Monarchism, Religion, and Moral Philosophy

Ludvig Holberg and the Early Northern Enlightenment

Brian Kjær Olesen

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to obtaining the degree of Doctor of History and Civilization of the European University Institute

Florence, 22 April 2016
European University Institute
Department of History and Civilization

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Abstract

This thesis deals with the thought of Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754) from the perspective of intellectual history; its aim, to think about the enlightenment anew. The historical problem, to which the thesis offers an answer, is twofold. What was the nature of Holberg’s thought in relation to the enlightenment and how can it be said to have constituted an early Northern enlightenment more specifically? To the extent that we can talk historically of a specific early Northern enlightenment, it cannot, of course, be reduced to the case of Holberg. Yet, this thesis argues that any proper understanding of the question whether there was a particular early Northern enlightenment, as one amongst a multitude of enlightenments, must necessarily begin from an understanding of the thought of Holberg, the most prominent writer in the early eighteenth century. Describing Holberg as an eclectic thinker, the main argument of the thesis is that the early Northern enlightenment is best understood in light of Holberg’s engagement with a wide range of intellectual traditions, both secular and religious. Thus, the thesis aims to reconstruct the trajectories of Holberg’s thought and to situate his thinking about monarchism, religion, and moral philosophy in relation to a broader range of European enlightenments. It aims to show that the key to understanding the early Northern enlightenment is to be found in the connection between the thought of Ludvig Holberg and the multiple enlightenments with which he was engaged. In addressing such issues, the thesis sets an essentially revisionist agenda: the enlightenment of Holberg is best understood as an eclectic blend of Lutheranism, Arminianism, and modern natural law.
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Acknowledgements

This dissertation has its early beginning in December 2009, when I, as an undergraduate student at Odense, was writing an essay on late eighteenth-century Danish political thought. Originally conceived as a study of eighteenth-century Scandinavian conceptions of liberty, my research slowly turned into a study of monarchism, religion and moral philosophy in the early Northern enlightenment, focusing on the Danish-Norwegian writer Ludvig Holberg.

First of all, I should like to thank my supervisor, Martin van Gelderen, for his encouragements and critiques as well as his interest in my research. It is largely due to Martin that I first came to appreciate the role of religion in early modern political thought – a topic which continues to inspire my attention. I should like, moreover, to express my gratitude to my second reader, Ann Thomson, for her comments and suggestions, and for sharing with me her knowledge on enlightenment, religion, and the long eighteenth century. I should also like to thank Jorge Flores, who was my second reader during my first years in Florence. Furthermore, I owe my gratitude to Knud Haakonssen and Timothy Stanton, whose comments and criticisms have helped me to improve my thesis, my arguments and interpretations, on a number of issues.

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My final, and most sincere gratitude, is to Carolina, with whom I have shared my life and my thoughts during these past five years, and with whom I hope to share many more to come. To her I dedicate this work.
Conventions

Biographical information: this study deals with a broad array of Danish and Norwegian writers, and unless otherwise noted, all biographical information about these writers builds on Dansk Biografisk Lexikon, 19 vols., C.F. Bircka, ed., (Copenhagen 1887-1905). In order, however, to keep the already extensive apparatus of footnotes to a minimum, I shall not refer to this work, every time I introduce a writer.

Enlightenment: Throughout this study I shall refer (for reasons that I explain in the introduction) to the enlightenments in its de-capitalised form, thus understanding enlightenments in the plural.

References: Referring to historical texts I have adopted the page-numbering of the texts themselves, unless otherwise specified. Whilst small roman numerals refer to page numbers, capitalised Roman numerals are used to indicate the volumes in works consisting of two or more volumes. John Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition, 2nd edition, (Princeton 2003): vii thus refers to the page whilst John Pocock, Barbarism and Religion, 6 vols., (Cambridge 1999-2015): III.372-416 refers to specific pages in the third volume of Pocock’s work.

Translations and quotations: Whenever available I have made use of Danish or English editions of Latin works. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted. When translating the texts, I always give the original quote in original language in the footnote. When translating from Latin and Danish into English, I have largely followed the original punctuation and capitalisation, whilst changing the grammatical signs into modern standards, for instance in cases where the original text uses “/” instead of “,“.
Introduction

Enlightenment Controversies

The Enlightenment began with controversy, thrived in controversy, and has remained a subject of controversy for two centuries.

Peter Gay

‘History’, writes Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754) in his Moralske Fabler or Moral Fables, first published in 1751, ‘was once discharged from its Office.’ The fate of history, as Holberg describes it in Moralske Fabler, was part of a broader reflection on the role of history in civil society. Scandalized by its critical and subversive behaviour, Holberg tells, ‘All the Estates’, ranging from princes and courtiers to merchants, priest, and peasants, conspired against history. Discharged from its office, history, ‘as it had learned no Trade whereby it could provide for itself’ was forced to seek employment with the ‘Chimney Sweeper’, whose trade most resembled that of the historian, ‘for the Historian and the Chimney Sweeper both make a Profession out of sweeping;’ Holberg writes, ‘one the State and the Church, the other Fireplaces and Chimneys.’ Having endured for some time ‘such a contemptuous Condition’, Holberg continues, ‘many took pity’ on history, pleading for a reinstatement into its ‘former Office’. Their wish was granted, but the return of history to its former glory was conditioned upon its complete obedience to the authorities, and the restriction of its subject matter to the deeds of great men and great ‘Events such as Fires, Plague, Earthquakes, Eclipses, Comets etc.’ Moreover, history was allowed to write

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3 Holberg, Værker i Tolv Bind: IX.399: ‘Alle Stænder’.
6 Holberg, Værker i Tolv Bind: IX.400: ‘Hendelser, som Ildebrand, Pest, Jorsdkielv, Formørkelser, Cometer, etc.’
about ‘Wars and Battles, but without Critique, and without examining the proper Cause of a War’. Agreeing to these conditions history became, as it was known to Holberg and his contemporaries, the instrument of authority and tradition, an uncritical compilation of names, deeds and events, without reflection on proper causes, without any usefulness to the society in which it was written. ‘Thus History was restrained,’ Holberg concludes his fable, ‘and it came into the State in which we now find it to be, in addition to which we, instead of old useful Histories, have nothing but Daily Records and dry Annales.’ This image of history was much in contrast to Holberg’s own. Holberg understood history as ‘a Mirror’ in which the historian can inform ‘Princes and Persons of a high Esteem’ about politics, law and morality, holding before them the examples of the past. History, therefore, is ‘the most important amongst the secular Studies.’

A staunch defender of absolute monarchy, Holberg was not inclined to criticism, particularly not of the sort described in his fable. History has an educational purpose, its intended audience comprises not reformers and projectors (what we today would call revolutionaries), but princes, notable persons, and citizens capable of appreciating the moral point of a well-written story. Hence as his fable warns us, should the historian become too critical of traditional religious and political authorities, be it justified or not, the consequences of exceeding the boundaries of one’s office would be far greater on the part of the historian, than it ever would for those in power. Moderation being one of the central contentions in Holberg’s enlightenment, the aim of moral and historical criticism is always to be subversive and apologetic at one and the same time. For this to be possible, however, certain conditions must be in place, most notably the freedom of the press, without which not only civil society, but also the government of a state would dissolve. As Holberg saw it, reducing the subject matter of history to the mere recording of events in time and subjecting the printed word to a rigid censorship, would have a devastating effect on the government of a state, particularly an absolute monarchy such as the Danish-Norwegian, where no limitations were placed upon the power of the monarch, except the force of sound moral judgements and historical examples. A monarch, therefore, who sets aside examples of history and prevents the historian from performing the duties of his office, is no better than a tyrant. A society without freedom, Holberg suggests, is a society without enlightenment.

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7 Holberg, *Værker i Tolv Bind*: IX.400: ‘Kriig og Feltslag, men uden Critique, og uden at eftersøge en Kriigs rette Aarsag’.
8 Holberg, *Værker i Tolv Bind*: IX.400: ‘Saaledes blev da Historien indskrænket, og er kommen i den Stand, som vi nu see den at være udi, hverudover vi i steden for gamle nyttige Historier have ikke uden Dag-Registere og tørre Annales’.
This thesis deals with the thought of Ludvig Holberg from the perspective of intellectual history; its aim, to think about the enlightenment anew. The historical problem, to which the thesis offers an answer, is twofold. What was the nature of Holberg’s thought in relation to the enlightenment and how can it be said to have constituted an early Northern enlightenment more specifically? To the extent that we can talk historically of a specific early Northern enlightenment, it cannot, of course, be reduced to the case of Holberg. Yet, this thesis argues that any proper understanding of the question whether there was a particular early Northern enlightenment, as one amongst a multitude of enlightenments, must necessarily begin from an understanding of the thought of Holberg, the most prominent thinker in the early eighteenth century. Describing Holberg as an eclectic thinker, the main argument of the thesis is that the early Northern enlightenment is best understood in light of Holberg’s engagement with a wide range of intellectual traditions, both secular and religious. Thus, the thesis aims to reconstruct the trajectories of Holberg’s thought and to situate his thinking about monarchism, religion, and moral philosophy – the three main areas of thought in which he was engaged – in the contexts of early eighteenth-century Danish and European political thought, on the one hand, and a long-established tradition of Christian political thinking coming out of the seventeenth century, on the other.

Holberg’s enlightenment, however, evades simple definition, such as the one recently offered by Jonathan Israel. In his reading of the enlightenment as intrinsic struggle between a moderate enlightenment that favoured pragmatic reforms, religion, and social stability, and a radical enlightenment, essentially secular and republican in nature, which favoured revolution, democracy, and universal principles of freedom and rights, Israel places Holberg, ‘the real initiator of Early Enlightenment philosophical debate in Denmark-Norway,’ on the side of the moderates.\textsuperscript{11} The moderate enlightenment in Denmark-Norway, advocated by Holberg and other writers such as Erich Pontoppidan (1698-1764), ‘co-existed with both autocratic monarchy and aristocracy, presided over by a sporadically repressive court allied to the Lutheran clergy.’\textsuperscript{12} This treatment of Holberg and the Northern enlightenment is simplistic. Both Holberg and Pontoppidan were indeed monarchists, and both writers accorded religion a central role in their understanding of human interaction in civil society, but they were fierce enemies, who disagreed on basically everything. Seeing both these writers as representatives of the moderate enlightenment is a


blatant simplification, ignoring the different shades of religious and political thinking that constituted the early Northern enlightenment. As I argue in this study, Holberg’s enlightenment cannot be rendered meaningful by placing him in either the moderate or the radical camp; indeed the very distinction that underpins Israel’s conception makes little (if any) sense when applied to the early Northern enlightenment.\textsuperscript{13} Seen in light of the contexts in which he wrote, Holberg, arguably, advocated conservative as well as subversive ideas. His thoughts on the role of history was as much a call for freedom of the press as it was a warning against unsound criticism of traditional authorities.

As Israel sees it, the \textit{true} enlightenment is radical, and it is to the radical enlightenment that we owe our modern thinking about freedom and democracy\textsuperscript{14} – an interpretation which has recently gained wide currency amongst Danish scholars and intellectuals.\textsuperscript{15} Within the broader scheme of Israel’s enlightenment, Holberg becomes an irrelevant thinker as he fails the test of modernity. The intellectual ties between Holberg’s thought, the enlightenment and modernity is indeed a contested issue, but it is hardly a new one. Since the nineteenth century, the reception of Holberg’s thought in Scandinavia has centred on the question of his modernity, and his legacy has been the subject of controversy since the eighteenth century. Still in place today, two competing and contradictory appropriations have dominated our view of Holberg. On the one hand, he is seen as a conservative thinker, keen on defending absolute monarchy against its seventeenth and eighteenth-century critics,\textsuperscript{16} and, on the other, he is seen as a radical thinker, whose modern,

\textsuperscript{13} In current historiography there are different interpretations of radical enlightenment available. Next to Israel’s understanding, which dominates recent debates on the topic, Margaret Jacob has contributed significantly to the conceptualisation of a radical enlightenment. On the relation between these conceptions see Margaret Jacob, ‘How Radical was the Enlightenment? What do we mean by Radical?’, \textit{Diametros} 40 (2014): 102, 103-04; Jonathan Israel, “Radical Enlightenment” – Peripheral, Substantial, or the Main Face of the Trans-Atlantic Enlightenment (1650-1850), \textit{Diametros} 40 (2014): esp. 83. For an overview of different applications of the term radical enlightenment since the nineteenth century, see Frederik Stjernfelt, ‘Abstraktion i humaniora – ’radikal oplysning’ som case’, David Butz Pedersen, Frederik Stjernfelt, and Simo Koppe, eds., \textit{Kampen om disciplinerne: viden og videnskabelighed i humanistisk forskning} (Copenhagen 2015).


\textsuperscript{15} I shall return to this connection in the conclusions to this study; here I shall only stress the fact that Israel’s interpretation of the enlightenment is generally accepted, see Frederik Stjernfelt, ‘Kortlægning af den moderne verdens opkomst’, \textit{Information} 16 January (2010); Frederik Stjernfelt, ‘Fornuftens ideer – samfundets grundlæggende værdier’, \textit{Information} 15 May (2010). Others have accepted Israel’s conception of the radical enlightenment, whilst questioning some of the normative sides to his interpretation, see Rune Lykkeberg, ‘Kampen mellem den radikale riddere og den moderate slapsvans’, \textit{Information} 28 August (2010); Rune Lykkeberg, ‘Vi star dagligt mellem det gode og det sande’, \textit{Information} 24 September (2011); Rune Lykkeberg, ‘Filosofi som verdenshistorisk våben’, \textit{Information} 14 April (2012).

\textsuperscript{16} For this view see Edvard Holm, \textit{Holbergs statsretlige og politiske Synsmaade} (Copenhagen 1879); F. J. Billeskov Jansen, \textit{Ludvig Holberg og menneskerettighetene …og andre Holbergstudier} (Copenhagen 1999); Eiliv Vinje & Jørgen Magnus Sejersted, \textit{Innleie}, in Eiliv Vinje and Jørgen Magnus Sejersted, eds., \textit{Ludvig Holbergs Naturrett} (Oslo 2012); Sebastian Olden-Jorgensen, \textit{Ludvig Holberg som pragmatisk historiker} (Copenhagen 2015).
liberal ideas put him ahead of his own time. These treatments of Holberg’s legacy seem to complement Israel’s conception of the enlightenment, but they do so only in reverse. Whilst the more recent representatives of the latter interpretation places Holberg in the radical camp, accepting Israel’s conceptual premises, the former shares Israel’s own conclusions about Holberg. On the one hand, Holberg is treated as a conservative thinker, whose ideas and arguments are valuable, indeed meaningful, only in light of the context in which he lived, whilst on the other, the appropriation of his radical ideas are meaningful only from a presentist perspective that subjects his thought to teleological interpretation.

This thesis intends to challenge all these appropriations. The key question is not whether Holberg was a conservative or a radical (however these terms are understood), but rather whether Holberg was an enlightenment figure and, if so, what kind of enlightenment springs from the diversity of his thought. This is the task of the present study. Thus, the general aim of the thesis is to rethink the early Northern enlightenment through Holberg’s writings on monarchism, religion, and moral philosophy. In recent years, the concept of the Northern enlightenment has gained currency as an historical field of study. As Kasper Risbjerg Eskildsen has argued, a particular branch of enlightenment thought existed in Northern Europe. Thriving at universities and other learned academies, this branch of enlightenment derived its philosophical and intellectual force from such philosophers as Christian Thomasius (1655–1728) and Christian Wolff (1679–1754). In Denmark, Holberg was one of the most prominent followers of the German philosophy, and it is with Holberg that the principal shift occurred, which should be seen as the intellectual origin of the enlightenment in Denmark. Yet, as I argue in this study, thinking about Holberg and the Northern enlightenment reaches far beyond the focus on enlightened absolutism and natural law.
as a secular language of politics, which has been the prevailing interpretation of Holberg’s political thought. Holberg’s enlightenment, even his theory of monarchism, which he arguably derived from modern natural law theory, was not a secular revolt against religion, but an attempt to reconfigure the relations between politics and religion. We need, in other words, to rethink how enlightenment is conceptualised, particularly in relation to religion. This thesis brings together the idea of an early enlightenment and that of a peculiar Northern variant, situating Holberg’s thought in relation to a broader range of European enlightenments. It aims to show that the key to understanding the early Northern enlightenment is to be found in the connection between the thought of Ludvig Holberg and the multiple enlightenments with which he was engaged, religious and secular alike. In addressing such issues, the thesis sets an essentially revisionist agenda: the enlightenment of Holberg, I shall argue, is best understood as an eclectic blend of Lutheranism, Arminianism, and modern natural law.

Enlightenments and Religions

The idea of a secular enlightenment originates in the enlightenment itself, and it has, since then, found powerful expressions in influential works of philosophers and historians alike. In his lectures on the history of philosophy, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), who was amongst the first to draw distinctions between different forms of enlightenment, contrasted the German Aufklärung to a secular French enlightenment. ‘In Germany’, Hegel asserts, ‘the Enlightenment was on the side of theology; in France, it was at once directed against the Church.’ Whilst the German Aufklärung embraces the theology of the Reformation and leads to reform, the French enlightenment rejects religion and embarks on a path to revolution. In twentieth-century historiography, the idea of a secular enlightenment, closely tied to France, is at the heart of Peter Gay’s seminal interpretation of the enlightenment as the rise of modern paganism and the science of freedom. ‘In the hands of the philosophes’, writes Gay, ‘natural law was, in effect, secular, a modern version of classical pagan speculation’. Focusing not on natural law, which, as Gay sees it, was only influential in the first half of the eighteenth century, but on

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21 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Political Writings, Laurence Dickey and H. B. Nisbet, eds., (Cambridge 2004): 212. I am grateful to Jonas Gerlings for kindly directing my attention to this passage in Hegel.

secularism as this doctrine was advanced by the intellectual activities of the *philosophes*, Gay delves into a world of philosophical and ideological strife united in common contempt for Church and state. The enlightenment that Gay describes 'was a volatile mixture of classicism, impiety, and science; the *philosophes*, in a phrase, were modern pagans.'

Viewed in the context of the 1950s and 1960s, Gay’s interpretation of the enlightenment as a quintessentially anti-religious and secular mode of thought can be read as a refutation of Carl L. Becker’s provocative argument in *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, a work which Gay criticised on numerous occasions. The crux of Becker’s argument was that ‘the underlying preconceptions of eighteenth-century thought were still, allowance made for certain important alterations in the bias, essentially the same as those of the thirteenth century.’ The *philosophes* had merely reproduced the modes of thought of their Christian predecessors, and thus, Becker asserts, ‘the Philosophes demolished the Heavenly City of St. Augustine only to rebuild it with more up-to-date materials’. According to Gay, writing with bite in 1957, Becker’s *Heavenly City* was ‘a masterpiece of persuasion that has done more to shape the current image of the Enlightenment than any other book.’ Naively caught up in Christian modes of thought, Becker’s account of the *Heavenly City* of the *philosophes* ‘had every virtue save one, the virtue of being right.’ As Gay saw it, the *philosophes* desacralised the intellectual world they inhabited and denied the Christian foundations of natural law, pointing instead to stoicism, to classical Greek and Roman thought. They appealed to classical authorities in order to free themselves from the yoke of ecclesiastical structures and to reach for the future. As men of letters deeply involved with the society in which they lived, the *philosophes* in diverse ways formed a party of humanity, unified in their striving for liberty. ‘The struggle of the *philosophes*’, writes Gay, ‘was a struggle for freedom.’

Whilst Gay is mindful of the rich spectrum of enlightenment ideas, he focuses on a uniform enlightenment. ‘I shall speak throughout of the *philosophes*’ he argues, ‘and call the totality of their ideas the Enlightenment, and I shall use these terms to refer to what I shall call a family, a family of intellectuals united by a single style of thinking.’ Unlike Ernst Cassirer, however,
whose views both troubled and intrigued him, Gay saw the task at hand not as that of writing the history of a coherent philosophy, which had been a central concern for Cassirer in his pivotal account of the enlightenment. In The Philosophy of the Enlightenment, Cassirer unproblematically portrays a coherent ‘philosophy of the Enlightenment’, which, emerging from the ‘the unity of its conceptual origin’ as well as ‘its underlying principles’, results in what is called an esprit systématique, as opposed to the seventeenth-century ideal of an esprit de système: a systematic mind or spirit, rather than a system building mind. On Gay’s account, the task at hand consisted of writing what he called a ‘social history of ideas’. Yet, as Robert Darnton has argued, whilst Gay might have been a keen champion of a social history of ideas, he was hardly a practitioner.

Even construed in the broadest sense possible, the notion of the secular-minded philosophe, so central to Gay’s narrative, seems to work only poorly for the kind of writers, whose thoughts and ideas constituted the early Northern enlightenment. If we take the French philosophes to be the paradigmatic case for the enlightenment, we run the risk of searching for a type of intellectual and a corresponding mode of thought that simply did not exist in many other places and contexts during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Tore Frängsmyr’s attempts to find a French enlightenment in Sweden illustrates the pitfalls of adopting Gay’s approach. The study arrives at the predictable conclusion that there was no real enlightenment in Sweden, only a few scattered ideas that never formed ‘a truly coherent current of ideas or became a unified movement’. For the early Northern enlightenment as it featured in Denmark, the ideas of the philosophes, to the extent they were even known, were often rejected and opposed. Holberg was no philosophe (at least not in the way Gay understands this term), and to view him as such is to place him, intellectually as well as culturally, in a context very alien to the world he himself inhabited. In contrast to the philosophes, Holberg sought not to overthrow Church and state, but to advance civility, to guarantee the monarchy, and to reform how the clergy and the laity thought about religion.

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36 Jonathan Israel has indexed Holberg as a philosophe in Israel, Radical Enlightenment: 792.
Over the past two decades, enlightenment studies have largely abandoned Gay’s interpretation of the enlightenment, recognising the role of religion and rethinking the enlightenment in terms of the various forms in which it existed.37 Following these historiographical trends, the early Northern enlightenment, as I shall attempt to describe in this study, was neither irreligious nor modelled on the intellectual activities of the French philosophes. Starting from John Pocock’s ‘pluralist account’ of the enlightenment, which comprises both religious and secular aspects, this thesis conceptualises the early Northern enlightenment as one amongst a multitude of enlightenments.38 This approach has two central implications in relation to recent debates on the enlightenment.

First, within the broader field of enlightenment studies, this approach is situated between what has turned into a historiographical contest between national and transnational approaches to the enlightenment. At the heart of the historiographical move from a predominantly French enlightenment to a plurality of European enlightenments, we find what Roy Porter and Mikulás Teich have called enlightenment in national context. Although Porter and Teich accept the existence of ‘a certain common identity in the Enlightenment’, this approach is mainly concerned with ‘the many different forms the Enlightenment took in vastly different social and political environments.’39 As a central premise of this thesis, in order to understand the enlightenment of Holberg, we need first to understand the conditions under which he lived, wrote, and published his work. These conditions were in many instances peculiar to the Danish-Norwegian monarchy, where the political and religious structures differed significantly from those of France, England, or the Netherlands. The approach to national enlightenments is limited, however, as the national easily turns into a straightjacket at the expense of understanding ideas and practices that were shared on a wider European scale. Thus, without equating the enlightenment to the activities of the French philosophes and without presuming the existence of a coherent philosophy of the enlightenment, there is still a need to for a transnational or trans-European perspective.

Despite of all attempts to situate the enlightenment in national context, the notion of a coherent enlightenment still prevails. In recent historiography a number of historians have criticised pervasiveness of the notion of multiple enlightenments; the propagated plurality is perceived as a slippery slope, which can result only in postmodernist relativism. The central contention, for instance, in John Robertson’s influential account of the enlightenment in Scotland and Naples is simply that ‘there was only one Enlightenment’. To critics of the national enlightenment paradigm, such as Robertson and Israel, putting too much emphasis on national conditions will lead to a loss of coherence, and thus a clouded vision of the enlightenment as a whole. Consequentially, the critics of the national enlightenments approach, whose critique is not altogether misplaced, have advocated a rival approach, which, as Robertson puts it, aims to resist ‘the temptation to fragment the Enlightenment into separate national contexts’. The aim of this approach is to place enlightenment above national context. But to simply presume the existence of a single philosophy or language of Enlightenment would also be misleading. This approach merely shifts the perspective from one extreme to the other and, in the attempt to avoid the pitfalls of national history, ignores what is distinctive about the ways in which enlightenment became meaningful in various contexts. In this study, I shall therefore begin not from Porter and Teich, nor Robertson, but from Pocock.

Envisioned as a web of ‘family resemblances and family quarrels (some of them bitter and even bloody),’ Pocock’s enlightenment exceeds the interpretative scope of the national enlightenment paradigm as well as that of the enlightenment above national context – a point, not acknowledged by critics such as Israel, who sees it as ‘far too vague and diffuse to be useful’. Combining national and transnational perspectives, Pocock’s notion of a family of enlightenments is capable of grasping the various ways of thinking that constitutes different enlightenment

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42 Israel, Radical Enlightenment: v-vii, 137; Robertson, The Case for the Enlightenment.
discourses, thus defying essentiality. Hence, in alignment with this perspective, the aim of this thesis is to bring to our attention one particular branch of enlightenment thought, namely that of the early Northern enlightenment. Yet, rather than attempting to grasp what is essential in the early Northern enlightenment – also comprising a variety of thought – the aim is to illuminate one particular way in which the enlightenment became meaningful, thus bringing to light the whole family tree.

The metaphorical scope of the concept of a family of enlightenments does not, however, stop with the synchronic view on a variety of eighteenth-century enlightenments; it also leans towards genealogy. The Northern enlightenment did not take place in a void, either synchronically or diachronically; it emerged out of long-standing traditions of thought inherited from the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation, and it was closely tied to enlightenment thought elsewhere in Europe – which is not to claim that the enlightenment was everywhere the same. Understanding the early Northern enlightenment as one branch of the family tree, my aim in the following chapters is not only to shed light on the distinctive features that set this enlightenment apart from other enlightenments, but also to emphasise those features that were shared by different branches of enlightenment. On a general scale, the enlightenment can be seen ‘as a distinct intellectual movement’, to invoke Robertson’s recent exposition, ‘dedicated to the better understanding, and thence the practical advancement, of the human condition on this earth.’\textsuperscript{47} Holberg, as we shall see, was part of this movement, but the way in which he thought about human betterment differed from other enlightenment figures elsewhere in Europe.

The second implication that follows from the pluralist approach to the enlightenment relates to the question of religion. Whilst recent historiography has contested the narrow focus of the French enlightenment paradigm, the irreligious touch of Gay’s enlightenment still prevails.\textsuperscript{48} The emphasis on secularism and irreligion comes in several variations. In current historiography, the idea of an irreligious enlightenment is most prominently advocated by Jonathan Israel, whose dichotomy between radical and moderate enlightenment turns (amongst other things) on religion and secularisation. Whilst the moderates constantly compromise their own enlightenment principles by subjecting themselves to traditional political and clerical authorities, the radical enlightenment adheres to universal principles of freedom, toleration, and equality. Originating in the philosophy of Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677), and spreading throughout Europe with the


dissemination of Spinozism, the radical enlightenment opposed superstition and organised religion, which it perceived as an instrument of politics. The radical enlightenment, as Israel’s sees it, advocates a secular morality.

As already stressed, the dogmatic distinction between moderate and radical enlightenment is incapable of rendering meaningful what was at stake in the debates in which Holberg partook. Holberg sought not to overthrow religion. He advocated the separation of church and state in order to reshape the relation between religion and politics in such a way as to ensure the preservation of both. This entails a different conception of secularisation, closer to what Ian Hunter in his *Rival Enlightenments* has described as a struggle between two rival philosophical cultures in Protestant Germany. Shaped respectively by civil and metaphysical conceptions of philosophy, proponents of the civil enlightenment such as Pufendorf and Thomasius tended towards desacralisation and secularisation, as opposed to the religious concerns of the metaphysical enlightenment represented by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1648-1716), Christian Wolff, and Immanuel Kant (1727-1804).

Whilst Hunter’s account of the philosophical and cultural rivalry in the early German enlightenment holds important clues for our understanding of Holberg and the early Northern enlightenment, the interpretative framework of his *Rival Enlightenments* falls sort of accounting for the role of religion, as religious issues are all too easily brushed aside as belonging solely to metaphysical philosophy. The civil enlightenment of Pufendorf and Thomasius, closely tied, as it was, to their theories of natural law, was anti-metaphysical, aiming at ‘detranscendentalising’ politics and ethics. Although Hunter treats religious issues more ardently in his subsequent monograph on the thought of Thomasius, *The Secularisation of the Confessional State*, the main emphasis is still on the question of secularisation. As other scholars have suggested, there is

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54 Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments* 89, 227.

more to be said about the religious thought of both Pufendorf and Thomasius. Natural law, in this perspective, ‘was intimately tied up with religious concerns’.

In recent historiography a number of studies has turned the tables on those perspectives primarily concerned with enlightenment and secularism, emphasising instead the close correlation between enlightenment and religion. Since the appearance in 1967 of Hugh Trevor-Roper’s now classical essay on the religious origins of the enlightenment, scholars have not only rehabilitated the role of religion in the enlightenment, they have also expanded the range of figures and issues now treated as central to the enlightenment. One of the richest perspectives to emerge in the past years is perhaps David Sorkin’s examination of the religious enlightenment, in which he has included such orthodox religious thinkers as William Warburton (1698-1779), Jacob Vernet (1698-1789), Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten (1706-1757), and Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), to name but a few. Holberg, as we shall see in this study, was perhaps not as orthodox in his religious beliefs as these writers, but he shared many of their most central contentions. Developed within the ‘institutional confines’ of established religious traditions – Protestant, Jewish, and Catholic – the religious enlightenment, in Sorkin’s words rested on ‘such ideas as reasonableness and natural religion, natural law, and toleration,’ and it ‘constituted a conscious search for a middle way between extremes.’ Yet, despite the enriching focus on religious enlightenment thinkers, Sorkin betrays the historiographical potential of his perspective, seeing the religious enlightenment not as a rejection of, but as a supplement to Israel’s conceptual dichotomy. ‘The Enlightenment’, Sorkin claims, ‘consisted of its radical, moderate, and religious versions as they developed across Europe from the mid-seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth

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57 Haakonsen, Enlightenments and Religions: 113.
61 Sorkin, The Religious Enlightenment: 11, 20-21. For a criticism of Sorkin’s perspective, which argues that Sorkin’s work is both historically inaccurate and politically undesirable, see Graham Gargett, ‘Jacob Vernet and “The Religious Enlightenment”: “Rational Calvinism”, the Pastors of Geneva and the French philosophes’, History of European Ideas (2013): esp. 25-57. Nevertheless, while Gargett might have a point in regard to certain details in Sorkin’s account, he seems to misunderstand (or he fails to grasp) the perspective of Sorkin’s work, i.e. the (historical) religious enlightenment as an attempt to theorise – in a normative vein – the middle ground between dogmatic and fanatical extremes. Cf. Sorkin, The Religious Enlightenment: 511-14.
In the following, I shall therefore use the concept of religious enlightenment (in a slightly broader sense than Sorkin) to signify those positions that claimed a strong correlation between reasonable belief and the aim of living peacefully together in civil associations.

Concepts such as reasonableness, natural religion, natural law and toleration were central Holberg’s understanding of religion. But to understand his religious thought we should not seek to interpret religion as the opposite to a purely secular or irreligious understanding of society, be it moderate or radical. As Peter Harrison has argued, the invention of concepts such as ‘religion’ and ‘the religious’, as opposed to mere ‘faith’, was itself an enlightenment creation and should therefore not be seen as opposites. Although many enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke (1632-1704) and Holberg were critical of certain aspects of theology, they did not question the role of religion as such. Enlightenment and religion are not mutually exclusive modes of thought and life. Indeed, in order to secure for religion a place that was both desirable and necessary, Holberg, like Locke, intended to rethink the place of religion in civil society. Stressing Holberg’s engagement with religious issues, I intend to ‘travel back into a world’, as Pocock remarks in the first volume of his Barbarism and Religion, ‘where Enlightenment was a product of religious debate and not merely a rebellion against it.’

In doing so, this thesis seeks to understand the thought of Holberg in light of a wider range of rival or conflicting enlightenments, both religious and secular. A canonical figure in the context of the early Northern enlightenment – mainly comprised, however, of lesser known figures – Holberg was engaged in the most pressing debates of his time, and though he did not become part of the European canon of enlightenment thinkers, his works were widely read and circulated in his own time and many were also translated into Dutch, English, French, German, and Swedish.

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65 John Pocock, Barbarism and Religion: I.5.
Yet Holberg remains largely unknown to modern enlightenment historiography.67 Introducing Holberg and the early Northern enlightenment to the broader field of enlightenment studies, this thesis addresses a set of historical and methodological questions about the relation between Holberg’s ideas and the enlightenment more broadly.

On Sources and Methods of Interpretation

In understanding the early Northern enlightenment as one amongst a multitude of enlightenments, the thesis combines two distinct, yet overlapping approaches to intellectual history: historical contextualism as practised by the historians of the so-called Cambridge School and the history of the writer as a specific persona. As historians such as Quentin Skinner and John Pocock have argued, there is an intimate relationship between meaning, action and context.68 Approaching the past from this perspective, historical interpretation require us to reconstruct, in Skinner’s words, ‘the prevailing conventions governing the treatment of the issue or themes with which the text is concerned.’69 Following this proposal, the production of meaning in the past can be seen as a two-way traffic between pre-existing languages on one hand, and innovative speech acts on the other. In depicting the relationship between text and context in this way, ‘there is’, as Pocock has put it, ‘a history formed by the interactions of parole and langue.’70

Reconstructing the intellectual history of the early Northern enlightenment, I shall primarily focus on Holberg’s works and their place in what is broadly considered public debate. I intend not to construct the ideological history or the history of eighteenth-century Danish political thought in its entirety, but rather to reconstruct a range of traditions or genealogies of thought with which Holberg was engaged. Holberg’s texts are thus situated within a broader array of published materials, i.e. periodical literature, literary and poetic works, plays, pamphlets, official speeches, constitutional documents, sermons, correspondences, and finally treatises on

70 Pocock, Political Thought and History: 88.
political, juridical, moral and historical subjects. Yet, there is more to our understanding of the early Northern enlightenment than the contextual analysis of Holberg’s works; we also need to consider the status and innovations of Holberg’s texts as well as his role as an author. Holberg was a prolific writer. He made use of a broad repertoire of literary strategies, and this is where historical contextualism can be fruitfully combined with the history of the persona of the writer, understood not as a ‘performed role’ that ‘presupposes an inner but ultimately accessible moral and decision-making agent’, but a range of duties necessary for the performance of particular ‘social offices’. A persona is a restraint as well as a resource or a possibility. As I shall argue in this study, the language of office and duty was not only important to Holberg’s thinking about civil society, the performance of specific duties and the limits imposed by these duties on a particular office also influenced the ways in which Holberg fashioned himself as an author, i.e. the ways in which he cultivated a range of different personae in his writings. From this perspective, particularly three literary strategies are quintessential to our understanding of Holberg and the early Northern enlightenment.

First, Holberg wrote in different genres, ranging from comedies and satires to histories, philosophical essays and a treatise on natural jurisprudence. This raises an important question about our classification of Holberg as a writer. Indeed, modern scholarship has fought a long-lasting battle over what label to put on Holberg. Whilst some see him essentially as an historian, others have argued that Holberg was mainly concerned with religion and moral philosophy. Holberg’s identity as a writer was not, however, tied to one single genre alone, in relation to which all others were secondary. We should not think of Holberg for instance as an historian, who wrote poetry on the side, nor should we think of him as a moral philosopher, who happened to take an unusual interest in comedy. Holberg’s identity as a writer springs rather from his use of multiple genres and the way in which each genre is attached to a corresponding persona such as the philosopher, the playwright, the poet, the historian, or the biographer – to mention some of the most prominent personae that figure in Holberg’s published œuvre. Thus, for us to understand Holberg as a writer, it is vital to look at the different personae he cultivated, when writing different

71 This means that I do not take into account existing unpublished manuscripts, even though such materials (this I fully acknowledge) do provide unique perspectives on the formation of an author’s thoughts and arguments. For an intriguing claim to such an approach see Robert Wokler, Rousseau, the Age of Enlightenment, and Their Legacies (Princeton & Oxford 2012): Ch 8.
74 Søren Holm, Holberg og Religionen (Copenhagen 1954): 5-6.
works within different genres. The *persona* of the writer is part of the performativity of the text, or what is often referred to as its ‘illocutionary force’.\(^\text{75}\) By considering how Holberg engaged in contemporary debates through the cultivation of different *personae* and their interrelations, we learn a great deal about the contexts or institutional settings to which Holberg saw himself as a contributor.\(^\text{76}\) The *persona*, in this sense, constitutes a position from which it is possible for a writer to engage with particular arguments. Seen in this light, Holberg’s consideration of the duty and office of a particular *persona* offers important clues as to his intentions in writing what he did.

It is a common mistake amongst critics particularly of the methodological claims advanced by Skinner, to assume that when we are seeking to recover the intentions of a past writer, the texts we read embodies only one intention, intrinsic to the texts themselves.\(^\text{77}\) Moreover, critics have asserted that from the Skinnerian perspective the intentions of a writer, or the illocutionary forces of the text, become meaningful if and only if the text is situated in its proper context. In this way, contextualism, the critics argue, becomes reductionism.\(^\text{78}\) These assertions rest, however, on a misreading of the methodological presuppositions of historical contextualism. As both Skinner and Pocock are keen to stress, the contextual recovery of past meaning is often complicated by the fact that ideas and arguments have different meanings in different settings, for which reason the historian is obliged to reconstruct the various contexts or language games, to allude to Ludwig Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language, within which specific arguments or ideas become meaningful.\(^\text{79}\) What this amounts to is a certain historical sensitivity to the plurality of meanings, intentions and contexts embodied in a text.

Secondly, if the emphasis on historical context often ‘leaves the traditional figure of the author in extremely poor health’, as Skinner has put it, the combination of this perspective with that of the history of different *personae*, brings the author back in.\(^\text{80}\) Holberg, however, often sought to mask his own identity and his intended meaning(s). His published works (particularly his comedies and his satirical works) embody a plurality of voices and perspectives, and he often plays with notions of authorship, publishing both pseudonymously and under his own name. In the late 1710s and 1720s, for instance, Holberg published all of his satirical works under the

\(^{\text{75}}\) Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*: 98-107, 115-16.


\(^{\text{80}}\) Skinner, *Visions of Politics*: I.118.
pseudonym ‘Hans Mikkelsen’, often accompanied by yet another invented author, ‘Just Justesen’, a figure, whom Holberg used as the voice of his more general literary reflections on satire and comedy. But throughout his published works he used other pseudonyms as well, most notable that of ‘Zille Hans’s Daughter’, through whom Holberg changes the gender of his perspective, taking upon himself a feminine voice, and ‘Nicholas Klimius’, who appeared as the author of a utopian novel as late as in 1741. That Holberg was the author of his early satirical works became publicly known only in 1728, when he discussed his literary production in the first part of his memoirs. Before that, his authorship was supposedly only known to his publishers in Copenhagen, his distributor in Norway, and, possibly, to a small group of ‘friends’, about whom he writes without any further specification in his memoirs.\footnote{Ludvig Holberg, \textit{Ludvig Holberg’s Memoirs: An Eighteenth-Century Danish Contribution to International Understandings}, Steward E. Fraser, ed., (Leiden 1970): 98. On Holberg’s authorship see Jens Bjerring-Hansen, \textit{Ludvig Holberg på bogmarkedet: Studier i Peder Paars og den litterære kultur i 1700- og 1800-tallet} (Copenhagen 2015): 50.} Holberg, in other words, took pains to disguise his authorship, expressing his opinion through multiple \textit{persona}. This raises important questions about the conditions under which Holberg authored and published his works. Traditionally these questions have been answered by considering the external or social context in which he wrote. One perspective, is to see Holberg’s use of pseudonyms in light of his social status. At the time when Holberg’s published his satirical works and his comedies, he was a professor at Copenhagen, and since it was unbecoming of a professor to engage with low culture such as comedy and satire, Holberg had to disguise his authorship. His social station conflicts with his work as a poet and a playwright. Whilst such considerations may have motivated Holberg, this interpretation tells us very little about the status of Holberg’s texts and how he intended the plurality of voices and opinions to be read. Moreover, when Holberg declared his authorship in the first part of his memoirs, his social station was the same as when he first wrote and published his satirical works. Hence, concerns for his social station alone offer an implausible explanation of his use of pseudonyms. Another perspective on Holberg’s use of pseudonyms, is to view his works against the background of the structures of absolutism and the rigid system of censorship in place in the early eighteenth century. As several scholars have argued, Holberg struggled with censorship, particularly in his historical works,\footnote{Øystein Rian, ‘Ludvig Holbergs historie- og samfunnsforståelse’, in Peter Christensen Teilmann and Gunnar Sivertsen, eds., \textit{Ind i Holbergs fjerde århundrede} (Copenhagen 2004). The same argument is presented more expansively in Øystein Rian, \textit{Sensuren i Danmark-Norge: Fikkarene for offentlige ytringer 1536-1814} (Oslo 2014). For a critique of this position see Olden-Jørgensen, \textit{Ludvig Holberg som pragmatisk historiker}: 76.} and when he used the pseudonym ‘Nicholas Klimius’, he was trying to avoid the censorship of what is often considered one of his most subversive works.\footnote{Torben Damsholt, ‘Historikeren Holberg mellem utopi og skepsis’, \textit{Almanak} (1985): 162-63.} As we shall see in the following chapters, Holberg
was a fierce critic of the prevailing norms of censorship, but as critical of the institution of censorship as he may have been, this interpretation does not explain why Holberg only used pseudonyms in some cases, whilst uttering similar views in other works, published under his own name. Rather the use of pseudonyms is a integrated part of the tricks that Holberg plays on his readers.

As variations of the same interpretative scheme, the emphasis on social station and censorship confuse external motives for the illocutionary force or the meaning of Holberg’s texts. Bringing to life a plurality of voices, Holberg’s works constitute a web of intertextuality in which a range of themes are treated in different genre, thus creating a dialogue between different characters or personae. Thus we should understand Holberg’s use of pseudonyms such as ‘Hans Mikkelsen’, ‘Just Justesen’ and ‘Nicholas Klimius’ not as an attempt to disguise his own voice and opinion because of external restraints (be they social or political), but as a way of negotiating the boundaries and interconnections between particular offices such as the playwright, the historian or the moral philosopher. This being said, there is still a case to be made for social context. The languages and discourses that constitute the linguistic context in which Holberg wrote his texts were not, of course, detached from the broader social, political and cultural contexts in which they took place. The social, political and cultural context neither can nor shall be ignored – after all, this is what distinguishes Holberg’s background from the writers with whom he was engaged – although I should stress that my analysis of the meaning of Holberg’s texts is concerned primarily with languages and arguments.

Finally, in several of his works, Holberg either draws on or imitates other authors, sometimes without acknowledging his sources. Consequentially a tradition of scholarship has been devoted to mapping Holberg’s sources – in his essays, his comedies, and his historical works. The merits of this tradition of scholarship has been to shed light on such important aspects as what works Holberg was reading, when and how he did so, and the way in which he produced his own texts, i.e. what he used and what he chose to ignore or leave out. Yet, the question to which

89 For a summary of these points see Olden-Jørgensen, *Ludvig Holberg som pragmatisk historiker*: 83-86.
this scholarship is addressed has come to be framed as a question of plagiarism and originality, more than a question about his reading and the reception of prominent thinkers and ideas.\footnote{These perspectives are not without merit, as historians such as Robert Darnton, whose standards of scholarship and whose emphasis on the diffusion of texts and ideas is not met by the tradition of scholarship I am criticising here, has convincingly shown. See Robert Darnton, ‘Discourse and Diffusion’, \textit{Contributions to the History of Concepts} 1:1 (2005). For a response to Darnton’s position and its relation to intellectual history see Quentin Skinner, ‘On Intellectual History and the History of Books’, \textit{Contributions to the History of Concepts} 1:1 (2005).} Whilst it is important to note that Holberg not only drew on and imitated other authors, but also plagiarised their works (which was already suggested, as we shall see, by Holberg’s contemporaries), this perspective is reductionist for a number of reasons.

First, it puts widespread literary strategies, indeed commonplaces, such as the imitation of influential works, both ancient and modern, in a dubious light. Holberg, thus, is often portrayed as an unoriginal thinker,\footnote{Kåre Foss, \textit{Ludvig Holbergs naturrett på idéhistorisk bakgrunn} (Oslo 1934); Ditlev Tamm, ‘Ludvig Holberg og hans naturret’, in Eiliv Vinje and Jørgen Magnus Sejersted, eds., \textit{Ludvig Holbergs Naturrett} (Oslo 2012): 47–49; Ditlev Tamm, ‘Holberg og juristerne’, in Klaus Nenndam & Ditlev Tamm, \textit{Holberg og juristerne} (Copenhagen 1984): 46. Sebastian Olden-Jørgensen, ‘Saa at jeg har efterlevet en Historieskrivers uden at overtræde en Borgers Pligt – naturret og historie i Holbergs behandling af enevældens indførelse 1660’, in Eiliv Vinje and Jørgen Magnus Sejersted, eds., \textit{Ludvig Holbergs Naturrett} (Oslo 2012): 128-137.} a plagiarist,\footnote{Sebastian Olden-Jørgensen, ‘Saa at jeg har efterlevet en Historieskrivers uden at overtræde en Borgers Pligt – naturret og historie i Holbergs behandling af enevældens indførelse 1660’, in Eiliv Vinje and Jørgen Magnus Sejersted, eds., \textit{Ludvig Holbergs Naturrett} (Oslo 2012): 128-137.} and even his treatment of historical sources is seen as manipulative and incorrect.\footnote{Vicente Oieni and João Feres Jr., ‘Conceptual History and Translation: An Interview with Melvin Richter’, \textit{Contributions to the History of Concepts} 4 (2008): 231.} Secondly, on a related note, Holberg’s texts are often understood in relation to an original source, thus reducing Holberg’s text to a mere copy. These issues are not irrelevant, but they are reductionist in the sense that they have the rather unfortunate consequence of diverting our attention away from what may be considered the more pressing issues. As Melvin Richter has recently claimed, ‘the procedure that seems to be commonsensical is to ask to what extent does the received concept or vocabulary reflect the original form, whereas the more interesting question is what happens in this new setting?’\footnote{Vicente Oieni and João Feres Jr., ‘Conceptual History and Translation: An Interview with Melvin Richter’, \textit{Contributions to the History of Concepts} 4 (2008): 231.} Following Richter’s suggestion, Holberg’s texts can be read as ‘creative adaptations’,\footnote{Oieni and Feres Jr., ‘Conceptual History and Translation’: 231.} as opposed to mirror images of the original. The search for origins, moreover, presupposes a notion of stable meaning that is entirely untenable.\footnote{The essentially metaphysical quest for a stable origin has been sufficiently deconstructed by Michel Foucault in his widely influential essay on ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’, reprinted in his \textit{Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984}, 3 vols., (London 1997-2000): L.369-89.} What happens, for instance, when we realise that Pufendorf’s works on natural law, rather than being the original source, or ‘foundational formulations’, as Charles Taylor has put it, of Holberg’s thinking, are themselves ‘creative redictions’.\footnote{Charles Taylor, ‘Philosophy and its history’, in Richard Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner, eds., \textit{Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy} (Cambridge 1984): 20.} Compared to Pufendorf, for instance, Holberg’s thinking about natural law may be said to be unoriginal, at least in the very strict sense of the word, but the issue at hand, or so it seems, ought not to be one of
originality or plagiarism, but of performativity, that is, what Holberg was doing in writing what he did. This aspect of the production of Holberg’s texts is not only related to the personae he cultivated in his writings (the poet and the playwright, for instance, stand in a different relation to their literary forerunners, than the historian to other historians and to his sources), but also to the contexts in which Holberg placed his works.

Situating Holberg’s thinking within multiple contexts, and emphasising his engagement with a range of traditions of thought, this study adopts a genealogical view on Holberg’s texts and their relation to the enlightenment more broadly. Writing the history of the early Northern enlightenment as one particular branch within a broader family of enlightenments, this thesis reads Holberg in light of a genealogy of different enlightenment traditions, related through a range of family resemblances. Reconstructing the history of different family resemblances (in what follows, I shall speak mainly of languages, traditions and genealogies of thought), what we are dealing with is a range of contexts, in which to understand the thought of Holberg. To write the history of how Holberg engaged with these genealogies of thought, how he reiterated certain languages and engaged himself with certain range of controversies and traditions, is to write a history not of intrinsic meanings that arrests Holberg’s thought; it is to write a history of possible meaning.

Narrating the Early Northern Enlightenment

Focusing primarily on the period between ca. 1710 and 1760, which covers the period in which Holberg was active as a writer as well as his immediate aftermath, the thesis aims to describe the intellectual transformations that constituted the early Northern Enlightenment. From the 1680s onwards, the European mind, or so Paul Hazard tells us, was changing at a rapid pace:

Never was there a greater contrast, never a more sudden transition than this! An hierarchical system ensured by authority; life firmly based on dogmatic principle – such were the things held dear by the people of the seventeenth century; but these – controls, authority, dogmas and the like – were the very thing that their immediate successors of the eighteenth held in cordial detestation. The former were upholders of Christianity; the latter were its foes. The former believed in the laws of God; the latter in the laws of Nature; the former lived contentedly enough in a world composed of unequal social grades; of the latter the one absorbing dream was Equality.

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98 Here I am specifically alluding to Wittgenstein’s understanding of this term, which is particularly suitable to the approach I am describing, as the genealogical structures of the family tree and the different language games through which they are constituted evades essentiality. See Wittgenstein, Philosophische Untersuchungen: §§67, 69.


Drawing on the intellectual potential unleashed by the Renaissance, a host of writers at the end of the seventeenth century set out to think anew about man and the world he inhabited. As Hazard sees it, their collective intellectual activities constituted ‘a change so abrupt’ that it amounted to ‘a revolution’. Hazard’s account is no longer tenable, but the basic assertion that the enlightenment emerged out of intellectual transformations in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries is still worth upholding. In this study, I shall explore how the enlightenment, albeit in a less rapid and less abrupt fashion, changed the way Danish writers thought about politics, religion, and moral philosophy. This was the time of Holberg, an age of enlightenment.

I have organised the chapters thematically, although each chapter is structured chronologically. In terms of introduction to the main character of the thesis, chapter 1 deals with what I refer to – in a Pocockian fashion – as the enlightenments of Ludvig Holberg. Dealing with the formation of Holberg’s thought, the chapter outlines the principal periods and episodes of his life, and it places his published works within the broader intellectual traditions with which he was engaged: modern natural law and the early enlightenment republic of letters. Chapter 2 deals with the political and religious discourses that informed the rise of Danish absolutism in the seventeenth century. The chapter has a double introductory purpose. First, offering an overview of early modern Danish political thought, it introduces readers not acquainted with Danish history to a range of topics and events important to our understanding of Holberg and the early Northern enlightenment. Secondly, it traces the emergence of a particular breed of Christian political thinkers, whose blend of orthodox Lutheranism and absolutism became one of the primary targets for Holberg’s criticism.

Chapter 3 deals with the transformation of the theory of monarchism in connection to natural jurisprudence, Lutheran political thought, and what I describe as a republican critique of absolutism. Reconstructing Holberg’s engagement with modern natural law, which he applied to his discussions of the legitimacy of monarchical sovereignty and the origin of civil associations, this chapter examines how Holberg’s theory of monarchism was shaped by both his refutation of Lutheran or Christian political thinkers, on the one hand, and his encounter with contemporary republican critics of absolute monarchy, on the other. Yet, as the chapter argues, Holberg did not reject all aspects of either the tradition of Lutheran political thought inherited from the seventeenth century or the republican tradition. Chapter 4 is devoted to enlightenment

102 Hazard, The European Mind: xv.
interpretations of civil society. Connecting Holberg’s theory of civil society to his thinking about sociability, duty and the function of different *personae*, which he partly derived from the discourse of natural law, the chapter situates his thinking about philosophy and learning within the intellectual fabric of the republic of letters.

In chapters 5 and 6, I explore Holberg’s religious thinking. Chapter 4 deals with the development of Holberg’s religious thinking from the 1710s to the early 1740s and focuses on Holberg’s commitment to Lutheranism and his criticism of pietism, fanaticism, and secret societies. Chapter 5 deals with Holberg’s rethinking of his religious beliefs in his major works on moral philosophy published in the 1740s and 1750s. Exploring Holberg’s commitment to religious toleration and its intellectual foundation, the chapter further seeks to reconstruct how his tolerationist ideas involved him in a wide range of religious controversies, to which he was introduced through the republic of letters, that would ultimately challenge the scope of his toleration. Situating Holberg’s religious thinking in relation to the religious rationalists, the naturalists, the atheists, the materialists, and the deists, the chapter stresses his intellectual ties to the Arminian enlightenment, a tradition of thought which he first encountered in the 1720s. Finally, this chapter argues that Holberg’s enlightenment is intimately tied to the religious enlightenment.

In the conclusion to the study, I seek to place the early Northern enlightenment within the broader matrix of European enlightenments, and turning to the intellectual and political *wirkungsgeschichte* of the enlightenment (i.e., the enlightenment legacy to the modern world), I address, albeit briefly, the relation between enlightenment and a range of pressing issues in current political thought. History should not, after all, as Holberg warned us in his *Moralske Fabler*, be reduced to ‘Daily Records and dry Annales.’

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Chapter 1

The Enlightenments of Ludvig Holberg:
Life, Works, and Contexts

The autobiography of a man whose business is thinking should be the story of his thought.

R. G. Collingwood

A celebrated playwright, historian, novelist, and essayist, Holberg’s thought was formed by numerous intellectual encounters and his works were written in multiple contexts. His political observations were monarchical while, in terms of professed religion, he was a Lutheran. Yet, his religious thinking was highly at odds with contemporary orthodoxies, and his theories of political authority and civil society opened up intellectual horizons previously unknown. What set Holberg apart from most of his contemporaries was his engagement with a multitude of enlightenments. In order for us to better understand the early Northern enlightenment, this chapter offers an introduction to the life of its main protagonist. It does not, however, deal with his personal affairs, finances, social relations, sexuality, or other such matters, as those aspects of Holberg’s biography are largely irrelevant to the intellectual history of the early Northern enlightenment. The chapter focuses on his principal works and the contexts in which they were written, following the principles of contextual or intellectual biography. Discerning the traditions of thought in which Holberg placed his works and to which he intended to contribute, this chapter draws primarily on autobiographical writings, i.e. his memoirs, published in Latin in three parts between 1728 and

105 For such attempts see Th. A. Müller, Den unge Ludvig Holberg 1684-1722 (Copenhagen 1943). And most recently Lars Roar Langslet, Den store ensomme En biografi om Ludvig Holberg (Copenhagen 2002).
1743, and the autobiographical essay, published posthumously in 1754. Although his autobiographical works, at least to some degree, provide a rosary and teleological account, these works are the best sources available in regard to the formation of Holberg’s thought. Yet, rather than reading his autobiographical works prima facie, Holberg’s own descriptions shall be measured against the record of his published works and other intellectual activities.

A Man of Letters and the Grand Tour

Born in 1684 in Bergen, Norway, and educated in Copenhagen in Denmark, Holberg grew up in the two principal commercial cities in the Danish-Norwegian monarchy. Whilst Copenhagen was the capital of the composite monarchy and the principal place of learning, Bergen was, in Holberg’s own words, ‘like Noah’s ark, the receptacle of all living creatures’. In light of contemporary customs and practices, Holberg’s career took a rather surprising turn. His father was a colonel in the Norwegian army; Holberg should, as was the custom of the times, have followed in his father’s footsteps. Holberg did indeed pursue a military career, but his commanding officers, and he himself, soon realised that he was ill suited for military service. He was allowed to pursue his ‘passions for literature.’ In 1702, Holberg arrived at Copenhagen; in 1704, he had finished his university studies, achieving the best result in all the sciences except metaphysics. Thirteen years later, Holberg was appointed professor of metaphysics at Copenhagen, a position which he exchanged first for a professorship in eloquence and Latin literature, which he held during the 1720s, and finally one in history, to which he was appointed in 1730. Reflecting on the transformation of his intellectual persona in the first part of his memoirs, Holberg writes:

I was made a corporal at starting, under the implied condition that I should receive instruction in the art of military. This is a part of my history, however, which it may not be very prudent to divulge; since to be transformed from a petty officer into a professor of philosophy, and to exchange my rank of corporal for spiritual preferment, is a sort of Ovidian metamorphosis which might expose me to the risk of being sent back from my professorial chair to the camp, if the authorities were to question my qualifications.

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107 In 1741, a translation of the first two part was issued in Bergen and in 1745 a translation of all three letters was published in Copenhagen. See Ludvig Holberg, Professor Ludvig Holbergs Lif og Lefnets Beskrivelse af ham selv i en Epistel til en stor Mand paa Latine forfattet, og nu til flere Fornøyelse paa det Danske Sprog verteret og Udgivet (Bergen 1741); and Ludvig Holberg, Ludvig Holbergs Tredje Epistler til *** Hvorudi befattes det Fornemste af hans Liv og Levet, Oversat af det Latinske i det Danske Sprog (Copenhagen 1745).


109 Holberg, Memoirs of Lewis Holberg: 3.

110 Holberg, Memoirs of Lewis Holberg: 3.
In an important respect, the first part of Holberg’s memoirs can be read as an explanation and a justification of this intellectual metamorphosis. From personal experience, Holberg became a staunch advocate of employing individual persons based not on their social station or tradition, but on their natural talents. Yet he was never ready to completely disregard tradition. This way of thinking, as we shall see, became central to Holberg’s moral philosophy and his political thought. Holberg’s thought was formed in various contexts. His travels and his engagement with a multitude of enlightenments, which he encountered in various European libraries and cities as well as through his reading of printed works, both ancient and modern, are particularly important.

From an early age, Holberg’s horizons became European. In 1704, at the age of twenty, Holberg spent close to a year travelling through the Low Countries, ‘where’, as became clear to him while in Amsterdam, ‘trade occupies every man’s thoughts, and philosophy is at a discount’. Travelling to England in 1706, he stayed in London and Oxford, where he visited the famous Bodleian library and taught language and music to aristocratic women. Shortly after his return to Copenhagen in the summer of 1708, Holberg was offered to accompany the son of Poul Winding (1658-1712), a professor at Copenhagen and a high-ranking public official, on a journey to Germany. Holberg accepted, and in the company of Winding’s son he set out for Dresden. Having reached their destination, Holberg was ‘civilly dismissed’ and continued on his own to Leipzig, where he met a fellow countryman, ‘a very pleasant and facetious young man’, who persuaded Holberg to prolong his stay in Leipzig. Together with his new companion, Holberg visited famous professors, whom he praised for their ‘courtesy’, and he followed lectures, ‘not so much to obtain instruction as to criticise the professors, at whose expense we constantly amused ourselves on our return.’

Holberg’s intellectual sympathies are difficult to discern at this stage. Whilst his journey through the Low Countries had no intellectual aim whatsoever, his visits to the Bodleian library, where he first conceived the notion of becoming an author, and his stay in Leipzig do give some clues as to his intellectual orientation. His youthful, almost boyish amusement at the cost of the professors in Leipzig should not, however, cloud our judgement of the formation of his thinking. Holberg ridiculed the German professors not only for his own boyish amusement, but more importantly because they lectured on useless, metaphysical questions. ‘Stivelius was our favourite professor’, Holberg records in the first part of his memoirs, referring to an otherwise unknown professor, ‘for he furnished us with more abundant topics of ridicule than any of his colleagues.”

111 Holberg, Memoirs of Lewis Holberg: 11.
113 Holberg, Memoirs of Lewis Holberg: 29.
One of the doctrines on which this professor delighted to enlarge was, that the elect would have excellent dinners and suppers in Paradise." Hence, the image that emerge from his descriptions in the first part of the memoirs is one in which the useful sciences are juxtaposed to metaphysics. Whether these sympathies were beginning to take shape between 1706 and 1708, or whether they belong to the late 1720s, when Holberg composed the first part of his memoirs, remains puzzling. Although inconclusive in regard to Holberg’s intellectual sympathies at the time, there is some evidence to suggest that Holberg was cultivating such ideas already by 1708. When Holberg left Leipzig, travelling back to Copenhagen through Brunswig and Hamburg, he first went to Halle, where he met the celebrated jurist and philosopher Christian Thomasius, famous for his anti-metaphysical doctrines. ‘From Leipsic I went to Halle,’ writes Holberg, ‘where my stay, however, was so short, that the only professor I saw was the celebrated Thomas. My visit to this professor afforded me little satisfaction, for he talked only of the inclemency of the season, and other indifferent topics; not thinking it worth while, I suppose, to enter upon philosophical subjects with so young a man as myself.’ Filled with disappointment, Holberg’s encounter with Thomasius was emblematic of what was to become his principal strategy of self-fashioning from the 1710s onwards, when he published his first works and clearly steered towards a career as an university professor. In the 1710s, Holberg increasingly fashions himself as a learned man of letters, seeking out the pioneers of the early enlightenment republic of letters, both on his travels and through his choice of reading.

In 1714, risking the loss of a travel grant he had received for academic research at foreign Protestant universities, Holberg, then aged thirty, embarked upon what was to be his longest journey, taking him first to France via the Netherlands and then to Italy, thus ignoring the original purpose of the travel grant. Having arrived in Paris in the spring of 1714, Holberg at first longed ‘for society’, spending his time as a spectator in the public gardens. ‘At length I procured a lodging in the Faubourg St Germain,’ he recalls, ‘where I spent some months in philosophical seclusion, communing only with my books, and with my own thoughts; for I knew no one but my landlord, and I was known to no one.’ Besides his visits to the public gardens, he also visited the Bibliothèque Mazarine and the library of Saint Victor, both of which, to his surprise, were only ‘little frequented’. In the Mazarine library, however, he did take note of one recurring spectacle. As he writes:

116 Holberg, Memoirs of Lewis Holberg: 42.
118 Holberg, Memoirs of Lewis Holberg: 42.
The Mazarine library was not so entirely deserted, for the college of Four Nations is situated in the centre of Faubourg St Germain, and there is, besides, a greater number of new books to be obtained there. In the morning, before the doors of the library were opened, a number of students generally assembled, ready to rush in and seize the prize that awaited the first man who entered. The prize was Bayle’s Dictionary, a book which was read with extraordinary avidity, and the temporary possession of which was the object of all the struggling and contention at the door, and the race which took place after the students were admitted. The strongest and the swiftest of foot generally succeeded in obtaining the prize.\textsuperscript{119}

After living for ‘two or three months at Paris secluded from the society of men’,\textsuperscript{120} Holberg took the initiative to get acquainted with a few fellow countrymen who had converted to Catholicism and were living in Paris. Much to his liking, he was taken to public ‘disputations held on Sundays and festivals in the church of St Sulpice, where a priest, who has a salary from the crown for that purpose, defended the doctrines of the Roman Catholic church against all opponents’, but on occasion he could not but be provoked by the attacks on the Evangelical religion.\textsuperscript{121} The Paris to which Holberg had arrived in the spring of 1714 was the Paris of the Counter-Reformation, and his encounter with Catholic theology was to become important to the formation of his own religious thinking.

Arriving at Rome in August 1715, after a journey troubled by thieves, pirates, and a lasting fever, Holberg sought every day to visit a new part of the city; he was thrilled with the Italian theatre, particularly the masquerades and the \textit{commedia dell’arte}, and he soon became ‘a constant frequenter of the public libraries, especially the Minerva library, and the library of science’.\textsuperscript{122} In contrast to his experiences of the Parisian libraries, the libraries in Rome were not empty; much to his astonishment, the librarians ‘furnished every body with pens, ink, and paper, gratuitously’.\textsuperscript{123} In the first part of his memoirs, Holberg records an incident taking place at the Minerva library, which illustrates his intellectual interests at that time. ‘No one was permitted,’ he regretfully learns, ‘to read prohibited works without the permission of the inquisitors.’\textsuperscript{124} Still, in the Minerva library, Holberg accidently got a hold of ‘Bayle’s Dictionary from one of the attendants, a simple, unlettered monk, who was severely reprimanded for his negligence by the librarian, a Dominican father, and a fellow of the college of inquisitors.’\textsuperscript{125} As he could not obtain the necessary dispensation to read Bayle’s dictionary, he left the library without having consulted the heretical work. ‘I left the Minerva library,’ he tells, ‘and went to the library of science, where, as the

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\item \textsuperscript{119} Holberg, \textit{Memoirs of Lewis Holberg}: 42.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Holberg, \textit{Memoirs of Lewis Holberg}: 42.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Holberg, \textit{Memoirs of Lewis Holberg}: 48.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Holberg, \textit{Memoirs of Lewis Holberg}: 75.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Holberg, \textit{Memoirs of Lewis Holberg}: 76.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Holberg, \textit{Memoirs of Lewis Holberg}: 76.
\item \textsuperscript{125} Holberg, \textit{Memoirs of Lewis Holberg}: 76.
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librarian was a layman, I hoped to have less difficulties in overcoming his scruples. But here also I met with a similar repulse, although, I professed myself a heretic, whom the reading of prohibited books could not make worse than I was.\textsuperscript{126} Centred on Bayle and his dictionary, Holberg’s memoirs affords only little description of his reading more generally. That he singles out Bayle, however, is not without significance, as Bayle’s dictionary was a trophy-reading to the learned mind of the early eighteenth century.

The libraries that Holberg visited in Oxford, Paris, and Rome were amongst the best of the time; famous for their universal collections, they attracted visitors from all over Europe.\textsuperscript{127} What Holberg was doing on his numerous travels abroad was to perform a quintessential enlightenment activity, namely that of the Grand Tour.\textsuperscript{128} In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Grand Tour existed in two distinct forms. With the exception, perhaps, of his first journey to the Low Countries, about which he tells us almost nothing, Holberg sought to cultivate himself as a man of letters. The Grand Tour, as Holberg and other men of letters construed it, was all about learning and education. With the prospect of visiting library collections not available elsewhere, students and travellers were offered exceptional chances to consult rare books that were either unknown or forbidden in their countries of origin; moreover, as men of letters, they could visit distinguished figures of the republic of letters and learn about religion and manners by observing foreign cultures. Through travel accounts, the perception of philosophy, culture, politics, and religion was transformed.\textsuperscript{129} Yet, many travellers, particularly young gentlemen, saw another purpose in the Grand Tour – elements of which are also present in Holberg’s descriptions of his early journeys. They visited the capitals of Europe as well as other places for their own amusement, but more than anything else, they travelled to Paris to study the latest fashions, while squandering away their fortunes. The enlightenment was also an age of luxury and high fashion, a theme which Holberg was to explore both as a playwright and a moral philosopher.

As much as he had advocated and benefitted from the Grand Tour in his youth, however, with age he became increasingly sceptical about its ‘absolute Necessity.’\textsuperscript{130} Most people, Holberg writes in 1750, particularly ‘young Persons’, who travel abroad ‘before they have grown a Beard, or have reached an Age, wherein they can benefit from their travel’, would be better off pursuing

\textsuperscript{126} Holberg, Memoirs of Lewis Holberg: 76.
\textsuperscript{128} On the Grand Tour in the enlightenment see Robert Wokler, Rousseau, the Enlightenment, and Their Legacies (Princeton & Oxford 2012): 29-45.
the same studies at national academies.\footnote{Holberg, *Epistler*: IV.90: ‘unge Personer, førend de have faaet Skieg paa Hagen, eller ere komne til den Alder, at de kand rejse med Nytte’.
\footnote{Holberg, *Epistler*: IV.91-92: ‘Bøgers Læsning’, ‘kunde man blive virkelig Ejer af de fleeste saadanne Skrifter, som man ellers alleene faaer Frihed at blade udi’, ‘ved Correspondance, med ringe Bekostning faae Copier deraf’.} What worried Holberg was mainly that foreign travels were a costly affair. Knowledge of foreign languages could easily be obtained from language teachers and ‘the Reading of Books’, and by spending only a small percentage of the cost of travelling, ‘one could become the real Owner of most such Works that one would otherwise only have the Freedom to leaf through’ or ‘through Correspondence’ one could seek to ‘obtain Copies thereof at a low Cost.’\footnote{Holberg, *Epistler*: IV.90: ‘udenlandske rejser’, ‘deres Misbrug’.
\footnote{Holberg, *Memoirs of Lewis Holberg*: 34.}
\footnote{Holberg, *Memoirs of Lewis Holberg*: 34.} As Holberg insists, however, he did not intend to denounce ‘foreign Travels’ as such, only ‘their Abuse’.

