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A WOMAN’S INFLUENCE?

JOHN LOCKE AND DAMARIS MASHAM

ON MORAL ACCOUNTABILITY

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Abstract

Some scholars suggest that John Locke’s revisions to the chapter “Of Power” for the 1694 second edition of his *Essay concerning Human Understanding* may be indebted to the Cambridge Platonist, Ralph Cudworth. Their claims rest on evidence that Locke may have had access to Cudworth’s unpublished manuscript treatises on free will. In this paper, I examine an alternative suggestion – the claim that Cudworth’s daughter, Damaris Cudworth Masham, and not Cudworth himself, may have exerted an influence on Locke’s revisions. I discuss the plausibility of this claim in light of the relevant historical and textual evidence.

In a 1705 letter to the poet Elizabeth Thomas, Richard Gwinnett offers his considered opinion on ‘a little Posthumous Treatise of Mr. Locke’. Gwinnett observes that the work is ‘nothing inferiour to the more elaborate Works of that ingenious author, except in the

Stile, which is sometimes perplexed, and in many Places forced and stiff'.¹ Notwithstanding this criticism, Gwinnett remarks that 'what in my opinion deserves the highest Praise, is the principal Design of the Book, which is to recommend the Improvement of the Fair Sex, by a more ingenious and learned Education than is now customary, or even commendable among them'.² For Locke scholars, it will come as no surprise to hear that Locke never wrote a defence of women's education. Although the work in question was issued under Locke's name in 1747, the treatise is in fact Damaris Cudworth Masham's *Occasional Thoughts in Reference to a Vertuous or Christian Life* (1705).³ Lady Masham (1659-1708) was one of Locke's closest friends in the later years of his life. The daughter of the Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth (1617-88), Masham grew up among philosophers and theologians at Cambridge University, and later became a philosopher herself, and the correspondent of many leading intellectuals of the day. Masham and Locke probably first met in London in about 1681, when she was in her early twenties and he was already 'past the middle age of Man'.⁴ Although the full details are obscure, their early attachment seems to have been a romantic one. When Locke went into exile in 1683, the couple exchanged letters on a range of topics, from general town gossip to philosophical discussions of Locke's early abridgment of the *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. In 1685, Masham married a member of Parliament, Sir Francis Masham, and left Cambridge for the Masham family estate of

¹ Richard Gwinnett to Elizabeth Thomas, 2 June 1705; in Elizabeth Thomas and Richard Gwinnett, *Pylades and Corinna: or, Memoirs of the Lives, Amours, and Writings of Richard Gwinnett and Mrs Elizabeth Thomas* (London: Edmund Curl, 1731), p. 90.

² Thomas and Gwinnett, *Pylades and Corinna*, p. 92.

³ Masham's *Occasional Thoughts* was first attributed to Locke in Abel Boyer's *The History of the Reign of Queen Anne, Digested into Annals. Year the Third* (London: A. Roper, 1705), p. 262. In 1747, it appeared as *Thoughts on a Christian Life by John Locke, Esq.* (London: T. Waller, 1747).

⁴ Damaris Masham to Jean le Clerc, 12 January 1705; in the Amsterdam University Library (UvA), MS J.57.a.

‘Oates’, a Tudor manor house situated in Essex (about 25 miles north-east of London). Upon Locke’s return to England in 1689, he met with Lady Masham and her husband in London, and they invited him to make ‘a Tryal of the Air’ at their home. After a few extended visits, Locke made a permanent move to Oates in 1691, and from that time onwards Locke and Damaris Masham spent ‘many years almost constantly together’.⁵ Apart from occasional visits to London in the summer, Locke resided with Masham and her family till his death on 28 October 1704.

In his *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy* (1874), John Tulloch says that Masham ‘may be said by herself to deserve a niche in the history of English philosophy’.⁶ In her lifetime, Masham published two philosophical treatises, and Locke’s influence upon these works is unmistakable. In her earlier work, *A Discourse concerning the Love of God* (1696), Masham bases her criticisms of John Norris’s occasionalist philosophy upon Lockean epistemological principles; and this *Discourse* was also misattributed to Locke.⁷ In her *Occasional Thoughts* (a work that was written a year or so before Locke’s death), Masham also appeals to ‘that Knowledge immediately received from *Sense*, or

⁵ Damaris Masham to Jean le Clerc, 12 January 1705; in the Amsterdam University Library (UvA), MS J.57.a.

⁶ John Tulloch, *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in England in the Seventeenth Century: The Cambridge Platonists*, facsimile reprint of 1874 edition (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuhhandlung, 1966), 226.

⁷ Mary Astell and John Norris mistake Masham’s work for that of Locke: Astell in her *The Christian Religion, As Profess’d by a Daughter Of The Church of England. In a Letter to the Right Honourable, T.L. C.I.* (London: R. Wilkin, 1705), and Norris in his *Practical Discourses upon several Divine Subjects* (London: S. Manship, 1698), vol. IV. Although Masham’s *Discourse* was published anonymously in 1696, a French translation by Pierre Coste appeared in 1705 prefaced with an epistle to ‘Madame Masham’. In this letter to Masham, Coste does not identify Masham as the author, but he does broadly hint that ‘in describing the character of this piece of work, I have almost given the portrait of your own spirit, in which these qualities shine so brightly that no amount of modesty could possibly hide them from those who have the honour of your presence’; *Discours sur L’Amour Divin ... Traduit de l’Anglois par Pierre Coste* (Amsterdam: Pierre de Coup, 1715), sig. 3r-v (my translation).

Reflection’;⁸ and elsewhere in the text, she explicitly acknowledges a debt to Locke’s *Reasonableness of Christianity*, and his *Thoughts concerning Education*.⁹ In a short correspondence with the German philosopher, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, from 1703-4, Masham upholds a Lockean position on substances, and articulates something like Locke’s theory of ‘thinking matter’. In all her intellectual writings, as one scholar says, Masham was an ‘ardent exponent’ of Locke’s ideas.¹⁰

In this paper, however, rather than look at Locke’s influence on Masham, I propose to turn the tables and examine whether or not Masham might have influenced *him*. Some scholars assert that Masham had an impact upon the early drafting of Locke’s *Essay*. Ruth Perry claims that ‘There is evidence to suggest that Locke partially worked out the materialist epistemology of the *Essay concerning Human Understanding* in reaction to the Platonist arguments of Damaris Cudworth’.¹¹ And Sarah Hutton likewise observes that ‘it is not ... too fanciful to suggest that Lady Masham’s comments may have had some impact on the full exposition of Locke’s philosophy contained in the *Essay*’.¹² The evidence in question includes Masham’s letters to Locke on enthusiasm in John Smith’s essay ‘On the True Way or Method of Attaining to Divine Knowledge’ in his *Select Discourses* (1660),¹³ as well as Masham’s later comments on the *Abregé*, in

⁸ Damaris Masham, *Occasional Thoughts in Reference to a Vertuous or Christian Life* (London: A. and J. Churchil, 1705), p. 61.

