

# **‘Sun in the sun’: The Moral Theology of Peter Sterry**

Eric M. Parker  
School of Religious Studies  
McGill University, Montréal

February 2018

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of the degree of doctor of philosophy

© Eric M. Parker, 2018

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	4
Resumé.....	5
Acknowledgements.....	6
Abbreviations.....	7
 Introduction: The Moral Theology of Peter Sterry .....	8
Peter Sterry in Modern Scholarship.....	19
Sterry's Unpublished Manuscripts.....	32
Division of Chapters .....	33
 1. A Universal Method of Morality: Sterry's Sources.....	37
Metaphysics as Ethics in Neoplatonism .....	38
Method and Ethics in the Medieval Period.....	45
Method and Ethics in the Early Modern Period.....	50
 2. The 'Divine Art of Numeration': Sterry's Trinitarian Method.....	81
Lord Brooke and the Coincidence of Opposites .....	82
Sterry's Universal A Priori Method.....	88
Method and the Arithmetical Trinity .....	98
Method and the <i>imago Dei</i> .....	109
 3. 'Secret Virtues of the Supreme Unity': A Rational Ethic.....	117
Eudaimonia and the Power of Judgment .....	119
A Rational Virtue Ethic .....	123
An Intellectual Virtue Ethic .....	131
Freedom for Virtue .....	146
 4. 'Ye only waking sight of Things': A Religious Ethic .....	157
True Religion and the Spiritual Senses.....	159

The Darkness of Conjecture and ‘Carnal Sense’ .....	165
Spiritual Virtue and Happiness .....	173
5. ‘Inseperable Society of Heavenly Love’: A Social Ethic .....	202
Spiritual Friendship.....	204
Universal Peace.....	219
Conclusion .....	238
Bibliography .....	246

## Abstract

The Cambridge Platonist and erstwhile chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, Peter Sterry (1613–1672) employed Neoplatonic metaphysics in order to form a Christian philosophy that facilitates a complete transformation of the self. Utilizing a Trinitarian method influenced by Nicholas Cusanus, Sterry's moral theology is an ethic of universal reform, regarding not only the human person but society at large. Sterry uses the logic of coincidence promoted by Cusanus to argue that all truths, even the contradiction of being and non-being are in reality unified in the ultimate Truth that descends from God. Like the Neoplatonists (and Cusanus), Sterry argues that only the 'higher' kinds of intellection, such as the divine and angelic intellects (*nous*), are set above the 'wall' of opposites perceived by discursive reason (*dianoia*). Sterry sees this contrast between higher and lower reason as indicative of the Triune shape of the mind, which he delineates according to unity (essence), variety (understanding), and union (will) as the proper method for viewing all of reality. This Triune vision of the soul unites philosophy and theology, as it replicates the life of Christ in his birth, death, and resurrection, in the 'birth' of divinity in the intellect, the subordination of understanding and discursive reason to God, and the union of the intellect and will in the soul as it is united with God's vision. The acceptance of the coincidence of opposites not only enables one to participate in the divine Life, but it also illuminates the whole person with divine Virtue, which is the intellectual vision of the soul forming its concepts and loves into their Triune shape of unity, variety, and union. Sterry's Trinitarian method is inherently practical, as it provides for a broader sense of tolerance and freedom in the individual as well as society as it limits human ambition, specifically the quest for absolute certainty in matters of religion and politics. This study shows how Peter Sterry worked to propose a practical Christian philosophy as the means to universal reform and peace in seventeenth-century England.

## Resumé

Platoniste de Cambridge et ancien aumônier d'Oliver Cromwell, Peter Sterry (1613-1672) a employé la métaphysique néoplatonicienne pour former une philosophie chrétienne qui facilite une transformation complète du soi. Utilisant une méthode trinitaire influencée par Nicholas Cusanus, la théologie morale de Sterry est une éthique de réforme universelle, concernant non seulement la personne humaine mais la société dans son ensemble. Sterry utilise la logique de coïncidence promue par Cusanus pour soutenir que toutes les vérités, même la contradiction de l'être et du non-être, sont en réalité unifiées dans la Vérité ultime qui descend de Dieu. Comme les néo-platoniciens (et Cusanus), Sterry soutient que seules les formes d'intellection «supérieures», telles que les intellects divins et angéliques (*nous*), sont situées au-dessus du «mur» des opposés perçus par la raison discursive (*dianoia*). Sterry voit ce contraste entre une raison supérieure et inférieure comme indicateur de la forme trinitaire de l'esprit, qu'il délimite selon l'unité (essence), la variété (intellect) et l'union (volonté) comme méthode appropriée pour voir toute la réalité. Cette vision trine de l'âme unit la philosophie et la théologie, comme elle reproduit la vie du Christ dans sa naissance, sa mort et sa résurrection, dans la «naissance» de la divinité dans l'intellect, la subordination de la raison discursive et l'intellect à Dieu, et l'union de l'intellect et de la volonté dans l'âme telle qu'elle s'unit à la vision de Dieu. L'acceptation de la coïncidence des opposés permet non seulement de participer à la vie divine, mais illumine aussi toute la personne avec la Vertu divine, qui est la vision intellectuelle de l'âme formant ses concepts et ses amours dans leur forme trinitaire d'unité, de variété et d'union. La méthode trinitaire de Sterry est intrinsèquement pratique, car elle offre un sens plus large de tolérance et de liberté à l'individu comme à la société, car elle limite l'ambition humaine, en particulier la quête d'une certitude absolue en matière de religion et de politique. Cette étude montre comment Peter Sterry a travaillé pour proposer une philosophie chrétienne pratique comme moyen de réforme universelle et de paix dans l'Angleterre du dix-septième siècle.

## **Acknowledgements**

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of the following, including Douglas Hedley, the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, Donald Duclow, David Albertson, and the American Cusanus Society, the Masters and Fellows of Emmanuel College Cambridge, and the staff of Emmanuel College Library as well as the British Library. I would like to thank Prof. Paul Yachnin, Torrance Kirby, and the Early Modern Conversions research team, as well as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for making possible my research travels in Cambridge and London. Also, I am deeply grateful to the Barbara & Patrick Keenan Foundation for providing me with a substantial stipend that aided in the completion of my research. I am especially grateful to the School of Religious Studies at McGill University, notably Professors Farrow, Green, Cere, Oegema, and Henderson as well as the wonderful support staff, Francesca, Debbie and Sami in particular. Furthermore, my research would not have been possible without the enlightening conversations of Richard Cumming, Simon Burton, and Joshua Hollmann. I would also like to thank the churches that supported me, notably Westminster Presbyterian Church and St. Stephen's Anglican Church. I would like to give my deepest thanks to my family, to Aubrey, Asher, and Evelyn for their love, patience, and persistent support during my research and writing. And I am ever grateful for the scholarship, wise advice, direction, and encouragement of my supervisor Prof. Torrance Kirby.

## Abbreviations

- NT* Robert Greville, Lord Brooke (co-authored by Peter Sterry), *The Nature of Truth, Its Union and Unity with the Soule*, 1641.
- SCS* *The Spirit Convincing of Sinne*, 1645
- CCC* *The Clouds in which Christ Comes*, 1648
- TCS* *The Teachings of Christ in the Soul*, 1648
- CFC* *The Commings Forth of Christ In the Power of his Death*, 1650
- EDN* *England's Deliverance from the Northern Presbytery*, 1652
- WOG* *The Way of God with his People in these Nations*, 1657
- TWU* *The True Way of Uniting the People of God in these Nations*, 1660
- DFW* *A Discourse of the Freedom of the Will*, 1675
- RRR* *The Rise, Race, and Royalty of the Kingdom of God in the Soul of Man*, 1683
- AGM* *The Appearance of God to Man in the Gospel, and the Gospel Change*, 1710
- SW* *Peter Sterry: Select Writings*, (ed. N.I. Matar, 1994), contains letters and treatises beginning in 1650 to the end of Sterry's life.
- EC MS Emmanuel College Library Manuscript, Cambridge University
- h The 'Heidelberg' critical edition of Nicholas Cusanus's works – *Nicolai de Cusa Opera omnia iussu et auctoritate Academiae Litterarum Heidelbergensis*. Hamburg: Meiner, 1932–2005.

## The Moral Theology of Peter Sterry

All Beauties. These are the life, the living Law  
From which thou dost all forms of Being draw.  
As light to dazled eyes, all things below  
From these pure Suns, in fading circles flow.<sup>1</sup>

A short distance from the old Dominican friars' fishpond on the grounds of Emmanuel College Cambridge sits the school chapel designed by Sir Christopher Wren (completed in 1677). Inside the chapel, depicted on one of the stained glass windows (a late 19<sup>th</sup>-century addition) along with Origen, John Scotus Eriugena, and others, is the 'father' of the Cambridge Platonist movement Benjamin Whichcote, and beside him stands his former pupil Peter Sterry. In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, Emmanuel College, the renowned Puritan seminary founded by Sir Walter Mildmay in 1588, had become the unlikely home of an ostensible Platonic academy. A certain group of students, who eventually came to be known as the 'Cambridge Platonists', drew their influence from Whichcote's tutelage. They were dedicated to the reading of Plato, Plotinus, Marsilio Ficino, and others, utilizing Neoplatonic metaphysics in order to discover a rational "seed of a deiform nature" at the root of religion, at a time when scholastic Aristotelianism dominated the arts curriculum at Cambridge.<sup>2</sup> Peter Sterry entered Emmanuel College in October of 1629, and under the influence

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter Sterry, a translation of Boethius' *Consolatio Philosophiae* 3, in *DFW*, 86.

<sup>2</sup> Gilbert Burnet, *History of His Own Times*, ed. Sir Thomas Burnet (London: A. Miller, 1753), I:261: "[Whichcote] set young students much on reading the ancient Philosophers, chiefly Plato, Tully, and Plotin."; On the nature of the curriculum in 17<sup>th</sup> century Cambridge see William T. Costello, *The Scholastic Curriculum at Early Seventeenth-Century Cambridge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958).



of Whichcote (as we are told by one of his contemporaries), he became one of the first to “make a public Profession of Platonism in the univers[ity] of Cambridge.”<sup>3</sup>

As to the reason why the artist and patron of the chapel window chose to depict Whichcote and Sterry together, when other Cambridge Platonists and Emmanuel men like John Smith, Ralph Cudworth, and Nathanael Culverwel were equally inspired by Whichcote in their pursuit of rational religion, their inscriptions may give us some clue.<sup>4</sup> In the window Whichcote and Sterry appear dressed in clerical cassock and gown, each holding a piece of parchment. Upon Whichcote’s paper are written the words ‘LUCERNA DOMINI SPIRITUS HOMINIS’, “the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord,” a quotation from Proverbs 20:27. Under Whichcote’s teaching and preaching, this verse became the veritable rallying cry of the Cambridge Platonist movement, with its implication that human reason (i.e., the “spirit of man”) is ordained by God to be a necessary and guiding feature of the religious life. The scroll in Sterry’s hand, on the other hand, reads ‘UT SIT DEUS OMNIA IN OMNIBUS’, “that god may be all in all,” a quotation from 1 Corinthians 15:28. This verse indicates the mystical disposition of Sterry, who emphasizes the apophatic approach to religion, the endeavour to discover the presence of the divine in all things through the darkness of unknowing. It is quite likely that the artist and patron of this window undoubtedly had the likeness of these two men placed together in order to depict these two definitive aspects of Cambridge Platonism, namely, the rational and the mystical. Though rational and mystical religion may seem to be strange bedfellows, Sterry nonetheless proposes that it is only through the mystical obscuring and darkening of reason that one is able fully to participate

---

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Baker, MS VI, fol. 83v, quoted in Vivian De Sola Pinto, *Peter Sterry: Platonist and Puritan 1613-1672*, 1968, Reprint (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013), 10.

<sup>4</sup> John Smith is also depicted on one of the windows in Emmanuel College chapel, but the place immediately adjacent to Whichcote is reserved for Sterry.

divine Reason and discover through that union a way of life that is truly rational and inherently practical.

Peter Sterry (1613-72) was born to a family of merchants in Southwark in 1613 and baptized at St. Olave's in September of that year.<sup>5</sup> After completing a brief stint as a fellow at Emmanuel in 1637-9 he promptly left the academic world and would serve the remainder of his life as a chaplain, first to the Parliamentarian and Puritan, Robert Greville, Lord Brooke, then to Oliver Cromwell, and after the Restoration he moved with his family to West Sheen in Richmond, where he ministered to a small nonconformist community under the patronage of Sir Philip Sidney, Viscount Lisle. After Lord Brooke's death, Sterry was appointed a delegate to the Westminster Assembly by the House of Lords as a member of the Independent party, and his name appears in the assembly minutes for the ninth of October, 1643 during a debate over proposed modifications to article thirteen of the Thirty-Nine Articles.<sup>6</sup> Sterry would later be appointed along with John Milton to oversee and arrange the minutes of the assembly for official purposes of the Commonwealth. As a personal chaplain to Cromwell and an official preacher to the English Council of State, Sterry was assigned to preach to the members of Parliament at St. Margaret's on occasion, and at Whitehall every fortnight. In his official political role, Sterry and others (including Thomas Goodwin and John Owen) sat on the Board of Commissioners who oversaw the licensing of public preachers, and in 1655 Cromwell appointed him to a special conference in the Council of State concerning the readmission of the Jews to England, a proposal that Sterry would have

---

<sup>5</sup> For biographical information on Sterry, see Pinto, *Peter Sterry*; and Nabil Matar, "Peter Sterry (1613-1672), Independent Minister," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> See Chad Van Dixhoorn and David F. Wright, eds., *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643-1652*, (Oxford, U.K: Oxford University Press, 2012), 2:177.

likely supported.<sup>7</sup> As an Independent and a strong supporter of the Protectorate, Sterry's reputation inevitably fell victim to attacks from both Presbyterians and Royalists after Cromwell's death. In 1660 Sterry received an official pardon from King Charles II for his involvement in the Cromwellian regime, after which he retired to West Sheen, where he and his community of nonconformist family and friends lived as a spiritual society, which one author has compared to Thomas More's community at Chelsea or Nicholas Ferrar's society at Little Gidding.<sup>8</sup>

In all of these ventures Sterry proved to be the most politically involved of the Cambridge Platonists, and his sermons and writings demonstrate his devotion to their central ideal, namely, the pursuit of the good life through the close union of natural reason and Christian religion. Christian ethics was a crucial element in the Cambridge Platonists' agenda for the renewal of religion. Publications on this topic by Henry More, Ralph Cudworth, and Nathanael Culverwel, as well as numerous sermons and treatises stressing the importance of a Christian use of right reason ("the Candle of the Lord") as a way of life by Whichcote, John Smith, and others attest to the decisively ethical focus of the movement.<sup>9</sup> As Eugene Austen describes in the only monograph on Cambridge Platonist ethics, their ethic follows the classical *eudaimonist* tradition in positing the life of the intellect as the condition of ultimate happiness for humanity. They propose that the pursuit of the intellectual good is reflected in the permanence of moral distinctions, the union of ethics with religion, and the practical application of ethical principles to the acquisition and

---

<sup>7</sup> Vivian De Sola Pinto conjectures that Sterry was appointed to the commission precisely because of his views on tolerance. See Pinto, *Peter Sterry*, 31.

<sup>8</sup> Nabil Matar, "Peter Sterry and the 'Lovely Society' of West Sheen," *Notes and Queries*, 227 (1982), 46; On Sterry's "lovely society" see chapter 5 below.

<sup>9</sup> See especially Henry More, *Enchiridion Ethicum*, (London: J. Flesher, 1667), and the English translation, *An Account of Virtue*, trans. Edward Southwell (London: B. Tooke, 1701); and Ralph Cudworth, *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality with a Treatise of Freewill*, ed. Sarah Hutton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

maintenance of moral and religious virtues in human society.<sup>10</sup> The modern resurgence of interest in virtue ethics brought about in part by the work of Alistair MacIntyre has produced relatively few studies on the nature of Neoplatonic virtue ethics or those Christians influenced by that tradition of thought.<sup>11</sup> The Cambridge Platonists provide an illuminating example of the Christian reception of Neoplatonic ethics in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, these Cambridge philosophers were motivated to unite the moral, philosophical and religious life by a shared concern that the scholastic Aristotelian basis of theology in the universities and throughout the Christian world was contributing to a general turn toward purely speculative religion among lay persons and clergy alike. Influenced to some degree by Francis Bacon's call for a great 'instauration' of learning, they believed popular devotion to the 'idols' of the mind, whether to authorities like Aristotle or John Calvin, to particular political or ecclesiastical parties, or to the outward forms of religion, were not only threatening to fracture the image of God in the human mind but were also causing division within the church, society, and the world at large.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the Cambridge Platonists saw the popular turn toward merely speculative religion, stemming from the innumerable volumes produced amidst the various controversies of religion as a form of materialism and atheism, of

---

<sup>10</sup> Eugene M. Austen, *The Ethics of the Cambridge Platonists* (Ph.D. Diss., The University of Pennsylvania, 1935).

<sup>11</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007); For a more Platonist approach to ethics, see Robert Merrihew Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> The Cambridge Platonists tend to agree with Bacon's prognosis against the idols of the mind but they disagree with his empiricism. Whichcote and Smith make reference to mental idols. See Patrides, *Cambridge Platonists*, 137, 332; and Sterry's sermon against mental idols in *AGM*, 406-16; and as Robert Greene notes, Culverwel intended his book on natural law to be a response to Bacon's call for a new "divine logic." See Greene's forward in Nathanael Culverwel, *An Elegant and Learned Discourse of the Light of Nature*, ed. Robert A. Greene and Hugh MacCallum, 1652 (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), 11.

which the threats of Socinianism, extreme Calvinist determinism, and the new philosophies of Thomas Hobbes, Baruch Spinoza and to some extent, Rene Descartes, were only symptoms.<sup>13</sup>

Their proposed solution to the materialistic spirit of the age is a philosophical and religious ethic that unifies the various aspects of human identity.<sup>14</sup> This sort of unification requires a delicate balance between philosophical and religious moral norms and goals, the pursuit of the universal Good and one's own individual good. As Plotinus explains, in order for the soul to have a vision of "the great Beauty" (τὸ μέγα κάλλος) the eye that beholds it must first be beautiful.<sup>15</sup> The union of goods and the ultimate happiness arising therefrom requires a certain unitive likeness of the absolute Good/One within the human soul. For some of the Cambridge Platonists, the traditional scholastic distinction between the theoretical and the practical intellects threatens to sever the connection between the intellectual eye and its divine object, as it makes "two persons" in the soul, one that thinks and one that wills, thus failing to provide a philosophical justification for the human person's unique and uninterrupted desire for the *summum bonum*.<sup>16</sup> Since the time of the Reformation, Protestant theologians have debated the practical nature of theology based on the distinction between the speculative and practical intellect.<sup>17</sup> For an Englishman like William Perkins theology is inherently practical because it is the "science of living well and blessedly

---

<sup>13</sup> See Ralph Cudworth, *A Sermon preached before the Honourable House of Commons*, in Patrides, *Cambridge Platonists*, 91: "[O]ur bookish Christians, that have all their religion in writings and papers, think they are now compleatly furnished with all kind of knowledge concerning Christ ... as if Religion were nothing but a little Book-craft, a mere paper-skill."

<sup>14</sup> See Patrides, 91: Cudworth claims the 'bookish Christians' think there is "no need of purging and purifying of their hearts, for the right knowledge of Christ."

<sup>15</sup> Plotinus, *Ennead* I.6.9., trans. A.H. Armstrong, 7 vols. Loeb Classical Library (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966–1988), I:261: "No eye ever saw the sun without becoming sun-like, nor can a soul see beauty without becoming beautiful."

<sup>16</sup> See Cudworth, *Eternal and Immutable Morality*, 170-8.

<sup>17</sup> See Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), I:340-54.

forever” or in the language of St. Augustine, theology has to do with rightly ordered love.<sup>18</sup> The Cambridge Platonists were certainly not opposed to these traditional forms of expression, but they believed theology cannot be proven practical without the discernment of a single practical metaphysical and epistemological principle within the human person that supplies the inherent condition that makes all knowledge and motivation possible. Religion in its most rational form, in other words, must not merely effect and perfect a single faculty of the soul, speculative or practical, but it must realign the whole person to the divine centre, through a power inherent in the image of God itself, thus unifying all of the soul’s powers in the pursuit of the Good.

In order to explain the metaphysical unity of the soul in both its speculative and practical aspects, the Cambridge Platonists drew from Neoplatonic metaphysics, particularly the Plotinian notion that the soul is a monad which participates in the divine Good/Mind beyond discursive reason, through the intellect.<sup>19</sup> For the Neoplatonists, intellect (*nous*) is distinguished from reason (*dianoia*) as intellectual intuition of first principles is distinguished from the ability to distinguish between the various substances or accidents that derive from those principles. For Peter Sterry, Ralph Cudworth, and Henry More, each person’s “higher reason” functions as the centre of the intellectual life and the finite locus of union with the divine Good/Mind (Nous). More refers to this power of the soul as the “Boniform Faculty,” which is the inherent intellectual unity of the soul that contains the objects of both reason (truth) and the will (good) in a single power of cognition.<sup>20</sup> For Cudworth, all ethical motivation arises entirely out of the soul’s unitive, self-

---

<sup>18</sup> William Perkins, *A golden Chaine or, The Description of Theologie Containing the order of the causes of Salvation and Damnation, according to Gods word* (Cambridge: John Legat, 1600), fol. 4v.; and Augustine, *De Civ. Dei* 15.22.

<sup>19</sup> Plotinus, *Ennead* VI.9.

<sup>20</sup> More, *An Account of Virtue*, 6: “The Boniform Faculty ... [is] of that divine Composition, and supernatural Texture, as enables us to distinguish not only what is simply and absolutely the best, but to relish it and to have pleasure in that alone.”

reflective power, which he refers to as the “hegemonical faculty.” This faculty is the soul’s *autoexousion* or *sui potestas*, that is, its self-governing power and ability to judge and measure all things within its own self-reflective unity.<sup>21</sup> Since the soul is a monad it forms judgments by means of its own “potential omniformity,” namely, its ability to create reliable concepts (i.e., ‘forms’) of all things by unfolding them from its own intellectual unity, a notion that Cudworth derives from Marsilio Ficino.<sup>22</sup>

Contrary to the scholastic notion that the will must follow the last dictate of the practical intellect, Cudworth posits the “hegemonicon” as both intellect and freewill, an autonomous power of judgment and will within the soul “reduplicated upon itself” that permits the soul to act or suspend action, even the action that it determines to be the best.<sup>23</sup> The hegemonicon’s intellectual power of self-rule enables each person to become a co-worker with God in the creative formation of concepts and in the right ordering of one’s love for the things perceived through them.<sup>24</sup> The abuse of the hegemonicon is the birth of evil, which forms a divisive battle within the self between one’s desire for the Good itself and one’s love of self and pursuit of one’s own private interest.<sup>25</sup> A consequence of Cudworth’s philosophical defence of the intellectual unity of the moral life and his persistent appeal to moral independence and responsibility, is his lack of stress upon the religious reception of the Good through divine grace and illumination as a constituent element of moral judgment and motivation. Indeed, some modern interpreters have seen in Cudworth’s ethics

---

<sup>21</sup> Cudworth, *Eternal and Immutable Morality*, 196.

<sup>22</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *Theologica Platonica de Immortalitate Animæ*, II.10, in *Opera Omnia* (Basel, 1561), I:105.: “formam suam re vera unam, vigore & respectu quodam considerat omniformem, perinde ac si Solis lux, colorum fons omnium, quæ ... unicolor est, se tanquam omnicolorem percipiat.”

<sup>23</sup> *Eternal and Immutable Morality*, 184.

<sup>24</sup> *Eternal and Immutable Morality*, 185.

<sup>25</sup> Cudworth, *Eternal and Immutable Morality*, 177; On self-love see Patrides, *Cambridge Platonists*, 98-9, & 156.

an “autonomist internalism” that functions independently of any normative order external to the mind itself.<sup>26</sup>

Peter Sterry’s unpublished treatises *Of Vertue* and *Of Philosophie in General* reveal his conviction that the philosophical pursuit of ethics (whether in the academy or through catechesis) is a necessary preparation for religion and, therefore, not strictly separate from devotion to God.<sup>27</sup> Sterry’s ethics, however, represents the other end of the spectrum from that of Cudworth, as Sterry lays the weight of the moral life upon a religious and mystical union between God and the soul. As Sterry’s first modern biographer noted in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Sterry stands out from the rationalism of the other Cambridge Platonists in his emphatic placement of the human ‘spirit’ above reason and by confining the discernment of spiritual things to the religious life.<sup>28</sup> For Sterry, as we will see below, the “Spirit of Man” is the *apex mentis*, the highest level of the intellect (nous), where it is immediately united to the divine Mind. So, like Cudworth, Sterry also aims to unify the speculative and practical aspects of the mind in a single intellectual faculty that is higher than reason though not contrary to it. Also like Cudworth (and Ficino), Sterry refers to this power of the human mind as the soul’s potential ‘omniformity’, and he sees it as a faculty of both judgment and will. Rather than a mere appeal to Christian principles, Sterry also frequently appeals to Proclus to explain the idea “that God may be all in all,” namely, that every soul is an intellectual

---

<sup>26</sup> According to Stephen Darwall and J. A. Passmore, the existence of God is not a necessary philosophical principle in Cudworth’s ethics. See Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal ‘Ought’, 1640-1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 120; and J.A. Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth: An Interpretation*, 1951 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 84.

<sup>27</sup> See Sterry, *Of Vertue*, in EC MS 291, 172-230; and Sterry, *Of Philosophy in General*, EC MS 291, 3-66.

<sup>28</sup> Pinto, *Peter Sterry*, 16.



substance that contains all created principles in their proper proportions (πάντα ἐν πᾶσι) within itself.<sup>29</sup>

Sterry is more emphatic than the other Cambridge Platonists, however, that the ‘spirit’ is distinct from the discursive faculty of reason, and he also affirms that the spirit is in some sense even beyond the intellect. For Sterry, ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’ are interchangeable terms, as they both describe the unity of the whole person, which is a unity of understanding and will.<sup>30</sup> Yet, Sterry also speaks of ‘spirit’ as a power above both ‘soul’ and ‘body’.<sup>31</sup> He follows Plotinus in describing the ‘spirit’ as the separable soul that dwells above the body in an immediate union with the divine Spirit.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the spirit of a person is a direct participation in the mediatory image of Christ, who is the incarnation of the divine Mind. The spirit of the human person is not merely ‘right reason’ or ‘intellect’; rather, it is God himself proportioning his infinite nature to his finite reflection therein.<sup>33</sup> This proportioning between infinite and finite in the spirit is the mediatory image of Christ, as it is a direct and immediate participation in the unity of Christ’s human and divine vision. So, the spirit of a person is not merely infinite or finite but a unity of both. Influenced by the dialectical mysticism of Nicholas of Cusa, Sterry believes the mediatory image in the human soul is a living image of the Trinity, which Sterry names ‘unity’, ‘variety’, and ‘union’. Each person naturally imitates the Trinity on some level by means of self-reflection, as the soul becomes a tri-unity of self, self-image, and union (or soul, understanding, and will).

---

<sup>29</sup> See Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, ed. & trans. E.R. Dodds, (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1963), prop. 197.

<sup>30</sup> See Sterry, *Of the Nature of a Spirit*, in EC MS 291, 69: “Nothing from without can worke upon the soule, or make any change in it because it is a spirit, that is, an immaterial and incorporeal substance, a substantial act or activitie.”

<sup>31</sup> See *RRR*, 193: “The upper end of the Beam, where it is fullest and brightest, immediately united to, and rooted in the supream Light, makes the Spirit.”

<sup>32</sup> See Sterry, *Of Vertue*, in EC MS 291, esp. 212.

<sup>33</sup> *TCS*, “Epistle Dedicatory,” fol. 3v: “the Spirit of Man hath a Higher than That, by which It Self lives, even the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, who is the King, and Father of Spirits.”

The mediatory image in the ‘spirit’ of a person is a self-awareness of another self, one’s divine self or Idea in the Mind of God, as it is immediately united to oneself. This awareness of the Self in the self – the Sun in the sun, in Sterry’s metaphor – is faith, and it relies both on the metaphysical ground of the soul’s natural tri-unity and the epistemological lens and an *a priori* method that arises from that tri-unity and by which each person judges and chooses all of one’s concepts and loves in an immediate union with the Mind of God. In this way, Sterry’s ethic unites both an ethic of right reason with a Christological and Trinitarian method for transcending one’s own conceptual knowledge and pursuing the Good itself in all things apart from one’s mental idols and private interest. Through the deified faculty of judgment, or ‘spirit’, each saint participates with Christ’s virtuous activity of forming all things in the image of the Trinity, so that, whether in life or death, darkness or light, believers judge finite appearances by their eternal forms in the intellectual light, so that “God may be all in all” in oneself.

Though Sterry’s ethic incorporates both philosophical and theological principles in essential union, in this study we will refer to his effort to unite the speculative and practical lives as ‘moral theology’. Though Sterry never uses this phrase, he is aware of the encyclopedic work of the Herborn theologian and pedagogue Johann Heinrich Alsted, who argues that “moral theology differs from moral philosophy, which considers only this, that virtue is the middle way between extremes.”<sup>34</sup> Moral theology, “unfolds the manner of likeness, or subjection, by which the Christian man becomes like God.”<sup>35</sup> The Platonic goal of assimilation as much as possible to

---

<sup>34</sup> Johann Heinrich Alsted, *Encyclopædia: Septem tomis distincta* (Herborn, 1630), 5:1684: “[T]heologia moralis differat a philosophia morali, quæ solum hoc spectat, ut virtus sit medium inter extrema.”; See the reference to Alsted in Robert Greville, Lord Brooke, *The Nature of Truth, Its Union and Unity with the Soule: Which is One in its Essence, Faculties, Acts, One with Truth*, (London: R. Bishop, 1641), 177.

<sup>35</sup> Alsted, *Encyclopædia*, 5:1685: “Theologia moralis explicat modum conformitatis, sive subjectionis, qua homo Christianus fit conformis Deo.”

God more accurately characterizes Sterry's aims, and since Sterry maintains the traditional distinction between philosophy and theology by distinguishing between mediate knowledge (philosophy) and immediate knowledge (religion) of God, then it is more consistent with Sterry's intention to label his ethics 'moral theology', though Sterry would agree with Alsted that "they err who conclude that the teaching of the virtues is only philosophy or only theology."<sup>36</sup>

### **Peter Sterry in Modern Scholarship**

Despite his prominent appearance beside Benjamin Whichcote in the Emmanuel College chapel window, Peter Sterry is often regarded as a marginal figure among the Cambridge Platonists. This is due to a variety of reasons. Sterry's published works consist of various sermons and treatises ranging from brief to lengthy, all of which were published posthumously and were not reprinted beyond the first edition, so his works have never had a very wide readership. Also, Sterry's only monograph, his *Discourse of the Freedom of the Will* (1675), was left incomplete, and some of its sections were lost after they were loaned out to Sterry's friends and family. Sterry's argument, therefore, has many missing pieces, leaving the arrangement of the discourse somewhat haphazard, only lending Sterry's propensity for topical digression even more disorienting. As F.D. Maurice once noted, "If [the reader] can make out no theory of the Will from [Sterry's] suggestions and reflections, he will at least be assured that there is a good which must triumph at last."<sup>37</sup>

Another reason for Sterry's minor status in the literature on Cambridge Platonism is owing to scholars having tended to see an anti-rationalist bias in the mystical nature of his writings, which

---

<sup>36</sup> Alsted, *Encyclopædia*, 5:1684: "Errant enim, qui virtutum disciplinam vel solam philosophiam, vel solam theologiam consituunt."

<sup>37</sup> Frederick Denison Maurice, *Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy*, (New York: MacMillan and Co., 1890), 2:351.

seems to contradict the central feature and aim of the movement. This is undoubtedly the reason for his exclusion from many of the foundational treatments of the Cambridge Platonists, such as the influential two-volume work by John Tulloch (1872) as well as the anthologies by John Muirhead (1931) and C.A. Patrides (1969), though other anthologies by Frederick Powicke (1926), and a more recent volume by Alison Teply and Charles Taliaferro (2004) include selections from Sterry's writings.<sup>38</sup> Austen has written the only book to date that encompasses the wealth of material and diversity that is Cambridge Platonist ethics, but his treatment of the subject does not include Sterry, undoubtedly because Whichcote and others saw right reason as "the ultimate reference in all things moral."<sup>39</sup> Three dissertations have addressed Sterry's thought in general with little mention of any focus on Christian ethics in his works.<sup>40</sup>

Some scholars, such as Patrides, Noel Mayfield (1988), and Robert Greene (1991), see Sterry's mystical emphasis as a direct corollary of his Calvinistic and Puritan theological commitments, which are not shared by his other Cambridge colleagues.<sup>41</sup> According to Patrides, Sterry belongs among the more "uncompromising" Calvinists such as Richard Sibbes who argued

---

<sup>38</sup> John Tulloch, *The Cambridge Platonists* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1872); John H. Muirhead, *The Platonic Tradition of Anglo-Saxon Philosophy: Studies in the History of Idealism in England and America* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1931); C.A. Patrides, "The High and Aery Hills of Platonisme: An Introduction to the Cambridge Platonists," in *The Cambridge Platonists*, ed. C.A. Patrides (London: Edward Arnold, 1969); Frederick J. Powicke, *The Cambridge Platonists: A Study with Six Illustrations* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1926); Charles Taliaferro and Alison J. Teply, *Cambridge Platonist Spirituality* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2004).

<sup>39</sup> Austen, *Ethics*, 42; More recent treatments of their ethics, such as Darwall (1997) and Michael Gill, also do not discuss Sterry. See Michael Gill, *The British Moralists and Human Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>40</sup> Mary A. Nevins, *Peter Sterry, a Platonic Independent*, (Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, 1954); Alison J. Teply, *The Mystical Theology of Peter Sterry: A Study in Neoplatonist Puritanism* (Ph.D. Diss., Cambridge University, 2004); Thomas Dixon, "*Spiritual Musick*": *The Model of Divine Harmony in the Work of Peter Sterry (1613-1672)* (Ph.D. Diss., University of Manchester, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> Noel H. Mayfield, *Puritans and Regicide: Presbyterian-Independent Differences Over the Trial and Execution of Charles (I) Stuart* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988); Robert Greene, "Whichcote, the Candle of the Lord, and Synderesis," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 52:4 (Oct-Dec., 1991), 617-44.

that “it is the greatest reason, to yeeld reason to Faith.”<sup>42</sup> Greene and Mayfield focus on Sterry’s negative appraisals of the “Candle of the Lord,” which they interpret as part and parcel of his harsh Calvinist mistrust of the natural principles of human reason vis-à-vis divine revelation.<sup>43</sup> Greene points to Sterry’s assertion in his sermon *The Spirits Convincing of Sin* (1645) that “Reason’s selfe must first be cast into a deep sleep and die, before she can rise again in the brightnesse of the Spirit” as proof that Sterry distances himself from Whichcote’s rationalism.<sup>44</sup>

Mayfield presents examples from Sterry’s sermon *The Comings Forth of Christ* (1650) in an effort to explain the political and theological aspirations of the Independent party after the execution of Charles I. Mayfield argues that Independents such as Thomas Goodwin and John Owen justified the regicide by drawing a stark distinction between the visible and invisible church, so that whereas Presbyterians saw the visible church as a mixture of sinners and saints, the Independents believed the true church is invisible and, therefore, does not depend on external authorities such as the presbytery or especially monarchical government. Their desire to separate and purify the invisible church of the elect led these ministers to preach against the Christian use of natural reason and to see the divisions in the English nation as a direct result of its leaders’ use of worldly standards of morality rather than those derived directly from the Scriptures to form its system of government and draft its public policy. For John Owen, Christians are certainly to utilize reason in their worldly affairs, but they must come to realize that reason differs from faith in *kind* and not merely by *degree*.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, Mayfield argues, “Owen felt that the natural man’s knowledge

---

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Patrides, *Cambridge Platonists*, 9.

<sup>43</sup> Robert Greene, “Candle of the Lord,” 636-7.: Greene argues that Sterry’s “mystical and Platonic inclinations separated him from Whichcote as decisively as his Calvinism. He too showed little sympathy for the tradition of the candle of the Lord.”

<sup>44</sup> Greene, “Candle of the Lord,” 637.

<sup>45</sup> Mayfield, *Puritans and Regicide*, 193: “For Owen and the Independents the natural man was different in *kind*, not simply in *degree*, from the truly spiritual man.”

of God led nowhere but to condemnation,” and that “there was nothing spiritually significant about natural human virtue.”<sup>46</sup>

When Mayfield turns his focus on Sterry’s sermon, he does so with these conclusions about the theology of the Independent party in mind. He rightly interprets Sterry’s intention in his sermon to steer between the extremes of legalism and antinomianism. Sterry affirms the abrogation of both the Old Testament moral and ceremonial laws for Christians while at the same time affirming that true spirituality includes morality as the sunlight of Christ is connected to its reflection in the “fleshly part” of the believer.<sup>47</sup> Mayfield finds in this stark contrast between morality and spirituality the same division between nature and grace, reason and faith that he finds in other Independents like Owen. Since the ‘natural man’ and natural morality are mere shadows of true spiritual reality, then spirituality is not only superior to morality but the two are “fundamentally different.”<sup>48</sup> The moral life of the believer is a part of the Old Testament system and is designed to pass away when the Spirit arrives. As Sterry says (via Mayfield), Christ came into the world “to pitch his tabernacle for a season in the natural image ... before he dissolved [sic] it.”<sup>49</sup>

Despite Mayfield’s attention to the historical context, his reading of Sterry’s sermon (and Sterry’s theology by consequence) does not appear to issue from a close reading of the text but from his predetermined conclusions about the nature of Independent theology. This is demonstrated in the very line that he quotes from Sterry above. Indeed, Mayfield cuts Sterry’s sentence short so that Sterry appears to leave the contrast between morality and spirituality hanging in irreconcilable division. The complete sentence from Sterry’s sermon reads as follows: “He [Christ] comes first to put a period to the Ceremonial Law; but to pitch his Tabernacle for a Season

---

<sup>46</sup> Mayfield, *Puritans and Regicide*, 192.

<sup>47</sup> CFC, “Epistle Dedicatory,” fol. 11r.

<sup>48</sup> Mayfield, *Puritans and Regicide*, 214.

<sup>49</sup> Mayfield, *Puritans and Regicide*, 214.

in the Natural Image; to dwell in it, before he dissolve it; *not to ruine, but restore it, in all things that are Moral.*”<sup>50</sup> Rather than displaying a radical distrust of human reason, this passage actually proves the opposite, namely, that Christ comes into the soul not to destroy permanently but rather to *uphold* morality. Indeed, Christ restores morality by restoring human reason to its natural order below the ‘spirit’ of the intellect. Sterry affirms in this sermon that the righteousness of the law is a “Friend to the Bridegroom,” and though it “Resignes to Christ” when he comes to the soul, it does so “as Stars do their Glory to the Rising Sun; yet Retaining their proper Brightness, though Clothed-upon with His Beauties.”<sup>51</sup> Since the natural man is a shadow of Christ, his existence is necessary in order to properly distinguish between Christ and the individual soul to which He unites himself. As Sterry affirms, “Thy Moral Beauties are the Image of God in this Shadow. Take these away; Nothing will be left, but Darkness, and Confusion.”<sup>52</sup>

The readings of Sterry’s Christian ethics by Greene and Mayfield, furthermore, fail to take into account the Neoplatonic notion of intellectual hierarchy that Sterry employs in distinguishing between the natural/moral and the spiritual. As Sterry affirms, lower principles of truth cannot comprehend the higher, though the higher principles enfold the lower as a larger circle enfolds its lower emanations.<sup>53</sup> The subordination of a lower principle to a higher one does not indicate the destruction of the lower principle but its union and identity with its source. Likewise, Sterry upholds a threefold intellectual hierarchy, namely, spirit-reason-sense. As he affirms:

These three Principles of truth are as three Circles upon the face of the water; one within another: the lesser are infolded in the greater; but cannot extend themselves to the wide

---

<sup>50</sup> CFC, “Epistle Dedicatory,” fol. 5v. Italics added.

<sup>51</sup> CFC, “Epistle Dedicatory,” fol. 11r.

<sup>52</sup> CFC, “Epistle Dedicatory,” fol. 11r.

<sup>53</sup> SCS, 13.

compasse of the greater circle, unlesse they break and vanish in themselves, that they may become one with it.<sup>54</sup>

Though the lower principles of sense and reason ‘break’ and ‘vanish’, they do not vanish permanently but they reappear in perfect unity within the spirit (“that they may become one with it”), which is the soul reflecting upon itself in union with Christ. The passage quoted by Greene affirms this. Indeed, Sterry insists that “Reason’s selfe must first be cast into a deep sleep and die,” not so that it may remain dead but that it may “rise again in the brightnesse of the Spirit.”<sup>55</sup> As we will see below, Sterry sees the restoration of reason as following the pattern of the Trinity, the persons of which are constantly ‘dying’ into one another in their perfect union of eternal Love. When the powers of the soul perform their proper function and remain in their correct hierarchical order, they each contribute to the overall happiness of the human person.<sup>56</sup> In fact, God commands natural devotion and religious reformation as human goods.<sup>57</sup> If a person breaks the order of the intellect by the improper use of reason and natural goods, however, there will be division, evil, and misery in the soul and in society. Natural goods are necessary for the body, as they “procure Temporall, Temporary blessings. But if they be not Subordinate to the Convictions of the Spirit, they can doe your souls no good.”<sup>58</sup>

Though Sterry certainly distinguishes between faith and reason, nature and grace in their hierarchical relations, he does not see them as completely separate in *kind* but as essentially united

---

<sup>54</sup> SCS, 13.

<sup>55</sup> SCS, 13.

<sup>56</sup> Mayfield also misses the implications of the hierarchical pattern in Sterry’s distinction between the spiritual, supernatural, and natural elements of the *imago Dei*. See Mayfield, *Puritans and Regicide* 214.

<sup>57</sup> SCS, 18: “Happy are our times, if some amongst us doe not, upon no higher Conviction, then these of Naturall Devotion, call for dayes of Humiliation, Reformation in Religion. But do I condemne these Convictions? No. God commands and commends them from the example of Brute Creatures: The Oxe knowes his owne; and the Asse his Masters Crib.”

<sup>58</sup> SCS, 18.



within the one ‘seed’ of divinity within the human intellect.<sup>59</sup> According to Mayfield, the Independent emphasis on spirituality and grace over nature did not lead them to adopt the doctrine of universal salvation, as one author claims.<sup>60</sup> Rather than seeing all humanity as elect in Christ, argues Mayfield, Independent spirituality led to an emphasis on the grace of election for the invisible church alone. Apparently Mayfield is unaware that Sterry is a universalist. In his treatise entitled, *The state of wicked men after this life is mixt of evill & good things*, found in his unpublished notebooks, Sterry upholds the Origenist doctrine of universal restoration (*apokatastasis*) and presents a thorough case for this position using both rational and biblical evidence.<sup>61</sup> This means, for Sterry, that every person is united to Christ as the first principle of human nature – the *imago Dei* consists of essence, understanding, and will, which are common to all human persons – and so every person is elect, though the ‘veils’ of ignorance and sin cover over the seed of divinity/unity in the soul so that not everyone is aware of one’s true identity. This is why Sterry asserts with conviction that the natural image is not to be fought against, though it should be subordinated to the spirit. Rather, “He, that defaceth the Prints, and Image of the Eternal Word in his Natural Man, Crucifies his Saviour in the Flesh, a Second Time.”<sup>62</sup>

A testament to his concern to find a natural basis for the supernatural is the fact that Sterry bases religious faith on the idea of epistemological faith that he borrows from Neoplatonism and from Proclus in particular. For Proclus, faith, truth, and love (πίστις, ἀλήθεια, and ἔρος) are salvific powers of the soul that unite it to the Good through the sympathetic attraction of likeness. Faith transcends reason and intellect, resting in a direct union with the first principles themselves.

---

<sup>59</sup> See below, chapter 5.

<sup>60</sup> See Christopher Hill, “God and the English Revolution,” *History Workshop Journal* 17:1 (1984), 19-31.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Sterry, EC MS 291, 96-105.

<sup>62</sup> CFC, “Epistle Dedicatory,” fol. 11v.

Indeed, Proclus argues, it is only a “bastard reason” (νόθον λόγον) that knows the One as its object of cognition.<sup>63</sup> For Sterry, faith removes the veils covering the perception of the natural man, so that unhindered by the idols of the mind, each believer may immediately participate Christ’s vision and thereby attain to self-mastery. Indeed, though Christ comes “the second time at the last Day, to set an End to the Natural Image, with all its Moral Excellencies” he does not come to eliminate the natural image and its virtues by “confounding them with an inferior or contrary Spirit” but to set the proper limit upon them by directing them to their ultimate end; thus, Christ completes them, “consummating them in a superior, a Spiritual Glory.”<sup>64</sup> When faith and reason are united in their proper hierarchical order a person becomes “One Spirit with the Lord, and so One with the Supream Principle of things, thorow which he hath a Sovereigne Power over them.”<sup>65</sup> The one who has faith also lives according to reason, which is never permitted to contradict the principles of faith, because the believer’s reason has become intimately united to the divine Mind of Christ, who is the “Reason of his Reasons.”<sup>66</sup>

Besides the influence of Neoplatonism, Sterry’s ethic is profoundly shaped by Nicholas Cusanus’s method of learned ignorance and its potential to provide a universal vision of human life.<sup>67</sup> Sterry sees the loss of the natural image and its restoration in the spirit as a reflection of the tri-une nature of the human person, as well as an *a priori* method for bringing about the

---

<sup>63</sup> Proclus, *In Timaeus* 257.25., trans. David T. Runia and Michael Share, 4 Vols., (Cambridge University Press, 2008); Proclus subordinates human λόγος not only to νοῦς but also to the salvific qualities of faith, truth, and love that he gleans from the Chaldean Oracles. See Proclus, *Théologie Platonicienne*, edited and translated by H.D. Saffrey and L.G. Westerink, 2 vols., (Paris: Société d’Édition Les Belles Lettres, 1968), I.25; For a brief but thorough discussion of the history of this triad in Neoplatonic philosophy see J.M. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, (Cambridge University Press, 1967), 231-246.

<sup>64</sup> CFC, “Epistle Dedicatory,” fol. 5v.

<sup>65</sup> CFC, 22.

<sup>66</sup> RRR, 41; SCS, 34: “Beleeve it, ‘Tis true as Gospel: No man that is led by the law of the Spirit of Life; can walk contrary to any Law of Nature, Common Honesty, Civill Policy, or whatsoever is of good Report, Praise-worthy.”

<sup>67</sup> On Cusanus and Sterry’s use of his method see chapters one and two below.

transformation of the mind. Cusanus also utilized the paradoxical union of opposites as a mechanism for transcending the conjectural nature of human reason. For Cusanus and Sterry, reason does not provide a universal perspective of reality, precisely because it always begins from the standpoint of the finite. When a person detaches oneself from reason in learned ignorance, then one finds certainty beyond the wall of coinciding opposites, in an intuition of the infinite beyond one's finite perception. This does not mean that reason is unreliable or that one must hold rational conclusions in suspicion. Reason is only conjectural in comparison with the infinite vision possessed by God alone.<sup>68</sup> For Sterry, when reason is united with God, it is enabled to judge all finite things properly, from neither a purely divine nor a conjectural perspective but from a triune perspective of light-in-conjecture. Thus, the *imago Dei* is not merely characterised by 'reason' but by reason's union with the divine, in a paradoxical vision of Reason-in-reason, which is the essential union between God's self-vision and his vision reflected in a finite intellect (i.e., Christ's mediatory image).

Sterry's ethic, therefore, is both mystical and methodical. He derives his triune *a priori* method from the triune nature of the *imago Dei*, which he believes provides the pathway to certainty and spiritual virtue through intellectual humility. Indeed, for Sterry, the triune method provides greater certainty than reason alone, because it unites the whole person with the divine Vision and Virtue in all of one's judgments, motives, and actions.<sup>69</sup> Sterry's method is both speculative and experiential. It begins with the natural image as a necessary preparation for divine vision. Then, one proceeds by giving up natural concepts and one's own finite gaze at the created

---

<sup>68</sup> See the helpful introduction in H. Lawrence Bond, ed. and trans., *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997).

<sup>69</sup> SCS, 33: "O! that the most Rationall Men, were so modest towards their Maker; as to suspect, that there may be in him a Divine Sense, a Spirit of Light, above the Compasse and Conjectures of their Reason; which he may communicate to whom he pleaseth!"

world in order to subordinate reason to divine Reason in the spirit. Finally, one unites the natural image to the spiritual image, which is one's divine Idea in the divine Mind, so that the natural image and the spiritual become perfectly united while retaining their distinct modes of being. Using this method, one comes to view all of one's concepts and loves as images of divine Virtue, shadows that when placed in subordination to divine Virtue become one with it, as participations in the divine Light in a shadow. So, for Sterry, human happiness is a paradoxical discovery of God's own vision within oneself by means of an apophatic ethic. This ethic, though it removes the natural image from view, does not destroy one's responsibility to pursue a moral life. Rather, Sterry's ethic demands a life of self-sacrifice, of giving up one's natural image to "Expire in a Fire of Love, not of Lust"<sup>70</sup> so that by faith and love one might reach "a Height in the Spirit of Man above all things" and judge all things from one's own self-sufficient intellectual power, converting knowledge from shadows of conjecture into light in a shadow, and certainty-in-conjecture.<sup>71</sup>

Sterry's emphatic subordination of reason to the 'spirit' of the intellect is not a product of a dualistic Puritan worldview. As historians have pointed out, the term "Puritan" is notoriously difficult to define, as the term had a variety of connotations in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, belying the fact that "Puritanism" did not denote a single theological program.<sup>72</sup> Many of Sterry's interpreters use the term as characteristic of a sort of extreme Calvinism, delineated by an emphatic predestinarianism and a marked suspension of reason from all areas of religion.<sup>73</sup> Though Sterry

---

<sup>70</sup> *CFC*, "Epistle Dedicatory," fol. 11v.

<sup>71</sup> *AGM*, 183.

<sup>72</sup> See Basil Hall, "Puritanism: the Problem of Definition," *Studies in Church History* 2 (1965): 283-296.; and Randall J. Pederson, *Unity in Diversity: English Puritans and the Puritan Reformation, 1603-1689*, Leiden: Brill, 2014.

<sup>73</sup> Most assessments of Sterry forgo any definition of the term 'Puritan' but merely equate it with 'Calvinism', a term also left undefined. On the problems with the term 'Calvinism', particularly with regard to the diversity of Reformed theology, see Richard A. Muller, *Reformed Dogmatics*, esp., I:37-42; Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological*

is certainly influenced by Calvinism, his version of Puritanism is not characterized by a theological rigidity but primarily by his millenarianism and support of an independent ecclesiastical polity, though as we will see in chapter six, these views are also profoundly colored by Cusanus's principle of 'one religion in a variety of rites' (*una religio in rituum varietate*). Sterry's Christian ethic is certainly not that of an anti-rationalist Puritan, but as Pinto notes, Sterry embraces mystery while attempting "to find a rational explanation for the mysteries."<sup>74</sup> Though the mystical embrace of opposite realities in his method permits Sterry to preach in the same language of radical Puritanism – and it is perhaps true that Sterry emphasizes the difference between faith and reason more so than Cusanus or the other Cambridge Platonists did – his Trinitarian method ensures the ultimate unity of all modes of cognition as the higher circle of intelligence contains the lower in a union of opposites.

Modern scholars have seen in the famous debate between Benjamin Whichcote and his former teacher Anthony Tuckney, the incompatibility of Puritanism and rationalism.<sup>75</sup> Tuckney objects not only to what he sees as Whichcote's over-zealous promotion of the ancient philosophers but to his use of Plato in particular, which he fears will lead his students to "runne a veine of doctrine" (i.e., promote unorthodox doctrines).<sup>76</sup> This apprehension toward Platonism comes in part from the scholastic belief that the teachings of Aristotle are clear and simple whereas those of Plato are filled with obscurities that will potentially confuse students and lead them to

---

*Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>74</sup> Pinto, *Peter Sterry*, 113.

<sup>75</sup> See Patrides, "The High and Aiery Hills of Platonisme," in *Cambridge Platonists*, 1-41.; and the introduction in Tod E. Jones, ed. *The Cambridge Platonists: A Brief Introduction*, trans. Sarah E. Phang (Dallas: University Press of America, 2005).

<sup>76</sup> Benjamin Whichcote, *Moral and Religious Aphorisms* (London: J. Payne, 1753), 38.

embrace aberrant theologies, the chief being Arianism.<sup>77</sup> As Sarah Hutton argues, the Puritans show an attitude of apprehension toward Platonism, especially regarding the nature of the Trinity, whereas the Cambridge Platonists take the compatibility of Platonism and Christianity for granted. Though the Puritan Theophilus Gale sought to clarify and systematize Platonic doctrine in his massive work, *The Court of the Gentiles*, he ultimately concluded that Plotinus's Trinitarianism cannot be reconciled with the Christian Trinity and should therefore be rejected.<sup>78</sup> Ralph Cudworth, on the other hand, goes to great length in his *True Intellectual System* to prove that Plotinus's three hypostases do not represent three deities, though they appear to necessitate a relationship of subordination within the Godhead.<sup>79</sup> Though Sterry does not offer a defence of the Neoplatonic Trinity, he assumes the truth of the philosophical principles underlying Proclus's concept of the three hypostases, so much so that Sterry uses them to formulate his own philosophical explanation of the Trinity and his triune method.<sup>80</sup> This shows that Sterry's emphatic subordination of reason to faith is more likely due to the influence of Proclus and Nicholas Cusanus than any Puritan apprehension toward reason or Platonism.

Indeed, there is no record of any criticism of Sterry's theology or accusation of Puritanism by any Cambridge Platonist or other author of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Sterry's method, however, was implicitly criticized by Nathanael Culverwel. The apophatic element in Sterry's method and his willingness to confine right reason to the realm of conjecture, even if only from the perspective of

---

<sup>77</sup> Interestingly Simplicius is largely responsible for the characterization of Plato's writings as obscure in both Medieval and early modern philosophers. See Michael Chase, "The Medieval Posterity of Simplicius' Commentary on the *Categories*: Thomas Aquinas and Al-Farabi," in Lloyd A. Newton, *Medieval Commentaries on Aristotle's Categories* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 9-30.

<sup>78</sup> See Gale's criticism of Cudworth in this regard in Gale, *The Court of the Gentiles* (London, A. Maxwell and R. Roberts for T. Cockeril, 1669-78) 4:384.

<sup>79</sup> Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London: Richard Royston, 1678), 580ff.; On Cudworth's Trinitarianism see Benjamin Carter, *'The Little Commonwealth of Man': The Trinitarian Origins of the Ethical and Political Philosophy of Ralph Cudworth* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011).

<sup>80</sup> See chapter two below.

the infinite (i.e., not absolutely), likely struck his Cambridge colleagues as a form of scepticism. Lord Brooke's and Sterry's adoption of paradox as a method of knowledge triggered a negative response from Culverwel, who compared their method to the philosophy of Sextus Empiricus.<sup>81</sup> Likewise, Henry More laments a modern trend to embrace contradiction as an explanation of natural phenomena. Consequently, Sterry's willingness to embrace contradiction as a means of transcending reason would have likely been viewed by More as a capitulation to the sceptical spirit of the age.<sup>82</sup>

In sum, Sterry's rational and religious ethic, bears important similarities and differences with the ethics of the other Cambridge Platonists. The differences certainly include but are not fully explained by Sterry's political Puritanism, and the similarities are significant enough to place Sterry in substantial continuity with his Cambridge colleagues. The likenesses of Whichcote and Sterry in the Emmanuel College chapel window, therefore, should not be thought to represent two opposing branches of Cambridge Platonism but two different ways of emphasizing a common goal, namely, the reformation of religion by means of a rational and religious ethic, which endeavors to see "Reason re-enthroned in her Majestick Seat ... in Religion and the Gospel."<sup>83</sup> The rational way seeks to restore the place of reason within religion by emphasizing the necessary role of morality and practical reason within the religious life, while the mystical way seeks to achieve

---

<sup>81</sup> See chapter two below.

<sup>82</sup> See Henry More, *A Discourse of the Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Celebration of the Holy Eucharist*, (London: Printed for Walter Kettilby, 1686), 11: More responds to modern Roman Catholic apologists who defend the doctrine of transubstantiation as an embrace of contradiction – the simultaneous removal of the substance of bread and the persistent presence of 'breadness' – at the heart of religion, one which More vehemently opposes. Ironically, Brooke argues that the ambitious desire to overcome contradiction is what led to the doctrine of transubstantiation in the first place, and that his method is the only means of overcoming such transgressions of reason into the realm of religion. See chapter two below.

<sup>83</sup> Ralph Cudworth, *A Sermon Preached to the Honourable Society of Lincolns-Inne* (London: Printed by J. Flesher for R. Royston, 1664), 38.

the same goal by drawing attention to the limitations of reason in order to reveal its consummation at the height of the intellect in faith. Both of these ways are united in promoting religion as a way of life that stresses the importance of ‘higher reason’ and the unity of the speculative and practical lives for the ultimate fulfillment of the human person.

### **Sterry’s Unpublished Manuscripts**

Many of Sterry’s philosophical writings were never published but were written for private use and subsequently loaned out and circulated among Sterry’s students, family and friends in his community at Richmond and elsewhere. Treatises such as *Of Vertue* and *Of Philosophie in General*, which are crucial for understanding Sterry’s moral theology, are contained within seven volumes in the Emmanuel College Library at Cambridge.<sup>84</sup> The manuscripts are written in a variety of hands, only some of which are Sterry’s. As P.J. Croft and Nabil Matar have convincingly demonstrated, owing to the prevalence of Sterry’s handwriting in many of the MSS coupled with the record of their circulation and Sterry’s admission to using an amanuensis, one may reasonably conclude that all of the treatises and letters in the MSS were authored by Sterry and were either written by him or dictated by him to his children and students.<sup>85</sup> The inclusion of many of the same titles in the MSS as those listed by the 18<sup>th</sup> century editor of Sterry’s *The Appearance of God to Man* as titles to be included in a future volume (which never came to fruition) and the fact that these treatises are also written in the hand of Sterry’s children and students further corroborates

---

<sup>84</sup> See EC MS 289-95.

<sup>85</sup> P.J. Croft and Nabil Matar, “The Peter Sterry MSS at Emmanuel College, Cambridge,” *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 8:1 (1981), 42-56; Croft and Matar correct Pinto’s assumption that the variety of handwriting represented in the MSS indicates separate authors. See Vivian de Sola Pinto, “Peter Sterry and his Unpublished Writings,” *The Review of English Studies* 6:24 (1930): 385-407.



Sterry's authorship. That the MSS were used to teach Sterry's students and children explains why many of the pages are written in the hand of Sterry's daughter Frances and son Joseph Lee and often include spelling and grammatical corrections in Sterry's hand, the former of whom would go on to prepare many of the MSS for publication after their father's death. The MSS were inherited by Sterry's daughter Francis after Sterry's death and passed down to her descendants for many generations. In 1916 they passed from a Mrs. Wynter of Taunton to another descendant of Sterry's, Mrs. E. Poolman, who brought them with her to Australia.<sup>86</sup> During World War II the MSS were brought from Australia to Emmanuel College Library where they were deposited on indefinite loan.<sup>87</sup>

### **Division of Chapters**

Our survey of Sterry's moral theology is divided into five chapters, each of which reveals Sterry's promotion of a rational and religious ethic originating in the nature of the Trinity rather than a divine command ethic deriving from the arbitrary determinations of the divine will. The first chapter in this study examines the sources that inspired Sterry to develop his Trinitarian method. We begin by looking at the way Neoplatonists studied, contemplated, and wrote their metaphysics as a way of bringing about a complete transformation of the mind. A variety of Christian authors, influenced primarily by Augustine and the Pseudo-Dionysius incorporated the Neoplatonic tradition of philosophy as a way of life into their theological writings and meditations. In the late-Medieval period Christians such as Ramon Llull and Nicholas Cusanus began to simplify these ideas into a concise method that, by designating the ineffability of the divine unity and its reflection

---

<sup>86</sup> See Pinto, "Unpublished Writings," 398.

<sup>87</sup> Nabil Matar, ed. *Peter Sterry: Select Writings*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 25.

in the human person as the appropriate point of departure, may provide a universal perspective from which to summarize the learning of all the sciences and bestow universal knowledge on its practitioners. Many early-modern encyclopedists found in these sources their inspiration to incorporate the whole universe of human knowledge into a single art of learning. For an early modern theologian and educator like Jan Amos Comenius, Llull's combinatory art was capable of bringing about universal reform. Llull's method for combining all wisdom ('pansophia') made the intellectual journey to assimilation with God available to individuals from every walk of life, precisely because it provides a simple cognitive tool for briefly articulating the pathway to mental transformation inspired by Neoplatonic metaphysics.

The second chapter examines the nature of Sterry's method. Sterry and Lord Brooke showed their support for universal reform in a treatise co-authored by Sterry entitled, *The Nature of Truth* (1641). Brooke, who was among the sponsors of Jan Amos Comenius in his voyage to England, uses Cusanus's Llull-inspired method of coincidence to form his central argument that all truths, even the contradiction of "Esse and Non-Esse", are in reality unified in the ultimate Truth that descends from God. In his later writings Sterry refers explicitly to Cusanus to argue that only the "higher" kinds of intellection, such as the divine and angelic intellects, are set above the "wall of coincidence" as Cusanus describes it in *De Visione Dei*. For Brooke and Sterry, the Cusan logic of coincidence initiates a truly inward turn, persuading the soul to agree, "Ne te quaesiveris extra." Sterry also combines arithmetic, philosophy, and theology in order to form a simplistic method for the religious life. He appeals to Cusanus's notion of the arithmetical Trinity as well as the Neopythagorean notions of monad, dyad, and triad in order to name the Trinity as unity, variety, and union. These terms, based on the numeric principle of the number three as

simultaneously enfolding and unfolding of the numbers one and two, form a lens of transcendent vision that enables one to see all things from the perspective of the infinite.

The third chapter investigates Sterry's moral philosophy by focusing especially on his two unpublished treatises, *Of Philosophy in General* and *Of Virtue*. Sterry's writings demonstrate his intent to create a practical Christian philosophy that functions as a preparation for the religious life. This philosophy is based on the abstract nature of humanity in its purely natural state, and it reveals the fundamental principles of all knowledge and metaphysics in the arithmetic nature of the Trinity. Sterry applies his Trinitarian method to the nature and acquisition of virtue, which he distinguishes between moral and spiritual virtues. The moral virtues pertain primarily to the activities of right reason, whereas the spiritual virtues are immediate intellectual receptions and participations in heavenly Virtue, which is the essence of the Trinity. Thus, there is a lower rational ethic that pertains to moral and intellectual virtue and a higher intellectual or spiritual ethic that pertains to the reception of divine Virtue. Spiritual virtue is attained by using one's omniform power of judgment to simultaneously descend and ascend through the orders of all things within oneself, returning all of one's concepts and loves to their original in the divine Mind. The power of the individual to freely descend and ascend through all things ensures the liberty and self-sufficiency of the human person while maintaining the essential dependence of the individual on one's immediate participation of divine Virtue for ordering one's own thoughts, motives and actions.

In the fourth chapter, we look at the explicitly religious and theological aspect of Sterry's rational ethic. Sterry's notion of religion is founded upon his natural theology and his religious ethic emerges from his concept of spiritual virtue, which is based on what he sees as the soul's natural union with its true self. The natural immediacy of union between the soul and its true self

in the divine Mind is obscured and hidden from the vision of the human mind by one's sinful choice to love the natural image of oneself for one's own private interest and oppose the spiritual image. For Sterry, Christ comes into the world to re-establish the Triune order of love, and he does so by uniting his divine unity to humanity, sacrificing humanity in a display of the divine variety, and perfectly uniting the two in and through his resurrection. Those who have the Spirit of Christ united to their spirits live by the virtues of faith, hope, and love. They no longer view the world through the veil of conjecture but through the immediate union of vision, that is, of God's self-reflective vision in the mediatory image of Christ. Those who are in Christ see, taste, touch, and feel the divine Life in all things by means of their spiritual senses, and through this mode of perception they have the power to fight against sin and convert all conjectural darkness, to light-in-darkness.