**Natural Law and Moral Philosophy**

Before embarking upon his journey to France and Italy in 1714, Holberg was granted a scholarship at Borchs Kollegium; during his ‘residence in this college’, he saw through to publication his first ‘two works’: the *Introduction til de fornemste Europeiske Rigers Historier, Fortsat Indtil disse sidste Tider* (Introduction to the History of the Principal European Kingdoms down to these latest Times), which appeared in 1711, and the *Anhang Til hans Historiske Introduction Eller Underretning Om de fornemste Europeiske Rigers og Republiqvers Stater* (Appendix to his Historical Introduction or Information about the Principal European Kingdoms and Republics), published two years later in 1713.\footnote{Holberg, *Memoirs of Lewis Holberg*: 34.} These two works, on which he had begun working while in Oxford, dealt with historical and geographical subjects, and followed the example of Pufendorf. ‘I commenced this work in England,’ he writes in his memoirs, ‘when I had an opportunity of consulting the books from which the materials are taken in the Bodleian library, and when I was animated with the desire of becoming an author before I had acquired a beard.’\footnote{Holberg, *Memoirs of Lewis Holberg*: 34.} In Copenhagen Holberg had also become part of Professor Reitzer’s circle. Christian Reitzer (1665-1736), a professor of jurisprudence at Copenhagen, possessed one of the largest private collections of books in Copenhagen, comprising some 17,000 volumes, which he put at the disposal of his students. Holberg and other prominent men of letters of the early eighteenth century, such as the historian Hans Gram (1685-1748), the jurist Andreas Hojer (1690-1739), and the philologist Christian Falster (1690-1752), were frequent guests. Reitzer had studied natural jurisprudence under Thomasius in Halle, and it was in Reitzer’s library and the Bodleian library that Holberg first
became acquainted with modern theories of natural jurisprudence. Holberg’s discovery of modern natural law theories, was to become one of the two major formative encounters that shaped his intellectual development.

In 1714, before setting out on his journey to the Netherlands, Paris, and Rome, Holberg had sent a letter to Frederik IV (1671-1730), applying for a vacant chair in Greek at Copenhagen or, alternatively, to become *adjunctus professor philosophie*. The professorship went to Hans Gram, a man of great erudition whom Holberg knew from Reitzer’s circle. However, in January 1714, his second wish was granted and he became adjunct professor in philosophy, awaiting the first forthcoming vacancy. What is remarkable about Holberg’s application for a professorship is that he had never earned the academic titles (i.e., the baccalaureus or the master’s) usually required from professorial candidates. In this context, the way in which Holberg fashioned himself as a learned man in his application is particularly important to our understanding of Holberg as a figure of the enlightenment.

In his application, Holberg first refers to his theological exam, which he had completed ten years earlier, only to move on quickly to his European journeys. At the time when he sent his application, he had already travelled in the Low Countries, England, and Germany. It is clear from the context that it is the Grand Tour to which he refers in an attempt to legitimise his professorial candidacy. Holberg further stresses his mentorship to Poul Winding’s son on his travels in Germany. Winding, who should be counted amongst the highest-ranking public officials in the state administration, had long been acting as Holberg’s protector, and it is largely due to Winding that Holberg managed to establish a network of benefactors and friends amongst the political and educational elite in Denmark. Finally, he mentions his published historical works as well as two unpublished manuscripts. The first manuscript to which he refers was an unpublished historical account of the reigns of Christian IV (1577-1648) and Frederik III (1609-1670), which would remain in manuscript form until 1729, when it was incorporated into his *Dannemarke og Norges Beskrivelse* (Description of Denmark and Norway), the first history of the kingdom of Denmark and Norway penned by Holberg. Thus, already in the 1710s, Holberg had made the first attempts to delve into what would become his principal subject during the 1730s; as late as 1749, the work

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The second manuscript to which he refers in his application for a professorship was an unpublished work dealing with the subject of jurisprudence or natural law. This work was not published until his return from Paris and Rome. By that time, the manuscript had been finished for some time, lacking only an introduction. Holberg saw natural jurisprudence as moral philosophy, originally intending his work to be entitled *Moralske Kierne* (The Moral Core); he eventually abandoned this title before seeing the work through to publication in 1716. Although the work appeared as *Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskab* (Introduction to the Law of Nature and of Nations), the original title page was inserted into the treatise between the preface and the first chapter, with the year 1715 printed at the bottom. In both his historical works and the unpublished work on jurisprudence, Holberg placed himself in a tradition of thought closely linked to the philosophy of Pufendorf. Whilst the title as well as most of the contents of Holberg’s treatise on natural law corresponded to Pufendorf’s magnum opus *De Jure Naturae et Gentium*, published in 1672, the chapter headings of his work mirrored those of Pufendorf’s *De Officio Hominis et Civis Juxta Legem Naturalem Libri Duo* (On the Duty of Man and Citizen According to Natural Law in Two Books), first published in 1673, in which Pufendorf had summarised his views on natural law. Holberg’s commitment to this tradition gives an important insight into how Holberg in the 1710s fashioned himself as an enlightened man of letters, steeped in the useful sciences.

Well aware of the administrative and educational structures of the society in which he lived, Holberg saw his early works as an answer to the administrative needs of the absolute state, an answer that consisted of a gradual integration of natural law into the curricula at Copenhagen and the Danish learned academies. The absolutist state saw an increase in the number of public officials, who needed a thorough knowledge of law and politics. In the early eighteenth century at

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140 For a discussion see Kåre Foss, *Ludvig Holbergs naturrett på idéhistorisk bakgrunn* (Oslo 1934): 477-83.
142 The most notable exception is that Holberg omits from his treatise the chapter on natural religion. For a discussion of this aspect see Jørgen Magnus Sejersted, ‘Bibel og protestantisme i Holbergs naturrett’, in Eiliv Vinje and Jørgen Magnus Sejersted, eds., *Ludvig Holbergs Naturrett* (Oslo 2012).
the University of Copenhagen, politics, law, and history were only secondary sciences next to theology. Though the professors at the Royal Knightly Academy at Copenhagen, founded by Christian V in 1691 (and closed in 1710), were required to lecture ‘on Theology and the Principles of faith as well as on Public and private Law, the mathematical Sciences [i.e. Mathesi], Eloquence, History, Politics Genealogy and Geography’, there was a considerable need in Denmark to clarify the principles of law for the growing number of public servants employed in the state administration. When Holberg applied for a professorship in the early 1710s, this was exactly the way in which Holberg fashioned himself as a learned man of letters, given that he was lacking, as we have seen, the required academic titles. Not only had he travelled abroad for several years, Holberg explains in the application when seeking to clarify what he calls his ‘motives’ (i.e. the reason why the King should consider him for an academic position), he had also written several historical works, in which he offered a quick guide to the histories and constitutions of the principal European states. Equally, he had further devoted himself to ‘Jurisprudence’, authoring a treatise on the law of nature and of nations, to which he had added examples from Danish law codes. Moreover, when he published his treatise on natural law in 1716, or his ‘System of the Law of Nature and Nations’, he declared in the dedication to Frederik IV that one of his main intentions had been to author a work in Danish, ‘so that those in particular, who do not understand Latin or other foreign Languages, could benefit from it.’ Holberg was thus well versed in the useful sciences essential to any public official, that is, natural jurisprudence and the history of the principal European kingdoms; he may well have intended his early works to perform this educational function.

To be sure, Holberg’s early works did fill out a void. His Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskab was the only work on natural law available in Danish from its appearance in 1716 until 1742, when the first translation of Pufendorf appeared in Copenhagen. Compared to Sweden, where Lund and Uppsala had become vibrant centres of natural jurisprudence from the

146 For this interpretation see Tamm, ‘Holberg og Naturretten’: 110-11; Dahl, ‘Holbergs naturrett i et bokhistorisk perspektiv’: 211.
147 Samuel Pufendorf, Et Menniskes Og en Borgers Pligter efter Naturens Lov, Christian Homfred Brugman, trans., (Copenhagen 1742).

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late seventeenth century onwards, and to North German university cities such Kiel, Greifswald, Helmstedt, Tübingen, Giessen, and Halle, the reception of natural law in Denmark had happened at a slow pace. Yet, Holberg was not the first to introduce the ideas of Grotius, Pufendorf and others were slowly getting through as well. As early as 1634, the German lawyer Heinrich Ernst (1603-1665) lectured on Grotian natural law at the Knightly Academy of Sorø, and Christian IV, who founded Sorø Academy in 1623, even seems to have made an attempt to offer a professorship to Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), who had fled the Low Countries to seek asylum in France. Though there are no surviving records of the lectures delivered on natural law at Copenhagen in the 1690s, it is known that Reitzer lectured on the subject of natural jurisprudence in 1700 and 1701. He also published a dissertation in 1702 on divine universal right, which followed Grotius, and particularly Pufendorf, closely. Further, already in 1696, Henrik Weghorst (1653-1722), a professor of moral philosophy and later metaphysics and jurisprudence at Copenhagen, had published his Compendii Juris Naturaes Dissertatio Prima (Compendium on Natural Law, First Dissertation), which drew extensively on Grotius and classical stoic writers such as Cicero and Seneca; equally, from 1708 onwards, Weghorst lectured on Grotius at Copenhagen. Natural jurisprudence, however, only became an established science at Copenhagen in the 1730s. In 1732, the number of professors in jurisprudence at Copenhagen was doubled from one to two, natural law being the responsibility of the new professor; in 1736, it became possible for students to graduate from university with an exam in jurisprudence. The first professor to fill this position was Andreas Hojer, who was appointed in 1734. However, it was not until the early 1740s that there were regular lectures on the works of Grotius and Pufendorf.

Yet, Holberg’s thinking on natural law should not be seen solely as the application of a particular legal discourse to the administration of the absolutist state. To Holberg, natural law is

151 Holm, Holbergs statsretlige og politiske Synsmaade 16n.
152 Cf. Holm, Holbergs statsretlige og politiske Synsmaade 16-17.
153 Holm, Holbergs statsretlige og politiske Synsmaade 16.
154 Troels G. Jørgensen, Andreas Hojer – juris og historiker (Copenhagen 1961): 143-44.
155 Holm, Holbergs statsretlige og politiske Synsmaade 20.
more than a legal discourse; it is, first and foremost, a language of duties, obligations, and human sociability. Natural law, as Holberg understands it, is a moral philosophy. As he recalls in his memoirs:

In the mean time I published a little work in the Danish language under the title of *An Introduction to the Law of Nature and of Nations*, according to the principles of Grotius and Puffendorf, which authors, together with Christopher Thomas, I made my constant guides in this performance. In this work the laws and constitutions of Denmark and Norway are cited, instead of the Code and Pandects; and historical examples, calculated to illustrate the ethical part of the treatise, are taken not merely from Roman and Grecian history, but from that of northern nations.156

The tradition of modern natural law in which Holberg places himself had largely been shaped in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Formed to an important extent by his commitments to the tradition of modern natural law, Holberg’s views on politics and civil society were drawn from his understanding of sociability. In Holberg’s thought, sociability is central in at least two different ways. First, in his work on natural jurisprudence, Holberg committed himself to a Pufendorfian understanding of natural sociability, with which he aimed to explain the origin of civil society, and thus of political authority.157 Secondly, sociability to Holberg also entailed a particular view on how it is possible for people to live together in civil associations. Holberg’s understanding of natural law as a form of moral philosophy was steeped in eclecticism and in what Pufendorf and his followers, most notably Thomasius and the French Huguenot Jean Barbeyrac (1674–1744), saw as the science or history of morality.158 Next to Pufendorf, the foundational figure in this tradition was Hugo Grotius, whose works also play a central role in Holberg’s moral and political thought:

There are some authors, however, whom I am never satiated with reading. Thus Grotius *de Jure Belli ac Paece*, though it has long since lost the charm of novelty, is to me always a new book. This author has established the foundation of moral philosophy; and though innumerable writers have followed in the same path, none have reached his excellence; every word he writes is an axiom, every precept an oracle; and such is the majesty of his style, that he might be taken for a ancient writer of the best stamp.159

Modern scholars, however, have tended to over-emphasise Holberg’s intellectual commitments to the tradition of modern natural law. As F. J. Billeskov Jansen has argued, Holberg’s ethics, which

he drew from modern natural law, centred not on God, but on man, and fostered a moral philosophical thinking about man and his relation to God, to others, and to the state which was to inform the whole of Holberg’s published oeuvre.\(^\text{160}\) Whilst natural law, understood as a form of moral philosophy, was to leave a profound mark on much of Holberg’s published work, his thinking cannot be reduced to a mere natural law discourse. Holberg was, I argue in this study, equally engaged with other enlightenments as well. Yet, in the 1710s, around the time when he applied for a professorship, the tradition of modern natural law was the strongest influence on his thought and it also shaped the way in which he fashioned himself as an enlightened man of letters.

In the context of the eighteenth century Holberg’s view of natural jurisprudence was not undisputed. In 1736, a reform of legal studies was implemented at Copenhagen, making it possible for students to graduate with a final exam on jurisprudence. On that occasion, a translation was issued of Pufendorf’s *De officio*, which was intended to counter the influence of Holberg’s *Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kunds kab*. Other traditions of jurisprudence were also advocated; for instance, by Henrik Stampe (1713-1789), who taught jurisprudence at Copenhagen from 1738 onwards. As Stampe writes in his autobiography, he had learned about Grotius’ *De jure belli et pacis* when following the lectures on natural jurisprudence delivered by Christian Wolff in Marburg, where he stayed between 1736 and 1738.\(^\text{161}\) Steeped in a Wolffian tradition of natural law, rather than the Pufendorfian tradition to which Holberg belonged, Stampe became a central figure in the circles of learned scholars and professors in Denmark, whose thoughts on monarchy and jurisprudence were heavily inspired by Montesquieu’s *L’esprit des lois*.\(^\text{162}\) Holberg’s views on Montesquieu were neither completely for nor against the French philosopher, although Montesquieu challenged the Pufendorfian foundation upon which he based much of his political thinking. He had been amongst the first to write about Montesquieu’s *De l’esprit de lois* in Denmark, a work which he both admired and criticised for its use of the concept of despotism, and he held in great esteem Montesquieu’s earlier work, the *Lettres persanes*. ‘I know of no Author,’ writes Holberg in the third volume of his *Epistler* in 1750, ‘whom an Advocate could be less

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declined to defend before a Court of orthodox Judges than the Author of the Persian Letters.'\textsuperscript{163} To fully understand Holberg’s engagement with the political philosophy of Montesquieu in the 1750s, we need to view his political thought not only in light of his commitments to modern natural law, but also against the background of a thriving republican tradition in Europe.\textsuperscript{164}

Committed from an early stage to a Pufendorfian tradition of natural law, the way in which Holberg fashioned himself as a enlightened man of letters as well as his academic career differed from other prominent scholars attending Reitzer’s circle. Whilst Hans Gram became a renowned and erudite scholar, devoted to learning, history, and philology, Hojer wrote a few provocative dissertations before he embarked on a career first as a professor at Copenhagen, then as a public official. As an enlightened reformer in the state administration, Hojer became the driving force behind the university reforms of the 1730s. Holberg, by contrast, highlights his knowledge of the useful sciences, comprising history, jurisprudence, and moral philosophy, and he referred to his European travels as a valuable source of knowledge of different European cultures. Rather than seeking to influence the politics of the absolute monarchy through the state administration or from his position as university professor, Holberg became a public moraliser, and it is thanks to Holberg’s intention to educate and moralise that the early Northern enlightenment has its first and brightest light.

\textbf{History, the University, and the Rise of Pietism}

In the 1720s, during his so-called ‘poetic frenzy’, Holberg devoted most his time to writing satirical works and comedies for the Danish theatre in Lille Grønnegade in Copenhagen, which had opened in 1722.\textsuperscript{165} His comedies were a huge success. When he, in 1725, arrived in Paris, on what was to be his last journey abroad, he sought to stage two of his comedies that he had translated whilst residing in the French capital. His efforts, though, were unsuccessful.\textsuperscript{166} After his return to Copenhagen in 1726, aged forty two, two key events altered Holberg’s intellectual activities. First, in the late 1720s, the Danish theatre closed due to financial difficulties. Secondly, in 1730, the staunchly Pietist Christian VI (1699-1746) inherited the Danish throne, thus fuelling an inevitable

\begin{itemize}
\item Holberg, \textit{Epistler: III.310: 'Jeg veed ingen Autør, hvilken en Advocat mindre kunde driste sig at forsøre for en Ret af orthodoxe Dommere end Autør til de Persiske Breve'.}
\item Ludvig Holberg, \textit{Hans Mikkelsens skrifter} (Copenhagen 1722): 2recto: ‘poetisk raptus’.
\end{itemize}
clash between the established orthodox Lutheran church and the Pietist dissenters. Holberg’s intellectual activities in the 1730s are best understood in light of those local events. The restrictions which these events put on Holberg were reflected in the second, and by far the shortest part of his memoirs, published in 1737, in which he is primarily concerned with the great fire of Copenhagen in 1728 and his historical works.167

By this time, he had become an established professor at Copenhagen. In 1730, the year after he published his Dannemarks og Norges Beskrivelse, he was appointed to a professorship in history. Holberg retreated from public life and devoted himself to the study of history as well as to the administration of the university, first as vice-chancellor, an office which he held between 1735 and 1736, and then as treasurer from 1737 onwards. In 1733, he published a universal history in Latin. Then, between 1732 and 1735, he published his Dannemarks Riges Historie in three volumes, covering the period from the earliest history of Denmark down to the monarchical revolution of 1660. In Dannemarks Riges Historie, perhaps his greatest achievement as an historian, Holberg set out to refute several contentions from the historical works of Arild Huitfeldt (1546-1609), a sixteenth-century aristocrat, historian, and member of the Council of State.168 Published between 1595 and 1603, Huitfeldt’s account of the history of Denmark comprised no less than ten volumes, in which he depicted the virtues and vices of the Danish kings. It was the most influential historical account to appear in Danish prior the eighteenth century. Holberg not only intended Dannemarks Riges Historie to replace Huitfeldt’s account as the standard work on Danish history, he also intended to offer a rival monarchist account to what he saw as Huitfeldt’s aristocratic narrative. ‘[H]ad a Citizen of Copenhagen written his History,’ writes Holberg, referring to the reign of Christian II, whom Huitfeldt depicts as a villain and a tyrant, ‘it would have been substantially different from Huitfeldt’s.’169 As Holberg saw it, Huitfeldt’s historical narrative was partisan, favouring the aristocratic regime of which Huitfeldt himself was a prominent representative. Holberg, by contrast, sought to write impartial history,170 ‘so that’, as he writes in Betænkning over Historier (Reflection on Histories), which was prefaced to the third volume of

168 On Danish historians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries see Karen Skovgaard-Petersen, Historiography at the Court of Christian IV (1588-1648): Studies in the Latin Histories of Denmark by Johannes Pontanus and Johannes Meursius (Copenhagen 2002).
169 Ludvig Holberg, Dannemarks Riges Historie, 3 vols., (Copenhagen 1732-1735): II.35: ‘om en Københavns Borger havde skrevet hans Historie, havde den bleven langt anderledes end Hvittfelds’.
Dannemarke Riges Historie, 'I have followed the Duty of a Citizen without breaking that of an Historian.' Thus, impartiality was a defining feature of the persona of the historian.

In subsequent works, Holberg explored different branches of historiography. He turned to religious history, resulting first in the publication of his Almindelig Kirke-Historie Fra Christendommens første Begyndelse til Lutheri Reformation (General Church History from the Beginning of Christianity to the Lutheran Reformation), which appeared in 1738, then, in 1742, in the publication of his Jodiske Historie (Jewish History). In 1746 he turned to ancient history, translating Herodian's (c. 170 - c. 240) Greek history of the Roman Emperors, the Herodiani Historie udi otte Bøger (The History of Herodian in Eight Books), to which he preaced a long exposition of the principal cause of the growth of Rome as well as a short account of the life and reign of Marcus Aurelius (121-180), whose death Herodian had used as the beginning his narrative. Finally, between 1739 and 1745, Holberg authored two historical and moralising works, in which he described the lives of past heroes and heroines respectively, imitating the method of Plutarch (c. 46-127), i.e. the parallel or comparative analysis of two persons' virtues and vices. Holberg wrote these works not as an 'Historian', but as a 'Biographer', as the 'Office' of the biographer was not restrained by the same 'Rules' as that of the historian. Circumventing, thus, long expositions of 'Wars, Battles and Sieges' as well as the strictures of a 'Chronological Order', Holberg the biographer was able to justify the composition of his works, structuring each comparison around a specific 'moral Theme'. His intention, however, remained genuinely historical, though distinctively moralising. Holberg's choice of the persona of the biographer, as opposed the impartial historian, can therefore be seen as a way of circumventing the duties of the historian, thus combining history and moral philosophy. The content of Holberg’s histories of heroes and heroines, though, was largely plagiarised from earlier writers, which was not unusual in the eighteenth century. Holberg was painfully aware of such issues as plagiarism and literary

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171 Holberg, Dannemarke Riges Historie. Betænkning over Historier: 'saa at jeg har efterlevet en Historieskrivers uden at overtræde en Borgers Pligt'.
173 Holberg, Adskillige store Heltes: 4recto-4verso: 'Historicus', 'Biographus', 'Regler', 'Officium'.
174 Holberg, Adskillige store Heltes: 4recto, 4verso, 2verso: 'Kriege, Feltslage og Beleyringer', 'Chronologisk Orden', 'moralisk Thema'.
176 For a discussion see Schmidt, 'Kildestudierens nytte'.
dependence, and how they might affect his image as an original thinker. This was particularly true in regard to his early historical works.

During his stay in Oxford between 1706 and 1708, when he first conceived of the notion of becoming a writer, Holberg devoted his studies to works on history, both secular and ecclesiastical, as well as ‘the Law of Nature and Nations’. Holberg, as he tells us in 1728 in the first part of his memoirs, organised the *Introduction til de fornemste Europeiske Rigers Historier* ‘after the plan of Puffendorf’, though he also assures his reader that his work was ‘derived from original sources’. The work on which Holberg modelled his introduction was Pufendorf’s much influential *Einleitung zu der Historie der Vornehmsten Reiche und Staaten so itziger Zeit in Europa sich befinden* (An Introduction to the History of the Principal Kingdoms and States of Europe), first published in 1682, a work, which besides its traditional four-monarchies framework placed significant emphasis on modern history and state interests. The claim to originality on Holberg’s part was, however, intended as a response to his critics, who, in Holberg’s own words, had perceived his work as ‘a mere translation’. One of his critics, ‘in fact, one of our Danish historians’, as Holberg continues, ‘has not scrupled to assert that it is transcribed from the history of Puffendorf’. As Holberg contends, this assertion was, ‘with the exception of the section on Germany’, founded on a ‘superficial examination’ of his work; thus, it would have been dismissed had his work been subjected to ‘a more attentive examination’. The historian to whom Holberg was alluding in the memoirs was Andreas Hojer, who had also been part of Reitz’s circle. In the late 1710s, Holberg and Hojer had been engaged in a fierce controversy against each other over the nature of history and the right interpretation of natural law; Holberg, who had been the more polemical of the two combatants, would continue throughout his writings to attack the position of Hojer. However, Hojer had found a soft spot, which might explain Holberg’s continued aversion towards him and, at least to some degree, his attempts at fashion himself as a leading intellectual in the North, that is, as an enlightened man of letters.

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183 For Hojer’s comments on Holberg’s reliance on Pufendorf see Andreas Hojer, *Kurtzgefasste dänemarkische Geschichte* (Flensburg 1719): Vorbericht.
In his later writings, Holberg became particularly sensitive to his intellectual relationship to Pufendorf, whom he came to regard as a partisan scholar, not only in regard to his historical works, but also his natural law. Pufendorf had entered into the service of the Swedish monarchy – the long-term rival to Danish supremacy in the North, the control of the sounds, which were the only maritime entrance to the Baltic Sea, and the vital Sound Dues.\footnote{On Denmark-Norway and the Great Northern War see Michael Bregnsbo and Kurt Villads Jensen, \textit{Det danske imperium}. 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition, (Copenhagen 2005: 144-47); Knud J. V. Jespersen, \textit{A History of Denmark} (Basingstoke & New York 2004): 7, 19-20. See further Jeremy Black, \textit{Eighteenth-Century Europe 1700-1789} (London 1990): 282-87.} As Royal Historiographer in Sweden, Pufendorf authored a multi-volume history of Sweden, which naturally favoured the Swedish position in the North,\footnote{On the historiographical dialogue between Holberg and Pufendorf see Tim Berndtsson, “\textit{Hvad Contra-Parten har at sige derimod}”: Historiografisk dialog mellan Holberg och Pufendorf’, in Jørgen Magnus Sejersted and Sebastian Olden-Jørgensen, eds., \textit{Historikeren Ludvig Holberg} (Oslo 2014).} and in his writings on natural law, Pufendorf drew several conclusions that undermine, the Danish claims to control of the Sound Dues. Holberg thus saw a need to respond to Pufendorf’s partisanship. Throughout his writings, while he still praises Pufendorf as amongst the most notable modern historians, he does blame him for ‘writing in such a way as to Please the Swedes’, as he writes in his autobiographical essay in 1754.\footnote{Ludvig Holberg, \textit{Epistler}, 8 vols., F. J. Billeskov Jansen, ed., (Copenhagen 1944-54): V.14: ‘at skrive de Sveneské til Behag’.} Moreover, when Holberg published the second edition of his natural law (a work which modern historians often see as unoriginal),\footnote{As already indicated in the introduction to this study, this view is particularly outspoken in such works as Kåre Foss, \textit{Ludvig Holbergs naturrett på idéhistorisk bakgrunn} (Oslo 1934); Ditte Tamm, \textit{Ludvig Holberg og hans naturret’}, in Eiliv Vinje and Jørgen Magnus Sejersted, eds., \textit{Ludvig Holbergs Naturrett} (Oslo 2012): 47-49; Ditte Tamm, ‘\textit{Holberg og juristerne’}, in Klaus Nielandam & Ditte Tamm, \textit{Holberg og juristerne} (Copenhagen 1984): 46.} he not only erased the word ‘introduction’ and removed the names of Grotius, Pufendorf and Thomasius from the title of the work, he also sharpened his own position vis-à-vis Pufendorf, the interpretation of the Sound Dues being one of the crucial areas of disagreement.\footnote{On the differences between Pufendorf and Holberg in regards to the Sound Dues see Søren Koch, ‘\textit{Holbergs Naturrett i et funksjonelt perspektiv’}, in Eiliv Vinje and Jørgen Magnus Sejersted, eds., \textit{Ludvig Holbergs Naturrett} (Oslo 2012): 84.}

Another defining feature of Holberg’s historical writing from the late 1730s and early 1740s onwards is the changing relation between history and moral philosophy. As Torben Damsholt has argued, between the 1730s and the appearance of the essay on the fate of history in \textit{Moralske Fabler} in 1751, Holberg’s thinking about the usefulness of history underwent significant changes. Having originally entertained a strong belief in the ability of history to project an ideal vision of political and civil life derived from the precepts of natural law, in the 1740s and 1750s Holberg became increasingly sceptical about the usefulness of history, as the historian’s task, which also entailed a critical engagement with traditional political and ecclesiastical authorities, was made impossible
under current conditions of censorship. Yet, Holberg's fable about the fate of history was intended not to convey an accurate description of reality (it is after all a fable), but to illustrate a moral insight, i.e., that history without criticism is utterly pointless, but also that relentless criticism of authorities can never achieve the intended effect. If we take a closer look, however, at his treatment of history on the Moralske Fabler and in his Betænkning over Historier, he is concerned with much the same thing. 'History' he writes in the Betænkning over Historier, thus prefiguring a theme to which he would return in the Moralske Fabler, 'consists not in the simple List of Things past,' which one can learn by heart, but in the engagement with the past based on 'Understanding and Reflection'. Hence, rather than changing his mind about history, occupying a more sceptical position, Holberg was merely changing his perspective. Exploring different genres of historiography, Holberg emerges – as Sebastian Olden-Jørgensen argues in a recent study – as a pragmatic historian contend to use history in order to inform or enlighten the present. From the late 1730s onwards, the *persona* of the historian, though distinct, moves closer to that of the moral philosopher.

The main force behind Holberg's retreat from public life was connected with the rise of Pietism and the Pietist repugnance at public displays like the theatre. The Pietist movement made its first impact on Danish intellectual life in 1706, when Frederik IV abolished all rights of religious assembly. The abolition was issued as a response both to rumours that burghers in Copenhagen were gathering in private societies and to the circulation of a work in German entitled *Lutherus ante Lutheranismum, Oder die uhrälteste evangelische Warheit* (Luther before Lutheranism, or the oldest evangelical Truth), first published in 1703. This work urged Christians to break out of the established orthodox Lutheran Church and to establish small congregations in its stead. Luther, not Lutheranism, the book title claimed. Espoused in the writings of Philipp Jacob Spener (1635-1705), August Hermann Francke (1663-1727), and Gottfried Arnold (1666-1714), whose works had been translated into Danish in the early eighteenth century, the Pietists rejected the established Lutheran Church and reclaimed the priesthood of all believers. No church or institution, they argued, could ensure the salvation of true believers, whose only relation with God was their internal, heartfelt faith. Centred on the concept of the priesthood of all believers,

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191 Holberg, * Dannemarks Riges Historie: Betænkning over Historier: 'Historie består ikke udi forbigangne Tings simple Recit', 'Skiønsomhed og Reflexion'.
193 The classical account of the introduction of pietism into Denmark is Johannes Pedersen, 'Pietismens Tid 1699-1746', in Hal Koch and Bjørn Kornerup, eds., *Den Danske Kirkes Historie V* (Copenhagen 1951).
the Pietists understood faith to be an individual matter – a notion deeply rooted in the Lutheran tradition, having been at the core of Luther’s own reforms of Christianity.

In the Pietist view, the established Lutheran Church had betrayed its origins and a renewal of the Evangelical religion was needed. As Spener argued, the institutionalised orthodox Church was incapable of fulfilling its purpose, that is, to care for the salvation of true believers, as church ceremonies and practices had become a matter of mere habit. Faith, Spener argued, is always an individual matter, a heartfelt relationship between God and the individual believer. From this contention, Spener set up a series of arguments not commonly entertained by the established Lutheran Church. First, he argued, true faith always involves personal repentance. Any true believer must experience an awakening which leads the person to repent his or her former way of life, thus resulting in a rebirth. The sinner is born again as a true believer. The second argument concerns the issue of good works. Whilst the orthodox Lutherans commonly held good works to be a Catholic doctrine, Spener argued that true faith would always foster works. Yet, Spener’s understanding of good works differs strongly from the Catholic doctrine. Spener sees good works as purely accidental, having no bearing on salvation and faith itself. Finally, Spener advocated the notion of a church within a church; in Germany, both Spener and Francke had organised private gatherings, the collegia pietatis, centred around philological discussions and readings of the Bible.195

The Pietists in Denmark never confessed to a uniform set of beliefs. In early eighteenth-century Denmark, however, it is possible to distinguish at least two main strands of Pietism: a moderate strand, often referred to either as Halle Pietism or state Pietism, which was represented by such writers as Erich Pontoppidan (1698-1764) and Andreas Hojer, and a separatist form of Pietism, represented primarily by the Moravian Brotherhood. Centred at Herrenhut in Moravia, Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), together with a small handful of religious refugees from different places of origin, founded the Moravian Brethren in 1722. The Moravian Brotherhood was a radical lay movement, largely isolated from society. They held that a Christian way of life centres not on theological doctrines and learned disputes, but on religious practices and a true inner devotion. Zinzendorf and the Moravian Brethren stood for faith without theology, as Thomas Bredsdorff has pointed out, and most of their contemporaries considered them to be

enthusiasts or fanatics. In the 1730s, Zinzendorf had become an influential figure at the royal court in Copenhagen. Zinzendorf was related to the royal family; in 1731, he was present at the celebration of Christian VI’s coronation. Nonetheless, when Christian VI intervened in the great ecclesiastical controversy of the 1730s, he embraced the moderate strand of state Pietism, represented by Pontoppidan and others, banning Zinzendorf and the Moravian Brethren from the kingdom. This form of Pietism made a lasting impact on the religious thought of the early Northern enlightenment, not through Zinzendorf himself but through one of his followers, the self-educated craftsman and missionary Christian David (1691-1751), whose *Forklaring over de Otte Saligheder* (Explanation of the Eight Beatitudes), published anonymously in 1733, greatly upset many of his contemporaries.

Holberg, too, was as staunch critic of Pietism. Yet, in the 1730s, when he turned to religious history, he took up a range of critical arguments against the established Lutheran state Church that had been originally advanced by Pietist writers and made them his own. Holberg, like other early enlightenment thinkers such as Thomasius, who more strongly engaged with Pietism than Holberg, was staunchly critical of prevailing religious orthodoxies. The moderate sympathy for Pietism, in its rival strands, did not challenge his commitments to Lutheranism. Rather, Holberg’s religious thinking consisted in redescribing central Lutheran doctrines, making them compatible with his enlightenment project.

**The Republic of Letters and the State of Learning**

Holberg’s commitments to the university in the 1730s, moreover, fostered a great concern for the state of learning, which, as he saw it, still suffered from the yoke of scholasticism. In the 1740s and 1750s, the concern for the state of learning formed part of his renewed interest in public moralising and criticism, which resulted in a string of major works on moral philosophy. In 1741, he published a utopian novel in Leipzig, *Nicholai Klimii Iter subterraneum* (A Journey to the World Under-ground, By Nicholas Klimius), in which he depicts an ideal society or state named Potu, a pun on the word utop(ia), or utop(i) in Danish. In 1743, he published the third volume of his memoirs, in which he defends freedom of religion and the liberty of the press. It was followed by a

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rich flow of moral essays collected in the Moralske Tanker (Moral Thoughts) in 1744, the Moralske Fabler in 1751, and the five volumes of his Epistler (Epistles), which appeared between 1748 and 1754. Holberg's understanding of learning, morality, and public criticism in these works moves beyond the tradition of modern natural law as he understood it in the 1710s. An evolution of thinking rather than an intellectual transformation, Holberg's understanding of learning and criticism took shape parallel to his engagement with the early enlightenment republic of letters. Next to his engagement with Pufendorf, Grotius, and modern natural law theories, the republic of letters, broadly construed, is the second formative context in which Holberg's enlightenment was formed.

On his numerous travels in Europe, Holberg met several major figures in the republic of letters. Already in 1708, as we have seen, he had met Thomasius in Halle, and during his stay in Paris in the summer of 1725, he had conversed with Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657-1757), a key exponent of the early French enlightenment who 'spoke very highly', as Holberg recalls in his memoirs, 'of the literary merits of the Danes.' Journeying back to Copenhagen in February 1726, he twice met the Arminian philosopher, publicist, and theologian Jean Le Clerc (1657-1736) in Amsterdam:

During the three weeks I spent at Amsterdam I lived in that distinguished seat of commerce in a state of great seclusion; for the life of a literary man in a city where all arts, except that of making money, are neglected, is sufficiently dull. I paid two visits however to the celebrated John Le Clerc, whom I found, notwithstanding his advanced years, in the full possession both of bodily and mental vigour. On one of these occasions we were locked into the room by his maid-servant, and to me the confinement was most delightful; for while we were waiting for the return of the servant, we discussed a great variety of literary subjects. The name of this great scholar was not known in the street where he resided, a circumstance at which I could not but feel some indignation; for if you ask for the house of Jacob the banker, Cornelius the fuller, Ephraim the Jew, and others of that class, you are instantly directed to them.

Born and educated in Geneva, Le Clerc settled in Amsterdam in the 1680s, after residing for a shorter period of time in France and England. Le Clerc’s religious beliefs were heterodox, and his reasons for leaving Geneva were mainly religious, as he could not make peace with the prevailing orthodox or ‘rigorous Calvinism’, as John Pocock puts it. Le Clerc’s arrival to Amsterdam coincided not only with the French Huguenot’s flight to the Netherlands, but also with John Locke’s exile in Amsterdam. Le Clerc and Locke soon became friends, and in 1688 Le Clerc published an extract in French of Locke’s An Essay Concerning Human Understanding.

200 Holberg, Memoirs of Lewis Holberg: 120.
201 Holberg, Memoirs of Lewis Holberg: 140.
203 Pocock, Barbarism and Religion: V.92.
204 Pocock, Barbarism and Religion: I.55-57.
followed in 1691 by a summary, also in French, of the *Two Treatises of Government*.205 Living amongst the Remonstrants or Arminians in Amsterdam, Le Clerc soon became one of the leading figures in the early enlightenment republic of letters. Between 1686 and 1726, he edited no less than three journals, in which he published critical reviews and summaries of printed works as well as lengthy excerpts, and at the same time he corresponded with a great number of European writers.206

As I shall argue, Holberg’s encounter with Le Clerc in 1726 and the tradition of thought to which he belonged was to have a profound impact on the formation of Holberg’s thinking.207 ‘I have read all his work’, writes Holberg in one of his essays, in which he defends the theological views of Le Clerc.208 Yet, when Holberg wrote about his meeting with Le Clerc in the fourth volume of the *Epistler*, published in 1750, the image was quite different from the one recorded in the first part of his memoirs. ‘I visited,’ he writes, ‘Msr. Le Clerc a couple of Times in Amsterdam, and was on both Occasions warmly received; but when I came a third Time, he frowned. The pretended Glory is nothing but the name alone, so that one on arriving home can say that one had talked with a man like that.’209 As Sebastian Olden-Jørgensen Le Clerc was one bigwigs of the republic of letters, and as Holberg and Le Clerc had different on key politics (Le Clerc being a republican, Holberg a monarchist), Holberg’s description of their meeting is nothing but self-fashioning.210 True, Holberg and Le Clerc had different views on politics, and true, Holberg’s description of their meeting is anecdotal, but this is besides the point; Holberg’s engagement with Le Clerc reaches far beyond political differences and self-fashioning. Through his engagement with Le Clerc, Holberg was introduced not only to the early enlightenment republic of letters, but also to the Arminian enlightenment, which was based on religious freedom, irenicism, and toleration.

Holberg’s engagement with the republic of letters differs from that of Le Clerc on one crucial issue. Although his numerous travels afforded him many an opportunity, Holberg never


206 Le Clerc’s journals count: the Bibliothèque universelle et historique, 1686–1893; the Bibliothèque choisie, 1703–1713; and the Bibliothèque ancienne et moderne 1714–1726.


sought to establish networks of correspondence. In light of the prevailing historiographical interpretation, which traditionally considers learned correspondence a defining feature of the republic of letters, Holberg’s disposition may seem strange; it may even question his engagement with the learned republic. Still, to be sure, Holberg was strongly committed to the republic of letters, understood not as a network of correspondence, however, but as an intellectual project or an ideal of learning and scholarship. In the third part of his memoirs, published in 1743, Holberg describes himself as a moral philosopher, commenting on the most pressing literary, religious, and philosophical issues of the day; Holberg is an established member, an integral part of the republic of letters. Thus we should, as John Christian Laursen has argued, think of Holberg humanist cosmopolitanism, as opposed to Holberg as simply a national writer, but we should not forget that he included in the third part of his memoirs a discussion of national characteristics in European comparison. Holberg’s engagement with the republic of letters never made him a full-fledged cosmopolitan.

Though Holberg did not establish networks of correspondences, he did partake in other, equally central activities of the republic of letters. During Holberg’s lifetime, the republic of letters was transforming from a cosmopolitan elite of scholars, who shared an erudite neo-Latin culture grounded in Renaissance humanism, to a vernacular culture, more public in its composition and expanding its critical gaze. Holberg, who was opposed to the linguistic purists, shared this commitment, and he deliberately published his works in both Latin and Danish. Publishing his works in both Danish and Latin, he partly intended to place Denmark on the literary map of Europe. On various occasions, he defended the religion, the constitution, and the learning of his patria, as in his 1727 pamphlet Holger Danskes Brev til Buurman (Holger Danske’s

211 The only surviving letters in Holberg’s hand are very few in number and are mainly concerned with formalities in regards to his landed estate and issues related to his printed works. See Ludvig Holberg, Nogle utrykte Breve af Ludvig Holberg, Paul Botten Hansen, ed., (Christiania 1858); Ludvig Holberg, Holbergs Breve, 2 vols., Verner Dahlerup, ed., (Copenhagen 1926).


Letter to Burman), which refuted Pieter Burman (1668-1741), a professor at Leiden who had criticised the state of learning in Denmark in a published letter. Burman was not the only foreign critic of the state of learning in Denmark. The English diplomat Robert Molesworth (1656-1725) is perhaps the best example, but there were others. As William Bromley (1664-1732), an English Tory, wrote in a travel account first published in 1702, the nepotism and the arbitrary rule of the Danish monarchs had resulted in great negligence of learning. As he wrote:

Not far from Helsingore lies the Island of Ween, where formerly lived that famous Astrologer Tycho Brahe; it is cut upon his Seat in the Church that he lived here Anno 1575. Here was a Tower, or Observatory, built for the making his Astrological Observations; he fell to Teaching and Instructing others, upon his Disgrace at Court, and the King gave the Castle he lived in, with all the Island, to a Mistress of his called Catherine, one Andrea's Daughter, who suffered the House to decay.

The sciences were thus neglected by decadent and arbitrary monarchs more interested in pleasing their mistresses than promoting the sciences. Whether Holberg knew of Bromley's critical description of Danish learning is uncertain, but he knew of Molesworth, whose criticisms he refuted in his historical works. His efforts to refute foreign critics kept him busy from his first encounters with Hojer, whom he considered a foreigner, and throughout the 1720s. But Holberg never became a simplistic apologist for Danish learning.

In fact, the second motivation behind Holberg’s publishing strategy is related not to the defence of his patria, but to his own criticisms of its intellectual, religious, and political shortcomings. Holberg published in Latin with foreign publishers to avoid the rigid censorship in place in the early eighteenth century. Holberg’s attempts to avoid censorship should not be exaggerated. In the 1740s, whilst Holberg published some of his more subversive tracts abroad, his Moralske Tanker and the Epistler were published in Copenhagen. A convicted monarchist and a devoted Lutheran, Holberg’s major works on moral philosophy were neither challenging the legitimacy of absolutism, nor the truth of the Christian religion. The subversive nature of Holberg’s writings from the 1740s and 1750s consists rather in his embrace of the most central ideas of the republic of letters, as it was taking shape from the 1680s onwards, particularly the strong belief in the liberty of the press, moral criticism, toleration, and freedom of conscience.

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216 Holberg's pamphlet was originally published in Latin in 1727, but it appeared the same year in a Danish translation, possibly by Holberg himself. See Ludvig Holberg, Holger Danskes Brev til Buurman (Copenhagen 1727); Pieter Burman, Petri Burmanni Epistola ad Claudium Cápperonnerium (Leiden 1726): 31.

217 William Bromley, Several years travels through Portugal, Spain, Italy, Germany, Prussia, Sweden, Denmark and the United Provinces. Performed by a Gentleman (London 1702): 260.

218 On censorship in Denmark see generally Øystein Rian, Sensuren i Danmark-Norge: Vilkårene for offentlige stringer 1536-1814 (Oslo 2014); Harald Jorgensen, Da censuren blev opgivet (Copenhagen 1970).

219 This interpretation is particularly outspoken in the works of Øystein Rian. See Rian, Sensuren i Danmark-Norge; Øystein Rian, ‘Ludvig Holbergs historie- og samfunnsforståelse’, in Peter Christensen Teilmann and Gunnar Sivertsen, eds., Ind i Holbergs fjerde århundrede (Copenhagen 2004).
Hence, what Holberg was doing was, I shall argue, to engage with alternative ways of thinking about absolutism and Christianity.

Holberg’s engagement with the enlightenment republic of letters provides us with a crucial context, or contexts, in which to place his works and his thought. Yet, as Pocock has argued, the republic of letters had different forms. We should therefore be careful to distinguish the republic of letters to which Holberg aligned himself from the later French version of the republic, primarily associated with the *Encyclopédie* published by Jean le Rond d’Alembert (1717-1783) and Denis Diderot (1713-1784). The republic of letters with which Holberg aligned himself was Protestant, or rather Arminian, in nature and it was modelled on a late seventeenth-century vision of learning.²²⁰ The differences, however, consist not only in the divisions of concepts and methods through which the tree of knowledge is rendered meaningful, but also in the activity of scholarship itself; i.e., the contrast between erudition, criticism, and individual scholarship, on the one hand, and the activities of the *Philosophes* or the *Gens de Lettres* on the other.²²¹ In the *Preliminary Discourse* to the *Encyclopédie*, d’Alembert described its authorship as the collective activities of ‘a learned Body’, or a society of scholars.²²² By contrast, Holberg’s engagement with the republic of letters places him firmly within what Jean Le Clerc referred to as ‘the Common-wealth of Learning’, in which the main intellectual activity was to enquire into the nature of things, both natural and divine, and to converse with others about the truth of the matter.²²³ The republic of letters was considered a republic, comprised of equals, that is, of learned men of letters exchanging ideas and respecting one another. Engaged with individual scholarship, journalism, and the dissemination of ideas and information, the republic of letters rested on such ideas as public opinion and freedom of the press. D’Alembert, to be sure, also placed a great deal of emphasis on enquiry,²²⁴ but whilst the *Encyclopédie* was perceived as a collective enterprise, Holberg gave preference to individual scholarship before any other intellectual activity. ‘From experience we know’, he writes in the fourth volume of his *Epistler*, published in 1750, just one

year prior to the publication of the first volumes of the *Encyclopédie*, ‘that the best works have had single authors.’

To Jean Le Clerc as well as to Holberg, individual enquiry is the foundation of scholarship, the aim of which is to enter into critical, yet respectful conversation, intended so that each scholar gains from the knowledge and arguments of others. Individual enquiry thus seeks to discover ‘general Truths’, as opposed to entering into ‘Quarrels’ with one’s opponents. A central feature of the early enlightenment culture to which both Le Clerc and Holberg belong, individual enquiry thus constitutes a form of civility. Collective undertakings, Holberg asserts, result only in confusion, which may subsequently give birth to factions and internal strife; even when a majority is formed, the scholarly gain is often questionable. ‘In large societies many speculations are often heard which lead one astray’, continues Holberg, thus concluding that ‘the opinion that the majority accepts is not always the soundest’. In the introduction to *Moralske Tanker*, first published in 1744, Holberg passes a similar judgement on the English *Spectator*, in which he had become interested in the late 1730s. ‘In this Collection’, he writes, ‘as it is not the Work of one Man, the Pieces are altogether unequal.’ Referring to the quality of the contributions, he finds that whilst some contributions were laudable and could pass for ‘Masterpieces’, others would have been better off had they not been published.

The early enlightenment republic of letters was to be central not only to Holberg’s ideas about philosophy and learning, but also to his thoughts on religion and civil society. In the 1740s, religion and moral philosophy came to occupy a central place in Holberg’s thought. ‘It is to moral Meditations and Theology that my studies these days are devoted’, writes Holberg in the preface to *Moralske Tanker*, ‘for I view myself, in regard to my Age and Weakness, as a Man at the end of his journey, in need of publishing his Systema before he takes his Leave and sets out on his last Journey.’ Holberg’s journey lasted still another decade; he died on 28 January 1754, aged seventy nine. In 1747, he had been appointed baron by Frederik V (1723-1726); upon his death, all

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226 Jean Le Clerc, *Parrhasiana: Or, Thoughts upon Several Subjects; As, Criticism History, Morality, and Politics* (London 1700): Preface.
229 In Jansen, *Holberg som Epigrammatiker og Essayist*: II.31, Holberg’s encounter with the *Spectator* is dated to somewhere between 1737 and 1739.
his estate was granted to Sorø Academy, which was reopened in 1747. That his estate went to the Sorø Academy was part of the terms of his ennoblement. In the *Epistler*, Holberg defended the decision in broader ideological terms, alluding to the duty of the writer in relation to civil society and the common good. As he writes, ‘all that I have acquired through my Forty Years of Labour, I solely consider to be a Debt, which I owe to the *Public*.’

**The Construction of an Enlightenment Ethos**

Holberg had written and thought about politics, religion and moral philosophy since the 1710s. His view on these issues as well as the way in which he presented them varied greatly, however, through his active life as a thinker and a writer. Coming from a thoroughly Lutheran and absolutist background, this chapter has outlined the contours of what was to become the two principal intellectual encounters through which Holberg’s thought was formed. Holberg’s enlightenment, I have argued, is best understood in light of his engagement with modern natural law and the early enlightenment republic of letters. Through his engagement with these traditions, a broader genealogy of ideas and concerns emerge, one which is deeply embedded in dominant currents of intellectual life not only in the early enlightenment itself, but also in the early modern period more generally. Engaging with these traditions of thought, Holberg constructs an enlightenment ethos and places himself as its foremost representative in the early Northern enlightenment. First, Holberg places his thinking about history, monarchy, and political power in a longer genealogy of thought, ranging from Grotius to Pufendorf, Thomasius, and Barbeyrac. Though Holberg’s thinking about natural law follows Pufendorf closely, it is to Grotius that he gives his highest praise. Grotius is, in other words, the foundational figure in what Holberg sees – following Pufendorf, Thomasius, and Barbeyrac – as a history of morality, embedded in eclecticism.

Secondly, Holberg’s engagement with the early enlightenment republic of letters, opened up a broader spectrum in which he could place his works. Tailored to the ideas of Pierre Bayle and Le Clerc, whom he praises as the greatest scholars of the late seventeenth century, his engagement with the republic of letters not only left a lasting imprint on his thinking about learning and criticism, it also led him to the Arminian enlightenment and its embrace of religious toleration. Holberg explored the Arminian roots of Le Clerc’s thinking, leading him back, as we shall see, to Jacob Arminius (1569–1609) and Hugo Grotius, and further back to such humanist writers as Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560) and Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536). Although these

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233 Holberg, *Epistler*: III.318: 'alt som jeg ved 40 Aars Arbejde haver erhvervet, det anseer jeg alleene som en Gield, hvilken jeg er *Publico* skyldig'.
writers had been ‘smeared with the appalling Name of Syncretists’, as he writes in the *Epistler* in 1748, in one of his most important pieces on religious toleration, Holberg constructs this genealogy in order to advance a particular view on philosophy and learning as well as on Christianity and toleration. Corresponding, largely, to what Hugh Trevor-Roper in an important essay from 1967 referred to as the religious origins of the enlightenment, the genealogies of thought in which Holberg placed himself had Erasmian, Grotian and Arminian roots. Hence, what underpinned Holberg’s enlightenment was a particular view of religion, but in the context of the early enlightenment in Europe, this view did not stand unchallenged. In Holberg’s local or national context, the enlightenment ethos which Holberg made his own was rivalled by rationalist philosophers and theologians on the one hand, and by Pietists and orthodox Lutherans on the other.

What binds these two traditions together is the figure of Grotius, the greatest moral philosopher ever to have lived, as Holberg sees him. Grotius was a foundational figure not only within the Pufendorfian tradition of modern natural law, but also in the Arminian enlightenment as it was taking shape within the early enlightenment republic of letters. The contexts or traditions of thought in which Holberg placed himself, however, were full of intellectual tensions and frictions. These writers looked differently at civil society, political authority, duty, rights, and obligation, and their religious views had been shaped by different events belonging to the post-Reformation era, i.e. the Wars of Religion, and the more recent example of the expulsion from France of the Huguenots. Yet, reading Holberg’s works in light of this broader genealogy of thought, that is, by placing him within he contexts in which he intended his works to be read, enable us to understand not only Holberg’s thinking about monarchy, civil society, and religion, from which the early Northern enlightenment emerged, but also his contribution to enlightenment thought more broadly. To fully understand the enlightenment of Holberg and to appreciate why he felt compelled to construct this particular enlightenment ethos, however, it is pivotal also to explore Holberg’s opposition to contemporary Danish intellectual life and those traditions he rejected. This takes us back to the history of sixteenth and seventeenth century political thought, when a particular way of thinking about absolutism and orthodox Lutheranism rose to prominence in Denmark.

The best beginning to everything is to begin with God.

*Lex Regia*

On the eve of the monarchical revolution of October 1660, a party of burghers and clergymen, who called themselves the Conjugates under the Freedom of Copenhagen, walked in procession through the streets of the Danish capital. The spectacle was led by the bishop of Zealand, Hans Svane (1606-1668), who was accompanied by the burgomaster of Copenhagen, Hans Nansen (1598-1667). Their purpose was political, their demand hereditary monarchy. The immediate context surrounding the procession and the demand for hereditary monarchy was a deep economic crisis, caused by almost half a century of continuous wars. The devastating involvement in the Thirty Years War as well as the exhausting wars against Sweden in the late 1650s had left Denmark on the brink of bankruptcy, which made a new economic settlement of the utmost importance. To solve these issues, King Frederik III (1609-1670) had summoned the Estates (*stændermøde*) to discuss the future of the realm, but the negotiations quickly broke down. Discontented with the political dispositions and general arrogance of the aristocracy, Nansen and Svane risked their reputations by demanding hereditary monarchy. In their view, the right of heredity ought to be granted to the monarch who had defended the country, while aristocrats had deserted, disregarding their political and military obligations. This was a daring manoeuvre that

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238 The emphasis on crisis has been a recurrent theme in historiography. For the most recent statement see Thomas Lyngby, Søren Metz & Sebastian Olden-Jorgensen, *Magt og pragt: Enevelde 1660-1848* (Copenhagen 2010): 13-53.
threatened to remove the political influence of the country’s most powerful aristocrats, the members of the Council of State. If it failed, chances were that the country would be thrown into civil war.

Confident in the support of the burghers and the clergy represented by Nansen and Svane, Frederik III ordered the gates of Copenhagen closed, and, realising their defeat, the aristocracy gave in to the demands for hereditary monarchy. The immediate aftermath of the monarchical coup d’état shows exactly how much had changed. Not only was the Council of State dissolved, the coronation charter was also annulled and handed over to the king. On 18 October 1660 the representatives of all the estates swore an oath to Frederik III and left it up to him alone to define a new political regime. In 1665, five years after the monarchical revolution, the constitutional and political justification of hereditary and absolute monarchy was spelled out in the Lex Regia, the crown jewel of the absolute monarchy.239 A renaissance monarchy had fallen, and from the ashes of the former aristocratic society, Frederik III was reborn as an ideal absolute ruler, the only contemporary European monarch to govern by an absolutist constitution.240 What had begun as a political revolution in Copenhagen soon affected the entire Danish empire. By 1662, the estates in Denmark, Norway, Iceland and the Faroe Islands had signed a document consenting to the revolutionary changes in the form of government.241

The erection of the absolute monarchy is a milestone in Danish historiography.242 The monarchical moment marks a significant turning-point not only in seventeenth-century political


240 On Denmark as a renaissance monarchy see Paul Douglas Lockhart, Denmark 1513-1660: The Rise and Decline of a Renaissance Monarchy (Oxford 2007). The classical study of the period leading up to the monarchical revolution in 1660 is J. A. Fredericia, Adelsvældens sidste dage: Danmarks historie fra Christian IV’s død til enevældens indførelse (1648-1660) (Copenhagen 1894); esp. 491-550.


and constitutional history, but also in the history of early modern Danish political thought. As this chapter argues, Danish absolutism rests on diverse intellectual strands, which made it possible for writers of different intellectual allegiances to support the absolute monarchy, thus extending its momentum into the enlightenment and beyond. To Holberg and other eighteenth-century monarchists, the monarchical revolution of 1660 became a foundational event. As Carl Henrik Koch has argued, Holberg’s political attitudes were altogether conservative, and although he had one foot planted in the soil of the enlightenment, his understanding of absolute monarchy belonged rather to the seventeenth century than to the age of enlightenment.

Whilst the monarchical revolution was pivotal to Holberg’s political thought, the social and political structures of absolutism contributed to how he envisioned his works. The absolute monarchy introduced a system of meritocracy, and in 1709, just two years prior to the publication of Holberg’s first works, the Lex Regia was published, making the constitutional foundation as well as the intellectual justification of Danish absolutism known to the reading public. Whilst thoroughly monarchical in nature, the enlightenment interpretation of absolutism that Holberg advocated differed on crucial issues from what can be considered the dominant interpretation of absolute monarchy in the seventeenth century. Like Pufendorf, Le Clerc, Bayle and others, to whom the Wars of Religion and the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 was a matter of personal experience, Holberg was well aware of the potentially destabilising effect of religion on civil associations. Consequentially, Holberg contested the prevailing religious justification of political authority and he drew different conclusions as to the scope of absolute monarchical power.

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This chapter reconstructs the religious and political languages that informed the introduction of absolutism in Denmark, and structured the way in which Holberg and other enlightenment political thinkers thought about the relation between religion and politics. Dealing, in a broad sense, with early modern political thought, the chapter offers an overview of the major lines of contestation that the enlightenment inherited from the Renaissance and the Reformation. This *longue durée* is important to our understanding of the thought of Holberg and the early Northern enlightenment not because the specific writers were of any particular concern to Holberg, but because it contributes to our understanding of the political culture in which Holberg’s thinking about monarchism, religion and moral philosophy was engrained.

**Monarchia Mixta and the Right to Revolt**

Before the monarchical revolution of October 1660, ‘the Kingdom of Denmark’ was regarded ‘a free Elective Kingdom’. Governing in concert with an aristocratic Council of State (*rigens raad*), comprised of the leading noble families, the power of the king was limited. Every monarch was elected by the Council of State, and the election was conditioned upon the prospective monarch’s agreement to a coronation charter (*Haandfestning*) that stated the terms of the nobility. Thus monarchical authority was limited by the terms of election; i.e., the political influence and privileges of the aristocracy put forth in the coronation charter, which every king had swear to uphold before being elected. The monarch, in return, had the right to appoint members of the Council of State, and he was also responsible for summoning it. In addition, the king appointed three leading officers of the realm, often drawn from the ranks of the council: a seneschal (*rigshofmester*), responsible for state finances; a chancellor (*kongens kansler*), who was the chief mediator between the king and the Council; and a marshal (*rigsmarsk*), responsible for the defence of the realm. Together, these institutions constituted ‘the Crown of Denmark’ (*Danmarks krone*), a concept which first appeared in Christian III’s (1503-1559) coronation charter of 1536.

Whilst sixteenth-century Danish writers were keen to stress the monarchical aspects of the mixed constitution, the *monarchia mixta*, the French political theorist Jean Bodin (1530-1596) ridiculed the Danish constitution. The Danish constitution, as Bodin claimed, was incompatible

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with his conception of indivisible sovereignty, as ‘the king of Denmark and his nobility each have a share of sovereignty.’\textsuperscript{248} The figure of the virtuous monarch played a crucial role in the ideological justification of the Danish \textit{monarchia mixta}. In his \textit{En Klage Vise} (A Mourning Song), published in the year of Frederik II’s (1534–1588) death in 1588, Jacob Rasmussen Malmø depicts Frederik II as an ideal Christian prince, a ‘Merciful Lord’, who ‘ruled’ in a ‘Truly Christian Manner’.\textsuperscript{249} The central theme of Malmø’s \textit{Klage Vise} is a Christian life in devotion to God. Yet, a virtuous Christian prince should not only be pious and fearful of God, he should also be noble and bold in the protection of the commonwealth. ‘\textit{PIOUS} was his mind’, Malmø writes, ‘This \textit{KING} noble and bold.’\textsuperscript{250} Along similar lines, the court preacher and historian Anders Sørensen Vedel (1542–1616) speaks of the king’s ‘true fear of God, Piety and Justice, and other such Virtues’,\textsuperscript{251} and Hans Olufsen Slangerup (-1596), a professor of theology at Copenhagen, depicts Frederik II as ‘a Pious Mirror to all Great Lords and Princes’.\textsuperscript{252} According to these writers, the best form of government was not solely dependent on the Christian virtues of the king. As Malmø puts it in his \textit{En Klage Vise}, the king ought to rule in concert with the Council of State:

\begin{quote}
He has no strength/
If not this Council of State
Would with him agree/
That it honestly stood:
It is also worth to praise
In a Royal Man
To rule with the Wise/
Who have knowledge of the Law.\textsuperscript{253}
\end{quote}

Malmø did, however, depict the relationship between the monarch and the Council of State in an ambiguous way. The phrase ‘To rule with the Wise’ (in Danish ‘At raade met de Vise’) could refer both to a situation in which the king and the council \textit{rule} as equal partners and to one in which the council would \textit{advise} the monarch, i.e. that the king should, or rather could, govern following the advice of the Council of State. In light of sixteenth-century Danish constitutional thought, what


\textsuperscript{250} Malmø, \textit{En Klage Vise} §11: ‘\textit{GFDS FR1CT} haffd hand i sinde/ Denne ædelig \textit{KONGE} bold’.

\textsuperscript{251} Anders Sørensen Vedel, \textit{En sørgelig Ligpredicken} (Copenhagen 1588): 6: ‘sand Guds fryct/ Fromhed oc Retfærdighed/ oc flere saadanre Dyder’.


\textsuperscript{253} Malmø, \textit{En Klage Vise} §20: ‘Hand anheffuet igen stycke/ For iden Rigens Raad/ Vilde det met hannem samtycke/Om det sig ærligt stod: Det er oc værd at prise/ Vdaff en Kongelig Mand/ At raade met de Vise/ Som i Lowen haflue forstand’.
Malmö had in mind was a situation in which the Council of State had an equal share in the government of the kingdom. The monarch, as it reads in §4 of Frederik II’s coronation charter, is obliged ‘To Love and to cherish the Danish Council of State and the Nobility, and to Govern and Rule the Kingdom of Denmark with them.’

The main protagonists of *monarchia mixta* were the theologian Niels Hemmingsen (1513-1600) and the chancellor and historian Arild Huitfeldt. Drawing, respectively, on the tradition of Renaissance humanism and a form of aristocratic constitutionalism, embedded in the Danish constitutional tradition and its coronation charters, Hemmingsen and Huitfeldt, however, differed on such crucial matters as the right to revolt. A Christian humanist of Philippist leaning, Hemmingsen was inspired by intellectual trends from Germany. In 1537 he was matriculated at Wittenberg, where he studied theology under Martin Luther’s (1483-1546) humanist colleague, Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560), earning his master in 1542. Upon his return to Denmark in 1543, he first taught Greek literature, then Dialectics at Copenhagen, and in 1553 he was appointed to a chair of theology, although he only earned his doctorate in 1557. Hemmingsen soon gained a reputation comparable to that of his teacher. Whilst Melanchthon was praised as the *Praeceptor Germaniae*, the teacher of Germany, Hemmingsen was famed as the *Praeceptor Daniae*, the teacher of Denmark. Towards the end of the sixteenth century, he had become a leading figure in the Protestant Reformation, with followers in several European countries.

In his main political work, *De Lege Naturæ Apodicitica Methodus* (The Law of Nature based on the Apodictic Method), first published in Wittenberg in 1562, Hemmingsen presents a moral philosophy founded not on the Scriptures, but on classical authors and the Decalogue. ‘When I have not used any sentences from theology in the whole of this treatise’, Hemmingsen proclaims towards the end of *De Lege Naturæ*, ‘it is because I wanted to show how far reason can go without the prophetic and apostolic word.’ Framing, thus, his theory of natural law as a secular way of thinking, Hemmingsen’s *De Lege Naturae* advances two central claims related, respectively, to the nature of just government and the possibility of knowing the precepts of natural law.

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257 Hemmingsen, *Om naturens lov 1562*: §291: ‘Quod autem ex theologia sententias in hoc toto tractatu adduxerim, id ideo a me factum est, ut ostenderem quoquose ratio sine voce prophetica et apostolica progresi posit’.

The first claim is that the aim of politics is just government. ‘According to Plutarch there is an old saying, my Noble Lord’ writes Hemmingsen in the dedicatory epistle, which he addressed to Eric Krabbe (1510-1564) – a renowned lawyer and member of the Council of State, whose lifework had been to compile the diverse Danish regional law codes into a single book – ‘that without Justice not even Jupiter can be Prince’.\textsuperscript{259} Drawing on humanist or Ciceronian conventions, Hemmingsen argues that government should be based on the cardinal virtues: ‘prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice’.\textsuperscript{260} Whilst Hemmingsen considers prudence the principal virtue, it is not sufficient on its own. A ruler needs fortitude or braveness in order to keep the citizens to their promises; a ruler needs temperance or modesty so that he does not destroy the city out of his own desire and grandeur. Finally, a ruler needs justice to regulate agreements. In a crucial passage, Hemmingsen links the cardinal virtues to the preservation of the commonwealth, which, as he states, is the end of political life:

The end of political life is the calm and peaceful existence of polities, upheld by political actions. It is caused by the fact that a just harmony must prevail in political life, while a similar order must be upheld amongst humans; and God should be to human society its final end. One must take care that political actions do not turn away from this end. But whereas the preservation of the polity in its totality and the preservation of its individual parts takes aim at the same, in regard to the nature of the actions, the same virtues are demanded from individual humans, and, further, individual families.\textsuperscript{261}

Man must direct his actions not only towards salvation, but also towards civil society, argues Hemmingsen, thus emphasising the importance of human behaviour towards others. Invoking the humanist ideal of the active citizen, Hemmingsen describes civil associations as best preserved by virtuous citizens and families. \textit{Civilitas}, or civic virtues, are particularly suitable for ‘political man’ and his associations,\textsuperscript{262} as the ‘effects of virtues’ are what ‘preserves the status and dignity of Man’ and ‘strengthens Commonwealths and households’ alike.\textsuperscript{263} \textit{De Lege Naturæ} is stepped in classical and Renaissance humanism, a tradition in which princely office is associated with virtue and moral philosophy. Yet, Hemmingsen argues, just laws are not only dependent on ‘the authority of

\textsuperscript{259}Hemmingsen, \textit{Om naturens lov} 1562: §1: ‘Vetus (teste Plutarcho) dictum est, Vir Clarissime, sine Justitia ne Jovem quidem posse Principem agere’. On Krabbe see Tamm, ‘Om Niels Hemmingsens Naturret’: iii; Lockhart, \textit{Denmark 1513-1660}: 34.

\textsuperscript{260}Hemmingsen, \textit{Om naturens lov} 1562: §128-129: ‘prudense, temperantia, fortitude et justitia’.

\textsuperscript{261}Hemmingsen, \textit{Om naturens lov} 1562: §127: ‘Vitae politicae finis est politarum tranquillus et pacificus status per actiones politicas; quae omnes eo referri debent, ut maneat justa ordinis politici harmonia, servato inter homines jure analoge, et Deus in humana societate tamquam funis ultimus societatis humanae constituantur. Cavendum itaque, ne ab hoc fine bonorum actiones politicae aberrant. Verum quoniam eadem ratio est totius conservandae, quae est singularum partium, quantum quidem ad genus actionum attinet; eadem virtutes hic requiruntur, quas in singulis hominibus et deinde in singulis families requiri diximus’.

\textsuperscript{262}Hemmingsen, \textit{Om naturens lov} 1562: §193: ‘Civilitas’, ‘homini politico’.

Princes and magistrates’, but also need to be ‘founded on solid and immobile ground.’ Seeking to mediate between natura and opinione, Hemmingsen argues, just government cannot be understood solely as a human convention relative to individual polities and forms of government. The understanding of just government needs, moreover, to be grounded in universal principles derived from natural law.

The second central claim in Hemmingsen’s De Lege Naturæ is that all humans possess a natural capacity that enables them to know right from wrong. This is where natural law, as opposed to the Scriptures, takes the centre stage as the foundation of moral action. Setting aside the Augustinian emphasis on original sin or the status corruptus, from which it follows that human reason is corrupted and therefore deeply if not totally incapable of knowing right from wrong, Hemmingsen asserts that natural law can be known through the sparks of reason imprinted in the heart of all human beings after the fall. “The gentiles have shown’, he writes, ‘that the Law’s work is imprinted in their hearts.” Nature itself has provided the ‘seeds’ of what is ‘just and honourable’, and it is from those seeds that the laws which aim at the ‘welfare of the Commonwealth’ are deduced. All laws that honour this intention are proper laws, as opposed to the laws of ‘tyrants’ and other arbitrary decisions. Moreover, proper or just laws must always correspond not only with the law of nature, i.e. with what is just and honourable, but also with the law of God. As he writes, ‘our definition reminds us of the origin of the Law of Nature and it refers to God as its author, He who has imprinted it on the human mind for it to be like a ray of the Divine Mind and Wisdom.’