⁹ Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, pp. 109, 185, and 196.

¹⁰ Ada Wallas, *Before the Bluestockings* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1929), p. 95.

¹¹ Ruth Perry, ‘Radical Doubt and the Liberation of Women’, *Eighteenth Century Studies* 18, no. 4 (1985): 483.

¹² Sarah Hutton, ‘Damaris Cudworth, Lady Masham: Between Platonism and Enlightenment’, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 1 (1993), n. 72, p. 47.

¹³ In an early letter, dated 1 April 1682, Damaris challenges Locke to find fault with Smith’s essay; and Locke, in turn, spells out a distinction between real knowledge and Smith’s kind of ‘enthusiasm’, which can never ‘by any means be taken for knowledge’. See Damaris Cudworth (later Masham) to John Locke, 1 April 1682, and John Locke to Damaris Cudworth (later Masham), [6 April 1682?]; in *The Correspondence of John Locke*, edited by E. S. de Beer, 8 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976-82), nos. 695, 696.

which she draws comparisons between Locke and the Cambridge Platonists.¹⁴ But Masham's impact on Locke in these cases appears to be extremely minimal. In what follows, I concentrate instead on claims about a different chain of influence, from *Ralph Cudworth* to Masham to Locke, in the second edition of the *Essay* (1694). Some scholars suggest that Locke's revisions for the second edition may be indebted to Cudworth's unpublished manuscripts.¹⁵ Their claims rest on evidence that, through his connection with Masham, Locke may have had access to her father's treatises on free will. One scholar, Sarah Hutton, has recently taken the suggestion further by asking whether or not 'the apparent echoes of Cudworth' in Locke's revisions might possibly be 'the result of the impact not of Ralph, but Damaris'?¹⁶ The following discussion addresses this question. Is it plausible, we might ask, that Masham had any influence on Locke's revisions to the *Essay* during his time at Oates?

i.

First, from the available evidence, it is clear that Locke and Masham were remarkably close. In a 1690 letter to Masham, Locke says that he regards her as 'a sister or a daughter, or something nearer than those relations';¹⁷ and in a 1704 letter to Leibniz, Masham says of Locke that he 'has supply'd to me the Place of a Father and Brother'.¹⁸

¹⁴ Damaris Masham to John Locke, 7 April [1688]; in de Beer (ed.), *Correspondence of John Locke*, no. 1040, p. 433.

¹⁵ John Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth: An Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), p. 94; and Stephen Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought': 1640-1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 154.

¹⁶ Sarah Hutton, 'Like Father Like Daughter? The Moral Philosophy of Damaris Cudworth, Lady Masham', presented at the South Eastern meeting of the American Philosophical Association in Atlanta, 28-30 December 1996. I am very grateful to Dr. Hutton for providing me with a copy of her presentation, and for kindly granting permission to cite the paper here.

¹⁷ John Locke to Damaris Masham, 30 September 1690; in de Beer (ed.), *Correspondence*, no. 3122, p. 139.

¹⁸ Damaris Masham to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, 24 November 1704; in Niedersächsische

During his time at Oates, Locke provided both practical and intellectual assistance to Masham's writing career. Locke brought with him to Oates an extensive library of about 2000 books; and his presence in the Masham home attracted many distinguished visitors, including Isaac Newton, Francis Mercury van Helmont, and Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third earl of Shaftesbury. Locke's *Journals* reveal that, in addition to ribbons, cauliflower seeds, wine, pickled herring, and slippers, Locke purchased for Lady Masham a reading desk, several quires and reams of paper, bottles of ink, and numerous books on theological and philosophical subjects.¹⁹ He also paid for the binding of her books.

Locke, in turn, found in Lady Masham a willing participant in theological and philosophical discussions.²⁰ In a letter to Philippe van Limborch, dated 13 March 1691,

Landesbibliothek zu Hannover, MS 612, f. 16; and C. I. Gerhardt (ed.), *Die Philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz* (Berlin: Georg Olms Hildesheim, 1960), vol. III, p. 365.

¹⁹ Among the items that Locke records 'for my Lady Masham' are Simon Patrick's *The Devout Christian instructed how to Pray and give Thanks to God* (1694), Cicero's *De Officiis*, Charpentier's *Life of Socrates*, Richard Allestree's *The Whole Duty of Man* (1658), Peter King's *An Enquiry into the Constitution, Discipline, Unity and Worship of the Primitive Church* (1691), Pierre Gassendi's *Astronomia*, John Edwards' *A Farther Enquiry into Several Remarkable Texts of the Old and New Testament* (1694), and Matthew Smith's *A Philosophical Discourse of the Nature of Rational and Irrational Souls* (1695). The last item includes a discussion about Cudworth's views on the immortality of the soul. See Locke's journal entries, in Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Locke MS f.10, fols. 162, 174, 231, 265, 267, and 270. Locke also bought for Lady Masham Mary Astell's *Proposal to the Ladies* and Astell and John Norris's *Letters concerning the Love of God* – two works that seem to have had a notable impact on Masham's theories about the love of God and women's education (See Locke MS f. 10, fol. 251).

²⁰ On the occasion of the tercentenary of Locke's death, it is perhaps not inappropriate to make some mention of Masham's role as a caregiver in the last year of Locke's life. In a 1704 letter to Leibniz, Masham thanks the German philosopher for his medical advice, and says of Locke 'If I could contribute to the prolonging so valuable a life as his, I should think this one of the best uses I could ever make of my own' (Damaris Masham to Leibniz, 8 August 1704; in Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek zu Hannover, MS 612, f.13; and Gerhardt (ed.), *Die Philosophischen Schriften*, vol. III, p. 361). One year before Locke's death, Masham writes to Peter King that 'It is with great Greife I tell you that since you was Here our Deare Frd has manifestly declin'd in his Health. He says it; & it is visible to everie one. I am more Afflicted than I can tell you in the Apprehension that it is impossible for him to get thro this Winter' (Damaris Masham to Peter King, 7 November 1703; in King's College Modern Archive Centre, Cambridge, MS PP/87/42/3); and in a later letter to the third earl of Shaftesbury (dated 18 November 1705), it is likely that Masham refers to Locke when she alludes to 'that desperation I was in ... to see myself about to lose the Support of a Faithful and Wise Friend, respected by all who knew him' (Damaris Masham to Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third earl of Shaftesbury, 18 November 1705; in Public Record Office, London, MS 30/24/20, ff. 266-7). According to Pierre Coste, on the day that Locke died, Lady

Locke describes Masham as ‘a remarkably gifted woman’. ‘The lady herself,’ Locke says,

is so much occupied with study and reflection on theological and philosophical matters, that you could find few men with whom you might associate with greater profit and pleasure. Her judgment is singularly keen, and I know few men capable of discussing with such insight the most abstruse subjects, such as are beyond the grasp, I do not say of women, but even of the most educated men, and of resolving the difficulties they present.²¹

