to God was based upon human metabolism and digestive incorporation. “Adam, the first parent of the whole humankind” was formed out of the basic constitutive material of the universe, an “ens” or “*slime or dust*... a mass or matter, which had conjoined and composed in itself the universal essence, nature, virtue and propriety of *the whole greater World*.”³⁷⁶ As the universe in miniature, man contained the substance of the entire world and was able to incorporate a variety of external stuff—food, air, divine influence—into his being.

³⁷² Crab, *English Hermite*, 1-2.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, “To the Reader.” See also “Norwood, Robert (c.1610–1654),” Ariel Hessayon in *ODNB*.

³⁷⁴ Crab, *English Hermite*, 4.

³⁷⁵ Whittington’s press near the Royal Exchange in London was a central publisher for parliamentary tracts during the late 1640s, producing petitions, remonstrances, and responses regarding the Leveller agitations. It also published heterodox theology, including Henrick Niclaes’s *The Glass of Righteousness* in 1649.

³⁷⁶ Valentine Weigel, *Astrologie Theologized* (London, 1649), 19-21. Weigel’s mysticism was influenced by Johannes Tauler’s emphasis upon the need to find spiritual unity with God, the astrological doctrines of Paracelsus, and the interiority of spiritual life advocated by Sebastian Franck and Caspar Schwenckfeldt. His writings made their way to German presses in 1609, decades after his death in 1588. See Rufus Jones, *Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries* (London, 1914), 139; Russell H. Hvolbek, “Being and Knowing: Spiritualist Epistemology and Anthropology from Sweckenfeld to Böhme,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 22 (1991): 103-105.

Weigel observed that nutritive stuff was converted into the substance of the person: “whatsoever a man eats and drinks, the same thing is essentially transmitted into the substance, nature, propriety, and form of man.” This required some sort of substantive commonality between the digester and the edible matter. So food was “converted into the nature of the eater...and is made one and the same with him.” (6) Weigel argued that knowledge was also an immaterial form of “food.” Digestion was also the chemical incorporation of knowledge into the soul. Just as man was made from the food he eats, so his essence was constituted by the immaterial knowledge that he learns or studies. The “food of the soul” was science, the arts, and technical skill that unified with the soul’s being:

As he tincts his body by meat and drink, which pass into the substance of flesh and blood, so also his soul is tincted with whatsoever kind of sciences, arts, etc. Eating, and drinking, he is united essentially with that which he eats and drinks. And learning and knowing he is united essentially with that which he studies, learns, and knows. (7)

The epistemological “tincture” of knowledge was homologous to the body’s constitutive consumption of material stuff into itself: “by meat, drink, knowledge, study, and intelligence, this is the same that man is and is made the same in man.” Just as food becomes a part of the eater, knowledge was “agglutinated,” incorporated into the spiritual substance of the person. (7) The immaterial stuff of wisdom blended into the body through mixture, refinement, distillation, and incorporation.

Weigel’s interpretation of the Paracelsian microcosm entailed that both material stuff and immaterial knowledge intersected in the bowels of man—the body’s interior functioned alchemically, distilling knowledge like chemical elements. It was within man that “astrology” was “theologized,” or made godly and spiritual. Weigel noted, “in nature all things are convertible, as well to good as to evil.” (8-9) The human being thus served as a container for alchemical processes both material and epistemological. Man not only distilled the pure from the impure elements within his body, he also purified and refined materialized knowledge.

There were theosophical implications for this epistemic digestion. Spiritual nourishment, the metabolic incorporation of ideas into the soul, meant that God’s immaterial knowledge was unified within a person’s spirit. Weigel wrote, “we are of God, move in God, and live in God, and are nourished of God. Hence God is in us and we are in God.” This meant that man’s relationship to God was more than a matter of right knowledge and practice. Rather proper religious practice was an issue of substances, the conversion of matter, and man’s essential relationship to the divine. Chemical interpenetration through digestion allowed divine principles to reside in the human form; it was the means by which the immaterial will of God could be incorporated into the lower, material body. But while man was subject to external influences, Weigel stressed the primacy of the human metabolic form, writing that man was “the center of the whole universe.” Material and astral elements, as well as God’s inspiration and spirit, were only truly realized in the human body. Digested matter gained its importance in the form of man the microcosm.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁷ Weigel, *Astrologie Theologized*, 8-9. Weigel fits into Leon Kass’s neo-classical theory of edible matter—the idea that matter is ontologically inferior to “life,” and only gains meaning when incorporated into the vitalized “form” of an organism. Indeed, like Weigel, Kass places man at the hierarchical center of the universe; *The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of our Nature* (New York: Macmillan, 1999), 19, 40-44.

As a moment of cosmic and divine influence, Crab politicized consumption in a radical economic critique. His vegetarian skirmish with his flesh staged the broader condemnation of English society more generally. *The English Hermite* contained a sense of despair over the political problems of the Commonwealth, perhaps reflecting the failure of the first Protectorate parliament earlier in 1655, the third parliament dissolved in as many years.³⁷⁸ Crab pointed out “our fighting to regulate government in the old men; we see it still as bad, if not worse than it was before.”³⁷⁹ But the squabbles in Whitehall paled in comparison to England’s social concerns; Crab described the laboring poor as wallowing in drunkenness and gluttony. With fleshly consciences “feared up” by the false blessings of the Sabbath, poor men drank “as much as a bushel of barley will make, which will keep two ordinary families a whole week in bread.” The consumption of meat and alcohol created a cascade of economic miseries for the English poor:

By their drunkenness and gluttony corn is made dear; and corn being dear, land is made dear, so that the farmer must give a great rent for his farm and is constrained to hire many more acres. By this means cattle and corn hath been at a high rate, the farmer being covetous-minded to uphold his wife and children in pomp and pride, feasting and gluttony at christenings and banquetings. By which means surfeits and diseases drive them to the physicians, who wait for their prey to get their money to purchase lands and houses that they may let it out to them again.³⁸⁰

This was a society glutted with “external commodity.” Fleshliness implicated even institutionalized religion in the desires of the consumptive flesh.³⁸¹ Religious holidays were not holy, but mere feasts that drained the resources of the economy into further scarcity: “There is spent of wines and beer, flesh and wheat, and all other varieties in them twelve days, than will keep the whole nation twelve weeks if discreetly used; so that this must needs make all manner of food the scarcer; and this scarcity must needs oppress the poor.” These ostensibly Christian celebrations unbalanced an already ungodly market system whereby bodies of flesh sated themselves. Such holidays were “neither [for] God nor the increase of food to the nation.”³⁸²

Vegetarianism thus had political utility. It emphasized—to borrow a phrase from Karl Gunther and Ethan Shagan—a form of “economic theology,” the articulation of a divinely sanctioned order of human exchange.³⁸³ The return to a natural economy through the adoption of a natural diet would correct the English economy. Crab was sensitive to the interconnections between fleshly consumption and the broader productive forces of the English economy. Carnal desires sustained the innumerable people who made their living producing products that sated the ephemeral wants of the body. If the English did not “wear superfluous things, thousands of people would starve for want of trading.” English society was acculturated to the fleshly logic of

³⁷⁸ Patrick Little and David L. Smith, *Parliament and Politics during the Cromwellian Protectorate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 130-148.

³⁷⁹ Crab, *English Hermite*, 2.

³⁸⁰ Crab, *English Hermite*, 7-8.

³⁸¹ Crab’s very existence stemmed from the desire for material gain. He claimed that without his mother’s income of twenty pounds per year, his father would not “have agreed that they should come together for generation,” *Dagons Downfall*, 2-4.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 9-11.

³⁸³ Karl Gunther and Ethan Shagan, “Protestant Radicalism and Political Thought in the Reign of Henry VIII,” *Past and Present* 194 (2007): 38-43.

consumption. Reform would thus need to be individual and corporeal. Interventions from above, government-imposed asceticism, could not reform the ills of carnal society. Crab supported this with a biblical food example. When God purified the Hebrews in the wilderness with “angel’s food called manna” the people murmured and rebelled against the Lord. So Crab conceded he would not have rich men “sell their goods before God hath enlightened their understandings.” Ordering the English polity required an intestine effort from below, not a political scheme from above. Men would have to forbear flesh of their own volition before England could “entertain light, love, and peace, and joy in the holy ghost.”³⁸⁴

Reflecting the political climate of the radical milieu of the Revolution, Crab reframed the fasting asceticism of scripture into a mystical diet—a regimen he believed would resolve the social problems of the age and create a new, divine order in the world. Crab believed this effort, the casting off of flesh’s “rudiments,” was the “treasure” of religion.³⁸⁵ Spiritual regeneration and a stable solution of England’s consumption-based economy required a violent mastery of the self along the lines of Crab’s divinely inspired triumph over his body.

Crab’s economic theology—centered on the consuming body—was a striking revision of Protestant ascetic practice. Rather than fasting to glorify God, Crab tamed his flesh to achieve an immediate natural unity with the divine: “I saw that [God] made use of natural causes to fulfill natural desires, so I came to know God in nature.”³⁸⁶ This was theosophy as worldliness. God existed in the world; care of the self required a radical reorientation toward the material world. Crab thus relied upon an anthropological vision in which the flesh was morally different from the inspired, divine soul. Only through a material transformation of the body natural could the body politic be reformed. This meant that, paradoxically, the dangerous materiality of the body was itself the natural means by which godly existence could be obtained. Abstinence shaped the dispositions and religious orientation of the believer; taming the “fleshy members” of the body realized the New Man—a body disciplined to live on the natural products of the world and reconstituted through godly food into divine purity.

Prelapsarian Theories of Digestion

There was a wave of interest regarding the material nature of “natural” man in late seventeenth-century England. Both Crab and Tryon believed the early chapters of Genesis provided insight into the formative nature of the human body and how edible matter influenced the religious disposition of the body. Explaining the shift from the violence of Roger Crab’s “shrewd skirmish” with his body to the “pleasant alacrity” of Thomas Tryon’s dietetics requires widening our focus to the broader intellectual culture between 1650 and 1680. Adam, the original vegetarian of Genesis, provided an exegetical moment for heterodox thinkers to investigate the material implications of Adam’s fall from prelapsarian purity. In the 1660s and 1670s, emphasis in these sources changed in a subtle but important way: English exegetes began to consider the material influence of digested food, in addition to changes in Adam’s body *per se*. This was spurred by an intellectual revival of chemical vitalism through the rising popularity of Helmontian medical theory, sometimes called “iatrochemical” for the way it sought chemical

³⁸⁴ Crab, *English Hermite*, 9-10, 12.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

cures for bodily ailments. These chemical theories about digestion emphasized two things: first, that health required specific care for the stomach and diet; and, secondly, that the incorporation of food into the body revealed matter to contain active agents operating within a monistic spectrum of vitalized substance. The differences between Crab and Tryon reflected these changing concerns in scientific, medical, and cultural writings—a widening of interest about the interaction between human bodies and the external matter.

For his part, Crab considered the fall of Adam as the moment in which the human body changed from vegetarian purity into fleshly, lustful materiality. In a pamphlet, *Dagons Downfall*, the hermit argued Adam's disobedience trespassed God's intended material boundaries for man: "he obeyed the subtlety of the serpent and brought himself into a posture for propriety, for he had gained of more materials than God before had created him." Man abandoned the naked, vegetable purity of God for the superfluous foods and possessions of lower creation. By accumulating material objects, men were forced to rely upon "other breathing creatures to uphold their bodies."³⁸⁷ This reliance on the corporeal flesh represented a fall from a divinely created primordial state; eating meat was the enemy to "pure nature," the original creation of God. Crab wrote, "If natural Adam had kept to his single natural fruits of God's appointment, namely fruits and herbs, we [would have] not been corrupted." Man's initial fall from grace was sustained by what he ate and drank. "By that means," the hermit admonished, "our desires were made strong after the flesh." Now conditioned by carnal feasting, man slighted "the herbs and innocent food" that came forth naturally from the world.³⁸⁸

These references to Adam occurred amidst new allegorical interpretations of Genesis that expanded the fall of Adam beyond the literal text of scripture.³⁸⁹ In the liberated print atmosphere of the English Revolution, anxiety about the corporeal body permeated these sources, as they elaborated upon the material implications of Adam's fall from vegetarian purity and spirituous existence. Even Henry More, the great opponent of midcentury enthusiasts, stressed the "spiritual meaning" in Genesis, worrying that skeptical atheists would deflate scripture into "the mere grammatical sense." His 1653 *Conjectura Cabbalistica* elaborated upon Adam's fall through a three-part revision of Genesis into a "Literal," "Philosophic," and "Moral Cabbala." More's literal interpretation emphasized Adam's vegetarian prelapsarian existence: God gave Adam "every frugiferous herb" that grew upon the earth. Man was made the possessor of "the choicest fruits of the earth." Lower beasts were forced to feed on baser herbage.³⁹⁰ Moving beyond the literal reading of the story, vegetarian Adam's fall became much more than an act of disobedience. In his "Philosophic Cabbala" More considered the fall as Adam's submission to "the luscious dictates of his own will." Adam's selfish turn had material effects. Man had been "first wholly ethereal," his mind had been enriched by the divine intellect. But upon forsaking God's will, Adam "sunk" into terrestrial matter. His ethereal body was replaced by flesh: "in due process of time Adam appeared clothed in the skin of beasts; that is he became a downright terrestrial animal."³⁹¹

³⁸⁷ Crab, *Dagons Downfall*, 12-13.

³⁸⁸ Crab, *English Hermite*, sig. B1v, 4-5

³⁸⁹ Turner, *One Flesh*, 124-126.

³⁹⁰ In Henry More's literal cabbala all creatures in Paradise were plant eaters, *Conjectura Cabbalistica. Or A Conjectural Essay of Interpreting the Minde of Moses* (London, 1653), sig. A3r, 8-9.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 36-37, 48, 50-51.

Radical interpretations printed during the Revolution emphasized, to an even greater degree, Adam's changed materiality. For Jakob Böhme, the German mystic, the fall of man entailed an essential shift in the very substance of mankind. In his exposition on Genesis, *Mysterium Magnum*, translated in 1652, Böhme described Adam as containing both an inward heavenly being and an outward earthly body—a composite blended into a “Holy Tincture.” Adam's body, although material, was highly refined—“an extract of the good part of the earth.” It lacked the grossness and corruptibility of flesh. Adam thus ate and drank “in a magical manner; not into the body, as now, but in the mouth there was the separation.” Presumably—Böhme does not specify—this separation entailed the direct conversion of food into immaterial nutrition. Such magical digestion did not require the fleshly bowels for nourishment. The forbidden fruit—*Mysterium Magnum* slips in and out of considering the fruit as an actual material object or as merely symbolizing the lustful imagination of Adam and Eve—contained the seed of concupiscence. Derived from the tree of good and evil, the fruit's “essences were discordant and un-like therein.” Eating it created enmity within the man's blended essential tincture. When Eve and Adam ate the fruit the heavenly part of man disappeared; their bodies were reconstituted into flesh. “A fiery hunger” impressed itself onto the substance of the body, “whereupon the flesh became gross, hard, thick, and corruptible.”³⁹²

Böhme's emphasis upon the fall as a consumptive moment of material change influenced English thought most directly in Samuel Pordage's 1661 creation epic, *Mundorum Explicatio*, which elaborated upon Böhme's version of Genesis. Pordage, the son of the heterodox religious leader and physician John Pordage, described Adam as vegetarian, indeed angelic, and not needing of “help from beasts, nor physics from the plant.” Adam's body, although “corporeal,” was pure, perfect, and vegetarian; “upon the tree of life only he fed.” Pordage described his fall as a “strange metamorphosis” into fleshly materiality. Given free will, Adam became captivated by the material allures of the created world. His body changed from transparent ether into “clog'd” flesh.³⁹³ Such allegories of the early chapters of Genesis reveal the extent to which heterodox thought between 1650 and 1670—literary or otherwise—focused upon the materiality of Adam's fall. Natural man and the fatal conversion into materiality suggested that man's very substance was flawed. Following this Roger Crab's vegetarianism was a radical attempt to reclaim this prelapsarian material state, “pure nature being the workmanship of God.”³⁹⁴

This inflationary exegesis regarding prelapsarian Adam—a reading of meaning into the literal text of Genesis—continued into the 1660s, but exegetes began to lay emphasis upon the process of digestion itself and the dispositive mechanisms of the forbidden fruit. Digestive interpretations of the fall were particularly evident in the Helmontian chemical theories of medicine (iatrochemistry) that proliferated in the 1660s and 1670s. A foundational text for new Helmontian medical practices was the 1662 translation of the Flemish physician Jan Baptiste van Helmont's medical opus, *Ortus Medicinus*, which argued that the stomach was the seat of the

³⁹² Jakob Böhme, *Mysterium Magnum: Or An Exposition on the First Book of Moses called Genesis* trans. John Sparrow (London, 1654), 78-79, 88-89, 94. See Turner, *One Flesh*, 142-148.

³⁹³ Pordage suggested that Adam's fall was tripartite: from angelic purity to fleshly materiality, from androgenous unity to sexual division from Eve, and from material obedience to disobedience in eating the forbidden fruit, *Mundorum Explicatio* (London, 1661), 57-62.

³⁹⁴ Crab, *English Hermite*, 4.

vital and sensitive soul. Van Helmont speculated that the first man's soul had been separate from the corpus. Adam's prelapsarian mind had been wholly immaterial, tied to the body through "an immediate wedlock" without corporeal mediation. Before the fall, the mind controlled the body, apparently without material contact, to direct the wellbeing of the first man.³⁹⁵ Eating the "apple" in the Garden of Eden caused the immaterial mind's fall, again, suggesting the fruit's intense material power. The fruit of the tree of knowledge contained a poisonous vibrancy, tincturing the genetic composition of the human body. It inclined the first man toward fleshly concupiscence, inserting the "fructifying seed" God had infused into the sensitive souls of beasts. Eating the fruit triggered the mind's descent into the stomach ("it withdrew itself like a kernel") where it became enmeshed in the carnal concerns of the body, "constrained with an unwearied study to watch for his own support of nourishment." Van Helmont lamented that "the mind being astonished, withdrew itself from the stern of life." (648-651) The specific mechanism of the apple was upon the blood. The forbidden fruit "disposed the arterial blood unto a seed, and from whence a sensitive soul." (658) The immaterial mind fell into the sensitive soul and its immaterial guidance of the body collapsed. Man's best attributes of reason, intellect, and spiritual aspiration were thenceforth mediated through the needs, inclinations, and desires of the body.³⁹⁶

By reconfiguring the corporeal position of the fallen mind, Van Helmont remapped the anatomy of the soul to place greater emphasis upon the digestive functions of the body. The physician was aware that there was a long history of debate over the soul's location—"strife about the center or place of exercise of the soul"—but he believed there must be a central, indivisible soul located in a particularly part of the body. He reasoned that if a body part, say a limb or finger, was cut off, the life-function of that member ceased. So there must be a spatial seat from which the soul sent vital instruction and nourishment. Like roots that served as the vital beginnings for trees, van Helmont argued that the stomach—especially its upper, or cardiac, orifice—was the "central point" for "the principle of life, of the digestion of meats, and the disposing of the same unto life."³⁹⁷ Although the faculties and functions of the sensitive soul were distributed across the body, van Helmont was adamant that the soul was embedded in the "inn" of the stomach:

The radical bride-bed of the sensitive soul is in the vital archeus of the stomach; and it stands and remains there for the whole lifetime. Not indeed, that the sensitive soul is entertained in the stomach as it were in a sack, skin, membrane, pot, prison, little cell or bark; neither is it comprehended in that seat in [the] manner of bodies enclosed within a purse; but after an irregular manner, it is centrally in a point and, as it

³⁹⁵ Jan Baptiste van Helmont, *Ortus Medicinus* (Amsterdam, 1648), trans. John Chandler, *Oriatrike, Or, Physick Refined* (London, 1662), 287-288. All references will be to this English version.

³⁹⁶ Even as he was unpacking the literal physiological effects of the Fall, van Helmont insisted he was not allegorizing in the manner of "atheists and libertines, [who] even at this day, take the text of the dissuaded apple... for an allegory," *Ibid.*, 651.

³⁹⁷ Van Helmont defended his anatomy of the soul by noting several examples in which trauma to the upper abdomen led to death, *Ibid.*, 283-284. For the influence of van Helmont's anatomy on English practitioners see Robert Godfrey, *Various Injuries and Abuses in Chemical and Galenical Physick* (London, 1674), 117-120.

were, in the very undividable middle of one membranous thickness. (283-286)

The soul was within the flesh of the gut. Indeed, it was not contained within the stomach, but very much a part of the organ's fleshy membrane. Adam's immaterial mind had fallen, quite literally, into the "membranous thickness" of the body. Spirit had been made flesh.

Unlike hermetic writers like Weigel, van Helmont avoided positioning the human body as a cosmic center of digestion. Instead his natural philosophy stressed the primacy of innumerable individual objects—disposed clusters of matter—in the natural world. These assemblages of vitalized stuff constituted all larger bodies, human and otherwise. All matter was "disposed" into a particular psycho-somatic arrangement of form and function. Crucial in this monadistic arrangement was Van Helmont's adaptation of the Paracelsian "archeus," the formal aspect of an object that conferred empirical existence onto an individual object, disposing it into form, and ensuring its harmonious function. Although the archeus was the vital spiritual principle of an object, it was not entirely incorporeal. Rather it abided within the component material of the individual object. Form or spiritual essence was not superadded to matter; rather it was immanent and intrinsic to extended things. There was an essential, spiritual kernel *within* certain collections of matter that disposed stuff into particular objects. Van Helmont argued that the archeus was not a speculative or occult concept; chemical experimentation could reveal it by removing the husks of matter to its pure object-specific vapor essence. This was the "gas" of an object, a term first used by van Helmont.³⁹⁸

This natural philosophy had important physiological implications. Van Helmont was more interested in the body's individual anatomical parts than the circulatory flows and elemental balances that defined rival mechanist and Galenic understandings of the body. Individual organs, governed by a hierarchy of archei, had far more functional autonomy than allowed by Galenic and mechanist paradigms. Helmontian theories gave new chemical agency to the physiological workings of the stomach, ferments that both sustained and threatened human health, and the chemical impact of edible matter upon those ferments. Within this vitalist vision of substance, digestion served as a crucial display of van Helmont's ontological principles. Mechanist and Aristotelian theories of digestion as concoctive heat were too simplistic; Van Helmont suggested that heat was "adjacent to our life," a byproduct or accident of digestion rather than the central agent of material change.³⁹⁹ Much more important was the chemical composition of digesting ferments—their sharpness, sourness, vitriol, and bitterness. The stomach's "primitive causes of transmutations" were an interrelated complex of organs and ferments where various chemical

³⁹⁸ Walter Pagel, *Joan Baptista Van Helmont: Reformer of Science and Medicine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 35-36, 40, 96-98; Andrew Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550-1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 368-371.

³⁹⁹ Early moderns inherited Aristotelian views of digestion, theories that considered the assimilation of food into the body as a mechanism of heat; Aristotle, *De Anima*, 415a14-416b31; Michael Boylan, "The Digestive and 'Circulatory' Systems in Aristotle's Biology," *Journal of the History of Biology* 15 (Spring, 1982): 94-102. Mechanical theories of digestion became prominent in this period. For examples see Walter Charleton, *Natural History of Nutrition, Life, and Voluntary Motion* (London, 1659), 9-10; Thomas Willis, *A Medical-Philosophical Discourse of Fermentation* (London, 1681), 2, 9-15.

properties—most crucially sharpness and sourness—converted foods into the nutritious chyle of the guts. The resulting vital spirits were not simply heat, but various chemical energies that “climbed through the chief arteries into the head” to the faculties of the brain. These material spirits were a type of “light,” but not a mechanical burning, lamp-like flame—rather they manifested as the chemical luminescence visible in bellies of glow-worms and “bubbles of the sea,” but hidden in the life processes within the human skin. The chemical nature of vital light, its varied and individual nature, explained the diversity of life around the world—men were hot while fish were cold as they digested through different chemical signatures. This physiology concurred with God’s delight in an abundance of different kinds of animal life. God himself contained “a certain commonwealth of lights” and the likeness of this diversity was manifested in various forms of vital creatures in the world.⁴⁰⁰ Such language, the commonwealth of lights, may have implied political homologies on the part of Helmont’s English translator, John Chandler. But at the very least this formulation overturned engrained thermal hierarchies of the body, suggesting that the human body was governed in a vitalistic parity, a commonwealth of interconnected organs, internally-motivated ferments, and chemically-affective food.⁴⁰¹

For the Helmontians digestion was not an assimilation into the human body, but a vital chemistry in which matter affected the body in both material and spiritual ways. In addition to Jan Baptiste van Helmont’s expanded print presence after 1660, his son, Francis Mercury van Helmont, personally expressed his father’s vitalist ideas in England’s influential circles, directly expounding variations of his physic and philosophy in the 1670s under the patronage of Anne Conway at Ragley Hall.⁴⁰² Francis Mercury believed that all matter was made up of a single substance, in his case primordial water formulated into a spectrum of different forms and operations; “matter and spirit differ only gradually and are mutually convertible one into another.”⁴⁰³ This constitutive water contained various vital essences that determined the “affinity and communion” of corporeal bodies. Digestion revealed how vastly different types of edible stuff could be broken down into a foundational matter and then rarefied into more subtle material. In *The Spirit of Diseases* (1694) he argued that food was converted into “fluid water” and these liquids then circulated to renovate the body. Aliment was not just the stuff of the body; digested food literally constituted the human mind. “Food must be reduced to that high degree of spirituality,” Mercury reasoned, “to be fit nutriment or our thoughts.” Food was converted into a spiritual essence “out of which our thoughts and ideas are formed.” This explained why hunger

⁴⁰⁰ Van Helmont, *Oriatrike*, 195-203.

⁴⁰¹ The digestive tract was paramount in the human commonwealth; in particular, the stomach and the spleen shared the crucial digesting archei that were “chief in the government of life.” Van Helmont (and translator) continued the political analogy to the body politic, referring to the stomach and spleen as “the duumvirate or sheriffdom” of the body, *ibid.*, 201-3, 206-207, 215. See also Walter Pagel, “The Smiling Spleen,” in *History and Imagination: Essays in Honour of H.R. Trevor-Roper*, ed. Hugh Lloyd-Jones et al. (London: Duckworth & Co., 1981), 81-87.

⁴⁰² Sarah Hutton, “Of Physic and Philosophy: Anne Conway, F.M. van Helmont and Seventeenth-Century Medicine” in *Religio Medici: Medicine and Religion in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 1996), 234-39.

⁴⁰³ Francis Mercury van Helmont, trans. Daniel Foote, “Observations, physical, alchemical, and theological,” BL Sloane MS 530, 1682, fo. 19.

interfered with critical thinking and study; emotions, ideas, rationality itself were all part of the same watery stuff that constituted flesh. The food we swallow was the substance of our very thoughts.⁴⁰⁴

This was the landscape of ideas within which abstemious vegetarianism shifted from radical economic theology to a focused concern with the physiological effects of edible stuff. In keepings with broader cultural interest in the early chapters of Genesis, publications by Thomas Tryon in 1685 and 1697 contained verse by the Restoration poet Aphra Behn, who hailed Tryon's practical guide as reclaiming "the first state of innocence." Nature had taught Adam, "the noble savage," how to live on "crystal streams" and "sweets" that grew without human aid: "Spacious plains produc'd / what nature crav'd." Behn considered the fall as a steady decline over time from the Adam's natural health. Debauchery invaded the minds of men, who replaced the natural economy with one of vice, and luxury that spurred the enfeebling of human stock with every generation. Men now took "poison in" and natural health was "declining by degrees." Behn's verse implicated the problems of excessive edible matter: even the "rich restoratives" of medicine tended to clog up a body "cloy'd with full supplies." Tryon's guides to vegetarian self-denial—Behn wrote she had "tried thy method, and adore thy theme"—allowed man to rediscover that God had provided "cleanly food" for health and regeneration.⁴⁰⁵ Behn thought Tryon followed in chemical medicine's optimistic desire to regenerate the human body by controlling the types of foods consumed. The regulatory temperance of diet replaced the violent purification of the self.

Theological and medical commentators expanded the exegetical focus on Genesis beyond the idealized prelapsarian body itself, to acute speculation about the nature of the edible matter. For Helmontians, the functions of the gut—the chemical conversions of edible matter—displayed a larger religious philosophy of substance. Food contained dispositions and inclinations that influenced the nature of the human body. Religious imperatives remained prominent, indeed drove this new awareness of vital matter. As we shall see below, the mystical impulse, the desire for direct, theosophical spiritual regeneration, maintained anxieties over the influence of edible matter to "incline" the body toward either fleshly corruption or spiritual refinement. But Helmontian iatrochemistry's emphasis upon the vitalistic process of digestion moderated the earlier spiritualist antipathy toward the flesh of the 1650s.

Thomas Tryon's Vegetarian Dietetics

Tryon's and Crab's lives were similar in many ways. Both were inspired to vegetarianism because of mystical experience; both experienced the sectarian nonconformity of London in the

⁴⁰⁴ Francis Mercury van Helmont, *The Spirit of Diseases; Or, Diseases from the Spirit* (London, 1694), 24-31.

⁴⁰⁵ The poem was published in 1685 in *Miscellany*, a collection of poems collected by Behn, 252-256. It was included in another of Tryon's temperance guidebooks, *The Way to Make All People Rich*, and in the prefatory matter of *The Way to Health's* third print edition in 1697. See Janet Todd, ed., *The Works of Aphra Behn* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1992), 179-180, 412; "Behn, Aphra (1640?-1689)," Janet Todd in *ODNB*, ed. Lawrence Goldman, (Oxford: OUP, 2004). I thank James Grantham Turner for bringing Behn to my attention.

1650s and 1660s; and both were hatters with heterodox religious ideas. However comparing Tryon's writings with Crab's religious tracts reveals changes in the abstemious critique of meat consumption—a shift from Crab's Augustinian “battle” with his flesh, to a gentler diet of vegetarian temperance. Unlike Crab's violent relationship with his body, Tryon understood vegetarianism as therapeutic—a digestive transformation of the body into an idealized, platonic form. Reflecting new chemical ideas, his writings were interested in edible matter's active powers to achieve this existence. Far from being sterile, homogenous, or passive stuff, food contained a vital materiality—a conative ability to persist within the gut, and to affect human health, cognitive function, and religious orientation.⁴⁰⁶ This influence varied depending on the type of edible matter. So attention and care were needed to shape the godly soul and imagination.

