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THE LAW OF REASON AND BEYOND**

DAMARIS CUDWORTH MASHAM AS A NATURAL LAW SCHOLAR

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Abstract: Lady Damaris Cudworth Masham, an English philosopher and theologian, holds a distinctive place in the intellectual discourse of late seventeenth century England. As the daughter of Ralph Cudworth, a prominent Cambridge Platonist, and a close friend and student of John Locke, Damaris Masham participated in a number of discussions at once, related in one way or another to the basic tenets of Christian theology and moral philosophy. The first of these is a dispute with the English Malebranchians, primarily John Norris and his intellectual companion Mary Astell, regarding the concept of the love of God. The second important debate concerned the defence of John Locke's rational Christianity against attacks from deists and enthusiasts. In addition to the defence of moderate conformist theology against radical non-conformism, Masham's writings also offer a special vision of Christian moral life, in which there is room for pleasures, the precepts of natural law and the commandments of Christian Revelation. Natural law occupies an important, but underexplored place in Masham's moral philosophy and theology. This paper is intended to fill said gap and is devoted to the reconstruction of Masham's approach to natural law and its connection with other crucial concepts of her moral theology: pleasures, sociability, reason, Revelation. In order to accomplish this goal, we interpret Masham's writings in light of relevant contexts and consider them as polemical arguments in which natural law plays an important, but limited role.

Keywords: Damaris Cudworth Masham, Natural Law, the Law of Reason, Revelation, Deism, Enthusiasm.

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INTRODUCTION

Lady Damaris Masham is now seen as one of the most notable women philosophers of the seventeenth century. A daughter of Ralph Cudworth and a close friend of John Locke, she was an active participator of many philosophical and theological quarrels closer to the end of the century: amongst her adversaries were such prominent authors as Nicolas Malebranche, John

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Norris, Mary Astell and even Leibniz, with whom she carried out an extensive correspondence.¹ Today, Masham is considered by many commentators a prominent moral theologian, whose works were of great importance in the context of the changing face of the Church of England, especially in the period when its tenets were questioned by various unorthodox groups.

Due to the fact that Masham has been for a long time considered an author of secondary importance and was brought to light relatively recently, contemporary scholarship dedicated to her works is immense. One of its central themes is Masham's moral theology, and research in this field consists of four topics of research; all of them, in one respect or another, describe Masham as a polemic figure that was heavily engaged in several debates and discussions. First of these themes is a relation between Masham and Locke, her friend and mentor. Locke's influence on Masham is colossal, as she in fact used his vocabulary in both her works and openly praised her teacher's theological work, adopting his basic propositions as a foundation for her own moral philosophy.²

Two other themes are closely connected: Masham's critique and polemical exchange with John Norris and Mary Astell, two prominent English authors, in the context of moral theology. Masham's first work, *A Discourse Concerning the Love of God*, was intended as a critique of Norris' doctrine of the love of God, which had occasionalist roots (Norris was the first of English Malebranchians), and she returned to this theme for a short time in her second work, *Occasional Thoughts in Reference to a Vertuous or Christian Life*. Mary Astell, whom Masham also noticed in *A Discourse*, was in correspondence with Norris, and their exchange was later published as *Letters Concerning the Love of God*.

However, Astell's polemic with Masham was not limited by their discussion on the nature of love towards God and creature. In fact, Astell's feminist works are now considered one of Masham's sources of influence and inspiration. But the full extent of this influence and their hostility to each other is not entirely clear and remains a point of disagreement. Several commentators have argued that in her later work Masham implicitly

¹Masham's polemic with Norris, Malebranche and Astell is contained in her major works: *A Discourse Concerning the Love of God* and *Occasional Thoughts in Reference to a Vertuous or Christian Life* (Masham, 1696; 1705). As for her exchange with Leibniz, it survived and is published in *Die Philosophischen Schriften von G. W. Leibniz. Vol. 1: Briefwechsel 1663–1716* (Leibniz, 1875). See also (Lodge, ed., 2007; Phemister & Smith, 2007; Widmaier, 1986).

²On Masham and Locke see (Broad, 2006; Goldie, 2004; Hammou, 2008; Woolhouse, 2003).

responded to Astell's critique of *A Discourse* (Perry, 1986; Di Biase, 2019), whereas other authors see their exchange mostly in terms of influence of Astell's feminism on Masham's idea of moral and religious education (Broad, 2003). In this paper we have taken the first interpretation; in later sections we shall show that Masham's arguments in *Occasional Thoughts* may indeed be seen as a partial answer to Astell's *Christian Religion*.

