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CUDWORTH ON SUPERINTELLECTUAL INSTINCT AS INCLINATION TO THE GOOD

ABSTRACT

Stephen Darwall notes that for Cudworth the fundamental ethical motive is love, but that the Cambridge Platonist tells us little about love's character, aim and object (*The British Moralists and the Internal Ought* 1640-1740). In this article I examine Cudworth's doctrine of 'superintellectual instinct' as a natural love for or inclination to the good as it takes shape in two of his unpublished freewill manuscripts (*BL MS Additional* 4980 and 4982). I show that in these manuscripts he assumes a three-fold model of how this higher love as a natural or 'created' grace fits into the overall moral life of a person, together with human free will and special grace. I argue that although Cudworth adopts an Origenist synergistic position on the question of the relationship between grace and free will, stating that special grace is a necessary condition of salvation conjointly with free will and creation grace, in reality he struggles to show the strict necessity of special grace.

KEYWORDS Cudworth; love; instinct; unconscious; Pelagianism; grace; free will; Origen; enthusiasm

In this article I examine Cudworth's account of 'superintellectual instinct' as a natural instinct or inclination towards the good as it takes shape in two of his unpublished freewill manuscripts (*BL MS Additional* 4980 and 4982, hereafter 4980, 4982). Cudworth had originally planned three books which would together have constituted the *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678, hereafter *TIS*). The first would refute atheistic fatalisms (published as the *TIS*), the second defend God's nature not his arbitrary will as the basis of morality, and the third establish that humans possessed free will and could be held to account morally. The manuscripts on free will – *BL MS Additional* 4978-4982 – may represent attempts at the third book (Darwall, *The British Moralists*, 116-17).¹

I show that in these manuscripts Cudworth assumes a three-fold model of how this higher instinct as a natural grace fits into the overall moral life of a person, together with human free will and special grace. Although Cudworth adopts an Origenist synergistic position on the question of the relationship between grace and free will, stating that special grace is a necessary condition of salvation conjointly with free will and creation grace, in reality he struggles to show the strict necessity of

¹ These manuscripts remain unpublished except for *MS* 4978, published as *A Treatise of Freewill* (hereafter *FW*). Throughout the article references to 'the manuscripts' should be taken to refer only to *MS* 4980 and 4982. When citing from them as from Cudworth's published works I have modernised the spelling, and I have deleted Cudworth's crossings out except in one instance. For discussion of the manuscripts, see Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth*, 107-13 and Carter, *The Little Commonwealth of Man*, 161-68, who convincingly dates the composition of 4980 and 4982 to the 1680s but in any case certainly after the completion of *TIS* in 1671. Apart from Carter, Darwall, and Passmore, Cudworth's manuscript writings have tended to receive very scant attention. Passmore's treatment remains the most comprehensive. I would like to express my thanks to Sarah Hutton for encouraging me to work on Cudworth's manuscripts and for her very helpful comments and suggestions.

special grace.²

Since Cudworth classes superintellectual instinct as a kind of love, it will be helpful firstly to say something about what he states generally about love. In the *True Intellectual System* Cudworth broadly distinguishes between two basic kinds of love: an ‘Orphic-Pythagorean’ love – which is a ‘love of redundancy and overflowing fullness’ - and a ‘love of desire’ (*TIS*, 375), where these correspond to agape- and eros-love respectively. In the category of Orphic-Pythagorean love belongs:

- (1) God’s ‘eternal, self-originated, intellectual Love...[which] dispenses itself uninvitably’ (*TIS*, 123), a ‘love of infinite activity’ (*TIS*, 583), which is both God’s very nature, and also the ordering principle of the created universe.³
- (2) the superior motivational instinct in humans, which is the participated likeness of (1),⁴ and both the ‘highest perfection’ of humans as well as the ‘source’ of morality (*TIS*, 205).

In the category of ‘love of desire’ belongs:

- (3) ‘narrow and contracted selfishness’ (*TIS*, 886), or the lower motivational instinct, which is not intrinsically bad but needs to be kept in check.

As Passmore has noted, the reader who turns to Cudworth’s unpublished manuscripts on free will having only in mind *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* (hereafter *EIM*) with its pronounced rationalism, will be surprised to discover that for Cudworth the spring of moral action is presented as ‘a certain love’ (4983, 84), with instincts or inclinations identified as the source of moral life (Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth*, 52-53).⁵ In the manuscripts Cudworth objects to the idea that the speculative intellect can determine moral action, stating that the first principle by which good and evil are to be distinguished is ‘vital and not notional’ (4982, 9).⁶ Indeed as Gill has shown, notwithstanding the rationalism of the *EIM*, the sermons Cudworth gave in 1647 also paint a very different picture of his ethics, one that anticipates sentimentalism as much as it does rationalism (Gill, *The British Moralists on Human Nature*, 39).⁷

² In this respect I find myself in agreement with Gill, *The British Moralists on Human Nature*, who concludes from an examination of Cudworth’s published works that he leaned heavily towards Pelagianism. Stanciu, ‘Re-interpreting Augustine’ by contrast, argues for an Augustinian influence on Cudworth.