Far from Crab's eremitic condemnation of the fallen world, Tryon (1634-1703) embraced the modernizing political economy of post-Restoration England. In his memoirs, Tryon considered himself to be “industrious.”⁴⁰⁷ As a child in Gloucestershire he spun and carded wool for the family income, and eventually tended sheep. In 1652, at the age of seventeen, he sold his small flock and used the profit to move to London, binding himself to a Baptist haberdasher. After a year of working with his master, Tryon was admitted into a Baptist congregation. He wrote in his memoirs that in 1657, two years after the publication of Crab's vegetarian tract, he felt called by God “for separation and self-denial”:

I betook myself to water only for drink, and forbore eating any kind of flesh or fish, and confining myself to an abstemious self-denying life; my drink being only water, and food only bread and some fruit.⁴⁰⁸

His vegetarian lifestyle was confirmed in 1659 through a mystical experience. One evening, frustrated in his studies of chemistry, Tryon despaired of understanding the mysteries of material form and transmutation—crucial knowledge, he thought, for the “preservation of both body and soul.” In a dream that night he had a vision of a globe containing the universe “whereon was only written in capital golden letters, REGENERATION.” The vision indicated that obtaining knowledge about both God and nature required rehabilitating the self through vegetarian self-denial, cleanness, and sobriety. “Cleansing the court of terrestrial nature” prepared the body for worldly knowledge and direct communion with God.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁶ Tryon was aware of what Jane Bennett considers to be a material vibrancy in food. I agree with Bennett's argument about the conative powers of edible matter—she focuses on motifs from Nietzsche and Thoreau—but formulations of food's vital materiality begin much earlier in the late seventeenth century and indicate the advent of modern interest and anxieties about the efficacy and power of foodstuffs. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 39-51.

⁴⁰⁷ Max Weber would have considered Tryon as an ideal type of the “inner-worldly ascetic,” rationally acting within the institutions of the world as an instrument of God, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 541-556.

⁴⁰⁸ Tryon, *Some Memoirs*, 7-27.

⁴⁰⁹ After marriage in 1661 Tryon voyaged abroad, thriving in the expanding American markets of the English empire and finding success in the lucrative beaver pelt trade. When he returned to London, Tryon's diligent work as a hatter led to increasingly prosperity. He settled with his wife in Hackney, had five children, and “made a pretty

Tryon's studies of chemistry and astrology provided the vocabulary for this abstemious interest in the physiological effects of edible matter. In *Health's Grand Preservative* (1682) the self-trained chemist held, like Weigel, that man was the microcosmic creation of God, containing all natural elements, numbers, and proportions.⁴¹⁰ This made man sympathetic to external forces; he was "influenced by all things he communicates with or joins himself onto." Chemical properties in the environment alleviated or aggravated corresponding agents within the human body. Tryon called these "similes," efficacious qualities that were particularly potent in meats and drinks. Similes held "power in the body to awaken and strengthen their likeness." This meant that meat and drink triggered physiological effects within the body.⁴¹¹ The simile system opposed the Galenic view of oppositional medicine, which created humoral balance through elemental "contraries." Instead, Tryon argued that health required triggering optimal similes within the body by controlling exogenous influences. Although a variety of external forces affected human bodies, food's chemical penetration into the interior of the gut had the strongest effect on human complexion. Diet was the key toward optimal health.

The recognition of edible matter's power provided the intellectual basis for Tryon's abstemious regimen. In his dietary-medical treatise *The Way to Health* (1683) Tryon created lengthy descriptions about the qualities of food—their influence upon the various human constitutions and the best methods of preparation to ensure physical well-being. Food was vitally potent:

Every sort of food has its various operations upon the body and spirit of man, and that by way of simile. Therefore all meats and drinks ought to be equally compounded of a body and spirit, as most things are in themselves before the Artist takes the separation; the food as well as the Man should be compounded of body and spirit.⁴¹²

Barring divine intervention, only the stomach could unleash the spiritual qualities of food. This amalgam of vital life was further determined by the "radix" of food—the "shape, form, inclination, complexion, and disposition" that encouraged the human soul "to practice either good or evil." The simplicity of vegetables, herbs, and fruits—their clean origins in nature—meant that their operations on the body were both easy to control and generally pure in effect. Vegetables contained a "balsamic virtue and healing quality" that made man's inclinations "more friendly and sanguine."⁴¹³

Animal meat was generally toxic with detrimental physiological effects on the body.⁴¹⁴ Flesh was poisonous, Tryon argued, since animal blood was "endued with all kinds of bestial

good progress on the Base-viol," *Some Memoirs*, 26-29, 37-41, 58-63 (misnumbered as "40-46").

⁴¹⁰ Similar to Weigel, Tryon's writings indicate the influence of Jakob Böhme, who relied heavily upon the notion of micro-macrocosm, *Memoirs*, 30-34. See also Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought*, 114-115.

⁴¹¹ Thomas Tryon, *Health's Grand Preservative* (London, 1682), 6-7.

⁴¹² Tryon, *Way to Health*, 202.

⁴¹³ Tryon, *Way to Health*, 39-43; Tryon, *Grand Preservative*, 19.

⁴¹⁴ Keith Thomas suggests that Tryon's vegetarianism was motivated by a precocious shift in sensibility, a belief that bestial creatures bore the image of the creator and thus should not be killed or cruelly treated, *Man and the Natural World*, 290-292. But far

passions,” such as anger, covetousness, hate, and lust. This explained the Mosaic injunctions against particularly poisonous types of flesh. Moses recognized unclean meat and blood as the location of the humors and dispositions of the creature. A vibrant amalgam of “dispositions and inclination” remained in the veins, arteries, and meat of the dead animal’s body, and this transferred to the flesh eater. This was exacerbated by the necessary violence of slaughter. The agony of the deathblow awoke additional “internal poisons” in the animal, making the flesh even more volatile.⁴¹⁵ Additionally, flesh was obstructive to the digestive process. Gastric respiration and aeration were crucial to the maintenance of purity in the gut and Tryon theorized that “superfluous matter” was the source of many diseases. Rich food and drink created an abundance of nourishment. This excess generated “too much blood and thick dull spirits,” making the body heavy and sluggish; the obstructive particles of meat blocked vapors of air from penetrating the body’s pores.⁴¹⁶

Tryon held that similes chemically determined a person’s constitution. Tryon described “four grand qualities,” alchemical properties, from which basic human complexion proceeded. Bitter, sweet, sour, and astringent qualities combined to form physiological complexions—the physical features of the body combined with the emotional and mental inclinations of the person. Like a musician skillfully adjusting his instrument, the knowledgeable man learned “to tune himself and compose the properties of nature.” Through diet, man could chemically “tincture and change the worst complexion,” altering the constitution of the body into salubrious dispositions.⁴¹⁷ He was optimistic that through temperate life and self-knowledge, man could better himself both physically and emotionally. Humans were subject to exogenous forces, but through attention and care they could change and improve their basic constitutional qualities.

Similarly, self-indulgence and rich food had lasting effects upon both body and soul.⁴¹⁸ *The Way to Health* contained a lengthy chapter outlining how the consumption of flesh was

more prominent in the hat-maker’s writings was the bestial otherness of animal flesh—that meat was innately fallen and corporeal.

⁴¹⁵ Tryon, *Way to Health*, 397-398. Through the wounds of the animal, the poisons in animal blood were exposed to the air. The evaporation of blood’s “dark, wrathful spirits” defiled anyone who inhaled them. Tryon believed the constant inhalation of “dark, wrathful spirits” in the air explained why butchers and others of “killing employments” tended to be fierce and cruel, *Health’s Grand Preservative*, 15-19.

⁴¹⁶ Tryon, *Way to Health*, 46-47, 79; Tryon, *Health’s Grand Preservative*, 1. Tryon’s concerns about the bestial disposition of animal matter were similar to those raised by xenotransfusions in France in 1668. Peter Sahlins argues that the scandal caused by the transfusion of animal blood into human produced a resurgent anthropocentrism that traversed divisions between “modern” Cartesians and traditional Galenists.

Antitransfusionists articulated vitalist notions of animal blood particles to convey moral and metaphysical worries about the passions and brutal animality within the human. This included worries about transfusion more generally as a form of cannibalism, “The Beast Within: Animals in the First Xenotransfusion Experiments in France, ca. 1667-68,” *Representations* 129 (2015): 25-55, esp. 44-45.

⁴¹⁷ Tryon, *The Way to Health*, 3, 12-14, 19.

⁴¹⁸ Tryon maintained Crab’s condemnation the conspicuous carnality of holidays and feasts. Elites had made the Sabbath a celebration of ribald consumption, a day when wealthy “English belly-slaves” made their servants work more preparing meat than they

interwoven into a variety of social, political, and religious failings. He targeted the nobility for additional opprobrium, noting that nobles displayed the violent origins of their social status through coats of arms bearing pictures of “rapacious beasts and birds.”⁴¹⁹ As predatory creatures themselves, the English nobility reveled in the consumption of flesh and believed expensive meat consumption raised them above commoners.⁴²⁰ The meat-eating elite would get their comeuppance eventually—when “the momentary pleasures of the throat” were manifested in the Resurrection. At Christ’s return every soul would be reinvested into a new body depending on the nature of that soul’s spiritual disposition, inclinations, and complexion. The resurrected spirit would “attract such matter out of all things, as their spirits are capable of and have a simile with; and so appear in forms hideous.” Meat eaters would be resurrected in hideous forms, made up of the carcasses of dead, flesh-picked animals, “full of excrement, ordure, garbage, grease, and filthiness.” Tryon’s eschatology stressed the deeply material implications for the carnivorous nobility’s moral failings. At the end of the world, you are what you ate.⁴²¹

We hear undertones of cannibalism in Tryon’s attack on the carnivorous nobility, a suggestion that the luxury of meat entailed a predatory consumption of “the blood of the poor.” This was a wider anxiety in the seventeenth century, beyond the vegetarians. The physician Thomas Browne worried in 1643 that the process of digestion meant that men were, ultimately, “anthropophagi and cannibals, devourers not only of men, but of ourselves.” The digestive process entailed the metabolism of edible matter that had, in some sense, become a part of the eater. The mass of human flesh, “this frame we look upon, hath been upon our trenchers.” The Helmontian physician George Thomson—in advocating for a heavily meat diet—suggested that the efficacy of digestion was determined by chemical congruities between the body and edible matter. This explained, Thompson argued, the physicality and good health of cannibals. “Sarcophagi,” or flesh eaters thrived because there was consanguinity between sulfurous foods and the chemical constitution of the human body. Thompson reasoned that the “humanum sulfur” was the same as the eater’s own flesh and was therefore “easily converted into their own substance.”⁴²²

While maintaining this moralized impulse toward corporeal purification, Tryon had abandoned the violent self-abnegation of earlier radical writers. Far from the “shrewd skirmish” Roger Crab fought with his starving body, Tryon remarked in his memoirs that his personal diet of bread and “water-gruel” made him feel “more nimble, brisk, easy, and lightsome. . . feeling a most pleasant alacrity though the whole body.”⁴²³ Tryon maintained the morally laden categories

did any other day of the week. He was shocked to watch the bodies of “slaughtered fellow-creatures” loaded upon the backs of porters and carried to aristocratic estates, *Health’s Grand Preservative*, 22.

⁴¹⁹ Tryon, *The Way to Health*, 383-387;

⁴²⁰ Perplexed by the idea of noble blood, Tryon “inquired of chirurgeons and chemists” and concluded that there was no difference in the blood of nobles. Indeed, God had made men anatomically similar: “the meanest farmer had altogether as large a stomach, though not so large an house, as his landlord,” *The Way to Health*, 385-395.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 444-446.

⁴²² Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici*, 2nd ed. (London, 1643), 84-85; George Thomson, *Orthometodos Iatrochymike, or, The Direct Method of Curing Chymically* (London, 1675), 97-98.

⁴²³ Tryon, *Memoirs*, 55-56, misnumbered as “37-39.”

of body and spirit within his physiology—the gastric lightness of vegetable food encouraged the body’s purer components. But the stark division between the “old” man of flesh and the “new” man of God was missing, replaced by monistic chemical linkages between spiritual soul and material body. For example, Tryon believed the soul was not quite material, but neither was it wholly incorporeal. The human mind was nourished with vapors of air from the stomach, deriving “their purer aliment like sponges through the whole body.” Meat and liquor obstructed the soul’s spiritual nourishment.⁴²⁴ Self-denial was not violent, but had “a certain occult quality” as it cleared the passages of the body and the functions of the mind from superfluous, obstructive matter. This material influence gave vegetarian diet its efficacy: asceticism cleansed, quite literally, both body and mind. Of course, Tryon recognized the vegetarian diet could be mentally taxing: fasting from meats caused a person to feel “a kind of gnawing or disorder in his stomach.” But this pain was only the chemical heat of the stomach dislodging the “phlegmy substance” clogged in the vessels of the gut and casting it out “upwards and downwards.” Vegetarian temperance—what Tryon called a “divine gift”—allowed the stomach to naturally cleanse the body of putrid stuff and enable higher intellectual functions.⁴²⁵

Tryon wrote at a moment in which post-Reformation mysticism encountered a growing market of self-help publications created to encourage temperance and health.⁴²⁶ His mystical self-transformation adapted with the increasing commercialism of post-Restoration society. Indeed, Tryon noted the luxurious influence of expanding global trade. “A thousand kickshaws enriched with the East and West Indies’ ingredients,” he noted, encouraged English “gluttony and epicurism.”⁴²⁷ His interest in the chemical force of edible matter functioned alongside a new pragmatism. Tryon conceded that although flesh was inherently dangerous there was “no stemming the tide of popular opinion.” People would gorge themselves on flesh regardless of the circumstances. So Tryon outlined lengthy guides to make meat less thick and obstructive to digestion. For example, careful preparation by boiling meat in an open vessel allowed vapors of air to enter the meat, maintaining the “lively tinctures” of the flesh. Overcooking however, evaporated off the spirits of the meat, making the food sour and detrimental to health. Boiling meat in rainwater was ideal because the flesh than sucked into it an “oily, saline quality,” which mitigated the detrimental and phlegmatic digestive effects of the meat.⁴²⁸

The resilience of religious dietary motivations across the changing intellectual and political concerns of the 1670s and 1680s aligns with revisionist historiography that cautions against overstating 1659-1660 as an ideological rupture, or a shift from the eschatologically charged political climate of the Revolution to a new political and religious economy of the Restoration.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁴ Tryon, *Way to Health*, 49.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 49, 62-63.

⁴²⁶ For the rise of the medical market place in the emergent consumer society see Roy Porter, *Health For Sale: Quackery in England, 1660-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 40-46.

⁴²⁷ Tryon, *Way to Health*, 47-49.

⁴²⁸ Thomas Tryon, *A Treatise of Cleanness in Meats and Drinks of the Preparation of Food* (London, 1682), 1-5.

⁴²⁹ Tim Harris, “Revising the Restoration,” in *The Politics in Restoration England*, ed. Tim Harris et al. (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 1990); Richard L. Greaves, *Enemies Under His Feet: Radicals and Nonconformists in Britain, 1664-1677* (Stanford, CA: Stanford

Yet Tryon's new therapies of vegetarian dietetics suggest that the sorts of political work that asceticism could do changed between 1655 and 1682. Vegetarian fasts and diets ceased to display the dramatic political critique that was proclaimed within and upon the body of the ascetic. The anxieties about the problem of human materiality as "flesh" had expanded to include the active force of edible matter outside the body. The curious blending of the self-denial impulse with the growing medical market of self-help dietetics made Tryon sensitive to food's ability to induce effects within the physiology and religious disposition of a person. Tryon exchanged the destabilizing political critique of the vegetable fast for a new interest in the mechanisms of food's material force. His dietetics thus recast vegetarian abstinence as a method of policing the dangerous matter that might enter the body. The temperate body remained motivated by mystical impulses toward self-abnegation and purity; but these impulses expressed a new type of anxiety about edible matter in the 1660s and 1670s.

George Cheyne and the Afterlife of Mystical Vegetarianism

The resonance of mystically inspired vegetarianism continued into the eighteenth century. Abstemious diet adapted to mechanist and Newtonian philosophies as the ideal of the purified body changed to confront new social concerns at the turn of the eighteenth century. The most interesting example is the unique life and work of George Cheyne, a Scottish physician whose dietary and therapeutic ideas were popular in the early eighteenth century.⁴³⁰ Cheyne (1671-1743)—whose friends and patients included Samuel Johnson, David Hume, Alexander Pope, and John Wesley—was influenced by mystical religion and advocated a temperate vegetable diet.⁴³¹ Cheyne implemented his ideas in his successful medical practice in Bath between 1715 and 1742, where the Scot treated a number of affluent patients, including Robert Walpole and his daughter Catherine.⁴³² Cheyne's writings supported abstemious diet through Neoplatonic cosmology, but his vitalist interest in the effective power of edible matter was recast as a bulwark against the heightened dangers of a commercial society.⁴³³ As empire and trade became engines of the Britain's economic and political growth, mystical dietetics became a household therapy to control for the excesses of material pleasure and consumption.

Cheyne held that all people would benefit from a degree of self-denial, but abstemious diet was particularly appropriate for the new material wealth of British society. People would live longer and healthier lives "by universal temperance." He noted that the early church saints had

University Press, 1990); Donald A. Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger: Parsons and Parishioners, 1660-1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁴³⁰ Cheyne's 1724 *An Essay of Health and Long Life*, reached nine editions during Cheyne's lifetime. It was translated into several European languages and reprinted into the 1820s, see Anita Guerrini, *Obesity and Depression in the Enlightenment: The Life and Times of George Cheyne* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 118.

⁴³¹ Wesley recommended Cheyne's *Essay of Health and Long Life* to his mother in 1724. Anita Guerrini, "Isaac Newton, George Cheyne, and the 'Principia Medicinæ,'" in *The Medical Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Roger French and Andrew Wear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 240.

⁴³² Guerrini, *Obesity and Depression*, 107-114

⁴³³ Porter, *Health For Sale*, 40-46.

lived on very little food, leading long lives on “about twelve ounces... with mere element for drink.” Cheyne reassured readers that that the northern climate of Britain necessitated much larger quantities of food than sustained the desert fathers—colder climates demanded “larger supplies” than warmer environments—but he remarked that abstemious living, “a low diet,” encouraged sprightliness, strength, and freedom of spirit.⁴³⁴ This diet was newly necessary in the commercial context of the early Georgian period as new foods, dishes, and delicacies were available to the merchant and upper classes. With new forms of consumption in Britain had come the rise of diseases of luxury, such as the gout and hysteria, which revealed “what astonishing miseries wealth and vice bring upon humankind.” Cheyne was convinced that the “exquisite sensations” induced by rich foods and material wealth created pains that could only be cured by plain and simple diet.⁴³⁵

Cheyne adapted Isaac Newton’s physical theories into a physiology of edible matter to support his regimen of “low diet.” The animal body was a hydraulic apparatus—a complex system of pumps, pipes, and pathways—that functioned fluidly if maintained by the correct input of food and exercise.⁴³⁶ Illness was caused by a disruption of this system through large, pathogenic particles “not...sufficiently broken by the concoctive powers” of the body.⁴³⁷ In particular, the obstructions of edible matter hindered circulation, rendering bodily fluids corrosive and enervating the organs. Cheyne argued that particles of edible matter held variable cohesive power depending upon mass, momentum, and salinity. Animal meat consisted of especially large, salty, and cohesive particles of food, whose attractive qualities were problematic for health:

When [food particles] approach within the sphere of another’s activity, they firmly unite in clusters; all which make the separation of their original particles the more difficult. I say, from these three principles [mass, force, salinity], we may in general compare the easiness or difficulty of digesting (that is, breaking into small parts) the several sorts of vegetables and animals.”

While Cheyne considered edible matter in terms of particulate stuff, food was not inert. It held agency in its attractive power within the body. Cheyne’s vegetarian injunctions were due to vegetables’ constitutive weakness; having absorbed less energy than animal flesh, a vegetable’s constitutive parts were “united by a weaker heat” and were thus easier to digest.⁴³⁸ If the stomach had a greater the superiority of concoctive power relative to the attractive quality of food particulate, then the digested chyle would be finer. Eating vegetable food that was “under our concoctive powers” allowed better circulation, enabling better digestion and health.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁴ George Cheyne, *An Essay of Health* (London, 1724), 29-32.

⁴³⁵ George Cheyne, *An Essay on the Gout: The 2nd Edition* (London, 1720), 97-98.

⁴³⁶ Cheyne’s anatomical views were influenced by Archibald Pitcairne, an early proponent for the revision of medical practice to reflect Newton’s physical theories as well as older the mechanist philosophies of Descartes, Bellini, Borelli, and Boyle. See Anita Guerrini, “James Keill, George Cheyne, and Newtonian Physiology, 1690-1740,” *Journal of the History of Biology*, 18 (1985): 247-266.

⁴³⁷ George Cheyne, *Essay of Health*, 19-20.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, 27

Cheyne was an odd advocate for abstemious diet. By his mid-thirties he weighed 32 stone, containing over 440 pounds of flesh, and he struggled with his weight and health to the end of his life. The Scot had experienced early success in his medical career: he gained his M.D. from Aberdeen, obtained praise for a 1701 treatise on fevers, and found employment in London as a physician for the Duke of Roxburgh's brother. He was elected to the Royal Society in 1702.⁴⁴⁰ However, city life ravaged Cheyne's health. Already disposed to corpulence, his weight exploded when he moved to London in 1701. In the metropole he found "bottle-companions, the younger gentry, and free-livers to be the most easy of access, and most quickly susceptible of friendship and acquaintance." The hard-drinking and worldly lifestyle of London taverns and coffeehouses caused him to grow "excessively fat, short-breathed, lethargic, and listless."⁴⁴¹ His weight became a lifelong struggle. At points in his life he could barely step into a chariot "for want of breath." When he walked through the city of Bath on his patient rounds, he was "obliged to have a servant [follow] with a stool to rest on."⁴⁴² His obesity was a personal case study of the new dangers of commercial life.

Cheyne's troublesome health is noteworthy because it influenced a shift in his thought, a new proclivity to inject a moralized spiritualism into his ideas about physiology and health.⁴⁴³ In the summer of 1705, following two disastrously-received publications in natural philosophy, Cheyne fled north back to Aberdeen.⁴⁴⁴ Faced with the deterioration of his health and career, Cheyne increasingly questioned rationalist natural theology, wondering if there might be "more enlightening principles revealed to mankind somewhere...than those arising from natural religion only." This crisis of both career and flesh precipitated an effort to infuse an older mystical self-denial with popular Newtonian natural philosophical ideas. It provided Cheyne

⁴⁴⁰ Anita Guerrini, "Isaac Newton, George Cheyne" 226-227; Porter, *Health for Sale*, 31-39.

⁴⁴¹ George Cheyne, "The Case of the Author," in *The English Malady: Or a Treatise of Nervous Diseases of All Kinds* (London, 1733), 325-329.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, 342-343.

⁴⁴³ Cheyne's mysticism makes him unique among the Newtonian physicians, and the historiography regarding his life and work has debated the nature of his beliefs. G. S. Rousseau's consideration of Cheyne as turning "mere Enthusiast" in 1705 ignores the pragmatism of Cheyne's therapies, as well as his attempt to continued adherence to Newton's mechanics within a broader Neoplatonic cosmology. Yet Anita Guerrini's positioning of Cheyne as a "moderate" between mystical fanaticism and deist naturalism also obscures how the moderation of the physician's thought depended on its immediate context. Indeed, such labels of "moderate" and "radical" are problematic given the shifting political landscape of post-1688 Britain. The question of Cheyne's mysticism, as Rousseau himself concludes, may be "ultimately paradoxical," but more likely it is the inadequacy of sectarian and philosophical labels to contain the ideological ambivalence occasioned by acute spiritual crises in the later seventeenth century. G. S. Rousseau, "Mysticism and Millenarianism: 'Immortal Dr. Cheyne'," in *Millenarianism and Messianism in English Literature and Thought, 1650-1800*, ed. Richard H. Popkin, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988), 116-124; Guerrini, *Obesity and Depression*, 45, 72, 81, et passim.

⁴⁴⁴ Guerrini, *Obesity and Depression*, 3-4, 68-79.

with heightened moral motivations to understand the effects of mechanical attraction within the physiological substance of the body.⁴⁴⁵

Although decidedly tory, hailing from Scotland's Episcopalian northeast, Cheyne was part of a circle of correspondence centered on the Scottish mystics George and James Garden.⁴⁴⁶ Anita Guerrini has corrected vague social connections in the historiography on Cheyne by revealing the extent to which Cheyne's patronage and correspondence network centered on the Gardens' mystical circle.⁴⁴⁷ But how this mysticism directly informed Cheyne's adaptation of Newtonian physics into mystical self-denial remains unclear. A manuscript in the Bodleian Library, attributed to the Scottish physician James Keith, likely documents how mystical neoplatonism was injected into Cheyne's Newtonian view of edible matter. A central figure in the Scottish mystical circle, Keith was a physician trained at King's College, Aberdeen. By 1706 he had moved to London and was admitted as a licentiate of the College of Physicians. With friends across British society, Keith effectively bridged the mysticism of the Aberdeen group with the Newtonian medical set of Cheyne and other physicians.⁴⁴⁸ His correspondence is loaded with references to Cheyne, indicating continual personal contact and correspondence between the two from 1713 to 1720.⁴⁴⁹ Keith intended the manuscript, Rawlinson A 404, as a "preliminary treatise" to an unnamed work by the Philadelphian John Pordage. The manuscript focused on the nature of divinity and eternity, but also relied upon the observations of natural philosophy. Keith worked out his "general notion of spirit from the consideration of bodily motion."⁴⁵⁰

Keith believed that all substance was endowed with a blended mix of material and immaterial properties. Spirit—"a power acting from its own center by its intrinsic and constitutive activity"—was the life of a being, the perceptive sensory center of the will.⁴⁵¹ But he insisted that

⁴⁴⁵ Cheyne, "Case of the Author," 330-333.

⁴⁴⁶ For G. S. Rousseau, the proximity of the French Prophets and the possibility that Cheyne read Böhme explains Cheyne's abstemious therapies, "Mysticism and Millenarianism: 'Immortal Dr. Cheyne,'" 95-100.

⁴⁴⁷ Guerrini, *Obesity and Depression*, 10-20, 79-88, 143-149.

⁴⁴⁸ Anita Guerrini describes Keith as the "nerve center" of the group, but sees the reference to George Garden in *English Malady* as evidence for Garden's central influence; *Obesity and Depression*, 12-13, 137.

⁴⁴⁹ Keith's friends and contacts included Robert Harley, earl of Oxford, Scottish Jacobites, Presbyterians, in addition to the London Philadelphians Francis Lee and Richard Roach; G.D. Henderson, *Mystic of the North-east* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1934), 56-61, 65-67, 75-80, passim.

⁴⁵⁰ Attributing Rawlinson MS A. 404 to Keith cannot be certain, but there is evidence to suggest his affiliation with the manuscript. A flyleaf at the beginning of the manuscript states that "this was found amongst Dr. Keith's papers, a Philadelphian and a mystic." Keith corresponded with the Philadelphian leaders Francis Lee and Richard Roach. Additionally, the manuscript reflects a Newtonian understanding of spiritual qualities and a platonic continuum of substance from matter to spirit that is very similar to Cheyne's later ideas.

⁴⁵¹ Bodl., Rawlinson MS A. 404, fo 2. It was this blend of will and perception that defined life. All things, including plants, had a will and intelligence according to Keith. He cited Jan Baptiste van Helmont that even minerals "have some sort of perception, will, and election proportionate to their life," fo. 4.

to be a substance, spiritual stuff needed to have the quality of extension. “Take away from [a thing] all manner of extension,” Keith asked, “and then see if you can find there remains any being.” (fos. 4-6) But extension did not imply duality; spirit did not need to be conceived “partes extra partes,” or as different from its constitutive matter. Spirit functioned as the “æther of this world”; it was universal, invisible, and permeated this world as well as “all the planets that swim in it.” (fos. 6-7) At the core of all things there was an active vital principle extending itself into material movement and shape, a process Keith called “dilation.” A spirit could generate itself “by a real emanation or dilation of its own being into a quantity of extension, and give itself a certain shape.” Keith concluded that material objects were imbued with vital force: spirit was “coextended” with “bodily being”—matter and spirit existed as a continuity of unitary platonic substance. (fos. 8-9)

A larger religious cosmology lay behind this spectrum of substance; God’s spiritual essence defined the spirit-matter spectrum of being. Genesis, divine creation, was a series of coagulations in which the divine energy was made solid: the divine essence “ejaculated its coagulated vibrations” into lower graduations, which were then “coagulated” into thicker constitutions. This successive process continued until matter, “a most thick and compacted essence,” was created. Material stuff was the substantial end point of God’s spiritual emanations—a “vehicle and clothing of a spirit”—and the result of spirit’s motive and active processes. This entailed that God’s *spiritual* substance had generated the world’s variety of *material* beings. The corporeal bodies of the material world were just the various levels of the divine’s rarefied essence.⁴⁵²

These platonic continuities were evident in Cheyne’s writings. In his revised *Philosophical Principles*, published in 1715, the physician described creation as the “images, emanations, effluxes, and streams out of [God’s] own abyss of being.” Cheyne envisioned the material universe as an inverted “infinite cone,” in which God served as the supreme base from which the created world descended. Body and spirit sat on the cone’s spectrum of being; both were extended and capable of changing each other. “Material substances” were “the same with spiritual substances.” They only differed in degree of solidity, density, and activity: material substance was but spiritual stuff “infinitely condensed and contracted.”⁴⁵³ Matter was not so much *res extensa* as it was *res vitalis*, the unitary stuff of divine kinesis.⁴⁵⁴ This “quasi-vitalist physiology” continued to rely upon Newton’s theories about attraction, but also the polymath’s later thoughts about intermediary substances. In the second 1706 edition of his *Opticks*, Newton had asserted that material particles had “certain powers, virtues, or forces, by which they act at a distance, not only upon the rays of light...but also upon one another.”⁴⁵⁵ This, along with Newton’s suggestive comments in the revised *Principia* (1713) about the existence of the

⁴⁵² Ibid., fos. 98-99.