It is possible that Locke refers to Masham in a passage about the process of writing the *Reasonableness of Christianity*. ‘How much I was pleased with the growing Discovery, every Day,’ Locke says, ‘whilst I was employed in this search [of the Scriptures], I need not say’:

The Wonderful Harmony, that the farther I went, disclosed itself, tending to the same points, in all the parts of the sacred History of the Gospel, was of no small Weight with me and *another Person*, who every Day, from the beginning to the end of my search, saw the Progress of it, and knew at my first setting out, that I was

Masham had been quietly reading to him from the Psalms. To all reports, she was deeply grieved by his loss. On 17 November 1704, three weeks after Locke’s death, Damaris’s step-daughter Esther Masham writes to a former servant, Mrs Smith, that ‘Ever since his Death we have been in a continued hurry; for my Mother, not being able to settle her thoughts to anything, bustles about as much as she can, and I generally come in for one. Tho’ we could not expect his Life a great while, it did nevertheless surprize us. ... He is extremely regretted by every body’ (Esther Masham to Mrs Smith, 17 November 1704; ‘Copy of a Letter concerning Mr. Locke’s Death, written by Mrs. E. Masham (sister to ye first Lord Masham) to a Person who had been a Servant in the Family’; in the British Library, Add. MS 4311, fol. 143.

ignorant whither it would lead me; and therefore, every Day, asked me what more the Scripture had taught me.²²

It is extremely likely that this other person is Masham. From Locke's correspondence, we know that Masham had a keen interest in the theological writings of Locke's friends Limborch and Isaac Newton. And according to Pierre Coste, on the day that Locke dies, Masham had been quietly reading to him from the Psalms.

There is ample evidence, then, that Masham was a close companion of John Locke, that she shared his philosophical and religious interests, and that she was in a position to converse with him on an almost daily basis for more than a decade. To determine that Masham exerted an intellectual influence on Locke, however, we need to establish much more than these mere biographical details. History, after all, is full of examples of women who were essential helpmeets and confidantes to great male intellectuals. But it is an entirely different question whether or not we ought to attribute to these women any influence on the key philosophical themes of these men. To address this question with reference to Masham, we need to identify those views that she may have held independently of Locke, and then assess the possible impact of those ideas on Locke's works.

It would be beyond the scope of this paper to examine each and every possible trace of Masham's influence on Locke's revisions during his time at Oates. This period, from 1691 till Locke's death in 1704, was one of the most intellectually productive times

²¹ John Locke to Philippe van Limborch, 13 March 1691; in de Beer (ed.), *Correspondence of John Locke*, no. 1375, p. 237.

of Locke's career. In addition to his revisions to the *Essay*, Locke published the first, second, and third editions of his *Thoughts concerning Education* (1693, 1695 and 1699), as well as *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695; second edition, 1696), the first and second *Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695 and 1697), and his three replies to Edward Stillingfleet (1697-8). Locke also worked on various other manuscripts that appeared in print only after his death. From 1692, Locke began revisions for the second edition of the *Essay*, which was published in May 1694. For this edition, he wrote a new chapter 'Of Identity and Diversity' (II.xxvii), and made significant changes to the chapter 'Of Power' (II.xxi). For the fourth edition, which appeared in 1700, Locke added two new chapters: one 'Of Enthusiasm' (IV.xix) and the other 'Of the Association of Ideas' (II.xxxiii). These and other differences between the various editions from 1689 to 1706 reveal significant changes and developments in Locke's thinking. But here I concentrate exclusively on whether or not it is plausible that Masham had any influence on Locke's revisions to book 2, chapter 21 of the *Essay*, the chapter entitled 'Of Power'.

ii.

I begin by examining the possible influence of Masham's father, Ralph Cudworth, on Locke's revisions to this chapter. Several scholars have examined various connections between Locke and Cudworth.²³ Despite their radically different views about innate

²² John Locke, *A Second Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity & c, by the author of the Reasonableness of Christianity* (London: A. and J. Churchill, and Edward Castle, 1697), 'A Preface to the Reader' (unnumbered page); my italics.

²³ See, for example, Robert L. Armstrong, 'Cambridge Platonists and Locke on Innate Ideas', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 30, no. 2 (1969): 187-202; Michael Ayers, 'Mechanism, Superaddition, and the Proof of God's Existence in Locke's Essay', *The Philosophical Review* 90 (1981): 210-51; Roland Hall, 'New Words and Antedatings from Cudworth's "Treatise of Freewill"', *Notes and Queries* 7 (1960): 427-32; and G.A.J. Rogers, 'Locke, Newton, and the Cambridge Platonists on Innate Ideas', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40, no. 2 (1979): 191-205.

ideas, the two philosophers have much in common: both are supporters of toleration, both uphold the importance of a faith grounded in reason, and they are both hostile toward enthusiasm and superstition. Locke makes explicit reference to Cudworth's major work, the *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678), in his *Journal*,²⁴ his *Thoughts concerning Education*,²⁵ and his third response to Stillingfleet.²⁶ In addition, as John Passmore observes, Locke seems to develop his *Essay* argument for the existence of God 'with one eye on Cudworth's book'.²⁷

When Cudworth first published his *Intellectual System* in 1678, he told his readers that he had intended to publish two more parts along with the confutation of atheism contained in that work.²⁸ The two books aimed to show, first, that there is a 'Natural, Eternal, and Immutable Justice, or Morality'; and, second, that 'we have some Liberty, or Power over our own Actions'.²⁹ These works were never published in Cudworth's lifetime. The first, which is taken to be his *Treatise concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, was not published until 1731; and the second, comprised of several draft manuscripts on free will, was first published (only in part) in 1838.³⁰ But this has not

²⁴ 'Excerpts from Journals', 18 February 1682; in R.I. Aaron and Jocelyn Gibb (eds.), *An Early Draft of Locke's Essay* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), p. 118.

²⁵ Locke writes that 'He that would look further back, and acquaint himself with the several Opinions of the Ancients, may consult Dr. Cudworth's *Intellectual System*; wherein that very learned Author hath with such Accurateness and Judgment collected and explained the Opinions of the Greek Philosophers, better to be seen in him, than any where else that I know'; John Locke, *Some Thoughts concerning Education* (London: Awnsham and John Churchill, 1693), p. 231.

²⁶ John Locke, 'Mr. Locke's Reply to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Worcester's Answer to his Second Letter', in *The Works of John Locke*, facsimile reprint of 1794 ninth edition, 9 vols. (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1997), vol III, pp. 281, 477. Locke appeals to Cudworth's distinction between faith and certainty, and his observations on pre-Christian beliefs about the soul.

²⁷ Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth*, p. 91.

²⁸ Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe: The First Part; Wherein, All the Reason and Philosophy Of Atheism is Confuted; And Its Impossibility Demonstrated*, facsimile reprint of 1678 edition (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1964), 'The Preface', sig. A4v.