³ See also Armour, ‘Trinity, Community, and Love’, 114.

⁴ ‘as it is in men, is but a participation of that...Love, God himself’ (*TIS*, 488).

⁵ Cf. Darwall: ‘his is an ethics of love...his ultimate aim is to argue that love grounds moral obligation’ (*The British Moralists*, 130; and generally 109-48). For other recent studies of Cudworth’s ethics, see also Armour, ‘Trinity, Community, and Love’; Attfield, ‘Cudworth, Prior and Passmore on the Autonomy of Ethics’; Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason*; Carter, *The Little Commonwealth of Man*; Hengstermann, ‘Platonismus und Pantheismus bei Ralph Cudworth’; Erdelack, ‘Antivoluntarism and the Birth of Autonomy’; Hedley, ‘Cudworth on Freedom’; Hutton, ‘Liberty and Self-determination’; Irwin, *The Development of Ethics*; 2:238-63; Rogers et al. *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context*; Schneewind, *Moral Philosophy from Montaigne to Kant*.

⁶ Cf. also Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth*, 54, 66; Carter, *The Little Commonwealth of Man*, 114-18.

⁷ Gill in the same place suggests that Cudworth switched from the ‘proto-sentimentalism’ of the sermons to a rationalist ethics from the late 1640s onwards due to a felt need to differentiate his own religious stance from seemingly similar ones of dangerous radicals in the 1650s. However, this is

As Passmore notes, Cudworth sees the human soul as constituted by ‘two distinct systems of passion’: animate loves on the one hand, and a superior love on the other hand (Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth*, 56; also Darwall, *The British Moralists*, 138). In this article I will chiefly be interested in this ‘higher’ love or inclination, which Cudworth variously refers to in the manuscripts as ‘an inward simple intellectual principle...a superrational and superintellectual instinct’ (4982, 8); a ‘vital intellectual instinct’ and ‘principle of ...superior intellectual life’ (4982, 19-20); and ‘the vital or intellectual instinct of divine life (4982, 21). As Darwall has noted, Cudworth treats the terms ‘superior reason’, ‘intellectual instinct’, and ‘love’ (and their variants) interchangeably (*The British Moralists*, 144). In what follows I will refer to this natural faculty exclusively as ‘superintellectual instinct’ for consistency’s sake.⁸

Both of these systems have the status of ‘nature’ in Cudworth’s system – they cannot be changed, and humans are simply passive to them (Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth*, 58; Darwall, *The British Moralists*, 127). However, this by no means entails that humans are determined to good (or bad), because the two systems are only ingredients in our moral life; in addition humans have freewill and the assistance of special grace.

Cudworth sees free will as threatened from two sides: ‘atheistic fate’ – the subject of *TIS* - which denies free will and also any kind of higher life; and ‘divine fate’ - the subject of *MS* 4980 and 4982 - which prioritizes special grace to the degree that free will is effectively denied. In the manuscripts Cudworth is chiefly interested in the latter. He also significantly expands upon the exact nature of superintellectual instinct and its relationship to free will and grace in the manuscripts by comparison with his published works.

Superintellectual Instinct

I turn first to Cudworth’s characterisation of this higher instinct. As Armour has also noted, for Cudworth, ‘genuine’ (sc. higher) human love – love in sense (2) above - is an expression of the divine. While not identifying the higher human love with God’s Love, which identity can only hold for Christ as the incarnation and literal embodiment of God’s love, Cudworth nevertheless speaks of it superlatively as itself divine, in the sense of the participated likeness of God’s essence in humans (‘Trinity, Community, and Love’, 114, 122-23). In the manuscripts, this higher love is described in the context of criticising Epicurus for not acknowledging any pleasures of the mind except those which arose from the pleasures of the body. Cudworth states that

the good of honesty and moral rectitude which in scripture language is *theia physis* and *zoe tou theou* is the highest and most sovereign good of all intellectual beings and the pleasure of it which some will needs distinguish from the thing itself and place happiness in it as Aristotle observeth is no adventitious appendix added to it distinct from it but merely the sense and fruition of the thing itself.

(4980, 59)

In other words, superintellectual instinct is partly constituted by a sui generis ‘higher’

difficult to maintain in face of the continuities between the sermons and the freewill manuscripts.

⁸ See also Carter, *The Little Commonwealth of Man*, 111-12.

delight which anticipates and then necessarily accompanies the state of being morally good.⁹ The state of being morally good is also the state of sharing in the ‘divine life’ (*zoe tou theou*), since humans are morally good by virtue of participating in the morally perfect nature of God. This sui generis type of delight is irreducible to merely animal desire (love in sense (3) above), since the latter is often avoided or denied for the sake of the former, which is a ‘good of a different species’ (4980, 59).