⁴⁵³ George, Cheyne, *Philosophical Principles* (London, 1715), preface part 2, sig. A3v-sig. A4v; Guerrini, *Obesity and Depression*, 87.

⁴⁵⁴ In *Philosophical Principles* Cheyne wrote that attraction and gravity were caused by God’s love and desire. Interestingly, James Keith described the attractive properties of matter as due to the extended desires of spiritual will and perception. The fulfillment of this desire was consumptive “nourishment;” unifying or “eating” a desired object imparted a “real joy” that diffused into the consuming spirit, “penetrating and tincturing the whole being of the spirit.” Rawlinson A 404, fos. 10-11; Anita Guerrini, “Newtonian Physiology,” 247-266.

⁴⁵⁵ Guerrini, “Newtonian Physiology,” 253.

ether—a “certain most subtle spirit” endued with attractive force—encouraged Cheyne to consider the “secret and internal actions of parts of matter upon one another” as attributable to an “elastic fluid, or spirit” that permeated through the universe.⁴⁵⁶

This monistic continuity—a chain of elasticized, forceful substance—provided the metaphysical framework for Cheyne’s medical theories of temperate diet. As Thomas Tryon had suggested in the 1680s, Cheyne considered the healthy body as “a well-tuned instrument,” subject to the interrelated influences of immaterial passions and material bodies. Cheyne argued that although man had discovered only a few “links of the universal chain” of being, Newton’s theories could be adapted to the workings of human bodies.⁴⁵⁷ The ether provided the conceptual analogy through which Cheyne injected his platonic metaphysics into human physiology. He noted in *The English Malady* (1733) the ether might explain how “elasticity, attraction, and other qualities” might exist within other, unknown intermediaries within the body:

There may be intermediates between pure, immaterial spirit and gross matter; and that this intermediate, material substance may take the cement between the human soul and body, and may be the instrument or medium of all its actions and functions where material organs are not manifest.⁴⁵⁸

Just as there was a principle of gravity within bodies, “whereby in *vacuo* they tend to one another and would unite,” immaterial elements within matter also directed attractive force on the body. These gravitational intermediaries were the basis of disease, but also enabled spiritualist medical therapy. God would not have created these laws without “implanting into [the body’s] essence and substance, as an antidote to such variety of distractions, an infinite tendency, bent and bias towards beings of the same nature.”⁴⁵⁹ There were a variety of gravitational forces—some corporeal, some spiritual, some a blend of the two—that influenced the mechanics of the human body’s organic functions.

Effective therapy recognized this spectrum of intermediates, and the vitalized interactions between various agents in the body. Cheyne did not believe edible matter was ensouled—the sensitive soul of the creature being consumed was dead. But nor was it inert, mechanistic stuff. Rather, food maintained a lively ability to enact vibrant force within the human body. Meat, liquors, and other rich foods were particularly strong agents:

Oily and fat substances elude the force and action of the concoctive powers [of the stomach]; and their parts attract one another and unite more strongly than other substances do, (except salts) as Sir Isaac Newton observes.⁴⁶⁰

In his *Essay on Regimen* (1740), Cheyne argued that animal flesh and strong liquors consisted of powerful particles that concentrated the attractive power “like the rays of the sun in the focus of a burning-glass.”⁴⁶¹ These attractive particles thickened the blood, caused blockages in the guts, and encouraged the accumulation of fleshy mass. Again, Cheyne considered himself an example

⁴⁵⁶ George Cheyne, *The English Malady*, 75; Guerrini, “Isaac Newton, George Cheyne,” 235-236.

⁴⁵⁷ Cheyne, *Essay of Health*, 144-145.

⁴⁵⁸ Cheyne, *English Malady*, 85-87.

⁴⁵⁹ Cheyne, *Essay of Health*, 149-150.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁶¹ George Cheyne, *An Essay on Regimen* (London, 1740), 23.

of this: during a relapse his blood became “one continued impenetrable mass of glue.”⁴⁶² He was convinced that “a diet of milk and seeds, with water-drinking only” was an antidote for his chronic illness. Temperate regimen—diet, exercise, and abstemious medical therapy—could undo the cohesive blockages created by animal meat, making the human flesh more mobile and alacritous.⁴⁶³

By rationalizing abstemious, mystical regimens along the lines of both Newtonian natural philosophy and platonic spectrums of matter, Cheyne emphasized food’s vital influence. The human body was field within which edible particles with innate attractive force interrelated with the mechanical operations of the organs. His guidebooks for health were predicated upon the idea that edible matter had effective power within the stomach to enact change upon the body—helpful rules for the medical concerns of the affluent upper classes and emergent consumer society. The popularity of regimented medical therapies—*An Essay of Health and Long Life* reached nine printed editions during Cheyne’s lifetime—indicates not only the persistence of mystical influence in diet, but also its continual adaptation to the changing scientific discourse of mechanism, chemistry, and Newtonian physics. Far from ending mystical forms of therapy and diet, Newtonian philosophies of substance enabled these diets to maintain their viability, indeed popularity, in the commercial environment of Georgian medicine.⁴⁶⁴ In the new society of English epicures, the platonic philosophy of the abstemious diet became an important medical safeguard for an age of pleasure.

Cheyne’s mystical turn provided the vitalist language for the problem of food and recast the human body as a site of material and immaterial interaction that required regimented guidance.⁴⁶⁵ But his inspired religion also maintained older teleological motivations—vestiges of the midcentury efforts towards abstemious purity. We hear in Cheyne’s last publication in 1742, *The Natural Method of Curing the Diseases of the Body*, an echo of John Milton’s Raphael, who suggested man might one day ascend digestively to spiritual existence. “Man is a diminutive angel,” concluded Cheyne, “shut up in a flesh prison or vehicle.”⁴⁶⁶ The Scottish physician leaves us with an odd historical incongruity: the idea of the ethereal articulated by the fleshiest of men. But we might resolve Cheyne’s personal paradox of the flesh through empathy for his lifetime struggle with health and wellbeing. His vitalism provided the possibility that even the obstinate flesh of man was the same stuff of divinity. It is little surprise that Cheyne found solace in the belief that within his many pounds of uncooperative mass there was a diminutive angel that might take flight to God.

Conclusion

⁴⁶² Cheyne, “Case of the Author,” 344-345.

⁴⁶³ Cheyne, *Essay on Regimen*, xv.

⁴⁶⁴ For Cheyne as representing a modern, capitalist process of social rationalization, see Brian S. Turner, “The Government of the Body: Medical Regimens and the Rationalization of Diet,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 33 (1982): 254-269.

⁴⁶⁵ *An Essay of Health* contained chapters on exercise and sleep in addition to Cheyne’s lengthy guides to food.

⁴⁶⁶ George Cheyne, *The Natural Method of Cureing the Diseases of the Body* (London, 1742), 79.

The fact that seventeenth-century England contained two published vegetarian hatters was not a curious coincidence; rather, it signals deeper cultural and intellectual anxieties in the late seventeenth century about the nature of edible matter and its impact upon the body. In the second half of the seventeenth century consumption and digestion—the conversion of matter into the human body—meant much more than mere physical nourishment. Religious anthropologies and metaphysical understandings of the body politicized consumption and metabolism within socio-economic critique, medical theory, and philosophies of matter. Specific cultural and intellectual formulations of materiality, as well as religious ideas about the nature of spiritual regeneration, were expressed through new ideas about digestion and diet. Vegetarianism reflected broader philosophical problems that were being examined by the philosophers, scientists, and physicians of the period. Religious notions of consumption and digestion helped change how early moderns idealized matter itself.

While we can see a lingering Augustinian antipathy to the flesh, there was new interest in the chemical properties of food itself, evident in Helmontian writings about digestion and allegorical interpretations of the fall as gastric crisis. The shift was an expansion in the scope of concern: older anxieties regarding the flesh increasing encompassed more than the human corpus, to include edible matter itself. This accounts for mystic vegetarianism's longer genealogy into the eighteenth century. Christian antipathy of the flesh adapted to the changing intellectual and cultural atmosphere of late seventeenth-century England. Tryon and Cheyne displaced this ancient concern about the human body itself onto the liminal edible matter that was both constitutive and separate from the body. This extended the care of the self to the control of foreign objects that interacted with the body. The gut became a field of influential forces that needed to be managed and adjusted. In this way, marginal voices—mystics, hermits, and hat-makers—contributed significantly to the development of modern sensibilities and anxieties about the body's dependence upon wider arrays of material influences. Concerns with edible matter sustained mystical interest despite new natural philosophies and the faddish therapies of Georgian medicine.

Chapter 5

The Rise and Fall of Quaker Spiritualism

In his 1660 defense of inspired religion, Samuel Fisher argued that the Bible's material nature made it an unsuitable source of religious knowledge. For Fisher, an Oxford-trained convert to Quakerism, doctrinal reliance upon a physical document was dangerous religion. Not only did the textual exegesis of religious doctrine rely upon the fallible interpretations of men, scripture itself was composed of labile, changing, and vulnerable matter. Writing in *Rusticus ad Academicos...The Rustick's Alarm to the Rabbies* (London, 1660), a lengthy response to hostile Presbyterian and Independent clergymen, Fisher defined "scripture" as "letters legible to our bodily eyes however extant, upon whatever outward matter capable to receive their impression—tables of stone, walls, skin, parchment, paper—by the finger of God or hands of men."⁴⁶⁷ Both ends of the subject-object relationship were potentially problematic. "Bodily eyes" could fail or misread. The physical text of biblical writing, ink on pulped paper or animal leather, was susceptible to alteration, damage, and appropriation. Was the Bible made by the fingers of God or the hands of men?

Fisher's critique of scriptural infallibility laid specific emphasis upon the materiality that constituted the scriptural texts. He wrote, "the Letter is changeable, alterable, flexible, passing, perishing, corruptible at man's will, who may mistranscribe, turn, tear, change, alter, burn it, etc."⁴⁶⁸ The Bible of the puritans was necessarily made from the same contingent matter as the rest of the created world. The arrangement of translated words, syntax, and punctuation were "confused chaoses that came to pass more by chance then by any rules of art, and a world created by a casual concurrence of antic atoms."⁴⁶⁹ Scripture was not the Word of God, but very much part of the fallen, contingent world of matter. Merely the result of corporeal chance and atomistic randomness, Fisher concluded that doctrinal truth could not rest upon man's fallible interpretation of blotted ink on pulpy parchment. Only the direct, unmediated inspiration of God could avoid the taint of human misunderstanding and material contingency.

At the same moment that Fisher was lambasting the Bible's materiality, another Quaker, John Perrot, expanded upon Quaker criticism of formal worship by attempting to raze any remaining material, physical, or ritualistic structure within Quaker worship. Perrot's "hat controversy," a critique of lingering ritual "works" within the religious meetings of Friends, destabilized existing theological tensions within early Quakerism and nearly split the movement. Perrot lambasted the removal of hats during worship as a "bodily exercise," eroding the divinely inspired nature of true belief and worship. Establishment Quakers were forced to retreat from the fissiparous implications of the sect's early theology. But, for several months in 1660 and 1661, at the very advent of monarchical Restoration, the spiritualist impulses of the post-Reformation were turned back upon the material foundations of western Christianity.

⁴⁶⁷ Samuel Fisher, *Rusticus ad Academicos in Exercitationibus Expostulatoriis, Apologeticis Quatnor. The Rustick's Alarm to the Rabbies: Or The Country Correcting the University* (London, 1660), Ex. 2. 5-6.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Ex. 2. 149.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Ex. 2. 111.

Historians have acknowledged the spiritualist efforts of Fisher and Perrot, but there is a tendency to position them as marginal to the historiographies of both the Society of Friends and revolutionary England (1640-1660). Christopher Hill's brief chapter on Fisher in the *World Turned Upside Down* concluded that Fisher was anachronistic, precociously anticipating enlightened skeptical criticism of the biblical text, but in a polemical style that was fading with the Restoration.⁴⁷⁰ Richard Popkin connected Fisher with the Enlightenment through the possibility that he interacted with Baruch Spinoza in Amsterdam. Popkin abstrusely suggested some sort of mutual influence through the family resemblance between their respective epistemologies.⁴⁷¹ Even Nicholas McDowell's insightful reading of Fisher's work frames *Rusticus* as "a Janus-like text," which fused two radical traditions—the post-Reformation mode of satirical religious dissent *à la* Martin Marprelate, and the intellectual skepticism that culminated with the eighteenth-century deism and freethinking. Fisher anticipated the cultural *bricolage* of the "radical enlightenment," deploying learned intellectual traditions in the support of popular political antagonisms.⁴⁷²

Caution is needed in positioning Fisher as a transitional point within an "enlightened" constellation of proto-secular thought. His writings, defined by extreme religious motivations, sit awkwardly as a forerunner to eighteenth-century critiques of classical theism. While he contributed to a broader cultural and intellectual problem regarding the nature of true belief, Fisher sits firmly within a strand of English spiritualism defined by its fierce interrogation of the epistemological foundations for religious knowledge. His ideas have much more in common with John Perrot's universalist formulation of the Inner Light, a theology formed through an abortive mission trip to the Mediterranean.⁴⁷³ By targeting ceremonial religion and the material production of scriptural text, the writings of Perrot and Fisher were the period's most strident critiques of Protestant reliance upon material objects, practices, and corporeal ecclesiology as a source of religious authority and knowledge.

This chapter considers Perrot and Fisher as confronting a central material ambivalence that persisted through British post-reformation religion. The causal mechanism triggering this radical anti-materialism was the experience of missionary service, and the historical narrative of these two case studies is connected through Quaker evangelism beyond the shores of Britain. The experience of foreign communities influenced their spiritualist theology: mission work forced Quakers to revise their mysticism for non-English audiences, and to construct anthropologies supporting the universal nature of divine inspiration. The experience of foreign peoples clarified

⁴⁷⁰ Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (New York, 1972), 213-215.

⁴⁷¹ Richard Popkin, "Spinoza's Relations with the Quakers in Amsterdam," *Quaker History* 73 (1984): 14-28; Richard Popkin, "Spinoza and Samuel Fisher," *Philosophia* 15 (1985): 219-221.

⁴⁷² Nicholas McDowell, *The English Radical Imagination: Culture, Religion, and Revolution, 1630-1660* (Oxford, 2003), 137-141.

⁴⁷³ William Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism* (London, 1923), 416-433; see also Kenneth Carroll, *John Perrot: early Quaker schismatic* (London, 1971), 51-61; Nigel Smith, "Exporting Enthusiasm: John Perrot and the Quaker Epic," in *Literature and the English Civil War* ed. Thomas Healy and Jonathan Sawday (Cambridge, 1990), 248-264; Rosemary Moore, *The Light in Their Consciences: The Early Quakers in Britain, 1646-1666* (University Park, PA, 2000), 193-203.

and energized the Perrot and Fisher's concept of the "Inner Light," the idea that God directly guided the religious conscience of the believer in matters of religious faith through an inward transformation. But it also exacerbated the fragmenting impulses within the movement. Perrot and Fisher's writings leveled the antinomian, non-institutional impulse that motivated Quakerism's critique of religious ceremony, hierarchy, and exegesis against the very textual and ritual foundations of religion itself.

In their attempt to create a truly immaterial religion based solely upon the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Fisher and Perrot represent the endpoint (and implosion) of the spiritualist impulse through the rejection of reformed religion's material vestiges, an antipathy to the physical ritualism of ceremony, and a scathing critique of the material text's physical vulnerabilities. The chapter expands upon McDowell's recognition of Fisher's "acute awareness of the materiality and plasticity of the printed word" by reconstructing its origins in early Quaker theology and reconnecting Fisher to the work of John Perrot, the catalyst of the first Quaker "schism."⁴⁷⁴ Fisher's and Perrot's writings reveal the problems presented by the radical rejection of material religion through the Quaker ambivalence to physical texts, corporeal ritual, and formal worship. Despite the explicit spiritualism of their efforts, two material problems—hats and texts—exposed contradictions within the Quaker movement and forced its leaders to anchor religious authority within the corporate body of the Society of Friends.

Quaker Theology's Unstable Origins

Perrot and Fisher, early converts to the Quaker movement, inherited a blurry, capacious theology that reflected the group's unsettled historical origins. The movement had its beginnings in the meetings of independent, voluntary (and often Baptist) congregations that gathered in the English Midlands and northern counties between 1646 and 1649. George Fox, the leading preacher of the early Quaker movement, recalled that his ideas developed amid large religious gatherings in churches, taverns, and fields. The son of a weaver and apprenticed in Mansfield as a shoemaker, Fox's account of the early movement in his posthumously published *Journal* conveys the ideological upheaval that gripped rural England in the late 1640s. Fox traveled across the midlands between 1645 and 1649, searching for an elusive sense of spiritual comfort. He wrote in his journal about contentious religious gatherings. He watched "Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists, and Common-prayer-men" dispute across pulpits and pews. He met naturalist pantheists in taverns who claimed, "there was no God, but that all things came by nature." He preached informally against the religious insincerity of priests and testified to "shattered Baptists" in Nottinghamshire. These types of encounters spurred a series of spiritual awakenings during his itinerant perambulations, adding a sense of eschatological urgency to Fox's inchoate spirituality: he believed the hearts of the English needed "to be shaken before the seed of God was raised out of the earth."⁴⁷⁵ There exist several extended accounts of the history

⁴⁷⁴ McDowell, *English Radical Imagination*, 141. McDowell connects Fisher and Perrot, but focuses on their shared persecution through "sensational episodes of physical protest and prophetic gesture," 148-150.

⁴⁷⁵ George Fox, *The Journal of George Fox*, 8th ed. (London, 1891), 23-26.

of early Quakerism.⁴⁷⁶ But for the purposes of this chapter, it is important to stress the movement's open hostility to institutional and doctrinal forms of religious knowledge.

Similar to other contemporary "seekers," Fox expressed the believer's relationship to God in terms of continuing, direct revelation. He sought religious answers outside the institutional framework of organized churches. God could be felt through an indwelling Holy Spirit that existed in all people. In his *Journal*, Fox called these religious experiences "openings," in which his burdened soul was enlightened by the sensation of union with Christ and the inspiration of his Word.⁴⁷⁷ Early Quakers relied upon older imagery of emanation, usually in terms of Christian enlightenment—God's "light" or the "inner light" that shined into the "openings" of believers. For the Quakers, being enlightened was not simply the revelation of specific discursive knowledge; rather enlightenment authenticated the substantive, indeed essential, relationship between the believer's being and God. As Leo Damrosch has pointed out, the actual content of expressed doctrine was itself instrumental to a more fundamental question of whether one stood redeemed and authorized by God's inspired Light.⁴⁷⁸ Intensifying this were millenarian expectations in the late 1640s and early 1650s, which encouraged an extreme form of mystical unity—the Light's inspiration entailed the utter irradiation of the Saint. Quaker preachers stressed the complete abnegation of the body and soul into the guidance of an internal, immanent presence that was also, somehow, divine transcendence itself.⁴⁷⁹ From the outset of the movement, the totality of this enlightened experience was theologically problematic and, quite simply, difficult to understand. The idea of light obviously expressed a sensation of spiritual solace—the idea of divine contact and assurance. Salvation came from the light, which was from Christ. Yet the merging the self into the Light made the ethical and epistemological functions of this Inner Light especially capacious.

The indwelling Light of the Quakers confirmed older antinomian and anticlerical religious tendencies in northern Britain, providing an alternative mystical knowledge outside of scripture. Fox described his teachings as learned through "the pure openings of the light, without help of any man." He confirmed the truth of his enlightened revelations by double-checking them in the Bible: "afterwards, searching the Scripture, I found it."⁴⁸⁰ In other words, the Light provided the same knowledge as scriptural text. Indeed, Fox followed the antinomian tradition in considering the Calvinist emphasis on the scriptural exegesis to be overly "legalistic." One of the crucial revelations from his "openings" was the realization "that being bred at Oxford or Cambridge was not enough to fit and qualify men to be ministers of Christ."⁴⁸¹ Other early Quakers shared this anticlerical sentiment. In a 1653 pamphlet, James Naylor, an early co-leader with Fox, described puritan church ministers as "blind guides" who used "the Letter for a cloak" to cover their lack of godliness. The truly purified were the Saints who understood that the basic element of the

⁴⁷⁶ See for example, Braithwaite, *Beginnings of Quakerism*; Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), esp. 1-11; Moore, *Light in Their Consciences*, esp. 3-34.

⁴⁷⁷ Braithwaite, *Beginnings of Quakerism*, 33-37.

⁴⁷⁸ Leo Damrosch, *The Sorrows of the Quaker Jesus: James Naylor and the Puritan Crackdown on the Free Spirit* (Cambridge, MA, 1996), 75-76.

⁴⁷⁹ Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion, 1640-1660* (Oxford, 1989), 66-70.

⁴⁸⁰ Fox, *Journal*, 34-35.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

divine “was within them.”⁴⁸² Embedded within this anticlericalism was an attack upon the ministerial ability to interpret scripture, but also the very notion that scripture should serve as the baseline for Christian belief. Quaker writings compared the vitality of the Spirit with the moribund biblical text. Fox decried how the people of England “fed upon words, and fed one another with words; but they trampled upon the life.” The “airy notions” of ministerial exegetes, pontificated in pulpits across England, could not tap into a living, internal Christ contained within the self.⁴⁸³ Christ was not scriptural words, but an allegorized Logos, a divine aspect of all mankind, manifesting itself in varying degrees among the bodies of all believers.

The Light also had ethical functions and provided practical advice for living spiritually in the created world. Naylor admonished in a letter that Friends, “keep your eye to the light.” It provided a form of guidance through the material realm, “through all the visible things of the world.”⁴⁸⁴ For Richard Farnworth, a Yorkshire man and one of Fox’s earliest convincements, the Inner Light was something akin to a moral compass or “teacher.” In 1653 Farnworth admonished, “mind the light of God in you, that shows you sin and evil, that which does convince you of sin and uncleanness.”⁴⁸⁵ Farnworth adapted the Light to the early modern idiom of moderation. In a letter, he cautioned that Quakers not “run without your guide” and “take heed of running into extremes of anything.” Although Quakers should be “not sayers, but doers and practicers,” the Light’s qualities of the self-control and austerity must be displayed: “Let your moderation be known to all men, for the Lord is at hand.”⁴⁸⁶ But the discipline of the Light was internal and lacking in any ceremonial or institutional apparatus. Exclusion was the only tangible enforcement mechanism for falling out of the Light.⁴⁸⁷ If the saint contained this moral “guide,” she should be able to act perfectly and without sin; however, if she did sin, there was no other explanation than that the believer lacked the Light and was actually unregenerate, not a Friend. This was exemplified by the treatment of Christopher Atkinson, an early reprobate amongst the Quakers whose sexual improprieties in 1655 led Friends in Norwich to “cast him out from amongst us.”⁴⁸⁸ Similarly, the Quaker William Dewsbury suggested in 1653 that those who were “most grown in the power and life” should admonish Friends “if any walk disorderly.” If a Quaker refused to be reprimanded and persisted in their errors, the community of Friends should “charge them to depart amongst you, so cast them out and not any have union with them, not so much as to eat with them until they repent.”⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸² James Naylor, *A Discovery of Faith* (London, 1653), 6-7.

⁴⁸³ Fox, *Journal*, 20.

⁴⁸⁴ James Naylor, *Two Epistles*, (1654), 5.

⁴⁸⁵ Richard Farnworth, *The Generall-Good to People*, cited by Moore, *Light in Their Consciences*, 81-82.

⁴⁸⁶ “R. Farnworth to M. Fell on God Dwelling in the Person, 1656,” Swarthmore MS. Vol. 3. 47 (henceforth cited as “SW. MS. 3. 47”), FHL.

⁴⁸⁷ For the origins of radical claims of moderation see Ethan Shagan, *The Rule of Moderation: Violence, Religion, and the Politics of Restraint in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2011), 177-181. Of interest is Shagan’s analysis of Baptist John Smyth’s formulations of how “maximum liberty” enabled the godly to display their sanctification and election through a peculiar “simultaneity of internal and external moderation.”

⁴⁸⁸ “R. Cleayton to M. Fell Concerning Christopher Atkinson, 1655,” FHL SW. MS. 1. 30,

⁴⁸⁹ “W. Dewsbury to ‘Friends about’, 1653,” FHL SW. MS. 3. 19,

The language of internal “guides” and “teachers” introduced a new set of problems. Quakers used the word “Light” in a way that was difficult to distinguish from the natural light of the conscience, or reason.⁴⁹⁰ This was a common complaint from contemporary critics. If the light was wholly internal, what differentiated it from natural reason or even the carnal desires of the self? John Toldervy, a onetime Quaker who repudiated the movement in 1656, commented that the Quaker Inner Light was merely “‘Self for the justifying of Self’ where all was ‘Resolved from Self’.”⁴⁹¹ Given the potential for moral relativism, other English clergymen regarded the Quakers’ extreme emphasis on the “Light” with contempt. Francis Higginson, the vicar of Kirkby Stephen in Westmorland, claimed that Quakers believed “Christ is a light within every man,” and that “Jesus Christ is come into their flesh.” In other words, the Light blasphemously unified the Quakers into Christ.⁴⁹² Richard Baxter considered Quaker theology of the light to be heretical in so far as it overturned scriptural mandates and ministerial control over religious doctrine. In his autobiographical *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, Baxter fretted over the dangers of Quaker inspiration well into the Restoration. “They make the light which every man have within him to be his sufficient rule,” wrote the minister, “and consequently the Scripture and ministry are set light by.”⁴⁹³ Quakers language about “light” and “spirit” made the actual idea of Christ impossible to understand. Baxter complained that Quakers “speak allegorically and equivocally when they mention his name and nature, and so show that indeed they are not Christians.”⁴⁹⁴ Baxter was not alone in his contempt. A group of Particular Baptists in Ireland vilified the Light in the conscience as “a natural light, a corrupt thing, a false guide, which makes the Jews deny Christ and Turks worship Mahomet.”⁴⁹⁵ For the Irish Baptists, Quaker appeals to an Inner Light as a non-ceremonial justification of belief was actually the basis of heathenism and religious heresy.

Quaker religious ideas thus coalesced around several theological tensions during the movement’s formative years. First, in responding to the moribund “Letter” of scripturally-based Calvinist justification, Fox transformed seeker and antinomian language about interior, spiritual faith into a broader, divinely inspired belief system. But the incoherence of this emphasis upon the internal spirit made any sort of lingering ritual convention or material epistemic standard liable to be overthrown by the Light. Vestigial elements of material standards of religious knowledge, practice, and belief—formal worship, a textual foundation to belief, the maintenance of social mores and conventions—were vulnerable to further extensions of Quaker’s spiritualist critique. Secondly, was the Inner Light derived from God or was it, to quote the Irish Baptists, merely “a natural light” of human reason? While the universality of the natural light had led to the variety of religious experiences across the world, the Inner Light was also, theoretically, self-evident to all willing to abnegate the self. This slippage, the conceptual collapse between natural reason and the Inner Light, provided a crucial space for Quaker evangelism beyond Britain, but it also made Quaker inspiration liable to rejection as “carnal” reason. Finally, the theology of the

⁴⁹⁰ Moore, *Light in their Consciences*, 102-104.

⁴⁹¹ Cited in Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, 68.

⁴⁹² Francis Higginson, *A Brief Relation of the Irreligion of the Northern Quakers* (London, 1653), 5-6.

⁴⁹³ Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae, or, Mr. Richard Baxters Narrative of the Most Memorable Passages of His Life and Times* (London, 1696), 77.

⁴⁹⁴ Baxter, *One Sheet Against the Quakers*, 3-4.

⁴⁹⁵ “W. Morris to Particular Baptists in Ireland,” FHL SW. MS. 5. 34.

Friends provided little authoritative basis to restrain someone from claiming the Light. When these tensions—standards of faith, the nature of the light, ecclesiastical discipline—were strained by the experience of service abroad, there was no ready ceremonial, exegetical, or authoritative function that could control idiosyncratic claims to the Light. As we will see with John Perrot and Quaker bibliolatry, the ecstatic impulse within the Light engendered hostility toward efforts to mitigate the idiosyncratic iconoclasm of inspired religion and to recast the Light as a source of communal discipline and moderation.

Perrot's Anthropology of the Light

In the summer of 1656 John Perrot, a former Baptist who was convinced as a Friend in 1653, had a prophetic experience in which he was spoken to by the Lord. Perrot wrote that on 17 August, 1656 the Word of the Lord spoke directly to him in southeastern Ireland. He was told to “bear witness,” and that God was sending him “into a far country, having given thee a sharp instrument to thresh upon the mountains of Turkey.” God required Perrot to testify Quaker theology in “two cities,” Rome and Istanbul, despite the dangers “among that bloodthirsty people.”⁴⁹⁶ Perrot interpreted this divine message as a call to travel to the Mediterranean and testify Quaker beliefs about the inspiration of the Inner Light to the Ottoman emperor, Mehmed IV, and the Roman Catholic Pope, Alexander VII. Perrot's travels occurred in the wake of earlier Quaker efforts abroad. By 1656 individual Friends had crossed the Channel into France and Holland; a few individuals had reached the West Indies and the American mainland.⁴⁹⁷

Quakers were pulled outwards by the millenarian belief that the Kingdom of God was imminent. Even if Christ's return was figurative and spiritually internal, Quakers saw the regenerative changes within the bodies and souls of the saved as indicative of a climatic eschatological moment. For example, this millenarianism led to a sustained attempt in the late 1650s to enact the general conversion of the Jews. Quakers shared in the belief, common among contemporary millenarians, that the conversion of the Jews was preliminary to the creation of Christ's Kingdom. Margaret Fell was a chief proponent of this mission, and published admonishments to Dutch Jews, including the Amsterdam rabbi Manesseh ben Israel. She published pamphlets in 1656 and 1657 that allegorized the conversion of the Jews as the consolidation of the Quaker movement in England.⁴⁹⁸ Samuel Fisher would be involved in this mission, and attempted to translate two of Fell's pamphlets into Hebrew.⁴⁹⁹

This eschatological enthusiasm was expressed by other Quaker leaders through personal exhortations in both print and manuscript correspondence to the leaders of non-Protestant polities. Writing from London “to all the world,” the Quaker activist Edward Burrough, who

⁴⁹⁶ “J. Perrot from Catherlagh, 1657,” FHL SW. MS. 5. 19.