²⁹ Cudworth, *True Intellectual System*, 'The Preface', sig. *r.

³⁰ Ralph Cudworth, *A Treatise of Freewill*, edited by John Allen (London: John W. Parker, 1838). The unpublished manuscripts can be found in the British Library, Add. MSS 4978-82. Four additional

deterred some scholars from asserting that Locke's *Essay* is indebted to Cudworth's manuscripts. In his 1951 intellectual biography, *Ralph Cudworth*, John Passmore argues that the chapter 'Of Power' in the first edition of Locke's *Essay* seems to be influenced by Cudworth's rejection of faculty psychology in the treatises on free will.³¹ Then, in his 1995 work on *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought'*, Stephen Darwall argues that Locke's debt to Cudworth extends beyond his rejection of faculty psychology, to his revised views on liberty and will in the second edition of the *Essay*. On the latter topic, Darwall says, the authors' theories are 'virtually identical'.³²

From 1692 to 1694, Locke made extensive revisions to his chapter 'Of Power' for the second edition: he changed the wording of several key passages, he cut several old paragraphs, and he added a further 26 sections to the chapter. Locke made these alterations, he says, because 'as a Lover of Truth, and not a Worshipper of my own Doctrines, I own some change in my opinion, which I think I have discover'd ground for'.³³ Locke does not elaborate on the rationale behind his revisions. We can partially trace the evolution of his thinking on the subject in his letters to William Molyneux.³⁴ But there is some evidence that Cudworth's thoughts on liberty were a further inspiration behind Locke's alterations. Darwall points out that 'Locke went in 1691 to live at Oates, the home of Lord and Lady Masham and the place where, following his death in 1688, Ralph Cudworth's manuscripts on free will were kept'.³⁵ Although there is no explicit

manuscripts (Add. MSS 4983, 4984, 4985, and 4988), once attributed to Cudworth, are now assumed not to be his work.

³¹ Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth*, pp. 90-6.

³² Darwall, *British Moralists*, p. 154n.

³³ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), II.xxi.72, p. 285.

³⁴ See, for example, William Molyneux to John Locke, 22 December 1692; in de Beer (ed.), *Correspondence of John Locke*, pp. 600-1.

³⁵ Darwall, *British Moralists*, p. 173.

evidence that Locke read the treatises on free will, Darwall maintains that ‘the indirect, textual evidence is considerable’.³⁶

First, in the second edition of his *Essay*, Locke develops something like Cudworth’s ‘accountability’ theory in his *Treatise of Freewill*. In Cudworth’s view, an agent cannot be held responsible for an act of wrong-doing if he or she does not have the capacity to weigh and consider the alternatives. We do not blame non-human animals, such as cats, for example, for killing and eating their offspring. It simply does not make sense to attribute guilt or blame to a creature that lacks the capacity to determine itself to act morally. Yet if Medea were a real person, we would blame her for the death of her children – not simply because we think that she ought not to have killed them, but because it was possible for her *to avoid* doing so.³⁷ Medea would possess, in other words, a capacity for self-determination that would give her control over her own actions. For any individual to be held accountable for their actions, according to Cudworth, they must possess this capacity to direct or to determine themselves toward some end; they must, in other words, have the capacity for free will.

In the first edition of the *Essay*, Locke defines will as the ‘preferring any Action to its forbearance’³⁸. Liberty, for Locke, simply consists in a lack of impediments to carrying out the will.³⁹ In the second edition, however, Locke changes his definition of the will to ‘the power of the Mind to determine its thought, to the producing, continuing,

³⁶ Darwall, *British Moralists*, p. 173.

³⁷ Ralph Cudworth, *A Treatise of Freewill*, in *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality, with A Treatise of Freewill*, edited by Sarah Hutton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): ‘[W]e praise and dispraise, commend and blame men for their actings, much otherwise than we do inanimate beings or brute animals. ... [W]hen we blame a man for any wicked actions, as for taking away another man’s life, either by perjury or by wilful murder, we blame him not only as doing otherwise than ought to have been done, but also than he might have done, and that it was possible for him to have avoided it, so that he was himself the cause of the evil thereof’ (p. 155).

³⁸ Locke, *Essay* II.xxi.15, p. 241n.

or stopping any Action, as far as it depends on us'.⁴⁰ Locke's new emphasis is on the agent's *power to direct* her mind toward producing, or not producing, an action; the will is defined, in other words, in terms of self-conscious *self-direction*.⁴¹ This definition parallels Cudworth's own definition of will as the agent's 'power of determining himself towards the better or the worse'.⁴² For Locke, as for Cudworth, liberty does not consist in the mere absence of external obstacles; it is intimately tied to the agent's capacity for self-determination.

Second, while in the first edition Locke claims that will is determined by a consideration of the 'greater good',⁴³ in the second edition, he emphasises that the will is motivated by some present 'uneasiness' or 'desire' that the agent suffers under.⁴⁴ Here Locke echoes Cudworth's insistence about the appetites being 'the original and beginning of all action in the soul', or that which determines us to do some things and avoid others.⁴⁵ Although Medea may have had an intellectual or a speculative belief that infanticide was not for the best, Cudworth implies, she nevertheless decided that it was the best thing to do. This is because she allowed her *present appetites* – her thirst for revenge, for example – to dictate her actions.⁴⁶ Likewise, according to Locke, an alcoholic will often decide to continue drinking, even though he is aware that this does

³⁹ Locke, *Essay* II.xxi.7, p. 237n.

⁴⁰ Locke, *Essay* II.xxi.15.

⁴¹ Darwall, *British Moralists*, pp. 158, 159.

⁴² Cudworth, *A Treatise of Freewill*, p. 184.

⁴³ Locke, *Essay* II.xxi, pp. 248-9n, 256n.

⁴⁴ Locke, *Essay* II.xxi.31: 'To return then to the Enquiry, *what is it that determines the Will in regard to our Actions?* And that upon second thoughts I am apt to imagine is not, as is generally supposed, the greater good in view: But some (and for the most part the most pressing) *uneasiness* a Man is at present under. This is that which successively determines the *Will*, and sets us upon those Actions, we perform' (pp. 250-1).

⁴⁵ Cudworth says that '[M]ere speculative intellection without any inclination to one thing more than another, without anything of appetite or volition is not the first gate or entry, the first original and beginning of all action in the soul'; Add. MS 4982, fol. 10; quoted in Darwall, *British Moralists*, p. 136.

⁴⁶ See Darwall, *British Moralists*, p. 135.

not promote his greater good. ‘Let a drunkard see,’ Locke says, ‘that his Health decays, his Estate Wastes; Discredit and Diseases ... [attend] him in the course he follows: yet the returns of *uneasiness* to miss his Companions; the habitual thirst after his Cups, at the usual time, drives him to the Tavern.’⁴⁷ Although a man might have the greater good in view, it is desire or uneasiness that moves him to take one particular action rather than another.