This assertion had two implications, one theological the other political: Hemmingsen explored both in his later works. The theological implications, which were related with Hemmingsen’s treatment of divine grace and the freedom of the will, were far-reaching. The Tractatus De Gratia Universali (Treatise on the Common Grace), first published in Copenhagen in 1591, contains Hemmingsen’s most systematic account of divine grace and the freedom of will. As Hemmingsen argues in the Tractatus, God has offered the gift of grace to all of mankind, that is, to Christians as well as to heretics and infidels. Salvation depends, in effect, upon the acceptance of

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264 Hemmingsen, Om naturens lov 1562: §11: ‘autoratatem principum et magistratus’ … ‘ratione forma et immota nititur’.
265 Tamm, ‘Om Niels Hemmingsens Naturret’: ii.
266 Hemmingsen, Om naturens lov 1562: §30: ‘Gentes ostendere opus Legis in cordibus sui’. The notion of the light of God was also present in the writings of Luther; however, here it was seen not in relation to the faculty of reason, but to his concepts of sola fida, justification by faith alone, and the priesthood of all believers.
268 Hemmingsen, Om naturens lov 1562: §12: ‘tyrannorum’.
269 Hemmingsen, Om naturens lov 1562: §41: ‘itaque definitio nostra meminit originis Legis Naturae et ipsam ad Deum refert autorem, Qui eam mentibus humanis impressit, ut sit tamquam radius quidam Divinæ Mentis et Sapientiae’. 
the gift of grace. Consequentially, ‘Faith’, and thus salvation, is dependent equally on ‘the gift of God’ and ‘Human action’.\textsuperscript{270} Whilst Hemmingsen’s political thought centres on civic and princely virtues, his theological thought centres on the freedom of will. ‘A free Will’, Hemmingsen claims, ‘is the Will’s natural power in Man, by which we after the escort and judgement of Reason desire the good and despise or displace all evil.’\textsuperscript{271} Accepting the gift of grace is a matter of free will, that is, a matter of rejecting evil and desiring the good based on such sound judgement that all humans due to the divine spark of morality or reason imprinted in their hearts are able to make.

The political implication which Hemmingsen draws from the prevalence of divine light is that a magistrate must always rule in accordance with natural and divine law. In Liffens Vey or The Way of Life, first published in 1570, Hemmingsen presents a discussion of the external use of the law, that is, those restriction placed upon man in order to direct his actions towards the good, and thus to enable humans to live together in civil associations. This discussion is essential to Hemmingsen’s view on worldly authority:

The Law of Moses also command the Worldly Authority to attend to the outward discipline, because Paul calls such Authority the servants of God, to advance that which is good and to punish that which is evil. And because this is God’s command to all Worlady Authorities, they ought to advance and cultivate God’s honour, and to avert all that which is opposed to God, in so far as it relate to the external interaction amongst Humans: Thus Worlady Authority is called Custos vitrissque tabulæ [the Guardian of the two Tables], so that he shall diligently be mindful about maintaining his subjects’ courtliness, piety, and good morals, in accordance with the ten Commandments, and to attend to his own way of life in such a way that he can be to his subjects like a Mirror, wherein one can see how to carry oneself in the World in accordance with God’s Law.\textsuperscript{272}

Moreover, Hemmingsen continues, should a person act in violation of God’s law, it is the duty of the worldly authority to punish this person, and should the earthly ruler refrain from inflicting such punishment, he shall himself be guilty of the sins committed. ‘For it is a relentless grace’, Hemmingsen argues, ‘to spare one for the depravity and injury of the multitude.’\textsuperscript{273}


\textsuperscript{271} Hemmingsen, D. Niels Hemmingsøns Bog/ Om Guds Naade: 161 recto: ‘En fri Villie er Villiens naturlige kraft i Menniskit/ ved huilcken wi effter Fornufts ledsagelse og dom begiere det gode/ oc sky eller forskiuide det onde’.


\textsuperscript{273} Hemmingsen, Liffens Vey: 32recto: ‘Thi det er en wbamhiertig naade/ at spare en til mangis fordærfuelse oc skade’.
These implications had a strong bearing on Hemmingsen’s view on the right to revolt.274 ‘The thought of this end’, he writes, ‘warns us that he who rules is not to command anything against God, and he who obeys is not to obey the Prince in illegal things, that is, things that goes against Natural and Divine Law.’275 Commonly seen as an advocate of the right to revolt, the theory of resistance that Hemmingsen advocated in De Lege Naturæ is often misinterpreted. Whilst one tradition of scholarship sees Hemmingsen as an advocate of active, popular resistance (a theory more Calvinist than Lutheran),276 other scholars have argued that Hemmingsen restricted the right of armed resistance to the Council of State.277 Yet, in De Lege Naturæ, Hemmingsen reiterates a position not far from his former teachers from Wittenberg. In 1523, in his treatise on secular authority, Luther had argued the case for obedience and non-resistance. If secular power was ordained by God, as Luther and his followers believed, any resistance against a tyrannical prince would counter the will of God. Although Luther painted a rather dark picture of contemporary politics, he did not grant the subjects the right to resist. ‘Evil is not to be resisted,’ he writes, ‘but suffered.’278 In his widely known Loci Communes, first published in 1521, Melanchthon similarly emphasises the duty of obedience to God’s ordained magistrates. ‘But should the Magistrate command the Subject to do anything against God’s Mandates,’ Melanchthon writes, ‘the Subject shall obey God more than Man, as the third Chapter of the Story of Daniel shows.’279 In De Lege Naturæ, Hemmingsen adopts a stand closely related to Luther’s position in the 1520s, advocating passive resistance and endurance in matters when a tyrant encroaches upon divine and natural law. Active resistance leads to anarchy and the dissolution of civil society, deeming such action contrary to the purpose of civil societies, as sanctioned divine and natural law:

Everything that preserves the political state is recommended by the Law of Nature. But this may by no means be preserved unless the superior and the inferior find a place in an order, that is, [as] magistrates

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275 Hemmingsen, Om naturens lov 1562: §139: ‘Cogitatio hujus finis monet utrumque: cum eum qui imperat, ne quid contra Deum mandet suis: tum eum qui paret, ne in rebus illicitis, hoc est, pugnantibus cum Lege Naturali et Divina, obediat principi’.
276 Knud Fabricius, Kongeloven: Denst tilblivelse og plads i samtidsen natur- og arveretlige udvikling (Copenhagen 1920): 75; Ebbesen & Koch, Dansk filosofi i renæsance: 59-60.
278 Luther, On Secular Authority: 29.
Hierarchical in nature, magistrates or rulers must attend to ‘the common good’ and the ‘safety of the Commonwealth’.\textsuperscript{281} In return, Hemmingsen argues, subjects are obliged to obey the laws of the commonwealth so long as they do not contradict the law of nature. For to disobey the laws of the ruler is to disturb justice and the common good of the republic, and, further, to disobey the law of nature, which is the whole foundation of civil society.\textsuperscript{282} In \textit{De Lege Naturae}, Hemmingsen thus offers the subjects no more than a right of passive disobedience.

As Sebastian Olden-Jørgensen has rightly pointed out, however, Hemmingsen offers a more thorough analysis of the right of resistance in his Latin commentary on Psalm 84, first published in 1569.\textsuperscript{283} In a discussion of the duty to obey a tyrant who demands idolatry of his subjects, Hemmingsen argues that it is the duty of ‘popular magistrates’ to take up armed resistance, should moderation, ‘counsel’, ‘wisedome’, and persuasion fail.\textsuperscript{284} ‘[O]utward violence,’ writes Hemmingsen, ‘which is offered to religion by tyrants, maie by the magistrate placed betweene the cheefe head, and priuate men, be repelled by force. Which thing both nature teacheth, and the office of the popular magistrate requireth, and the example of holie men doe confirme.’\textsuperscript{285} In the discussion of the right of resistance in the commentary, Hemmingsen significantly widens the scope of tyrannical rule against which resistance is justified to include such commands as are ‘against the lawes and religion’.\textsuperscript{286} Whilst Hemmingsen is silent about the actual implications of this wider scope, it is clear that in the commentary he is taking a much stronger stand on the issue of revolt.

Although the position advocated by Jean Calvin (1509-1564) played no role in \textit{De Lege Naturae}, one possible explanation of this intellectual shift is that Hemmingsen sometime between 1562 and 1569 had moved closer to the Calvinists. As Calvin argued in the final chapter of the


\textsuperscript{281} Hemmingsen, \textit{Om naturens lov} 1562: §250: ‘commune bonum’, ‘Reipublicae incolumitatem’.

\textsuperscript{282} See for example Hemmingsen, \textit{Om naturens lov} 1562: §255.

\textsuperscript{283} Olden-Jørgensen, ‘Scandinavia’, in Howell A. Lloyd, et al, eds., \textit{European Political Thought 1450-1700: Religion, Law and Philosophy} (New Haven & London 2007): 312. Olden-Jørgensen is wrong, however, in his assertion that he only offers one discussion of the right to revolt, as Hemmingsen clearly raises the issue both in \textit{De Lege Naturae} and the commentary on Psalm 84.


\textsuperscript{285} Hemmingsen, \textit{The faith of the Church Militant}: 432.

\textsuperscript{286} Hemmingsen, \textit{The faith of the Church Militant}: 432.
Institutio Christianae religionis, first published in 1536, it is the duty of ‘popular magistrates’, as opposed to ‘private persons’ to resist and repel tyrannical rule in order to protect the liberty of the people.\textsuperscript{287} ‘If there are such [popular magistrates established],’ Calvin writes, ‘then it is no part of my intention to prohibit them from acting in accordance with their duty, and resisting the licentiousness and frenzy of kings; on the contrary if they connive at their unbridled violence and insults against the poor common people, I say that such negligence is a nefarious betrayal of their oath; they are betraying the people and defrauding them of that liberty which they know they were ordained by God to defend.’\textsuperscript{288} The central aspect of Calvin’s discussion of the right to revolt is the concept of popular magistrates, whose office he understands parallel to the ‘Ephors’ of Sparta, the ‘Tribunes’ of Rome, and the ‘Demarchs’ of Athens.\textsuperscript{289} As Quentin Skinner has argued, Calvin invoked these examples in order to denote that the office of popular magistrates not only was divinely instituted, but also constitutional. Popular magistrates, as Calvin sees it, are the representatives of the people.\textsuperscript{290} The argument that Calvin was making is thus that the right to revolt resides (or ought to reside) with the representative bodies of the people, such as the three estates: ‘And perhaps,’ as he puts it, ‘in current circumstances, the authority exercised by the three estates in individual kingdoms when they hold their principal assemblies is of the same kind.’\textsuperscript{291}

In his discussion in the commentary of the right to resist tyrannical rule, Hemmingsen uses a vocabulary similar to that of Calvin. First of all, Hemmingsen’s emphasis is on the office of popular magistrates, which he understands in relation to examples from classical antiquity: ‘at Lacedemonia the Ephors; at Athens the Demarches; at Rome the Tribunes of the people’.\textsuperscript{292} Like Calvin, Hemmingsen also includes contemporary examples: ‘the Septemuirie in the Romane Empire, the chiefe Senators next vnto Kinges in euerie Realme.’\textsuperscript{293} Hemmingsen, nevertheless, differs from Calvin on crucial points. Whilst Calvin understood popular magistrates as the defenders of liberty and sought to expand the concept to include the three estates as the elected representatives of the people, Hemmingsen’s references to contemporary examples serves to delimit the scope of their office. Popular magistrates, Hemmingsen argues, are not elected, but ‘placed of God, first to be the keepers of the first and second tables’, and secondly to ‘moderate’ and if necessary ‘with weapons to defend godlie subjectes, and remoue-awaie idolatrie & restore

\textsuperscript{288} Calvin, \textit{On Civil Government}: 83.
\textsuperscript{289} Calvin, \textit{On Civil Government}: 82-83.
\textsuperscript{290} Skinner, \textit{The Foundations of Political Thought}: II.230-34.
\textsuperscript{291} Calvin, \textit{On Civil Government}: 83.
\textsuperscript{292} Hemmingsen, \textit{The faith of the Church Militant}: 432.
\textsuperscript{293} Hemmingsen, \textit{The faith of the Church Militant}: 432.
true Religion.\footnote{Hemmingsen, \textit{The faith of the Church Militant}: 432.} It is thus clear that we should place Hemmingsen’s theory of the right to revolt not in the Calvinist camp, but rather in the Lutheran tradition of thinking about lesser or inferior magistrates that is visible from 1530s onwards, when the position of the Protestant princes in Germany, and thus the fate of the Reformation, was threatened by the turn of political events.\footnote{Robert von Friedeburg and Michael J. Seidler, ‘The Holy German Empire of the German Nation’, in Howell A. Lloyd, et al, eds., \textit{European Political Thought 1450-1700: Religion, Law and Philosophy} (New Haven & London 2007): 114–20.}

In the context of the 1530s, the Lutheran reformers (including Melanchthon and Luther himself) changed their mind on the right to resist a tyrannical ruler. On two issues in particular the Lutherans adopted a more subversive stand towards tyrannical rule. First, a tyrannical ruler can be lawfully resisted, they argued with reference to private law theory, as a tyrant is considered nothing more than a private person who has failed to perform the duties attached to his office. Without abandoning the theory of obedience to a lawful authority, the Lutheran reformers drew a crucial distinction between the office of the prince and the political order more generally, justifying revolt against a tyrant as a means of preserving the political order, i.e. the ordinance of God.\footnote{Mads Langballe Jensen, ‘Ulydighed og modstand mod øvrigheden i tidlig luthersk politisk tænkning’, \textit{Kritik} 199 (2011): 124–26.} Secondly, the Lutheran revised their interpretation of chapter 13 of St Paul’s epistle to the Romans, commonly invoked in favour of non-resistance, to include lesser as well as superior magistrates in the definition of legal and divinely ordained political authority. Should a superior magistrate exceed his office, it is the duty of lesser magistrates to resist his rule.\footnote{Skinner, \textit{The Foundations of Modern Political Thought}: II.74, 199-206.} It is this clear that Hemmingsen’s discussion of popular magistrates should be understood within a constitutional arrangement comprised of lesser and superior magistrates – an arrangement fully compatible with the functions of the Council of State in Denmark. There is no evidence to suggest, however, that Hemmingsen had in mind an institution such as the Council of State. Whilst Hemmingsen may be seen as indirectly arguing the case for the right to revolt on the part of the Council of State – a right which the Council, in the late 1560s, had not possessed for more than thirty years – Hemmingsen never made the connection himself. Although he was an advocate of \textit{monarchia mixta}, Hemmingsen’s theory of monarchism centred on a humanist account of princely virtues.

This placed him in opposition to the other main advocate of \textit{monarchia mixta} in the sixteenth century: Arild Huitfeldt, the most influential protagonist of aristocratic constitutionalism in
Denmark-Norway. Born in Norway into a noble family, Huitfeldt made a career as an official; from 1586 onwards, he became a member of the State Council and was appointed chancellor. Huitfeldt’s political theory is best known from his historical writings, which offered him an opportunity to advocate the right to revolt. Published between 1595 and 1603, Huitfeldt wrote no less than ten volumes on the history of the Danish realm; in the preface of each volume, he sought to draw moral conclusions that would benefit the present monarch. Stressing the virtues and vices of past kings, his favourite examples are the histories of Christian II and Christian III, which denote respectively the actions of a tyrant and a virtuous monarch. From the history of Christian III, one can learn that a virtuous Christian monarch is mindful of ‘God’s honour and the Benefit, Welfare and Assistance of the Subjects.’ ‘Law and Justice’, Huitfeldt writes, ‘is the right Vocation and Office of the Magistrate.’

‘Princely Virtues’ were not, however, sufficient ground for legitimate government. The legitimacy of political power and authority, Huitfeldt claims, is intimately connected with the contrasts between ‘Hereditary Kingdoms’ and ‘free Elective Kingdoms’. A free elective kingdom, the Danish government depends not solely on the will of the monarch, as is the case in hereditary kingdoms, but also of the Council of State. Consequentially, Huitfeldt asserts, ‘a Prince and Lord shall gather around him prudent, wise and noble People; their Advice he must use.’ Yet, whilst Huitfeldt shared his preference for elective monarchy, or monarchia mixta, with other sixteenth-century writers such as Hemmingsen, his account of tyranny and the right to revolt differed from Hemmingsen’s position on central issues. In view of contemporary political thought Huitfeldt’s account of tyranny can be regarded the most distinctive feature of his political thought. Contrasting the image of the tyrant, who governs by ‘Fear’ and to whom the subjects owe no ‘Obedience’, to the figure of the virtuous Christian monarch, Huitfeldt makes a strong case for the right to revolt.

According to Huitfeldt, the image of the tyrant fitted, ideally, the description of Christian II (1481–1559), who had been dethroned in an aristocratic rebellion in 1523. As he puts it in his historical account of the reign of Christian II, published in 1596, ‘He had been a Lord and Prince

301 Huitfeldt, En kaart Historiske Beskriffelse: Fortalen: ‘Førstelige Dyder’.
without any Fear of God; Evil, Immoral, Tyrannical, Bloodthirsty, his Government Unbearable." The revolt against his tyrannical regime was legitimate for two reasons. First, Huitfeldt argues, Christian II had acted disgracefully in the eyes of God, displaying no fear of God, which was one of the principal virtues of a Christian monarch. ‘But the same God’, Huitfeldt claims, ‘that punishes and haunts us with a Ferocious Magistrate, He eventually hears the Complaints of the Miserable, and when time has come, he relieves them off their Needs and Cravings [...] as it happened here to King Christian.’

Huitfeldt’s second point is that the revolt was legitimate because Christian II had broken his bond with the people and the nobility, thus undermining their ‘Privileges’ and ‘Liberties’. On this point, Huitfeld makes a far more radical claim. In undermining the privileges and liberties of the estates, Christian II had dismissed the foundation on which the legitimacy of his political power rested; ‘In this’, Huitfeld asserts, ‘enough Causes could be found for him to lose his Royal Right to these Kingdoms.’ As representatives of the people and the common good, the aristocracy could ‘with all Rights’ revolt against any form of ‘Violence, Power and Tyranny.’ Hence, within the framework of his aristocratic constitutionalism, a monarch who breaks his bond with the people and with God can be legitimately overthrown by the aristocracy. ‘The Sword and the Power’, once entrusted in the monarch by God and the people, Huitfeldt claims, can be ‘turned against himself’, should he turn out to be a tyrant.

Huitfeldt’s theory of the right to revolt against a tyrannical ruler – though limited to the aristocracy – drew on two distinct traditions of thought, rooted in the early decades of the sixteenth century. First, Huitfeldt drew on a humanist tradition, most prominently represented by the appearance of a translation of Erasmus of Rotterdam’s Institutio Principis Christiani (Education of a Christian Prince). Translated in 1522 by the Carmelite monk Poul Helgesen, or Paulus Heile in Latin (1485-1534), a most distinguished humanist and a staunch critic of the Lutheran...
Reformation, the work was not without significance. Embodying a strong warning against tyranny, Helgesen’s translation (which was only published in 1534) is best understood in the context of contemporary political events, as the manuscript appeared only two years after Christian II’s ruthless onslaught against the population of the Swedish city of Stockholm, who had opposed Danish rule of the Kalmar Union. However, as some historians have speculated, Helgesen had initially been commissioned by Christian II to translate a manuscript of Niccolò Machiavelli’s (1469-1527) *Il Principe*, which he allegedly found to be an unchristian work; he then decided to translate Erasmus. However, not much can be said with certainty in this regard, and the speculation might indeed say more about later perceptions of Christian II’s government than the actual exchange.

Nonetheless, considering the context in which he wrote, the point of translating Erasmus seems rather clear, as the main issue addressed in this work was the distinctions between a virtuous ruler and a ruthless tyrant. ‘A tyrant always does as he pleases,’ writes Helgesen in the preface, ‘but a king does that which is good, right, and best; a tyrant’s pay is riches, but a king’s is glory and honour; a tyrant rules his regiment by threats, falsehoods, and other cunning ideas, but a king (who is incorruptible) rules by wisdom and good deeds.’ In 1523, the year after Helgesen had translated Erasmus into Danish, the Danish aristocracy accused Christian II of tyranny and claimed their right to resist his tyrannical rule. Although Christian II managed to escape into exile, the king was later imprisoned. In consequence, all future kings were to rule – as it states in Frederik II’s coronation charter – in concert with ‘a seneschal of the realm, a chancellor, and a marshal of the realm.’

Secondly, Huitfeldt’s theory of the right to revolt was grounded in the constitutional tradition of the early sixteenth century. The theory of resistance figures prominently in coronation charters from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. In King Hans’ (1445-1513) coronation charter of 1483, for instance, the monarch is obliged to secure the ‘life, health, or

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312 For Helgesen’s critique of the Lutheran Reformation see Poul Helgesen, *Menige Danmarkis Rigis Biscoppers och Prelaters christelige oc reisindige geensvar till the Lutheranische article* (Aarhus 1533).
property’ of his subjects; should anyone revolt against the monarchy, the subjects are, in return, required to assist the monarchy in ‘disrupting and resisting and putting to justice’ any ‘such uprising’.\(^{316}\) Hence, the subjects owe the monarchy their obedience so long as the monarch does not encroach on their privileges and liberties. Should the monarch, however, turn into a tyrant, the subjects are ‘obligated to educate’ their tyrannical king.\(^{317}\) This emphasis on the need to re-educate a tyrannical monarch also figures in subsequent coronation charters. Drawing on the same conceptual constellation, the coronation charter of Christian II, signed in 1513, states that ‘all the inhabitants of the kingdom’ are obliged ‘to resist’ a tyrannical king, who neglects his obligation to his subjects and refuses ‘to be educated therein by the council of state’.\(^{318}\) Further, in the coronation charter of Frederik I (1471-1533), signed in 1523, it states that, should the monarch become a tyrant, the subjects no longer owe the monarchy their ‘praise, oaths, or faithful service, but they shall be obliged by their oath to resist it’.\(^{319}\) Thus, the right to revolt was constitutionally guaranteed in the early sixteenth century. However, when Christian III signed his coronation charter in 1536, the right to revolt was omitted from the text, though the subjects could still complain to the officers of the realm in case the monarch abused his powers.\(^{320}\)

In the seventeenth century, the philosophical underpinnings of monarchia mixta was advanced by a group of political Aristotelians at the Knightly Academy of Soro, which Richard Tuck has described as ‘relatively obscure’.\(^{321}\) Soro Academy was founded in 1623 by Christian IV; within its first years of existence, academic positions were offered to some of the finest and most famous European writers of the time. In the 1620s, Christian IV seems to have made an attempt to offer a professorship to the renowned Dutch jurist and philosopher Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), who had fled the Low Countries to seek asylum in France.\(^{322}\) Although Grotius never accepted any offers to come to Denmark, his works on politics and jurisprudence had an immediate impact on Danish as well as European intellectual life. At Soro, Heinrich Ernst (1603-1665), a German lawyer who occupied a chair in jurisprudence, was one of the leading figures amongst political

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\(^{317}\) Samling af Danske Kongers Haandfæstninger: 50: ‘forplichtuge till attwenderwise’.


\(^{319}\) Samling af Danske Kongers Haandfæstninger: 79: ‘hyldskaffb, eed eller tro tienniste plichtige, meden the skall være forplichtige ved theris eed eed thett att affwærge’.


Aristotelianism. Ernst lectured on Grotius' natural law, and in his main political work, the *Catholica juris* (Common jurisprudence), published in Copenhagen in 1634, he incorporated central aspects of Grotius' thought. An advocate of limited monarchy and the right of resistance, Ernst places at the heart of his discussion a contractual understanding of fundamental laws:

"[The] laws of the realm or fundamental laws [are those] which the prince normally expressly or tacitly binds himself piously to observe. Thus if he breaks the faith he has pledged to his subjects he will incur punishment. For the people did not give away its right to someone and does not give power to his descendants in order to become slaves instead of citizens, but in order to live more securely under one with greater prudence. … Here one must note that prince and people before the contract by means of which they are joined by the strongest bond of faith and love are equals, at least concerning the matter in which both oblige themselves. … We have an example of this not too remote from our own times in that the most prudent councillors of the Realm of Denmark chose Christian II for their king. And when they saw that he not only overturned human and divine law but was a most cruel tyrant they stripped him of his royal dignity and in order to prevent greater danger locked him up in perpetual prison, as they saw, and chose in his place the good and pious prince Frederick for King.

In the *Catholica juris*, Ernst invokes the rights of resistance whilst referring to the monarch as the *primus inter pares*. Chosen for his piety and prudence, a monarch was bound to his subjects through a contract to which he was held accountable. Should he break this contract and turn his subjects or citizens into slaves, like Christian II had done, it was the duty of prudent councillors to strip him of his powers. Hence, the right to revolt was restricted to the office of the lesser magistrates. To live under the terror of a tyrant, Ernst argued, was to live in a condition of slavery. At this point, Ernst’s argumentation was in sync with a classical Roman law distinction between *sui iuris* and *sub potestate*, between free men and slaves – central not only to Grotius, but also to contemporary English republican writers. Filtered through a contractual or Grotian scheme, Ernst’s political convictions were, however, more monarchical than republican.

When Frederik III was elected king in 1648, he had agreed to a coronation charter that granted extensive privileges to the nobility, and reintroduced the right to revolt into the constitutional fabric of the elective monarchy. At Frederik III’s coronation ceremony, the

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324 Quoted in Olden-Jørgensen, ‘Scandinavia’: 314.
326 Ernst’s political leanings have been a contested topic in Danish historiography. Whilst Fabricius, for example, has described him as an opportunist who was more than willing to adjust his political convictions according to changing circumstances, i.e. the shift from limited monarchy to absolutism, historians such as Olden-Jørgensen and Leon Jespersen have seen him more strictly as an advocate of *monarchia mixta*. See Fabricius, *Kongeloven; Olden-Jørgensen, ‘Scandinavia’: 314-15; Leon Jespersen, ‘Knud Fabricius og den monarkiske bølge: nogle kommentarer til de statsretlige brydninger i 15-1600-tallets Danmark’, *Historie* 1 (1997): 74-77.
members of the Council of State played a central role. As the bishop of Zealand Jesper Rasmussen Brochmand (1585-1652) writes in his description of the coronation, which appeared in 1650, the officers of the realm not only ‘offered on God’s Altar’ the ‘Regalia of the Kingdoms’, i.e. the crown, the sceptre, the sword, and the apple, they also redressed the king in his royal gown and partook in placing ‘the Royal Crown on His Majesty’s Head’. These actions were a monument on aristocratic aspects of the *monarchia mixta*, intellectually embedded in the constitutional thought of Huitfeldt and Ernst as well as the Danish tradition of coronation charters. Moreover, during the church ceremony the coronation charter, including the section on the right to revolt, was read aloud by the seneschal, and the monarch, who himself read the final paragraph, then swore his ‘Royal Oath’, whilst placing his hand on the ‘New Testament’. During the ceremony, the constitutional or aristocratic elements were further emphasised by the chancellor, who stated that ‘Divine Guidance and Providence’ had moved the Council of State to ‘elect and entrust’ Frederik III ‘to be our Lord and King.’ Hence, the Council of State not only played a central constitutional role, symbolically represented in the coronation ceremonials, its political power was also sanctioned by God, who acted indirectly through the council.

This contention, embedded as it was in the tradition of aristocratic constitutionalism, was alive and well throughout the first half of the seventeenth century, but in the 1650s it was challenged on almost all fronts: economically, socially, politically, and intellectually. The Council of State was ‘instituted by God in order to govern and rule with His Royal Highness’, wrote the nobleman Christian Skeel (1603-1659) in November 1658, in a letter to his fellow members of the council, reminding them of their status and privileges. The kingdom of Denmark was in ruins, on the brink of total defeat to the invading Swedish armies. Yet, what worried Skeel was not primarily the spoils of war or the threat of military defeat, but the monarch’s reliance on foreign advisors – a disposition which violated the terms of Frederik III’s election as put forth in the coronation charter of 1648. Skeel, who longed for a time when king and the council were working

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for the same aims, thus suggested to take action against the king.\textsuperscript{333} Although the council of state did not follow Skeel’s proposal to remind the monarch of his duties and obligations, the major lines of contestation that were to become the steppingstone for the introduction of absolutism were already drawn before Frederik III summoned the assembly of the estates in the fall of 1660.

The Monarchical Revolution

The turbulent days in October 1660 had left the kingdom in a constitutional vacuum.\textsuperscript{334} The Council of State had been dissolved, and the coronation charter had been annulled and handed over to Frederik III. Nansen and Svane had so far achieved what they wanted. Yet, the right of hereditary, which Nansen and Svane had fought for, did not necessarily entail absolutism.\textsuperscript{335} Although the right of heredity made obsolete the coronation charter, and thus removed the principal political instrument of the Council of State, the right of heredity did not exclude a situation in which monarchical power was limited either by an aristocratic body such as the Council of State or by a Diet. This has led some historians to question the intentions of Nansen and Svane. In October 1660, as J. A. Fabricius has argued, the leaders of the estates (including Nansen and Svane) expected Frederik III to take into consideration not only such principles as the unity of the realm and the common good, but also the wishes, the liberties, and privileges of the estates.\textsuperscript{336} Seen in this light, absolutism only gradually became an option; the monarch, finding himself in a strengthened position both militarily and politically, simply seized the moment and removed the last remnants of aristocratic power. As other historians have argued, however, absolute monarchy had been on the agenda from the moment in which the assembly of the estates was first called. During the negotiations Nansen and Svane, who were collaborating with entrusted public officials close to Frederik III, played a crucial role, strategically undermining the position of the aristocracy and the Council of State.\textsuperscript{337} Hence, thoroughly anti-aristocratic, there is no reason to doubt that Nansen and Svane supported both heredity and absolutism – though the latter was not publicly uttered. In January 1661, however, each of the estates signed a document, usually referred to as the Act of Sovereignty (\textit{Enevoldsarvegeringsakten}), in which they gave their consent to the new absolutist regime.

\textsuperscript{333} Jespersen, ‘Knud Fabricius og den monarkiske bolge’; 66-67.
\textsuperscript{335} Benito Scocozza, \textit{Ved afgrundens rand 1600-1700: Gyldendal og Politikens Danmarkshistorie} 8, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition (Copenhagen 2003): 240-44.
\textsuperscript{336} Fredericia, \textit{Adelsvældens sidste dage} 528-29.
In the Act of Sovereignty, emphasis was placed on ‘the protection and security of the Kingdom’, which had been undermined by the ‘inconveniences’ caused by ‘the past right of Election.’ The aristocracy had given up any claims to *monarchia mixta*, declaring that Frederik III’s coronation charter of 1648 ‘hereafter shall be entirely dead and powerless,’ and ‘out of their own free Will’ the aristocracy together with the other estates had given to the king the ‘Right of Succession over the Kingdoms of Denmark and Norway as well as all jura Majestatis, absolute Government, and all Regalia.’ In addition, Frederik III was granted a free hand regarding the outlook of the ‘Right of Succession, Sovereignty and absolute Government.’ In order to settle the right of succession, the Act of Sovereignty obliged the monarch to issue a political testament or a ‘last Will’, which should be considered ‘a Fundamental Law and a public regulation’.

The annulment of the coronation charter and the common consent of the estates constituted Frederik III as an absolute monarch, and as such the Act of Sovereignty solved the constitutional situation. Yet, as Sebastian Olden-Jørgensen has argued, several issues remained unresolved in relation to the line of succession, the formation of a regency in case the crown prince was a minor, and whether to issue a testament, as proclaimed in the Act of Sovereignty, or to settle the issues in a law of heredity. The most serious issues, however, relates to the question of personal or arbitrary absolutism. Whilst demanding the total subordination of the subjects, regardless of their status, the Act of Sovereignty placed no obligations upon the office of kingship, other than the aforementioned political testament. Following the advice of Dietrich Reinkingk (1590-1664) and the German Chancellery in Glückstadt, however, Frederik III finally settled on a law of heredity, thus taking a decisive step in the direction of legal monarchism. When the *Lex Regia* was signed in 1665 it contained not only the a law of heredity, but also several constitutional arrangements. Between the Act of Sovereignty of 1661 and the appearance of the *Lex Regia*, a number of projects were initiated in order to settle the issue of succession. In 1663, two high-ranking officials, Søren Kornerup (1624-1674) and Rasmus Vinding (1615-1684), drafted a royal constitution entitled *Lex Regia Frederici Tertii*, in which they sought to ground monarchical power in divine rights

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339 Kongeloven og dens forhistorie: 2: ’hereffter skall were gandske dødet och mactisløsz.’
341 Kongeloven og dens forhistorie: 2: ‘Arrfue Rettighed, Souverainität och absolute Regierung.’
theory. The *Lex Regia Frederici Tertii* was not accepted. Instead, the task of writing a final draft fell to a young and ambitious public official, the archivist and librarian Peder Schumacher (1635-1699), who was working as the king’s secretary. In his youth Schumacher had enjoyed the patronage of leading theological figures in Denmark such as Brochmand, and as a public official, his absolutist convictions – not unlike those of Hans Nansen and the group of royalists to which he belonged – were driven by anti-aristocratic and meritocratic contentions as well as personal ambition.

Comprised of a preface and forty paragraphs, the *Lex Regia* outlines the constitutional foundation of the absolute monarchy as well as the law of heredity. ‘[For] as long as anyone of this [Royal bloodline] is alive,’ we read in the preface, the monarch will possess ‘the Right of Heredity to these Our Kingdoms Denmark and Norway as well as all Iura Majestatis, absolute Power, sovereignty, and all Royal Splendours and Regalia.’ The law of heredity had two further implications, that responded to the political crisis of the 1650s, where the Danish monarchy had nearly become a Swedish province. Although the law of heredity was a limitation on the absolute power of the monarch, as it prevented him from dealing with the issues of succession as he pleased in a political testament, it was considered necessary thus to limit the power of the monarch in order to ensure the safety of the kingdom, both internally and externally. The kingdom, simply, must remain ‘unchanged and united’. As the right of heredity placed all political power in the hands of a single person, as opposed to the previous monarchia mixta, and clarified the *Lex Regia* aimed to create a strong state. ‘And,’ it reads, ‘because reason and daily experience fully teach that a complete and comprehensive power is far stronger and of greater power and vigour than one that is divided and split; and, the greater the power and authority a Lord and King possess, the safer can he and his subjects live from the assault of external Enemies.’ Moreover, by laying out a detailed law of succession that placed emphasis not only on the fact that princes of the blood, who were not first in line, should settle for their position in society, but also that the heir was morally obliged to ensure that position, the *Lex Regia* aims to limit the possibility of internal

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345 The draft is reprinted in *Kongeloven og dens forhistorie*: 33-37. For a discussion of the date and the authorship see Fabricius, *Kongeloven*: Ch 7.


348 *Kongeloven og dens forhistorie*: §XIX: ‘uskifftet og udeelt’.

349 *Kongeloven og dens forhistorie*: §XIX: ‘Og efterdj fornufften og den daglige forfarenhed lærer, at een samblet og sammenknyttet magt er langt sterckere og aff store kraft og lynd end den, som er adskillt og adspred, og jo store vælde og herredomme een Herre og Konge besiddler, jo tryggere leffver hand og hans undersaatter for alle udvortes Fienders anfald’. 76
political struggles between different factions, supporting one or the other amongst the sons and daughters of the king. As it states in §40, the principal aim of the *Lex Regia* was to enable the subjects of the Danish-Norwegian monarchy to 'build and live in peace and tranquillity, without fear of domestic strife and revolt.'

Both the Act of Sovereignty and the *Lex Regia* were stepped in a particular language of monarchism, rooted in the political philosophy of Jean Bodin. In the *Six Books of the Commonwealth*, Bodin put forth a novel theory of sovereignty. ‘Sovereignty’, writes Bodin, ‘is the absolute and perpetual power of a commonwealth.’ The defining feature of Bodin’s theory of sovereignty was its notion of indivisibility. Sovereignty, Bodin argues, cannot be shared between a monarch and an aristocratic institution such as the Council of State, for ‘the notion of a sovereign (that is to say, of someone who is above all subjects) cannot apply to someone who has made a subject his companion.’ In addition to its indivisibility, Bodin attached to his concept of sovereignty seven *iura majestatis* or sovereign rights, counting 1) the right of legislation; 2) the right of war and peace; 3) the right to appoint officials; 4) the right of executive power; 5) the right to give pardon; 6) the right of obedience from the subjects, and 7) the right to taxation and to issue new currency.

The concept of *ius majestatis* is essential to our understanding of the *Lex Regia* and the language of absolutism. Centred on the concept of *ius majestatis*, as derived from Bodin, the *Lex Regia* granted the monarch extensive sovereign rights. Establishing close ties between the monarch’s arbitrary will and the government of the state, the king is unbound by human laws, and ‘the King shall neither orally nor in writing subscribe to any Oath or any obligation whatsoever, for he, as a free and unfettered Absolute King, cannot be bound by his subjects to any Oath or prescribed obligations.’ The *Lex Regia* not only defined the power of the absolute monarch and the constitutional relationship between the monarch, the church, and the subjects, it also delivered a decisive blow against any reminiscences of aristocratic governance. Included are such rights as the right to make war and peace, a right previously shared with the Council of State, and right to appoint and dismiss officials. ‘The king alone shall have the supreme power and authority to appoint and dismiss all officials, high and low, no matter what name or title they may have, according to his own free will and judgment, so that all offices and positions, no matter what...”

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authority they possess, shall have their first source, as from a spring, in the absolute power of the king. This entailed the introduction of a system of loyalty and merit, as opposed to the privileges and liberties of the nobility central to Huitfeldt’s aristocratic constitutionalism.

Another crucial right subordinates the church to the will of the monarch. ‘The king alone’, it reads, ‘shall also have supreme power over the clergy from the highest to the lowest to order and arrange all ecclesiastical and divine services; to enjoin or forbid, when he considers it advisable, meetings, assemblies, and conventions on religious matters and, in general, to put it briefly, the king alone shall have the power to make use of all the regalia and Iura Majestatis whatever designation they may have.’ As the head of a confessional state, the monarch directly under God, and everything else directly under him: ‘The absolute hereditary king of Denmark and Norway shall hereafter be, and by all subjects be held and honoured as, the greatest and highest head on earth, above all human laws and knowing no other head or judge above him, either in spiritual or secular matters, except God alone.’ Despite the extensive rights granted to the monarch, however, the monarch was not unlimited in all his relations. The Lex Regia, for instance, limits the power of the monarch in relation to the private property of the subjects or what belongs to their households, as no such dominion was explicitly mentioned amongst the rights of the sovereign. Likewise, the Lex Regia obliges the monarch to

... honor, serve, and worship the only just and true God in that manner and fashion which He has revealed in His holy and true word; and make known our Christian faith and creed clearly according to the form and manner in which it was presented, pure and undefiled, in the Augsburg Confession of the year 1530, and hold the inhabitants of the country to the same pure and undefiled Christian faith and defend it by force and shield it in these lands and kingdoms against all heretics, fanatics, and mockers of God.

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357 Kongeloven og dens forhistorie: §II: ‘Danmarcks og Norges EenevoldsArffveKonge skal være hereffter og aff alle undersaatterne holdes og agtes for det ypperste og høyeste hoffved her paa Jorden offer alle Menniskelige Lowe, og der ingen anden hoffved og dommere kiender offer sig enten i Geistlige eller Verdslige Sager uden Gud alleene’.

As was the case anywhere else in Europe, monarchical power was limited in relation to natural and divine law, but in the case of the Danish-Norwegian monarchy, monarchical power was also limited by the very document that constituted its power constitutionally: the Lex Regia was considered ‘an unchangeable Fundamental Law.’\textsuperscript{359} The power of the Danish monarch is limited in relation to God and the Augsburg Confession, and though the monarch is the head of the Church, his powers includes not the inner government of the Church, but the outer.\textsuperscript{360} Moreover, just like the property of the subjects is not subjected to the will of the king, he cannot alter the line of succession, divide the kingdom, or by any other means decrease the absolute power of the monarchy.\textsuperscript{361} In addition, absolute monarchical power was limited as the monarch was dependent on the state administration. Absolutism, thus, was aspired to only in theory.\textsuperscript{362} Yet, despite these limitations, absolutism is commonly interpreted by modern historians as an essentially unlimited and arbitrary form of government.\textsuperscript{363}

In recent historiography, the most controversial aspect of the Lex Regia has been its justification of absolute monarchical power. Penned by Peder Schumacher, the Lex Regia brings together several, partly contradictory, traditions of thought. On the one hand, it appeals to the divine character of the monarch, claiming that God has granted the power of the monarch. On the other hand, the justification of absolute monarchy is provided by reference to a social contract between ruler and subject. At the moment of creation, the people had transferred all their powers, liberties, and rights to the monarch, who would be for all posterity the sole possessor of political power. Combining religious and secular conceptions of political authority, the Lex Regia positions the absolute monarchy within current intellectual fashions and grounds its justification in a complex web of ideas. As it reads in a crucial passage:

\[ T \]he great and almighty God rules over all kings and princes as well as their subject kingdoms and lands according to the counsel of his inscrutable wisdom and thereby governs and orders everything; this perceptibly inasmuch as His divine omnipotence has paternally delivered us from the danger of almost apparent and imminent utter ruin and collapse which was hovering over our royal house and these our kingdoms and lands, and has acted to such an end that not only have we been saved and placed in the desired state of peace and tranquillity but also that He has caused our then existing Council of the Realm and all the estates, noble and non-noble, spiritual and secular, to give up their previous prerogatives and rights of election and to consent to render the capitulation previously signed by us, with all of its transcripts, points and clauses, null and void.\textsuperscript{364}

\textsuperscript{359} Kongeloven og dens forhistorie: 40-41: ‘uforanderlig GrundvoldsLow.’
\textsuperscript{360} Jespersen, ‘The Constitutional and Administrative Situation’: 50.
\textsuperscript{361} See Thomas Munck, The Peasantry and the Early Absolute Monarchy in Denmark 1660-1708 (Copenhagen 1979): 50.
\textsuperscript{363} Lyngby, Metz & Olden-Jørgensen, Magt & pragt: 71.
\textsuperscript{364} Kongeloven og dens forhistorie: 38-39: ‘… den store og Allmegetige Gud offver alle Konger og Herskaber saavelsom deris Riger og Land eftben sin uransgelige viisdoms raad hersker og alting derudj styrer og beskicker,
As Knud Fabricius has argued in his pioneering study of the *Lex Regia* and its intellectual context, the introduction of absolute monarchy was the result of long and continuous intellectual developments, culminating in the mid-seventeenth century in what Fabricius saw as a wave of monarchism. Fabricius, like many historians after him, concentrated his focus on the rise of a theocratic idea of monarchy, advocated by leading theologians in Denmark such as Brochmand and Peder Vinstrup (1549-1614), and pointed out how divine ordination played a crucial role in the erection of the absolute monarchy in Denmark. Other historians have reacted strongly against this theocratic interpretation. As Olden-Jørgensen (the most influential protagonist of this line of argumentation in recent historiography) has argued, the introduction of absolute monarchy as well as its official justification was steeped in Roman law, natural law, and contract theory. Essentially secular in nature, the official rhetoric of the monarchy stressed that the Estates had voluntarily handed over all their power to the monarch in appreciation of his efforts in the wars against Sweden. This way of justifying the introduction of absolutism was a direct reference to Roman history, where the Roman people in a similar fashion had granted supreme power to Augustus. Pushed aside, as it is in this picture, the theocratic notions of monarchy are reduced to mere rhetorical flattery that spoke only to the extravagant desires present at the royal court: practical politics, this interpretation suggests, is not to be confused with political languages.

These interpretations are misleading. First, to fully understand the rise of Danish absolutism we need to appreciate the multiple justifications offered in the *Lex Regia*. Though

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certain tensions may be said to exist between the two principal ways of justifying, they are equal parts of the intellectual context of Danish absolutism. Secondly, we should be careful not to offer an anachronistic interpretation of the contractual aspects of the Lex Regia, that it, its references to the consent of the people, as an expression of modern natural law, as that particular interpretation is conditioned by developments that took place within that same tradition in the second half of the seventeenth century: the interpretation in question needs, in other words, a Pufendorf, a Thomasius, a Barbevrae, and a Holberg.

**Monarchism and Christian Political Thought**

The predominant way of thinking about absolutism was not derived from natural law, but rested on a particular appropriation of Lutheran political thought that rose to prominence in the seventeenth century. Svane, for instance, who played a central role in the monarchical revolution, came from a tradition of Christian political thinkers that had dominated Danish theological thought since the turn of the century. Championed by such theologians as Vinstrup, Hans Poulsen Resen (1561-1638), and Brochmand, the Christian political thinkers sought to combine orthodox Lutheranism and absolutism.370 In 1596, at the coronation of Christian IV (1577-1648), Vinstrup interpreted monarchical power as ordained by God and referred to Christian IV as ‘an Absolute Monarch’,371 and as Resen argued in 1614, in his Om den Hellige Tro til Den sande Gud (On the Holy Faith in the True God), ‘Christian Kings’ were embodying ‘a sacred Office’.372 A few decades later, at the coronation of Frederik III in 1648, Brochmand assured the king ‘that all of us would honour and Regard Your Majesty as the one God has put in his own place.’373 As professors at Copenhagen and superintendents of Zealand, the highest ecclesiastical office in Denmark-Norway, these theologians were amongst the most influential thinkers in the seventeenth century; initiated

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371 Vinstrup’s speech was printed by August Erich, who published a German description of the coronation in 1597, see August Erich, *Aufführliche und warhaffte Beschreibung Des Durchlauchtigsten/ Grosmechtigen und Hochgebornen Fürsten und Herrn/ Herrn Christians/ des Veirden…* (Copenhagen 1597). The following year his description was translated into Danish by A.B. Dallin, see August Erich, *Klarlige oc Visse Beskriffuelse/ Om dend Stormectige/ Høybaarne Førstis oc Herris/ Herr Christians den Fieirdis…*, A.B. Dallin, trans., (Copenhagen 1598): 56: ’en Eenuolds Konning’.


by Resen, the Christian political thinkers mounted fierce theological and political attacks on the Danish Philippists and other theologians who did not subscribe to their rigid orthodoxy and their Augustinian emphasis on corruption and original sin. They also shared close intellectual ties. When Resen was appointed bishop of Zealand in 1615, his professorial chair was passed on to Brochmand, who would also succeed Resen as bishop of Zealand in 1639. Brochmand had been a pupil of Resen, Svane was, in turn, a pupil of Brochmand. Yet, their distinctive feature was their engagement with political issues.

The political thought of the Christian political thinkers was drawn from Luther’s two-kingdom theory. Dialectic in nature, the two-kingdom theory depicts the tensions of a Christian life in regard to what Luther saw as an earthly and a heavenly kingdom. Governed simultaneously by both kingdoms, the nature of man is split between the temporal and the eternal, the internal and external, and the visible and the invisible. As a longer tradition of scholarship has shown, what complicates the matter, however, is that Luther tended to use the two-kingdom theory in at least two conflicting ways. In the first sense, the two kingdoms referred to the kingdom of God, comprised of all Christians, as opposed to the kingdom of Satan on earth, comprised of non-Christians. No true Christian, Luther asserts, can be part of both these kingdoms simultaneously, as they are strictly separated. ‘Here’, Luther writes, ‘we must divide Adam’s children, all mankind, into two parts: the first belong to the kingdom of God, the second to the kingdom of the world. All those who truly believe in Christ belong to God’s kingdom, for Christ is king and lord in God’s kingdom, as the second Psalm and the whole of Scripture proclaims.’ Nevertheless, since man is not merely a spiritual being, but also a temporal being, Luther employs the two kingdoms in a second sense. Embodying a double nature, represented by the soul and the flesh, the two kingdoms referred to the two forms of government to which all humans were subjected, that is, to the spiritual government of the word and the secular government of the sword. As temporal being, all true Christians must subject themselves to secular authority, divinely ordained, as it is, though secular authority extents only to earthly and bodily things.

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Secular princes were mediators in the earthly kingdom: they were regarded as God’s vicars or ministers on earth.\textsuperscript{377} A central claim in Luther’s political thought, the ‘secular Sword’ – a recurring metaphor in his writings – is ordained by God ‘to punish the wicked and protect the just.’\textsuperscript{378} It was directed only against the wicked, however, as the just, the one who is good by nature, need no secular authority to force one to act according to God’s law. ‘And so has God ordained the two governments’, Luther argues, ‘the spiritual [government] which fashions true Christians and just persons through the Holy Spirit under Christ, and the secular [\textit{weltlich}] government which holds the Unchristian and wicked in check and forces them to keep the peace outwardly and be still, like it or not.’\textsuperscript{379}

The separation of the earthly and the heavenly kingdom provided Protestant thinkers with the means necessary to make faith an individual relationship between God and man, and subject true Christians to earthly authority. Since faith was a gift of God, it was up to the individual believer to accept God’s gift; thus, no institution, either secular or ecclesiastical, could legislate in regard to the individual believer’s salvation. The authority of secular government was limited to the external world of bodies and goods, of flesh and blood, and should therefore make no attempts to legislate in spiritual matters. As Luther puts it, ‘Secular government has laws that extend no further than the body, goods and outward, earthly matters. But where the soul is concerned, God neither can nor will allow anyone but himself to rule. And so, where secular government takes it upon itself to rule for the soul, it trespasses in [what belongs to] God’s government, and merely seduces and ruins souls.’\textsuperscript{380} Political power was, as it was unfolded within the two-kingdom theory, divine in origin, but its arena was strictly limited to earthly matters.\textsuperscript{381} Based on this distinction, Luther directed a fierce attack on the Catholic Church. ‘For my ungracious lords, the pope and the bishops’, he claimed, ‘have become secular princes, ruling by means of laws that concern only life and goods. They have managed to turn everything upside down: they ought to rule souls with God’s Word, inwardly, and instead they rule castles, towns, countries and peoples, outwardly, and torment souls with unspeakable murders.’\textsuperscript{382} A similar critique was directed against the secular princes, who, according to Luther, had failed their call and become ‘spiritual tyrants’.\textsuperscript{383}

\textsuperscript{377} Witte, \textit{Law and Protestantism}: 76-77.  
\textsuperscript{378} Luther, \textit{On Secular Authority}: 7.  
\textsuperscript{379} Luther, \textit{On Secular Authority}: 10-11.  
\textsuperscript{380} Luther, \textit{On Secular Authority}: 23.  
\textsuperscript{381} Witte, \textit{Law and Protestantism}: 9.  
\textsuperscript{382} Luther, \textit{On Secular Authority}: 26-27.  
\textsuperscript{383} Luther, \textit{On Secular Authority}: 28.
In addition to the two kingdoms, God had ordained three regiments or estates that should govern the earthly kingdom: the *ordo economicus* (the household), the *ordo politicus* (the commonwealth), and the *ordo ecclesiasticus* (the church). Limited to earthly matters, politics, or the *ordo politicus*, was to be balanced by the *ordo ecclesiasticus* and the *ordo economicus*. In opposition to the medieval semantics of regiments (i.e., the social division between the nobility, the clergy, the burghers, and the peasantry), Luther’s three regiments represent not a social division of society, but specific ways of acting, specific offices. A dynamic construction, the individual Christian believer comes into contact with each of these earthly orders. Luther intended the three regiments to combat the idea that salvation depended on one’s place in a web of social hierarchies, an idea often associated with Catholic theology. To God, Luther argued, one’s social station was without significance; only faith mattered.

In his coronation speech in 1648, Luther’s two-kingdom theory played a central role in Brochmand’s rejection of *monarchia mixta*. Interpreting the biblical story of King David, he indirectly warned the king and the Council of State not to go against the order of God, as the Israelites had done according to the Scriptures: ‘When the Order of God does not have any leverage and Man wants to raise his Orders above that of God’s Institution: then Doomsday is not far away. In the Beginning, God Instituted *Judges* amongst his People, who should rule Israel: He wanted Himself to be King and Head and Lord of the Government’. The Christian political thinkers contrasts the order of God to all earthly claims to power. The problem, as Brochmand saw it, was that man’s affectations had led him astray from the path of God. Humans had come to believe not in the order of God but in the order of man; the rule or the will of the judges had come to supersede the will of God. ‘Nothing is more dangerous’, Brochmand asserts, ‘than when our Human Affectations, in this manner, grow out of control; so, whether in speech, talk, or action, it makes no difference, no matter how Pious and beneficial, for it contradicts that which we have in Mind, and, subsequently, wants to put into Work, be it useful or harmful, be it for God or against

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386 For a discussion see Witte, *Law and Protestantism*: Ch. 4.
The phrase ‘human affectations’ derived its meaning from original sin. The affectations of Man would lead him on the path of disbelief and destruction; man would adopt the ‘Manners of the Infidels’. As Brochmand stressed in his early works, only by fear of God and faith in God and Jesus Christ could man hope to counter the corruption of original sin and see the light of salvation, for the ‘Highest blessing is in that Kingdom, where the King fears the living God’.

In directing our attention towards the destructive nature of human affectations as well as how they are an obstacle to our most sincere purpose, Brochmand implicitly questions the philosophical presupposition of aristocratic constitutionalism, that is, the idea that man or the people have a say in politics. ‘The Lord’s Command ought to be regarded above ones own Will,’ Brochmand argues, ‘A King should act according to this, not according to his own Illusions’. Considering the context in which Brochmand presented his argument, his timing seems rather misplaced. Not only did he present it when standing face-to-face with the most influential members of the Council of State, he also presented it in the immediate aftermath of some of the toughest negotiations between king and Council regarding the terms of election and the range of aristocratic privileges to have taken place in Danish history. In Brochmand’s view, this was exactly what gave his speech the rhetorical power needed to present his point. What was at stake, both rhetorically and religiously, was nothing short of a choice between the path of God or religious and moral decline, which would inevitably be the consequence of aristocratic constitutionalism.

Although Brochmand’s criticism of aristocratic constitutionalism was hidden behind biblical examples, it did surface at crucial moments in the coronation ceremony; for example, when he addressed the king directly. Thus, commenting on the rightfulness of Frederik III’s coronation, and implicitly referring to the aristocratic practice of laying down their privileges in the Coronation Charter, Brochmand makes a somewhat bold statement on the origins of monarchical power:

\[\text{God has chosen Your Majesty himself and no one else. We will all, by the Mercy of God, be insured that Your Majesty's Heart is formed after God's own Heart and that the Spirit of God, after Your Majesty has}\]

True monarchs are appointed by God, he claimed, not by any aristocratic institution, corrupted by earthly desires. To the Christian political thinkers, human desires should have no say in the formation of civil government, which was the sole concern of God. In a similar fashion to what these theologians drew from the two-kingdom theory, the order of God, to which Brochmand appealed, placed each man in a specific station and obliged him not to interfere with divine matters. Thus, no active aristocratic involvement like the one put forth in Huitfeldt’s constitutional theory was possible within the framework proposed by Brochmand. Further, interpreting the biblical story of the Israelites, Brochmand once again directs the attention of his audience towards contemporary politics:

They should have let God rule and not themselves change the Government that God had instated. All-knowing "as He is," He saw best how long the Government of the Judges, which he had installed, would benefit his People: He too understood best when the right Time had come and the Oath he had sworn Abraham and Jacob on the Monarchical Regiment should, prosperously, begin.

With this appeal to the providence of God and its predominance in secular politics, Brochmand has reached a point where he is capable of taking issue with one of the main assumptions supporting the idea of *monarchia mixta:* the liberties and privileges of the subjects, particularly the nobility. As he states:

Now, God, the King of Kings, presumes that Your Royal Majesty eagerly will read the Lord’s holy Law and from there find good and beneficial Advice on Monarchical Government and that Your Majesty will [lead] his life and Regiment according to all Divine Examples, following the Lord’s holy Commands: to cherish and honour God’s Servants according to the duties of the office, to provide for them, and let them enjoy the Liberties granted them by the Word of God.

These liberties, bestowed on God’s servants, Brochmand argues, had been secured by Christian IV and should likewise be secured by Frederik III. This appeal to tradition creates an almost
aristocratic moment in Brochmand’s ceremonial speeches that would certainly have pleased the
members of the State Council present at the events. However, although he strikes a chord similar
to the semantics of aristocratic privileges, the liberties of which he speaks belong to all God’s
servants, not just to an aristocratic elite. The intellectual background from which Brochmand
drew his arguments was the two-kingdom theory. ‘Nothing is more disgraceful in the Eyes of
God’, he argues, ‘than a King who does not esteem his Subjects and remembers that although they
are made his Subjects by God’s Order, they are still his Brothers in the Eyes of God.’

As Brochmand saw it, the liberties of the subjects stemmed from God, not secular rulers, and
therefore the monarch should respect and preserve them. Thus, drawing the meaning of liberty
from the order of God or the two-kingdom theory placed a crucial limitation on the power of the
monarch, who was otherwise solely limited by God. As Fabricius has argued, Brochmand’s view
on monarchy was ambiguous. On the one hand, he defended a theocratic notion of monarchy that
viewed monarchs as gods on earth, and, on the other, he sought to limit the powers of the
monarch. However, in drawing such conclusions, I believe that Fabricius misunderstands the
nature as well as the intellectual background of Brochmand’s political rhetoric. Within the
framework of the two-kingdom theory, politics is limited; the earthly kingdom is limited by the
heavenly kingdom, the ordo politicus by the ordo ecclesiasticus and the ordo economicus. Through
combining the concept of the order of God and the contention that God erected governments of
judges in the earthly kingdom, a particular vision of absolute monarchy emerges. This was a
general feature in the political thought of the Danish Christian political tinkers; Resen, Vinstrup,
and Brochmand all drew their conclusions from this specific interpretation of Luther’s two-
kingdom theory.

Interpreting the rise of Danish absolutism in light of this tradition of Christian political
thought, it will now be clear that we should think differently about several aspects of the Lex
Regia, particularly those pertaining to the scope of absolute power. The monarch, for instance,
whose place in the earthly kingdom is the ordo politicus, should at all times refrain himself from
interfering with the inner affairs of the Church; the domain of the monarch was the external,
earthly realm, within which one would also count such things as church meetings and ceremonies.
The ordo ecclesiasticus remained free in its domain, which related to salvation, faith, and the inner
intentions of man. This was also true for the ordo economicus, as no dominion over the private

396 Brochmand, Den Stormetige Haybaarne Forstis oc Herris: Fii verso ‘Ingen ting er vederstyggeligere for Guds Øyen/
end at en Konge acter intet om sine Undersaatet: icke ihukommer/ at endog de ere aff Guds forordning/ hans
Underdanne/ saa ere de dog for Guds Øyen hans Brødre’.
property of the subjects or their households was explicitly mentioned amongst the rights of the sovereign. Hence, the notion of political authority embodied in the *Lex Regia* does not amount to the all-embracing notion of absolute monarchical sovereignty, entertained by modern scholars.398 Rather than being essentially unlimited and arbitrary, monarchical power is absolute only within the *ordo politicus*, and what makes the office of the monarch absolute within the *ordo politicus* is the possession of a range of specific sovereign rights or *iura majestatis*. If absolutism itself is not a myth, as Nicholas Henshall polemically claimed in *The Myth of Absolutism*, the understanding of absolute power as unlimited in regard to all aspects of life is untenable.399 This kind of absolutism was aspired to not in theory, but only in practice.400

Intellectually, the rise of Danish absolutism rested on twin pillars. On the one hand, absolute monarchical power was understood in connection with a Bodinian language of sovereignty, centred on indivisibility and sovereign rights. On the other, absolute monarchical power was strictly limited to the *ordo politicus*, and the limits that were placed on absolute power corresponded to Luther’s two-kingdom theory, as it was interpreted by the Christian political thinkers. In the last decades of the seventeenth century, this tradition of Christian political thought was continued by Johann Wandal (1624-1675), a professor of theology and the bishop of Zealand.401 Yet, whilst his predecessors such Svane and Brochmand had argued the case for absolutism and sought to overthrow what they saw as a corrupt aristocratic regime, the problems that Wandal faced were principally related to the question of arbitrary power.

Still in its early stages of conception, the absolute monarchy was unstable, and although the legal framework of the absolute monarchy had been placed down in the *Lex Regia* of 1665, the last years of the reign of Frederik III and the early reign of Christian V (1646-1699) witnessed a fierce ideological battle over the right interpretation of absolute monarchical power. On the one hand, a party led by Queen Charlotte Amalie (1650-1714) advocated that the monarch should rule as he pleased, regardless of anything but his own arbitrary will. On the other hand, Schumacher and other public officials advocated legal monarchism and sought to introduce a meritocratic system

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399 Though I do not share Henshall's scepticism about the use of the concept of absolutism, I do share his criticism of the it is used in modern historiography. Coinined in the nineteenth century, this notion of absolutism carries with it too many remnants of its intellectual origin: absolutism is not totalitarianism. See Hensshall, *The Myth of Absolutism*: 119-212. This case is argued more forcefully in Nicholas Henshall, 'The Myth of Absolutism', *History Today* 42 (1992).
400 In current historiography on absolutism this case is often argued vice versa, see Johan P. Sommerville, 'Early Modern Absolutism in Practice and Theory', in Cesare Cuttica & Glenn Burgess, eds., *Monarchism and Absolutism in Early Modern Europe* (London 2012).
based on loyalty. Schumacher’s party eventually won the battle, at least on paper. In 1683, Christian V issued a monumental law codex entitled Kong Christians den Femtes Danske Lov (King Christian V’s Danish Law), in which meritocracy and piety were described as the pillars of Danish absolutism. “That Kingdom succeeds best,” wrote Henrik Thomsen Gerner (1629-1700), a royalist writer, who had been held in Swedish captivity during the wars in the 1650s, “which is bound to the Law.” Yet, it is characteristic of the ideological situation in which the young, absolute monarchy found itself in the early 1670s that Schumacher, after his ennoblement in 1673, and his subsequent rise to the highest office in the state administration, should find himself accused and convicted for crimen laesae maiestatis in 1676, allegedly because he opposed Christian V’s plans to declare war on the Swedes. Although Schumacher did not receive the death penalty (he was instead condemned to life long imprisonment in Norway) his fall from royal grace was arbitrary in nature, as his only offence had been accept briberies in return for personal favours, thus betraying his own meritocratic convictions.

Although this ideological battle was mainly confined to the royal court, Wandal became an important partisan. In his pivotal work, the Juris Regii libri VI, published between 1663 and 1672, Wandal puts forth a theory of monarchism that picked up the pieces from earlier Christian political thinkers such as Brochmand and gave a systematic account of the origin and nature of secular authority. Corresponding, in general terms, to a series of lectures which Wandal delivered at Copenhagen on the rights of sovereignty, the Juris Regii provides us with an ongoing commentary on the most important intellectual trends of the 1660s and early 1670s. As opposed to earlier Danish works on political theory, Wandal was heavily engaged with writers like Hugo Grotius and Thomas Hobbes, as well as with numerous Catholic writers. The Juris Regii consists of six books, each divided into twelve chapters. Throughout his magnum opus, Wandal discusses the distinctions between Christian princes and tyrants, the divine origin of monarchical sovereignty, the ius majestatis, and the duties that monarchs owe to God. Further, he

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405 Olden-Jørgensen, Kun navnet er tilbage.
406 My discussion of Wandal’s Juris Regii is much indebted to Paolo Borioni, Suverænitetsbegrebet i Bog IV af H. Wandals Jus Regium, (PhD Dissertation, University of Copenhagen 2003). See also Olden-Jørgensen, Magtudøvelse og magtscesesættelse under den ældre danske enevælde 1660-1730: II.86-95
also discusses the universal nature of monarchy, claiming that monarchy as well as the rights of heredity existed even before the fall of man.\footnote{Borioni, Suverænitsbegrebet: 67-71.}

At the coronation of Christian V in 1671, Wandal – like his predecessors – delivered a speech in which he stressed the divine character of monarchical power, which, as he saw it, was instituted by 'the holiest Anointment'.\footnote{Johann Wandal, Den Stormagtigste og Høybaarne Atffve-Konnings og Monarchs/ HER CHRISTIAN DEN FEMTES..., (Copenhagen 1671): Aii recto: 'den helligste Salving'. For a description of the coronation of Christian V, see Olden-Jørgensen, Kun navnet er tilbage: 162-70; Olden-Jørgensen, Magtudøvelse og magtscenesættelse under den ældre danske enevælde 1660-1730: 95-101.} In a central part of his coronation speech, Wandal offers a comparison of the death of Frederik III and the succession of Christian V with the death of King David and the succession of King Solomon. Invoking the image of Solomon had become a common practice in theological circles in the second half of the seventeenth century. In 1667, for instance, the largely unknown writer Hans Jensøn Alan describes Frederik III and Solomon as 'Twins'.\footnote{Hans Jensøn Alan, Catena methodica Salomonis. Det er: Salomon adspredt, samblett aeff hans Ordsprocker, Prædicker oc Høysang effter Joseph Hals Methodum udi tre gudelige Konster, som ere Ethica ... Politica ... Oeconomica aeff Hans Jensøn Alan (Copenhagen 1667): Dedicatio: 'Tvillinger'.}

Yet, Wandal's use of the analogy plays with larger biblical narratives. As he claims:

> What the Spirit of God informs us of deathly departure of the Lord's most dear Friend and King, David, and his Son's entry after him in the Royal Regiment, to this we could rightly add: now David rests with his Fathers, and was buried in his City: but our Solomon sits again on his Father's, our David's, Throne and his Kingdom is already much Constituted [...] Our Solomon, King Christian the Fifth, long may he live and be happy.\footnote{Wandal, Den Stormagtigste og Høybaarne Atffve-Konnings og Monarchs: B verso: 'Det som Guds Aand mæller om den HERrens egen elskeligste Vens og Konges Davids dødelige afgang/ og om hans Søns indtrædelse efter hannem i det Kongl. Regimente/ det kunde vi med all rætte hiføre: saa sof vor David hen med sine Fædre/ og blef begrafven i sin Stad: men vor Salomon sidder igien paa sin Faders/ vor Davids, Throne/ oc hans Kongerige er allerede meget stadfæsted [...] For Salomon/ Kong Christian den Femhte/ lefve længe/ oc bliffve lyksalig.}

The biblical analogy to the succession of power had strong rhetorical connotations. Not only did Wandal stress the role of heredity, he also placed first David and Solomon, and then Frederik III and Christian V, in relation to God, from whom all political power derives. Frederik III's victory over the aristocracy in 1660 echoes the story of David and Goliath; just as the reign of Solomon was just and prosperous, so does the reign of Christian V have the promise of glory. Wandal was not just praising his masters using analogies of biblical proportions; he also was being subversive in the sense that his comparison set out an equally strong recommendation. He was, so to speak, telling his masters how to conduct their regiments and why they needed to do it in that particular manner.

Drawing on the division between the three earthly regiments as it was laid down in the two-kingdom theory, Wandal presented a distinct theory of the role of the clergy within the confessional state, which placed upon the ordo ecclesiasticus the duty to critically assert the moral
grounding of the actions of the monarch. The purpose of the *ordo ecclesiasticus* was to be the moral watchdog over the *ordo politicus*. Wandal was, in other words, defending the right of the theologian to perform moral criticism of secular rulers. His main argument in this context was that the monarch must seek moral advice from theologians and priests. In a crucial passage, Wandal writes:

> When a Priest and Servant of God by himself must remember, warn and urge a King, on behalf of God and his Office, about those Cases that concerns Gods honour and right worship as well as the utility and education of his Christian Congregation: then, when it happens with sufficient reverence and well intended servility, a Christian King ought to take it in to account.\(^{412}\)

Describing the office of the theologian as the only true advisor to the king in matters pertaining to religion, Wandal offers his advice to the new monarch, urging him to banish all false religion. ‘A Christian King,’ he argues, ‘must ward off and avert from his subjects all Heresy, all false, erring and seductive teachings [and he must seek to] hinder and ward off those *false Prophets who show up in cheeps clothing, but internally are tearing Wolves*.\(^{413}\) The idea of moral criticism – Wandal’s most distinctive contribution to the tradition of Christian political thinking, mirrored certain intellectual and theological tendencies coming out of Germany. As Johann Benedict Carpzov the younger (1636–1699), a Leipzig theologian, argued in his *De jure decidendi controversias theologicas* (On the Right of Deciding Theological Controversies), which first appeared in Leipzig in 1695, the earthly estates are sharply separated and the rights of the ruler encompass only the external government of the church.\(^{414}\)

This power [of the magistrate] is thus only external, concerning the conservation of the faith, the appointment of ministers, the convocation of synods, the coercion of heretics, and other acts pertaining to the government of the church externally considered. This power, though, may not be exercised without the advice of theologians or ministers. This is in part because it is not possessed by the magistrate alone but concurs with the power of the ministers. Further, it is because such exercises of power are generally of the kind that require the knowledge of those to whom the internal power of the church belongs. The magistrate should thus attend to two things. First, he should acquiesce in his external power and not seek to infringe on the internal power of the ministers. Thus we read that when King Uzziah burnt an offering of incense he was stricken with leprosy (2 Chronicles XXVI, 16). Second, even in external affairs he must consult the ministers of the church in difficult matters that concern the whole church.\(^{415}\)


\(^{413}\) Wandal, *Den Stormægtigste og Høybaarne Arfve-Konnings og Monarchs*: E recto: ‘En Christen Konge maae afværge og afvende fra sine underhavfende all Kjætterie, all falsk/ vildfarende og forfærende lærdom […] forhindre og afværge de falske Prophetier/ som komme i faarekleider/ og ere dog indvortes rifffende Ulfre’.


\(^{415}\) Quoted in Hunter, *The Secularisation of the Confessional State*: 131.
The intellectual foundation of the theory of public criticism was the division between the inner and the external government of the Church, excluding the secular ruler from interference with internal matters of the faith whilst simultaneously subjecting the ruler to moral criticism. As we have already seen, this division was at the heart of the *Lex Regia*, and thus the predominant theory of absolutism.