In the final chapter we see how Sterry's rational and religious ethic includes an interpersonal dimension. Indeed, Sterry believes spiritual friendship is a virtue required not only by nature but by the Trinitarian shape of human life. For spiritual friends the immediate mutual embrace between God and the soul does not make a person into a solitary unity but sends one outside of oneself to care for others, who become another self with oneself. In his letters to family and friends who lived with him in his community at Richmond and elsewhere, Sterry encourages the virtue of self-sacrificial love, suggesting that in giving oneself to the image of God in the other, one becomes a 'martyr' for divine Beauty in the world. No temporal situation can affect the love of spiritual friends. Whether they live together or circumstances force them into distant locations from one another, spiritual friends are always one in Christ and through the power of judgment that they share with him are able to convert the sadness of their parting or death to joy-in-sadness, and life-in-death.

## Chapter 1

### A Universal Method of Morality: Sterry's Sources

O thou, who by the golden linked Chain  
Of reason's Musick, with an even strain  
Conductest all from thy bright Throne on high  
Father of shady Earth, and shining Skie.<sup>1</sup>

Many of Peter Sterry's sources were motivated by the idea of encyclopædia (literally "circular education"). The metaphor of knowledge as the mind 'circling' around its divine source was important for Plato and Plotinus, as well as for Christian authors like the Pseudo-Dionysius. For Plotinus this metaphor symbolizes the self-motion of the human soul as it circles or converts itself around the divine Intellect (Nous), a motion which denotes the highest form of life for humanity (or *eudaimonia*). For the encyclopaedists of the medieval and early modern world, the circular motion of the soul mirrored the motion of the heavens, and so the development of an all-encompassing system of knowledge was fitting for the microcosmic humanity for which it was designed. For Peter Sterry, who was likely familiar with the famous macrocosm/microcosm chart by Robert Fludd, the reduction of wisdom to an encyclopædic method was seen to go hand-in-hand with the inward turn or conversion promoted by the Neoplatonists. One of Sterry's most important Christian sources for the development of his Trinitarian *a priori* method is the German Cardinal, Nicholas of Cusa (Cusanus), who incorporated many of the findings from the early Medieval encyclopædism of Thierry of Chartres into his writings and method. Sterry relies on Cusanus's names for the Trinity and Trinitarian method for developing his own method. This

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter Sterry, a translation of Boethius' *Consolatio Philosophiæ* 3, in *DFW*, 85.

chapter addresses the Neoplatonic search for *eudaimonia* via philosophy as a way of life and its simplification by way of an *a priori* method in the encyclopædism promoted by early modern authors, with a special focus on Nicholas of Cusa.

### **Metaphysics as Ethics in Neoplatonism**

The moral dimension of Peter Sterry's thought is dependent on the ethical treatments of Aristotle and Plato but it is primarily the Neoplatonic interpretation of concept of *eudaimonia* that contributes to his idea of the moral life. Plotinus and his successors do not seem to have been interested in ethics as a scientific discipline. Their emphasis on the other-worldly orientation of the philosophical life gives the impression at first that Neoplatonists were completely unconcerned with moral or political issues. Porphyry's biography of Plotinus, however, shows Plotinus caring for the welfare of orphans and engaging in the life of an educator.<sup>2</sup> His interest in founding Platonopolis, a philosophical utopia based on ideals found in Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*, also attests to his political interests. And, as Dominic O'Meara shows, for Plotinus's successors, the philosophical sage (*spoudaios*) is deeply invested in the life of the city, his role being incomplete apart from the task of promoting political virtue as the first stage in the path to divinization.<sup>3</sup>

Though Plotinus's notion of political virtue is based on Aristotle's definition of virtue as a habit of choosing the mean between vices as determined by right reason, his idea of human well-being or *eudaimonia* is based more on Plato's exhortation to the philosopher in the *Theaetetus* to

---

<sup>2</sup> Porphyry, *Vita Plotini*, 9, in *Plotinus: Enneads*, trans. A.H. Armstrong, 7 vols. Loeb Classical Library, (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966–1988), 1:31.

<sup>3</sup> Dominic J. O'Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 91: Iamblichus was inspired to political life by his reading of Plato's *Republic* where "philosopher-kings are compared to painters who imitate a divine model and thus, in their action, divinize the *polis*."

flee from the bounds of material existence and aim for “assimilation to God as much as possible.”<sup>4</sup> In *Ennead* I.4 Plotinus criticizes Aristotle’s notion of *eudaimonia* as “living well” (τὸ εὖ ζῆν) because it makes human fulfillment dependent upon activity rather than ontology.<sup>5</sup> Though Aristotle believes that *eudaimonia* is grounded in human likeness to the gods and specifically in the activity of contemplation, his conclusion that *eudaimonia* requires bodily health and external goods and can be lost by unconsciousness or adversity, implies for Plotinus that it is an activity dependent on external circumstances rather than the internal connection between the soul and its divine Source.<sup>6</sup> The sage’s good, on the other hand, is caused by the Good itself, and so the sage who has reached full maturity, “is self-sufficient in regard to *eudaimonia* and possession of the good; for there is no good which he does not have.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, the sage possesses the fullness of life at the highest level, the level of Nous. Only humans can partake of *eudaimonia* at this level because they have a higher soul that is not descended from Nous to the level of the body. Thus, for Plotinus, *eudaimonia* is the fullness of the intellectual life expressed in an intuitive awareness (*nous*) of participation in the Good itself for the sake of itself and not for the sake of derivative goods.

Plotinus’s concern to prioritize the ontological nature of *eudaimonia* stems from the inseparable relationship between metaphysics and ethics, or philosophy as a way of life.<sup>8</sup> The

---

<sup>4</sup> *Theaetetus* 176a5-b1, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. with introduction and notes by John M. Cooper, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 195.

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.4.1095a15-22, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1730-31; It is likely that Plotinus is merely attempting to reconcile the apparent tension between *theoria* and *praxis* in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. See Kieran McGroarty, *Plotinus on Eudaimonia: A Commentary on Ennead I.4*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 40-58; Armstrong, McGroarty and others argue convincingly that Aristotle is in Plotinus’s crosshairs here, though the Stoics and Epicureans are also included. See Armstrong, *Enneads*, 1:173.

<sup>6</sup> *Nic. Eth.* X.8.1178b1.

<sup>7</sup> *Enneads*, I.4.4., in McGroarty, *Eudaimonia*, 12-13.

<sup>8</sup> Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy As a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault to Foucault*, trans. Arnold I. Davidson, (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995), 60; Hadot notes that for Ancient philosophers

various levels of emanated being, from the One, Nous, and Soul correspond to likenesses in the human soul. As Werner Beierwaltes notes, the One is an ethical norm of life for Plotinus. The One is the origin of the many but it is also the terminus and limit to which the variety of things returns for their fulfillment. Rather than a mere determining force, “The One/Good is to be conceived as the orientation point defining, guiding, and motivating thought and action, and the consciously and freely contemplated goal to be achieved in all human activity.”<sup>9</sup> The ability to orient all of our activity around the One as the source of unity in the soul is not itself a result of activity but a participation in the activity of the Good inherently present within the soul itself, whether the sage is conscious of it or not.<sup>10</sup> Intuitive knowledge (*nous*) is the center of virtue in the soul, not because it is purely theoretical, but because it is the life of the divine part of the soul, the likeness of the One/Good, wherein is discovered the norm and orientation-point by which all measures of desire (for multiplicity and unity) are brought to rest.<sup>11</sup>

For Plotinus a person is only able attain to the life of Nous, wherein they bear the likeness of the One’s self-sufficiency, by a process of abstraction (ἀφαίρεσις). He refer to the virtues that correspond to this activity and to Plato’s notion of “likeness” as ‘purifications’ (κάθαρσεις).<sup>12</sup> Since the One is the source of all being, it is beyond being, and so is beyond predication. By cutting

---

like Plotinus, “theory is never considered an end in itself; it is clearly and decidedly put in the service of practice.”

<sup>9</sup> Werner Beierwaltes, “Das Eine als Norm des Lebens. Zum metaphysischen Grund neuplatonischer Lebensform,” in *Metaphysik und Religion: Zur Signatur des spätantiken Denkens*, eds. Michael Erler and Theo Kobusch, 121-151, (Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 2002), 127: “Das Eine/Gute ist als der das Denken und Handeln bestimmende, leitende und motivierende Orientierungspunkt, das bewußt und frei ins Auge gefaßte und zu verwirklichende Ziel des gesamten menschlichen Tätigseins zu begreifen.”

<sup>10</sup> *Enneads* I.4.9-10.; Though, as John Rist notes, the potentiality of some kind of consciousness must remain in order for *eudaimonia* to participate life at the level of Nous. See Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1967), 143.

<sup>11</sup> See Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. Michael Chase, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 70: As Hadot notes, for Plato and his followers “knowledge is never purely theoretical. It is the transformation of our being; it is virtue.”

<sup>12</sup> *Enneads* I.2.3.



away all predication from it, the soul is able to rest in the One through a habitual sense of awe (θαῦμα ἔξεις), through intuition (συννόει) and by “seeing its greatness by the things which exist after it and through it.”<sup>13</sup> The purificatory virtues enable the soul’s “conversion” (ἐπιστροφή, or ‘convertere’ in early modern Latin translations) to the One as they bring about a “complete transformation of inner life” through the awareness of the One/Good in the soul.<sup>14</sup> In *Enneads* I.2 and I.3., Plotinus addresses an *aporia* that arises from Plato’s notion of *eudaimonia* as “assimilation to God,” namely, in what way do the gods possess virtue? Neither the divine Soul nor Nous possess virtue because these represent states of being (διάκειται) which imply limit, but “[the Divine] has no states at all; all states belong to the soul.”<sup>15</sup> The cardinal/political virtues correspond to the lower part of the soul because they have to do with the multiplicity of desire and with their order and distribution. Yet, since likeness comes by our possession of virtue, presumably we are becoming like a being that also possesses virtue.<sup>16</sup> The political virtues are a participation in Nous because they set limits on the desires and abolish false opinions, “to the point of deceiving us that [the soul] is a god.”<sup>17</sup> Yet, political virtues by themselves do not make the sage godlike.

The purifications are as different from political virtues as restraint is different from disengagement. Indeed, the sage’s self-sufficiency implies a certain disinterest in political goods to the extent of a complete unhinging of the connection between body and intellect.<sup>18</sup> Apart from

---

<sup>13</sup> *Enneads* III.8.10.

<sup>14</sup> See Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus or The Simplicity of Vision*, trans. Michael Chase, with an introduction by Arnold I. Davidson, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 70.

<sup>15</sup> *Enneads* I.2.3.

<sup>16</sup> *Enneads* I.2.1.

<sup>17</sup> *Enneads* I.2.2.

<sup>18</sup> *Enneads* I.8.14. Plotinus refers to matter both as evil and as potency in the Aristotelian sense, seeking to do justice to the dual aspect of matter as presented in the *Timaeus* and the *Phaedo*. See A.H. Armstrong, *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus*, (Cambridge University Press, 1940), 87: Armstrong explains, “We may perhaps say that the view of matter as potency is the one which Plotinus adopts when he is thinking as a pure metaphysician. The other is generally rhetorically expressed, and is closely bound up with his passionate conviction that man’s soul can only find its true destiny in complete detachment from the material world.”

this unhinging, the lower soul will be grieved and troubled and prevent the sage “from perceiving the things which the upper part of the soul contemplates.”<sup>19</sup> As purifications the civic virtues are reoriented along with the lower soul’s conversion and vision in the life of Nous.<sup>20</sup> By wisdom and intelligence the soul acts alone, not through mere opinion. Temperance no longer shares bodily experiences. Fortitude is not afraid of leaving the body, and justice rules by reason and intellect without opposition from the passions.

The soul’s goodness, however, is something more than purification. For, the life of Nous is not a state of being but a substance and the exemplar of virtue; here the mind’s activity “is the act of the self, what it really is; virtue is what comes Thence and exists here in another.”<sup>21</sup> The soul’s conversion to Nous is its discovery of its “true self,” a discovery and uncovering of the likeness of the One within. “What is [the result of conversion]? A sight and the impression of what is seen, implanted and working in [the soul].”<sup>22</sup> Plotinus refers to the life of the converted soul as a choral dance in which it circles around the One as its true center.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the soul discovers the likeness of the One within itself as it is more and more abstracted from external desires, and from its purified one-like desire pour out every virtue and goodness from its center of being, “the spring of life, the spring of the intellect [*nous*].”<sup>24</sup>

Though the One proceeds outward and “unrolls itself” out of a desire to create, Plotinus views the sage’s downward procession as unnecessary, even ignoble by comparison.<sup>25</sup> Action is only for the sake of contemplation, yet due to human weakness, these actions become necessary

---

<sup>19</sup> *Enneads* IV.8.8.

<sup>20</sup> *Enneads* I.2.4.

<sup>21</sup> *Enneads* I.2.6.

<sup>22</sup> *Enneads* I.2.6.

<sup>23</sup> *Enneads* VI.9.8.; On Plotinus’s use of the circle metaphor, see John Bussanich, *The One and Its Relation to Intellect in Plotinus: A Commentary on Selected Texts*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998), 83-5.

<sup>24</sup> *Enneads* VI.9.9.

<sup>25</sup> *Enneads* III.8.8.

for the sage as well. Contemplation only fails to produce vision because the lower soul has weak vision, since “making and action are either a weakening or a consequence of contemplation.”<sup>26</sup> The higher part of the soul remains above filled with the reality above while the soul descends in action and leaves its prior part behind.<sup>27</sup> Thus, for Plotinus, the purpose of engaging in outward (moral) activity, even the life of the *polis*, is so that contemplation might be increased, that is, so that our awareness of the life of Nous within us might grow, leading the soul to reflect a greater likeness and union with its transcendent source.<sup>28</sup>

Plotinus’s successors had an even greater concern for outward action and the well-being of the earthly city. The writings of the “eastern” Neoplatonists, Iamblichus and Proclus in particular, show more concern for the body, the senses, as well as religious ritual, primarily because they disagreed with Plotinus’s notion that part of the soul remains above and separate from the life of the body. For Proclus the soul is fully descended, which means that care for one’s neighbor is not a weakness but a participation and imitation of the creative activity of the Demiurge.<sup>29</sup> The sage is capable of participating in the gods’ creative and providential care of the world, even utilizing evil actions as the gods do in their plan to bring harmony and goodness out of discord. He is able to do

---

<sup>26</sup> *Enneads* III.8.4.

<sup>27</sup> *Enneads* III.8.5. Though the soul is disembodied, virtue for Plotinus is not strictly an effort to separate oneself from the body. See Hadot, *Plotinus*, 71: Hadot explains, “Plotinian virtue ... consists of an extremely simple spiritual attitude. When we consider it from the outside, we can no doubt distinguish different aspects in it, which we may then call prudence, justice, strength, or temperance. Seen from within, however, it is not even an effort to separate oneself from the body; it is only a continuous attention to the divine, and a perpetual exercise of God’s presence.”

<sup>28</sup> McGroarty notes that it is unclear if Plotinus thinks care for one’s neighbor is necessary. See Kieran McGroarty, “The Ethics of Plotinus,” in *Eklogai: Studies in Honour of Thomas Finan and Gerard Watson*, (Department of Ancient Classics, National University of Ireland Maynooth, 2001), 20-34.

<sup>29</sup> Radek Chlup, *Proclus: An Introduction*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 242-43; Also see D. Gregory MacIsaac, “The Soul and the Virtues in Proclus’s Commentary on the Republic of Plato,” *Philosophie antique*, 9 (2009), 120: MacIsaac notes that for Proclus the paradigmatic virtues order the political virtues which in turn order the city.; and Dirk Baltzly, “The Human Life,” in *All From One: A Guide to Proclus*, eds. Pieter d’Hoine and Marije Martjin, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), 258-273.

this because of his participation in Nous, through which he has the ability to measure all things using the measurement of the “one in the soul,” that is, the unitive power of non-discursive intellect.<sup>30</sup> The Pythagorean element in Plotinus’s metaphysics is expanded in later Neoplatonists, as Proclus for example, incorporates a large number of intermediary deities between humanity and the One, delineating them in triadic patterns to imitate the procession of One-Nous-Soul on various levels of being, and granting different levels of virtue corresponding to different levels of deity, virtues which allow the philosopher-king to rule the city according to the proper cosmic measures in arithmetic proportion.<sup>31</sup>

For our purposes it is important to note that for Neoplatonists as a whole metaphysics has an essentially ethical component, because as Pierre Hadot so thoroughly described, philosophy is not a purely speculative exercise for Neoplatonists, but a way of life characterized by the pursuit of wisdom through a variety of spiritual exercises.<sup>32</sup> In fact, philosophy demands the purification of the mind through the negation of lower forms of knowledge and desire, as this is the proper means for attaining to true likeness to the One/Good and for realizing one’s true self in the life of Nous, which is the realization of *eudaimonia*. The highest form of life for humans (*eudaimonia*), therefore, combines *theoria* and *praxis*, necessitating contemplation and political action at a higher level, that is, action for the sake of contemplation. Philosophy and its virtues are only achievable for the sage, however, not those unenlightened by instruction in the dialogues of Plato – the Iamblichan curriculum follows the order of the cardinal virtues – as is characteristic of the curriculum of the Platonic academy.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Beierwaltes, *Metaphysik und Religion*, 260: As Beierwaltes notes, for Proclus, “Das Eine in uns ist die Vorläufigkeit des Einen selbst im Denken.”

<sup>31</sup> Dominic J. O’Meara, *Pythagoras Revived: Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1990), esp. 76, 207.

<sup>32</sup> Hadot, *Plotinus*, 22.

<sup>33</sup> Baltzly, *All From One*, 259.

## Method and Ethics in the Medieval Period

During the Medieval period the Neoplatonic notions of *eudaimonia* and virtue were often utilized by Christian authors attempting to combine and restore the various modes of human life. A key motive in this regard was the effort to restore the unity of the *imago Dei*, thought to be fractured by sin and ignorance. To many this effort of reformation, which necessitated an “inward turn,” seemed threatened by the distinctions imposed upon the sciences by scholastic Aristotelianism, though Aristotelians also drew on Neoplatonic sources.<sup>34</sup> Though medieval authors did not always draw explicitly from Neoplatonic sources to form their notions of *eudaimonia* or virtue, they were inspired by them to seek a practical metaphysics, with the goal of union and likeness to God by means of negative theology and conversion to God (the One) in the soul.<sup>35</sup>

The Neoplatonic delineation of the various orders of virtue impacted the medieval west through Macrobius, though the Plotinian (and Proclan) notion of purified virtue is reflected in the more widespread influence of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, particularly his trifold notion of purification, illumination, and perfection.<sup>36</sup> As Josef Koch explains, medieval European thought is characterized by the attempt on behalf of philosophers and theologians to reconcile the differences between the two greatest Christian authorities, Dionysius and Augustine.<sup>37</sup> For Dionysius, who is deeply influenced by Proclus’s speculations on the *Parmenides*, the inward turn

---

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Aquinas, for example, is highly influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius and uses Macrobius’ list of Neoplatonic virtues. See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II, Q. 61 a. 5, resp. 130-32.

<sup>35</sup> See Theo Kobusch, “Metaphysik als Lebensform. Zur Idee einer praktischen Metaphysik,” in *Die Metaphysik und das Gute: Aufsätze zu ihrem Verhältnis in Antike und Mittelalter, Jan A. Aersten zu Ehren*, ed. Wouter Goris, (Louvain: Peeters, 1999), 51: As Kobusch notes, medieval commentaries on the *Song of Songs* exhibit a practical metaphysics as they were based on the “Art der Selbsterkenntnis,” which continues the classical tradition of philosophy as a way of life.

<sup>36</sup> Macrobius, *In Somnium Scipionis*, I.8., in *Macrobius*, ed. Franciscus Eyssenhardt, (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1893).

<sup>37</sup> Josef Koch, “Augustinischer Und Dionysischer Neuplatonismus Und Das Mittelalter,” *Kant-studien*, 48 (1957): 117-133.

to union (ἔνωσις) with God in the soul occurs in the “cloud” of unknowing, when “mind turns away from all things, even from itself ... enlightened by the inscrutable depth of Wisdom.”<sup>38</sup> For Dionysius, like the Neoplatonists, God’s highest name is “One,” and so, unlike Augustine who posits “Being” as the highest divine name, Dionysius places the soul’s union with God beyond being, beyond affirmation and negation, that is, beyond the activity of the mind, in “the mysterious darkness of unknowing.”<sup>39</sup> The mind has to be purified from its desire for external things before it is illuminated and united with God, whereby it becomes assimilated to God in a one-like yearning for transcendent Beauty.<sup>40</sup> For Augustine, on the other hand, rational discourse does not present an obstacle to union with God since reason is the essential property of the *imago Dei* in each person and its fulfillment lies in the proper “use” of things and the “enjoyment” of God as the *Ens Realissimum*, the cause of all being.

Thinkers often combined Augustinian and Dionysian elements in unique and original ways. One can see a competing variety of Platonisms, for example, among Albertists and Thomists. Where Thomas Aquinas’ combination of the two Platonisms relies more on the Augustinian notion of the *imago Dei* (which consists principally in the activities of understanding and loving oneself),<sup>41</sup> for those following Albert the Great (such as Dietrich of Freiburg, Meister Eckhart, *et alia*) it is the hidden *speculum aeternitatis* or the spark of the soul (*scintilla animæ*) that constitutes

---

<sup>38</sup> *Div. Nom.* 7.3.872b, in *Corpus Dionysiacum I. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, De divinis nominibus*, ed. Beate Regina Suchla, (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1990); English translation from *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem, (Mahway, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987); On Dionysius’ indebtedness to Proclus see H.D. Saffrey, “New Objective Links between the Pseudo-Dionysius and Proclus,” in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, ed. Dominic J. O’Meara, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1982), 65-74.

<sup>39</sup> *Myst. Theol.* 3.1001a, (Luibheid, 137) in *Corpus Dionysiacum II. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, De coelesti hierarchia, De ecclesiastic hierarchia, De mystica theologia, Epistulae*, ed. Günter Heil and Adolf Martin Ritter (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991).

<sup>40</sup> *Ecc. Hier.* I.1.372b, (Luibheid, 196).

<sup>41</sup> *Summa Theologiae* I Q.93, a.4; See also Koch, “Augustinischer Und Dionysischer,” 127: As Koch notes, Thomas did not have access to the full version of *Liber de Causis*.

the divine image there,<sup>42</sup> ideas based on Dionysius' Plotinian concept of the soul's circular motion around the Good (κυκλική εἰς ἑαυτὴν εἴσοδος).<sup>43</sup> Loris Sturlese shows, for example, that this is the case for Berthold von Moosburg and Johannes Tauler, the latter of whom combined Augustine's language of the *abditus mentis* with Proclus's concept of the "one in the soul" in his notion of the *imago* as the "ground" of the soul (*Seelengrund*).<sup>44</sup> The Albertists, therefore, leaned more heavily on Dionysian Neoplatonism to provide the element of transcendent unity that seemed lacking in scholastic theology.

Another Albertist, the Catalan mystic Raymond Llull looked beyond the Aristotelian method of the scholastics and sought to expand the Neoplatonic *a priori* method into a complete system of learning and reform, one that resembles the Neoplatonic hierarchy of being promoted by Dionysius.<sup>45</sup> Llull was influenced by Dionysius and John Scotus Eriugena in his quest to create a general "art of arts" that would provide the mechanism for unifying all of the disciplines and

---

<sup>42</sup> On Albert's notion of the *speculum aeternitatis*, see his *Comentary on Dionysius' Mystical Theology* in Simon Tugwell, ed. *Albert & Thomas: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 165-7.; See also David Burrell and Isabelle Moulin, "Albert, Aquinas, and Dionysius," in Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang, eds., *Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 103-20.

<sup>43</sup> *Div. Nom.* 4.8.704d, (Luibheid, 78); On the question of the *imago Dei* among medieval mystics see Joseph Bernhart, *Die Philosophische Mystik des Mittelalters, Von Ihren Antiken Ursprüngen Bis Zur Renaissance* (München: E. Reinhardt, 1922), 70ff.

<sup>44</sup> Tauler was inspired in this combination by Dietrich of Freiburg and Berthold von Moosburg. See Loris Sturlese, *Homo Divinus: Philosophische Projekte in Deutschland zwischen Meister Eckhart und Heinrich Seuse*, (Kohlhammer GmbH: Stuttgart, 2007), 195: "Tauler macht sich das Proklische »unum animae« zunutze, um der Interpretation des »abditum mentis« im Sinne des Intellekts, die Dietrich von Freiberg – einem Motiv Alberts des Großen folgend – vorgetragen hatte (Tauler kennt sie...), die Deutung des »abditum mentis« als transintellektuelles Prinzip gegenüberzustellen [...]. Hierbei zeigt sich Tauler als vom philosophischen Denken Bertholds von Moosburg abhängig, denn er interpretiert die Proklischen Texte zum »unum« in einer Weise, die bei Berthold, und nur bei ihm, eine genaue Entsprechung findet."

<sup>45</sup> On Llull's art see Francis Yates, *Lull & Bruno*, (London: Routledge, 1982); Paolo Rossi, *Logic and the Art of Memory: The Quest for a Universal Language*, Stephen Clucas, trans. and introduction (London: Continuum, 2006); and Anthony Bonner, *The Art and Logic of Ramon Llull: A User's Guide*, (Leiden: Brill, 2007). On Llull's logic see Charles Lhor, "The new Logic of Ramon Llull," *Enrahonar* 18, (1992), 23-35; and Mark Johnston, *The Spiritual Logic of Ramon Llull*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

make learning all of the arts simple, quick, and complete.

In his *Ars magna*, Llull describes the arts in *a priori* terms, descending from the most universal principles and ascending again from particulars to universals. In this way Llull methodizes Neoplatonic metaphysics, as the order of thought imitates the natural procession and reversion of all things from and to their divine archetype in the One. Influenced by Dionysius's *Divine Names* as well as the Kabbalah, Llull's art blends logic, metaphysics, and theology into a complete system delineated by combinatory charts and figures. His method begins with the most universal terms, the "divine dignities" or attributes, with each assigned a letter of the alphabet B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, K. The highest name (letter "A") being ineffable, the list proceeds according to Bonitas, Magnitudo, Duratio, Potestas, Sapientia, Voluntas, Virtus, Veritas, and Gloria. Each of these divine dignities, when placed within the center of Llull's circular diagram alongside the relative principles, subjects, and rules of his art produces every possible combination of data available to human knowledge.<sup>46</sup>

Llull's art reflects the nature of the Trinity, and his method is inspired by the unity of the Trinitarian persons. Indeed, the nine dignities relate to one another in patterns of three and they are further trichotomized in their relative principles: Differentia-Concordantia-Contrarietas, Principium-Medium-Finis, and Maioritas-Aequalitas-Minoritas.<sup>47</sup> These relative principles give precedent to the rule that contradictions can be united (though not reconciled) in a middle term, which was to be one of the key aspects of Llullism in its early modern reception. This pattern reflects the nature of thought as well as reality. For, Llull's art ignores the scholastic distinction

---

<sup>46</sup> Ramon Llull, *Ars generalis ultima* in *Opera Latina*, Aloisius Madre, ed., *Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Mediaevalis*, LXXV, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1986), 14:11: "In ista figura implicantur omnia. Sicut quando dicitur: Deus est bonus, magnus, aeternus, et cetera. Angelus est bonus, magnus, durabilis, et cetera. Auaritia non est bona, sed mala; et sic de aliis suo modo,"

<sup>47</sup> *Opera*, 14:16: Each of the relative principles are represented by triangles composed of a triune structure. "Principium," for example is composed of the triad, "principiatum, principiabile, et principiare."



between primary and secondary intentions. That is, like Plotinus, he considers human concepts to be exact representations of things themselves (primary intentions) as they exist in their divine exemplars or dignities, not as purely mental phenomena (secondary intentions).<sup>48</sup> Thus, the divine dignities are not mere instruments of knowledge but reflect the fundamental aspects and the necessary attributes of every existing thing. All of creation, therefore, necessarily depends upon the Triune being of God himself, as the triadic pattern of the dignities form the essential nature of existing things as well as the method for properly discerning them.<sup>49</sup> The reformation of the divine image in the soul, for Llull, is based on the Neoplatonic notion of the mind's capacity to contain the principles of all things,<sup>50</sup> the actualization of which is conditioned upon its purification from opinion. As Llull says, the purpose of his *ars* is, "ut intellectus in ipsis scientiis quiescat per uerum intelligere, et ab opinionibus erroneis sit remotus et prolongatus."<sup>51</sup> Unlike the Neoplatonists, Llull's *a priori* method is not merely an epistemological method but a skill of methodizing what we know, a kind of intellectual technology (τέχνη) that quickly and easily gives to the mind the ability to see all particulars within their universals (*sicut particulare in uniuersali*) or divine exemplars/dignities, which in a certain sense, is a methodization of the inward turn.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> See Bonner, *Art and Logic*, 72; Llull distinguishes between primary and secondary intentions, but he gives them a different meaning than the scholastics. Bonner notes that for Llull, "The second intention is thus the instrument or means which permits one to arrive at the first intention, the final cause or goal" rather than a concept of a concept.; See Plotinus, *Enneads* I.3.5.

<sup>49</sup> Llull, *Metaphysica nova et compendiosa* in *Opera Latina*, Helmut Riedlinger, ed., *Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Mediaevalis*, XXXIII, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1978), 6:20: For Llull, created being depends for its existence upon the Trinitarian pattern of primalities in God and bears a likeness to them. "Secundum ens dicimus totum uniuersum creatum. Et dicitur secundum, quia dependet a primo. Et secundum quod de primo determinauimus, intendimus uenari secundum, cum sit similitudo eius. Sicut causa bona, magna, etc., quae causat suum effectum propter se taliter, ut per ipsum sint cognita sua bonitas, magnitudo etc."

<sup>50</sup> See Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, ed. & trans. E.R. Dodds, (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1963), prop. 197.; Dionysius also speaks this way in *Div. Nom.* 7.4.872c (Luibheid, 109): "[the mind by] divine faith revolves around [the Logos] because it is pure and unwavering knowledge of all."

<sup>51</sup> Llull, *Ars generalis*, prologue, in *Opera* 14:6.

<sup>52</sup> Llull, *Ars generalis*, prologue, in *Opera* 14:5.

## Method and Ethics in the Early Modern Period

Llull's *ars combinatoria* and its totalistic *a priori* method, accompanied with his exemplarist metaphysics appeared to many in the early modern world as a plausible alternative to the method of the scholastics. The ancient philosophers did not bequeath a single method to their Medieval and Renaissance inheritors; rather, at least four methods were discerned: the analytical, definitive, divisive, and apodeictic methods, culled from Plato's *Phaedrus*.<sup>53</sup> Llull's "art of arts," therefore, was seen as a *clavis universalis*, a magical key for easily unlocking all of the secrets of nature. As Paulo Rossi notes, "the term *clavis universalis* was used in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to designate a method or general science which would enable man to see beyond the veil of phenomenal appearances, or the 'shadows of ideas,' and grasp the ideal and essential structure of reality."<sup>54</sup> Indeed, the combinatory preoccupation of Llull's *ars* "initiated what was to become an intellectual obsession in European culture," that is, the obsession with the creation of encyclopedia as universal systems of knowledge.<sup>55</sup> Llull's voluminous works were printed and promoted, often with extensive commentary and revision, by Renaissance humanists such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Bernardo da Lavinheta, Jacque Lefèvre d'Étaples, Charles de Bovelles and later, Agrippa von Nettesheim and Giordano Bruno. The common purpose of these works was the reformation of the individual and society, often promoted in terms of both a philosophical and religious conversion, or inward turn.

---

<sup>53</sup> See Neal W. Gilbert, *Renaissance Concepts of Method* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 5.

<sup>54</sup> Rossi, *Logic and the Art*, xv.

<sup>55</sup> Rossi, *Logic and the Art*, 29.

Renaissance humanists in general were very concerned to remediate a scholastic curriculum overburdened with a host of unnecessary and unnatural terminology, by means of the *studia humanitatis*.<sup>56</sup> Though Aristotle does not supply a single method of investigation, humanists such as Rudolph Agricola and Philip Melancthon sought to combine his various logical works for an overarching method of invention, which would quickly give one access to the right terms and language for adequately describing nature.<sup>57</sup>

Some humanists, like Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola turned to Platonism as a way of “combining the imaginative values of religion with the values of a humane life.”<sup>58</sup> There was an essentially moral and religious dimension to the pursuit of wisdom for humanists because it entailed the reform of the decadent *imago Dei* in the human person, which is the necessary key to the restoration of human civilization. The restoration of humanity’s divine likeness, as Charles Trinkaus has shown, was the driving principle behind the humanists’ zealous

---

<sup>56</sup> On the humanist pursuit of curricular reform, see Paul O. Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources*, Michael Mooney, ed., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); Charles E. Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 1970, Reprint, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009); Charles G. Nauert, *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Erika Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance & Reformation*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).; For an example of the humanist critique of scholastic logic, see Juan Luis Vives’s *In pseudodialecticis* in *Juan Luis Vives against the Pseudodialecticians: A Humanist Attack on Medieval Logic*, Rita Guerlac, ed., (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1979), esp. 53; Hence, as Petrarch quips, “there is nothing so ugly as an old man who is a dialectic debater,” with the implication that dialectic is a boy’s art that one must pass beyond in order to obtain the gray hairs of true wisdom. See Francesco Petrarca, “Letter to Tommaso Caloria in Messina,” in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man: Selections in Translation*, Ernst Cassirer, Paul O. Kristeller, and John H. Randall, Jr., eds., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 139.

<sup>57</sup> For Rudolph Agricola, the method of “grammatical reading,” itself influenced by the Neoplatonic method of providing introductions to their commentaries on philosophical texts, promised to reveal common “topics” (*loci communes*) in the ancient sources and thereby wedding logic to rhetoric in a way that made the art eminently practical. See Eckhard Kessler, “Introducing Aristotle to the sixteenth century: the Lefèvre enterprise,” in *Philosophy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Conversations with Aristotle*, ed. Constance Blackwell and Sachiko Kusukawa, (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1999), 1-21.

<sup>58</sup> Kristeller, *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, 6.

promotion of the pride and dignity of humanity.<sup>59</sup> The “humanist theology” of Ficino and Pico exemplifies this pursuit of the restoration of the divine image through a unified arts curriculum, one that is equally philosophical and religious.<sup>60</sup> In the preface to his *De Christiana Religione*, Ficino argues that it is a relic of the “iron age” (*ferrei seculi*) that philosophers are unacquainted with religion and the religious with philosophy.<sup>61</sup> Rather, the two must be brought together, as Ficino had done personally in his decision to become a philosopher-priest.<sup>62</sup> Ficino follows Plotinus specifically in outlining *eudaimonia* as a life that participates in the One, one that specifically requires higher virtues. Unlike Plotinus, however, Ficino considered these virtues available to people in all walks of life, “due to their natural constitution and their implanted spark – all human beings who had the desire and will to approach the divine.”<sup>63</sup> Ficino’s idea of a more universal wisdom does not, however, utilize a universal method as Lull did, though his commentary on Plato’s *Parmenides* and his publication of Proclus’s writings made the idea of coincidence more readily available.<sup>64</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola did show a concern for universal method, as is evident in his *900 Theses*, in which he shows the influence of Lull, the Kabbalah, and the German

---

<sup>59</sup> Trinkaus, *Image and Likeness*, xxii.

<sup>60</sup> Salvatore I. Camporeale, “Renaissance Humanism and the Origins of Humanist Theology,” in *Humanity and Divinity in Renaissance and Reformation: Essays in Honor of Charles Trinkaus*, John W. O’Malley, Thomas M. Izbicki, and Gerald Christianson, eds., (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 101-124; and Amos Edelheit, *Ficino, Pico and Savonarola: The Evolution of Humanist Theology 1461/2-1498*, (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

<sup>61</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *Opera* (Henricus Petri: Basil, 1561), I:1.

<sup>62</sup> Ficino, *Opera* I:1: “Nam cum animus (ut Platoni nostro placet) duabus tantum alis, id est intellectu, & voluntate possit ad cœlestem patrem, & patriam revolare, ac philosophus intellectu maxime, sacerdos voluntate nitatur, & intellectus voluntatem illuminet, voluntas intellectum accedat, consentaneum est qui primi divina per intelligentiam vel ex se invenerunt, vel divinitus attigerunt, primos divina per voluntatem rectissime coluisse, rectumque eorum cultum rationemque colendi ad cæteros propagasse.”

<sup>63</sup> Leo Catana, “Readings of Platonic Virtue Theories from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance: The Case of Marsilio Ficino’s *De amore*,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 22:4 (2014): 696.

<sup>64</sup> On the similarities differences between Ficino and a more “methodical” Platonist, See Maurice de Gandillac, “Neoplatonism and Christian Thought in the Fifteenth Century (Nicholas of Cusa and Marsilio Ficino),” in *Neoplatonism*, ed. O’Meara, 143-168.

Cardinal, Nicholas of Cusa (or Cusanus).<sup>65</sup> For Sterry, who was a reader of Ficino and Pico, it is Cusanus's idea of a sanctified and universal method that would come to exercise the most influence.

### **Nicholas Cusanus (1401-1464)**

For the German Cardinal, Nicholas Cusanus, the Neoplatonic metaphysics of Proclus and Dionysius, coupled with Llull's Trinitarian method (not to mention the earlier encyclopedic efforts of Thierry of Chartres) provided an opportunity to expand traditional Aristotelian anthropology and give a universal method to the pursuit of *eudaimonia*. As the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer argued in his famous *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance*, Cusanus's method of "learned ignorance" coupled with his quite radical assertion of heliocentrism (one that would come to influence the Copernican Revolution) and his collapsing of the hierarchy of being in the face of God's total and immediate immanence in the world brought about a "totally new intellectual orientation" (völlig neue geistige Gesamtorientierung) that resembled the subjective turn in modern philosophy.<sup>66</sup> This new orientation, the idea that the contrast between the absolute and empirical was to be discerned from out of the human mind, Cassirer argued, makes Cusanus "the first modern thinker."<sup>67</sup> Recent scholarship, however, has clarified Cusanus's position as that of a "janus-faced" transitional figure between the medieval and modern worlds,

---

<sup>65</sup> On Pico, see Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, *Philosophia Perennis: Historical Outlines of Western Spirituality in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought*, (Dordrecht: Springer, 2004), 93-99; On Cusanus's apparent influence on Pico see, Harald Schwaetzer, "'Semen universale'. Die Anthropologie bei Nikolaus von Kues und Giovanni Pico della Mirandola," in Martin Thurner, ed., *Nicolaus Cusanus zwischen Deutschland und Italien: Beiträge eines deutsch-italienischen Symposiums in der Villa Vigoni* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2002), 555-74.

<sup>66</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *Individuum Und Kosmos in Der Philosophie Der Renaissance* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1927), 10.

<sup>67</sup> Cassirer, *Individuum*, 10.

not modern, yet in many ways anticipating (and perhaps even providing an alternative passageway to) the modern worldview.<sup>68</sup>

Though he did not write a systematic ethical treatise Cusanus's new "intellectual orientation" (conversion/reversion) is central to his notion of *eudaimonia*, as it was for Neoplatonists in their pursuit of metaphysics as ethics, that is, for the complete transformation of the self. Cusanus's new orientation, which he himself describes as being revealed to him by a sort of conversion as he was traveling by boat from Constantinople ("credo superno dono a patre luminum"), is his philosophical method of "learned ignorance," in which opposite entities are purposefully held together in dialectical tension in order to reveal their underlying unity, a method which is based partly on a dialectical reading of Dionysius' *Mystical Theology* (i.e., the paradox of knowing/unknowing) – it was revealed to him "ut incomprehensibilia incomprehensibiliter amplecterer in docta ignorantia," as he explains in the dedicatory epistle to his most famous work, *De docta ignorantia* written in 1440<sup>69</sup> – as well as Llull's combinatorial method.

### *Cusanus's Method*

Cusanus, who owned quite a number of Llull's writings, develops the method of learned ignorance as a specifically Christological and Trinitarian method, one that is similar to Llull's but drastically

---

<sup>68</sup> See the highly important volumes by Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983); and Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

<sup>69</sup> Cusanus, *De docta ignorantia*, "Epistola auctoris" (h I.163); On the nature of Cusanus's vision see Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, "Cusanus at Sea: The Topicality of Illuminative Discourse," *The Journal of Religion* 71.2. (1991): 180-201.; On Cusanus and Dionysius, see Peter Casarella, "Cusanus on Dionysius: The Turn to Speculative Theology," in *Re-Thinking Dionysius*, ed. Coakly & Stang, 138: "[Cusanus] lauds the Areopagite as *magnus Dionysius* ('the great Dionysius'), *maximus theologorum* ('the greatest of theologians'), and *sapientissimus, maximus ille divinorum scrutator, divinus vir* ('the wisest and greatest investigator of divine realities, a man himself divine')."

reduced for his own practical ends.<sup>70</sup> He refers to his method as “learned ignorance,” as the “way of the beryl” (*modus berylii*), and the “art of conjecture” (*ars coniecturalis*).<sup>71</sup> The beryl is a clear stone used for making eyeglasses, which is an apt metaphor for describing Cusanus’s vision of a method that quickly and easily provides a new perspective on reality by uniting the opposing interpretive lenses of identity and otherness.<sup>72</sup> In *De docta ignorantia*, Cusanus reveals his method through a combination of Dionysian negative theology and Boethian mathematical theology. As for Dionysius and the Neoplatonists, Cusanus sees the numeral “One” as denoting the highest divine name because God is the simply maximum unity from whom all things emanate and to whom all desire to return.<sup>73</sup>

For Cusanus, God is the maximum unity that acts as the measure of all things, as an infinite circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference has no bounds is the measure of all geometrical proportion.<sup>74</sup> Cusanus quotes a line from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* to show that “the First is the rule and measure of all, because it is the essence [*ratio*] of all.”<sup>75</sup> So, God is the one exemplar idea of all and the “one essence of all.” Multiplicity presupposes unity, and so the many

---

<sup>70</sup> Cusanus’s handwritten marginal notes on various works of Llull are catalogued in Ulli Roth, ed., *Raimundus Lullus, Die Exzerptensammlung aus Schriften des Raimundus Lullus im Codex Cusanus* 83, *Cusanus-Texte, III, Marginalien* 4, (Universitätsverlag C. Winter, Heidelberg, 1999); On Cusanus’s use of Llull’s *ars* see Eusebio Colomer, *Nikolaus Von Kues Und Raimund Llull Aus Handschriften Der Kueser Bibliothek*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1961); and Anthony Bonner, *Doctor Illuminatus: A Ramon Llull Reader* (Princeton N.J: Princeton University Press, 1993), 63: According to Bonner, “No other thinker influenced Cusanus as much, and it can probably be said that no other later thinker understood Llull so well.”

<sup>71</sup> On Cusanus’s *ars coniecturalis*, see Josef Koch, *Die Ars Coniecturalis Des Nikolaus Von Kues* (Koln: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1956), 14ff.

<sup>72</sup> Cusanus views this method specifically as a device for theological reform. See H. Lawrence Bond, “Nicholas of Cusa and the reconstruction of theology: the centrality of Christology in the coincidence of opposites,” in H. Lawrence Bond and Gerald Christianson, *Reform, Representation and Theology in Nicholas of Cusa and his Age* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 227-40.

<sup>73</sup> *De docta ignorantia* 1.24.75.

<sup>74</sup> *De docta ignorantia* 1.21.63, & 2.12.162; Cusanus likely receives the idea of God as an infinite circle from the *Liber XXIV Philosophorum*. See Kurt Flasch, trans., *Was Ist Gott?: Das Buch Der 24 Philosophen* (München: C.H. Beck, 2011), 29.

<sup>75</sup> *De docta ignorantia* 1.17.47 (h I.33).

is measured by the one, as “unity” enfolds all numeric differences in the genus of number.<sup>76</sup> Since God is infinite, however, there is no proportion between his being and finite being. God’s infinite essence is not measured by its opposite as a line is measured by its beginning and end points. Rather, God is the “essence of all essences” because “all that can be measured falls between the maximum and the minimum” and God is both maximum and minimum, as an infinite line contains the greatest and least points of every finite line.<sup>77</sup> The fact that there appear to us to be many exemplars is a weakness of human perspective, because all things participate in God’s essence differently. All opposite measures, then, coincide in God’s infinite measure in such a way that he is not measured by any of them but rather measures himself and all things by means of himself. The method of learned ignorance consists of this combining of apparent opposites based on their one exemplar in God.

In *De visione dei*, Cusanus uses an omnivoyant icon of Jesus (likely the face of Christ upon the Veil of Veronica) to explain his method to the monks in the abbey of Tegernsee.<sup>78</sup> The icon displays an optical illusion. The gaze of Christ’s face appears to follow the monks who pass in front of it, while it simultaneously appears stationary to those who remains stationary. Cusanus uses the paradoxical motion/stillness of Christ’s face to explain how our vision is limited by our perspective. Changes of circumstance cause individuals to appear to us in a mode other than their universal principles, whereas God sees universals and particulars simultaneously, with no degree of otherness. When we unite what appear to us to be opposites, whether maximum/minimum, identity/otherness, or infinite/finite we see them beyond opposition as realities united in their one exemplar in God’s infinite essence. Yet, we are only able to see beyond the “wall of Paradise”

---

<sup>76</sup> *De docta ignorantia* 1.22.68.

<sup>77</sup> *De docta ignorantia* 1.16.45 (h 1.32).

<sup>78</sup> Cusanus, *De visione dei*, “Praefatio”.



where opposites coincide by an intuitive realization that there is unity without otherness in God. This realization or “intuition” of identity beyond otherness functions as the ground of Cusanus’s epistemology, as identity-beyond-otherness is the absolute standard/measure presupposed in all finite measures of identity-in-otherness, just as the whole is presupposed and is present *in* each of its parts but contained by none of them.<sup>79</sup>

This means, for Cusanus, that the first principle of knowledge is in God himself as he is reflected in the human mind rather than in the principle of non-contradiction as it was for Aristotle – though Cusanus does not discard the principle of non-contradiction for discursive knowledge.<sup>80</sup> As he says in *De coniecturis*, reason (*ratio*) represents discursive knowledge, whereby the mind analyzes the multiplicity and magnitude of things, but discursive knowledge presupposes the power of the mind to form the likeness of an object within the intellect (*intellectus*). For Cusanus “intelligence is to reason as God is to intelligence,” that is to say, *intellectus* is the source of reason’s power of recognizing opposites, as the knowledge of difference presupposes unity. The unity of *intellectus* grants it the ability to enfold opposites into a single connection.<sup>81</sup> It does this, not by innate knowledge, but by its innate power of intuition whereby we know by simple self-reflection that there is oneness beyond contradictories.<sup>82</sup> For Cusanus, *intellectus* is the unity and center of the human soul and the highest reflection of the divine Intellect, a notion that he gleans from Proclus’s idea of the “one in the soul” – which he knows as *centrum totius vite* from his

---

<sup>79</sup> The notion of identity-in-otherness stems from the Neoplatonic notion of procession and reversion, as multiplicity emanates from and returns to the One. See Werner Beierwaltes, *Identität und Differenz: Zum Prinzip Cusanischen Denkens* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1977), 9ff.

<sup>80</sup> See K.M. Ziebart, *Nicolaus Cusanus on Faith and the Intellect: A Case Study in 15th-Century Fides-Ratio Controversy* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 8.

<sup>81</sup> *De coniecturis*, 1.10.53 (h III.54).

<sup>82</sup> See Karsten Harries, *Infinity and Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 52: As Harries notes, “to be aware that our words, too, provide only a perspective is to have an intuition of the translinguistic—that is to say, of the transcendence of reality.”

reading and handwritten excerpts and notes in his Latin translation of Proclus's *Platonic Theology*.<sup>83</sup> The unity of *intellectus* makes the human mind its own microcosm (*Coniecturalis itaque mundi humana mens forma*), knowing the multiplicity of things by unfolding (*explicare*) them from itself and enfolding (*complicare*) them within its own unity – Cusanus ignores the scholastic distinction between primary and secondary intentions just as Llull did.<sup>84</sup> So, “just as the absolute divine being is all that is in each thing that is, so the unity of the human mind is the being of its own conjectures.”<sup>85</sup> Therefore, in utilizing *intellectus* we measure all things in the rational world by means of our own unity, which is our finite participation in the divine Reason. And, in circling around the divine Reason we discover our “only life-giving center [*unicum vitale centrum*].”<sup>86</sup>

Even *intellectus* is a finite manner of knowing, however, as its own human oneness is its point of departure. The degree of otherness in our knowledge, therefore, necessitates a *via negativa* with regard to both God and creatures, that is, the limitation of our knowledge to conjectures. Cusanus defines conjecture as a “positiva assertio, in alteritate veritatem, uti est, participans.”<sup>87</sup> Conjecture, then, is a participation in Truth by way of otherness, and so it is not a skeptical embrace of cognitive *aporia* as the goal of knowledge but an explanation of the limits of knowledge that

---

<sup>83</sup> See H.G. Senger, ed. *Cusanus-Texte III, Marginalien, 2. Proclus Latinus: Die Exzerpte und Randnoten des Nikolaus von Kues zu den lateinischen Übersetzungen der Proclus-Schriften; 2.1 Theologia Platonis, Elementatio theologica* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1986).; On the significance of this passage in Cusanus's thought see Werner Beierwaltes, “‘Centrum totius vite’. Zur Bedeutung von Proklos’ ‘Theologia Platonis’ im Denken des Cusanus,” in A. Ph. Segonds and Carlos G. Steel, eds., *Proclus et la théologie platonicienne* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000), 629-51.; and Stephen Gersh, “Nicholas of Cusa,” in Stephen Gersh, ed., *Interpreting Proclus: From Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 125-36.

<sup>84</sup> *De coniecturis*, 1.1.5 (h III.7).

<sup>85</sup> *De coniecturis*, 1.1.5 (h III.7).

<sup>86</sup> *De Coniecturis*, 1.1.5 (h III.8).

<sup>87</sup> *De coniecturis*, 57 (h III.58).

forms the basis of further growth and development in personal understanding.<sup>88</sup> Conjecture, therefore, is combinatorial as all things are enfolded within *intellectus*. That is, conjecture combines the way of negation *and* assertion in a *via eminentiæ* facilitated by the power of *intellectus* to reduce multiplicity to unity.

Cusanus refers to his method of uniting identity-in-difference as a Trinitarian method. This is because he sees the Trinity in light of the Pythagorean problem of the one and the many. The Father is the unity (*unitas*) within the godhead, the Son is the exact image/equality (*æqualitas*) of the Father's unity, and the Holy Spirit is the connection (*connectio*) between the Father's unity and his perfect image of equality.<sup>89</sup> Cusanus, unlike the pagan Neoplatonists, does not see the One as a single *hypostasis* but the "maximum unity" is a trinity, that is, a union of three *hypostases* related to one another in a single essence.<sup>90</sup> Since all things emanate from the divine Unity, then all things have a triune character. In *De beryllo* Cusanus explains his method as a "triune beginning." Aristotle did not understand the method of coincidence, Cusanus argues, because he placed the starting point in the three opposites: matter, form, and privation. The way of the beryl, however, posits a triune beginning (*principium unitrinum*) because it begins with the exemplar of Tri-unity that precedes all difference of otherness, thus permitting us to see privation in light of the connecting activity of the Holy Spirit.<sup>91</sup> In other words, privation is not a pure deprivation but a union of contraries (i.e., matter and form), insofar as the union between them is *deprived* of all

---

<sup>88</sup> See Clyde Lee Miller, "Knowledge and the Human Mind," in Thomas Izbicki, Christopher Bellitto, and Gerald Christianson, eds., *Introducing Nicholas of Cusa: A Guide to a Renaissance Man* (New York, N.Y.: Paulist Press, 2004), 305: As Miller points out, Cusanus intends that "our conjectural knowledge can and must approximate the ideal by correcting its inadequacies, even if human imperfection cannot be fully overcome."

<sup>89</sup> *De docta ignorantia* 1.7.21.

<sup>90</sup> *De docta ignorantia* 1.10.27.

<sup>91</sup> *De berylo*, 42 (h XI/1.48): "Et ob hoc omnes philosophi ad spiritum, qui est principium connexionis et est tertia persona in divinis secundum nostram perfectam theologiam, non attigerunt."

contraries in their exemplar. This means, according to Cusanus, that the fundamental principles of knowledge and reality are not reducible to one of two opposites, such as act and potency (or form and matter).<sup>92</sup> Rather, as Cusanus argues in *De beryllo*, all things participate in their triune Principle by a triune likeness, that is, act and potency alone do not constitute the nature of beings but act and potency *in a union of opposites* do, a union of act-in-potency.<sup>93</sup>

Cusanus's method, like Llull's, is combinatorial because it is based on the one-in-many principle in the Trinity, in the incarnate Christ, and in the human soul. The Holy Spirit is the connecting agent within the Godhead as well as between the two natures of Christ.<sup>94</sup> Christ is the equality of the Father and the Reason (logos) of all things in the Godhead, and as mentioned above, he is Reason, the center and life around which the human intellect turns. In his incarnation Christ became the perfect symbol of the coincidence of opposites, combining the maximum Godhead with the minimum corporeality in microcosmic humanity. He is both the exemplar of all things and the specific exemplar of humanity. This means that the *imago Dei* in humanity is perfectly realized when "Christ is the center and circumference of intellectual nature" and the "life of all rational spirits."<sup>95</sup> Thus, for Cusanus the goal of the human life is *Christiformitas* or to live a life that is in perfect conformity with Christ's union of opposites, which is an intellectual life of finite and contracted participation in the self-reflective activity of the Trinity – a human reflection of the Son's equality-of-unity.<sup>96</sup> The human mind is able to make itself the triune beginning of its own conjectures because it is conformed to its divine image in Christ whereby it is made in the image

---

<sup>92</sup> Cusanus's is likely opposing certain scholastic interpretations of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, IX.

<sup>93</sup> *De beryllo* 40, 60, (h XI/1, 46, 68); See Jasper Hopkins, "Introduction" in Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*, (Minneapolis: A.J. Banning, 1996), 24ff.

<sup>94</sup> *De docta ignorantia* 3.12.262.

<sup>95</sup> *De docta ignorantia* 3.8.232 (h I.145): "Ipse [Christus] centrum atque circumferentia intellectualis naturae est et, cum intellectus omnia ambiat, supra omnia est."; The notion that Christ is both the center and circumference of the cosmos becomes most explicit in his *Dialogus de ludo globi*.

<sup>96</sup> Sermo CCLXXXII.18.

of the Trinity. As it circles around – converts to – divine Reason in its derivative oneness “the mind’s oneness [*unitas*] enfolds within itself all multitude” and “its equality [*æqualitas*] enfolds all magnitude, even as its union [*conectio*] enfolds all composition.”<sup>97</sup>

Though our knowledge of the world is conjectural, Cusanus’s method provides a way to certainty beyond conjecture by means of the creative freedom of the human mind, particularly the freedom to assimilate or liken itself to all things in its own mathematical proportion. As he says in *Idiota de mente*, the mind’s assimilative power to create concepts of things is the likeness of Truth, whereas God’s knowledge is Truth itself and the creation of things.<sup>98</sup> The assimilative power of *intellectus*, then, as a one-in-many is a mathematical symbol. As David Albertson shows, Cusanus’s theology is a “mathematical theology,” many of the principles of which are drawn from the Christian Pythagoreanism of Thierry of Chartres (1100-1150). Thierry was inspired by Augustine and Boethius in his quest to marry the quadrivium and trivium in an encyclopedia of all knowledge.<sup>99</sup> For Thierry God and creation, as well as the scientific disciplines, stand in mutual relation through their reciprocal “foldings,” a term derived from the relationship between unity and plurality in mathematics. As unity enfolds plurality or number, so plurality is the unfolding of unity. Likewise, God is the enfolding of being and creation is the unfolding potentiality of the divine being. For Thierry, mathematics denotes a second mode of necessary being that descends from God’s absolute necessity. He refers to this mode as “necessary enfolding” (*necessitas completionis*) to denote the necessity of mathematical principles as mediating realities between

---

<sup>97</sup> *De coniecturis* 1.1.6. (h III.9).

<sup>98</sup> *Idiota de mente* 3.72.

<sup>99</sup> See David Albertson, *Mathematical Theologies: Nicholas of Cusa and the Legacy of Thierry of Chartres* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 171: As Albertson notes, “Nicholas also covers all of the major elements of Thierry of Chartres’s theology: the quadrivium as a guide to creation, the mathematical Trinity, the triad of perpetuums, reciprocal folding, the four modes of being, and God as the form of being.”

Creator and creature and supplying a certain necessary reliability for the ascent to the absolute. The “arithmetical Trinity” provides the first principle of the reciprocal folding of the various modes of being, as the Trinitarian enfolding and unfolding of the divine persons is the first cause of the enfolding/unfolding power of number, specifically of the number three to enfold/unfold the numbers one and two, which form the basis of all number.<sup>100</sup>

Cusanus reads and adapts Thierry’s mathematical theology, specifically the notion of the arithmetical Trinity. In *De docta ignorantia*, he argues that we can only approach God’s absolute being through symbols, and mathematical symbols are most appropriate because they possess an “incorruptible certitude.”<sup>101</sup> Cusanus, however, attempts to make fuller sense of Thierry’s proposed relationship between the “necessary enfolding” of creation and God’s absolute necessity. In *Idiota de mente*, Cusanus distinguishes between “unfolding” and “image,” arguing that the human mind is not an unfolding of absolute necessity but a reflection of it.<sup>102</sup> He thereby combines Thierry’s notion of “necessary enfolding” with the traditional notion of the *imago Dei*, thus mathematizing human reflection of the Trinity in our own intellectual activity of self-measuring. By his reflection upon himself, God generates the oneness of his being (the origin of number) and the equality of form (the origin of geometric form) and their union. Likewise, in self-reflection we turn to our Source and become our own “self-moving number” (*animam numerum se moventem*) which is a Trinitarian “symbol” (*ænigma*) of coincidence – a symbol of unity coinciding with

---

<sup>100</sup> Albertson, *Mathematical Theologies*, 138: “The arithmetical Trinity expresses how the unity of God self-multiplies into its own primal harmony, and from that harmony descends an infinite variety of autonomous numerical structures.”

<sup>101</sup> *De docta ignorantia* 1.11.32 (h I.24).

<sup>102</sup> Albertson, *Mathematical Theologies*, 231; Cusanus, *Idiota de mente* 4.74 (h V.113): “Attende aliam esse imaginem, aliam explicationem. Nam aequalitas est unitatis imago.... Et non est aequalitas unitatis explicatio, sed pluralitas. Complicationis igitur unitatis aequalitas est imago, non explicatio.”

equality and their connection in our consciousness of absolute Truth beyond symbols and otherness.<sup>103</sup>

For Cusanus, then, the conversion of the human mind in self-reflection is a mathematical viewing of the unfolding of things enfolded within the oneness of *intellectus*. Thus, as Albertson notes, “The mind,” for Cusanus, “as a mathematical self-measure reflects the Trinity’s own self-measure.”<sup>104</sup> The mind measures itself above *ratio* and above the law of non-contradiction, within *intellectus*.<sup>105</sup> Cusanus explains the crucial connection between conversion, knowledge and the *imago Dei* as self-moving number.

The mind uses itself [in its intuition of absolute Truth] in the most elevated way, as it is the image of God. And God, who is all things, shines forth within it, that is, when the mind, as a living image of God [*viva imago Dei*], converts itself to its own exemplar by assimilating itself to it with all its effort. And in this way the mind intuits that all things are one and that itself is an assimilation of this One, by which it makes concepts concerning the One that is all things.<sup>106</sup>

Within *intellectus* the mind is angelic, being able to “touch” the infinite essence of God through the mathematical symbol of its own unity, which is the tri-unity of one-in-many.<sup>107</sup> This mathematical viewing of God within the soul is what Albertson refers to as Cusanus’s “theory of arithmetical theosis,” that is, the idea that the soul’s self-reflection is “an iconological turn to the mind’s simplicity,” which reveals the cooperative relationship between one’s own self-measurement and God’s self-measurement.<sup>108</sup> Cusanus does not reduce reality or religion to pure mathematics. Rather, his philosophy of the inward turn is at once a visual and mystical “ecstasy

---

<sup>103</sup> See *Idiota de mente* 7.97 (h V.146).

<sup>104</sup> Albertson, *Mathematical Theologies*, 240.

<sup>105</sup> See Tamara Albertini, “Mathematics and Astronomy,” in *Introducing Nicholas of Cusa*, 381.

<sup>106</sup> *Idiota de mente* 7.106. (h V.159).

<sup>107</sup> *De coniecturis* 1.9.40.

<sup>108</sup> Albertson, *Mathematical Theologies*, 239

of mathematical procedures.”<sup>109</sup> For, by means of the inward turn we are capable of taking some measure of the divine. In this sense, Protagoras was correct to say that “man is the measure of all things.”<sup>110</sup> That is to say, we measure the divine Measure by knowing (or intuiting) that our knowledge of God is symbolical “so that he knows the symbol [*ænigma*] of Truth to be the Truth that cannot be shaped into any symbolism [*ænigmate*].”<sup>111</sup>

Cusanus’s Trinitarian and mathematical method of learned ignorance is a universal method, as it enfolds all of the arts and sciences as well as religion, just as the mind enfolds all things in its tri-unity. In *De beryllo* he reduces the principles of logic (genus, species, and difference) to a numeric harmony. “Specification,” Cusanus notes, “is a bond that binds the difference to a genus, and so, the species gives a thing its entire being.”<sup>112</sup> As he explains in *De coniecturis*, his method presents the student with a way of viewing all otherness that they encounter in their investigations within the underlying identity of all things.<sup>113</sup> He develops charts that resemble Llull’s, only much more simplistic. The most important of these is the “diagram of all things” (*universorum figuram*) in which all regions of things are displayed in an interconnecting chain of circles linked by their basic mathematical numbers in descending triads from one to 400 – these are progressions of the numbers four and ten that contain all other numbers.<sup>114</sup> Cusanus says this chart will enable the viewer to easily see “in the otherness of contracted beings, the modes, as it were of absolute Oneness.”<sup>115</sup> The diagram of all things, therefore, presents the viewer

---

<sup>109</sup> Albertson, *Mathematical Theologies*, 245.

<sup>110</sup> Cusanus, *De beryllo* 36-37; On Protagoras see fragment DK80b1 in Hermann Diels & Walther Knawz, eds., *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, (Zurich: Weidman, 1985).

<sup>111</sup> *De beryllo* 7 (h XI/1.9-10).

<sup>112</sup> *De beryllo* 62 (h XI/1.70).

<sup>113</sup> *De coniecturis* 2.1.71

<sup>114</sup> *De coniecturis* 1.13.66, and the reference to ‘universorum figuram’ in 2.2.86.

<sup>115</sup> *De coniecturis* 2.1.71. (h III.72): “Quapropter non habes alia consideratione opus, nisi ut in diversitate rerum a te indagandarum identitatem inquiras aut in alteritate unitatem.”



with the “deep root of all the sciences that are to be investigated” by reducing all things to their mathematical principles. Religion is also included in Cusanus’s method, as *De coniecturis* concludes with a chapter on self-knowledge. The combinatorial charts that Cusanus displays present the mathematical method by which the many are reduced to one in the soul and in which we are enabled to see our contracted humanity as a oneness that is triune. Thus, as he tells Father Julian, “you will be able to see, from a consideration of yourself, that the elect are Godlike [*deiformes*].”<sup>116</sup>

### *Cusanus’s Ethics*

Cusanus’s universal method is not meant to be a purely speculative discipline but, like his Neoplatonic and Christian influences, it is a tool for the pursuit of metaphysics as ethics, that is, as a spiritual exercise that ends in the transformation of the self into the divine image. As Jasper Hopkins and others have shown, Cusanus’s ethic follows the classical tradition of *eudaimonia* in conceiving of human moral life in terms of the pursuit of virtue in accordance with rational norms of morality as the essential means for the attainment of well-being.<sup>117</sup> According to Isabella Mandrella in her *Viva imago: Die praktische Philosophie des Nikolaus Cusanus*, the idea of the *imago Dei* as a “living image” (*viva imago*) is central to Cusanus’s notion of *eudaimonia* because, like Plotinus, Cusanus envisions human well-being as the attainment of life at the level of Nous, and for Cusanus that means a life that participates in the Trinity by means of its own self-moving

---

<sup>116</sup> *De coniecturis* 2.17.182. (h III.181).