However, despite sharing the instinct-like features of pleasantness and passivity, superintellectual instinct and animal love differ with respect to the relative strength or ‘pull’ their objects have on their possessor:

the lower principle obtrudes itself upon [free willed beings], they need no self-active exertion of their own towards it...but the higher principle is that which though nature gives us some glimpse of it afar off, there being naturally some impression made of the *to theion* upon us, yet it does but invite us and allure us towards it, calling for our own assistance and the free exertion of our own power to promote ourselves to it...

(4980, 83)

In other words, humans have two distinct motivational instincts (loves (2) and (3)), which move their possessor towards mundane and heavenly goals respectively. However, they are dissimilar insofar as the lower motivational instinct exerts a force on us such that we need not freely exert ourselves towards it in order to be sufficiently motivated to get it (for instance, eating food when hungry). By contrast, the higher motivational source exerts only a sort of allure – Cudworth elsewhere speaks of ‘mild and gentle but golden attractions’ (4982, 22) - so that we need in addition to freely exert ourselves to reach it (we might say that it is attractive but still easily resistible). Indeed, he implies here that it is part of the divine design plan that God has made it somehow challenging to love him so that we can only love God by exerting at least a modicum of effort, rather than by an easy surrender to his overwhelming attractive force.

The Threefold Model: Creation Grace, Freewill, Special Grace

According to Cudworth, the superintellectual instinct just by itself – even though everybody possesses it by nature - is not sufficient for achieving moral goodness (even, as we shall see, in the pre-lapsarian state). Cudworth outlines the ‘forces’ which enable us to be moral and even saintly as follows:

there is the concurrence of several forces that contribute towards this higher good of honesty, virtue + the divine life,

(1) First something of nature by which is to be understood *common grace*, for if God in nature had not planted in us a participation of the *to theion*, holiness and righteousness would have been violent and preternatural things and consequently no good at all.

⁹ Cf. Gill: ‘the real point...Cudworth [is] trying to make is that righteousness consists of a particular kind of ‘temper’ or state of mind...no substantive distinction can be drawn between righteousness and a heavenly state of mind’ (*The British Moralists on Human Nature*, 28).

(2) Secondly there is something also of our own self-exertive conation requisite thereunto to express [sc. suppress] the vigour and impetuosity of lower appetites and actively to protrude ourselves towards the higher principle...

(3) And lastly the assistance of special grace to make our endeavours...effectual.

(4980, 83 (numbering and spacing added by the author))

Here Cudworth follows Lombard's distinction between (1) creation grace (*gratia generalis*), and (3) special grace (*gratia specialis*) (3), where (1) is to be identified with natural graces, the purely natural endowments of creation given to all human beings by God's general providence and including superintellectual instinct. By contrast, (3) is a properly supernatural and internal grace, which offers occasional ('specialis') assistance to humans through special acts of divine providence – experienced as a divine power working in their souls - to help them in their struggle with their own fallenness. Cudworth also gives a firm place to free will (2), and rejects the standard Augustinian-Calvinist elevation of (3) at the expense of (1) and (2):

grace is not to be understood as to supercede our own endeavours and to do all the work without us. This also were to make that which is called goodness to be a mere foreign extraneous and adventitious thing to the soul, a thing that is only forced and clapt upon us from without and not truly our own nor ourselves. Wherefore it is necessary that this should in a manner spring and sprout out of ourselves...

(4980, 83)

The whole force of Cudworth's objection here is against those orthodox Reformers who would see the free will (2) and the natural gift of superintellectual instinct (1) as totally impaired by original sin, leaving only special grace (3) as effective in the moral life.¹⁰ His solution is to stress natural or creation grace ('goodness...should in a manner spring and sprout out of ourselves'). The emphasis on creation grace is everywhere at hand:

Righteousness is no artificial thing, but a living form, which man doth not actually produce but is passive to, being actuated quickened and enlivened by it. In which sense we are said to be God's workmanship and that is the divine life is said to be formed not by us but in us. This...is not self-activity but nature...

(4982, 46)

Righteousness is not a product of free will (2) or special grace (3), but it is pristinely fully formed in humans. In saying that the divine life is formed 'not by us but in us', he is not conceding to the sovereignty of 'divine fate' and special grace. The main thrust of his point is rather that God inserted it into humans by creation grace (1) as their eternal and immutable nature. Humans have the capacity to bring it out of its impairment by sin by freely effecting a reversal of their fallen state, which restores the practical effectiveness of the superintellectual instinct and corrects forgetfulness of it. Nevertheless, the action of special grace (3) is also acknowledged as necessary to

¹⁰ For an excellent outlining of the debates on predestination to which Cudworth was reacting, see Carter, *The Little Commonwealth of Man*, esp. 32, 34-35.

support our freely determined resolve (2) to help to restore the natural grace in us of superintellectual instinct (1). Just as Cudworth wants to resist the Calvinist prioritisation of (3) over (1) and (2), he also wants to resist the Pelagian prioritisation of (1) and (2) over (3).