This paper is intended as an attempt to bring light to a theme in Masham's work that has not been much discussed yet. In her writings she appeals to the idea of natural law in a sense that is close to the most prominent authors in natural law tradition — Grotius, Pufendorf and Locke. An appeal to the law of nature shapes Masham's arguments both in *A Discourse* and in *Occasional Thoughts* in such a way that makes it possible for her to connect Lockean empiricism and moderate latitudinarian (and later, Lockean) theology in order to vindicate human social life as a moral ideal for Christians. This is even more important when taking into consideration the context in which Masham lived and worked, namely — the struggle between different unorthodox religious doctrines and attempts on the part of the Church of England to defend its authority from the attacks — real or imaginary — of Catholics, dissenters, free-thinkers and atheists.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to explicate Masham's account of natural law and, moreover, to set limits to her use of it. As we shall demonstrate, Masham appeals to natural law in two different contexts in her *Discourse* and *Occasional Thoughts*: the former is determined by her polemic with Norris, while the latter is much wider and includes debates around deism and Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity*. Furthermore, Masham not only employs natural law as a polemic instrument, but also criticises it at length, trying to establish a moderate account of Christian moral life, which would be rooted not only in the natural light of nature, but also — *pace* deism and following Locke — in Revelation.

LIFE AND INFLUENCES

Lady Damaris Cudworth Masham (1659–1708) was born in Cambridge into the family of Ralph Cudworth, distinguished philosopher, Cambridge Platonist. Although she never received any formal education, her father was her primary tutor in her early years (Ballard, 1752: 379). At the age of 26, Damaris Cudworth married Sir Francis Masham, a widower with eight children. There is very limited information about the nature of their marriage, yet the union certainly provided financial security and status, so she could continue her studies in philosophy and theology.

When Damaris Masham was about 22 years old, even before her marriage, she was introduced to John Locke by their mutual friend Edward Clarke. They quickly developed a strong relationship and remained intellectual companions for over twenty years. Locke moved to the Masham household in Oates, and lived there as a tenant until his death in 1704. Damaris' association with Locke facilitated her entry into a group of prominent intellectual contemporaries, for example, Lord Shaftesbury, Isaac Newton, and many others. She also corresponded with several philosophers during her life, including Leibniz, with whom she discussed different topics, such as his own philosophical ideas.

Masham was influenced by a lot of thinkers, but most of all she gravitated to Locke, and during the twenty years of their friendship they profoundly influenced each other's ideas. Masham is often called a "Lockean feminist" and presented as a direct adherent of Locke's ideas; it is noteworthy that she is not attributed to any specific philosophical tradition, at least there is no general consensus besides her being seen as a Lockean thinker in many ways. Masham might also be associated with Cambridge Platonism, since her father was a notable representative and a leader of the philosophical group. As Jacqueline Broad states, although Masham was heavily influenced by Locke's empiric views, she never fully abandoned Platonism (Broad, 2002: 117). However, to speak of Masham as a member of some definite tradition would be to oversimplify her stance.

A DISCOURSE OF THE LOVE OF GOD: THE CONTEXT OF PUBLICATION

Masham lived and worked within the context of rivalries between various philosophical and theological traditions, and her works must be understood as participating in moral-theological debates of the period. In the second half of the seventeenth century, many English theologians and divines were concerned with numerous groups that were considered dangerous for the doctrine and institution of the Church of England. Among these groups the most important were Catholics, deists and enthusiasts, and Masham aspired to defend Christianity from all of them.

While there is nothing special about Masham's use of the terms "deism" and "Catholicism," however, this is not the case with *enthusiasm*. Enthusiasm is not a name of a religious doctrine — in the seventeenth century the term was used to describe a set of religious dispositions which were usually associated with radical Protestantism (Heyd, 1995: 15) and consisted of ecstatic attitudes towards God and faith. Enthusiasm was frequently

defined as a false divine inspiration (More, 1656: 2; Evans, 1757: 5); it was a pejorative term and generally used by moderate theologians and divines in order to discredit certain religious stances with little to no definite referents. Robert Burton, English medical and theological writer, united Catholics, puritans and sectarians under this term. Other important authors, such as More and Locke, did not specify whom they meant by enthusiasts, considering the term as an indication of specific mental disposition or even illness (Locke, 1706: 587–588); finally, Masham's enthusiasts are, first and foremost, English Malebranchians.