<sup>117</sup> Jasper Hopkins, “Die tugenden in der Sicht des Nikolaus von Kues. Ihre Vielfalt, ihr Verhältnis untereinander und ihr Sein. Erbe und Neuansatz,” in Klaus Kremer and Klaus Reinhardt, eds., *Sein und Sollen: Die Ethik des Nikolaus von Kues. Akten des Symposions in Trier vom 15. Bis 17. Oktober 1998* (Trier: Paulinus, 2000), 9-38.

and self-turning (or converting) power, i.e., *intellectus*.<sup>118</sup> In *De Pace fidei* Cusanus combines the contemplative aspect of *eudaimonia* defined by Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* X and Augustine's Neoplatonic notion of *fruitio* and *unio* with God as the ultimate goal of humanity. He blends these ideas with Proclus's concept of the "one in the soul," or *centrum totius vite* as Cusanus understood it, to place *eudaimonia* in the realization of one's true self as a living image of the Trinity.

In a sermon on a passage from *Galatians* Cusanus explains how the consciousness of ourselves as a living image motivates us to live at the highest level of life. He notes that when the intellect becomes aware of itself as an intellect, it sees itself intelligently, not by means of the senses but as a "living vision" seeing itself and all things within itself.

Therefore only the intellect, as it were a living image, is capable of savoring life from within itself, that is, the true Life, of whose image it is. For because the living image knows itself to be an image by means of the intellectual life in it, it knows the Truth and Exemplar and Form in itself, which gives being to it, so that it is an image. And this is the true life of the image, which exists in itself as the Truth in an image.<sup>119</sup>

When the intellect becomes aware of itself as a living image it finds a power from God within itself to assimilate itself more to its exemplar and to ascend to a greater union with the Truth "in order that it may more sweetly rest [in it]." If the image that knows itself to be an image tries to find rest outside of the Truth itself, Cusanus notes, it will only find error and confusion and death because it will be separated from the divine influence that gives it the power of intellectual life. Thus, as Mandrella notes, the notion of the mind as *viva imago* gives Cusanus's philosophy "an

---

<sup>118</sup> Isabelle Mandrella, *Viva Imago: Die Praktische Philosophie Des Nicolaus Cusanus* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2012).

<sup>119</sup> *Sermo* CLXIX.4. (h XVIII.226).

eminent practical impulse, namely, the desire of the image to become more and more like its Original.”<sup>120</sup>

Cusanus rejects the Aristotelian and scholastic distinction between speculative and practical reason, substituting in its place the dynamic relationship between *intellectus* and *ratio* in what Hans Gerhard Senger refers to as a “Regionenethik,” that is, an ethic centered primarily in these two modes of intellectuality.<sup>121</sup> The relationship between *intellectus* and *ratio*, however, is not the equivalent of speculative and practical reason for Cusanus. Rather, they each have a role to play in both *theoria* and *praxis*, as the unity of *intellectus* is the condition that makes the differences analyzed by *ratio* possible.<sup>122</sup> The ability to distinguish between good and evil, therefore, is not based on an abstract notion of right/wrong or on the first self-evident principle of the practical intellect (as it is for Aquinas)<sup>123</sup> but on the mind’s dynamic creative power that it possesses as the *viva imago Dei*. There is a “connatural judgment” (*iudicium concreatum*) enfolded in *intellectus* wherein it has the ability to judge between right and wrong, virtue and vice, based on the pattern of the exemplar of Good/Virtue connaturally present within it.<sup>124</sup> The desire for the exemplar frees the mind from otherness as it enables it to intuit the Good/Truth beyond the coincidence of opposites, thus permitting the *iudicium concreatum* to discern the “works of light” (identity) from the works of darkness (otherness).<sup>125</sup> Therefore, the mind’s innate ability to

---

<sup>120</sup> Mandrella, *Viva Imago*, 275: “ein eminent praktischer Impuls, nämlich das Bestreben des Abbildes, seinem Urbild immer ähnlicher zu werden.”

<sup>121</sup> Hans Senger, “Zur Frage nach einer philosophischen Ethik des Nikolaus von Kues,” *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 33 (1970): 14-23.

<sup>122</sup> See Mandrella, *Viva Imago*, 50-7.

<sup>123</sup> *Summa theologiae* I-II, Q. 94, a. 2.

<sup>124</sup> *Idiota de mente* 5.85 (h V.127): “[Mens] habet [iudicium] ex eo, quia est imago exemplaris omnium. Deus enim est omnium exemplar. Unde cum omnium exemplar in mente ut veritas in imagine reluceat, in se habet ad quod respicit, secundum quod iudicium de exterioribus facit.”

<sup>125</sup> *Sermo* LIV.1-10; *Idiota de mente* 4.78 (h V.119): “Nam clare experimur spiritum in mente nostra loquentem et iudicantem hoc bonum, hoc iustum, hoc verum, et nos reprehendentem, si declinamus a iusto. Quam loquelam et quod iudicium nequaquam didicit, sed sibi connatum est.”

assimilate itself to all things, which arises from its ability to measure its own unity in light of the divine Unity – a self-moving number or *viva imago* – is what permits us to discover the unity that is presupposed in and renders possible the difference between virtue and vice. So, we know innately when we have “fallen away from what is right [*iusto*].”<sup>126</sup> Though the mind resembles someone who has fallen asleep, Cusanus says, once it is aroused and awed by perceptible things it becomes like a living law code (*lex viva*), reading the judgments of all things within itself.<sup>127</sup>

The mind as *viva imago* is free to fashion itself into the likeness of the divine Exemplar, though this freedom is itself dependent upon its ontological relationship with its Exemplar (as a living reflection of it). As noted above, the Exemplar of the human mind, for Cusanus, is the Trinity, but more specifically it is the Equality of the Trinity. In his *De æqualitate* Cusanus argues that the divine Equality of the Trinity comes to manifest itself in the human mind, which has the power of “equalizing” by recognizing a “trinity prior to all otherness.”<sup>128</sup> From the faculty of judgment are derived certain moral norms based on this awareness of equality. Indeed, Cusanus argues that all the sciences and arts are grounded in the idea of equality. Grammar, for example, is based on the equality of the sign and the thing signified, and ethics is based on the equality of the mean.<sup>129</sup> All of the virtues, in fact, are based on the “rule of equality” (*regula æqualitatis*), which is the Golden Rule: “do to others what you want done to yourself,” from Matthew 7:12. Justice, prudence, temperance and all other virtues are founded upon this rule, Cusanus says, because “virtue consists in the mean, which is equality.”<sup>130</sup> Equality is the mean because it is the midpoint

---

<sup>126</sup> *Idiota de mente* 4.78 (h V.119).

<sup>127</sup> *Idiota de mente* 5.85 (h V.128): “Ac si lex scripta foret viva, illa, quia viva, in se iudicanda legeret. Unde mens est viva descriptio aeternæ et infinitæ sapientiæ.”

<sup>128</sup> *De æqualitate*, 31 (h X/1.40).

<sup>129</sup> *De æqualitate*, 27.

<sup>130</sup> *De æqualitate*, 27 (h X/1.35-6): “Sublata æqualitate cessat prudentia, cessat temperantia et omnis virtus, quoniam in medio, quod est æqualitas, consistit.”

between doing too much and doing too little, which is presupposed in the discernment of all inequality.<sup>131</sup>

In *De coniecturis* Cusanus repeats the law of equality and explains its basis in the Trinitarian principle of identity-in-difference (or one-in-many):

If you want to be just, nothing else is necessary for you than to not depart from that equality in which is unity and connection. Then you will bear – equally and in unity and love – adversity and prosperity, poverty and riches, honor and reproach. You will stray neither to the right nor to the left, but you will be “most secure” in equality. Nothing serious or adverse can happen to you, if you understand and embrace everything that appears adverse to the senses in such a way as to hold it in the equality-of-unity of being and of love, since this is to participate divinity nobly and happily.<sup>132</sup>

Here we see that the method of learned ignorance provides the rational norm for Cusanus’s moral philosophy. The rule of equality is a “triune beginning” because it teaches us never to depart from equality, union, and their connection. That is, by means of the rule of equality one is capable of holding the outward contradiction of adversity and prosperity together as a diversity that presupposes a tri-unity, and therefore each person has the power to resolve all moral otherness back into its original unity within the mind while at the same time allowing the apparently opposing principles to remain.

The eminent practical impulse of striving after the Exemplar means that Cusanus’s method is not merely speculative but has the all-important function of shaping the desires as well, and hence its use necessarily presupposes and engenders virtue. Cusanus is aware of the traditional virtue schema in terms of the cardinal virtues, moral/political virtues, and theological virtue, as

---

<sup>131</sup> *De docta ignorantia* 1.7.19 (h I.15): “Inaequalitas ergo posterior natura est æqualitate, quod per resolutionem firmissime probari potest. Omnis enim inaequalitas in æqualitatem resolvitur; nam æquale inter maius et minus est.”

<sup>132</sup> *De coniecturis* 2.17.183 (h III.182).

well as the Neoplatonic schema relayed by Macrobius.<sup>133</sup> In *De coniecturis*, Cusanus reduces these virtues to their triune simplicity in the power of unity, the power of equality or justice, and the power of uniting or love.<sup>134</sup> These virtues of *intellectus* manifest themselves in the rational powers of discriminating, proportioning, and combining, and in the sensitive powers of perceiving, sensual proportioning, and sensual union or love. The virtue of unity is the innate power of *intellectus* to hold all aspects of being within the unity of our being. Cusanus refers to justice as a “living scale” (*viva statera*) because it measures all things by means of its own rule of equality, defining what is just and equitable in participation with divine Justice, yet in its own human way.<sup>135</sup> Love is the unitive force in the human soul that drives it to seek union with the Good for its own sake. For Cusanus, love combines *intellectus* and *affectus* in coincidence, as eternal life is dependent upon the understanding of love and a love of the object of understanding.<sup>136</sup> Love and justice are bound together in the soul’s journey to the Exemplar, as the love of absolute Unity is a love that is perfectly one and perfectly ordered because it renders the appropriate proportion of love to finite and infinite objects. Love is just because it recognizes that “every love by which God is loved is less than that by which he is lovable.”<sup>137</sup> For Cusanus, the virtues are dispositions of the soul that are caused by the soul’s participation in their divine Exemplars in God. Therefore, we become more just and more loving the more we partake of divine Justice and Love. This happens primarily

---

<sup>133</sup> See Hopkins, *Sein und Sollen*, 27.

<sup>134</sup> *De coniecturis* 2.17.176; See Mandrella, *Viva Imago*, 89.

<sup>135</sup> *Sermo* CCXLVIII.6 (h XIX.300): “Iustitia in numero, pondere et mensura attenditur. Iustitia intellectualis est viva statera. Solus homo per intellectum invenit medio staterae iusta rerum pondera et mensuras.”

<sup>136</sup> *Sermo* CCLXXXIII.11 (h XIX.616): “Unde cum dico vitam aeternam esse cognitionem caritatis [...] Sed dum te elevas ad illam simplicitatem, ubi idem est intelligere et amare, concipis has potentias animae nostrae, scilicet intelligere et amare, in felicitate ultima coincidere. Ideo in quantum beata anima amat, tantum intelligit, et e converso quantum intelligit, tantum amat, cum felicitas illa sibi adveniat ab eo, ubi idem est intelligere et amare et qui felicitando animam non se plus communicat intelligendo quam amando.”

<sup>137</sup> *De coniecturis*, 2.17.182 (h III.181-2).

by means of self-reflection, as the outwardly just action does not serve to increase justice unless the agent knows the activity to be just and perceives it to be a participation of divine Justice.<sup>138</sup>

Cusanus's virtue ethic, like his method, is equally Christological as it is Trinitarian. In fact, he refers to Christ as *virtus virtutum*, and *forma*, *exemplar*, and *finis*, of all of the virtues.<sup>139</sup> Since Christ combines the absolute maximum and minimum in the union of divinity and humanity, he is also the "enfolding of all the virtues" (*omnium virtutum complicatio*).<sup>140</sup> As the divine equality and image of the Father's unity, Christ enfolds the fullness of all things in both an infinite and finite way. Christ, whose human mind is "personally supposed ... in the divine Intellect" represents the highest possible union between humanity and divinity, and so his virtue is the most pure and intellectual.<sup>141</sup> Since all the virtues conform to the pattern of equality, then all virtues are fulfilled in Christ. For, in him "minimum things coincide with maximum, as maximum humiliation with exaltation, the most shameful death of a virtuous man with the most glorious life."<sup>142</sup> For Cusanus, the theological virtues are necessary to attain union with Christ as the center of our intellectual nature. He affirms that the infused virtues of faith, hope, and charity are divine illuminations that are necessary for the conversion of the spirit to Christ as its source of life.<sup>143</sup> Yet, as Rudolf Haubst notes, Cusanus's Christological conclusions are founded upon his metaphysical speculations regarding the one and the many.<sup>144</sup> This means that, for Cusanus, the virtues are both divine

---

<sup>138</sup> See *Sermo* CCXLVIII.8-9 (h XIX.301): Cusanus says that justice is "amor æternitatis" that leads the soul to intellectual quietude. Therefore, justice increases by exercising justice as love for eternity. "Anima quæ cognoscit quid iustum, ipsa se potest iustitiæ plus et plus conformare. Sola igitur intellectualis substantia potest augeri sine termino. Sicut ars se ipsam auget assiduatione operis – fabrilis ars augetur in fabro fabricante –, ita intellectus habet iustitiam suam intellectualem, quæ augetur continue per exercitia iusta."

<sup>139</sup> See Albert Dahm, "Christus – 'Tugend der Tugenden,'" in *Sein und Sollen*, 191.

<sup>140</sup> *Sermo* CXXVI.13 (h XVIII.27).

<sup>141</sup> *De docta ignorantia* 3.4.206 (h I.132).

<sup>142</sup> *De docta ignorantia* 3.6.220 (h I.138).

<sup>143</sup> *De docta ignorantia* 3.9.237.

<sup>144</sup> See Haubst, *Die Christologie des Nikolaus von Kues* (Freiburg: Herder, 1956), 270-274.

illuminations and the fulfillment of natural human capacities, including the creative freedom of the will. The conversion of the soul to Christ is at the same time its conversion to the One (or equality-of-unity), which occurs by means of the “the capacity of the intellectual nature, that by receiving life into itself it is converted into life according to its convertible nature, just as air is converted into light by receiving the ray of the sun into itself.”<sup>145</sup>

The conversion of the mind to its exemplar Equality-of-unity happens within the mind, unmediated by any outside force; yet this seemingly detached inward turn serves as the foundational impetus for the soul’s loving turn toward society with humanity. Mandrella notes that Cusanus does not promote the *vita contemplativa* at the expense of the *vita activa*. Rather, he combines the two in coincidence, using the Virgin Mary as a model of one who combined both lifestyles, since she was both a domestic mother and the mother of God.<sup>146</sup> For Cusanus, love of one’s neighbor is a necessary part of the law of equality and *Christiformitas* because it is an imitation of Christ’s self-sacrificial love for humanity. Christ’s love is not only religious but is based on the soul’s natural attraction to God both in himself and as he is fully present within his finite images.<sup>147</sup> As Cusanus says in *De coniecturis*, loving the universe and humanity according to their oneness is a finite way of partaking of the divine Unity because it is a love that is both a unity and an equality-of-unity, that is, it loves oneness in proper proportion to its objects.<sup>148</sup> Cusanus showed his concern for the active life in his “Herculean” efforts to reform the catholic church.<sup>149</sup> This concern arose from his belief that the ministers of the church are responsible to act

---

<sup>145</sup> *De docta ignorantia* 3.12.259 (h I.160-1).

<sup>146</sup> See Mandrella, *Viva Imago*, 205.

<sup>147</sup> See Wilhelm Dupré, “Liebe als Grundbestandteil allen Seins,” in *Sein und Sollen*, 79.

<sup>148</sup> *De coniecturis*, 2.17.181 (h III.181): “Vides igitur non esse amorem divinam connexionem participantem, qui est extra unum et ordinem ad unum. Nihil igitur universi diligendum est nisi in unitate atque ordine universi.”

<sup>149</sup> See Paul E. Sigmund, *Nicholas of Cusa and Medieval Political Thought* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1963), 281.



as exemplars to their parishioners, thereby engendering *Christiformitas* within the church through their example of self-sacrificial love.<sup>150</sup>

For Cusanus, the method of coincidence is not merely speculative but is fundamentally crafted for the reformation of the *imago Dei* in the human soul and for the development of deiform virtue. In *De coniecturis* Cusanus encourages Father Julian to use the procedures and rules that are laid down in the charts for viewing identity-in-otherness, as this method is the means whereby our “intellect frees itself from its own otherness in order to be able to ascend more highly unto most simple Unity.”<sup>151</sup> By this reduction of Neoplatonic metaphysics to a simple method *intellectus* can be freed to ascend to “a nearer likeness to divine and infinite Unity, which is, for the intellect, infinite Life, infinite Truth, and infinite Rest.” For, to see identity-in-otherness is to participate in the vision of the Trinity, wherein there is no otherness, by reducing otherness to the underlying unity/identity in all things. It is to convert all multiplicity into an equality-of-unity. In his *De pace fidei*, Cusanus employs this universal method in a highly optimistic spirit, as a way to bring about universal peace. For there he uses the principle of identity-in-otherness as “one religion in a variety of rites” to argue for universal peace among Christians, Jews, and Muslims, not by a mere *tolerance* of difference, but an *enduring* the burden of otherness for the sake of unity.<sup>152</sup>

---

<sup>150</sup> *Reformatio generalis*, 4 (h XV.25-6): “Qui igitur in locum apostolorum successimus, ut alios nostra imitatione formam Christi induamus, utique prioriter aliis christiformes esse necesse est [...] Quem ut unicum magistrum vitae recipientes fide et opere sic formati sunt quod aeternae vitae capaces existunt. Neque capaces eo ipso eam habent, sed necesse est quod eis eam Christus communicet et donet, qui eam non solum merito virtutis oboedientiae habet.”

<sup>151</sup> *De coniecturis* 2.16.167 (h III.168): “Quanto igitur ipse intellectus a sua alteritate se altius abstrahit, ut in unitatem simplicissimam plus ascendere queat.”

<sup>152</sup> Jose Decorte, “Tolerance and Trinity,” in Inigo Bocken, ed., *Conflict and Reconciliation: Perspectives on Nicolas of Cusa* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 115; For a thorough treatment of Cusanus’s notion of religious tolerance, see Joshua Hollmann, *The Religious Concordance: Nicholas of Cusa and Christian-Muslim Dialogue* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

### Jan Amos Comenius (1592-1670) and the Cambridge Platonists (1641-88)

Some of the early modern humanists who promoted Llullism also read and published the works of Cusanus. Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and his circle, for example, printed Cusanus's *Opera Omnia*, undoubtedly because they aimed to improve the natural learning of the layman (*idiotia*) and saw in Cusanus's works a concern to educate the layperson with a simple but sophisticated approach to wisdom.<sup>153</sup> According to Stephan Meier-Oeser, many early modern authors engaged with Cusanus's ideas, but most read him in light of their own concerns, many reducing his ingenious solutions to commentaries on the *corpus Dionysiacum*. Yet, the "presence of the forgotten [Cusanus]," as Stephan Meier-Oeser terms the reception of Cusanus in the early modern world, stands in contrast to those who more faithfully received and appropriated his writings and his method.<sup>154</sup> The most important of these for Peter Sterry is Jan Amos Comenius, the Czech polymath and bishop of the Bohemian brethren.

Comenius' teacher was one of the chief proponents of encyclopedism in the early modern world, Johann Heinrich Alsted. According to Alsted, writer of the first modern encyclopedia in 1630, early-modern philosophers fell into three camps: Aristotelians, Llullists, and Ramists.<sup>155</sup> Peter Ramus proposed a method for invention that he derived partly from Rudolph Agricola, which aimed to simplify all of the sciences by reducing them to a single method. This involved an *a priori* description of the most universal terms and their derivative particulars divided into seemingly

---

<sup>153</sup> See Richard J. Oosterhoff, "Idiotae, Mathematics, and Artisans: The Untutored Mind and the Discovery of Nature in the Fabrist Circle" *Intellectual History Review*, 24.3 (2014): 301-319.

<sup>154</sup> Stephan Meier-Oeser, *Die Präsenz Des Vergessenen: Zur Rezeption Der Philosophie Des Nicolaus Cusanus Vom 15. Bis Zum 18. Jahrhundert*, (Münster: Aschendorff, 1989); and Meier-Oeser, "Die Cusanus-Rezeption im deutschen Renaissancehumanismus," in Thurner, *Cusanus zwischen Deutschland*, 617-32.

<sup>155</sup> Johann Heinrich Alsted, *Clavis Artis Lullianæ, et Veræ Logices Duos in Libellos*, (Strasbourg: Lazarus Zetzner, 1633), 9ff.

innumerable dichotomous charts. Ramus received a very mixed reception in Europe, especially in Germany where he was met with fierce resistance from the faculty of the University of Heidelberg, Tübingen, and elsewhere mostly due to his somewhat non-humanistic goal to replace the reading of Aristotle in the schools with his own highly simplistic compendia.<sup>156</sup> Later semi-Ramists like Bartholomeus Keckermann criticized Ramus's tendency to dichotomize and his apparent distortion of Aristotelian method, as well as his exclusion of metaphysics from philosophy. They maintained, however, his attention to method and the prospects of the encyclopedia of the disciplines. The semi-Ramist Alsted, who also published Llull's writings, even attempted to combine the three methods of Aristotle, Llull, and Ramus in his logical works.<sup>157</sup>

Comenius was inspired by Alsted to pursue the combinatory goals of Llull, the encyclopedic enterprises of Renaissance humanists, and the simplifying methods of Ramus and Keckermann.<sup>158</sup> Comenius proposed that with the proper method it is possible for any person to attain to the knowledge of every possible subject, no matter their socio-economic status or intellectual capabilities.<sup>159</sup> In his *Pansophia Christiana* (1637), Comenius says that his universal method is a science that "fully contains all things within itself."<sup>160</sup> It contains theological as well as philosophical principles, based as it is on the nature of the Trinity. Comenius refers to this knowledge as "pansophia," or literally "all-wisdom," which is modeled on the microcosmic and

---

<sup>156</sup> See Walter Ong, *Ramus: Method, and the Decay of Dialogue; from the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason*, 1958, Reprint (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>157</sup> See Howard Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted 1588–1638: Between Renaissance, Reformation, and Universal Reform* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).

<sup>158</sup> See Howard Hotson, "The Ramist Roots of Comenian Pansophia," in Steven Reid and Emma Wilson, eds., *Ramus, Pedagogy and the Liberal Arts: Ramism in Britain and the Wider World* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2011), 227-52.

<sup>159</sup> Like other Llulists, Comenius thought of nature as the layman's Bible. See Petr Pavlas, "The Book Metaphor Triadized: The Layman's Bible and God's Books in Raymond of Sabunde, Nicholas of Cusa and Jan Amos Comenius," in Simon J.G. Burton, Joshua Hollmann, and Eric M. Parker, eds., *Nicholas of Cusa and the Early Modern World* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming), 406-38.

<sup>160</sup> Comenius, *Pansophiae Prodromus* (Leiden: David Lopez de Haro, 1644), 6.

quasi-divine nature of the human person. Just as God is the infinite circle containing all things, so man is a circular reflection of this divine circle in his capacity for all-wisdom. As Jan Patočka and Pavel Floss have demonstrated, Comenius's pansophic ideas are profoundly influenced by Cusanus's philosophy.<sup>161</sup> Much like Cusanus, who he knew through the compendium of Ulrich Pinder, Comenius utilizes the metaphor of the enfolding and unfolding of knowledge, the mathematical Trinity, man as the measure of all things, and the metaphor of God as an infinite circle.<sup>162</sup> As Simon Burton points out, Comenius's proposed sanctified "scripture logic" is the same as Cusanus's Trinitarian and Christocentric logic.<sup>163</sup> For, this logic combines the maximum and minimum of philosophy in the person of Christ, who is the *centrum securitas*. It is possible, though impossible to prove, that Sterry turned to the writings of Cusanus due the influence of Comenius, as he likely corresponded with Comenius prior to and upon Comenius' arrival in England in 1641, a journey that was sponsored by Sterry's friend and employer, Lord Robert Greville, Baron Brooke. As we will see in the next chapter, Brooke and Sterry make reference to Comenius and employ a method similar to the Czech pedagogue in their collaborative work, *The Nature of Truth*, published in 1641, the same year as Comenius's visit.

There are also many similarities between Cusanus's philosophy and the philosophy of the other Cambridge Platonists, who in their opposition to the perceived atheism of Hobbes, Spinoza,

---

<sup>161</sup> Jan Patočka, "Comenius und Cusanus," in Jan Patočka, *Andere Wege in die Moderne: Studien zur europäischen Ideengeschichte von der Renaissance bis zur Romantik*, ed. Ludger Hagedorn (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006), 237-43.; and Pavel Floss, "Cusanus und Comenius," *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft* 10 (1973): 172-90.

<sup>162</sup> On Pinder, see Catrien Santing, "Through the Looking Glass of Ulrich Pinder: The Impact of Humanism on the Career of a Nuremberg Town Physician around 1500," in Stephen Gersh and Bert Roest, eds., *Medieval and Renaissance Humanism: Rhetoric, Representation and Reform* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 203-20.

<sup>163</sup> Simon J.G. Burton, "'Squaring the Circle': Cusan Metaphysics and the Pansophic Vision of Jan Amos Comenius," in *Cusa and the Early Modern World*, 439-74.

and others, strove to see “Reason re-enthroned in her Majestick Seat” within religion.<sup>164</sup> As Cassirer notes in his *Die Platonische Renaissance in England und die Schule von Cambridge*, the Cambridge Platonists were instrumental in bringing about a “Platonic Renaissance” in England that would have important implications for the development of modern philosophy.<sup>165</sup> Together the Cambridge Platonists upheld the heart of Trinitarian religion in the rationalistic spirit of Origen, Ficino, and Cusanus with Henry More leaning on Plotinus’s notion of virtue as ‘purification’ and Ralph Cudworth seeking philosophical basis for the Christian Trinity in Plotinus’s Neoplatonic triads.<sup>166</sup> Cassirer remarks on the resemblance of their thought to Cusanus, particularly in their combination of subjective and objective perspectives within religion.<sup>167</sup> James Bryson has shown Cassirer’s supposition about Cusanus’s influence on the Platonic renaissance in England to be true, namely, that Cusanus did exercise some influence on the Oxford predecessor of the Cambridge theologians, Thomas Jackson.<sup>168</sup>

There are many notable parallels between Cusanus and the Cambridge Platonists, partly owing to their shared deep immersion in Neoplatonic sources as well as the influence of Rene Descartes, who was himself a reader of Cusanus – the Cartesian element is true of Henry More

---

<sup>164</sup> Ralph Cudworth, *A sermon preached to the honourable Society of Lincolns-Inne*, (London: J. Flesher for R. Royston, 1664), 38; Douglas Hedley, “Real Atheism and Cambridge Platonism: Men of Latitude, Polemics, and the Great Dead Philosophers,” in Kevin Corrigan and John D. Turner, eds., *Platonisms: Ancient, Modern, and Postmodern* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 155-174.

<sup>165</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *Die Platonische Renaissance in England und die Schule von Cambridge*, (Berlin: Teubner, 1932), esp. 110-141.

<sup>166</sup> On Origen and the Cambridge Platonists see the chapters by Douglas Hedley and Sarah Hutton in Christian Hengstmann and Alfons Fürst, eds., *Autonomie und Menschenwürde: Origenes in der Philosophie der Neuzeit* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2012); On More’s use of Plotinus’s virtue ethics, see Henry More, *Discourses on Several Texts of Scripture*, (London: Printed by I. R. and are to be Sold by Brabazon Aylmer, 1692) 50ff.; On Cudworth and the Trinity see Benjamin Carter, *‘The Little Commonwealth of Man’: The Trinitarian Origins of the Ethical and Political Philosophy of Ralph Cudworth*, (Louvain: Peeters), 2011.

<sup>167</sup> Cassirer, *Platonische*, 22.

<sup>168</sup> James Bryson, *The Christian Platonism of Thomas Jackson*, (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 109-155.

and Ralph Cudworth but Sterry shows no sign of having read Descartes.<sup>169</sup> Their interest in a new intellectual orientation manifests itself in many of their ideas: the idea that Reason is “the Spirit of Man” and the “Candle of the Lord” as the essential mechanism of human deification;<sup>170</sup> an exemplarist metaphysics coupled with an autonomous ethic;<sup>171</sup> the criticism of Aristotelian faculty psychology and the crucial role that self-reflection plays in their philosophical notion of religion (More’s ‘boniform faculty,’ Cudworth’s ‘hegemonikon,’ and Peter Sterry’s ‘omniformity’ of the soul);<sup>172</sup> the promotion of man as the “measure of all things” along with an idealistic epistemology and a theory of representative perception;<sup>173</sup> the notion of the world-soul as a “plastick nature” mediating between material and spiritual realities;<sup>174</sup> and finally, their efforts to promote universal tolerance (Cudworth and Sterry played a role in Cromwell’s commission for the readmission of the Jews to England), all testify to the cosmic breadth of their notion of reform.<sup>175</sup>

---

<sup>169</sup> On Cusanus and Descartes see Karsten Harries, “Problems of the Infinite: Cusanus and Descartes,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 64.1 (1990): 89-110.

<sup>170</sup> See Robert A. Greene, “Whichcote, the Candle of the Lord, and Synderesis,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52.4 (1991): 617-44.

<sup>171</sup> See Stephen Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal Ought*, (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 23-52, and 109-148; and Michael Gill, *The British Moralists and Human Nature*, (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 7-74.

<sup>172</sup> On More see Robert Crocker, “Mysticism and enthusiasm in Henry More,” in Sarah Hutton, ed., *Henry More (1614-1687): Tercentenary Studies* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990), 137-155; On Cudworth see Darwall, *Internal Ought*, 109-148; Also see Peter Sterry, *DFW*, 90; and Dewey D. Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660–1714: Variety, Persistence, and Transformation*, (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2011), 51-86.

<sup>173</sup> See J.A. Passmore, *Ralph Cudworth: An Interpretation*, 1951, (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 29-39; On More see Robert Crocker, “The Role of Illuminism in the Thought of Henry More,” in G.A.J. Rogers, Jean-Michel Vienne, and Yves C. Zarka, eds., *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context: Politics, Metaphysics and Religion* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1997), 129-144.

<sup>174</sup> See Lutz Bergemann, *Ralph Cudworth - System aus Transformation: Zur Naturphilosophie der Cambridge Platonisten und Ihrer Methode*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012); and Jasper Reid, *The Metaphysics of Henry More*, (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), 313-348.

<sup>175</sup> See Luisa Simonutti, “Reason and toleration: Henry More and Philip van Limborch,” in Hutton, *Henry More*, 201-218; David Pailin, “Reconciling Theory and Fact: The Problem of ‘Other Faiths’ in Lord Herbert and the Cambridge Platonists,” in Hedley, *Platonism*, 93-111; and Louise Hickman, “‘Love is all and God is love’: Universalism in Peter Sterry (1613-1672) and Jeremiah White (1630-1707),” in Gregory MacDonald, ed., *‘All shall be well’: Explorations in Universalism and Christian Theology from Origen to Moltmann* (Cambridge, U.K.: James Clarke & Co., 2011), 95-115.

The Cambridge Platonists were undoubtedly familiar with Cusanus, as he is mentioned in the famous works of John Dee and Sir Walter Raleigh, and his *De visione Dei* and *Idiota de mente* were translated into English and published by John Everard in 1646 and 1650.<sup>176</sup> Despite the similarity of ideas, Peter Sterry is the only member of the Cambridge Platonists to refer explicitly to Cusanus in his writings – though Ralph Cudworth owned a copy of the Basel edition of Cusanus’s *Opera Omnia* (1565) – possibly due to the prospects of censure, as Everard himself was accused of both enthusiasm and papist sympathies, in part because of his publications of Cusanus.<sup>177</sup> Sterry’s acceptance and public promotion of Cusan ideas during his tenure as a chaplain to Oliver Cromwell and other Parliamentarians provides even further justification for viewing the Cambridge Platonists in light of Cusanus’s reforms. Many of their ideas, as mentioned, stem from the influence of Descartes, yet, their criticism of certain key aspects of Cartesianism – voluntarism, mechanism, and the method of doubt, etc. – more closely align them with Cusanus.<sup>178</sup> Yet, as we will see in the next chapter, at least one of the Cambridge Platonists, Nathanael Culverwel, considered Lord Brooke’s promotion of paradox to be a capitulation to skepticism.

---

<sup>176</sup> John Dee introduced the phrase *experimentalis scientia* to the English world, which he culled from Cusanus’s *De staticis experimentis*. See Fritz Nagel, *Nicolaus Cusanus Und Die Entstehung Der Exakten Wissenschaften*, (Münster: Aschendorff, 1984), 140-158; and Meier-Oeser, *Die Präsenz*, 182-85; and Thomas Wilson Hayes, “Nicholas of Cusa and Popular Literacy in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Studies in Philology*, 84.1 (1987): 80-94.

<sup>177</sup> Ralph Cudworth, *Bibliotheca Cudworthiana, sive Catalogus Variorum Librorum Plurimis Facultatibus Insignium Bibliothecæ Instructissimæ Rev. Doct. Dr. Cudworth*, (London: Edward Millington, 1691), 1; On Everard see Rufus M. Jones, *Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, (Toronto: Macmillan and Co., 1914), 235ff.

<sup>178</sup> See David Leech, *The Hammer of the Cartesians: Henry More's Philosophy of Spirit and the Origins of Modern Atheism*, (Leuven: Peeters, 2013); and see the chapters by John Cottingham and Marialuisa Baldi in Rogers, *Philosophical Context*, 145-158, and 159-172 respectively.

## Conclusion

In his treatment of Proclus's ethics Dirk Baltzly notes that "we, from our modern standpoint, don't see the ethical purpose of metaphysics."<sup>179</sup> This was not the case for early modern philosophers like Cusanus, Ficino and the Cambridge Platonists. For them, the fact that the human mind participates in the divine Mind in its act of knowing itself and the world functions as the ground of its ability to transition or convert itself and all things within itself into a likeness of its divine source, and thereby to achieve *eudaimonia*. The early-modern encyclopedic movement and its promotion of a universal key of wisdom or pansophia made this sort of conversion to the intellectual life available to all types of people, not merely the clergy or the Neoplatonic sage. As we will see in the following chapters, Sterry utilized Cusanus's Trinitarian method as a means to bring about an inward turn in those to whom he ministered: the members of Parliament, his parishioners, students, and family. Like Cusanus, he believed that this method would enable average individuals to devote their lives to the interests of the Good rather than their own private interests, as the method of learned ignorance provides a mathematical tool by which to take in and enjoy all things in the deep unity hidden in the variety of things.

---

<sup>179</sup> Baltzly, *All from One*, 258.



## Chapter 2

### The ‘Divine Art of Numeration’: Sterry’s Trinitarian Method

A World all fair, from thee supremely fair  
Shines in thy mind, above controul or care.  
In an harmonious Image thou the same  
By perfect parts dost to perfection frame.  
By potent Charms of sacred numbers bound  
The waving Elements keep their set round.<sup>1</sup>

Though he published very little in his lifetime, Peter Sterry’s lifelong career as a chaplain to various members of Parliament, including Oliver Cromwell, granted him a more direct role to play in the political arena than his fellow Cambridge companions. It is within this role as a preacher at St. Margaret’s and Whitehall and as a private chaplain and teacher that we find Sterry propounding a notion of reform deeply indebted to the thought of Nicholas Cusanus. And, though Richard Baxter mocked him for the “sterility” of his pen, it appears that Sterry influenced and even authored portions of Lord Brooke’s treatise *The Nature of Truth*, published in 1641, in which Brooke uses the logic of coincidence to argue for universal reform and peace.<sup>2</sup> Brooke’s treatise precedes any other publication by the Cambridge Platonists. If he was indeed influenced by Cusanus, then we have compelling evidence for Ernst Cassirer’s assertion that the “Platonic Renaissance in England” initiated by the Cambridge Platonists was of Cusan provenance.<sup>3</sup> The fact that Sterry’s indebtedness to Cusanus manifests itself explicitly in several key places within

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter Sterry, a translation of Boethius’ *Consolatio Philosophiæ* 3, in *DFW*, 86.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Greville, Lord Brooke, *The Nature of Truth, Its Union and Unity with the Soule: Which is One in its Essence, Faculties, Acts, One with Truth*, (London: Printed by R. Bishop for Samuel Cartwright, 1641).

<sup>3</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *Die Platonische Renaissance in England und die Schule von Cambridge* (Berlin: Teubner, 1932), 22.

his writings makes this influence all the more probable. In this chapter we examine Sterry's universal *a priori* method and its metaphysical grounding in the Trinity and the Trinitarian *imago Dei* in the human soul, with a view to showing that Sterry's method has a fundamentally practical orientation, as it is intended to bring about an intellectual conversion that leads to the transformation of the self.

### Lord Brooke and the Coincidence of Opposites

The idea of a universal method was crucial to the various movements for "universal reform" in the early modern period, but among Reformed theologians like Jan Amos Comenius and Samuel Hartlib, the notion was essential to their Baconian ideals of reform. Though Francis Bacon was certainly no Platonist as Comenius was, he called for the restoration of Adam's lost knowledge, which he claimed would only come about through the recovery of the appropriate method of investigating nature and the rejection of all previous authorities, such as Aristotle and Plato.<sup>4</sup> These authorities create "idols" in the mind that plague it with biases, thus preventing the investigator of nature from seeing natural phenomena for what they are in themselves. Bacon's call for a reformed method was taken up and modified by Comenius and the Hartlib circle, who sought to find what they called "the True Logicke."<sup>5</sup> This logic would incorporate the principles of every science in a

---

<sup>4</sup> See Sir Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, ed. Joseph Devey, (New York: P.F. Collier, 1902), 35-39; On the religious dimension in Bacon's reform project see Stephen A. McKnight, *The Religious Foundations of Francis Bacon's Thought*, (Columbia, MI: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 70: "[W]hile Bacon's epistemology is new and while it is a break from the Aristotelian and Scholastic epistemology, it is also a restoration of the inquiry into nature that began with Adam and continued through the esoteric Jewish tradition and 'pagan' traditions of a *prisca theologia*."

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Clucas, "In search of 'The True Logick': methodological eclecticism among the 'Baconian reformers,'" in *Samuel Hartlib and Universal Reformation: Studies in Intellectual Communication*, ed. Mark Greengrass, Michael Leslie, and Timothy Raylor, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 51.

simple *a priori* method, which would be the tool for building a universal system of the sciences. Though such a method is quite antithetical to Bacon's proposed empirical science, it does proceed by abolishing the idols of the mind according to the utopian spirit of the *Instauratio magna*. And so, as the editors of a recent volume on the Hartlib circle point out, in the early modern world, "The most vulgar Baconians in one context turn out to be the most committed hermeticists in the next."<sup>6</sup> Inspired by Bacon, Samuel Hartlib wanted to find the sort of Logicke that is "not learned out of other men's Logicke [such] as Aristotle [...] but out of ones selfe."<sup>7</sup> Thus, Hartlib, like Comenius, sought a new combinatory method that would facilitate the "inward turn," thus uniting all of the sciences as well as providing impetus for the investigation of the natural world.

From 1639-1643, Peter Sterry was employed as a personal chaplain to Robert Greville, 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron Brooke (†1643), a prominent Member of Parliament and a friend and contemporary of Sterry's at Cambridge University. Lord Brooke reveals his interest in universal reform and universal method in his treatise entitled *The Nature of Truth*, in which he also reveals a certain interest in Baconian reform.<sup>8</sup> Brooke was one of Jan Amos Comenius' sponsors in his voyage to England and was associated with the Hartlib circle, which was responsible for circulating and publishing Comenius' writings in England. Brooke was a known patron of this circle of scholars, also sponsoring Hartlib's journey to England and giving Hartlib lodging within his house.<sup>9</sup> In his treatise, originally a commentary on the Gospel of Matthew chapter 24, Brooke

---

<sup>6</sup> Mark Greengrass, Michael Leslie, and Timothy Raylor, "Introduction," in *Samuel Hartlib*, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Hartlib, *Ephemerides*, quoted in Clucas, "True Logick," 61.

<sup>8</sup> On Brooke and his treatise see Robert E. L. Strider, *Lord Brooke and "The Nature of Truth": A Biography and Critical Edition* (Ph.D. Diss. Harvard University, 1950).; On his relationship with Sterry see Alison Jane Teply, *The Mystical Theology of Peter Sterry: A Study in Neoplatonist Puritanism*, (PhD Diss. Cambridge University, 2004), 18-54.; Brooke sees Bacon's desire to study nature and not venture into metaphysics as an example of intellectual humility. See Brooke, *NT*, 125.

<sup>9</sup> See Nabil Matar, "Peter Sterry and the Comenian Circle: Education and Eschatology in Restoration Nonconformity," *The Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society*, 5:4 (1994), 183.

supplies his reader with intellectual eyeglasses for viewing the world. These are found in the unity of all truth as it is present within the human intellect. In a strident critique of scholastic philosophy, Brooke argues that we should not permit our minds to divide between internal and external truths, nor between truths in the various faculties of the soul, or even truths of reason and faith. Rather, all truth is one Truth in various degrees of being, like the sunlight reflected on various media. By looking at the unity of Truth, Brooke says, “we raise from our Microcosme a passable Hieroglyphick of the Trinity.”<sup>10</sup> Truth in the human mind forms a unity modeled on God’s simple tri-unity, as it remains one in the intelligence of the *Patrem intelligentem*, descends from the *Filium intellectum* above, and as it enjoys and reflects upon itself in the *Spiritum dilectum*. Thus, for Brooke the Trinitarian hieroglyph provided by intellectual self-reflection is the *imago Dei* in the human soul and the key to the acquisition of all knowledge.

According to Brooke, not even the contradictions found in the material world present an obstacle to the unity of divine truth. He criticizes Aristotle for dividing reality into form and matter, noting that when a man begins with these two principles, “he is yet to seek for the Rock and Pit, out of which matter and form are digged and hewed.”<sup>11</sup> He admits that as long as we look through the “glasses of flesh” we cannot comprehend the union of the persons of the Trinity because “these are aenigmata.”<sup>12</sup> Brooke answers this dilemma by appealing to a hidden plain of perspective available to the human intellect, one that bears striking similarities to Cusanus’s method of learned ignorance and its doctrine of the coincidence of opposites. For, Brooke says, the leading astronomers, Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo, have proven that our perception of place has deceived our reason into thinking that our earthly foundation is firm and immovable. “Let the soule

---

<sup>10</sup> NT, 24-5.

<sup>11</sup> NT, 140-1.

<sup>12</sup> NT, 38.

be raised to its supreme height of power,” Brook answers, “and it will cleerely see, that all the actings of reason which seeme severall (bee they, as we think, distinguished by time and place) are but one, a fixt entire unity.”<sup>13</sup> Once reason forfeits its bearings in “place” and “time” it is able to ascend beyond the appearance of opposites. Brooke confirms:

I fully conclude with Aristotle’s Adversaries Anaxagoras, Democritus, &c, That Contradictions may be *simul & semel* in the same Subject, same Instant, same Notion [...] For, *Non ens* is nothing; and so, the Being which it hath, may subsist with that which contradicts it.<sup>14</sup>

For Brooke, we discover the unity that lies behind the contradictions in our finite perspective by reflecting on the unity of contrary actions. If we attempt to reconcile contradictions in a middle term (per Aristotle) then we will either be forced to conclude that everything is God (complete being) or that everything is nothing (pure non-entity).<sup>15</sup> So, “we see Good and Evill may co-exist in severall, in particular Actions; Why then not so, if all Acts should bee but one entire Act, undistinguisht by Time or Place?”<sup>16</sup> In other words, our very awareness of the contradiction between being and non-being provides a window beyond finite and temporal limitations, to a reality that is one, pure and unmixed, namely, the reality of our Creator. Our ability to access absolute truth in the coincidence of opposites, is the one method for uniting all of the sciences. Here Brooke refers specifically to Comenius, concluding, “that learned, that mighty man Comenius doth happily and rationally endeavor to reduce all into one. Why doe wee make Philosophy and Divinity two Sciences? What is True Philosophy but Divinity? and if it be not

---

<sup>13</sup> NT, 106-7.

<sup>14</sup> NT, 100.

<sup>15</sup> NT, 102: “This Contradiction (of Entity, Non-Entity) must be in the selfe-same Act, (and not in two distinct Acts:), else the Act is perfect...and so is onely the Creator, or else it is...no Entity, and so no Action.”

<sup>16</sup> NT, 102.

True, it is not Philosophy.”<sup>17</sup> Rather than divide one science from another, Brooke advises, we should view all branches of learning with our Trinitarian eyeglasses:

If you follow this rule, and see all things in the glasse of Unity, you will not lose all Arts and Sciences in the Wood of Divisions and Subdivisions *in infinitum*; you shall be more substantiall, than to make Substance and Accidents Two; neither will it ever happen, that you maintaine transubstantiation, by affirming that Accidents can *haerere in nullo subjecto*. You shall not make to your selfe a God of contradiction, dividing the will and power of God. Both which in God, is God; and so but one.<sup>18</sup>

Fitted with these Trinitarian glasses, Brooke concludes, we will be more inclined to follow St. Paul’s advice *Noli altum sapere*, and only to improve upon what we know rather than confusing or dividing the divine nature of truth. Ironically Brooke believes that his method is a distinctly Protestant method, though it very likely derived from Cusanus, who used the same method in his defense of the papacy.

Peter Sterry reflects many of the same convictions as Brooke in his writings. In fact, he very likely had a hand in writing portions of *The Nature of Truth*. Brooke himself admits that he delivered the “substratum of the Discourse” to a friend, who was to furnish it with counterarguments to its anticipated adversaries.<sup>19</sup> That friend “returned me the Chapter imbellished with so much wit and learning, that I durst not call it mine.”<sup>20</sup> According to a contemporary, Anthony à Wood, Brooke was known to utilize the talents of “some Puritanical

---

<sup>17</sup> *NT*, 124.

<sup>18</sup> *NT*, 164.

<sup>19</sup> *NT*, 173-4: “It will appeare in costly robes, adorned with lofty and glorious language, sweetned by many a pleasant and cleare Simile, quickned by divers acute and learned Criticisemes: These, none of these are mine: My Cabinet enshrineth no such Treasure. I confesse, to save the labour of contending with Pareus, and others, I delivered to a Friend of Yours, and Mine, onely the substratum of the Discourse, desiring him, from those principles to undertake my adversaries.”

<sup>20</sup> *NT*, 174.

minister” in his treatises.<sup>21</sup> Though there were other ministers in Brooke’s patronage at Warwick castle, Sterry’s Platonism, pansophism, and the embellished prose exemplified throughout his writings make him the strongest candidate for Brooke’s co-author.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Sterry, like Brooke, also makes use of the method of learned ignorance as a universal method overshadowing Aristotle’s analytical method, and he does so at a time when few others in England were doing so.

Another Cambridge Platonist, Nathanael Culverwel, criticized Brooke’s innovative notion of coinciding opposites. When Culverwel read Brooke’s conclusion “that absolute contradictions may meet together in the same respect *Esse & non esse*” he exclaimed, “O rare and compendious Synopsis of all Scepticism! O the quintessence of Sextus Empiricus[!]”<sup>23</sup> Were it not for his untimely death at the hands of the Royalists, Brooke would have undoubtedly replied to Culverwel that his universal method does not promote skepticism but intellectual humility. In Brooke’s view, the scholastic proclivity to make distinctions fails to locate the source of the unity of things, and so tends more toward skepticism than the method of learned ignorance. Sterry attempts to avoid the charge of skepticism in his appeal to the certitude of mathematical principles, and it is in this respect that we find Sterry drawing particularly from Boethius’ and Cusanus’s mathematical theology.

---

<sup>21</sup> Anthony à Wood, *Athenæ Oxonienses: An Exact History of All the Writers and Bishops Who Have Had Their Education in the University of Oxford*, ed. Philip Bliss, (London: F.C. and J. Rivington, 1815), II: 433.

<sup>22</sup> Vivian de Sola Pinto notes of Brooke’s treatises that “their style and matter are not unlike those of Sterry’s own writings,” Pinto, *Peter Sterry: Platonist and Puritan, 1613-1672: A Biographical and Critical Study with Passages Selected from His Writings*, 1934, Reprint, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 12.

<sup>23</sup> Nathanael Culverwel, *An Elegant and Learned Discourse of the Light of Nature*, ed. Robert A. Greene and Hugh MacCallum, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), 142.

### Peter Sterry's Universal A Priori Method

In his personal and academic writings Peter Sterry reveals a concern to give his reader a new intellectual perspective, even a conversion to their true self in union with God. He is very cautious, however, not to present this new perspective in the packaging of a “magic key” or as some sort of purely philosophical novelty. Rather, he proposes a philosophical and Trinitarian *a priori* method, often digressing into poetic and meditative descriptions of the tri-unity of all things in order to awaken his audience into a vision of absolute Truth in its triune shape. In order to discover the Truth, Sterry believes, one must not begin one’s investigation with distinctions, qualifications, or modifications of what is ultimately real, rather, with the One reality, the one Truth that all changes and modifications assume and within which they subsist.<sup>24</sup> In one of his extant letters Sterry advises a friend to stand in the Sun and view all things with “solar eyes,” that is, to begin with the “mystery of God” in the divine unity and see its essential union with the variety and contrariety of all things.<sup>25</sup>

That Sterry considers his method to arise from metaphysics is due to the influence of Cusanus, but also Tommaso Campanella. Sterry refers to Campanella’s principle that “all second causes are *causa prima modificata*” as a reason for pursuing a metaphysical vision of reality.<sup>26</sup> Campanella refers to his textbook of metaphysics as the “Bible of Philosophers,” which he claims is a panacea for the problems of every theoretical and practical discipline.<sup>27</sup> His metaphysics, like Llull’s art, is the “wisdom of the sciences, the ark of all things divine and human,” and so it “may

---

<sup>24</sup> DFW, 13.

<sup>25</sup> Sterry, Letter to Sylvander, in *SW*, 135.

<sup>26</sup> DFW, “Preface,” fol. 1v.

<sup>27</sup> Campanella, *Universalis Philosophiæ seu Metaphysicarum Rerum* (1638); On Campanella’s philosophy, see Bernardino M. Bonansea, *Tommaso Campanella: Renaissance Pioneer of Modern Thought*, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1969).



be referred to every science that has been discovered or will be discovered as their workshop and source.”<sup>28</sup> Campanella reduces anything perceived by the senses to modifications of the “primalities of being,” or the triune divine attributes. The attributes of Power, Wisdom, and Love form the basic structure of reality as it descends from the One, and we discover them in ourselves through an innate self-awareness of being, knowing, and willing, which are human modifications of the same primalities.

In his treatise *Of Philosophy in General* Sterry presents to his small community of students an encyclopedic summary of all sciences.<sup>29</sup> As Nabil Matar notes, “Like Comenius, Sterry simplified learning [in this treatise] so that all members could participate in a pansophia that combined theology with philosophy and science.”<sup>30</sup> In this simplified description of philosophy Sterry notes that the “general science” of metaphysics “setteth up the light of the first and general principles by which the truth in the distinct nature of things, is made manifest to us, and united to our understandings.”<sup>31</sup> The general science teaches that the first principle of reality and knowledge is the “Supreme Unity” of God:

The supreme being is the supreme unity, and so comprehending all things most completely in it selfe, and communicating it selfe to all things in the lowest extent and lowest degrees of descent is of all things the most universal. But this universalitie with all that unbounded varietie, into which it diffuseth, and spreadeth it selfe round about is so high and absolute an unitie, that it transcendeth all comprehension, comparison, or expression in the creature. From this glorious head hid in its owne impenetrable light, all things come down by several

---

<sup>28</sup> Campanella, *Metaphysicarum Rerum*, “Epistola ad D. Claudio De Bullion,” a. ii.: “Codex iste, si ut decet confectus est (id quod posteritas iudicabit) appellari potest Biblia Philosophorum, sapientia scientiarum, divinarum & humanarum rerum Arx [...] Praeterea etiam sicuti se habet Prudentia ad omnes virtutes, vel Poëtica Ars ad omnia poëmata, ita hæc Philosophia, quam voco universalem & Metaphysicam, ad omnes scientias, & artes inventas & inveniendas ut Officina & fons ipsarum referri potest.”

<sup>29</sup> This treatise is found in EC MS 291, 3-66.

<sup>30</sup> Matar, “Comenian Circle,” 187.

<sup>31</sup> EC MS 291, 15.

and orderly degrees of universalitie and division to the lowest descent, and last division, which bears the imperfect and shadowie image of the unitie.<sup>32</sup>

Human knowledge must begin with the Supreme Unity but not as the Unity exists in itself. Since it is a Unity that is also an “unbounded varietie,” the divine nature is a Unity that is also a Trinity, and so it is beyond any comparison with the finite world, beyond any analogy of proportion. Rather knowledge ascends from the shadowy image of the self, where it faces the apparent contradiction of unity within diversity, or identity in otherness, which is a finite image of the divine tri-unity.

Sterry affirms that the Trinity is not only the ultimate reality and exemplar of all creatures but it also supplies the basic principles of logic. For, the “distinct forms of things are set downe by Logicke in theyr several ranks under several general heads according to the order of theyr universality, or particularitie, that is of theyr comprehending one another, being in one another.”<sup>33</sup> The most universal principle, Sterry says, proceeds “in an eminent and united manner, divideth and bringeth itselfe first into two different formes, which are contrarie one to the other, and in theyr descent from that universal nature, are inconsistent one with another.”<sup>34</sup> These two contraries refer to the logical differences that descend from a genus. For example, the genus “animal,” Sterry says, divides itself into “reasonable” and “unreasonable” to make “human” and “beast.” Thus, “Uniting it selfe to these two differences and contracting itselfe into them [the genus ‘animal’] maketh two distinct species or particular kindes.”<sup>35</sup> In order to comprehend the genus “animal,” therefore, the contradictory differences “reasonable” and “unreasonable” must be held together, and the same rule applies to the differences between individual humans and animals. To know an individual human as “this” person is to presuppose a common genus that unites “this” person with

---

<sup>32</sup> EC MS 291, 31-2.

<sup>33</sup> EC MS 291, 30.

<sup>34</sup> EC MS 291, 33.

<sup>35</sup> EC MS 291, 35.

“that” person while permitting their distinction. Thus, knowledge of any species must begin with the Triune principle of unity and variety in union (or one-in-many), which are Sterry’s names for the persons of the Trinity, as will be explained more thoroughly below.

In his most famous work, *A Discourse of the Freedom of the Will* (1675), Sterry implements this Trinitarian logic and urges his readers to meditate on the divine nature as the necessary beginning for understanding the human will. The human will is a contracted shade of the divine Harmony, which he defines as “the Union of variety and Unity.”<sup>36</sup> The harmony in things is modeled after their exemplar Harmony in the Trinity, that is, in unity and variety and their union. The proper form of the divine Union, Sterry says, is “a concurrence of Distinction and Unity, where two are one, retaining their distinction in their Unity.” The Harmony within the Trinity is the absolute Measure of all things. In fact, “Every thing, every where, lieth within the bounds and measures of this Divine Harmony, is measured and governed by it, springeth forth from it, beareth the figure of it, beareth a part in it, is Harmony in this Harmony.” By viewing all distinctions within their Source in the union of unity and variety, Sterry says, the human mind is able to measure all things within their divine Measure, to see the whole “universal Musick” in each and every part and instrument, to bring all discord and division into the unity of the entire orchestral piece.

Sterry’s method of harmony – seeing all things as “a concurrence of Distinction and Unity” – is strikingly similar to Cusanus’s method of learned ignorance and its logic of coincidence. We know that Sterry kept a copy of Cusanus’s works (most likely the Basel edition of his *Opera Omnia*) in Chelsea, which he apparently used to teach his small circle of students there.<sup>37</sup> Matar

---

<sup>36</sup> DFW, 13.

<sup>37</sup> See Sterry’s list of books in *SW*, 95; Sterry refers generally to ‘Cusanus’s in his notebook, which is a shorthand for reference to the entire *opera*. As Stephan Meier-Oeser’s inventory reveals, the only available printings of *De docta ignorantia*, from which Sterry quotes, were in the various *opera*, the most prominent being the Paris (1514) edition of Jacques Lefevre d’Etaples and the Basel (1565) edition from Henricus Petri. See Meier-Oeser, *Die Präsenz des Vergessenen: zur Rezeption der*

even speculates that Sterry was attempting to establish the “College of Light” at Chelsea College, which was first proposed and promoted by Jan Amos Comenius on his visit to England.<sup>38</sup> In fact, Bacon’s *Instauratio magna* was among the few books that Sterry kept there. Like Comenius, Sterry utilizes Cusanus’s method as a way to purify the mind from its natural biases. Sterry mentions ‘Cusanus’s directly on two occasions in his extant writings. The location of these citations within Sterry’s discourse reveals Cusanus to be a key source of Sterry’s basic principles of method and reform. Sterry very often returns to the logic of the Trinity, rather than to Aristotle’s analytical method, as the lens through which to see all of reality. Like Cusanus, Sterry’s metaphysics begins with God as the exemplar cause of all things and the material world as a shadowy “contraction” of the divine being. Sterry also speaks of Christ as *maximum* and *minimum*; he refers to God using the geometrical metaphor of an infinite circle, and he places Christ at its center; he explains existence in terms of the reciprocal folding of various levels of reality; he sees the mind as a “measure” of its knowledge, he adopts the notion of representative perception, and he sees all of these concepts as inherently mathematical.

One of the references to Cusanus in Sterry’s *oeuvre* occurs in his *Freedom of the Will* where he discusses the nature of the soul’s union with God. Sterry says that God is transcendentally one with the Soul in the same way that he is all things by the “transcendency of his Unity.”<sup>39</sup> God incomprehensibly contains all things within himself as the Universal Cause. God is “the Unity of every Unity, the Being of Beings, the Essence of every Essence, not formally but transcendentally, not after a finite, but an infinite manner.” This is a paraphrase from Cusanus’s *De docta ignorantia*

---

*Philosophie des Nicolaus Cusanus vom 15. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert*, (Münster: Aschendorff, 1989), 402-406.

<sup>38</sup> Matar, “Comenian Circle,” 188: Matar notes that the list of books that Sterry describes as his library in Chelsea were for the advanced student and implicit of a certain Baconian curriculum.

<sup>39</sup> *DFW*, 77.

1.16 where Cusanus argues that the maximum is the measure of all things just as an infinite line contains all lines.<sup>40</sup> After this paraphrase, Sterry refers to Cusanus explicitly to note, “Cusanus saith, God is the Sun in the Sun, not formally, finitely, but after a transcendent, infinite manner. He is so the Sun in the Sun, that he is all things with the fulness of the Divine Nature and eternity in that form.” This is a reference to *De docta ignorantia* 2.4, where Cusanus argues that the universe is a “contracted quiddity” of the divine being. Here his argument is worded a bit differently than what Sterry recounts, yet Sterry accurately represents Cusanus’s intent in this quote, that God is not in the sun formally but in an infinite and incomprehensible manner.<sup>41</sup> This citation reveals that Sterry is familiar with how the logic of coincidence functions to unify and distinguish finite and infinite realities in Cusanus’s thought. Sterry frequently describes God’s presence in creation as the “greatest” within the “least,” as the divine sunlight piercing through “contracted shades.”<sup>42</sup> So, Sterry says, “[God] is *Minimus in Maximis*, Least, and Lowest in the most Glorious Creatures. He can shine forth in Stones, raise them to a Participation of the Divine Nature ... So he is *Maximus in Minimis*, with all his Greatness in the Least and Meanest Things.”<sup>43</sup> In one of his remaining notebooks Sterry uses Cusanus’s phrase again to argue that Christ, the perfect Image of the Father, is “ye True Sun in ye Sun” as he is transcendentally present in all things as he “comprehends all Circles of things in Himselfe.”<sup>44</sup>

Sterry explains the rationale behind the coincidence of opposites in *A Discourse of the Knowledge of God*.<sup>45</sup> Like Cusanus, Sterry sees human knowledge as vastly limited by its own

---

<sup>40</sup> *De docta ignorantia* 1.16.45 (h I.32).

<sup>41</sup> In *De docta ignorantia* 2.4.115 (h I.74): “Deus autem non est in sole sol et in luna luna, sed id, quod est sol et luna, sine pluralitate et diversitate.”

<sup>42</sup> *DFW*, 29.

<sup>43</sup> *AGM*, 121.

<sup>44</sup> EC MS 289, 168-172.

<sup>45</sup> This treatise is found in *AGM*, 181-99.

finitude, which renders each person incapable of seeing finite and infinite perspectives simultaneously. The data presented to the imagination by the senses does not present us with an accurate picture of the divine essence, and reason only knows things by the “thin Images” of intellectual species.<sup>46</sup> Reason understands “by intervening Arguments, and a Chain of Discourse,” Sterry says. That is, reason knows things insofar as they are mediated through the images of discursive thought, not immediately. God is above all resemblances, and any attempt to make inward or outward images of God in the mind is idolatry. We cannot even know the essence of creatures because “they all have unconstant Beings still flowing up and down ... which are full of waving and trembling.”<sup>47</sup> Even Angels, though more purely intellectual, are mutable and capable of falling into non-being. Thus, our knowledge of their being is only a representation of “fleeting Appearances” in comparison to God, who is “the same Yesterday, to Day, and Forever.”

Echoing Cusanus, Sterry distinguishes between two types of knowledge of God: conjectural and personal. Conjectural knowledge of God consists of those truths that the mind is able to discover by means of the light of nature. Personal knowledge on the other hand is something that transcends the natural light and is received from God alone. Sterry divides conjectural knowledge of God into three “pathways” that he delineates with a triad of terms: comprehension, contrariety, and comparison. The knowledge of God by way of comprehension ascends by stages through the various spheres of human existence: material (imagination), human (rational), angelic (intellective) and divine (unity). It ascends by “enfolding” lower realities into higher, that is, by gathering sense perception into the imagination, imagination into reason and uniting rational discourse with intuitive knowledge in the intellectual spirit. Though comprehensive knowledge gives us a sense of God’s fullness by which he contains the “particular fullness of each Creature,”

---

<sup>46</sup> *AGM*, 184.

<sup>47</sup> *AGM*, 185.

it is ultimately a mere “Guess of God” and is “as if you should paint a Soul with dead Colours.”<sup>48</sup> The knowledge of God by way of contrariety proceeds by denying the imperfection in created things. Contrariety is a “ridling knowledge of God” because it says “that which all Creatures have, and have not, this is God.” Knowledge of God by way of comparison is the “fullest way of comparing God with Creatures” because it acknowledges that there is no comparison between them. We are only able to compare things by way of some measure that is common to both. “God is in all his Beauty and Attributes unmeasurable. By what then will ye compare him?” Sterry asks.

In order to know God and all things as they stand within his being, Sterry concludes, “You must loose [sic] all the Creatures, your own knowledge, yourself, in an infiniteness that drinks all into itself as the Sun Beams [drink] the Dew, if you will know God. That is that which by Divines is call’d *Docta Ignorantia*; a profound and deep learn’d ignorance.”<sup>49</sup> Nature leads us to a loss, Sterry argues, by leading us to the boundary between nature and grace. Just as Christ was taken up into a cloud, so conjectural knowledge must pass over into the personal knowledge of Jesus within the cloud. Thus, the true knowledge of God, for Sterry, flows from the divine sunlight of Christ’s face. “As the Flower of Light, the Sun-shine immediately falls from the Face of the Sun itself: So the Light of Glory, in which God is seen, falls directly from the Person of God shining forth thro’ Christ; as the Divine Air or Spirit in the Soul of Man.”

Sterry explains that reason is not capable of arriving at this unmediated union with Christ because it is dependent on mental images and it is bound by the law of non-contradiction as “the Philosopher” (i.e., Aristotle) attests. But, he notes, the “Angelical Part of the Soul,” which bears a likeness to the angels that dwell nearest to the divine unity in the region of paradise, is “set above this Law of Contradictions” and so is able to take in “All Forms of Things with an Immortal

---

<sup>48</sup> AGM, 195.

<sup>49</sup> AGM, 196.