**Religious Toleration and Religious Conformity**

In the late seventeenth century, the Danish monarchy had adopted a practice of religious toleration, and much to the outrage of Wandal and other Christian political thinkers, different religious groups were allowed to settle within the Danish-Norwegian monarchy. Anti-tolerationist arguments were deeply rooted in early modern Danish history. In the sixteenth century, when arguments for religious toleration were being advocated by such writers as Erasmus and Sebastian Castello, the Danish-Norwegian monarchy promoted ideas of Lutheran conformity, when faced with the prospect of a community of exiled Calvinists settling in Denmark. Even leading sixteenth-century humanists such as Hemmingsen, although he did not regard Calvinism a heresy, advocated religious conformity. It might be that God extend his offer of grace to all mankind, but Hemmingsen, much in contrast to Dutch Arminians in the seventeenth century, who were indebted to Hemmingsen’s understanding of divine grace, saw no need to tolerate those who either failed or refused to accept the gift of grace. Central to the ethos of enlightenment in which Holberg sees himself, the Dutch Arminians were amongst the principal advocates of toleration in the seventeenth century.

In the Danish seventeenth-century context, the Christian political thinkers were strong advocates of religious uniformity, and their view on Christianity was thoroughly anti-Calvinist and anti-Catholic. Christian IV’s *Recess* of 1615, a collection of laws, offers a clear indication as to

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how influential the Christian political thinkers were already early in the century. The first paragraph of Christian IV's *Recess* is devoted to questions regarding true religion. No one who believes in 'the Papist *Religion*', it states in §1, shall be allowed any rights of inheritance in Denmark-Norway, and 'neither shall these Papists be allowed to Settle in this *Realm*'.

Furthermore, 'If anyone is found to have attended School or Studied at Jesuit Places, they shall be entrusted with no calling, neither in [our] *Schools* nor in the *Churches*'.

This question of religious toleration had been raised in 1670 by the burgomaster of Fredericia, a city located on the east coast of Jutland, who argued that toleration would be prosperous for commerce. ‘Neither can any such forceful or precise argument from any politician [politico] be put forth’, Wandal urged in his official remonstration of the debate, ‘which can move and convince a true Christian and God-fearing king of the tolerance and free permission of such numerous sects.’ What concerned Wandal the most was not, however, the idea of toleration as such, though it was bad enough, but rather that the secular ruler would fall prey to his own affectations and be blinded by the prospects of ‘short and soon disappearing earthly riches.’ Refuting the argument of his opponents, he urged that the monarch should not mistake ‘the earthly, bodily and temporal utility and advantage for the heavenly and spiritual good, nor for eternal blissfulness.’ Sheltered in the name of tolerance, human affectation and greed had encroached on the spiritual sphere of the Church and threatened to undermine the balance between the three regiments ideally depicted by the Christian political thinkers.

In addition, in 1667, the Danish scientist Niels Stensen (1638-1686), who was a well-esteemed anatomist and a fierce critic of Cartesian methodology, converted to Catholicism while working in Florence. His conversion provoked a strong reaction against him; Danish theologians insinuated that Stensen was driven by perverse and immoral motivations, as it was supposed he had fallen in love with a Catholic Florentine woman. Both the practice of religious toleration and Stensen’s conversion had undermined the position of the Christian political thinkers. In this

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422 *Konning Christian den Fierdis Recess* §1: 'Fin dis oc ellers nogen paa Jesuitiske Steder/ at haffue ganget i Skole/ eller Studerit/ skal de icke til noget kald/ enten i Skolerne/ eller Kircker Betrois'.


424 Wandal's remonstration is reprinted in Christensen, 'Hans Wandals remonstration': 128: 'Der kand oc intet saa krafttgot eller nysagtigt argument af nogen politico forrebringes, som skulle kunde bevege oc olvertele en ræt christen oc gudfryctig konge til saadan adskillige secters tolerantz oc frie tilladelse'.

425 Christensen, 'Hans Wandals remonstration': 128: 'kortvarende oc snart forsvindende jordiske rigdom'.

426 Christensen, 'Hans Wandals remonstration': 128: 'jordiske, legemlig oc timelig nytte oc fordeel for det himmelske oc aandelige goede oc for den Æwige salighed'.

context, Wandal's appeal to the monarch not to give up his duty to pursue and persecute all heretics within his kingdoms reflected a heartfelt concern of the Christian political thinkers. To open the borders of the country for prophets of false religion would undermine the safety of the kingdom and lead astray the morality of both rulers and subjects.

When Christian V was anointed in 1671, the issue of religious toleration became even more present. The queen, Charlotte Amalie of Hesse-Kassel (1650-1714), was a Calvinist and was thus not present at the anointment. Yet, she had persuaded Christian V to allow the Calvinists to set up a Reformed church in Copenhagen. As the English royalist writer William Carr notes in his *Travels through Flanders, Holland, Germany, Sweden, and Denmark*, the queen was successful and the government of Christian V became tolerant of rival confessions. Carr writes, 'is a most virtuous Princess, Sister to the present Landtgrave of Hesse Cassel, and in perswasion a Calvinist, having a Chapel allowed her within the Court, though the publick Religion of the King and Kingdom be Lutheran. The Clergy here are learned, many of them having studied at Oxford and Cambridge, where they learnt the English Language; and amongst the Bishops there is one Doctor King the son of a Scottish-man.' Yet, as Carr observes, Christian V was tolerant not only because of the religious convictions of the queen, but also in order to advance trade and commerce:

The Soldiers as well as Courtiers are quartered upon the Citizens, a custom which is likewise practiced in Sweden, and tho' somewhat uneasie, yet not repined at by the People, who by the care and good Government of the King, find trade much advanced. For his Majesty by encouraging Strangers of all Religions to live in his Dominions, and allowing the French and Dutch Calvinists, to have publick Churches, hath brought many trading families to Copenhagen, and by the measure he hath taken for setting trade in prohibiting the importation of Foreign Manufactures, and reforming and new modelling the East and West India Companies, hath much encreased commerce, and thereby the wealth of his Subjects; so that notwithstanding the new taxes imposed upon all Coaches, Wagons, Ploughs, and all real and personal estates, which amount to considerable Sums of Money; the People live very well and contented.

Offering an outsider’s view on the toleration controversy in which Wandal took part, Carr’s account of the debate on toleration in the late seventeenth century overestimates the ease with which the practice of religious toleration was introduced in Denmark. In reality, toleration was fiercely opposed by the Christian political thinkers; the generation of theologians who took the centre stage in the 1680s became even more anti-tolerationist than Wandal. As William Bromley (1664-1732), another foreign observer of the Danish monarchy, stated, the Lutherans adopted a severely anti-Calvinist language. As Bromley notes on his visit to Copenhagen:

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429 Carr, *Travels through Flanders, Holland, Germany, Sweden, and Denmark*: 157.
430 Carr, *Travels through Flanders, Holland, Germany, Sweden, and Denmark*: 156.
The Religion in this Country is Lutheranism, yet the Queen Mother, who is a Calvinist, got leave of the late King for the Calvinists to have a Church here, which they built Anno 1689; how long that Liberty will be continued after her Death, may be easily guessed by anyone that considers the Animosities and Differences of Opinions between Lutheran Ministers, and the Calvinists.431

The differences of opinions to which Bromley alludes may well have been intended as a commentary on the ongoing controversies surrounding the writings of Hector Gottfried Masius (1653-1709), the most prominent Christian political thinker from the 1680s onwards. Drawing on the political theories of his predecessors, Masius advanced and developed the arguments of the Christian political thinkers. Like Resen, Brochmand, and Wandal before him, Masius was a fierce critic of competing religious confessions. In his main work, the *Intresse Principum circa Religionem Evangelicam* (The Interest of Princes Concerning the Evangelical Religion), first published in Copenhagen in 1687, Masius argues that the Calvinists held dangerous beliefs that could undermine the power of the prince. Masius had been in France in 1685 when Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes, and he witnessed the religious persecution of the French Huguenots. Seen in this light, the *Intresse Principum circa Religionem Evangelicam* can be read as a legitimisation of this act of persecution.

Almost immediately upon its publication, the *Intresse Principum circa Religionem Evangelicam* provoked a number of German theologians, lawyers, and philosophers to react. To Masius himself, however, these attacks came as something of a surprise, as he had not written anything that his predecessors had not already argued. As he puts it in the preface to his *Das True Lutherthum* (The True Lutheranism), ‘It is not otherwise new at this University that our Theologians spoke the Truth in this Play against the Reformed; the most distinguished Bishop of Zealand, the celebrated Dr. Wandal, had, in his Book *de Jure Regio*, already strongly complained about it.’432 What had been commonplace in the political thought of Brochmand and Wandal had become a problem for Masius.433 The attacks on Masius came from two different sides; together with the intellectual background to which Masius’ work was a response, they were symptoms of a major shift in the attitude to toleration in contemporary political, moral, and religious thought. Understanding what


433 On Masius’ relation to his predecessors see Borioni, *Suverænitetsbegrebet* 72-78. My discussions of Masius’ *Intresse Principum Circa Religionem Evangelicam* builds on Borioni’s account.
was at stake in the Masius debate will allow us to understand the intellectual origins of the early northern enlightenment.

As the title of his work suggests, *Interesse Principum circa Religionem Evangelicam*, Masius attaches to the Evangelical religion a particular usefulness; moreover, it is a usefulness that deserves the attention of the secular ruler. ‘AS LONG AS THE LUTHERAN RELIGION REMAINS,’ Masius claimed, ‘THE MAJESTY IN DENMARK WILL BE SUPREME AND ABSOLUTE.’ However, in what does this importance or usefulness of the evangelical religion consist? The importance of religion, in Masius’ opinion, is its ability to bind together the commonwealth and create safety and stability. ‘Without Religion’, Masius writes in the epitome of the *Interesse Principum circa Religionem Evangelicam*, ‘there is no support of human society.’ Masius juxtaposes a stable society informed by religion to atheism, which, in his opinion, ‘is the plague of human society.’ However, his claim reaches further than that, as the importance of religion is linked to a particular confessional creed, the evangelical religion. The ability of religion to bind together a commonwealth was, to an important extent, limited to what Masius, along with other Christian political thinkers, described as ‘true Religion’. This was the core of the disputes.

Following the publication of the *Interesse Principum Circa Religionem Evangelicam*, Masius was attacked from several sides. In Frankfurt an der Oder, Johann Christoph Becmann (1641-1717), a theologian and political philosopher, critically engaged with Masius’ political views. In his *Bericht Von Der Reformirten Lehre Von der Veltlichen Obrigkeit*, published in Frankfurt an der Oder in 1690 under the pseudonym Hubert Mosani, Becmann sets out to refute the alleged unreliability of the Calvinists in political matters. The context in which Becmann wrote his tract is marked by two interconnected traditions of thought. First, in the late seventeenth century, the university in Frankfurt an der Oder had become a spawning ground for theologians, philosophers, and jurists who advocated a mixed confessional order in opposition to the model of Lutheran uniformity defended at such universities as Leipzig and Wittenberg in Saxony. The

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Christian political thinkers in Denmark were close to the intellectual milieu at Leipzig and Wittenberg and were equally strong advocates of Lutheran uniformity within the confessional state. Rejecting the theological underpinnings of the orthodox Lutheran view on monarchy, Becmann argued in his *Send-Schreiben* (Letter), published in 1691 under the pseudonym Andreas Montanus, that the Old Testament contains no mentions of secular authority.440 Secondly, Becmann’s political philosophy was largely derived from his engagement with the natural law theory of Hobbes; after Pufendorf, Becmann was one of the driving forces behind the reception of Hobbes in the early German enlightenment.441 Becmann thus derived his conception of political authority not from divine ordination, but from the precepts of natural law.

Masius’ reply to his critics is spread over several works, amongst which *Das True Lutherthumb*, first published in 1690, is the principal one.442 In *Das True Lutherthumb*, which was written as a polemical reply to Becmann, or ‘the masked Hubert Musano’, Masius sets out to repudiate those confessions and intellectual traditions that defended the right to resist.443 In *Das True Lutherthumb*, Masius criticises Becmann for confounding different literary genres or areas of thought such as politics, morality, history, geography, and finally theology, thus confusing his overall argument.444 The main concern, however, in Masius’ encounter with Becmann is his support of the right to resist. Thus, *Das True Lutherthumb*, like the *Interesse Principum Circa Religionem Evangelicam*, is a strong warning against Calvinism and the Calvinist theory of the peoples’ right to revolt, a theory which Masius describes as a violation of ‘the unquestionable Power of their Government’.445 As Masius asserts, Becmann had derived his most central convictions from the writings of reformed theologians such as Jean Calvin, who, as Masius asserts, advocated ‘Godless Principiæ’.446 In Masius’ view, the principal aim of Calvinism is to undermine the sovereignty and authority of the secular authorities.447 What in particular troubles Masius is that Calvinism grounds political power on the people. This interpretation of political power is not only contrary to the idea that secular rulers are ordained by God to take up the offices as his *stadholders*


443 Masius, *Das True Lutherthumb*: Vorrede: ‘dem vermummeten Huberto Musano’.

444 Masius, *Das True Lutherthumb*: 6.


446 Masius, *Das True Lutherthumb*: 79-80: ‘Gottlose Principiæ’.

447 Masius, *Das True Lutherthumb*: Vorrede.
in the earthly kingdom; it is also an assault against Masius' most basic ideas about the correlation between religion and politics. If governments are elected by the people, as opposed to being instituted by divine ordination, he asserts, 'then all Rebellions would have this excuse'.448

This position was dangerous. ‘Calvin’ had ‘a Republican Mind’, which politically pushed Calvinism in the direction of popular sovereignty.449 It is within ‘the Nature of the Calvinist Religion’, Masius writes, to embrace ‘Democratical Freedom’.450 In Masius’ account, this republican mind, along with the embrace of democratic freedom, undermines the stability of monarchical government.451 ‘Calvin is a sworn Enemy of Monarchy’, Masius asserts, ‘and [he] has given the Power to the popular Officials to push Kings from the Throne.’452

As Masius took it, the two models of political authority in play in the debate were utterly incompatible. Like Wandal, Masius’ theory of monarchism builds on an unbridgeable contrast between those theories that see the power of the magistrate coming directly from God and those that takes it to be indirect.453 Consequentially, where the people hold sovereign power, divine right has no place. ‘But where the populus grants the Majesty to the Secular Authority,’ Masius asserts, ‘there it does not come directly from God to the Secular Authority.’454 Returning to the theme of his Interesse Principum circa Religionem Evangelicam, Masius argues that Lutheranism is the most supportive of absolute monarchy. ‘That the Lutheran Religion according to Scripture favours absolute Dominio or Sovereign Monarchy more than other Religions, especially Papism and Calvinism’, Masius writes, ‘can be denied by no reasonable person.’455

Masius’ engagement with Becmann is thus structured along two lines of argumentation. On the one hand, he invokes a range of commonplace Lutheran doctrines about divine ordination, obedience, and non-resistance central to the tradition of Christian political thinking to which Masius belongs. On the other hand, Masius rests his argumentation on anti-Calvinist contentions, equally central to the Christian political thinkers. This aspect was emphasised further in 1690, when the theologian Hans Wandal (1656-1710), the son of Johann Wandal, published his Sandfærdig og kort Underretning om den Calvinske Lærdoms Urigtighed (True and Short Discourse on

448 Masius, Das True Lutherthumb: 16: ‘so hat alle Rebellion diese Entschuldigung’.
451 Masius, Das True Lutherthumb: 267.
453 Masius, Das True Lutherthumb: 131.
454 Masius, Das True Lutherthumb: 133: ‘Wo aber populus die Majestät der Obrigkeit beyleget, so kompt sie ja nicht immediat à DEO an die Obrigkeit’.
the Errors of the Calvinist Teachings), in which describes how the Protestants had originally joined hands against the Catholic Church and thus broken out of their Babylonian captivity. Subsequently, the Calvinists abandoned the path to true religion, insisting on a number of erroneous doctrines. Calvinism, as Wandal depicts it, has ever since been a threat to true belief and must therefore be resisted. ‘As it belongs to the Office of the Holy Spirit to punish disbelief,’ Wandal writes in the preface his work, ‘so it is also the Duty of all his faithful Servants not only to remain with the Doctrines of True Belief, but also both to beseech others to remain with the same Doctrines and to convince those who resist.’

The most prominent thinker to enter the debate on Masius’ *Int interesse Principum circa Religionem Evangelicam* was the German philosopher Christian Thomasius.\(^457\) As Thomas Ahnert has pointed out, Thomasius sought to take middle way in the Masius debate, arguing that *maiestas* could be derived neither directly from God nor from the people.\(^458\) Against the orthodox Lutheran position inhabited by Masius, Thomasius insisted on the separation of theology and natural law. At a crucial moment in the debate, Thomasius had attacked the protagonists of political theology in a somewhat harsh tone: ‘Although history is the pre-eminent part of the gallant sciences, philosophers advise against it from fear that it might completely destroy the kingdom of darkness – that is, scholastic philosophy – which previously has been wrongly held to be a necessary instrument of theology’.\(^459\)

The Masius controversy was symptomatic of broader tendencies that were reshaping European intellectual life and its political and religious arrangements. It was no coincidence that Masius’ critics were predominantly German, as their encounter with Masius to an important extent reflects the reality of the German states in the late seventeenth century. In contrast to the Danish-Norwegian monarchy, the German states were comprised of multiple religious confessions, which since the Thirty Years War had been subjected to different political solutions, which were still an ongoing debate by the end of the seventeenth century. Masius, insensitive as


he was to toleration and religious freedom, was grouped together with orthodox Lutherans in Germany who argued for religious conformity. Moreover, the rise of modern natural law at such German universities as Frankfurt an der Oder and Halle, in which both Becmann and Thomasius partook, had already challenged the scholastic and theological underpinnings of Masius’ orthodox Lutheran views.460 Though many of the German advocates of modern natural law were monarchists, the discourse of natural law still challenged the dominant language of monarchism in Denmark.

The revocation of the Edict of Nantes, which was implicitly defended by Masius in his *Interesse Principum circa Religionem Evangelicam*, placed the resistance towards toleration by dominant Danish theologians in a problematic light. Organised as a confessional state and based on an orthodox Lutheran creed, the limited toleration practised in the Danish absolute monarchy seemed rather unstable, as William Bromley observes in his travel account. Louis XIV’s revocation of the Edict of Nantes and the subsequent persecutions of the French Huguenots provoked a swarm of publications on the subject of toleration as well as on the relations between Church and state. In Denmark, orthodox Lutherans defended the right of the prince to dictate the religion of his subjects and were staunchly opposed to the practice of toleration as it emerged from the 1670s onwards. Writers such as Johann Wandal and Masius largely shared their aversion towards the Calvinists, and towards the idea of toleration more generally, with leading French theologians. Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704), the leading Catholic theorist of divine right monarchy, celebrated the revocation of the Edict of Nantes and the measures taken against what was generally seen as the inherently rebellious Protestant faith. In particular, Bossuet attacked the position of Pierre Jurieu (1637-1713), a leading Huguenot émigré, who strongly advocated the right to revolt.461 Jurieu, in many ways, was a fitting example of the republican mind which Masius ascribed to the Calvinist. In a German context, Samuel Pufendorf reacted strongly against the persecution of the French Huguenots. Christ had not used force but arguments to spread his


doctrines; thus, the prince should do the same. ‘Neither do we find, that he made use of any outward means to promote his doctrine’, Pufendorf writes, ‘He did not call to his aid the Power and Authority of Civil Magistrates, to force People to receive his Words […] It was not God Almighty’s pleasure to pull people head-long into Heaven, or make use of the new French way of Converting them by Dragoons’.462 However, Pufendorf also rejected the position of Jurieu, arguing that both his religious views and his politics were wrong.463

In a broader context, some of the fiercest attacks on Danish absolutism were penned by English writers. The restoration of the English monarchy in 1660 was a short-lived peace, as religious and political turmoil soon erupted again. After 1670, many writers worried that Charles II (1630-1685) was secretly leaning towards popery and absolutism. To English writers, these terms were trademarks of French or Catholic absolutism, as it had been shaped under Louis XIV.464 Later, many English writers expressed the same fears during the exclusion crisis of 1679-1681, which centred on the issue of the succession to the throne of James (1633-1701), the Catholic Duke of York.465 In relation to the Danish monarchy, Robert Molesworth’s (1656-1725) An Account of Denmark, as It was in the Year 1692, which appeared in London in 1694, is the most striking example of contemporary rejections of absolutism. Referring to the monarchical revolution of 1660, Molesworth states ‘that the Kings have ever since been, and at present are, Absolute and Arbitrary; not the least remnant of Liberty remaining to the Subject’466 Yet, while English writers were concerned with the refutation of popery and absolutism, the Christian political thinkers in Denmark, though critical of popery, were more concerned with refuting Calvinism, popular sovereignty, and the right to revolt.


The Emergence of an Early Enlightenment Culture

As we have seen in this chapter, the ideology of the young absolute monarchy rested on two separate theories of monarchism. Next to the Christian political thinkers, Peder Schumacher and other royalists at court and in the state administration pushed the absolute monarchy in the direction of legal monarchism and meritocracy. Though Schumacher, perhaps the most prominent advocate of this theory of monarchism, was eventually condemned for *crimen laesae maiestatis*, meritocracy featured prominently in *Danske Lov*. In the late seventeenth-century public debates, however, the theory of monarchism advocated by the Christian political thinkers became the dominant strand of thought, finding its most refined expression in Johann Wandal’s lectures in the 1660s and early 1670s at Copenhagen and in his coronation speech in 1671. Four aspects are at the heart of this theory of monarchism.

First, Wandal and the Christian political thinkers derive political power from divine ordination, thus granting the monarch absolute authority. Secondly, thinking in general terms about the earthly kingdom as divided between the three *ordos* – the *ordo politicus*, the *ordo ecclesiasticus*, and the *ordo economicus* – political power extends only to those aspects of life that belong to the *ordo politicus*. Thus, the household and the inner government of the Church are relatively free from monarchical power, though the borderlines are always relative to context. A monarch, as Wandal argues in his coronation speech, has the right to issue taxes, which extends his powers into the *ordo economicus*, but he can never issue extensive taxation unless, for instance, the kingdom is under attack. Thirdly, the Christian political thinkers were strong advocates of religious uniformity centred on an orthodox Lutheran creed and they strongly opposed the practice of toleration as it took shape from the 1670s onwards. Finally, the Christian political thinkers advocated a theory of moral criticism, which attached to the offices of the bishops and theologians the right to criticise the monarch in public whenever his actions were immoral or against true belief.

Yet, as we have seen, when Masius in the late 1680s published those same views, an intellectual storm gathered against the chief ideologist of Danish absolutism in the 1680s and 1690s. What had changed between the 1670s and 1680s was the emergence of an early enlightenment culture. This had not yet occurred in Denmark, not yet, but it was happening on a wider European scale. In contrast to the religious uniformity and anti-Calvinist doctrines championed by the Christian political thinkers in Denmark, Masius’ German critics placed at the heart of their religious thinking a concern for toleration and religious plurality; they derived their political thinking not from divine rights theory, but from modern natural law. In seventeenth-
century Danish political thought, these ideas were still resisted, and it was not until well into the eighteenth century that they would become common currency. The main force behind this intellectual shift was Ludvig Holberg, the most prominent writer in the early Northern enlightenment.

The context in which Holberg and other early enlightenment thinkers began to write was largely shaped around two clusters of ideas. First, the rise of modern natural law and the religious and political situation in almost all European kingdoms at the end of the seventeenth century raised a number of issues regarding the best form of government. Whilst the Christian political thinkers refuted popery and popular or republican government, the Danish monarchy was depicted as a tyrannical and arbitrary regime by foreign writers. Molesworth's *An Account of Denmark* is, perhaps, the best example of this; to monarchist writers of the early eighteenth century like Holberg, Molesworth's *Account of Denmark* was to become one of the principal ideological challenges. Although no Danish writer subscribed to Molesworth's criticism of the seventeenth-century model of Danish absolutism, the first generation of enlightenment thinkers, equally disenchanted with the theory of monarchism advocated by the Christian political thinkers, sought to provide a new theoretical foundation for absolutism. Secondly, the aftermath of the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, culminating with the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, had rendered religious uniformity severely problematic. Whilst the Christian political thinkers valued religious conformity and true belief higher than the toleration of heretics, starting with Holberg, religious toleration was to occupy a central place in religious and political thought of the Northern enlightenment.
Chapter 3

Liberty, Monarchy, and the Common Good:
Enlightenment Theories of Monarchism

A State is like a Building, comprised of several Pieces, and so comprehensive that one cannot move a single Piece without thereby making the whole Machine totter.

*Ludvig Holberg*

‘Freedom is detrimental’ writes Ludvig Holberg in *Danmarks og Norges Beskrivelse*, first published in 1729. Holberg’s contention that liberty is harmful to the state occupies the centre of his encounter with the republican ideas of Robert Molesworth, who argued that the monarchical revolution of 1660 had substituted a system of slavery for a system of ancient or Gothic liberty. Molesworth subscribes to what Quentin Skinner and others have termed ‘a third concept of liberty’, that is, a concept thoroughly embedded in republican or neo-Roman political theory. In the republican tradition of thought to which Molesworth belongs, absolute monarchy is commonly rejected on two separate, yet interconnected, counts. The first charge against absolute monarchy is that it constitutes an arbitrary form of power, which makes absolute government both tyrannical and despotic. Following immediately from this, the second charge against absolute monarchy is that, as a consequence of the arbitrary and tyrannical nature of its government, the subjects of an absolute monarchy necessarily find themselves in a state of servitude, as opposed to the government of a free republic or commonwealth. The republican background on which

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470 As Glenn Burgess points out, the association of absolutism with servitude in English intellectual history gained momentum in the political turmoil of the 1640s. Cf. Glenn Burgess, *Tyrants, Absolute Kings, Arbitrary Rulers and
Molesworth relies, reiterates a classical distinction from Roman law, juxtaposing free persons to the figure of the slave. Whilst a citizen is considered *sui iuris*, or free to act within the legal confines of the republic, the slave is living in a state of total dependence on the will of a master. The slave, therefore, is considered unfree, or *sub potestate*, since the arbitrary dominion of the master will pre-empt the slave from acting. The slave, in other words, upon finding him or herself in a state of servitude, will seek to self-censor their own actions. As a subject of an absolute monarchy, or so the republican line of argumentation goes, is equally dependent on the will of the monarch, the condition of the subject differs only a little from that of the slave. In contrast to a subject of a monopolistic state, who by definition is not the master of his own actions, a free citizen rests his freedom on active participation in the government of the commonwealth.

The most prominent writer in the late seventeenth century to advocate this view on absolute monarchy was John Locke. Though we should not think of Locke as a republican (Locke did after all approve of monarchy instituted by consent), his *Two Treatises of Government* nevertheless reiterates certain key elements of the republican ethos. As he argues in the second treatise, absolute monarchy, or ‘Absolute, Arbitrary Power’, as is his preferred terminology, is inconsistent not only with the aim of civil society, which consists of the preservation of the ‘Lives, Liberties and Estates’ of the citizens, but also with the ‘*Liberty of Man, in Society*’, that is, the establishment of a legal framework by the consent of the people as opposed to the arbitrary dominion of a single person. From this perspective, freedom and monarchy are incompatible.

When Holberg wrote that freedom is detrimental in 1729, what he intended to do was to refute this particular understanding of freedom, namely liberty understood as political liberty or active participation in government on the part of the citizens or the estates. Republicanism was considered a real threat in eighteenth-century Scandinavia. In Sweden between 1718 and 1720,
absolutism had been overturned and replaced by what was considered by contemporaries a free state. Though the key theorists of the so-called Age of Liberty did not rest their aristocratic republicanism on conceptual distinctions between freedom and monarchy, they did juxtapose absolute monarchical sovereignty to the liberty of the estates, thus invoking the right to political participation on the part of the estates. To Holberg and other eighteenth-century protagonists of monarchism, political liberty is equivalent to factionalism, self-interest, and insecurity, and is therefore seen as a hindrance to the general aim of civil and political associations, that is, the common security of the populace. Yet, Holberg’s political thought does not entail a rejection of the role of freedom as such. Disenchanted with Molesworth’s republican ethos and the role of political freedom, Holberg ascribes to other forms of freedom a prominent role in the intellectual fabric of a monarchical state. To Holberg, it is not only possible for a subject in a monarchical state to be free, monarchism is also preferable to any other constitutional arrangement. Thus, to eighteenth-century monarchists, freedom and monarchism are not conceptually discordant.

This chapter deals with Holberg’s theory of monarchism, and the multiple contexts in which his political thought was formed. Holberg is often seen as an important transitional figure, ‘using natural law’, as one scholar claims, ‘as the basis of his ideals of the rational citizen and enlightened despotism.’ Holberg, or so the prevailing interpretation goes, played a crucial role in detaching the language of politics from the religious strictures that informed the seventeenth-century understanding of monarchy. The historical account on offer in traditional historiography centres on Holberg’s embrace of a contractual and secular notion of monarchy as instituted for and by the people. The pivotal intellectual tenet here is natural law. According to the traditional understanding, what Holberg and other eighteenth-century writers were doing was to advocate a

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476 This view resonates even in nineteenth-century historiography, see Johannes Steenstrup, Borgerlig Frihed i England og i Danmark-Norge i forrige Århundrede: En sammenlignende Undersøgelse (Stockholm 1885): esp. 22-23.

477 Several modern studies have pushed the same agenda, thus inviting a dialogue between historiographies on republicanism and monarchism. See Skinner, Liberty Before Liberalism: 54-55; Quentin Skinner, ‘The Monarchical Republic Enthroned’, in John F. McDiarmid, ed., The Monarchical Republic of Early Modern England: Essays in Response to Patrick Collinson (Aldershot, Hampshire 2007). The most ambitious attempt to create such a dialogue can be found in Hans Blom, John Christian Laursen & Luisa Simonutti, ‘Introduction’, in Hans Blom, John Christian Laursen & Luisa Simonutti, eds., Monarchisms in the Age of Enlightenment: Liberty, Patriotism, and the Common Good (Toronto, Buffalo & London 2007). It is nevertheless highly regretful that this volume on monarchism remains somewhat antagonistic in its treatment of historiography on republicanism, meaning that the intended dialogue between those historiographical traditions is sidelined even before it has really begun. This chapter can be seen as an attempt at putting the dialogue back on track.


479 The classical account is Edvard Holm, Holbergs statsrelige og politiske Synsmaade (Copenhagen 1879).
theory of enlightened absolutism embedded in Pufendorfian natural law discourse, as opposed to the theory of divine right monarchy.\textsuperscript{480} Whilst the present study does not challenge the centrality of Holberg in this transformation of the language of politics, I shall find it necessary, however, to significantly widen the scope of historical analysis.

As I argue in this chapter, Holberg’s political thinking responded to two interconnected, yet distinct, problems. The first problem to which Holberg’s political thinking is a response is related to the connection between religion and politics. Holberg’s engagement with this problem was largely framed within the discourse of modern natural law. A formative encounter in the development of Holberg’s thought, his commitments to natural law made it possible for him to ground his theory of monarachism on a secular foundation, deriving it not from divine right, but from such concepts as original freedom, natural equality, and social contracts.\textsuperscript{481} Whilst the rise of modern natural law in the Protestant North provided Holberg with a way of thinking about monarchical power and civil associations which reshaped the relationship between religion and politics, his theory of monarchism reiterates key aspects of the intellectual foundations of Danish absolutism.

The second problem is related to the republican or constitutional discourses against monarchism. Yet, monarchism and republicanism are not incompatible. Elevated above all human laws, a monarch should at all times seek to conduct his government in such a way as to secure and advance the common good, and this aim was best fulfilled by allowing the subjects a limited range of freedoms. As I shall seek to show in this chapter, it is crucial to grasp how Holberg’s political thought was formed in the interplay between a civic humanist or republican tradition of thought, which centred on virtue, active participation in politics, and other matters pertaining to civil society, and a tradition drawn from the precepts of natural jurisprudence.\textsuperscript{482}


\textsuperscript{482} As Pocock, for instance, has argued in the case of the Scottish enlightenment, we not think about republicanism, natural law, and constitutionalism as incompatible, see John Pocock, ‘Cambridge paradigms and Scotch philosophers: a study of the relations between the civic humanist and the jurisprudential interpretation of eighteenth-century social
Thus, situating Holberg’s theory of monarchism in the context of seventeenth-century political and religious discourses as well as modern theories of natural law and republican political theory, the main aim of this chapter is to understand the intellectual changes that constituted the political thought of the early Northern enlightenment.

**Moral Theology, Eclecticism, and the History of Morality**

Natural law was an essentially contested field, which makes it difficult to speak about a single coherent tradition of natural law in early modern Europe. Its key practitioners were divided not only over the interpretation of central concepts such as *ius* or *socialitas*, but also over the role of its practitioners and its political implications. At the time when Holberg first published the *Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskab* in 1716, natural jurisprudence was split into rival camps. Coming out of Northern Germany, predominantly Leipzig and Halle, the main contesters were Samuel Pufendorf and Christian Thomasius, whose thinking on natural law was closely connected to empiricism, eclecticism, and voluntarism, and their main opponents, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Christian Wolff, whose natural law theories were steeped in rationalism and metaphysics.

An introduction to the principal elements of natural law, Pufendorf’s *De Officio* draws crucial distinctions between natural law, civil or positive law, and divine law. The contrasts between natural and divine law occupies the heart of Pufendorf’s thought. As he puts it:

> But by far the greatest difference is that the scope of the discipline of natural law is defined within the orbit of this life, and so it forms man on the assumption that he is to lead his life in society with others. Moral theology, however, forms a Christian man, who, beyond his duty to pass this life in goodness, has an expectation of reward for piety in the life to come and who therefore has his citizenship in the heavens while here he lives merely as a pilgrim or stranger.

Although not entirely demarcated, natural law and moral theology deal with different things. Whilst natural law relates itself to this life, to living in civil societies, moral theology deals with inner morality and the kingdom to come. Moral theology, in other words, deals with issues that transcend the mere faculty of human reason. Hence, Pufendorf argues, ‘natural law is not in conflict with the dogmas of true theology; it simply abstracts from certain theological dogmas.

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which cannot be investigated by reason alone’. Pufendorf’s rejection of moral theology is based on its confusion of the earthly kingdom and the heavenly kingdom to come. A key protagonist of what some scholars have seen as modern theories of natural law (others as post-scholastic or Protestant natural law). Pufendorf sought to secularise political authority by separating it from all theological and metaphysical claims to a transcendental truth. Pufendorf’s civil philosophy is founded on a staunch critique of metaphysical philosophy, as opposed to true theology; at the centre of his argumentation, Pufendorf contends that civil life and civil arrangements should be separated from sacralised religion, which claims a metaphysical basis of civil laws and authority. Natural law and civil philosophy are, in Pufendorf’s view, de-transcendentalised modes of thought. Indeed, sacred or higher morality is incompatible with civil philosophy. Pufendorf’s theory of natural law was a response to the uncertainties of the religious conflicts that culminated with the Thirty Years War. As Pufendorf sees it, the absolutist state, which he argued was founded on a double contract through which men leave the state of nature and join together in civil associations, is directed towards the establishment and preservation of peace and security. To this end, as Pufendorf asserts in De Officio, ‘the sovereign authority [summum imperium] is superior to human and civil laws as such, and thus not directly bound by them.’ Thus, to circumscribe the role of religion in political life and to offer all earthly powers to princely absolutism was, for Pufendorf, the only way of ensuring the public safety.

Thomasius, Pufendorf’s most prominent follower, took up a similar position in the Institutiones jurisprudentiae divinae (Institutes of Divine Jurisprudence), first published in 1688. The early Thomasius supported Pufendorf’s secular notion of absolutism, granting the prince, and only the prince, full authority in civil matters. Religion should not be housed in a visible church, putting on display its sacraments and rituals, but rather be kept an individual choice. Secular

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488 For a discussion see Hunter, Rival Enlightenments: 180-96.
absolutism and inner piety were central concepts in Thomasius’ thought. The life of man is miserable, Thomasius asserts, as he ‘confuses the natural and supernatural light, reason and divine revelation, thereby bringing disorder to all knowledge.’ Whilst man’s actions in civil societies are guided by natural light, he is taught revelation and salvation through supernatural light. The two forms of light should be kept separate without the one being subjected to the other. As he puts it, ‘Since it is certain that as divine gifts the supernatural and the natural lights will never be opposed to each other, so the controversies which have arisen among scholars – when they rack their brains over whether natural light should be preferred to the supernatural one – are completely in vain and unnecessary.’ One of the novel features of Thomasius’s Institutiones was that it placed divine positive law alongside natural law as sources for sociability and positive law. As Thomasius sees it, divine positive law (or biblical law) and natural law are both part of God’s divine law, but they have different sources. Natural law is known through reason, biblical law through scriptural revelation. As Thomasius writes in the Institutiones:

The divine laws, however, which regulate the duties of humans toward humans are common to theologians and jurists. They belong to the former insofar as they are, according to the institution of the legislator, subordinated to eternal salvation, or insofar as the gospel cannot be explained properly without the law. They are relevant to the latter insofar as God in them has immediate regard for the tranquillity and decorous order of this life.

Seeing both natural law and divine positive law as sources of positive laws, Thomasius subjects crucial issues such as witchcraft, heresy, marriage and sexual morality to the authority of the secular prince, to jurists and civil courts. This was a controversial position, as such issues were commonly considered theological matters. Thomasius’ views were subsequently met with fierce criticism from orthodox Lutherans in Saxony, and he was eventually forced to leave for Brandenburg, where he became involved in the founding of the university in Halle. In Halle, however, Thomasius published his second major treatise on natural law, the Fundamenta juris naturae et gentium (Foundations of the Law of Nature and Nations), which appeared in 1705 – just a few years prior to Holberg’s visit. In the Fundamenta, Thomasius dropped from his theory of

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493 Thomasius, Essays on Church, State, and Politics: 5.
496 Haakonssen and Seidler, ‘Natural Law’: 390.
natural law the notion of divine positive law, devoting his work to a theory of the passions.\textsuperscript{497} Both Pufendorf and Thomasius found moral theology deeply problematic, as it presupposed a direct continuity between man and God which enabled humans to partake in divine rationality. Instead, the starting point for Pufendorf and Thomasius was, in Knud Haakonssen’s words, ‘the complete discontinuity between God and man, a discontinuity which made it impossible to give a rational account of human rationality by reference to God and his eternal law. Only faith could bridge the gulf between humanity and its creator.’\textsuperscript{498} As practitioners of natural law, however, Pufendorf and Thomasius went about their work in different ways. Whilst Pufendorf was a theorist of sovereign power, working in the service of different territorial states, Thomasius was first and foremost an academic, working within the confines of universities and learned academies.\textsuperscript{499}

To critics of Pufendorf and Thomasius such as Leibniz and Wolff, moral theology was the solution, not the problem.\textsuperscript{500} Pufendorf’s understanding of natural law, Leibniz objects, is ‘a superficial smattering’, without any trace of ‘sound learning’.\textsuperscript{501} Leibniz advances three criticisms of Pufendorf’s principles. First, he asserts, to confine natural law to this life is ‘to set aside here the consideration of the future life, which is inseparably connected to divine providence, and to be content with an inferior degree of natural law, which can even be valid for atheists’.\textsuperscript{502} Secondly, the distinction between a science of natural law that deals only with external matters of human life and the subject of moral theology as ‘that which remains hidden in the soul’ is flawed, since law, duty, sins, and justice also relate to the inner being of man.\textsuperscript{503} Thirdly, Leibniz objects that Pufendorf is a covert Hobbesian, adhering to the problematic doctrine of voluntarism.\textsuperscript{504} Instead Leibniz advocates a close correlation between natural law and moral theology, reserving a prominent place for revelation.\textsuperscript{505}

Leibniz’s objections to Pufendorf’s position reflects more than a rivalry between voluntarism and rationalism, it also hinges on different perceptions of the practitioners of natural law and the place of the discipline in civil society. To Leibniz and Wolff, who advocated a neo-scholastic idea of natural law as an earthly reflection of divine eternal law, the practitioners of the disciplines of

\textsuperscript{497} Haakonssen and Seidler, ‘Natural Law’: 390-91.  
\textsuperscript{498} Haakonssen, \textit{Natural Law and Moral Philosophy}: 25.  
\textsuperscript{499} Haakonssen and Seidler, ‘Natural Law’: 390.  
\textsuperscript{500} On this tradition in relation to Pufendorf and Thomasius see Tim Hochstrasser, \textit{Natural Law Theories in the Early Enlightenment} (Cambridge 2000); Hunter, \textit{Rival Enlightenments}.  
\textsuperscript{502} Leibniz, \textit{The Political Writings of Leibniz}: 67  
\textsuperscript{503} Leibniz, \textit{The Political Writings of Leibniz}: 68.  
\textsuperscript{504} Haakonssen, \textit{Natural Law and Moral Philosophy}: 46-49.  
\textsuperscript{505} Hochstrasser, \textit{Natural Law Theories in the Early Enlightenment}: 72.
natural law gain a privileged insight into the God’s divine plan. This privileged insight, in turn, supports the claim that theology wields both civil and intellectual authority. Thus, what was at stake, in other words, when Holberg composed his treatise on natural law was not only a fierce rivalry between two philosophical cultures: the civil philosophy of Pufendorf and Thomasius and the neo-scholasticism of Leibniz and Wolff, but a rivalry between two mutually exclusive visions of theology, law and secular authority, which cultivated contrasting personae with a corresponding set of claims to moral power and authority.

In the preface to the Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskab, which Holberg wrote between 1714 and 1716 – only after reading Barbeyrac, as Kåre Foss has argued, and after the manuscript had long been ready for publication – Holberg positions himself as a modern natural law theorist following two key assumptions of the Pufendorfian school. Often neglected in modern scholarship, however, the preface to his work is crucial to our understanding of his thinking about natural law, as it contains important clues as to how Holberg intended his work to be read and how he envisioned natural law within the broader matrix of civil society. The first key assumption that Holberg appropriates is related to eclecticism and the history of morality. In the preface to his treatise, Holberg makes a brief sketch of the history of moral philosophy from antiquity to the present, in which he intends to show, as he writes, ‘what Fate this Study has had.’ Moving from the philosophers in Greek and Roman antiquity to the early fathers of the Church, the ‘Scholastic Moralists’ of the ‘Age of Barbarism’, and Philipp Melanchthon, who is praised as ‘the first amongst the Protestants to have treated this Subject Matter’, Holberg’s emphasis is, nevertheless, on the seventeenth century. The key figures in Holberg’s history of moral philosophy are Grotius, Pufendorf, Hobbes and Thomasius. ‘Grotius’, writes Holberg, ‘is seen as the first to have given us a proper System of Natural Law.’

This emphasis on Grotius as a foundational figure in the history of morality was no coincidence. When the first German translation of Grotius’ De jure belli ac pacis (The Right of War and Peace) appeared in 1707, Thomasius authored a foreword in which he outlined the history of

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506 Haakonssen and Seidler, ‘Natural Law’: 387.
507 Haakonssen and Seidler, ‘Natural Law’: 388.
508 On Holberg’s reading of Barbeyrac and the dater of the preface, see Kåre Foss, Ludvig Holbergs naturrett på idehistorisk bakgrunn (Oslo 1934): 477-83.
moral philosophy and natural law from antiquity down to Grotius. 513 'In a word,' Thomasius writes, 'Grotius was the tool which God's wisdom used to lift the natural light's long-standing confusion with the supernatural light and to provide it with a new beginning.' 514 Grotius plays a similar role in Jean Barbeyrac's An Historical and Critical Account of the Science of Morality, written as an introduction to Pufendorf's De Jure Naturae et Gentium. 515 'The Ethicks of the Schoolmen,' writes Barbeyrac, 'is a Piece of Patchwork; a confus'd Collection, without any Order, or fix'd Principles; a Medley of diverse Thoughts and Sentences out of Aristotle, Civil and Canon Law, Scripture, and the Fathers.' 516 Barbeyrac's judgement of Aristotle, one of the cornerstones of scholastic philosophy, is harsh. Although Aristotle 'was the first of the ancient Philosophers, who gave us a Methodical System of Morality', his system is smeared by the lack of 'just Ideas of the natural Equality of Mankind.' 517 Aristotle thus violates one of 'the most evident Principles of the Law of Nature.' 518 The turning point in Barbeyrac's account takes place in the seventeenth century, or, as he puts it, 'that Age, wherein the Science of Morality was, if I may so say, rais'd again from the Dead.' 519 'Grotius', Barbeyrac asserts, 'ought to be regarded, as the first who broke the Ice'. 520

Referring in this way to Grotius as a foundational figure, Holberg was reiterating a commonplace in what was becoming the predominant way of thinking about the history of natural law and moral philosophy in the early enlightenment. 521 This way of thinking about natural law played a crucial role in the formation of natural law as an academic discipline with its own practical language, literary genre, and history. 522 Yet, whilst Grotius had been the first amongst the moderns to author a full system of natural law, Pufendorf's system was considered 'the most perfect and the best'. 523 '[F]or', as Holberg continues (in a phrase that only appears in the first edition of his work from 1716), 'what has been written on this Subject Matter after him, is of no

514 Thomasius, Essays on Church, State, and Politics: 45.
517 Barbeyrac, An Historical and Critical Account of the Science of Morality: 60, 66
522 Haakonssen, ‘Naturrettene, Pufendorf og Holberg’: 34-35.
523 Holberg, Verker i tolv Bind: I.58: det fuldkomneste og beste'.
particular Importance, with the exception of Thomasius, whose Works, due to the Astuteness of the Author, are highly praised by many.\textsuperscript{524} Compared to Pufendorf, both Grotius and Thomasius were to play only marginal roles in Holberg’s treatise on natural law, which was drew almost exclusively on Pufendorf, bordering even on plagiarism.\textsuperscript{525} What distinguished Pufendorf from other writers was that his work was well grounded in the Protestant tradition; it draws on ‘Christian Principles’, as Holberg contends, and has ‘solid and good Foundations’.\textsuperscript{526} To Holberg, in other words, Pufendorf is the major heir to Grotius.\textsuperscript{527}

The history of moral philosophy and natural law on offer in Holberg’s preface is closely tied to eclecticism as a philosophical attitude, which became a trademark of the Pufendorfian tradition of natural jurisprudence in the early enlightenment. Indeed, the tradition itself, as its practitioners were keen to stress, was constituted through eclectic philosophising, free from sectarian doctrines and preconceived intellectual authorities. As a philosophical attitude, eclecticism emerged as an answer not only to dogmatic scholastic philosophy, but also to Pyrrhonism or scepticism.\textsuperscript{528} As Barbeyrac argues, ‘this universal Scepticism, utterly destroys, and overturns the very Foundation of all Religion, and Morality.’\textsuperscript{529} Whilst the advocates of this tradition of natural jurisprudence believe that moral practices spring from particular historical circumstances, they also argue that certain moral precepts remain unaffected by historical change and circumstance. Such unchangeable natural laws are what provide mankind with a set of universal moral principles, albeit only a minimalist conception thereof. Thus, on this account, eclecticism leads not to ethical scepticism, but to moral pluralism. As Grotius asserts, there are many ways of living, but some are considered better than others.\textsuperscript{530} Yet, as Martin Mulsow has shown, eclecticism did not rid itself so easily from scepticism; some practitioners such as Jakob Friedrich Reimmann (1668-1743), a German historian and philosopher, went so far as to question whether eclectic philosophy had not itself become a sectarian position, thereby making Pyrrhonism a better antidote to dogmatic


\textsuperscript{525} Haakonsen, ‘Naturretten, Pufendorf og Holberg’: 31.

\textsuperscript{526} Holberg, \textit{Værker i tolv Bind}: I.58: ‘Christne Principii’, ‘solide og gode Fundamenter’.

\textsuperscript{527} On Pufendorf as the heir to Grotius see Richard Tuck, \textit{Natural rights theories: Their origin and development} (Cambridge 1979): 174-77.

\textsuperscript{528} Cf. Hochstrasser, \textit{Natural Law Theories in the Early Enlightenment}: 125.

\textsuperscript{529} Barbeyrac, \textit{An Historical and Critical Account of the Science of Morality}: 67.

philosophy. Still others, such as Johann Franz Buddeus (1667-1729), a philosopher and a colleague and follower of Thomasius, sought to combat scepticism by combining eclecticism with an historical and holistic notion of the history of philosophy.

Set against this background, Holberg never engaged with the full breath of eclecticism as it featured in the early German enlightenment. The principles of eclectic philosophy to which Holberg generally subscribed both presupposed and called for the ability of free reasoning on the part of the philosopher and careful selection of one’s sources. The principles of moral philosophy can be deduced from no single authority, be it the reputation of a teacher or the word of God, but have to be established from a thorough examination of a variety of writings – biblical, historical, classical and modern. Eclecticism thus differs from scholasticism, described by Barbeyrac as a disordered patchwork. In opposition to the scholastic thinker, the eclectic philosopher examines no preconceived authorities (i.e. Aristotle and the Scriptures). Rather the eclectic philosopher seeks those moral principles that are considered the most solid, wherever they may be found. Thus, as Holberg argues, even though Thomas Hobbes’ principles are considered by most to be ‘impious and ill-conceived’, and even though his Leviathan ‘seemingly aims to overthrow both Religion and Government’, several praiseworthy ideas and notions are found in Hobbes’ system of natural law.

However, this kind of eclectic history of morality was also capable of ironing out major differences between the figures that made it into the philosophical canon. Indeed, the tradition of modern natural law which Holberg invokes is not as coherent as we are made to believe in his short exposition, but encompasses a number of tensions amongst which the tension between a natural rights interpretation and a natural law interpretation is amongst the principal ones. Such figures as Grotius and Pufendorf entertained widely different interpretations of the concept of ius, meaning law or right, depending on the perspective. If Grotius can be seen as an advocate of individual and corporate rights, a tradition in which such figures as Hobbes and John Locke are often placed, Pufendorf’s emphasis was on law and duty. In the Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskab, Holberg, again, follows Pufendorf’s conception, thinking about natural law as a language not of subjective rights, but law, duties and obligations. Thus we should not think of

532 Mulsow, ‘Eclecticism or Scepticism’: 474.
534 Haakonsen, Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: 1, 6-7.
535 Haakonsen and Seidler, ‘Natural Law’: 384-85. For a contrasting view on Grotius as a republican civil philosopher whose emphasis was on freedom, law, moral duties and virtues see Martin van Gelderen, “Justitiam non includo”: Carl Schmitt, Hugo Grotius and the Ius Publicum Europaeum’, History of European Ideas 37 (2011).
Holberg as a rights theorist, and surely not as a proto-democratic advocate of human rights, as it has been suggested by some, in what can only be seen as an anachronistic fashion.536

Offering a history of morality, Holberg seeks to cultivate himself as an eclectic philosopher, an exponent of an anti-scholastic interpretation of natural law. Although Holberg would only use the term eclectic to describe his own position in his later works on moral philosophy, eclecticism as a philosophical attitude is present already in the preface to the Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskab.537 Thus, Holberg’s ‘System [Systema] of the Law of Nature and Nations’ rests firmly on eclectic foundations – although his close reliance on Pufendorf in his treatise at times seems to undermine his eclectic starting point.538 Holberg’s eclecticism and his intention to author a Systema, a term he also used to describe the works of Grotius and Pufendorf, might seem contradictory to a modern reader. Yet, as Leo Catana has shown in his analysis of the German theologian and historian of philosophy Jacob Brucker (1696-1770), concepts such as Systema and eclecticism were inseparable in the early enlightenment understanding of the historiography of philosophy.539 Although Holberg’s use of these terms does not correspond entirely to Brucker’s, Holberg’s commitment to eclecticism in the 1710s, had important implications for the way in which Holberg envisioned the persona of the moral philosopher.

The second key assumption which Holberg appropriates is related to the distinction between natural law and moral theology. Like Pufendorf, Holberg seeks to separate natural law, which he understands as form of moral philosophy, from theology. To understand the implications of this division for Holberg’s political thought, we need to consider the divisions of the sciences which he outlined in the preface to the Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskab. Alongside medicine, mathematics, and history, Holberg considers ‘Philosophia moralis’ – or ‘the Moral Philosophy’, as he writes, ‘whereby the Mind is cultivated and a Human Being, so to speak, is formed’ – a part of the useful studies, that is, those sciences which ‘must be practised at the Academies.’540 As Holberg sees it, each of the useful sciences embody a specific quality or utility. Whilst philosophia moralis cultivates the human mind and serves the creation and the preservation of a well-ordered society, ‘Medicine’ serves the health of ‘the Body’, and the mathematical sciences,

Holberg’s classification of history as part of the useful sciences is something of a novelty considered against the background of the natural law tradition in which he placed himself. Whilst Pufendorf, in book II, chapter IV of \textit{De Jure Naturae et Gentium}, lists history amongst the ‘Elegant and Curious’ forms of learning,\footnote{Samuel Pufendorf, \textit{Of The Law of Nature and Nations: Eight Books}, Basil Kennett, ed., (London 1729): 173.} Holberg considers history equally important to theology, moral philosophy, mathematics, and medicine—a position that he continuously advocated throughout his entire published \textit{oeuvre}.\footnote{See esp. Ludvig Holberg, \textit{Moralske Tanker} (Copenhagen 1744): 413-424. See further Ebbe Spang-Hansen, \textit{Erasmus Montanus og Naturvidenskaben} (Copenhagen 1965): 58-61.} Holberg’s notion of history belonged to the humanist tradition of \textit{historia magistra vitae}, which had become a commonplace by the eighteenth century.\footnote{See for instance Reinhart Koselleck, \textit{Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time} (New York 2004): 26-42.} Yet, as Sebastian Olden-Jørgensen has argued, Holberg’s appeal to the notion of \textit{historia magistra vitae} does not amount to more than a cliché.\footnote{Sebastian Olden Jørgensen, \textit{Ludvig Holberg som pragmatisk historiker} (Copenhagen 2015): 17.} However, this interpretation is misleading. Not only does it fail to account for the centrality of history in Holberg’s thought in the 1710s, it also fails to establish the relations between history and natural law, thus clouding our understanding of what Holberg was doing in appealing to this particular notion of history in his treatise on natural law.

To fully appreciate what Holberg was doing, we need to take a closer look at the \textit{personae} which he cultivated in his early works. In the 1710s, as we have seen in chapter 1, Holberg sought to fashion himself as a learned man of letters, claiming his mastery of the useful sciences, most prominently history and natural law. The principal task of the historian, as Holberg goes on to explain it in book I, chapter 4 of the \textit{Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskab}, is to serve as an advisor to the prince:

\begin{quote}
[W]hen Histories are well written, and read with the right Intention, they bring with them an indescribable Utility. The Examples of others inspire Virtue; from the Mistakes of others one learns how to take care of oneself; seeing oneself Portrayed in others teaches one to know oneself; [and], in particular, one learns about the Nature and Quality of all Nations, which is why Historical Studies in particular are recommended to Kings and Princes.\footnote{Holberg, \textit{Værker i tolv Bind}: I.83: ’naar Historier ere vel skrevne, og blive læst med rette Æyne, føre de en ubeskrivelig Nytte med sig. Man opmundres af andres Exempler til Dyd; man lærer af andres Feyl at tage sig selv vare; man lærer at kiende sig selv ved at see sit eget Portræt i andre; man lærer ogsaa i sæt at kiende enhver Nations Art og Egenskab, hvorudover det Historiske Studium i sær recommenderes Konger og Førster’.}
\end{quote}
Holberg contrasts this understanding of history to what he refers to as the ‘useless’ sciences, comprising ‘many of the old Philosophical Dogmata, which in the Barbaric Ages had occupied all the Schools, and are still practised with great Enthusiasm by many, whereby they confuse the Mind, and prevent it from reaching any thorough Learning.’

Whilst the historian informs the prince and cultivates his virtues, philosophical dogmata, characteristic of the medieval scholastic tradition or what he calls the barbaric ages, confuses the mind. The persona of the historian is the enlightened advisor to the prince. Holberg’s rejection of the scholasticism can reasonably be conceived along the lines of Pufendorf’s rejection of moral theology. The persona of the historian, as Holberg sees it, shares a family resemblance with the practitioner of natural law, that is, the eclectic moral philosopher.

Moral philosophy, he asserts, ‘teaches us not only what is Right and Wrong, what is Appropriate and Inappropriate, it also gives its natural Causes, so that nothing serves better the Creation and Preservation of human Societies.’ The distinction between philosophia moralis and what Pufendorf calls moral theology is crucial to Holberg’s understanding of moral philosophy. Natural law, as Holberg sees it, relates not to questions concerning good and evil, which is the task of the theologian proper. The subject of natural law consists rather in deciphering right from wrong, appropriate from inappropriate, in order to educate man for civil life. Holberg did not, however, intend to undermine the importance of theology, but rather to separate it from the discipline of natural law, as two distinct modes of thought. Yet, much to Holberg’s regret not all his contemporaries acknowledged this division of labour. As he writes in the preface to the Introduction til Naturens of Folke-Rettens Kundskab, ‘it is regrettable that most, who have taken it upon themselves to teach this Matter have gone the wrong Way: some have build their Systems on false, impious and Atheist Principles; others, such as the Scholastics, have corrupted them with Questions too peculiar and useless, whereby the Mind is more confused than cultivated.’

This passage can be read as a commentary upon the prevailing intellectual and political culture in Denmark in the early eighteenth century.


550 Holberg, Værker i tolv Bind: I.52: ‘det er at beklage, at de fleeste, som have taget dem paa at undervise udi den Materie ikke have gaaed den rette Vey: thi nogle have bygget deres Systemata paa falske, ugdelige og Atheistiske Principii; andre, som de Scholastici, fordervet dem ved alt for curieuse og unyttinge Spørgsmaal, livorved Sindet meere forvirres end ophygges’.

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In 1716, when Holberg published the *Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskab*, scholasticism was the dominant current in Danish intellectual life; in public affairs of the state, moral theology, as it was derived from the seventeenth-century tradition of Christian political thought, was the dominant strand of thought. In contrast to this tradition, Holberg advocated that politics should not be subject to theological arguments, but rather be based on a broad understanding of history and natural law. The prince should learn about politics, law and morality not from theologians with an opinion about politics, but from the useful sciences, most prominently from history and moral philosophy.

It is symptomatic of Holberg’s discussion of the useful sciences in the first two editions of his treatise on natural law, the second of which appeared in 1728, that it offers no reflection on the place of theology within these divisions of the sciences, considered by most his contemporaries the mother of all the sciences. Yet, in 1734, when the third edition of his treatise appeared, Holberg added theology to the list of useful sciences, without otherwise altering his argument.551 Although the addition consists only of the simple phrase ‘next to Theology,’ immediately followed by his more detailed analysis of moral philosophy, medicine, mathematics, and history, the addition reflects how Holberg in the third edition changes if not his *persona* and his argument, then the way in which he presents his arguments and a corresponding *persona* according to shifting circumstances.552 What had changed between 1728 and 1734 was the disruption of the prevailing religious or orthodox Lutheran culture in Denmark, which followed the rise of Pietism and the accession to the throne of Christian VI. In this context, where accusations of impiety and heresy easily circulated, Holberg could not afford to leave out theology from those sciences that mattered the most. However, his main argument, i.e. that theology and natural law must be separated, remained the same. Indeed, throughout his lifetime, Holberg would advocate this position. ‘Moral philosophy is one subject and theology another’, he writes in the *Epistler*, ‘If we undertake to write of the former it is necessary to base our doctrines on the teachings of nature; otherwise the subject matter would not correspond to the title. If we write the latter, Christian ethics alone are the basis.’553 Initiated in his treatise on natural law, one of Holberg’s principal tasks as a moral philosopher remained that of removing the influence of theological arguments on politics.

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Sociability and Sovereignty

Holberg’s view on the politics marks a sharp contrast to the prevailing political culture in Denmark-Norway in the early eighteenth century, which had been shaped by such Christian political thinkers as Jesper Rasmussen Brochmand, Johann Wandal, Hector Gottfried Masius, and their followers. In the context in which Holberg authored his treatise on natural law, the prevailing theory of monarchy was still largely drawn from the seventeenth-century notion of divine rights, depicting the monarch as ‘a loyal Servant of God’.554 It is against this current that Holberg writes. Yet, although Holberg’s attempt in the *Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskab* was to separate natural law from theology, thereby preventing the influence of moral theology on the politics of the absolute monarchy, he did share with Christian political thinkers the contention that a ruler must attend to the Christian religion, as it induces subjects to live as good Christians – an assertion which he drew from Masius’ *Interesse Principium circa Religionem Evangelicam*.555 This contention, however, is not the same as allowing the politics of the state to be guided by theological arguments.

When Holberg published his treatise on natural law in 1716, he envisioned his work not only as an answer to the philosophical problems that flowed from the divisions of the sciences, eclecticism, and the history of morality, but also as a comment on a far more political or ideological controversy. What had driven Holberg to author a treatise on natural law was his intention to come up with an answer to a particular problem concerning the political theory of Danish absolutism: the nature and origin of monarchical sovereignty. In 1709, Frederik Rostgaard (1671-1746), a public official, published the *Lex Regia*, making it known to the reading public that the power of the absolute monarch rested equally on theocratic and popular notions of monarchical power. Authorised by Frederik IV, Rostgaard authored a new preface in which he explained the origins of the ‘Unconditional Sovereignty and Absolute Rule’.556 The heroic attempts of both the monarch and subjects to save the kingdom in 1660, Rostgaard writes, had led

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God to institute ‘a change in the Form of Government’ that promoted the ‘Highness and Splendour of the Royal Family as well as the welfare and benefit of all Inhabitants’ of the kingdom.\(^{557}\) Thus moved by God, ‘all the Estates, without pressure or coercion, willingly offered to hand over […] the complete Right of Heredity to the Kingdoms of Denmark and Norway’ to the monarch.\(^{558}\)

A pupil of Hector Gottfried Masius and a former member of Masius’ academic household, Rostgaard drew heavily on a seventeenth-century discursive legacy. Hence, the role of God as the origin of absolute sovereignty plays a central role; it is only by being moved by God that the people grant sovereign power to the monarch. This was nothing new in light of the political discourse advocated by the Christian political thinkers. What was considerably novel, however, was that the legitimacy of absolute monarchy now publicly appeared to be tailored not only to divine right theory, which had dominated the political ideology of the seventeenth century, but also a notion (albeit a vague one) of popular sovereignty. It was mainly with this second aspect that Holberg was concerned.

In the *Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskab*, which is the best source to Holberg’s interpretation of monarchical sovereignty in the 1710s, he presents a rival theory of monarchism, thus intending to derail the influence of the Christian political thinkers in regards to the question of the origin of sovereign power. In book I, chapter 1, Holberg describes man as a creature of reason and will. His emphasis is on the latter. ‘In General’, he writes, ‘the Will desires that which is good, and it is Generally Disgusted by that which is evil, but Experience teaches us, nonetheless, that the Will from time to time desires that which is destructive, caused by the fact that Reason gets lost trying to know Evil from Good, for sometimes a good Thing appears Evil, and the worst Thing can seem the best.’\(^{559}\) On this foundation, he builds his theory of monarchical sovereignty. In the state of nature, humans live in a state of natural liberty, equal to all, and are therefore under constant threat of losing both their life and property. Yet, it is not a Hobbesian state of nature, famously described in the *Leviathan* as a war ‘of every man, against every man’, that Holberg has in mind.\(^{560}\) As he writes in a central passage, reiterating Pufendorf’s rejection of

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\(^{559}\) Holberg, *Værker i tolv Bind*: I.65: ‘Villien begiærer udi Almindelighed det, som er godt, og haver udi Almindelighed Afskye for det, som er ondt, ikke desmindre lærer Erfarenhed os, at Villien begiærer det undertiden, som er skadeligt, hvilket kommer deraf, af Formuften farer vild udi at kiende det Onde fra det Gode, thi undertiden har en god Ting et Ondskabs Skin, og den verste Ting kan synes best’.

Hobbes’s argument that in the state of nature there can be no injury, as there are no contractual relations established:

Hobbes calls the natural State Statum Lupinum or the State of Wolves, where no one can be said to do injustice to another, as he breaks no Law, that is not given, nor any Contract, that is not bound; A pernicious Opinion! that sets aside all Morality, and the great Law of Nature; namely, that you ought not to do unto others that which you do not whish done upon yourself.\(^{561}\)

In the state of nature, humans are moved by a certain kind of morality that binds them together in a common obligation toward one another. This is not in conflict with his stress on human will. Although he places more emphasis on human will than on reason, this focus does not lead him to embrace an individualist theory of voluntarism like the one put forth by Hobbes in *Leviathan*. The lesson to be drawn from the state of nature, Holberg insists, does not relate to the individual, but rather to the collective. All humans need social relations. ‘The Foundation of natural Law’, Holberg argues, ‘is that every Man, as best he can, must maintain Relations and Associations’.\(^{562}\) Human will and desire is thus inscribed into a theory of collective action, of sociability. In book II, chapter 4 of the *Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskab*, Holberg turns to the question of what drives human beings to form ‘Societies’, and, in particular, ‘Cities, which are held to be the most perfected Societies’.\(^{563}\) In order to answer this question, he argues, we must ‘consider the Nature of Civil Societies along with Human Propensity’.\(^{564}\) Arguing against the Aristotelian idea that ‘that Man by Nature is driven to [enter into] Civil Society’,\(^{565}\) Holberg claims that civil society, in fact, brings about a significant amount of discomfort:

\[*F*]or they do by Nature desire Freedom, to such degree that they refuse to be subjected to anyone, but do everything as they Please, considering only their own Advantage. By contrast, a Citizen loses his natural Freedom, [when he] subjects himself to a Sovereign, who possesses the Right of life and death [Jus vitae et necis], and on whose Command he must do many things, which he would otherwise Despise, and refrain from doing much that he otherwise desired; moreover, in Cities most Actions must benefit the common Good, which does not always correspond to the particular Interest of everyone.\(^{566}\)

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\(^{561}\) Holberg, *Værker i tolv Bind*: I.77-78: ‘Hobbesius kalder den naturlige Stand Statum Lupinum eller Ulve-Stand, hvorudi ingen kand siges at giøre den anden uret, efterdi han synder hverken imod Lov, som ikke er given, ey heller imod Contract, som ikke er slutted; En fordervelig Mening! som kuldskaster all Moralitet, og det store Naturens Bud; nemlig: At du maa ikke giøre imod en anden det, som du ikke vil skal vederfares dig selv’.

\(^{562}\) Holberg, *Værker i tolv Bind*: I.80: ‘Grundvolden af den naturlige Lov er, at et hvert Menneske saa vidt det staaer til ham, maa holde ved lige Samqvem og Foreening’.


The propensity of individual, their desires and particular interests, are thus balanced by a specific notion of the common good, a notion that prescribes the will of the individual into a social setting. The force behind this movement was, Holberg argues, was not the natural inclination of humans to enter into societies together, but that of 'Fear'.\footnote{Holberg, \textit{Værker i tolv Bind}: I.284: 'Frygt'.} In a crucial passage, he argues:

\begin{quote}
The right Reason, why Societies and States are formed, is that kind of Fear, which one Person has of another's Cruelty, and therefore did the first Humans subject themselves to Laws and Authorities, that could protect the Weak against the Strong, and punish Cruelty, which was Common in the past, for, where no Laws or Rights existed, as the Saying goes, one Man would absorb the other.\footnote{Holberg, \textit{Værker i tolv Bind}: I.284: 'Den rette Aarsag derfor, hvorfore Societæter og Stæder ere indstiftede, er Frygt, som det ene Menneske haver for det andets Ondskab, og derfor have de første Mennesker givet sig under Love og Øvrighed, der kunde beskytte de Svage imod de Sterke, og strafe Ondskab, som tilforn gik saa meget udi Svang, thi, dersom ikke Lov og Ret var, skulde, saasom Ordsproget lyder, det eene Menneske opsluge det andet'.}
\end{quote}

The only way to secure oneself against the cruelty of others, Holberg thus asserts, 'is to subject oneself to Government and Authority.'\footnote{Holberg, \textit{Værker i tolv Bind}: I.285: 'er at begive sig under Regiering og Øvrighed'.} Holberg supports his case with reference to the election of popes in the Roman Catholic Church and to Sextus Empiricus’ (ca. 160-210) description of the Persians. He dwells on the point that, in these cases, a significant amount of time separates the end of one ‘Government’ and the election of a new one, so that the people might experience what ‘unhappy Condition’ would endure without the protection of government, and thus be encouraged to show the ‘subsequent Kings a greater Love and Obedience’.\footnote{Holberg, \textit{Værker i tolv Bind}: I.285: 'Regiering', 'ulyksalig Tilstand', 'efterfølgende Konger des større Kiærlighed og Lydhighed'.} What moves man to enter into societies is his passions and desires, his fear of the cruelty of others. The passions, in other words, play a central role in Holberg’s natural law theory. Yet although Holberg thus offers an anti-rationalist interpretation of the creation of civil societies, his treatment of the passions should be seen rather as a mirror of Pufendorf, than an anticipation of a later turn towards the passions represented by such figures as and Johann Jacob Schmauss (1690-1757) and Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi (1717-1771).\footnote{On passions and natural law see Ere Nokkala, ‘Passion as the foundation of natural law in the German Enlightenment: Johann Jacob Schmauss and J. G. H. von Justi’, \textit{European Review of History – Revue européenne d’histoire} 17:1 (2010).}

In light of the context in which Holberg wrote the \textit{Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskab}, his view on the origin of civil associations can be read as a rejection of the interpretation of political authority, offered by the Christian political thinkers. Yet Holberg’s attempt to provide a natural law foundation for absolutism is also opposed to another group of writers, whose interpretations of absolutism was tied to the \textit{Lex Regia} itself. The most prominent advocate of this position was Holberg’s rival, Andreas Hojer. Born in the Duchy of Schleswig, Hojer went to Halle...
to study theology with the renowned Pietist theologian August Hermann Francke (1663-1727), after having received a traditional, though rather modest, religious upbringing. He was born into a family of Pietist clergymen and would, throughout his career, remain strongly affiliated with the Pietist movement. In Halle, however, Hojer lost interest in theology and turned instead to medicine, which was taught by the equally renowned professor Georg Ernst Stahl (1659-1743). During his three years in Halle, he also became interested in natural law and politics, which lead him to seek the intellectual guidance of Thomasius.572 After a long and admirable career as a practitioner of medicine, historian, and administrator, he was appointed professor of jurisprudence at Copenhagen in 1732.