Nevertheless we see here an emphasis on creation grace (1) and free will (2) which edges Cudworth towards the Pelagian end of this debate. He strongly denies that the reversion to one's pristine nature is effected solely by special grace coming externally from God to violently transform an absolutely impaired nature. He rejects the view that at the fall humans were not only 'habitually weakened and wounded as to good', but 'the very *dunamis* the power itself is lost', so that in grace and regeneration there is a new power 'introduced from without and inspired and infused after a gross manner into the soul'. By contrast, the model of grace which he wants to promote represents the 'power or faculty in the soul to spiritual things' (superintellectual instinct) as only 'fettered/chained' by sin, such that it only requires special grace to 'confirm' it in cooperation with human free will so that it can 'come forth into act' again. Otherwise righteousness would be *paraphysin*, 'a contra-natural thing and that it is a mere force and violence for the soul to lie under it' (4982, 48).

In other words, Cudworth rejects models of grace which stress the absolute impairment of superintellectual instinct and the free will. He denies that grace comes 'wholly from without'. Otherwise, he notes, no saint in heaven could do good 'freely, naturally, heartily, and spontaneously from an inward living principle of its own, but his true nature and inward vitality would be checked and curbed, stopped, and an external bias...clapped upon him'. Also, such a saint – who by hypothesis would have an absolutely impaired nature - would have no possibility of inner harmony, because the sinful nature would be in constant inner warfare with the externally implanted superintellectual instinct in him, and 'every good thing will be unwillingly done by him' (4982, 48).

He identifies this belief that goodness is 'preternatural' to (absolutely impaired) souls as the 'root false idea' about grace, the idea that grace is an

(1) *aureum fraenum* a golden bridal... or a thing which is good only by accident, that there is no intrinsical goodness nor naturality in holiness and righteousness, but that it consisteth only in a forced compliance with the will and command of some other being, or else...(2) that though righteousness were natural to a man before his fall, yet by sin and the fall his very nature was destroyed in him, that his natural powers and faculties were not only weakened and impaired, but also that something of them was eradicated and that he had now a new nature, a nature of sinfulness in him...and then afterward by grace, this nature was again altered a second time and that then he had another nature put in him.

(4982, 49 (numbering added by the author))

This spirited rejection of the absolute impairment of created grace is of course by implication also a strong defence of the intrinsic goodness of human beings. Sin did not destroy the very nature of human beings, but only occluded it. This is clearest when he argues, appealing to the definition of sin as against nature, that if there is no nature of sin, then 'of necessity righteousness must be nature, and the true nature of man or all intellectual beings' (4982, 49). Implicit here – although he is explicit elsewhere – is a denial of original sin as 'substantial' rather than as a quality of

human acts.¹¹

The Loss and Recovery of Superintellectual Instinct

However, while Cudworth plainly rejects models of grace which prioritize special grace, he is also at pains to offer an alternative account which steers clear of Pelagianism. His account presents the pre-lapsarian condition as one in which superintellectual instinct is (as he puts it) ‘in act’, whereas in the post-lapsarian condition it is to varying degrees unavailable (to the point of total unconsciousness), but always retrievable by free effort, although not without the assistance of special grace. Humans, through sin, have become progressively unconscious of their natural endowment of this higher instinct or love through freely ignoring it, and then through habits of feeling and mind suppressing and then repressing awareness of it, so that only the lower motivational instincts remain in consciousness and active. However, this self-alienation can be reversed through cultivating habits of moral goodness (purification, effortful practice of the virtues) together with the assistance of special grace which together help to remove the obstacles to a clear awareness of it in us and bring it back into activity.¹²

The essence of Cudworth’s position is captured in the following account of fall and loss of deformity:

Now when souls are created, as Adam was supposed to be, in innocency, without any actual flaw, yet not in such a state of perfection, but that they are sensible of both these attractions, the lower as well as the higher, and then as they had two inclinations in them so they would be sensible of two practical lights also, in which case, after they had a while contested with their lower appetites and suppressed the same by their self-active autexousous power, beginning at length to grow weary of standing always upon their guard, and being tempted with the love of change and variety which hath some appearance of liberty, they rashly by their autexousous faculty assent to the light and verdict of their lower appetites as propounding the greater good, or at least so far as that they will make trial and experiment...

(4982, 37)

In other words, God creates souls, not in any actual state of sinfulness, but with the potential to sin. Humans are distinguished from God in that they possess the ability to sin, whereas God is unable to sin, not through some deficiency, but because in God absolute freedom is absolute necessity to be good:

This contingency of those reduplicated being which are called self-powerful is much inferior to the simplicity and necessity of that which is not Good and Wise by way of self activity and self exersion, but...essentially and immutably being Goodness and Wisdom itself, such is the divine nature.