For Locke, as for Cudworth, a man can still be held *responsible* for choosing the worse course of action, even in those cases in which his desires have completely enslaved him. The individual is still personally accountable for his actions because he possesses the freedom to engage in a careful and considered examination of the options, and the power to ‘*suspend* the execution and satisfaction’ of any of his desires.⁴⁸ For Cudworth, the agent’s *practical judgment* plays a vital role in the free weighing and considering of alternatives. Practical judgement is not just an intellectual belief about what it is best to do, but the ‘inherently motivating’ outcome of one’s deliberation about alternatives – the motivation to act in order to obtain a (perceived) good.⁴⁹ Cudworth warns that a man can be held responsible for his wrong doing if he does ‘but slightly consider’ and ‘*hastily choose* that as better, which upon more serious and leisurely consideration, he would judge should be refused’.⁵⁰ Similarly, Locke believes that the practical judgement about *what to do* is entirely within our power. Locke says of the wrong-doer that ‘though his *will* be always determined by that, which is judg’d good by his Understanding, yet it excuses him not; Because by too *hasty choice* of his own making, he has imposed on

⁴⁷ Locke, *Essay* II.xxi.35.

⁴⁸ Locke, *Essay* II.xxi.47.

⁴⁹ For this definition of practical judgement, I am indebted to Darwall, *British Moralists*, chapter 5.

⁵⁰ Cudworth, *Treatise of Freewill*, p. 179; my italics.

himself wrong measures of good and evil'.⁵¹ Liberty, for both Locke and Cudworth, simply consists in the power to direct or determine ourselves, through considered practical judgement.

In sum, Darwall says that

The crucial point ... is that, by the second edition, Locke believes attributing the power of self-determination to an agent is a necessary condition for holding him accountable and thus of his being obligated. Only if an agent has the power to suspend the force of the present desire, judiciously deliberate, and thereby determine his will can he be held responsible for doing what is worse even though he may think it better at the time. Only because he has moral liberty can we impute his actions to *him* and hold him accountable for them.⁵²

In these respects, according to Darwall, Locke's theory of liberty bears an uncanny resemblance to that of Cudworth in his manuscripts on free will.⁵³

iii.

Nevertheless, there is in fact one major problem facing Darwall's thesis: it is unlikely that the Cudworth manuscripts were ever at Oates during Locke's lifetime. There are two manuscript sources that lend support to this view: Ralph Cudworth's last will and testament, and a 1704 letter from Lady Masham to the Arminian theologian, Jean le

⁵¹ Locke, *Essay* II.xxi.56, p. 271; my italics.

⁵² Darwall, *British Moralists*, pp. 166-7.

Clerc. The first source reveals that the beneficiaries of Cudworth's will were not just Masham and her mother, as is commonly supposed,⁵⁴ but also Masham's older brother, John Cudworth (1656-1726). Ralph Cudworth's eldest son, John, was a fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, from 1678 to 1697.⁵⁵ In addition to property in Suffolk and Cambridge, Ralph Cudworth bequeaths 'to my son, John Cudworth ... all my books except such English books as my wife shall take for herself or for her daughter Masham'.⁵⁶ It is possible that Cudworth's manuscripts were among the 'English books' that Masham and her mother salvaged from this library,⁵⁷ or the manuscripts might have been part of the personal estate bequeathed to Cudworth's wife, Damaris, and brought to Oates in 1688. But in a letter to Jean le Clerc, dated May 1704, Masham explicitly says that she herself does not possess the so-called 'Second Part' of Ralph Cudworth's *True Intellectual System*. Masham says that

The Book [Cudworth's *Intellectual System*] now Begins to grown rare; and I hope it may within a few years receive another impression. One cause of its haveing been

⁵³ Following Roland Hall, Darwall points out that Locke appears to summarise Cudworth's argument concerning free will in the fourth edition of the *Essay* IV.xvii.4 (for further details, see Hall, 'New Words and Antedatings', p. 432).

⁵⁴ In her 'Introduction' to the *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, Sarah Hutton asserts that 'None of his sons survived him [Ralph Cudworth]' and that Masham 'became the guardian of his intellectual legacy' (p. xi). Likewise, John Harrison and Peter Laslett claim that 'Ralph Cudworth left some or all of his manuscripts to his daughter when he died in 1688 ... Certainly the unpublished second part of his great work, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, went to Otes'; John Harrison and Peter Laslett, *The Library of John Locke*, The Oxford Bibliographical Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 58. It is possible that these assumptions derive from Francis Cudworth Masham's role in the publication of the *Eternal and Immutable Morality* in 1731 (see below).

⁵⁵ John Peile, *Biographical Register of Christ's College 1505-1905 and of the Earlier Foundation, God's House 1448-1505* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), vol. I, p. 466.

⁵⁶ A transcription of the 'Will of Ralph Cudworth, D.D., Master of Christ's College' [dated 24 November 1686], in 'The John Peile Collection', Post-Medieval MSS Collection, Ref. Box 77, V, at Christ's College Library, Cambridge, fol. 2. I am very grateful to Candace Guite at Christ's College Library for providing me with a copy of this document.

⁵⁷ The remainder of Cudworth's books were sold at auction in February 1691; see John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Nichols, Sons, & Bentley, 1812), vol. IV, p. 29.

less look'd after (as Mr Churchil tells me) has been its being apprehended to be but an imperfect work; which tho it indeed was in respect of the Authors designe; Yet consider'd as a discourse against Atheisme, it is Compleat. You was told truly that a Second Part to this was left by the Author: which Second Part yet was both first in his intention, and also first writt by him: what concern'd the Atheistick Fate being design'd to be contain'd within the compass of a Preface to that Work: but the subject growing upon his hands, it became, as it is, a book by it self. That this second Part is yet in Being, I beleeve; tho had the Will of the Dead been perform'd it had not long surviv'd its Author. Nor was his Injunction to this Purpose from a sudden or late resolution, but a Determination which I remember to have heard him often speak of when I was a Girl, tho not with an intention of neglecting what he had design'd, but of writeing anew upon the same matter as not thoroughly satisfy'd with what he had writ: *which still remains, I suppose, in the hands of my Brother; whose intentions concerning it are wholly unknowne to me.*⁵⁸

After 1697, John Cudworth retired to live alone on the family estate at Southwold, where he died (unmarried and childless) in September 1726. Sometime thereabouts, this 'Second Part' came into the possession of Masham's only child, Francis Cudworth Masham. In 1731, Cudworth Masham arranged with Edward Chandler, the Lord Bishop of Durham, for the publication of the *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*.⁵⁹ In her letter to le Clerc, it is possible that Masham is simply referring to this

⁵⁸ Damaris Masham to Jean Le Clerc, May 1704; in the Amsterdam University Library (UvA), MS J.57.b; my italics.