In his *Jus Publicum, det er Stats-Ret eller Statsforfatning og Rettigheder for Danmark, Norge og Fyrstendommene* (Jus Publicum, that is Public Law or the Constitution and Rights of Denmark, Norway, and the Duchies), a collection of lectures originally delivered in 1737 or 1738, Hojer offers an exposition of the *Lex Regia*.573 In the opening paragraph, Hojer sketches three definitions of the work’s key notion. The concept of *jus publicum*, Hojer asserts, refers, first, to a ‘*public Law*’, which cannot be changed by anyone.574 Secondly, *jus publicum* denotes the common laws of a country, and thirdly, ‘such a *Law*, which concerns the Constitution of a Republic or a Government, as well as the Bond that exists between its Head and the Members [*of the body politic*], or, that is, the Constitution of the State and the Rights [*of the citizens*].’575 In developing the third notion, which he believed to be the most common usage of the term, Hojer turns to history, giving as his examples the Reformation in Denmark and the events of the monarchical revolution in 1660 that led to the *Lex Regia*, ‘an un-breakable *Fundamental Law*.’576 ‘*The King has the highest and un-limited Power,*’ he asserts, quoting from the *Lex Regia*, ‘*as he is the supreme Head on Earth above all Human Laws, and acknowledges no other Judge than GOd alone in either Ecclesiastical or Civil Matters, and is not obliged to Account of his Actions before his Subjects.*’577 Hojer’s exposition of the foundations of Danish absolutism follows closely the view from the 1660s and the *Lex Regia*’s justification of absolute monarchical sovereignty. Hojer emphasises the ‘benevolent and willing Transfer’ of power made by ‘the whole People’, who thereby consented to ‘this Form of

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577 Hojer, *Jus Publicum*: 2: ’*Kongen har den høyeste og u-indskrænkede Magt, da han er det øverste Hoved her paa Jorden over alle Menneskelige Love, og erlynder ingen anden Dommer over sig enten i Gejstlige eller Verdslige Sager uden GUd alleene, og ikke er forpligtet at gjøre sine Undersaatter Regnskab for sin Opførsel*’.
Government’. Moreover, ‘no Prince in Europe holds this Right on such good Ground, as the Danish Royal-Line,’ Hojer concludes, thus stressing the exceptionalism of Danish absolutism, ‘and what has once been the free Will of the People, must necessarily remain such in the future’.

To Holberg and Hojer alike, the monarchical revolution of 1660 is a foundational event. What sets Holberg apart from Hojer, however, is the interpretation of the popular contract through which the absolute monarchy was instituted. Holberg, as opposed to Hojer, derived his understanding of contracts and the institution of civil associations from the precepts of modern natural law. In book II, chapter 5 of the *Introduction til Naturens of Folke-Rettens Kundskab*, Holberg offers an analysis of the internal formation of states founded on the concepts of security and sociability. In order to ‘Secure oneself against the Cruelty of other Humans’, he argues, one must acquire ‘such Aid, whereby cruel Humans are deterred from assaulting others’. However, whereas this kind of collective security, would be a sufficient way of securing oneself against an immediate danger, there is no way of securing the duration of such an arrangement unless it involves the erection of a sovereign power. ‘Amongst such a great number of People, who join themselves together in order to create Cities’, Holberg argues, ‘Consent and Concord is required in order to make use of all those Resources that are necessary for them to reach this End.’

Moreover, the creation of civil associations requires ‘Sovereignty and Power’ in order to ‘force them [the people] to hold on to that, about which they have once agreed upon.’

Following Pufendorf, Holberg’s explains the origin of civil society in three steps, constituted through ‘two Covenants and one Decree.’ The first step is constituted through a covenant in which the people agree with each other to leave the state of nature and to erect civil societies. ‘The first Covenant is an agreement by a large number of people living in natural Liberty to unite themselves,’ Holberg writes, ‘and it is necessary that everyone agrees upon this Covenant; for he, who will not unite with the others, must remain outside Civil Society.’ The second step is

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581 Holberg, *Værker i tolv Bind*: I.286: ‘Blant saadanne mange Folk, som komme sammen at indstifte Stæder, udfordres Samtykke og Overeensstemmelse til at bruge de Midler, som ere fornødne til den Ende.’
584 Holberg, *Værker i tolv Bind*: I.287: ‘Den første Pagt indgaaes af mange udi den naturlige Frihed, om at forene sig med hinanden, og er fornødent, at enhver samtykker saadan Pagt; thi den, som ikke vil stemme overeens med de andre, maa blive uden for Borgerskabet’.

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related to the creation of a government. In order to deal with this issue, a ‘Decree is issued, stating how to form a Government’, the principal aim of which is to act in the interest of ‘the common Good.’585 The final step consists of ‘the second Covenant’, whereby ‘the one, or those, who Governs’ is found.586 Further, whilst ‘the one who Governs is obliged, through this Covenant, to Care for the common Good, the others oblige themselves to be obedient and to subject their Will to his Will.’587

Holberg’s theories of sovereignty and the creation of civil associations closely follow Pufendorf’s discussion in De Officio.588 Two interconnected claims by Pufendorf are particularly central to Holberg’s account of sovereignty: the distinction between regular and irregular governments and the criticism of limited monarchy and mixed governments. ‘The forms of a state [civitas] are either regular or irregular,’ writes Pufendorf in De Officio in a manner that echoes his earlier discussion if the topic in his account of the present state of the German Empire.589 Holberg’s discussion in book II, chapter 6 of the Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskab pivots on the same distinction. ‘The Form of Republics’, Holberg asserts, ‘is either regular or irregular. The regular ones are those, where the highest Power is unified in one Person, and flows from the Will of one, where this is not the case, it is called an irregular Government.’590 Holberg then goes on to divide the regular republics into three different forms. Following a classical typology, regular governments can take the form of a ‘Monarchy’, an ‘Aristocracy’, or a ‘Democracy’.591 No government, though, can ever be said to be entirely perfect, for which reason there is an ever present danger of these governments turning into their respective negations, that is, ‘tyranny’, ‘oligarchy’, and ‘ochlocracy’.592

Holberg offers several explanations for the imperfections of the different forms of governments. First, ‘since Governments are handed over to Humans, and thus for as long as they

exist, there will be Vises.\textsuperscript{595} Secondly, since no government fits perfectly ‘every Landscape’, but must adapt to ‘the Status of the Nation, its Conditions and Nature’, the question of which form of government is best is relative to the particular needs that govern a particular people and a particular place.\textsuperscript{594} Holberg’s preferences are, however, perfectly clear: In ‘a Monarchical Government’, order prevails, as the politics of the state depends only in the will of one person.\textsuperscript{595} In ‘Aristocracies and Democracies’, by contrast, ‘the Estates and the People’ must be gathered ‘at a certain Time and Place’ in order to reach a decision, thus complicating the government of the state.\textsuperscript{596}

As Holberg aimed to show in the \textit{Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskaub}, absolute sovereignty rested on solid foundations. Seeing it as one of his principal tasks to outline those foundations, Holberg’s treatise on natural law can be read as a secular statement on contemporary politics in the sense that the overarching intention of his treatise was to free the understanding of politics and government from theological arguments. In Holberg’s account, politics and religion, state and church, should not be confounded. Centred on sociability, covenants, and consent, Holberg’s concept of sovereignty left little room for divine right notions of monarchy like those advanced by Christian political thinkers such as Brochmand, Wandal, and Masius. Yet, despite his rejection of divine right theory, religious sentiments still featured prominently in Holberg’s theory of sovereignty and in his explanation of the creation of civil associations.\textsuperscript{597} ‘Civil Government is rightly said to be instituted by GOD, for, since GOD commands us to follow the precepts of natural Law, he also commands to use those Means that are necessary in this regard, namely to create Governments, whereby this can be enforced, \[and\] moreover,’ Holberg writes, ‘the Holy Scripture also teaches us that GOD sanctions Governments, and commands the Subjects to obey Authority.’\textsuperscript{598}

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Offering what can be seen as a Lutheran account of political obligation, Holberg is keen to stress that even under such condition where the monarch turns into a tyrant, the subjects do not have the right to ‘break the Bond and Obligation’ that they owe to their sovereign.599 Holberg shared his rejection of the right to revolt with the Christian political thinkers. But, as we have seen, whereas Masius in his *Interesse Principium circa Religionem Evangelicam*, associated the right to revolt with a rebellious Calvinist spirit, Holberg sees the right to revolt as an affront against the law of nature, of which God is the author. ‘Nobody except from GOD’, writes Holberg, alluding to Marcus Aurelius, ‘is the Prince’s Judge.’600 The appeal to God, albeit a very general one, suggests an important qualification of the secular nature of Holberg’s arguments in the treatise on natural law. The transformation of the interpretation of monarchical sovereignty that was first instituted by Holberg is not, as some scholars have claimed, a transformation from an entirely religious perception of politics to a purely secular one.601 What was novel about Holberg’s theory of monarchism was that it was based on the precepts of modern or Protestant natural law, as opposed to mere contractualism.

Holberg’s reinterpretation of Danish absolutism differed from the prevailing interpretations in another important respect. Whilst the Christian political thinkers sought to restrict the scope of monarchical power to the *ordo politicalus*, thus delimiting it in relation to the *ordo ecclesiasticus* and the *ordo economicus*, Holberg’s notion of monarchical sovereignty is less restrained. Like Pufendorf, Holberg advocated the view that monarchical power is necessarily absolute within the sphere of politics, but this did not mean that there were no limitations on monarchical power.602 In Holberg’s view, absolute political power is limited not by a particular relation between the three ordines, but by the precepts of natural and divine law. Thus, according to Holberg, monarchical power is unlimited. Placed above all human laws, monarchical power is restricted only by a moral obligation to follow the precepts of divine and natural law understood as a language of duties and sociability; the task of informing the monarch of those duties, as Holberg exemplify in his treatise on natural law, befalls the historian and the moral philosopher, not the moral theologian. This was to become an important foundation for Holberg’s later engagement in the enlightenment debate on absolutism.

602 Haakonssen, ‘Naturretten, Pufendorf og Holberg’: 43.
History, Monarchy, and Republicanism

Holberg’s major historical works, which published in the late 1720s and 1730s, expand on the general reinterpretation of Danish absolutism initiated in the Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskab. Often seen by modern historians as an attempt to interpret the monarchical revolution along an utopian ideal, drawn from the precepts of natural law, much more is at stake in Holberg’s historical works. Whilst Holberg in the treatise on natural law, had fashioned himself as a historian and a moral philosopher steeped in the useful sciences, thus separating the understanding of monarchical government from the yoke of theological argument or moral theology, his historical works were written from another, yet still related perspective. Fashioning himself as an impartial historian, Holberg nevertheless continued his commitment to the tradition of historia magister vitae, emphasising his intention to inform his reader about the ‘Country’s past as well as present Condition.’ Holberg, thus, did not abandon his previous engagement with reinterpreting the nature and origin of Danish absolutism. Indeed, the persona of the impartial historian was merely a pretext to turn to other aspects of the debate on monarchy. Holberg not only engaged with the historical works of Huitfeldt, whom he abhorred for his aristocratic partisanship, he also wrestled what can be seen as a republican critique of Danish absolutism. The persona of the impartial historian, in other words, is contrasted to the partisan critic of absolutism. Thus, to fully understand the debates on monarchy in the 1720s and 1730s and Holberg’s place in them, we must also view them in the light of the European criticisms of absolute monarchism in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

When Holberg published his historical works, the Danish-Norwegian monarchy had long suffered a damaged reputation in the rest of Europe. As Sir William Temple (1628-1699) wrote in 1671, for instance, the Danish nation suffered ‘from a fainter Spirit which appears of late in their People, and in their Government itself.’ Yet, as already indicated in the previous chapter, the most fierce critic of Danish absolutism was the Anglo-Irish diplomat and Whig politician Robert Molesworth, who attacked the Danish constitution in an anonymous work entitled An Account of Denmark as It was in 1692. Published in 1694, Molesworth’s An Account of Denmark drew heavily on his personal impressions of Danish politics in the late seventeenth century, of which he had first hand experience from his diplomatic mission to Denmark between 1689 and 1692. Although the work essentially depicts Danish monarchism as a form of tyranny, and contrasts it to the liberty of the English, Molesworth’s intention was less to smear Danish absolutism than it was to


issue a warning against tyranny and the loss of liberty to the English themselves. ‘Health and Liberty,’ writes Molesworth in the preface, thus addressing the general theme of his account, ‘are without dispute the greatest natural Blessings Mankind is capable of enjoying.’ Liberty and servitude are at war and, to Molesworth, the Danish form of government is nothing but perplexing:

If it be objected, that Princes have acquired Right to be absolute and arbitrary where the subjects have given up their Liberties, there are some in the World who venture to answer, That no People in their right Wits, (that is) not guided by Fear and Tumult, can be supposed to confer an absolute Dominion, or to give away the Freedom of themselves and their Posterity for all Generations.

Molesworth’s criticism of Danish monarchism is founded on two interconnected observations, one regarding culture, the other the form of government. First, he claims, ‘People may be so season’d to and hardened in Slavery, as not only to have lost the very Taste of Liberty, but even to love the contrary State.’ The culture of servitude which Molesworth found everywhere infected the whole of society, determined both the people’s behaviour and their taste for learning. Not only did Denmark have only one university, but also the conditions that seemed to encourage and cultivate new inventions elsewhere were absent. ‘I do not see that they are good at imitating the Inventions of other Countries’, he writes in chapter 8, ‘and for inventing themselves, I believe none here, since the famous Tycho Brahe, ever pretended to it. Few or no Books are written, but what some of the Clergy compose of Religion.’ Nonetheless, despite the ill-state of culture and learning in Denmark, Molesworth does acknowledged ‘that Common People do generally write and read.’

Molesworth’s second criticism relates to the form of government, discussed in chapter 6 of the Account of Denmark. Describing first ‘the Ancient Form of Government in this Kingdom’, a form of government resting on active participation of the nobility and the gentry in electing the king and through frequent meetings of the estates in politics more generally, Molesworth turns to

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606 Robert Molesworth, An Account of Denmark as It was in the Year 1692, in An Account of Denmark With Francogallia and Some Considerations for the Promoting of Agriculture and Employing the Poor, Justin Champion, ed., (Indianapolis 2011): 7.
610 Molesworth, An Account of Denmark: 75.
611 Molesworth, An Account of Denmark: 155.
the nature of government after the revolution in 1660.\textsuperscript{612} As he asserts, ‘the Kings have ever since been, and at present are, Absolute and Arbitrary; not the least remnant of Liberty remaining to the Subject; all Meetings of the Estates in Parliament intirely abolished, nay, the very Name of Estates and Liberty quite forgotten, as if there never had been any such thing’.\textsuperscript{613} The change in government, as Molesworth saw it, brought with it poverty and misery, ‘frequent and arbitrary Taxes’, mischief and favouritism, all ‘being the constant Effects of Arbitrary Rule’.\textsuperscript{614} However, Molesworth did see one good thing springing from the absolute and arbitrary government, since he praised the ‘Danish Laws’ and the ‘good Character of them in general’.\textsuperscript{615} If the present state of Denmark contained many things ‘to be avoided’, he asserts, the prevalence of ‘justice, Brevity, and perspicuity’ is worthy of imitation.\textsuperscript{616} However, despite the reign of justice, in itself merely a ‘conveniency of Arbitrary Government, among the multitude of Mischiefs attending it’, the form of government was so well rooted that it was unlikely to change anytime soon.\textsuperscript{617} In explaining this, Molesworth turns to the role of religion:

The vast convenience to any Prince of having all his Subjects of one Opinion, is visible in Denmark; where there are no Factions nor Dispute about Religion, which usually have a great influence on any Government; but all are of one Mind, as to the way of Salvation, and as to the Duty they owe to their Sovereign. This cuts off occasion of Rebellion and Mutiny from many, who otherwise would desire it, and seem to have reason enough, because of the heavy pressure they lye under. As long as the Priests are entirely dependant upon the Crown, and the People absolutely governed by the Priests in Matters of Conscience, as they are here, the Prince may be as arbitrary as he pleases, without running any risque from his Subjects.\textsuperscript{618}

As Molesworth emphasises in the conclusion of \textit{An Account of Denmark}, the ‘Popish Religion’ is not the only confession destined for slavery: ‘other Religions, and particularly the Lutheran, has succeeded as effectually in this Design as ever Popery did.’\textsuperscript{619} The cause of slavery lies not with the religious confession as such, be it Lutheran or Popish, but rather with ‘the Doctrine of blind Obedience’, which sets in motion the ‘destruction of the Liberty, and consequently of all the Happiness of any Nation.’\textsuperscript{620} Hence there are only few chances that the Danes will re-establish that ‘natural Love of Liberty, which resided formerly in the Northern Nations more eminently than in other Parts of the World.’\textsuperscript{621} As Molesworth concludes:

\begin{itemize}
\item[612] Molesworth, \textit{An Account of Denmark}: 51.
\item[613] Molesworth, \textit{An Account of Denmark}: 51–52.
\item[614] Molesworth, \textit{An Account of Denmark}: 52.
\item[615] Molesworth, \textit{An Account of Denmark}: 143.
\item[616] Molesworth, \textit{An Account of Denmark}: 143.
\item[617] Molesworth, \textit{An Account of Denmark}: 146.
\item[618] Molesworth, \textit{An Account of Denmark}: 152.
\item[619] Molesworth, \textit{An Account of Denmark}: 156.
\item[620] Molesworth, \textit{An Account of Denmark}: 156.
\item[621] Molesworth, \textit{An Account of Denmark}: 159.
\end{itemize}
For, first, the ancient Love of Liberty seems to be quite extinct in the North; and in its place to have succeeded the conveniencies of a dull Obedience […] Insomuch that I verily believe, the Danes do really love Servitude; and like the Cappadocians of old, could not make use of Liberty if it were offered them; but would throw it away if they had it, and resume their Chains.\textsuperscript{622}

Molesworth’s account gained a wide European reception, with translations in French, German, and Dutch. Within three months of its publication, it had sold 6000 copies; even Pierre Bayle held Molesworth’s \textit{Account of Denmark} posed a serious challenge to the reputation of the Danish monarchy.\textsuperscript{623} The first response to Molesworth appeared in 1694 under the title \textit{Denmark Vindicated}. Authored by Jodocus Crull (1660-1713), a German translator settled in England, Molesworth’s \textit{Account of Denmark} is portrayed as an untrue and partisan contribution, ‘so little suitable to the rules of true History.’\textsuperscript{624} In \textit{Denmark Vindicated}, however, Crull fully recognises that a true historical account was never the intention of the anonymous author of the \textit{Account of Denmark}. Inspired, rather, by ‘some political Doctors among us’, its purpose was indeed political and, as Crull asserts, ‘the author did not intend to give us a just account of those Countries, but under a Romantick Cover of Arbitrary Power, to represent Tyranny in its worst shape to the English Nation.’\textsuperscript{625}

The early critics of the \textit{Account of Denmark}, such as Crull and others, were mainly engaged with the work from an English perspective.\textsuperscript{626} In 1694, William King (1663-1712) anonymously published his \textit{Animadversions on a Pretended Account of Denmark}. King, who was a professor at Oxford and a convinced Tory, had been in contact with the Danish delegation in London, particularly the ambassador Mogens Skeel (1650-1694); his \textit{Animadversions} is, as Olden-Jørgensen has argued, probably the closest we can get to an official state reply to Molesworth.\textsuperscript{627} Two years later, the French Huguenot Jean Payen La Fouleresse (c. 1650-after 1701) issued an expanded translation in French of King’s \textit{Animadversions}, which, moreover, formed the basis of subsequent German and Dutch translations. In 1695, for instance, a German translation of Molesworth’s \textit{Account of Denmark} appeared anonymously in Cologne; already in the following year, King’s reply (in the expanded version by La Fouleresse) was published by the same publisher who had issued

\textsuperscript{622} Molesworth, \textit{An Account of Denmark}: 160.
\textsuperscript{623} On the reception of Molesworth in Denmark-Norway see Henrik Horstbøll, ‘Defending Monarchism in Denmark-Norway in the Eighteenth Century’ in H. Blom, J.C. Laursen & L Simonutti, eds., \textit{Monarchisms in the Age of Enlightenment: Liberty, Patriotism, and the Common Good} (Toronto, Buffalo, London 2007); Sebastian Olden-Jørgensen, ‘Robert Molesworth’s \textit{An Account of Denmark as it was in 1692}: A Political Scandal and its Literary Aftermath’, in Knud Haakonssen & Henrik Horstbøll, eds., \textit{Northern Antiquities and National Identities: Perceptions of Denmark and the North in the Eighteenth Century} (Copenhagen 2008). The following is greatly indebted to these accounts.
\textsuperscript{624} Jodocus Crull, \textit{Denmark Vindicated: Being an Answer to a late Treatise called, An Account of Denmark, As it was in the Year 1692} (London 1694): A Letter.
\textsuperscript{625} Crull, \textit{Denmark Vindicated: A Letter}.
\textsuperscript{626} Olden-Jørgensen, ‘Robert Molesworth’s \textit{An Account of Denmark as it was in 1692}’: 71.
\textsuperscript{627} Olden-Jørgensen, ‘Robert Molesworth’s \textit{An Account of Denmark as it was in 1692}’: 71-75.
the translation of Molesworth. Moreover, later generations of Danish writers sought to repudiate Molesworth’s *Account of Denmark* by invoking a strong sense of patriotism. The bishop of Ribe Laurids Thura (1657-1731), for instance, stressed (in Olden-Jørgensen’s words) the ‘intimate connection between loyalty to the king and the love of the fatherland’ while Johannes Moller (1661-1725), the headmaster of the Flensburg grammar school, stressed that the Danes had always been a learned nation.

The publication of the *Lex Regia* in 1709 should also be seen in this context. In light of the Molesworth debate, however, Rostgaard’s publication of the *Lex Regia* takes on a different meaning, as it not only strives to make public the legal foundations of the absolute monarchy, but also aims to show that popular sovereignty did play a role in such foundations, although Rostgaard’s emphasis was firmly placed on divine ordination. This point, however, was ignored by the critics of Danish monarchism; indeed, by stroke of irony, Rostgaard’s edition only gave new ammunition to the advocates of free constitutions. In 1731, Rostgaard’s edition of the *Lex Regia* was translated into English by ‘a Lover of the British Constitution’, as the title page reads. In the preface to the *Lex Regia: or the Danish Royal Law*, the translator, Jenkin Thomas Phillips (1755), a renowned linguist, picks up a line of argumentation similar to that of Molesworth (who is, nonetheless, criticised for leaving the *Lex Regia* out of his *Account of Denmark*). Juxtaposing ancient ‘Gothick Constitutions’ and ‘publick Liberty’ to ‘despotick Power’ and ‘Tyranny and absolute Government’, the erection of the absolute monarchy in 1660 meant for Denmark the loss of the former and the embrace of the latter. In offering Frederik III ‘an unlimited despotick Government’, the burghers and clergymen had encroached on the ancient privileges and liberties of the nobility in a ‘Plot against the publick Liberty.’

Moreover, Phillips claims, the Danes had lost their liberty not because of the abuse of power, but because of internal struggles between the estates. As he writes: ‘Thus fell the Liberty of the ancient Danish Nation a Sacrifice to the Revenge of a Party, rather than to the Ambition of Frederik the Third; a great Lesson to Clergymen and Laymen, to love their Country, and avoid Factions and Parties, which have been always destructive of the publick Liberty.’

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629 Olden-Jørgensen, ‘Robert Molesworth’s An Account of Denmark as it was in 1692’: 77, 80.


631 *Lex Regia: or the Royal Law of Denmark*: iii–iv.

632 *Lex Regia: or the Royal Law of Denmark*: iv–v.
government. Hence his intentions in translating for the first time into English the *Lex Regia*, was to show the Danish government rests on ‘a compleat System of absolute Government’, which cannot ‘but reflect Honour and Glory upon the British Nation, who thrò Succession of many Ages, have maintain’d in full Lustre the original Northern Plan of Government’. This agenda also manifested itself in his translation. Whereas Rostgaard, for instance, gave an account of how the monarch was offered ‘the complete Right of Heredity’ in his edition of *Lex Regia*, Phillips’ translation is written in an idiom closer to Molesworth’s account, in that he in the same passage writes ‘an arbitrary or absolute sovereignty’. Hence, to writers such as Molesworth and Philips, absolute monarchy and hereditary rights constitute an arbitrary form of government; however, to defenders of absolute monarchical sovereignty, such allegations of arbitrariness were erroneous.

When Holberg first engaged the issues raised in the Molesworth debate, his main emphasis was on the form of government and the Danish national character. In *Danmarks og Norges Beskrivelse*, Holberg turned first to Molesworth’s claim the Danes were ‘not foolish, nor wise’. According to Holberg, the Danes were not mediocre. Instead, he turned the character of the Danes into a virtue: the Danes did not engage in political experiments or revolutions, as had happened in Britain in the seventeenth century, nor were they as lazy as other European nations. In his rejection of Molesworth’s critique of Danish monarchism, Holberg turns, secondly, to the concept of liberty, the guiding principle of Molesworth’s *Account of Denmark*, which he contrasts to the stability of absolute monarchy:

Since the Author of the work called The State of Denmark as it was in the Year 1692 seems to have published the said work especially to contest Sovereign Government in General, I do not consider it totally superfluous to say something about this Matter before I embark on the Danish Government *in Particular* [*in Specie*] and to examine the Words with which he begins his magnificent Preface: *Liberty and Health are the greatest blessings mankind is capable of enjoying*. I confess that nearly all Humans by Nature are inclined to Liberty and Independence, but from this it does not follow that it is useful for them, were Humans not subjected to Passions, the Author’s Opinion would seem indisputable; but as Humans themselves have felt that it was not useful for them to live in Freedom they have first instituted Societies and set up Government, through which the natural Liberty has been restricted more or less according to Necessity, from which the many forms of Government such as Democracies, Aristocracies, Monarchies have Originated.

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633 *Lex Regia: or the Royal Law of Denmark: v.*


635 *Lex Regia: or the Royal Law of Denmark*: 4.

636 Ludvig Holberg, *Værker i tolv Bind*: 1.33.

637 In Epistle 72, Holberg, however, argues that, since he advanced this claim, the character of the Danes had changed from ‘stability’ into ‘volatility’. See Ludvig Holberg, *Selected Essays of Ludvig Holberg*, P.M. Mitchell, ed., (Lawrence 1955): 62.

Drawing on the theory of natural jurisprudence advanced in the *Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskab*, Holberg moves the discussion from natural love of liberty to the insecurity of natural liberty. 'I will only loosely note this', Holberg asserts, 'that the common Security, on account of which Humans have established Societies and instituted Cities, cannot be fully sustained except by Sovereign Government, and that the so-called free Republics are quite incapable of such ends.'

Challenging Molesworth's assertion that the ancient form of government in Denmark was a free republic, Holberg argues that the ancient form of government had in fact been a hereditary monarchy. Holberg's discussion of republican government turns on what he sees as misconstrued notion of liberty first put in place by Greek and Roman writers in classical antiquity. 'Some might well take this Opinion to be unreasonable and ill-founded', writes Holberg, surely including Molesworth amongst this number, 'particularly those, who, from an eager Reading of Greek and Roman Writers have conceived such lofty Ideas about the so-called Republics'. Yet, Holberg asserts, not only is the 'golden Liberty', which republican writers value above anything else, based more on 'self Interest', than the 'the Welfare of the Republic', it is also used as a pretext to make 'Regicide' into 'the greatest Virtue'. Moreover, when Holberg in his later writings returned to the issue of the political ideas of classical antiquity, he warned once again against a recurrent republican tenet. In the *Epistler* he writes:

No little precaution is required in reading these authors. It must be borne in mind at what time and by whom a book was written. The foremost Greek authors lived at a time when all Greek cities were free republics and, as a consequence, they have painted monarchy in the most heinous and hateful colours and even made regicide an heroic virtue. Given to such daily reading in which the necessary explanations are lacking, our youth can acquire a dislike for all royal rule and can come to look upon only that government as fortunate where the undiscerning common people dominate and where, in the words of the Scythian

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639 Holberg, *Dannemarks og Norges Geistlige og Verdslige Staat*: 56-57: 'Jeg vil ikkun alleene løsligen merke dette, at den tilfælles Sikkerhed, for hvis Skyld Menneskene have oprettet Societeter og anrettet Regiering, hvorved den naturlige Frihed er bleven indskrænket meere og mindre, ligesom Fornødenhed det haver udfordret, herudafhave Oprindelse de mange slags Regieringer, saasom Democratier, Aristocratier, Monarchier'. In translating this passage, I have compared (but not followed in its entirety) the translation in Olden-Jørgensen, 'Robert Molesworth's *An Account of Denmark as it was in 1692*': 83.

640 Holberg, *Dannemarks og Norges Geistlige og Verdslige Staat*: 57: 'Nogle ville vel holde saadan halvad Meening for uriimelig og daarlig, besynderlig de der af Grædske og Romerske Skribenters idelige Læsning have faaet saadan høy Idee om de saa kaldte fri Republikser ere gandske ikke tilstrækkelige dertil.'


philosopher Anacharsis, reasonable men have to perform what fools and precipitous persons decide and command.\textsuperscript{643}

Hence, as Holberg sees it, republican freedom is an illusion or a chimera. Holberg’s response to Molesworth thus contrasts two rival languages of politics, one monarchical and the other republican. Whilst Molesworth is concerned with free republics and the love of liberty, Holberg invokes a concept of natural liberty, which is restricted to the state of nature, and contrasts it to civil governments, the sole purpose of which is to ensure the common safety – be they democratic, aristocratic, or monarchical.

Holberg’s refutation of the republican interpretation of liberty, at this stage, closely resembles (though he does not refer directly to) the criticism levelled by Hobbes in the \textit{Leviathan} against the ‘Venime of Heathen Politicians.’\textsuperscript{644} In a discussion of the dissolution of the commonwealth, Hobbes lists, as one of the most devastating causes, that of revolts against the sovereign. ‘And as to Rebellion in particular against Monarchy’, he writes, ‘one of the most frequent causes of it, is the Reading of the books of Policy, and Histories of the antient Greeks, and Romans.’\textsuperscript{645} Mislead by the reading of such seditious books, young and immature men are easily turned against legitimate governments, joining the cause of contemporary ‘Democraticall writers.’\textsuperscript{646} Thus, both Hobbes and Holberg emphasise the reading of classical Greek and Latin writers as potentially dangerous to a monarchical state. ‘From the reading, I say,’ continues Hobbes in the \textit{Leviathan}, ‘of such books, men have undertaken to kill their Kings, because the Greek and Latine writers, in their books, and discourses of Policy, make it lawfull, and laudable, for any man so to do; provided before he do it, he call him Tyrant. For they say not \textit{Regicide}, that is, killing of a King, but \textit{Tyrannicide}, that is, killing of a Tyrant is lawfull.’\textsuperscript{647} Moreover, as Hobbes continues, ‘From the same books, they that live under a Monarch conceive an opinion, that the Subjects in a Popular Common-wealth enjoy Liberty; but that in a Monarchy they are all Slaves.’\textsuperscript{648} As Hobbes sees it, Greek and Roman writers, as well as their contemporary democratic followers, entertained a misconstrued notion of liberty, thus failing to see that ‘LIBERTY, or FREEDOME, signifieth (properly) the absence of Opposition,’ or, as he writes elsewhere, ‘the absence of external Impediments.’\textsuperscript{649} On this point, however, Holberg’s interpretation differs from

\textsuperscript{643} Holberg, \textit{Moral Reflections \& Epistles}: 129.
\textsuperscript{645} Hobbes, \textit{Leviathan}: 225.
\textsuperscript{646} Hobbes, \textit{Leviathan}: 226.
\textsuperscript{647} Hobbes, \textit{Leviathan}: 226.
\textsuperscript{648} Hobbes, \textit{Leviathan}: 226.
\textsuperscript{649} Hobbes, \textit{Leviathan}: 145, 91.
that of Hobbes, in that the argument he advances turns rather on the issue of security than any Hobbesian understanding of liberty.  

Holberg’s engagement with the republican critique of Danish absolutism went further than the points that directly hinged on Molesworth’s arguments. The larger discussion of the monarchical revolution which Holberg offers in his historical works, continue within the framework originally set out in his treatise on natural law. In the discussion of the Danish constitution in the third chapter of his Dannemarks og Norges Geistlige og Verdslige Staat, Holberg emphasises the common consent leading up to the erection of the absolute monarchy in 1660; in particular, he stresses ‘the Consent of the Nobility.’ As Sebastian Olden-Jørgensen has argued, Holberg deliberately downplayed the presence of political and social conflict in his description of the monarchical revolution of 1660. Holberg knew, or so Olden-Jørgensen argues, that the revolution had been rooted in social and political turmoil, for this is what his sources told him, but he still chose to manipulate the historical truth.

Holberg’s objective was to interpret the monarchical revolution from the point of view of modern natural law, and, thus, to legitimise the absolute monarchy. In Dannemarks Riges Historie, Holberg offers a slightly different interpretation of the crucial events leading up to the monarchical revolution. In the third volume, Holberg still interprets the monarchical revolution of 1660 as an ideal example of a government founded on the principles of natural law. Hence, the consensus of all the estates plays a crucial role. ‘Thus Sovereignty was granted by all the Estates,’ writes Holberg, stressing the role of the formal act constituted by the consent of the people, ‘and immediately thereupon the so-called Act of Hereditary and Absolute Monarchy was authored and signed, first, by all who were present in Copenhagen, and later circulated to those absent for Signing in all the Danish and Norwegian Provinces.’ In his description, Holberg time and again stresses that the common estates as well as the aristocracy presented Frederik III with several

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plans for a new constitution, all of which he turned down because of partisanship and lack of consensus:

What must be perplexing here is that all this happened under a King, who had an Eye on nothing short of his own Highness, and by no Action either Caused the Beginning of this great Work, or sought to support the same, once things were in motion; so that therefore no European Potentate has greater Right over his Sovereign Power than the Danish Kings, as it was offered to the Royal House by common consent.655

Yet, although Holberg’s perception of the origin of monarchical sovereignty is informed by the principles of natural law and contractual theory, Holberg does acknowledge the real political struggles behind the erection of hereditary absolute monarchy: he even gives a prominent role to God and chance. Both the cost and the destruction caused by the wars against Sweden and all the political struggles between the estates contributed to the great fortune of absolutism. ‘But it is precisely these countless Inconveniences’, he asserts, ‘that gave Cause to the strikingly marvellous Revolution, whereby the Royal House has been brought into a flourishing Time, and whereby the Realm has gained greater Reputation than ever before.’656 Further, Holberg ascribes a prominent role to God in his account of erection of the absolute monarchy. Whilst everyone around Frederik III encouraged him to take action and strike a blow for absolutism, the king showed great modesty and temperance, ‘depending’, as Holberg writes, ‘everything on the Providence of GOD’.657 Refusing to take any action unless supported by all the estates, Frederik III remained a spectator, ‘as he neither by Deceit nor by Power wanted to gain any Advantage, but rather let the Matter run its course without contributing anything thereunto, which he took to be the most Legal and best Way for the Elevation of the Royal House. Indeed, his Moderation went so far that he declared that he would accept no such Advantage unless by the unanimous Consent of all the Estates.’658 Founded on the consent of the people, Holberg’s account of the monarchical revolution takes the form of a Danish exceptionalism.

655 Holberg, Dannemarks Rigs Historie: 480-481: ‘Det som man her maa forundre sig over, er, at saadant skeede under en Konge, som havde intet mindre end sin egen Høihed for Øjene, og ved ingen Bevægelse enten gav Anledning til dette store Verks Begyndelse, eller søgte at understøtte det samme, da det var kommen i Drift; saa at derfore ingen Europæisk Potentat med store Rett over sin Eenevolds-Magt, end de Danske Konger, eftersom den ved en almindelig eenstæmmig Rigs-Slutning det Kongelige Huus blev offerered.’

656 Holberg, Dannemarks Rigs Historie: 434: ‘Men just disse mange Uleiligheder gave Aarsag til den paafaldende forunderlige Revolution, hvorved det Kongelige Huus blev bragt udi en florisant Tilstand, og hvorved Riger er kommen udi store Anseelse end tilforn’.

657 Holberg, Dannemarks Rigs Historie: 468: ‘ladende allting komme an paa GUs Forsium’.

Liberty, Monarchism, and Despotism

This form of Danish exceptionalism also informed Holberg’s discussion of sovereignty in the 1740s and 1750s. In the first volume of the *Epitler*, first published in 1748, Holberg offers a description of the various notions of sovereignty used in contemporary political discourse. Reflecting on the apparent paradox that ‘certain European Regents are called sovereign Lords, although their Power is limited by Laws’, Holberg argues ‘that the Word sovereign has several Meanings’.

First, the concept of sovereign could refer to a ‘Ruler, who governs according to his own Capriciousness alone, and who is above all Human Laws.’ Secondly, the concept of sovereign could refer to such rulers as ‘the German Princes’ who ‘exercise the highest Power, though he stands under another Sovereign.’ Thirdly, the concept of sovereign could also refer to ‘certain high Courts, that judge without Appeal’, and finally, the concept of sovereign could refer to everything that is considered ‘sublime’.

Sketching out the different meanings of the word ‘Sovereign’, Holberg introduces a crucial distinction between *de facto* and *de jure* sovereignty. Contrasting *de facto* and *de jure* sovereignty to limited monarchy as well as to Catholic and oriental states, Holberg is able to single out Denmark and France as the only states suitable for the description. However, whereas the French monarchy could only be described as having *de facto* sovereignty, the Danish king could legitimately claim *de jure* sovereignty. ‘This Power’, he writes, ‘is handed over to the Danish Kings by the Estates of the Realm in a formal Act.’ In Holberg’s terminology, this placed the French model of absolutism in an illegitimate light, since the French monarch could not refer to a similar act where the subjects had handed over their sovereign power. ‘Thus one sees,’ Holberg concludes, ‘that no such Sovereignty exists, as in Denmark, because anywhere else it is founded on Power alone.’ The only legitimate form of sovereignty is *de jure* sovereignty; in advancing this claim, Holberg advocates a form of exceptionalism, as only the Danish-Norwegian monarchy is able to meet such criteria.

When Holberg in the 1740s and 1750s published his major works on moral philosophy, the discourse on natural law in Denmark had shifted from Pufendorf and Thomasius to Wolffian...

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Although the most basic tenets of natural law is still present in Holberg’s thought, his discussion of monarchism is moved to his moral philosophical works. The change of literary genre signals an important shift in Holberg’s perception of his own persona. Whilst Holberg in his treatise on natural law and his Danish histories cultivated himself as the counsellor to the prince, steeped in the useful sciences, in his later works he would shift his attention to the public; performing the duty of the philosopher and the moralist, he sought thus to educate the public. This shift in emphasis is emblematic of broader tendencies within the enlightenment in Europe. Seeking to educate the public, and not merely the prince, Holberg substitutes the persona of the moral philosopher for the theologian, whose claim to moral authority he had been doing battle against since the publication of his treatise on natural law. As Holberg sees it, the claim to public criticism advanced in the late seventeenth century by Johann Wandal and other Christian political thinkers is untenable, as it destabilises the bounds of civil society. As he writes in the Epistler, ‘just as clergymen must not overstep the bounds which insure the security of government and society, they must on the other hand not forbid philosophers to condemn in general all sorts of sins, including those committed by a ruler.’ The role of public moraliser belongs not to the theologian, but to the philosopher.

Whilst Holberg’s conception of the persona of the historian in his earlier works was linked to the idea of historia magister vitae and to that of impartiality, the notion of history on which he based his later moral philosophical works had a broader scope, a more critical edge. The principal difference between these conceptions was the different roles or personae that Holberg ascribed to each of them. Still, to be sure, these conceptions were united by a common intention to mirror the present in the past, or that is, in ‘the infallible Mirror of Virtues and Vices’ as he wrote in the preface to his Adskillige Heltinders og Navnkundige Damers Sammenlignende Historier in 1745.

Perhaps the best example of the way in which Holberg in this period envisioned the correlations between history and moral philosophy as a form of public criticism is his fable on history, which he published in his Moralske Fabler in 1751. As we have seen in the introduction to this thesis, Holberg’s fable on the fate of history was equally conservative and critical. Whilst some historians have seen Holberg’s notion of history in the 1740s as an expression of sceptical disenchantment

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669 I shall return to Holberg’s idea of public criticism in the following chapter.

with the usefulness of historical examples,\textsuperscript{671} the fable on the fate of history suggests another reading. What concerned Holberg in the \textit{Moral Fables} was not the fact that all the estates, as he writes, conspired against history, thus showing that the natural law ideal had no bearing on reality. Rather Holberg was concerned with the role of history in civil society more broadly, and the question whether the \textit{persona} of the historian should subjected to a blind obedience. Holberg shared this concern with Jean Le Clerc, to whose historical thought Holberg first alluded in his encounter in the late 1710s with Andreas Hojer.\textsuperscript{672} In the \textit{Parrhasiana}, Le Clerc defended a broadly humanist view on history, criticism and learning. As he writes in a central passage:

Thus the Defenders of the Supreme Authority of the Ecclesiastical Monarchy, on the one side, and the Defenders of the Arbitrary Power of Temporal Princes, on the other, have been of Opinion that the Reading of the ancient Heathen or Christian Writers was so far from being necessary, that it was believed for some time, it were much better on the contrary that the Republican Notions of the \textit{Grecians} and \textit{Romans} should be forgotten, and that the Opinion of the ancient Christians both in the \textit{East} and \textit{West}, which do not agree with the Modern Doctrine and Interests, should be covered with the Vail of an unintelligible Language. They have lookt for Men, who would obey without Reply, and make it their business to Maintain and Encrease the Spiritual and Temporal Power, without any regard to the Notions which Men had in former Times. \textit{Soldiers}, who have no Principles, nor sense of Virtue, and \textit{Clergy-men}, who are blind Slaves to the present Power, and examine nothing, and execute with the utmost Rigour whatever Orders they receive, are look’d upon as the most unmoveable Pillars of the Church and State; and they, who quote ancient Authors, and whose Principles are independent on the Will of the Princes, can have no Hearing.\textsuperscript{673}

Whether Holberg had in mind Le Clerc’s discussion in the \textit{Parrhasiana} when he composed his fable on the fate of history is uncertain. What is certain, however, is that whilst Holberg would not share with Le Clerc his view on the republicanism of the Greeks and Romans, the notion of history which Holberg embraced it the 1740s mirrored that of Le Clerc’s. Holberg’s argument in the \textit{Moralske Fabler} is not that history has lost the battle against self-interest and factionalism, but that history defies blind obedience. What enabled Holberg to take a more subversive stance in contemporary political debates was his combination of moral philosophy with history, biography, satire, fables, essays and a utopian novel. In the \textit{Moralske Tanker}, for instance, Holberg wrote not as an historian, but as a moralist. Despite the diversity of genres, Holberg’s discussion of monarchy in the 1740s and 1750s turned on the issue of tyranny.

Across his major works on moral philosophy, Holberg offers an answer to the problem of tyranny composed of three interconnected arguments. The first argument is one for hereditary


\textsuperscript{673} Jean Le Clerc, \textit{Parrhasiana: Or, Thoughts upon Several Subjects; As, Criticism History, Morality, and Politics} (London 1700): 189.
monarchy. In his utopia novel *Nicholai Klimii*, first published in 1741, Holberg offers a discussion of the role of heredity in absolute monarchies. The history of Potu, Holberg writes in chapter VII of *Nicholai Klimii*, shows that the Potuan monarch is out of a ‘lineal Succession’ that has been in place ‘for a full Thousand Years’, though the historical records also show that the ‘Order of Succession’ had been broken ‘in one Instance’, where a philosopher was elected king of Potu.674 The key concern that underlies Holberg’s discussion in *Nicholai Klimii* stems from the Pufendorfian notion of political office. ‘For since right Reason seem’d to require,’ Holberg asserts, ‘that Rulers should excel their Subjects in Wisdom and all the Endowments of the Mind, hence it was thought necessary that Virtue should be more regarded than Birth, and that he should be elected for their Sovereign, who should be thought the most excellent and worthy among the Subjects.’675 The Potuan nation thus elected for their ruler ‘a Philosopher, nam’d Rabbacku’, a man of humble birth, yet great learning.676 However, although Rabbacku governed with ‘Prudence’ and ‘Mildness’, the government of the philosopher king soon lost its authority.677

For since the new Sovereign was rais’d from the meanest Fortune to the Height of Power, his Virtues and all his Arts of Government could not procure or maintain that Veneration, that Respect, that Majesty, which is the great Support of a Monarch’s Power. Those who but lately had been his Equals or Superiors, could hardly be brought to bow to an Equal or Inferior, or to pay the new Prince that Measure of Obedience due from Subjects to their Rulers.678

At this stage of his argumentation, Holberg draws on political anthropology, in the sense that the people do not accept as their superior a person who was formerly their equal or inferior. The result of this situation led to ‘Severity’ in the way government was conducted and, subsequently, to ‘Rebellion’ against the philosopher king.679 ‘Government’, Holberg concludes, ’could no longer subsist but under a Sovereign of illustrious Decent, whose high Birth might extort a Veneration from the People.’680 Holberg’s discussion of the issue of heredity thus emphasises birthright and traditional authority as more capable of constituting stability than an elective system based on virtue and merits.

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As Olden-Jørgensen has argued, *Nicholai Klimii* was intended as a defence of political stability in absolute and hereditary monarchies. This account, however, is misleading in that it skips the whole discussion leading up to the conclusion, which provides a far better insight into Holberg’s theory of monarchism. To emphasise the advantages of ‘the Hereditary House of the KINGS’, as opposed to elective monarchies, was commonplace in eighteenth-century monarchist writings. Yet Holberg’s discussion in *Nicholai Klimii* takes a different turn. What Holberg was doing was not only to outline an argument stating why heredity is the best constitution, but also to point out the inherent threat of tyranny to any monopolitical arrangement. Seen in this light, Holberg’s discussion of political authority in *Nicholai Klimii* is far more subversive than Olden-Jørgensen acknowledges. Not once, but twice does Holberg force his reader to think about the possibility that any given monarch might not be the best to occupy the office of the monarch; indeed, he might not even be capable.

As Holberg writes in chapter VII of *Nicholai Klimii*, the historical records of Potu further reveal that another philosopher once proposed a blend of meritocracy and heredity, in the sense that the new ruler should be the one amongst the ‘Sons of the deceas’d Sovereign’ who was most suited for government. However, this proposal was rejected by the inhabitants of Potu, as it would become ‘the Source of perpetual Troubles, and would sow the Seeds of Discord between the Royal Progeny.’ As Holberg sees it, absolute monarchy is not a flawless political system, and this is largely the message he intended to convey in chapter VII of *Nicholai Klimii*. However, the potential flaws are outweighed by other concerns, such as stability and security. Despite the flaws of hereditary monarchy, it is still the best constitution, Holberg argues. In light of these concerns, heredity is the only means of maintaining the security of a state, both internal and external. The philosopher shall be not the king, but the advisor or preceptor to the king, thus instructing the monarch in matters essential to political life. This is the practice of Holberg’s utopian state. ‘His Preceptor, the wisest Tree in all the Empire’, he writes in *Nicholai Klimii*, thus connecting his argumentation to his notion of the useful sciences in the *Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskab*, ‘instructed him in the Knowledge of the Creator, in History, in Mathematics and moral Philosophy.’

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Holberg’s embrace of heredity supplemented by an informed preceptor drew on his earlier thinking about monarchism – he had first, for instance, rejected the notion of the philosopher king in the second edition of his treatise on natural law. It is crucial, however, that we appreciate the subversive implications of his discussion of this problem in *Nicholai Klimii* and elsewhere, as it calls for an important qualification to Holberg’s theory of monarchism in the 1740s and 1750s. Holberg was neither a straightforward apologist of absolutism, but nor was he suppressed by the structures of absolutism, censorship in particular. The subversive implications of his discussion become all the more clear once we look at the context in which Holberg wrote the *Nicholai Klimii*. In 1741, the staunchly Pietist Christian VI had ruled the Danish-Norwegian monarchy for over a decade, to the detriment of those public activities that Holberg had come to appreciate in the 1720s. Questioning the role of heredity, the very foundation of the absolute monarchy, was implicitly a way of questioning the rule of Christian VI. Moreover, Holberg returned to the question of heredity in 1745 in the *Adskillige Heltinders og Navnkundige Damers Sammenlignende Historier*. ‘[F]or how can one be certain’, he asks in the introduction to the comparison of Margaret I of Denmark (1353-1412) and Elisabeth I of England (1533-1603), ‘about a perpetually good Government ’? Using historical examples, Holberg’s conclusion is ‘that one by reasonable Foundations can make Virtues inheritable.’

In the further discussion of the issue of heredity and virtuous government, Holberg introduces a crucial argument into his theory of monarchism. Since none of the classical forms of governments that Aristotle mentions are flawless, the question of whether a government is good and virtuous pertains not to the form, but rather to the person or persons who governs. ‘[A]ll Forms of Government are good, when the Rulers are virtuous and able,’ he writes, thus arguing that it is possible to ‘live just as happily under an absolute as it is under a limited Monarchy, under an Aristocracy as it is under a Popular Government, and under Women’s as well as Men’s Regime’. Thus, whilst it us unlikely that Holberg ever challenged the legitimacy of Christian VI’s government, the question is rather whether he considered him a good ruler – and here the odds are against the monarch.

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686 Ludvig Holberg, *Værker i tolv Bind* I.305.  
687 Olden-Jørgensen, “Absolut enevolds Regiering er de sikkerste af alle”; Holm, *Holbergs statsretlige og politiske Synsmaade*.  
689 Holberg, *Adskillige Heltinders*: I.7: ‘thi, hvorledes kan man være forvissed om en bestandig god Øvrighed?’.  
The second argument that Holberg develops is an argument for public opinion and the common good. The ideal or utopian state that Holberg describes in *Nicholai Klimii* is both hereditary and absolute. ‘The Power of the *Potuan* Monarchs’, Holberg asserts, ‘altho’ subject to no Laws, is yet rather a paternal than a regal Power. For being naturally Lovers of Justice, Power, and Liberty, Things totally incompatible elsewhere, do here go Hand in Hand.’\(^{692}\) Though Holberg’s utopian state is an absolute monarchy, the citizens possess certain freedoms. Amongst the principal freedoms that Holberg describes in *Nicholai Klimii* is the liberty to scrutinise new laws. As Holberg argues, the ‘Citizens are free to examine’ all new laws, but once a law is ‘enacted by public Authority, all future canvassing and criticising upon it is prohibited by Pain of Death.’\(^{693}\) Holberg’s vision of public opinion, which he describes as being ‘equal to that of the old Romans’,\(^{694}\) was largely intended as a bulwark against the arbitrary exercise of power and thus against tyranny. A ruler must always take care to rule in accordance with ‘the common Good’, as he writes in the *Epistler* in 1754.\(^{695}\) For as long as absolute or supreme power is exercised in a non-arbitrary manner that cares for the common good, absolute monarchy is the best form of government. There is, however, an important distinction to be drawn out. Although Holberg envisions public opinion as a form active participation and though he describes it as being a Roman invention, it does not translate into the institution of government, as in the case of the English Parliament. Institutions like parliaments will, he argues, compromise the principle of the indivisibility of sovereignty, thus fostering factionalism, self-interest, and eventually civil unrest.\(^{696}\) Furthermore, Holberg asserts, as a means of preventing tyranny, the English Parliament would fall short of the intended aim, as even an English monarch who understands ‘the Art of Government’, can in practice yield as much power as ‘an absolute Monarch’, partly by playing the different factions in Parliament against each other and partly by observing the changing temperaments of the subjects.\(^{697}\)

Holberg’s view on the English Parliament marks a sharp contrast to Voltaire’s description in his *Letters Concerning the English Nation*, which first appeared in 1733. Comparing the English Government to ancient Rome, Voltaire argues that the English have excelled the Romans in one regard, namely in that ‘the civil wars of Rome ended in slavery, and those of the English in

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\(^{693}\) Holberg, *A Journey to the World Under-Ground*: 80, 81.


\(^{696}\) Holberg, *Epistler*: II.90-94.

The liberty of the English nation is central to Voltaire’s interpretation of the relation between Parliament and the monarch. ‘The English,’ Voltaire writes, ‘are the only people upon earth who have been able to prescribe limits to the power of Kings by resisting them.’ By contrast, Holberg’s account emphasises the instability of English politics, and, as he concludes, it is generally possible for a cunning monarch to manipulate the English Parliament to his own ends:

In the fact of such conditions it may be said that they err who imagine that it is impossible to introduce absolute autocracy into Great Britain. They base their convictions in part on the inhabitants’ passion to preserve their freedom and in part on the tragic fate certain rulers have met with in attempting to rob their subjects of their freedom. As far as the passion of the inhabitants is concerned, it is indeed strong but not always uniform. It is like a fever which often is followed by chills. The ruler must know in what tempo he can act.

Thus, on Holberg’s account, an absolute monarchy which attend to the common good of the people is much preferable to the English constitution, which is flawed by instability, self-interest, and factionalism. Indeed, in ‘Democracies and Popular Governments’, as he argues in Adskillige Heltinders og Navnkundige Damers Sammenlignende Historier, ‘the Fruits of the beloved common Liberty have been strife and disagreement, which eventually have led to civil Wars.’

Holberg’s third argument is related to the role of the reformer or the projector. The emphasis on public opinion and the freedom of each citizen to scrutinise new laws opened up space in which citizens could participate, broadly construed, in government. Holberg’s idea of the liberty of examination of the laws should not, however, be conflated with political liberty, of which he continued to be a staunch critic throughout his written works. Yet, the space in which the citizens could participate in the politics of their patria goes beyond the mere examinations of the laws and is thus far less conservative than traditional accounts of Holberg’s political thought have cared to acknowledge. Next to the examination of the laws, Holberg’s vision of political participation also includes the liberty to propose social and political reforms. As he writes in Nicholai Klimii, it is the custom in Potu that all citizens are free to propose any kind of reform of the state, but that during the examination of the proposal, the ‘Projector’ shall be placed in the public square with ‘a

699 Voltaire, Letters Concerning the English Nation: 34.
700 Holberg, Moral Reflections & Epistles 103.
701 Holberg, Adskillige Heltinders: I.3, 4: ‘Democratier og Folke-Regieringer’, ‘Frugterne af den kiære almindelige Frihed have været Trætte og U-enighed, som omsider er udbrodt til borgerlige Krige’.
702 Olden-Jørgensen, ‘”Absolut enevolds Regiering er de sikkerste af alle”; Holm, Holbergs statsretlige og politiske Synsmaade.’
Halter about his Neck’, ready to be hanged should the proposed reform be deemed an affront to the common good.\textsuperscript{703} As he writes:

if it should appear that it was a well digested Thing, and salutary to the Commonwealth, the Offender was not only absolv’d, but rewarded; but if injurious to the Publick, or if the Projector by the Repeal of this Law appear’d to have glanc’d at his own Advantage, he was presently to be hang’d as a Disturber of the Realm. And this is the Reason why few are found to run this Risque, or have Courage enough to advise the Abrogation of any Law, unless the Thing be so demonstrably evident and just, that the Success of it cannot be doubted of: So persuaded are the Subterraneans, that the ancient Laws and Institutions of their Ancestors are to be maintain’d and rever’d. For they believe the Government would be in Danger, if for the Wantonness of every Body, those Laws were to be chang’d or disannul’d. What, alas! said I to myself, would become of the Projectors of our World, who, under a Pretence of Publick Emolument, are daily hatching and inventing new Laws, with an Eye only to their private Gains, instead of the common Benefit?\textsuperscript{704}

As he writes in chapter VII of Nicholai Klimii, ‘every Change or Reformation, however well digested, gives Occasion to Disturbance and Commotion’ and must thus be carried out with caution, for ‘if it be a rash and ill-digested Alteration, it is followed with inevitable Ruin.’\textsuperscript{705} Holberg is not, however, principally against reform; indeed, he argues that doubt is a quintessential quality in any reformer, as ‘no one is more suited to reform than the one, who doubts himself.’\textsuperscript{706} Doubt and ‘Fear’ can serve as ‘Proof’ of the ‘Insight’ and ‘Knowledge’ of a given reformer.\textsuperscript{707} A reformer must therefore be extremely careful, when examining the nature of a society, mapping out its strengths and weaknesses. When Holberg published Moralske Tanker in 1744, he included two essays dealing in general terms with the issue of the projector: one on reforms and the other on the laws. Thinking about the state in terms of a bodily metaphor, Holberg draws out strong analogies between the reformer and the physician. As he argues:

Cities and societies are, like the human body, subject to various weaknesses. What in the human body is called sickness is in empires and republics called governmental error. The former is cured by powders and drops, the latter by laws and regulations and what is in the former case called medicine is in the latter called reform. Just as there is a marked parallel between a lawgiver and a physician and the means of cure are the same although the prescriptions are different, a reformer does well when he undertakes to cure governmental error to make use of the same method that the physician use to cure weaknesses of the body [...] Before he prescribes a medicine, a sensible physician examines the patient’s condition and adjusts the prescription accordingly. After his example the reformer should determine carefully the nature and peculiarities of a society and thereafter invent his decrees.\textsuperscript{708}

\textsuperscript{703} Holberg, A Journey to the World Under-Ground: 43.

\textsuperscript{704} Holberg, A Journey to the World Under-Ground: 43–44.

\textsuperscript{705} Holberg, A Journey to the World Under-Ground: 74.

\textsuperscript{706} Holberg, Episler: III.29: ‘ingen er beqvenmmere til at reformere, end den, som tvivler om sig selv’.


Although the dominant metaphor in Holberg’s conception of political society is that of the political body, he also uses mechanical metaphors to signify the state. A State is like a Building, comprised of several Pieces,’ he writes in the essay on the laws, ‘and so comprehensive that one cannot move a single Piece without thereby making the whole Machine totter.’ Reforms, therefore, should be conducted with a high degree of moderation. The mechanical metaphor has a further consequence in relation to the actions of the monarch, as no ruler can interfere arbitrarily in the state machine without thereby disrupting the whole machine.

In the Epistler, Holberg returns yet again to the issue of reforms, but what is distinctive about his treatment of the issue in the Epistler, as opposed to his earlier accounts, is that he now situates his position within the broader fabric of what we have come to see as the enlightenment. In the third volume of the Epistler, Holberg warns against the increasing urge for reforms, the ‘Patriotic Fervour’ as he calls it. The projector, whose patriotic fervour we are warned against, is, in Holberg’s treatment, associated with a particular culture. Alluding to the culture of the French enlightenment, which had become fashionable during the early eighteenth century, Holberg writes, ‘when I enter a Coffee-House, wherein I find as many Reformers as there are Tables and Benches, I consider it either a Hospital, full of sick Inmates, or a Mad-House.’ What Holberg reacted against was the unfettered enthusiasm and patriotic fervour he associated with the pseudo-politicians of the Parisian coffee houses. Holberg’s enlightenment is not that of the French enlightenment; his is one of moderation. Whilst Holberg emphasises the importance of security and stability, he simultaneously stresses the essential role played by a critically engaged citizenry. Although this does not entail political liberty in the republican sense of the word, Holberg does leave open a limited space within which political participation is allowed.

In the late 1750s, Holberg’s discussion of monarchism become more centred on Charles Louis de Secondat Montesquieu’s masterpiece, L’esprit des lois (The Spirit of the Laws), first published in 1748. The engagement with the thought of Montesquieu was to become the single most important encounter in the 1750s; Holberg met the work with both grave concern and ardent admiration. Holberg engaged Montesquieu in a number of essays, published posthumously.

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710 Holberg, Moralske Tanker: 347: ‘En Stat er som en Bygning, der er sammensat af adskillige Stykker, og saa sammenhængende, at man ikke kand røre ved et Stykke uden at den heele Machine derved vakler’.


in the fifth and final volume of his *Epistler* in 1754, but already in 1753, he translated and published a selection of the most critical essays in French as *Remarques sur quelques positions, qui se trouvent dans l’Esprit des Lois par M. le Baron de Holberg*.\(^{713}\) Whilst Holberg was critical of Montesquieu’s political views, he was genuinely positive when it came to his religious opinions, with which he dealt in two essays, one them, a translation of a chapter on toleration from the *L’esprit des lois*.\(^{714}\)

The Molesworth debate played a crucial role in the reception of Montesquieu’s *L’esprit des lois* when it first appeared in 1748. The equation in Molesworth’s *Account of Denmark* of absolute monarchy with arbitrary government and tyranny largely predetermined how *L’esprit des lois* would be read by Danish monarchists.\(^{715}\) What was particularly alarming to Holberg and other Danish monarchists was that Montesquieu offered a novel account of the forms of government, thus overturning the classical Aristotelian distinctions.\(^{716}\) According to Montesquieu, the main distinctions were to be drawn not between monarchy, aristocracy, *politeia*, and their respective negations, but between republican government, which in Montesquieu’s terminology could be either democratic or aristocratic, monarchical government, and despotic governments.\(^{717}\) One of the principal novelties of the work was the introduction of the concept of despotism into enlightenment political theory.\(^{718}\) Though earlier writers had made some use of the concept, they had generally used it in a fashion applicable to the classical distinctions. In the *Two Treatises of Government*, Locke defined ‘Despotical Power’ as ‘an Absolute, Arbitrary Power one Man

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\(^{713}\) Holberg deals with *The Spirit of the Laws* in eight epistles; see Holberg, *Epistler*: V. ep. 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, 519, 520 and 526b. See further Ludvig Holberg, *Remarques sur quelques positions, qui se trouvent dans l’Esprit des Lois par M. le Baron de Holberg* (Copenhagen 1753).

\(^{714}\) I shall return to Holberg’s engagement with Montesquieu’s religious views in chapter 6.


has over another, to take away his Life, whenever he pleases.\textsuperscript{719} Despotic power thus contained a meaning very close to that of 'Tyranny', which Locke defined as 'the exercise of Power beyond Right'.\textsuperscript{720} Montesquieu, by contrast, understood despotism to be an independent form of government. Another crucial aspect of Montesquieu's work was that he tied a specific nature as well as a characteristic principle to each form of government. In a crucial passage, Montesquieu puts it in these words:

\begin{quote}
I have said that the nature of republican governments is that the people as a body, or certain families, have the sovereign power; the nature of monarchial government is that the prince has the sovereign power, but that he exercises it according to established laws; the nature of despotic government is that one alone governs according to his wills and caprices.\textsuperscript{721}
\end{quote}

The characteristic principles, he argued, followed directly from the nature of government. Republican governments were thus characterised by virtue, though he found that it was more the case in democracies, where virtue applies to all citizens, than aristocracies, where it only applies to noble families. In monarichies, virtues are replaced by honour, which set aside the principles of patriotism and the love of country and constitution. Finally, the principle of despotism was fear.\textsuperscript{722}

Redescribing the distinctions between the classical forms of government, Montesquieu posed a serious challenge to the thoroughly monarchical convictions of contemporary Danish and Norwegian writers. As one of the leading writers of his time, Holberg was the first to address the problem. Holberg’s engagement with the political philosophy of Montesquieu turns on two key aspects in the latter's argumentation, which Holberg sought to redescribe.\textsuperscript{723} First, Holberg challenges the relationship between virtue and republican government. Taking Roman history as his example, he argues that 'the closer Government moved towards Democracy, the more its citizens lost their good Qualities; the more Liberty, the less Virtue. Enthusiasm for the Welfare of the Country turned into Love of oneself, Obedience to Authorities was succeeded by Persistence'.\textsuperscript{724} Thus, the condition for virtue is better in monarichies, where the citizens are unselfish, than in republics, where faction and self-interest govern interactions amongst the citizenry.

The second line of argumentation is somewhat more refined and it is directed against another key aspect in Montesquieu’s political theory: the introduction of despotism as an

\textsuperscript{719} Locke, \textit{Two Treatises of Government}: 382.
\textsuperscript{720} Locke, \textit{Two Treatises of Government}: 398.
\textsuperscript{722} Montesquieu, \textit{The Spirit of the Laws}: 21-30.
\textsuperscript{724} Holberg, \textit{Epistles}: V.202: 'jo meere Regieringen nærmede sig til Democratie, jo meere aftoge Indbyggernes gode Qualiteter; jo meere Frihed jo mindre Dyd. Nidkierhed for Landets Velfærd blev forvandlet til egen Rærlighed, Lydhed mod Øvrigheden blev succederet af Gienstridighed.'
independent constitutional category. Disputing Montesquieu’s conceptualisation of despotism, Holberg points out that the distinction between ‘Barbarian Despotisms’ and ‘other absolute Governments’ is unclear. Holberg then goes on to attack what he sees as Montesquieu’s reluctance to define what he actually means by despotism in clear terms. Arriving at what is his central argument, Holberg asserts:

> Despotism, whether it is found in Africa or Europe, in moral or immoral Countries, cannot be defined by other terms than an arbitrary Government, where the one who Governs, following the Examples of the oldest Patriarchs, has Throat and Hand over his Subjects, so that his Will alone is the Law of the Country. [It is evident] that under good Despots the Subjects can live in Happiness, and that Virtue and Honour does have a place in such Governments as well as in Democracies, Aristocracies and limited Monarchies. My Intention is not to accuse the Author of indirectly wanting to scorn all Sovereign Government: This may never have Occurred to him. All that I am saying is that he ought to have explained himself more clearly.

As Holberg asserts, the question of despotism is, on the one hand, connected to the exercise of power, that is, whether political government is arbitrary or subjected to the rule of law. On the other, despotism is related to the question of good or bad rulers. ‘Yet, one can claim,’ Holberg writes, thus concluding his engagement with Montesquieu’s political philosophy, ‘that when the Rulers or the Sovereigns are good, then all Governments are good, whether they carry the Name of Monarchies, Aristocracies or Democracies. And if one look for Examples one will find that the Subjects in certain Monarchies often had greater Freedom and were subjected to fewer Burdens than in many of the so called free Republics. In presenting this twofold argumentation, Holberg is addressing the possible connections between Denmark-Norway and despotism. Throughout history, Holberg argues, absolute monarchs have been mostly virtuous and honourable, a description not befitting republican governments. Despotic rulers, consequently, have all been defined by their determination to exercise arbitrary power. To Holberg, this was the real

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727 Holberg, Episler: V.210: ‘Despotismus enten den findes udi Africa eller Evropa, udi moraliserede eller umoraliserede Lande, kand ikke anderledes definers end en arbitraire Regierung, hvor Regenten efter de ældste Patriarchers Exempel have Hals og Haand over Undersatterne, saa at hans Villie allene er Landets Lov [... ] vises af utallige Exempler, at under gode Despoter Undersatterne kand leve udi Lyksalighed, og at Dyd og Honour have Sted udi saadan Regierung saavel som udi Democratier, Aristocratier og indskrænkede Monarchier. Mit Forsæt er ikke at beskyde Autor for indirecte at have vildet svært all Sovereign Regierung: Saadant kand maaske aldrig have rindet ham i Sinde. Jeg siger allene, at han burde have forklaret sig tydeligere’.
728 Holberg, Episler: V.211-212: ‘Man kand sige, at naar Regentere eller Øvrighed ere gode, saa ere alle Regierungers gode, enten de have Navn af Monarchier, Aristocratier eller Democratier, og leder man efter Exempler, saa finder man, at Undersatterne have levet udi større Frihed og været mindre Byrder underkastede udi visse Monarchier end udi mange af de saa kaldne fra Republicker’.
distinction to be drawn and its function was to justify the kind of absolute monarchism instituted in Denmark-Norway after 1660. If the rulers are good, Holberg writes, echoing an argument he first presented in the history of heroines, all governments are good.