Brightness and Sweetness...By the Golden Band, and Sacred Charms of a most High and Heavenly Harmony.”<sup>50</sup> Sterry draws from Proclus to say that in the angelic regions there is no defect “ἐν τοῖς ὅλοις” where the whole meets in each part as the angels process, revert, and abide in each form.<sup>51</sup> His notion of seeing the whole in every part is based, as we will see below, on the Pythagorean notion of the triad containing the monad and the dyad within itself. When we arrive at the wholeness of vision or the vision of the whole, says Sterry:

[We come] where all Forms, Diversities, Contrarieties, Contradictions, Light and Darkness, Love and Hatred, Pain and Pleasure, Life and Death, are reconcil’d and gather’d up into one Divine Beauty, into one Divine Melody, into one Divine Agreeableness, which filleth, which charmeth, which ravisheth and chaineth to itself all Senses, all Souls, which come within the Force of it. Now you are come to the Pearly Walls of Paradise, or the Heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>52</sup>

Those who enter into the city beyond the walls, Sterry affirms, lose themselves, their understanding and their language. For, here we ascend beyond concepts and images to speak only the “Words of the Heavenly Paradise” and “the Words here are the Eternal Ideas” contained “in the Paradise of Divine Unity.”<sup>53</sup>

Of course, this does not mean that all distinctions of identity and otherness are lost when one crosses beyond the wall of Paradise. On the contrary, Sterry affirms, all distinctions stand here “in a perfect Unity,” for “the Darkness is not Darkness here; but it is Darkness and Light; no Light, and yet Light.”<sup>54</sup> For, all things meet in the unity of the intellectual soul, as the monad and dyad are united in the triad. Even contradictions meet in the senses and in the “Discursive Faculty”

---

<sup>50</sup> *AGM*, 390.

<sup>51</sup> Proclus, *Theologie Platonicienne*, ed. H.D. Saffrey and Leendert G. Westerink, (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1968), I.18, 85.

<sup>52</sup> *AGM*, 390.

<sup>53</sup> *AGM*, 391.

<sup>54</sup> *AGM*, 392.



when they “infolde each with most amiable Embraces...in the Intuitive and Divine Part of the Soul, in the Angelical Natures and Universal Forms above, which are no more than finite Images of the Divine Unity.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, the human intellect is characterized by the coincidence of its reciprocal folding, which enables each person to intuit the divine unity in one’s own finite unity.

For both Sterry and Cusanus, knowledge is founded on the unity of the soul with its divine exemplar and principle in the Trinity. However, there is a subtle but important difference between them in the way that they conceive intellectual vision. As Garth Green has pointed out with regard to Cusanus, and as Derek Michaud explains with reference to John Smith, Cusanus’s explanation of the spiritual senses is emphatically apophatic, whereas for Smith spiritual perception is more kataphatic.<sup>56</sup> In *De visione Dei* Cusanus affirms, “*Revelatio autem gustum non attingit.*”<sup>57</sup> The “ears of faith” that receive divine revelation, Cusanus says, do not attain to the “sweetness” of the divine nature just as the sweetness of an unknown fruit cannot be tasted in an image or picture of it. For Cusanus, it seems, the vision of faith has a certain conjectural quality, though it apparently transcends conjecture. As Green notes, “Vision is the most exalted sense for Cusa insofar as it can attest not only to revelation as a re-vealing, but also and equally as a re-veiling.”<sup>58</sup> This “re-veiling” and hiddenness of faith motivates Cusanus to seek a rapturous vision like St. Paul, who was caught up into the third heaven. For Sterry, on the other hand, faith provides a personal knowledge and a “vision” of God that completely surpasses conjectural knowledge because “God is known by no

---

<sup>55</sup> AGM, 392.

<sup>56</sup> Garth W. Green, “Nicholas of Cusa,” in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, ed. Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 210-223; Derek Michaud, “Varieties of Spiritual Sense: Cusanus and John Smith,” in *Nicholas of Cusa and the Making of the Early Modern World*, Simon Burton, Joshua Hollmann, and Eric M. Parker, eds. (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming), 303-26.

<sup>57</sup> *De visione Dei*, 17.79. (h VI.62).

<sup>58</sup> Green, *Spiritual Senses*, 221.

Shadow. No Image of God, besides that which is God, can make him known to us.”<sup>59</sup> Rather, faith unites the soul directly to Christ, who is “the Essential Image [of the Father],” and in this way the “Supream Truth ... is known by being seen, felt and tasted in our Spirits.” So, for Sterry, faith normalizes the rapturous vision and tasting of God that Cusanus seeks, as it actualizes the spiritual senses in a vision unmediated by any image, whether an icon, a concept, or even the shadow of the self. Though it is obscure knowledge, Sterry believes faith provides a vision of “the Supream and Universal Principle.”<sup>60</sup> Thus, for those who possess the divine life through faith, “the Beatifical Vision is begun already.”<sup>61</sup>

Though the personal knowledge of Christ in the intellect demands religious faith, Sterry grounds faith in the intuitive capacity of *intellectus* to shape itself after the pattern of its exemplar unity. And, as we will see below (chapter 4), Sterry also models religious faith on the idea of epistemological faith. Because he sees a greater contrast between conjectural knowledge and personal knowledge, Sterry confines the method of learned ignorance to the realm of negative theology, which gives way to the personal knowledge of Jesus Christ. Yet, when he discusses the Trinity, particularly in its mathematical nature, *docta ignorantia* becomes a positive lens through which to view God’s presence in all of reality.

### Method and the Arithmetical Trinity

Echoing Cusanus’s mathematical theology, Sterry affirms that the divine ideas, which form the language of the heavenly Paradise, are the exemplars of ordinary numbers.<sup>62</sup> Also like Cusanus,

---

<sup>59</sup> *AGM*, 185.

<sup>60</sup> *AGM*, 186.

<sup>61</sup> *AGM*, 193.

<sup>62</sup> *DFW*, 27: Sterry says, “The Ideas or eternal Images of things in God so seem to shine forth most clearly, with the sweetest and fullest beauties, in abstracted numbers.”; See Cusanus, *De Coniecturis*, 1.2, 9 (h III.14).

Sterry asserts that one finds certainty in the “Divine Art of Numeration” both (a) because numbers are the mental figures most abstracted from material limitations, and (b) because one’s concept of form is dependent on proportion, which is determined by number.<sup>63</sup> Number is also the means by which a person measures things and the means by which God, the divine musician, transcendently contains the Measure of all measures.

Sterry explains God’s measuring of reality by commenting on Boethius’s *Consolatio Philosophiæ*, which Sterry says is “drawn forth from the inmost Treasuries of the Platonical, Pythagorean, Mosaical, Christian Philosophy and Divinity.”<sup>64</sup> In the portion of the *Consolatio* that Sterry translates (3.9), Boethius refers to the “Father of all things” who governs the universe by means of his mind (*Mundum mente*) and brings about motion and life by causing a similitude and image of his beauty in all things. God’s wisdom limits the elementary principles of the physical world by means of numbers. “By potent Charms of sacred numbers bound / The waving Elements keep their set round,” as Sterry translates it.<sup>65</sup> The four elements are bound by the “sacred number” of the divine unity that guides them. “Number,” Sterry says, “hath been reputed the first seat and measure of proportion, Harmony, Musick, and Beauty in every kind.”<sup>66</sup> And, numbers belong primarily to intellectual beings as their “proper operations and objects.”

The numbers by which God numbers things are enfolded within the sacred number of his own essence. In his *An Explication of the Trinity in Three Sections*, Sterry expounds his concept of the arithmetical Trinity.<sup>67</sup> Here he proposes an “Explication of this unsearchable Mystery [of

---

<sup>63</sup> DFW, 27; See Cusanus on the simplicity of numbers in *De beryllo*, 52-54, (h XI/1.58-62); and see Cusanus on number as the measure of proportion in *Idiota de mente*, 6.91 (h V.135, 136).

<sup>64</sup> DFW, 84.

<sup>65</sup> DFW, 86.

<sup>66</sup> DFW, 27.

<sup>67</sup> This treatise is found in *AGM*, 422-51.

the Trinity], by the Hieroglyphicks of these three Characters, the Unity, Variety and Union.”<sup>68</sup> Sterry arrives at these three hieroglyphs from the Pythagorean notion of monad, dyad, and triad that he finds in Proclus (via Plato’s *Philebus*) and from Cusanus’s arithmetical Trinitarian names. According to Sterry, God is the first principle of all things, and because he is the first, he is a perfect unity. Because duality presupposes unity, “All Numbers lie originally in an Unity: From this they flow, being compos’d by the Unity from this Plenitude or Fulness.”<sup>69</sup> Elsewhere he defines number as “Unity diffusing itself,” by going outside of itself in the form of all numbers and returning to itself again.<sup>70</sup> A perfect unity must possess all of its diversities (or those aspects that are removed from the center of its being) perfectly within itself.

Here Sterry raises an objection to himself. If God is an infinite unity containing all numbers within himself, then why is he a trinity, and not a quaternity or a centenary? He answers that a perfect unity comprehends itself in its own “Self-Image” and all things within the image of itself. God’s self-reflection creates a trinity through the abiding, proceeding, and self-reverting activities of God’s “Mysterious and Divine Circle.”<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, Sterry argues, a trinity “is the most Essential Form of every Number,” since every number is composed of a unity and variety adhering to one another in an essential union. Thus, the number three is the “Seat and Fountain of all Numbers,” the “Original and Universal Number,” and this being the case, it is preeminent above them all.<sup>72</sup> Because of the simplicity of unqualified number and the power of the number three to enfold all numbers, Sterry concludes that the highest and most certain divine names are those of unity, variety, and union.

---

<sup>68</sup> *AGM*, 439.

<sup>69</sup> *AGM*, 423.

<sup>70</sup> *DFW*, 83.

<sup>71</sup> *AGM*, 425, 438.

<sup>72</sup> *AGM*, 438.

Sterry reduces the Augustinian (and Campanellan) divine names, Power, Wisdom, and Love to these mathematical terms.<sup>73</sup> The name ‘Power’ is not as perfect a name as ‘Unity,’ Sterry argues, since ‘Power’ can be reduced to the unqualified ‘One.’ Sterry borrows Proclus’s definition of ‘Power’ from his *Platonic Theology*, noting that Proclus defines it to be “an Unity like a Fountain, comprehending variety of Forms in itself, and sending them forth, from itself.”<sup>74</sup> Wisdom should be reduced to the name ‘Variety’ because, as Proclus says, it is “a variety of Things in Order,” which is nothing more than “an Unity bringing forth itself into a Variety, according to the Laws of Unity, which is the Band and Measure of all Order; so comprehending the Variety thus brought forth in itself.”<sup>75</sup> Love is the union of unity and variety, the activity of self-enjoyment between the original Good and its beautiful Image in “the Form of the Good.” So, the names unity, variety, and union, according to Sterry denote the infinite being of God and all things as he reflects upon them within himself. These names enfold the whole of reality because they contain the mathematical possibilities of all being in God, whose self-measuring number is the source of all number, proportion, and order in the world.

Sterry recognizes that his seventeenth-century reader may feel uncomfortable with his use of Proclus’s divine names to describe the Christian Trinity. In his defense, he argues that he uses Proclus’s words because they clearly agree with both the light of reason and revelation and they “enlighten our minds with the clearest Evidence of this Mystery.”<sup>76</sup> Yet, Sterry does not merely leave his reader to be persuaded by reason but appeals directly to the authority of a respected theologian, namely, Nicholas Cusanus. Sterry affirms, “Neither am I in this sense, altogether without Authority of the most Learned Interpreters of Nature and this Light. Cusanus, in the first

---

<sup>73</sup> On Campanella’s primalities see Bonansea, *Tommaso Campanella*, 150-163.

<sup>74</sup> *AGM*, 438; Proclus, *Theologie Platonicienne*, I.22.

<sup>75</sup> Proclus, *Theologie Platonicienne*, I.23.

<sup>76</sup> *AGM*, 439.

Book, as I remember, of Learned Ignorance, establishes and unfoldeth the Nature of this Divine Trinity, by these three Terms, Unity, Equality, and Union; which he affirmeth to have been deriv'd from Pythagoras.”<sup>77</sup> This confirms not only that Sterry read Cusanus but also that he considered him a theological authority as well as a trustworthy guide for interpreting nature, specifically the nature of the Trinity.

Here, Sterry reveals that his reading of Proclus is informed by a tandem reading of Cusanus's *De docta ignorantia*. That is to say, when Sterry uses the names unity, variety, and union he is reading those terms not only through the lens of Proclus's *Platonic Theology* but in light of Cusanus's arithmetical trinity of unity, equality, and connection. Sterry's dependence upon Cusanus clearly appears in his concern to correct Cusanus's Trinitarian names. Referring to Cusanus's term 'equality' Sterry notes, “Equality is in Logick defin'd the Union of two Subjects, or Substances in the same Quantity: As Similitude is the Union of two distinct Subjects in the same Quality. Equality therefore appearing to me coincident with Union, in that respect, hath been chang'd by me, into the Term of Variety, which seems much more proper, clear and complete in that Place.”<sup>78</sup> The term 'equality' appears too similar to 'union,' Sterry says, but his choice of the term 'variety' as its replacement is based on Cusanus as well. For, Sterry frequently stresses the equality of the variety with the unity of God. Though the variety is an equal image of unity, for Sterry this equality properly lies within the union of unity and variety, rather than in variety itself.

Sterry prefers the term 'variety' to 'equality' also because of how he understands and uses the Pythagorean triad, which he refers to as limit, infinity, and mixture. For, he says, the terms, “πέρας, ἄπειρος, μικτός [*terminus, infinitum, mixtum*]” – derivatives of monad, dyad, and triad –

---

<sup>77</sup> AGM, 439.

<sup>78</sup> AGM, 439.

are perfectly denoted by the names unity, variety, and union.<sup>79</sup> The term ‘variety’ (from the Pythagorean ‘dyad’), Sterry seems to think, relates to the term ‘unity’ more fittingly as it preserves the underlying numerical connection of the Trinitarian relations, that is, the unfolding of unity into duality. And, the dyad behind *infinitum* more exactly communicates that the divine variety “in its Formality is Boundless and Infinite”; thus it demonstrates that God is not a solitary unity but is a unity “richly Replinish’d, and Eternally entertained, with a Variety ... true and boundless.”<sup>80</sup> As he says in his *Freedom of the Will*:

The [Supreme] Unity unfolds it self into its amplest *Variety* by just degrees, even numbers, and exact proportions: When one extreame passeth not to another, but through all the middle terms that stand between these extreames. When *one* passeth not to three, but by *two*. Now the Unity is preserved, the middle term being as the band, or the connexion of the two extreames which joyneth them in one. Now the Variety lies in the explication of the Unity, as it lies complicated in the Unity, when as the Ternary by being first gathered up into a duality, lieth folded up in the bosom of the Unity; so the Unity from the bosom of the duality, unfoldeth it self into the Ternary number.<sup>81</sup>

The ‘variety’ of God, like Cusanus’s ‘equality,’ is an unfolding of ‘unity’ into an exact proportion and even number with itself, as simultaneously unfolded (explicated) and enfolded (complicated) within ‘unity’. Variety, in other words, is the “middle term” out of which the “Ternary number” is unfolded – Sterry’s mathematical description of the “filioque” clause.

Like Cusanus, Sterry grounds the logic of coincidence in the Trinity as it manifests itself in the finite world, which he also describes with both mathematical and geometrical symbols.

---

<sup>79</sup> *AGM*, 439; Sterry lists these terms as ὅρος, ἀπέρατον, and μικτόν, which are different than those in the modern text of Proclus’s *Platonic Theology*. I have not been able to locate an edition of Proclus with the exact terms listed by Sterry. It is very likely that he lists them by memory rather than providing a direct quote.

<sup>80</sup> *AGM*, 439, 433.

<sup>81</sup> *DFW*, 158.

Sterry sees the mathematical terms, limit, infinity, and mixture, as the basic structure of reality. As he says in his *Freedom of the Will*, absolute being descends from its “unlimited fulness,” limiting itself in particular modes of being, and ascending within them back into itself.<sup>82</sup> In this way act (limit) and potency (infinity) are united in every being because “[being] it self remaineth potentially, and undividedly in each of these parts.”<sup>83</sup> The divine unity, in its descent and ascent, “divideth it self into many Unities” and then “by its own unconfined power” combines several unities into one “common Unity.” The union of unity and variety, being the basic elements of all proportion, “joyntly constitute and compose all essences and forms of things.”<sup>84</sup> Sterry uses the symbol of the infinite circle to illustrate this triadic structure of reality:

The Unity of God is his Infiniteness. By the Purity and Perfection of this Unity, he is in All, thro’ All, on every Side, beneath, above, beyond All, every where the same equally entire, equally undivided, equally unconfin’d, full of himself, encompassed with himself, that Sacred Circle of All-Being, of Infiniteness, of Eternity, whose Center is every where, in the smallest Point of Things, whose Circumference, is no where Bounded, spreads beyond all Bound or Measure; which yet with its whole Circumference, in its full Amplitude, lies every where compleat in its Center, altogether undivided in the lowest, the least, the last Division of Things.<sup>85</sup>

For Sterry, the “Sacred Circle of All-Being” is the perfect representation of God as the triadic Measure of things. As the infinite circle, God circles through the infinite variety of things while maintaining his perfect unity by enfolding the multiplicity of things into the center of his own unity. The circular nature of the divine intellect is a picture very likely inspired by Cusanus’s use

---

<sup>82</sup> *DFW*, 29.

<sup>83</sup> *DFW*, 29.

<sup>84</sup> *DFW*, 11.

<sup>85</sup> *AGM*, 388; For Cusanus’s use of this metaphor see *De docta ignorantia*, 1.21.63, & 2.12.162.



of the metaphor of the infinite circle, as well as his description of God as ‘limit’ and the “center, circumference, and bond of all things,” from *De docta ignorantia* 3.1.<sup>86</sup>

Sterry uses a circular diagram to describe his Trinitarian method. Though he does not leave an explicit drawing of the ‘circle of all-being’, he explains the intricate parts and pieces of it in a detailed description provided in his treatise *Of Vertue*.<sup>87</sup> There Sterry asks his reader to imagine eternity, eviternity, and time as three circles of reality, each contained within the other. He requests that his reader imagine the scene of eternity as a great room containing a wide variety of richly ornate furniture. In the center of the room is a dancing troupe encircled by mirrors of different shapes all contained within a circle equal to the magnitude of all the mirrors. The mirrors are full of light and shine with the clarity of a polished diamond, and they are so “mysteriously placed” that the whole room, troupe, and furniture appears in every mirror at once, so that each mirror and its reflection is seen in every mirror “with a perfect distinction without any change, or succession.”<sup>88</sup> The circle of eviternity is represented by the same room and troupe, the only difference being, the mirrors shine in diverse colors, representing the change of light in a descending order. The different colors and hierarchical order of light also means that the reflection of the troupe is only seen in one mirror at a time.<sup>89</sup> The circle of time combines all of the features of eternity and eviternity, as it is represented by the same circle and troupe, but the mirrors are in a hierarchy of colors and magnitudes.

All of the circles are combined in one “Universall Image” to form a perspective “where all ye distinct formes of this Universall Image, as it stands in time, in Eveternity, or Eternity itselfe,

---

<sup>86</sup> Cusanus, *De docta ignorantia*, 3.1.185 (h I.120): “Non est igitur nisi unus terminus aut specierum aut generum aut universi, qui est centrum, circumferentia atque connexio omnium,”; On Cusanus’s use of these terms, see Albertson, *Mathematical Theologies*, 196-197.

<sup>87</sup> This treatise is contained in EC MS 291, 172-230.

<sup>88</sup> EC MS 291, 188.

<sup>89</sup> EC MS 291, 189.

as seen in an order proper to each Glasse at severall distances one within another, & in severall degrees of Obscurity or Clearnesse.”<sup>90</sup> In this way the universal image of all being appears to perpetually circle through all things “as it descends contracting, as it ascends spreading itselfe to a greater Amplitude” all while “keeing ye Unity through all.”<sup>91</sup> It seems very likely that Sterry is thinking of his diagram in terms of a Llullian combinatory wheel, where the outermost circle remains stationary while the inner circles turn to achieve all possible combinations of terms. This circular motion of the circles of eviternity and time would explain Sterry’s stipulation that the reflection of the dancing troupe only appears in one mirror at a time in a successive order. Of course, it is also possible to see Sterry’s description within Cusanus’s ‘diagram of all things.’



Figure 1. A rendering of Sterry’s description of the ‘universal image’ of all things, from his treatise *Of Vertue* (EC MS 291).

<sup>90</sup> EC MS 291, 189.

<sup>91</sup> EC MS 291, 190.



the innermost circle may symbolize time, the human soul, and reason/sense – Sterry often combines reason and sense because they both depend upon images.<sup>92</sup> And, mostly importantly, when combined into one, the diagram displays the Trinitarian pattern of reality as variety (circle 2) proceeds from unity (circle 1) into a one-in-many by means of the union of unity and variety (circle 3). Sterry’s diagramed depiction of eternity and time is very similar to Cusanus’s description of the same terms by means of the spinning top in *De possest* (figure 2).<sup>93</sup>

Though he only quotes Cusanus’s *De docta ignorantia*, Sterry appears to rely on Cusanus’s other works for his Pythagorean-inspired concept of method, metaphysics and the arithmetical Trinity. According to the eighteenth-century editor of his works, Sterry left behind an unpublished treatise entitled “Number’s the first Image of all Things,” which unfortunately is no longer extant.<sup>94</sup> The title of this treatise is very likely inspired by the heading from Cusanus’s *De coniecturis*, chapter two, entitled, “*Symbolicum exemplar rerum numerum esse*.”<sup>95</sup> It is Sterry’s usual habit to render philosophical language into ordinary English. So, his rendering of *symbolicum exemplar* as “first Image” is likely a loose simplification of Cusanus’s idea, especially considering Cusanus’s argument in this chapter that number is a *principium* – this can be rendered ‘beginning’ or ‘first’ – and a *symbolum* and *similitudo* of reason – which may be translated ‘image’. If this is indeed Sterry’s simplification of Cusanus, it shows the extent to which Sterry’s use of mathematical symbols is dependent upon Cusanus’s larger corpus of writings. Yet his detailed description of the universal image of things, Sterry proves to be more concerned to provide a

---

<sup>92</sup> EC MS 291, 185: “This Heavenly Man in ye first Creation descends by a threefold step into ye intellectuall, or Angelicall Man, the Rational, ye Sensitive Man.”

<sup>93</sup> Cusanus, *De possest* 18.

<sup>94</sup> *AGM*, fol. 4r; This title is listed in *AGM* by the editor as an item contained within Sterry’s remaining notebooks, yet when I searched through Sterry’s notebooks at Emmanuel College Library I discovered no such treatise.

<sup>95</sup> *De coniecturis*, 2.7 (h 3.11).

pleasant aesthetic picture of reality that will inspire the whole person with a sense of awe and affection for the divine, than he is with a geometric or mnemonic diagram for learning all of the sciences.

### **Method and the *Imago Dei***

Sterry argues that all things participate in God's infinite circle as unities within the divine Unity. In his *Freedom of the Will*, Sterry describes the *imago Dei* in human beings with the triad, essence, understanding, and will – this is also the same as Brooke's triadic *imago Dei* mentioned above.<sup>96</sup> These three (essence, understanding, and will) correspond very closely to the Pythagorean terms monad/limit, dyad/infinity, and triad/mixture, as well as Cusanus's three 'regions' of unity, equality, and union that make up the triune *imago Dei*.<sup>97</sup> Indeed, Sterry refers to the image of God in the soul as the "living Image of the Trinity in Man" and for the same reason as Cusanus. That is, each person has the innate creative freedom to make oneself into an image of the Trinity by unfolding/enfolding all things from oneself through by converting or reflecting upon oneself. Sterry argues that God becomes a Trinity of persons "while he reflects upon himself" and so the human soul "brings forth in herself the Image of God" by the unitive power of the Father and "then by the Person of the Spirit, she unites herself to, enjoys the Contemplation of this Image, the Image of all Truth and Glory."<sup>98</sup> When the soul unfolds all things from herself she makes an image of herself, and so she looks upon all things "as [her] own proper and complete Image" in their proper "proportions and harmonies," an act that appears to correspond completely with Cusanus's *virtus*

---

<sup>96</sup> NT, 24, 25.

<sup>97</sup> Cusanus, *De coniecturis*, 2.17.176; Sterry very likely reads finds terms in Augustine's *De Trinitate* as well. See the reference to this work in *DFW*, 242.

<sup>98</sup> *AGM*, 182.

*aequalificandi seu iustificandi*.<sup>99</sup> As the soul produces the likeness of things within itself in its own image it makes itself into a “living image” and a “self-moving” number.<sup>100</sup> Sterry is very likely drawing from Cusanus’s *Idiota de mente* for this terminology.<sup>101</sup> There Cusanus describes the “philosopher” as requesting an explanation of “how it is that the soul is self-moving number.” Cusanus answers that the human mind assimilates itself to all things by measuring them within itself, as the image of divine unity, by its “*intuitio veritatis absolutae*.”<sup>102</sup> In a similar manner Sterry says, “So doth the Soul after the manner of number, which is the measure of all proportion and order from its supream and universal Unity, descend and re-ascend through all particular Forms, in the most just order, and most exact proportions.”<sup>103</sup>

Sterry agrees, to some degree, with Protagoras that “man is the measure of all things,” that is, on the basis of the *imago Dei*.<sup>104</sup> The soul, like its fundamental numeric principle, “diffuses itself” through all of the variety of things within itself and binds them up again into its own unity by means of self-reflection. “[T]he Soul,” says Sterry, “by the Unity of its Essence subsists, and contemplates it self within it self, in all forms of things from the highest to the lowest, according to their several Angelical Diversities...This is the soul, a Divine Circle, a compleat Paradise.”<sup>105</sup> Since the soul is composed of number, or tri-unity, it is able to measure the proportions of all finite things, even the nature of angels by reflecting upon itself in what Sterry calls its potential “omniformity.”<sup>106</sup> The act of using its own tri-unity as the measure of reality reveals that the human soul reflects the infinite reality above the coincidence of opposites, as the soul contains in itself a

---

<sup>99</sup> Cusanus, *De coniecturis* 2.17.176.

<sup>100</sup> *DFW*, 91.

<sup>101</sup> Cusanus, *Idiota de mente* 7.98 (h V.148).

<sup>102</sup> *Idiota de mente* 7.106 (h V.158).

<sup>103</sup> *DFW*, 91.

<sup>104</sup> *DFW*, 91-98.

<sup>105</sup> *DFW*, 82.

<sup>106</sup> *DFW*, 83.

potential infinity or the “potentiality of knowing all things.”<sup>107</sup> Rather than possessing innate knowledge, the soul’s potential omniscience is its ability to measure all things, which it does in its essential act of circling around its divine Idea within itself.

Like Cusanus, Sterry’s notion of the *imago Dei* as a “living image” is deeply influenced by Proclus’s notion of “the one in the soul.” Sterry draws from Proclus to show that the soul’s omniformity is not a pure potency, but an active potency. The human intellectual spirit is pure act, “having always in it self the judgment of all things, in the potentiality or power of it.”<sup>108</sup> As Proclus says (via Sterry), all things are present in the soul ψυχικῶς, that is, according to its particular soul-like mode of being.<sup>109</sup> God is present in the human soul as well, both *secundum modum Creaturæ* and *secundum modum Dei*.<sup>110</sup> The soul’s unitive ‘spirit’ is its divine part, which is the *apex mentis*, the “flower of the soul,” and the “one in the soul.”<sup>111</sup> The unity of the human intellect is a “comprehensive Unity, which is the proper character of Intellectual Spirits” whereby it is “capable of Commerce with the Divinity it self, and of enjoying in it self the Divine presence.” The intellect, then, is the unity of the soul with its own image or idea in the mind of God. For Sterry, the mind of God is Jesus Christ, who is the “Original spring and measure of all understandings and expression ... the first, the most universal proportion and harmony.”<sup>112</sup> Sterry affirms that all angels and other creatures have their existence through their own idea in the divine

---

<sup>107</sup> DFW, 73.

<sup>108</sup> DFW, 73.

<sup>109</sup> DFW, 74; Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, ed. & trans. E.R. Dodds, (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1963), prop. 197.

<sup>110</sup> DFW, 75.

<sup>111</sup> DFW, 74; On Sterry’s use of Proclus’s ἄνθος τοῦ νοῦ, see Sterry, *RRR*, 197; Proclus, *In Alcibiades*, ed. L.G. Westerink, trans. William O’Neill, (Dilton Marsh, UK: The Prometheus Trust, 2011), 248.2; see also Radek Chlup, *Proclus: An Introduction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 165.

<sup>112</sup> DFW, 26.

mind. “But God himself in his own essential Image, in the Person of the Son, the Idea of Ideas, is the Idea of Man.”<sup>113</sup>

Christ is the idea of humanity around which the human soul circles or to which it converts in its essential act of existence. God’s idea of himself is non-participatory, however, in the sense that God does not divide himself by going outside of himself. Yet, we are able to get “touches” and “glimpses” of the infinity of God’s self-Idea by our consciousness of union with God, as this union of Idea/idea constitutes the center of the *imago Dei*.<sup>114</sup> Sterry says, “This is that seed of Infiniteness and Eternity, which by an irresistable instinct inclines the Soul so evidently, so forcibly in all its Desires, in all its Operations to immortality, and to an unbounded good.”<sup>115</sup> The human soul does not exist within the center of its own circle but it “circleth round this Deep of the Divine Mind, not after a Corporeal, or Local manner, but as one Spirit encompasseth another without Circumscription extension or distance.”<sup>116</sup> And by circling around the divine mind in perfect union with it, the soul views “all things in their universal Forms, under the Property or Character of that universal Form,” that is, it sees the diversity of things as the contractions of the divine Unity.<sup>117</sup>

In Sterry’s doctrine of the *imago Dei* as a “living image” we can see the radical nature of his perspectivalism. For, in the soul’s omniform power of judgment it also participates in the creation of the sensible world, that is, by unfolding all things in mental concepts from its own enfolded omniformity. In his *Freedom of the Will* Sterry weds the Kabbalist notion of “Adam

---

<sup>113</sup> DFW, 81.

<sup>114</sup> See Cusanus, *De beryllo* 7 (h XI/1, 9-10): “Habet [homo] autem visum subtilissimum, per quem videt ænigma esse veritatis ænigma, ut sciat hanc esse veritatem, quae non est figurabilis in aliquo ænigmate.”

<sup>115</sup> DFW, 109.

<sup>116</sup> DFW, 93.

<sup>117</sup> DFW, 83.



Kadmon” (the preexistence of Adam’s “celestial humanity”) with the Platonic notion of the World Soul in the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>118</sup> For Sterry, the World Soul is Jesus Christ in his divine person and preexistent human soul, along with the soul of his bride united to him; his bride is the rest of humanity but primarily the faithful who have a personal knowledge of Christ’s divine person as their ideal existence and center.<sup>119</sup> For this reason the human intellect is “the Act of this Universe of Sense, the whole Corporeal World”; and furthermore, the “Intellectual Soul is *all this World*.”<sup>120</sup> Sterry says that the whole celestial and elemental world are enacted and subsist in the “pure Act” of the intellectual soul’s unity, having “no ground of substance in themselves.” This “world” is what we perceive by its representative images and concepts in the intellect, concepts which descend into our minds from God the Son by way of the created soul of Jesus Christ, not by way of the senses, though the senses awaken them.<sup>121</sup>

In the intellectual soul, Sterry says, corporeal figures “are that which they are; As Mathematical figures in the mind, the Soul it self alone, filling those figures, being all the Essence, Substance, Power, Virtue, and Form in them.”<sup>122</sup> Christ, the first and “God-like Soul,” always has his face turned to the face of God and “without thought, care, or trouble ... casts this Corporeal World from it self,” as a shadow “[where] there is no ground for it to fall upon, besides the Soul it self.” This creative act of the intellect is not only true of the World Soul. Sterry says, “All Souls,

---

<sup>118</sup> DFW, 78.

<sup>119</sup> Sterry explains the preexistence of Christ as the World Soul in *Of the Nature of a Spirit*, in EC MS 291, 67-79.

<sup>120</sup> DFW, 97. Italics in original.

<sup>121</sup> Sterry, EC MS 291, 73: “[O]ur lord jesus in his godhead, as he is the only true god ... casts all these images upon this looking- glasse, first upon the created spirit of christ, and from him upon all other inferiour spirits.”; By limiting the idea of Adam Kadman to the created soul of Christ, rather than Christ’s divine person, Sterry avoids subordinationism, unlike Anne Conway. See Sarah Hutton, “Platonism and the Trinity: Anne Conway, Henry More and Christoph Sand,” in *Socinianism and Arminianism: Antitrinitarians, Calvinists, and Cultural Exchange in Seventeenth-Century Europe*, ed. Martin Mulrow and Jan Rohls, (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 209-224.

<sup>122</sup> DFW, 97.

as they flow in their Order, and successions from this first Soul, by virtue of the *first production*, bring forth to themselves the whole World in its fairest and fullest measure.” The human soul, though it is a living image, is not a purely autonomous agent in its activity of measuring and forming intelligible species. Rather, it measures things by its own reflective participation in Christ’s mediating act of measuring and illuminating the soul, thus forming his image therein.<sup>123</sup>

For Sterry as for Cusanus, Christ is the coincidence of opposites, both God and man “mutually enfolding Each other; as Hee is at once a God, and Man appearing in both ... the Heavenly Image in the earthly forme, the Earthly Image in the forme of an Heavenly One.”<sup>124</sup> The human souls that receive illumination and union with Christ become his “bride” and receive their “true selves,” which gives them the ability to measure all things, including themselves.

Thus the glorious Bride of Eternity, having her heavenly Bridegroom in her embraces, clothed and crowned with the same heavenly Image, being now in the true state of her own proper person in her *first and last state*, in her own proper unveiled Substance, and Original here with her Bridegroom, is her own rule and measure in this heavenly Image, which is her true substantial self, her Eternity.<sup>125</sup>

The soul in union with Christ, the World Soul, and the divine Word, becomes its own sacred harmony and “by its Union with this Spirit [of Christ] in it self, it reigns upon this Throne over all things.”

The human intellect is capable of and dependent upon the measure of God that it takes by means of its own tri-unity, as it intuits thereby the divine Unity as the Source presupposed in its own identity and otherness. “Here the Soul, in its Divine Unity, seeth, feeleth, enjoyeth God in his Unity, which is his proper Essence ... transcending all similitudes, all commerce, all bounds, by a

---

<sup>123</sup> DFW, 101.

<sup>124</sup> Sterry, “Apollo,” in *SW*, 158.

<sup>125</sup> DFW, 140.

Divine sympathy.”<sup>126</sup> The soul’s potential infinity is a coincidence of potency and act (i.e., a “seed of infinity”) and so remains a finite symbol, as it is composed of contrarities. Sterry refers the reader to a “great and learned Divine,” very likely Cusanus, to say that there is a great distance between human, angelic, and divine numbers.<sup>127</sup> Human numbers “divide, break, and lessen the subject,” whereas the divine number, “transcending all divisibility and diversity joyneth in one, the simplest Unity, with the amplest and most distinct Variety.”<sup>128</sup> The divine number, in other words, is not like the “contracted, obscur’d Unities below” but is perfectly one.<sup>129</sup> Yet, to know an image as an image is to see beyond it, and in some degree to take measure of it. This is the highest mode of knowing, to see all things in the symbolic unity of identity and otherness, of measuring and being measured, in their triune Harmony. When we ascend to this vision of unity-in-variety, Sterry says, we behold all things with “solar eyes,” and “wee see all things in Godlike formes, as an Assembly of Gods ... Here God is all in all.”<sup>130</sup>

## Conclusion

The ethical ramifications of Sterry’s metaphysical and Trinitarian method are already visible from the evidence presented in this chapter. Sterry’s *a priori* method, like Cusanus’s *docta ignorantia*, reduces all other methods and realities to their essential triune structure. His method is not based on the first principles of reason (the law of non-contradiction, excluded middle, etc.) but on the relationship between the Trinity and its image in the soul, discerned by the intuitive or converting power of the intellect. The triune and numeric principle of unity and variety in union functions as

---

<sup>126</sup> *DFW*, 108.

<sup>127</sup> This is very likely a reference to chapters 5-8 of *De coniecturis*.

<sup>128</sup> *DFW*, 27.

<sup>129</sup> *AGM*, 443.

<sup>130</sup> Sterry, *SW*, 135.

the beginning of all knowledge as it reveals the underlying tri-unity that is presupposed in the multiplicity and union of all things. This triune principle is discovered in the omniform capacity of the intellect, above reason, in the soul's essential act of converting itself into a "self-moving number," which is the "living image" of the Trinity. It does this by imitating the triune processions within the Godhead, that is, it unfolds concepts of all things from within its own unity (essence); it measures and delights in the limitless variety of things within itself (intellect), and brings the variety and unity of things into a union of joy and love of God in the self (will).

As the soul reflects upon itself it becomes the living image of the divine Self-Image, an ectypal imprint of the Father in union with the Son by means of the Holy Spirit. Sterry's *a priori* method provides only a conjectural knowledge of God as he is discoverable by the use of purely natural principles. Yet, the mathematical nature of this "Divine Art of Numeration" shows that Sterry does not think of conjecture as an absolute defect of knowledge but a pathway for transcending the boundary between finite and infinite, nature and grace within the human person. And, those who find the boundary where God's vision of us and our vision of him coincide in perfect union find themselves in the same cloud in which Christ dwells, waiting to reveal himself. The complete and personal knowledge of one's true self requires union with Christ through faith in his incarnation, death, and resurrection. Yet, for Sterry, this Trinitarian method is instrumental in bringing about religious conversion because it reveals the natural and philosophical substratum upon which the personal knowledge of Christ is based. It is a philosophical method but one that encompasses the natural principles presupposed in the religious life, and so it is a universal method. As we will see in the next chapter, Sterry considers his philosophical and Trinitarian method to be the key for discovering and living a virtuous and happy life.

## Chapter 3

### ‘Secret Virtues of the Supreme Unity’: A Rational Ethic

Here Those, who thus Ascended bee  
Beauty’s, and Love’s Idea see;  
Seeing put on Its Forme Divine,  
And in It now for ever shine.<sup>1</sup>

A number of Peter Sterry’s letters to his son Peter the younger remain in Sterry’s unpublished notebooks.<sup>2</sup> These letters reveal the senior Sterry to be a father very much concerned with the moral state of his son. Sterry sent his son Peter to Eton College to be educated, only later to discover that his son had been led astray by the company that he kept while there, prompting his father to visit him every fortnight and request detailed reports of his daily activities and of his time spent in meditation and prayer. Sterry’s son was later sent to port to begin an apprenticeship aboard a mercantile vessel, and his father’s letters continued thereafter with admonitions to the younger Peter against keeping ill company, associating with women, gambling, and drinking alcohol.<sup>3</sup> In these letters Sterry utilizes his Trinitarian method to attempt to convert his son away from the appearances of things to their underlying unity in the Trinity. On one occasion Sterry says, “When you rise in the morning thinck not your selfe awake till you retire into the Seede of God in you.”<sup>4</sup> This seed is a “heavenly eye” and a “heavenly man,” by which you begin to judge “yourselfe in the eye of your Saviour, and him in your eye.”<sup>5</sup> Beginning with this mutual embrace that one finds in the soul, the self is at once embracing and being embraced by one’s true Self in the Mind of

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter Sterry, *The Repose at Beau-Plaine*, in *SW*, 192.

<sup>2</sup> The bulk of Sterry’s letters to his son are contained in EC MS 290.

<sup>3</sup> For a summary of Sterry’s advice in his letters see Pinto, Peter Sterry: 47-54.

<sup>4</sup> *SW*, 130.

<sup>5</sup> *SW*, 130.

God, so that “nothing is to be judged according to the outward Apperances to sense, where all things are darke, and dead: but in the light of the Spirit, which alone is Truth.”<sup>6</sup>

In this chapter we will see that Sterry intended his universal method also to be a method of morality, which unites the divine and human life in a universal ethic that is at once philosophical, Trinitarian, Christological, and aesthetic. Sterry’s notion of the human person as the living image of the Trinity unifies philosophy and theology in his “Christian philosophy.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, “the Heart is Triangular, which therefore cannot be filled with the round World, but only with the Trinity.”<sup>8</sup> Sterry’s concept of ethics and morality are thoroughly rational, as they derive from the character of Adam’s ‘angelic’ intellect (or *nous*) in the state of pure nature.<sup>9</sup> In the state of nature all moral norms and motivation were centered in Adam’s self-reflective power of omniform judgment, which is in accordance with the *imago Dei*. The soul’s essential act of judgment, whereby it generates a universal image of its true self, is inherently practical because it unites and expands all of the soul’s motives and intentions to a universal and divine scope. The soul’s omniform judgment unveils the universal realities of things, and grants the human mind the power to convert the appearances of ugliness, contrariety, and evil and its desire for them to their eternal Beauty and Virtue in the divine Harmony. For Sterry, human virtues are the harmonious motions of the soul as it receives its true self from God by way of *nous* (or spirit) and places itself upon all things as various images of the Good within itself. The paradoxical union of the self with its true Self (or the one-in-many) in the human soul creates a two-fold ethic: one that is mediated by human reason (the natural self), and another that is an immediate ‘birth’ of the divine Mind/Good within the

---

<sup>6</sup> *SW*, 72.

<sup>7</sup> *AGM*, 467.

<sup>8</sup> *RRR*, 194.

<sup>9</sup> *DFW*, 117: “In the pure nature of man, he [God] shines through the Vail of the Angelical or Intellectual Image, as a transparent Vail of finest Lawn, or sweetest Light, sprung from his own Face.”

human mind (the spiritual self). Sterry proposes that human happiness not only requires the submission of the sensitive appetite to the judgment of right reason but the elevation of the whole soul via *nous* to the divine Life where it becomes a living judge and a living image of the Holy Trinity.

### ***Eudaimonia* and the Power of Judgment**

Like his method, Sterry's moral thought is at once philosophical and theological. His understanding of the good life for humanity is fundamentally dependent upon his notion of the human person as the "living image" of the Trinity. Unlike all of the other creatures, the exemplar idea of the human person is the Idea of ideas, that is, God's own Idea of himself, which is the Son in the Trinity. The very Life of the Trinity and all other finite life is contained in God's self-image, which also contains the original Idea – the 'true self' – of humanity immediately united to it. Sterry appeals to the authority of Aristotle, Seneca, Plutarch, Plotinus, and Proclus in order to explain the meaning of the term 'life.' Aristotle affirms that "Life is a perpetual generation ... the propagation of oneself";<sup>10</sup> Seneca says "life is a reflection upon itself";<sup>11</sup> Plutarch affirms that life "hath a Depth in it, the Depth of a Spring";<sup>12</sup> Plotinus says life flows from the "Intellectual Form";<sup>13</sup> and finally Proclus says life is "a Unity bringing forth itself into a variety of Forms, which it containeth originally in itself, as in a Fountain."<sup>14</sup> Life, in other words, is the omniform judgment that an

---

<sup>10</sup> *AGM*, 428; This is possibly a reference to Aristotle, *De Generatione*, II.10, 336a32.

<sup>11</sup> *EC MS* 289, 133; See Seneca, *De Vita Beata*, cap. XIX.

<sup>12</sup> *DFW*, 93; A possible reference to Plutarch, *Sentiments concerning nature with which philosophers were delighted*, II.4 or III.9.

<sup>13</sup> *DFW*, 87; See Plotinus, *Enneads*, I.4.3.

<sup>14</sup> *AGM*, 428; See Proclus, *In Timaeus*, Bk. 2. Proclus defines the third hypostasis, the World Soul, as the "fount and source of life".

intellectual being makes of all things by means of reflecting upon itself, knowing and enjoying every variety of forms within its own essence as images of its true self.

In its abstract form (in its pure nature), the human soul “by a continual emanation ... from the Divine Mind” participates divine Life through the mediation of the “Angelical Mind,” which is the human understanding or *nous*. The Platonists, Sterry says, refer to the angelic intellect as “Mind” (or *Nous*), though it more appropriately refers to the divine Mind of Christ. The divine Life in the angelic intellect is to the human soul the “Unity of its Unity, the Center in its Center.” Through the angelic intellect, God looks upon the soul itself “as the Looking-Glass of his own Beauty, lying and playing in himself, as the Image of a Flower, or Tree in the water, every way circled in by him, as she is centered in him.”<sup>15</sup> Here Sterry affirms Plotinus’s notion of *eudaimonia* as the highest level of intellectual life, the participation of which renders each human a complete person. As Sterry recounts, Plotinus says the soul emanates from the divine nature with its eye always fixed upon its true self in its exemplar form.

The Soul extendeth her self ... to [the] utmost Heighths above, and Depths beneath, by her Idea, which is her Golden Head, by her Angel, which is her Arms and Breast of her Silver, her immediate Image and Birth, as she springs forth from her Idea, her incorruptible Essence, above all motion, the first seat of her Life, Understanding, Virtue, Power, as they flow from her Ideal Spring. Thus Plotinus believed the Soul her self, in her Essence, in her Intellectual Form, at its first abstracted heighth and purity to be her own good Angel.<sup>16</sup>

The “good Angel,” Sterry’s translation of *eudaimonia*, is the intellectual life of the Trinity and the pattern of all personhood and moral goodness descending into the human intellect as a reflection

---

<sup>15</sup> DFW, 93-4.

<sup>16</sup> DFW, 87.



of itself in itself. The Life of God, then, is the life of the human soul contracted according to the soul's particular mode of being, according to Sterry's concept of theosis or 'deiformity'.<sup>17</sup>

In order to be a complete person, each intellectual being must participate in the Life of the Trinity, which one does through one's living knowledge, that is, one's faculty of universal judgment. Sterry defines 'person' as "an Intellectual Being, compleatly existing," and every "intellectual Spirit" comprehends the principles of its own essence within itself, including its essential form and operation, "by comprehending in it self the whole nature of things."<sup>18</sup> Sterry believes the rules defining intellectual judgment are identical with those that define 'life' and 'personhood.' In order for one to be a person: (1) there must be a universal image within the entity as "the Face of all Being in one," (2) the universal image (or form) must have the fountain of all being within itself so that it subsists within itself, and (3) there must be a necessary and immediate union between the image and the fountain.<sup>19</sup> If the fountain did not fully contain the universal image within itself, then it would not be whole. Likewise, if the universal image did not contain the fountain "diffus'd thro' the whole, and entire in each Part or Point of the whole" it would not subsist in itself as an image, and so would be incomplete.<sup>20</sup> And finally, if the fountain and the image did not subsist in a complete and mutual embrace of one another, then the image would not be a true image and the fountain would be incomplete, as neither the unity of things nor the

---

<sup>17</sup> Sterry refers to deification as 'singularity' and as becoming 'Deiform.' See *SW*, 115; and *AGM*, 190; As we saw in the previous chapter, Sterry says, the life of the soul "circleth round this Deep [i.e., Life] of the Divine Mind, not after a Corporeal, or Local manner, but as one Spirit encompasseth another without Circumscription extension or distance," (*DFW*, 93).; Sterry quotes the Porphyrian principle, "That every thing received, is received according to the nature and manner of the Recipient," (*DFW*, 28).

<sup>18</sup> *DFW*, 48.

<sup>19</sup> *AGM*, 445.

<sup>20</sup> *AGM*, 445.

distinctions that the image contains within itself would be true images of the fountain.<sup>21</sup> Sterry concludes, therefore, that “God alone is a true Person, as he is indeed the only Truth of all Things, for he alone hath the true Fountain, the true Form of all Being in himself.”<sup>22</sup> Angels and humans, on the other hand, are “shadowy Persons,” as their fountain, form, and union are reflections of the divine Life and Light.

In order for a human being to be a true person one must produce an image of one’s true universal self within the soul, in a mutual embrace of the self and its universal self-image. For Sterry, all moral norms derive from this Trinity in the soul, of self, Self, and the mutual embrace of these two. The power of judgment, like the soul’s knowledge of God, is a creative power. It is a living knowledge that takes on the likeness of the object known by receiving it and forming itself in accordance with it. As Sterry affirms, “the Knowledge of God makes a Man, for it makes the Image of God in Man.”<sup>23</sup> In this way the intellectual life of the soul is itself:

a Power, which compareth and judgeth things; which discerneth the differences of things, relations, proportions, agreements, disagreements; which is delighted with Harmony, Beauty, Musick; which taketh in, entertaineth it self with the Essences of things, the whole, Universals, as its most native, and most suitable Companions; which adorneth it self with Sciences.<sup>24</sup>

The soul constructs all of the sciences through its power of judgment “like Jewels knit together into one Body of Divine Light,” which Sterry says, has its feet on the earth and raises its head “into the unseen Gloriest of the highest Heavens.”<sup>25</sup> Sterry often says that the soul “converts” or “tunes”

---

<sup>21</sup> *AGM*, 445: “[In the] Union between these two, the Fountain, and the Form or Image ... all the distinct Forms of Things here are compleat in their Distinctions, compleat in their Unity, every one having the Universal Form entire and distinct in itself.”

<sup>22</sup> *AGM*, 445.

<sup>23</sup> *AGM*, 182.

<sup>24</sup> *DFW*, 69.

<sup>25</sup> *DFW*, 69.

the differences of things to their universals by means of its self-reflective power of judgment. Sterry affirms, if the object of knowledge or the image of the object are taken into the soul by a diversity of powers then “they no where meet together in one, they are no where compared and judged, the Discord, the Harmony, the Whole, is no where understood.”<sup>26</sup> Therefore, any judgment of one/many, good/evil, depends on the original tri-unity of the soul, proceeding as it does from its original Trinity as its first Principle.

The power of reason, in conjunction with the intellect, enables each person to form a universal judgment of this sort, yet one that is conjectural, as it is mediated by intellectual concepts. As we will see below, Sterry refers to the human person’s mediated and conjectural judgment as the natural image of God in the soul. The soul’s spiritual judgment occurs above conjecture in the ‘spiritual image’, by an immediate union with God and the intellect. The existence of a higher ‘spiritual’ ethic does not deter Sterry from promoting a lower ‘bodily’ ethic. The fact that the concepts formed by the natural image are conjectural means that they are often obscured by error and false motives. For Sterry, this fact necessitates a curriculum of philosophical study with an emphasis on moral philosophy in particular as a preparation for the spiritual life.

### **A Rational Virtue Ethic**

In his treatise *Of Philosophy in General*, Sterry affirms that philosophy perfects the natural ability of a person to live actively as an image of the divine Trinity through one’s unified soul-understanding-will, insofar as the divine Life is mediated by the images created by the angelic intellect.<sup>27</sup> The ability to live as the *imago Dei* in unmediated union with the divine Trinity is

---

<sup>26</sup> DFW, 69.

<sup>27</sup> This treatise is found in EC MS 291, 3-66.

supernatural and demands revealed religion, though natural theology outlines the rational basis of faith. According to Sterry, the rational power of the soul – Sterry often uses ‘rational’ or ‘reason’ to stand for both ‘reason’ and ‘understanding’ though he more frequently distinguishes between the two – is “the most raised ... power of the soule,” though it is subject to imperfection and change due to its discursive nature and dependence on finite images.<sup>28</sup> Reason, is the “angellical image planting it selfe in an inferiour forme, or glasse; and so shining forth with an inferiour or more shady light.”<sup>29</sup> The goal of philosophy is to unite the human intellect to its ultimate end, that is, to God. It does this by presenting the beautiful images of Truth to the intellect, which converts the will into a love of Truth, which is its “moral goodnesse.”<sup>30</sup> For Sterry, therefore, Christian philosophy is inherently moral. The various parts of philosophy function as stages of ascent upon which the student proceeds upward to the immediate knowledge of God. The curriculum proceeds according to logic, metaphysics, physics, ethics, and natural theology. These individual subjects are united in their singular goal of perfecting the intellect, as logic, metaphysics, physics, and ethics are all preparations for the knowledge of God attained in natural theology.

Philosophy, as Sterry sees it, is fundamentally oriented toward the transformation of the human person’s essence-intellect-will or spirit-soul-body. For, philosophy is the “habit or fixed frame ... in which the natural perfection, and happynesse of man consists.”<sup>31</sup> Plato was correct to refer to philosophy as a “meditation on death” because philosophy brings about a “moral death” by freeing the soul from its subjection to the body. Philosophy trains the soul to live in the body as if it were outside of it by teaching it to live in “contemplation, love, fruition of the first cause.”<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> EC MS 291, 13.

<sup>29</sup> EC MS 291, 5.

<sup>30</sup> EC MS 291, 7.

<sup>31</sup> EC MS 291, 6.

<sup>32</sup> EC MS 291, 9.

This is the perfection of the soul's essence. Secondly, philosophy causes the soul to live above the body while in it by teaching it to contemplate the images of all things in its own unity. This is the perfection of the intellect. Finally, the soul lives contrary to the body while in it by subduing the sensual appetite to the judgment of the intellect and the command of the will. This is the perfection of the will in union with the body.

According to Sterry, "ethickes or moral philosophy" has the fourth place in philosophy as it prepares the student for the knowledge of God by freeing the will from the sensual passions that "tye us downe to the sense, and to the earth."<sup>33</sup> Ethics is part of practical philosophy, along with logic, as its object is that which may be known or practiced. So, Sterry affirms, "we study the knowledge of virtue in moral philosophy that we may practice it."<sup>34</sup> The moral virtues are "principle dispositions of the soul" that make it "capable of divine contemplations."<sup>35</sup> By receiving the first Truth and Good from the intellect and impressing it upon the sensual appetite, the moral virtues order the passions like strings on a well-tuned lute and "bring ye mind into an harmony, and suitableness to divine things, which raise it up to a sympathising sence and desire of them." For Sterry the virtues are types of knowledge that permit the soul to live contrary to the body while living within it, the most important being wisdom and prudence. Wisdom perfects the intellect by uniting it to the first Truth, whereas prudence unites the will to the first Good by which all of the passions are governed. So, prudence is "the fountaine and mother of all moral virtues."<sup>36</sup>

Thus far Sterry's ethic seems to follow Aristotle's conclusion that ethics is a practical discipline having to do with the virtues that pertain in some respect to the will.<sup>37</sup> He even appeals

---

<sup>33</sup> EC MS 291, 18.

<sup>34</sup> EC MS 291, 11.

<sup>35</sup> EC MS 291, 18.

<sup>36</sup> EC MS 291, 19.

<sup>37</sup> *Nic. Ethic.* VI.13, 1144b30-1145a2: "if a man have the one virtue of Prudence he will also have all the Moral Virtues together with it."

to the authority of “St. Thomas” who affirms that prudence is like the steward of a house who prepares the house for the repose of its lord.<sup>38</sup> Sterry, who kept a copy of Thomas’ *Summa theologiæ* in Chelsea that he apparently used for the instruction of his students there, often refers to Thomas in his writings.<sup>39</sup> Sterry’s understanding of the soul’s powers or faculties, however, is more reliant upon Duns Scotus and Cusanus than upon Thomas. For, Sterry does not promote a strict distinction between the faculties of the soul, nor does he distinguish between the speculative and practical intellects; thus, he does not believe moral choices are dependent upon the final judgment of the practical intellect.<sup>40</sup>

For Sterry, the soul, the intellect, and the will are not really distinct, as intellect and will are both aspects of the soul. Intellect and will, then, are not really but only formally different.<sup>41</sup> As each person of the Trinity comprehends the whole essence of the Trinity in itself, so the soul’s power of intellect comprehends the whole soul and power of the will in its own form, and likewise the will “comprehends Reason or Understanding in its essential Form.”<sup>42</sup> Each faculty, therefore, is distinguished from the other by “formally comprehending the formality of each other.” That is, the will is the whole soul comprehending itself “in a distinct and compleat image of itself” so that the soul is “Love and Understanding both in one.” This means, for Sterry, that ethics perfects not only the will but the whole soul in its ability to make correct judgments regarding the sensual appetite, as it “composeth the tumultuous motions of the soul, and formes them to a beautiful similitude, suitableness, capacity, and affection of divine things.”<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> For the divine ordering wisdom, see *Summa Theologiæ* Ia q. 21, art. 1. On law see Ia IIae q. 97, art. 4. On prudence itself see IIa IIae q. 47, art. 1.

<sup>39</sup> *SW*, 95.

<sup>40</sup> *DFW*, 187: Sterry refers to the “practically practical dictate of the Understanding” in the motion of the will to the Good but does not generally adopt what he calls the language of “The Schools.”

<sup>41</sup> See Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense*, IV, 43, q.2, nos. 4-6.

<sup>42</sup> *DFW*, 67.

<sup>43</sup> EC MS 291, 20.

Sterry does not believe that moral virtues in the soul arise out of physical activities *per se*, as Aristotle claims, since the motions of the body do not immediately move the soul.<sup>44</sup> He is quite clear, however, that the purpose of moral virtue is to make the soul more capable of an ascent to the contemplation of God. He also believes that moral virtue is an act of judgment, like “the musical lesson in the head of the musician” descending onto the sensual appetite and tuning it to reflect the pattern of goodness in the mind.<sup>45</sup> The descent of the intellect upon the senses mirrors what Sterry says elsewhere regarding the order and pattern of intellection and judgment:

It is the soule which understandeth which seeth. The soule alone is the musitian which maketh, heareth, & judgeth ye musicke. The body with its various parts is but as ye lute with its many stringes upon which ye soule formeth a figure of its musicke, like the face in the glasse, frome which it reflecteth the musick upon itselfe againe, having ye true and living forme of ye musicke ever upon itselfe alone.<sup>46</sup>

Having the living form of divine music within itself by its power of self-reflective judgment, the soul makes the music by which it motivates the body to move and dance. For Sterry, the soul is not immediately affected by the changes of the body or of the senses because it is “an immaterial and incorporeal substance, a substantial act or activitie, and so impassible from without.”<sup>47</sup> Though ethics is concerned primarily with the actions of the will, the will is only perfected when the whole soul “lives in contemplation, love, fruition of the first cause, and the first truth, and [is] transformed into the likeness of it,”<sup>48</sup> which the soul does apart from the activities of the body.

In *The Nature of Truth*, Brooke and Sterry castigate the scholastics for sharply dividing the faculties of the soul with its various activities. The scholastics who separate the faculties, they say,

---

<sup>44</sup> *Nic. Eth.* II.1.

<sup>45</sup> EC MS 291, 8.

<sup>46</sup> Peter Sterry, *On the Nature of a Spirit*, in EC MS 291, 68.

<sup>47</sup> *Nature of a Spirit*, EC MS 291, 69.

<sup>48</sup> EC MS 291, 9.

set up competing masters within the soul between reason, the will, and understanding. The scholastics have also unjustly separated the activities of the faculties from the activity of the soul itself.

I confesse, whilst the Understanding seeth light and right (I now discourse of the Understanding, Will, Affections, &c. in their termes) it doth right; for, seeing and doing is all one; for the act of the Soule is but seeing or discerning. But that Understanding, which now did see right perfectly, at the same instant is blind, even in a grosse, absurd thing: and so the effect and birth of it is but darknesse and folly.<sup>49</sup>

Because the whole soul is completely present in all of its powers, in other words, seeing and doing are both activities of the soul, and so if the soul sees rightly, it judges rightly and behaves rightly and vice versa. Thus, the virtues are modes of intellectual vision and judgment. By contemplating the images of things as modifications of first Truth, mediated by intellectual concepts, the soul sees “so many images of the faculty, or the happynesse of the divine nature.”<sup>50</sup>

As we saw in the previous chapter, however, Sterry contrasts the personal knowledge of Christ with conjectural knowledge as between immediate knowledge and knowledge mediated through images. In order to measure or judge things rightly and immutably one must use the judgment of God himself as it is immediately present in the soul, not as it is mediated by ‘fleshly’ human concepts. According to Sterry, when God created Adam, he created him in the image of the Trinity but as an “Earthly Man” whose knowledge of God derived from the “Image of Nature,” which is the divine Mind mediated through the angelic form of the intellect or reason.<sup>51</sup> Adam was created under the law, the divine command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which was delivered by angelic mediators. He did not have his “first Principle, or the Truth

---

<sup>49</sup> Brooke, *NT*, 150.

<sup>50</sup> EC MS 291, 9.

<sup>51</sup> *RRR*, 2.



of [his] being in [himself], nor the power of [himself] for a moment.”<sup>52</sup> Rather, he depended on rules and precepts that were given to him from outside of his true self in God, “a show of things, but not the very things themselves.”<sup>53</sup> These were not the substance of the divine Life but merely a preparation for it, just as the law of Moses was a schoolmaster that leads to Christ, according to St. Paul.

Adam was not able to see clearly beyond the light and darkness of the first creation but the light pleased him and the darkness perplexed him “so that this Life is a Shady Valley.”<sup>54</sup> The law presented Adam with a choice between good and evil, separating the two and further obscuring the unity of all being. By using only his natural image Adam knew himself to be a shadow cast from the original Intellect and that he must turn inward to the seed of his Original within himself.<sup>55</sup> The best Adam could do when confronted with the coincidence of opposites, however, was to look upward and exclaim “O thou supreme Substance! Which hast cast me, as thy Shadow, upon this Earth; comprehend me.”<sup>56</sup> Through these flashings of angelic light, Adam was “persuaded to return, and submit himself to the supreme Beauty.”<sup>57</sup> This does not mean, however, that God created Adam as an incomplete person. For Sterry, there is a certain immediacy that is necessary and essential between God and a person in order for one to exist as the image of God. Indeed, Adam possessed an immediateness of person and of virtue with God, but he lacked the immediate *appearance* (or form) of God, seeing God only through the mediation of his own natural image.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> *RRR*, 258.

<sup>53</sup> *RRR*, 3.

<sup>54</sup> *RRR*, 4.

<sup>55</sup> *RRR*, 4: “Can I comprehend my self? Can I tell into what form my will would grow up? Or into what shapes I shall pass after this moment, while I live, or when I am dead? If I cannot tell this, then sure I am not my own Original.”

<sup>56</sup> *RRR*, 5.

<sup>57</sup> *RRR*, 7.

<sup>58</sup> *DFW*, 108.

In other words, Adam was led by his natural image to the wall between nature and grace, where he was only able to make a conjecture about his true self beyond the wall. Sterry likens Adam's mediated knowledge of God to the way that two swimmers embrace each other beneath the water. Their embrace is immediate, yet they appear to one another through the hazy medium of the murky water.<sup>59</sup>

The coincidence of immediate and mediate knowledge in Adam's natural image means, for Sterry, that Christian philosophy (and ethics) is based on the immediate knowledge of God in the soul, which is at the same time mediated by a variety of intellectual concepts (of one/many, light/dark, good/evil, etc.) that cannot be completely overcome by judgment of reason alone. In fact, an immediate participation of the divine Life and Virtue is available through the exercise of reason alone, since the power of reason (or understanding) is one with the soul and the will, which is the natural image of the Trinity in the human person. Yet, this image is conjectural and ultimately powerless to reform the disorderly motions of the soul, due to the obscurity and multiplicity of the mind's own created concepts. In order to ascend beyond mere conjectural judgment to a pure and certain judgment of things, one must receive the divine Life as one's own life, apart from any mediating concepts. One must judge things as reflections of one's true self, not by discarding conjectures and concepts completely, but by seeing them as immediate reflections of one's true self in God. In this way the soul is free to know and to love things beyond apparent differences, based solely on the eternal and unchangeable Ideas in the Mind of God.

---

<sup>59</sup> *DFW*, 108.

## An Intellectual Virtue Ethic

As the fourth discipline of philosophy, ethics depends upon the information learned in the previous disciplines of logic, metaphysics, and natural philosophy. In these disciplines the student learns about the metaphysical Trinity, Sterry's Trinitarian method, and the Trinitarian shape of the image of God in the soul.<sup>60</sup> As we saw in the previous chapter, Sterry believed that Proclus understood the Trinity in some form by the "inbred Light of Nature, or Reason," and Sterry likely used Proclus's writings for instructing his students at Chelsea.<sup>61</sup> Sterry believes, furthermore, that Aeneas was able to know by natural wisdom "to Scatter all these troupes of frightfull and monstrous Shades" pressing on beyond them to the Elysian Fields.<sup>62</sup> The necessity of an immediate union with the divine Mind for the sake of complete personhood and judgment, therefore, is knowable by reason and grounded in the natural principles of philosophy, particularly natural theology.

In his treatise *Of Philosophy in General*, Sterry explains how philosophy perfects moral judgment for the angelic intellect, but he does not indicate the nature of moral judgment for the immediate participation of divine virtue in the soul. In his treatise, *Of Vertue*, Sterry uses the principles of natural theology to explain how the soul's inward motion of reflective judgment depends upon an immediate and mutual embrace between human *nous* and the divine Nous. He argues that human virtues in their deified form are receptions of divine Virtues, particularly through the 'top' or 'spirit' of the mind, and moral judgment is the virtuous activity of the mind as

---

<sup>60</sup> EC MS 291, 19: "But moral philosophy is to follow natural philosophy, because the grounds of those rules which it gives us to direct the motion of our will, our passion, and the actions of our life, are layed in the knowledge of the nature of man, of the soule, the body, and of theyr natural union, whiche we receive from natural philosophy."