The main target of *A Discourse* is John Norris, one of the first Malebranchians in England and the most influential at the time. In his third volume of *Practical Discourses Upon several Divine Subjects* Norris outlined a theory of the love of God, according to which all our love must be directed at God. Initially this theory emerges as a commentary on Mat. 22:37: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind," where Norris argues against traditional interpretation:

all that was signified by loving God with all the heart, with all the soul, and with all the mind, that we love him chiefly principally, *best* and *most* (Norris, 1693: 5);

however, in the same discourse Norris turns to Malebranche and his occasionalism in order to prove "i. That God is the only Author or Cause of our Love. ii. That he is also the only proper object of it" (ibid.: 9). The former conclusion stems from the fact that God is the only cause of all our sensations, including the sense of pleasure. And for only that what causes pleasure is our good, and for we ought to love only what is our good, we may make the latter conclusion: that God is the only proper object of our love.

Two years after publication of *Practical Discourses* Norris engaged in a correspondence with Mary Astell (Locke, 1695), who by this time was a writer, relatively recognised for her *Proposal to the Ladies*. Astell participated in an exchange initially as a critic, but in the end she was convinced by Norris' doctrine. In her later *Christian Religion* she returned to advocating it against Masham, but before we look into it in detail, it is necessary to reconstruct Masham's own account.

In *A Discourse* Masham accuses Norris and his French teacher, as well as Astell, of writing their accounts of the Love of God as unsuitable for human nature, impracticable for Christians and unreflective of the process by which we discover the idea of God. Here we are interested in the unfolding of Masham's account of human nature that leads her to the specific version of the idea of sociability, central to her and many other natural law theories. As

was noted by Regan Penaluna, the main thing that concerns Masham about Calvinism and Catholicism is the fact that both these doctrines undermine the importance of social life; thus, *Discourse* may be seen as an attempt to root Christian conduct in a specific set of social dispositions that are necessary for Christians to live a good life. In the next sections we argue that this attempt is made by using the language of natural law.

NATURAL LAW IN
“A DISCOURSE CONCERNING THE LOVE OF GOD”

Masham’s use of natural law in *Discourse* is very limited thematically: it is rather a polemical instrument against Norris and Malebranche than a full account. Nevertheless, it contains many important features and plays a prominent role in Masham’s argumentation against Norris. Here we shall focus on three main aspects of her account: pleasure, desire and sociability.

Pleasure is the central idea in Norris’ account of the love of God, and it plays a similar role in Masham’ conception of the love of a creature. Masham agrees with Norris on the definitions of good and love through pleasure: “we necessarily loving whatever is accompanied with pleasure” (Masham, 1696: 88). The difference between them lies in what each of them sees as a cause of pleasure and, therefore, as a proper object of love.

Masham employs Mat. 22:39 as a ground for her conception of pleasure and desire. Whereas for Norris the only permissible kind of love of the creature is the love as benevolence, for Masham all desire is a necessary middle term between pleasure and love: all we desire pleases us, and all we love, we desire:

When I say that I love my self, I likewise mean by it that my Being is dear, and pleasing to me. [...] When we say we love our selves: Have we then only a simple perception of pleasure... Or is any thing else annex’d to that Pleasure as a necessary Concominant... of it? [Mr. N] expressly tells us, that *There is no desire without Benevolence, and no Benevolence without desire*. But he does not in this oppose himself only, but Truth also, since the desire of the continuation of our Being is truly a Desire of our Selves (ibid.: 18, 20–21).

Thus, we genuinely desire ourselves, and, as it follows from Mat. 22:39, we ought to desire our neighbour as ourselves, i. e. to desire the continuation and improvement of his being, as well as his presence with us. Here, however, it is not the conclusion itself that is important, but rather the language that is used by Masham in formulating it. While for Norris the desire of created things is sinful, for Masham it is a necessary and lawful feature

of human nature, the only means by which we are able to reach the idea of God. The idea that our social ties are necessary for us to achieve the ultimate happiness was well-known and used by natural law theorists under the name of sociability, or sociality (*sociabilitas*) (Myers, 2013).

Sociability in *Discourse* is, first of all, an epistemic feature of human nature. Norris' account of the love of God is inadequate, because it neglects all the process of acquiring the idea of God. Masham takes the Lockean stance:

God is an invisible Being: And it is by his Works, that we are led both to know, and to love him. They lead us to their invisible Author (Masham, 1696: 62).

At first, it is a creature that we know and deal with, and only then we discover God. Thus, we are put in a position of a necessity of social life in order to reach the idea of God, even more so to love him.

However, sociability is also a moral condition, i. e. it is a feature that imposes obligations on us. Namely, if we ought to love God, we ought to love his creation:

Pompous Rhapsodies of the Soul's debasing her self when she descends to set the least part of her Affections upon any thing but her Creator... are plainly but a complementing God with the contempt of his Works, by which we are the most effectually led to Know Love and Adore him. An such kind of Expressions as carry not a Relative, but Absolute Abhorrence (ibid.: 27).