¹¹ Cf. ‘though sin have had a long and customary possession in the soul, yet it has no just title...of inheritance in it. ...sin it is no nature [sc. substance], as *S. Austin* and others of the fathers often inculcate, but an adventitious and extraneous thing’ (Cudworth, *Lincoln’s Inn*, 34). Cf. also Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*, 219.

¹² For recent accounts of Cudworth’s psychology, which undergirds his ethics, see for instance Hutton, *Salving the Phenomena of Mind*; Lähteenmäki, ‘Cudworth on Types of Consciousness’; Pécharman, ‘Cudworth on Self-consciousness and the I Myself’; Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject*, 67-71.

(4980, 39)

Free beings are (by contrast with God) ‘not their own perfection by immutable nature’ (4980, 39) but by self-exertion, i.e. humans are not essentially perfect. Cudworth’s position here is Origenist:

This seeming to be an imperfection that belongs to all freewilled beings...that they are alienable from the highest good, as Origen hath determined that there is no being immutably good and wise and absolutely impeccable in his own nature but God alone, all other things being not good by nature but by participation only and therefore by freewill or self active exertion¹³

(4980, 59)

Also Origenist is his characterisation of the fall in terms of a *failure* to exercise free will. Consider for instance the following definition of sin:

Sin therefore is not to be imputed to free will as if it were actively willed by freewill...it being a voluntary relaxation of our self power activity towards good by reason of its natural defectability and want of vigilance, attention, and circumspection...it is impossible there should be a natural ambidextrual faculty as is indifferent to good created by God. Sin is nothing but a voluntary deficiency of a good power.

(4982, 22)

In other words, God has not created a free will in humans which is designed to give them the capacity to choose indifferently between good and evil, but instead to give them the capacity to choose the good.¹⁴ But this capacity can be misused due to a ‘voluntary’ relaxation of our natural directedness towards the good, because we have been designed (as finite beings) with the bare capability of failing to pursue it. Sin therefore arises through a failure to hold the balance between pursuing superintellectual instinct and keeping a vigilant eye on the inferior motivational instincts.

The pre-lapsarian state can be characterised as follows: (a) no actual sinfulness is present; (b) humans have sinless awareness of the higher and animal loves/instincts; (c) humans freely contest and suppress - without extinguishing - their lower appetites; but (d) they (sinfully) tire of being on their guard, tempted by ‘love of change and variety’, and (e) they mistake this freedom to choose either way for real freedom (when in fact they were already in possession of it!); and due to this mistake they (f) assent to the lower appetites, (g) mistakenly judging that they may represent a greater good. What is also implicit here is that this ‘fall’ or self-alienation leads to progressive weakening not just of the strength of the superior motivational instinct,

¹³ On the extensive Origenist influence on Cudworth and the other major Cambridge Platonists, see for instance Fürst, ‘Autonomie und Menschenwürde’; and Kobusch, ‘Die Idee der Freiheit’. Kobusch (79) notes that of the Cambridge Platonists, Cudworth is the one who most extensively assimilated Origen’s freedom doctrine.

¹⁴ This is what he calls ‘free will moral’, which he defines as follows: ‘it is a self active, self determining, self exerting power of the soul whereby it is enabled to put forth vigorous endeavors towards the attainment of its highest good’ (4982, 27).

but also of the bare awareness of it.¹⁵ But as noted the process can be reversed through effort:

[this] divine nature, or the essay of god participated by men; which in our lapsed state, seems to be at a great distance from us...by holy endeavours and self-activity, the soul doth, as it were, promote itself nearer and nearer towards it and withdraw itself from the contrary life of carnality, sensuality, and selfishness.

(4982, 46)

In effect Cudworth is talking here about degrees of consciousness of one's natural endowment of the superintellectual instinct. In the extreme case, consciousness of this instinct is obliterated (unconsciousness); in the less extreme case, it is attenuated. Indeed Cudworth also thinks that this natural endowment (by creation grace) of superintellectual instinct is sometimes mistaken for special grace:

Nay this is that which many mean by grace for they sensibly and experimentally find it to be something above their own activity which they are in a manner passive to, a thing that rules and governs them, informs and actuates their souls.

(4982, 46)

He seems to want to suggest here that 'divine fatalists' who deny the essential goodness of human nature, mistake the source of the grace they experience: they are so impressed by the sense of it seemingly coming from outside themselves ('above their own activity...passive to') that they effectively attribute it to the special acts of an external power (God). But in reality it is their own superintellectual instinct, implanted in them through creation grace, which they are alienated from and out of touch with to the extent that it can feel like something external to them when it obtrudes into their consciousness. Cudworth here notably underplays the concept of special grace as an inner force or power from God, reducing it to something constitutional in rather than superadded to humans.