Centred on the persona and the office of the monarch, the issue of despotism is settled not in relation to the scope of political power, but its use. Yet, Holberg’s theory of monarchism does not solve the problem. On the one hand, the issue of tyranny is only secondary to other political concerns such as the internal and external peace and security of the state; those concerns are abandoned, he argues, once the idea of absolute and hereditary monarchy is given up. On the other hand, though, Holberg does leave open a limited space in which the people can participate in their government by examining the laws and by presenting moderate reforms, intending thus to limit the possibility of arbitrary tyrannical government. Moreover, absolute monarchies, Holberg suggests, have an advantage over free republics in that absolute monarchies are better equipped to protecting and maintaining the liberty of the subjects.729

**Patriotism and the Intrinsic Problem of Despotism**

As Henrik Horstbøll has argued, the reception of Montesquieu marks a decisive ideological shift from a language of monarchism steeped in Pufendorfian natural law to one embedded in Montesquian discourse. Whilst Holberg, or so the story goes, defended Danish monarchism from the perspective of natural jurisprudence, the most prominent writers of the next generation sought to fuse onto the language of Danish monarchism a strong emphasis on liberty, honour, and virtue.730 Thus, from the mid-1750s onwards, a number of works appeared in which absolute monarchy was defended against charges of despotism, embedding the language of monarchism in a patriotic discourse.731 Though Holberg’s ideas were still central, the writers of the 1750s were more receptive to the central tenets of Montesquieu’s political philosophy. Reiterating the Holbergian contention that republican freedom is but a chimera intended to disguise the factionalism and self-interest of the ruling party, the absolute monarch is depicted as a paternal

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figure who loves and cares for his subjects.732 ‘The King is the best and most just Man in the Country,’ writes the philosopher Jens Kraft in 1755, in praise of the mildness of the king and the reciprocity of his government: ‘were He not the King, he would become amongst us a Model of all civic Virtues.’733 The patriotic discourse on monachism centred on concepts such as virtue, honour, liberty, and love of country. In his *Tanker om Kierlighed til Fædernelandet* (Thoughts on the Love of Country), which appeared in 1759, the philosopher Tyge Rothe explains the office of patriotic kingship as that of being ‘the best of citizens in one’s country.’734 The same year that Rothe published his *Tanker om Kierlighed til Fædernelandet*, he was appointed to a professorship at Copenhagen and assigned the office of tutor to the hereditary prince Frederik (1753-1805), who was just six years old at the time. Though in 1760 he was already assigned to another office in the state administration, the coincidence in time is worth noticing. Rothe intended his *Tanker om Kierlighed til Fædernelandet* as an educational treatise.735 ‘The crown does not honour our Regent,’ he writes, ‘but he honours the crown.’736

In the second half of the 1750s, the question of absolute monarchy became a question of liberty.737 On the first centenary of the absolute monarchy in 1760, the public discourse treated the monarchy in constitutional as well as apologetic terms.738 In a speech, Erich Pontoppidan, then vice-chancellor at the University of Copenhagen, sought to tailor the notion of absolute monarchy to ‘that Word Freedom, meaning Civil Liberty, which is contrasted to Civil Coercion and Enslavement.’739 Contrasting civil liberty to slavery and coercion, Pontoppidan aims to distinguish absolutism from ‘Despotic Government’, which he understands as an arbitrary form of government, and free republics, founded on the illusion of liberty.740 Moreover, Pontoppidan also rejects certain misconceptions about freedom in a monarchy, arguing that freedom does not entail political liberty or grant subjects the freedom from duties or the freedom to do whatever one

733 Jens Kraft, *Tale, Holdt paa Hans Kongelige Majestets Kong Frederich den Femtes Høye Fodsels-Fest, ved Sorøe Ridderlig Academie, Onsdagen den 2 April 1755* (Copenhagen 1755): ‘Kongen er den beste og retsindigste Mand i Landet, var Han ikke Konge, vilde Han blive os en Model af alle borgerlige Dyder’.
737 Holm, *Om det Syn paa Kongemagt, Folk og borgerlig Frihed*: 88-102.
pleases. Rather, civil liberty is related to peace and security. ‘Precisely hereupon’, Pontoppidan writes, ‘rests the true liberty of Danish and Norwegian Men.’ Yet, despite the rise of a patriotic language of monarchism in the 1750s, the theory of monarchy by divine right still prevailed.

The stress on liberty and monarchy created a patriotic identity in the composite monarchy, tying the subjects to their king as well as to the common good. What changed in 1750s was that the advocates of absolute monarchy increasingly derived their arguments from their republican adversaries. Thus, by the mid-1750s, the discourse on monarchism was thoroughly embedded in republican political theory. In particular the distinctions between monarchical and despotic governments, which was at the heart of the Danish debates from the 1750s onwards, indicate that the boundaries between republicanism and monarchism were shifting.

The most notable work to be published in the second half of the 1750s was Jens Schielderup Sneedorff’s (1724-1764) Om den Borgerlige Regiering (On Civil Government). A professor of politics at Soro Academy, Sneedorff sets out to examine the ‘Foundations of civil Society according to the Nature of the different Forms of Government.’ Sneedorff, as opposed to Holberg and others, saw no direct problem in Montesquieu’s distinction between monarchy and despotism; refuting Holberg’s reading of Montesquieu, Sneedorff finds it clear ‘that the Author by that Form of Government, which he calls Monarchy, understands only those unlimited Kingdoms that are found in Europe, and by Despotism only the Eastern States.’ Thus, Sneedorff concludes, despotic and monarchical government defer not in terms of the ‘Power’ of the ruler, but in the ‘Way in which the Government is conducted.’ Drawing on Montesquieu, Sneedorff places the distinction between republicanism, monarchism, and despotism at the heart of his political theory. ‘When one by Monarchy understands a Government, which is different from the Republican,’ Sneedorff writes, ‘one must imagine a State in which one Person has the Power to

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741 Pontoppidan, Patriotiske Betragtninger: 9, 18.
742 Pontoppidan, Patriotiske Betragtninger: 24: ‘Just her paa hviler alle Danske og Norske Mænds sande Frihed’.
743 Johann Ernst Gunnerus, Den Lof og Priis, vi ere GUUD skyldige for de store Velgjerninger, Han, ved Arwe-Eenevolds Regieringens Indforsel i disse Riiger, haer beviss vore Konger av den Oldenburgske Stamme, forestillet i en Prediken over den til Højmesse allernaadigst anordnede Text Ps. XVIII, 30, 31. Holdem paa Juubel-Festen den 16 Octobr. 1760. udi Tronhjemms Doom-kirke av Johan Ernst Gunnerus (Trondheims 1760); Johann Andreas Cramer, Jubel-Prediken, holden for Kongen, til Erindring om den for et hundrede Aar siden ved den Kongelige Regiering lykkelig indførte Eenevoldsmagt og Herredømme (Copenhagen 1760); esp. 7-8.
bend everything according to his Will, whether he uses this Right or not, whether he has the Name of Monarch, Emperor or Duke.'

Sneedorff distinguishes further between absolute and limited monarchies. Limited monarchy, in which a privy council, a parliament, or any other political body has a share in the government, is to be considered a republic, as no limitations can be put on monarchical government. Still, amongst the monarchical forms of government, Sneedorff considers both hereditary and elective monarchies. In elective monarchies, however, 'both the internal and external Security is under Threat and the Government become unstable every time a Change occurs.' Hereditary monarchies are therefore to be preferred. ‘The Advantages of Hereditary Regents are closely connected to the common [good of the state], Sneedorff asserts, for ‘through Education He can be made fit to fulfil that Hope, placed upon him by Birth; the Foundation of the Government is more secure; it prevents both internal and external Parties, and it avoids those Inconveniences, which are common when a State is subjected to a Foreign Government, or a Subject is elevated to the Throne.’ At the heart of Sneedorff’s theory of monarchism, we find such concepts as civic virtue and honour. Civic virtue, as Sneedorff understands it, is contrasted to common virtues that relate to those specific qualities demanded from different stations and offices in civil life. ‘Civic Virtue is more necessary. In what Regards the Monarch it consists in Love of the People, and in what Regards the People, in Love of the Monarch, but both must be grounded in Love of the common [good].’ Patriotism, thus, is a central tenet in the political thought of Sneedorff. 'The Interest of the Monarch and the People is so inseparable that it is impossible to have a reasonable Love of the one, without also loving the other', Sneedorff writes, 'and in this Love consists what is called Patriotism.'

Sneedorff differs, however, from Montesquieu in his treatment of honour in monarchies. Whereas Montesquieu understands honour in relation to the alliance between the king and the

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749 Sneedorff, Om den Borgerlige Regiering: 221: 'Naar man ved Monarkie vil forståe en Regiering, som er adskillig fra den Republikanske, saa maa man forestille sig i Staten een Person, som har Magt til at høye alting efter sin Villie, enten hand bruger denne Ret eller ey, enten hand har Navn af Monark, Keyser eller Hertug'.

750 Sneedorff, Om den Borgerlige Regiering: 252: 'Baade den indvortes og udvortes Sikkerhed staarer i Fare og Regieringen vakler ved hver Forandring'.

751 Sneedorff, Om den Borgerlige Regiering: 252-53: 'Arve-Regentens Fordele ere nøyere foreenede med de almindelige; hand ved Opdragelsen giøres beqven til at opfylde det Haab, som Fødselen har givet ham; regeringens Grund er mere sikker; man forebygger baade ud- og indvortes Partier og unngaae de Uleiligheder, som ere sædvanlige naar en Stat kommer under Fremmed Regiering eller en Undersaat ophøyes paa Thronen'.

752 Sneedorff, Om den Borgerlige Regiering: 379: 'Den borgerlige Dyd er mere fornøden. Den bestaar paa Monarkens Side i Kierlighed til Folket, og paa Folkets Side i Kierlighed til Monarken, men begge maae være grundede i Kierlighed til det almindelige'.

753 Sneedorff, Om den Borgerlige Regiering: 380: 'Monarkens of Folkets Interesse er saa u-adskillelig, at det er umuligt at have en fornuffige Kierlighed til den eene uden at elske den anden’ … ‘og i denne Kierlighed bestaar det som man kalder Patriotisme'.

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nobility, Sneedorff sees it as a relation between the king and his subjects. \(^{754}\) ‘I have previously shown that Honour has no Place except where the People have the Liberty to think, the Liberty to pass judgement and the Liberty to act according to those judgements that Honour dictates. One must not believe that this Liberty, which springs from Honour, limits the Monarch; with Liberty and Honour comes an Insight and Zealousness, which saves the Regent from many Commandments. Enlightened Nations do many things on their own, without Laws, Punishments and Rewards, to which an ignorant Multitude that does not feel Honour must be forced.’ \(^{755}\) Thus, a good government, Sneedorff asserts, informs the people of its decisions and it allows the subjects to enjoy their civil liberty without arbitrary interference.

The intellectual shift that occurred in the 1750s was enforced by a number of foreign writers present in Copenhagen. In the 1750s, the monarchy invited a number of Swiss republicans to Copenhagen and commissioned them to write a history of Denmark using a republican political discourse. \(^{756}\) The first result was the historian Paul-Henri Mallet’s (1730-1807) *Introduction à l’histoire de Dannemarc*, first published in 1755 and translated into Danish the following year. As Mallet argues, from early antiquity onwards ‘that Nation, a Citizen of which I have now become’, has always been characterised not by oppression or factionalism, but by ‘a Form of Government dictated by sound Reason and Liberty.’ \(^{757}\) Taking his lead from Montesquieu, Mallet interprets the mores and manners of what he sees as a northern antiquity, contrasting its forms of government to the tyranny and slavery introduced in Southern Europe by the Roman Empire. \(^{758}\) Thus, as Franco Venturi has argued, Mallet contributed ‘to a reemergence of traditions of liberty and constitutional ideas’. \(^{759}\) Yet, while the concept of original freedom was used by Holberg and Mallet alike to defend absolute monarchy, later generations turned it against the more conservative branches of monarchy. As the original condition of man was that of freedom, the

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\(^{755}\) Sneedorff, *Om den Borgerlige Regiering*: 412-13: ‘Jeg har viist tilforn, at Ære ikke kand have Sted uden hvor Folk har Frihed til at tænke, Frihed til at dømme og Frihed til at handle efter de dømme som Ære tilsiger. Man maa ikke tænke, at denne Frihed, som følger med Ære, indskrænker Monarken; Frihed og Ære fører en Indsigt og Nidkierhed med sig, som sparer Regenten mange Ting, hvortil en dum Mængde, som ikke føler Ære, maae tvinges’.


enslavement of the peasantry was depicted by late eighteenth-century monarchists as an unnatural condition.\(^{760}\)

The Swiss republican André Roger (-1759), a diplomat and publicist who had arrived in Denmark in 1752 to take up the position as secretary to the influential statesman Count Johann Hartwig Ernst von Bernstorff (1712-1772), made an even stronger case in defence of Danish absolutism. In the first volume of the *Lettres sur le Dannemarc*, published in Geneva in 1757, Roger distinguishes between absolute monarchy founded on a system of laws and despotism, by which he means an arbitrary and unlimited form government. ‘It is doing great injustice to the constitutions of this country,’ writes Roger in the first letter, reflecting on the nature of Danish absolutism, ‘to say it is despotic. The monarch possesses, indeed, the sole authority; but his administration is one of the most moderate and regular in the world. Its mildness is not only owing to the personal virtues of the king, but it is the natural effects of the constitution.’\(^{761}\) Still, absolutism had a tainted image, which the Swiss republican could not leave untreated. Governed by a single person, elevated above all laws, thus subjecting the life, the property, and the liberty of the citizens to the arbitrary will of that person, how could absolute monarchy not be despotic and tyrannical? To Roger, this posed a serious conceptual problem. ‘If by despotism is understood unlimited monarchy,’ he writes, ‘the constitution of Denmark is certainly despotic.’\(^{762}\) Yet, where Holberg just a few years earlier had focused on the detrimental effects that the label of despotism would have on the reputation of Danish absolutism, which, as we have seen, he sought to defend as founded on *de jure* sovereignty, Roger takes his departure from the Montesquian distinctions between despotic and monarchical forms of government. ‘To avoid therefore every ambiguity,’ he writes, ‘let us be guided in our enquiry, by Montesquieu, the immortal author of the *spirit of laws*; and let us apply the word despotism to those monstrous governments alone which are entirely supported by fear. In fact, how extremely do they differ from a well-regulated monarchy, tho ever so absolute! and how unjust would it be to confound them.’\(^{763}\)

Roger’s efforts do not, however, or at least not at this stage of his exposition, solve the problem of despotism. ‘Of all forms of governments the best without doubt is an absolute monarchy,’ writes Roger before introducing the presupposition upon which his entire political theory rests, for absolute monarchical power only functions ‘when in the hands of a wise and

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A rather precarious foundation for political government and the security of a monarchical state, Roger’s contention does go to the heart of the matter at hand. What happens should the monarch be not a wise and well-instructed ruler? Or, to put it in a more Holbergian vein, what happens to absolute monarchy should the monarch turn out to be unfit for government, that is, a bad ruler? Considered in this light, what Roger is doing in the *Lettres sur le Dannemarc* is offering a discussion of what can be seen as an intrinsic problem in monarchical political theory. Roger’s discussion of this problem orbits around a central distinction between the figure of the monarch, who governs in such a fashion as to maintain the ‘balance and harmony in which consists the health and vigor of the political body’, and that of the despot. As he asserts:

> It is very true that monarchy would not be productive of all these happy effects, if the sovereigns themselves were not wise enough to regulate the exercise of their own authority; and this is the respect in which despotism so very widely differs, and is distinguishable from monarchy. The despot is guided by no other rule than the caprice which reigns in the moment he determines: the monarch makes his intentions known by well-considered and permanent laws. The despot confines himself to no forms: the monarch observes those which he has instituted for the proper management of affairs, and against surprise of party and artifice. In a despotic state, every man is equal, because all are equally slaves: a monarchical government admit those intermediate powers, which at the same time give strength and stability to the throne, and are the check and moderators of supreme authority. The despot is at once judge, party, and prosecutor; and thus unites qualities which are contradictory and incompatible: the monarch makes no difficulty of submitting his cause, and pleading against the meanest of his subjects, before his own tribunals. The despot centring every thing in himself, looks upon his territories as a private property, which he can dispose of at will: a monarch regards his empire as a society, whose happiness he is bound to promote.

Roger’s theory of monarchism is thus grounded in ‘a system of laws’, as opposed to arbitrary government; as he concludes, ‘These are, I think, the principal lines which mark the boundaries between monarchy and despotism; and these marks you may easily distinguish in the government of Denmark.’

This interpretation, Roger further asserts, is also true of the monarchical revolution of 1660. ‘It is a gross mistake to imagin that the revolution of one thousand six hundred and sixty, destroyed the liberty of a kingdom which had hitherto been free. Liberty, properly speaking, was known only to the nobility; the clergy and commons were of no sort of consequence in the assembly of the state.’ Rather, Roger concludes, the monarchical revolution substituted ‘a well-regulated monarchy’ for a government informed by the ‘principles of a vicious aristocracy’, which

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had been upheld only by the suppression of the ‘commons’, keeping the lower estates in a state ‘little distant from total, abject slavery’.\(^770\)

Beginning with Holberg’s discussions of monarchism in the 1740s, which culminated in his engagement with Montesquieu, eighteenth-century monarchical writers moved semantically closer to a republican discourse, juxtaposing liberty to slavery and arbitrary government.\(^771\) As these monarchical writers argue, factionalism, corruption, and self-interest are intrinsic threats to republican government or free constitutions. As Rothe asserts in his *Kierlighed til Fædernelandet*, for a republic to flourish a complete harmony or unity is required between ‘love of oneself and love of one’s country’,\(^772\) a harmony which is easily overturned in a republic where ‘all citizens are Kings’.\(^773\) Yet, as Holberg had already pointed out, monarchism faces a similar problem, equally detrimental to political government, as absolute monarchies are constantly threatened by the possibility that the monarch is a bad ruler, unfit for government; that is, that the ruler is neither wise nor well instructed. Absolute monarchies may thus at any moment negate into tyranny or despotism. Whilst Holberg’s answer to the inherent problem of despotism consisted of three key aspects, that is, heredity supplemented by instruction, public opinion, and reforms, later generations of Danish monarchists provided different answers to the problem. To Rothe as well as to Sneedorff, the answer was education. As Sneedorff sees it, tyranny, which is instituted when a monarch does not consider the common good to correspond to his own interest, can easily ‘be prevented through Education’\(^774\).

The possibility of educating the prince, Sneedorff goes on to claim, is an advantage to monarchical government. ‘It is not the least of the Advantages in a Monarchy,’ he asserts, ‘that the person, who by Birth is destined to rule, can be made fit for this task through Education.’\(^775\) The inherent problem of despotism made monarchies particularly vulnerable to ideological criticism when they were, as was the case in Denmark and Norway, absolute hereditary monarchies. ‘An Heir to the Throne can thus not loose his Right of Heredit\(^776\), Sneedorff asserts, ‘except for such Reasons that are explicat\(^777\)ed in the Fundamental Laws, and in order for them not give Occasion to Disputes in such an important Matter, these must not only be important, but also be recognisable; Weakness, Inadequateness, and other Personal Shortcomings are not only difficult


\(^{775}\) Sneedorff, *Om den Borgerlige Regiering*: 436: ‘Det er ikke een af de ringeste Fordele i et Monarkie, at den, som ved Fødselen er bestemt til at regieret, kand gøres beqvem dertil ved Opdragelsen’.
to judge, but they can also, where the Government is conducted by Colleges, remain hidden.'

To fully appreciate Sneedorff’s contention, which might be valid in practice but has only little force as a theoretical argument, we must have in mind the distinction between the ‘Power’ of a ruler and the ‘Way’ in which a ruler exercises that power. Sneedorff’s contention comes close to the position which Holberg advocated in his engagement with the political philosophy of Montesquieu; that is, the emphasis not on the form of government, but on the actions of the ruler.

Considered in this light, we may add a qualification to Horstbøll’s interpretation of the intellectual shifts that occurred in the 1750s. Whilst Horstbøll is right in regard to the rise of a patriotic discourse, centred on virtue, the transition from Holberg-Pufendorf to Sneedorff-Montesquieu was less abrupt than previously presumed, as the changes in the political language that occurred from the 1750s onwards were largely set out in Holberg’s works from the 1740s and 1750s.

**Liberty and Authority in Early Enlightenment Thought**

In this chapter I have dealt with Holberg’s theory of monarchism and the various contexts in which it was formed. During the first half of the eighteenth century, the language of monarchism underwent significant changes. At the heart of those changes, two problems in particular attracted the attention of monarchical theorists: the relation between politics and religion and the ideological contest between monarchical and republican forms of government. As I have argued in this chapter, Holberg’s engagement with these problems can be divided into three partly overlapping phases. During the first phase, which is connected to his historical works and his treatise on natural law published in the 1710s, Holberg was mainly concerned with the relationship between politics and religion.

Arguing against the theory of divine right monarchy as it had been advocated in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries by the Christian political thinkers, Holberg founds his theory of monarchism on notions derived from modern natural law theories. Monarchical power stems not from divine ordination, but from popular consent. The people, living first in a state of natural freedom and equality, have joined themselves together in civil associations, granting political power to the monarch through a single act of sovereignty. What Holberg intended to do by applying the precepts of natural law to his theory of monarchism was to separate the

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government of the state from theological arguments. In contrast to the Christian political thinkers, who separated the ordo politicus from the ordo economicus and the ordo ecclesiasticus and reserved a prominent place for moral criticism of the ruler derived from theological insights, Holberg emphasised the useful sciences, which he particularly associated with history and moral philosophy. Fashioning himself as a theorist of modern natural law, Holberg’s novel contribution to the history of Danish political thought in this period consisted in his reinterpretation of the foundations of Danish monarchism. The absolute monarchy rests not on divine rights theory, nor on a mere contractual relation between the ruler and the ruled, but on the precepts of modern natural law, understood as a language of duties, sociability and sovereignty.

The second phase in the development of Holberg’s theory of monarchism sets in with the publication, between 1729 and 1735, of Holberg’s major Danish histories: his Dannemarck og Norges Beskrivelse, which appeared in a second edition in 1749, and his Dannemarks Riges Historie. In these works, Holberg is mainly concerned with the contrasts between monarchism and republicanism, thus moving to the second main problem facing the eighteenth-century Danish monarchists. Fashioning himself as an impartial historian, Holberg rejects what he sees as partisan treatments of Danish history. Intended, in particular, as a refutation of the devastating, republican critique of monarchy on offer in Molesworth’s Account of Denmark, Holberg offers an historical argument in favour of the monarchical revolution of 1660, one grounded in a discourse of natural law. Contrasting republican government, which treasures above all else political freedom, to monarchy founded on popular consent, Holberg paints a picture in which republican government equals factionalism and civil unrest, while absolute monarchy becomes the sole guarantor of peace and security. Republicanism, in Holberg’s account, is incapable of ensuring the peace and security of the state against internal faction and strife as well as external threats.

The third phase in the development of Holberg’s theory of monarchism falls between the publication of Nicholai Klimii in 1741 and the final volume of his Epistler, published posthumously in 1754. In this period Holberg takes upon himself the persona of the moral philosopher, who not only sees to inform the prince, but also to educate the public. Culminating with the reception of Montesquieu in the 1750s, Holberg’s political thought in this period continued his earlier engagements with natural law as well as his refutation of republican liberty. In the same period, however, his political thinking also moves in the direction of freedom, emphasising already in Nicholai Klimii the freedom of the citizens in an absolute monarchy. Whilst Holberg’s earlier works distinguished absolutism from tyranny on account of the former’s ability to provide the citizenry with the comfort of peace and security, from 1741 onwards, Holberg was concerned with
refuting the equation of absolute monarchy with of arbitrary government, subsequently feeding into Montesquieu’s conception of despotism. The question of despotism, Holberg asserts, is decided upon not in reference to the form of government, but the way in which political power is exercised. Taking issue with what I have described as an inherent problem in monarchical theory, Holberg offers a three-fold argument, seeking thus to delimit the potential arbitrary nature of absolute monarchical power. The three themes on which Holberg’s answer to the inherent problem of despotism turned (heredity, public opinion, and reforms) also runs through his other intellectual pursuits. It is to these pursuits that the following chapters are devoted.
Ludvig Holberg’s play *Erasmus Montanus eller Rasmus Berg* (Erasmus Montanus or Rasmus Berg), first published in 1731, portrays a young academic returning to his home village after finishing his university studies in the Danish capital. Confident in his new learning, the main character of the play, Rasmus Berg – or Erasmus Montanus in the Latinised version – adopts an arrogant and pedantic attitude towards his family, the community, and their culture. Putting his new learning to use, Montanus argues by way of deductive logic that his mother is a stone, that Per Deacon is a cock, and (most provocative of all) that the world is not flat, but round. However, as a common trait in Holberg’s comedies, the joke is on the main character, whose flaws, ignorance, and ambitions are exposed. In act I, scene 6, after having built up the expectations of the return of the learned Rasmus Berg, Holberg introduces his main character by way of an anecdote about his journey from Copenhagen to his home village. Bringing their father the news, Jacob has the following to say about the return of his brother:

JEPPE: Zounds! Is it possible? How does he look?
JACOB: Oh, he looks very learned. Rasmus Nielsen, who drove him, swears that all he did on the way home was to debate with himself in Greek and Persian. Several times he got so carried away that he struck Rasmus Nielsen three or four times in the back of the neck with his fist, shouting the whole time, “*Probe majoren, probe majoren*!” I guess he had a dispute with a major just before he left Copenhagen. Sometimes he sat very still and stared at the moon and the stars with such concentration that he fell out of the wagon.

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three times and nearly broke his neck out of sheer learning. Rasmus Nielsen laughed at him and said to himself, “Rasmus Berg may be knowledgeable about heaven, but he’s an ass on earth!”

Whilst many scholars have interpreted Erasmus Montanus as a satirical comment on contemporary astronomical theories and a criticism of the prevailing scholastic philosophy practised at the University of Copenhagen, much more seems to be at stake in Holberg’s play if viewed against the backdrop of contemporary moral and political thought. When falling out of the wagon, Montanus is revealed as a fool who is out of touch with his social background and the role of the philosopher. Holberg not only ridicules the foolishness of an academic, whose passions and pride has clouded his judgement; the play also puts on display the utter uselessness of university disquisitions, or philosophia instrumentalis, which Montanus praises for their applicability to any situation or debate. ‘Philosophia instrumentalis’, Montanus states, ‘is the only solid instruction. The rest may be nice enough, but it’s not learned. One who is skilled in logica and metaphysica can get out of anything; dispute on any subject, even though it is unfamiliar. It doesn’t matter to me what I decide to defend, I’ll come out well in the end. There was never any disputation at the university where I was not an opponent. A philosophus instrumentalis can pass in any discipline.’

A central theme in the play is thus that Montanus misunderstands the role of the philosopher as well as the nature of philosophy. In Holberg’s view, philosophy is not a systematic science or a formal method with which any proposition can be defended. Rather, philosophy is a way of life, it is wisdom through critical reflection and modest behaviour; indeed, a true philosopher is known for his behaviour rather than his disputes. In Erasmus Montanus, the instrumental knowledge of scholastic philosophy, the disciplines of logic and metaphysics, is mistaken for utility and truth. As Holberg intends to show, philosophia instrumentalis is not useful, nor does it relate itself to any form of truthfulness. It is pertinent to Holberg’s understanding of philosophy that a philosopher at all times questions his own presuppositions and seeks to cultivate no single perspective as the truth. In this light, Holberg’s understanding of the persona of the philosopher is as much a rejection of neo-scholasticism as it is of philosophical rationalism.
Thus, a philosopher is defined not by the doctrines of learning he advocates or by the philosophical schools to which he belongs, but rather by a set of behaviours and skills, to which is attached a corresponding range of moral duties.

The central conflict in *Erasmus Montanus* is the learned philosopher’s claim that the world is round, a claim which by the local community is perceived as ‘nothing less than confounding religion and leading people away from faith.’ The main controversy of the comedy is thus structured around the subsequent attempts on the part of the local community to convince Montanus to disclaim his beliefs and swear like any other good Christian that the world is flat. If he does not comply, he will lose his chance to marry his fiancée. Nonetheless, as Montanus asserts, a true philosopher does not disclaim what he has already publicly stated, for such action will undermine his philosophical authority and severely damage his reputation. Yet, at a crucial point, Montanus explains to his future father-in-law why he cannot embrace a religious worldview. ‘You misunderstand’, he tells him, ‘Philosophy is nothing more than a science, which has opened my eyes to this, as well as to other things.’ Although the philosophical conclusions drawn by Montanus in regard to the world being round or flat are correct, and although he, in this passage, utters one of Holberg’s most central convictions, namely that philosophy is about understanding, Montanus is still a fool, as he misunderstands the nature of philosophy and the office of the philosopher.

In regard to the nature of philosophy, what is at stake here is a tension between universal truth and pragmatic or functional regimes of utility; in terms of politics, the contrast is between community and self-interest. Whilst Montanus advocates self-interest by adhering to universal philosophical principles foreign to the townsfolk, his family and friends seeks to persuade him otherwise. Yet, in Holberg’s enlightenment, the universal and the local are not always contradictory – much in contrast to community and self-interest, which are not reconciled. When Montanus eventually finds his match, it is a lieutenant who had ‘read the classic Latin authors and studied the natural law and moral problems’. A set of universal principles, natural law lends itself not to philosophical truth in the sense pursued by Montanus, but to the practical organisation of social and political life; that is, to sociability, the common good, and the art of good government. Hence, the central moral and political issue at stake in Holberg’s play is how to

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786 As the moral nature of Holberg’s characters changes during his plays, I fundamentally disagree with the structural analysis proposed by Jens Kr. Andersen, who sees such moral judgements as fixed. In Andersen’s account, the figure of Erasmus Montanus represents therefore only what is morally speaking undesirable. See Jens Kr. Andersen, *Handling og moral: En stukturel studie i elleve Holberg-komedier* (Copenhagen 1992): 118–25.
organise as well as how to live together in civil society, an issue to which Holberg devoted large parts of his literary oeuvre. In raising this issue, which captures the central theme in his moral philosophy, Holberg addresses a vital problem in enlightenment thought, one which had strong bearings on contemporary theories of monarchism. Indeed, comprising both theology and natural jurisprudence, both comedy and philosophy, both secular and religious strands of thought, Holberg’s enlightenment is a call for man to reflect on how to live together, not fight each other, be it over questions of religion or philosophical truth.

This chapter deals with Holberg’s moral philosophy and its relation to his theory of civil society, that is, how people should act and live together in civil associations. Having initially been severely critical of any contention even remotely connected to political liberty and popular participation in government, as we have seen in the previous chapter, Holberg came to embrace what can be seen as a light version of civic participation in his major works on moral philosophy, published in the 1740s and 1750s. Several of his key contentions are, however, visible already in his writings from the 1720s, in his satirical works and his plays: they draw, largely, on the framework put into place in the Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskab. Natural law features prominently in the two dominant historiographical interpretations of Holberg’s moral philosophy. The first interpretation, which places natural law at the heart of Holberg’s entire intellectual oeuvre, is flawed, as it does not fully grasp those aspects of Holberg’s thought which are derived from different intellectual traditions; thus, it runs the danger, to put it in stronger terms, of becoming reductionist. According to the second historiographical interpretation, which also departs from his commitments to natural law, Holberg was, or so the story goes, ‘advocating reason and mature, responsible citizenship’, as opposed to ‘antiquated methods of upbringing and education, the decline of comedy and public taste, religious fanaticism, the suppression of women, narrowmindedness, and hypocrisy.’ This interpretation is even more flawed than the first, as it mistakes Holberg’s commitments to natural law and moral philosophy for rationalist discourse.

Across Holberg’s works, we find the contours of a particular theory of civil society grounded in a moral philosophical language of duty and sociability. In Holberg’s account, in contrast to the ideal of the monarchical state, which is founded on principles of unity and security, civil society is a place of diversity, glued together by diverse actions and offices. To each office Holberg ascribes a

788 The main advocate of this view is F. J. Billeskov Jansen, Ludvig Holberg og menneskerettighederne … og andre Holbergstudier (Copenhagen 1999): 23–56. It should be mentioned that Billeskov Jansen is the Danish scholar, who has done the most to map the sources of Holberg’s moral philosophy, where natural law do play a central role. See esp. F. J. Billeskov Jansen, Holberg som Epigrammatiker og Essayist, 2 vols. (Copenhagen 1938–39).
distinct set of duties. Thus, in order for us to fully appreciate what Holberg was doing, we shall consider his thoughts not only in relation to contemporary traditions of moral philosophy, but also in relation to the function of particular personae in civil society more broadly. As this chapter argues, Holberg’s thoughts on moral philosophy and civil society were formed within three partly overlapping contexts, embedding the early Northern enlightenment in diverse traditions of thought.

**Staging the Enlightenment**

Between the 1710s and the 1750s, Holberg developed his moral thought using a broad variety of literary and academic genres, mutually reinforcing his overall arguments as well as the particular interventions performed by each literary production. Whilst in some of his works he imitates well-established genres and expositions by renowned European thinkers such as Pufendorf or Thomasius, in others his choice of genre and presentation is highly unconventional. Within this second category, we must consider Holberg’s plays, which encapsulate one of the most remarkable expositions of early enlightenment moral philosophy. Holberg’s project, as he puts it time and again, is to moralise, simultaneously using such strategies as erudition, ridicule, reason, laughter, and scorn. As Georg Brandes notes, Holberg’s plays drew on personal or internal experience, as well as the external reality of the eighteenth century, and on published literature, most notably the French playwright Jean-Baptiste Poquelin (1622-1673), known to the world as Molière.790 Yet, as we shall see shortly, the connections established in Holberg’s writings between moral philosophy, drawn from theories of natural law, and comedies, as the means of presenting such moral precepts, were ill perceived by most contemporary thinkers, who entertained an altogether different notion of the public utility of the playwright.791 Yet, before giving an account of these opinions, we shall first enter the stage of the theatre and the tradition from Molière in which Holberg placed himself. Neo-classicism, thus, is the first context in which we shall consider Holberg’s moral philosophy.

When the first Danish theatre opened in Lille Grønnegade in Copenhagen on 22 September 1722, the first production to be staged was Molière’s L’Avare (The Miser); only three days later, on 25 September, Holberg’s Den politiske Kandestøber (The Political Tinker) premiered ‘with extraordinary success’, as he recalls in the first part of his memoirs.792 ‘Such was the crowd of

790 Georg Brandes, *Ludvig Holberg: Et Festskrift* (Copenhagen 1969); Ch 5.
spectators’, he continues, ‘and so great was the general eagerness to witness this performance, that the entrances to the theatre were thronged with persons who were unable to advance or recede.’

Within the first one and a half years of the opening, Holberg, using the pseudonym Hans Mikkelsen, had composed fifteen comedies; during his lifetime, he would write more than thirty plays altogether. He had begun his satirical writing a few years earlier. His ‘poetic Frenzy’, as he called it, was set in motion by his controversy with Andreas Hojer, which followed the publication of Hojer’s Kurtzgefasste dänemarckische Geschichte and his Latin tract on marriage. Holberg, as we saw in the previous chapter, reacted strongly to Hojer’s criticism of him as an historian; in doing so, he also discovered his own satirical talents. Besides his two polemical responses to Hojer, Holberg produced a mock-heroic poem Peder Paars, which was published in four volumes between 1719 and 1720, and a number of minor satirical-poetic pieces. The early satirical works contain important reflections on the persona of the satirist or the poet as a general critic of contemporary culture. ‘Like bitter Medicine, a healthy Satire is,’ Holberg writes, before moving on to compare it to ‘a Chirurgical Blade that heals, when it cuts.’

At the time when Holberg first began writing satirical works, he was professor of metaphysics, a position to which he was appointed in 1717; however, as Erasmus Montanus will evidence, Holberg never held his professorial duties as teacher of metaphysics very seriously. In 1720, however, he took over the professorship in classical eloquence and literature, which gave him the opportunity to study the Roman classics, which were, together with Molière, to become an inexhaustible source of inspiration for his dramatic writings as well as his moral philosophy, his aim being to ‘expose prevailing follies’.

Until the theatre in Lille Grønnegade opened in 1722, theatrical performances had been limited to the royal court, where productions were commissioned to travelling theatre companies. It was to one such travelling actor, the French actor René Magnon de Montaigu (1661-1737), who had performed at the royal court since the reign of Christian V, that the court in 1722 granted a privilege to establish a Danish theatre where plays should be performed in the

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793 Holberg, Memoirs of Lewis Holberg: 96.
vernacular by Danish actors, who, as it happened, were often recruited among young students at the university, much to the regret of the majority of professors.\footnote{Amongst modern scholars, the opening of a Danish theatre has received most attention from literary historians, see particularly Gustav Albeck & F. J. Billeskov Jansen, \textit{Fra Runerne til Johannes Ewald: Dansk litteratur historie 1} (Copenhagen 1964): 273-306; F. J. Billeskov Jansen, \textit{Ludvig Holberg og menneskeretighederne …og andre Holbergstudier} (Copenhagen 1999): 13-22; Jens Hougaard \textit{et al}, \textit{Dansk litteraturhistorie 3: Stænderkultur og enevælde 1620-1746}, 2nd edition, (Copenhagen 1990): 359-481; Thomas Bredsdorff, \textit{Den brogede oplysning: Om følelsernes fornuft og fornuftens følelse i 1700-tallets nordiske litteratur} (Copenhagen 2003): 166-168.} Along with Molière’s comedies, a number of plays by another French playwright Jean-François Regnard (1655-1709) were also translated. Already a celebrated satirical writer, Holberg was asked to author original plays for the newly erected theatre.

Following the tradition from Molière, and to a lesser extent the Italian tradition of the \textit{Commedia dell’Arte}, Holberg intended his comedies to portray the general vices and flaws of his fellow countrymen. ‘I made it my chief object in these comedies’, he recalls, ‘to attack follies and vices which had escaped other dramatic writers, and which, in some instances, were peculiar to the people of this country.’\footnote{Holberg, \textit{Memoirs of Lewis Holberg} 95.} Like Molière’s plays, Holberg’s comedies thus revolve around a particular character, whose vices are exaggerated in order to reach a general moral point. In contrast to earlier traditions, particularly the \textit{Haupt- und Staatsaktion} prominent at the court of Christian V, the character comedies do not revolve around the great deeds of kings and states, but rather the common people. In \textit{L’Avare}, for instance, Molière exposes the greed of the main character Harpagon, who is more concerned for his own wealth and fortune than the happiness of his children. In \textit{Tartuffe}, which triggered many polemics in France, the pious Tartuffe is exposed as a hypocrite after his seductive engagement with Elmira.\footnote{Molière, \textit{Comoedie om Gamle Jens Gnier eller Penge-Puger, Oversat til det Danske Thetri Brug, efter det bekendte Franske Stykke, af Molières, kaldet: L’Avarre} (Copenhagen 1748); Molière, \textit{Tartuffe eller Den Skinhellige, Comoedie i Fem Acter Forestillet paa Den Danske Skueplads}, Diderich Sekmann, trans., (Copenhagen 1724). It is possible that both plays by Molière were published in Danish translation in the 1720s by the public official Diderich Sekmann (1684-1743), the principal translator of French plays in this period. Many of Molière’s plays were translated again in the 1740s, this time by Barthold Johan Lodde (1706-1788), who also translated Regnard, Voltaire, and others. On Molière and the polemics surrounding \textit{Tartuffe} see Carl Johan Elmquist, \textit{Molière} (Copenhagen 1966): exp. 50-65. \footnote{Ludvig Holberg, \textit{Selected Essays of Ludvig Holberg}, P.M. Mitchell, ed., (Lawrence 1955): 122.} Half a lifetime later, in the late 1740s and early 1750s, from whence this reflection stems, Holberg still cherished this tradition, contrasting it to the deteriorated dramatic taste of the mid-eighteenth century, dictated, as he saw it, by principles
of entertainment and fashion. ‘Nothing could have been easier for me’, he claims, ‘than to write such Plays as are now Fashionable; but I have made use of my Pen in this kind of Work, as a Philosopher, and therefore count my Comedies amongst my Moral Writings.’ Thus, in Holberg’s view, the playwright must take on the persona of the moral philosopher who unites education and entertainment rather than subjecting himself to the dictates of current fashions: ‘The sect wanting this sort of play can be called orthodox, since it demands order and rules, utile and dulce – that is, utility intermingled with pleasure.’

However, although ‘most Plays by the French Comedy-Writer are Masterpieces’, not all Molière’s comedies were suited for the Danish theatre. As Holberg argues, using another pseudonym, in Just Justesens Betænkning over Comoedier (Just Justesen’s Reflection on Comedies), prefaced to the first printed volume of his plays in 1723 and again in an improved version in 1724, it is crucial that the names, places, characters, and language of a comedy correspond to the nation in which the play is to be performed. ‘Tartuffe in Molière can never be Danish, for the main character is a directeur de conscience, who, under the cloak of holiness, conquers the authority of a household, and who is a kind of person cultivated only in Roman Catholic countries.’ Some scholars have suggested that Holberg’s reservations toward Molière’s Tartuffe as unbefitting the Danish theatre stems from his own ambition and want of fame, in that he simply seeks to promote his own comedies over the translations of Molière. This view seems rather out of tune, however, not only with Holberg’s praise of Molière and the neoclassical tradition within which he also placed himself, but also with his general views on theatre and civil society. For, if we read his Betænkning over Comoedier not as a promotion of his own plays, but as a broader reflection on the moral force of comedies and the persona of the playwright, Holberg’s text becomes a call for a particular form of enlightenment, one in tension with the predominant schools of thought in the early eighteenth century.

When the Pietists came to power in the 1730s, they moved to ban theatre from public life. The theatre in Lille Grønnegade, however, had already closed at that time due to the great fire of Copenhagen in 1728 and financial difficulties, a topic which Holberg explored in a short comedy

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804 Ludvig Holberg, Epistler, 8 vols., F. J. Billeskov Jansen, ed., (Copenhagen 1944–54): IV.206: ‘Intet kunde have været lettere, end at skrive saadanne Skue-Spil, som nu er paa Moden; men jeg haver brugt min Pen udi dette slags Arbejde, som en Philosophus, og derfore regner mine Comoedier iblandt mine Moralske Skrifter’.

805 Holberg, Selected Essays of Ludvig Holberg: 122–23.


themed around the funeral of the Danish theatre. However, this had no effect on the Pietist attacks on the theatre and comedies. The Pietist refutation of the theatre was spearheaded by Erich Pontoppidan, in whose works dramatic performances, along with a host of other activities, were condemned as both immoral and ungodly. As Pontoppidan asserts in *Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed* (Truthfulness for Piety), a much-celebrated explanation of Luther’s small catechism, which first appeared in 1737, ‘Comedies’, along with dance, games, and tavern songs, are ‘in themselves a Sin’, right next to ‘Futility, salacious Company, Novels and promiscuous Love-Stories or Images, frivolous Games, Dancing,’ and whatever else might arouse mankind’s desires, ‘Plays’ are considered amongst those things inspiring impurity. To Pontoppidan and the Pietists, the effects of dramatic performances are a grave danger to the order and seriousness which characterise a truly Christian way of life. As the Pietists saw it, taking on another person’s identity was a devilish act, which can be traced back to Satan in the Garden of Eden, who appeared before Eve in the form of a snake.

In his later writings, Pontoppidan expands his criticism of the theatre, most notably in his discussion of comedies contained in the letters comprising the religious novel *Menoza, en asiatisk Prins* (Menoza, an Asian Prince), published in three volumes between 1742 and 1743. In the fifteenth letter, the main character, an Asian Prince who travels the world in order to find true Christians, only to find very little of what he seeks, arrives in Venice ‘in the midst of the Time of Carnival in the Year 1718’, which occasions a host of reflections on masquerades, comedies, operas, games, and dancing. Throughout these reflections, theatrical activities are placed in the same boat with ‘all sorts of flagrant Iniquity’, fostering ‘Murder, Betrayal, Theft or Fornication’; to permit such activities to take place in a Christian society, Pontoppidan asserts, would mean ‘that Christ is exterminated amongst the Christians, and that one has to a high Degree forgotten his Mind, yes has become like a stranger to his and the early Christian’s serious Way of Life.’

The deception and the unrestrained passions are recurrent themes in Pontoppidan’s criticism of

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the theatre as a place of illusions: all illusions are devilish and inspire impious acts. In a central passage of his *Menoza*, in which Pontoppidan alludes to the theatre in Lille Grønregade that in the 1720s enjoyed the support of the monarchy, he contrasts the serious, Christian way of life to the frivolous promise of the Devil, which is the theatre. ‘I take it to be one of Satan’s Masterpieces’, he writes, ‘that he has managed not only to permit, but also to privilege Comedies amongst the Christians, and by the Institutions of the Magistracy made it reach its Perfection. Should Comedies become innocent, then must be removed from them just that which the degenerated Taste of the Commoners crave for, and then they would disappear by themselves when they by small Numbers were ill paid.’

Considering, however, the context in which Pontoppidan wrote, his renunciation of the theatre did not contain anything out of the ordinary. Pontoppidan merely reiterated long-established anti-theatrical arguments. The critique of the theatre had a lengthy tradition in European thought, dating back to at least Plato’s discussion of poetry and drama in relation to truth in *The Republic*. The early Christian tradition, much indebted as it was to Plato’s ideas, construed theatrical performances as suspect, since the act of taking on another’s personality was altogether dishonest, imitating the work of the devil. Yet, the criticisms of the theatre went beyond the Christian tradition. In the early eighteenth century, several enlightened thinkers condemned comedies and plays in a similar idiom. In the republic of Geneva, for instance, theatre was banned by official decree, except during some turbulent years in the mid-1730s. Jacob Vernet (1698-1789), a leading Calvinist in the mid-eighteenth century, denounced the theatre for its display of luxury and immorality as well as its assault on religious and republican virtues; even Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), that most famous citizen of Geneva, held the theatre in contempt. Furthermore, the fate of the Geneva theatre was to become one of the controversial points in the encounters between Rousseau and Voltaire. Whilst Voltaire, for his part, held private performances in Geneva and authored a number of plays (some of which were translated into Danish), Rousseau was concerned about what he saw as the moral decay staged in theatrical

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spectacles, favouring instead the opera and the ballet. Rousseau, moreover, had further reason for opposing the theatre, given his suspicions of human betterment through the illumination offered by philosophy. Rousseau thus opposed one of the most central contentions in Holberg’s version of enlightenment moral philosophy. Through moral and satirical criticism, through comedies, Holberg asserts, it is possible to educate people and improve their way of life, for ‘no more forceful Way of Writing is invented in which to moralise, and wherein the Character of Virtues and Vices can be brought more to life.’ Summarising the controversy over the nature of theatre, Holberg states:

As far as comedies are concerned, opinions are at variance. Fanatics have regularly considered histrionics among the sinful pleasures and others have preached against the theatre, but they have been forcefully refuted by the sternest and most sensible moralists. The arguments that are used pro and con I shall not cite here, since they are known to all. I will say but this, that our Danish theatre has reformed, as it were, the public in this country and taught the people to reason about virtues and vices of which many previously had scarcely any idea.

Humans can improve themselves through comedies given that they take directions not from the pulpit, but the theatre. To Holberg, the theatre is one of the quintessential places of public enlightenment. ‘Like a Comedy is a School for the whole People,’ he argues in the fourth volume of his Epistler in 1750, ‘so can a Play also serve as a School for the learning Youth. For those Presentations and Performances, which happen by living Persons, can have great Effect on the Dispositions of an Audience, as one better mirrors oneself in such Spectacles, than Examples, which is read in Histories. The Upbringing and Information of the Youth can be arranged in such a way that the Theory, which acquired from philosophical and moral Works, can by exemplary Spectacles on Stage continue into Praxis. Advocating the public utility of the theatre, Holberg presents the persona of the playwright as a quintessential enlightenment figure, drawing a sharp distinction between the playwright and the persona of the theologian advocated by Pontoppidan. According to Pontoppidan, the serious Christian should learn to withstand the devilish promise of liberty and passion; to let go of God’s grace, which is what is at stake in comedies and masquerades, will give mankind an ‘inner Peace and Freedom, though it be of the false Kind, and it is a Sign of Satan’s

Slavery.' All Christians, Pontoppidan concludes, must choose between rival visions of human interaction, embracing either a Christian way of life or the ways of the Devil. As he puts it in *Menoza*, 'one must either renounce true Christianity or those quite contradictory Things, that the first serious Christians would have called, as they also are heathen Things, that is some of the Devil's work, which they through Baptism have forsaken, and to which they hardly by any Death Penalty could be threatened and forced.' Thus, Pontoppidan's attack on the theatre has a reforming purpose, aiming to reform society from pulpit and to inspire an inner piety capable of withstanding the frivolous joys of the theatre.

In his response to the position of Pontoppidan and the Pietists, which is scattered throughout his writings, Holberg insists on the educational function of the theatre and the masquerades as well as their philosophical nature. Masquerades, for instance, represent not deceit and immoral interaction between humans, but 'the natural State, whereby all humans are made equal, and wherein all cumbersome Ceremonies are dissolved for a While.' In this natural state, human interactions become 'free, unconstrained, without Fear and Bashfulness'. Far from invoking the kind of devilish or brutish passions against which Pontoppidan warns his readers in *Menoza*, the masquerade is characterised in Holberg's vocabulary as a 'philosophical Game' from which springs 'philosophical Reflections, as all are thereby reminded of that Condition in which Mankind was first placed upon GOD's Creation, and from where it has fallen due to Sin: In this regard, one can claim that the common State in which we live is a perpetual Masquerade, as Government, Fashions and Customs place upon us Masks, which we by such Games remove, and that we in truth are not really masked, except when we walk around with naked Faces. The comedy or the theatrical performance as a metaphor for a person's life span or a way of life in general had deep roots in the classical and humanist traditions. The metaphor appeared in Seneca's epistles, a selection of which appeared in Danish translation in 1741, and in

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825 Pontoppidan, *Menoza*: 197: ‘man maa enten afsige sand Kristendom, eller slige plat stridige Ting, hvilke de første alvorlige Kristne ville have kaldet, som de og ere, hedenske Ting, og altså noget af det Djævelsvæsen, som de i Daaben forsagede, til hvilket de knapt ved Dødsstraf havde ladet sig true og tvinge’.

826 Holberg, *Epitler*: IV.123 ‘den naturlige Stand, hvorved alle Mennesker gjøres lige, og hvorudt all Tvang og besværlige Ceremonier til en Tiid ophøre’.


829 Seneca, *Den fornuftige Seneca, Eller, et fromt og dydefuldit Levnets Rettesnor, Uddragen af En Hednings L. Annae Senecæ Epitler, Som Christne maatte ønske altid at practicere. Af Tydsk paa Dansk oversat, Peder Bruun, trans., (Copenhagen 1741): 40. As F. J. Billeskov Jansen has pointed out, Holberg refers to Seneca from his early works onwards. However,
Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*, that great play about deception and delusion, where human existence is seen as ‘A stage, where every man must play a part’. In the writings of Holberg’s younger contemporary, the rationalist philosopher Friderich Christian Eilschow (1725-1750), human existence is described as being part of a single but incomprehensible comedy, instructed by God and situated ‘on the World Stage’. ‘We have, each of us,’ Eilschow asserts, ‘our own Role to play.’

Further, as a critic of human passions and vices, the principal task of the playwright is to inspire virtue through ridicule, but never to combat them or to promote any one virtue before all others. This, Holberg asserts, is the way of the Pietists, whose foremost aim is to impose on all others their way of life. Common amongst his critics, Holberg puts this feature under scrutiny in several of his plays, thus turning their piety against themselves. In his *Philosophus udi egen Indbildung* (The Imagined Philosopher), which Holberg wrote for the new Danish theatre when it reopened in the late 1740s, the main character Cosmoligoreus lives an elevated life as a true philosopher, devoting his time to combating human ‘Mistakes and Vices’, in particular ‘Plays and Dancing’. A parallel to Molière’s *Tartuffe*, the main theme of the play is whether ‘Philosophy and Hypocrisy are two mutually excluding Things’. Holberg places Cosmoligoreus at a crossroads, making him choose between the two, that is, between his philosophy and his ‘Love for a Woman’. At first, he chooses his philosophy: ‘No, Cosmoligoree!,’ he tells himself in act III, scene 7, ‘you must Resist Temptations; you must let people see that you are a Philosopher not only in Words, but also in Deeds, and that your Way of Life corresponds with your Doctrine.’