Thus, the duty to love thy neighbour is a natural duty that stems from our status as rational creatures. For we possess reason that leads us to God and consequently to the duty to him; and as we cannot love him without loving his creation, we naturally ought to love it. If we try to analyse this argument from the perspective of natural law, it appears that the idea of the intertwining of different classes of natural duties (i. e. to God, to others and to self) is to be found in every notable work on natural law in this period. The closest to Masham's variation of this connection between duties belongs to Richard Cumberland, who derived our duty to others from our duty to venerate God (Cumberland, 1672: 186). Of course, Masham herself was not primarily a natural law theorist, however her argument against Norris bears similar motivations with that of, say, Pufendorf, Cumberland or Locke: she aspires to naturally root ourselves in social relations in order for our ends as human beings — and, what is more, Christians — to be achievable.

In the end, sociability in *Discourse* is a necessary instrument in a theological argument that seeks to refute dangerous religious beliefs as unsuitable for humans and impracticable for Christians that seek salvation. It unites

other concepts employed by Masham, primarily *desire* and *pleasure*, with the purpose of vindication of Christian social life. One of the last passages in the treatise excellently concludes:

There is nothing more evident than that Mankind is design'd for a Sociable Life. To say that Religion unfits us for it, is to reproach the Wisdom of God as highly as it is possible; And to represent Religion as the most mischievous thing in the World, dissolving Societies. And there could not be a greater Artifice of the Devil, or Wicked Men to bring Christianity into contempt than this (Masham, 1696: 123).

CONTEXT OF "OCCASIONAL THOUGHTS"

The roots of English deism in seventeenth century might be traced to the publication of *De Veritate, prout distinguitur a revelatione, a verisimili, a possibili, et a falso* by Lord Herbert of Cherbury in 1624. In the end of the seventeenth and at the beginning of the eighteenth century deism was among British intellectuals. In *Occasional Thoughts* Masham states that

to reconcile Men to, or establish them in the belief of Divine Revelation, nothing was more requisite to make this appear... in an Age wherein the prevalency of Deism has been so much and so justly complained of (Masham, 1705: 110).

Closer to the end of the seventeenth century, the most influential deist authors were Charles Blount and his circle. In 1693 he published a collection of essays and letters *The Oracles of Reason* (Blount, 1693), one of the authors of which was Charles Gilden, another prominent deist, whose work will be briefly examined later.

Deism was often regarded as another extreme on the same spectrum as enthusiasm: while the latter was a mistaken experience of revelation, the former presupposed a rejection of any revelation whatsoever. At the same time, both were considered to be high ways to atheism: William Popple wrote to Locke in 1696:

I dispute not how little they [Deists] deserve that Title. The men I mean are such as deny all Immaterial Beings, though that does not hinder them from talking of a God upon all occasions... I see plainly the Youth of this Age build all upon that Foundation. We are running from one Extream to another. Atheism, or... even Irreligion is a sad Sanctuary from the Mischiefs of Superstition (Locke, 1980: 519),

meaning by this exactly that deism, as well as enthusiasm, are in fact two extremes that are hostile to Christian religion.

Locke himself was a dedicated critic of deism, and it is important to examine, in short, his account of reason and revelation in *The Reasonableness*

of *Christianity*. His argument in favour of the necessity of revelation is founded on a distinction between the law of works (i. e. law of Moses) and the law of faith (i. e. law of Christ). The law of works is such that it requires perfect obedience, as it is the foundation of *righteousness*. However, Christians also abide by the law of faith, that is to the law “whereby God justifies a man for believing, though by his works he be not just or righteous” (Locke, 1695: 22). The law of faith states “for every one to believe what God requires him to believe” (ibid.: 24–25). And as God requires to believe in the revelation of the gospel, every Christian ought to do that.

As was noted by Giuliana di Biase, *The Reasonableness of Christianity* was intended as an attempt “to bridge the gap between the deists and the Christians” (Di Biase, 2019: 111). It, however, did not succeed. In the letter cited above, Popple points out with disappointment that this book did not have effect on deists. In reality, however, the situation was much more ironic: not only was deism not shaken by Locke’s arguments, but it was also inspired by his own epistemology. Irish deist John Tolland, whose *Christianity not Mysterious* was infamous amongst English Christians, leaned both on Lockean empiricism and his treatment of reason in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (Tolland, 1696). What is more, orthodox divines and intellectuals attempted to accuse Locke of Socinianism (see (Edwards, 1696), and that led to an entirely different debate, in which Locke tried to restate his defence of reasonable Christianity and distance himself from dissenters at the same time.