Enthusiasm 'In a Good Sense'

Indeed, Cudworth even offers an account of the reconnection with one's own natural endowment of superintellectual instinct in terms of enthusiasm. Surprisingly, perhaps, in light of his approach in *EIM*, but less so in light of the earlier sermons, Cudworth is prepared to maintain that 'to assert such an inward an lifting form of righteousness, above free will or man's production' is an acceptable form of 'enthusiasm', and the true gospel teaching (4982, 46). This is not, however, to be construed as a prioritising of (irresistible) special grace or a subduing of the free will. Cudworth is not suggesting that humans are necessitated to goodness by their enthusiastically triggered superintellectual instinct by a sort of necessitating internal cause. Rather, he is suggesting that in the case of such enthusiasm some of the usual self-imposed or inherited hindrances to the delight in and free choice of the good (sinful habits, dispositions) are temporarily and effortlessly removed, so that the enthusiast is in a position freely to choose the good in a more favourable state, perhaps approximating

¹⁵ For a similar account in Henry More, see Leech, *The Hammer of the Cartesians*, 39-52.

the pre-lapsarian one (which, however, as just noted, is still not a state in which humans are 'above' the need to exercise free will).

Again, the point here as I interpret it is one about righteousness originating from something which feels at least 'external' to the agent, but is not: regeneration feels like an incursion of an alien power from without (i.e. special grace as a divine force), but in fact it is our reversion to our own deiform self in its pristine state so that becoming righteous just is this process of return to one's pristine self which is innately and naturally virtuous.¹⁶

More characterises enthusiasm 'in a good sense' as

when men are acted by a divine instinct, a thing which is not below but above reason...which is indeed theopathy being passive to God working in us [i.e. through creation grace] and thereby raised above ourselves...

(4982, 46)

The fact that authentic enthusiasm can propel somebody to virtue suggests to Cudworth that virtue is not – or need not – be a matter of habit formation:

There may be a divine enthusiasm towards virtue and the heavenly life, as in all such as are said to be heroically virtuous and good, for they are sensibly carried with a swing and impetus towards that which is good and do not only...tug themselves on to it.

(4982, 47)

The contrast here is one between grace ('divine enthusiasm') and willed effort ('moral and divine sobriety') (4982, 47). But the former should be understood as follows: when true enthusiasts feel themselves moved by a power 'superior to themselves', this should be taken to mean by a power superior only to their fallen selves, but this divine or superintellectual instinct is a power natural to and inherent in their true selves. Cudworth praises authentic enthusiasm as no less legitimate than the approach of 'human sobriety' in achieving the moral life, and compares it favourably to Plato's 'divine madness'. When people are 'inspired by a divine instinct, to that which is morally good', it is just the mirror of bad enthusiasm; in the latter, they are inspired by a principle 'below reason', in the former by a divine principle 'superior to reason and intellect but always agreeing with it' (4982, 47).

Unconsciousness

Cudworth even offers a remarkably 'experiential' account of the loss and recovery of superintellectual instinct in terms of the suppression of conscious content into the unconscious and its return into consciousness:

the inward nature of all intellectual beings [is righteousness] ...which through the abuse of their autexousous power they become alienated and estranged from, and, as

¹⁶ Cf. 'For the *spirit* is not always to be taken for a breath or impulse from without; but also for an inward propension of the soul awakened and revived in it, to return to its proper state, as it is intellectual, and then to act freely in it according to its ancient nature' (Cudworth, *Lincoln's Inn*, 36).

it were, removed into another country, a great distance from it, yet it remains unextinguishable in the bottom and centre of their beings, though bared low, stifled, and oppressed in them.

(4982, 50)

The idea here is that superintellectual instinct is fully present in us at the ‘bottom’ of our beings, but through some originally free, sinful acts it eventually becomes suppressed and unavailable to consciousness.¹⁷ Conversely, ‘regeneration’ represents a making conscious again of this superior motivational instinct which had become inaccessible to consciousness:

regeneration is nothing but the recovery of the true ancient nature and the bringing of them back, as it were, from the surface of their being and their outside into their most inward self. To find God and return to him by grace is nothing but to find ourselves and to return to that divine principle in the bottom of our beings. God and the divine nature is no...[adventitious thing] to the soul, neither must it come to it from without and to be introduced into it; it is that which our souls are built and grounded upon. God is nearer to us than we are aware of...for we are his offspring, and in him we live and move and have our being: and the kingdom of God (which is his life and righteousness) is within us.