⁴⁹⁷ Braithwaite, *Beginnings of Quakerism*, 403-408.

⁴⁹⁸ Margaret Fell, *For Mannasseh Ben Israel: The Call of the Jewes out of Babylon* (London, 1656), 3-4, 16-20; Margaret Fell, *A Loving Salutation to the Seed of Abraham Among the Jewes* (London, 1657), 7-11.

⁴⁹⁹ Richard Popkin speculates that Spinoza was enlisted into this translation effort through his connections to the Collegiants, but this connection is unverifiable with extant sources. See “Spinoza's Relations with the Quakers in Amsterdam,” 14-28; “Spinoza and Samuel Fisher,” 219-221.

converted John Perrot, declared that the day of the Lord was appearing and that God was gathering his chosen seed “out of nations, peoples, and countries.” When Burroughs and other Quaker leaders described that Christ was the “light of the world,” they meant this literally as admonitions to non-Christians increased in volume between 1656 and 1661.⁵⁰⁰ In a pamphlet directed to the Ottoman emperor, Fox lamented that Adam’s children were scattered and “divided into families, into nations and several kingdoms,” political divisions that had, in turn, created innumerable varieties of religious worship. Fox suggested the abandonment of all structured religion, including Islam but also any other type of worship involving ecclesiastical institutions and formal churches. The *exogena* of the Inner Light, its external, alien divinity, enabled the dismissal of formal religious difference as “made of men’s hands.” One should only follow the “bishop of the soul,” the shepherd that would raise God’s spiritual standard above the boundaries of kingdoms, dominions, and principalities.⁵⁰¹

These writings were literally outlandish. An interesting letter exchange between William Caton and John Fox revealed the global ambitions of Quaker missionary efforts. Caton, who had joined the Quaker mission in Amsterdam, noted that he had received a letter from the Quaker leader “wherein [Fox] made mention of a seed of God which is to be gathered in Russia, Muscovia, Poland, Hungary, and Swedeland and withal it appeared that [Fox] would gladly have us to pass into them nations.” Caton cagily declined, writing that God had not “filled [him] so, as He hath for service in these parts.”⁵⁰² Other Quakers considered trips to Africa. Henry Fell, a Quaker who cut his teeth testifying in the Barbados, wrote a Latin message to Prester John, the mythic Christian king of Africa. Fell declared to Prester John that the Lord had commanded him “to give thee and thy dominions and nations a visit and hearing.” God was coming “to teach his people himself by his spirit, in which they shall have unity with himself.” The inwardness of Christian religion was self evident to any man, even the Nestorian church in Africa, by “the law God put into his mind and his heart.”⁵⁰³ So while perhaps slightly more audacious in his attempt to testify to the two *bête noirs* of post-Reformation Protestantism, the pope and the “Turk,” John Perrot’s mission to the Mediterranean was part of the wider movement’s enthusiasm for extravagant expression and testimony. Still, it must have seemed an exemplary and special effort for the Friends. Records in the Swarthmore manuscripts indicate that in 1656 Quaker leaders collected over £443 from meetings across England to fund missions across Europe and New England. Forty percent of this amount, over £175, went to the Mediterranean trip that departed England in the summer of 1657 for Turkey and Rome.⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰⁰ “E. Burroughs to the Heads, Rulers, 1655” SW. MS. 5. 2, FHL; “E. Burroughs ‘To all the world’, 13 February, 1657,” SW. MS. 5. 29, FHL.

⁵⁰¹ George Fox, *Turcae, et Omnibus Sub Ejus Ditione* (London, 1660), 10, 12-14.

⁵⁰² “W. Caton to F. Fox and M. Fell,” SW. MS. 4. 273, FHL.

⁵⁰³ Henry Fell, *Pro Presbytero Joahanne ac omnibus ejus regibus and principibus* (London, 1660), 4-6. Fell, who embarked for Egypt with John Stubbs in 1661, was banished from Livorno by the English consul while in route and forced to return north. See *ODNB*, “Fell, Henry (c.1630–1674),” by Stefano Villani, ed. Lawrence Goldman, Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9256>, accessed 15 February 2016.

⁵⁰⁴ “Expenditure for foreign missions, 1656,” Swarthmore Manuscript Transcription, Vol. 3, 685-686.

The trip was strenuous. In the spring of 1657 Perrot reached southern England and formed a missionary group, including John Luffe, Mary Fisher, Mary Prince, John Buckley, and Beatrice Beckley. Extant records indicate that the group reached the Mediterranean by summer's end, stopping in Livorno before proceeding to the island of Zakynthos (Zante) off the coast of Greece and then Smyrna (modern day Izmir).⁵⁰⁵ Perrot's correspondence to Quakers in England and Ireland noted continual obstacles including problematic weather, hostility from local authorities (including English diplomatic representatives), and violence from ship-captains and fellow passengers.⁵⁰⁶ These disruptions apparently led the missionaries to divide and head in different directions. Seemingly blocked from visiting the Sultan, Perrot and John Luffe headed back east and bore testimony to the pope and his cardinals in Rome.⁵⁰⁷ Perrot sought to clear his conscience "to the pope's face."⁵⁰⁸ The women of the group, Fisher and Beckley, continued eastward toward the court of the Ottoman sultan, Mehmed IV.⁵⁰⁹

During his trip and imprisonment, Perrot composed several letters for Turks, Italians, and other nations that made their way back to English presses. In these he followed Fell and Fox in expounding the universal implications of Quaker theology; however, close readings reveal subtle rhetorical maneuvers that reflected Perrot's situation on the ground—his movement through communities of Jews, Muslims, Roman Catholics, and hostile English merchants. His writings reveal subtle alterations to the rhetorical and theological frameworks developed during the English Revolution. The idea of non-Christian peoples influenced his religious thought, leading to increased emphasis upon mankind's cognitive abilities to understand religious values independent of particular social customs and religious institutions. He reframed the Quaker variety of antinomianism as a universal religion that subsumed political, religious, and cultural divisions that divided Christian from heathen.

The writings—while maintaining a tendentious insistence upon the self-evidence of theological truths—revised Quaker theology in basic terms of self-knowledge and highlighted the Inner Light's quietist appeal to multi-ethnic, multi-confessional polities. First, Perrot followed in the Christian evangelical tradition of proclaiming God's international nature. In a letter to the Ottoman emperor, published as *A Visitation of Love* in 1658, Perrot described God as "the light of the world that all nations may come to know." This knowledge would occur in apocalyptic fashion: a spiritual reckoning was coming in which God would "make many tongues, languages, and people of many nations of one heart and one mind and soul." Perrot called God "a spirit infinite" within every person. The new world of the light would happen within the hearts and minds of the believers.⁵¹⁰ Perrot stressed that God could not be understood through

⁵⁰⁵ "J. Perrot to E. Burroughs (written in Leghorn), 1657," Portfolio Manuscripts (henceforth cited as "Port. MS.") Vol. 17. fols. 75-76, FHL.

⁵⁰⁶ "J. Perrot to 'my father's flock in Ireland', 7 July 1657," SW. MS. 5. 25, FHL.

⁵⁰⁷ "J. Perrot to E. Burroughs, July 1657," SW MS. 5. 36, FHL; "The trial of John Luffe before Pope Alexander," Port. MS. 17. fol. 74, FHL.

⁵⁰⁸ John Perrot, *Battering Rams Against Rome* (London, 1661), 145.

⁵⁰⁹ "An epistle from John Perrot to Friend in Ireland, 16 January 1658," SW. MS. 5. 33, FHL. See also William Sewel, *The History of the Rise, Increase, and Progress of the Christian People called Quakers*, 3rd ed. (London, 1795), 472-473; also, "State Papers, 1658: July (6 of 7)," in *A Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe, Volume 7, March 1658 - May 1660*, ed. Thomas Birch (London, 1742), 287.

⁵¹⁰ John Perrot, *A Visitation of Love and Gentle Greeting of the Turk* (London, 1658) 3-4.

ceremonies or other human arrangements. Human customs obstructed the direct form of divine contact that determined religious knowledge and spiritual regeneration. Writing to the Vatican, Perrot wrote that the peculiarities of religious custom and local ceremonies of worship forced God out of the church: “The sons of men, who by the limitations of their customs and forms of worship, and words in the will... thrust him, the unlimited spirit, out of his true habitation.”⁵¹¹ When these ceremonial accretions were abandoned, God literally changed the person of the believer. His spirit enriched the mind of the believer, and divine contact “changed the operation of the substance” within a person.⁵¹² Perrot cleverly expanded the older antinomian dialectic of spirit-opposed-by-ceremony to include all cultural variations of customs, manners, and laws. Any human ritual was subservient to a universal relationship with the Spirit. Quaker beliefs, fashioned within the particular doctrinal debates of Britain over theology and ecclesiology, were being marketed abroad and aimed at a non-Protestant, indeed multi-confessional audience.

This type of oppositional theology—contrasting an internal and introspective spiritualism with the legalistic ceremonialism of “orthodox” religion—was common for Quakers and other religious thinkers of the English Revolution. But in the context of global religious difference, Quaker light universalism intentionally unsettled the localism of institutionalized worship. All local forms of worship were, by definition, carnal. So spiritualism became the equivalent to natural religion. Perrot stressed this point to the Ottoman emperor. In his *Visitation* he wrote, “the sons of men... have worshipped in their place, and upon that mountain, and in this form... but they were worshipping the works of their own hands and the imaginations of their hearts.” (10-11) Perrot argued that Quaker insight into the immaterial Light was a useful religious alternative for the Ottoman sultan, who was “set over many regions, [and] that over many more thou mayest reign until all the earth be subdued for thee.” (3) Given the varieties of religion and worship in the world—and within the territory ruled by the Turks—only God’s spirit could serve as a common denominator.

This rhetorical maneuver packaged antinomian religion as ideal for a polity of multiple faiths. Perrot stressed to the Sultan that the recognition of the immaterial, indwelling God “will lead unto quietness and settledness out of strife and hard contentions, fighting and quarellings, or raising of tumults or seditions, or heresies, or sects, or many opinions, which aim to the dividing of nations.” In an empire of multiple faiths and peoples, religious custom served as a source of division. Perrot suggested the quiet recognition of the divine light in the conscience would establish God’s kingdom on earth, a beneficial occurrence for the godly emperor. God’s quieting light would “lead all into subjection to authority and all into the knowledge and understanding of the true power and authority and office of magistracy.” (15-16) There was no dominion more stable than “his who walks in the light.” Teaching the idea to wait upon the Inner Light would lead to lasting political stability:

This is the sum. Man must know the Light in his conscience to rule him, else he is as a wild ass, unruly, without a bridle in his mouth or curb to his way, and knows no restraint to the wickedness of his heart but is ready to run swiftly in the open passages of mischief. (16)

The formulation of the Light as a moderating “bridle” was also an imperial restraint. The internal guide of the light in the body facilitated the external rule of the body-politic, a peculiar adaptation of the puritan impulse to remove outward restraints in favor of inward discipline.

⁵¹¹ Perrot, *Battering Rams Against Rome*, 8.

⁵¹² Perrot, *A Visitation of Love*, 18-19.

Perrot's antinomianism was anti-ceremonial, but this was packaged as a source political unity, a quietist carrot for the multi-confessional polity. This was Quakerism as a faith of empire.

There was then, embedded in Perrot's writings to non-Christians, an attempt to show fundamental religious commonalities within all men. Quaker theology's focus upon the recognition of divine influence upon "inward parts" was readily adapted for foreign peoples. In a work aimed even further afield than Turkey, Perrot repackaged Quaker ideas about the inner light for the peoples of south Asia, stressing the internal nature of Holy Spirit's functions. Upon his return to London in 1661, Perrot published *Beams of Eternal Brightness*, a letter intended to present Quaker religious ideas to the "kings, princes, rulers, and peoples of India." This tract presented right religion as recognizing the "the glorious sun of the soul," a divine representation within the body of all people. This knowledge was self-sufficient; Perrot made no reference to Christian scripture or traditions of worship. Rather he argued that "when all men, in all nations, countries, and lands shall attain to the true knowledge of their maker and creator *in themselves*; then they shall have no need of any other instruction."⁵¹³ Divine knowledge was immaterial and predicated solely upon the proper understanding of the self and the Creator, the nature of man and the nature of God. Indeed, this is the entire point of the letter: true godliness was universal in so far as the illumination of the proper relationship between God, mind, and body was possible for all.⁵¹⁴

In *Beams of Eternal Brightness*, Perrot described this inward enlightenment as spiritualist anthropology. There was a tripartite division within all men. Contained within the body was the soul, "the sensible living part that has its being in the body of flesh." In addition to this division between soul and body, Perrot argued that there was a third element within the person, the light of God, or "the sun of the soul." God could not intermingle with the unclean corporeality of man since the divine "[had] no unity nor fellowship with man's uncleanness and beastliness." (4) There was a necessary division between the soul and the flesh, the mind and the body. During creation God infused the rational soul into the "dead substance" of the body to ensure a place of communication in the mind, "the most noble part of man." It was within this epistemological space that God interacted with man: "the eternal sun of the soul shines into the soul and enlightens the inward parts." Thus the Light of God, a pure spiritual radiation, vitalized the mind of man, providing a means of right moral decision and godly orientation. Perrot concluded that through the Light "every member of the body is acted as a continual servant in obedience to the motions of the soul and mind of man." (20-21) The godly person was spiritually energized by the recognition of divine truth and religious morality through his own being.

In both of Perrot's formulations, what was crucial to convey to eastern peoples was not a particular religious tenet—the redemptive sacrifice of Christ comes to mind—but rather an understanding of the complex relationship between an immaterial God and the human being. Couched in the antinomian language that opposed scriptural, ceremonial, and doctrinal forms of religion, Perrot framed religion as self-knowledge, a sort of deep epistemology, in which human knowledge was embedded within a blend of theological and anthropomorphic presumptions. It was this "inward" knowledge of self that achieved peace through the recognition of God's panentheistic unity with the believer:

⁵¹³ John Perrot, *Beams of Eternal Brightness or Branches of Everlasting Blessings; Spring Forth of the Stock of Salvation, to be Spread over India* (London, 1661), 3-4; Perrot's emphasis.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4-6.

All souls therefore uniting to the principle of his brightness *in them*, and dwelling in it as He abides and rests in Himself, will come to see themselves swallowed up (as in a bottomless and endless Ocean) in the same property of his nature.⁵¹⁵

For Perrot, the main message to non-Christians was not, “Here is the good news,” but rather “Here is what you are.” This resistance to the “theologizing of belief” and doctrinal assertion reconstructed religion as a form of mystical anthropology. Recognizing the nature of man as body, soul, and light constituted knowledge of God; the right understanding of the relationship between these entities was where salvation was found.

Questions of Bodily Exercise

These writings would not be published in England until Perrot’s return, which was delayed considerably in Italy. After a turbulent trip across the eastern Mediterranean marked by storms and hostility from fellow passengers, John Perrot and John Luffe arrived in Venice in March, and traveled south to Rome.⁵¹⁶ On 8 April, 1658, Perrot was dragged from his bed in his lodgings near the Piazza Farnese in Rome. Taken by the guards of the city, he was stripped of all his belongings and interrogated by the city’s governor. Less than a week later, he was transferred to the Roman Inquisition’s prison and interrogated by members of the Church. After several months Perrot was transferred again, this time to the Pazzarella, Rome’s prison for madmen. There he was held for nearly three years, often as a close prisoner and, by his own published account in 1661, subject to beatings and torture.⁵¹⁷ Luffe fared even worse. Sources indicate that Luffe died by November of 1658.⁵¹⁸ It is possible, though unlikely, that Luffe gained an audience with Pope Alexander VII. A hostile 1661 pamphlet gave a descriptive, likely fabricated, account of Luffe making his way into the presence of Pope Alexander, “the Italians, being willing to entertain a few sly laughs, made way for his admittance.”⁵¹⁹ It is more probable that Luffe died fasting in a Roman prison.⁵²⁰

Perrot claimed that during his detainment he was “first chained by the neck” to the walls of his cell. After a few days the neck chain was removed but irons were then attached to his leg which, according to Perrot, “shrank up the sinews,” making him lame. While in irons he was beaten. Perrot said his torturers “used for the most part a dried bull’s pizzle as the instrument for punishing me; bruising and breaking my body with the same.” His chains were eventually removed, but he was kept in a locked room “not exceeding in latitude 9 and longitude 14 feet.” Throughout the months of his captivity he was tortured periodically: “I was stript of all my

⁵¹⁵ Perrot, *Beams of Eternal Brightness*, 22-23, his emphasis.

⁵¹⁶ “An epistle from John Perrot to Friend in Ireland, 16 January 1658,” SW. MS 5. 33, FHL.

⁵¹⁷ Perrot, *Battering Rams Against Rome*, 99-101.

⁵¹⁸ See also “W. Caton to R. Weaver, 3 November 1658,” SW. MS. 4. 357, FHL, which notes that Quakers had heard “John Lofe is deceased.”

⁵¹⁹ Anonymous, *The Trial of John Love* (London, 1661), 4-6. In the pamphlet, Luffe dangerously declared Christ to be a part of himself: “I have Christ about me and in me, and therefore cannot chose but [to] remember him continually.”

⁵²⁰ Moore, *Light in Their Consciences*, 194n2.

clothes from top to toe and with the aforesaid instrument they fell upon me.” Perrot would later reflect “that no soul that lived immediately in His Grace ever suffered the like, even since the day of Adam’s being a man created of his Maker.”⁵²¹ He would remain in prison for nearly three years.

Perrot returned to England with the formative experience of his mission with non-Protestants and the extended trauma of Roman imprisonment. His papers were brought back to England and published in 1660 and 1661. As scholarly commentators have noted, several of these writings were incoherent, especially the bizarrely titled *A Wren in the Burning Bush, Waving the Wings of Contraction, to the Congregated Clean Fowls of Heaven, in the Ark of God, Holy Host of the Eternal Power, Salutation*. Perrot’s avian title importantly reveals the extent of his idiosyncrasy after Rome and that his spiritualist impulse had become energized in odd, combustible ways. But historians have overstated Perrot’s post-Rome weirdness as the causal force in his schism with Fox and other Quaker leaders.⁵²² He is better understood as a catalyst that destabilized latent spiritualist impulses within the Quaker religious beliefs.

After his return, Perrot wrote a letter, noting “the purpose of God is to bring to naught the customary and traditional ways of worship of the sons of men.” This was, of course, the whole point of early Quaker movement. But Perrot went on to say that he had received “express commandment” from God to bear testimony “against the custom and tradition of taking off the hat by men when they go to pray to God.” Perrot held that men should leave their hats on during prayer and the meetings of Friends. This was not an entirely new form of transgression for the Friends. Numerous Quakers had gotten into trouble with local authorities across England for refusing to offer “hat service”—i.e. removing of one’s hat—in the presence of one’s social betters.⁵²³ However, this was an adaptation of social defiance into a form of ritual iconoclasm; Perrot denied the need to remove one’s hat, even before God. For Perrot, the reverent act of reverence of taking off one’s hat as a sign of humility was a “worship of the work of prayer” rather than an actual worship of the internalized divinity. Furthermore, Perrot made the practical point that if God was universal, “the same both in the male and in the female” and thus “no respecter of persons,” men should not bother to remove their hats in the same manner female Quakers kept their heads covered during meetings.⁵²⁴ By Quaker logic, Perrot was not incorrect in his assertion. True worship was the movement of the Friend through God’s Light. So while several historians of Quakerism have considered Perrot’s rejection of hats as the result of his prison experience of “separation, isolation, unspeakable suffering, and temptation,” his ideas were not irrational.⁵²⁵ Perrot, unchained from the practical and political needs of the Quaker movement by his experiences in foreign service, had been made sensitive to the contradictions within the movement. His was the endpoint of the Quakers’ spiritualist impulse.

Perrot defended his opposition to divine hat service by noting Quaker opposition to other rituals of ceremonial worship. Religious worship as ceremony—as material work through corporeal positioning, ritual movement, and clothing—had been the initial target of Quaker’s

⁵²¹ Ibid., 128, 131.

⁵²² Carroll, *John Perrot*, 40-45; Smith, “Enthusiasm Exported,” 251-253; Moore, *Light in Their Consciences*, 194-197.

⁵²³ See Adrian Davies, *The Quakers in English Society, 1655-1725* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 55-57.

⁵²⁴ “Perrot concerning the wearing of hat in prayer,” SW. MS. 5. 17, FHL.

⁵²⁵ Carroll, *John Perrot*, 44.

approach to a religion of mystical inspiration. In another letter, he noted that God had given Moses a precept against wearing shoes during worship; yet Quakers still kept their shoes on during a meeting. Why then maintain hat service in prayer? “If any Friend be moved of the Lord God,” Perrot wrote, taking his logic to its fullest conclusion, “to pray in the congregation of God fallen down with his face to the ground, without taking off the hat, or the shoes, let him do so in the fear and name of the Lord.”⁵²⁶ Furthermore, the internal Light trumped the physical community of the Saints. In a published letter, Perrot described speaking with Fox, who worried the hat controversy “would be an occasion of a breach of unity.” Perrot’s reply noted that social cohesion had never been the basis of the movement: “In as much as the unity of the Saints stood not in a hat, or an outward action with the hat, but in the Spirit only, every man walking according to the motions and guiding of it, for me to do a thing contrary to the motion of the Spirit and thereby to sin against my God, instead of seeking unity with the Saints in such a manner, should disunity my soul from such as stood in the true unity and fellowship in the holy and true Spirit.”⁵²⁷ The question then was whether a Quaker should have an invisible fellowship with the Holy Spirit or the “outward action” of unity with the Saints.

The Quaker establishment, having coalesced in Perrot’s absence amidst the transition to the restored monarchical government, pushed back. George Fox condemned the hat controversy. In a letter he attacked Perrot as the latest in a chain of spiritualist deviants, including “the Ranters” and James Naylor. As Christopher Hill observed, “Fox’s reply was to tighten the organization of government in the Society of Friends.”⁵²⁸ But in terms of theological justifications, Fox could do little to prove Perrot wrong, except question his inspired authority. Fox pleaded that the hat movement was motivated “by an earthly, dark spirit,” not the Light of God.⁵²⁹ Fox, by all accounts not a particularly brilliant thinker, had nothing but the literal community of Saints to base his claims against the potential Ranterism of Perrot’s claims against ceremonial control. He admonished Friends to have “perfect fellowship and unity, for there is your profit. For they that have a fellowship in keeping on their hats, and observing of meats, those outwards things lead them from the power.”⁵³⁰ Oddly, the leading preacher of the Quakers, who had condemned the very idea of formal churches, was now defending hat innovation by referencing the need to maintain the physical community of believers.

This was an astonishing retreat from the antinomian iconoclasm of Fox’s earlier years. Obviously Fox had once argued that the inspiration of the Light had overturned the religious need for formal ceremonies of worship. This opposition to formalism had extended into the mundane affairs of everyday life. As late as 1657, Fox had published a tract admonishing Friends to not “say ‘Godspeed’ to such who hath not the Father and the Son... such are not to be received into houses.”⁵³¹ The revelation of the Inner Light determined behavior and regulated the saint’s association and relationships with other people. However, Fox’s response to Perrot reversed this causal relationship between inspiration and the movement’s fellowship: rather than the Light

⁵²⁶ John Perrot, “Let this pass through all friends of God. On hats,” FHL Crosse Collection MS, 12.

⁵²⁷ Anonymous, *Hidden Things Brought to Light Or the Discord of the Grand Quakers Among Themselves* (London, 1678), 7.

⁵²⁸ Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, 204-205.

⁵²⁹ George Fox, *A Collection of Many Select and Christian Epistles* (London, 1698), 175.

⁵³⁰ Fox, *Christian Epistles*, 156.

⁵³¹ George Fox, *Concerning Good-Morrow and Good-Even* (London, 1657), 3-4.

drawing together the Saints in friendship, the community of the Saints had become the basis for determining the truth of the Light. This fundamentally changed the mystical formulation that had connected inspiration and sectarian cohesion. The community of the Friends was now the basis by which the Light's inspiration would be judged correct.

Other establishment Quakers defended the removal of hats during prayer. William Smith wrote cautiously that while the hat was nothing, he realized "the keeping of it on is introduced in opposition to the putting of it off." It was actually Perrot who was adding ritualistic "work" into Quaker worship, by adding ceremonial emphasis onto hats where there had been none. There was a disingenuous circularity in Smith's reasoning. But we hear in his argument an echo from the puritan debates of the Elizabethan church. To use a term from the sixteenth century, hats were *adiaphora*—a thing indifferent to God. Perrot was making an issue where there had been none. Smith argued Friends should be mindful of those "who are not come to discern from what principle every practice is made manifest."⁵³² Few would understand the nuance of Perrot's theological reasoning, and the Friends should worship in a way that encouraged the "weak babes" who lacked certitude in the Light.

Fellowship meant recognizing a material element to religion that the Quakers had heretofore condemned. Smith concluded his letter about tending to "weak" Friends by warning that "the body is to be considered, and nothing is to be done but in the tender love, by which the body may be edified and comforted."⁵³³ In other words, man's physical existence should be kept in mind, even as one waited upon the immaterial inspiration of the Light. Richard Farnworth, who had argued in 1653 that the Light could restrain disorderly Friends, also contributed to the establishment argument in favor of removing hats. He agreed that the corporeal form was useful in worship. It was incorrect Farnworth argued, to "object and say, that bodily exercise profits little, and so conclude that praying with the hat off is but a bodily exercise." The outward body was actually "joined in action" with the inward Light of the saint: "as the inward man is directed and disposed by the eternal power and Godhead, and so directs and disposes of the outward man, as to put off the hat in prayer, [this] is not only a bodily exercise... but of some use and service."⁵³⁴ Farnworth recognized that spiritual community required concessions to corporeal form and its material operations in worship. Indeed, he would go on to become the likely author of the "Testimony of Brethren," a 1666 document that formalized the nature of church discipline and, in the words of Rosemary Moore "epitomizes the nature of Quakerism for the next two hundred years."⁵³⁵ The idea of an utter abnegation of the self into the Light was giving way to idealizations of physical community complete with rituals of bodily exercise.

There were, of course, other reasons beyond the theological debates of the early 1660s that led to the Quakers' corporate discipline—surviving the post-Restoration required adaptation to a more hostile political environment than the Protectorate. But the reaction of Fox and other leading Quakers is striking in its retreat from the antinomian spiritualism of the movement. It is important to recognize that up until this point the Quaker leaders had lacked any tangible epistemic basis to defend ritual worship and church organization from Perrot's hat criticism.

⁵³² William Smith, "7 June 1663," FHL John Pennington MS. Vol. 4. 7, cited in Moore, *Light in Their Consciences*, 201.

⁵³³ *Ibid.* 201.

⁵³⁴ "August 1663," FHL Pennington MS. Vol. 4. 40; cited in Moore, *The Light in Their Consciences*, 202.

⁵³⁵ Moore, *Light in Their Consciences*, 224-226.

Ritual tradition, official church institutions, ministerial training, scriptural exegesis—the demolition of these religious authorities was a major motivation behind the preaching of the first Friends. But a purely spiritual church, one that was moved entirely by the individual motions of Light and that held all material religious structures in contempt, was unsustainable. In Perrot, leading Quakers saw the endpoint of a religious movement of personal inspiration and spiritualization of worship. They blinked.

Tattered Transcripts and the “Public Spirit”

The missions of the late 1650s sharpened the universalist emphasis within Quakerism, reshaping the sectarian group’s inchoate theology. But they also injected a new material ambivalence into larger debates beyond the internal disciplinary squabbles of the Friends. The implications for puritan doctrinal emphasis was evident in the work of Samuel Fisher, an early Quaker who was also a university man. Fisher studied at Oxford, matriculating at Trinity College in 1623 before transferring to New Inn Hall where he took his MA in 1630.⁵³⁶ He could read Hebrew and Greek, and he served as a deacon before abandoning a vicarage in Lydd, Kent in the late 1640s to take a prominent role as a disputant for the General Baptists. After a meeting with the Quakers William Caton and John Stubbes in March of 1655, Fisher eventually converted to Quakerism in 1654.⁵³⁷ Fisher’s writings, particularly *Rusticus ad Academicos*, is another example of Quaker ambivalence toward the material nature of Christian religion. Missionary experience was again crucial: in Fisher’s case, the idea of the “heathen” highlighted the material vulnerabilities of Scripture and the need for an immaterial, spiritual standard of religion through directly revealed inspiration.

The records of Fisher’s life and ideas are confrontational. Fisher was tossed out of Westminster in February of 1659 after attempting “a few words to speak to this Parliament in the name and fear of the Lord.”⁵³⁸ In 1659 and 1660 he became embroiled in the pamphlet battles fought between Quakers and orthodox puritans and other sectarian groups. In April 1659, Fisher had a series of debates with Thomas Danson at Sandwich. The result of this, his magnum opus, *Rusticus ad Academicos*, was an immense work running over nine hundred pages that was published just after the Restoration in 1660. Like other sectarian works formulated during the Revolution, it was a response to rival forms of Protestantism—in Fisher’s case, puritan varieties of Presbyterianism and Independency. *Rusticus* is a difficult book. It is filled with lengthy screeds against puritan scriptural exegesis. The treatise’s ideas are expressed within chains of interlinked polemic; Fisher teased out his religious ideas through aggressive attacks on several eminent puritan divines, including Owen, Danson, and Richard Baxter. Even William Penn, who endorsed *Rusticus* after Fisher’s death, conceded, “his part fell to be mostly controversial; in

⁵³⁶ McDowell situates Fisher as a case study of the manner by which university-educated radicals used their knowledge and experience of institutional education to reveal how those systems preserved hierarchical and antichristian structures of power; *English Radical Imagination*, 8-9, 152-153.

⁵³⁷ “Fisher, Samuel (*bap.* 1604, *d.* 1665),” by Stefano Villani, in *ODNB*, ed. Lawrence Goldman, Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9507>, accessed 3 March 2016.