Locke was of course not the only critic of deist attempts to rationalise Christian religion. Mary Astell was another one. In 1705 her *Christian Religion, as Profess’d by a Daughter of the Church of England* was published: it was a systematic treatment of Christian theology, starting with natural religion, moving to the necessity of Revelation and then — to the moral theology, based on a standard for natural jurisprudence classification of duties. Astell’s critique of deism differed immensely from that of Locke. While the aim of *The Reasonableness of Christianity* was to show that Revelation is necessary and that it is in conformity with our reason, Astell stated that Revelation is necessary, because it consists of truth that cannot be attained by natural reason:

For certainly the Sun of Knowledge, the Light that enlightens every Man, the Supreme and Universal Reason, must make greater discoveries than my seeble Taper can pretend to (Astell, 1705: 13).

It is impossible for human reason to be “the standard of Truth and Knowledge” (Astell, 1705: 48), and only divine reason can be a measure of truth (ibid.: 49). The Christian religion is not as puzzling as it may appear, since its revelations are very clear in that human nature has its weaknesses and the cause of it is the original sin, and Christ was sent to people, so they could reconcile unto God. In this worldview, people now have a knowledge of the divine nature only because of the revelation, and no one should question its truth.

Astell explicitly states that she does not “understand the Philosophy of the Union between Divine and Human Nature” (ibid.: 51). Jesus, as a son of God and son of Virgin Mary, had a divine and human nature, and is a part of Holy Trinity, and one must not worship anyone or anything else: “...to pay Divine Worship to any but GOD is gross Idolatry” (ibid.: 52).

Astell criticised not only the *Reasonableness* but also *A Discourse* to which she responded with *The Christian Religion* nine years later. It may have taken that long to write since it is a comprehensive, four hundred page text, however, it is also important that the writing was published after Locke’s passing. In fact, like many other contemporaries, Astell believed that *A Discourse* was written by Locke and not by Masham.

As a response, Astell demonstrates that equating love with pleasure is wrong and references Locke in a rather ironic manner without using his name — “...Law of Self-Preservation, as *some* call it...” (ibid.: 133). This specific paragraph is devoted to illustrating the fallacy of the belief that one must love thy enemy, and in it she mentions the Lockean concept of self-preservation: when the persecutor invades the stated law of self-preservation, one simply cannot desire their well-being. If the definition of love presented by Masham is right, then one ought to be pleased by their Enemies, and vice versa, it is not possible to love thy Enemy, if no pleasure is derived from them.

Another argument against the notion of love as pleasure is that it is “no more in our power than the motion of our Pulse” (ibid.: 136), hence, it is beyond human control. However, if the “act or disposition of Mind” indicates a “voluntary Motion of the Mind toward that pleases” (ibid.), then it represents an inclination and aspiration to the good in general, and one cannot gravitate towards the evil.

NATURAL LAW IN "OCCASIONAL THOUGHTS".

(1) REASON, CUSTOM AND SUPERSTITION

The most striking difference between Masham's use of natural law in *A Discourse* and *Occasional Thoughts* is that, in the latter work, we may for the first time find that she appeals to the notion of reason in the moral sense. In *Discourse*, as we have seen, the ground for natural law is human nature and its inherent and necessary desires: the need to desire one's neighbour and inability to not desire the self before growing into the desire of God. Reason plays an important role in the ordering of desires: in the end, Masham defends a traditional conception of the love of God—that he ought to be loved, if not exclusively, above everything else. However, these remarks appear only closer to the end of *A Discourse*, and, in general, reason is treated as a necessary *epistemic* capacity of a human being.

It is also worth mentioning that the notion of "the Law of Reason" appears for the first time in one of the latest passages:

It is evident also, that by virtue of our being such [i. e. reasonable creatures]; we are obliged to Live by the Law of Reason; which whenever we transgress, we must necessarily offend against God... And that we are so prone... to offend against this Law of Reason, is from the Unruliness of our Affections (Masham, 1705: 104–105).

This passage comes right before Masham's final attacks on Malebranche and Norris, in which she once again stresses that their conclusions are un- and anti-Scriptural, as well as disruptive for social life. Compared to that, Masham's use of natural law in *Occasional Thoughts* is much more apparent and systematic. While in *Discourse* the Law of Reason appears only in the last twenty pages, in *Occasional Thoughts* we may find it already in the first half of the treatise.

In order to properly assess Masham's account of the law of nature in *Occasional Thoughts*, it is important to make the following distinction between her treatment of natural law as a source of moral obligations and her account of our epistemological relation to it. It is striking how much these aspects of Masham's discussion differ, as from the first point of view she acts as a proponent of natural law against traditional and local customs, but from the second—she is a fierce critic of natural law thinking.