<sup>61</sup> *AGM*, 433; See *SW*, 95: Sterry references a copy of Proclus's commentary on the *Timaieus*.

<sup>62</sup> *SW*, 96.

it imitates and participates the motions of the Trinity within itself. The chief activity of ‘spiritual’ judgment consists of seeing beyond appearances by converting them, that is, by changing one’s own understanding of particulars in light of the Trinity as their final *telos*, an act which consequently shapes one’s desire for them.

According to Sterry, the “spiritual man” is a spiritual judge who “takes not away the Differences of things” but “tunes them, and attones them.”<sup>63</sup> Adam was able to name all of the animals because in his spirit he “knits up into one frame of Life, and Beauty the divers natures of ... Creatures” where the variety of things abides in a the unity of the microcosm. For Sterry, divine Virtue brings a perfection to the whole person in spirit, soul, and body. A spirit is a monad, an intellectual unity, having the source of its own being within itself.<sup>64</sup> Sterry refers to the ‘spirit’ as the “Spire-top” of the soul, the *apex mentis*, which he understands with reference to Plotinus’s undescended soul (or *nous*) and Proclus’s ‘flower’ of the soul, where the soul receives immediate ‘touches’ from the divine Nous.<sup>65</sup> Sterry’s trifold anthropology does not necessitate different powers of the soul, however, but ‘spirit’ and ‘body’ refer to different aspects of the soul itself.<sup>66</sup> The ‘soul’ is both a spirit and a body, that is, it is a unity of act and potency (or unity and variety) drawing forth Life from the divine Mind through the ‘spirit’ and communicating it to the body.<sup>67</sup> At no point does Sterry separate the moral life of *nous* from the duty of caring for one’s body, as

---

<sup>63</sup> *RRR*, 71.

<sup>64</sup> *DFW*, 223.

<sup>65</sup> *RRR*, 24; *DFW*, 87: “Plotinus believed the Soul her self, in her Essence, in her Intellectual Form, at its first abstracted height and purity to be her own good Angel.”; On the ‘flower of the soul’ see *RRR*, 197.

<sup>66</sup> *DFW*, 87: “The Soul is a middle-nature between both these [spirit and body], not by Abnegation or Separation, but by Participation and Connection.”; For Sterry, the body is an image upon which the ‘spirit’ forms a variety in unity. See *SW*, 145.

<sup>67</sup> *DFW*, 87; Also *EC MS* 291, 48: “[The] spirit slideth downe into the embraces of the matter, which hath a passive capacitie answering its active force, and virtues, which had hid in the power of its wombe all those formes and beauties.”

the soul's power of judgment is both reflective and communicative, contemplative and active, as it creates universal concepts that it uses to shape bodily desires. In fact, all "Corporeal Natures are there [in the soul] exalted into Spirits, in their Intellectual Patterns and Powers, in their rational forms and Virtues."<sup>68</sup> The 'spirit' of man, and by consequence Sterry's ethic, is either natural or spiritual, that is, mediated by conceptual appearances or immediately united to the divine Spirit.<sup>69</sup>

Sterry begins his treatise *Of Vertue* by discussing the definition of the word 'virtue' itself. Some philosophers claim that virtue is the perfection of a thing's nature. Others say that human virtue is the perfection of human nature according to "right Reason."<sup>70</sup> Sterry applauds these definitions of 'virtue' and notes that "they seeme rightly to assert yt all Vertue is One, distinguished only by various applications to various Objects." Where these definitions fall short of the reality, however, is that they do not begin with absolute Virtue as the only beginning and first principle of all human virtue. Rather, Sterry says, "Wee will endeavor to ascend somewhat higher, yt wee may bring this discourse, concerning ye Nature & Unity of humane Vertue fro its proper ffountaine Vertue." Sterry defines 'virtue' as "ye proper force of each Nature in its full strength and Vigour." Virtue is found in things according to the particular way in which each thing reflects the nature of the Trinity. Sterry affirms, the Scriptures and "divine Philosophy" have revealed the "livliest Picture" of the Trinity to us in a manner that is beyond all human and angelic thought in order to "raise our Mindes to ye most refined, & heightened Conceptions of ye most entire Simplicity of ye most rich & unbounded Plenitude, of ye sweetest, & purest Activity of Life, in ye fullest fruition of it selfe above all Division, Composition, Confinement or Change."

---

<sup>68</sup> DFW, 88.

<sup>69</sup> RRR, 193-94.

<sup>70</sup> EC MS 291, 172.

Proper moral judgment and virtue must begin with first principles, namely, by viewing all things through the glass of the Trinity. The knowledge of the Trinity, Sterry says, raises our minds to the most absolute and uncorrupt exemplar of Life in the Unity, Variety, and Union of the Godhead. Here we discover the one Virtue that unites all other human and angelic virtues in the Unity of which “alone things that live, are capable of acting, or reflecting upon themselves, of having a sense, or comprehension of themselves.”<sup>71</sup> In the divine Variety we see the infinite vastness of Life in its “unapproachable Beauties” as the “blessed fface” of the divine Unity.” This vision of divine Beauty takes us outside of ourselves and transforms us into the Image of the Trinity. “Blessed is that Spirit,” Sterry exclaims, “which bathes, & rowles Itselfe in his bosome, where all divine varietyes of all that is desyrable ... ever incomprehensibly fresh, & new; where all things new, & old, cast themselves into its Embraces as beautifull, & blessed Varietys.” In the Union of the Trinitarian persons we get a glimpse of the perfection of the divine Life, which is a “wonderfull, & Divine Consent of all ravishing Harmony in ye Divine Being” where all three persons are one in each of the three and all three are distinct in each of the three, and “All Three are both One, & distinct in each of the Three.”<sup>72</sup>

After revealing the fullness of the divine Life in the Trinity, Sterry explains how the divine Harmony functions as the exemplar order and structure of all inferior realities. The divine Unity, as the source of all number, diffuses itself through its self-image in the Variety, descending to the lowest degrees of being “by most iust proportions,” extends itself to the vastest distance and limit, and “ascends againe to ye highest degree, & returns into Itselfe.”<sup>73</sup> The self-image of God is itself the Beauty of the Godhead because it contains within itself “all degrees of Proportions, &

---

<sup>71</sup> EC MS 291, 173.

<sup>72</sup> EC MS 291, 175.

<sup>73</sup> EC MS 291, 175.

Harmony” which arise from the union of distant parts in their varieties. Each part of the divine Variety, which “in its proper place, & Order is admirably, divinely beautifull, & pleasant in itselfe, makes up ye Beautie, & Pleasure of all the distinct parts, & of ye whole resting upon it & concentered in it.” The whole of the divine Unity rests upon each part in the Variety to complete their Union, so that the “Unity, & ye Variety of ye Unity is compleat in every part.” For Sterry, God is an artist, who draws an image of himself upon all things within himself by the perfect and harmonious union of himself with himself. For Sterry, the mutual embrace of God’s Unity and Variety correspond to the vastness and “Infinitenesse of Variety” which are necessary attributes of absolute Beauty and cause “an Infiniteness of Glory, Pleasure, & Admiration” in created minds.<sup>74</sup>

All things in the created world were formed after their original in the Trinity and so they have for their pattern the Unity and Variety of divine ideas in the mind of God. These ideas are the Truth of all things “which goe forth, & variously figure themselfe in different degrees of Lights, & Shade through ye whole Creation.”<sup>75</sup> According to Sterry these Truths are not mere abstractions but are themselves living persons who subsist in their own self in the divine mind. God knows not only universal natures in his ideas of them but individuals as well. In his *Freedom of the Will*, Sterry says no object “however low, however base, embaseth the Divine Understanding.”<sup>76</sup> He describes God’s knowledge of individuals figuratively as a prince or a king gazing upon a painting of “Vandike, or Titian, or some great Master.” These truths in the divine mind are the “Divine Members of ye heavenly & Divine Body of ye Lord Jesus,” that is, the souls of all the saints who existed “in Eternity before ye world was made, & sung together when ye foundations of ye World

---

<sup>74</sup> EC MS 291, 176.

<sup>75</sup> EC MS 291, 177.

<sup>76</sup> *DFW*, 28.

was [sic] laide.”<sup>77</sup> This is Sterry’s poetic description of Christ’s preexistent human soul (the World Soul) and the souls of the saints as the principal ideas within the divine Variety.<sup>78</sup> For Sterry, the souls of the saints “in their primitive state ... are ye Heads of ye Angells themselves, & of this whole Creation.”<sup>79</sup> Sterry affirms that his purpose in writing his discourse is that the reader might “discover the beautifull fface of Truth” regarding the unity of Virtue “thorough all Divine, Naturall, & morall Philosophy.”<sup>80</sup> Contemplation on the nature of the Trinitarian relations reveals the unity of speculative and practical philosophy, of philosophy and religion, because it reveals the “most delightfull Order of ye Sacred Union in Itselfe” and the pattern by which God brings about all motions and change in the created world, a pattern that reveals the source of all human wisdom and love in God’s own inward and eternal possibility or self-love.<sup>81</sup>

For Sterry, Virtue is “ye Perfection & fforce” of the proper nature of each thing, and the perfection and force (likely Sterry’s translation of ἐνέργεια) of each thing “consists in a conformity to, & a Coniunction with its proper Idea or Variety in ye Divine Minde” because this idea is “an exact Unity.”<sup>82</sup> Since the essences of things are “so many distinct, & Divine Unitys, or Ideas in ye Godhead” then the perfection and force (i.e., virtue) of intellectual essences consists of their union with their exemplar Unity in the divine nature. The virtue of “intellectual spirits,” Sterry says, is

---

<sup>77</sup> EC MS 291, 177; Sterry understanding of the preexistence of the soul is explained more thoroughly in his treatise *The eternity of duration that hath a beginning without any end, is exposed to these difficulties*, in EC MS 291, 106-54.

<sup>78</sup> DFW, 108: “This Unity of the Soul is the most immediate reflection of the Divine Unity without it self, and so at once a Divine Looking-Glass, in which it most immediately contemplates it self.”

<sup>79</sup> EC MS 291, 177.

<sup>80</sup> EC MS 291, 177.

<sup>81</sup> EC MS 291, 180: “[T]o us, in our shadowy & low estate this ever blessed Unity appeareth obscurely, & gradually in its most beautiful, & rich Varieties according to ye most divine, & most delightfull Order of ye Sacred Union in Itselfe, which Order in its shadowy Appearances, & foot-steps is that, which wee call Wisdome among Spirits, Nature in corporeall things, Love, Beauty, Pleasure every where.”; Sterry refers to God’s power as ‘Universal Possibility’ in *AGM*, 298.

<sup>82</sup> EC MS 291, 181.



the “distinct Variety in ye Divine Unity, or its distinct Unity in ye Divine Variety.”<sup>83</sup> Here Sterry reiterates the uniqueness of the human person, namely, that humans are the only creatures whose divine Idea is “ye Unity itselfe, and ye Variety itself in their Supream forms, supremely United.” This idea is the Trinity reflected in the person of Jesus Christ, and so the proper perfection and force, the virtue of the human person, is found in its union with Jesus Christ. In Christ is contained the “most entyre, & Universal Harmony” because in him the Father and the Son are united in their mutual self-image and love.<sup>84</sup> The Idea of humanity is the “heavenly Man” as he exists eternally in union with the divine Variety. According to Sterry, Jesus is the “Eternall Reason” and the “Eternall Word, which is called  $\acute{o} \nu\omicron\varsigma$  ... ye proper Image & Idea of ye Divine Nature, ye Supream Image & Idea.”<sup>85</sup> And, since Jesus is the self-image of the Godhead, comprehending all ideas, he is also the “Universal Harmony, ye first Harmony by ye first, & Supreme Union between ye most absolute Unity, & ye most compleate Variety.”<sup>86</sup>

For Sterry, the divine Harmony (very much like Cusanus’s notion of the divine Equality) is the mathematical ordering of all things within the divine Unity, Variety, and Union.<sup>87</sup> As the first image of the Trinity, the “heavenly Man” is the divine Harmony, and so he is the one absolute Virtue.

You see how in this heavenly Man ye Vertue is One, ye Divine Reason is One, the Divine Harmony is One, in as much as all Variety stands here in ye most simple, & undivided Unity; yet do you see too, how this one Vertue, this one Reason, & Harmony multiplies itselfe into innumerable Vertues innumerable, distinct Species, or formes of Divine Reason, & Harmony, in every one of which the whole Nature of that One, & ffirst is

---

<sup>83</sup> EC MS 291, 181.

<sup>84</sup> EC MS 291, 184: “[T]hat eternall & heavenly forme of ye Lord Jesus ... is ye first, & fairest Image of ye first, & fullest Union betweene ye highest Unity, & ye Supream Variety, that is ye first, & fairest Image of ye Trinity, which is ye fface, & Essence of ye Godhead Unveiled.”

<sup>85</sup> EC MS 291, 182.

<sup>86</sup> EC MS 291, 183.

<sup>87</sup> See *De Coniecturis*, II.17.183.

compleat, & clear; for as much as ye Supream Unity stands here Supreamely, & clearly in ye first, & most compleat Variety.<sup>88</sup>

The Trinity is the universal Harmony for the same reason that it is the complete definition of a person, namely, because “Harmony is most compleat, where the Unity is preserved most entire and conspicuous, in the fullest Variety.”<sup>89</sup> In preserving his own personhood in his self-reflective judgment God unfolds himself into a duality and a trinity while remaining a whole and complete unity “by just degrees, even numbers, and exact proportions.” The eternal and harmonious relations and motions within the Trinity act as the exemplar of all human virtue because these motions are perfectly ordered to the mutual embrace between one’s true self and God’s true self.

The heavenly man, the divine Reason/Harmony and all of its innumerable virtues, descends from his eternal abode into the ‘eviternal’ world, the world of his creation, by a threefold descent into the intellectual man, the rational man, and the sensitive man. Each of these stages, according to Sterry, is the manifestation of the divine Harmony veiled by the “shadow of Eternity,” which is eviternity.<sup>90</sup> Here Christ takes on an angelic form as the head of all of the angels. The realm of angels and angelic spirits is eviternity, which has a mutable beginning and end yet appears “no where to be bounded” in its temporal progression. The virtues of this realm are the proportional motions of the universal Harmony in its descent and ascent, which Sterry illustrates by the converting (or turning) motion of a circle (or ‘orbs’).<sup>91</sup> As the “first born of all creation” Christ in his angelic form is the first created form of the divine Beauty, the first Idea of creation in the divine Mind.<sup>92</sup> All created things proceed from this hypostatic union in the divine Person of Christ, and by a natural desire for their Source they all “conspire to cast themselves into, & bring forth

---

<sup>88</sup> EC MS 291, 185.

<sup>89</sup> *DFW*, 158.

<sup>90</sup> EC MS 291, 187.

<sup>91</sup> See *DFW*, 107.

<sup>92</sup> This passage from Colossians 1:15 is one of Sterry’s favorite verses.

themselves in his forme againe.”<sup>93</sup> The human person is the ‘rational man’ into whom the heavenly and angelic man descends where he displays all of his “beautifull Varieties in a lower kinde of Images,” which Sterry says are the “Substantiall fformes of things.”<sup>94</sup> The variety of these forms stands in an undivided unity in the union of the soul of each human person with its archetype in the heavenly man. The rational man descends into the particular forms of things by a natural desire to form a likeness of itself upon things by a “Divine, & irresistable Magicke, wch drawes every Soule downe in its descent.”<sup>95</sup> The likeness of the lowest forms with the soul itself “awakens ye forme next above it in ye Soule” and by the same divine magic, the soul ascends back into itself and from there back into “ye Orbe of Angells, & so thorough [sic] that into ye Kingdome of Eternity, its first birth-place, to reigne there in one Glory with that heavenly Man, which is God blessed for ever.”<sup>96</sup>

Christ the heavenly and angelic man, does not descend into the human soul as an external force. Rather, his various appearances there are by means of a likeness, which is a real participation in Christ in his divine person, so that the circular motions of descent and ascent are simultaneously God’s motions and the motions of the human soul within itself.<sup>97</sup> Without this concurrence of human and divine activity human virtue would not properly reflect the divine, as it would not be the “proper force” of the human soul itself as the image of God. For Sterry, the heavenly man in the human soul is the “Divine Circle” of the soul. Here “all ye first unfailing Glories of Eternity dwell together in ye Soule but veiled according to ye proper Nature of ye Soule.”<sup>98</sup> This divine

---

<sup>93</sup> EC MS 289, 194.

<sup>94</sup> EC MS 289, 194.

<sup>95</sup> EC MS 289, 197.

<sup>96</sup> EC MS 289, 197.

<sup>97</sup> *DFW*, 93: “The Soul circleth round this Deep of the Divine Mind ... as one Spirit encompasseth another without Circumscription extension or distance.”

<sup>98</sup> EC MS 289, 197.

circle “is in greeke called  $\mu\upsilon\nu\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$ ” because it is part of the soul where the divine Unity dwells in “a living & immortall Veile,” that is, the soul’s own created unity or spirit.<sup>99</sup> The proper force or virtue of this part of the soul is its capacity to receive “ye immediate touches, & infusions of ye Godhead ... knowing God in a way above all the knowledge of Sense, Reason, or Understanding.”<sup>100</sup> The second motion or circle of the soul is the angelic circle, which Sterry calls  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ , understanding, and the ‘Intellectual part.’ In this circle the soul comprehends the substances of things below the divine in the created world “with all their severall harmonys, with their beautys, Musicks, & Dances, to make up a distinct, & Universall Harmony.”<sup>101</sup> The virtue of this part of the soul lies in its ability to form a universal harmony in its concept of all things within itself. It does this by its innate act of intuition, by which it views all things from the perspective of its divine circle in the “Glory of an Universal Beauty.”<sup>102</sup>

The third part of the soul in its circular motion is “ye proper & distinct form of ye rationall Man” which in Greek is called  $\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$  and *ratio* in Latin.<sup>103</sup> Reason is the proper seat of the soul’s omniform act of judgment as it contains “ye beautifull, & Just proportions” of all things, by which (a) universals descend into particulars, (b) particulars ascend into universals, and (c) particulars and universals both lie together in perfect unity and distinction.<sup>104</sup> In reason “are formed all Conceptions, Propositions, Syllogismes, & Methods” in the source of all discursive knowledge. Reason does not really separate universals from their particular instances but sees them in a “mutual Union like immortall Daughters in ye hands of their immortall mothers” beholding the

---

<sup>99</sup> EC MS 289, 198.

<sup>100</sup> EC MS 289, 198.

<sup>101</sup> EC MS 289, 199.

<sup>102</sup> EC MS 289, 201.

<sup>103</sup> EC MS 289, 201.

<sup>104</sup> EC MS 289, 200.

faces of each other “as in living looking-glasses.”<sup>105</sup> The virtue of the soul’s rational circle, as a manifestation of the divine Harmony, is its vision of “ye most harmonious Motions of all forms of things” in one “ravishing, glorious View at once, descending and ascending into each other, & circling through each other” as they maintain their proper order and proportion in the divine Harmony.<sup>106</sup> This, Sterry affirms, “is ye true, & Originall Logick.”

All of the spheres of the soul are mutually dependent upon one another as they subsist in their own form independent of the body. The last circle of the soul is the sensitive man. In this part of the soul the heavenly man descends into the lowest shade of matter. The first shade of matter is the angelic man, whose potentiality is prime matter. The second is a mixture of light and dark in the rational soul, separated from matter but more changeable (and potential) than the angelic soul. In the sensitive soul, the shade “reigns, & predominates over ye Light.”<sup>107</sup> Here is the “mysterious, & divine” shadow of the heavenly man in his descent into the mixture of form and matter, which is “Nature itselfe ... ye Principle, & Rule of all Motion” of corporeal things.<sup>108</sup> The immortal human soul never enters into composition with material things but it subsists completely in both parts of the hylomorphic essence without being contained by it. The rational soul is “ye Life of the whole” and so it operates and performs all of the motions of “Light, of Life, of Joy, of grieve” in each state in which the composite exists. Depending on reason’s tri-fold pattern of judgment, the soul sends forth every compounded substance from itself, and gathers them back into itself according to the measure of their exemplars in the divine Beauty and Harmony (or the heavenly man).

The way that the rational soul acts within the sensitive man establishes the proper nature of human virtue. According to Sterry, there are three characters of the rational soul’s action here

---

<sup>105</sup> EC MS 289, 203.

<sup>106</sup> EC MS 289, 203.

<sup>107</sup> EC MS 289, 207.

<sup>108</sup> EC MS 289, 208.

which correspond to its tri-fold act of judgment: (1) Reason acts within its own sphere, which encompasses all of reality, visible and invisible; (2) it acts within the images of all things in the soul with all of their motions and forms of life, as it depends mutually upon the senses below and the immortal souls above; and lastly (3) the rational soul in the sensitive man stands in a middle state between its own immortal form in “its owne indivisible Unity” and the forms below that are inseparable from matter.<sup>109</sup> As a “Divine Substance” the rational soul dwells in its own unity and exercises all of its operations in the sensitive man within itself as it possesses “within itselfe ye Universall, & eternall formes of thinges.”<sup>110</sup> The principal virtue of the rational soul in the sensitive man, therefore, is its Triune order and power of judgment, whereby it brings forth itself in a material shadow of itself (i.e., the body), dwelling entirely in each part of the corporeal form as the life of the body, and ascending through the body back into its own immortal unity and the unity of the heavenly man. With this Triune act the soul permits the body to participate divine Harmony and truly divinizes the body as a “compleate Birth beneath himselfe.”<sup>111</sup> By placing the whole of its true self in each part of the body, the immortal soul participates in the divine act of the heavenly man or Wisdom in the creation of its own material world.<sup>112</sup> When the soul judges itself and actively subsists in each part of the body as the whole in the part, it brings together matter and form “by ye curious Skill of this Spirit so wonderfully inter-woven, that together they appear every where distinct, every where entyrelly one, every where mutually enfolding one another.”<sup>113</sup> Through the creative activity of the rational soul each aspect of the body becomes filled with light

---

<sup>109</sup> EC MS 289, 210.

<sup>110</sup> EC MS 289, 210-11.

<sup>111</sup> EC MS 289, 215: This birth is “ye livliest, & compleatest Image of Himselfe, which is ye lowest Palace, & Paradice of ye Corporeall, or visible World.”

<sup>112</sup> EC MS 289, 215: “It is ye immortal Soule, which at once springeth forth into a mysterious, divine, & most beautifull Shadow of itselfe.”

<sup>113</sup> EC MS 289, 215.

and life, and comes to share in the identity of both the human and divine person as a living image in corporeal form.<sup>114</sup> The soul does this by making, shaping, and converting the images of things to their universal triune pattern, namely, by keeping the unity of form, by shading the form with matter, and by placing matter within the form, all while the soul comprehends the whole body within itself “being itselfe ye Shadow in ye Shadow, within the Shadow.”<sup>115</sup> In union with the divine Mind/Harmony, human reason becomes the “spirit or forme descending from above into the bosome of the matter; and marrying itselfe to it,” which “awakeneth and bringeth forth upon it its owne proper life and beauties as it selfe before was veiled there.”<sup>116</sup>

Sterry sums up his treatise *On Vertue* by returning to the nature of the Trinity and the inferior Trinity in the human soul. Though there are various virtues in the soul’s four circles, these virtues are enfolded in the soul’s own singular image of the divine Harmony, as this image is present in each of the four circles: the divine, the angelic, the rational, and the sensitive (monad, nous, logos, sensitive). The soul’s simple tri-unity is the fountain of all of the soul’s operations (or ‘force’) and knowledge and is the virtuousness and life of the soul itself. The understanding contains all of the intellectual virtues in its production and maintenance of the universal image of the divine Variety.<sup>117</sup> The will contains the moral virtues and the “proper, or perfect Idea of all Vertue” because it is the soul’s own motion toward the divine Harmony reflected in the soul’s universal image.<sup>118</sup> The will, that is, naturally moves toward and enjoys the divine Mind in the universal image that the soul makes by reflecting upon itself in judgment. The perfection of virtue

---

<sup>114</sup> EC MS 289, 217: “Matter itselfe [...] possesseth within Itselfe ... ye immortall Soule in its Unity” where the soul’s Varieties “feast, & sport together, making ye Matter with all its Darkness, & changes ye Divine Exuberances, & Reflections of their Divine feasts, & Glory.”

<sup>115</sup> EC MS 289, 215.

<sup>116</sup> *Of Philosophy*, EC MS 291, 48.

<sup>117</sup> *DFW*, 14: Sterry approves of Aristotle’s division of the intellectual virtues into five, namely, “νοῦς, ἐπιστήμη, σοφία, φρόνησις, τέχνη.”

<sup>118</sup> EC MS 289, 223; See Sterry’s reference to the cardinal virtues in *RRR*, 80.

(and personhood), however, is having all of the triune aspects of the soul fully present and active in each of the soul's four circles as the soul reflects upon itself and judges all things within itself.<sup>119</sup> This happens as the rational soul simultaneously descends and ascends through the four circles (via unity) in union with the divine Harmony, shaping each appearance of one/many, light/dark, or good/evil into a likeness of the divine Harmony (via understanding), and making this likeness its own enjoyable and loveable self-image (via will) by which it ascends again to the source of its being and motion in the divine Harmony.

All moral norms of judgment are based on the exemplarity of the Trinity. According to Sterry, the divine Wisdom perfectly reflects the triune pattern of reality, as he is the Universal Harmony and the "essential Righteousness of God" who contains all the "secret Virtues of the Supreme Unity."<sup>120</sup> Righteousness or justice is "that which giveth every one its own," which for Sterry means, that which replicates the pattern of the Trinity by giving to everything what "makes up the Harmony and Unity of the whole in that part" by ordering each part to the whole as its end. Human beings do this by following the "Rule of Justice" which is the command to love our neighbor as ourselves, even to "Love your Enemies" and "do good to them that hate you," as Jesus says.<sup>121</sup> To do this, Sterry affirms, is to follow the "Law of Goodness" which imitates the Good itself, in diffusing itself upon all, "upon the Just and the Unjust." The most important rule, however, in carrying out just judgments of things is, "With the measure with which thou has measured unto others, shall it be measured unto thee."<sup>122</sup> For Sterry, this means, that in order to

---

<sup>119</sup> EC MS 289, 218: "Every one of these [four] Worlds is a Divine Man, who in ye Maiesty of his shinning Person most beautifully comprehends all things of that world from ye highest Circle to ye least, & lowest point."; See also *SW*, 148: "By these three [divine, angelic, sensitive] did the soul at once live in those three worlds, and was all those three worlds in her self, the divine, the angelical, the sensitive."

<sup>120</sup> *DFW*, 126; *AGM*, 390.

<sup>121</sup> *DFW*, 148.

<sup>122</sup> *DFW*, "Preface," fol. 9r.



properly distribute what is owed to each thing, one must measure everything by means of divine and universal measures, by means of one's true self in the Mind of God.

Each person discovers the universal Measure of things in the *imago Dei*, whose natural motion describes and prescribes the norms that outline the proper order of self-reflection or judgment: by ascending and descending within the divine Harmony in its various levels of existence each person avoids the extremes of ascending or descending too high or too low. By ascending and descending according to the just measures of its true self, the soul makes the whole Harmony to subsist in every part of its own universal image of the world as it orients each part, each appearance of darkness and light to its ultimate divine Light and Life, allowing the darkness and light to remain by tuning and proportioning (or converting) them in accordance with their ultimate end. The virtues of the four circles of the soul derive from these proper measures and correct proportions of darkness and light, potency and act: (1) the divine circle of the soul makes the potency in the diversity of things and itself exist in the divine Variety/Harmony eminently and eternally, (2) the angelic circle makes the potency in the universe a reflection of the divine Variety/Harmony in eviternity, (3) the rational circle makes each particular thing a shade of its eternal Idea, and (4) the sensitive circle of the soul makes every material thing an extension of its formative principle. In each of these acts of judgment the intellectual soul reflects the Trinity as it permits the light and dark, form and matter to remain as distinct selves while it proportions both to their ultimate unity within its true self, the divine Harmony.

For Sterry, the act of judgment is not a mere abstraction of the intellect but indicates a real motion of the soul through the whole of reality within itself, as it participates the Trinitarian motion of producing, forming all things in its own image, and embracing them within its own harmonious self-image. The virtuous person, by acting in simultaneous concurrence with the divine Harmony

to form a judgment of all things within oneself, becomes impervious to the vicious desire to enjoy anything outside of the universal Harmony. The motionless motion of the human ‘spirit’ in its highest circle around the divine Nous renders the whole soul divine and frees it to form moral judgments that direct the desires beyond appearances to eternal substances.

### **Freedom for Virtue**

The nature of the human person as the living image of the Trinity functions as the ground of human agency and moral responsibility for Sterry. The natural ability to participate in the divine Life through the ‘spirit of man’ in the intellect is one’s source of life and freedom. This means, of course, that each person is morally accountable for one’s own actions, whether in preserving or breaking the image of divine Life in the soul. Nevertheless, Sterry’s Puritan political associations coupled with his idealistic philosophical account of freewill in his *Discourse of the Freedom of the Will* (1675) gave the impression to Sterry’s younger contemporary, Richard Baxter, and to some modern scholars that Sterry promotes a predominately deterministic account of human freedom.<sup>123</sup> As Alison Teply argues, however, these readings of Sterry do not offer a balanced representation of his thought on the matter.<sup>124</sup> Sterry repeatedly argues against the deistic and materialistic notion that people are like automata or clocks set in motion and governed by the

---

<sup>123</sup> Peter Sterry, *DFW*; Baxter somewhat hastily places Sterry’s doctrine of freewill within an intellectual lineage, grouping it under the general label of “Universally-necessary Predetermination, as delivered by Bradwardine, the Dominicans, Dr. Twisse, Rutherford and Hobbes.” See Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* (London: Printed by Robert White, 1675), III:108; For a summary of Baxter’s view of Sterry, see Pinto, *Peter Sterry*, 221-2; For modern proponents of Sterry as a strict determinist see C.A. Patrides, *The Cambridge Platonists* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969), xxvi.; and William M. Lamont, *Puritanism and Historical Controversy*, (London: U.C.L. Press, 1996), 105.

<sup>124</sup> Alison Jane Teply, *The Mystical Theology of Peter Sterry: A Study in Neoplatonist Puritanism* (PhD Disss. University of Cambridge, 2004), 225-70.

arbitrary commands of God.<sup>125</sup> Rather, for Sterry, God acts within the soul of each person as the Essence within the essence of the soul, and the Liberty in human liberty. God does not determine a person's motions from outside or below, but he gives each person a share in the divine Life within one's own natural powers of being, understanding, and willing what is good for oneself.

What previous interpretations of Sterry's concept of freewill have overlooked, however, is his attempt to reconcile determinism and human liberty with his own Cusanus-inspired Trinitarian method. In his *Freedom of the Will*, Sterry defines human freedom according to the same Trinitarian paradigm that characterizes his definitions of 'person', 'life', and 'virtue.' The ground of intellectual liberty is the "Divine essence, and the Divine Image of that essence."<sup>126</sup> The liberty of every intellectual spirit, then, lies within the sphere of Being itself in its first and "most universal form with all its unbounded self-bounding varieties," and the chief activity of intellectual liberty is the "descent into all forms of things, figuring ... it self upon them, filling them with it self."<sup>127</sup> Freewill, therefore, is the natural ability of the soul to move itself to the universal Being and Good and to figure the Good upon all things as images of its true self, the likeness and the harmony of its essence.<sup>128</sup> By way of Aristotle, Sterry affirms that the freedom of human nature is when it "moves and rests according to its own nature" with a motion that it is καθ' αὐτό, "by it self, and not by accident."<sup>129</sup> Since human nature is "our true-self" then "we have the power of self-acting when we move and rest according to our own natures, being acted in them by our own natural and essential Principles." Sterry then affirms that there is a concurrence of the divine and human wills that originates from within the *imago Dei* itself. The essence of a human person is free because it

---

<sup>125</sup> DFW, 190.

<sup>126</sup> DFW, 4.

<sup>127</sup> DFW, 4.

<sup>128</sup> DFW, 1.

<sup>129</sup> This is a possible reference to *Physics* VIII.2-3.

possesses the “fulness of Being,” as it is the “immediate birth of the Supreme Original.”<sup>130</sup> The liberty of understanding is one’s power of universal judgment wherein the soul comprehends all things “within its own circle” as most beautifully distinct and united in its own essence. Finally, the liberty of the will is its ability to draw forth the good from the understanding as it sees the “suitableness and agreeableness” of the original Good and its reflection in the proper forms of things.

The freedom of the human will, then, is the soul’s natural ability to reflect upon itself and move itself through all things within itself without ceasing to be a pure act and a self-moving number. As the soul, understanding, and will move toward one another in the act of judgment, the whole soul displays the image of the Trinity from a power that derives from within each person. In other words, the soul possesses the power of its true self as its internal principle. According to Sterry, his doctrine of freewill upholds:

[t]he liberty of acting from an internal, essential, universal Principle of inclination or love, which is confined or restrained in its nature and power by no particular differences; which is by nothing determined in its actings, except only as it determines it self by the Laws of its own universal nature, in which it bears the immediate and most express figure of the Divine Nature, and so of the Divine freedom or liberty.<sup>131</sup>

The human will is free to judge and choose the good for itself by its own internal principle, which is its true self within itself. The union of the divine Will and the human will in concurrence is “a necessity and irresistableness most rational, and most voluntary.”<sup>132</sup> As the soul flies to its original Good on the “golden wings” of the understanding and will (per Plato’s *Phaedrus*), it discovers

---

<sup>130</sup> DFW, 5.

<sup>131</sup> DFW, 8.

<sup>132</sup> DFW, 222.

itself within God's own self-Idea, which is its first cause.<sup>133</sup> And, as Sterry asserts, recalling his reading of Cusanus's *De Docta Ignorantia*,

the first and universal Cause is the most internal and essential Principle of every effect, of all humane Operations, of all the acts of the Will. For it is the Essence of every Essence, the Being of every Being, the Act of every Act, the first, the formal Cause, the most immediate, the most intimate Cause of every Effect.<sup>134</sup>

For Sterry, the shadowy secondary causes are "explications and modifications of the first cause."<sup>135</sup> This may initially appear to be a monistic account of God's presence within the human soul, but it is in reality a Trinitarian one, as the union of the divine and human wills does not destroy but preserves and enlarges the range of the whole person, specifically in the unity, variety, and union of all good in the will.<sup>136</sup>

[I]n this doth his Will become a most beautiful figure of the ever-glorious life, the Divine Will, that its Liberty is the free springing, flourishing, and fruitfulness of it in all good, through the whole Latitude and Amplitude of the most spacious and blissful sphere of good; and so that a most pleasing and agreeable necessity of being good is inseparable from this sweet and ample freedom, while it continues in the state of a Divine Image and Figure.<sup>137</sup>

As the unfolding (i.e., explication) of the first cause, the human person receives the power of secondary causality, so that it rightly possesses the creative freedom of angelic spirits, who unfold the realities of things from within themselves, and "converting themselves to Images in their minds, they bring forth new forms without."<sup>138</sup>

---

<sup>133</sup> DFW, 137; See Plato, *Phaedrus*, 249c-e.

<sup>134</sup> DFW, 138; On Sterry's reference to Cusanus on this point, see DFW, 77.

<sup>135</sup> DFW, 42.

<sup>136</sup> Pinto, *Peter Sterry*, 89: Pinto's conclusion that "Sterry is a strict monist" should be modified in light of Sterry's Trinitarianism.

<sup>137</sup> DFW, 138.

<sup>138</sup> DFW, 88.

Sterry thinks of freewill as a particular moral freedom that grants to each person the ability and responsibility to pattern oneself and one's actions according to the divine Life of the Trinity. The will is the motive force of the soul as it moves itself upward toward its source in the divine Good, Beauty, and Love, and downward to impart its goodness to the body.<sup>139</sup> According to Sterry, the will particularly reflects the nature of the Holy Spirit in its essential motion of love toward its essential image (or understanding).<sup>140</sup> The will is the "rational inclination to the rational, intellectual, eternal, and supreme good" which is the soul's true self in the Trinity.<sup>141</sup> In fact, Sterry holds 'Love' to be the highest and most representative divine name.<sup>142</sup> Plato, "the Divine Philosopher defineth Love to be a Birth in a Beautiful Subject."<sup>143</sup> The transcendent source of every 'love-birth' is the Father eternally begetting the Son and uniting himself to the Son in the love of the Holy Spirit. Aquinas (via Sterry) says that all loves and harmonies are the Holy Spirit, who is the 'love-union' of the 'love-spring' and its beautiful 'love-birth'.<sup>144</sup>

Following Peter Lombard, Sterry argues that love in the human person is the Holy Spirit, whose harmonious attractive force is also "the Virtue, the Power" in the divine nature.<sup>145</sup> To conclude that human love and virtue is the Holy Spirit might seem to detract from the freedom of human persons to love the objects of their own choice and to possess virtue as an inherent characteristic of one's nature. Sterry's definition of love as the Holy Spirit does not detract from human agency and virtue, however, as he affirms that every "Transcendent virtue of pure Love"

---

<sup>139</sup> *RRR*, 207.

<sup>140</sup> *DFW*, 32.

<sup>141</sup> *DFW*, 137.

<sup>142</sup> *RRR*, 323 ff.

<sup>143</sup> *RRR*, 363.

<sup>144</sup> *RRR*, 364; For Sterry's reference to Aquinas see *RRR*, 378; Sterry is possibly referring to Aquinas' explanation of Augustine's *usus/fruitio* distinction in *Summa Theologiae* I Q. 39 a.8 resp.

<sup>145</sup> *DFW*, "Preface," fol. 8v; Peter Lombard, *Sententiarum*, bk. 1, dist. 17: "That the Holy Spirit is the charity, by which we love God and neighbour." See also bk. 3, dist. 27 on "Charity".

is the divine Sun within the human sun.<sup>146</sup> “It is Love, which is the Supream Sun of Eternity, which *generateth* us to a Divine Birth, which *infuseth* a Divine Principle of Life into us, and awakeneth it in us.”<sup>147</sup> Although Sterry here shows his typical aversion to scholastic categories such as ‘infused qualities’, he affirms nonetheless that participation in the divine Life relies on an infused divine principle. Sterry’s notion of virtue as transcendent Love is based on his concept of the *imago Dei* as an immediate participation in the Life of the Trinity. A Trinity of loves is formed in the union between God and the soul, so that both divine and human loves remain in their celestial marriage.<sup>148</sup> Human life and virtue is the divine Life and Virtue contracted to the finite life, agency, and freewill of each individual human person. In fact, “Love is a Liberty: but it is a Law to itself in its Liberty” and “Love, saith St. Paul, is the fulfilling of the whole Law.”<sup>149</sup> This sort of love is both natural and transcendent. Thus, Sterry bears an obligation to remind his son to turn inward to the divine seed upon waking each morning, namely, because each person discovers divine Love within as a natural desire to care for and water the seed planted by God within the soul, as it is one’s true self.<sup>150</sup>

Sterry affirms the liberty of contradiction and contrariety in human choice, but he does not believe this sort of liberty permits a Nominalist or Hobbesian freedom of indifference.<sup>151</sup> A freedom that permits one to separate oneself from one’s own natural and universal causes is not

---

<sup>146</sup> *RRR*, 396.

<sup>147</sup> *RRR*, 411. Emphasis added.

<sup>148</sup> *DFW*, “Preface,” fol. 11v: “Where liberty and necessity meet in one; while the Will is carried most freely and most necessarily to its Object, which is goodness: Goodness at once becometh the essence and election of the Will, for the highest necessity is that of our natures and essences.”

<sup>149</sup> *RRR*, 340.

<sup>150</sup> *RRR*, 6: “Our first Seed will be most Inward with us, and Inseparable from us; it will travel with us thorow all Forms still working in us, still wearing out, and casting off all Forms, in which it sojourns with us, until it bring us back into it self.”

<sup>151</sup> These varieties of natural freedom are affirmed by Reformed theologians of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. See Willem J. van Asselt, J. Martin Bac, and Roelf T. te Velde, eds., *Reformed Thought on Freedom: the Concept of Free Choice in Early Modern Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

true freedom.<sup>152</sup> True and proper freewill is a coincidence of determining and being determined, of being made into the likeness of the divine Image and making oneself the virtuous image of God. In fact, it is this concurrence of apparently opposite realities within the soul that act as the Trinitarian pattern and measure of all of its virtuous choices and motions. As we saw above, the soul has the freedom to receive true Virtue in the apex of the mind and to cooperate with the divine Harmony in tuning all of its motions to concord with the celestial music. Humans have the freedom, then, to develop and increase their own virtue by taking on the likeness of the Trinity in their knowledge and judgment of all things. According to Sterry, the knowledge of God “makes a Good Man” because it gives him a divine instinct whereby he sees the divine Beauty as the ultimate end of all things, truly present in each thing.<sup>153</sup> “The Discovery of a Man’s End is that which first moves in him, and moves him towards itself.”<sup>154</sup> As the divine Sun, God shines his light upon the glass of the human soul, and each person has a responsibility to keep the glass untarnished by sensual lusts, to “seek first of all the Discovery of God in you, if you would be mov’d by him, or mov’d towards him.”<sup>155</sup>

The last End that moves each person to true Virtue and Goodness is discovered within the soul itself. Sterry refers to the ‘moralists’ who say that the discovery of the end makes all of the means to the end easy and pleasant. If we seek the knowledge of God from within the *imago Dei*, then “the knowledge of the Way to him will be Easy: For God, like the Sun to the Eye, at once shines out, and sends down a Beam, which to follow is our direct Way to him.”<sup>156</sup> And, this light is the discovery of one’s true self in the “Shining-forth of the first Principle, the last End in

---

<sup>152</sup> *DFW*, 14. If freedom of indifference were true, Sterry says, then the divine Harmony would be out of tune, and there would be discord in all Being.

<sup>153</sup> *AGM*, 189.

<sup>154</sup> *AGM*, 188.

<sup>155</sup> *AGM*, 188.

<sup>156</sup> *AGM*, 188.



ourselves.” Each person has the responsibility to ‘enlarge’ one’s knowledge of God, and one does this not by ignoring the world outside of oneself but by imitating the creative activities of the divine Goodness, that is, in attracting and communicating the Good to all things.

A good Man draws in all Things to one Spirit with himself ... Then he puts the Glory of this Spirit upon every Thing, and goes forth again in all Objects, as the Beautiful Outgoings of this Divine Spirit. This is Goodness, thus to converse with all Creatures, thus to enjoy ones self in them, by becoming one Spirit of Goodness with them all.<sup>157</sup>

When the human will is illuminated with the divine Life and Light within itself it becomes like a bee in a garden, “flying at liberty over all forms of truth and beauty, as the Flowers and Plants in this Paradise, resting at pleasure upon every one of them, sucking sweetness, the virtue, the good, the unexpressibleness of the Divinity, and the Divine Unity from them.”<sup>158</sup> As the soul dwells in the spirit, it communicates the divine Life and Goodness to the body, that is, to all of its angelic and human potencies, by descending and ascending through them at once. The characteristic motion of the virtuous soul is its “Cœlestial delight,” as it flies on the “golden wings” of understanding and will above “all impressions of outward force.”<sup>159</sup> Here each person “hath a liberty and power in it self, in despight of all impressions of outward force, to fly above them all, upon these golden wings, into the Bosom of the Divine Will, which is the universal and supream good.” By means of this “triumphant Will” each person descends and ascends above and through “all Chances and Changes, over all Confinements and Compulsions, over all the extremities of Force and Fury, while it keeps these wings unlimed, unclogged, unclipt by the filth or guilt of fleshly lusts, while it preserves it self from the Chains of Vice.”<sup>160</sup> For Sterry, true freedom for intellectual

---

<sup>157</sup> *AGM*, 191.

<sup>158</sup> *DFW*, 7.

<sup>159</sup> *DFW*, 137.

<sup>160</sup> *DFW*, 137.

beings is a creative and converting freedom. It is the freedom to be the Sun in the sun of all things, as “to be good, is to be like God, *Deiformis*.”<sup>161</sup>

## Conclusion

For Sterry, the soul’s ‘omniform’ power of judgment is the fundamental principle of the good life for human beings. With his Trinitarian version of Plotinus’s notion of *eudaimonia*, Sterry affirms that the good life, the highest form of life for human beings is the immediate union of the human intellectual ‘spirit’ (or *nous*) with the divine Mind in all of its judgments. The dynamic relationship between the image of God in the soul and its Source in the divine Mind reveals the Trinitarian pattern of the intellectual life, and it prescribes the proper norms of universal judgment. Sterry’s distinction between the higher and lower selves necessitates a distinction between a higher and lower happiness and morality. The philosophical life gives the mind the principles, norms, and motives for living in the body while being free from bodily motions. Philosophy perfects the capacities of the soul to receive the divine Life in the ‘spirit’ and shapes the body according to its pattern and principles. The understanding and will, specifically, restore the sensual appetite and fortify it with intellectual and moral virtues. Philosophical knowledge, however, is conjectural, being limited by the discursive nature of reason and the finitude of the intellect. Even Sterry’s Trinitarian method is conjectural if it is not used with the self-awareness of one’s personal union with the divine Mind. Philosophy perfects the soul’s ability to see and enjoy all appearances of the Good as appearances of one’s natural self. The philosophical life prepares the soul for an immediate union with the divine Mind by making the created mind its object. The intellectual life

---

<sup>161</sup> *AGM*, 190.

of the ‘spiritual’ self, however, begins with the Trinity and makes the Trinity its object in all of its motions and judgments.

Sterry does not strictly separate the natural from the spiritual lives. Rather, as he shows in his treatise *On Virtue* the higher circles of the soul carry the divine Life and Harmony into the lower circles in order to place the image of its true self upon them. The mutual embrace of the immanent self and transcendent Self within the *imago Dei* is the innate measure by which the soul tunes, converts, and shapes its own concepts and desires of things. As the soul is the living image of the Trinity, it is also a living sun in a world of shadows and appearances. As the human mind circles around the divine Mind, knowing it and judging it as its true self, it makes its Triune beginning of Self-in-self the pattern of all its motions and creative judgments. First, it judges or makes a unity out of all variety by seeing the many in their single Source. Then it makes a variety out of the unity of things by seeing them in the divine Variety. And finally it unites the variety and the unity of shade/light, matter/form, act/potency at every level of being to make a mutual embrace of unity-in-variety. This tri-fold motion and judgment of the soul is the intellectual motion characteristic of ‘person’, the necessary requirement and definition of intellectual ‘life’, the definitive quality of human ‘virtue’, and the essential condition for human freedom.

When a person measures and judges all things from the inward measure of divine personhood, one is able to tune the darkness of potency in oneself to the light of actuality, not by removing potency, but by shaping it, illuminating it, and placing it into a harmonious embrace of shade and light. Sterry repeatedly refers to the human person as a musician and an artist precisely because of each person’s innate ability to illuminate the shades of the world and self without

destroying them.<sup>162</sup> When the intellectual spirit is perfectly united to the divine Mind in all of its judgments the soul puts off the desires of the body by shaping them into images of their true Unity, Variety, and Union. By repeatedly turning inward and judging all things and desires by its innate Trinitarian pattern, the soul receives a greater share in the divine Light, Life, and Virtue. And, so each spiritual person lives according to the natural moral norms and precepts – even observing the golden mean – as one measures others by the same eternal standard and Measure by which one measures oneself. As we will see in the next chapter, Sterry’s distinction between the higher/spiritual and lower/natural life of the soul and their mutual embrace in the *imago Dei* forms the metaphysical basis for his distinction between faith and reason.

---

<sup>162</sup> *DFW*, 23: “So in one indivisible Act, or Idea of beauty in the Spirit of the Painter, lie together all the differing lines, lights, shades, and colours, by which that Idea reflecteth it self in Picture upon the eyes and spirits of the Beholder.”

## Chapter 4

### ‘Ye only waking sight of Things’: A Religious Ethic

In Glasse, and Spring, O wonder! Wee  
With Ravisht Soules this Virtue see;  
[...] It is Love’s Deity, which doth  
Shine thus upon Itselfe in Both  
The God Himselfe doth act our parts  
Assumes our Shapes, dwells in our Hearts.<sup>1</sup>

For Peter Sterry, Christian religion is a way of life that mirrors the pattern and eternal motion of the Trinity and the heavenly quire of angels in celestial beatitude. By faith, each Christian lives a “double Life” on two planes of existence at once, experiencing the whole breadth of reality, both infinite and finite, time and eternity in one spiritual sensation and vision.<sup>2</sup> In his personal letters Sterry recounts how each morning he awakens early to take a walk, usually through Lord Lisle’s garden and often beyond Richmond Palace to the top of Richmond Hill, near Sterry’s house in West Sheen. As he travels up the hill, Sterry sees himself with the divine spectacles of the spiritual senses, ascending “to the house and Mount of God.”<sup>3</sup> The metaphor of the ascent to the holy mountain of God is an analogy frequently used by Christian mystics to describe the ascent of the soul to union with God. The Pseudo-Dionysius, for example models his *Mystical Theology* on Moses’ ascent of Mt. Sinai. When Moses approaches the mountain he purifies himself with a sacrifice, then he ascends to the summit where he receives illumination and union with God in a

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter Sterry, *The Repose at Beau-Plaine*, in *SW*, 195.

<sup>2</sup> *SW*, 78.

<sup>3</sup> *SW*, 80.

divine darkness beyond knowing and unknowing.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, Sterry recounts his ascent to the “Mountaine of Spices above on Richmond Hill” as a walk in which he meets with Jesus Christ “in every Darknesse, Herb or dust” in which he discovers “a new heaven, where wee meete with the divine beauty” and see “ourselves too” in a glorious palace “as heavenly Princes” in Christ.<sup>5</sup>

In this chapter we will see how Sterry promotes religion as an intellectual way of life, which incorporates the divine principles and rules for living a moral and spiritual life on earth by means of the ancient doctrine of the spiritual senses. Rather than reducing the moral life of the Christian to obedience to divine commands alone, Sterry shows that his understanding of sin and salvation is united to his universal philosophical method and ethic. For Sterry, the purpose of religion is to provide a passageway beyond conceptual knowledge and civic virtue, not for the sake of abandoning cognition and earthly happiness but for purifying it and enlarging it by providing access to a super-intellectual perception and judgment that does not merely discern the goodness or badness of a particular choice but the nearness or distance of all concepts and loves to the supreme Good. The spiritual vision of faith is this divine perception, as it is the triadic lens uniting knowing and unknowing, by which the soul measures and judges all appearances of things in its natural image. By faith, the saints are united to Christ, the divine Measure, whose incarnation, death, and resurrection, purifies and unites the vision of God and man in one immediate vision. This spiritual vision is the way that a Christian finds inner happiness amidst the conjectural appearances of sin, sorrow, and shame that one finds in oneself after Adam’s fall. Through faith, hope, and love, the soul finds itself to be filled with the fullness of divine Virtue and perfectly self-sufficient in all of its desires. With the divine vision of faith, each Christian descends into the body

---

<sup>4</sup> See Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystica Theologia* 3, in *Corpus Dionysiacum II. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, De coelesti hierarchia, De ecclesiastic hierarchia, De mystica theologia, Epistulae*, ed. Günter Heil and Adolf Martin Ritter (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> *SW*, 74, 80.

to convert every darkness into a divine masterpiece in shades of darkness and light, to experience with Christ, joy mixed with suffering, love in the midst of loss, and eternal life in death.

### **True Religion and the Spiritual Senses**

Due in part to their belief that the basic principles of natural wisdom can be expounded by a single simplified method, early modern encyclopedists often viewed the uneducated layperson as more in tune with the language of the natural world than the typical academic. One can see this interest in the ‘idiotia’ in Nicholas Cusanus’s various dialogues with the layman and in the circle of Jacques Lefevre d’Étaples with their interest in Llullist simplification.<sup>6</sup> For Sterry, the layperson relies on a common wisdom that is closer to the nature of true religion because true religion is not determined by intellectual veils, such as the letter of the Scriptures, doctrine, or concepts in which the Truth of the Gospel appears.<sup>7</sup> True religion, rather, is founded on the inward spiritual ‘treasure’ discovered within the conjectures of outward religion and virtue.<sup>8</sup> The treasure transcends the perception of both body and soul, as its discovery necessitates an inward sense of Truth beyond conjecture in “the Sweetness and Vigor of Christ’s Spirit working within us.” The one who attempts to grasp the substance of Truth in finite concepts is like a child “labouring to empty the Sea with a Cockle-Shell.”<sup>9</sup> Human notions are mere opinions in comparison with the divine substance, and so there can be no proportion “between our Opinions of Truth, when they are rightest, and the Truth itself,” which is “uncreated Excellency ... the Beauty of the Truth of Jesus

---

<sup>6</sup> See Richard J. Oosterhoff, “Idiotiae, Mathematics, and Artisans: The Untutored Mind and the Discovery of Nature in the Fabrist Circle” *Intellectual History Review* 24.3 (2014): 301-319.

<sup>7</sup> *AGM*, 407.

<sup>8</sup> *AGM*, 407.

<sup>9</sup> *AGM*, 409.

Christ, as it is in Jesus Christ.”<sup>10</sup> And so, “[God] often leaves Men with high Notions, and large Comprehensions of Things ... in the dark, when poor, ignorant, low-capacitated Men walk in the Light and Sunshine.”<sup>11</sup>

The ‘idiot’ is able to walk in the eternal light of the Godhead because faith is a spiritual sense, which enables every saint to know the ‘sweetness’ of Christ beyond knowledge, in a true and deep learned ignorance.<sup>12</sup> The notion of spiritual senses entered into the vocabulary of Western literature through the influence of Philo of Alexandria and received acceptance and development in the theology of Origen. A spiritual sense is, simply speaking, a perception of eternal realities through an intellectual faculty that transcends the capacity of other cognitive faculties, yet is analogous to the operation of the five physical senses.<sup>13</sup> As Karl Rahner notes in his seminal treatment of the spiritual senses in Origen’s theology, Origen’s ‘divine sense’ includes “sight for the contemplation of immaterial forms ... taste in order to savour the living bread which came down from heaven ... a sense of smell, with which Paul perceived those realities which caused him to describe himself as a sweet odour of Christ,” etc.<sup>14</sup> The language of spiritual sensation has often been used in a strictly metaphorical sense in Christian writings, often with reference to the singular sense of sight experienced in the beatific vision. Rahner stipulates that a true doctrine of the spiritual senses recognizes a real relation between the physical and divine senses and posits

---

<sup>10</sup> *AGM*, 408.

<sup>11</sup> *AGM*, 414.

<sup>12</sup> *AGM*, 327: Faith is “a right knowledge of nothing.”

<sup>13</sup> A definition along these lines is proposed by Paul Gavryliuk and Sarah Coakley: “[A] ‘spiritual senses’ is an umbrella term covering a variety of overlapping, yet distinct, expressions in which ‘sense’ in general or a particular sensory modality (vision, audition, olfaction, touch or taste) is typically qualified by reference to spirit (e.g. ‘eyes of the spirit’, ‘spiritual touch’).” See Gavryliuk and Coakley, eds., *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Karl Rahner, “The ‘Spiritual Senses’ According to Origen,” trans. David Morland in *Theological Investigations*, vol. xvi (New York: Seaburg Press, 1979), 83.



five corresponding instruments for perceiving immaterial realities. So, if an author refers to these five ways of perception, “we are justified in taking into account texts which only refer to a single faculty.”<sup>15</sup> And, as Mark McInroy points out, with reference to the principles outlined by Augustin-François Poulain, the spiritual senses “resemble their corporeal counterparts in that they discern a presence, be it of God or other ‘spiritual’ realities.”<sup>16</sup>

Peter Sterry does not offer a systematic treatment of the spiritual senses, but his notion of spiritual perception meets the above qualifications for what constitutes an analogous relationship between spiritual and physical sensation. For Sterry, a spiritual sense is a mystical, intellectual and intuitive awareness of the immediate union of divine and human perception, the infinite Original seen and seeing through the finite image, which constitutes the *imago Dei*.<sup>17</sup> Any vision of an object requires some proportion between the object and the eye that takes it in. In Christ and the saints through him, God proportions himself to himself, so that the subject and the object of vision are the same. The likeness of God in the soul is the soul’s divine part, which is “the most immediate reflection of the Divine Unity without it self, and so at once a Divine Looking-Glass, in which it most immediately contemplates it self, and a Divine Eye, which it feasts with it self, setting it self fully in it.”<sup>18</sup> In its own unity the soul “seeth, feeleth, enjoyeth God in his Unity, which is his proper Essence ... transcending all similitudes” by means of a sympathy and sense “transcending all Sense, Understanding, or Expression.”<sup>19</sup> Sterry compares spiritual vision to the immediacy of

---

<sup>15</sup> Rahner, “The Spiritual Senses,” 82.

<sup>16</sup> Mark J. McInroy, “Origen of Alexandria,” in Gavryliuk and Coakley, eds., *The Spiritual Senses*, 26.; See also Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, trans. L. L. Yorke Smith (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1950), 88.

<sup>17</sup> *WOG*, 30: “So is it in every act of Spiritual Sense; The Spirit of the Lord witnesseth together with our Spirits, saith St. Paul, Rom. 8. The Spirit of the Lord, and our Spirit, like the Soul and the Eye, joyntly concur in every act of Spiritual Knowledge. The Lord knoweth in us, we know in the Lord that we are his. Thus this Union, which is the Principle of Life in us, is in like manner the Seal of Light.”

<sup>18</sup> *DFW*, 108.

<sup>19</sup> *DFW*, 108.

reasoning from first principles. Just as first principles are assumed, not demonstrated in every argument, so God, “the only Principle of Demonstration,” is “the Intellectual Sun, God unvail[ing] Himself in our Spirits,”<sup>20</sup> through all of our intellectual perceptions.

The spiritual senses in the human soul are mediated by Christ’s “mediatory image.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the spiritual senses are one with Christ’s mediating vision, which is God proportioning himself to himself in a created form. This mediatory perception is necessary because, as Proclus says, the divine Wisdom is the *πληρότης των ὄντων* (fullness of being).<sup>22</sup> This implies there can be “no vacuity, no breach, no gap in the Divine Wisdom or Work.”<sup>23</sup> Also according to Proclus in his “Platonick Divinity,” two extremes cannot pass into each other without a medium:

So it seemeth necessary that between the uncreated glories, and ye created figures of those glories, which are as two extremes, infiniteness and finiteness, infinitely divided one from another, there should be a medium, or a mediatory state, in which the uncreated glories descend to figure themselves in the created glories by a person or spirit which uniteth both in itself.<sup>24</sup>

There must be a mean or mediating state of vision between infinite and finite vision or there would either be an unbreakable gap between the two or a spilling over of one into the essence of the other.<sup>25</sup> In his incarnate form Christ is the “*Medium participationis*,” that is, the middle state between infinite and finite vision that participates in both, and is capable of uniting both without confusion or division.<sup>26</sup> Like Nicholas Cusanus, who depicted the coincidence of opposites by

---

<sup>20</sup> DFW, 44.

<sup>21</sup> DFW, 209.

<sup>22</sup> DFW, 197.

<sup>23</sup> DFW, 197.

<sup>24</sup> EC MS 291, 120.

<sup>25</sup> DFW, 197: “If there were any vacuity in the Wisdom or Work of God, which is the Birth and Design of his Wisdom: There would be a wound upon it, and a deformity in the face of it, by the dissolution of the Continuity.”

<sup>26</sup> DFW, 197.

means of an omnivoyant icon of Christ's face that appears to move while it remains stationary, Sterry also sees the mediatory image and vision of Christ as "the beautiful and Divine Face of each part, of the whole in each part [which] standeth and looketh at once every way in every part of the whole, and in the whole."<sup>27</sup>

For this reason, spiritual vision or sight is the most important spiritual sense for Sterry, though he does reference the five-fold sensorium.<sup>28</sup> The vision of the spirit enfolds and unfolds all of the soul's powers and spiritual senses, as the higher circle enfolds the lower.<sup>29</sup> The vision of God in the soul is a sweet vision encompassing all the senses in a sensation comparable to the sweet taste of honey and wine, or the smell of fresh flowers.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Sterry places 'Sweetness' among the divine names of the Trinity.<sup>31</sup> Spiritual vision possesses eternal realities as truly present within the soul, where the "Eternal Unity is both the Eye and the Object in this Spirit."<sup>32</sup> This 'singularity' of vision in Christ – or God proportioning himself to himself in the soul – is what Sterry refers to as the 'heavenly image' in the soul, which is a heavenly garden full of spiritual sights, smells, and sounds.<sup>33</sup> As he and his wife Frances take their daily walks up the path to Richmond Hill, Sterry tells his daughter in a letter, they are truly walking and talking with Christ, who is really present with them in their spiritual garden. "Dow wee not every Day gather some

---

<sup>27</sup> *DFW*, 225; See Cusanus, *De visione dei*, preface.

<sup>28</sup> *SW*, 130; *AGM*, 172: Sterry affirms that "The Spiritual Senses of a Saint, differ one from another."

<sup>29</sup> *SW*, 135-6: "How beautifull and chearfull a world should wee live in, if thus at once wee saw the higher Circles as once with all their severall Glories descending into the lower Circles ... heightening themselves beyond all bounds to an Infinitenes."; *CCC*, 26: "But when Christ comes, the Outward Man with His Faculties and Senses shall be taken in by the Intellectuall and Spirituall Man, as the Tabernacle was into the Temple. So Both shall see the same Glory, by the same Light."

<sup>30</sup> *RRR*, 156: "Do but tast this honey, the Sweetness of the Love of Christ, and see how the Eyes of your minds will be Enlightened, to a Discovery of Spiritual and Heavenly Things."

<sup>31</sup> See *DFW*, 44-5, where Sterry refers to the Trinity as Goodness, Beauty, and Sweetness.

<sup>32</sup> *RRR*, 214; See also *RRR*, 247: "[T]hat is Gods own Light by way of eminency, peculiarity, and distinction from every other Light ... Every thing seen in this Light is a Divine Wonder; a Divine Mystery, Incomprehensible, for the greatness of the Glory, to sense and reason; but familiar, and plain to the Spiritual Eye, as bred up with it, and continually before it, known to it from the Beginning."

<sup>33</sup> *SW*, 115.

Spirituell Flowers, as wee walke here, and make garlands, and set them on each others heads?”<sup>34</sup> He tells his daughter that Richmond Hill will soon be blossoming with “our pretty sweet violets” but “in Christ, our violets, and Flowers already Appaere everywhere.”<sup>35</sup> Here one discovers the contrast between the physical and spiritual senses, when in the absence of fragrant flowers to see and smell, one may still discover a spiritual sense and vision of Christ through the union of presence and absence. Indeed, though feeling is a duller sense than seeing, “Thou mayst feel warm and sweet Workings of the Lord in thy Heart, and yet not understand nor see him.”<sup>36</sup> For Sterry, the spiritual senses utilize the imagination and the physical senses so that the natural world experienced through the instrument of the body provides the analogue for an experience of the transcendent. Jesus’ resurrected physical body, for example, truly reveals his spiritual form to his disciples, “not as shadowy Images to shadowy senses, but as the essential, eternal Truth, the Spirit and Life of them, as Mysteries and Glories unvailed, and sealing themselves upon the spiritual senses.”<sup>37</sup>

True religion, happiness (*eudaimonia*), and virtue, all originate in the intellectual perception of the spiritual senses. Quoting Romans 8:7, Sterry affirms that “to be Spiritually minded, is Life and Peace,” which he interprets to mean:

A Mind enlightened with Spiritual Objects, whereof God is the general and chief, comprehends things, as united to one Principle of Life in itself, diffuseth and spreads itself in the Workings of this Life thro’ all. Thus all Things are to it Life and Peace, the sweet Harmony of a Divine Life.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> *SW*, 68.

<sup>35</sup> *SW*, 79.

<sup>36</sup> *AGM*, 172.

<sup>37</sup> *DFW*, 243-4: “So now the Lord Jesus by these Signs to the outward senses at once opened, fortified, heightened, enlarged the Understanding, and the spiritual senses of the Apostles, and presented himself to them with his whole Manhood, Soul and Body, risen into the Glory of his Mediatory Form, and of his Divine Nature.”