⁵⁹ In 'The Preface' to that work, Chandler says that Cudworth's *Eternal and Immutable Morality* 'with several other Manuscripts, were lock'd up from the sight of the world for many years, and at last came in to

treatise and not to the manuscripts concerning free will (which are probably more accurately referred to as the ‘Third Part’ of Cudworth’s *Intellectual System*). But it is odd that Masham does not mention the free will manuscripts to le Clerc; and, in any case, it seems more plausible that Cudworth would pass his intellectual legacy onto his scholarly son, rather than his daughter. Cudworth could not have known, after all, that Masham would come to live with one of the greatest thinkers of her generation, or that she herself would publish works of theology and morality. Hence it seems likely that the Cudworth manuscripts came to Oates only following John Cudworth’s death in 1726, and that Locke had never in fact seen them.

iv.

But the evidence that Locke was influenced by Cudworth’s views on free will is still reasonably compelling. The question remains, therefore, how Locke could have become familiar with Cudworth’s ideas. At this point, the notion that Masham may have influenced Locke becomes increasingly plausible – while she might not have been the keeper of the Cudworth manuscripts, during her formative years she certainly had first-hand access to her father and his writings. From her letters to Locke and Leibniz, we know that Masham was familiar with the views of Cudworth and Henry More on ‘divine sagacity’ and innate ideas,⁶⁰ and that she was capable of defending her father’s theory of

the Hands of his Grandson *Francis Cudworth Masham* Esq.; one of the Masters in *Chancery*, whose Temper is too beneficent and communicative to deprive the Publick any longer of a Work that promises much benefit to it’; *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*, with a preface by Edward, Lord Bishop of Durham (London: James and John Knapton, 1731), p. xi.

⁶⁰ Damaris Cudworth (later Masham) to John Locke, 20 April 1682; and Damaris Masham to John Locke, 7 April 1688; in de Beer (ed.), *Correspondence of John Locke*, nos. 699 and 1040.

plastic nature against the criticisms of Pierre Bayle.⁶¹ Although she never advocates the Cambridge-Platonist theories as her own, she does demonstrate a strong understanding of their views. Is there any evidence, we might ask, that Masham was familiar with Cudworth's manuscripts on free will? Or that Masham herself might be the inspiration behind Locke's revisions to the chapter 'Of Power'?

There are two extant sources that provide some insight into Masham's views on free will: a 1704 letter to Leibniz, and her last treatise, the *Occasional Thoughts*. Shortly before Locke's death, Masham began a correspondence with Leibniz. In one letter, dated 8 August 1704, Masham objects to Leibniz's system of pre-established harmony on the grounds that 'as I am a true English woman, I cannot but naturally have a Passion for Libertie in all senses'.⁶² She says that

I will ... now mention to you one difficultie (as I conceive) in your Hypothesis ... Viz how to reconcile your Systeme to *Libertie* or *Free Agencie*; for tho in regard of any Compulsion from other Causes, we are according thereto *Free*, yet I see not how we can be so in respect of the first Mover. ... I must acknowledge that I cannot make out *Libertie* either with, or without any Hypothesis whatsoever. Tho as being perswaded that I feel myself a *Free Agent*, and that *Freedome to Act* is necessarie to our being accountable for our Actions, I not onelie conclude we are indu'd therewith, but am very tenacious hereof: whence I should be sorry to find from any

⁶¹ Damaris Masham to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, 20 October 1705; in Hannover, MS 612, fols. 22-3; and Gerhardt (ed.), *Die Philosophischen Schriften*, vol. III, pp. 370-1.

⁶² Damaris Masham to Leibniz, 8 August 1704; in Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek zu Hannover, MS 612, f.13; and Gerhardt (ed.), *Die Philosophischen Schriften*, vol. III, p. 361.

new Hypothesis new difficulties in maintaining of this.⁶³

According to Leibniz's philosophy, God creates a system of union or interaction between souls and bodies by way of 'a pre-established harmony', or a regulating of everything in advance. Masham objects to the fatalistic overtones of this theory: if God arranges everything in advance, it is difficult to see how human beings can have any choice or free agency in their actions.⁶⁴ Although her comments are rather brief, Masham states Cudworth's characteristic claim that liberty is a necessary precondition for accountability.⁶⁵ On this topic, she might have imbibed something from her father's *True Intellectual System*: in the preface to that work, Cudworth emphasises that we must be 'Masters of our own Actions' in order to be 'accountable to Justice for them, or to make us Guilty and Blameworthy for what we doe Amis, and to Deserve Punishment accordingly'.⁶⁶ But there is also evidence that Masham might have been familiar with Cudworth's manuscripts on free will.

In *Occasional Thoughts*, there are echoes of Cudworth's views about restraining the lower appetites, and using one's practical judgement in the process of moral decision-making. Masham affirms that human beings do not always choose what is in their long-term interests. This is because the course of action which is 'best in reference to the

⁶³ Damaris Masham to Leibniz, 8 August 1704; in Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek zu Hannover, MS 612, f.13; and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Leibniz's New System and Associated Contemporary Texts*, translated and edited by R.S. Woolhouse and Richard Francks (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 218.

⁶⁴ In his response, dated September 1704, Leibniz says that 'With regard to liberty, I do not see that there is any more difficulty about it in my system than in any other, and as M. Locke has written a quite excellent chapter on this subject, it would be impolite, madam, for me to try to improve on your ... domestic oracle' (Woolhouse and Franks (eds.), *Leibniz's New System*, p. 220).

⁶⁵ With her statement that 'I cannot make out *Libertie* either with, or without any Hypothesis whatsoever', Masham also faintly echoes her father's claim that 'If what I shall say concerning free-will seems unsatisfactory to any, I shall think it no marvel at all, for I never was fully satisfied in any discourse which I read of it' (Add. MS4982, fol. 1; quoted in Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth*, p. 63).

⁶⁶ Cudworth, *True Intellectual System*, Preface, sig. A3v.

design of the Creator', is not always present to our minds. Like Cudworth, Masham highlights the importance of *desire* as a motivating force in human action. Our natural desire for happiness and our love of pleasure drive us to pursue one course of action rather than another. But for a *rational* or *moral* agent, Masham says, it is important to recognise that the gratification of one's present 'Appetites' is not always the most effective means to long-term happiness. While this observation might ultimately derive from Locke, it is notable that Masham uses the Cudworthian language of the gratification of 'appetites' and 'inclinations', rather than Locke's emphasis upon 'desire' and 'uneasiness'. 'It is apparent,' according to Masham, 'that the Gratification of our present Appetites cannot be that which always, as we are rational Agents, proposing to our selves happiness for our chief end, should determine or regulate our voluntary actions'.⁶⁷

Masham observes that it is sometimes a matter of choice whether or not we should go ahead and procure pleasure through the gratification of our appetites. In these situations, she says, it is reasonable to inquire whether or not we ought to exercise *restraint*.⁶⁸ The superior faculty of reason plays a crucial role in determining what one will do.⁶⁹ She says

What else then appears to be the Rule, or Measure of Men's actions acting purely with respect to the pursuit of happiness as their chief End, but the *determinations* of that Faculty in them which, in reference to the different properties and relations discernable in things, can alone be *the Judge* of what will, in the whole, procure to

⁶⁷ Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, p. 76.