First of all, let us review how Masham treats the law of nature in itself. It is notable that she uses *Law of Reason, or Nature* as a general expression to indicate the law of nature. The law that God imposes on people is the law of Reason, i. e. it is formulated in accordance with their capacity of understanding. The text implies that, potentially, we may discover it by

ourselves, using our natural light; here Masham appeals to the notion of the state of nature as a state in which

Men must be considered... as having no extrinsick Law to direct them, but indu'd only with a faculty of comparing their distant Ideas by intermediate Ones (Masham, 1705: 60–61).

Here a Lockean conception of understanding (which is equated with the light of nature) coincides with the idea of the state of nature that is closer to Pufendorf than to Locke himself or anyone else.

Masham defines the light of nature as

a faculty of comparing their distant ideas by intermediate Ones, and Thence of deducing, or inferring one thing from another; whereby our Knowledge immediately received from Sense, or Reflection, is enlarged to a view of Truths remote... (ibid.: 61).

At some length she explicates the idea that we already saw in *Discourse*—namely, that God may be discovered by reason and senses. And again, as in *Discourse*, this way of discovery is twofold: first, as Attributes of God are invisible in themselves, we acquire ideas of them by seeing them in “the Works of the Creation,” from where the existence of the Creator becomes obvious. Second, the reason we possess is also a regulator of our conduct and inclinations: similarly to “brutes” that “appear... intended to be subjected to Men,” our inferior faculties are to be subjected to reason, by virtue of which we differ from other animals (ibid.: 66–67).

By knowing that God made reason our superior ability over our inferior inclinations, we come to know that not to obey reason is to be an inconsistent creature. By transgressing God’s will we transgress the nature of things, according to which we have been made. And because we are not only rational, but also willing creatures, we may choose whether to follow this order of things or transgress it. In both scenarios, still, we abide by the dictates of reason, which are, ultimately, commands of God’s will. It is noteworthy that for Masham human duty and human happiness are not only compatible, but necessary for each other. For we acquire the greatest pleasure when we live by our own nature, but we live by it only when we follow the Law of Reason. That is why her subsequent attack on enthusiasm and deism is formulated as a moral, rather than purely theological, objection.

Masham asserts that religion and morality are very often seen as distinctive. Virtue is viewed as a conformity to a certain rule of action that has moral force in a given society, and Masham acknowledges that these

rules may and in fact do vary between “different Times and Places.” The problem is that

Man is a Creature that has variable, and disagreeing Inclinations, as having passions very changeable, and oftentimes contradictory (Masham, 1705: 86).

As for religion, it is on the one hand presupposes that there is a “Superior Invisible Power that made them” and that the rule of action is unchangeable and universal, but on the other hand it is often viewed as “some Expedient, or other, found out to satisfy Men that God was satisfied with them” (ibid.: 90).

These notions of virtue and religion lead in fact to a transgression of the law of nature. For so-called “Men of Vertue” are in fact just those who follow the law of their society, notwithstanding their cruelty, and so-called “Religious Men” pretend to have had or are just mistaken for having a personal revelation that has given them the knowledge concerning the best way to please God. It leads men to the rejection of their own lawful pleasures and happiness:

as are denying them selves the lawfulllest Enjoyments of Life; Macerating their Bodies; Prostituting their Wives; and exposing their Offspring and Themselves to cruel Torments, and even Death it self (ibid.: 91).

It is not clear whom Masham means by the first of these groups, but the second one are, apparently, enthusiasts, and above all others — Astell. We have already shown that in *Discourse* enthusiasm appeared as a source of moral corruption that would turn one against creature and, therefore, against God himself; besides, it would make human life miserable and impractical, as its precepts are not compatible with human natural desires. Here Masham also shows that enthusiasm is not compatible with human reason, as she contraposes enthusiasts to “Men... who are virtuous in a Rational and Christian estimation,” i. e. to those, whose knowledge of the rule of action is based not on superstitions or false revelation, but on the light of nature and the force of true revelation.

As we have seen, Astell’s *Christian Religion* contained a version of the critique of deism that divorced reason and revelation almost altogether. However it was definitely not how Masham saw the proper alternative to deist natural theology: in *Occasional Thoughts* she stresses the “Union between Divine and Human Nature,” i. e. the substantial agreement between natural reason and divine revelation that Astell rejected. There is one particular passage in the text that suggests that it was an attack on Astell:

Christians, perhaps, need not the consideration of this to in force their obedience to the Will of their Maker; but as it is a great recommendation of the Precepts of the Gospel to find that they have an exact correspondence with, and conformity to the Nature of Things: So also those who are not influenc'd by, as not being yet thorowly perswaded of this Divine Revelation, will fooner be induc'd to imbrace Vertue, and contemn the allurements of Vice,' when they see These to have the very same reality in Nature as their Happiness and Misery have; than when (tho' ever so pompously set out) Vertue appears founded only upon nice, or subtle Speculations (Masham, 1705: 81–82).