<sup>38</sup> *AGM*, 191.

Spiritual vision is the knowledge of Christ in the soul, which being one with Christ's own self-knowledge, is a living knowledge. It is the activity of the "good Man" who "gathers up all Things into one, in the Spirit of Christ within him, as in a Center of Glory" and then sends all things forth from himself "as Fellow-Beams of Glory," descending with them and enjoying them as one self with oneself.<sup>39</sup> Spiritual vision is both Christ's vision – the reconciling of infinite and finite in the soul – and the human soul's own vision and ability to convert extremes to their eternal Harmony through participation in Christ. And so, "Religion is a Discovery in the Soul, of God, as the Eternal Spirit, the Quickning Spirit; as bringing forth Himself, as working his own works, as fulfilling his Joy."<sup>40</sup> The soul that experiences the joy of God in itself becomes self-sufficient, not requiring or desiring to possess anything outside of itself because, "Thou now comprehendest all things in an uncorruptible Beauty, Love, and Joy in thy self."<sup>41</sup> Through this sense of divine Beauty, the soul looks upon all outward things in the purity and self-sufficiency of the *imago Dei*, converting all things to their eternal forms, as various appearances of Christ in one's inward spiritual garden.<sup>42</sup>

### **The Darkness of Conjecture and 'Carnal Sense'**

Sterry often compares the present life to the frightening prospects of a nightmare from which one cannot awaken and in which one receives tormenting images sent from demonic messengers. In this life, each person experiences not only the darkness of conjecture but also the loneliness, painfulness, and sorrow of sin and death brought about by the contrariety of good and evil in one's

---

<sup>39</sup> *AGM*, 191.

<sup>40</sup> *RRR*, 107.

<sup>41</sup> *RRR*, 445.

<sup>42</sup> *RRR*, 446: "Thy Spiritual Principle is the Divine Ground, out of which all these Plants of Paradise grow up within thee, as thine own Plants. Thy spiritual Sense and Savour, is a perpetual Feeding and Feasting upon the Fruits of Paradise."

own desires, vision, and choices. This apparent loss of vision through the blindness and darkness of evil displays the infinite gap between God and his image within the soul, and it threatens to undo the just and harmonious order of God's good creation. Now that the divine image has become disordered and ugly, "[t]he evil of suffering" has become "the proper way, in the Universal Order, by which the disorderly Spirit, with its disorders, returneth into order, to possess and enjoy in it self the Divine Beauty and Musick of the whole."<sup>43</sup>

Sterry understands the state of humanity after Adam's fall in an Augustinian and Reformed sense, not in terms of an absolute depravity of all goodness, but as the inherited corruption of original sin and deformity, which renders each person incapable of achieving divine vision by one's own efforts.<sup>44</sup> He also sees sin in a philosophical sense, as ignorance of one's true self in Christ. This is not, however, an ignorance of conceptual knowledge (via the natural image) but a loss of the spiritual sense and personal knowledge of Christ in the soul, which is the immediate unity of the *imago Dei*. The veil of the angelic image (i.e., intellect and reason) in which he was created, prevented Adam from enjoying the spiritual vision of Christ. Adam was created in this shadowy state in part due to his own choice, as each member of the body of Christ in their heavenly state prior to creation, were given foreknowledge of and chose to participate in God's plan to create the world, permit the fall, and bring about the restoration and perfection of all things in Christ.<sup>45</sup>

Adam was created with his vision blurred by a veil of conjecture in order that he might understand the complete disproportion between infinite and finite being and thereby become dissatisfied with the limitations of his natural image, that is, the created image of essence,

---

<sup>43</sup> DFW, 162.

<sup>44</sup> For a correction of the popular interpretation of the Reformed view of original sin as absolute depravity, see Luca Baschera, "Total Depravity? The Consequences of Original Sin in John Calvin and Later Reformed Theology," in *Calvinus clarissimus theologus. Papers of the Tenth International Congress on Calvin Research*, Herman J. Selderhuis, ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2012), 37-58.

<sup>45</sup> DFW, 34.

understanding, and will. This will be contrasted with the ‘spiritual’ image, which is the union of the natural image with Christ, the divine Image. For Sterry, Adam’s fall is not a necessary consequence of the original conjectural vision of his natural image. In fact, God originally provided Adam with an alternative pathway through the earthly veil of conjecture into a spiritual sense of things. Sterry appeals to Aristotle’s notion of poetic tragedy to describe the way in which God illuminates the soul with divine vision. In every “Poetical History” – here Sterry mentions Homer, Virgil, Tasso, and Spencer – the tragic hero is carried to the “utmost extremity, into a state where they seem altogether incapable of any return to Beauty or Bliss.”<sup>46</sup> Then, the hero is raised up from the throws of adversity and tragedy to the highest state of glory “by just degrees of harmonious proportions.”<sup>47</sup>

The best poetry follows this pattern of ‘untying’ and ‘tying’ the knot of the story in imitation of the divine Wisdom. Indeed, God’s creation is the original poem, or ποίημα τοῦ θεοῦ as St. Paul says.<sup>48</sup> Poetry imitates the transcendent Beauty of divine number, as it represents the diffusion of unity into variety and the union of unity and variety in the final resolution of the story. For Aristotle the reversal of fortune in tragic poetry “arouses the human feeling” in the audience.<sup>49</sup> For Sterry, the unity of infinite and finite in Christ presents the soul with a “Beauty infinitely surpassing all Measures, all Capacities in the soul” where souls “ravish’d with unexpressible Loves and Joys, most gladly loose themselves” in the mutual embrace between God and the soul.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, the unity of the beginning with the end in tragedy presents the soul with a ‘discovery’ – Sterry refers to Aristotle’s language, “Διὰ ἀνάγνωσιν” – which “transporteth us most out of our

---

<sup>46</sup> *DFW*, 179.

<sup>47</sup> *DFW*, 179.

<sup>48</sup> Ephesians 2:10.

<sup>49</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1456a20.

<sup>50</sup> *AGM*, 436.

selves unto the kindest and most ravishing touches and senses of the Divinity.”<sup>51</sup> So, for Sterry God gives Adam a vision of tragedy in the darkness of his finite image prior to the fall in order that the knot of the natural image might be untied and tied again in an immediate spiritual sense of reality outside of any veil of conjecture.

God introduced the divine law to Adam’s conscience in order to show him the extreme disproportion between infinite and finite being, the nothingness of created being in comparison to the divine Being.<sup>52</sup> Creaturely nothingness is not the privation of being but the potency of being, which is the essential nature of a being created *ex nihilo*, as Augustine argues.<sup>53</sup> For Sterry, the law is not merely the Ten Commandments but any imposition of an action as an antecedent condition of attaining a good.<sup>54</sup> The conditionality inherent in finite being – the natural longing for an infinite good beyond the proportion of finite capacities – presented Adam with a choice between his own nothingness (potency) and the divine fullness of being (omnipotence). In order to pass the test, Adam was to give up his natural image and heed the voice of God, which said, “Abide ... with thy darkness in the Divine Light, as a shadow of the Divine Glory, in the simplicity of the Divine Unity; so shall this Unity, this Glory be a Tree of Life to thee; thou shalt eat of it, and live for ever.”<sup>55</sup> Adam should have waited for God to supply a mediatory vision (between infinite and finite), which is the heavenly image of Christ. In Adam’s vision of tragedy, however, God withdrew the divine light from Adam’s natural image, from which his vision descended “to the

---

<sup>51</sup> *DFW*, 179.

<sup>52</sup> *DFW*, 177: “The Law comes, this distinguisheth between the Light of God, and the darkness of the Creature in man. This is the temptation, and the state of tryal.”

<sup>53</sup> Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XII.6.; *DFW*, 118: “This nothingness, in the nature of the Creature, is not to be understood a meer simple nothing; for this hath no existence ... This nothingness, of which we speak, or Not-Being, is a contrariety to Being ... This is the Contrariety it self, which is a part of the Variety of things in the Unity of the whole.”

<sup>54</sup> *DFW*, 173: “Whatever imposeth upon us any thing to be done by us, as an antecedent condition to any consequent good, is the Law opposed to the Gospel.”

<sup>55</sup> *DFW*, 177.



lowest state of the unity, which while it was preserved, preserved all things in theyr purity, and in paradise” but when removed “[it] is the breache of the unity by the contrariety, and enmity, which is the fallen state of things, where they lye in sin and death.”<sup>56</sup>

When Adam chose to glorify his own created self-image rather than wait for the mediatory image of Christ, the angelic veil of intellect and reason became even further darkened by the addition of another veil, namely, the ‘carnal sense’ of self-love and idolatry, which is the ‘savor’ of death rather than eternal life. A carnal sense is the lustful descent of the soul into the dark and miry depths of the rational and sensitive circles without passing through the *medium participationis* (i.e., Christ in the divine circle), thus resulting in the fragmentation of the soul’s unity into contrariety.<sup>57</sup> In its carnal state the soul gazes upon itself, and like Narcissus it sees its reflection but “forgets it to be itselfe, forgets that itselfe is the face, the shadow & the fountaine, so it falls into a fond love of itself in its owne shadowie figure of itselfe. So it languisheth and dys, becoming only a shadow of itselfe in which itselfe with all its superior and true glories ly buried.”<sup>58</sup> Since the human person is a microcosm, combining heavenly and earthly realities, sin unties the knot between the two realites and creates a perpetual war of matter against form and flesh against spirit. Within the human intellect “this war and tyranny is morral and intellectual in ye understanding and wills by undivided, yet diverse, appearances and affections with mutual repugnances and conflicts.”<sup>59</sup>

According to Sterry, God permits the contrariety of evil in the world for the same reason that he tested Adam, namely, to humble each person and prepare them for the mediatory image by

---

<sup>56</sup> EC MS 291, 54.

<sup>57</sup> DFW, 118: “[Creatuere nothingness] taken apart in it self, is the breach of the Unity and the Harmony, the first and blackest ground of all Discord, Division, Darkness, Enmity, Death, of all the evils of sin and sufferings.”; See also *AGM*, 446.

<sup>58</sup> EC MS 291, 71.

<sup>59</sup> EC MS 291, 54-5.

displaying the disproportion between infinite and finite being. There is no evil in God *per se*, since evil is the privation of being, but the contrariety and darkness of evil reveals to humanity the transcendent vastness of the divine Variety, where privation is no longer privation but is “heightned far above all imperfection.”<sup>60</sup> The philosophers confirm that God “comprehends Originally in himself not only all Beings, but all privation of Being” so that the privation of being that permits the entrance of evil is presupposed (by negation) in the first principle of being.<sup>61</sup> Sterry resolutely affirms that God is not the author of evil, though Sterry certainly places this resolution in tension when he repeatedly asserts in his *Freedom of the Will* that the first principle of sin in Adam and all humanity is “Grace it self, in its first Principle, with-holding, or with-drawing it self.”<sup>62</sup> Yet, at the same time Sterry argues that God’s withholding of grace is only the cause of sin *per accidens*, as sin does not have an efficient cause but a deficient cause.<sup>63</sup> Just as the withdrawing of the sun brings in the night but does not indicate a defect in the sun, and as the waning tide, which reveals black and pungent mud below, does not indicate an imperfection in the water.<sup>64</sup> Sin arises from humanity’s material nothingness, but matter and the body are not evil or pure privations, as their shadowiness is only a shadow “compared with the eternal Glories: yet they

---

<sup>60</sup> *DFW*, 146; Sterry explains “eminent” in *CFC*, Epistle Dedicatory, fol. 8r.: “Darkness, and Light, are Both in God; not onely Representatively, but Really; not in their Ideas onely, but their Identities; yet not Materially, nor Formally, but Eminently; after a more Perfect maner than they are in themselves; as in the Supream Unity of All Perfections.”

<sup>61</sup> *DFW*, 151: “[D]arkness, night, absence and death in their place and time, are Forms of good, although not Forms of Being and Divine Forms.”

<sup>62</sup> *DFW*, 153; This is likely the reason why Richard Baxter accused Sterry of promoting “Universal-necessary Predetermination.” See Baxter, *Catholicke Theologie* (London: Robert White, 1675), I.108.

<sup>63</sup> *DFW*, 141; Sterry refers to the withdrawal of grace as a consequent and accidental effect of sin (*DFW*, 153); According to D.P. Walker, Sterry embraces a Manichean view of good and evil. See Walker, *The Decline of Hell and seventeenth-century ideas of eternal torment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), 120; Sterry, however, argues that Manicheism is exploded “by the voice of reason it self,” (*DFW*, 141).

<sup>64</sup> *DFW*, 114.

[have] a real Being, a real existency in their own place and order.”<sup>65</sup> Sin represents the absence of proportion, harmony, and order because, “There can be no Order, where there is no First or Last, no beginning or End.”<sup>66</sup> God permits evil and sin, therefore, that in fighting against it and tying up the knot of discord, he might reveal his own vision to humanity and restore the reflection of the Triune image within the human person.

According to Sterry, Adam’s chief sin was self-love, which is “[the] establishing of a Proper Interest divided from the general Interest of things in the God-head.”<sup>67</sup> Self-love was Adam’s own narcissistic version of the inward turn, the “Cloven Foot” by which he withdrew himself from the divine Unity “into a Circle, and Center of his own.”<sup>68</sup> Thus, Adam was converted into the “Image of the Devil,” which corrupts the entire image of God in the human person with the “Power of Division.” This divisive power divides itself into the seven deadly sins, which are (in Sterry’s language), self-love, lust, covetousness, pride, envy, passion, and enmity or despair. As he stands underneath the power of darkness and division Adam becomes a “Living Tomb” and a false unity, trying to draw all things into himself for his own private interest as he is “perpetually dividing, and Tearing all things, but most of all himself.”<sup>69</sup> Each person knows evil and sin by means of one’s own unity, which shows division to be a disproportion and ugliness in the outward form or appearance of things, whereas “Darkness in harmony with Light makes a Beauty.”<sup>70</sup> Where God is both one and many by a distinction within the Unity, Satan is one and many “by a grating Division without Unity.”<sup>71</sup> The power of division within the soul reveals two rules that “measure

---

<sup>65</sup> *DFW*, 213; Sterry affirms that one will find “in scripture flesh and spirit opposed to one another, not Body, and spirit,” (*SW*, 145).

<sup>66</sup> *AGM*, 268.

<sup>67</sup> *RRR*, 10.

<sup>68</sup> *RRR*, 10.

<sup>69</sup> *RRR*, 12.

<sup>70</sup> *RRR*, 14.

<sup>71</sup> *RRR*, 9.

out every Sin.” First, “Every choice of an Act or Object, that draws you down, out of the Light of God; is Sin.”<sup>72</sup> The attempt to establish one’s own private interest above all others causes a person to leave the “Supream Beauty” and worship “empty Shows of Beauty,” by which “we are transform’d into every base, inferiour Image.” The second rule for measuring sin is, “The Divided enjoyment of any particular Image apart from the Image of God; is Sin.” Since all things are united in the image of God in the human person, to remove even one piece from the image in order to enjoy it by itself is to break the whole unity, as each piece is meant to reflect the whole of the divine being.<sup>73</sup>

The image of God is not completely broken by the fall in Sterry’s view, as the immediate union between God and the soul is the essential nature of humanity. Rather, God’s image in humanity is “hid beneath the ruines of the fall” in the divine seed that God implants within the soul through his grace. This ‘common grace’ is Christ in a seed of unity that renews and maintains the shadowy “essence of the intellectual Spirit” in all of humanity.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, Sterry says, the seed of nature and of grace are both the same seed, for as St. Paul affirms, “We also are his Off-spring.”<sup>75</sup> Even the wicked in hell have the seed of God and a ‘sense of the divine Harmony’ through their sufferings, and as Sterry believes God will eventually use this seed of unity to restore all of those condemned to Hell to eternal life.<sup>76</sup> Even the Holy Spirit is present in every creature, where he

---

<sup>72</sup> *RRR*, 16.

<sup>73</sup> Sterry is most likely dependent on Augustine’s distinction between *usus* and *fruitio* here. See *De doctrina Christiana*, Bk. 1, 3.3.; and Walter Hannam, “Ad illud ubi permanendum est: the metaphysics of St Augustine’s *usus-fruitio* distinction in relation to love of neighbour, *De doctrina christiana*, I,” in Maurice Wiles, Edward Yarnold, and P Parvis, eds., *St Augustine and His Opponents: Other Latin Writers* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 169-173.

<sup>74</sup> *DFW*, 7; Sterry says common grace is “supernaturally communicated by virtue of the heavenly seed,” (*DFW*, 176).

<sup>75</sup> *RRR*, 358: “The Apostle ... confirmeth the Testimony of Nature to this Truth; the Unity of the Divine Seed in Nature. God is One not in Regeneration only, but in the Creation also.”

<sup>76</sup> EC MS 291, 102, and also 98: “The seede of god immediately puts forth itself in them ... [in which] they feele their eternal union with god & relation to him, they discern this seed to be themselves in truth, their proper substance and person, their first principle.” Sterry adheres to the patristic doctrine of

“only changeth his Appearances and Effulgencies there.”<sup>77</sup> The natural image, however, is both infinitely disproportional to the divine nature and at enmity with it. In order to fully restore the divine Life in the human soul, therefore, God appears in a form of wrath, in the condemnation of the law, which consumes the confusion and division of the flesh in order to “Collect all things into their proper Unities.”<sup>78</sup> The fire of the divine wrath swallows up all discord and contrariety as the divine Harmony opposes itself to the contrariety of evil.<sup>79</sup> In order to ensure that humanity is not fully consumed in the eternal blaze of wrath, however, God himself becomes human and places the whole of his divinity into a human nature, thereby divinizing the entirety of the human life in all of its pleasures as well as its pains.

### Spiritual Virtue and Happiness

Now that tragedy has struck humanity, as it were in a tragic poem, suffering has become the universal way to restore order, spiritual virtue and vision to the soul, so that every image of God in creation might be returned “into their first and Divine Principles.”<sup>80</sup> In the incarnation of Jesus Christ the divine Original becomes one with universal humanity and sets itself in opposition to all sin and contrariety, as “*Contrarium remedium est contrarium*.”<sup>81</sup> Christ reduces all disorder and division throughout creation into order and unity in a three-fold action, which corresponds to the

---

*apokatastasis*. See his *The state of wicked men after this life is mixt of evill & good things*, in EC MS 291, 96-105; and Louise Hickman, “‘Love is all and God is love’: Universalism in Peter Sterry (1613-1672) and Jeremiah White (1630-1707),” in *‘All shall be well’: Explorations in Universalism and Christian Theology from Origen to Moltmann*, ed. Gregory MacDonald, (Cambridge, U.K.: James Clarke & Co., 2011), 95-115.

<sup>77</sup> DFW, 75.

<sup>78</sup> RRR, 13.

<sup>79</sup> DFW, 158: Sterry refers to the Pseudo-Dionysius to affirm that “God reduceth into order those things which are out of order, and so establisheth all in good and beauty.”

<sup>80</sup> DFW, 238.

<sup>81</sup> DFW, 160; Also, DFW, 232: Christ is “an universal Person.”

Trinitarian order of unity, variety, and union as well as Pseudo-Dionysius' order of purification, illumination, and perfection. More importantly, however, Christ's three-fold restoration gives birth to the spiritual senses, first by awaking the soul's natural vision, then in the vision of grace overshadowing nature, and finally in the union of divine and human vision in the resurrection of Christ. First, Christ's incarnation puts the divine Original into the natural image, thus purifying the 'bodily' senses (i.e., the lower senses enfolded within reason). In his incarnate form Christ reveals that he is "an universal Person,"<sup>82</sup> the seed of both nature and grace, "maintaining the Reminders of the Divine Image in nature obscured."<sup>83</sup> Christ is the "supream Harmony" and Beauty who in his incarnation and life is "the God of Order discovering himself, as a sacred and eternal Root at the bottom of the disorder."<sup>84</sup>

Secondly, Christ prepares the natural image and vision of his soul for its elevation to spiritual vision and virtue. He does this by an illumination of both darkness and light. On the cross, Christ makes a compensation that "turneth the Discord into a Concord" by becoming the "mark of opposition and contrariety" to the fiery darts and arrows of his own justice and wrath.<sup>85</sup> In his death Christ experiences the dark night of the soul, yet he is able to see through the dark cloud of the divine wrath because he makes the darkness the light by which he sees the "supream Love" contending with itself for the sake of humanity.<sup>86</sup> In his death Christ unties the knot of harmony between his humanity and divinity by descending to the lowest state of being so that "swallowing up all in the most beautiful and blissful flame" he might receive all of "our Sins and Sorrows, all

---

<sup>82</sup> *DFW*, 232.

<sup>83</sup> *DFW*, 231.

<sup>84</sup> *DFW*, 162: Sterry compares the incarnation to brimstone which pagans believed had the power of purification due to its combination of divine and material elements.

<sup>85</sup> *DFW*, 162.

<sup>86</sup> *DFW*, 218: "This is eternal Love in a disguise. All pleasantnesses in the Face of the supream Love and Beauty, our Jesus, our God, lie hid beneath this Vail."

the Diseases of our Bodies and Minds ... [into] the Unity of this blessed and eternal Person.”<sup>87</sup> Since Jesus is the eternal Image of God and the “universal Person,” he is perfectly one with all created images of God, and “by an entire and mutual communion in death with all the Creatures,”<sup>88</sup> Christ dies “and the whole Creation dieth with him, so he makes an end of Sin and Transgression.”<sup>89</sup> The twist of fate, wherein Christ becomes both death and life, darkness and light, infinite and finite love, is a revelation of eternal harmony, proportion, and beauty that leads Sterry to exclaim, “O sweet and Divine Mystery! O musical Discord, and harmonious Contrariety! O peaceful and pleasant War!”<sup>90</sup> In Christ the supreme Harmony and Love stand on the side of order and disorder where it fights with itself, suffers for itself, and sinks through death into the fountain of its own bosom.<sup>91</sup> “Thus Love it self, in the place of us all, most lovingly, and beauty it self, most beautifully is become a Sacrifice for it self to it self.”<sup>92</sup>

For his final act upon the “Stage of this World,”<sup>93</sup> Christ rises from the dead and abolishes the darkness and disorder of sin completely by restoring the union between his human nature and his divine Person. Christ’s death takes the natural image out of its shadowy existence and disorder, dissolves it, and places it into its “Original Glory.”<sup>94</sup> In his descent into death and his ascent into life, Christ takes the natural image into the heavenly image (his divine Person) and “raiseth the whole Creation together with himself, as his proper and immediate Birth.”<sup>95</sup> Now the mediated

---

<sup>87</sup> *DFW*, 232.

<sup>88</sup> *DFW*, 164.

<sup>89</sup> *DFW*, 163.

<sup>90</sup> *DFW*, 163.

<sup>91</sup> *DFW*, 235: “God in his own Person, in the most sweet, most vital, the supream Unity of his Divine Person is separated and divided from himself by the force and fury of an unexpressible Wrath.”

<sup>92</sup> *DFW*, 163.

<sup>93</sup> *DFW*, 121.

<sup>94</sup> *DFW*, 164.

<sup>95</sup> *DFW*, 164.

vision of Adam has given way to an immediate union with the “Sun-shine of the Godhead.”<sup>96</sup> Now in Christ’s resurrection, the darkness of the fall with the resulting wounds, suffering and evil of the “Divine Death” are seen “as they eternally spring up and flourish in the Garden of the Divine Mind ... where the wounds appear in his [Christ’s] glorified Person; not as Wounds, but as Beauties; not as Fractures or Stains, but as Diamonds or Pearls in the Crown of his Righteousness and Glory.”<sup>97</sup> Christ’s three-fold pattern of restoration is the same Trinitarian pattern found in the Godhead, as the persons in the Trinity are “ever bringing forth one another; dying into each other; rising again one out of the other; and in all united.”<sup>98</sup> So, for Sterry, Christ is both the Original and the Pattern, the Creator and the mediator of the spiritual senses and spiritual virtue. By putting the whole of his divinity into every part of his suffering, Christ fulfilled the law of God, perfectly joining the spirit and the letter, the divine Love-Image with its Love-Original, where “all the united Excellencies and Blessedness of the Godhead stood entirely in every Wound, in every Sigh ... in every part, in every degree of sufferings through the whole flesh of Christ.”<sup>99</sup> And, finally, by uniting the natural and heavenly image in his resurrected mediatory image, he places the whole of the divine Life into all things in their first principle. God is now “*totus, & totaliter in toto Christo, & in qualibet parte Christi.*”<sup>100</sup>

After Christ has accomplished the deification of creation in himself by his three-fold restoration of all things, he sends his Spirit forth in order to “generate a Divine Seed to itself,” that is, to fill up the potentiality of each person with Christ’s spiritual vision and virtue.<sup>101</sup> Sterry refers to spiritual virtue as “the Divine Nature, or the Power of Christ, putting forth itself by Virtue of

---

<sup>96</sup> DFW, 206.

<sup>97</sup> DFW, 165.

<sup>98</sup> RRR, 308.

<sup>99</sup> DFW, 236.

<sup>100</sup> DFW, 245.

<sup>101</sup> RRR, 329.



the Union” between Christ and the soul.<sup>102</sup> Since every virtue is both God’s vision of the soul and the soul’s reflection of God’s vision, then God’s grace *is* divine Virtue springing up within the natural image, a mutual embrace of vision and virtue within the human person that grounds human responsibility for the good or evil reflected in one’s actions.<sup>103</sup> God’s vision of the soul is his grace and God’s grace is his self-Love of his own Image reflected in his saints. Indeed, it is the “essential Character of a Saint” to be “the immediate and proper Birth of the Divine Love.”<sup>104</sup> God’s electing and justifying love is his vision of each soul’s Idea in Christ, where he says of each soul, “Thou art not only Righteous, but Righteousness itself; the Righteousness of God.”<sup>105</sup> God’s justifying vision of a saint is “the Life of the Heavenly Principle,” which corresponds to Sterry’s Plotinian notion of the undescended soul.<sup>106</sup> God’s eternal justifying vision of the individual soul manifests itself in time as sanctifying love, which unites one’s earthly and heavenly principles within one’s own spirit and vision.<sup>107</sup> Both justifying and sanctifying love are metaphysically connected insofar as God’s Idea of an individual and the substance of that individual are one – this metaphysical explanation of justification certainly puts Sterry’s view in tension with the traditional Reformed notion of forensic justification.<sup>108</sup>

---

<sup>102</sup> *AGM*, 171.

<sup>103</sup> *AGM*, 118: “The Exercise of every Grace is a Reflection of the Beam of Sweetness and Glory, shot from the Face of God into our Spirits, back from our Spirits to the Eye of God again.”

<sup>104</sup> *DFW*, 34-5.

<sup>105</sup> *RRR*, 346.

<sup>106</sup> *RRR*, 173: “It is the Opinion of some very learned men, that the Supream part of the Soul ... is above sensible Things, ever living in the midst of Invisible Things, the Head, and Spirit of the Soul ... The Head of Man is Christ ... Thou has an Eternal Life in this Head, and Spirit of thine. In this Life thou art more than an Angel in the mist of the Throne: thou art Light in the Lord”; *DFW*, 127: “This Righteousness in Christ, as our Head, comprehending us in it self, by virtue of the mutual Union cloathing us, filling us, overflowing us, is our Justification.”

<sup>107</sup> *RRR*, 346: “[In sanctifying love] the Seed of God, which is One, soweth itself in thy Soul, and springeth up into the Fruits of Holiness, and Immortality.”

<sup>108</sup> *RRR*, 470: Sterry fears the notion of imputed righteousness may lead to licentiousness, “while without any Honesty in ourselves, laden with all Evil, we are taught to trust for our Happiness and Justification to that Good, which is in another.” Though, he agrees that “the imputed Righteousness would be no

The spiritual virtues spring out of God's justifying and sanctifying Love. The most important of these, for Sterry, are the traditional theological virtues: faith, hope, and love. Like Christ's three-fold restoration of the *imago Dei*, these virtues purify, illuminate, and perfect the soul.<sup>109</sup> When Christ converts the soul and infuses it with spiritual vision and virtue he repeats the pattern of his incarnation, death, and resurrection.<sup>110</sup> Sterry refers to Christ's conversion of the soul as a series of concentric circles, each enfolding the other.<sup>111</sup> First, there is the conversion of nature, which is a new birth of the divine Original, one's true self, rising up through the natural seed of divine unity (i.e., common grace) in the soul.<sup>112</sup> This happens when the divine image, "which is eternal Love and life it self," rises into its own beauty in the midst of the natural image. This act of grace purifies the "Inward Image," in which Adam was able to comprehend and command the image of all creatures and change them "into divers Shapes of Delight, at pleasure."<sup>113</sup> The natural image, however, is too weak to raise itself completely out of its own disorder and division as it is merely a finite image of the universe, presenting to the soul an "Imitation of true joys, rather than the Joys themselves."<sup>114</sup> After the natural image is converted, the law comes in, forcing the soul, like Adam, to choose between its own darkness and the divine light. Here the soul feels the shame of its own sin and guilt of loving the natural image, and it finds that "All things of Darkness, of the evil of sin, lye in the Darkness of Divine wrath, where the Evil

---

Fiction or cover for Lust, while all is founded upon that Unity," namely, the unity of one's self with God and God with all things, (*RRR*, 472).

<sup>109</sup> EC MS 291, 105: "The springs of holynes in the gospel are a divine ffaith, a divine hope, a divine love, these purifie the heart, and these are the bands of perfection."

<sup>110</sup> Sterry rehearses the three-fold pattern of conversion in numerous places throughout his writings. See for example *SW*, 56-7; *RRR*, 126; and *RRR*, 226ff.

<sup>111</sup> *RRR*, 2: "[A saint] must make his first Motion a Conversion, a Change from a Descent to an Ascent; from going Outward to the Circle, to go Inward towards the Center of things, which comprehends and casts forth all the Circles."

<sup>112</sup> *DFW*, 164.

<sup>113</sup> *RRR*, 18.

<sup>114</sup> *RRR*, 20.

of Sufferings, as a Secret Fire consumeth them.”<sup>115</sup> In the darkness of the law and conjecture, the soul realizes that the “Great River of Reason [is] not the Sea.”<sup>116</sup> The dark “Night of nature, or melancholy” creates a deep desire in the soul to see the natural image of reason removed in order that the heavenly image and vision underlying it might appear unveiled.

The second circle of conversion that Christ brings about in the soul happens by an illumination that brings it into the “Spiritual state in Christ.”<sup>117</sup> In this state the soul experiences the twist of fate, in which all of the shadowy images of conjecture and sinful principles in the soul die in the death of Christ, where the earthly image of “sensual Reason” is cast off in order to reveal the eternal substance in the soul as the sunlight of the Godhead. For Sterry, conversion to the spiritual state does not destroy the natural image. In fact, Sterry seems to agree with Thomas Aquinas that grace does not destroy nature but perfects it (*gratia non tollit naturam, sed perficit*).<sup>118</sup> He affirms that the ‘spiritual state’ is “the Lord Jesus in the Spirit [of man]. He comes first ... but to pitch his Tabernacle for a Season in the Natural Image; to dwell in it, before he dissolve it; not to ruine, but restore it, in all things that are Moral.”<sup>119</sup> Rather than destroy the natural image, the spiritual state converts it so that what “was in Nature an Image only” is now “an Image, and a Glass.”<sup>120</sup> In this divine glass, the soul is unveiled of its natural image that it might discover a spiritual sight of its true self, its heavenly image through “the Supream part of the soul which is above sensible things” in Christ.<sup>121</sup> Thus, the soul sacrifices its natural image by placing it in subordination to its heavenly principle, that it might dwell above all changes and sorrows in

---

<sup>115</sup> *RRR*, 226.

<sup>116</sup> *SCS*, 24.

<sup>117</sup> *RRR*, 19.

<sup>118</sup> *ST* Ia, q. 1, a. 8.

<sup>119</sup> *CFC*, “Epistle Dedicatory,” fol. 5v.

<sup>120</sup> *RRR*, 21.

<sup>121</sup> *RRR*, 173.

Christ.<sup>122</sup> “The Spirit of Glory in this Divine Shade is the Blood of Christ purifying the Heavenly Things in the Creature by washing away the Earthly Forms.”<sup>123</sup>

The final conversion is the deification of the soul, which happens in a vision of the “Divine State of things.”<sup>124</sup> In this state each person becomes fully conscious of one’s immediate union with Christ and strives to “Know, as we are Known; that is, *in patria*, at home in God, Comprehensively, by being Comprehended in God, and so Comprehending him again.” In union with Christ’s vision, we do not see any difference between making the natural image (of reason and conjecture) the “Glass, thorow which we see God” and “having the Godhead for the Glass, placing itself next to our Eye, and discovering all the Creatures in itself.”<sup>125</sup> The law unties the knot connecting the infinite and finite in humanity, and now grace restores the connection by another twist of fate, when the vision of one’s own sinful self-love and fragmented desires is brought into the eternal embrace of God’s Love. This vision of the Gospel, of the divine death and resurrection, produces “an extasy of wonder and delight” in the hearts of those who hear, meditate on, and pray the Scriptures.<sup>126</sup> Through its deifying conversion, the soul now sees all of the images within its natural image as shades of divine light. In this universal light and vision one realizes, as Proclus says, that “there is neither Privation or Corruption, ἐν τοῖς ὅλοις, in *Totis*,” that is, those things contained in the created principle (i.e., conjecture, sin, and suffering) are merely parts within the whole plan of God to restore harmony between heaven and earth.<sup>127</sup> After its conversion, the soul now sees the whole of the divine nature in every part of itself, suffering in its sufferings,

---

<sup>122</sup> *RRR*, 177: “Let the Mourning of your Earthly Principle be a Subordination, and Submission to your Heavenly Principle. This makes your Sorrow a Sacrifice.”

<sup>123</sup> *RRR*, 226.

<sup>124</sup> *RRR*, 22.

<sup>125</sup> *RRR*, 23.

<sup>126</sup> *DFW*, 160.

<sup>127</sup> *DFW*, 154.

fighting with it against sin and the flesh, and filling it with the joy and pleasure of a divine Life in its true heavenly image. “This Life in the Heavenly Principle is the Resurrection. In this we are alwaies, as Angels.”<sup>128</sup> Thus, for Sterry, Christ restores the *imago Dei* by means of the spiritual senses: Christ reveals the Original in the Image by (1) begetting a new vision in the natural image, (2) sacrificing the conjectural and sinful nature of natural vision, and (3) shining the divine Light of the Original through the vision of the natural image as its first principle, as the Image in the image of God. So now, in Christ each person “riseth again an universal Person, with both Images, created and uncreated, united in himself.”<sup>129</sup>

Christ’s three-fold restoration of spiritual vision within the human soul is both a vision and a reflection, both a center and a circle, both grace and virtue. Sterry refers to faith, hope, and love as transcendent virtues and divine graces.<sup>130</sup> These virtues are participations in the Virtue of Christ, along with his spiritual senses. Faith, hope, and love derive their power from the sunlight of the divinity descending and ascending through the soul and awakening itself “from above and below,” as the beams of the Sun “descend upon the Earth, infuse a precious vertue into it, quicken and call up the vertue, and Seeds of the Sun there.”<sup>131</sup> The spiritual virtues work like the Sun’s power of conversion, that is, the power of the *imago Dei* converts all of its lower conceptual circles to their higher circles as they are enfolded and unfolded from within itself. Faith is the most important of the spiritual virtues, as it is the spiritual vision of an illuminated understanding. According to Sterry, “The light of faith is a knowledge of things in the sight-glas of the divine essence shining forth immediately by its own pure and uncreated light from the glorified face of Christ in the soules

---

<sup>128</sup> *RRR*, 173.

<sup>129</sup> *DFW*, 164.

<sup>130</sup> *RRR*, 396.

<sup>131</sup> *RRR*, 357.

of saints on earth, within the covering of the flesh, and natural man, as under a veile.”<sup>132</sup> Faith, in other words, is the knowledge of the eternal substance of things behind the veil of nature, through the lens of the Trinity in the soul. Since all graces are specific participations of divine Love, and since faith is the first in the order of cognition – it is the “substance of things hoped for” – then hope and love are both contained within faith.<sup>133</sup> Indeed, the key to the “Life of Heaven upon Earth ... is a constant Exercise of our most Holy Faith.”<sup>134</sup> Faith is the earthly counterpart of divine Love, as faith gives the soul a “right knowledge of nothing” and a sight beyond sight, so that “the less we see, the more we may feel of a Divine pleasure in the admirations, and raptures of Divine love transcending our highest faculties.”<sup>135</sup>

Sterry’s notion of faith is not purely theological but is based on Proclus’s concept of epistemological faith. Neoplatonists such as Plotinus, Porphyry and Proclus employed the concept of faith within their philosophy in a way that Plato did not.<sup>136</sup> Though the idea that reason and intellection must be subordinate to πίστις seems to flatly contradict Plato’s placement of πίστις below νόησις and διάνοια in his analogy of the divide line, Proclus argues that Plato did not mean to denigrate *rational* πίστις or separate it from the philosophical life. Rational faith is a ‘convincingness’ regarding eternal substances that cannot be discovered by scientific knowledge.<sup>137</sup> Πίστις, for Proclus, is tied to the most fundamental principle of Neoplatonic

---

<sup>132</sup> EC MS 291, 4.

<sup>133</sup> *AGM*, 332, quoting Hebrews 11:1; See *AGM*, 75: Sterry says love originates in faith as light “carries Love along with it.”

<sup>134</sup> *AGM*, 335.

<sup>135</sup> *RRR*, 327; See also *RRR*, 325: “Faith in the Soul is to be the Counterpart of Love in God ... O that our Hearts, our Souls, our whole Being were all one Mouth of Faith, and that Mouth opening itself still wider and wider to take in these Seas of Divine Love.”

<sup>136</sup> For a brief but thorough discussion of ‘faith’ in Neoplatonic philosophy see J.M. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, (Cambridge University Press, 1967), 231-246.

<sup>137</sup> For Plato’s divided-line analogy see *Republic* 509D–513E; On Proclus’s concept of “rational faith” see *In Timaeus*. 346.3-347.2., David T. Runia and Michael Share, trans., 4 Vols. (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

theurgy, that is, the concept of συμπάθεια or “sympathies” that cause like to be attracted to like. Πίστις is an attractive force that unites all of the gods with the Good and causes ἑνώσις or the unity of all of their powers and processions.<sup>138</sup> Πίστις also unites the human soul with the Good, which contains both the Wise and the Beautiful.<sup>139</sup> In this way, πίστις is more crucial than ἀλήθεια and ἔπος, a triad that he gleans from the Chaldean Oracles, because the former reveal the knowledge of the universal Wisdom that the latter use to revert all things to the Beautiful.<sup>140</sup>

As K.M. Ziebart notes, Cusanus utilizes both ‘epistemological faith’, which is a trust in the first principles of knowledge, and dogmatic faith, or a belief in the principles of revealed religion, and he sees the former as preparative for the latter.<sup>141</sup> As mentioned above, Sterry sees the spiritual sense of vision, which comes from faith, as analogous to the intuition of first principles in Truth itself. In one of his sermons Sterry refers to the Chaldean triad of πίστις, ἀλήθεια, and ἔπος, which he very likely discovered in Proclus. According to Sterry, a certain “heathen philosopher” affirms “[that] there are Three ways of being united to God; by Knowledge; by Love; by Faith. But, saith he, this Faith is no Empty Image, or Thin Persuasion; but a Substantial Incorporation of the Things themselves with the Soul.”<sup>142</sup> So, for Sterry, faith is both epistemological and dogmatic. It is the

<sup>138</sup> Proclus, *Théologie Platonicienne*, I.25., H.D. Saffrey and L.G. Westerink, ed. and trans., 2 vols., (Paris: Société d'Édition Les Belles Lettres, 1968).

<sup>139</sup> Proclus, *In Alcibiades* 51.15; 52.13., L.G. Westerink, ed., and William O'Neill, trans. (Dilton Marsh, UK: The Prometheus Trust, 2011).

<sup>140</sup> *In Alcibiades* 52.10-13.

<sup>141</sup> K.M. Ziebart, *Nicolaus Cusanus on Faith and the Intellect: A Case Study in 15th-Century Fides-Ratio Controversy* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 24ff.

<sup>142</sup> Sterry, *RRR*, 133; Sterry's description of faith here is also very close to that of Simplicius in his commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*. See Philippe Hoffmann Hoffmann, “La Triade Chaldaïque, ἔπος, ἀλήθεια, πίστις: de Proclus a Simplicius,” in Alain Philippe Segonds, Carlos G. Steel, et alia, eds., *Proclus et la théologie platonicienne: actes du colloque international de Louvain (13-16 mai 1998) en l'honneur de H.D. Saffrey et de L.G. Westerink*, (Belgium, University of Leuven Press, 2000), 472: Simplicius argues, “this sympathy [of faith] does not create only the solidity of true knowledge, when it comes after the demonstration and is added to it, but it creates also the union with the things known, which is the complete achievement of human felicity.”

“substance of things hoped for” because it unites the soul to the eternal substances of things as they are enfolded in Christ.

Hope is the desire to possess all heavenly and earthly realities as they are in Christ, “to hope endlessly, infinitely beyond, and above all Hope.”<sup>143</sup> Hope rests in the assurance and confidence (τῆς ὑποστάσεως) of faith, which possesses the whole ‘fullness’ of reality in the fullness of Christ. Since Christ is the Wisdom of God and the “fullness of being” (πληρότης τῶν ὀντῶν), he enfolds the principles of all things in their divine Ideas.<sup>144</sup> Those who believe in Christ and see him by means of Christ’s own spiritual vision possess “the Substance of things hoped for,” namely, the divine Substance.<sup>145</sup> Faith embraces the divine darkness and light as it is the evidence of “things seen in their Unseen and Divine Forms, unclouding themselves.”<sup>146</sup> So, each believer is complete and self-sufficient because, “entring into Christ [they are] filled with the same Fulness of the Godhead in him, together with him.”<sup>147</sup> Hope is the resting of all the soul’s desires in Christ and his vision, wherein consists a heavenly life “encompass’d with Heavenly Sights, to be in the midst of all Things, to be yourselves as Visions of glory coming down out of Heaven.”<sup>148</sup>

Love is the union of the soul with the divine Beauty, through a ‘taste’ of the divine Sweetness proportioning itself to the finite and sinful soul.<sup>149</sup> Love is dependent upon faith, as “Light carries Love along with it.”<sup>150</sup> For Sterry, as for Proclus, faith works by means of its sympathetic power, that is, the force that binds two similar realities together in their shared likeness. Faith, in the manner of Prometheus, ‘steals’ the fire of divine knowledge from the face

---

<sup>143</sup> *AGM*, 333.

<sup>144</sup> *DFW*, 211.

<sup>145</sup> *AGM*, 330;

<sup>146</sup> *AGM*, 328.

<sup>147</sup> *AGM*, 326.

<sup>148</sup> *AGM*, 329.

<sup>149</sup> *AGM*, 335.

<sup>150</sup> *AGM*, 75.



of Christ.<sup>151</sup> Sterry argues, “The first Part of Faith is the outgoing Act of the Soul, rooting itself (beyond every thing Created) in Jesus Christ. The Second Part of Faith, is the indrawing Act of the soul, sucking forth and attracting to itself the Virtue and Fulness of Christ.”<sup>152</sup> After the soul’s conversion in faith, it bears an attractive likeness to the divine Unity in its own finite unity, and so faith is able to draw the divine substance and Virtue into the soul – or more accurately, faith participates in God’s act of drawing himself into the soul – while love is the Supreme Unity in the soul desiring and aspiring to return itself and all things to the same Unity.<sup>153</sup> “Faith draws forth all from God, thro’ Christ. Charity carries all back into God again by Jesus Christ.”<sup>154</sup> In sum, faith is the procession of divinity into the soul, hope is the abiding rest of the desires in the fullness of divinity, and love is the reversion of the soul to union with the divine being.

Faith is a transforming or converting power, and love is a perfecting power; both of which aid the soul in its fight against sin and vice by perfectly uniting all of its motives and desires to its true self and divine vision. Through the attractive power of faith, the believer is able to draw God out of every conjectural or wrathful appearance. Just as Jacob wrestled with God and received a blessing, Sterry argues that faith works through prayer, and “Prayer hath a Charm in it, which can bring God down out of Heaven; which can change him out of his own Shape, into the Form of a poor afflicted Thing, like unto ourselves and so present him to us in our Spirits.”<sup>155</sup> As a heavenly and divine vision, faith is able to convert the hardest rocks to life-giving fountains. “O the transforming power of Faith!” Sterry exclaims, “Which way soever it casteth its Bright and sweet Glances, the hardest Rocks drop with a delicious Honey, and are fasten’d into Honey-Combs,

---

<sup>151</sup> *AGM*, 252.

<sup>152</sup> *AGM*, 450.

<sup>153</sup> *AGM*, 103.

<sup>154</sup> *AGM*, 173.

<sup>155</sup> *AGM*, 111.

every shady Bush of Briars and thorns becometh a bed of Roses and Lillies.”<sup>156</sup> When the eye of faith looks upon the sin of self-love in the soul, it sees beyond the finite division between good and evil. The eye of faith sees sin originating from the potentiality of the natural image, and it recognizes sin as an enmity to the divine harmony, which may only be reduced to order “through the Wrath and Righteousness of God.”<sup>157</sup>

The soul becomes the divine wrath to itself through humility and repentance, by which it converts its sinful love into divine Love. Repentance consists of the acts of conviction, contrition, confession, and conversion, but in itself, repentance is “a Circle of Darkness, thro’ which we go forth from the false Sparkles of a Fleshly Brightness, into the midst of Divine Glories.”<sup>158</sup> Through faith and repentance each person sees sin as a desire to judge higher “principles of Truth” by means of their lower participations, that is, judging spiritual things by natural reason.<sup>159</sup> The penitent soul sees Christ pierced by this disorder of desire and is shamed with conviction. Sterry says, a person is convicted by “Beams of Beauty” when one sees Christ on the cross, and when one finds Christ’s forgiveness in the midst of one’s own self-centeredness, when one utters a confession and hears Christ saying, “Often I have set my selfe before thee in the blood of my Manhood, in the glory of my Godhead, in the love of both my Natures: Thou hast wearied me with thy scorings: But thou shalt be mine, I freely forgive all thy sins, as if they never had been committed.”<sup>160</sup> So the wrath of the soul upon itself is not a violent wrath but a sternness of love, which melts the soul into nothing in its own sight. Thus, repentance restores the *imago Dei*, as the union between Christ and the soul “is the very Eye of Repentance, by which a Man weepeth out Selfe in Tears; and taketh

---

<sup>156</sup> *AGM*, 335.

<sup>157</sup> *DFW*, 79.

<sup>158</sup> *AGM*, 307.

<sup>159</sup> *SCS*, 12.

<sup>160</sup> *SCS*, 19.

in Christ in sweet Beames. It is that Mouth of Faith, by which a Man breathes forth himselfe into his Saviour, and sucks in Iesus Christ, as a Quickning Spirit.”<sup>161</sup>

As repentance takes the soul out of its sinful, conjectural principle, so the perfecting power of love completes the fight against sin by placing the whole self into its divine principle with a divine sweetness. When the soul sees Christ’s blood, the “blood of God, with all the Virtues of the Godhead in it,”<sup>162</sup> cleansing and caring for the soul in its sin, darkness, and rebellion against God, the soul is “transported upon Spiritual Wings, which the Divine Beauty giveth unto it, quite out of itself, out of every thing of the Creature, into the Bosom of this pure Eternal Beauty” where it embraces Christ as two loving faces “meet, kiss ... entirely possess and enjoy each other throughout, fully.”<sup>163</sup> Thus, love fulfills the greatest commandment to love God above all things, as it places itself into all things in their eternal forms, sacrificing its natural image to the divine Love within them, so that the divine Light and Loveliness might shine “thro’ every Part and Point of it.”<sup>164</sup> The believer who is raptured in an ecstasy of divine love finds that he has no other self to love when he has loved God with all of his heart, mind, soul, and strength, except for the self that is “thy only Self, which thou lookest upon, lovest in the Loveliness of God.”<sup>165</sup> Every other self, Sterry says, is either a shadow cast upon the earth from “thy Divine Self above” or a counterfeit and a devil. So, Sterry concludes:

That is the best, the truest, the only Self-Love, when the Love of myself is comprehended in the Love of God; when I love myself in God, for God, when, I love nothing else but God alone in myself, in my Earthly or Heavenly Self, when with one undivided Love, I love myself and my God, because these two are one.<sup>166</sup>

---

<sup>161</sup> *CFC*, 21.

<sup>162</sup> *AGM*, 331.

<sup>163</sup> *AGM*, 337.

<sup>164</sup> *AGM*, 338.

<sup>165</sup> *AGM*, 338.

<sup>166</sup> *AGM*, 338-9.

The love of Christ in the soul “begets a Desire of Imitating, and Possessing Jesus Christ. It suffers not the Soul to rest, til she be perfectly like him, inwardly united to him.”<sup>167</sup> Through faith, repentance, and love the soul attracts the divine Love into itself, sacrifices its own vicious self-love in the natural image, and discovers the divine Love perfectly united all of its conceptual image and loves.<sup>168</sup> This is the converting and perfecting power of spiritual virtue, “the discovering of the Divine Glory in every Creature, and the covering of the Darkness of the Creature with the Brightness of this Glory.”<sup>169</sup>

Since faith grants to each person a participation in the divine Wisdom, it also motivates the soul to imitate the creative and restorative activities of God. In his letters to his Son, Peter the younger, Sterry exhorts his son to imitate Christ by mimicking the power of the divine sunlight. He tells Peter to stir up all the spiritual senses in his “heavenly eye” by which he “sees, hears, Smells, tastes, handels, embraces Eternall Objects.”<sup>170</sup> Peter is meant to turn this eye toward Christ, sprinkle himself with the blood of his saviour, and “perfume yourselfe with his Sweete Odours of Loveliness.”<sup>171</sup> By these means “[you will] come forth fresh every morning in the hand of your Christ, as the Bridegroom, and Bride out of their Chamber, like the Sun, to make a Spirituall Day every where.”<sup>172</sup> So, Sterry advises him in another letter, “arise you in your Jesus, and Shine in the midst of your owne Spirit, and of all your Relations.”<sup>173</sup> The attractive and converting power of

---

<sup>167</sup> *AGM*, 75.

<sup>168</sup> Thomas Traherne also adds repentance to the list of theological virtues. See Traherne, *Christian ethicks, or, Divine morality opening the way to blessedness, by the rules of vertue and reason* (London, Jonathan Edwin, 1675), 24: “forasmuch as this Virtue, tho it be occasioned by sin, is chiefly taught by the Word of GOD, and respects GOD as its Principal Object.”

<sup>169</sup> *AGM*, 340.

<sup>170</sup> *SW*, 130.

<sup>171</sup> *SW*, 131.

<sup>172</sup> *SW*, 131.

<sup>173</sup> *SW*, 133.

the spiritual virtues leads believers to look upon the world with divine vision, not ascend out of it completely. Sterry tells his daughter that it is her duty to be a king and a priest, commanding and sanctifying all things with the converting power of the resurrection, that by “unfolding the Mystery of the Godheade in the face of every worke of His,” the morning stars “clouded in every Creature ... may rise from under their cloude, and shine as at the beginning.”<sup>174</sup>

The darkness of the natural image obscures and clouds the true eternal substances of things with pains and sorrows, but Sterry tells his daughter, “I will not say scatter this Cloude but Convert that also into a new Sun, nay rather open the eyes that have been so long shutt by which wee shall see that, wee were ever cloathed with the Sun itselke in every Forme, even then, when wee saw it in a dreame as a Cloude.”<sup>175</sup> The reality of pain and suffering must remain, for the sake of humbling the soul into its proper order, but conversion turns the cloud of suffering into the clothing of the divine Sun. Sterry’s daughter writes to him to express her anxiety and feelings of inadequacy to accomplish her duty of converting and sanctifying all things in the midst of her frequent bouts of melancholy. This duty gives her a certain “trouble arising from [her] apprehensions of having so like power unto God.”<sup>176</sup> Sterry replies to her that the converting power of faith does not work by a mere exertion of will, but it is the bread of angels in the Word of God within her soul, and the Word does not bid us to turn corruptible stone into bread. Rather, “ye strength, ioy, and Glory of a Saint lies not in ye conforming ye Divine Will to his but in transforming his Will into That, in feeding and feasting his understanding & Will upon ye Excellencies, ye Dellacacies of ye Divine Wisdome & Will, wch set themselves before us in every act of Providence, as on a table set downe from Heaven ready furnished.”<sup>177</sup> The meal is already furnished. If it appears otherwise to human

---

<sup>174</sup> *SW*, 100.

<sup>175</sup> *SW*, 74.

<sup>176</sup> EC MS 289, 61.

<sup>177</sup> EC MS 289, 63.

senses, the problem lies in the cloudiness of the human will, not in the sunlight of divinity upon that cloud. Sterry advises his daughter to wait in her sadness, as a trial that produces patience, and as she waits he reminds her that Christ is visible to her even when she finds no strength or vision in herself. Indeed, Christ lies within and behind every veil of sorrow, so that “my Selfe, each Relation in its lowest degree, is in Truth, a sleeping Jesus, a dying Jesus, Jesus in his Grave.”<sup>178</sup> And, if Jesus lies dead in human weakness, sinfulness, and depression, “Hee shall also awake, and arise out of this sleepe of Death; carrying with Him this Captivity itselfe captive into the Light of Life.”<sup>179</sup> Even in death, the spiritual Christian can feel the presence of Christ and see one’s suffering, not as that of a criminal but as a martyr for the Beauty of all things. “Suffer cheerfully ... and thou are in thy Sufferings a Martyr, for the Plot of thy particular Life, for the Beauty of Divine Wisdom, for the whole Frame of Things in Time and Eternity.”<sup>180</sup>

The goal of the Christian life and true religion is the imitation of divine Beauty, Wisdom, and Love in Christ, by placing the whole of divinity into each part of one’s vision and being, whether conceptual or material, without laying too little or too much weight upon the outside (or potentiality) of things. Though everything “is a Divine Sun to you,” Sterry still advises his daughter, “Keepe yourselfe pure in Body, and Soule; So your Person shall bee all a cleare Skye, a cleare eye” so that she might “be a Spring of Heavenlyness” to all of her friends, family, and relations.<sup>181</sup> Spiritual virtue provides the motivation and impetus for pursuing moral virtue in order that one might convert all of one’s vision into a divine vision of the Trinity. Indeed, faith perfects the vision of reason, as they both arise from the same seed of divine Unity, which “awakeneth

---

<sup>178</sup> *SW*, 100.

<sup>179</sup> *SW*, 100.

<sup>180</sup> *AGM*, 267.

<sup>181</sup> *SW*, 86.

itself from above and below.”<sup>182</sup> By faith “The Spiritual Man is one Person with the Natural Man, as the Divine and Human Natures of Christ.”<sup>183</sup> Though the natures of faith and reason differ in degree, they share the same person and mind, and there is a “Communication of Properties” (*koinonia idiomaton*) between them, in accordance with the Chalcedonian formulation, so that the “Purity of the Spiritual is attributed to the Person of the Natural Man” and the person who is in the natural man “is brought forth into the Life and clear Discoveries of the Spiritual Man.”<sup>184</sup> Both faith and reason have a purpose in the Christian life because Christ is active in both in a union of opposites; that is, the “Candle of the Lord” (or reason) has the Spirit of Christ “for the Spring of Natural Light, and Life in it.”<sup>185</sup> The man who places the conjectural vision of reason into his “Divine Principle” is naturally good, Sterry affirms, because “It is his Nature to be so. For he is made partaker of the Divine Nature, 2 Pet. I. 4.”<sup>186</sup>

Since the rational soul participates in the deified vision of Christ, Sterry freely advises his congregation to “Retire your self into your Chamber, in which the Candle of the Lord shines” and “wait quietly, and silently for the openings of the Spirit of God in the secret Voice of Nature within you.”<sup>187</sup> Sterry urges his audience to listen to the report of the senses and “Listen to the inbred voice of your own Reason,” and these will confirm that there is a God who exists above all things.<sup>188</sup> The natural image of reason is like the cedar that sustained Solomon’s temple, and the heavenly image is the gold overlaid upon it. So, Sterry advises believers to look at reason as it is enfolded in its higher divine circle: “So the Natural Life stands for ever comprehended in the

---

<sup>182</sup> *RRR*, 356: “[The divine seed] meeteth with, receiveth itself, and twisteth into one with itself, the Glory from on high, and the Dust from beneath.”

<sup>183</sup> *AGM*, 17.

<sup>184</sup> *AGM*, 18.

<sup>185</sup> *RRR*, 96.

<sup>186</sup> *RRR*, 70.

<sup>187</sup> *RRR*, 96.

<sup>188</sup> *RRR*, 67.

Spiritually; and all the pleasant Figures have a double Life, and are doubly enjoyed; once in the Cedar within the Gold, another time in the Gold.”<sup>189</sup> The mind that is illuminated with faith knows reason to be only a conjectural shadow, yet it is a pleasant shadow, “because it is a shadow of something infinitely above it self, and us, which we feel, but can forme no Image, nor make no expression of it.”<sup>190</sup> By uniting the heavenly and natural images into one vision, the saints descend into the natural world in order to “finish the Mystery of Divine Love below,” to set an end to death and wrath, and “to set free the Princely, and Divine race – in Prison.”<sup>191</sup> This descent leads to other spiritual virtues, such as temperance, which is “the tempering and tuning of our Natural desires, to the Spiritual Discoveries of Jesus Christ.”<sup>192</sup> Virtues such as spiritual temperance, patience, and sobriety (σωφροσύνη), begin in prayer and meditation and end in the imitation of Christ, “That you may be Sanctified throughout, in Spirit, Soul and Body, that the Lower Part of your Life ... may have a Beauty ... proportionable to that Virtue and Knowledge, which is in the Upper Part of your Life, most free from Flesh.”<sup>193</sup>

The spiritual virtues and their adjoining spiritual senses transform the soul’s natural faculty of omniform judgment into spiritual judgment, which is the immediate union of divine and human judgment in the soul. True religion, for Sterry, produces spiritual judgment, as it reveals that Christ is the mystical mean for measuring, converting, and tuning the appearances of things in their cognitive images into the harmony of a universal image. Though there is no proportion between the infinite and the finite, God graciously bridges the gap to create a similitude of his own unity within the human soul of Christ, which is God himself in the soul – or in Proclean terms “the one

---

<sup>189</sup> *SW*, 78.

<sup>190</sup> *SW*, 81.

<sup>191</sup> *SW*, 121.

<sup>192</sup> *AGM*, 172.

<sup>193</sup> *AGM*, 172; On sobriety, see *AGM*, 48; Though Sterry does not mention Aquinas, these spiritual moral virtues are similar to Aquinas’ infused moral virtues. See *Summa Theologiae* I-II, Q. 65, a. 2-3.



in the soul.”<sup>194</sup> By means of the soul’s unity or its divine circle (or ‘spirit’), God proportions himself to himself in the soul “although there be no mutual proportion or likeness between them [i.e., the Creator and creature].”<sup>195</sup> In his treatise *The eternity of duration*, Sterry argues that Christ is the head of both nature and grace.<sup>196</sup> He is the “image of the invisible God, and the firstborn of every creature” as St. Paul says. This means, through the hypostatic union in Christ’s person, “He is ye first created image in which the spirits of the whole creation preexist in a distinct, lively, and eminent manner.”<sup>197</sup> Christ is also the “firstborn from the dead” through his resurrection, and so he maintains a “distinct headship in nature & in grace, or in the creation and in the resurrection, the creation being the natural, the resurrection the spiritual state of things.”<sup>198</sup>

For Aristotle, virtue is determined by the ‘golden mean,’ the middle point between the vicious states of excess or defect as determined by right reason.<sup>199</sup> Sterry’s religious ethic, on the other hand, descends from the divine Mind, Christ the mean and the absolute Measure of all measures. In Christ’s spiritual and divine vision, all created concepts, whether “great or little, universal or particular, beautiful or deformed,” are enfolded and immediately united to their divine substances or originals in his divine person.<sup>200</sup> Aristotle’s mean, on the other hand, applies only to the realm of discursive reason, not intellect (or nous), and so it is akin to the law or divine commands, the letter of which kills and does not bring eternal life.<sup>201</sup> For Sterry, the law is a veil

---

<sup>194</sup> Proclus, *In Alcibiades*. 248.2, in L.G. Westerink, ed., William O’Neill, trans., (Dilton Marsh, UK: The Prometheus Trust, 2011).

<sup>195</sup> *DFW*, 106.

<sup>196</sup> This treatise is found in EC MS 291, 106-154, with the full title, *The eternity of duration that hath a beginning without any end, is exposed to these difficulties*.

<sup>197</sup> EC MS 291, 122.

<sup>198</sup> EC MS 291, 122.

<sup>199</sup> *Nic. Ethic.* 1107a1-5.

<sup>200</sup> *DFW*, 26.

<sup>201</sup> *SCS*, 26: “If you see your sins this day, and weep for them, though it be only by the Owle-light of your own reason, (as the Philosopher himself styles it) you shall not lose your reward, though you may lose your soules.”

that covers the Gospel with “a proposal of good and evil to man, as the object of his choice,” a proposal that merely reveals the opposition between sin and grace, but does not overcome it.<sup>202</sup> The law, and practical reason, only reveal a multiplicity of choices – reason demands a choice between either finite or infinite, good or evil – and their consequences (either reward or punishment). Right reason does not provide a way of seeing beyond the darkness of conjecture and inordinate desire, beyond the conceptual wall of Paradise. In order to determine the proper measure and proportion of conceptual knowledge, one must have a vision transcending concepts. Indeed, “The best Understandings, pure and clear as the Sun it self, clouded with flesh, while they see through so thick a medium, are capable of various and disproportionate views of their Object.”<sup>203</sup> In union with the absolute Measure and Mean, (through faith, hope, and love) the soul is taken outside of its finite perspective and shares immediately in God’s vision on a human level, where both darkness and light are preserved in a union where darkness “is Darkness and Light; no Light, and yet Light.”<sup>204</sup>

Sterry’s mystical mean of virtue and vision is not strictly a mean between vices but the absolute Mean between extreme modes of being. Indeed, as early modern logic and ethics textbooks point out, virtue cannot be the *medium participationis* because this would imply that the mean partakes of vice in order to mediate between two vicious states.<sup>205</sup> Instead, virtue is the “*medium abnegationis*,” insofar as right reason determines the nature of virtue by taking a negative course between vices, falling neither into Scylla on one side nor Charybdis on the other. Quite contrary to this, Sterry asserts that sin, rather than virtue, is a “*Medium abnegationis*” not because

---

<sup>202</sup> DFW, 177.

<sup>203</sup> DFW, 37.

<sup>204</sup> AGM, 392.

<sup>205</sup> Aristotle, *Topics*, 123b10-25; for an interpretation of Aristotle’s notion of the mean by one of Sterry’s acquaintances see John Milton, *Artis logicæ plenior institutio*, XIV, in *The Prose Works of John Milton* (London: Westley and Davis, 1834), 874.

the law and right reason are inherently flawed, but because sin is the pitting of one's own dark conjectures and nothingness against the divine light, the intentional fracturing of the union between extremes in the *imago Dei*.<sup>206</sup> Sterry self-consciously changes the more Aristotelian meaning of the *medium participationis* and *abnegationis* in order to apply them to Christ and sin respectively.<sup>207</sup> Sterry's mystical mean is more akin to the general Pythagorean distinction between limit, unlimited, and mixture, as outlined in the *Philebus*, than to Aristotle's rational 'golden mean', as Christ is the only middle point between finite limits and unlimited infinity.<sup>208</sup> Sterry's mystical mean is a union of opposite realities in Christ, "where killing with the Sword of his Mouth, and making alive with the Kiss of his Mouth, Heights of Heaven above, the Depths of Hell beneath meet, and break up into one Rich and Ravishing Mystery."<sup>209</sup> This mystical mean "toucheth both the extremes of infiniteness and finiteness," granting a certain proportion of infinity to the human soul, and permitting the human mind to ascend outside of its own finite concepts and idols to a universal perspective where it can properly judge and balance the weight and proportion it places on its own conceptual knowledge and finite loves.<sup>210</sup> Thus, in Christ a saint becomes the measure of all things, passing to the lowest extremes in oneself (the rational and sensitive circle) while simultaneously ascending to the highest unity in the *medium participationis* (Christ in the divine circle of the intellect).<sup>211</sup> With Christ as its proper Measure (and true self) the soul descends

---

<sup>206</sup> DFW, 197: "[S]in is a medium of separation between God and Creatures; partaking of neither, inasmuch as it is a privation of Being; dividing both, as an unpassable Gulf between them."