⁵³⁸ “Fisher to Wm Lenthall, 1659,” Bodl., Tanner MS. 51. fol. 112.

which, to carry a clear mind and an even hand, is very difficult.”⁵³⁹ In so doing, Fisher created a massive book that questioned the epistemic foundations of Scripture by questioning the textual authenticity of the text. Indeed, Fisher attacked the very possibility of authentic religious knowledge through material mediums of information. The work was, in Christopher Hill’s opinion, one of the most radical critiques of biblical exegesis during the English Revolution and the end of “the epoch of Protestant Bibliolatry.”⁵⁴⁰

This was of course the period of intense sectarian critique of doctrinal scripturalism and legalism, when both sectarians and puritans hoped to revise the medium of communication between God and man. In his consideration of radical theories of divine signification, Nigel Smith placed the Quakers within a broader search for “pure language” that blended the inspirational *ens* of God within the body of Friend. For Fox, as noted above, inspiration served as an authority to the scriptural text, providing authoritative support to the interpretation of its contents. Divine language should ideally reflect the purity of the scriptural original, as interpreted by the Inner Light. Smith considers Fisher as an exemplary example of sectarian attack upon puritan linguistic idealism regarding the capacity of language to contain the divine logos.⁵⁴¹ But the basis for Fisher’s critique was an acute sensitivity to the physical and material nature in which this divine language was necessarily made manifest. Indeed, his ideas take issue with the very idea of a Protestant search for the divine *urtext*, highlighting the fallen materiality contained in the very effort of a scriptural language.

For Fisher, the Bible was a human invention, a physical text that obscured God’s Word through an endless chain of translation, interpretive gloss, and material manipulation. Perhaps the most delightful of Fisher’s numerous dismissals of bibliolatry and scriptural exegesis was his lampooning in *Rusticus* of the Independent theologian John Owen’s “vindication of the purity and integrity” of Hebrew punctuation in Owen’s *Of the Divine Original, Authority, Self-Evidencing Light and Power of the Scriptures* (Oxford, 1659). Fisher realized that by staking God’s Word to the original meaning of Hebrew translation, Owen had opened an endless rabbit hole of puritanical nitpicking. Fisher saw his opening through Owen’s admonition for the correct placement of punctuation marks in Hebrew translation. The puritan exegete cautioned against the “arbitrary supplying of the points.”⁵⁴² Fisher satirically lamented for those unable “to read Hebrew either with pricks or without,” a not so subtle comparison of punctuation to genitalia. If knowledge of Hebrew punctuation was needed to understand God’s word, why even bother printing Bible’s in vernacular? Furthermore, Fisher questioned the authority of this linguistic framework. Did it come “from the rabbi’s mouth or God’s own?”⁵⁴³ And, in any event, did the “kingdom of God, and salvation” really depend upon proper punctuation? Fisher’s point was that these sorts of “mischiefs and inconveniencies” naturally ensued when men searched “too critically, too near” into foundation of Scripture.⁵⁴⁴ Owen’s erroneous belief that God’s Logos resided within textual scripture had merely opened up a new can of worms: having found Hebrew to be the divine language, Owen was now forced to figure out the divine punctuation.

⁵³⁹ William Penn, “Testimony Concerning Samuel Fisher,” in *The Testimony of Truth Exalted* by Samuel Fisher, (1670), sig. C2r.

⁵⁴⁰ Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, 213-215.

⁵⁴¹ Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, 289-299.

⁵⁴² John Owen, *Of the Divine Original* (Oxford, 1659), 218.

⁵⁴³ Fisher, *Rusticus*, Ex. 2. 117-119.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Ex. 2. 112.

The search for the “divine original” of scripture merely uncovered an endless process of translation, interpretation, and linguistic argument. The epistemic foundation of the scriptural text was the shifting sands of man’s innate fallibility.

Fisher’s scathing dismissal of the biblical text not only condemned human misappropriation and mistranslation of scripture, but fretted over the physical text’s material vulnerabilities. Unlike Balling, Fisher dismissed the Bible not simply a “weak” container of the divine Logos, but more interestingly as a fluid material object, and thus vulnerable to human alteration. Of particular concern is Fisher’s extended discussion of the actual material conditions of the biblical text:

Consider the naked, literal aspect of the holy scriptures, nor in its highest, not in its primitive, best, and purest, as at first given forth, but in its mere derivative, in its lowest, meanest, and most altered and adulterated capacity, wherein it stands at this day, wrested and torn like a nose of wax, twisted and twined into more than twice, if not ten or twenty times twenty, several shapes by men’s untrue and tattered transcripts and translations (for oh, that vast variety of lections, besides the infinity of senses, throw men’s misrenderings, corrupt copyings, correctings of, and commentings on it, etc. that the world is now loaded with, and led out into!) yet as a mere a graven image as that is with ink and pen on paper or skin of parchment...and as dead a letter as it is... and as very a nose of wax and lesbian rule, and no certain stable standard.⁵⁴⁵

Misinterpretation was an issue, but also the physicality of the text itself. Scripture had become a graven image of ink, paper, and animal skin. The material nature of biblical writing, its very human form of textual production, had eroded its basis as a standard of religious truth. The biblical text not only lacked the divine vitality of inspiration, it was also “twisted and twined” into the variabilities of human interpretation.⁵⁴⁶ Fisher argued that regardless of the critical abilities of the puritans to translate and interpret Scripture, the very text of this exegesis was defined by sources corrupted by their material fluidity. Scriptural texts had been altered so much, by so many, God’s Word was indiscernible.

Fisher conflated the physicality of a book—parchment, paper, ink—with the text of Scripture itself, an order of character and words that was in some sense disembodied. The problem was not that the written Word was dead, but that it was very much alive. It was all too human—the mutable result of worldly processes of interpretation, misinterpretation, copying, pasting, and production. Thus Fisher described biblical translation and interpretation “as the picture that every passenger had liberty with a pencil to mend what he thought and fancied to be amiss in it as he passed by. At last it became a misshapen monster and so the Scripture is screwed into such a multiformity of men’s monstrous meanings” (Ex. 4. 76). What defined Christian Scripture was its potential fluidity, its wax-like nature, and its human production. Man’s effort throughout history to transcribe and translate God’s Word had made it wholly unreliable as a standard of religious knowledge.

⁵⁴⁵ Fisher, *Rusticus*, Ex. 2. 28. “Lesbian rule” referred to a mason’s rule of lead that could be bent to measure the irregular curves of a molding. Such rules were originally constructed from a pliable lead found on the island of Lesbos.

⁵⁴⁶ See also *Ibid.*, Ex. 4. 48-49.

This extreme cynicism regarding the material Word served Fisher's larger rehabilitation of Quaker religious beliefs—a systematization of the group's basic idea that God served as a source of continual inspired knowledge. Naturally, Fisher pushed against the mainstream puritan argument that God's divine revelation had ended in biblical times and criticized the belief that inspiration was "delusion, fanaticism, enthusiasm, quakerism, diabolism" (Ex. 4. 1). Fisher argued, God "manifests something of himself in every conscience." But there was a class of people, who were so inspired by God, and moved into action through the recognition of the divine spirit. Addressing John Owen, Fisher defended the divinity of these latter-day prophets:

There are some (whether they work miracles yea or nay, as thou confess, most of the Prophets did not, that's nothing to thee) who pretend not to this inspiration falsely, but both can and do to you [who] would insist upon this, that being *theopneustoi*, divinely inspired, their doctrine is to be received by you as from God, and in their so doing it will be found in due time to be your sin, even unbelief and rebellion against God not to submit to what they speak in his name, as that of his word they receive from his mouth (Ex. 4. 4).

The Quakers were, in fact, the *theopneustoi* to whom God revealed his mind and will through his own Spirit. Fisher claimed that the *theopneustoi* were capable of extreme spiritual sensitivity and susceptibility, even to the point of infallibility; Fisher suggested that elements of God's omniscience could be conveyed via inspiration.⁵⁴⁷

Fisher's understanding of divine inspiration, *theopneustia*, drew from his own missionary experience on the continent. As mentioned above, in 1657 he was involved in the mission in Amsterdam and efforts to translate pamphlets by Margaret Fell into Hebrew.⁵⁴⁸ Caught up in the wave of enthusiastic missionary travel, Fisher traveled from the Dutch Republic with John Stubbes to Italy in 1658.⁵⁴⁹ After a dangerous journey over the Alps, the men inquired into the location of Perrot and Luffe, perhaps with the hopes of freeing them. Arriving in Venice in April of 1658, they heard erroneous rumors that Perrot and Luffe were condemned for life "to be slaves in the galleys...forced to row in the pope's armada." By June Fisher and Stubbes were in Rome, where they were told that Perrot and Luffe "remained so close there was no likelihood of anyone's coming to see them." Fisher and Stubbes managed to avoid the Inquisition, which was aware of their activities, since they had "daily exercised" Quaker ideas about the Light in both Venice and Rome. In letters back to Quakers in England, Fisher and Stubbes described meeting in Italy with a variety of religious and ethnic communities. Fisher met with "Turks, Jews, Indians, Papists, Protestants of all which sort there are some here"; many of these groups gave the missionaries "a quiet hearing." Throughout their trip Fisher and Stubbes found a receptive audience with local Jews. This surprised Fisher. Despite the extreme legalism of the Jews, the "reasons of their circumcision," Fisher found them amenable to Quaker ideas. He wrote, "[they] deny not the light in the conscience to be chief teacher." A manuscript abstracting their correspondence back to Quakers in England noted they had been invited to give to the Roman

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., Ex. 4. 25.

⁵⁴⁸ See Popkin, "Spinoza's Relations with the Quakers," 21-25; "Spinoza and Samuel Fisher," 219-221.

⁵⁴⁹ "J. Stubbes on S. Fisher, 19 October 1657," FHL SW. MS. 1. 127.

Jews “testimony to the truth, both privately as they had invited them, and also publically in the open schools where they had heard [Fisher and Stubbes] preach.”⁵⁵⁰

The missionary experience of 1658 and 1659 granted an international dimension to Fisher’s understanding of revealed religion and the *theopneustoi*. For Fisher, the Inner Light was a universal episteme of religious knowledge, an immaterial conduit to a universal recognition of the divine. This revelation of the internal Light grounded all subsequent knowledge. It was here, as a foundation for religious meaning and truth, that we see a broader universalism that constructed religious knowledge as common to all people. Every nation contained people who were enlightened:

I say then the heathen who have not the letter, but the light of God which is saving, are a law unto themselves and they do show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also by the law enlightened, bearing witness within them and their thoughts, so that the law is not only a light and saving, but universal and common in some measure to all men.⁵⁵¹

The idea of the non-Christian heathen, highlighted the exogenous and alien nature of divine influence. Because then the Light was “distinct and separable,” from any sort of natural knowledge there was a certain level of equality by which anyone can partake in this spirit. The Inner Light was, in Fisher’s words, the “Public Spirit of God, which is one and the same in all, though not in the same measure, and not anything of our own that we testify to and profess to follow as our guide.”⁵⁵²

This type of universalism exposed the persistent problem with Quaker theology, in that the Light of God sounded suspiciously like the innate natural reason that all men shared. Fisher certainly pushed the Inner Light dangerously toward a conflation with natural reason itself.⁵⁵³ To prevent the misinterpretation of the Light as mere rationality, Fisher stressed its external, alien nature, doubling down on the exogenous and utterly immaterial nature of divine inspiration. Fisher wrote that this Light was not human: “’tis not the visive faculty or understanding itself.” Rather it was “a beam of light communicated from the Holy Spirit to the understanding” that allowed the mind to understand and judge the nature of spiritual truths. The light was external, objective, yet paradoxically inside all people. Fisher compared the light’s inward motion to the outward moving exegesis expelled by doctrinaire puritans; he suggested “that which... the [puritans] in their more obscure and inferior ways do declare *ad extra*, must be something *ad intra* which falls in with and teaches men the Spirit of God in the faculty of man’s understanding and conscience.”⁵⁵⁴ Religious knowledge did not come from inside out, but rather from outside in.

⁵⁵⁰ “A Letter from John Stubbes and Samuel Fisher concerning their Services in the city of Vienna,” 18 April, 1658, FHL Port. 17. fols. 76-77.

⁵⁵¹ Fisher, *Rusticus*, Ex. 4, 151.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, Ex. 4, 180.

⁵⁵³ As Fisher noted in another pamphlet, perhaps intended for continental circulation, Quakers believed divine knowledge was distributed across the entire world, even if this distribution was not equal: “This light therefore shines in all even to the heathen, in some measure, although not in all in the same measure.” Samuel Fisher, *Lux Christi Emergens* (1660), 10.

⁵⁵⁴ Fisher, *Rusticus*, Ex. 4, 58. Fisher’s emphasis.

Similar to Perrot, Fisher fitted this exogenous influence within a divinized anatomy of man:
 The light, then I say, comes from God and Christ into the mind and conscience, not as the soul and its essential faculties of understanding do, which with the organical body, make that one compositum called man... but by way of immediate infusion from them into the mind and conscience... as a thing distinct and separable from the man in whom it is and... eternally one with God and Christ from whom it shines and flows.⁵⁵⁵

For Fisher, as it was for Perrot, religious knowledge was a form of self-awareness, a sort of divine anthropology.⁵⁵⁶ The supernatural nature of this knowledge, its alien immaterial and exogenous divinity was the basis for the light's universality. Since this self-knowledge was only gained by divine infusion it could be understood by anyone. Fisher constructed an immaterial, yet universal, foundation for divine truths by locating them simultaneously outside and within the person without reference to any material epistemic medium, such as the senses, reason, or scriptural interpretation.

This had destabilizing implications. Similar to Perrot's provocations about the vestiges of material ritual, Quaker antipathy toward the materials of scriptural doctrine also threatened the corporate authority of the Friends. The anxiety of literal biblioclasm, the burning of bibles, hovered at the polemical edges of Quaker antiscritpturalism. In a bizarre scene in July 1671, a Quaker merchant named John Pennyman burned a number of books on the floor of the London Royal Exchange. He was arrested and put into prison at Bishop's Gate.⁵⁵⁷ A rumor promptly began that Pennyman had burned (or attempted to burn) a Bible. Pennyman defended himself, claiming he would have rather experienced painful death by "as many lives to lose as I have hairs on my head... than willfully burn that Book."⁵⁵⁸ But he was quickly disowned publically by a group of London Quakers, prompting him to defend his actions in a manner similar to Perrot. Pennyman argued that exercising disciplinary authority within the community of Friends was a limitation to the activity of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁵⁹

For outsiders, this was the culmination of Quaker spiritualism's hostility to written text. Henry More, the Cambridge don whose hostility to "enthusiasm" has been well documented, commented on the Pennyman affair in a letter to Ann Conway, Countess of Ragley. More had a good sense of the stakes of the situation. He considered Pennyman's apology about preferring to die than burn a bible, but he concluded it was unsurprising that the religious beliefs of Quakers tended toward biblioclasm: "Neither do I think that it is so far from the spirit of a real Quaker to

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., Ex. 4, 69.

⁵⁵⁶ This anthropology is discussed in another of Fisher's tracts, *Certain Hidden, or Veiled Spiritual Verities Revealed* (London, 1661), in which Fisher lays out an anatomy of man as "a creature of these three, namely, body, soul, and spirit," 12-17.

⁵⁵⁷ John Pennyman, untitled broadsheet, beginning, "Upon the 28th day of the month called July," (1670). Pennyman never explained why he burned the books on the exchange or what he was trying to accomplish, only that he was moved to burn books in his possession.

⁵⁵⁸ John Pennyman, untitled broadsheet, beginning "These followings words the Lord required," (1670).

⁵⁵⁹ Lesley H. Higgins, "The Apostatized Apostle, John Pennyman: Heresy and Community in Seventeenth-Century Quakerism," *Quaker History* 69 (1980): 102-110.

burn the bible when as the letter of it is so little believed by them. For that unbelief takes away the very sense of the bible, the fire consumes only the paper.”⁵⁶⁰ More took claims like Fisher’s about “tattered transcripts” seriously. His assessment of Quaker beliefs is recognized Fisher’s materialist worries. Fisher, who had died in 1665, would have agreed with the final clause, but would have pushed back against the first, arguing that it was the *absence* of any stable “sense” in the Bible that led to religious “unbelief.”

Pennyman also elicited a conservative reaction within the Society of Friends. William Penn forgave Fisher for “exposing absurd things by vulgar terms,” but he was unwilling to condone Pennyman’s literal mishandling of the scriptural text.⁵⁶¹ The Bible might consist of “tattered transcripts,” but Penn saw the “ranterish” trajectory of Pennyman’s biblioclastic expansion of the authority of the Spirit. He questioned the implications of Pennyman’s actions: “Shall this position, I say, that all men ought to follow the Light in themselves, deprive the Church of the power of judging that for a dark imagination, which from the savor and sense of God’s light and truth, they feel to be so?”⁵⁶² The problem of course was determining whose “savor” and which “sense” could rightly judge a fallen imagination. For Penn, this could only be the corporate will of the church. By the 1670s, the principle of social consensus (and social exclusion) had become the means of confirming the true presence of the Inner Light, but the Friends continued to suffer from the absence of formal rites of membership. Despite the Quaker disownment of Pennyman, he refused to leave the group, forcing Friends to physically bar him from meetings. Leading Friends eventually returned money Pennyman had contributed to the building of the meeting space on Gracechurch Street, an attempt to nullify his trusteeship the Society. But he continued to harass the Friends for the rest of his life, publishing works describing how the Friends had strayed theologically from the true Quakerism of the Light. Ultimately, the London Quakers were unable to remove Pennyman from the community of Friends. After his death in 1706, Pennyman’s body was buried in the Quaker burial grounds at Bunhill Fields—his remains a fading corporeal reminder of the movement’s theological and ecclesiological ambivalence toward materialized doctrine and discipline.⁵⁶³

Conclusion

It is no coincidence that critiques of the material foundations of Protestant theology and worship followed extended experiences of missionary effort. Exporting Quaker ideas about the Inner Light and the internal nature of God’s indwelling spirit forced Perrot and Fisher to confront lingering contradictions within the sectarian group’s theology. Foreign audiences, both real and conceptual, led both men to confront radical spiritualism’s internal tensions. Perrot and Fisher thus turned the theological tendencies of English Protestantism—a questioning of worldly custom, human interpretation, and theological interpretative tradition—against the very ceremonial and textual foundations of post-Reformation Christianity. Missionary outreach placed new epistemological strain upon already unstable theological concepts. The idea of the non-Protestant, and the lived experience of confessional and religious difference, transformed Quaker

⁵⁶⁰ “H. More to A. Conway, 15 September 1670,” BL Add. MS. 23216, fol. 97.

⁵⁶¹ William Penn, “Testimony Concerning Samuel Fisher,” sig. C2r.

⁵⁶² William Penn, *Judas and the Jews* (1673), 15, cited in Higgins, “Apostatized Apostle,” 114-115.

⁵⁶³ Higgins, “Apostatized Apostle,” 112-114, 118.

theology from a Christian spiritualism steeped in allegorical and idiosyncratic biblical interpretations into an anthropologized theology based entirely upon the mystical recognition of God's inspired residence within the believer.

The unchecked spiritualism of the Quakers is thus an interesting case study of the rejection of material religion. For Fisher, this critique focused upon the physical production of the Bible. The materiality of scriptural text and punctuation, the papered and inked production of the Bible's religious content, necessitated its demolition; the material mutability of the written word undermined its utility as a support for religious truth. A parallel effort was made by Perrot's attempt to ban hat service in Quaker meetings. The conflicts forced Quaker leaders to pull back from religious ideas that had allegorized religious practice into an internal spiritual experience. Perrot's bizarre set of religious ideas were idiosyncratic, liable to fragment the movement, and potentially dangerous in its implications of practical antinomianism. Faced with the worrisome endpoint of a religion that wholly rested upon the individual interpretation of the revelations of the Light, the Quaker establishment moderated the sect by reference to the community and fellowship of the Friends. The movement retreated not so much into quietism as into rapprochement and accommodation with the material world.

The theological histories of both men reveals the tension within the Quakers' universalist vision of religion, one that remained intertwined with rhetorical and theological imperatives of exclusivity that defined most sectarian groups in early modern England. Since the Light separated the redeemed from the fallen, and the universalism of the Quaker message served to heighten the exclusion of all who disagreed with their message. This paradox was part of a general tendency of early moderns to use the inclusiveness of the Christian message as a mark of their particular election—an intellectual framework Paul Stevens has called “exclusive universalism.”⁵⁶⁴ In the Quaker case, the internal nature of the light on the conscience made spiritual salvation self-evident. There was thus an implicit critique that those that denied the Quaker message, or simply could not understand it, were unredeemable. In the 1660s, as leading Friends began to discipline the church, this exclusionary impulse was leveled against Quaker spiritualism in an effort to control unruly members. The burgeoning Quaker establishment abandoned its iconoclastic approach to material religion and affirmed the will of the corporate body.

We can conclude that for Quaker preachers and theological disputants, the material problems of spiritual religion sheltered fundamental questions of authority. Perrot's and Fisher's anxieties stemmed from the contested sources of religious knowledge, debate, and discipline. The plasticity of the biblical transcript highlighted the tenuous epistemic foundations supporting religious belief. The ostensible silliness of the hat controversy disguised the pragmatic concern of determining questions of worship and ceremony within the anti-scriptural and anti-ceremonial corporate ecclesiology of the early Quakers. The hat and text were proxies for the question of whether the Friends would follow the authority of God or the authority of man. Hats and religious books were materialized nodes of conflict that arose in the effort toward an immaterial religion. The Quakers, advocates for the most expansive strand of post-Reformation spiritualism, found themselves engrossed on theological issues revolving around literal material objects—hats and paper.

⁵⁶⁴ Paul Stevens, “‘Leviticus Thinking’ and the Rhetoric of Early Modern Colonialism,” *Criticism* 35 (1983): 441-442.

Chapter 6

Personal Gods: Muggletonians, Hobbes, and Corporeal Metaphysics

The Muggletonians had an odd interpretation of the Incarnation. This was evident in the Muggletonian Thomas Greenhill's "Daily meditations, epigrams, and encomiums," written in 1670 when the sectarian group was at the height of its post-Restoration notoriety. When God became incarnate in the flesh, Greenhill noted, "the wise creator and maker of all things sets his house in order and leaves his power and his authority with his servants, Moses and Elias, who did represent this almighty God in his creatorship condition, in his Godhead power."⁵⁶⁵ When God descended to the earthly world, he left Moses and the prophet Elias in charge of the divine throne of heaven. This meant that when Christ was on earth, another body represented God the Father. Someone else held down the godhead until Christ returned.

This peculiar idea hinted at the core theology of John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton, the sectarian group's leaders. They believed that God existed within a single, distinctive, and visually recognizable human body. God was not an incorporeal spirit. He had dimensions, magnitude, and a spatial existence. Reeve and Muggleton declared in handwritten letters and printed tracts that their divine commission revealed that all qualities of the Godhead were contained within the body of Christ, a spiritualized human frame that had preceded the fleshly body God inhabited between incarnation and crucifixion. Reeve and Muggleton continually emphasized that the functions and elements of divinity were locked within "that distinct personal God, Creator, Redeemer, and alone everlasting father Jesus Christ, the Righteous Spiritual God-man."⁵⁶⁶ God did not exist in a triune Trinity, nor did he exist throughout the world in omnipresent spiritual saturation. He was contained, his infinite power confined within his personal body. Salvation, according to the Muggletonian "Prophets," depended upon the recognition of God's contained corporeality.

This extreme Christocentric theology led to awkward exegetical problems regarding "those literal sayings" in the New Testament, especially regarding those moments when Christ made reference to his Father. "What," asked John Reeve, "was that God and Father that Christ prayed or cried unto in his greatest extremity upon the Earth?"⁵⁶⁷ Why would God make reference to some sort of divinity above himself? Reeve laid out the answer through a theory of divine transference of office. According to Reeve, when Christ was holding the Godhead in heaven he was "in the glory of the Father." However, when his "uncreated infiniteness was wholly transmitted into a creature-like finiteness, it must needs be disabled of its former glorious power, to protect itself under all temptations and unutterable sufferings."⁵⁶⁸ God needed someone to take up the functions of the Godhead to provide providential protection and omnipotence. Thomas Greenhill's mediations in 1670 on Moses and Elias as divine representatives were a reference to this transfer. Given that a human frame was needed to contain the divine, God

⁵⁶⁵ BL Add. MS 60202, fo. 8.

⁵⁶⁶ BL Add. MS 60171, fos. 46-57.

⁵⁶⁷ BL Add. MS 60171, fo. 58. In 1832, Joseph and Isaac Frost printed this transcribed collection as the third volume of collected works by Reeve and Muggleton: *The Works of John Reeve and Lodowicke Muggleton, The Two Last Prophets of the Only true God, our Lord Jesus Christ*, ed. Joseph Frost and Issac Frost (London, 1832), 3:25.

⁵⁶⁸ BL Add. MS 60171; fo. 58; *Works*, 3:25.

needed someone else to substitute as God.⁵⁶⁹ Christ's entrance into the material world required a person to sit on the throne of the Father. Moses and Elias "were rewarded with God-like glorification in the high heavens that they might be fit representatives of an infinite majesty."⁵⁷⁰ Muggleton was blunt about this divine pinch-hitting. He claimed in 1680 "that Elias did govern the heavens above and watch over Christ's person as God the Father."⁵⁷¹ This was a curious substitution of the divine Person.

This was, admittedly, a weird interpretation of Christian doctrine. It raises questions as to why the Muggletonians felt God needed to be represented by Moses and Elias and why they were so invested in the notion of God's singular existence—that his person could only be understood through a body. But such ideas were not wholly unique in the intellectual environment of Interregnum England. Thomas Hobbes's 1651 *Leviathan* considered Moses as a "representative" of God, describing the Trinity as a series of significations in which God's triune aspects were representatives, the personal bearers of divinity in the material world. The product of historically specific religious and intellectual forces, both Muggletonian and Hobbesian theologies stressed the metaphysical "person" of God. Resting beneath the transference of divinity was a shared recognition of the political problems presented by an infinite, spiritually omnipresent God.

This chapter studies Hobbes's and the Muggletonians' emphasis upon divine corporeality, examining how the idea of God's body functioned to contain divine qualities in a bodily form. Both Hobbes and the Muggletonians shared a theological emphasis upon metaphysical corporealism, the idea that God was represented and understood by personal bodies. Paradoxically, the *spirit* of God could only be understood *corporeally*. Articulated within the context of rampant English spiritualism during the 1640s and 1650s, this metaphysical corporealism functioned to restrict and control access to the divine, serving to disenchant improper or unmediated forms of theosis and theosophy. Furthermore, corporealist metaphysics provided a material theory of divinity, one based upon the epistemological experiences of this world. Given that human experience was necessarily corporeal, the body of God was the means by which humanity could understand metaphysical and religious mysteries.

It must of course be noted that Hobbes and the Muggletonians had differing aims in terms of politics, theology, and religious sensibility. Indeed, Hobbes condemned prophetic pretensions like those of the Muggletonians as enthusiastic screech. But while the two parties had different

⁵⁶⁹ BL Add. MS 60171, fo. 58; *Works*, 3:25-26.

⁵⁷⁰ BL Add. MS 60171, fo. 60; *Works*, 3:27.

⁵⁷¹ BL Add. MS 60168, fo. 33. It is unclear whether both of the biblical figures were sitting on the throne or if they perhaps traded off. Reeve was ambivalent and only stressed that "Elias or some other" was needed "as a glorious object for Christ to fix his faith upon." However, what was most important was for a fixed corporeal person to hold the Godhead. God could not be in two places at once and his spirit was not able to exist outside of his body. Reeve was quick to qualify that this divine transference was only "for a season" and "was in seasure only" since none could fully hold the Spirit of God. (fo. 60; 28) But it is certain that the Muggletonians believed that during the several decades that Christ came to earth there were actually two persons acting as God: God the Man Christ, who took a carnal substance and came to Earth, and Elijah (and/or Moses) who became God the Father and held the divine majesty over the world while Christ was made flesh.

intellectual aims in grounding God within personal representatives, metaphysical corporealism was more than just a shared tactic to disparate ends. Both groups hoped to empty the world of the presence of the divine. By evacuating religion's providential and spiritualist claims, they hoped to defang religion's political and theological threats presented by the spirit of God. The metaphysical corporealists emerged as a critical reaction against the immaterial spiritualisms that blossomed in the mid-seventeenth century. In so doing the Muggletonians and Hobbes inverted the usual hierarchy of spirit/body, positioning the body as ontologically prior to the unseen spirit. The signified person of God was a means to empty the world of incorporeal spirits and end the violent contests that resulted from competing claims to God's immaterial spirit.

Tailors and Prophets

On the third, fourth, and fifth mornings of February 1652, John Reeve spoke with Jesus Christ. Each conversation lasted about an hour and Christ told Reeve that he would be a new Moses, a prophet of the final commission from God who would deliver a new message to the unbelieving world. In his first publication, *A Transcendent Spiritual Treatise*, Reeve described these mystical conversations, announcing that he and his cousin Lodowick Muggleton were the final witnesses and prophets of God that were mentioned in the book of Revelation. He claimed that Christ had given him a new understanding of the Scriptures, a divine hermeneutic for biblical writing that was "above all men in the world" and appropriate for the new age of the spirit. Reeve would have help from Muggleton in spreading this message as Christ had told Reeve, "I have given thee Lodowick Muggleton to be thy mouth," to be the Aaron to his Moses.⁵⁷² Muggleton, the namesake of the group that would become known as the Muggletonians, was originally the lower member in this prophetic partnership. However, Reeve's death in 1658 and Muggleton's longevity as leader and pastoral caretaker of the sect allowed him to become the namesake of the church in the decades after the Restoration.