The comedy reaches its satirical potential when Cosmoligoreus is persuaded by Pernille, who poses as a philosopher adhering to the made-up ‘Philosophy of Prague’, that it is appropriate for a true philosopher to sleep with his maid twice a week.

```plaintext
COSMOLIGOREUS: What! two Nights every Week.
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whereas he, in his early works, only knows him through Grotius and Pufendorf, he seems to have worked on directly on Seneca’s works (in Lipsius’ edition) between 1732 and 1744, that is, whilst working on his *Moralske Tanker*, a work in which Seneca is a key figure. Cf. F. J. Billeskov Jansen, *Holberg som Epigrammatiker og Essayist*, 2 vols. (Copenhagen 1938-39): I.199-200.

832 Eilschow, *Philosophiske Anmerkninger*: 3: ‘Vi have selv vores Rolle at iagttage’.
834 Holberg, *Verker i Tolv Bind* VII.255: ‘Philosophie og Hyklerie ere evende stridige Ting’
835 Holberg, *Verker i Tolv Bind* VII.293: ‘Kierlighed til et Fruentimmer’.
836 Holberg, *Verker i Tolv Bind* VII.293: ‘Ney, Cosmoligoree! du maa holde Stand mod Fristelser; du maa lade see, at du est Philosophus, ikke alleene udi Ord, men end og udi Gierninger, og at dit Levnet svarer til din Lærdom’.
837 Holberg, *Verker i Tolv Bind* VII.301: ‘Fragiske Philosophie’.
After hesitating at first, Cosmoligoreus is finally persuaded by this new philosophical doctrine; putting it to use, he is exposed as a hypocrite who cherishes philosophy only in theory. As Bent Holm has pointed out, numerous themes and phrases in Holberg’s *Philosophus udi egen Indbildung* resemble those found in Pontoppidan’s *Menoza,* in which we are told, that ‘it was not really Games, but the desire for Games, not Dancing, but the desire for Dancing that besmirched the Soul in the Eyes of God.’ Thus, it would seem, *Philosophus udi egen Indbildung* is an unmistakable critique of the Pietists as fanatic hypocrites, a point which becomes even clearer when considering the moral upshot of the play, uttered by Jeronimus at the end of act IV, scene 7. Only people of a certain inclination are drawn by the infamous fourteenth article of the philosophical diet, Jeronimus argues, ‘For how unfair such Doctrine may be, then one finds that it is practised by all Fanatics.’

According to Holberg, most critics of theatre, of comedies, and masquerades are hypocrites, like Tartuffe or Cosmoligoreus, taking their ill-founded morality too far, particularly when imposing it on others. In ‘Roman Catholic countries’, he argues, ‘comedians are excommunicated’ by authorities that publicly tolerate prostitution; although ‘the comedy often has been misused’, he still finds no reason why it should not be tolerated. ’An hypocrite’, he writes, ‘plays the most heinous comedies; the difference between him and another actor is that although both are playing roles, the former does so in order to deceive the world and the latter in order to lay bare deception.

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838 Holberg, *Værker i Tolv Bind*: VII.304: ‘COSMOLIGOREUS. Hillemand! tvende Nætter om Ugen. PERNILLE. Ja! det er Tirsdag og Torsdag Nat; thi der udi lever jeg ogsaa efter philosophiske Regler. COSMOLIGOREUS. Er det philosophical Rule to sleep with one’s maid-servant? PERNILLE: Yes indeed! it is the 14th Article of my philosophical Diet or Way of Life that consists of 62 Articles, all of which I carefully observe. COSMOLIGOREUS: But that is sinful? PERNILLE: Not at all, my Lord! given that the Intention of doing so is decent, and the Soul is pure. If that is a Sin, then it is only the Body that Sins, which cannot properly be called a Sin. Otherwise one must make Distinctions between Friendship and Desire; what I am doing in this regard, stems alone from initial Friendship, which is a Cardinal Virtue, and cannot be recommended too often to Mankind.

839 Holm, ‘De talte om Comoedi-Spil som Djevlens Strik og Snare’.


841 Holberg, *Værker i Tolv Bind*: VII.510: ‘Thi hvor u-rimelig saadan Lærdom end er, saa seer mand dog, at den antages af alle Fanaticics’.

and false virtues. Pope Sixtus V and Molière were both great actors, but we would not hesitate to excommunicate the former and place the latter in a category with the greatest philosophers.

The fanatical opponents of the theatre take the illusions for reality and misunderstand the offices of the actor and the playwright, a theme explored by Holberg in his comedy *Hexerie Eller Blind Allarm* (Witchcraft or False Alarm), the story of which is centred around a theatre company being falsely accused of witchcraft when rehearsing a play on that very same topic. Serving the ends as the entertainment, education, and betterment of the people, the playwright becomes a kind of philosopher. This is the central contention of Holberg’s *Betænkning over Comoedier*, in which he lists the essential skills required in a playwright:

> For it is vital for a Comedy Writer that he is, first, a Philosopher, and has carefully studied that which is called *Ridiculum* of the human race; secondly, that he possesses the talent to expose vices in such as way as to also entertain. Third, that he in his imagination can picture the effect it will have in a Theatre; for at times the Comedy, which is most entertaining to read, can be the least pleasant on stage; for by jokes and clever inventions one can convey that which cannot be easily described, which is something that makes a Theatre lively. 4th that he from the reading of good Comedies has learned all those rules, which thus needs to be observed; yet one should take care that one does not seek to make the Theatre living in such a way that one thereby offend that which is called *bonsens*. It is certainly necessary to exaggerate the Characters, but in such a way that one does not turn a ludicrous Hero into a mad Man.

A broader reflection on the *persona* of the playwright and the corresponding range of skills and duties, what Holberg was doing was to stage the enlightenment, or, that is, a particular strand of enlightenment thought. As Holberg sees it, the poet, the playwright, and the philosopher share a family resemblance. Pontoppidan, by contrast, was also engaged in an enlightenment project, one which differed from that of Holberg in that it aimed at pious reform of the self and of civil society. What was at stake, therefore, in the controversy surrounding the theatre was a tension

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844 Holberg, *Værker i Tolv Bind*: V.309-395. On the context of the play see Holm, ’En fandens profession’.
845 Holberg, *Comoedier, Sammenskrevne for Den Danske Skueplads*: n.p.: ‘thi der udfordres af en Comoedie-Skriver, først at han Philosophus, og har nøje udstdueret det som kaldes Ridiculum udi det menneskelige kion; for det andet, at hand har det pund, at igennemhegle lyder saaledes, at han diverterer tillige. Tredie, at han i sin imagination kand forestille sig hvad virkning den vil have paa et Theatro; thi undertiden kand den Comoedie, som er lystist at læse, allerminst behage paa skue-pladsen; thi ved klygter og artige indfald kan fattes det, som ikke kan vel beskrives, men er noget som gør et Theatrum levende. 4. At hand af gode Comoediers læsning har faaet alle de regler i hovedet, som derved bør i azt tages; dog maa man tage sig vare, at mand ikke søger at gøre et Theatrum saaledes levende, og man derved steder og mod det som kaldes bonsens. Det er vel fornøden, at outrere Characterne, men dog saaledes, at mand ikke af en etterlig Hero gør en gal Mand’.
846 As Francis Bull has argued, this notion of how to construct good plays remained central to Holberg throughout his writings, although the later comedies, composed after 1731, differ from his early dramatic writings. Most notably, the later comedies are structured around a controversy, as opposed to being structured around a particular character. This deviation, as Bull also suggests, reflects not a change in Holberg’s view on comedies, but rather that Holberg has matured as a playwright. See Francis Bull, ’Om Holbergs Femten første Komedier’, *Holberg Aarbog* (1920): 38–40. The best survey of Holberg’s comedies is still to be found in F. J. Billeskov Jansen’s biography, where he distinguishes between comedies of character, of intrigue, of presentation, parodies, and comedies of ideas. See Jansen, *Ludvig Holberg*: 62-78.
between multiple visions of enlightenment and civil society. These visions were subsequently grounded in rival notions of human nature and human freedom. To Holberg, humans are in possession of reason and free will, which consequently makes human adherence and enslavement to the passions a comical feature. As a poet and a playwright, therefore, Holberg writes about the manners and behaviours of common people – peasants, servants, students, clergymen, and philosophers to name but a few – not to ridicule particular persons, or even particular groups of people, but in order to address a larger range of issues related to the passions and the duties of particular offices in civil society. In the 1730s, this contention was taken up by Friderich Horn (1708-1781), a poet, jurist, and a follower of Holberg. As Horn asserts, in terms of their ability to move the people towards the moral good, ‘a Satirical Work’ is far superior to ‘a Sermon’, which, due to its ceremonial character and frequency, is taken no more serious than some ‘Drunken-Discourse’. Though Holberg is not alone with this vision of enlightenment, he is one of the very few writers in the early eighteenth century to launch an intellectual defence of comedy and satire as part of a larger enlightenment project of moral philosophy. ‘[W]hen I decry the Folly of Mankind, I do not forget my own,’ Holberg writes, ‘when I laugh at others, I laugh at myself.’ Satire is an instrument of enlightenment, its purpose human betterment – one of the characteristic features of the enlightenment.

Sociability, Duty, and Character

Having grounded his conceptions of the poet and the playwright as moral philosophers in a neo-classical tradition as represented by Molière, the ideas that Holberg staged in his plays were equally embedded in the tradition of modern natural law with which he engaged in his early works from the 1710s. A central theme in Holberg’s moral philosophy concerns the relations between citizens in civil societies. At the heart of his theory of civil society, he places the concept

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847 "Friderich Horn", Somnium Poëticum, Eller en Poetisk Drom af Frans Hansen Drejer i Helsingør (Copenhagen 1731).
851 In Harald Hoffding’s account of Danish philosophy, beginning with Holberg and Sneedorff, natural law theories and eclecticism play no mentionable role. English and French philosophy was dominant, Hoffding argues, and the influence of German philosophy on Danish philosophers begins only with Wolff and peaks with Kant, Schilling, and Hegel, thus pushing aside figures like Pufendorf and Thomasius. Yët, understanding Holberg’s notion of philosophy, and thus Holberg as a philosopher, we need to reappraise his relation to this particular tradition of philosophy. See Harald Hoffding, Udvulgte Stykker af Dansk Filosofisk Litteratur med Indledninger af Harald Hoffding (Copenhagen 1910): 1, 4.
of sociability, central to Grotius as well as Pufendorf.\(^{852}\) The main moral issue that Holberg addressed in his plays is the question of how to live together in civil society. In this regard, the concept of sociability refers not to the creation of societies, as it primarily did in the *Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskab*. Rather, it signifies a second aspect of sociability, also present in the treatise on natural law, related to the actions of persons in relation to themselves, to others, and to their authorities. Sociability, or ‘the Sociality of Human Life’, as Holberg puts it, means ‘that one from time to time must abandon one’s evil Desires.’\(^{853}\) This encouragement of sociality is a central tenet in the tradition of modern natural law. ‘The Foundation of natural Law’, Holberg writes, ‘is that every Person, as far as he can, must maintain Relations and Associations.’\(^{854}\) The ‘fundamental natural law’, as Pufendorf sees it, is ‘to cultivate and preserve sociality.’\(^{855}\) Alluding to the classical account by Cicero, Holberg, as well as Pufendorf, understands duty as an *officium* and interprets the role of man’s sociability as that of understanding one’s duties towards oneself, others, God, and society.\(^{856}\) Thus, sociability means becoming useful not only to oneself, but also to others. In *De Officio*, Pufendorf strikes a similar chord when he states that man has a duty to act in accordance with his natural talents and his station in life:

> Every man must also receive some education in accordance with his capacity and fortune, so that no one shall be a useless burden on the earth, a problem to himself and a nuisance to others. He must also choose in due time an honest way of life in accordance with his natural bent, his mental and physical abilities, the condition of his birth, his fortune, his parents’ wishes, the commands of the civil rulers, opportunity or necessity.\(^{857}\)

In his plays, Holberg thematises various aspects of human sociability, depicting the virtues and vices of particular characters in relation to roles or offices in civil society. Though Holberg’s conception of civil society differs from the view advocated for instance by David Hume (1711-1776) and Adam Smith (1723-1790) from the 1740s onwards, he was already in the 1720s pursuing one of the central contentions of the Scottish enlightenment: the close correlation between character and sociability.\(^{858}\) We have already seen how Holberg treated these issues in

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858 Recent studies have explored the connections between sociability, character, and the self from the point of view of the Scottish enlightenment, beginning with David Hume. See Thomas Ahnert and Susan Manning, eds., *Character, Self, and Sociability in the Scottish Enlightenment* (New York 2011).
Erasmus Montanus in relation to philosophy and learning, but he also thematises other aspects, closely related to his theory of monarchism. Before we examine the interpretation of character and sociability in the comedies, we shall first see how Holberg treats the relationship between sociability, duty, and office in the *Introduction til Naturens of Folke-Rettens Kundskab*.

As Holberg sees it, civil society consists of different offices. Whether a person is a prince, a preacher, or a peasant, certain distinct duties are attached to those offices. Whilst the duty of the peasant is to cultivate the earth, the principal duty attached to the office of the prince is, as we saw in the previous chapter, to attend to the common good and the security of the commonwealth. As Holberg argues, just as the distinction between a slave and a free man exists only in civil societies, and not in the state of natural liberty, so does the distinction between certain offices in civil society become a matter of functional context. The distinction between a citizen and a soldier, for instance, only exists after the soldiers are enrolled and lasts only for as long as a state of war prevails between the nations involved.\textsuperscript{859} Unfolding a functional theory of offices and duties, Holberg interprets moral duties relative to particular offices in civil society.\textsuperscript{860} A key aspect of Holberg’s moral and political thought, people should act not only according to the moral requirements of their respective offices, but also in accordance with their own nature, character, or *persona*. The *persona*, as Holberg understands it, thus represents a certain office, to which is ascribed a particular set of duties, obligations, and liberties that both legitimises the office in question and subverts it when the performance of the *persona* does not live up to the moral duties of the particular office. Regrettably, Holberg argues in the *Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskab*, the ‘Rule’, as he calls it, that all persons in civil society must choose that ‘Study’, or office, towards which they exhibit the ‘most natural Expedience’ is but seldom enforced.\textsuperscript{861} He continues:

\begin{quote}
for a Statesman will have his Son become a Statesman as well, a Clergyman \textsuperscript{[will have]} his Son become a Clergyman etcetera, although the Head of neither one is suited for it, and from this flows the Ineptness of many People; for instead of being forced to become a bad Politician, the Son of the Statesman could become a great Mathematician, and instead of becoming a bad Clergyman the Priest’s Son could become a great General.\textsuperscript{862}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{859} Holberg, *Værker i tolv Bind* I.114–15.

\textsuperscript{860} On this functional theory of monarchism in Pufendorf, see Haakonssen, ‘Naturretten, Pufendorf og Holberg’: 43.

\textsuperscript{861} Holberg, *Værker i tolv Bind* I.83: ‘Regel’, ‘most naturlig Beqvenhed’.

\textsuperscript{862} Holberg, *Værker i tolv Bind*: I.83–84: ‘thi en Statsmand vil have sin Son ogsaa til Statsmand, en Præst sin Søn til Præst etc. skjønt ingens Hoved er beqvem dertil, og flyder deraf besynderlig mange Folks Udygtighed; thi Statsmandens Son kunde i Steden for en forcered og slet Politicus blive en stor Mathematicus, og Præstens Søn i steden for en slet Præst blive en stor General’.
This linkage between the characters of people and their positions in society serves as one of the cornerstones of Holberg’s moral philosophy. Holberg sees a close link between specific offices and the characters of the people, which he unremittingly explores in his plays; like other early modern philosophers, he insists on the importance of understanding morality in relation to the functional persona attached to particular offices. Applying this functional determination to the actions and offices of citizens, Holberg makes the concept of character a crucial element of his moral philosophy.

The potential contradictions between the moral duties attached to particular offices and a person’s character is at the heart of Holberg’s comedies, particularly those that are centred on questions of politics and authority. In *Jeppe paa Bierget, Eller den forvandlede Bonde* (Jeppe of the Hill, or the Transformed Peasant), a comedy written in 1722, Holberg shows his notion of character to be a double-edged sword. At the beginning of act II, Jeppe wakes up in the baron’s bed after a visit to the local tavern; in a state of confusion, he asks himself: ‘am I dreaming? Or am I awake?’ This brings us to the central plot of *Jeppe paa Bierget*, namely the relations between dream and reality. Jeppe is a simple peasant who drinks too much; in addition, he is often beaten by his wife. This is Jeppe’s reality. Nonetheless, waking up in the baron’s bed, Jeppe is soon persuaded by appearances and he jumps at the chance, immediately taking advantage of his new office as baron. This is Jeppe’s dream. Convinced he is the baron, Jeppe quickly turns into a tyrant of the worst kind, only to realise (too late, of course) the unreal nature of his situation. Towards the end of the play, the dream turns into a nightmare. Jeppe is set before a mock trial and condemned to death for impersonating the baron. However, though the trial was real, Jeppe lives at the end, and returns to his reality as a peasant.

*Jeppe paa Bierget* embodies two notions of character, which are pertinent in relation to Holberg’s moral and political thought. At the surface level of the play, the notion of character refers to the idea that people are born into specific social hierarchies, which it is not within their reach to change; their social station is their natural place in the world. From the perspective of what might be called the social interpretation of the concept of character, it is a person’s character, in the sense of a social station, that determines what that person becomes. Jeppe was born a

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866 On this topos, i.e. dream and reality, or illusion and reality, in eighteenth-century literature see Wilhelm Helt’s poem *Tobaks-Aske* (Tobacco Ash) in which the smoking of tobacco is described as a three-stage progression moving from enchantment to despair and salvation. See William Helt, *Curieuse Poëtiske Skrifter* (Copenhagen 1732): 227-31.
peasant, at the bottom of society, and, as Holberg shows, he cannot escape that reality. The political implications of Holberg’s argumentation are, at this stage, rather straightforward. What Holberg is doing is presenting a commonplace argument in favour of absolutism and against popular sovereignty and political freedom. Describing how Jeppe instantaneously turns into a tyrant once he finds himself in a position of political power, Holberg uses the notion of character to separate sovereignty and political power from popular sovereignty. The dream neither could nor should become reality. The people, here represented by Jeppe, are not fit for government. Rather, the destiny of the people is to be ruled, not to rule. In Jeppe’s dream, his reality is revealed; namely, that he is a foolish peasant not suitable to be a prince. The argument against popular sovereignty is forcefully presented at the end of Jeppe paa Bierget, where the real baron addresses the audience of the comedy in soliloquy:

Listen, dearest children, be instructed by this story:  
We’ve demonstrated clearly peasants thrust to glory  
Pose as much a danger as those who would, by knavery,  
Depose one who earned greatness by industry and bravery.  
When peasants, overnight, are given notoriety,  
The sceptre meant to rule can be turned into impiety.  
When moved above his station, this momentary hero,  
Without the proper training, becomes a ruthless Nero,  
Did Caligula or Phalaris, those tyrants of antiquity  
Ever misuse power more than Jeppe’s gross iniquity?  
He brought down plagues upon us in his new found jurisdiction,  
With beatings, railing, gallows, and injurious afflictions.  
If we follow the old customs and make this ancient error,  
Each nobleman’s estate could sustain a reign of terror.  
So leave the workmen in the fields, avoid the awful spectre,  
Of elevating peasants; beating ploughshare into sceptre.867

Grounded in a social interpretation of character, Holberg is, in other words, warning us against what will happen if the fool, or fools, were to govern. This notion of character also informs Den Politiske Kandstøber, the first of Holberg’s comedies to be performed in the Danish theatre in Lille Grønnegade. In Den Politiske Kandstøber, Herman von Bremen, a tinker who is more engaged in his collegium politicum than with his duties as a craftsman, is tricked into thinking that he is the burgomaster of Hamburg, only to realise that he is utterly ignorant about matters of politics. In

867 Holberg, Jeppe of the Hill and other Comedies by Ludvig Holberg: 143.
act II, scene 1, Holberg depicts the ignorance of the people in political matters through a discussion between the tinker and his *collegium politicum* about the good of the republic, a discussion which gets derailed by the fact that everyone seeks to equate their own interests with the common good whilst accusing the others of acting out of self-interest. As Holberg asserts in the first part of his memoirs, published in 1728, he intended *Den politiske Kandstøber* to support absolutism by portraying how unfit for political office an ignorant commoner acting as a *politicus* can be. Yet, not everyone understood his intentions. As he writes in the memoirs:

The plot of this comedy gave offence to some persons who did not properly appreciate the object of the dramatist, and who conceived that the consuls and senators of the city were ridiculed in it; whereas the piece was eminently calculated to uphold the true dignity of the magistracy. The play was intended to satirize those ale-house politicians who take upon themselves to attack princes, magistrates, and generals over their cups, and who condemn public measures, and military movements, as if they were themselves statesmen and generals, instead of cobbler and haberdashers. The hero of the piece is a tinman, who certain senators, pretending to be delegated by the senate, invest with the dignity of consul. The tinman makes himself ridiculous by attempting to discharge public duties to which he is unequal, finds there is more difficulty than he had imagined in governing a nation, and learns the wisdom of abandoning politics and attending to the manufacture of saucepans. The lesson conveyed by this piece is extremely salutary, especially in free states, where the licence of speech in which the common people indulge cannot be restrained by laws or penal enactments.

Thus, the lesson at stake in Holberg’s political comedies is that the common good is far better attended to in monarchical states than in free republics, where self-interest is disguised as the common good. ‘Further,’ Holberg writes in the third volume of his *Epistler* in 1750, ‘the same Piece puts on display Project Mongers, who under *Pretext* of the common Good aim at their own self-Interest.’

Yet, in addition to the social interpretation of character, which Holberg placed at the forefront of the plot in *Jeppe paa Bierget*, he also invokes a concept of character founded on sociability. A person’s character is not something simply there from the beginning. Rather, it is something that a person has to evolve into. Character is a state that determines as well as creates the path of a person as that person goes along. Hence, the office occupied by humans in civil society also prescribes a particular moral duty onto that position which has to be fulfilled. It is a functional notion of character. Jeppe could have become a virtuous prince, he just happened to be caught in the ways of a foolish peasant. At first sight, this notion of character seems to confirm Holberg’s view on monarchical government as opposed to popular sovereignty and political freedom, i.e. that it is not within the character of the people to rule. The example of Jeppe serves

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as a warning – popular government will turn into tyranny. The character of persons, however, also plays a subversive function when considered in relation to the political reality in which Holberg found himself, namely that of an absolute and hereditary monarchy. Placed in this context, *Jeppe paa Bierget* addresses a crucial problem in the prevailing theories of monarchism, one which went beyond the social determination of a person’s character: what would happen were the monarch to become a tyrant or be outright unfit to rule? What Holberg was doing was to issue a warning to his contemporaries against the inherent danger within hereditary monarchies of having a ruler who is not capable of performing the moral duties attached to the office of kingship. This assertion was, as we have seen, to underpin Holberg’s political writings from the 1740s onwards.

Holberg’s notions of character drew on a broad range of traditions. First, it invoked a classical legacy that praised the capability of governing oneself, the family, and others; secondly, it drew on Luther’s two kingdom-theory. As moral standards or ways of acting, Jeppe failed them all. As a drunken peasant, he could not govern himself; as he was beaten by his wife, he could not govern his household and become a proper Lutheran house-father; and finally, turning into a tyrant, he proved incapable of governing a commonwealth. In relation to contemporary theories of monarchism, Holberg’s double-edged concept of character places the discussion of absolute monarchy within a larger moral philosophical context, in which Holberg is capable of interpreting the relationship between citizens in civil society on the basis of a functional ethics, ascribing to particular civil offices a certain range of duties and judging the actions of the persons holding those offices on account of their performances.

**Meritocracy and Gender Equality**

Holberg’s moral philosophy also addressed the question of social hierarchies in a monarchy. Subjected to the rule of one man, an absolute monarch, equality prevails in civil society. Holberg’s position is anti-aristocratic. Favouring a meritocratic system, he calls for equal opportunity for all citizens in civil society. In the *Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskab*, book II, chapter 12, Holberg asserts that a sovereign has the right to appoint any citizen to official offices of the administration based solely on the recognition of merits, virtue, and bravery. Though some families carry a certain honour with their names, one often find the common citizen, by virtue of their merits, to be the finest and noblest. However, Holberg notes, ‘In this Kingdom there used to be such Difference between the Nobility and the Citizens that the

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latter were called Unfree, though the Word in the early Beginning did not have those Connotations, which was later associated with it; for at that time un-free meant nothing more than un-privileged.\footnote{Holberg, \textit{Værker i tolv Bind}: I.338–339: ‘Her udi Riget var fordum saa stor Forskiel mellem Adel og Borgere, at de sidste bleve kaldte Ufrie, enskiønt Ordet udi første Begyndelse ikke havde saadan Bemærkelse, som det siden blev taget udi; thi u-fri var da ikke andet end u-priviligeret’.
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The meritocratic system introduced after the monarchical revolution in 1660 marked the end of aristocratic privileges; by offering citizens the honour of a good reputation, as Holberg asserts, meritocracy paved the way for a system of ennoblement that promotes good and virtuous actions amongst the citizens. Holberg was a staunch critic of inequality based on pure contingency of birth. In a crucial discussion in the \textit{Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskab} of the tensions between natural equality and the character of persons, Holberg rejects ‘the Opinion of the ancient Greeks’, who believed that ‘some People from Nature are held to be Slaves, which is incompatible with natural Equality.’\footnote{Holberg, \textit{Værker i tolv Bind}: I.114: ‘de gamle Grækernes Meening’ … ‘eenkelte Mennesker holdes for af Naturen at være Trælle, hvilket strider lige mod den naturlige Lighed’.
}

Although Holberg is a staunch defender of meritocracy and equality amongst the citizens of the monarchical state, he does argue that some people are naturally inclined to govern, whilst others are by nature prone to obedience. As he writes:

\begin{quote}
It is true, however, that some People have those Gifts of the Mind, which make them capable of governing not only themselves, but also others. Others, by contrast, are so mean and thick-headed that they are not capable of doing any Good, unless they are driven to do so, under the instruction of others; when such persons live under the Direction and Authority of wise People, then they are in that State, which best suits their Nature.\footnote{Holberg, \textit{Værker i tolv Bind}: I.114: ‘Vel er sandt, at nogle Mennesker have de Sindets Gaver, at de ikke alleene kunne regiere sig selv, men endogsaa andre. Andre derimod ere grove og tyk-hovede, saa at de intet Godt kunne gjøre, uden de drives dertil, og undervises derudi af andre; naar saadanne leve under kloge Menneskers Direction og Herredom, da ere de udi den Stand, som best stemmer overeens med deres Natur’.
}
\end{quote}

As Holberg sees it, the state of subjection and obedience in which a person who is unfit for government finds himself is distinct from the condition of slavery. Both slavery and subjection are artificial conditions, absent from the state of nature, in which men are governed solely by natural liberty and equality. Subjection and obedience differ from the condition of slavery in the sense that subjection follows naturally from the human desire for self-preservation, which leads to the institution of governments and civil associations. As Holberg asserts, drawing on his theory of the creation of civil societies, ‘as everyone has the same Degree of natural Liberty, no one can gain Authority over another, without his Consent.’\footnote{Holberg, \textit{Værker i tolv Bind}: I.114: ‘som alle have den naturlige Frihed udi lige Grad, saa kand ingen tilegne sig Heredømme over en anden, uden han haver givet sit Samtykke dertil’.
} Subjection and obedience are natural consequences of human sociability. Yet, as Holberg sees it, those who live in the state of obedience
are still equal in the sense that they are all subjected to same laws, which distinguishes the state of obedience from both enslavement to a master and subjection to aristocratic privilege.

Meritocracy was one of the defining features of Danish absolutism;\(^\text{876}\) in his later writings, Holberg turns meritocracy, as founded on sociability and natural equality, into an argument for absolutism. ‘To imprint in the Citizens Faithfulness, Obedience as well as Love cost nothing more than behaving equally as a King and as a Father,’ writes Holberg in 1746, ‘And to supply a whole Country with able Public Officials consists only in a single Concept or Coup d’etat; namely not to look for Offices to give to Men; but for Men to fulfil these Offices, so that it must not be said: this Man is in need of an Office, therefore he must be helped; but rather that this Office needs that Man, therefore it must be fulfilled by him.’\(^\text{877}\) Thus, there are close correlations between a benevolent and paternal monarch and the meritocratic system. Holberg presents the strongest case for meritocracy as a means for ensuring the peace and security of a monarchical state in the Epistler. The best way of ensuring the stability of a state is to treat all subjects, both ‘the Nobility and the Citizens’, equally and to consider ‘Merits rather than Birth’ when searching for the right person for a particular office.\(^\text{878}\) ‘For it is by imposing such a Balance and Rivalry between the Estates,’ Holberg concludes, ‘that the Strength and Security of the Government is grounded.’\(^\text{879}\)

Holberg shared his anti-aristocratic contentions with other early eighteenth-century writers who entertained similar ideas about the correlations between merits, social rank, and office. In a short pamphlet entitled Adelens Oprindelse og Herkomst (The Origin and Provenance of Nobility), for instance, Frederik Rostgaard contrasts nobility by birthright to new nobility, a category to which Rostgaard himself belonged, arguing that the old nobility has no claim to virtue.\(^\text{880}\) In a central paragraph, he writes:

Your Father’s weapon I willingly let you carry
Let me just carry that which I have won with Honour
By Labour and Virtue; For what I carry is mine


\(^{879}\) Holberg, Epistler: II.94: ‘Thi det er paa saadan Ballance og Emulation mellem begge Stænder Regierungens Styrke og Sikkerhed er grundet’.

\(^{880}\) The circumstances under which the pamphlet was published is unknown, but it is tempting to connect its publication to Rostgaard’s own ennoblement in 1702. Some scholars have, however, attributedted Adelens Oprindelse og Herkomst to Wilhelm Helt; see Albeck & Jansen, Fra Runerne til Johannes Ewald: 282-83.
But what you carry is your Father’s, not yours.881

Initially, Rostgaard had tried to pursue an academic career. Between 1690 and 1699, he travelled to Germany, the Netherlands, and England, studying law and Arabic at Giessen and languages at Leiden and Oxford in England. Upon his return to Denmark, Rostgaard got acquainted with the chancellor Conrad Reventlow (1644-1708), who recommended him for the position as state archivist in 1700, the office he held when publishing the *Lex Regia* in 1709. Ennobled in 1702, Rostgaard had among his possessions the small isle of Anholt. In an unfortunate coincidence, the inhabitants of Anholt had been ridiculed in Holberg’s mock-heroic poem *Peder Paars*, much to the agitation of Rostgaard, who filed an official, but unsuccessful, complaint to the king.882 Both Rostgaard and Holberg, however, placed themselves in the seventeenth-century royalist tradition, which strongly emphasised the meritocratic nature of the absolute monarchy. Equally, both men advocated an anti-aristocratic view on the connections between merits, offices, and social station. However, in addition to the anti-aristocratic discourse, Holberg framed his theory of meritocracy within a broader context, related to the security of the monarchical state, thus moving beyond the intellectual scope of Rostgaard’s *Adelens Oprindelse og Herkomst*. The shortcomings of Rostgaard’s position did not go unnoticed in Holberg’s writings. In the second volume of his *Epistler*, which appeared in 1740, Holberg included an essay in which he warns against substituting the ‘Desire for Titles of Honour’ for the pursuit of academic studies.883 Without mentioning anyone by name, Rostgaard, having abandoned his studies for a prestigious career as a public official, is a likely candidate for Holberg’s criticism, although the two gentlemen, who were both fond of theatre, were close to a reconciliation in the 1730s during the Pietist reign of Christian VI. Their ‘Desires and Thoughts’, Holberg writes, ‘are mostly devoted to those Things that *flatter* their *Ambition* and pave the Way for them to Titles of Honour.’884

Next to his defence of sociability and natural equality, Holberg took his commitments to meritocracy into a far more novel, if not radical, direction, presenting an argument for gender equality. Predating the treatment of this subject in the writings of such canonical liberal thinkers as Mary Wollstonecroft (1759-1797) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), Holberg’s thoughts on

equality mark one of his most original contributions to the enlightenment. To other canonical thinkers of the enlightenment, women were treated as inferior. To David Hume, for instance, women were fully capable of reading historical works, though they were not expected to be able to write such works.

Anne E. Jensen has argued that Holberg derived his idea of gender equality from the Cartesian separation of the body from the soul, which he first encountered between 1719 and 1722. Since the soul is non-gendered, women possess the same intellectual faculties as men, for which reason they are equally equipped for intellectual and civil offices. This interpretation is misleading, as Holberg based his arguments for gender equality not on Cartesian distinctions between body and soul, but on the idea of meritocracy.

In Zille Hans Dotters Forsvars-Skrift for Quinde-Konned (Zille Hans’s Daughter’s Defence of Women), published in 1722 together with his satirical writings, Holberg argues ‘that Men and Women are of the same Matter, the same Machines, so the latter should be equally suited for many Offices [Forretninger] from which they are excluded, and be equally useful members of a Republic as Men.’ The idea of equality does not entail the bestowment upon women of a privileged access to certain offices; rather, Holberg seeks to ensure equal access to all offices in civil society for both genders. ‘I am not disputing the Right of Men’, Holberg asserts, ‘which is solely grounded on Custom.’ Nor was it Holberg’s aim to eradicate all differences between men and women. Rather, what Holberg intended to say was ‘that women are excluded from holding public offices, not by the laws of nature, but by prescription and arbitrary institutions.’ Hence the embrace of the idea of meritocracy becomes to Holberg a way of overturning the age old custom of treating men and women unequally. Women, Holberg argues, should be enabled to take part in public administration on equal terms to men. From the 1740s onwards, other moderate writers made similar assertions about gender equality. ‘In General’, writes Friderich Christian Eilschow in 1747, ‘one can say and prove from History that Women are treated as Slaves in the Eastern

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890 Holberg, Memoirs of Lewis Holberg: 93.
Countries, as Goddesses in the Southern- and Western, and as Humans in the North. As Eilschow aims to show, to treat women as slaves is unacceptable, but to treat them as goddesses, as was the practice in Southern and Western Europe, is equally mistaken. As fellow humans and as fellow citizens, Eilschow argues, women are to be treated on equal terms.

As Jonathan Israel has argued, ideas of equality and the emancipation of women belonged first to what he sees as the radical enlightenment: both ideas are amongst the most revolutionary in their implications. If we were to follow Israel’s assumptions, we would be forced to think about Holberg as a radical enlightenment thinker, which conflicts not only with his monarchical convictions, but also with his actual argument about gender equality. As Holberg sees it, the idea of gender equality should be seen in connection with meritocracy, as opposed to an egalitarian notion of equality as such. In the context in which Holberg wrote, to be sure, his ideas about gender equality were radical, but not in the sense that Israel understands the term. Holberg’s ideas were radical not because he subscribed to a distinct set of ideas which can be deemed radical or not, but because his ideas undermined a long-established Lutheran doctrine, namely that of the house-father’s authority over the household. In Nicholai Klimiu, which was published in 1741, Holberg brings together his concern for meritocracy and gender equality in a passage where he describes Klimius’ encounter with the system of distribution of public offices in the utopian state of Potu:

For among these People there was no Difference of Sexes observed in the Distribution of publick Posts; but an Election being made, the Affairs of the Republick were committed to the wisest and most worthy. And in order to form a right Judgement of the Proficience, or of the intellectual Endowments of every one, there were proper Seminaries instituted, the chief Directors of which were styl’d Karatti (a Word that strictly signifies Inquisitors.) It was their Office to inspect into every one’s Abilities, to inquire nicely into the Genius of the Youth, and after such Inquiry transmit annually to their Prince an Account or List of such as were to be admitted to all Duties and Posts of Government, and to point out at the same Time, in what Particular every one of them was most likely to be of Service to the State. The Prince upon the Receipt of such Catalogue ordered their Names to be inscrib’d in a Book, that he might never be at a Loss what Sort of Persons to prefer to the vacant Posts.

After being instructed in the seminary of Potu, Klimius himself is assigned an office in accordance with his merits and manners. As he was ‘extremely quick of Apprehension’ and ‘excels every one

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in Swiftness of Foot’, Klimius, much to his own disappointment, is finally assigned the post of the king’s messenger.\textsuperscript{894}

In his later writings, Holberg was, moreover, severely critical of Andreas Hojer, who, in his capacity as professor of jurisprudence, had published an introduction on that subject in which the \textit{persona} of the jurist, as Holberg saw it, played a rather dubious role. ‘\textit{Jurisprudence}’, writes Hojer in his \textit{Juridiske Collegium}, which appeared in several editions between 1742 and 1769, ‘consists in a \textit{Habitude} or Skill, which is acquired through Diligence, Reading, and Exercise, enabling one to pass the right judgement in Ecclesiastical and Secular Matters in accordance with the Precept of the Law, and to separate Truth from false, and Right from wrong.’\textsuperscript{895} Though Hojer was an advocate of meritocracy, Holberg was still blinded with fury against his old enemy and critic. In Holberg’s view, Hojer’s notion of the jurist’s \textit{habitude} would entail that all jurists should become polymaths, which was as unreasonable as it was impossible. Using Hojer’s own reasoning, Holberg writes in the third volume of his \textit{Epistler}, which appeared in 1750, all the skills required of a jurist could just as well be applied to the \textit{persona} of a shoemaker, who would need a solid theological training in order to distinguish between different religious sects. ‘For it is one thing to work for an \textit{Orthodox},’ he writes, ‘who wants thin and sometimes turned Soles, because he often uses his Feet for Dancing; another thing is to make Shoes for a Heretic, particularly a \textit{Fanatic}, who condemns Dancing, and would rather have strong Soles, in order to trample with greater Force on the Vanity of the World.’\textsuperscript{896}

In a subsequent essay, following almost immediately after the essay on Hojer’s \textit{Juridiske Collegium}, Holberg argues that a person should never be looked upon with contempt simply because he is not talented in one or another trade, ‘for we are taught by Experience,’ he asserts, ‘that he can be a useful and able Public Official, when he is put in his right Post.’\textsuperscript{897} Drawing upon his meritocratic ideals as well as the notion of character espoused in his comedies, Holberg contrasts Hojer’s polymath in favour of his own ideal image of the relation between a person’s natural talents and the post in civil society which that person ought to occupy. Further, reaching back to the idea first presented in \textit{Nicholai Klimii} that a person, before being assigned to a public

\textsuperscript{894} Holberg, \textit{A Journey to the World Under-Ground}: 38.
\textsuperscript{896} Holberg, \textit{Epistler}: III.353: ‘Thi eet er at arbejde for en \textit{Orthodox}, som vil have tynde og undertiden forkeerte Saaler, efterdi han bruger ofte sine Fødder til Dans; et andet er at giøre Skoe for en Kætter, sær en \textit{Fanatico}, som fordømmer Dans, og heller vil have stærke Saaler, for med des større Eftertryk at kunde træde på Verdens Forfængelighed’.
\textsuperscript{897} Holberg, \textit{Epistler}: III.358: ‘saasom Erfarenhed lærer, at han kand blive en nyttige og duelig Embeds-Mand, naar han kommer paa sin rette Post’.

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post, must first be examined before a seminary of professors or inquisitors in order to determine
the character of that person’s faculties, Holberg connects his refutation of Hojer to the question
regarding learning and education. Before examining Holberg’s ideas about education, we shall
first see how he thinks about fashion.

**Fashion, Decorum, and Reputation**

The repudiation of the desire for titles and honour, which runs throughout Holberg’s criticism of
Rostgaard, is, moreover, closely linked to a concern for fashion. When he published his *Moralske
Tanker* in 1744, he included an essay on fashion and decency. ‘It is decent to dress like others,’
writes Holberg, ‘and indecent to put on a Costume that nobody uses anymore. It is ridiculous to
distinguish oneself by adhering to old Fashions; for what once Beautified may now Disfigure.’

In addition to the temporal view on fashion, what is considered decent and fashionable depends on
the function and the context. ‘A Flowerpot is considered beautiful by Appearance,’ Holberg writes,
‘and beautifies People’s Houses, when it is placed in the Windows; but when someone will wear it
on their Heads whilst walking through the Streets, it is no longer Beautiful, but a Disfigurement,
because it is unusual. He, who first takes up a Fashion, is a Fool, and he, who endures it the
longest, is not an Inch better.’ Thus, as Holberg sees it, the actions and behaviours of citizens
living together in civil associations change in relation to time, place, and function. Yet, more than
a mere reflection on rapidly changing fashions, Holberg’s thinking about fashion has strong
implications for his theory of civil society and the way in which the citizens ought to act in
relation to one another. ‘It is reasonable, even philosophical,’ he argues, ‘to adapt one’s Dress and
Manners to the Fashions of the Country.’

Holberg explored the theme further in his comedies, where fashion is linked to questions
regarding local or national culture and personal identity. In *Jean de France, Eller Hans Frandsen*
(Jean de France; or, Hans Frandsen), first published in 1723, Holberg ridicules the obsession
amongst his contemporaries for French fashion. Upon his return to Copenhagen, Hans Frandsen,
the main character of the comedy, brings with him great admiration for French culture and
fashion. Much to the confusion of his family and friends, Frandsen no longer responds to his

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Christian name, but prefers instead to be called Jean de France. After disrupting all social and cultural norms prevailing amongst his countrymen, Jean de France is taught a lesson by a young woman posing as a French mademoiselle. The main character falls under her spell, and ends up being ridiculed after losing his fashionable French coat, vest, and hat as payment for a gambling debt. Stripped of French clothes, his costume, he is left naked, without any signs of fashion. Hence, *Jean de France* displays a tension between the good manners of local cultures and the passion for foreign values, a tension which, on a smaller scale, also informed *Erasmus Montanus*.

Themed on the issue of fashion, Holberg may have intended his plays to be understood in the context of natural jurisprudence or, more precisely, the theory of *decorum* advanced by Thomasius in the early eighteenth century. After experiencing a severe Pietist crisis where he came to doubt the theory of natural law outlined in his *Institutiones jurisprudentiae divinæ*, Thomasius reworked his interpretation. Restating his position in the *Fundamenta juris naturæ et gentium* (Foundations of the Law of Nature and of Nations), which was published in 1705, Thomasius distinguished between *justum* (law or natural jurisprudence), *honestum* (morals or moral philosophy), and *decorum* (manners), or, as he wrote, ‘between the three categories of morality, namely, the honest, the decorous, and the just’. Advocating, on account of such distinctions, an educational programme that urged academics to follow the right social norms and conventions, Thomasius held that a student who was in tune with correct fashion would be a good and active citizen. The discipline of *decorum* was intended to educate people, teaching them about norms, manners, and fashion, so that they did not fall prey to contingencies and rapid change. Consequently, without the practice of *decorum* as an academic discipline, without the sound knowledge of the norms of fashion, civil society would burst into a state of civil war: *decorum* ‘is the soul of human societies’.

In light of Thomasius’s theory of *decorum*, the moral point of Holberg’s *Jean de France* is to warn against fashion without manners. Imitating French culture, Holberg’s main character loses his identity and disconnects from civil society in violation of the duties of natural law. However, Holberg was not alone in advancing the doctrine of *decorum*. The tensions between the adoption of French fashion and one’s local culture are also present in the work of Christoph Heinrich Amthor.

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901 For an English translation of *Jean de France* see Ludvig Holberg, *Jeppe of the Hill and other Comedies* by Ludvig Holberg, Gerald S. Argetsinger & Sven H. Rossel (Carbondale and Edwardsville 1990).


A professor in Kiel, Amthor introduced the educational programme of Thomasius into Denmark; based on the notion of *decorum*, Amthor advanced a theory of courtly behaviour, urging the courtier to disguise his social or personal background through the adoption of courtly manners.  

In Holberg’s view, however, such interpretation of *decorum* entails not civility, but hypocrisy. The disguise of one’s true self amounts to nothing more than misconceived and superficial manners. As Holberg argues in 1748, in the second volume of the *Epistler*, what constitutes civil and courtly manners is exactly that a person is able to act freely, without taking on the appearance of someone he is not. Writing about the openness of the new royal court and praising the government of Frederik V for basing ‘the strength and security of the royal house on the love of his people’, Holberg reflects on his own courtly appearances, a reflection essentially about *decorum*.  

‘You must therefore not be astonished’, he writes, ‘that I now and then go to court in my old age. This does not happen because of vanity but because I find no more agreeable place for a philosopher than the present court. There one can be in the presence of exalted company without a mask, without artifice, without mincing steps, and without affectation of speech, so that one sees represented at royal court the natural state of man.’  

Whilst it is doubtful that Holberg ever frequented the new royal court in this fashion (full of praise, though, as he was of the new monarch), it is equally uncertain that Holberg was familiar with the writings on *decorum* by Thomasius and Amthor, though his own thinking orbits a range of similar ideas. What is more likely is that Holberg understanding of fashion as a form of sociability came out his engagement with Pufendorf.  

Understood as the soul of society, the issue of fashion feeds into the discussion of reputation as a civic bond in Pufendorf. Pufendorf’s *De Officio* includes, in book II, chapter 14, a discussion on reputation. ‘Reputation in general’, Pufendorf writes, ‘is the value of persons in common life [*vita communis*] by which they may be measured against others or compared with them and either preferred or put after them.’ Holberg first addressed the issue of reputation in the *Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskab*; he returned to the issue at several points in his later writings, particularly in *Erasmus Montanus*. Drawing largely on Pufendorf’s account of reputation, Holberg makes it a central point that Montanus, who entertains a misconceived notion of the role

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or character of the philosopher, also misunderstands the meaning of a person’s reputation in civil life:

MONTANUS: [“Alone.”] My parents plagued me for a full hour, moaning and crying, trying to make me deny my beliefs. But they don’t know Erasmum Montanum. Even if they made me emperor I wouldn’t go back on what I have said. It’s true that I love Mademoiselle Elisabet; but for me to sacrifice philosophy for her sake and deny that which I publicly sustained will never happen. I do hope, though, that everything will turn out for the best; that I can win my true love without losing my reputation.912

Montanus is worried about his reputation; however, blinded by his own pride and haughtiness, Montanus cannot give up that which he has already publicly stated as his opinion. Hence, Montanus is guilty of impoliteness, inhumane behaviour, and incivility, since he seeks to elevate himself instead of recognising the equal reputations of others. As the plot of Erasmus Montanus comes into play, Holberg develops this point even further. Blinded by pride and arrogance, Montanus fails to see that the issue at hand (the fact that Montanus is close to losing his betrothed at the cost of his claim to the world being round) is nothing but a question of adiaphora, of things indifferent. Holberg introduces this in act IV, scene 4, where he presents the moral of the play in a dialogue between Jacob and Montanus:

JACOB: I believe that the world is round, too; but if someone gave me a caraway pretzel to say that it’s oblong, I’d say that it’s oblong. It makes no difference to me.
MONTANUS: It may be alright for you, but not for a philosophe, whose primary virtue it is to defend to the last modicum that which he has proclaimed. I will publicly dispute it here in town and challenge everyone who has studied.
JACOB: Let me ask Monsieur one thing: If you win the dispute, what happens then?
MONTANUS: What happens then? I have the honor of winning and being regarded as a learned man!
JACOB: Monsieur should say a verbose man. I’ve noticed from the people here in town that wisdom and verbosity are not the same. Rasmus Hansen who is always talking and whom no one can shut up, is considered by others to have only the mind of a goose. On the other hand, Niels Christensen, the district bailiff who speaks little and always forfeits an argument, is considered able to manage the office of a district judge.913

Adiaphora, or matters indifferent, had been a central concept in the civil philosophy of Thomasius, who had taken it up in his discussion of the rights of the Protestant prince in religious matters.914 From the question of adiaphora, Holberg reconnects with the major theme of the play, in that he presents its moral point as a question of the relation between the office or duties of persons in relation to their social function.

JACOB: What if I could prove that I’m more learned than Monsieur.
MONTANUS: I’d like to hear that.

912 Holberg, Jeppe of the Hill and other Comedies: 177.
913 Holberg, Jeppe of the Hill and other Comedies: 183.
Though the moral point of *Erasmus Montanus* is uttered by Jacob, it is the lieutenant, a recognisable figure of authority, who solves the issues and brings back order to the local community. As we saw above, the lieutenant had studied natural law and moral problems. Yet, a central point in Holberg’s comedy is exactly that the lieutenant, who acts as a figure of authority, does not live up to the moral duties attached to office of a moral philosopher, as he has to trick Montanus into believing that he has been enrolled in the army, using false arguments. Yet, one question remains unanswered, namely how Holberg think about the duties of the philosopher, seeing that Montanus had so severely misunderstood them.

**Philosophy, Learning, and the Republic of Letters**

‘We consider the one a true and genuine Philosopher’, declares Holberg in his farewell address as vice-chancellor of the University of Copenhagen in 1736, ‘who would rather be than be seen, who knows when to keep quiet, no less than when to talk, and who educates more by his Way of Life than by his Words.’ Holberg was a staunch critic of metaphysics and predominance of scholastic disputations within contemporary academic culture, which he never sought to hide, not even from his professorial colleagues at Copenhagen. In 1732, for instance, Holberg wrote to Hans Gram, the rector of the university, to inform him, amongst other things, about the subjects upon which he will deliver his public lectures in the coming academic year and when he plans to conduct the obligatory academic disputations. ‘In what regards *lectiones publicas*,’ Holberg writes, ‘then I will teach *historiam universalem* and *Geographiam*, either of the two, each week. And in what regards the Disputations, then I ask to be the last, partly as I have taken it upon me to write a *præcepta historica et Geographica in usum Juventutis* […] partly also because I have not the faintest idea about arte

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disputandi and of all the Professors I am the least suited for this task. Holberg was not, however, fundamentally opposed to disputations; rather, he wanted to restrict its use to those, ‘who intend to devote themselves to a Life in Jurisprudence.’

Holberg’s aversion towards the state of learning and the structure of the university is aimed at two interconnected aspects of the early eighteenth-century practice of intellectual life. In the third part of the memoirs, published in 1743, Holberg distinguishes between two concepts of metaphysics. First, he asserts, metaphysics refers to ‘the mere apparatus of technical terms and subtile distinctions, which are abused by disputants in the schools.’ This kind of metaphysics or scholasticism is, as we have seen so far, ridiculed in his comedies. Secondly, metaphysics, ‘in the legitimate sense’, refers to that science which attempts to ‘define the nature of spiritual essences’. This second understanding of metaphysics is closely related to questions regarding reason, or, to be more precise the limits of reason, that which is beyond human comprehension. This second aspect of metaphysics was, as we shall see in the following chapters, to play a central role in Holberg’s religious thinking. Yet, the two concepts are difficult to separate, as the key aspects signified by these concepts respectively, the form and the content of metaphysics, one is tempted to say, were so intertwined in early eighteenth-century intellectual practice that they had become almost synonymous:

As Holberg sees it, philosophy is an anti-rationalist and empirical mode of thinking, staunchly opposed to ‘abstract and transcendental Reflections’ as well as ‘Speculations that are either irrelevant or will continuously remain Secret.’ Yet, philosophy, as Holberg understands it, is still reasonable, in the sense that it aims to understand the empirical world which mankind inhabits. It is not the philosopher’s role to mould society according to some transcendent truth,
as in the second meaning of metaphysics. In *Erasmus Montanus*, Holberg plays religion, philosophy, and natural science against each other, not with the intention of splitting enlightenment thought, but rather as a way of putting into play a host of contemporary modes of thought, all of which were equally a part of the early Northern enlightenment. Claiming that the world is round, Montanus is 'close to becoming an atheist' in the eyes of the local community.294

Confronted by his future father-in-law and Jesper, the town overseer, Montanus defend his views:

MONTANUS: What have I done wrong?
JERONIMUS: I hear that you have some very peculiar ideas. People will think you’ve either gone mad or crazy in the head. How can a rational man fall into the foolishness of saying that the world is round?
MONTANUS: But *profecto* she is round. I have to speak the truth.
JERONIMUS: That’s sure as hell not true. That could only come from the devil, the father of all lies. I’m sure every person here in town would condemn beliefs like that. Just as the overseer. He’s a sensible man, see if he doesn’t think the same as me.
JESPER: It doesn’t make a bit of difference to me if she’s oblong or round. But I have to believe my own eyes, which show me that the earth is flat as a pancake.295

The rationalist, but not reasonable, truth advocated by Montanus does not connect with the religious worldview of the local community or with simple empirical observations. Erasmus eventually loses the dispute, not because he is wrong, but because, in insisting on the fact that his own perspective is the only truth, he is out of tune with his civic duties and his surroundings. In Holberg’s view, a philosopher must be an advocate of philosophical eclecticism, which he had advocated in his treatise on natural law. ‘I take it’, Holberg writes in *Moralske Tanker*, ‘that it is the Duty of the *Philosopher* to examine traditional Opinions, in order to decide whether or not they are solid’.296 Similar contentions were also advocated by Friderich Horn in his *Poësiens Misbrug* (The Abuse of Poetry), where he argued that a poet or a satirist must always aim to avoid hypocrisy by constantly revising his own thinking.297

Despite Holberg’s efforts, the university disputations were still being defended by other eighteenth-century writers. In his *Logik eller den Videnskab at tænke* (Logic or the Science of Thinking), which appeared in 1751, the philosopher Jens Kraft (1720–1765) defends the usefulness of university disputations, which he describes as a ‘Form of public Conversation’.298 Although not all disputations lead to the discovery of truth, which is the overall aim of the exercise, they are still useful, he argues, as ‘Young People thereby are used to speaking publicly without Confusion, they

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294 Holberg, *Jeppe of the Hill and other Comedies*: 175.
296 Holberg, *Moralske Tanker*: ‘Jeg holder for, at det fornemmeligen er en *Philosophi* Pligt at examinere antagne *Meeninger, om de ere vel grundede eller ey*’.
arrive effortlessly at that which is called Presence d’Esprit [or Presence of Mind].”

Kraft stresses the importance of intellectual contemplation: he sees the university disputation as a sound means for achieving this end. Contemplation and truth are the aims of disпутations. By contrast, Holberg saw contemplation as useless, as true philosophy consists in adopting a certain way of life that teaches by example; as for the disпутations, these exercises obscure the search for truth rather than lay it bear. As he insists in Nicholai Klimii, disputation blend in more naturally in the theatre than at university:

I begg’d to know of my Host, how it was possible that so judicious a Nation could think of leaving to the Theatre those noble Exercises, whereby a Faculty of Speaking is acquir’d, Truth is discover’d, and the Understanding sharpen’d? He reply’d, that formerly those Exercises were in high Reputation among their barbarous Ancestors, but since they had been convind’d by Experience, That Truth was rather stifled by Disputes, that their Youth were render’d petulant and forward thereby, that Disturbances arose from them, and that the more generous Studies so much the more fetter’d, they turned over these Exercises from the University to the Playhouse; and the Event has shew’d us, that by Reading, Silence, and Meditation, the Students now make far greater Advances in Learning.

Kraft’s defence of the usefulness of academic disputation should be seen in light of the broader intellectual rivalries that divided the early Northern enlightenment. In the early eighteenth century, not only Holberg’s notion of arte disputandi, but also his conception of the persona of the philosopher was rivalled by a group of rationalist philosophers, taking their lead from writings of Leibniz and Wolff. As Ian Hunter has argued, in Leibniz’s view, the philosopher’s authority to speak his mind on religious and civil matters is drawn from ‘his participation in the quasi-divine intellection of pure concepts.’

What was at stake in this context was a rivalry between two philosophical cultures that fostered widely different notions not only of politics and morality (as we saw in the previous chapter), but also of the very nature of philosophy. Whilst the tradition in which Holberg placed himself advocated empiricism and eclecticism as philosophical virtues, the Leibnizian-Wolffian tradition advocated metaphysics and contemplation. Amongst the most zealous advocates of this rival philosophical tradition was Andreas Lundhoff (1710-1748), a philosopher and an outsider to the established university life of the early eighteenth century.

In Een kort historisk Beskrivelse paa En sand Philosophi Liv og Levnet Meddeeled alle Sandheds og Dydens Elskere (A Brief Historical Account of a True Philosopher’s Life and Lifestyle Presented to all Lovers of Truth and Virtue), which first appeared in 1744, Lundhoff unfolds his understanding of the true philosopher, drawing on the tradition of Leibniz and Wolff. Yet, before embarking on

931 Hunter, Rival Enlightenments: 104.
his task at hand (to describe the life and lifestyle of true philosopher), Lundhoff devotes the preface to a refutation of a rival understanding of the way of life of the philosopher. ‘Ignorance’, he claims, ‘along with Illusions about Knowledge of the Truth is the Cause of those ill-founded Judgements about God, Virtue, Sciences and all other Things, that one daily hear even many Learned people to pass.’ The false philosopher, according to Lundhoff, is one who substitutes laughter for reason and seriousness; he seeks not contemplation, but an active life, which is why such a figure is dishonest. ‘Such Judgements’, Lundhoff continues, ‘are the Cause of contempt for the Truth and the repugnance of Virtue, for the contemplation of Truth and the un-witty presentation of Knowledge is depicted as a kind of Intellectual Silliness, and a virtuous Lifestyle as a kind of Pedantry.’ In a Danish context, Lundhoff’s fashioning of the role of the philosopher is, eo ipso, a refutation of the way of thinking about the *persona* of the philosopher advocated by Holberg. To Holberg, as we have seen, the offices or *personae* of the playwright and the philosopher share a wide range of family resemblances; philosophy in itself consists not of contemplative speculation, but an active way of life. Lundhoff, nevertheless, continue his attack on the Holbergian conception of the philosopher:

To repel these damaging Judgements by those, who in their Ignorance imagine themselves in the possession of truthful Knowledge is very difficult and perhaps impossible, considering their condition; but to diminish them in those, who in their Ignorance have a meticulous desire to know the Truth Sincerely, I take it to be of such probability that I for that end have compiled this Account of a true Philosopher's Life and Lifestyle in order that the sincere Reader can pass proper Judgement about a true Philosopher and hold him neither in lower, nor higher regard than what pertains to the Truth.

A true philosopher is a Christian rationalist equally perceptive to revelation and natural reason; in Lundhoff’s account, a true philosopher strives to improve his way of life on several levels and through multiple social interactions. As he argues, the principal aim of a true philosopher is to improve his lifestyle in relation to God, himself, and others, a theme which he also pursued in his

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934 Lundhoff, *Een kort historisk Beskrivelse* n.p.: ‘At afskaffe disse saa skadelige Domme hos den, som i sin Vankundighed indbilde sig selv at beside sanheds Kundskab er meget vanskeligt og maae skee efter deres Tilstand umuligt, men at formindske dem hos dem som i sin Vankundighed har een omhyggelig begærlighed til at kiende Sandhed i Oprigtighed, holder jeg for saa ganske mueligt at jeg til den ende har samled denne Beskrivelse om een sand Philosophi Liv og Levnet paa det at den oprigtige Læsere kand rettelig Domme om en sand Philosopho og fatte hverken slettere eller høyere Tanker om ham end det sig bør i Sandhed’.
other writings. First, a philosopher must honour the word of God and the true knowledge of divinity. He always seeks to better his understanding of God’s will: ‘to that End’, Lundhoff asserts, ‘he devotes all his Studies, his Actions in the World, and all his Thoughts.’ Secondly, a true philosopher strives to know himself. Yet, the self consists of multiple aspects ordered hierarchically. The ‘Soul’, which is further divided into the ‘Intellect’ and the ‘Will’, is the most important; then follows the ‘Body’, and, finally, ‘outward Circumstances’, pertaining to a person’s honour and reputation. Lundhoff’s reflection on the intellect is at the heart of his rationalist conception of the persona of the philosopher. As he writes:

A true philosopher strives toward that End, more and more everyday, to become profound, subtle and Solid in his Knowledge of Truth; he strives to become more and more wise and intelligent, sensible, knowledgeable; to be more and more skilled in Truth Finding; He strives to persist the Illusions of his Senses and imagination that are contrary to the Knowledge of Truth. In one Word, a true Philosopher solely uses the Acts of his Intellect, Senses, Imagination and Recollection to enjoy more and to become more skilled in knowing the Truth with Certainty, as well as the Untruthful; in order for him to be able to advance God’s Honour more conveniently in his Understanding.

Next to the intellect, the will directs the philosopher’s ‘Desire, solely towards that which is truly good’. ‘To that End,’ Lundhoff writes, ‘he strives to master his untamed affectations that will hinder him from truly good Things.’ Holberg’s understanding of the persona of the philosopher is, by contrast, an embrace of the human passions. Contemplation and the attempt to conquer the passions are obsolete. Whilst a philosopher should never give in to his passions, he should accept his vices and seek to combat them, but never in order to defeat his passions. Rather, Holberg argues, the key to life is to learn to live with one’s own flaws, vices, and passions. ‘I am aware that it is often better to appear virtuous, than to be so’, he writes in first part of his memoirs in 1728, ‘but I think many pursuits becoming the character of a philosopher which others suppose to be utterly inconsistent with it; and the highest praise is in my opinion due, not so much to him who

935 Andreas Lundhoff, Nogle faae Tanker, Om Et Menneskes Skyldigheder Imod sig selv Meddelede alle Dydens Elskere (Copenhagen 1742).
938 Lundhoff, Een kort historisk Beskrivelse: 7: ‘Een sand Philosophus stræber til den Ende daglig meere og meere at blive dybsindig, skarpsindig og Solid i Sandheds Kundskab; han stræber efter at blive meere og meere vis og forstandig, fornuflige, kundstig; at blive meere og meere færdig i Sandheds Udfindelse; Han stræber efter at imodstaae sine Sandsers og imaginations Forestillinger som ere stridige imod Sandheds Kundskab. Med et Ord een sand Philosophus bruger sin Forstands, Sandses, Imaginationens og Hukommelsens Gierninger alene til at mude meere og meere og Færdighed i at kiende Sandheds med Vished, saa velsom U-sandfærdighed; for at han kan blive begymemmere til at forfremme Guds Ære i sin Forstand’.
939 Lundhoff, Een kort historisk Beskrivelse: 8: ‘Begjærlighed, til sande gode Ting alene’
940 Lundhoff, Een kort historisk Beskrivelse: 8: ‘Til den Ende stræber han, at undertvinge sine utemmede affecter, som vil hinder han fra sande gode Ting’.

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shuns the pleasures of life, as to him who manfully throws himself in their way, and proves himself superior to them.'941 The conception of the *persona* of the philosopher advocated by the rationalists is, to Holberg, altogether misconstrued. Holberg was not the only critic of the rationalist ideal of contemplation. As the poet Christian Falster writes in 1716, a good education teaches the youth 'To sacrifice his Reason and Time, For the common Good, To use all his Skill and Diligence In his Neighbour’s Service.'942 What remains to be examined is how Holberg's notion of the *persona* of the philosopher connects with his thinking about learning and education.

In his early satirical works and comedies such as *Erasmus Montanus*, Holberg came out as a staunch critic of the structure of the Danish university system. In *Peder Paars*, Holberg describes a fictive dispute that had broken out between three learned men over the question whether the goddess of Venus had been injured in the right hand, the left arm, or in the thigh during the Trojan War. Since the learned disputants could not reach an agreement, the case had to be settled before the faculty of theology; however, during the proceedings, a fight broke out in which books were used as weapons.943 'One saw School-Books flying around the ears,' writes Holberg, 'One by Hesiod got the Nose, the Mouth smeared in Blood, the Edge of Pindar in another’s Forehead hit. An Aristophanes, which had been solidly bound, was after the Battle upon a half dead Rector found.'944 Yet, Holberg’s satirical depiction of the state of learning in Denmark applied not only to the strong emphasis at Copenhagen on the *arte disputandi* or the *philosophia instrumentalis*, but also to the status of the sciences.

In the early eighteenth century, the University of Copenhagen was largely structured around the theological faculty; it was only possible to graduate from university with a final exam in theology. In a central passage in *Dannemarck og Norges Beskrivelse*, which he published in 1729, Holberg complains that, at Copenhagen, ‘no Study, except Theology, is learned with any particular Zeal.’945 At other European ‘Academies’, he continues, ‘the Students’ are divided equally between theology, jurisprudence, medicine and mathematics’, but ‘at this Academy, none can be found except Theologians’.946 Although the university structure in place when Holberg first became a professor was replaced by a new one in 1732, Holberg did not fully applaud the new reform. In the

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1730s, however, Holberg did come to terms with his obligations as a university professor of history: he even took up the offices of vice-chancellor and later treasurer. Yet, there is strong evidence to suggest that his rapprochement with the world of the university was caused by external events, rather than an embrace of the state of learning. In the 1720s, he had been heavily engaged with public life in Copenhagen, mainly centred on the activities of the Danish theatre in Lille Grønnegade; however, from 1730 onwards, under the Pietist reign of Christian VI, public life had been significantly restrained.

The strongest evidence of Holberg’s continued disenchantment with the state of learning can be found in his farewell address as vice-chancellor at Copenhagen. Intending to refute ‘the Hegemony of Dialectics’, which he understands as the predominance of the arte disputandi as a form of examination, Holberg sketched out his ideas for a reform of the university teaching. First, students must choose their studies not according to tradition, but a ‘Selection according to Talent’. Further, he suggests introducing a variety of examinations between which the students themselves can choose. As students have different talents, some excelling in ‘Eloquence’, and others in ‘sound Judgment’ or in ‘Memory’, and still others in ‘Creativity’, the possibility of choosing between different forms of examination will provide better results and thus enhance the state of learning. Finally, Holberg suggests restructuring the aim of the examinations in relation to the content of each of the sciences. ‘A Theologian is tested by Sermons and Commentaries’, he writes, ‘a Medical Doctor by Observations, a Physicist and a Philosopher by his Ability to establish the most probable Hypotheses; the Test applied to a Mathematician is Proofs; only the juridical Tests are Disputations, as it is only in the Court Room that Disputations find any Use.’

In his major works on moral philosophy, most notably in the third part of the memoirs Moralske Tanker, Holberg tirelessly continues his attacks on the state of learning and the structure of the university. In the third part of the memoirs and in Moralske Tanker, Holberg calls for ‘an Academic Luther’, who will undertake the reform of the ‘free liberal Arts’ and overthrow ‘the
subtle and useless Scholastic Learning'. Not, as he writes in the memoirs, because of the 'literary studies' themselves, but because of 'the method of pursuing those studies'.

Hence I have often wished to see a reform of the present system, corresponding with the intelligence of the age. I could wish to substitute silence for noisy declamation, and meditation for loquacity; I could wish to substitute for the present teachers and lectures, respondents whose duty it might be, not to expound theses selected by themselves, but to resolve such doubts and difficulties as might be proposed to them by the student. Such a plan would be attended with two advantages; students would obtain the information which they wished to acquire; and none could undertake the office of teaching, except those attained a perfect knowledge of the science they professed.

Adding to the thoughts about reform which he outlined in his farewell address in 1736, Holberg now emphasises the need for a reform of the relation between the teacher and the student to provide the means for a sound knowledge. In order to build up a sound knowledge, the first task at hand, he asserts, is to rid the students of their prejudices and to make the mind a blank sheet, free from traditional knowledge. In Moralske Tanker, which appeared the following year, Holberg repeats several of his earlier ideas about teaching and learning, but also moves his treatment of the issue in a new direction. Whilst his initial treatment of the prevailing university structure and the need for reforms had centred on the duties or the persona of the philosopher, as derived from the discourse of natural law, he now situates his discussion in a different context, namely that of the republic of letters. Yet, Holberg's engagement with the republic of letters should not be construed as a break with his previous intellectual allegiances, but as a change of perspective that added new features to his thinking about philosophy and learning. Whilst the natural law context framed Holberg's view of the persona of the philosopher as an eclectic thinker engaged with the world of useful sciences and the philosophical traditions that shapes each of the sciences, as opposed to metaphysics and contemplation, what the republic of letters had to offer was related to the kind of sociability practised in the academies and the learned societies:

The new Academies, founded in this as well as the previous Century, seem to have been instituted in order to correct the shortcomings of the old Universities. And one can say that it is to those Academies that we owe our gratitude for the great Progress, which the Sciences have had in our Time. These Societies are comprised of learned Men, who gather at certain Times in order to communicate to each other their Thoughts, so that everyone lets Inventions and Works be seen and corrected by whole Society. They also issue curious and difficult Problems to be solved, and grant Rewards to those who most successfully untie the Knots. It is known how much the Sciences by such Means have been improved, and how many hidden Things have thereby come to Light.
Although Holberg models his idea of learning on the learned societies (he does not single out any particular societies or academies), he never challenges the usefulness of universities. Rather, what he intended to do was to reform the university along the lines of a learned academy, which was centred on communication. Thus, the aim of learning, as it should be practised within the framework of his university reform, is two-fold. Learning, he argues, should be aimed at both ‘the Perfection of the Sciences amongst the Teachers, and the Information of the unrefined Youth.’

Holberg’s praise of the new academies and the learned societies as centres of knowledge reveals a certain tension in his thinking about learning, philosophy, and civil society. As we have seen in the previous chapters, Holberg was opposed not only to the thriving culture of the salons, which he disagreed with for political reasons, but also to collective undertakings such as the English Spectator. Yet, the most crucial part of Holberg’s embrace of the republic of letters, however, was his appropriation of the underlying notion of philosophy and learning as a form of critical conversation or polite philosophy, advocated by such prominent figures of the republic of letters as John Locke, Lord Shaftesbury (1671-1713), and Jean Le Clerc, whose anti-rationalist and anti-scholastic contentions Holberg shared.

In the broader context in which Holberg wrote, polite sociability had become an important social concept. The concept of politeness, however, covered a diversity of social and intellectual activities. For instance, in the French enlightenment culture of the salons, which in Holberg’s time rose to great prominence amongst aristocrats in Sweden, polite sociability was often interpreted as an aristocratic activity, though key figures such as Voltaire and Montesquieu did not agree on the meaning of the concept.

In contrast to this conception, Holberg understood polite sociability as a form of critical conversation or polite philosophy, advocated by such prominent figures of the republic of letters as John Locke, Lord Shaftesbury (1671-1713), and Jean Le Clerc, whose anti-rationalist and anti-scholastic contentions Holberg shared.

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sociability as an intellectual activity. Yet, the shift in emphasis in Holberg’s thinking about philosophy and learning, and his opposition to certain forms of polite sociability, does not constitute a contradiction. As Holberg sees it, civic conversation and learned disputes, as opposed to disputation on metaphysical questions (i.e. the *arte disputandi* and the *philosophia instrumentalis*) lead to true knowledge. However, for such conversations and disputes to be possible, particular circumstances need to be met. In Holberg’s view, liberty of the press is the only condition under which civic conversation and disputes are possible.

**Liberty of the Press, Censorship, and Public Criticism**

The creation of learned societies as well as the significant increase in the number of learned journals were essential features of the intellectual culture of the early enlightenment in Europe.\(^961\)

In Denmark, the first literary reviews appeared from 1720s onwards, and, in the 1740s, two learned societies were founded, namely *Videnskabernes Selskab* (The Academy of the Sciences), which was founded in 1742, and *Selskabet til det danske Sprog og den danske Histories Forbedring* (The Society for the Improvement of the Danish Language and Danish History), founded in 1745. Holberg became a member of *Videnskabernes Selskab* in 1745, to which he contributed with two papers later published in the journal of the society, *Skrifter, som udi det Kiøbenhavnske Selskab af Lærdoms og Videnskabers Elskere ere fremlagte og oplaæste* (Papers, which have been presented and read in the Society in Copenhagen by Lovers of Learning and the Sciences), which appeared from 1745 onwards.\(^962\) In Holberg’s own understanding, Pierre Bayle and Jean Le Clerc, who published books, edited journals, and corresponded with other men of letters, were the greatest writers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries; they were embodiments of the early enlightenment republic of letters. Yet, at the same time, Holberg considered Bayle and Le Clerc ‘the last great champions of the republic of letters’.\(^963\) As Holberg sees it, the eighteenth century had been the witness to a decline of the republic of letters, which, as he argues, was due to the ‘want of patronage’ and ‘the severe censorship of books’.\(^964\)

The framework within which the institution of censorship worked in the early eighteenth century was set out in Christian V’s *Danske Lov*, which appeared in 1683.\(^965\) In the early

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\(^961\) Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*: 142-55.

\(^962\) On Holberg’s contribution see Jansen, *Ludvig Holberg og menneskerettighederne*. 125-41.


eighteenth century, the contents of Christian V's *Danske Lov* were largely known. It appeared in several editions in the 1750s; however, Christian Leth already had published an index of the *Danske Lov* in 1735, thus providing an easy guide to the articles on censorship.\(^{966}\) In book II, chapter 21 of *Danske Lov*, the law of censorship was sketched out in six short articles. 'Nobody, whatever it may regard,' it states in article 1, 'may publish anything before it has been seen through and approved at the King’s University in Copenhagen by the Dean of that Faculty, to which the Matter belongs, or by one of the other Professors, should the Dean deem it necessary, due to other legitimate Tasks.'\(^{967}\) Thus, at least in principle, nothing could be printed in Denmark without the approval of the professors at Copenhagen, who were obliged to give permitted books the stamp of imprimatur. The main concern in *Danske Lov* was to limit the circulation of dangerous books dealing with religion and politics, be they domestic or foreign. As for the religious works, *Danske Lov* was mainly concerned with those books that deviated from the prevailing Lutheran orthodoxy and, to a lesser degree, with unauthorised almanacs and prophesy books.\(^{968}\) The books that dealt with political issues, such as the person of the monarch, the government, or the politics of the country, were treated far more seriously. As it states in article 4:

Should any Books in the King's Realms and Lands be published, or printed and imported from abroad, which would appear to be the cause of any form of Rebellion, or smear against the Majesty of the King, or be the cause of any other form of Disadvantage, then should not only the Persons, who have printed them, or imported them, be punished to the highest Degree, but the Books should also, in public, be thrown in the Fire to be burned by the Executioner.\(^{969}\)

Public criticism of the monarchy was treated in *Danske Lov* as an offence equal to that of a physical attack on any member of the royal family and was thus punishable by death. Public criticism, in other words, was considered a *crimine majestatis*.\(^{970}\)

Whilst Holberg's early works, that is, the histories and the *Introduction til Naturens og Folke-Rettens Kundskab*, were censored, his major works on moral philosophy, some of which he deliberately published abroad, contained a high degree of criticism of the institution of

\(^{966}\) Christian Leth, *Register over Kong Christian Den Femtes Danske Lov og de tilhørende kongelige Forordninger, forfatted af Christian Leth* (Copenhagen 1735); k2 recto.

\(^{967}\) Kong Christian den Femtes Danske Lov, paa nye oplagt ved Casper Peter Rothe efter Kongl. Allernaadigst meddelt Privilegio (Copenhagen 1750); 367: 'Ingen, i hvo og være kand, maa noget lade trykke, før end det tilforn i Kongens Universitet i Kiøbenhavn er i gennemset og paakient af Decano i den Facultet, som Materien hører hen til, eller af en anden Professore, som Decanus formedelst andet lovlig Forfald det tilskikker'.

\(^{968}\) Kong Christian den Femtes Danske Lov; 368-71.

\(^{969}\) Kong Christian den Femtes Danske Lov; 369-70: 'Skulle og nogle Boger i Kongens Riger og Lande trykkis, eller der trykte indføris, som kunde have Udseende til noget Opror, eller imod Kongens Hoihed, eller anden Ulempe foraarsaget, da bor ikke alleeniste Personerne, som sandanne trykke, eller indfører, i høieste Maader at straffis, men og Bogerne ved Bødelen offentlig paa Iden kastis og opbrændes'.

\(^{970}\) Rian, *Sensuren i Danmark-Norge*: 122.
In the third part of his memoirs, Holberg launches what can be considered the fiercest attack on the institution of censorship in early eighteenth-century Denmark. ‘In Germany, in France, and especially in England’, writes Holberg, ‘where no shackles are imposed upon genius, and where every thought that can occur to the human mind can be freely published, it is far easier to display the strength of the judgement and the imagination, than in our northern kingdoms, where the force and spirit of a writer are checked and blunted by a most rigid censorship.’