<sup>207</sup> Aristotle, *Topics*.

<sup>208</sup> Plato, *Philebus*, 25e-26a; Like Plato, Sterry affirms that this life is mixture of mirth and mourning (*RRR*, 185).

<sup>209</sup> *AGM*, 392.

<sup>210</sup> DFW, 197.

<sup>211</sup> DFW, 197: "[S]in is a medium of separation between God and the Creatures; partaking of neither, inasmuch as it is a privation of Being."

from heaven into itself to craft its own mediatory images, through which it measures its own nearness or distance from the divine Measure in each of its desires and actions.<sup>212</sup>

An example of how Sterry's Trinitarian method functions to supply the mystical mean appears in the way that he defines religion. Using the analogy of a scale, Sterry affirms that true religion says "it is the sweet and wise way, not to lay too much Weight upon outward Forms or inward Opinions in Religion"<sup>213</sup> but to weigh and judge all things by the love and light of the Trinity, mediated by the reflection of Christ in the soul.<sup>214</sup> The truly religious person begins to measure things with unity (monad/limit), the knowledge that "God in himself is the only inward hidden Substance of all Things,"<sup>215</sup> proceeds to the variety (dyad/unlimited), that the image of God in the soul is "divided from God himself, who then is but the Outside only,"<sup>216</sup> and finally ends with union (triad/mixture), in a truly inward sense of God immediately uniting himself to the soul and removing the outside of things from one's view "that Christ may be all in all."<sup>217</sup> The equality of union between the unity and variety, God and his image in the soul, does not destroy the created image but purifies it, so that it no longer obscures the hidden treasure contained within it. Thus Sterry affirms that both the treasure of Christ and the vessel of conjecture are essential parts of spiritual understanding.<sup>218</sup>

---

<sup>212</sup> EC MS 291, 209: "The immortall Soule, according to ye Modells of the Divine Beauty in itselfe formed upon it from the higher Originalls ... settts ye times, ye manners, ye measures for ye rising, for ye progresse, ye continuance, for ye fall of every compounded Substance, which as a shadow it sends forth from itselfe, & gathers up into itselfe againe."

<sup>213</sup> *AGM*, 407.

<sup>214</sup> *RRR*, 312: "Love is stiled [by Augustine] The Weight of the Soul. As heavy things by their Weight; so Souls by their Love are carried to their proper Center."

<sup>215</sup> *AGM*, 414.

<sup>216</sup> *AGM*, 414.

<sup>217</sup> *AGM*, 416; 1 Corinthians 15:28.

<sup>218</sup> *AGM*, 407: "The Treasure is Spiritual Truth, which is the Glory of God in the Face of Christ ... Then, there is the Vessel, and that is the Notions or Forms, by which this Truth appears and shines forth in our Understandings."

Though true religion is founded on the substance of God presupposed in conceptual knowledge, rather than on concepts themselves, it does not remove but establishes within believers an unwavering ability to discern between true and false religion, as well as moral good and evil. By his grace, God gives each person the ability to enjoy “Truth in our Earthen Vessels” so “that we may lay all the Weight upon the Treasure, and not upon the Vessel.”<sup>219</sup> Those who lay all of the weight upon the treasure, upon the enjoyment and love of Christ in the soul, are able to see the imbalance and discord of false religion as it places “Religion and Excellency in that which is not Spiritual but Natural (their Opinions of Things and Shapes, by which they take in Truth),” the result of which is disunity, fighting, and war.<sup>220</sup> In a letter to one of Sterry’s acquaintances, sent from Whitehall on 14 October 1653, Sterry says there are “two greate evils of these tymes, which agree both in a Carnality.”<sup>221</sup> The first of these evils, Sterry says, places the whole weight of Religion upon “an outward forme” and “Savour[s] not any Mistery, and depth in the Gospell,” whereas the latter “setts up a Mistery of Eniquity withe inward Fancy and Imagination” and “takes away all forme of Religion in the outward man and confounds light with darknesse, good with Evill, Spirit with Flesh.” The first, a likely reference to the rationalism of the Socinians separates outward from inward, while the latter, likely referring to ‘enthusiasts’ such as the Ranters, confuses the outward with the inward.<sup>222</sup>

Sterry, on the other hand, discovers the mean between these two extremes of religion in the Trinity, discerned by spiritual judgment. In true religion there is “the righteousness of God which is spirituall, and the originalls” then the “righteousness of God which is Morall, and the

---

<sup>219</sup> *AGM*, 408.

<sup>220</sup> *AGM*, 413.

<sup>221</sup> *SW*, 47.

<sup>222</sup> *RRR*, 245: Sterry says the Socinians make reason the rule of divine things.; *DFW*, 153: Sterry mentions the Ranters as those who deny morality and confuse sin with divine grace.; See Nabil Matar, “Peter Sterry and the Ranters,” *Notes and Queries* 227 (1982): 504-506.

Coppy or Image of the other,” and finally there is “peace, joy in the holy Ghost” in the union of the original and the image. Though Sterry distinguishes between the moral and spiritual in religion, the former enfolds and unfolds the latter, placing the original within the image as the whole within the part, in such a way that the original is not confused with the moral image nor the image destroyed in its union with the original. The Socinians lay all of the weight in religion on rational concepts and they break the unity of the Trinity in the soul by removing the image from the original, whereas the Ranters, by destroying the boundary between conceptual knowledge and the divine substance in religion, confuse the image and the original, the Creator and creation. Sterry, on the other hand, steers a middle course between these two extremes, not granting too much weight to either inward or outward appearances – since both are mere appearances – but seeing them both as forms of idolatry and atheism, corruptions of true inward religion, as concepts that bear little resemblance to the Triune shape of reality.<sup>223</sup>

When we keep “our Eyes perpetually fixt upon the Person of Christ, and God himself” we see God working through our conjectural knowledge, not destroying it, but putting upon it “the Stamp of the Divine Glory of the Godhead ... which makes them Rich and Precious.”<sup>224</sup> For, “Opinions [i.e., conjectures] are Nature’s Model in our Understanding, by which we take in Spiritual Truths.”<sup>225</sup> False religion, on the other hand, falls into an idolatrous worship of concepts, and so can have no ‘savour’ of the Truth but causes division and strife in the soul and in society. Acknowledging the conjectural nature of human knowledge and repenting of one’s worship of it brings about unity in society, as it makes the immediate vision of God in the soul – the good life

---

<sup>223</sup> *SW*, 48: “Sir the Bottome of those Principles [of the Ranters] unvailed of all their Maskeing, Mysterious Language is this That there is noe God but the spirit of this visible World noe other state, or apperance of things besides this visible image.”

<sup>224</sup> *AGM*, 415.

<sup>225</sup> *AGM*, 414.

at the level of *nous* – freely available to all classes of people, thus breaking down social hierarchies and privileged access to knowledge. God, Sterry says, is able to put his treasure in a dead carcass, so that the “poor Man of low Understanding” through “weak, low and dark Notions” often “enjoys the Visions of God in his Spirit, more sweetly and abundantly than that Man, whose Opinions are so far larger, whose Notions are far higher and righter of Jesus Christ.”<sup>226</sup> In a world darkened by the temptation of idolatry, true religion is “ye only waking sight of things,”<sup>227</sup> as it awakens believers to a right use and enjoyment of concepts, only laying enough weight upon them as is necessary to convert them to their true substance in Christ, “as Lines draw near the Center.”<sup>228</sup> Each person develops greater moderation of judgement the more one ‘turns’ all of one’s conjectural concepts around their true Measure in Christ. Indeed, “Moderation is the measure of Things,” and so the soul that measures and tunes all things to their true Measure has “a contented frame, composed, and equal motions ... [with] a right sence of the near, and immediate presence of the Lord Jesus in Glory with all these things ... [just as] Substance is present with its proper Shadow.”<sup>229</sup>

## Conclusion

Peter Sterry’s apophatic approach to religion and Christian ethics is both mystical and methodical. One might even say, for Sterry, the blanking of all natural perception is the beginning of a right and proper judgment of the nature of things. Indeed, the ascent into the divine darkness initiates the restricting descent of human ambition. For Sterry, as for other Christian mystics, vision can be

---

<sup>226</sup> *AGM*, 412.

<sup>227</sup> EC MS 289, 28.

<sup>228</sup> *AGM*, 413.

<sup>229</sup> *RRR*, 280; See also *AGM*, 41: “Though the Representation [of the spiritual man in the natural] be shadowy, yet we have a substantial, and real Treasure in the Vessel of that Representation.”

our happiness, but it can also be our downfall. Right reason may display the mean between the vices that are perceivable with our finite powers, but it cannot set its own limits. What is the mean between too much reasoning and too little, between a measured conceptualization of finite things and an ambitious confusion or disjunction of the finite and the infinite? The nature of human knowledge presents us with a paradox. If there can be no proportion between the finite and infinite, then neither the infinite nor the finite can be known, for finitude presupposes the infinite and vice versa. For Sterry, Christ provides the solution to the *aporia* of knowledge by uniting the infinite and finite in his ‘mediatory image.’ By using Christ’s vision a person sees all things through the lens of the divine Love, uniting all things in one’s own soul. This vision is the vision of the *imago Dei*, the ‘living image’ of the Trinity, the union of the infinite and finite in one vision.

When a believer hears the Word of God through the conjectural veil of the Scriptures, he finds the Love of God infinitely proportioning itself to itself within his own soul, begetting itself in human form, dying to itself to put an end to vicious self-centeredness, and rising again through the soul to unite the natural image to its heavenly Idea. The spiritual vision of Christ/Love in the soul converts the soul and grants to each believer the ability to cooperate in converting (or turning) the lower circles of the self back to their true center of Love. The soul’s enfolding and unfolding motions purify, illuminate, and perfect the soul in its vision of the self and its world. This turning motion of the soul inward and around the infinite Center is the origin and nature of spiritual sense and Virtue. For Sterry, all of the spiritual virtues are types of divine Love, precisely because of this motionless motion of the soul. The theological virtues of faith, repentance, hope, and love are all forms of Love as it circles through the forms of all things within itself, imitating the mediatory face of Christ as both the subject and the object of vision.

To see the world in this way is to descend into one’s own natural world and vision, one’s



body, and to tune the disorder of sin that one finds there into the Harmony of the whole. The vision of true religion divinizes all things through the trial of suffering. For Sterry, the trial of this life actually teaches each person how to place the whole of the divinity in the *imago Dei* upon every aspect of our perception, converting all conjectural appearances of sadness, shame, or loss to their center in Christ. The deified soul now descends into the world as the Sun in the sun to make a spiritual day everywhere, not by removing the clouds of suffering but by converting the cloud into a shadowy sun, as one substance and life with the true Sun, “not losing its Distinctons in Confusion, but like innumerable Lillys of a most rich, & delicate Variety standing in ye same stalke of an Eternall Unity.”<sup>230</sup> Once souls have lost their ambition for earthly knowledge and happiness, they become martyrs for divine Beauty, and cease to lust for the control and possession of all things for one’s own private interest. Thus, for Sterry, true religion fulfills the greatest commandment of love for God above all things, as it unites the spirit of heavenly Love with the letter of natural loves. As we will see in the next chapter, the motive of divine love leads to the fulfilment of the second commandment of love, namely, love of one’s neighbor.

---

<sup>230</sup> *SW*, 40.

## Chapter 5

### ‘Inseperable Society of Heavenly Love’: A Social Ethic

O Blessed Friendship! Blessed Birth!  
Which makes an Heaven on this Earth  
Thrice Blessed Friends, which ever dwell  
In Loves, and Beautys Golden Cell!<sup>1</sup>

After the death of Oliver Cromwell, Sterry became the private chaplain to Viscount Lisle at West Sheen in Richmond. Here Sterry and his family were able to enjoy the privacy and peace of country life. Lord Lisle apparently had an interest in gardening, and as Sterry reveals in his familiar letters, the lord of the manor kept a variety of trees and flowers among which Sterry would often walk, usually in the morning, to meditate and compose the thoughts from which he would draw his sermons and lectures.<sup>2</sup> Sterry speaks of the community of nonconformist families who lived in and around the Lisle estate in Richmond, whom Sterry served as a minister and tutor, as his “lovely society.”<sup>3</sup>

In one of Sterry’s remaining notebooks there is a poetic homage that he penned for this society of friends entitled, *Of Divine Friendship*.<sup>4</sup> As Nabil Matar points out, Sterry’s poem is based on a French romance by Honoré D’Urfé entitled *L’Astrée*, which describes a romantic venture among a small community of druids including ‘Adamas’ the druid, ‘Amasis’ a nymph, and ‘Silvander’ the son of Adamas.<sup>5</sup> At the center of the landscape setting of the poem stands a

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter Sterry, *The Repose at Beau-Plaine*, in *SW*, 192.

<sup>2</sup> *SW*, 84: Sterry compares the garden to the Garden of Eden and Lord Lisle’s trees to the Tree of Life.

<sup>3</sup> See Nabil Matar, “Peter Sterry and the ‘Lovely Society’ of West Sheen,” *Notes and Queries*, 227 (1982): 45-46.

<sup>4</sup> Both the poem and its prefatory treatise on divine friendship are recorded in EC MS 294, 9-42.

<sup>5</sup> Honoré D’Urfé, *L’astree De Messire Honoré D’Urfé, Marquis De Verromé, Comte De Chateau-Neuf, Baro[n] De Chateau-Morand, Cheualier De L’ordre De Sauoye, &c: Par Plusieurs Histoires Et Sous*

fountain with the power to reveal the true love of the one who gazes into it. Likewise, Sterry sees his little society in West Sheen as a gathering of lovers around the “Hallow’d Fount” of love, which reveals “Loves-King in Living Figures” to those who look into it.<sup>6</sup> D’Urfé’s romance evidently made a profound impression upon Sterry, as he not only sought to imitate it in his own poem, but he began after 1660 to give nicknames to his friends in the lovely society, referring to one as ‘Sylvander’ and often signing his letters with the name ‘Adamas.’

In this poem and in the prefatory treatise that precedes it, Sterry describes the nature of true friendship using the same Trinitarian perspective and method that we have discussed in previous chapters. As we will see in this chapter, Sterry believes human society and friendship is a necessary feature of human happiness (*eudaimonia*) because it is the way in which the *imago Dei* in humanity becomes a living image of the Trinity. That is, as two individuals are united in their mutual loves for one another and for Christ, they cease to be lifeless unities and become a unity that is a Trinity, a unity of lover, beloved, and love. As the soul descends with divine Virtue and Love into relationships with others it gathers its relations up into itself as reflections of its true self and unites their earthly image with their eternal form in Christ. When true heavenly lovers are united in physical relationships they establish a lovely society, one that is not devoid of earthly suffering and hardships, but one that discovers a presence of eternal loves in the midst of temporal absence and loneliness and a universal peace in the midst of suffering and death. This shows that Sterry intends his universal method, when properly used by faithful Christians, to have the temporal effect of establishing the true order of heavenly harmony and universal peace on earth.

---

*Perso[n]ne De Bergers & D’autres, Sont Deduits Les Diuers Effects De L’honneste Amitié : Troisième Partie* (Paris: Chez la veufue de Varennes, 1627); Matar, “Lovely Society,” 45.

<sup>6</sup> *SW*, 188.

## Spiritual Friendship

Like Aristotle, Sterry sees the human person as a social animal.<sup>7</sup> When God created humans, he made them in heaven, prior to the creation of the earth. There they lived with Christ and the angels in a collective body of individuals, such that together, their intellectual union of unity and variety in the body of Christ was a living mirror of the Trinity.<sup>8</sup> As we have seen, the Trinity is the exemplar of all things, for Sterry, and this includes social relationships, friendships, and virtues. “Life cannot be without Society, nor Society without Distinction,” and life is “a Reflection upon itself,” a Trinity, “a Circle all in one.”<sup>9</sup> The higher the distinction there is within the unity of the divine persons, “the higher is the Activity, Society, and Joy of Life.”<sup>10</sup> In order for the joy of life between the persons of the Trinity to be the fullest, the union between the unity and distinction must be a unity that is “divided from nothing” and “hath no relation to any thing without itself” but comprehends all things within itself in “the most perfect Union of the highest Unity and the highest Distinction.” Thus, the divine Life is a social life in a mutual embrace and perfect equality of persons in light and love, of vision and mutual affection.<sup>11</sup>

Human friendship is a virtuous relationship that reflects and participates the transcendent Life and relations of the Trinitarian persons. Just as God’s love is the personal union of lover and beloved, so human friendship is the union of two souls in mutual love.<sup>12</sup> In the explanatory preface to his poem *Of Divine Friendship*, Sterry affirms that there is a certain hierarchy of loves and friendship. The first and greatest friendship is the Trinity, whose love is especially seen in the

---

<sup>7</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* 1, 1253a.

<sup>8</sup> EC MS 289, 185.

<sup>9</sup> *AGM*, 467.

<sup>10</sup> *AGM*, 468.

<sup>11</sup> *AGM*, 468: Sterry uses the metaphors of light seeing, light seen, and vision as well as lover, beloved, and love to describe the social nature of the Trinity.

<sup>12</sup> *AGM*, 430.

“Heavenly Image” of God in Christ, “the only Object of a Divine Love, and Friendship.”<sup>13</sup> The first copy of the pattern of divine Love in the Trinity is the friendship between Christ and his bride, the church and the heavenly Jerusalem. Thirdly, there is the friendship between the saints, which is “the Immortall Love of the Spirit diffusing it selfe into severall Divine Spirits, and tying them up together with a Golden Knott of sacred, and inviolable Amity.”<sup>14</sup> The lowest form of friendship conforms to Aristotle’s notion of perfect friendship between “those who resemble each other in virtue.”<sup>15</sup> This sort of friendship is a “morall Friendship, founded upon Virtue, and regulated by it, mutually uniting the Lights, and Loves of Soules, in their Ascent to the Supream Good,” which for Sterry is a conceptual good, and so this form of friendship is “the lowest, and last Drought.”<sup>16</sup>

The truest and most perfect friendship between human persons is their mutual participation in the body of Christ. This type of love has a triune shape. First, the friendship between two members of Christ’s body is a unity of divine and eternal loves, “being at once the Temple, and the Heavenly Image of the Supream Love, and Lovers in the Holy Trinity.”<sup>17</sup> The second part of divine friendship between human persons is the unity in a variety of loves, that is, two lovely souls “in a love resulting from the Amiable proportions, and combinations of all morall Virtues.” And finally, the completion of divine friendship among humans is the union between the eternal Love and the temporal unity of two souls.

The Marriage of both these, the Life, and the Picture; the Originall, and the Copy; answering One another with a most Lovely Proportion, and making up, an Admirable Beauty, and Musicke, in which all Harmonious Spirits, all Supernaturall, and morall Harmonys of Lovely Spirits meet in one Loveliness, Love, and Life.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> *SW*, 178.

<sup>14</sup> *SW*, 178.

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *Nic. Ethic.* 8.

<sup>16</sup> *SW*, 178.

<sup>17</sup> *SW*, 178-9.

<sup>18</sup> *SW*, 179.

Though Sterry believes that all being has a triune shape and, consequently, that every living creature is a vessel reflecting the spiritual treasure of the divine Life to those with spiritual perception, the union between two human persons is a more exact and immediate reflection of the Trinity.

Friendship is a necessary condition of *eudaimonia*, of human participation of the divine Life at the highest possible level, namely, in the apex of the mind (or *nous*). The union of the persons of the Trinity is a union of three complete intellectual hypostases in a transcendent union where “One is all Three, and all Three are perfectly One, each One distinctly All in One, the same Three, and the same One.”<sup>19</sup> If God were not a Trinity of persons, he would be a “Melancholy, Barren Unity,” because he would be incapable of actualizing his communicative and absolute Goodness by pouring it upon an ‘other’ who is fully identical and fully distinct from himself. Likewise, human persons would be solitary and barren unities if they were unable to communicate their goodness and love to another person who is also essentially the same Self in another. Sterry describes a friend as an “Alter Idem,” the same self in another person by a union of substances.<sup>20</sup>

Friendship ... is the best Love, the Love of Souls and Spirits, where Virtue and Divine Grace is the Loveliness and Beauty, makes the two Friends, the two Lovers, one self in two distinct Forms, like one Soul in two Bodies, where the Bodies also are that Soul in a twofold Image of itself, bearing altogether the same Likeness and Similitude, acted by the same Life, being each to other, as living Looking-Glasses. Each of them sees himself perfectly in the other, and so still in each one, both appear together.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> *AGM*, 468.

<sup>20</sup> *RRR*, 201: “[This] properly imports One made into Two by a division, as Adam, and Eve; the other half of Ones self.”

<sup>21</sup> *AGM*, 430.

For Sterry, true friendship is not a mere intellectual union between persons united in the pursuit of the common good – though it is that too – but a divine union initiated, acted, and fulfilled by God himself as he proportions himself to himself within two souls.

Those who are true friends are not united by earthly loves *per se* but by the immediate reflection of the divine Love, the *imago Dei*, within and through their earthly loves or virtues. As Plato says (via Sterry), love is a birth in a beautiful subject.<sup>22</sup> Sterry interprets Plato's notion of love by way of the philosophies of Plotinus, Henry More and Ralph Cudworth, as Trinitarian love. According to Plotinus, every soul comes into the physical world as a celestial Venus attended by its own celestial Cupid, which is its own self-image in which it contemplates itself.<sup>23</sup> This, for Sterry, is a reflection of Trinitarian Love and Christ's relationship to the heavenly body, the heavenly Jerusalem. It is also the pattern of unity between the individual soul and the body, as the celestial bodies of every individual person is one's own self-image, as spirits in their "proper Vestments, Vehicles, or Chariots, with their proper Brides."<sup>24</sup> In a letter to a friend who Sterry refers to as "Scipio," Sterry tells his friend that where Love appears, it awakens a twin-Love together with itself, each of which is a perfect circle containing the whole of the divine Love in itself, presenting this Love to another person in all "ye glorious formes of mortall Loves."<sup>25</sup>

Dearest Scipio, such a Love as this, so awakened, is your Person, and Spirit to me; so doth it fly to my Spirit upon ye wings of ye Divine Beauty & Goodnes. While your Love springs fro a Principle of Divine Goodnes, ye ffather of Loves. While your Love beholdeth me, & so maketh me its beautifull marke by beholding mee in ye Image of ye divine Beauty, wch is our Jesus.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, 206e.

<sup>23</sup> *DFW*, 32; On this concept in Plotinus see Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus or the Simplicity of Vision* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 55.

<sup>24</sup> *DFW*, 33.

<sup>25</sup> EC MS 289, 135-6; "Scipio" is Mr. Robert Laiton, one of Sterry's pupils, and whose house was atop Richmond Hill where Sterry would take his daily walks and often write letters to his family.

<sup>26</sup> EC MS 289, 136.

Sterry tells his friend that if Socrates loved Phaedrus so much because of his delightful speeches, “with wt a delightfull necessity am I enforced to love you, who by this divine appearance formes so divine Loves in me?”<sup>27</sup> True friends, in the union of their substances, share the divine Love with one another in the body of Christ, which is the spiritual body and the universal image – the celestial Cupid – that the soul makes as it reflects upon itself. True friends share this universal self-image.

True friends also share the living image of Trinitarian love between them, as God works both the love of benevolence and complacency into their relationship. As a mutual “living Looking-Glass” of the divine Love, one friend offers one’s whole soul and essence and the soul’s reflection of the divine Goodness to the other friend. Both friends, as true lovers, rest in the joy of their mutual embraces and unity in the Good of the Trinity.

Nothing is pleasant to the Lovers, in nothing can they repose themselves, either within themselves, or without, in which they meet not with, in which they do not freely, fully, solely, immediately behold, possess, enjoy the beloved Persons of each other.<sup>28</sup>

So, Sterry says, the lover lives and has his whole being and pleasures in the one he loves, who is “all the World, the whole Universe of Beauty and of Being” and a “perfection of Beauty to the Lover.”<sup>29</sup> Just as the persons of the Trinity find their complete joy and fulfillment within the unity of the divine being, so human friends share a divine friendship, not requiring or being motivated by any good outside of the Goodness of the Trinity reflected in the “living image” of one’s other self.

After the fall, divine friendship is restored to its original heavenly glory in the union between Christ and his bride, the church. In a world that is darkened with conjecture and the sins

---

<sup>27</sup> EC MS 289, 136.

<sup>28</sup> *AGM*, 430.

<sup>29</sup> *AGM*, 430.



of the flesh, human relationships are often based on self-love, a desire to fulfill one's own private good rather than sharing it in a reciprocal exchange of the divine Good. Having restored the true Mean between infinite and finite loves through his incarnation, death, and resurrection, Christ casts away all veils and loves that mediated between God's Love and the love of human persons.<sup>30</sup> In the preface to his *Freedom of the Will* Sterry explains that Christ marries each individual soul to its proper Idea, which is the divine Love, so that nothing is anymore seen that is not seen through the lens of divine self-sacrificial love.<sup>31</sup> By finding oneself in the eternal love of God in Christ one sees the divine Beauty converting one's self, one's fears and self-love, into "one spiritual flame with it self."<sup>32</sup> Having lost all desires for finite loves and concepts through this divine vision, the soul can now fulfill the law of love as well as the precept of heavenly virtue: "With the measure with which thou has measured unto others, shall it be measured unto thee."<sup>33</sup> So, Sterry advises his reader:

[W]hen thou hast thus by the Sacred and sweet mystery of this Love found thy Beloved, thy God, in the place of thy self; Then love thy Neighbour as thy self. Love thy Neighbour in thy Jesus, thy God. Love thy Jesus, thy God, in thy Neighbour. Let this Neighbourhood of Divine Love be as large as the God of Love himself is. Let every other Person and Spirit, which lives and moves, and hath its being in God, within the encompassing, upon the Ground and Root of the Divine Being, be thy Neighbour, thy Brother, another self, as thy self.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> DFW, 200: "[God] casting off every Vail, and discovering his open Face in our Jesus ... doth with every glimpse of himself fill all the senses, all the understandings, all the capacities of Men and Angels, with the overflowing Pleasures of his Beauty."

<sup>31</sup> DFW, "Preface," fol. 10r.

<sup>32</sup> DFW, "Preface," fol. 3r.

<sup>33</sup> DFW, "Preface," fol. 10r.

<sup>34</sup> DFW, "Preface," fol. 3r.

The Love of Christ, therefore, restores the *imago Dei* in both the individual and the collective body of Christ, as it awakens each soul to a spiritual vision and taste of the divine Love in every finite love, a love which “believeth all things, all the good that ... every person or thing, is capable of.”<sup>35</sup>

Now, after the fall, human friendship is based on a self-sacrificial love that dies to itself in order to be reborn again in the Love of Christ in every relation. In his poetic tribute to the ‘lovely society’ Sterry draws a word picture of two lovers descending into the world from their source in the Trinity. As they descend they sing an ode to divine Love:

Behold; Two Hearts in One wee bring  
An Holy Image now of Thee  
A Sacrifice to Friendships King  
Thyselfe thus worshipt Gladly see.<sup>36</sup>

All interactions between divine friends are now acts of worship, that is, they are a sacrifice of faith, hope, and love in and through Christ to God.<sup>37</sup> Faithful and divine friendship now reflects and imitates Christ’s three-fold pattern of universal restoration, which is the threefold love of the Trinity itself. Each friend is purified in their understandings and loves for one another by seeing themselves descend from the holy Trinity as their origin. They are illuminated by their sacrificial death to earthly concepts and loves in a true reflection of their original Love. And finally, they are perfectly united to one another and to the Trinity by a complete union of themselves with the divine Love within them.

Wee Both still through new Shapes, new Beauties range  
One Beautious Spirit acteth every Change  
Love’s all infolding Spirit with Sweet Glorys

---

<sup>35</sup> *DFW*, “Preface,” fol. 10r.

<sup>36</sup> *SW*, 187.

<sup>37</sup> *SW*, 142: “[T]his is Right Worship, true Saintship; to know, to love nothing but God alone; to see, to be nothing, but that which God is in us, and in All things, that which wee and All things are in God.”

Unveiles Itselfe round Our whole Shining Storys  
 Its Seedes, Its Springings in Our selves now wee  
 Its Flowers, Its Fruites, and Its whole Circle see.<sup>38</sup>

While the two lovers sing, they never cease to gaze upon the reflection of “Loves King” in the “Hallow’d Fount” of divine Love in their shared loves and stories, as circles within the heavenly circle of all being, whereby they see themselves in “Living Figures” shining and “Circled with a like Glory.” Through this gaze at eternal Love, the lovers see “Love’s Glasse made of the Godlike Flame,” which does not annihilate their individual loves but “Presents us to Our selves the Same,” that is, as a living Trinity of lover, beloved, and uniting love.<sup>39</sup>

The restoration of divine friendship from sin and death is now the primary concern of those who are members of the body of Christ on earth, the visible church. Though he believes Christ has established the visible church as the means by which the Gospel is publically preached and divine Love awakened in human hearts, Sterry rarely mentions the public gatherings and prayers of the visible church. This is likely because Sterry is more concerned to convert his flock to a spiritual sense of God in the soul than he is concerned with the outward letter of ‘ordinances’ or visible administrations of the church, since each person is naturally tempted to gaze upon and desire outward things at the exclusion of the inward.<sup>40</sup> As Sterry affirms, however, he does not intend to “undervalue Ordinances, or the Scriptures,” but he does not want his congregation, like Potiphar’s Wife, to lust after the “outward Administration” and gaze upon them “to the Dishonour of your Husband.”<sup>41</sup> In fact, it is better to have the outward letter of the sacraments or the Scriptures, than

---

<sup>38</sup> *SW*, 188.

<sup>39</sup> *SW*, 195.

<sup>40</sup> Sterry mentions the outward forms of prayer to warn against hypocrisy. See *AGM*, 154.

<sup>41</sup> *AGM*, 355; See also *RRR*, 61: “Go then to the Sacraments; Pray; Read the Word; Hearken to the Promises; whatever thy Troubles, or Terrours be. These are appointed for thee to keep, to Comfort, to carry thee on, till Christ be revealed in thee.”

to have nothing at all, as in them “thou hold forth Jesus Christ, tho’ it be in the Letter only” and through them “Thou knowest not what Droppings of Divine Sweetness may at one Time or another fall upon thy Spirit.”<sup>42</sup> In the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper each person sees a visible sign of divine friendship, as “all the Saints at the Sacrament drink into one Spirit, together with their Saviour.”<sup>43</sup> Sterry affirms that the bread and the wine symbolize the Trinity, as in them Christ appears in two shapes. The bread maintains a consistent form, representing Christ’s unchangeable divinity, and the wine changes into the shape of the vessel that contains it, which represents the Spirit of Christ subsisting “in the distinct Form of every particular Saint” while keeping his personal form unchanged. The union of these two in the sacramental eating represents the unity of the body of Christ, “a Body and a Spirit. Several Manifestations, several Members to make up a Body with all Variety; but one Spirit.”<sup>44</sup>

Sterry does not confine the visible church and divine friendship to a single parish or to the clergy; rather, as a Reformed theologian he believes every Christian is a priest who ministers the love of Christ to their neighbor. He even refers to his daughter as a “Heavenly Priestesse” as she bears the form of divine love and friendship to all to whom she ministers.<sup>45</sup> In order to shed light upon the darkness and loneliness of a fallen world, God has chosen to make the members of the visible church as angels ministering to their brethren. “The great God is pleased by the Fleshly waies of man’s doing, speaking, writing, reading, living, to express and convey himself.”<sup>46</sup> This

---

<sup>42</sup> *AGM*, 357; Sterry even affirms the real presence of Christ in ordinances, comparing them to the healing waters of the Pool of Bethesda. See *AGM*, 358: “The Waters of an Ordinance are, as other Waters, when Christ is not present in them, to stir and quicken them.”

<sup>43</sup> *AGM*, 393.

<sup>44</sup> *AGM*, 396; See also *AGM*, 395: Sterry says the Father does not appear distinctly in the Supper because Jesus says “All that the Father hath are mine,” and so “the Father is the Spring of all, yet appears not in itself, but in the second Person.”

<sup>45</sup> *SW*, 121.

<sup>46</sup> *AGM*, 37.

is, in fact, how the Trinity is manifested to sinners, as it is “the Infiniteness of the Godhead, which brings forth itself in the greatest Variety of Shapes, yet still keeps the Unity, preserves it self entire, and full in every one.”<sup>47</sup> There are three ways in which a person ministers Trinitarian love and friendship to one’s neighbor. First, by praying for one’s neighbor, the spiritual soul “labours to raise it self into God, that by the clearness of his Light, by the fulness of his Life, it may bring it forth to perfection.”<sup>48</sup> Through prayer, God begets the divine Life into the faithful soul, which then leads a person to long for the same divine birth in one’s friends. And so “doth a good man travel in birth by Prayer ... till this Blessedness be formed in each soul.” So, for Sterry, prayer is not merely a supplication to God for one’s own private interests and desires. Rather, a spiritual person in prayer is “an Universal Father,” who “looks upon all Creatures, as its own Off-spring, or Bowels,” sacrificing constantly for its children, even “while they are playing away themselves in Vanity.”<sup>49</sup>

The second way in which the church ministers divine friendship to the world is through words of exhortation. After having received an imprint of the divine Life (and Virtue) through prayer, the spiritual person – the person who is filled with the Spirit of Christ – “feels the Waters of Divine Life and Joy bubbling up warm from the bosom of the Godhead” and then one’s tongue becomes “the Pen of a ready Writer” and labors to “imprint the Form of the same Life and Joys upon other hearts also.”<sup>50</sup> When one reports of Christ’s “sweet Contrivances ... and Compassions” upon oneself in the depth of sin and sadness, then he has “his Tongue made the Quill of the Godhead, by which he toucheth other Souls, and makes the same Musick upon them.”<sup>51</sup> God often

---

<sup>47</sup> *AGM*, 37.

<sup>48</sup> *AGM*, 38.

<sup>49</sup> Sterry references Job praying for his children, but one is also reminded of St. Monica’s prayers for Augustine.

<sup>50</sup> *AGM*, 38.

<sup>51</sup> *AGM*, 38.

uses the “Foolishness of Preaching” as an instrument of his divinity, which passes from “the highest Glory into inferior Forms” and from whence it returns into itself: from Christ it passes downward to the hearts of the faithful, then to their tongues and “into Words hovering in the Air” returning upward from there by passing into the heart, to the “Fairness of Christ, then to the “Fulness of God.”<sup>52</sup> Finally, the church administers divine friendship to one another by its example of life. According to Sterry, philosophers say that each thing has its proper beams of light by which it reveals and multiplies itself. Nothing has more piercing and plentiful beams than the divine nature, which when it is “brought forth in any Spirit, it cannot but manifest itself by beautiful Beams of Love, and Holiness.” And, Sterry says, as often as the divine nature is manifest in one person, so by its “power and luster thorow the whole man ... it many times draws strangers, first into the Love, then into the Likeness of it.”<sup>53</sup>

The Christian family is the realm in which the divine friendship of the church first manifests and multiplies itself. Sterry attributes the highest honor of any relationship to that between a husband and wife who both share a love for Jesus Christ. This is because “God hath Sealed upon it [marriage] the Image of the most Holy, and Blessed Trinity, the Trinity of Divine Love, the Trinity in the Divine Nature.”<sup>54</sup> A marriage that honors the Trinity keeps “the Bed of Love undefiled” by adultery and inordinate lusts, unlike the marriages of the Israelites and gentiles who lived before the incarnation of Christ. These marriages were of people who were “for the most part strangers to the Doctrine of the Trinity,” and so they were “loose, and dissolute in the rites of Marriage” making “nothing of Fornication, and very little of Adultery.”<sup>55</sup> Those lovers who participate in divine Love through faith in Christ, on the other hand, offer their union of earthly

---

<sup>52</sup> *AGM*, 39.

<sup>53</sup> *AGM*, 39.

<sup>54</sup> *RRR*, 364.

<sup>55</sup> *RRR*, 364.

love to Christ as a sacrifice, and for them Christ has “restored Marriage not only to its primitive institution [between Adam and Even before the fall], but to its Eternal Pattern, and Original in Heaven, the high, and holy Trinity.”<sup>56</sup> A marriage that preserves the divine Love “pure from Lusts, untroubled by passions” has the divine nature set upon it as the “Seal of Eternity,” and by the likeness of divinity within, it draws down “the Trinity itself with all its secret, and sacred Treasures of Blessedness to inhabit with [them] in it.” Fidelity to the Trinity in marriage does not happen automatically, however, which is why Sterry exhorts married couples to be responsible spouses and “hold the Band of Marriage undefiled, unbroken in the sweet, and beautiful Type, in the Glorious Truth of the Heavenly Unity in the most Blessed Trinity.”

When Sterry was at Whitehall and in other locations throughout his career, he often wrote love-letters to his wife, Frances to encourage her amidst their separation, especially in the frightful times of war and plague. Sterry sees the love between himself and his wife as a manifestation of the pleasantness and sweetness of a divine Love that can only be seen, tasted, and felt by lovers illuminated with spiritual senses. Sterry refers to his wife as “My Dearest Love” and the “most truly sweetest of all earthly Sweets.”<sup>57</sup> He admits to Frances that he constantly thinks about her – “when is it in the day, or in the night, that you come not into my mind?” – with “pleasant thoughts of you in that Fellowship, which wee have together in the spirit of our Blessed Jesus amidst all the delights of Heaven, and Earth.”<sup>58</sup> When he contemplates his wife in her eternal form, Sterry says, “A sweet spring presenteth it self to mee, with a new heaven and a new earth, in which at once all things sing, shine, send forth the holy Angells, our beautifull Jesus ... the supream love, powering forth himself, as A divine ointment, and perfume over all.”

---

<sup>56</sup> *RRR*, 364.

<sup>57</sup> *SW*, 118.

<sup>58</sup> *SW*, 118.

In the midst of this spiritual sight Sterry sees two divine lovers united in the “Fountaine of eternal love” gazed upon by all flowers, birds, angels, Jesus, and the Trinity “as if they were intended all only to set of[f], and serve the mutuall loves of this blessed and immortall pair.”<sup>59</sup> At other times the two lovers appear in strange lands and dark forests, in the midst of storms at night, often separated from one another, afraid and alone, “as if they were spirits and Apparitions.”<sup>60</sup> But, then the lovers find Jesus Christ, divine Love itself in human form, passing through all highs and lows with them “in the same disguises.” With this realization the two lovers also discover that the strange lands, the darkness and fears of loneliness are merely the angels of the heavens casting themselves into obscure shapes and hiding their true appearances beneath a variety of masks.

All this is A divine play composed, and acted by themselves in the riches of their own divine spirit, the Unity and Center of all Spirits, of All varieties of all wisdom, Power, and love, to enlarge and highten their mutuall delights, and loves. That spirit of glory, and sweetnesse it self, which is themselves ... hideth it self in them all in every point of the roughnesse ... with a full Consort of heavenly Musicke.<sup>61</sup>

Here Sterry urges his wife to convert her loneliness in the time of separation into a spiritual sense, not to see it as true darkness and separation, but as a darkness which is both darkness and light, an embrace of opposites. Sterry encourages her that loneliness is designed and ordered by the universal Harmony and Love to remove lovers from their earthly loves for one another in order to center all of their desires in the divine Love in a mutual embrace of infinite and finite loves, a circle of divine Love and earthly lovers. “O how sweet, and divine A death is that, by which these lover dy together by this spirit unto all flesh, with its enchantments, and delusions, to live in these joyes.” This divine vision of his wife’s true form in heavenly Love, does not lead Sterry to put

---

<sup>59</sup> *SW*, 118.

<sup>60</sup> *SW*, 119.

<sup>61</sup> *SW*, 120.



away his longing for reunion with her. On the contrary, he says “These make me ardently desire to bee with you, when I think, that thus we are wont to walk, talk, sleep together, and enjoy each other,” that is, in the image of the Trinity.<sup>62</sup> Yet, Sterry affirms, the mixture of darkness and light that he sees in his vision of union and separation from his wife “make me to have some satisfaction in your absence, when I see that we are undivided for ever in these joyes.” Finally, Sterry reassures her, “Wee are indeed thesse lovers, wee have brought forth A race of divine loves, what ever vailes may be cast upon them for A season.” Here Sterry’s letter to his wife ends, without a ‘goodbye,’ but with the immortal words, “I am your eternall lover.”

Sterry acts as a minister of divine friendship to his wife and the rest of his family and friends in the ‘lovely society’, whom he encourages in the same vocation of love. He encourages his daughter by letter that their mutual exchange of letters amidst their absence from one another reveals the divine beauties and loves in the “Musick of the Divine Essence” where “we see every Friend, Every Relation ... nay ourselves also with every Accident of our Lives.”<sup>63</sup> Sterry tells his daughter to see all of her relations in the light of the divine essence, to “Receave your litle boy, as by the Resurrection from the Dead, in a figure” and “Let Death bee your Gain as it is the unvailing this Jesus, that you may enjoy him in every forme, naked, and entire.”<sup>64</sup> Sterry advises his son Peter to read his father’s letters repeatedly “that my words on the Paper may be so many Beames of Divine truth from the eye of the Godhead shining into your minde, and so many Springs of heavenly Life, and Love opened from the heart of the Lord Jesus in your heart.”<sup>65</sup> Though the

---

<sup>62</sup> *SW*, 120.

<sup>63</sup> *SW*, 87.

<sup>64</sup> *SW*, 91; It is unclear as to whether Sterry’s daughter suffered the loss of a child, though it is likely that Sterry is merely encouraging her to imagine her son’s resurrection in order to shield her from anxiety and worry about the possibility of her child’s death.

<sup>65</sup> *SW*, 130; And *SW*, 60-1: Sterry tells his son to “Keepe this Letter often, read it over frequently, heedfully, believingly, Thincke you read every word as written deeply upon the very bowells, the heart

wayward lifestyle of young Peter deeply upsets and disappoints his father, Sterry is convinced that the constant exchange of letters between them will awaken Peter to the truth of the divine Love that they share in Christ. “Many Letters have I written to you, and so through the love, and power of Christ shall continue by writing and speaking to awaken, and stir up the Love-fire of the divine Seed, and Nature in you.”<sup>66</sup>

Sterry does not want to flame the fires of his son’s temporal loves with admonitions merely to lead a more rational or morally virtuous life. Rather, Sterry admonishes him to be a “keeper of the inward Paradise of God”<sup>67</sup> by turning away from all outward loves and appearances, even conceptual knowledge, and turn to Christ in prayer and purity of mind until Christ “become a principle, and Roote in you, filling you ever more with his owne vertues, likenesse, Joyes, and excellencies in your Understanding, Will, affections, in your whole man, and way.”<sup>68</sup> The life of sin that Peter has chosen actively crucifies Jesus Christ, defaces “ye Divine Beauty,” and “breake[s] God himselfe.”<sup>69</sup>

Sin cutts you of from that Best, & most Blessed Spirit God Himselfe, ye only Roote of all Good, in which you had your Roote, out of which you first sprang, & by which you were once sustained, & nourished, as a Deere, & delightful Branch in that Tree of Light, & Love.<sup>70</sup>

By reminding Peter that his true self and true happiness lies eternally comprehended in the divine Mind and Love, Sterry hopes to both shame him with the thought of breaking or staining the divine Unity, Love, and Beauty with sinful self-love, and awaken him to the reality of his true self beneath

---

of a most tender Father, nay of the Lord Jesus, and from thence written out upon your bowels, and heart, with theyr very Lifeblood.”

<sup>66</sup> *SW*, 124.

<sup>67</sup> EC MS 289, 70.

<sup>68</sup> *SW*, 124.

<sup>69</sup> EC MS 289, 7.

<sup>70</sup> EC MS 289, 7.

and within himself, in the divine seed, the *imago Dei*, ever hidden but ever present as the Sun within his sun and the Love within his loves. In this way Sterry, in his loving exhortations to his son, imitates the love of Christ, which uses tough love, playing “the Wrath-part in the Love-play,” to shame another away from inordinate love, and to awaken and enkindle the divine seed of love in their soul, so that the two may once again share the love and friendship of the Trinity in their mutual loves for one another.<sup>71</sup>

### Universal Peace

Peter Sterry’s notion of divine friendship is part and parcel of his belief that a period of universal peace may be established on earth through the efforts of Christians coming together in their mutual love for one another and for Christ in each other. The idea of universal peace was a commonplace of literature in the early modern world, especially among the encyclopedists, Baconians, and millenarians like Jan Amos Comenius, Lord Brooke, and Peter Sterry who were looking for the “great instauration” of learning and wisdom said to precede the second coming of Christ. Comenius and Sterry were clearly indebted to the reform efforts of Nicholas Cusanus, who in his own day became known as the “Hercules of the Eugenians” for his herculean efforts to bring about a “Catholic conchord” within the church around the papacy of Pope Eugenius IV.<sup>72</sup> Cusanus’s reform efforts, like those of other universal reformers, were driven by his apocalyptic expectations.<sup>73</sup> In his *De pace fidei*, Cusanus famously proposes the doctrine of the Trinity as a

---

<sup>71</sup> DFW, 215.

<sup>72</sup> On Cusanus’s reform efforts, see James E. Biechler, “Nicholas of Cusa and the End of the Conciliar Movement: A Humanist Crisis of Identity,” *Church History* 44 (1975): 5-21.

<sup>73</sup> Nicholas Cusanus, *Conjectura de ultimis diebus*, 123-40 (h IV.91-100); For early modern apocalypticism, including Comenius, see Howard Hotson, *Paradise Postponed: Johann Heinrich Alsted and the Birth of Calvinist Millenarianism* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2000).

mechanism for overcoming the conflict of the Abrahamic religions, arguing that Christianity proposes “*una religio in rituum variatate*.”<sup>74</sup> As scholars have pointed out, Cusanus conceives of peace and tolerance between individuals and religions, not by abandoning Christianity but by looking through the Trinity as “a symbol for the abandonment of all absolute claims to the truth.”<sup>75</sup> By abstracting all truths into their ultimate Truth in the divine unity, Cusanus outlines a specifically Christian, yet universal, method of peace.<sup>76</sup> Likewise, both Lord Brooke and Peter Sterry promote a Trinitarian vision of unity-in-distinction as a way of bringing about universal peace.<sup>77</sup>

In a lengthy sermon on John 16:33, Sterry endeavors to promote his eschatological vision of universal peace. He sees a pattern in this verse, as it enfolds both peace (“in me ye might have Peace”) and affliction (“In the world ye shall have Tribulation”) into the perfection of Christ’s conquest and triumph (“But be of good cheer, I have overcome the World”).<sup>78</sup> Because of human propensity to choose the pleasures of outward appearances over the divine light, there is now a perpetual war between the flesh and the spirit in the human soul, which spills out into society at large. Darkness has now descended upon the hearts and minds of each person and nation, causing them through their own lust and envy quite literally to break the harmony and peace of the divine

---

<sup>74</sup> Nicholas Cusanus, *De pace fidei*, 6 (h VII.9); On this principle in Cusanus, see Thomas McTighe, “Nicholas of Cusa’s Unity-Metaphysics and the Formula *Religio Una in Rituum Varietate*,” in *Nicholas of Cusa in Search of God and Wisdom*, ed. Gerald Christianon and Thomas M. Izbicki (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 161-72; See also Joshua Hollmann, *The Religious Concordance: Nicholas of Cusa and Christian-Muslim Dialogue* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

<sup>75</sup> Jos Decorte, “Tolerance and Trinity,” in *Conflict and Resolution: Perspectives on Nicholas of Cusa*, ed. Inigo Bocken (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 117.

<sup>76</sup> See William Howe, “The Idea of Truth as the Basis for Religious Tolerance According to Nicholas of Cusa with Comparisons to Thomas Aquinas,” in *Conflict and Resolution*, ed. Bocken, 161-176.

<sup>77</sup> *NT*, 169-70: Brooke concludes that if his audience will use his method of discovering unity, “We might have an Heaven here, we might see how Christ is one with GOD, and wee one with Christ; so wee in Christ, one with God. If wee cannot reach the perfection of this knowledge, yet let us come as neere it as we can, for the true knowledge of God in Christ, is life everlasting.”

<sup>78</sup> *AGM*, 260: For Sterry, the pairing of peace/tribulation is analogous to the pairing of love/wrath.

image in creation.<sup>79</sup> For Sterry, each person has a natural desire for peace, yet “We may love Peace amiss, so as to mistake the Ways of War for Paths of Peace,” as the person with a warlike spirit seeks an end to one war by causing another. So, in this life each person seeks peace but finds only tribulation.<sup>80</sup> True peace is found beyond the coincidence of peace and tribulation in the “Expectations of an universal Peace” upon Christ’s second coming to earth.<sup>81</sup> Sterry seeks to persuade his audience, quite contrary to their opinions, that to avoid pain and tribulation in the name of temporal peace only brings more strife and war, but to seek spiritual peace in the midst of affliction and sorrow is to discover universal peace and to usher in the second coming of Christ.

According to Sterry, peace is a divine attribute, and like God’s other attributes, it is a property of his essence, which is a unity in variety. Peace is another name for the divine Virtue, Life, Love and Harmony in God. Peace is the perfection of happiness, “which hath all its Parts, and every one in its due Place, Proportion and Union with the rest.”<sup>82</sup> True peace is not a lifeless silence; it is music. “Peace is not Rest without Motion, but Rest in Motion.”<sup>83</sup> It is a heavenly consort of many instruments, a unity in variety, and a variety that not contrary to peace “but only to Dulness and Stupidity.” The “sweetest Musick of Peace is composed of unequal Spirits, some of a higher and shriller Note, some of a deeper and graver Sound.”<sup>84</sup> A complete peace is a threefold chain composed of (1) several perfections in one spirit, which is primarily a peace between God and the soul; (2) several spirits united in their perfections, which is the peace of individual souls; and (3) a “Chain of outward Contents and Comforts, arising from a Chain of

---

<sup>79</sup> *AGM*, 293: “The whole World is too narrow to fill one Heart. Yet if one more have any thing of the World, the whole is divided and made the less.”

<sup>80</sup> *AGM*, 284.

<sup>81</sup> *AGM*, 288.

<sup>82</sup> *AGM*, 280: Sterry says that the Hebrew word ‘Shalom’ originally signifies ‘perfection’.

<sup>83</sup> *AGM*, 281.

<sup>84</sup> *AGM*, 281.

Spirits, and sweetly answering it,” which is the union between spiritual and temporal peace.<sup>85</sup> For Sterry, spiritual and temporal peace should not be confused or separated because the former is the cause of the latter. “Hearts must be Spiritually cemented by the Blood of Christ, before they can be rightly compos’d into an External Frame of Civil Peace.”<sup>86</sup>

Temporal peace and spiritual peace are necessarily linked because human society is the immediate reflection of the Trinity in the world, as human society is a variety of individuals united in one body by means of their head, Jesus Christ. For Sterry, the Trinity descends into five circles of peace, which are constantly putting themselves forth into one another and circling through one another in their proper order:

The Peace of God is the Center. This spreads itself into the Peace of Christ, the nearest and inmost Center. This enlargeth itself into the Peace of Hearts, That into the Peace of Men in Common-wealths, That flows forth into the largest and utmost Circle, the Peace of all Creatures. All these Circles lie comprehended in their Center, the Peace of God.<sup>87</sup>

The peace of God is “Infiniteness cast into a Harmony” of innumerable varieties “tun’d to each other, by Soul Ravishing Numbers and Measures.”<sup>88</sup> From this divine source of peace descends the union of temporal and eternal peace in the incarnation of Christ. This is the “Universal Peace in God, marrying itself to the Created Image of Things in the Person of Christ, so bringing forth and multiplying itself in every Creature.”<sup>89</sup> The peace of commonwealths occurs when individuals are united with one another in the same source and center from which they derive their being. So, the “true Peace of a Common-Wealth is the inward Peace of many Hearts flowing forth into their

---

<sup>85</sup> *AGM*, 281.

<sup>86</sup> *AGM*, 281.

<sup>87</sup> *AGM*, 289; Though Sterry does not cite Augustine here, this passage contains strong echoes of *De civ. Dei* XIX.

<sup>88</sup> *AGM*, 282.

<sup>89</sup> *AGM*, 282.

outward Converse, and forming its Image upon that.”<sup>90</sup> The peace of all creatures is the closing of the circle where circumference and center meet one another in a union of opposites. This universal peace will arrive at Christ’s second coming “when Sovereignty and Sweetness, Power and Love, Solitude and Society, the Principles of Rage and Death, the Principles of Peace and Life over all the Creation, shall Kiss each other.”<sup>91</sup>

The second coming of Christ and the universal peace that he brings is not a future event for which one must wait passively before attempting to pursue peace on earth. Rather, Sterry believes Christ has already returned with his heavenly host in a thick cloud of darkness, and that his kingdom is slowly growing, unveiling the light of peace through the darkness of tribulation.<sup>92</sup> Through his death and resurrection, Christ reestablished universal peace in himself, “reconcil’d the Bottom of Things to the Top, making the Extremes meet and enfold one another in him, as the first and last Links in a Chain.”<sup>93</sup> When Christ reveals himself in the human heart he “takes away the dark Grosness from it, works it to a ... Transparency, like a Crystal Glass, that the Beams of God may fill every Point of it.”<sup>94</sup> The veil of darkness is not fully removed in this life, but each good person has a “living picture” of the cross of Christ in one’s heart that makes the earthly image and all things perceived within it appear as “an Universal Darkness, like that, when Christ suffer’d.”<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> *AGM*, 288.

<sup>91</sup> *AGM*, 289.

<sup>92</sup> *WOG*, 18: “[Christ] turns the outward face of things in Church and Common-wealth, into a Wilderness, puts al into Confusion, that no humane Eye can see any way, either forward, or backward. Then he comes forth with new, extraordinary appearances in Christ ... These Extraordinary Appearances in Christ the Lord makes his way, in which he walks, and into which he leads his People to walk with him in his wonders through the Churches, and the Nations.”; *CCC*, 16: “What then is His Second Comming? ‘Tis His Shining forth upon the rest of the Creatures; that, as He comprehends Himselfe and All Things in God: So They may comprehend All Things, and Themselves in Him.”

<sup>93</sup> *AGM*, 312.

<sup>94</sup> *AGM*, 309.

<sup>95</sup> *AGM*, 310.

The darkness of the earthly image in the soul is the fire that Christ kindled in his incarnation that purifies the earthly image and earthly peace by the presence of divinity, through the darkness of death, and resurrection. For Sterry, each person participates in the death of Christ's earthly image by faith, when "the World and a Christian are seen again" through the universal darkness of the cross "as new Created in a Divine Shape."<sup>96</sup> The tribulations of this life are not the pure absence of Christ but the heat of the divine fire of Christ's descent from the heavens burning up the earthly image "in Plagues, Discords, Wars, all sorts of Miseries, till at the last Day it turn all into Flame."<sup>97</sup> The sight of Christ's descent, Sterry tells the members of Parliament, is meant to lead to repentance and humility, so that they might cease from establishing peace by means of the earthly image (i.e., by reason) alone.<sup>98</sup> Christ does not come to destroy earthly peace, however, but to resurrect it from its darkness and deformed state. "Therefore, when Christ hath reduc'd the World to Ashes, as the Phoenix, out of those Ashes he raiseth new Heavens, and a new Earth."<sup>99</sup> So, true universal peace will only be fully realized when societies die to their earthly ambitions through repentance and faith, and discover divine peace rising up within them from the ashes of their temporal desires.<sup>100</sup>

Believers are not merely passive to the arrival of Christ's Kingdom. Rather, they help to usher in universal peace by means of their divine friendships and heavenly loves, which are fueled by their spiritual vision and ability to convert variety to unity-in-variety, darkness to light-in-darkness, and tribulation to peace-in-tribulation. This principle of spiritual vision, based as it is on

---

<sup>96</sup> *AGM*, 310.

<sup>97</sup> *AGM*, 310.

<sup>98</sup> *EDN*, 33.

<sup>99</sup> *AGM*, 310.

<sup>100</sup> *TWU*, "Epistle Dedicatory," 2v: "the Lord beateth and bruiseth his People in these Nations ... that He may hide Pride, Ambition, and the Love of this World from our Eyes; that He may work us through Humility, Meekness, and Mutual love unto the Unity of the Spirit, and the sweet Fellowship of one Mystical Body in our Lord Jesus."



the *imago Dei*, leads Sterry to uphold Nicholas Cusanus's principle, *una religio in rituum varietate*. Sterry says, "Christ died to this end, that Men, differing in the outward Notions and Forms of things, might be united in one Spirit."<sup>101</sup> The body is composed of contrary qualities (hot/cold, moist/dry, etc.) yet the composition of these qualities make up one body. Likewise, some Christians have "zealous Affections" and others are cold and dry with a "wise Fixtness," but these variations "shall give a Temper one to another" in one and the same spirit. So, "Christian Religion is a Feast serv'd up in several Notions, and outward Rites, like several Dishes, at a Table. They that sit down to it, are of several Diets and Palates," but through Christ the variety of rites makes "a Feast, not a Battle."<sup>102</sup> Though Sterry does not explicitly address other religions as Cusanus did, he believes the dialectical principle of *una religio in rituum varietate* is the same principle used by Christ, and so it is capable of reconciling "Jews and Gentiles."<sup>103</sup>

These are the most contrary Points in the whole Compass of Spirits. The most Pious and most Profane. The most Superstitious, and most Sacrilegious. The most in Bondage to external Forms, the most at liberty from them. Jesus Christ crucifying the Flesh ... which is the Stuff of all outward Forms ... broke down the Wall of Enmity, the Flesh, with all its various Pictures and Images in it, that so he might make these two one Spirit.<sup>104</sup>

In light of this, Sterry asks his audience if they are still able to discern any substantial difference between Englishman and Scotsman, Presbyterian and Independent. Even if these two were "Jews and Heathen ... Christ reconcil'd those; and so he can do these."<sup>105</sup> Christ is able to reconcile Protestant and Roman Catholic as well if only both parties were to "give up [themselves] to be

---

<sup>101</sup> *AGM*, 291.

<sup>102</sup> *AGM*, 292.

<sup>103</sup> *AGM*, 292.

<sup>104</sup> *AGM*, 292.

<sup>105</sup> *AGM*, 292.

carry'd on in the Power of the spirit, which is Truth and Love.”<sup>106</sup> Sterry is elsewhere highly critical of Presbyterians and Roman Catholics for attaching so much weight to “Ceremonious Observations of outward Rites,”<sup>107</sup> yet he believes that these rites would be tuned to their proper order and use if “[we] all meet in Christ, in being Christians, and so agree, putting off all other Names and Forms of Differences, to put on this of Unity.”<sup>108</sup>

Despite his emphasis on spiritual vision and faith, Sterry does acknowledge the role of human reason in bringing about outward peace in the world. He affirms that it is the duty and a law in Christianity “to provide for things honest, not only in the sight of God, but in the sight of all men.”<sup>109</sup> Reason is a shadowy figure of the spirit, and so “[that] which is beautiful in the one, will be so in the other too: so the Spirit, and Reason, mutually give their testimony each to other; what is comely in the eye of one, is so to both.”<sup>110</sup> So, Sterry does not intend to speak against “outward Form in Religion, or an outward Reformation,” but he wishes everyone would “raise not these as Clouds, that we hang not these as Veils before the Face of Christ,” because these are not the “Rule of true Peace.”<sup>111</sup> The pursuit of temporal peace by reason alone cannot reconcile contradictions in the variety and contrariety in oneself, and so it cannot provide an ascent beyond our own private interests and temporal barriers to peace, but only Christ, the true Measure of peace can “bring together the scatter’d Pieces of your broken Hearts” with “an Universal Peace.”<sup>112</sup> In a sermon on the second coming of Christ, Sterry asks the members of Parliament:

Have any of you been thus tempted, to make the Calf of Humane-Policy your Counsellour, because this is the God of Nations? or to think; We know not what This Iesus, or His

---

<sup>106</sup> *AGM*, 286.

<sup>107</sup> *EDN*, 19.

<sup>108</sup> *AGM*, 292.

<sup>109</sup> *WOG*, 32.

<sup>110</sup> *WOG*, 32.

<sup>111</sup> *AGM*, 301.

<sup>112</sup> *AGM*, 315.

Comming in The Spirit meane? Shall we trust our selves, and the Kingdome to a name, an ayrie Fancy? If you have been thus tempted, I hope your own Piety and Prudence will prompt you to grind this Calf to Powder by a Penitent Contrition, and make it bitter to your Spirits, by a Kindly Remorse.<sup>113</sup>

Repentance and the grace of Christ, not human policies determined by reason alone, grants universal peace to the human soul and human friendships because Christ is “not the Branch only, nor the Root alone, but the whole Tree of Mankind,” who causes the whole person to subsist in him as the first Principle of peace, from which each person derives purified notions and motivations for peace.<sup>114</sup> By participating in Christ’s peace, each person receives the intellectual ability to convert tribulation into peace and embrace peace-in-tribulation. Through faith, each believer suffers the painful loss of one’s own self-interest and reason-based plans for peace and receives from Christ “the Universal Image, in which you may see lying all Images of Peace and Comfort, triumphing over all the Images of Woe and Grief wedded to these, and bearing their Image, as a Wife her Husband’s.”<sup>115</sup> The true peacemaker, in other words, does not perform the work of peace by reason alone, but by Christ, who is “the Reason of his Reason,” the consummation of all rational attempts at peace.<sup>116</sup>

Sterry’s promotion of universal peace through the principle of ‘one religion with many rites’ does not drive him to pacifism, but he acknowledges that war is often inevitable. One may be forced to go to war as a means of establishing and preserving temporal peace, but this must only be done by those who are able to convert tribulation to peace and war to love. Sterry acknowledges that God is depicted in various places within the Old Testament as a God of war. These depictions

---

<sup>113</sup> *CCC*, 41.

<sup>114</sup> *AGM*, 311.

<sup>115</sup> *AGM*, 316.

<sup>116</sup> *AGM*, 41.

do not reveal God as the creator of war, however, but evil spirits rising up in war against God. Since God is “all Love” the enmity originates with the wicked who “beat themselves in Pieces against him.”<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, God entertains this war with evildoers out of necessity, because “if you lay Stubble in the way of Fire; the Fire must consume it, or Die.”<sup>118</sup> And lastly, God manages the wars between himself and the evil forces in the world by the principle of love, not enmity. God permits war as a means of consuming the enmity of things and converting “all into one Love; like Fire.”<sup>119</sup> So, Christians who find themselves facing the inevitable necessity of war, may go to war with comfort as long as they imitate the love of God, letting “Love be the Principle which acts us quite thro’ the War.”<sup>120</sup> The one who is forced to fight should be ready to say to the enemy “you may force me to kill you, but nothing can force me from loving you.”<sup>121</sup> The only reason that moves a Christian to fight, Sterry reasserts, is duty or necessity. Anyone who is moved by worldly gains or private interest to take away the life of another person “undervalues the Image of God in the Life of Man, and is become a Murtherer.”<sup>122</sup> He who makes war his love is a devil in the form of a man, but he who makes love his war and war the “unwilling way for Discovery of Love,” is a god in human shape, “he is a true Christian, truly Divine.”<sup>123</sup>

The method for making divine friendships is the same as the method for bringing about universal peace, namely, by using the divine vision of the *imago Dei* intellectually to convert all enemies into lovers. Because the root of divine Love lies hidden within our cloudy perception, friends are disguised as enemies and “kill and hate one another to the Pit of Hell,” but the

---

<sup>117</sup> AGM, 286.

<sup>118</sup> AGM, 286.

<sup>119</sup> AGM, 286.

<sup>120</sup> AGM, 287.

<sup>121</sup> AGM, 287.

<sup>122</sup> AGM, 287.

<sup>123</sup> AGM, 287.

“mysteries of Christianity” take away the disguises and “discover this Eternal Kindred in Life, and Affinity in Joys between us.”<sup>124</sup> And so, Christians are meant to make peace “after the Example of our Beloved,” even being ready to “die one for another, seeing it is now manifest, that we live one in another.”<sup>125</sup> When one is humbled by the revelation that rational knowledge and pursuits are merely conjectural, one is forced to admit, as Sterry does that “I know not what I am, I am sure bad enough. I know not what I should be ... but so far as I weakly understand the Principles of the Gospel, I ought to be of this Temper.” The temper that Sterry refers to is the attitude toward suffering, that “as I would rather die by another hand, than Kill myself, so would I chuse to lose a Life, much rather than take one from any Man.”<sup>126</sup> To kill another person would be to kill oneself, because “every Man being as near a Neighbour to me, as myself is to myself.”