Here Masham takes a moderate stance between enthusiasts on one hand and deists — on the other. Astell's "practical theism," as Jacqueline Broad called it, presupposes that our natural reason is of no use or aid in practical, or moral, matters (Broad, 2015: 56). A genuine purpose of natural reason is to convince itself that revelation is true, but in any substantial matter "the Scriptures are our Rule of Faith and Manners, and for our better direction in both we have no more to do but to study them" (ibid.: 34).

However, from the passage cited above it is already clear that Masham does not want to argue that the light of reason is to be preferred to revelation. Despite emphasising its role in a moral education and being overall optimistic about its abilities — *pace* Astell, she is also convinced that natural reason needs to be supported by revelation, as it cannot operate alone in matters that concern our future life. Thus, from the appeal to the law of nature she turns to the critique of it. In the next section we shall explicate this critique and draw a connection between the two parts of her argument.

However, one more remark needs to be made: we have seen that in *Christian Religion* Astell argued against *A Discourse Concerning the Love of God*. Several recent commentators see it as a factor that influenced Masham's delay with publication (Di Biase, 2019: 110; Hutton, 2020; Perry, 1986: 96): *Occasional Thoughts* came out right after *Christian Religion*, and Masham, as it has been argued, probably took some time to answer to Astell's objections. In the beginning of the paper we posited that our stance is similar — and the above reasons for that were given — but concerning this particular question our views differ. It is striking that Masham does not mention almost any important idea from *A Discourse* and does not refer to it as a source or a support for her present discussion; on the contrary, she in fact rejects some of *Discourse's* core tenets, and first and foremost the claim that love as desire is a basis of human sociability and, therefore, of a great part of human morality. In *Occasional Thoughts* desires are seen as something that needs to be regulated by a higher instance, not embraced.

NATURAL LAW IN "OCCASIONAL THOUGHTS".

(II) REVELATION AND THE LIMITS OF NATURAL LIGHT

As has been said, Masham's account of natural law in *Occasional Thoughts* differs seriously from that in *A Discourse*, focusing much more on human reason than on desires and pleasures. In *Occasional Thoughts* the idea that we have desires and want to attain happiness is the reason why Masham turns to the critique of natural law right after she explicated the general idea of it. However, it is much more accurate to say that Masham's critique is pointed not at the law of nature itself—she is very consistent with her treating it as a set of genuine ultimate duties. Rather, she is not satisfied with how moral epistemology of natural law is perceived by those who "prefer their Natural Reason as a surer Teacher than the Revelation."

One of the most important examples that Masham uses in order to show limits of natural light is the example of *Peruvian* religion, i. e. the religion of Incas. It is noteworthy that Masham treats it favourably, calling it "Idolatry... the most specious that was possible" (Masham, 1705: 100), however, she makes a reservation on how Peruvians acquired such a knowledge. It is not possible for many people to come to understanding of these truths by their own light of reason: it needs to be imposed on them by "a few Instances of Persons of more than ordinarily inquisitive Minds" (ibid.: 101). Thus, natural light is not a universal source of knowledge of the law of nature; in order for this to properly guide us towards divine commands, we need to be "exempted by a happy privilege of Nature from the servitude of sensual, and sordid Passions" (ibid.).

In other words, Masham tries to point out that light of reason has its natural limits: perhaps, it is ultimately capable to achieve knowledge of the law of reason, as she has shown using the metaphor of the state of nature. However, this way is not practical. Thus, the first limit of reason is that it is intertwined with passions and desires that often lead in the contrary direction.

The second limit of reason is that it is not able to explicitly deduce rewards and punishments that God imposes on those who transgress the law (ibid.: 104). It is only Revelation of the Gospel that makes such knowledge possible: without it we can only think about present life, the future life is not intelligible to the light of reason. And, because in this view it is the future life that matters most, by using natural reason only, we are simply unable to attain the greatest happiness.

The objective that Masham's arguments pursue against natural law is to be understood in the context of English deism. Deist use of the natural law was common: Matthew Tindal, one of the most influential deists in the beginning of the eighteenth century, was a natural law theorist and political pamphleteer for Whigs; another deist author, Charles Gilden, whose *Deist's Manual* was published in the same year as Masham's *Occasional Thoughts*, dedicated a separate section in the book to the discussion of man's duties according to natural religion.