⁶⁸ Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, p. 74.

⁶⁹ Masham emphasises that the manifest 'dictates of Reason, or Natural Light' can lay a 'restraint upon their pleasing, and, oftentimes, violent Inclinations' (*Occasional Thoughts*, p. 102).

them the most Pleasure? And thus the very desire of happiness, or love of pleasure, rightly pursu'd, does oblige us to make *the determinations or dictates of Reason*, and not the suggestions of present Appetite, the Measure, and Rule of our actions in our pursuit after happiness.⁷⁰

Human beings, she suggests, are obliged to exercise their reason toward making a considered judgement about what it is best to do.

We being then indu'd, as we are, with a capacity of perceiving and distinguishing these differences of Things; and also with a liberty of acting, or not, suitably and agreeably hereunto; whence we can, according to the preference of our own minds, act either in conformity to, or disconformity with, the will of the Creator (manifested in his works no less than the will of any humane architect is in his) it follows, that to act answerably to the nature of such beings as we are, requires that we *attentively examine*, and consider the several natures of things, so far as they have any relation to our actions.⁷¹

This thesis explains how human beings can be held *responsible* for their wrong actions: they are guilty or blameworthy when they fail to engage in an attentive or 'cool examination'⁷² of all the alternatives. As Cudworth says, a moral agent 'may, upon slight considerations and immature deliberations ... choose and prefer that which is really

⁷⁰ Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, pp. 78-9; my italics.

⁷¹ Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, pp. 64-5. Darwall claims that this passage echoes 'the formulations of Locke's revised *Essay*' (Darwall, *The British Moralists*, p. 173n).

⁷² Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, p. 78.

worse for the better, so as to deserve blame thereby'.⁷³ Similarly, Masham emphasises that those who pursue present pleasure recklessly, 'Judge not thus from a due examination, or any examination at all of the nature of things, but from a Reason ... of Opposition';⁷⁴ they do not exercise their capacity to reflect on their future or long-term good.⁷⁵

Masham thus affirms that liberty, or will as self-determination combined with practical judgement, is a necessary condition for accountability. She observes that

without a capacity in the Creature to act contrary to the Will of the Creator there could be no desert, or self-excellency in any Created Being; contrariety to the Will of God is therefore permitted in the Universe as a necessary result of Creaturely imperfection, under the greatest endowment that a Created Being is capable of having, viz. *That of Freedom or Liberty of Action*.⁷⁶

With this word 'self-excellency' Masham emphasises, as does Cudworth, how the capacity for liberty of action is necessary for the self-improvement or salvation of human beings. Masham adheres to Cudworth's conception of liberty as a 'determining' of oneself for better or worse, or as a 'self-promoting, self-improving power'.⁷⁷ Masham says that 'no agent can offend farther than he wilfully abuses the Freedom he has to

⁷³ Cudworth, *Treatise of Freewill*, p. 179.

⁷⁴ Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, p. 80.

⁷⁵ Masham says that 'Mens Actions should be regulated, and directed by that Faculty in them which shows them the different properties, relations, and dependencies of things, and not by their Appetite, which only can tell what will at the present please, or offend them' (*Occasional Thoughts*, p. 101).

⁷⁶ Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, pp. 69-70.

⁷⁷ Cudworth, *Treatise of Freewill*, p. 185.

act'.⁷⁸ Morality or 'virtue ... is equal to our liberty of action; and its Principle the most Active one of the Mind'.⁷⁹

Here, then, is evidence that Masham may have been familiar with her father's unpublished views about free will. Is it now beyond the bounds of plausibility that Masham conveyed these views to Locke?

On the negative side, it must be noted that Masham's work was completed ten years *after* Locke's major revisions to book 2, chapter 21 of the *Essay*. It is therefore possible that her comments on 'liberty of action' might be indebted to Locke himself. On the positive side, however, there is some textual evidence that Masham consciously situates her views on liberty in the context of Cudworth's wider ethical project in the *Intellectual System*.

First, Masham casts scorn on those '*Enthusiastick atheists*, viz. who deny the Existence of an Invisible, Omniscient, Omnipotent, first Cause of all things, only through a sort of Sottish disbelief of whatsoever they cannot either see or feel; never consulting their Reason in the Case'.⁸⁰ Here Masham paraphrases Cudworth himself.⁸¹ In his *True Intellectual System*, Cudworth describes '*Enthusiastick and Fanatick Atheists*' as those who 'have not at all Philosophized, nor pretended to maintain any particular Atheistick System or Hypothesis, in a way of Reason, but were only led by a certain dull and sottish, though confident, disbelief of whatsoever they could not either See or Feel'.⁸² In her

⁷⁸ Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, p. 70.

⁷⁹ Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, p. 10.

⁸⁰ Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, p. 31.

⁸¹ In the text, she refers to him as a 'Learned Man' (*Occasional Thoughts*, p. 31).

⁸² Cudworth, *True Intellectual System*, p. 134. The same reference to 'enthusiastic atheists' appears in the work of Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third earl of Shaftesbury. In his *Letter concerning Enthusiasm* (1708), Shaftesbury observes that 'even *Atheism*' is not exempt from enthusiasm, 'for, as some have well remark'd, there have been *Enthusiastical Atheists*'; in Anthony Ashley Cooper, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times. In Three Volumes*, with a foreword by Douglas Den Uyl (Indianapolis: Liberty

attack on atheism, Masham stresses that moral agents must be held accountable for not duly exercising their reason in order to determine the best course of action. Like Cudworth, she emphasises that a proper examination would reveal to the atheist that their ungodliness, or their refusal to follow the dictates of a Christian life, was not in fact in their long-term interests.

Second, Masham follows Cudworth in affirming that God's will is subordinate to his supreme wisdom and benevolence.⁸³ In the *Intellectual System*, Cudworth attacks those voluntarists who claim that God's will is 'in no way Regulated or Determined, by any *Essentiall* and *Immutable Goodness*, and *Justice* ... he being onely *Arbitrary Will Omnipotent*'.⁸⁴ In his *Treatise of Freewill*, Cudworth affirms that 'There is a nature of goodness, and a nature of wisdom, antecedent to the will of God, which is the rule and measure of it'.⁸⁵ According to this viewpoint, the principles of morality are not arbitrarily determined by the will of God, but there is an 'eternal and immutable morality' existing independently of the divine will. Given that God is 'essentially good and wise', Cudworth says, it is rational to believe that he will always will the best.⁸⁶ While human beings are endowed with free will in order to attain greater perfection, God, by contrast, is a perfect being and therefore 'above this freewill or self-power, it being impossible that it [a perfect being] should ever improve itself, much less impair itself'.⁸⁷ God can never

Fund, 2001), vol. I, p. 34. Later, in his *Miscellaneous Reflections, & c.*, Shaftesbury cites Cudworth on 'Enthusiastical Atheists' in the *True Intellectual System*, p. 134 (see *Characteristics*, vol. III, p. 42).