But I would perish in my own private Interest a thousand times over, before I would by a War, be an occasion of Death to Thousands, for these are myself a thousand times over, I would kill a Man only upon the same Terms that I would die myself, for a Publick and Universal Good. I would trouble a State, as I would let my Father[’s] blood, like a Physitian, not an Enemy.<sup>127</sup>

Here Sterry reasserts the same principle regarding war mentioned earlier, that it must only be pursued for the sake of universal good, and the test for whether a war is a virtuous pursuit is whether the principle of divine Love is the driving force. “The same Principle should produce the same Proportion in us.” So, if Christians truly loved one another “as Living one to another” then there would be an end to all self-interested war. “For who can say of any Heart, which he is about to pierce with his Sword, that his Saviour lives not there, tho’ perhaps he do not yet appear?”

---

<sup>124</sup> *AGM*, 291.

<sup>125</sup> *AGM*, 291.

<sup>126</sup> *AGM*, 291.

<sup>127</sup> *AGM*, 291.

Though war may appear to disrupt any opportunity for peace and divine friendship, the spiritual person is able to see it as the first stage in God's new creation, when all of human ambition is burned up and humbled to the dust.

Iesus Christ, as He is the Glory of God, comes riding in the midst of this whirlle-wind, cloud, and fire ... While a cloud of darknesse covers the whole World, you, O ye Brethren of the Great King, sit in the secret of this Darknesse, upon a Throne of Light; you lie in the midst of this cloud upon a Bed of Love, in fellowship with your beloved Iesus Christ. While the Tempest tears up this Creation from the very Roots of it; you sit within it, as above it, as ruling it, as flying upon the Wings of it: you see a new Heaven, and a New earth in the midst of it, as in a womb, from which they together with your selves are ready to spring forth.<sup>128</sup>

Since Christians have a continual friendship with Christ, and through him all things, they are always ready to sacrifice their own desires for temporal peace and war, as this embrace of peace through darkness and tribulation proves to bring about eternal friendships. To those who trust in private gain, Sterry admonishes, "[T]hou shouldst like Curtius, have cast thy self with that, which was dearest to thee into the Gulf ... to have become a Sacrifice for the Peace of the Church, and Nation."<sup>129</sup>

In his *Freedom of the Will* Sterry issues a call to tolerance to his readers. He offers them a new method, not merely for reading and comprehending his argument on the nature of freewill but a new method for charming or converting one's turbulent and quarrelsome relations into peaceful and divine friendships. He urges his reader to begin by contemplating the divine love, and exhorts them to be illuminated with the divine light, to descend into all of their relations by means of that light, as ministers of that light to the world. According to Sterry, we should see God's providential

---

<sup>128</sup> *SCS*, 29.

<sup>129</sup> *TWU*, 15.

works as “so many modes and dresses” of the divine love. One should view all secondary causes as “*Causa prima modificata*,” he says (quoting Campanella), and so the diversities in relations are mere appearances.<sup>130</sup> Whether form and matter or differences of being or operation, all second causes are activities of the first cause (i.e., God), and so are reducible to ‘love.’ Furthermore, one should view all of one’s relations through a “two-fold Glass, the Blood, and the Beauties of Christ.”<sup>131</sup> Sterry urges his readers, therefore, not to let any principles, practices or conjectures divide them from one another, because these divisions are merely different reflections of the divine Love.

Sterry uses Aristotle’s principle that there is “the same reason of Contrarieties” to argue that all parties in a dispute have both good and evil motivations, principles, or practices; yet, both parties only discern the evil in each other, looking upon the other through “the same disturbed and coloured Medium” of conjecture.<sup>132</sup> When the two parties limit themselves to the conjectural binary of good-self and evil-other, then they both “heighten themselves by self-justifications” and render themselves incapable of looking upon the good, not only in each other, but in the whole work of God in creation.<sup>133</sup> It often happens that two saints who have “the same Spiritual Sense of some Excellency in Jesus Christ” aim to express what they know by means of concepts that are contrary to one another.<sup>134</sup> Sterry compares these warring parties to children fighting over the appearance of their father seen in different clothing. One child says that his father is in the red suit but the other child says his father is in the green suit, when in reality it is the same father in both

---

<sup>130</sup> Tomasso Campanella, *De Sensu Rerum et Magia, Libri Quatuor* (Frankfort: Egenolphum Emmelium, 1620), 145: “Particulares enim causæ, univocæque, potius organa & modifications primarum causarum sunt, quam causæ; quod olfecit S. Thomas.”

<sup>131</sup> *DFW*, “Preface,” fol. 5v.

<sup>132</sup> *DFW*, “Preface,” fol. 4r; Aristotle, *Physics*, 188b21.

<sup>133</sup> *DFW*, “Preface,” fol. 4v.

<sup>134</sup> *AGM*, 410; We find an example of this between Saints Dominic and Francis and their respective followers in Dante, *Paradiso*, canto XII.

suits.<sup>135</sup> When one lays too much stress on the “colour’d Glass” of conceptual knowledge, then Christ will appear in different forms, just as a staff appears to be strait in the air but crooked in the water.<sup>136</sup> The spiritual judge, however, recognizes that the same truth may appear in contrary notions, as one Christ in both cross and throne, and so his judgment will be that of a peacemaker: “Thou hast but one Piece of Truth in thy Notions, perhaps the other Man hath the other Piece in his Notions.”<sup>137</sup> When two warring parties judge things by the Measure of Christ, on the other hand, they cease to place too much weight on the notions of their own party and instead “they come more inwardly to Know one another, and see the same Truth, and the same Sweetness, which would break forth in the Hearts of them both tho’ it would come forth in several shapes there.”<sup>138</sup>

In his *Freedom of the Will*, Sterry urges his reader to look beyond conjectures to the heart of the person beside them, to take pleasure in the whole work of God therein, rather than its part or its defect. Only true evil threatens to divide one person from another. Some matters are indifferent, that is, they are neither good nor evil but depend upon “the intention and spirit which acteth them.”<sup>139</sup> Others are a mixture of good and evil. For those parties who are engaged in motives or plots that are purely evil, one should not treat them as if their persons were purely evil. Rather, one should imitate the divine sun and shine the heavenly light upon all persons.

[I]t is the part of every Child of Light, to maintain the Divine Love in his Spirit, like the Sun in the Firmament, encompassing the whole Earth, from one end to the other, shining upon all, both good and bad, upon dry and sandy Desarts, the Habitations of wild Beasts, and venomous Serpents, as well as cultivated Gardens, flourishing with wholesome Herbs, pleasant Flowers, and all sorts of fruits.<sup>140</sup>

---

<sup>135</sup> *AGM*, 413.

<sup>136</sup> *AGM*, 409.

<sup>137</sup> *AGM*, 410.

<sup>138</sup> *AGM*, 411.

<sup>139</sup> *DFW*, “Preface,” fol. 5r.

<sup>140</sup> *DFW*, “Preface,” fol. 5r.



One should shine light upon both good and evil but in the proper proportion, in such a way that the light tunes the shade to a universal harmony, so the good overcomes the privations of good. So, Sterry says, “be a Serpent to the evil, but at the same time a Dove to the person, without gaul, without any thing to offend” but mourning over the lack of good in the other as one self with them until they are recovered from their evil and are captivated “into a fellowship with you, in the purity and love of the Divine Nature.”<sup>141</sup> The wrath that the spiritual person shows toward the evil of one’s neighbor however, should not be like the fire of hell but like the fire of the altar, mingled with sweet incense, “with the rich Odours and Perfumes of a Divine Love.”<sup>142</sup> And, “let thy zeal against the evil be love to the person, flaming forth, and burning with a great, but with a sweet, and Divine force, that it may consume the Dross for the Golds-sake.”<sup>143</sup>

By viewing all things and converting them into a vision of spiritual harmony in Christ, the spiritual peacemaker is capable quite literally of charming one’s neighbor, Sterry believes, the lovelier that one becomes in oneself. A person becomes more lovely the more one reflects the divine Love and Virtue within oneself, the more one measures one’s neighbor by means of the divine Measure. When one discovers the divine love within oneself by ‘conversion’ or self-reflection, then one discovers “the highest and sweetest of all Ideas” in oneself and in all one’s relations.<sup>144</sup> When one discovers the divine love in all things we find our “proper Habitation and Palace, set up for thee in thine own person, in every Creature, in every Created or Uncreated form of things, to dwell in both, here and above.” When all things, even oneself, appear in the divine light of love, then one sees oneself as “the beloved Object of all divine things, and divinely beloved

---

<sup>141</sup> *DFW*, “Preface,” fol. 5v.

<sup>142</sup> *DFW*, “Preface,” fol. 7r.

<sup>143</sup> *DFW*, “Preface,” fol. 7r.

<sup>144</sup> *DFW*, “Preface,” fol. 10r.

by all things.” This new perspective of oneself as both loving all and loved by all, enables one to convert all otherness to identity-in-otherness within the perfect idea of absolute Love.

When one measures oneself and all persons by means of the perfect idea of love, then one becomes an incarnation of divine Love to one’s neighbor. Then like king David, one takes up the sacred harp of love to disarm every weapon of evil and “chase away every evil Spirit from every breast.”<sup>145</sup> Sterry appeals to the Neoplatonic notion of sympathies, that “like is attracted to like,” to explain how one’s reflection of the divine love acts as a charm.<sup>146</sup> When a person possesses the likeness (similitude) of the divine Love as one’s “proper Root” then all things, even heavenly spirits and the divine Love itself, “discloseth it self to, shineth forth upon, and in all forms of things circleth in this person, this heart, being attracted by it, drawn to it, as its proper Centre.”<sup>147</sup> So, when one measures others by the divine Mean in Christ, then one attracts the Love of God in them to oneself and so, by participation, one becomes a living image of divine Love for one’s neighbor and for all created things. Sterry urges his reader to see all things “in a beautiful circle” of Love, as Love itself diffusing itself through the opposites of time and eternity, “through finiteness and infiniteness it self,” and by this vision, convert any opposition in oneself and others into unity-in-diversity.

As Bees extract the virtue out of the commonest Herbs, and convert it to Honey in themselves: So do thou believe every thing here to be intended in the best sense, of which it is capable: Draw forth this sense from it, and improve it in thy self with the utmost advantage, to the sweetest satisfaction, and the richest treasure in thy own mind.<sup>148</sup>

---

<sup>145</sup> DFW, “Preface,” fol. 9v.

<sup>146</sup> See Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. A.H. Armstrong, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966-1988), VI.9.11.

<sup>147</sup> DFW, “Preface,” fol. 9v.

<sup>148</sup> DFW, “Preface,” fol. 10v.

As the Bee converts the flower into honey, so Sterry says, we too convert every negative appearance into its best possible sense by means of our reflection of the divine Love. The divine Love contains the reasons that “subject all other reason to themselves” and “keepeth the Unity of the eternal Workman ... in the golden band of an universal Peace.”<sup>149</sup> One brings about peace in oneself and one’s neighbor by gazing upon the divine Love that “comprehendeth all things with strictest tenderest imbraces in it self, as one self with it self” by comprehending one’s neighbor “in their Divine Root.”<sup>150</sup> This love conforms to the Trinitarian pattern, as the divine love in the soul sustains our unity while we “rove through all the fields of Goodness and Beauty ... in their richest and most unbounded Varieties, as freely, as through [our] own proper Essence and Being.”<sup>151</sup>

The human task of discovering universal peace begins and ends in the sacred circle of divine Love. If one looks at one’s neighbor through the spiritual lens of divine Love, then one is both converted into the likeness of Love and receives the converting power of love in oneself. Then, one proceeds downward into the conceptual world and charms the evil in one’s neighbor to the good of the whole by uniting the good in oneself with the good possessed by the other, as both seek to pursue and eradicate the evil within each other, sharing this task mutually. And, in so doing the divine friends “meet as two halves of each other, filling up the circle of each others Being, Beauties, Joys, and be now compleated in one.”<sup>152</sup> And, this mutual embrace of many souls in one fulfills the harmonious activity of true virtue, in which “ye Beauty, ye Life, ye Love, ye Power, ye Peace, ye Pleasure of all things Cœlestiall, Angelicall, & Divine meet in One.”<sup>153</sup>

---

<sup>149</sup> *DFW*, “Preface,” fol. 7v.

<sup>150</sup> *DFW*, “Preface,” fol. 8r.

<sup>151</sup> *DFW*, “Preface,” fol. 12r.

<sup>152</sup> *DFW*, “Preface,” fol. 4v.

<sup>153</sup> EC MS 291, 221.

## Conclusion

Sterry utilizes the method of the arithmetical Trinity to articulate a rational and religious understanding of tolerance and peace. His call for a renewed vision of universal peace is founded on the ‘omniform’ capacity of the human mind to enfold and unfold the measures of all things as it ‘circles’ around its divine Idea in God the Son. To see both self and other united in the light of the divine Love (or unity-in-variety) is the same as to see all things as eternal forms enfolded within the numerical union of the monad, the dyad, and their union. According to Sterry, one finds one’s true self in the divine love both above and below as the Holy Spirit, the essential union between the Father and the Son in the Godhead, brings about the union of souls in human society.

Rather than creating a division between natural and spiritual friendships, between temporal and eternal peace, or civic and spiritual virtue, Sterry uses the spiritual vision of the *imago Dei* to convert all of these binaries into varieties-in-union. In this light the darkness, loneliness, and suffering that comes from the disorder and confusion in earthly concepts, relationships, and loves, can be embraced as both the eschatological appearance of Christ in his earthly kingdom and a call to participation in Christ’s *parousia* through humble and self-sacrificial love for one’s neighbor. By imitating the harmonious descent and ascent of Christ, putting off self for the sake of finding one’s true self in the other, earthly lovers draw a beautiful circle composed of both infinite and finite measures, in which they embrace one another in both their eternal and temporal forms, ‘sporting’ with one another in their heavenly gardens through times of absence and presence, through both life and death in the eternal body of Christ.

Sterry finds the key to universal peace and harmony in Nicholas Cusanus’s notion of ‘one religion in many rites.’ In his sermons, letters, and other writings, Sterry bids his audience to model their relationships after the enfolding of distinction and unity in the Trinity, as the model of

universal peace. If each person were to look at their relations as various modes of divine Love rather than merely human love, Sterry believes, then every politician, churchman, and layperson would see their rational principles and policies as conjectural paths to peace. Through repentance and faith one becomes more perfectly human – more perfectly virtuous – and more completely possess one’s ‘self’ as a self that is both self and ‘other’. In the choice of oneself over one’s true self-in-other, a person becomes a mere monad in a world of loneliness and self-love, which is the origin of disunity, discord, and war. Only through the mutual embrace of one’s self-in-Christ, one’s true Self, can one find universal peace and work with Christ to bring peace and true heavenly virtue to all of one’s relations in the “Inseperable Society of Heavenly Love.”<sup>154</sup>

Sterry undoubtedly realizes that his Trinitarian method of peace and the implication that Christ is returning to bring universal peace through Christians who make proper use of this method will sound somewhat foreign to the ears of his audience. Sterry imagines that some will say, “Who is this that thus preacheth Love to the World? Is he himself a Dove washt in Milk?”<sup>155</sup> On the contrary, he replies, the one who proclaims this method of universal peace has not himself come near to the purity of the bride of the heavenly bridegroom. Rather, Sterry refers to himself as one like John the Baptist, a mere voice crying in the wilderness, “Prepare ye the way of Divine Love.”<sup>156</sup>

---

<sup>154</sup> *SW*, 122.

<sup>155</sup> *DFW*, “Preface,” fol. 16r.

<sup>156</sup> *DFW*, “Preface,” fol. 16r.

## Conclusion

In Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus* Socrates approaches his friend Phaedrus and asks him to read a speech concerning love.<sup>1</sup> Walking with bare feet along the Ilissos river, Phaedrus reads to Socrates from Lysias's speech on the nature of the true lover. Then, as Socrates contemplates the lovers' experience of rapturous desire and the look of delight on Phaedrus's face as he reads, he is so moved and 'overcome' by the experience that he expresses his desire to join in the frenzy of love. A very similar event occurs between Benjamin Whichcote and Peter Sterry. According to the 17<sup>th</sup> century editor of Sterry's works, on one occasion Whichcote and Sterry were "discussing some abstruse Points of divinity" at Emmanuel College when Sterry "explain'd himself with such Ease and Clearness" that Whichcote reportedly arose from his seat, embraced Sterry, and proclaimed, "Peter thou has overcome me, thou art all pure intellect."<sup>2</sup> This event aptly characterizes, not only the relationship of Whichcote and Sterry but the nature of Sterry's moral theology. As he plays Phaedrus to Whichcote's Socrates, Sterry does not speak a theology of pure faith devoid of reason but a theology of "pure intellect," which as Whichcote likely intends, is Plotinus's "pure intellect that sees the most Pure" (καθαρῶ τῷ νῷ τὸ καθαρώτατον θεᾶσθαι), a description of the hypernoetic experience of the sage who sees the One at the summit of the intellect (τοῦ νοῦ τῷ πρώτῳ), seeing all things by means of the divine Mind (Νοῦς), outside of the soul itself.<sup>3</sup>

For Sterry, and Plotinus as well, the purification that the sage undergoes on his journey to the Good, does not lead to a life of pure detachment from the body, human friendship, and the

---

<sup>1</sup> *Phaedrus*, 230e–235e.

<sup>2</sup> *AGM*, sig. A 2.

<sup>3</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI.9.3.

political life. Rather, Sterry's theology is intentionally designed to bring about the transformation of the mind, in order that one may live within society and even enjoy the reflections of the Trinity that one finds in one's closest relations and dearest friends, without attempting to remake the world in one's own image. In fact, for Sterry, the physical, imaginary, and creative aspects of human nature are part of the triadic image that the human person reflects. Sterry sees the purification of the mind as both philosophical and theological, for the sake of the human person, which is a microcosm in itself. And so Sterry's ethic is intended to be a universal ethic with a universal method for bringing about the purification of a soul that has a potential 'omniformity'. The pursuit of finite goods in this world is a preparation for the vision of God that one may experience through faith. So, Sterry believes each person is obligated to develop moral and intellectual virtues through the right application of one's own essence, understanding, and will, which is the natural image of God in the soul. This image, inherent within the nature of the human person, provides the fundamental laws of human nature and morality. When a person directs one's own desires in accordance with the tri-unity of the soul, one is capable of discerning the difference between good and evil, as one's own tri-unity limits the soul's desires by containing (or presupposing) the multiplicity within one's own unity. The 'lower' virtues developed through the philosophical pursuit of the True and the Good keep the eye of reason untarnished so that it may more quickly and easily perceive the illuminative influences of the divine Spirit via the *apex mentis* or the human 'spirit'.

In Sterry's Christian philosophy, the student learns the universal *a priori* method for attaining the knowledge of God and imitating him in one's knowledge, desires, and actions. This method originates with the nature of the Trinity itself and is immediately reflected in the 'living image' of the Trinity in the human person. Sterry describes his method with many different terms

but the most fundamental of these is the triad of unity, variety, and union. This is Sterry's own doctrine of the arithmetical Trinity, which he develops by modifying the Pythagorean arithmetical speculations of Proclus and Nicholas Cusanus. This triad reveals the Trinitarian structure of reality and is symbolized by the characteristic of the number 'three' to enfold and unfold all other numbers. Likewise, the triadic soul (essence, understanding, will) discovers its true nature as it reflects upon all things within its own omniformity and measures them by means of the divine number (i.e., tri-unity) reflected there. Indeed, a person forms concepts of all things by a three-fold method: a person (a) sees all things within their original Unity in the divine Mind; (b) determines the characteristics of each finite thing by seeing each as an image that truly reflects the being of its original Unity; and (c) unites the image with its Original in a mystical union where both are simultaneously one and three by means of the union.

Accepting the starting place of the good life from the triadic image in the soul, Sterry develops a three-fold philosophical ethic. First there is the divine circle of the soul, descending immediately from its birth in the divine Mind. Secondly follows the 'moral' life of the rational soul, wherein one pursues philosophy and the good life on earth with one's natural image and the mediatory images produced by the created intellect. And finally, the union of the spiritual and moral in the Christian life is marked by the union of earthly and heavenly goods in one single life. In theological language, Sterry's ethic is the imitation of the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ. It includes the purification of the mind by the presence of the Original within it, the illumination of the mind by the subordination of the natural image or reason to its Original, and finally the immediate union of the soul with Christ in a sanctified life. Therefore, the Christian who pursues philosophy as a way of life in union with religion has a deiform and spiritualized power of



omniform judgment, by which one is able to subordinate one's desire for earthly goods to the ultimate good.

Perhaps the keystone of Sterry's ethic is his use of the 'spiritual senses' to unite faith and the power of judgment in the soul's ability to convert finite images into reflections of the mediatory image of Christ, that is, to see intentionally the divine Image in all finite images. Though he sees the soul as fundamentally anchored in the divine nature and determined to live and act in accordance with the laws of the *imago Dei*, he sees divine determination and human freewill as a concurrence of opposites. God, in other words, is not an external force commanding each person with an arbitrary will but moves the soul through the internal powers of the soul itself. So, for Sterry each person has a certain autonomy and freedom to develop virtue for oneself by participating in the Trinity in one's own triadic judgment of things. The spiritual virtues even enable one to draw God into the soul by cooperating with him, by converting one's vision of all things to a vision of God in all things.

Sterry's *a priori* method also describes the nature of spiritual virtue, which is a living participation in the Life of the Trinity. Since the Life of the Trinity is the divine self-reflection and the union of unity-in-variety, then human virtue is also the union of divine and human virtue, which is the perfection of the *imago Dei*. Indeed, God's Life is his Love, as the persons of the Trinity are inseparably united in the bond of infinite love. Indeed, the image of God is first and foremost, Christ himself, who is the immediate birth of God as he reflects upon himself in the union of his Love. When Christ takes on a finite nature in his preexistent state he becomes the mediatory image of God. According to Sterry, the union of a finite and infinite gaze in Christ is a uniquely human love by which God overcomes the infinite disproportion between himself and creation, and by which the Christian is able to proportion one's own finite desires with their infinite Measure. So,

in order to pursue the Good of the Trinity in all things, one must have an immediate awareness of the ‘mutual embrace’ between God and the soul, which constitutes the unity-in-variety in the soul, the Love within all finite loves, and the triadic ‘self’ of the *imago Dei*. Through union with Christ, each person possess one’s ultimate *telos*, as one’s true self (Idea) that eternally exists in Christ comes to be immediately united to one’s finite and natural self in such a way that preserves the Triunity of the Self-in-self. Then, when a Christian forms concepts and judges the limits of one’s desires by means of omniform judgment, one circles around the divine Mind in an eternal gaze of love and proceeds into the world to bring the divine Light and Love to the body and one’s ‘other-selves’ in society. In one’s circular journey of procession and return to Christ, one finds self-sufficiency as a love-union between one’s eternal and temporal selves.

For Sterry, faith, hope, love, and repentance are the most important virtues, as they are the immediate participations in divine Virtue and Love. That is, they perfect the union between God and the soul, the mutual embrace between God and his image. These three are activated by one’s perception of divine grace preached in the Gospel as it is juxtaposed with one’s own finitude and sinfulness to reveal the vastness of the divine Variety containing the principles of all being and non-being within itself. Repentance reduces the soul to nothing in order to reveal the conjectural nature of one’s concepts and loves and to prepare the soul for receiving forgiveness and union with God’s infinite Love. The theological virtues as a whole are actualized and increased through one’s use of the spiritual senses in meditation and prayer, especially in the coincidence of spiritual sight and touch. The spiritual senses rely on the omniform vision of the soul, and the theological virtues are virtues primarily because they restore the living image whereby the soul reflects upon itself in union with the divine Mind as it brings order and structure to its desires. This means that, for Sterry, the soul’s participation in Love is its greatest virtue, as love is the union that each person

is capable of bringing about in oneself and the world by converting all conjectural appearances to their Trinitarian form, namely, as light-in-darkness or knowledge-in-conjecture. Though the theological virtues are above the natural powers of the soul, they perfect the natural movement of the soul around its centre in the divine Mind, which is natural, not because the individual has power over the divine but because it is the nature of the *imago Dei* to participate the divine nature.

Sterry's universal method, therefore, is meant to provide a simple and easily accessible tool for transforming the mind of each Christian and uniting it to the greatest Good. The pursuit of an infinite Good actually motivated Sterry in his quasi political role in the Council of State to search for ways to bring about universal peace in England. Though the circumstances of the age in which he was to have his influence were perhaps some of the least amenable to the idea of peace, Sterry insistently preached the Gospel of peace and tolerance, and spoke out against the use of mere human policies and reason as if these were the only measures for solving the troubles of the times. Rather, he proposed a quite radical solution. He urged his Parliamentary audience to begin to view all things through the lens of the Trinity as the proper Measure of peace, and then to see all religions united in the bond of peace, as one religion in a variety of rites. Sterry's determination certainly inspired his friends in the 'lovely society' just as much as it did his former teacher, Benjamin Whichcote.

Upon being asked to preach at Sterry's funeral Whichcote acknowledged that the news of Sterry's death had deeply saddened him and removed all appearances of temporal pleasures from his mind; in consequence, Whichcote proposed to give away half of his possessions "to obtain only some free Conversation with that great Enlightned Friend of ours."<sup>4</sup> If Sterry were to offer some comfort to his friend from the grave, he would undoubtedly reply that in 'our Jesus' all

---

<sup>4</sup> AGM, A 2v.

spiritual friends eternally enjoy one another at every moment, in a coincidence of presence and absence that abides through eternity and time, light and darkness, so that true friends remain inseparably united in the divine Life, even in the grave. So, through all apparent changes, we reflect the Love, the Virtue, the Life of the Trinity, that we may incessantly enjoy the felicity of divine vision, and that God may be ‘all in all’.

In conclusion, this study of Sterry’s rational and religious ethic not only reveals the mystical side to the Cambridge Platonist movement, but it demonstrates Sterry’s unique mind and character, which is well worthy of study independently of its historical significance. By looking at Sterry’s sources and reading his writings in light of his universal method, we have seen how his promotion of a methodical and mystical ethic includes the rational ‘natural image’ as an essential part of the triadic nature of religion and spirituality – i.e., a union of the exemplar Image and the created image. We have also shown that Sterry’s subordination of reason to ‘spirit’ had more to do with the philosophical principles that he received from the Neoplatonist philosophy of Plotinus and Proclus, and the combinatory methods of Ramond Llull and Nicholas Cusanus than it did from theological commitments relating to Puritanism. And, we have witnessed how Sterry designed the subordination of reason to ‘spirit’ in order to initiate the consummation, not destruction, of reason within the ‘spirit’ of the intellect, and fully integrated into the spiritual life through the faculty of omniform judgment. This demonstrates that Sterry’s rational and religious ethic rightfully belongs in the company of Whichcote and the other members of the Cambridge Platonist movement.

This study also reveals many interesting areas ripe for further investigation. For example, there are interesting parallels between Sterry and the ‘receptive human virtues’ promoted in the ethics of Jonathan Edwards, enough to provide material for future study.<sup>5</sup> Also, those who are

---

<sup>5</sup> See Elizabeth A. Cochran, *Receptive Human Virtues: A New Reading of Jonathan Edwards’s Ethics* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011).

interested in the impact of Nicholas Cusanus in the early modern period, especially regarding the underdeveloped theme of Cusanus's ethics will certainly benefit from the present study.<sup>6</sup> And, given Cusanus's importance in many recent studies regarding the origins of modernity, Sterry's use and development of Cusan ideas within the Cambridge Platonist movement will certainly prove beneficial for understanding their contribution to the rise of the modern.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> The only systematic treatment of Cusanus's ethics is Isabelle Mandrella, *Viva Imago: Die Praktische Philosophie Des Nicolaus Cusanus* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> For a helpful summary of the literature on Cusanus and modernity, see David Albertson, "Mystical Philosophy in the Fifteenth Century: New Directions in Research on Nicholas of Cusa," *Religion Compass* 4.8 (2010): 471-485.; On the Cambridge Platonists and modernity, see Douglas Hedley and Sarah Hutton, eds., *Platonism at the Origins of Modernity: Studies on Platonism and Early Modern Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008); and Simon J.G. Burton, Joshua Hollmann, and Eric M. Parker, eds., *Nicholas of Cusa and Early Modern Reform* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources – the Works of Peter Sterry

Greville, Robert, Lord Brooke (co-authored by Peter Sterry). *The Nature of Truth, Its Union and Unity with the Soule: Which Is One in Its Essence, Faculties, Acts, One with Truth*. London: R. Bishop, 1641.

Sterry, Peter. *The Appearance of God to Man in the Gospel: And the Gospel Change. Together with Several Other Discourses from Scripture to Which Is Added an Explication of the Trinity and a Short Catechism*. London, 1710.

Sterry, Peter. *The Clouds in Which Christ Comes*. London: R. Dawlman, 1648.

Sterry, Peter. *The Comings Forth of Christ in the Power of his Death*. London: Charles Sumptner, 1650.

Sterry, Peter. *A Discourse of the Freedom of the Will*. London: John Starkey, 1675.

Sterry, Peter. *England's Deliverance from the Northern Presbytery Compared with its Deliverance from the Roman Papacy*. London: Evan Tyler, 1652.

Sterry, Peter. *An Eternity of duration that hath a beginning without any ende, is exposed to these difficulties*. Emmanuel College MS 29, 106-54.

Sterry, Peter. *Of the Nature of a Spirit*. In Emmanuel College MS 291, 67-79.

Sterry, Peter. *Peter Sterry: Selected Writings*. Edited by Nabil Matar. New York: Peter Lang, 1994.

Sterry, Peter. *Of Philosophy in General*. In Emmanuel College MS 291, 3-66.

Sterry, Peter. *The Rise, Race, and Royalty of the Kingdom of God in the Soul of Man: Opened in Several Sermons Upon Matthew 18.3*. London: Thomas Cockerill, 1683.

Sterry, Peter. *The Spirit Convincing of Sinne*. London: Matth. Simmons, 1646.

Sterry, Peter. *That the State of wicked men after this Life is mixt of evill, & good things*. In Emmanuel College MS 291, 96-105.

Sterry, Peter. *Of ye Sun*. In Emmanuel College MS 289, 168-172.

Sterry, Peter. *The Teachings of Christ in the Soule*. London: R. Dawlman, 1648.

Sterry, Peter. *The True Way of Uniting the People of God in these Nations*. London: Peter Cole, 1660.

Sterry, Peter. *Of Vertue*. In Emmanuel College MS 291, 172-230.

Sterry, Peter. *The Way of God with his People in these Nations*. London: Peter Cole, 1657.

### Primary Sources

Albertus Magnus. *Commentary on Dionysius' Mystical Theology*. In *Albert & Thomas: Selected Writings*. Edited and translated by Simon Tugwell. New York: Paulist Press, 1988.

Alsted, Johann Heinrich. *Clavis Artis Lullianæ, et Veræ Logices Duos in Libellos*. Strasbourg: Lazarus Zetzner, 1633.

Alsted, Johann Heinrich. *Encyclopædia: Septem tomis distincta*. Herborn, 1630.

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae*. In *Opera Omnia Textum Leoninum*. Edited by Roberto Bussa and Enrique Alarcón. Rome, 1888. Accessed 4 May 2017. <http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/sth1003.html>.

Aristotle, *Works*. Translated and edited by J.A. Smith and W.D. Ross. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.

Augustine of Hippo. *De civitate Dei*. In *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*. Series Latina. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. Vol. 41. Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1864.

Augustine of Hippo. *De doctrina Christiana*. In *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*. Series Latina. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. Vol. 34. Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1841.

Augustine of Hippo. *De Trinitate*. In *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*. Series Latina. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. Vol. 42. Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1865.

Bacon, Sir Francis. *Novum Organum*. Edited by Joseph Devey. New York: P.F. Collier, 1902.

Baxter, Richard. *Catholick Theologie*. London: Printed by Robert White, 1675.

Baxter, Richard. *Reliquiæ Baxterianæ, Or, Mr. Richard Baxters Narrative of the Most Memorable Passages of His Life and Times*. London: Printed for T. Parkhurst, J. Robinson, F. Lawrence and F. Dunton, 1696.

Bond, H. Lawrence ed. and trans. *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*. New York: Paulist Press, 1997.

Burnet, Gilbert. *History of His Own Times*. Edited by Sir Thomas Burnet. London: A. Miller, 1753.

- Campanella, Tomasso. *De Sensu Rerum et Magia, Libri Quatuor*. Frankfort: Egenolphum Emmelium, 1620.
- Campanella, Tomasso. *Universalis Philosophiæ seu Metaphysicarum Rerum*. Paris: P. Burelly, 1638.
- Comenius, Jan Amos. *Pansophiæ Prodrromus*. Leiden, 1644.
- Cudworth, Ralph. *Bibliotheca Cudworthiana, sive Catalogus Variorum Librorum Plurimis Facultatibus Insignium Bibliothecæ Instructissimæ Rev. Doct. Dr. Cudworth*. London: Edward Millington, 1691.
- Cudworth, Ralph. *A sermon preached to the honourable Society of Lincolns-Inne*. London: J. Flesher for R. Royston, 1664.
- Cudworth, Ralph. *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality with a Treatise of Freewill*. Edited by Sarah Hutton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Cudworth, Ralph. *The True Intellectual System of the Universe; Wherein All Reason and Philosophy of Atheism Is Confuted and Its Impossibility Demonstrated*. London, 1678.
- Culverwel, Nathanael. *An Elegant and Learned Discourse of the Light of Nature*. Edited by Robert A. Greene and Hugh MacCallum. Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2001.
- Diels, Hermann and Walther Knawz, eds. *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. Zurich: Weidman, 1985.
- Ficino, Marsilio. *Opera Omnia*. Basel: Henric Petri, 1561.
- Flasch, Kurt, trans. *Was Ist Gott? Das Buch Der 24 Philosophen*. München: C.H. Beck, 2011.
- Gale, Theophilus. *The Court of the Gentiles*. London, A. Maxwell and R. Roberts, 1669-78.
- Llull, Ramon. *Opera Latina*. Edited by Aloisius Madre, et alia. *Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Mediaevalis, LXXV*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1986.
- Lombard, Peter. *Petri Lombardi episcopi Parisiensis sententiarum lib. IV*. Paris, 1560.
- Macrobius. *In Somnium Scipionis*. In *Macrobius*. Edited by Franciscus Eyssenhardt. Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1893.
- Milton, John. *Artis logicæ plenior institutio, XIV*. In *The Prose Works of John Milton*. London: Westley and Davis, 1834.
- More, Henry. *A Discourse of the Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Celebration of the Holy Eucharist*. London: Printed for Walter Kettilby, 1686.



- More, Henry. *Discourses on Several Texts of Scripture*. London: Printed by I. R., 1692).
- More, Henry. *Enchiridion Ethicum*. London: J. Flesher, 1667.
- More, Henry. *An Account of Virtue*. Translated by Edward Southwell. London: B. Tooke, 1701.
- Nicholas of Cusa. *Opera Omnia*. 22 vols. Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1932-2005.
- Nicholas of Cusa. *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Nicholas of Cusa*. 2 vols. Edited and translated by Jasper Hopkins. Minneapolis, MN: Arthur J. Banning Press, 2001.
- Patrides, C.A., ed. *The Cambridge Platonists*. London: Edward Arnold, 1969.
- Petrarca, Francesco. "Letter to Tommaso Caloria in Messina." In *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man: Selections in Translation*. Edited by Ernst Cassirer, Paul O. Kristeller, and John H. Randall, Jr. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948.
- Plato. *Plato: Complete Works*. Edited with introduction and notes by John M. Cooper. Indianapolis: Hacket Publishing Company, 1997.
- Plotinus. *Enneads*. Translated by A.H. Armstrong. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966-1988.
- Plutarch. *Plutarch's Morals*. Vol. 3. Edited with revised translation by William W. Goodwin. Introduction by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1878.
- Proclus. *Elements of Theology*. Edited and translated by E.R. Dodds. Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1963.
- Proclus. *In Alcibiades*. Edited by L.G. Westerink. Translated by William O'Neill. Dilton Marsh, UK: The Prometheus Trust, 2011.
- Proclus. *In Timaeus*. Translated by David T. Runia and Michael Share. 4 Vols. Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Proclus. *Theologie Platonicienne*. Edited and translated by H.D. Saffrey and Leendert G. Westerink. Paris: Belles Lettres, 1968.
- Pseudo-Dionysius. *Corpus Dionysiacum I. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, De divinis nominibus*. Edited by Beate Regina Suchla. New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1990.
- Pseudo-Dionysius. *Corpus Dionysiacum II. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, De coelesti hierarchia, De ecclesiastic hierarchia, De mystica theologia, Epistulae*. Edited by Günter Heil and Adolf Martin Ritter. New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991.

- Pseudo-Dionysius. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*. Translated by Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem. Mahway, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987.
- Roth, Ulli, ed. *Raimundus Lullus, Die Exzerptensammlung aus Schriften des Raimundus Lullus im Codex Cusanus 83. Cusanus-Texte, III. Marginalien 4*. Universitätsverlag C. Winter, Heidelberg, 1999.
- Scotus, John Duns. *Opera Omnia*. Vatican City: Typis Vaticanis, 2003.
- Seneca. *De Vita Beata*. In *Moral Essays, Volume II: De Consolatione Ad Marciam. De Vita Beata. De Otio. De Tranquillitate Animi. De Brevitate Vitae. De Consolatione Ad Polybium. De Consolatione Ad Helviam*. Translated by John W. Basore. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932.
- Senger, H.G., ed. *Proclus Latinus: Die Exzerpte und Randnoten des Nikolaus von Kues zu den lateinischen Übersetzungen der Proclus-Schriften; 2.1 Theologia Platonis, Elementatio theologica*. Cusanus-Texte, III. Marginalien, 2. Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1986.
- Traherne, Thomas. *Christian ethicks, or, Divine morality opening the way to blessedness, by the rules of vertue and reason*. London, Jonathan Edwin, 1675.
- D'Urfé, Honoré. *L'astree De Messire Honoré D'Urfé, Marquis De Verromé, Comte De Chasteau-Neuf, Baro[n] De Chasteau-Morand, Cheualier De L'ordre De Sauoye, &c: Par Plusieurs Histoires Et Sous Perso[n]ne De Bergers & D'autres, Sont Deduits Les Diuers Effects De L'honneste Amitié : Troisième Partie*. Paris: Chez la veufue de Varennes, 1627.
- Vives, Juan Louis. *In pseudodialecticos*. In *Juan Luis Vives against the Pseudodialecticians: A Humanist Attack on Medieval Logic*, Rita Guerlac, ed., (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1979)
- Whichcote, Benjamin. *Eight Letters of Dr. Anthony Tuckney and Dr. Benjamin Whichcote*. In *The Cambridge Platonists: A Brief Introduction*. Edited by Tod E. Jones. Translations by Sarah E. Phang. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005.
- Whichcote, Benjamin. *Moral and Religious Aphorisms*. London: J. Payne, 1753.
- Whichcote, Benjamin. *Select notions*. 1685. Reprint. Menston: Scholar Press, 1971.
- Wood, Anthony à. *Athenæ Oxonienses: An Exact History of All the Writers and Bishops Who Have Had Their Education in the University of Oxford*. Edited by Philip Bliss. London: F.C. and J. Rivington, 1815.

## Secondary Sources

- Adams, Robert Merrihew. *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Albertini, Tamara. "Mathematics and Astronomy." In *Introducing Nicholas of Cusa: A Guide to a Renaissance Man*. Edited by Thomas Izbicki, Christopher Bellitto, and Gerald Christianson. 373-406. New York, N.Y: Paulist Press, 2004.
- Albertson, David. *Mathematical Theologies: Nicholas of Cusa and the Legacy of Thierry of Chartres*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Albertson, David. "Mystical Philosophy in the Fifteenth Century: New Directions in Research on Nicholas of Cusa." *Religion Compass* 4 (2010): 471-485.
- Armstrong, A.H. *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus*. Cambridge University Press, 1940.
- Asselt, Willem J. van, J. Martin Bac, and Roelf T. te Velde, eds. *Reformed Thought on Freedom: the Concept of Free Choice in Early Modern Reformed Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010.
- Austen, Eugene M. *The Ethics of the Cambridge Platonists*. Ph.D. Diss., The University of Pennsylvania, 1935.
- Baltzly, Dirk. "The Human Life." In *All From One: A Guide to Proclus*. Edited by Pieter d'Hoine and Marije Martjin. 258-273. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Baschera, Luca. "Total Depravity? The Consequences of Original Sin in John Calvin and Later Reformed Theology." In *Calvinus clarissimus theologus. Papers of the Tenth International Congress on Calvin Research*. Edited by Herman J. Selderhuis. 37-58. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2012.
- Beierwaltes, Werner. "'Centrum tocius vite'. Zur Bedeutung von Proklos' 'Theologia Platonis' im Denken des Cusanus." In *Proclus et la théologie platonicienne*. Edited by A. Ph. Segonds and Carlos G. Steel. 629-51. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000.
- Beierwaltes, Werner. "Das Eine als Norm des Lebens. Zum metaphysischen Grund neuplatonischer Lebensform." In *Metaphysik und Religion: Zur Signatur des spätantiken Denkens*. Edited by Michael Erler and Theo Kobusch. 121-51. Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 2002.
- Beierwaltes, Werner. *Identität und Differenz: Zum Prinzip cusanischen Denkens*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1977.
- Bergemann, Lutz. *Ralph Cudworth – System aus Transformation: Zur Naturphilosophie der Cambridge Platonists und Ihrer Methode*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012.

- Bernhart, Joseph. *Die Philosophische Mystik des Mittelalters, Von Ihren Antiken Ursprüngen Bis Zur Renaissance*. München: E. Reinhardt, 1922.
- Biechler, James E. "Nicholas of Cusa and the End of the Conciliar Movement: A Humanist Crisis of Identity." *Church History* 44 (1975): 5-21.
- Blumenberg, Hans. *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*. Translated by Robert Wallace. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983.
- Bonansea, Bernardino M. *Tommaso Campanella: Renaissance Pioneer of Modern Thought*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1969.
- Bond, H. Lawrence. "Nicholas of Cusa and the reconstruction of theology: the centrality of Christology in the coincidence of opposites." In H. Lawrence Bond and Gerald Christianson, *Reform, Representation and Theology in Nicholas of Cusa and his Age*. 227-40. Burlington: Ashgate, 2011.
- Bonner, Anthony. *The Art and Logic of Ramon Llull: A User's Guide*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Bonner, Anthony. *Doctor Illuminatus: A Ramon Llull Reader*. Princeton N.J: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Boyle, Marjorie O'Rourke "Cusanus at Sea: The Topicality of Illuminative Discourse." *The Journal of Religion* 71.2. (1991): 180-201.
- Burrell, David and Isabelle Moulin. "Albert, Aquinas, and Dionysius." In *Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*. Edited by Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang. 103-20. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2011.
- Burton, Simon J.G., Joshua Hollmann, and Eric M. Parker, eds. *Nicholas of Cusa and Early Modern Reform*. Leiden: Brill, forthcoming.
- Burton, Simon J.G. "'Squaring the Circle': Cusan Metaphysics and the Pansophic Vision of Jan Amos Comenius." In *Nicholas of Cusa and Early Modern Reform*. Edited by Simon J.G. Burton, Joshua Hollmann, and Eric M. Parker. 439-74. Leiden: Brill, forthcoming.
- Bussanich, John. *The One and Its Relation to Intellect in Plotinus: A Commentary on Selected Texts*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998.
- Bryson, James. *The Christian Platonism of Thomas Jackson*. Leuven: Peeters, 2016.
- Camporeale, Salvatore I. "Renaissance Humanism and the Origins of Humanist Theology." In *Humanity and Divinity in Renaissance and Reformation: Essays in Honor of Charles Trinkaus*. Edited by John W. O'Malley, Thomas M. Izbicki, and Gerald Christianson. 101-124. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993.

- Carter, Benjamin. *'The Little Commonwealth of Man': The Trinitarian Origins of the Ethical and Political Philosophy of Ralph Cudworth*. Leuven: Peeters, 2011.
- Casarella, Peter, ed. *Cusanus: A Legacy of Learned Ignorance*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012.
- Casarella, Peter. "Cusanus on Dionysius: The Turn to Speculative Theology." In *Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*. Edited by Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang. 137-48. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2011.
- Cassirer, Ernst. *Die Platonische Renaissance in England und die Schule von Cambridge*. Berlin: Teubner, 1932.
- Cassirer, Ernst. *The Individual and Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*. New York: Harper & Row, 1963.
- Cassirer, Ernst. *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance*. Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1927.
- Catana, Leo. "Readings of Platonic Virtue Theories from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance: The Case of Marsilio Ficino's *De amore*," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 22:4 (2014): 680-703.
- Chase, Michael. "The Medieval Posterity of Simplicius' Commentary on the Categories: Thomas Aquinas and Al-Farabi." In *Medieval Commentaries on Aristotle's Categories*. Edited by Lloyd A. Newton. 9-30. Leiden: Brill, 2008.
- Chlup, Radek. *Proclus: An Introduction*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Clucas, Stephen. "In search of 'The True Logick': methodological eclecticism among the 'Baconian reformers.'" In *Samuel Hartlib and Universal Reformation: Studies in Intellectual Communication*. Edited by Mark Greengrass, Michael Leslie, and Timothy Raylor. 51-74. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Cochran, Elizabeth A. *Receptive Human Virtues: A New Reading of Jonathan Edwards's Ethics*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011.
- Colomer, Eusebio. *Nikolaus von Kues und Raimund Llull aus Handschriften der Kueser Bibliothek*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1961.
- Costello, William T. *The Scholastic Curriculum at Early Seventeenth-Century Cambridge*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958.

- Crocker, Robert. "Mysticism and Enthusiasm in Henry More." In *Henry More (1614-1687): Tercentenary Studies*, edited by Sarah Hutton, 137-155. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990.
- Crocker, Robert. "The Role of Illuminism in the Thought of Henry More." In *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context: Politics, Metaphysics and Religion*, edited by G.A.J. Rogers, Jean-Michel Vienne, and Yves C. Zarka, 129-144. Dordrecht: Springer, 1997.
- Croft, P.J. and Nabil Matar. "The Peter Sterry MSS at Emmanuel College, Cambridge." *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 8.1 (1981): 42-56.
- Dahm, Albert. "Christus – 'Tugend der Tugenden.'" In *Sein und Sollen: Die Ethik des Nikolaus von Kues. Akten des Symposions in Trier vom 15. Bis 17. Oktober 1998*. Edited by Klaus Kremer and Klaus Reinhardt. 187-207. Trier: Paulinus, 2000.
- Darwall, Stephen. *The British Moralists and the Internal Ought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Decorte, Jos. "Tolerance and Trinity." In *Conflict and Resolution: Perspectives on Nicholas of Cusa*. Edited by Inigo Bocken. 107-118. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- Dixhoorn, Chad Van and David F. Wright, eds. *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643-1652*. Oxford, U.K: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Dixon, Thomas. "*Spiritual Musick*": *The Model of Divine Harmony in the Work of Peter Sterry (1613-1672)*. Ph.D. Diss. University of Manchester, 2005.
- Dupré, Louis. *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Dupré, Wilhelm. "Liebe als Grundbestandteil allen Seins." In *Sein und Sollen: Die Ethik des Nikolaus von Kues. Akten des Symposions in Trier vom 15. Bis 17. Oktober 1998*. Edited by Klaus Kremer and Klaus Reinhardt. 65-99. Trier: Paulinus, 2000.
- Edelheit, Amos. *Ficino, Pico and Savonarola: The Evolution of Humanist Theology 1461/2-1498*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.
- Floss, Pavel. "Cusanus und Comenius." *Mitteilungen und Forschungsbeiträge der Cusanus-Gesellschaft* 10 (1973): 172-90.
- Gandillac, Maurice de. "Neoplatonism and Christian Thought in the Fifteenth Century (Nicholas of Cusa and Marsilio Ficino)." In *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*. Edited by Dominic J. O'Meara. 143-168. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1982.
- Gavryliuk, Paul L. and Coakley, eds. *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

- Gersh, Stephen. "Nicholas of Cusa." In *Interpreting Proclus: From Antiquity to the Renaissance*. Edited by Stephen Gersh. 125-36. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Gilbert, Neal W. *Renaissance Concepts of Method*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960.
- Gill, Michael. *The British Moralists and Human Nature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Green, Garth W. "Nicholas of Cusa." In *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*. Edited by Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley. 210-223. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Greene, Robert A. "Whichcote, the Candle of the Lord, and Synderesis." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52:4 (1991): 617-44.
- Greengrass, Mark, Michael Leslie, and Timothy Raylor. "Introduction." In *Samuel Hartlib and Universal Reformation: Studies in Intellectual Communication*. Edited by Mark Greengrass, Michael Leslie, and Timothy Raylor. 1-26. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Hadot, Pierre. *Philosophy As a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault to Foucault*. Translated by Arnold I. Davidson. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995.
- Hadot, Pierre. *Plotinus or The Simplicity of Vision*. Translated by Michael Chase, with an introduction by Arnold I. Davidson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Hadot, Pierre. *What is Ancient Philosophy?* Translated by Michael Chase. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Hall, Basil. "Puritanism: the Problem of Definition." *Studies in Church History* 2 (1965): 283-296.
- Hannam, Walter. "Ad illud ubi permanendum est: the metaphysics of St Augustine's usus-fructio distinction in relation to love of neighbour, De doctrina christiana, I." In *St Augustine and His Opponents: Other Latin Writers*. Edited by Maurice Wiles, Edward Yarnold, and P. Parvis. 169-173. Leuven: Peeters, 2001.
- Harries, Karsten. *Infinity and Perspective*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001.
- Harries, Karsten. "Problems of the Infinite: Cusanus and Descartes." *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 64:1 (1990): 89-110.
- Haubst, Rudolf. *Die Christologie des Nikolaus von Kues*. Freiburg: Herder, 1956.
- Hayes, Thomas Wilson. "Nicholas of Cusa and Popular Literacy in Seventeenth-Century England." *Studies in Philology*, 84.1 (1987): 80-94.

- Hedley, Douglas. *Coleridge, Philosophy, and Religion: Aids to Reflection and the Mirror of the Spirit*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Hedley, Douglas and Sarah Hutton, eds. *Platonism at the Origins of Modernity: Studies on Platonism and Early Modern Philosophy*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2008.
- Hedley, Douglas. "Real Atheism and Cambridge Platonism: Men of Latitude, Polemics, and the Great Dead Philosophers." In *Platonisms: Ancient, Modern, and Postmodern*, edited by Kevin Corrigan and John D. Turner, 155-174. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Hengsternann, Christian and Alfons Fürst, eds. *Autonomie und Menschenwürde: Origenes in der Philosophie der Neuzeit*. Münster: Aschendorff, 2012.
- Hickman, Louise. "'Love is all and God is love': Universalism in Peter Sterry (1613-1672) and Jeremiah White (1630-1707)." In *"All shall be well": Explorations in Universalism and Christian Theology from Origen to Moltmann*, edited by Gregory MacDonald, 95-115. Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2011.
- Hill, Christopher. "God and the English Revolution." *History Workshop Journal* 17:1 (1984), 19-31.
- Hoff, Johannes. *The Analogical Turn: Rethinking Modernity with Nicholas of Cusa*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013.
- Hoffmann, Phippe. "La Triade Chaldaïque, ἔπος, ἀλήθεια, πίστις: de Proclus a Simplicius." In *Proclus et la théologie platonicienne: actes du colloque international de Louvain (13-16 mai 1998) en l'honneur de H.D. Saffrey et de L.G. Westerink*. Edited by Alain Philippe Segonds, and Carlos G. Steel, eds. 459-90. Belgium, University of Leuven Press, 2000.
- Hollmann, Joshua. *The Religious Concordance: Nicholas of Cusa and Christian-Muslim Dialogue*. Leiden: Brill, 2017.
- Hopkins, Jasper. "Introduction." In *Nicholas of Cusa on Wisdom and Knowledge*. Minneapolis, MN: A.J. Banning, 1996.
- Hopkins, Jasper. "Die Tugenden in der Sicht des Nikolaus von Kues. Ihre Vielfalt, ihr Verhältnis untereinander und ihr Sein. Erbe und Neuansatz." In *Sein und Sollen: Die Ethik des Nikolaus von Kues. Akten des Symposions in Trier vom 15. Bis 17. Oktober 1998*. Edited by Klaus Kremer and Klaus Reinhardt. 9-38. Trier: Paulinus, 2000.
- Hotson, Howard. *Commonplace Learning: Ramism and its German Ramifications, 1543-1630*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Hotson, Howard. *Johann Heinrich Alsted 1588-1638: Between Renaissance, Reformation and Universal Reform*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.



- Hotson, Howard. *Paradise Postponed: Johann Heinrich Alsted and the Birth of Calvinist Millenarianism*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2000.
- Hotson, Howard. "The Ramist Roots of Comenian Pansophia." In *Ramus, Pedagogy and the Liberal Arts: Ramism in Britain and the Wider World*, edited by Steven Reid and Emma Wilson, 227-252. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011.
- Howe, William. "The Idea of Truth as the Basis for Religious Tolerance According to Nicholas of Cusa with Comparisons to Thomas Aquinas." In *Conflict and Resolution: Perspectives on Nicholas of Cusa*, edited by Inigo Bocken, 161-176. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
- Hutton, Sarah. "Platonism and the Trinity: Anne Conway, Henry More and Christoph Sand." In *Socinianism and Arminianism: Antitrinitarians, Calvinists, and Cultural Exchange in Seventeenth-Century Europe*, edited by Martin Mulsow and Jan Rohls, 209-224. Leiden: Brill, 2005.
- Hutton, Sarah. "Some Thoughts on Ralph Cudworth." In *Studies on Locke: Sources, Contemporaries, and Legacy*, edited by Sarah Hutton and G.A.J. Rogers, 143-158. Dordrecht: Springer, 2008.
- Johnston, Mark. *The Spiritual Logic of Ramon Llull*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.
- Jones, Rufus M. *Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries*. Toronto: Macmillan and Co., 1914.
- Jones, Tod E., ed. *The Cambridge Platonists: A Brief Introduction*. Translations by Sarah E. Phang. Dallas: University Press of America, 2005.
- Kessler, Eckhard. "Introducing Aristotle to the sixteenth century: the Lefèvre enterprise." In *Philosophy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Conversations with Aristotle*. Edited by Constance Blackwell and Sachiko Kusakawa. 1-21. Brookfield: Ashgate, 1999.
- Kobusch, Theo. "Metaphysik als Lebensform. Zur Idee einer praktischen Metaphysik." In *Die Metaphysik und das Gute: Aufsätze zu ihrem Verhältnis in Antike und Mittelalter, Jan A. Aersten zu Ehren*. Edited by Wouter Goris. 27-56. Louven: Peeters, 1999.
- Koch, Josef. *Die Ars Coniecturalis Des Nikolaus Von Kues*. Köln: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1956.
- Koch, Josef. "Augustinischer Und Dionysischer Neuplatonismus Und Das Mittelalter." *Kantstudien* 48 (1957): 117-133.
- Kristeller, Paul O. *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources*. Edited by Michael Mooney. New York: Columbia University Press, 1979.
- Lamont, William M. *Puritanism and Historical Controversy*. London: U.C.L. Press, 1996.

- Leech, David. *The Hammer of the Cartesians: Henry More's Philosophy of Spirit and the Origins of Modern Atheism*. Leuven: Peeters, 2013.
- Lhor, Charles. "The new Logic of Ramon Llull." *Enrahonar* 18 (1992): 23-35.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 3rd ed. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.
- MacIsaac, D. Gregory. "The Soul and the Virtues in Proclus's Commentary on the Republic of Plato." *Philosophie antique* 9 (2009): 115-43.
- Mandrella, Isabelle. *Viva Imago: Die Praktische Philosophie Des Nicolaus Cusanus*. Münster: Aschendorff, 2012.
- Matar, Nabil. "Peter Sterry and the Comenian Circle: Education and Eschatology in Restoration Nonconformity." *The Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society* 5:4 (1994): 183-92.
- Matar, Nabil. "Peter Sterry (1613-1672), Independent Minister." In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Matar, Nabil. "Peter Sterry and the 'Lovely Society' of West Sheen." *Notes and Queries* 227 (1982): 45-6.
- Matar, Nabil. "Peter Sterry and the Ranters." *Notes and Queries* 227 (1982): 504-506.
- Maurice, Frederick Denison. *Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy*. New York: MacMillan and Co., 1890.
- Mayfield, Noel H. *Puritans and Regicide: Presbyterian-Independent Differences Over the Trial and Execution of Charles (I) Stuart*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988.
- McGroarty, Kieran. *Plotinus on Eudaimonia: A Commentary on Ennead I.4*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- McInroy, Mark J. "Origen of Alexandria." In *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*. Edited by Paul L. Gavryliuk and Coakley. 20-35. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- McKnight, Stephen A. *The Religious Foundations of Francis Bacon's Thought*. Colombia, MI: University of Missouri Press, 2006.
- McTighe, Thomas. "Nicholas of Cusa's Unity-Metaphysics and the Formula Religio Una in Rituum Varietate." In *Nicholas of Cusa in Search of God and Wisdom*. Edited by Gerald Christianon and Thomas M. Izbicki. 161-72. Leiden: Brill, 1991.

- Meier-Oeser, Stephan. "Die Cusanus-Rezeption im deutschen Renaissancehumanismus." In *Nicolaus Cusanus zwischen Deutschland und Italien: Beiträge eines deutsch-italienischen Symposiums in der Villa Vigoni*. Edited by Martin Thurner. 617-32. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2002.
- Meier-Oeser, Stephan. *Die Präsenz des Vergessenen: Zur Rezeption der Philosophie des Nicolaus Cusanus vom 15. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert*. Münster: Aschendorff, 1989.
- Michaud, Derek A. *Reason Turned into Sense: John Smith on Spiritual Sensation*. Leuven: Peeters, 2017.
- Michaud, Derek A. "Varieties of Spiritual Sense: Cusanus and John Smith," in *Nicholas of Cusa and Early Modern Reform*. Edited by Simon J.G. Burton, Joshua Hollmann, and Eric M. Parker. 303-26. Leiden: Brill, forthcoming.
- Miller, Clyde Lee. "Knowledge and the Human Mind." In *Introducing Nicholas of Cusa: A Guide to a Renaissance Man*. Edited by Thomas Izbicki, Christopher Bellitto, and Gerald Christianson. New York, N.Y.: Paulist Press, 2004.
- Muirhead, John H. *The Platonic Tradition in Anglo-Saxon Philosophy*. London: Macmillan, 1931.
- Muller, Richard A. *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Muller, Richard A. *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*. 4 vols. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2003.
- Muller, Richard A. *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Nagel, Fritz. *Nicolaus Cusanus Und Die Entstehung Der Exakten Wissenschaften*. Münster: Aschendorff, 1984.
- Nauert, Charles G. *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Nevins, Mary A. *Peter Sterry, a Platonic Independent*. Ph.D. Diss. Columbia University, 1954.
- O'Meara, Dominic J. *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007.
- O'Meara, Dominic J. *Pythagoras Revived: Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

- Ong, Walter. *Ramus, Method and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Oosterhoff, Richard. "Idiotae, Mathematics, and Artisans: The Untutored Mind and the Discovery of Nature in the Fabrist Circle." *Intellectual History Review* 24:3 (2014): 301-19.
- Passmore, J.A. *Ralph Cudworth: An Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951; reprint 2013.
- Patočka, Jan. "Comenius und Cusanus." In Jan Patočka, *Andere Wege in die Moderne: Studien zur europäischen Ideengeschichte von der Renaissance bis zur Romantik*. Edited by Ludger Hagedorn. 237-43. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006.
- Patrides, C.A. "The High and Aiery Hills of Platonisme: An Introduction to the Cambridge Platonists." In *The Cambridge Platonists*. Edited by C.A. Patrides. London: Edward Arnold, 1969.
- Pavlas, Petr. "The Book Metaphor Triadized: The Layman's Bible and God's Books in Raymond of Sabunde, Nicholas of Cusa and Jan Amos Comenius." In *Nicholas of Cusa and Early Modern Reform*. Edited by Simon J.G. Burton, Joshua Hollmann, and Eric M. Parker. 406-38. Leiden: Brill, forthcoming.
- Pederson, Randall J. *Unity in Diversity: English Puritans and the Puritan Reformation, 1603-1689*. Leiden: Brill, 2014.
- Pinto, Vivian de Sola. *Peter Sterry Platonist and Puritan, 1613-1672: A Biographical and Critical Study with Passages Selected from His Writings*. 1968. Reprint. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Pinto, Vivian de Sola. "Peter Sterry and his Unpublished Writings." *The Review of English Studies* 6:24 (1930): 385-407.
- Poulain, Augustin-François. *The Graces of Interior Prayer*. Translated by L. L. Yorke Smith. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1950.
- Powicke, Frederick J. *The Cambridge Platonists: A Study with Six Illustrations*. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1926.
- Rahner, Karl. "The 'Spiritual Senses' According to Origen." In *Theological Investigations*. Vol. XVI. Translated by David Morland. New York: Seaburg Press, 1979.
- Reid, Jasper. *The Metaphysics of Henry More*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2012.
- Rist, J.M. *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*. Cambridge University Press, 1967.

- Rogers, G.A.J., Jean-Michel Vienne, and Yves C. Zarka, eds. *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context: Politics, Metaphysics and Religion*. Dordrecht: Springer, 1997.
- Rogers, G.A.J. "Locke, Plato, and Platonism." In *Platonism at the Origins of Modernity*, edited by Douglas Hedley and Sarah Hutton, 193-206. Dordrecht: Springer, 2007.
- Rossi, Paolo. *Logic and the Art of Memory: The Quest for a Universal Language*. Translated by Stephen Clucas. London: Athlone, 2000.
- Rummel, Erika. *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance & Reformation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Saffrey, H. D. "New Objective Links between the Pseudo-Dionysius and Proclus." In *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*. Edited by Dominic J. O'Meara. 65-74. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1982.
- Santing, Catrien. "Through the Looking Glass of Ulrich Pinder: The Impact of Humanism on the Career of a Nuremberg Town Physician around 1500." In *Medieval and Renaissance Humanism: Rhetoric, Representation and Reform*. Edited by Stephen Gersh and Bert Roest. 203-20. Leiden: Brill, 2003.
- Schmidt-Biggemann, Wilhelm. *Philosophia Perennis: Historical Outlines of Western Spirituality in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2004.
- Schwaetzer, Harald. "'Semen universale'. Die Anthropologie bei Nikolaus von Kues und Giovanni Pico della Mirandola." In *Nicolaus Cusanus zwischen Deutschland und Italien: Beiträge eines deutsch-italienischen Symposiums in der Villa Vigoni*. Edited by Martin Thurner. 555-74. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2002.
- Senger, Hans. "Zur Frage nach einer philosophischen Ethik des Nikolaus von Kues." *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 33 (1970): 5-25, 110-122.
- Sigmund, Paul E. *Nicholas of Cusa and Medieval Political Thought*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1963.
- Simonutti, Luisa. "Reason and Toleration: Henry More and Philip van Limborch." In *Henry More (1614-1687): Tercentenary Studies*. Edited by Sarah Hutton. 201-18. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990.
- Strider, Robert E. L. *Lord Brooke and "The Nature of Truth": A Biography and Critical Edition*. Ph.D. Diss. Harvard University, 1950.
- Sturlese, Loris. *Homo Divinus: Philosophische Projekte in Deutschland zwischen Meister Eckhart und Heinrich Seuse*. Kohlhammer GmbH: Stuttgart, 2007.

- Taliaferro, Charles, and Alison J. Teply, eds. *Cambridge Platonist Spirituality*. The Classics of Western Spirituality. New York: Paulist Press, 2004.
- Teply, Alison J. *The Mystical Theology of Peter Sterry: A Study in Neoplatonist Puritanism*. Ph.D. Diss., Cambridge University, 2004.
- Trinka, Charles E. *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*. 1970. Reprint. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009.
- Tulloch, John. *Rational Theology in England in the Seventeenth Century*. 2 vols. 2nd ed. Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1874.
- Wallace, Dewey D. *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660–1714: Variety, Persistence, and Transformation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Walker, D.P. *The Decline of Hell and Seventeenth-century Ideas of Eternal Torment*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964.
- Yates, Francis. *Lull & Bruno*. London: Routledge, 1982.
- Ziebart, K.M. *Nicolaus Cusanus on Faith and the Intellect: A Case Study in 15th-Century Fides-Ratio Controversy*. Leiden: Brill, 2014.