According to Muggleton's later account, John Reeve was a Wiltshire-born tailor and the son of a clerk to the Deputy of Ireland. Muggleton described Reeve as "a man of no great natural wit or wisdom. No subtlety or policy was in him, nor no great store of religion." This harsh assessment was likely part of Muggleton's retroactive attempts to recast himself as the original mind behind the operation. But it does indicate Reeve's middling origins in early Stuart London. For his part, Muggleton was the son of a London farrier and like Reeve he was in the clothing trade, having been apprenticed as tailor. In 1631 he found work as a journeyman for William Reeve, John's brother.⁵⁷³ If they did not already know each other through family and puritan social circles, they likely met then as both became involved in the London puritan underground. Muggleton described his new employer in London to be "a very zealous Puritan" and he was driven into the usual soteriologically induced depression that preceded the puritan turn toward

⁵⁷² John Reeve, *A Transcendent Spiritual Treatise* (London, 1652), 5. Both Reeve and Muggleton are credited as authors on the frontispiece, but Muggleton conceded later that Reeve had written the early treatise. See Lodowick Muggleton, *The Acts of the Witnesses of the Spirit* (London, 1699), 39, 48. For the Joachimite doctrine of the three ages in Muggletonian writings, see: Barry Reay, "The Muggletonians: An Introductory Survey," in *The World of the Muggletonians* (London: Temple Smith, 1983), 26-27.

⁵⁷³ Muggleton, *Acts of the Witnesses*, 5-6, 9.

antinomianism. Indeed Muggleton wrote that by early adulthood, “I was exceeding fearful of Hell and eternal damnation. The very thoughts of it made my spirit many times fail within me.”⁵⁷⁴

The sectarian group that would become known as the “Muggletonians” formed in a moment of extreme religious turmoil in London, Lodowick Muggleton recalled in his posthumously published autobiography *The Acts of the Witnesses of the Spirit* that in 1650 he heard of “several prophets and prophetesses that were about the streets and declared the day of the Lord.” Chief among these groups was the cult of John Robins, who “declared himself to be God Almighty and that he was the judge of the quick and of the dead.” According to Muggleton, the cult leader believed the world had returned to a prelapsarian condition. Robins described himself as “that first Adam that was in the innocent state and that his body had been dead this five thousand, six hundred and odd years.” Robins had not only raised himself from the dead but also several Old Testament prophets. Muggleton apparently played host to these revitalized seers. “I have had nine or ten of them at my house at a time,” he noted, including “those that were said to be raised from the dead.”⁵⁷⁵ Reeve also had some interaction with the English messiah. He claimed that Robins visited him in his bedroom one evening, presenting “the form of his face, looking me in the face in my bed the most part of a night insomuch that I cried in my spirit unto the Lord.”⁵⁷⁶ But Robins was not content to haunt the streets of London. He planned an ambitious millenarian expedition when he would gather “an hundred and forty four thousand men and woman and lead them to Jerusalem to Mount Olivet and there to make them happy.” Robins would feed these millenarian pilgrims with manna from the heavens, divide the Red Sea, and bring the group to the land of Israel.⁵⁷⁷

A fuller picture of the beliefs of John Robins and his small band of followers is difficult to achieve. Robins published no writings of his own and sources referencing the cult are hostile. The Ranter print moment of 1650-1651 had reached its zenith a few months earlier in a wave of colorful pamphlets condemning libertine spiritualism and the Robins cult was depicted with the same broad polemical brush.⁵⁷⁸ One tract suggested that Robins convinced several people of his personal divinity and that his family formed a sort of incarnated Trinity. Cult members claimed,

⁵⁷⁴ Muggleton, *Acts of the Witnesses*, 12. For work on the relationship between puritan theology and anxiety see Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 88-89; Peter Kaufman, *Prayer, Despair, and Drama: Elizabethan Introspection* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 8; John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English puritanism and the literature of religious despair* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 33; William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 40-42. For instances in which puritan theology and practical divinity could push believers toward antinomianism see Peter Lake, *Moderate puritans and the Elizabethan church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 128-129, 155-156 and David Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the emergence of an antinomian underground in pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2004), 117-123.

⁵⁷⁵ Muggleton, *Acts of the Witnesses*, 20-21.

⁵⁷⁶ Reeve, *Transcendent Spiritual Treatise*, 9.

⁵⁷⁷ Muggleton, *Acts of the Witnesses*, 21.

⁵⁷⁸ J. C. Davis, *Fear, Myth, and History: The Ranters and the Historians* (Cambridge, 1986), 107.

“John Robins to be their God, and his wife Joan Robins the Virgin Mary, and the child conceived by her (for indeed she is very big) to be Christ.”⁵⁷⁹ In another pamphlet, cult member Elisabeth Haygood confirmed that Christ was “now in the womb of Joan Robins, the wife of the aforesaid John and shall be savior of all those that shall be saved.”⁵⁸⁰ The group was called before the Justice of the Peace in Middlesex in May of 1651 for charges of blasphemy. Extant evidence of these examinations is sparse and distorted, mostly noted in the same sensationalist pamphlets based upon deposition summaries. The Middlesex JP Thomas Hubbert, presiding over the case, noted that during the examination the group “behaved themselves very rudely and uncivilly, clapping their hands and filliping with their fingers, casting themselves down upon the ground and singing and using strange postures.”⁵⁸¹

It was amidst these antics that the anti-spiritualist orientation of the Muggletonians would be forged. A primary purpose of Reeve’s first publications was to establish commission’s prophetic credentials through their condemnation of the London cult scene. When Christ visited Reeve in his bedroom—apparently a place of high eschatological drama—he told Reeve, “I have put the two-edged sword of my spirit into thy mouth.” This meant that, through the power of God, Reeve could curse and bless those who opposed or supported the new commission.⁵⁸² John Reeve condemned Robins as an antichrist, “who exalteth himself above all that is called God.”⁵⁸³ His followers had reached the height of blasphemy, “for they fell upon their faces at his feet and worshipped him, calling him their Lord and their God.”⁵⁸⁴ Reeve claimed he approached Robins during his imprisonment at the Newgate jail, where he “declared his wickedness unto him, and immediately pronounced him cursed in soul and body.”⁵⁸⁵ For whatever reason, this seemed to work: a few weeks after the curse, Robins recanted in a letter to Protector Oliver Cromwell. Reeve bragged in a 1653 remonstrance to Cromwell that his condemnation had silenced Robins, a feat “which the Magistrate’s power could not accomplish though they imprisoned him [Robins].”⁵⁸⁶ In terms of proving its bona fides in the sectarian street wars of the 1650s, the Third Commission had gotten off to a decent start.

Behind Reeve’s and Muggleton’s condemnation of specific cultic groups was criticism of a wider set of religious beliefs. For example, both men also lambasted Theaurau John Tany, another London sectary, who had created a rival cultic group. Like Robins, Tany had millenarian ambitions to lead converted Jews to Jerusalem. Reeve and Muggleton described Tany as the personification of a broader spiritualist religious heresy.⁵⁸⁷ In their words, Tany was “the prince

⁵⁷⁹ G. H., *The Declaration of John Robins* (London, 1651), 3.

⁵⁸⁰ Anonymous, *The Ranters Creed* (London, 1651), 1.

⁵⁸¹ John Taylor, *Ranters of Both Sexes, Male and Female*, (London, 1651), 3.

⁵⁸² Reeve, *Transcendent Spiritual Treatise*, 5.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁸⁴ Muggleton, *Acts of the Witnesses*, 21; John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton, *A Remonstrance from the Eternal God* (1653), 4.

⁵⁸⁵ Reeve, *Transcendent Spiritual Treatise*, 10.

⁵⁸⁶ Reeve and Muggleton, *Remonstrance*, 5.

⁵⁸⁷ Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), 181; Davis, *Fear, Myth, and History*, 25-27; B. J. Gibbons, “Fear, Myth, and Furore: Reappraising the Ranters,” *Past & Present* 140 (1993), 179. For Tany’s thought and ideological evolution, see: Ariel Hessayon, *Gold*

and head of that atheistical lie held forth by all filthy sodomitical Ranters.” The cult leader had unhinged God from a “personal substance,” decoupling God’s existence from a specific bodily form. This “lying notion” of God’s immateriality compelled Tany to “speak or write against that spiritual mystery of the immortal God clothing himself with flesh in the person of a man.”⁵⁸⁸ In other words, Robins and Tany were blasphemous exponents of “Ranterism,” the denial of the Incarnation, and the substantial existence of God as a physical and personal substance. According to Reeve and Muggleton, Ranter ideas dissolved God into spirit, unhinging him from the corporeal form. This led not only to the denial of Christ as the preeminent aspect of the Trinity, but also blasphemously supported notions of heretical unity between the divine and the material world. The revolutionary sects made a fundamental error of spiritual omnipresence, that God was “a vast incomprehensible Spirit essentially living in all things and places.”⁵⁸⁹ This was complete with libertine and immoral implications, as blurring of God’s being with creation made moral divisions difficult to maintain. The “atheistical lie” of an incorporeal God provided the immediate imperative of the Third Commission and framed the materialist theology that Reeve and Muggleton would go on to articulate.⁵⁹⁰

Reeve and Muggleton thus moved beyond the specific cultic blasphemies of Robins and Tany to condemn a wide-ranging and pervasive spiritualist culture. They argued most theological errors clustered around a core misconception that God existed as a vast bodiless spirit. In *A Transcendent Spiritual Treatise*, Reeve stated succinctly that the English spiritualists contained a dangerous error, an ontological threat to the very being of God by eroding his distinctive, divine glory:

They teach the people to worship an infinite spirit, that is everywhere, without a body or person, but he is fain to borrow his creatures’ bodies to live in; that is, a God of words only without any form or substance, or an infinite nothing, that can never be comprehended, nor apprehended in the least by any formed creature.⁵⁹¹

In addition to making God difficult to comprehend, theories of divine non-corporeality created a conceptual slipperiness that lent itself to ontological fluidity. Namely, it suggested that God was co-existential with his creation, that his spirit was contained in all things, and that humanity could make a claim toward partaking in this divinity.

The fear of the “infinite” or “incorporeal” or “incomprehensible” spirit permeated through the Muggletonian written correspondence. In 1654 Reeve told a friend that if anyone claimed God to be “an infinite spirit essentially abiding in all his creatures, that man is a liar.”⁵⁹² He declared to the earl of Pembroke that God “neither is nor ever was an infinite or vast spirit without any bodily form.”⁵⁹³ Just before his death in 1658, Reeve proclaimed the “vast

Tried in the Fire”: The Prophet Theauraujohn Tany and the English Revolution, (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007).

⁵⁸⁸ Reeve and Muggleton, *Remonstrance*, 4.

⁵⁸⁹ BL Add. MS 60171, fo. 119.

⁵⁹⁰ Reeve and Muggleton, *A Remonstrance*, 3-4; for Reeve’s remarks on Tany, see: Ariel Hessayon, *Gold Tried in Fire*, 209-212.

⁵⁹¹ Reeve, *Transcendent Spiritual Treatise*, 36.

⁵⁹² BL Add. MS 60171, fo. 45.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, fo. 76.

incomprehensible spirit” was something “men dream from their imaginary gods.”⁵⁹⁴ It was trope that spanned the length of the Third Commission in the seventeenth century, one that could be deployed and redeployed as needed. It became the foil against which the Muggletonians defined their own brand of prophecy and materialist dogma.⁵⁹⁵

“Spirit” was conceptually promiscuous. Lacking a physical form it could be whatever the perceiver of the spirit might conceive, even if this conception was a misconception and in error. In Reeve’s words, the idea of an incorporeal spirit was “an infinite nothing, but glittering words only.”⁵⁹⁶ This gave the imagination room to concoct theories about God’s promiscuous and shared qualities. The Muggletonians worried that the conceptual impossibility of incorporeal spirit allowed the ungodly to render God as whatever their minds fancied. Reeve wrote that “a cursed lying imagination” led man to think that God could not be visibly seen “as the person of man who is the image of God.”⁵⁹⁷ This suggests that Reeve and Muggleton believed human understanding of God relied upon spatial and visual standards. As Reeve noted the inward unseen Spirit could not be described. The image of all things, divine or otherwise, could only be known by their external attributes: “This it is clear that the image of God or men or angels, it is the outward form only and not the inward spirit, whose form cannot be described.”⁵⁹⁸ Thus one of the most important functions of material nature was its ability to guide the human understanding toward distinctive ideas.

Lacking the corporeal epistemic standard granted by God’s body, the divine was liable to any sort of conceptual manipulation and fluidity. Reeve and Muggleton held that any number of problematic ideas exploited this interpretative gap. This included the Trinity: “so these spirits, being one essence, make up their imaginary Trinity in unity.”⁵⁹⁹ Alternatively, ideas of a bodiless spirit could manifest in atheist naturalistic positions that stressed God’s existence “within the creatures only” or conclude “there is no God but nature only.” In their 1656 tract, *A Divine Looking-Glass*, Reeve and Muggleton wrote belief in God’s formless spirit led to the atheist conclusion that “the Creator is all things, and yet he is nothing at all.”⁶⁰⁰ If God was “so essentially vast that all places and things become as it were a God,” it was easy to conclude there was no God, “but mere senseless earth and water.”⁶⁰¹ Finally it led to strange prophecies like those of Arise Evans, the “Cavalier Prophet” who predicted that Christ would reign over the nations of the world through the seed of Charles I.⁶⁰² Unstable, unsettled, and protean, the idea that God existed as a diffuse, incorporeal Holy Spirit had allowed any number of human misconceptions to enter the radical milieu of revolutionary England.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., fo. 115.

⁵⁹⁵ Reeve and Muggleton would adapt this understanding of spiritualism to attack both Quakers and orthodox “Trinitary-Mongers”; see also Reeve and Muggleton, *Remonstrance*, 4.

⁵⁹⁶ Add. MS. 60171, fo. 68.

⁵⁹⁷ Reeve, *Transcendent Spiritual Treatise*, 15.

⁵⁹⁸ BL Add. MS 60171, fo. 33.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid., fo. 119.

⁶⁰⁰ John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton, *A Divine Looking-Glass, Or the Third and Last Testament of Our Lord Jesus Christ* (London, 1656), 49-50.

⁶⁰¹ BL Add. MS 60171, fo. 82.

⁶⁰² Reeve and Muggleton, *Divine Looking-Glass*, 168-170.

After Reeve's death in 1658, the idea of the "infinite spirit" would remain fluid enough for Muggleton to deploy it as a polemical tool in different ways against multiple sectarian enemies. His correspondence with followers and rivals is filled with anxiety over a capacious divine spirit. He continued to decry those that "deny God to have a person or body of his own without themselves."⁶⁰³ He chided the Quakers in 1662 for building a religion "upon the sand, that is upon an infinite incomprehensible spirit without a body."⁶⁰⁴ In a 1660 letter he condemned the German mystic Jacob Böhme, whom he described as worshiping an "incomprehensible formless spirit" such that his God was simply an empty word: "no more but so many letters, that is three letters, G. O. D."⁶⁰⁵ In another letter Muggleton noted, "there is very little difference betwixt the Bemonists and the Quakers," although he conceded, "the Quakers are a little more precise in their outward lives."⁶⁰⁶ Despite their outward precision, the Quakers would become Muggleton's core ideological opponents. Their early quaking had been "an influence of John Robins's spiritual witchcraft" which was itself produced from the idea that God "be all diffused into Spirits and so he is gotten into them and this is that which they call the light of Christ in them."⁶⁰⁷ This had led the Quakers to believe that the "life of every creature is the life of God" and that "God dwelleth bodily in every man's body."⁶⁰⁸ So, the idea of essential co-mingling with God, of the "infinite spirit," was continually adapted as the Third Commission faced new ideological opponents.⁶⁰⁹ By conflating their various sectarian rivals into a single theological error, the Muggletonians distanced themselves from their own populist sectarian origins. The printed letter to Cromwell in 1653 stressed both the political utility of the Commission while also drawing clear lines of demarcation between the Muggletonians and the other radical groups they sought to condemn.

The Muggletonians' summary condemnation of radical spiritualists rings similar to the elusive antinomian pantheism that J.C. Davis held as the criterion for a Ranter sect. Indeed, it is likely that the idea of the "infinite spirit" functioned to serve "the needs of sectarian consolidation" in which an external category of ideological danger defined the group's own beliefs, policed the sect's boundaries, and enhanced its respectability in the eyes of potentially repressive authorities.⁶¹⁰ It is not difficult to see that Reeve and Muggleton used the broad idea of the infinite, incomprehensible, spirit as a means of distilling various forms of spiritualism into a simplified heresy. However, we need not interpret their broad characterizations as mere polemical myth-making. They were responding not only to the sensationalized Robins/Tany cults but also to real ideas in the public sphere that could be easily encompassed within the theology

⁶⁰³ BL Add. MS 60171, fo. 192.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, fo. 174.

⁶⁰⁵ BL Add MS 60171, fos. 133-134.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, fo. 195.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, fo. 136, fo. 192.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, fo. 340.

⁶⁰⁹ By the second generation of Muggletonian writers, this spiritual pantheism had become systematized. In 1676, the Muggletonian Thomas Tomkinson noted that many believed God's "formless spirit infused itself into the whole creation, then could there be no god at all unless the creature were god," "Truth's Testimony or a Witness to the Two Witnesses," BL Add. MS, fo. 8.

⁶¹⁰ Davis, *Fear, Myth, and History*, 21-25, 110-111; see also Ann Hughes, *Gangraena and the Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 73.

of the “infinite spirit.” As we’ve seen, these writers were not contained within a singular sectarian group, but they did indeed blur the ontological boundaries between man and God.⁶¹¹ The Muggletonians were not just another rival group competing with Quakers, Seekers, new messiahs, and other spiritualist groups for plebian followers. Reeve and Muggleton were articulating a set of theological doctrines in direct opposition to what they perceived as a spectrum of spiritualist theological errors based upon decoupling God’s sanctifying, regenerative, and soteriological functions from a fixed corporeal body. This spiritualism, as perceived by the Muggletonians, had removed the material limits to the divine. The fundamental conceptual anchor of God’s spirit had been unmoored by the religious ideas of the Civil War and Interregnum. The Third Commission’s major motivation would be to restore the body of Christ to God and reconstruct Christian theology and cosmology so that the spiritualism of the English Revolution could no longer plague the English godly.

“That Pure Spiritual Body”

In contrast to the idea of an immanent, pantheistic, divine spirit, Reeve and Muggleton argued that God existed as a set and spatially limited body in which all aspects of the divine were localized within the person of Christ. In the 1656 *Divine Looking Glass* the Prophets declared that the Creator “was only one immortal undivided personal God-Man from all eternity, and in time.”⁶¹² God’s essence did not permeate and co-mingle with the world. It was contained in and of himself as a form of personated substance. Reeve succinctly stated this theory of divinity in a letter to Philip Herbert, fifth Earl of Pembroke:

I declare that the Creator neither is, nor never was, an infinite or vast Spirit without any bodily form, as men blindly imagine for want of a spiritual distinction in them. But from all eternity, that uncreated Creator of all sensible, spiritual, natural, and rational creatures, was a distinct, immortal, bodily substance in the form and likeness of a Man.⁶¹³

Reeve thus oriented the divine around the body or more specifically a “bodily substance” that was in the shape of men. This was a radical inversion of Scripture’s divine bestowing of form to man and this anthropomorphism will be treated below. However at this point it is important to note that Reeve fashioned a contrary form of corporeal divinity to counter the “bodiless God” theory of the radical spiritualists.

This was not a shift in emphasis within the Trinity, but rather a profound assertion that the fundamental nature of the divine was personal and formally embodied. In a 1654 manuscript treatise, “The Mysteries of the Manifestation,” Reeve stressed that the divine body *pre-existed* the Incarnation: “God the man Jesus was in the person of a man before he became flesh and bone.” He wrote that God “always liveth in a spiritual form or body or person.”⁶¹⁴ God had a specific form, a body that was contained in the same shape, size, and general outlines of a human body. The Incarnation was simply a change in accidentals. The divine body “did convert itself

⁶¹¹ See Chapter 3 above.

⁶¹² Reeve and Muggleton, *Divine Looking-Glass*, 2.

⁶¹³ BL Add. MS. 60171, fo. 76; John Reeve, “Epistle to the Earl of Pembroke,” in *Works*, 3:49.

⁶¹⁴ BL Add. MS 60171, fo. 28.

into a natural body of flesh, blood, and bone.” A spiritual form changed its constitutive parts from a contained spiritual divinity to a limited human corporeality. Similarly when Christ went through his passion and resurrection he reconverted back into “that pure spiritual body” that had contained God’s essence in a single form before the Incarnation.⁶¹⁵ Again writing to Pembroke, Reeve claimed that “the compass or substance of his glorious person is no bigger than a man is, and the essence of it is but in one place at once.” This entailed that the divine was fundamentally localized. Like a created person, God was spatially placed as a “spiritual substance which is but a small circumference.” His personal substance was “but in one place only,” his omnipotent power contained in delimited space.⁶¹⁶

Historians of English radicalism have considered this corporeal formalism as a populist effort. Barry Reay framed Reeve and Muggleton’s ideas as part of a longer anti-intellectualism that continued in opposition to priestly scripturalism and eventually Enlightenment metaphysics. This “suspicion of high-flying scholars” led Christopher Hill to consider that Reeve and Muggleton’s continual insistence on the body of God was part of a “no-damn-nonsense” theology articulated by practical craftsmen who were uneducated in formal theology, but endowed with a worldly artisanal sensibility. Muggletonians extrapolated their craftsmanship into a plebian set of religious beliefs.⁶¹⁷ There is an allure to this socio-economic explanation. Reeve and Muggleton were both tailors. As such they knew the shapes and dimensions of the human form better than anyone. Indeed, this sort of commonsense shrewdness does stand out in the sources. One can hear the Prophets exasperation with spiritualist ideology when they point out that “without a body, face, or tongue, His glorious spirit could not possibly have spoken any distinct words at all.”⁶¹⁸ How indeed could God speak without a tongue?

One might ask, what exactly Reeve and Muggleton were referring to when they described the “body” or “person” of God? Did they mean something tangible, a physical object you could touch and bump into? A fleshly corpus that could bleed and deteriorate? The words “form,” “body,” “person,” and “substance” were used interchangeably and never converted into a consistent vocabulary. After Reeve died in 1658, Muggleton would continue to defend that God was contained in a human form, but ambiguities over the exact nature of this body persist. Certainly the Muggletonian Prophets did not intend body to represent some extended abstraction. Rather they intended the divine to be wholly anthropomorphic, an entity whose spiritual qualities were contained within a distinctive form. In 1653, the Prophets stressed “the Creator was a spiritual body or person in the form of a man, having all parts in immortality as man hath in mortality.”⁶¹⁹ Reeve and Muggleton’s hope was that this religious corporealism would limit the sanctifying and destabilizing functions of God into a single, demarcated physical space. This “spiritual body” encapsulated the divine essence, bracketing the divine attributes from creation.

⁶¹⁵ BL Add. MS 60171, fos. 28-29.

⁶¹⁶ BL Add. MS 60171, fos. 81-82; John Reeve, “Epistle to the Earl of Pembroke,” in *Works*, 3:56.

⁶¹⁷ Christopher Hill, “John Reeve and the Origins of Muggletonianism,” in *The World of the Muggletonians*, ed. Christopher Hill, Barry Reay, and William Lamont. (London: Temple Smith, 1983), 74-75.

⁶¹⁸ *Divine Looking Glass*, 106.

⁶¹⁹ John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton, *A General Epistle from the Holy Spirit*, (1653), 3.

Reeve and Muggleton thus utilized the limitations of corporeality, the spatial confinement of the human body, as a containment of God's divinity. The Prophets stressed that God was the "Man-Christ." Like a man, he had comprehensible and easy to determine boundaries that demarcated the divine space but also bounded the politically and socially destabilizing functions of the divine. The true substance of the "Man-Christ" prevented the conceptually promiscuous notion of Spirit as an ontologically pernicious substance and replaced it with an image that all believers could instantly recognize by reference to their own bodily form. Rather than God bestowing his image to Man, in the context of radical spiritualism, Reeve was forced to invert the process of formal creation. It is Man by which the form of God is to be understood.

Reeve and Muggleton would continually stress, despite this anthropomorphism, that God was still a divine Creator. They balanced the need that God remain godly in terms of his power as omnipotent creator with the concern that his qualities were not essentially shared with his creation. For example, Reeve and Muggleton wanted to maintain the idea that God was an infinite deity, but revised the definition of infinity so that it stressed the qualitative aspects of God's glory, power, and potentiality and excluded the quantitative attributes of scope, scale, and size. Therefore they claimed, "infinite life does not consist in bigness or bulk of things, but in its exceeding brightness of wisdom, power, and glory in itself." The Prophets pressed this point, noting that if one were to claim that the Holy Spirit of God essentially dwelled in all living things, then his infinity would actually be *limited* by his existence within the base matter of the earthly world.⁶²⁰ God was necessarily infinite, otherwise how was he God? But as Reeve noted to Pembroke it was an "enclosed infiniteness," one that was held within the formal Godhead *qua* Christ.⁶²¹

God's essence was qualitatively different from that of humanity. The exact substance of God remained somewhat unclear, largely because God's corporeality was constantly defined in contrast to the polemically constructed "infinite spirit". But Reeve and Muggleton did state that the divine form "did not consist of natural earth, air, water, or fire." It was a body made of "uncompounded purities," albeit in a form that believers would instantly recognize as "like unto the first man Adam." God was qualitatively distinct from created matter. Divine matter was a higher stuff than the earthly elements. What God did share with humanity was a limited spatial nature, the encapsulation or personification of the divine within a set (meta)physical form. Muggleton would note that "a spiritual substance hath a nature as well as that which is natural."⁶²² But this substance contained a spiritual intensity that individual believers were unable to conceive. Reeve and Muggleton wrote, "neither fire, air, earth, water, sun, moon, stars, heavens, earth, angels, men nor anything else is capable of the indwelling of [God] without being consumed to ashes dust, sand, or powder." The essential nature of God was simply too intense to be conveyed to humanity. God could not possibly intermingle with other substances without those lesser beings "being consumed" by contact with God's omnipotent essence. The mystery of divinity was that God was able to contain this "infinite bright burning spirit" within a single bodily form.⁶²³ The Muggletonians thus reconstructed God as a formal body—a localized and contained divinity that was neither spiritually diffuse nor essentially co-mingling with the earthly

⁶²⁰ Reeve and Muggleton, *Divine Looking-Glass*, 74-75.

⁶²¹ BL Add. MS 60171, fo. 76.

⁶²² *Ibid.*, fo. 185.

⁶²³ Reeve and Muggleton, *Divine Looking-Glass*, 76.

world. The Holy Spirit could not be accessed, or dwelt in by the individual believer. The divine could not be shared.

The bodily God held anti-Trinitarian implications. Paul Lim has argued that the Muggletonians articulated “an intriguing coalescence of Christocentric modalism,” beliefs that affirmed the deity of Christ while denying the tripersonal nature of God.⁶²⁴ Reeve would tell Pembroke that “even the man-Christ Jesus inseparably is both father, Son, and Holy Ghost or Holy Spirit in one and only distinct glorified body or person.”⁶²⁵ Reeve’s extreme emphasis upon the human form of God led to the dismissal of the Trinity as confused and imagined. The Prophets decried “some deceived persons which ignorantly hold forth a false God or Trinity, which say that the infinite Majesty is a vast bodiless spirit; also they call their God by a twofold name or spirits, a Spirit Father, and a Spirit Son. . . and so these three spirits being one essence make up their imaginary Trinity in Unity.” The Two Prophets concluded that “though he hath never so many divine titles attributed him,” God should only be understood as “one glorious being only.”⁶²⁶ Lim links the Muggletonian “Unitarianism of the Son” with a broader intellectual assault upon the mystery of the Trinity, part of a larger attempt to close the historiographical distance that has separated “radical” forms of anti-Trinitarianism with “rational” forms of divinity, to put the populist radicalism of the “ranter milieu” into conversation with the learned anti-Trinitarian critiques of Socinians like Paul Best and John Biddle.⁶²⁷

Yet we must be cautious of Lim’s linkage of “*non-Trinitarianism*,” thinkers who were unconcerned with or, like the Muggletonians, simply dismissive of the Trinity, with “*anti-Trinitarianism*,” ideas that directly opposed a tri-fold divinity. It imposes the terms and problems of the Trinity onto religious figures who may not have thought exclusively in terms of the Trinity’s theological problematic. It is clear that Reeve and Muggleton had an anguished relationship to the Trinity and Lim’s judgment that Muggletonian views on the Trinity and Christology were “genuinely muddled” is apt.⁶²⁸ However the Muggletonian critique of the Trinity was derivative of a larger concern with the ontological collapse between Creator and created. Fuzzy Trinitarian logic was the expense of maintaining the corporeal nature of God as a bulwark against spiritualist pantheism.

Despite the Muggletonians’ muddled doctrines, their oft-incoherent Christocentric modalism, their ideas adapted older Trinitarian philosophical concerns to a more fundamental “bodyism” or corporeal formalism of the divine. God’s body served as a model, a transcendent exemplar for the material cosmos. While different in its component parts, God’s body exemplified the material nature of the wider universe. Muggleton would stress in a letter to a follower that God’s very existence entailed his personal nature, “for there can be no nature of God, angels, man, nor

⁶²⁴ Paul Lim, *Mystery Unveiled: The Crisis of the Trinity in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 84-85.

⁶²⁵ John Reeve, “Epistle to the Earl of Pembroke,” in *Works* 50; BL Add. MS. 60171, fos. 77.

⁶²⁶ Reeve and Muggleton, *Divine Looking-Glass*, 48, 82.

⁶²⁷ Reeve and Muggleton, *Divine Looking-Glass*, 43.

⁶²⁸ Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 84. For example, in correspondence written in 1657 the puritan controversialist William Sedgewick admitted perplexity over Reeve’s Trinitarian views: “I may say, I do believe what you there express, but it may be not in your sense.” BL Add. MS 60171, fos. 98, 112.

creature, nor thing but it must have a person or substance.”⁶²⁹ The Muggletonians would stress that the universe was fundamentally ordered into bodies: “Are not all infinite creatures a mere chaos of senseless matter, until they are formed into distinct beings of themselves?” The animate world consisted of “living spirits in complete bodies of their own.”⁶³⁰ This would provide a fundamental epistemological basis by which the Muggletonians held God was understandable to human minds. A common corporeal form was required in order to make sense of the mysteries of religion.