(4982, 50)

Firstly salvation is presented as a return to one’s pristine self (‘inward self’) from one’s fallen, benighted self (‘outside self’). However, this is presented as effected not by special grace coming to us from the outside (elsewhere this is not denied as an ingredient, although it is conspicuously absent from view here), but rather we have a ‘divine principle’ in our unconscious regions (‘the bottom of our beings’). Indeed God is almost presented as our unconscious self, or a Self which is the common ground of all unconscious selves. Strikingly, Cudworth equates finding God and ‘return[ing] to him by grace’ as reducible to (‘nothing but’) finding oneself and freely ‘return[ing] to that divine principle in the bottom of our beings’.¹⁸

Free Will, Special Grace and Pelagianism

I have now outlined Cudworth’s account of the relationship between creation grace and free will, so I will conclude by turning to his account of the relationship between free will and special grace. Although Cudworth describes free will as a ‘certain power that a being hath over itself and over its own volitions and actions’, he nevertheless recognises that it does not have an absolute power over itself such that it could make itself morally good or evil ‘as easily as we can turn / hand or head this way or that

¹⁷ Carter notes that ‘animal sense’ can be broadly identified as (a part of) plastic nature, which is a lower ‘inconscious’ (Cudworth’s term) power in humans (*The Little Commonwealth of Man*, 41-42). In a sense there is a parallel here with superintellectual instinct, which although not a lower, is also a vital power and a ‘nature’. Like animal sense, it is not itself self-conscious, but a possible object of consciousness.

¹⁸ Cf. ‘sin is but a disease...in the soul, righteousness is the health and natural complexion of it; and there is a propension in the nature of every thing to return to its proper state, and to cast off whatever is heterogeneous to it’ (Cudworth, *Lincoln’s Inn*, 34-35).

way’, and this is because it does not have an absolute power over ‘his whole soul and his moral dispositions to good and bad’. Here Cudworth introduces the need for special grace, stressing the importance of acknowledging that free will does not give humans complete power over themselves, and notwithstanding our freedom we still need God’s assistance for our salvation. Here (4980, 33) he explicitly distances himself from Pelagianism, ‘that false notion...as if every free willed being was so much in his own hands...as that he stood in no need at all of God or of his assistance’ (4980, 33).

Gill, however, has argued – convincingly, I think - that Cudworth, despite protestations to the contrary, nevertheless tends to dispense de facto with the *necessity* of special grace in overcoming sin and achieving moral goodness.¹⁹ He is aware that ‘officially’ Cudworth recognises special grace as a necessary ingredient in the moral life. However, Gill is querying the coherence of Cudworth’s position rather than what he officially says, and here I would suggest that despite an explicit and relatively lengthy treatment of Pelagianism in *MS 4980*, the manuscript writings tend to confirm the impression that Cudworth’s emphases tend to put him closer to the Pelagian than to the Augustinian-Calvinist end of the debate (Gill, *The British Moralists on Human Nature*, 71,74).

Firstly it will be helpful here briefly to define Pelagianism. Scholars are still divided about which of the surviving texts to attribute to Pelagius, and the category becomes very wide and even flabby from the Reformation onwards, but following Rees I will here define Pelagianism as implying (1) denial of original sin; (2) denial that God’s grace is necessary for salvation; (3) the affirmation that by the right use of free will, a baptised Christian could at least in theory remain sinless (perfectionism) (Rees, *Pelagius*, 90).

I have already indicated that Cudworth tends towards the denial of original sin (1). Where does Cudworth stand with respect to (2) and (3)? As Rees observes, (2) is complicated, because Pelagius certainly affirms the necessity of grace, but it turns out that he understands grace in the following senses: (a) creation grace (especially including free will); and the external graces of (b) forgiveness of hitherto committed sins through baptism; (c) the law as expressed in the scriptures; (d) Christ’s teaching and example, and his death, which also forgives sins (Rees, *Pelagius*, 36). But as Rees points out, what is missing is a clear affirmation that the external graces (b), (c) and (d) stand in any more than a strengthening and auxiliary role to creation grace (a), and a clear statement of the *necessity* in addition for special grace as an internal divine power which can make humans capable of agape-love (Cudworth’s ‘Orphic-Pythagorean’ love) both in the first place - i.e. preveniently - and thereafter. Or otherwise put, also missing is an explicit affirmation of the impossibility of human sinlessness without the help of special grace – humans who have *actually* sinned stand in need of divine forgiveness through baptism, but if they do not sin thereafter, theoretically they do not stand in need of this (or any) external grace outside of creation grace.²⁰

In his explicit rebuttal of Pelagianism Cudworth notes that the build up of

¹⁹ ‘Adherents of [the thesis of human nature as essentially good] will hold that people have within themselves the capacity to overcome sin – that righteousness is internally accessible to human beings’ (Gill, *The British Moralists on Human Nature*, 59).

²⁰ In Pelagius’s view it cannot be impossible at least theoretically for humans to attain to sinlessness (perfection) through graces (a)-(d), whether at once or incrementally, since God has commanded it (‘Be ye therefore perfect...’ Matthew 5,48), and God would not command what was impossible (Rees, *Pelagius*, 94).

habits means that humans cannot ‘despotically’ exercise moral free will. However, this does not exclude the possibility of a slow progress by degrees to the moral life, as Cudworth admits when he says here that humans can prevail over bad habits ‘little by little’ (4980, 33).