⁸³ On this topic, I am indebted to Sarah Hutton, 'The Ethical Background of the Rights of Women', in *Philosophical Theory and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, edited by William Sweet (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2003), pp. 28-9. See also Hutton's 'Lady Damaris Masham', in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/lady-masham/>.

⁸⁴ Cudworth, *True Intellectual System*, sig. A3r.

⁸⁵ Cudworth, *Treatise of Freewill*, p. 187.

⁸⁶ Cudworth, *Treatise of Freewill*, p. 189.

⁸⁷ Cudworth, *Treatise of Freewill*, p. 196.

be mutable or changeable, he says, like human beings.⁸⁸ In similar terms, Masham says

The infinite Perfection, and the inseparable Correspondence, and Harmony of which (discernable in the Frame and Government of the Universe) plainly tell us that the Divine Will cannot be (like ours) successive Determinations without dependence, or connection one upon another; much less inconsistent, contradictory, and mutable, but one steady, uniform, unchangeable result of infinite Wisdom and benevolence, extending to, and including All his Works. So that Sin, or disobedience to our Maker is manifestly the greatest Nonsense, Folly, and contradiction conceivable, with regard purely to the immutable perfection of the Divine Nature; and to the Natural constitution of things, independently upon any positive command of God to us, or his irresistible power over us.⁸⁹

We can be assured, according to Masham, that ‘the Law of right Reason’ is not ‘a changeable’ or ‘Arbitrary thing’. It is, instead, ‘founded in Relations, and Connexions, which are as immutable as that determinate constitution in Things, which makes every thing what it is’.⁹⁰ God, Masham emphasises, has not put any ‘unhappy Biass upon our Minds, as shall necessarily contradict this his End’ (*i.e.* that we might attain happiness); to do so would be inconsistent with his essential wisdom and benevolence.⁹¹ We can be assured, therefore, that ‘there is an inseparable connection, or relation of Moral Good and

⁸⁸ Cudworth, *Treatise of Freewill*, p. 186.

⁸⁹ Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, p. 69. While this is a very Cudworthian conception of God, Masham does use Locke’s terminology in describing God as ‘the Sovereign Disposer of all Things’ (*Occasional Thoughts*, p. 2; *Essay* II.vii.6, p. 131).

⁹⁰ Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, p. 98.

⁹¹ Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, p. 77.

Evil, with our Natural Good and Evil'.⁹²

Here Masham does not simply follow the second edition of Locke's *Essay*, but situates her ethical views *in the context* of Cudworth's theories about God's relationship to his creation. Masham's anti-voluntarist conception of God distances her from Locke, and brings her closer to Cudworth's general philosophical position.⁹³

v.

What, then, can we conclude about the chains of influence between Cudworth, Masham, and Locke? First, it is apparent that questions about one philosopher's influence on another are complicated and fraught with difficulties. Although we might establish similarities in language and philosophical outlook, short of finding any explicit acknowledgements, it is difficult to make conclusive findings about such matters. As Richard Aaron says, 'It is ... very dangerous to argue that since there are parallel passages in two writers belonging to the same epoch the one must have influenced the other directly'.⁹⁴ Such similarities might, in the end, boil down to a shared intellectual and cultural background. In this case, Masham, Locke, and Cudworth might have all been responding to Descartes' and Hobbes' views on free will, for example. I therefore recommend a cautious scepticism toward claims about Masham's influence on Locke. I allow that it is *possible* that Masham's Cudworth-inspired views on morality may have had some impact on Locke's revisions. There is evidence that Masham was familiar with Cudworth's views in the *Treatise on Freewill*, and there is reason to believe that Masham may have been the only source of those views for Locke. But in the end, we cannot say

⁹² Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, p. 78.

⁹³ Hutton, 'The Ethical Background', p. 29.

with any certainty that the revisions to the second edition of the *Essay* were due to Masham, rather than Cudworth. In her *Occasional Thoughts* and the letter to Leibniz, Masham may, after all, have been reiterating Locke's own views about free will – views that may or may not have been originally based upon Cudworth's ideas.

In arguing thus, however, I do not intend to detract from the worth of Masham's contribution to seventeenth-century thought. For one thing, a quick examination shows that Masham was more than capable of moving beyond Locke and Cudworth on some subjects. As Richard Gwinnett says, 'the principal Design' of Masham's *Occasional Thoughts* – a call for the education of women – still deserves 'the highest Praise'. Locke and Cudworth both recognise that the abuse of free will can lead men to become 'habitually fixed in evil and sinful inclinations'.⁹⁵ But it is Masham who offers a *practical* solution to this problem, one that involves the assistance of women as the early educators of men. Masham warns that before we come to 'a ripeness of understanding ... an evil indulgence of our Inclinations has commonly establish'd Habits in us too strong to be over-rul'd'.⁹⁶ An effective way of circumventing these habits, she suggests, is to give *women* a solid education in virtuous and rational principles. The assistance of mothers, after all, is necessary to 'the making men vertuous, as to have good Habits', and to avoid a 'Habit of Idleness, or Inapplication of the Mind'.⁹⁷ Yet many women are ignorant of the foundations of those beliefs for which they will be held accountable in another life, and are incapable of teaching their young.⁹⁸ So both men and women, on Masham's view, must be taught that the principles of virtue consist in 'being able to govern our

⁹⁴ Richard I. Aaron, *John Locke*, second edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 25.

⁹⁵ Cudworth, *Treatise of Freewill*, p. 197.

⁹⁶ Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, p. 53.

⁹⁷ Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, pp. 176, 193.

Passions and subject our Appetites to the directions of our Reason'.⁹⁹ This moral education can have tremendous benefits for the flourishing or prosperity of the commonwealth. For Masham, true social and political harmony can come about only if all citizens – women as well as men – are actively engaged in the private cultivation of virtue.

With these views, Masham anticipates the feminist themes of late eighteenth-century writers, such as Catharine Macaulay and Mary Wollstonecraft. There is also some reason to think that Masham's emphasis upon practical ethics or 'useful knowledge' is a persistent theme in her writings,¹⁰⁰ and one that partly distinguishes her approach from that of Locke and Cudworth. Further research will undoubtedly confirm that Masham's philosophy more than ably stands alone, as complex and original in its own right, without having to rely on the reflected glory of her male associates.

⁹⁸ Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, p. 152.

⁹⁹ Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, p. 177. Masham says that 'As they do become capable of examining and determining their Actions by Reason, they should be taught never to do anything of consequence heedlessly; and to look upon the Dictates of their Reason as so inviolable a Rule of their Determinations, that no Passion or Appetite must ever make them swerve therefrom' (Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, p. 182).

¹⁰⁰ See James Buickerood, 'Introduction' to *The Philosophical Writings of Damaris, Lady Masham* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2004).