Besides neutering the political and social dangers of the immanent spirit, God’s body provided a means of comprehension by which believers could correctly understand the mysteries of the divine. The body of God provided a spatial and anthropomorphic reference for the believer. In one sense this was a perfectly orthodox reaffirmation of the Genesis description of mankind as made in the image of God. Reeve wrote in 1654 that since “the creator from all eternity was an immortal distinct person of Spirit and Body as man, who is the image of God, is a distinct mortal person of Soul and Body.”⁶³¹ However, through circular reasoning the Muggletonians would argue that the inverse also held true. Just as man had been created in the image of God, so the human bodily form served as an exemplar by which we could understand the nature of the divine. Thus Reeve and Muggleton held that by acknowledging the formal distinctiveness of mankind’s existence, God could be understood as a body. The human condition could be employed to make sense of divinity.

In *A Transcendent Spiritual Treatise* the Muggletonians elaborated that the form of terrestrial man was comparable to the shape of God. They held that “the Lord Jesus is as visible seen of the creatures where his person is resident as a man is visibly seen of the creatures in this earth beneath.” The Prophets stressed that if God was not capable of being visualized, “then no creatures could possibly know him to return any praise or glory unto him at all for the happiness of their condition.”⁶³² Mankind could not worship unless God could be idealized as visible, spatial, and formal. This was a form of presumptive empiricism, a grounding of metaphysical truths upon the sensory apparatus, and it implied that the human form was evidence for larger spiritual truths. Much as a man could be seen in this world, Christ must be “visible seen” by his creation and it was this ability to be seen which allows creation to have a concrete idea for worship. In *A Divine Looking Glass* Reeve and Muggleton compared God to “earthly monarchs” who could not “be complete without natural bodies or persons for their subjects beholding them face to face.”⁶³³ For the Muggletonians the understanding of the divine was linked to material sensory processes. This did not entail actual empirical verification of the divine. One could not see God because he existed in a heavenly sphere above the world, but in order to conceive of the idea of God, the spatial cues of corporeality were required in order to speak sensibly of his existence.

This strong emphasis on God’s visual and spatial qualities reveals that embedded into the Muggletonian conception of the divine was a theory of human comprehension. If men could not see God in the same way as they saw things like animals or objects, then the idea of God was largely meaningless. Lodowick Muggleton explained this epistemology within a pamphlet

⁶²⁹ Ibid., fo. 185.

⁶³⁰ Reeve and Muggleton, *Divine Looking-Glass*, 80.

⁶³¹ BL Add. MS 60171, fo. 31.

⁶³² Reeve, *Transcendent Spiritual Treatise*, 15.

⁶³³ Reeve and Muggleton, *Divine Looking-Glass*, 106-107.

skirmish with the Quakers in the early 1670s. In *The Answer to William Penn* Muggleton argued that faith functioned much like human vision: it conveyed religious knowledge in a spatial, shape-based manner. Muggleton noted, “as the reason in man is evidence of things that are seen by the natural sight or light of the eye here in this world as the natural light, sight, and understanding in man, faith doth distinguish things by their forms and shapes.” Even though we recognize an animating force that distinguishes living creatures from inanimate objects, Muggleton argued that we understand the “horse of one shape, a cow of another” by the visual structure they convey to the human sense of sight. The idea of an incorporeal spirit, an idea of life without a visually spatial body, presented a problem of categorization:

Now if any of these creatures that have the breath of life in them, if they had no body, form, nor shape, how could you give that breath of life a name? What would you call it? As for example, a horse hath a breath of life in him and is a strong creature. Now if this horse had no form nor shape, what would you call him? Or what work would he do for you if he had no body, shape, nor form for his breath to dwell in?⁶³⁴

Without sensual reference to distinctive, spatially demarcated bodies, one could not comprehend the world. Without the idea of a demarcated form that believer could instantly recognize as a “body,” the basic material categorizations necessary for both life and religion were impossible. Muggleton went so far as to argue that faith in God is simply a higher form of the physical discernment that we use in the everyday world. The idea of God as seen by the “eye of faith” is a higher form of visual rationalization by which man can have faith in a clear and distinct idea of the divine: “he that hath faith in his heart, may see by the eye of faith the form, nature, and shape of God who is eternal, as man by his natural sight doth see the forms, natures, and shapes of Creatures here upon earth.”⁶³⁵ The Muggletonians understood religious truths within a framework of rudimentary object-based theory of the natural world. Shaped forms and, it seems, the properties of the shaped object, such as cohesion, solidity, continuity, and movement through contact, were the bases of both lower material and higher metaphysical forms of reasoning process.

Yet there was something deeper than categorization going on here. For Muggleton, the “breath of life” was a largely meaningless term unless it had a body or form, unless it had sensory qualities that could be affirmed visually. “For this I say,” wrote Muggleton, “there is no breath of life can proceed, or have any being at all, but in a body and shape.” This was an attack upon essentialist notions of knowledge, religious or otherwise. Creatures gained their meaning not through their a substance-accidents relationship or Aristotelian teleology, but strictly through their material appearance, their objective visually affirmative forms. “Therefore,” concluded Muggleton, “the reason of man hath given names to every creature that hath the breath of life in them according to the form and natures of their bodies.”⁶³⁶ The body, the materialized form, was a model for the understanding of the material structure of the earthly world. As with visualized faith, human beings could only assign labels to things based upon their visual qualities. These visually based significations attempted to undermine a spiritualist and internalist essentialism, the idea that every living creature was defined by an unknown constitution upon which their discoverable qualities depended. For Muggletonians, there was no spiritual hierarchy within

⁶³⁴ Lodowick Muggleton, *The Answer to William Penn* (1673), 3-4.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*, 2-4.

nature that lay behind the appearances of things. Rather, what gave a creature, both divine or worldly, its meaning was not its spirit, but rather its shape, its objective form containing qualities of body and physical structure, observable to the eye. Ontological, and thus epistemological priority was not with the spirit, but the body.

Signifying the Personal God

For the Muggletonians, a metaphysical corporealism modeled upon the body of God was the basis for human comprehension of the divine. This was foiled by the diffuse dangers of an incorporeal divinity. Indeed, the conceptual slipperiness of God's Spirit was also a problem for that other peculiar materialist of the mid-seventeenth century, Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes, of course, was hunting different political game than John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton. Indeed, he would have considered such pseudo-prophets as infringing upon the religious prerogatives of the sovereign by claiming access to speak for the divine. However, there are similarities in terms of metaphysical strategy by which both Hobbes and the Muggletonians attempted to collapse religious concepts, such as the Spirit, that had destabilized the English commonwealth. Like the Muggletonians, he represented God as a person, relying on his theory of "personation" to limit the Holy Spirit and the other parts of the Trinity to a series of personalist representations that localized ecclesiastical power within the Christian commonwealth. Furthermore, his effort to materialize and nominalize the spirit parallels the efforts of the Muggletonians to empty the world of the presence of divinity.⁶³⁷

Hobbes recognized that religious practice and belief entailed acute problems of linguistic signification. Philip Pettit has argued that the basis for Hobbes's broader political theory in *Leviathan* was a theory of language in which thought did not presuppose language, but rather intelligence was gained through the creation of speech and the demarcation of phenomena through verbal signification. Words were the basis by which abstract thought and reasoning could occur. For Pettit, this strong emphasis upon the signified features of the universe supported Hobbes's attack upon Aristotelian theories of naturalist political community.⁶³⁸ However, religion was a particularly difficult cluster of concepts to signify. It relied upon abstracted and arcane concepts and, in the context of early modern Europe, was mediated through a set of written texts that had been subject to centuries of exegesis and debate. Additionally, straining Hobbes's nominalist interpretation was his epistemological materialism. Hobbes considered life as "but a motion of limbs, the beginning whereof is in some principle part within." For Hobbes, human existence was best understood through a mechanics of motion. "For what is the heart, but a spring; and nerves, but so many strings; and the joints, but so many

⁶³⁷ See Jon Parkin, *Taming Leviathan: The Reception of the Political and Religious Ideas of Thomas Hobbes 1640-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 91-93, 192; Richard Tuck, "Introduction," *Leviathan*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), xli; Paul D. Cooke, *Hobbes and Christianity: Reassessing the Bible in Leviathan* (London, 1996), 21, 36-38.

⁶³⁸ The covenanting of all sovereign power allowed the Leviathan to become the arbiter who provided a common language for subjects to reason from a common linguistic understanding, see: Philip Pettit, *Made with Words: Hobbes on Language, Mind, and Politics* (Princeton, 2008).

wheels giving motion to the whole Body such as was intended by the Artificer?”⁶³⁹ The human body, Hobbes posits, was best understood as a biomechanical contraption, a living automaton that parallels man’s own creations.

The body was also a medium for motive energies, which Hobbes held as the basis for sensation. The cause of sense was an external object that displaced some sort of force “which presses the organ proper to each Sense.” This pressure caused a motion inside the body mediated through “nerves, and other strings, and membranes of the body” before finally moving to the brain and heart.⁶⁴⁰ In *De Corpore* Hobbes stressed that sense-organs serve mainly as pathways or “media” for this motion, creating a sort of chain reaction within the body: “For when the uttermost part of the organ is pressed, it no sooner yields, but the part next within it is pressed also; and, in this manner, the pressure or motion is propagated through all the parts of the organ to the innermost.” Having reached the most inward locale of the body’s sensory apparatus, this motion causes “a resistance, or counter-pressure,” creating the perception that there is some object outside the body. Hobbes concluded, “this seeming or fancy, is that which men call Sense.”⁶⁴¹ So while sense is the building block for understanding, Hobbes’s theory of human understanding eschews the use of images as a prerequisite for knowledge.

This epistemology was iconoclastic to the extent that it removed the primacy of both subject and object, stressing the energetic connection that passed between the two entities.⁶⁴² It also meant that any concept that could not be reduced to either kinetic energy or the material stuff was problematic since Hobbes extended this materialism beyond human understanding to the entire world: “the Universe, being the aggregate of all bodies, there is no real part thereof that is not also body.” Chief among these was the idea of the “spirit,” an incorporeal substance that was not subject to the physical rules of body. The problem was that “in the sense of common people, not all the universe is called by body.” In the minds of most people, there existed other poorly defined substances “called Wind or Breath or, because the same are called in the Latin *spiritus*, Spirit.” Spirit was a vague aerial substance that “in the body of any living creature, gives it life and motion.” Hobbes, of course, thought this was erroneous. The presumption that there was an alternative substance beyond the material fooled the human imagination into bestowing a unique ontological status unto a conceit of the senses. “The proper signification of spirit in common speech,” Hobbes concluded, “is either a subtle, fluid and invisible body, or a ghost, or other idol or phantasm of the imagination.”⁶⁴³

So the idea of *spiritus* had led men to confuse the qualities of corporeal bodies, substances that were subject to various accidents, with an unclear notion of “incorporeal body.” However, Hobbes could argue that all these concepts were simply material objects that people incorrectly

⁶³⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, Or The Matter, Forme, and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civil*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 9.

⁶⁴⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 13.

⁶⁴¹ Thomas Hobbes, *Elements of Philosophy: Concerning Body*, ed. William Molesworth (London, 1839), 1:390; Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 14

⁶⁴² For Hobbes’s idea of sensation, higher order ideas, and even the will as “an iconoclastic strategy” see, W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago, 1987), 172.

⁶⁴³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 269-70. For Hobbes’s argument that “spirit” derived from confused Greek epistemology, see: *Leviathan*, 440-441.

labeled as “incorporeal” or confusions about a process of sensation with an object itself. Incorporeal spirits were mists, “vapors,” “subtle aerial bodies,” or a product of the mind’s own mechanically-induced fancy. However, this was problematic in terms of “the Spirit of God,” God’s spiritual existence and his spiritual extension into the material world. Hobbes’ effort in *Leviathan* was to undermine the political claims that rested upon direct reference or contact with the Holy Spirit but also maintain the idea of God as the basis for ecclesiastical authority and power. The length to which Hobbes was forced to go in order to define the Holy Spirit reveals how elusive the idea remained given his materialist ontology.

For Hobbes the Holy Spirit had multiple meanings given its context in scripture. Hobbes listed the various usages of spirit in Scripture as wind, a form of “extraordinary understanding,” a strong sense of zeal, a prophetic grace, the life given to man, authority, and finally aerial bodies. Hobbes seemed most amenable to signifying Spirit as a process of perception and thought, a motion within the mind that was perhaps divinely inspired but explainable through Hobbes’s kinetic theories of sensory apparatus and motion. This also hinted at Hobbes’s effort later on in *Leviathan* to collapse spiritual inspiration or grace into simply a label of God’s blessing and represented power. However, Hobbes dwelled on the final signification of the spirit as “an aerial body.” He wrote that when the Disciples saw Christ walking on water, this cannot be construed as a phantasm or delusion in the mind because “they all saw him,” and thus it could not be a delusion that encompassed all of their minds simultaneously. However, although God can form “subtle bodies,” Hobbes noted that “when he hath so formed them, they are substances endowed with dimensions, and take up room, and can be moved from place to place, which is peculiar to bodies and therefore are not Ghosts incorporeal.” So at its most tangible, the Spirit was a material creation of God, an “aerial” or “subtle” body, which God used to “make use of, as of Ministers and Messengers (that is to say Angels) to declare his will.” It was a corporeal manifestation of God that functioned as representations in the same manner of his Prophets who were given “eminent graces.” The Holy Spirit, which strained Hobbes’s materialism, was still contained within it.⁶⁴⁴

These ideas could be read as part of an atheistic materialism. In this interpretation Hobbes collapsed the immaterial elements of Christian religion into materialist bodies or processes of sensation. This critique of incorporeal spirit was an attack upon the very idea of divinity. John Bramhall, Bishop of Londonderry, certainly interpreted Hobbes’s religious thinking along these lines. In *The Catching of Leviathan* (1658) Bramhall considered Hobbes’s opposition to incorporeal spirits as “the root of Atheism” and claimed that “by taking away all incorporeal substances, he taketh away God himself.” Bramhall’s attack was predicated upon conflating Hobbes materialism with his broader theology and ecclesiology. The bishop claimed that Hobbes’s God was finite and was “a divisible god, a compounded god that hath matter and qualities.”⁶⁴⁵ But Hobbes’s formulation of religion was more complex than this. As Amos Funkenstein has pointed out, Hobbes’s materialism and nominalism existed within a more general dialectic, a dualism in which Hobbes’s naturalist mechanism was in tension with his understanding of human society as a process of artificial linguistic construction. There was a tenuous line that divided the realm of natural mechanistic (and determined) causality and the

⁶⁴⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 271-274.

⁶⁴⁵ John Bramhall, *The catching of Leviathan or the Great Whale*, (London, 1658), 470-

arbitrary political constructs that mankind created as a bulwark preventing a slide into the state of nature.⁶⁴⁶

It is because of this tension that the basic idea of an omnipresent, omnipotent, and infinite God sat uncomfortably with Hobbes's theories of language and ontology. God was not only impossible to understand in material terms (because all spirits were corporeal), he was also impossible to signify. Like the Muggletonians, Hobbes was skeptical of mankind's abilities to make sense of divine qualities without reference to corporeal features. In his discussion of mental discourse in the opening chapters of *Leviathan*, Hobbes argued that given man's wholly empirical imagination, comprehension was limited to the motions that occurred in the brain. In keeping with his materialist empiricism, human minds "have no imagination whereof we have not formerly had sense." Ideas were linked to sensation: "all fancies are motions within us, relics of those made in the sense." Therefore, a person could not hold in his mind an idea of anything that was not the product of a sensation. This being the case, Hobbes held it impossible for mankind to have an idea of the infinite since the human mind could never have had a sensationally produced idea of infinite qualities such as infinite size, speed, time, or power. Hobbes concluded that when someone spoke of the infinite it simply signified their ignorance, "that we are not able to conceive the ends and bounds of the thing named; having no conception of the thing but our own inability."⁶⁴⁷ The idea of the infinite meant nothing other than the limits of human knowledge.

Hobbes's move was to ground the idea of God directly into this incomprehensibility. By considering it impossible to conceive of something without a sense of place or "determinate magnitude" that could "be divided into parts," this precluded the idea of omnipresence, that something might be in several places at the same time. Despite the non-existence of incorporeal spirit, Hobbes was unwilling to describe God as a finite body, labeling the anthropomorphic tendencies of the Muggletonians as repugnant.⁶⁴⁸ Since human beings could not mentally represent to themselves anything that was not subject to sense, this necessarily included God. Hobbes thus spent considerable time in *Leviathan* evacuating God of all sensible attributes. To ascribe figure, form, divisible parts, totality, location, movement, stillness, passion, will, sensation, knowledge, understanding placed finite constraints on the necessarily infinite. These attributes, Hobbes concluded, "being things that depend on natural causes, cannot be attributed to him." Being beyond the sensory derived "tumult of the mind," God existed beyond the realm of our language:

He that will attribute to God, nothing but what is warranted by natural reason, must either use negative attributes, as infinite, eternal, incomprehensible; or superlatives, as most high, most great, and the like; or indefinite, as good, just, holy, creator, and in such sense as if he meant not to declare what he is, (for that were to circumscribe him within the limits of our fancy) but how much we admire him and how ready we would be to obey him.

⁶⁴⁶ Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century*, (Princeton, 1986), 331-333. See also: Craig Harold Leon, *The Platonic Leviathan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010) 53-61.

⁶⁴⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 20-23.

⁶⁴⁸ For reference to God speaking to Old Testament prophets, see: Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 292.

There was, Hobbes concluded, “but one name to signify our conception of his nature, and that is, I AM.” When Christians referenced God, his name was not used to aid in the conception and understanding of God, but rather as a signal of his existence and that they intended to give him honor. Based upon man’s knowledge being limited to what he could perceive, those “external things that press the organical parts of man’s body,” the idea of God could only be a spur to obedience and honor.⁶⁴⁹ God was the empty absolute that existed beyond the realm of human comprehension. He could be worshipped but not understood. Ostensibly, the empty God of “I AM,” appears dramatically different from the anthropomorphic God of the Muggletonians. However it was the very absence of intelligibility that became the basis by which God was represented in a set of corporeal persons. By showing that God was inaccessible, the human mind required some sort of sensible infrastructure to support the commonwealth’s ecclesiastical power to regulate religious practice and belief. This would require a conflation of the representative and the represented, the idea that God’s actions could be made manifest in the world.

This process rested upon Hobbes’s definition of the person and his theory of personation. For Hobbes, to “personate” oneself or others was the ability to speak as the representative of particular words or actions. As Pettit has noted, Hobbes argued that persons were not distinguished by any innate metaphysical status, but rather by their actions. Persons were understood “by the things they can do, the roles they can play.” They were thus defined by characteristic roles of speech, the ability to act and speak for given subject. Thus in Hobbes’s functionalist view there were no persons that were not also spokespersons, agents with the ability and agency to speak for something.⁶⁵⁰ Additionally, there were two sorts of persons based upon the subject that was being personated. A “natural person” was someone who could represent their words and actions as their own. An “artificial person” represented the words and actions of another. This was of course an important argument in regards to the Sovereign, who acted and spoke for those covenanted into a commonwealth, but in terms of religion the implications were radical. Hobbes stated succinctly, “the true God may be personated.”⁶⁵¹ God’s divinity could be represented and his representations were the divine person, in this sense as spokesmen for the divine.

By arguing that the nature and location of ecclesiastical power in the commonwealth was based upon personation, Hobbes made his most provocative argument for religious corporealism. He noted that Moses and the high priests “were God’s Representative in the Old Testament; and our Savior himself as Man.” Following Christ’s ascension “the Holy Ghost, that is to say the Apostles... have represented him ever since.” The Holy Spirit was simply the signification of Representatives of God, particular men in a particular political and ecclesiastical station. In his discussion of the “powers ecclesiastical,” Hobbes conceded that the words person or Trinity were not used in Scripture to describe God, but he stressed that the concepts fit well in terms of the nature of God’s authority as personally represented in the Bible: “God, who has been represented thrice, may properly enough be said to be three Persons.” The Trinity was based upon a three-fold succession of ecclesiastical representation of God on Earth:

For so God the Father, as Represented by Moses is one Person; and as Represented by his Son, another Person; and as represented by the

⁶⁴⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 251

⁶⁵⁰ Pettit, *Made with Words*, 55-56.

⁶⁵¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 111,114.

Apostles, and by the Doctors that taught by authority from them derived, is a third Person; and yet every person here is the same Person of one and the same God.

This succession thus placed God as a series of persons in time. In his chapter on ecclesiastical powers in *Leviathan* Hobbes noted there was a gap between the ascension of Christ and the conversion of worldly governments, “the men endued with civil power.” During that gap, the “power ecclesiastical,” the ability to preach, teach, and instill faith in the Christian God was manifested in the Apostles. It was this ecclesiastical power that actually represented the Holy Spirit: “This was done,” Hobbes noted, “by Imposition of hands upon such as were ordained, by which was signified the giving of the Holy Spirit, or Spirit of God.” This was a seal of the Apostles commission to preach the gospel, but it was also a representation that functioned as the Holy Ghost itself. Hobbes was explicit that the apostles were God: “Here we have the Person of God born now the third time.” The Holy Spirit literally became in Hobbes’s account the imposition of hands, the seal of the commission. The signifier became the signified. As a name that held meaning and religious import, “the Holy Spirit” was both the process by which the apostolic succession was created and the apostles themselves.⁶⁵²

One might argue that Hobbes meant these representations as a form of priestly mediation that paralleled the Trinity. When Hobbes spoke of the Person of God, he meant it loosely in its representative function. Yet given Hobbes’s theories of political sovereignty, it’s likely that Hobbes made God’s nature indescribable precisely so that his significations became the basis of his ecclesiastical and political authority. Quentin Skinner has stressed that for Hobbes, the process of “artificial” personation created a distinction, a conceptual distance between the “actors” of authority, who “have their words and actions owned by those they represent,” and the “authors,” those who “owned” those words and actions. When working to deploy the functions of the commonwealth, this distance between actor and author was a process of representative extension, the means by which the authority of the sovereign was enacted in the service of his magistrates.⁶⁵³ But regarding the personation of God, the “author” of power was necessarily unknowable. God was a cluster of ill-defined words that indicated the limits of human knowledge. We must bear in mind, that from the opening page of the 1651 edition of *Leviathan*, Hobbes had noted that “representation” was the equivalence of appearance. This meant that the Trinity could be described as a “representation” and hence an “image” of God. It’s telling that Hobbes noted the etymology of the word “person” to the Latin “persona,” noting how it signified outward appearance in terms of a disguise or “as a mask or visard.”⁶⁵⁴ Hobbes’ personation of God was the visual appearance of God, a series of human impersonations in which God was held within a human body.

Hobbes realized he was treading a narrow path in *Leviathan*, a negotiation between two politically problematic positions. On the one hand, God was necessarily unintelligible and could only speak through his representatives. But the nature of this spoken connection was empty of meaning. Indeed, even describing the nature of God’s speech led to innumerable problems of interpretation. Hobbes focused on Scripture’s lengthiest instance of divine interlocution: God’s

⁶⁵² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 339-340.

⁶⁵³ Quentin Skinner, “Hobbes on Persons, Authors, and Representatives,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes’s Leviathan*, ed. Patricia Springborg (Cambridge, 2007), 168.

⁶⁵⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, xvi, 80, 112.

speeches to Moses. Problems occurred when trying to convey the meaning and nature of this speech to his Moses: To claim that Moses experienced a dream or vision on Mt. Sinai “is contrary to that distinction which God made between Moses and other Prophets.” To say that God “spoke or appeared as he is in his own nature is to deny his infiniteness, invisibility, incomprehensibility.” Hobbes concluded that God’s speech “is not intelligible otherwise then by a voice.” The way in which God spoke and the connection between the divine and his Representative was beyond the limits of human description.⁶⁵⁵

On the other hand, extending God’s divinity within the persons of Moses and the Apostles could be construed as the same sort of inspirational principle that supported the spiritualist claims of radical antinomians. Divine representation was structured in such a way that the political power gained from God was solely through the process of personation and not a direct ontological connection with God. The theory of personation localized divinity in the same way that the earthly political authority was localized in the person of the Sovereign. This was evident in Hobbes’s discussion of prophecy and the moments in scripture in which the Spirit of God seemed to move beyond the Persons of the Trinity and settled upon or within other prophets. Hobbes stressed here that the language of Holy Spirit only signified the disposition to obey and assist in ecclesiastical governance. “For if it were meant they had the substantial spirit of God; that is, the Divine nature, inspired into them, then they had it in no less manner then Christ himself, in whom only the Spirit of God dwelt bodily.” This erroneous belief that the Spirit of God was a mobile entity that could make various creatures consubstantial with the divine essence had not only led to “quarrels amongst the visionary prophets” of the Old Testament, but also “such controversies in the New Testament at this day amongst the spiritual prophets.”⁶⁵⁶ Hobbes recognized that the debate about the nature of the Spirit continued to plague the political and religious milieu of England in 1651. Like the Muggletonians, Hobbes noted that the misinterpretation of the Spirit as a means of becoming consubstantial with the divine threatened the structural power of the religious commonwealth.

One could not claim inspiration of the Holy Spirit since this Godhead was merely the ecclesiastical power manifested by sanctioned priests in their functions of an official church. God’s power in everyday life was incomprehensible. This made God’s being nothing other than that which represented his ecclesiastical powers. Given the absurdity of “substance incorporeal,” God as the personated representative shifted easily into God as the corporeal person. There was an infinite God, but he was unknowable and this incomprehensibility made his representative Persons the containers of the divine in the world and in human experience. This construction of the Christian church fit nicely within Hobbes’s ideas about the political purposes of the commonwealth more generally. Representatives, either individual (Moses or Christ) or collective (the apostles), were the bearers of divinity and by speaking for God they became the manifestation of divinity itself.

Hobbes’s efforts to reconstruct the Christian commonwealth along naturalistic lines were materialist. But it was a particular form of materialism, one in which non-naturalistic ideas, such as divinity, were signified by specific personal bodies.⁶⁵⁷ Where Hobbes differed from Reeve and Muggleton was a matter of temporalization and localization. Whereas the Muggletonians

⁶⁵⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 295.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 296-298.

⁶⁵⁷ See: Paul D. Cooke, *Hobbes And Christianity: Reassessing the Bible in Leviathan* (London, 1996), 196-202.

held the personal God to be an anthropomorphized divinity who resided physically within a material heaven, Hobbes located the person of God upon earth as an historical succession of ecclesiastical power. God existed as persons in time: “In the Trinity of Heaven, the Persons are the persons of one and the same God, though represented in three different times and occasions.”⁶⁵⁸ The Persons of the Trinity were historical personages. God, the *deus absconditus* evacuated of all knowable qualities, could only be understood through his personal representatives.⁶⁵⁹ These representatives were people that could be signified as discrete bearers of divinity, holders of office who could not bestow God’s qualities onto others. They were easily signified and empirically verifiable as corporeal bodies. The divine Person was a human person.

Hobbes’s personalist Trinity thus extended his nominalist flattening of the Spirit to the very being of God. By making the actual spiritual content of God beyond the limits of man’s knowledge, God’s features were evaporated as either “negative attributes” or meaningless ‘superlatives.’ Through the one-two punch of Hobbes’s materialist evacuation of incorporeal spirits and his nominalist personation of the divine, God became a corporeal person. Lacking both spiritual substance and the ability to be known beyond his spokesmen, God was an empty signifier outside the realm of human understanding. God’s representations thus became the literal embodiment of his divinity.

Further support for this interpretation can be found from Hobbes’s response to bishop John Bramhall. As we have seen, Hobbes’s materialization of spirit and his unknowable divinity was the basis for Bramhall’s most pointed critique of Hobbes’s religious ideas.⁶⁶⁰ By disproving incorporeal substance, Bramhall claimed Hobbes “destroyeth the very being of God and leaves nothing in his place but an empty name.” Since he had destroyed the Aristotelian category of spirit and the possibility that God was part of a metaphysical category separate from materiality, Hobbes had made God either “the orderly concourse of natural causes” or “a fiction of the brain without real being.”⁶⁶¹ Hobbes’s reply, printed in 1682, forced him to be more explicit about the corporeality of God’s personated nature. Hobbes began by agreeing with Bramhall’s claim that God was “a perfect, pure, simple individual infinite essence”, God was indeed all of these things. However the nature of that substance was necessarily corporealized within the persons of the Trinity: “I say the Trinity and the Persons thereof are that one pure, simple, and eternal corporeal spirit; and why does this destroy the Trinity, more if I had called it Incorporeal?” Here it was made explicit. God was corporeal and this corporeality consisted of the individual members of the Trinity. Hobbes defended his personalist Trinity by referencing Athanasius’s opposition to Arius as well as the writings of Tertullian, whose work against spiritualist sects in the early church led him to conclude that “whatsoever is not Body, is nothing.” Hobbes thus reframed the debate away from the problems of an historicized divinity and back toward the problems of incorporeality. “The question between us,” Hobbes wrote, “is whether God be a phantasm or a

⁶⁵⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 340.

⁶⁵⁹ For Hobbes’s political use of a temporally uncertain eschatology, see J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (New York, 1971), 165, 177-179; see also Bramhall, *The Catching of Leviathan*, 474.

⁶⁶⁰ Samuel Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan* (Cambridge, 1962), 67; Parkin, *Taming Leviathan*, 191-197.

⁶⁶¹ Bramhall, *The Catching of Leviathan*, 471-472.

corporeal spirit, that is to say, something containing Magnitude.”⁶⁶² The problem of religion was a problem of bodies and the body’s functions as signifiers of the divine.

Corporeal Disenchantment

Hobbes’s personalist signification parallel the Muggletonians’ ideas regarding Elias and Moses as holders of the Godhead. Indeed, in *Joyful News from Heaven* (1658), the Reeve and Muggleton wrote that God’s earthly body was first signified by Moses: “he represented the Person of God the Son, that Lamb Jesus.” Moses was “a great type of Christ,” a corporeal signification of the later Christ. Once God translated himself into an earthly carnal form, Elias held the bodily Godhead in heaven. Reeve and Muggleton noted that Elias was taken up into heaven “for that purpose that he might represent the person of God the Father for that time or season whilst God the Father went that journey in flesh.”⁶⁶³ The important point was that a personal body was needed to maintain the office and functions of divinity. Such functions could not be explained through an obfuscating reference to an immanent Spirit.