Gilden's deduction of natural law is not of much originality. Following many other natural law theorists of the seventeenth century, he derives moral duties from the natural condition of a man, namely from the self-love or self-preservation (Gildon, 1705: 210–211). This conception of the natural law was widely used throughout the century, and among its proponents were Grotius, Hobbes, Pufendorf and Locke. Masham, whose appeal to the state of nature was clearly of Lockean influence, nevertheless objected to the use of the law of nature in a way that was proposed by deists. Again, it was not the idea of natural law itself that she attacked; rather, it was rejection of Revelation that often followed from natural law accounts and that Masham considered dangerous for Christian salvation.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we aspired to reconstruct Masham's account of natural law in the context of debates in which she had participated throughout her philosophical career. Despite the fact that she was definitely not a natural law theorist per se, her work contains an extensive appeal to natural law intuitions and arguments: first, to the idea of natural sociability in *A Discourse Concerning the Love of God*, then—in *Occasional Thoughts*—to the doctrine of the natural light of reason that unveils fundamental duties in regard of God and our own happiness. Natural law is an important tool that Masham uses in order to refute rival theological and philosophical doctrines in several contexts that are ultimately linked by a common ground, namely—a vindication of Christian religion.

Another important conclusion that we tried to demonstrate is that, for Masham, the law of nature was a theological notion that must be seen as a part of moral theology; here we tried to explicate the limitations that she sets in order to support a moderate Lockean approach to Christianity and to argue in favour of revelation as an indispensable source of moral obligations.

Overall, we consider Masham's work on natural law to be sufficiently important to be investigated further. Some aspects of her natural law

account were inevitably left out in the current paper in order to maintain a more or less consistent and thematically straight narrative: one of the most important of these aspects is a relation between natural law, virtue and happiness in *Occasional Thoughts*, as it was a standard problem in the period when traditional structures of English moral philosophy were being gradually replaced and merged with modern natural law. In the case of Damaris Masham, this question is especially important due to the fact that we find similar arguments and ideas in Locke and Astell, two of Masham's most important intellectual partners — in one way or another. Furthermore, if we are to look into the relations between Masham and Astell even closer, we need to locate the place of natural law and virtue in their respective feminist doctrines, the analysis of which presupposes an entirely different context.

The final point that ought to be made is that Masham as an independent philosopher is a relatively recent discovery in the historiography of British philosophy. In our work we tried to treat her as one; however, when an author is put into a wide context that determines her framing of arguments and conclusions, it is easy to neglect the agency of the author. But this is certainly not the case with Masham, who, being a philosopher with a legacy of many traditions — from her father's Platonism to Lockean empiricism to Latitudinarian common sense theology — still presented a highly original body of work that occupies an important place among other female philosophers of early modern Britain — and reads as an outstanding philosophic heritage as a whole.

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САЕВ ТИМУР АЛЕКСЕЕВИЧ

СТУДЕНТ

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ЗАКОН РАЗУМА И ЕГО ПРЕДЕЛЫ

ДАМАРИС КЭВОРТ МЭШЕМ КАК ТЕОРЕТИК ЕСТЕСТВЕННОГО ПРАВА

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Аннотация: Леди Дамарис Кэворт Мэшем, английский философ и теолог, занимает особое место в интеллектуальном дискурсе Англии конца семнадцатого века. Будучи дочерью кембриджского платоника Ральфа Кэворта, а также близкой подругой и ученицей Джона Локка, Дамарис Мэшем принимала участие сразу в ряде дискуссий, так или иначе связанных с основными положениями христианской теологии и моральной философии. Первая из них — это спор с английскими мальбраншианцами, в первую очередь с Джоном Норрисом и его интеллектуальной компаньонкой Мэри Эстелл, относительно понятия любви к Богу. Вторая важная дискуссия связана с защитой разумного

христианства Джона Локка от нападок со стороны деистов и энтузиастов. В работах Мэшем отстаивает умеренную конформистскую теологию, противостоящую радикальному неконформизму, но также предлагает особое видение христианской моральной жизни, в которой есть место удовольствиям, предписаниям естественного закона и заповедям христианского Откровения. Естественный закон занимает важное, однако не до конца исследованное место в моральной философии и теологии Мэшем. В этой статье производится реконструкция ее подхода к естественному закону и его связи с другими центральными понятиями моральной теологии Мэшем: удовольствием, социальностью, разумом и Откровением. Для достижения этой цели сочинения Мэшем интерпретируются исходя из соответствующих контекстов и рассматриваются как полемические аргументы, в которых естественное право играет важную, однако ограниченную роль.

Ключевые слова: Дамарис Кэворт Мэшем, естественное право, закон разума, откровение, деизм, энтузиазм.

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