Since the Pelagian position does not imply that baptised humans must have this ‘despotic’ power to freely to achieve immediate sinlessness, but only the power to do so by degrees with the faculties (superintellectual instinct, free will) granted them by creation grace, this qualification does not exempt Cudworth from the suspicion of Pelagianism. But Cudworth does add ‘with divine assistance’. However, the deeper question about coherence relates to the necessity for this divine assistance, if progress to moral perfection²¹ by degrees is admitted as a possibility, and also in what sense ‘assistance’ is meant. Cudworth objects to simplifications according to which any defence of free will is equated with Pelagianism (4980, 33). But the substantive question here, which he does not address head on, remains: why should ‘implor[ing] the divine assistance’ for ‘inward good dispositions’ be a *necessary* condition for achieving the moral life (4980, 33), and what is the nature of this ‘divine assistance’ in any case?

Cudworth identifies the ‘doctrine of Pelagius that took away all necessity of divine grace’ as having its basis in the indifferency construal of free will (4980, 34). However, he tends (again) to state only that Pelagianism is mistaken because humans do not enjoy free will in such a manner that they can determine themselves to good or evil *by single actions* (4980, 35). However, this does not answer the question as to the necessity of special grace, only that *it can be of assistance* in the slow progress to moral perfection by degrees (something, as just noted, a Pelagian would not be required to deny). Cudworth claims that as a matter of fact there are

inward and more immediate actings of divine grace and providence by internal motions and suggestions of thoughts...by which divine grace may effectually insinuate itself in us without any violation of our freedom or self-power.

(4980, 36)

This does effectively seem to admit a place for an internal special grace. However, Cudworth clearly wishes to reject the idea of *irresistible* grace (‘without any violation of our freedom’). Therefore this statement seems to go only so far as to claim that there is in fact a cooperation between an internal assisting grace and free will in some cases, rather than an argument that it is required. Again, Cudworth’s basic stance is Origenist:

the learned Origen...determines notwithstanding that besides the ... *ta proaireta* right use of his own freewill in itself, there is a good *aproaireton* out of our own power, which we stand in need of, which is the divine grace and assistance conspiring with the use of our own freewill.

(4980, 36)

Again, this seems to be a clear statement that there is something ‘out of our own power’ which we stand in need of for our own salvation. However, Cudworth does not clarify the nature of this ‘good *aproaireton*’ or state that it is grace in some sense over and above the senses of grace which Pelagians would in any case recognise, or

²¹ Here I am using ‘moral perfection’ and ‘sinlessness’ interchangeably. See Ferguson, *Pelagius*, 166.

(importantly) which was *required*. Nor would his appeal to Origen here assuage the concerns of those of the opposite persuasion, for whom Pelagianism is just an offshoot of Origenism.²² Perhaps the closest Cudworth gets here to an argument that special grace is necessary, rather than a statement that it is so, may be in the immediately following passage:

To which purpose the learned Origen well determines that the good of freewilled being ~~which have but an imperfect power over themselves~~ doth not depend only upon *ta proaireta* the use of our own freewill, but also stands in need *aproaireton ti* something else which is out of our own power, which is the divine power and grace.

(4980, 36-37)

The suggestion is perhaps that the *imperfect* nature of free will (imperfect ontologically, due to human finitude, rather than just with respect to its slowness in reversing the effects of sin) is the reason why special as well as creation grace is necessary rather than merely helpful. However, the imperfect nature of free will implies only the possibility that human beings will sin without assistance. It does not imply its actuality, and Cudworth needs something stronger here than this, since the possibility of sinning is compatible with a possible world where some or all humans actually avoided sin without the help of special grace.

Conclusion

Cudworth, committed to denying the free irresistible grace of orthodox reformers, found himself on the horns of a dilemma: admit the profound impairment of superintellectual instinct and free will and embrace a stronger kind of ‘divine fate’; or deny that the higher instinct/love and free will are profoundly impaired but risk accusations of Pelagianism. Cudworth seems to seize the second horn. Whether this does indeed put him in the company of Pelagians, who emphasise creation grace and free will to the degree that they admit special grace only in an assisting, but not a necessary role, is perhaps too difficult to establish on account of the relative brevity of Cudworth’s treatment of the question. Cudworth states explicitly that special grace plays a necessary role in the achievement of personal holiness and righteousness, although his account of why special grace is necessary – while somehow short of irresistible – or what precisely it is, is very thin. In any case, in the manuscripts as elsewhere, Cudworth seems *de facto*, while not explicitly, to demote the role of special as opposed to created grace.

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²² Cf. Rees, *Pelagius: A Reluctant Heretic*, 94, and Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*, especially chapter 5. For an excoriation, contemporary with Cudworth, of Platonism and Origenism as jointly giving birth to Pelagianism, see Gale, *The Court of the Gentiles*, 159-163.

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