Similar to Hobbes, the Muggletonians went to great pains to reinterpret Scripture to show the Holy Spirit as signified corporeally. In manuscript writings, the Muggletonians revealed that they believed the Holy Spirit enacted two of Hobbes’s signifiatory functions. It was a form of prophetic grace and extraordinary understanding placed upon the Prophets and a physical representation of God’s blessing. In a 1680 letter to the Muggletonian Robert Peirce, Lodowick Muggleton stressed these two functions, noting that the appearances of the Holy Ghost in scripture were always “in a bodily shape,” e.g. when the dove appeared to bless Christ after his baptism and tongues of fire descended upon the Apostles. In both of these instances, the Holy Spirit was a corporeal entity, sent by the personated Godhead, not an extension of God himself:

This Holy Ghost was not God, but proceeded from God; and Elias being in the throne and place of God he had power to send the Holy Ghost in the shape of a dove. And when Christ was in his throne again he had power to send the Holy Ghost on the twelve Apostles, like cloven tongues of fire; for the person of God never was in the form of a dove, nor in the form of cloven tongues like fire, but his person was in the form of a man from all Eternity.⁶⁶⁴

Like all things, the Holy Ghost only manifested itself corporeally and this bodily envelope functioned to separate the Ghost from God himself. Muggleton argued that the “spirit of God” was something that proceeded *from* God, but was not God himself. The bodily form again demarcated the limits of the divine qualities. However, unlike Hobbes’s series of historical personages (Moses, Christ, and the Apostolic succession), this Muggletonian Trinity existed concomitantly (Elias as the Father, Christ as the son, and the dove as the Spirit) though still as a set of corporeal entities that were physically demarcated and limited.

⁶⁶² Thomas Hobbes, *An Answer to a Book Published by Dr. Bramhall, Late Bishop of Derry* (London, 1682), 31-33.

⁶⁶³ John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton, *Joyful News from Heaven: or the Last Intelligence from Our Glorified Jesus above the Stars* (London, 1658), 28-29.

⁶⁶⁴ BL Add. MS 60168, fo. 36; *Works*, 3:490.

Through the example of Christ's empowerment, the Muggletonians's reference to their Commission as "the Third Commission of the Spirit" becomes clear. In this usage, the Spirit functioned for Reeve and Muggleton as a means of transferring the revelatory powers of the divine to various material agents, such as the incarnated Christ, the Apostles, or themselves. In *A General Epistle from the Holy Spirit* (1653), John Reeve stressed that this direct and antinomian inspiration was superior to the existing ministries of England "taken up by your natural wit from the Letter of the Scripture." The Holy Spirit, "enables us to answer all needful spiritual questions of the deep things of God for the consolation of the elect and the condemnation of the Reprobate."⁶⁶⁵ This consolation was the "two-edged sword" that the Lord gave to Reeve during the bestowing of the commission in Reeve's bedroom back in 1651 so that "whoever I pronounced blessed through thy mouth is blessed to eternity and whoever I pronounced cursed through thy mouth is cursed to eternity."⁶⁶⁶ Thus if there was one way in which the Muggletonians allowed the Spirit to continue to function apart from the divine body as a form of inspiration, a means of continuing revelation and soteriological empowerment. However, even this was ultimately a limited concession to the solvent capabilities of the Spirit since the revelations of the Third Commission were limited solely to Reeve and Muggleton. Reeve and Muggleton continually stressed that theirs is the "last" commission, effectively closing the door of continuing revelation behind them.

The Muggletonians embodied theology allowed them to deny the existence of incorporeal spirit and, like Hobbes's materialism, drained the soteriological anxieties out from religion. For the metaphysical corporealists, the body of God became a container for divinity, important for political symbolism and a model for the operations of the material world, but inaccessibly transcendent and removed from everyday life. Both parties targeted concepts such as hell, ghosts, and witches in an attempt to end the fearful role that spirit played in the lives of early moderns. Their peculiar materialism attempted to disenchant religion while maintaining God as a meaningful concept for religious life and political order.

As early as 1657, John Reeve and Muggleton had explicitly targeted the spiritual migration of souls after death. In *Joyful News from Heaven* they trumpeted mortalist beliefs as central to the Muggletonians' doctrine. Reeve proclaimed, "man's spirit and body is but only one undivided living and dying essence."⁶⁶⁷ When the body died, the human person fell into a natural mordant sleep in which the soul was "shut close prisoner in its body" and ceased the motional existence that gave rise to thought and will. Reeve stressed that soul was centered upon the body and was "essentially one with its body" since the human being was produced naturally as an inseparable composite of sensible and corporeal life.⁶⁶⁸ Like God, the spiritual qualities of mankind were locked within the body. Corporeal containment precluded the idea of some sort spiritual transfer of qualities. The soul did not move beyond the body. In this variant of mortalism, the soul did not so much die as it was contained within the body for a period of spiritual regeneration. As the sensible part of the body-soul required sleep during life, so the soul required "death sleeping," a form of rest that anticipated the general resurrection of the faithful.⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶⁵ Reeve and Muggleton, *General Epistle*, 2, 5.

⁶⁶⁶ Reeve, *Transcendent Spiritual Treatise*, 5.

⁶⁶⁷ Reeve and Muggleton, *Joyful News from Heaven*, 5.

⁶⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 31, 38.

Eventually, at an unspecified date in the future God would descend from heaven to gather the saints and create a new heaven of the saved. Here was the single moment of spiritual transmutation as “those saints whose bodies were corrupt shall at their resurrection have spiritual bodies.”⁶⁷⁰ But even at the end of the world the emphasis on corporeality was maintained. The reprobate, those who did not believe in the divine body of God would simply be stuck within their material bodies. There was not a movement of fallen souls to hell, but rather “flesh and bone is the fuel of Hell,” as the damned were simply denied access to the divine person and remained “barred close prisoner within their bodies.”⁶⁷¹ What this entailed, however, was an emptying of spirit from the world at present. The idea of a spiritually enriched world where souls left their material envelopes and moved to unite with God was dismissed as Ranterish justifications of perfectionism. There was a day of resurrection in the future. However until then, the soul was wholly “fixed to the body.” Souls were not moving to various spiritual planes of salvation and reprobation. They were contained within the spatial forms of bodies; the world was devoid of incorporeal spirit.

After Reeve’s death Muggleton built upon this disenchanting corporealism to argue that witchcraft, ghosts, and the fear of the divine spirit were simply manipulations of human fears. For Muggleton, witchcraft and the perception of maleficium, diabolically motivated magic and supernaturalism, were better understood as a type of spiritual bewitchment, a false consciousness of sorts. By believing that the divine spiritually permeated the world in transgressive ways, people enacted an internal mental process within the consciousness by which they entrapped themselves within spiritualist errors. Through this spiritualist bewitchment, individuals and groups became caught up in a broader ideological deception, unable to comprehend the situation in which they were involved. This was addressed at length in Muggleton’s 1669 *A True Interpretation of the Witch of Endor*, in which Muggleton glossed at length upon the biblical story of King Saul’s attempt to raise the spirit of the deceased prophet Samuel. Muggleton claimed that witchcraft was part of the broader spiritualist error that allowed for spirits to exist without bodies. Believers “suppose the true God to be an infinite spirit” and they conclude that the devil is a spirit that “assumeth bodies or what shape he pleaseth.” There were of course, no such things as incorporeal spirits, only an internal process in the mind that Muggleton called “the devil in themselves.” Bewitchment however hinged upon the conscious decision to believe that incorporeal spirits existed. Belief in the incorporeal gave credence to what was simply a flaw in human imagination.⁶⁷² The witch of Endor in the Old Testament was simply a huckster, but one so committed to her delusion that she believed her own sleight of hand.⁶⁷³

This was a populist deployment of materialist disenchantment. The basis for determining whether sound belief remained the charismatic, sectarian prophecies of Muggleton and Reeve. Yet the Muggletonian interpretation of Christian religion fits awkwardly in the historiography of

⁶⁷⁰ BL Add. MS 60190, fo. 149.

⁶⁷¹ BL Add. MS 60171, fo. 30.

⁶⁷² Lodowick, Muggleton, *A True Interpretation of the Witch of Endor* (London, 1669), 4-5.

⁶⁷³ This paralleled the religious claims made by spiritualists, such as John Robins’s “spiritual witchcraft” and the “nonsensical” visions had by Quakers “hearkening to the light within them.” Muggleton, *Witch of Endor*, 6-8.

“enthusiasm” and “radical” religion.⁶⁷⁴ It is an instance of disenchantment being put to the use of religious radicals, a historical moment when prophetic enthusiasts decried the radical ideas usually considered to be the very basis for religious enthusiasm.

Naturally, a materialist like Hobbes shared in this corporealist critique. He agreed with the idea of the mortal soul, writing that it was not apparent in scripture that “the soul of man is in its own nature eternal, and a living creature independent on the body.” For Hobbes, the soul meant “either the life or the living creature; and the body and soul jointly, the body alive.” As with the Mugglestonians, Hobbes felt it was this idea of spiritual mobility, that the soul could move beyond the body, that “gives entrance to the dark doctrine first of eternal torments; and afterwards of purgatory, and consequently of walking abroad, especially in places consecrated, solitary, or cark of the ghosts of men deceased.” Separating the soul from the body was the basis of all manner of fears. Chief of these was the idea of spiritual salvation or reprobation in which the soul of every person was forced to exist somewhere outside of the body somewhere “by virtue of its own nature.”⁶⁷⁵ This led mankind to exist in a general fear of a spiritualized world. In addition their own material concerns, man was forced to worry over the implications of his actions and beliefs in regards to a spiritual realm. This had direct political implications. Belief in spirits, what Hobbes called “daemonology” was the basis by which mankind was easily hoodwinked into any number of beliefs or actions that tended toward the enervation of the Christian commonwealth. In his chapter on the causes of the commonwealth’s weakness, Hobbes stressed that the political machinations of divines had led to manipulations of religious sentiment. He writes:

When the spiritual power moveth the members of a commonwealth, by the terror of punishments, and hope of rewards (which are the nerves of it,) otherwise than by the civil power (which is the soul of the Commonwealth) they ought to be moved; and, by strange and hard words, suffocates their understanding, it must needs thereby distract the people, and either overwhelm the commonwealth with oppression, or cast it into the fire of a civil war.⁶⁷⁶

It was the hopes and fears of things unseen, the idea of the spirit, that undermined the political foundations of the Leviathan.

Given this broader materialism, Hobbes suggested spiritual scriptural references be interpreted metaphorically. Hell and eternal torment were “spoken metaphorically” to signify the grief and discontent of mind that disbelievers experienced “from the sight of that eternal felicity in others.” (*Leviathan*, 314) Just as the Holy Spirit was a linguistic signification for the grace and blessing of God, diabolism could be interpreted as a natural process: “by the entering of Satan may be understood the wicked cogitations and designs of the adversaries of Christ.” (443) When

⁶⁷⁴ See: J. G. A. Pocock, “Enthusiasm – The Antiself of Enlightenment,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 60, (1997): 18; Michael Heyd, “*Be Sober and Reasonable*”: *The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Century* (Brill: Leiden, 1995), 42; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Oxford, 1997), 148-150; Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason: The Modern Foundations of Body and Soul* (New York: Norton, 2003), 305-307.

⁶⁷⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 310, 426.

⁶⁷⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 227-228. Also, see: Benjamin Milner, “Hobbes on Religion,” *Political Theory* 16 (1988): 416.

these ideas were given ontological status as materially real, they became religious idols. These idols of the brain were the means by which mankind bewitched itself with the “representations of their own fancies.” It bestowed a divine inhabitation upon a mental image and thereby removed their adherence to a single political standard, God’s external and personated sovereignty. Being in the brain, these idols were specific to each person and so idolatry risked allowing a person to govern himself “according to his own appetite, to the utter aversion of the Commonwealth.” (446) Hobbes’s materialist daemonology thus combined with his personated divinity to wield broad functions of disenchantment. He maintained religion as a structural support of the commonwealth while evacuating its destabilizing tendencies via ecclesiastical claims to sovereignty (popes and presbyters) and the democratizing impulse of spiritualist inspiration.⁶⁷⁷ The authority constituted by faith was made historically distant from the individual believer. It existed in a Trinity that had existed in time and was ontologically removed from the present. This form of disenchantment did not end religion, but it ended all claims of spirituality that might exist beyond the localized institutions of the magisterial church. Lacking a personal basis to make spiritual claims, one could only rely upon God’s representatives.

Conclusion

Reeve and Muggleton were men of their time: enthusiastic, suspicious of Protestant orthodoxies, and operating within a language of prophetic pronouncement that was common in London during the English Revolution. In so far as they considered religious knowledge as derived from the Holy Spirit’s interpretative powers, the Muggletonians were similar to other sectarian groups that relied on religious inspiration to support their claims. Writing to Cromwell, the Prophets stressed that “none can interpret the holy Scriptures that are so mysterious according to the mind of God, except he that is endued with the infallible spirit of inspiration.”⁶⁷⁸ However, unlike other revolutionary sects, the Muggletonians refused to extend the functions of the Spirit beyond this limited revelation to the Prophets. They cannot be grouped within Pocock’s wider definition of intellectual enthusiasm, which “might denote any intellectual system of the universe in which the mind was of the same substance as the universe it apprehended.”⁶⁷⁹ Indeed, as we have seen, the Muggletonians leveled a variation of this definition against rival spiritualist sects. They painted the pantheistic error of radical spiritualism as part of a broader ideology that was dangerously enmeshed in the intellectual fabric of early modern England.

The Muggletonians were part of a larger discourse that was negotiating the boundaries of the spirit, a debate over the limits of divinity’s influence over the world and the nature of materiality as it functioned in and around the activities of the spirit. Unlike the spiritualists, “the generation deceived called Ranters,” Muggleton and Reeve refused to see the world as in union with God. Rather, through the hyperlocalization of the divine, they considered the ontological and political

⁶⁷⁷ See Roberto Farnetti, “Hobbes on Salvation,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes’s Leviathan*, ed. Patricia Springborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 291-308.

⁶⁷⁸ Reeve and Muggleton, *Remonstrance*, 5.

⁶⁷⁹ Pocock, “Enthusiasm,” 18.

functions of the Spirit as unreachably distant from the material world.⁶⁸⁰ So the Muggletonians were not just another variety of “tavern-style worship” that emerged amid the splintering of England’s ecclesiastical state. Rather, their ideas represent a materialist tension within the religious radicalism of the mid seventeenth-century, a reaction to a historically specific idea about God and the indwelling spirit. Thus if we understand the Muggletonians as part of a long sectarianism of the late-seventeenth century, then they should be read not only as a counterpoint to the radicalism of the 1640s and 1650s, but also in opposition to a loose collection of spiritualist ideas that emerged from the tumult of the Revolution. In so doing, the Muggletonians persisted as a materialist strand of religious thought into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a strand that sought to constrain the idea of “the infinite spirit” and contain the immanent nature of God and his relationship to the created world.⁶⁸¹

This chapter has compared these ideas with Hobbes’s theories of divine personation as means of normalizing Muggletonian radicalism within a broader metaphysical corporealism, the idea that God’s body served as a model for an historically specific form of epistemology and ontology. These ideas stressed that the world could only be understood through discrete packages of material meaning, bodies in which spiritualized matter was contained and evident to the senses. The Muggletonians’ main prophetic and theological efforts were, like Hobbes, to anchor the spirit within an ontologically-prior materiality. The idea of the “person” served as a ready means of comprehending the divine, an argument that deployed the very foundational structures of Christian theology through the idea of the body of Christ. The English metaphysical corporealists of the mid seventeenth-century thus extended the idea of the Incarnation into a broader “bodyism” that not only contained the political dangers of radical spiritualism, but provided a means of understanding concepts such as the infinite, the soul, and the nature of the world.

More importantly, metaphysical corporealism represented a new way of prioritizing the body in late-seventeenth century religious thought. By stressing the corporeal nature of the divine, this peculiar materialism inverted the emphasis of the traditional Aristotelian conception of the body/soul/spirit relationship. The physical form held ontological priority over the spiritual or immaterial element of the person. In printed works, pastoral letters, and polemical attacks, the Muggletonians continuously described the human body as the means by which divinity, personhood, and the cosmos were organized into distinctive self-contained units of meaning and value. Furthermore, without the body it was impossible to understand questions of Christian religion and the mysteries of the soul, salvation, and creation. Bodies thus provided the means by which both the divine and the everyday world was made comprehensible to the human mind. This corporeality, not only represented an extreme anthropomorphism of the divine, it also laid a broader emphasis on the human body as a source for understanding religious concepts and the broader world. The Muggletonians should be read in the context of other materialist efforts to disenchant spiritualist religion and reorient human knowledge toward the problems of the body.

There is then within the Muggletonian theology an intellectual orientation that considered the knowledge of God and the true interpretation of the world as requiring a form of lived corporeal

⁶⁸⁰ BL Add. MS 60171, fo. 91.

⁶⁸¹ Indeed, the Third Commission had adherents into the twentieth century, see E. P. Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 116; William Lamont, *Last Witnesses: The Muggletonian History, 1652-1979* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 213-226.

experience. This was evident from the very start of the Muggletonian Commission. During his first conversations with Christ in 1651, Reeve was told that his own body was the basis for understanding the nature of things divine. Christ commanded Reeve, “Look into thy own body, there thou shall see the kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of Hell.”⁶⁸² Other radicals had claimed that divine knowledge could be obtained from the body, however such claims were designed to stress a divine singularity, which united God with his material creation.⁶⁸³ Reeve and Muggleton shared in the language of these radical epistemologies, but were making much different conclusions.

By adhering so strictly to a corporeal theology that localized divinity in the body of God and made bodies the mode by which matters theological were understood, the Muggletonians remained pre-modern in terms of their language and content. However, the manner by which they used the body as a means of experience and a locus of proof hints towards a rejection of the spirit as a means of understanding the world. Moreover, by reacting against contemporary forms of radical spiritualism, the Muggletonians articulated a form of religious materialism that made the body ontologically prior to the soul and spirit. It was a cosmology that was extremely suspicious of “things unseen” and was the means by which they dismissed sectarian rivals as populist mountebanks. Bodies provided the burden of proof by which we can recognize the true work of the divine. A product of their specific historical circumstances, Muggletonian ideas about the body of God, the transference of divinity to Elias, and their broader materialism was a reaction to the radical spiritualism of the late 1640s and early 1650s. It is no surprise that the Muggletonian sect arose when it did, at the height of the spiritual inundation of early modern England.

The Muggletonians and Hobbes were both reactions to what Susan Schreiner has called “the Great Age of the Spirit,” a period that saw widespread attempts to ground certainty within individual relationships to the divine.⁶⁸⁴ The metaphysical corporealism of the 1650s provided an alternative form of certainty, grounded in the recognition of a “personal God.” The body of God became a standard of religious knowledge that was external to the believer. The shared corporeal structure of the body linked Creator and created. The divine remained recognizable through the shared experience of embodiment, providing an epistemic foundation for religious worship. But by preempting claims to shared divinity, corporeal religion curtailed the dangers of theosophy and spiritual immanence. For both Hobbes and the Muggletonians, the only framework for understanding the divine was the material world itself.

⁶⁸² Reeve, *Transcendent Spiritual Treatise*, 5.

⁶⁸³ Christopher Hill, “John Reeve and the Origins of Muggletonianism,” in *The World of the Muggletonians* (London: Temple Smith, 1983), 74.

⁶⁸⁴ Susan Schreiner, *Are You Alone Wise?: The Search for Certainty in the Early Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 83.

Conclusion

Welcome is every organ and attribute of me, and of any man hearty and
clean,
Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none shall be less familiar
than the rest.
(Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," 3. 20-22)

The cultural distance we must travel to get from the self-abnegating vegetarianism of Roger Crab or the populist spiritualism of Joseph Salmon or the alchemical speculations of Thomas Vaughan, to someone like Whitman extends beyond the boundaries of this study. But roughly between 1640 and 1715, English religious and intellectual culture traversed a significant portion of this space. The movement was, in part, energized by the efforts of thinkers that ostensibly appear in opposition to the sentiment of Whitman, whose ecstatic verse is a full-throated celebration of his own physicality and fleshly nature. On the surface, Whitman's desire to "sing the body electric" is a modern rejoinder to early modern anxieties about embodiment, worries manifested in such cultural expressions as Lawrence Clarkson's 1650 musing that "flesh become spirit" or Samuel Fisher's worry that society held increasing faith in "a casual concurrence of antic atoms" rather than the spiritual presence of God.⁶⁸⁵

This study has shown that the project of corporeal redemption, Christian interest in the reconstitution of the flesh into a saved body, functioned as the speculative mode by which many early modern Britons investigated the nature of matter. In the heightened eschatological environment of the English Revolution and its aftermath, the writings of the Ranters and the Quakers, the sectarians and the unorthodox, and scholars of all philosophical inclinations changed the intellectual ecology of seventeenth-century Britain. As William Poole has suggested, corporeal discourse often emerged within "a matrix of ideas generated in a theological project and then redeployed in and combined with a natural philosophical project."⁶⁸⁶ Just as scholars have recognized that orthodoxy and heterodox natural philosophy were not simple opposites, but closely intertwined, so philosophical and theological speculation worked in tandem to produce new ideas about corporeality and materiality.

Such oppositions, however, characterize the broad narrative of early modern cultural and intellectual history. In this story, beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, the pessimism and eschatological anxieties that characterized post-Reformation attitudes toward the world began to break. The idea that human nature was irredeemably fallen and removed from a transcendent God, as well as the belief that original sin resulted in the depravity of all people, began to wane. But by the end of the eighteenth-century, there was growing consensus that human sympathy, reason, and goodness could be cultivated and expanded in this material world. Stephen Greenblatt famously described this as an atomistic "swerve" from the transcendent-minded self-abnegation of the Christian mind to an enlightened embrace of materialist pleasure. Focus shifted

⁶⁸⁵ Samuel Fisher, *Rusticus ad Academicos in Exercitationibus Expostulatoriis, Apologeticis Quatnor. The Rustick's Alarm to the Rabbies: Or The Country Correcting the University* (London, 1660), Ex. 2. 111.

⁶⁸⁶ William Poole, "Francis Lodwick's Creation: Theology and Natural Philosophy in the Early Royal Society," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 66 (2005): 261-263.

from heavenly God to worldly man as high-minded intellectual luminaries redirected the purpose of science, society, and politics.⁶⁸⁷ Pleasure was no longer to be shunned as venal and ungodly. Man, though consisting of fallen, deteriorating flesh, became the physical and emotive center for infinite varieties of self-expression.⁶⁸⁸

Yet if the atom represents a conceptual swerve into modern materialism, it did not necessarily entail the evacuation of religious imperatives. Atomistic discourse could and did function within a broader religious matrix, one that remained fixated on the spiritual redemption of corporeal matter. If we indulge in one final example, we can see that the swerve of modernity was not linear change in direction, but rather an embrace of new forms of material complexity. Such was the nature of Thomas Traherne's philosophical efforts in the 1670s to unpack the relationship between God, man and atoms. Sometimes numbered among the "metaphysical poets" of the seventeenth century, Traherne been rediscovered as a source for theological and philosophical reflection in recently uncovered manuscripts.⁶⁸⁹ His worldview rested upon the concept of the "atom," a conceptual material entity.⁶⁹⁰ As the smallest unit of material stuff, atoms were the building block of matter, but they also provided conceptual flexibility between the concepts of immaterial spirit and corporeal matter.

Having grown up in royalist Hereford during the civil war and attended Brasenose College in Oxford (c. 1653-1656), then under puritan direction, Traherne came of age during the Revolution and was given a living at Credenhill outside Hereford in 1657. He conformed to the Restoration and was ordained in October of 1660.⁶⁹¹ In terms of material theology, Traherne was committed to overturning the idea that the body was a material hindrance to the soul's higher intelligible functions: "we shall repel that opinion as a vulgar error, that makes [the body] the impediment and prison of the mind, and looking on it as a glorious instrument and companion of the soul."⁶⁹² His most eloquent conjectures were written in an unpublished manuscript entitled *The Kingdom of God*, likely composed between 1669 and 1674.⁶⁹³ "The matter of the world is only corporeal,"

⁶⁸⁷ Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011).

⁶⁸⁸ Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason* (New York: Norton, 2003), 3-27.

⁶⁸⁹ J. B. Leishman, *The Metaphysical Poets: Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Traherne* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934); Helen C. White, *The Metaphysical Poets: A Study in Religious Experience* (New York: Collier, 1936). For a review of Traherne studies and manuscript discoveries, see Elizabeth S. Dodd, *Boundless Innocence in Thomas Traherne's Poetic Theology: 'Were all Men Wise and Innocent...'* (Ashgate, Surrey: 2016), 2-12.

⁶⁹⁰ Indeed, Traherne's entry on atoms in his unfinished religious encyclopedia, *Commentaries of Heaven*, was the lengthiest in the unfinished work; Thomas Traherne, *Commentaries of Heaven*, in *Works of Thomas Traherne*, ed. Jan Ross (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007), 3:333-363.

⁶⁹¹ Dodd, *Boundless Innocence*, 5-6.

⁶⁹² Traherne, *Seeds of Eternity or the Nature of the Soul*, in *Works of Thomas Traherne*, ed. Jan Ross (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), 1:240.

⁶⁹³ "Kingdom of Heaven," contained in Lambeth Palace Library MS 1360 was identified as belonging to Thomas Traherne in 1997. His manuscript work was put into print between 2005 and 2014. See Jan Ross, "Introduction," in *The Works of Thomas Traherne*, ed. Jan Ross (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), 1:xiii-xiv, xix-xxi

he wrote, “but things spiritual may be the matter of God’s kingdom.” The spiritual realm of God, though it was divine and ethereal, was still made from “palpable matter.”⁶⁹⁴ Traherne’s accounting of the universe, *Kingdom of God* was intended to reconcile God’s invisible, metaphysical existence with the material world through the better understanding of the nature of matter itself. The material world around us was, Traherne argued, “the center of our union, and the sphere of our communion with God.” As Elizabeth Dodd and Cassandra Gorman have recently pointed out, Traherne believed the transcendence of God required not only scripturally-based doctrine and worship, but a process of “coming to the matter” itself. His theology was predicated upon understanding “the material experience of the here and now.”⁶⁹⁵

The central question was how the various dichotomies of matter and spirit, man and God merged into a single divinized universe. Atoms were not purely physical particles, but rather were the “medius terminus” between matter and immaterial substance. In *Commentaries of Heaven*, Traherne’s atom entry described atoms as material, but incorporeal: “Since the essence of body is to be extended, and to have parts out of parts, an atom can be no body, because it has not its three dimensions.” Given infinite smallness, an atom was “matter incorporeal.” It was a “material spirit” that functioned as “the mean or clasp between immaterial spirits and material bodies.”⁶⁹⁶ Traherne conceived atoms as the material concept that proved the possibility of Christian redemption. As the basic particle of matter, atoms were indivisible—“the last and utmost particles into which any body can be divided.” He speculated that the resilience of particles enabled the corporeal resurrection promised in the Bible: despite the dissolution of bodies, atoms could be reconstituted to “make the same individual that was before.” The combination of atoms, their movement into each other, their flux into and out of corporeal pores, their combination into texture and surface, their division and collision, all this constituted the material operations of the world. They were, Traherne provocatively wrote, “more necessary to us than the existence of angels.” Traherne thus described the atom as the representation of God, “a mirror of his essence,” and the conceptual ligature that bound matter with spirit, as well as finite man with the infinite divine.⁶⁹⁷

The poet synthesized this atomistic materialism with Neoplatonic spiritual tropes, describing the universe as vast macrocosmic system of diastolic and systolic circulation. He illustrated this world by charting the possible course of a single atom. Beginning in a grain of sand, an atom might dissolve in water, and be carried into the earth, where it was absorbed through the roots of a blade of grass. Within the plant, it was consumed by a beast, carried into its flesh, and then eaten by man. The atom might then be exhaled and be evaporated into steam, carried thence by the currents of the air upwards into sky, the cosmos, and perhaps into the sun. “For ought we know,” marveled Traherne, the atom might be absorbed “into that fiery vortex, glittering there and assisting as a part of that flaming globe.” It might become a beam of light that traveled to other stars or perhaps back to earth, where it might mingle within an oyster and come to help

⁶⁹⁴ Thomas Traherne, *The Kingdom of God*, ed. Jan Ross (D. S. Brewer, Cambridge: 2005), 1:341.

⁶⁹⁵ Elizabeth S. Dodd and Cassandra Gorman, “Introduction,” in *Thomas Traherne and Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2016), 1:2-4.

⁶⁹⁶ Traherne, *Commentaries of Heaven*, 3.350-351.

⁶⁹⁷ Traherne also described atoms as “a physical monad” and the passive “seed of corporeity.” Traherne, *Kingdom of God*, 1:342-45, 347-48.

constitute, over time, a pearl which might be harvested to become a necklace or advance to the scepter of a king. Traherne concluded the matter was “deeply entangled.”⁶⁹⁸

That entanglement made the corporeal body a worthy vessel of God’s redemption. As the bearer of material organs and senses, mankind was subject to the infinite variety of atomistic interactions that constituted the world. Corporeality did not distance one from a perfect, immaterial, spiritual existence. Rather, it enabled a material richness otherwise inaccessible to an immaterial divinity. Here we see the routinization of Christian eschatology into a new materialist paradigm—the adaptation and recreation of corporeal redemption amid changing scientific and philosophical discourse. This was evident in Traherne’s comments about human love. Sensations, both pleasurable and painful, were produced by the interaction of corporeal organs with the material particles of an external object. Sweetness, for example, was “not inherent in the matter... but in the organ itself.” Humanity rested at the subjective intersection of these encounters. Humans had bodies upon which affections could impress feelings. When a human felt the experience of love, the reaction was necessarily physical:

It appears in the eyes and beautifies the cheeks, inspires the lips and speaks in the tongue, governs the hands and dances in the feet, boils in the blood and warms in the spirits, enflames the liver, and resting in the heart, so cheers the same that it impresses new motions in all the veins and spreads comforts over all the body. For if this be the nature of earthly love which, however material its object be, is spiritual in its essence, then how much greater power and force may we conceive divine love to be.⁶⁹⁹

This materialized schema was the basis of Traherne’s optimistic soteriology. Within the material swarms of atomistic entanglement, there were new possibilities for idealizing the body. Man was the atomistic, corporeal vessel of experience. He was the material metaphor for divine love. His body was crucial.

⁶⁹⁸ Traherne, *Kingdom of God*, 1:349-50, 355.

⁶⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 485-87, 489.

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