In England, Holberg argues, writers can say almost anything, while in France, Louis XIV had been a great patron of the arts, extending many indulgences to French writers. Using comparison as a subversive strategy, Holberg argues that the prevailing practice of censorship, rather than ensuring the quality of the printed word, is becoming an obstacle to the development of learning. Compared to the state of learning in other European countries, and most particularly in England, the Danish system of censorship prevents young writers from developing their literary skills. ‘From this cause, even if poets and philosophers were to arise in our country capable of rivalling the poets and philosophers of England, they would scarcely come to maturity.’

Despite his aversion towards the institution of censorship, Holberg did not advocate an unlimited form of liberty of the press. Freedom of the press is limited. As he writes, censorship should be conducted by the members of a learned society. As Holberg asserts, this understanding of censorship would become like ‘the Seal of a learned Society, whereby is announced that a Work is written with Creativity, Toil, and Discernment.’ In Holberg’s view, the seal of the learned society, the imprimatur, will thus become a sign of erudition. ‘I should wish the censorship to be regulated by this law: – “Let the censors take care that the republic of letters sustain no injury from common-place or vulgar productions, or from plagiarisms”. The effect of this law would be to substitute, for the mass of trash which is obtruded upon the public by so many despicable writers, a few productions written with ability, and worthy of an enlightened age.’ Thus, the censorship conducted by a society of learned men was intended to ensure the good quality of published works. Censorship, in other words should ideally work as a form of literary review,

973 On Louis XIV see Holberg, Memoirs of Lewis Holberg: 198.
974 Holberg, Memoirs of Lewis Holberg: 175.
975 Holberg, Moralske Tanker: 384: ‘et lærd Societets Stempel, hvorrowd gives tilkienede, at et Skrift med Konst, Møye og Skionsomhed er udarbejdet’.
recommending the book to a larger readership within the republic of letters.\footnote{On this conception of censorship see Robert Darnton, Censors at Work: How States Shaped Literature (London and New York 2014); Part One.} Imposing certain limits on the freedom of the press, Holberg, however, also has another aspect in mind. As he writes in the \textit{Epistler}:

\begin{quote}
I have often recommended freedom of the press and looked upon censorship as the chains and fetters of the learned world. I have, on the other hand, been of the opinion that freedom of the press should be granted only to those who have achieved maturity, and I have become even more convinced of this after having observed young persons writing about the most delicate matters, political as well as moral, before they have grown a beard.\footnote{Ludvig Holberg, Selected Essays of Ludvig Holberg, P.M. Mitchell, ed., (Lawrence 1955): 118.} 
\end{quote}

The practice of censorship which Holberg envisions is not intended to prevent the young writers from reaching their artistic and intellectual maturity. Rather, what he intends to do is to substitute a system that, in its eagerness to prevent the publication and circulation of dangerous books, prevented all writers from ever reaching maturity for a practice of censorship conducted by a learned society keen on literary style and quality of argument. Thus, one of the principal aims of the institution of censorship, as Holberg envisions it, is to prevent the bookmarket from being flooded by a stream of bad works written by unreasonable and ignorant authors.

The challenge, as Holberg sees it, is comprised of two aspects, equally detrimental to the state of learning. The first is related to the invention of the printing press and the subsequent creation of a bookmarket. Although the printing press had enabled the circulation of written works on a hitherto unseen scale, thus affecting learning, the bookmarket had succumbed to the interests of traders and booksellers. 'In the old Days', writes Holberg, 'before Books were traded, learned Men wrote solely in order to enlighten the World, and to present to others their Thoughts. Now, by contrast, it has turned into a Traffic, and can only be seen as an Income for Merchants and Booksellers.'\footnote{Holberg, \textit{Epistler}: I.13: 'I gamle Dage, førend der dreves Handel med Bøger, skrev lærde Mænd, alleene for oplyse Verden, og at meddeele til andre deres Tanker. Nu derimod er det bleven til en Trafiqve, og kan fast alleene ansees som en Næring for Kiøbmænd og Boghandlere'.} Moreover, as booksellers seek to promote 'their own Income', they tend to value the appearance of books more than the content.\footnote{Holberg, \textit{Epistler}: I.13: 'deres egen Næring'.} The second aspect of the challenge is related to the prevailing practice of censorship. The censors, Holberg asserts, must 'take care that nothing contrary to religion and good morals should be published.'\footnote{Holberg, \textit{Memoirs of Lewis Holberg}: 198.} This aspect of Holberg's argument should not, however, be conflated with prevailing practices of censorship. Though limited by certain restrictions, Holberg conception of censorship allows writers a larger margin of freedom; as he argues, it is far more devastating to the state of learning to prevent a
book from being published than to publish a work containing dangerous ideas. ‘We are told of the licentiousness of certain writers,’ he asserts, ‘which it is necessary to restrain by these shackles; but of two evils the least should be chosen, and the advantage arising from the precautionary measure is trifling, in comparison of the inconvenience which result from it.’

Holberg’s main objection against the prevailing practices of censorship turns on a psychological observation. ‘Books of the best character are constantly suppressed,’ he writes, ‘and in those which are tolerated the noblest thoughts are expunged by the timidity, the ignorance, or the bad taste of censors. Hence authors prefer suffering their works to be consumed in manuscript by moth and worms, to delivering them up to the tasteless shears of the censors.’ The most devastating effect of the prevailing practices of censorship, Holberg argues, is that it leads to self-censorship. Self-censorship, in this sense, is a condition of servitude in that it prevents a writer from giving expression to his or her thoughts in writing because of the arbitrary interference of a censor. Thus, the degree to which the writers of a given nation enjoy liberty of the press is, to Holberg, the true seal of a nation’s culture and civility. ‘The more a nation advances in civilization’, he writes, ‘the greater is the indulgence shown towards writers.’

Holberg’s arguments about the liberty of the press serve as the foundation for a larger claim about civil society. Whilst human action in civil societies is mediated by sociability, reputation, and decorum, the freedom of the press advances not only the state of learning, but also serves to improve the public morality of a nation by publicly criticising the flaws of humanity in general rather than particular individuals. This pertains to Holberg’s view on the moral philosopher, whose principal task in civil society is ‘to *moralise* in all useful Ways.’ In order to reach this point, Holberg contrasts the *persona* of the moral philosopher to the *persona* of the clergyman or the theologian. As we have seen, the Christian political thinkers had advanced a distinct theory of public criticism which was founded on the moral and theological authority of the theologian. In the *Epistler*, Holberg refutes two central claims used to defend this kind of moral criticism: first, that it is the duty of clergymen to reprove sinners regardless of their social station and, secondly, that this practice of moral criticism mirrors the actions of the ‘earliest Church fathers’ not considered ‘martyrs and apostolic men.’ Whilst it is a central part of the clerical office to reprove sinners regardless of their position in society, ‘as there are no *privileged* and *unprivileged* Sinners’, clergymen, Holberg asserts, should still abstain from ‘*censuring* the high Authority in

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public Gatherings.” As Holberg sees it, this form of public criticism constitutes a ‘form of Rebellion’, one which can cause a disturbance in the whole kingdom. As clergymen ‘are subjects of the crown’, they owe the ruler their complete obedience and must also take care not to undermine the ‘strength and welfare if the state’. As for the second claim, Holberg rejects ‘the ethics of the church fathers’ which legitimise rebellion; he refers to ‘Barbeyrac,’ who ‘has shown how often thy erred’. Holberg’s main argument against the seventeenth-century theory of moral criticism, which he presents at the end of his essay, is that the function of public criticism belongs not to the clerical office, but to the moral philosopher:

It should be observed that, just as clergymen must not overstep the bounds which insure the security of government and society, they must on the other hand not forbid philosophers to condemn in general all sorts of sins, included those committed by a ruler. Neither should one through misinterpretation or out of mere suspicion – as is often the case – assume that whatever a clergyman censures in general is meant as personal criticism. The clergyman in the one case and his communicant in the second are equally culpable. On the one hand, the boundary which the very nature of society requires is overstepped; on the other, philosophers are not free to speak at all.

To allow the clergyman to criticise the civil authorities in public, Holberg argues, will undermine that very foundation upon which civil society rests while to restrict the philosopher’s liberty to criticise will be equally detrimental. Although public criticism of authorities should be dislocated from the pulpits, a general criticism of the flaws and defects of civil society should prevail. This task, Holberg asserts, belongs to the office of the moral philosopher, whose duty it is to moralise and search for truth and sound knowledge. The theologian, by contrast, is excluded from public criticism, as he is a representative of specific religious doctrines and thus has a partisan view on the truth. Clerical office, as Holberg understands it, is confined to the teaching of the Gospels in church and private guidance in what pertains to the salvation of individual persons. Thus, the guardian of Holberg’s enlightenment is the moral philosopher, and moral philosophy is a call for civility. ‘Moral philosophy’, he writes, ‘is our guide in the conduct of life; it sounds our virtues, expels our vices; it is the parent of civilized philosophy, and of all endearing relations which result from civilization; it is the source from which laws and sound education flow. Hence there is no study to which I have devoted myself with greater zeal.’

987 Holberg, Epistler: II.299: ’efterdi der ere ingen privilegerede og upriviligerede Syndere’, ’censurere den høye Øvrighed udi offentlige Forsamlinger’.
988 Holberg, Episiler: II.299 : ’en slags Rebellion’.
989 Holberg, Moral Reflections & Epistles: 120
990 Holberg, Moral Reflections & Epistles: 120, 121.
991 Holberg, Moral Reflections & Epistles: 121.
Enlightenment, Moral Philosophy, and Civil Society

As we have seen in this chapter, Holberg’s thinking about civil society develops along two interconnected lines of argumentation. First, I argue, Holberg sees civil society as comprised of a multitude of offices, ranging from the office of kingship to the clergyman and the peasant, and further to the philosopher, the poet, and the playwright. To each office or persona, a particular set of duties is attached, stating the boundaries within which the officeholder can legitimately act. Secondly, within the multiple offices comprising civil society, Holberg pays particular attention to the persona of the philosopher and such related personae as the poet and the playwright, to whose offices he ascribes the duty not only to teach and to attend to the state of learning, but also to perform public criticism. Embedded in a moral philosophical language of sociability, duty, and criticism, and stressing such features as meritocracy and gender equality, Holberg’s view of civil society was shaped by his intellectual engagement with neoclassicism, the tradition of modern natural law, and the republic of letters. Constituting, thus, an early enlightenment interpretation of civil society, Holberg rejects a host of rival theories.

First, comprised of multiple offices, each working on a distinct set of moral principles or duties, Holberg’s theory of civil society is a rejection of the theories of public criticism and clerical authority advanced within the seventeenth-century tradition of Christian political thought. The fundamental difference between Holberg’s enlightenment and the seventeenth-century Lutheran tradition consists in the conception of moral criticism. Whereas the persona of the philosopher searches for truth and amends his arguments when he is convinced by other better ones, the persona of the theologian or clergyman is partisan, owing his allegiance to a distinctive set of religious doctrines. Secondly, Holberg’s conception of philosophy and learning is a rejection of philosophical rationalism. Founded on the ideal of contemplation and metaphysics, the rationalist philosopher, in Holberg’s understanding, is guilty of sophistry and pedantry. Like Erasmus Montanus, the rationalist philosopher puts his knowledge to use, not in order to benefit the common good, but to benefit his own intellectual pride and caprice. This model is detrimental to the state of learning. According to Holberg, the philosophical questions, that is, metaphysics, and the method of pursuing those questions, the arte disputandi and philosophia instrumentalis, are essentially misconstrued. Philosophy consists not in contemplation and speculation on metaphysical questions or in learning the formal structures of argumentation; rather, philosophy is, as Holberg sees it, a way of life.

Finally, embracing the theatre as an essential institution in civil society, Holberg rejects the Pietist enlightenment, which is essentially concerned with inner piety and the reformation of the
individual believer in relation to God. Holberg’s commitments to the theatre are, perhaps, one of the most distinctive features of his theory of civil society and of his enlightenment more generally. Viewed against the interpretations of the enlightenment put forth by such scholars as Reinhart Koselleck and Margret C. Jacob, who have emphasised the emergence in the early enlightenment of secret societies as places of apolitical criticism,993 Holberg’s contribution to enlightenment thought takes a different direction. Enlightenment, to Holberg, means civility; it is the role of the moral philosopher to nourish this civility through public criticism allowed by the freedom of the press. Holberg’s enlightenment is thus construed on a civic mode of thought, staunchly opposed to secrecy.

Chapter 5

Enlightenment against Fanaticism:
Religious Conformity, Pietist Dissent, and Sincere Belief

I have devoted so little time to polemical or systematic theology, that if I were to be examined before a bench of divines, I should in all probability be rejected. But I am well acquainted with sacred history, as well Jewish as Christian; and I have examined the foundations of the Christian religion with great solicitude.

Ludvig Holberg

In 1745, a Danish translation appeared of an anonymous French work entitled *L'ordre des Franc-Maçons trahi et le Secret des Mopser révélé*, which had first appeared in Paris in 1742. Commonly attributed to the Abbé Gabriel-Louis Calabre Pérau (1700-1767), the work was intended to reveal the great secret of the Freemasons. The work consisted of several pieces or documents, allegedly revealing the practices of the Freemasons in general, and the *Ordre des Mopser* in particular. The *Ordre des Mopser*, scrutinised in Pérau’s work, was founded in Austria in the 1730s, imitating masonic principles. Yet, the organisation of this order differed significantly from other masonic lodges in that it welcomed members of both the male and female sexes, making it, as one modern interpreter has put it, something like a ‘social club for women.’ When the translation of a Pérau’s work appeared, the content of the book was largely known in Denmark from a German translation already in circulation. Still, the Danish translation of Pérau’s work sparked a lively debate amongst the men of letters in Copenhagen.

The Freemasons first appeared in the Danish-Norwegian monarchy in the 1740s; soon afterwards, two lodges were established in Copenhagen, the second only after breaking free from

995 [“Gabriel-Louis Calabre Pérau”], *Den Opdagede og forraadte Friemurer-Orden, Og den aabenbarede Hemmelighed Om Mopser-Lauget (Oversat paa Dansk)* (Copenhagen 1745).
Freemasonry was a controversial topic in the early eighteenth century; in 1738, the Freemasons were banned when Pope Clement XII (1652-1740) issued a papal bull against the order. Attractive to some because of its secrecy, its rites, and rituals, it was equally alarming to others, who saw the Freemasonry as seditious a sect. Shortly after the publication of Péreau’s work, an anonymous pamphlet appeared under the title En Patriotisk Frimurers Critiske Brev (The Critical Letter of a Patriotic Freemason), in which the author claims that Péreau’s work contains nothing pertaining to the secret of the Freemasons. The anonymous author does, however, praise Péreau’s work for offering ‘a true Concept’ of Freemasonry, stressing that the Freemasons refrain themselves from the discussion of ‘Matters of Religion’ as well as ‘Matters of State.’ The pamphlet, which was incomplete at the time of its publication, was thus intended to debunk the allegations of sedition levelled against the Freemasons.

Similar arguments feature in an anonymous letter published by Jørgen Riis (1717-1749) in Den Danske Spectator (The Danish Spectator) in February 1745. The author of the letter first describes Péreau as ‘an Imposter,’ before proceeding with an apology for the Freemasons. Invoking the example of Socrates, who stood accused before the Athenian court, the author assures his readers ‘that in our Laws not the least is found whereby either the Supreme Being or Earthly Rulers are offended.’ The Freemasons are, in other words, good citizens.

Holberg first writes about the Freemasons in the Epistler. However, in contrast to the positions in the ongoing debate, Holberg does not share the common obsession with revealing the well-guarded and mysterious secrets of the Freemasons, for those secrets, he argues, are ‘of little or no importance.’ Holberg’s engagement with Freemasonry takes shape along two interconnected lines of argumentation. First, he contrasts the secrecy of Freemasons with the civic character of other human societies:

Since the secret of the society has been kept to the present day, it has occurred to me that it must for that very reason be nonexistent. The resolutions or laws which the Freemasons accept must either be good or
bad or insignificant. If they are bad, it is incomprehensible that so many worthy and enlightened men should hesitate to break an obligation which is sinful and unlawful. If they are good, why are they held secret? No one can be without reproach who refuses to communicate to mankind whatever can be to its advantage and betterment. It is therefore reasonable to assume that this society was established solely for the sake of founding a society and arousing other people’s curiosity; it serves no other function than to give people who have nothing to talk about a subject for conversation.1005

Societies should be useful and work for the advantage and betterment of the human race. As we have seen, Holberg’s ideal notion of learning and learned societies was constituted through individual scholarship and its subsequent communication to mankind. What Holberg was doing was, in other words, to measure Freemasonry against the intellectual ideals of the early enlightenment republic of letters, in which sociality, civility, and critical, yet respectful conversation were considered absolute virtues, while secrecy and sectarianism counted for vices.

The second line of argumentation runs along political lines. On the issue ‘whether such secret societies should be permitted’, Holberg takes ‘a middle path’.1006 ‘On the one hand’, he argues, ‘I believe that the Pope has acted precipitously in putting the Freemasons under the ban of the Church, for to sentence to Hell men about whose deeds and achievements one has no idea is strange indeed, and such excommunication can therefore be looked upon as fulmen brutum which can have no effect.’1007 To excommunicate someone about whose actions nothing is known is, to Holberg, an unacceptable behaviour in itself. ‘On the other hand,’ Holberg continues, ‘I believe a government cannot be blamed which tries to discourage such societies, for secret meetings arouse suspicion and are therefore difficult to tolerate in any country. Although they can be beneficial and innocent, they nevertheless do give occasion to plots and conspiracies, of which we have numerous examples both in ancient and modern history.’1008 Thus, secret societies cannot be tolerated in a state. As secret networks of communication that functioned across state and even across confessional borders,1009 Freemasonry was destined to conflict with Holberg’s notions of the state and of civil society. Such communication between lodges in different countries, Holberg argues, cannot but ‘arouse the Suspicion’ of the political authority in the countries they reside.1010 Further, as Holberg asserts, Freemasonry and fanaticism share a family resemblance, as both the fanatics and the Freemasons were sworn to secrecy.1011 Consequentially, both lead to separatism, which, to Holberg, equals the complete abandonment not only of the ideals of learning upheld in the

1006 Holberg, Selected Essays of Ludvig Holberg: 28.
1007 Holberg, Selected Essays of Ludvig Holberg: 28.
1008 Holberg, Selected Essays of Ludvig Holberg: 29.
republic of letters, but also such virtues as civility and sociality that underpin the very existence of civil associations.

Holberg’s involvement in the debate about Freemasonry should not, however, be seen in isolation. Holberg’s religious vocabulary in the 1740s and 1750s places Freemasonry in a semantic web, where it not only acquired a number of associations with fanaticism and separatism, but also with Pietism. As I shall argue in this chapter, Holberg’s stance in the debate on Freemasonry in the 1740s was intended as a broader reflection on the moral and confessional reality that had characterised the Danish-Norwegian monarchy since the early eighteenth century. What had shaped this reality more than anything else was a deep-rooted tension between religious conformity and religious dissent. In the early eighteenth century this tension split Danish religious life into two rival camps, represented most notably by orthodox Lutheranism and Pietism. Holberg’s answer to these positions was that of a civic enlightenment derived from the ideas being advocated in the republic of letters; however, it was never an irreligious enlightenment. Situating the thought of Holberg in relation to the prevailing religious positions of the early eighteenth century as well as the republic of letters more broadly, this chapter deals with the two major contexts in which Holberg’s religious thinking was formed. However, before we go into detail on the various religious enlightenments that he encountered in the 1740s and 1750s, we shall first trace the development of his religious thinking in relation to the confessional positions that constituted the religious context of the early Northern enlightenment.

**Lutheran Foundations – Protestant Enlightenments**

Holberg’s first treatment of religious questions stems from his early historical works. In his discussion of religious freedom in seventeenth-century England, Holberg links religious plurality to political insecurity. As Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) granted freedom of religion, which, according to Holberg, resulted in ‘great Confusion’ and ‘the Rise of many ludicrous Sects, most notably the Quakers.’ After Cromwell’s death, Holberg points out, the Quakers resisted the religious policies of the Restoration and rebelled against the Restoration monarchy. At the time when Holberg was preparing his early historical works in the Bodleian

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library in Oxford,\textsuperscript{1014} Danish translations of Quakers such as William Penn (1644–1718), William Dell (d. 1664), and Robert Barclay (1648–1690) were being issued in London by the Norwegian clergyman Christopher Meidel (1659–1715), preacher at the Danish church in London and chaplain to Prince Georg of Denmark (1653–1708).\textsuperscript{1015} ‘In our Time,’ writes Holberg in 1729, ‘the familiar Quaker Meydel has sought to seduce some of his Countrymen and for that End he has translated some of the famous Quaker William Penn’s Works into Danish, which he has offered to one or another, who has come to England, but one has never heard that he has thereby succeeded in seducing any Skipper or Boatswain, even less People of higher Consideration. The same can also be said of that Quaker Barkley’s Works, which are also translated into Danish.’\textsuperscript{1016}

Whether Holberg knew Meidel’s translations in the 1710s is uncertain, but, as Holberg resided in both London and Oxford around the same time as Meidel was issuing his translations, it is plausible that he was already aware of Meidel’s defence of Quakerism during his stay in England.\textsuperscript{1017} Seen in this light, Holberg’s analysis of Quakerism is as much about political insecurity in England after Cromwell as it is about the prospects of that religious sect gaining followers in the Danish-Norwegian monarchy. The Quakers constituted a separatist religious sect; to tolerate it would seriously disrupt the order of civil society. Thus, Holberg expresses a grave concern for peace and stability; like Pufendorf and Thomasius, he draws his arguments on this point from the tradition of reason of state.\textsuperscript{1018}

Holberg was further engaged, however, with other strands of religious thought, pivotal to the development of his religious thinking and the theory of toleration he came to advocate. The best source to his early religious thinking is the first part of his memoirs, published in 1728, in


which he describes his early years, his European travels, and his published works down to the late 1720s. At Oxford, Holberg is impressed by the knowledge of the young students. ‘The English are but moderately skilled in polemics’, he notes, ‘but they are well versed in sacred philology, ecclesiastical law and history, and in the works of the Fathers.’ \textsuperscript{1019} Holberg preferred ecclesiastical history to the polemical theology still prevailing on the continent; during his subsequent European travels, ecclesiastical history would become a favourite subject of his. On his long journey through the Netherlands, France, and Italy between 1714 and 1716, Holberg met a young Danish student in Paris who had taken a liking to the public disputations on theology organised by the authorities. The young student had participated with some success in those disputations, but had eventually lost the rhetorical battle against his Catholic opponent. ‘Had the Dane been better read in ecclesiastical history’, Holberg notes, ‘he might easily have confuted his adversary, by showing that the decrees of councils are in many instances diametrically opposed to each other, and that in the Romish church, therefore, the interpretation of the scriptures rests upon a most precarious foundation. But our Danish youth, while they cultivate polemics with ardour, are too apt to neglect the study of sacred history.’ \textsuperscript{1020}

Continuing, thus, the critique of neo-scholasticism that runs through his natural jurisprudence and, later, his comedies, Holberg depicts polemical theology as an empty academic exercise without any real substance. It is sacred or ecclesiastical history (Holberg does not seem to distinguish the two), as opposed to polemical theology, that gives students of theology a thorough and substantial knowledge of the decrees of councils, subsequently enabling them to turn the weapons of their opponents against themselves. It is difficult, however, to assess Holberg’s engagement with religious issues in the 1710s, aside from his adherence to a commonplace anti-papalism; however, whilst his treatment of religious belief is rather scarce, he does give prominence to ecclesiastical history. At one point he describes an encounter with ‘a doctor of the Sorbonne’ with whom he did battle; ‘being tolerably conversant with ecclesiastical history’, he tells us, ‘I endeavoured to destroy the doctor with his own weapons.’ \textsuperscript{1021}

A decisive moment in the development of Holberg’s religious views seems to have occurred in the 1720s, when he encountered Roman Catholicism yet again and read a number of prohibited books on religious issues, thereby becoming more aware of his own peculiar take on Lutheranism. The first instance occurred in Paris during his stay there from 1725 to 1726. Though the Parisians were no longer as eager as they had been in the 1710s to convert Protestants, Holberg

\textsuperscript{1019} Holberg, \textit{Memoirs of Lewis Holberg}: 24–25.
\textsuperscript{1020} Holberg, \textit{Memoirs of Lewis Holberg}: 50.
\textsuperscript{1021} Holberg, \textit{Memoirs of Lewis Holberg}: 46.
describes an encounter with ‘an old fellow who had a monstrous itch for disputation.’ Although Holberg, now a professor and a celebrated satirist and playwright, was reluctant to accept the challenge, he eventually had to give in. ‘I affected to admit that most of the articles of faith professed by the Protestants were problematical, since the Scriptures were differently interpreted by different sects, and it was possible therefore that Protestants might sometimes be wrong. The possibility of error being admitted, I admitted also that error could not but be unacceptable to the Supreme Being.’ Thus, the possibility of error is at the heart of Holberg’s exposition; more than being an exposition of commonplace Lutheran arguments, which it also is, his position is more concerned with the nature of erroneous belief. Holberg goes on to show how the Protestants ‘take a safer course’ than the Roman Catholics on a number of controversial articles of faith, such as the merits of good works, the existence of purgatory, the role of saints, the worship of images, the necessity of bread and wine in communion, the baptism of newborns as a necessity for entering into heaven, and, finally, which is for our present purposes the main point, the reading of the scriptures by laymen. As he notes:

The reading of the Scriptures is prohibited to laymen by the Roman Catholics, because, they say, it opens a door to error; and perhaps it does open a door; but Protestants take a safer course in permitting the laity to read the Scriptures, since an erroneous faith is better than no faith, and they who believe without examining the grounds of their belief, believe nothing, unless we admit in religion the maxim which obtains in law, that what a man does by the agency of another he does himself, and that therefore to believe by proxy is the same as if you believed yourself.

Alluding, albeit in superficial terms, to the Lutheran doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, Holberg is able to redescribe what it means to be erroneous in religious matters. Whilst the Protestants might be erroneous after reading the Bible for themselves, which cannot but be acceptable to God, since the worship of the divine being resulting from such erroneous belief is done with sincerity, the Roman Catholics cling to erroneous doctrines in the bad sense of the word. As he concludes his exposition, ‘I admit that most articles of faith are problematical; I admit that it is difficult to interpret the divine law, or, if you will, that the whole sacred writings are

1023 Holberg, Memoirs of Lewis Holberg: 124. The Latin original as well as the Danish translations that were issued of Holberg’s memoirs in the 1740s are somewhat clearer on this point, as it is exactly Holberg’s point that God does accept certain errors. See Ludvig Holberg, Ludovici Holbergii Ad Virum Perillustrem *** Epistola (n.p. 1727): 171: ‘Sed ipsos errores dicebam Deo ingratos esse non posse’; Ludvig Holberg, Professor Ludvig Helborgs Lif og Lefnets Beskrivelse af ham selv i en Epistel til een stoer Mand paa Latine forfatted, og nu til fleeres Fornøyelse paa det Danske Sprog verteter og Udgivet (Bergen 1741): 170: ‘Men disse Vildfærelser selv paastod jeg at de icke kunde være Gud misshagelige’; Ludvig Holberg, Ludvig Helborgs Trende Epister til ** Hvornud befatte det Fornemste af hans Liv og Levnet, Oversat af det Latinske i det Danske Sprog (Copenhagen 1745): 166: ‘kand dog Vildfærelserne selv ikke være Gud ubehagelige’.
1025 Holberg, Memoirs of Lewis Holberg: 126.
obscure, so that, after the most diligent examination, we cannot always elicit their true meaning. I do not say that Protestants are not liable to error; but I maintain that if we err, we err without danger, whereas, if the Roman Catholics walk in darkness, it is darkness which threatens them with destruction.\footnote{Holberg, \textit{Memoirs of Lewis Holberg}: 127.}

The second decisive development in Holberg’s religious thinking in the 1720s stems from his reading of prohibited books, which he describes at the end of the first part of his memoirs:

I candidly confess, however, that some years ago the reading of certain prohibited books led me to doubt the divine origin of Revelation; for as it seemed to me that men were chiefly distinguished from brutes by the liberty of thinking, I considered it the duty of every man to examine the grounds of the religious persuasions transmitted to him from his ancestors, to peruse prohibited books, and to doubt every thing which could not stand the test of rational inquiry. I read all the prohibited books I could procure, and this kind of reading raised many scruples in my mind.\footnote{Ludvig Holberg, \textit{Memoirs of Lewis Holberg}: 153–54.}

Much to the disappointment of his (modern) readers, Holberg is not very clear in regards to what books he has in mind. In connection, however, to the prohibited books, Holberg alludes to a number of ‘modern sceptical annotators on the prophets’ and ‘certain Roman Catholic writers’ who have increased his ‘perplexity’,\footnote{Holberg, \textit{Memoirs of Lewis Holberg}: 154.} referring to the French biblical scholar Richard Simon (1638–1712), whom Holberg found ten times worse than Spinoza.\footnote{Holberg, \textit{Ludovici Holbergii Ad Virum Perillustrem *** Epistola}: 210. For reasons unknown, this reference to Spinoza and Richard Simon is left out of the English translation.} Nonetheless, referring to prohibited books, Holberg may also have been alluding to Bayle, with whom he was familiar at the time, and possibly also the English Deists. In late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century England, for instance, deists, naturalists, and others refuted, to various degrees, revealed religion and sought instead to found religiosity and morality on reason and the precepts of natural religion. The reputation of the English deists in particular triggered much fear in orthodox circles in England and elsewhere; through the republic of letters, their works reached a broader European public. Although, as S. J. Barnett has recently suggested, the deist threat was largely a rhetorical creation conceived by orthodox clergymen in England, it might be added that the threat seemed very real to religious thinkers on the continent, Holberg among them.\footnote{S. J. Barnett, \textit{The Enlightenment and Religion: The myth of modernity} (Manchester and New York 2003): esp. Ch 3.}

Holberg’s encounter in the 1720s with the deists and other sceptical positions provoked a crisis of faith; what saved him from his religious crisis was the reading of Hugo Grotius, Jacques Abbadie (1658–1727), Pierre Daniel Huet (1630–1721) and others who defended Christianity
against the deists, the naturalists, the atheists and others who sought to undermine religion.1031

‘After some years’, he writes, ‘I happily extricated myself from the labyrinth in which the reading
of these books had involved me.’ 1032 As Ludvig Selmer has shown, Grotius, Abbadie, and Huet
came out of a tradition of Christian apologetics, who defended revelation and the truth of
Christianity.1033 In 1684, the Huguenot preacher Abbadie published his influential Traité de la
Vérité de la Religion Chrétienne (Treatise on the Truth of the Christian Religion), in which he
sought to save Christianity from Atheism, Deism and certain radical strands of Bible criticism.

Though Holberg praised Abbadie’s work and agreed with the general outlook of his arguments, it
is doubtful that it had any lasting influence on Holberg’s thought. Indeed, as Selmer points out,
Abbadie and Holberg differed on the central issue at hand, namely the relationship between reason
and revelation. Whilst Holberg saw the truth of revelation as a matter of reason, Abbadie insisted
on an inner belief in the truth of the revelation, thereby creating a gulf between reason and faith,
which Holberg rejected. By contrast, Huet was a scepticist and his influence on Holberg’s thought
was limited. Amongst the three writers mentioned, Grotius was to become the most important to
Holberg.

However, Selmer’s account is problematic, as his discussion of Holberg’s view on reason and
revelation randomly jumps between works that belongs to widely different phases in the
development of Holberg’s religious thinking. This view of things is, of course, legitimate in so far
that it aims – as does Selmer’s – to uncover the lasting influence of these writers on Holberg’s
thought; but as a representation of Holberg’s thinking in the 1720s it is misleading. Holberg’s
religious crisis in the 1720s had led him to engage with a host of overlapping intellectual
traditions that advocated individual scrutiny in matters of religion rather than an unreflective
reliance on tradition. In the late seventeenth century, Grotius’s treatise on the truth of the
Christian religion, in which he offered an irenicist account of the Christian religion based on a
minimalist conception of the fundamental articles of faith, had become one of the foundational
texts in the Arminian enlightenment, a tradition with which Holberg was becoming more
acquainted in the 1720s. In February 1726, as we have seen, Holberg met Jean Le Clerc, perhaps
the most prominent advocate of this strand of thought in the early enlightenment, who had not
only edited Grotius’s treatise, but also translated and popularised several works by Grotius and
John Locke. Although it did not have any traceable impact on Holberg’s religious thought in this
period, the Arminian enlightenment is crucial to understand Holberg’s later religious thinking.

1031 Holberg, Memoirs of Lewis Holberg: 145.
1033 The following discussion draws on Ludvig Selmer, Ludvig Holberg og religionen (Kristiania 1914): 111-19.
I shall return to Holberg’s engagement with this particular branch of enlightenment Arminianism in the following chapter; for now, it is sufficient to note that Holberg’s religious thinking in the 1720s begins to orbit around a notion of intellectual enquiry that considers it the duty of every man to examine for himself the grounds of his religious belief. This emphasis on enquiry, which substituted his earlier focus on ecclesiastical history, is rooted partly in the Lutheran tradition, where the laity is permitted to read and interpret the Scriptures, and partly in enlightenment Arminianism. Yet, ecclesiastical history does not disappear from his horizon.

Ecclesiastical History, Orthodox Lutheranism, and Papal Tyranny

In the 1730s, Holberg was chiefly interested in history; in 1739, ten years after the publication of the first part of the memoirs, in which ecclesiastical history featured prominently, he issued a Church history entitled *Almindelig Kirke-Historie Fra Christendommens første Begyndelse til Lutheri Reformation* (General Church History from the Beginning of Christianity to the Lutheran Reformation). It is not easily settled when Holberg first conceived the idea of writing an ecclesiastical history. He had briefly dealt with issues related with the Danish Reformation and the Lutheran state Church in *Holger Danskes Brev til Buurman*, which appeared in 1727, and in *Dannemarke og Norges Beskrivelse*, first published in 1729, in which he argued that, since the Reformation, there had been ‘no noteworthy Religious controversies in Denmark.’ Yet, as Holberg only deals with the religious history of Denmark and Norway in those works, we should be careful not to view them as precursors to his ecclesiastical history, published a decade later.

‘Now he took upon himself the task of writing another important historical Work’, writes Johann Adolph Scheibe, Holberg’s close friend and biographer, ‘for which he had prepared himself already in Oxford and later in Paris.’ In Scheibe’s account, it was in the Bodleian Library in Oxford that Holberg first took note of civil and ecclesiastical history, ‘after which he got acquainted with Religious Controversies and the Law of Nature and of Nations, to which his first learned Works bear witness.’ There are no reasons to believe, however, that Holberg already planned to write a work on ecclesiastical history before the 1730s. He first stated his intention to prepare a history of the church in his *Betænkning over Historier*, which appeared in 1735 in the

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At this point in time, the context had changed. Rather than responding to the Roman Catholic Counter Reformation he had experienced first hand on his travels in France, his intention to write an ecclesiastical history responded to a more local setting. Two contexts in particular are important for understanding Holberg’s Almindelig Kirke-Historie. First, in the 1730s, when the pious Christian VI ascended to the throne, Pietism had become the dominant strand of religious thinking in Denmark and, second, ecclesiastical history had become part of the university curricula at Copenhagen.

In March 1732, the University of Copenhagen received a new charter, one of the novelties of which was to appoint one professor from among the four in the faculty of theology to lecture on ecclesiastical history. ‘We will most graciously’, it reads in §1 of the charter, ‘that hereafter, as it has been previously, the University shall always have four Theological Professors, amongst whom one shall deliver public lectures on Ecclesiastical History, whilst the others [shall lecture] on the Holy Scripture, the Augsburg Confession and our pure Evangelical Teaching’. Next to ethics, polemical theology, a thorough knowledge of Scripture, and the linguistic means of understanding the Old and New Testaments in their original languages, ecclesiastical history had a special status amongst the theological disciplines, as students of theology were required to master this subject in order to gain the highest mark, the charactere laudabili, whilst it was not required for the second grade, the haud illaudabilis. Amongst the professors of theology at Copenhagen in the 1730s, many of whom were drawn to Pietism, the lectures on church history were mainly delivered by orthodox Lutherans. The first to deliver regular lectures on church history was the anti-sectarian orthodox Lutheran Marcus Wøldike (1699-1750), who was appointed to a chair of theology in 1731. The orthodox account of church history is one of the main aspects of the context in which Holberg prepared his ecclesiastical history.

The orthodox Lutheran interpretation of ecclesiastical history was rooted in the seventeenth-century tradition of Christian political thought. Celebrating the centenary of the Reformation in 1617, Hans Poulsen Resen published a church history entitled Lutherus triumphans

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1041 On Woldike see Banning, ‘Det teologiske Fakultet 1732-1830’: 220-22, 238.
(The Triumph of Luther), in which he summed up the advance of the Lutheranism. In 1622, the Norwegian theologian Cort Aslaksen (1564–1624) published his Theologiske oc Historiske beskrifielse om den Reformerede Religion (Theological and Historical Description of the Reformed Religion), which offers the first history of the Danish Church from the Reformation to the reign of Christian IV. The work, which had originally appeared in Latin in 1621, is a clear expression of the orthodox Lutheran view on the Protestant Reformation. In the preface, Aslaksen first contrasts ‘the clear Light of Gospel’ to what he describes as ‘the crude and coarse Papist Idolatry, [its] Tyranny and insatiable greed.’ The true knowledge of God, he asserts, thus echoing a commonplace Lutheran contention, springs not from ‘tradition and Fables invented by Humans’, but from ‘the Word of God’. Secondly, Aslaksen contrasts ‘the true Religion’ to ‘all false Doctrines’, which he lists as the Jesuits, Anabaptists, Arians and other forms of heresy and erroneous belief. The orthodoxy expounded in Aslaksen’s work is surprising, as Aslaksen, during the time he spent at various European universities in his youth, had been drawn to Calvinism. Upon his return to Denmark at the turn of the century, he was appointed professor in Copenhagen, but he was soon embroiled in a controversy with Resen. Aslaksen seems, however, to have abandoned his Calvinist beliefs around 1615, becoming a fierce advocate of orthodox Lutheranism, which, under the protection of the Danish-Norwegian monarchy, had ‘prevented these Countries and Kingdoms from internal Revolt, War and Feud.’

Pressured by the rise of Pietism, orthodox Lutherans turned to ecclesiastical history in order to defend the orthodox state Church. To the orthodox Lutherans, the Reformation had saved Christianity from the gradual corruptions of papalism, which had reached their height during the investiture contests in the early Middle Ages, and restored faith to its original strength found in early Christianity. As the Norwegian theologian and historian Jonas Ramus (1649–1718) argued in his general exposition of universal church history Guds Riige blant Verdens Riger (God’s Kingdom among the Kingdoms of the World), “The Principals of the Roman Catholic Church lived in Carnal Wantonness, holding the common Man in a state of ignorance in order to keep him under their Aegis of Slavery, and Tyrannised all those who wanted to bring to the

1042 Bjørn Kornerup, Biskop Hans Poulsen Resen: II.146-171.
People more Enlightenment.' Ramus then continues, ‘under this miserable Condition many God-fearing Men longed for Emancipation and a reformation of the Church.’ The account of the history of the Church offered by Ramus was accompanied by an exposition of the principal events in secular history, by which he intended ‘to show and to place before our Eyes a part of GOD’S great House-hold and his mighty Foresight and Protection, both in regard to his own Spiritual Kingdom, and in regard to all secular Kingdoms and Regiments.’ Ramus’ understanding of both secular and ecclesiastical history was largely derived from the two-kingdom theory, emphasising the spiritual and the secular; he understood history as an ‘artistic Clock-work’, ordered and driven solely by ‘GOD’S Foresight and providence.’ Although secular and ecclesiastical history deal with different subjects, both are subject to divine providence. Thus, in Guds Riige blant Verdens Riger, Ramus treats ecclesiastical and secular history side by side – literally on opposite pages – not only as an illustration of the great ‘Correlation, which in many instances are found between both of them’, but also ‘because in the Secular histories one can often find the Prophecies of the Holy Scripture to have come true.’

In 1736, just three years prior to the publication of Holberg’s Almindelig Kirke-Historie, Jørgen Westerholt (1705–1766) issued a second edition of Guds Riige blant Verdens Riger, to which he added a Continuation. Ramus had originally ended his narrative in the year 1660; however, in the Continuation, Westerholt completed the narrative for the period between 1660 and 1730. In style as well composition, Westerholt’s Continuation was similar to Guds Riige blant Verdens Riger; in terms of the view of the Reformation, Westerholt continued the orthodox Lutheran rhetoric. Thus, with the Reformation, Westerholt argues, ‘the true Evangelical Doctrine’ had finally been set ‘free from Papist Slavery’.


'Separatism', which, in the context of the 1730s, was an unmistakable reference to Pietism.\footnote{Westerholt, Continuation: 429: ‘Separatismus’} ‘In Denmark some Persons began to hold peculiar Gatherings,’ wrote Westerholt under an entry for the year 1706, ‘in which they interpreted the Bible and Theology, but as this aimed to place the public Worship of God in Contempt, and it was found that in such Gatherings much Abuse and Disorder went Together, they were by Royal Decree strictly forbidden.’\footnote{Westerholt, Continuation: 421: ‘I Danmark begyndte nogle Personer at holde særdeeles Forsamlinmger, i hvilke de forklarede Bibelen og Theologien, men som sligt sigtede til den offentlige Guds Tienestes Foragt, og det befandtes at i slige Forsamlinger adskillig Misbrug og U-orden gik i Svang, blev sligt ved en Kongelig Forordning strængeligen forbudeb’}

The orthodox Lutheran account of ecclesiastical historical also featured prominently in the thought of Søren Bloch (1696-1753), an orthodox professor of theology in Copenhagen. In his \textit{Jubel-Tale For Reformationen} (Celebratory Speech for the Reformation), first delivered as a sermon in 1742 and then published posthumously in his \textit{Efterladte Skrifter} (Collected Works), Bloch connects the Lutheran Reformation to the early Christians:

\begin{quote}
When I speak of \textit{A Theologian} I mean such a person, who, by the Teaching and Guidelines of the Holy Spirit, has gained from God’s Word a sufficient Knowledge of God and divine Things, and not only by his Speech and Writing, but also by the Arrangement of his Learning and his Way of Life extols God’s wondrous Virtues, and strives to become suited for his Honour. Such were in the ancient Time the old Patriarchs: Such were the Prophets, who were driven by the Holy Spirit: Such were the whole World’s Apostolic Teachers: Such were some of those we call Learned Fathers, shining a Light in the old Church: Such was Martin Luther.\footnote{Søren Bloch, \textit{Sören Blochs … Efterladte Skrifter, Første Samling Befordret til Trykken Af Hans ældste Son Tønne Bloch}, Tønne Bloch, ed., (Copenhagen 1756): 65: ‘Naar jeg taler om \textit{En Teolog}, saa meener jeg saadan een, som, ved den Hellig Aands Underviisning og Veyledning, har af Guds Ord faaed et tilstrækkelig Kundskab om Gud og de Guddommelige Ting, og ikke alleeneest med sine Taler og Skrifter, men endog med ald sin Studering og heele Levnets Indretning berømmer Guds forunderlige Dyder, og stræber at blive gandske skikket til hans Ære. Saadanne vare i fordum Tid de gamle Patriarcher: Saadanne vare Propheterne, der bleve drevne af den Hellig Aand: Saadanne vare heelle Verdens Apostoliske Lærere: Saadanne vare nogle af dem, som vi kalder Lære-Fældre, skinnende Lys i den gamle Kirke: Saadan een vare Morthen Luther’}

Though Luther is seen as the saviour of the faith, religious tribulation still marks the condition of true (Lutheran) believer, as true faith after the Reformation continues to be suppressed by the Catholic Church. Even after the Reformation, Bloch argues, the external ‘Religious Freedom’ of Protestants had repeatedly been undermined by Roman Catholic oppression. However, true Christian belief faced another danger potentially far worse than Catholic oppression,\footnote{Søren Bloch, \textit{Sören Blochs … Efterladte Skrifter, Første Samling Befordret til Trykken Af Hans ældste Son Tønne Bloch}, Tønne Bloch, ed., (Copenhagen 1756): 68: ‘Religions-Frihed’} an internal threat stemming from endless controversy and a corrupted way of life. Such controversies, as Bloch saw it, were threatening to split Protestantism from within. He therefore warned his audience that ‘Those Fruits are the most sour, which in Matters of Religion are harvested from Controversies that embitter those Temperaments, which Religion could
The context in which Bloch understands the danger of internal controversies is not, however, limited to the differences between orthodox Lutherans and Pietists, but extends to Protestantism in general, thus exceeding the emphasis on Pietist separatism in Westerholt. If only Christianity could free itself from such internal controversies, Bloch asserts, a state of Protestant unity founded on agreement and concord could be reached. ‘The worthy Fruit of the Reformation’, he asserted, ‘is Agreement, Conformity and Concord’. What Bloch envisioned was still, however, limited to a Protestant unity comprised only of true believers.

The Lutheran attacks on papal tyranny formed the linguistic context within which Holberg prepared his church history, and his *Almindelig Kirke-Historie* follows the orthodox account on several points. Holberg’s *Almindelig Kirke-Historie* is written from a Lutheran perspective, making the major narrative theme of his ecclesiastical history that of the original vitality of Christianity and its subsequent corruption under papal rule. Like Ramus had done in *Guds Riige blant Verdens Riger*, Holberg sets out to explain the condition of Christianity around the time of the Reformation, for, as Holberg argues, ‘it is essential to describe the miserable Condition of Christianity in order to show the Necessity of the Reformation’. Like Ramus, Holberg also emphasises the correlation between ecclesiastical and secular histories, though Holberg structures his narrative not by offering parallel accounts, but by integrating secular and ecclesiastical history. Yet, there are also differences. The providence of God, so central to the account that Ramus offered, is pushed to the background in the *Almindelig Kirke-Historie*. To Holberg, most notably, the fate of history did not depend solely upon the providence of God, but also on human actors. Thus Luther, and particularly the audacity he showed the papacy, becomes central to Holberg. ‘One must therefore,’ he writes, ‘particularly give God the Honour, but equally regard Luther as the most convenient Instrument amongst the People of those Times, whom God used to overthrow an Authority, whose equal in Strength had not existed since the Beginning of the World.’

Holberg divided his history into six different periods, or ages, intended to represent the characteristics of each historical epoch and depict the gradual decline of Christianity under papal rule. To Holberg, the history of the first period, comprising three centuries, marked an ideal state

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of Christianity 'for the Constance, Patience and great Virtues of the Apostles and the first Christians show us the Way to True Christianity, which consists of Modesty, Love, distaste for the World, and in following in the Footsteps of Christ.'\textsuperscript{1062} In his explanation of the decline of the Church in the second period, Holberg introduces a theme to which he was to return in his later writings on toleration. As he argues, Christianity in the second age came to be characterised by the rise of different sects and factions and the subsequent internal split of Christianity. Comparing Christianity in the second age to the first Christians, Holberg writes:

At this point only, Theology turned into Sects and Factions, like Pagan Philosophy before it, and everyone sought only to advance his own Party, convinced that this was Christianity; Every Symbol, Confession, Technical Terms were then like a Banner, under which one enrolled in order to use the Sword against one's Fellow Christians. The first Christians were of a different opinion; For one sees that the Fathers have differed amongst each other in one or another Speculation, and still lived in Communion together. It had been enough for them to agree with each other on the Fundamental Articles, on the Devotion in itself and holy Way of Life, so that it seems that they have rejected all those many Subtleties, which were later to be made Articles of Faith, and, like Cries of War to each Faction, become metaphysical Disputes, unrelated with the Teachings of Christ.\textsuperscript{1063}

The emphasis which Holberg places in this passage on the agreement amongst the first Christians on the fundamental articles seems to suggest that his \textit{Almindelig Kirke-Historie} was, at least partly, intended as a work of irenicism. Whilst the first Christians differed on matters of speculation, they still managed to live peacefully together. As Holberg argues, it was sects and factions, making particular speculations essential to their way of life, that first set in motion the decline of Christianity. However, the decisive turn towards corruption only occurred in the Middle Ages at the time of the investiture conflicts. As Holberg writes, 'at this point in time was erected that great ecclesiastical Monarchy, to which Gregorius VII ladid the Foundation, so that this Period is more likely Perceived as a secular than an ecclesiastical History, and shows the Origin and Growth of Papal Authority as well the sad Tragedies, which were played with Emperors and other Kings, who sought to defend Civil Authority's Majesty'.\textsuperscript{1064}

\textsuperscript{1062} Holberg, \textit{Kirke-Historie}. lvii: 'saasom Apostlernes og de første Christnes Bestandighed, Taalmogighed og store Ryder vise os Vey til den Rette Christendom, som bestaar udi Ydmyghed, Kierlighed, foragt for Verden og i at efterfølge Christi Fodspor'.

\textsuperscript{1063} Holberg, \textit{Kirke-Historie}. lviii: 'Da blev først Theologien bragt til Sekter og Factioner, ligesom fordum den Hedenske Philosophie, og enhver sogte kun at forsøvare og bestyrke sit Partie, meenende Christendommen derudi at bestaae; Hvert Symbolum, Confession, Konst-Terminus vare da som Felt-Tegn, hvorunder man indrullerede sig, for at føre Sværdet mod sine Med-Christne. Anderledes vare de første Christine sindede; Thi man ser, at Fædrene have udi een og anden Speculation differeret fra hinanden, og dog levet i Communion sammen. Det har været dem nok at være eenige med hinanden i Hoved-Poster, udi Dyrkelsen i sig selv og et heligt Levnet, saa at der synes, at de have relegeret de mange Subtiliteter, som siden bleve gjørte til Troes-Artikle og bleve som Feltskrig for hver Faction, til metaphysiske og Christi Lærdom u-vendkommende Disputer'.

\textsuperscript{1064} Holberg, \textit{Kirke-Historie}. lx-lxi: 'da blev stiftet det store geistlige Monarchie, hvortil Gregorius VII ladge Grundvold, saa at denne Periodus har meere Anseelse af verdslig end geistlig Historie, og viser det Pavelige
of the ecclesiastical monarchy gravelly affected the history of Christianity on two fronts. Firstly, the eagerness to establish papal authority undermined the status of Christianity, for ‘no one cared any more to examine Controversies, but let them depend on the Arbitrary Will of the Popes.’ Secondly, the rise of the ecclesiastical monarchy extended the authority of the papacy far beyond the confines of religion, ‘and in this Period, Heresy consisted solely in [the fact] that one sought to defend the Right of Secular Authority’.

With Holberg’s view on the rise of ecclesiastical monarchy, we have already prefigured the second major theme of the Almindelig Kirke-Historie, again a Lutheran commonplace: papalism as secular authority. Since the publication of Resen’s Lutherus Triumphant in 1617, and Aslaksen’s Theologiske oc Historiske beskrifjuelle om den Reformerede Religion in 1622, the orthodox Lutherans had made frequent use of the anti-Catholic discourse, particularly in panegyric pieces used for public celebrations of the monarchy and the Lutheran Reformation. Within this discourse, papalism was generally seen as a form of secular authority, as it laid claim to ‘all Worldly Authority’. The Roman Catholic Church constituted a ‘Papal Tyranny’, as ‘Peter’s Bishop’s Chair had become a Ruler’s Throne’. The orthodox rhetoric also centred on doctrinal differences, the aim of which was to depict Lutheranism as the restoration of true Christianity. As the clergyman and poet Jörgen Friis (1684–1740) stresses in his panegyric on the Reformation at the celebrations in 1717, Luther had enabled the individual believer to free himself from the mediated knowledge of the Scriptures, practised in the Roman Catholic Church by monks and popes alike: ‘read your Bible for yourself’, he asserts, alluding to the Lutheran notion of the priesthood of all believers. As Holberg sees it, civil and ecclesiastical history should be treated as complementary rather than distinct subject matters, ‘for, after all, such a Union exists between

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Herredoms Oprindelse og Fremvext, item de sorgelige Tragedier, der bleve spillede med Keysere og andre Konger, som sogte at forsøve det Civile Herredoms Majestæt.

Holberg, Kirke-Historie lixi: ‘bekymrede sig ingen meere om at examinere Tvistigheder, men lode det komme an paa Pavernes Gotfindende’.


Jörgen Friis, Et kort begreb/ Saa vel Af de gamle Danskes Blindhed i deris Afguds-Dørkelse under Hedenskabet/ Som af deris Fildeførelse i deris Guds-Dørkelse under Pavedommets: Indtil At GUD for To Hundrede Aar siden opvagte LUTHER, Som Aar 1517. til Wittenberg begyndte at sætte Den Christelige Troe paa den rette Food …, (Copenhagen 1717): 4 verso: ‘læs din Bibel selv’.
Ecclesiastical and Secular History that he who has not read both, has read nothing'. Further, he argues, religion is the driving force of history. ‘The greatest Revolutions of the State’, Holberg writes, ‘have arisen from Religious Controversies, and a great many important Things have been carried through under Pretext of Religion; from its Quiver are taken those Arrows, which the Roman Popes have used to subvert Kingdoms and Republics in order to erect from their shattered Pieces Ecclesiastical Monarchies.’

As Lars Roar Langslet has argued, Holberg’s *Almindelig Kirke-Historie* constitutes a secularisation of the genre of ecclesiastical history which would later lay the foundation of church history as a science, as opposed to mere preaching of the Gospels, broadly construed. If this was one of the consequences of Holberg’s *Almindelig Kirke-Historie*, we gain little in terms of understanding of what Holberg was doing in this work or what it meant to his religious thinking by approaching it from a teleological point of view. In order for us to grasp the meaning of Holberg’s *Almindelig Kirke-Historie*, we need to situate it in its proper early enlightenment context. So far we have seen how Holberg in the 1730s composed his ecclesiastical history from a largely Lutheran perspective; what is still to be shown is the extent in which Holberg’s thoughts on religion also went beyond the orthodox Lutheran tradition. Giving an answer to this question is to remove Holberg’s *Almindelig Kirke-Historie* from the world of Lutheran conformity and to situate it in a world of religious dissent. Here we have arrived at the second formative context out of which Holberg’s *Almindelig Kirke-Historie* grew, namely the rise of Pietism in Danish religious life and the interrelations between religious enthusiasm and early enlightenment culture.

### Religious Dissent and the Politics of Pietism

In the context of the 1730s, Holberg’s *Almindelig Kirke-Historie* can be read as a contemporary political and religious criticism of orthodox Lutheranism. Embodied in an irenic account of the decline of Christianity, first instituted by the sects and factions of the second age and subsequently fulfilled by the ecclesiastical monarchy, it is a rejection of two central claims advanced by contemporary orthodox Lutherans. Firstly, Holberg rejects the orthodox claim to religious conformity and the need for the persecution of heretics. Christianity, he claims, can prosper even with the existence of internal controversies between its members, for, as the first Christians

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1072 Holberg, *Kirke-Historie*: I: ‘De største Revolutioner i Staten have reiset sig af Religions-Tvistigheder, og mange vigtige Ting ere foretagne under Pretext af Religionsen, og ere af dens Raager tagne de Piile, som de Romerske Paver have betient sig af for at kuldkaste Riger og Republiquer, og af deres sonderbrudte Stykker at opreise Geistlige Monarchier’.

clearly showed, the existence of the Church is not sanctioned by conformity, but rather a common agreement on the fundamental doctrines and a Christian way of life. Secondly, the *Almindelig Kirke-Historie* is a rejection of the doctrine of public, moral criticism, central to the Christian political thinkers. As Holberg sees it, the orthodox Lutheran church, in their persecution of heretics and in their claim to moral authority, had encroached upon the sphere of secular authority. Holberg shared this criticism of orthodox Lutheranism with other early enlightenment thinkers such as Christian Thomasius and Gottfried Arnold (1666-1714), who is seen by David Sorkin as a representative of ‘separatist Pietism’.\(^{1074}\)

As Thomasius argued, the historical understanding of Christianity and the Protestant Reformation expounded by orthodox Lutherans was fundamentally flawed on key issues. The Protestant Reformation had not managed to restore Christianity to its original vitality, for papalism, represented by the orthodox clergy’s contention to exercise influence on matters pertaining to secular politics, continuously encroached upon the sphere of civil authority. Even Christianity under the early Christian emperors had been corrupted, Thomasius argued further, thus rejecting a central claim to orthodox conformity.\(^{1075}\) Gottfried Arnold, by contrast, developed another strategy of nonconformity on the theme of heresy. In his *Unparteyische Kirchen- und Ketzer-Historie* (Impartial History of the Church and its Heresies), which appeared in two volumes between 1699 and 1700, Arnold launched an attack on the established Church’s treatment of people holding different opinions. Heresy, therefore, is not intrinsic to any particular set of religious beliefs, but rather a brand attached to a set of beliefs by someone else. A heretic, thus argues Arnold, is a person branded as one by whoever is in power when their religious convictions differ.\(^{1076}\)

In the introduction to *Almindelig Kirke-Historie*, Holberg offers a longer discussion of Arnold’s work, which he neither embraces nor fully dismisses. In Holberg’s account, however, Arnold had not, as he otherwise claimed, authored an impartial history of heresy, and his historical interpretation only shifts the perspective from one extreme to another.\(^{1077}\) On the one hand he criticises those who defend the Church fathers and the Church’s persecution of heretics while, on the other, he defends the heretics and attacks the Church fathers. Therefore, whilst Arnold goes to an extreme in defending the heretics and criticising the Church fathers, Holberg takes the middle

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way, seeking to depict the vices and virtues of the characters under scrutiny. ‘In addition to the Vices of the Church-Fathers’, he writes, thus going beyond the orthodox Lutheran narrative, ‘I have not forgotten to depict their Virtues; I have done the same with the Heretics. I have strived to give everyone what they have coming. Orthodox, Heretics, Bishops, Secular Estates, all will get what they deserve.’

Holberg’s engagement with Arnold also shows to what extent he was concerned with impartiality. As Holberg argues in the preface to his Almindelig Kirke-Historie, the notion of an impartial account of religious history would be treated by different religious sects with as much diversity as the question of true belief: ‘an impartial Church History is something’, he writes, ‘which must be considered inter pia desideria,’ or among pious desires. In contrast to Arnold, Holberg’s modest aim is ‘to search for Truth’. What Holberg had in mind when he described his position as that of the middle way was literally to take the middle way: ‘And I have therefore considered it necessary while writing this Work to place on the one Side of my Writing-Desk a Roman-Catholic Writer, and on the other Side a Gottfried Arnold.’ Yet, Holberg was intellectually indebted to Arnold’s work in another way; though the term was in broad currency, it is likely that Holberg picked up from Arnold what was later to become a central concept in his theory of toleration, namely that of a ‘Kätzermacher’, or a ‘Kiettermager’ as Holberg translate the term in his Epistler; that is, a hereticator.

Yet, Holberg’s criticism of religious conformity in the 1730s was also shared by the Pietists. When the Lutheran Reformation was celebrated in 1736, heartfelt belief featured as a central theme. To mark the bicentennial, Andreas Hojer published a short pamphlet in which he not only offered an historical account of the Reformation in Denmark, stressing ‘the wretched and miserable State in which the Kingdom and its Inhabitants were placed, Spiritually and Bodily’.

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1078 Holberg, Kirke-Historie: liv: ‘Med Kirke-Fædrenes Lyder har jeg ikke glemt ogsaa at afmale deres Dyder; Det samme har jeg ogsaa i Agt taget med Kiettere. Jeg har stræbt at give enhver det ham tilkommer. Orthodoxi, Kiettere, Bispe, Verdslige Stænder faae alt hvad de have fortient
1079 Holberg, Kirke-Historie: liii: ’en u-partisk Kirke-Historie er noget, som maa regnes inter pia desideria’.
1080 Holberg, Kirke-Historie: liii: ’at efterlede Sandhed’.
1083 Holberg, Epistler: I.323.
but also reassessed its consequences.\textsuperscript{1086} As was the case in the orthodox Lutheran interpretation, Hojer devotes most his account to an attack on papalism. ‘Spiritually,’ he asserts, ‘the Church amongst us in the North, lay slumbered in the thickest Night of Darkness’, and although the clergy spoke of God and Christ, he continues, the faith in God and Christ was mixed with ‘the most shameful Fables and the most brutal Ideas of the blindest Papalism’.\textsuperscript{1087} Roman Catholicism was a superstitious cult in which ‘so-called Saints were called upon more than God’, and where ‘good Deeds’, ‘outward Things’, and ‘hypocritical Ceremonies’ meant more than sincere faith in Christ.\textsuperscript{1088} Worst of all, Hojer asserts, they believed in the doctrine of indulgence, ‘the most vulgar and unreasonable Invention of all’.\textsuperscript{1089} The consequences of papalism led Christian believers away from the true faith into depravity, and by hiding the true word of God, by taking it away from the congregation, papalism obscures each individual believer’s chance of salvation. What the Lutheran Reformation brought with it was a spiritual reformation of the Christian faith. The priesthood of all believers, not a privileged clergy, and the inner heartfelt belief in Christ marked the path to salvation.\textsuperscript{1090} What Scripture teaches us is not to trust in our own deeds and judgements, but rather to seek beatitude through inner faith:

Their own Good Deeds (and not GOD’s Mercy, the Power of the Death of Christ and the Resurrection of the Holy Spirit by and in Faith) was the Cause of Beatitude, which were preached to them, and in which they placed their Trust. And these Good Deeds were not those which God in the Scripture calls good, since he authors them himself, namely: Remorse and Regret over our Sinfulness and great Depravity; Longing and Hunger for GOD’s Grace; Belief in GOD’s Son Christ, the Saviour of the World; Purification of the Soul by his Blood and his Spirit; the Battle against the Power and Effects of original Sin; Heartfelt Prayers flowing from Faith; Self-denial; Knowledge and Confession of our own Ineptitude and Unworthiness; Sincere Diligence and Sanctification; Love of GOD and all Human Beings; constant denial; Knowledge and Confession of our own Ineptitude and Unworthiness; Sincere Diligence and Sanctification; Love of GOD and all Human Beings; constant and confidential Relationship to GOD; an everlasting Hope; the Promulgation of his Name, Honour, and Way amongst others; Patience in all spiritual and bodily Sufferings; Meekness towards all Human Beings; and primarily Humbleness and Contempt of our Selves and our own Good Deeds.\textsuperscript{1091}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{1086} Already the previous year, in 1735, Hojer had delivered a Latin speech at the University’s celebration of the Reformation, entitled \textit{A. Højeri Oratio habita in festo reformationis 1735}, which was never published. On this speech see Troels G. Jørgensen, \textit{Andreas Hojer – jurist og historiker} (Copenhagen 1961): 157.
\item \textsuperscript{1087} Hojer, \textit{Kort Forestilling Af De store Velgieringer}: A2: ‘I det Aandelige laae Kirken her i vores Norden som graven i den tykkeste Mørkheds Nat’ … ‘de skammeligstest Fabler og de groveste Paafund af det blindeste Pavedom’.
\item \textsuperscript{1088} Hojer, \textit{Kort Forestilling Af De store Velgieringer}: A2ii: ‘saa kaldte Helgen bleve meere paakaldede end GUD’… ‘gode Gieringer’ … ‘udvortes Ting’ … ‘hykleriske Ceremonier’.
\item \textsuperscript{1089} Hojer, \textit{Kort Forestilling Af De store Velgieringer}: A3: ‘det allergroveste og ufornuftigstae Paafund’.
\item \textsuperscript{1090} Hojer, \textit{Kort Forestilling Af De store Velgieringer}: A3ii.
\item \textsuperscript{1091} Hojer, \textit{Kort Forestilling Af De store Velgieringer}: A2ii: ‘Deres eegne Gode Gierninger (og ikke GUDs Bamhiertigkeit, Christi Dods Kraft og den Hellige Aaands Oplivelse ved og i Troen) vare den Saligheds Grund, som dem blev prædiket, og de satte deres Tillid til. Og disse \textit{Gode Gierninger} vare ikke dem, som GUD selv i Skriften kaldel gode, siden han dem selv virker, nemlig: Anger og Fortrydelse over vor Synd og store Bedervelse; Længsel og Hunger efter GUDs Naade; Troe paa GUDs Son Christum, Verdens Frelsere; Sjælens Renselse ved hans Blod og Aand; Strid imod den medfødte Synds Kraft og Virkninger; Hiertelige af Troen flydende Bønner; Selvfornaegelsen; Kundskab og Bekiendelse om vor egen Uduelighed og Uværdighed; Hiertelig Flid og Helliggjørelsen; Kierlighed til GUD og alle Mennesker, heldst vore Fiender; idelit fortrolig Omgang med GUD; et stadigt Haab til ham; hans Navns, Æres og Vejes Udbredelse for andre; Taalmodighed i al aandelig og legemlig Nød; Sagtmodighed imod alle Mennesker; og fornemmelig Ydmyghed og Ringeagitet af os selv og vore eegne Gierninger’.
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Cast in a recognisable Pietist idiom that stressed an inner heartfelt faith in Christ, Hojer goes beyond the orthodox Lutheran narrative of the Reformation; his emphasis is not on the Lutheran state Church, but on a wholehearted belief in God. Hojer next turns to the bodily or political aspects of papalism. Echoing Luther’s views on secular authority, he depicts the Catholic clergy as secular rulers, interested not in salvation but earthly riches:

It was not enough to them that they, from being Teachers in the Church, had become secular Rulers, nor that they in these Kingdoms [Denmark and Norway] as well as in other Christian Countries had exempted themselves from the Obedience, which they like any other Subject, owed to the Kings, the Princes and the Magistrates, and made for themselves an ecclesiastical Regiment inside the Realm, which should depend on no one, except for the Pope; but their acts of Violence they suppressed the Subjects, and their Insubordination disturbed the Kingdom.1092

As Troels G. Jørgensen has pointed out, Hojer was a staunch enemy of any independent ecclesiastical government outside the reach of the secular power.1093 As Hojer suggests, ‘the Authority of the Holy Church’ and ‘the Court of the Kings or the Kingdom’1094 constitutes two distinct orders; under no circumstances should secular authority be subjected to the papacy, under whose authority ‘Bishops and the Prelates, had become secular Rulers, and often the most dangerous Enemies of the Church and the Kingdom’.1095 What Hojer was doing was to depict the history of the Danish Reformation as a history of the struggle of ‘Freedom of the Conscience’ and ‘religious Freedom’ against the tyranny of the Roman Catholic Church,1096 both spiritual and temporal. However, in light of the religious controversies of the 1730s in Denmark, his pamphlet is also a reminder to the orthodox Lutherans, whose repression of the Pietists resembles that of the Catholic Church. To uphold religious conformity, Hojer asserts, is against God’s divine plan. ‘He turned, for us, Darkness into Light, freed us from of Suppression and Tyranny of Papalism,

1093 Jørgensen, Andreas Hojer: 159-60.
1094 Hojer, Kort Forestilling Af De store Velgierninger: B: ‘den Hellige Kirkes Myndighed’ … ‘Kongernes eller Rigets Domstoe’
1096 Hojer, Kort Forestilling Af De store Velgierninger: B:ii: ‘Samvittigheds Frihed’ … ‘Religions Frihed’
and transformed the wretched and miserable State of our Forefathers, in the Spiritual as well as the Bodily, into a true and, to us and our descendants, invaluable Happiness’.  

Hojer’s account of the Danish Reformation is best understood when viewed against the religious context in which it was composed. In the 1730s, when Hojer wrote the pamphlet on the history of the Danish Reformation, the Danish Church was tied down in religious controversy between orthodox Lutherans, who appealed to tradition and the essential importance of the state Church, and the Pietists, who cried out for inner belief and religious freedom while appealing to the protection of the monarchy, whose religious allegiances had shifted towards Pietism. Coming from a Pietist background, Hojer’s intention was very much marked by religious dissent against orthodox conformity. Whether Holberg was familiar with Hojer’s pamphlet is uncertain. Yet, whilst he shared the criticism of the institutionalised orthodox Church, there were limits to his agreement with the Pietists.

Christian Freedom and Sincere Belief

During the 1740s and 1750s, when he published his major works on moral philosophy, Holberg rethinks his commitment to Lutheranism along two interconnected lines, both hinging on the *persona* of the Christian believer. First, taking up his pen where he had ended his narrative in *Almindelig Kirke-Historie*, Holberg sets out in the *Moralske Tanker* to reassess the intellectual foundations of the Protestant rejection of papal monarchy. ‘Against this Tyranny’, he writes, ‘a few bold and brave Heroes finally stood up, and sought to overthrow such Authority, Forced upon the World only by Violence and Deceit. The Arguments which were used to storm it were based on the Duty of Man to examine before believing, to listen before passing judgement.’ Expanding his ideas about the Lutheran Reformation that he had first articulated in the 1720s, Holberg turns the call for individual scrutiny in matters pertaining to religion into a critique of the orthodox state Church, arguing that the orthodox Lutherans had abandoned the original ideas of the Reformation:

For the Foundation of the Reformation was the Christian Freedom to examine, before one believes, and when the Foundation is weakened the whole Building falls. It is thus evident that the Reformers sought to give us many Popes, instead of one, and instead of one infallible Church instituted others of equal


Holberg’s notion of individual scrutiny is deeply embedded in the Lutheran tradition; in addition to the concept of the priesthood of all believers, he gives legitimacy to his critique of the orthodox state Church by tailoring his argument to the Lutheran doctrine of Christian freedom. As Christian freedom urges people to examine before believing, and as numerous state churches now advocate their own orthodoxy, each claiming to practise the only true religion, the Lutheran Reformation has turned into what it initially was intended to replace. In an attempt to consolidate what the orthodox Lutherans understood as true belief, institutional control and religious conformity had replaced the doctrines of the priesthood of all believers and Christian freedom. Replacing the Roman Catholic pope, the Reformation had brought about a multitude of national popes, each claiming privileged access to the true meaning of the Holy Scriptures.

The abandonment of the doctrine of Christian freedom informed also the Post-Reformation history of the Danish Church. In the Epistler, for instance, Holberg outlined a short sketch of the historical progress of toleration, praising recent English and French works on toleration with which he aligns himself, by which he may have meant the works of Locke, Bayle, and Le Clerc. ‘In the North such Works are still highly necessary,’ he writes, ‘For one sees that Heretication just a few Years back was held to be a high Christian Virtue’. Furthermore, Holberg depicts the orthodox Lutherans as hereticators, persecuting others who only differ in regard to ‘indifferent Things’.

Turning to the religious history of seventeenth-century Denmark, he argues:

One sees that similar Things have caused Separations amongst Christian Congregations. That Intolerance has ruled equally strong amongst our Nordic Clergy, as in any other Country, can be shown from several Historical Examples. The two great Men, Holger Rosenkrands and Johan Paul Resen were accused solely for some Expressions of little Significance, and solely because they differed from the Orthodox in Style, although they agreed on the Substance Matter. Georgius Dibvadius was considered a Heretic, because he had recommended some English Theologians, in addition to Calvin, whom he placed in the same Class as Luther. Conradus Aslacus was also smeared for a similar Case, though he did not diverge one inch from the

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1099 Holberg, Moralske Tanker: 265: ‘Thi Reformationens Grundvold var den Christelige Frihed i at randsage, førend man troer, og naar Grundvolden svækkes, falder den heele Bygning. Det maatte da heede, at Reformatores søgte at give os mange Paver i stedet for een og i stedet for een infallible Kirke stiftede adskillige andre med samme Myndighed; saa at Reformationen bestoed udi at forflytte et Herredom fra Rom til Tydskland, Engelland, og Holland’.


1101 Holberg, Epistler: I.323: ‘Udi vor Norden ere saadanme Skrifter endnu høyt nødvendige: Thi man seer, at Kiettermagerie have for faa Aar siden været regent for en hoy-Christelig Dyd’.

1102 Holberg, Epistler: I.324: ‘indifferente Ting’.

1103 Holberg, Epistler: I.324: ‘indifferente Ting’.
Augsburg Confession. From these and other Examples is shown that the Wrath of the Nordic Clergy has been equally great as in those Places, where the Inquisition is introduced.\textsuperscript{1104}

In contrast to his earlier works, in which he described the peacefulness of the Danish Reformation and the absence of fierce theological controversies, Holberg now depicts the pursuit of religious conformity by orthodox Lutherans as the mirror image of Roman Catholicism.\textsuperscript{1105} Consequently, if Holberg in the 1710s and 1720s used ecclesiastical history to turn the weapons of his Catholic opponents against themselves, in the 1740s he used the same weapons against the orthodox Lutherans.

The Pietists, however, were no better. Understanding Christian freedom as the duty to examine prevailing religious dogmas, Holberg rejects the positions of Pietists on the same grounds. As he argues, once the Pietists were in a position of power, the doctrines of Pietism were superimposed on others, affecting a whole range of issues pertaining to faith, politics, and civil society. The Pietists, Holberg asserts, echoing a commonplace argument in the literature on toleration, had themselves become intolerant.\textsuperscript{1106} Erich Pontoppidan’s Pietist interpretation of Luther’s small catechism, \textit{Sandhed Til Gudsfygtighed}, in which Pontoppidan, as we have seen, declared war on all non-devotional life, was emblematic of Holberg’s interpretation of Pietism. Pontoppidan’s work did not stand alone; it was one amongst countless other Pietist catechisms and religious tracts, emphasising such aspects as the blissfulness of inner heartfelt belief, shared this agenda.\textsuperscript{1107}

\textsuperscript{1104} Holberg, \textit{Epistler}: I.324–325: 'Deslige Ting seer man dog at have foraarssaget Separationer udi Christian Meenigheder. At Intolerance haver regieret lige saa stærkt blant vor Nordiske Geistlighed, som udi noget andet Land, kend vises af adskillige Historiske Exempler. De tvende store Mænd, Holger Rosenkranz och Johan Paul Resen blev actionerede allene for nogle Expressioner af liden Betydelse, og allene, efterdi de differerede fra Orthodoxis udi Stilen, skioent de vare emige med dem i Materien. Georgius Dibvadius blev anseet, som en Kietter, efterdi han have roset nogle Engelske Theologos, item Calvinum, som han havde sat i Classe med Luther. Conradus Aislacus blev og sværtet formedelst saadan Sag, skioent han i det ovrigre ikke veed en Fodbred fra den Augsburgiske Bksiendelse. Af hvilke og andre Exempler vises, at den Nordiske Geistligheds Hidsighed haver fast været lige saa stor, som paa Stæder, hvor Inquisitionen er infort'.

\textsuperscript{1105} On this as a shift in Holberg’s view on the Danish Reformation, instituted in order to give legitimacy to his own views on toleration see Jansen, ‘Kommentar’: VI.147–48.

\textsuperscript{1106} Holberg, \textit{Epistler}: I.293–34. For this line of reasoning in the thought of Thomasius see Hunter, \textit{The Secularisation of the Confessional State}: Ch 5, esp. p. 157.

As a staunch opponent of religious conformity and persecution, Holberg’s appeals to the duty of all Christians to examine for themselves the doctrines of faith, came out of his engagement with ecclesiastical history. At the heart of Holberg’s religious thinking in the period we find not only the priesthood of all believers, which had informed his early thinking as well, but also an appeal to Christian freedom. What is more, in the 1740s, when he was working on his ‘System of morality’, he underscored the basic contentions embedded in the concept of Christian freedom by alluding to that kind of philosophical eclecticism, which not only informed his treatise on natural law, but also his understanding of the persona of the philosopher. ‘This Philosophy is known as *Philosophia eclectica,*’ he writes, ‘I do not know whether it goes against the prevailing Orthodoxy to wish, also, for a *Theologia eclectica.*’ Holberg’s appeal to eclecticism is significant not only because he introduces into his religious thought an attitude originally cultivated as part of the natural law context, but also because eclecticism in combination with the Christian duty to examine one’s religious beliefs, severely undermined contemporary claims to religious authority. Permitting humans to examine for themselves the articles of faith and to pass their own judgements, individual believers are expected ‘to Swear no more to anyone’s Word, but to extract from all Sects the best [“doctrines”].’

The second way in which Holberg’s religious thinking develops out of his engagement with ecclesiastical history is related to the social role of religion and the persona of the Christian believer. Whilst Holberg in the *Almindelig Kirke-Historie* had already interpreted ‘the Teachings of Christ’ as an embrace of ‘Sociality’, he pursued this contention even further in his works of the 1740s and 1750s. ‘I pray but seldom’, he writes in the third part of his memoirs, ‘for I think religious worship should consist not so much in prayer, as in actions, in correct moral conduct, and obedience to the laws of God.’ Religious belief, as Holberg understands it, presupposes civic action rather than inner repentance. Thus, Holberg understands religious belief not as the result of an inner conversion, but as a public activity centred on conversation; though he is a sound religious thinker, his religion demands civility. Embedded in Lutheran thought, chiefly the doctrines of the priesthood of all believers and Christian freedom, the civic foundation of religious belief rests on the duty of the Christian believer to examine all articles of faith. This claim to a sociable religion, was targeted equally against the orthodox Lutherans and Pietists.

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In a central essay in the *Moralske Tanker*, Holberg distinguishes between three kinds of piety. ‘Piety or Fear of God’, he claims, ‘is either made up, misconstrued or true’.

Made up piety is worse than atheism, for whilst the atheist does not claim to know God, a person whose piety is fake acknowledges the existence of God and his duties towards the divinity, but does not live his life in a Christian manner. Holberg’s criticism of Pietism falls within the second category. Misconstrued piety, which he again divides into metaphysical, mechanical, and fashionable piety, fosters a form of religiosity incompatible with Holberg’s notions of sociability and toleration. Whilst a ‘mechanical Devotion’ is found in all who believe themselves to be pious, although their behaviour rather resembles sadness or melancholy, fashionable piety or ‘Pietas vulgaris’ consists solely in ‘some outward Acts of Devotion that flow rather from Custom than inner Motion, and are grounded rather on the Movement of outward Limbs than the Heart’s Devotion’.

Holberg’s main concern, however, is metaphysical devotion, which feeds into his understanding of Pietism: ‘They break those Bonds that bind one Human Being to another, and their spiritual Speculations have no Correspondence with the Condition in which Human Beings are placed, and which cannot be changed without renouncing one’s Humanity.’ Therefore, Holberg argues, ‘These Kinds of mystical People neglect the Principal Duties of Christianity, though they believe themselves to be satisfying all to the Letter.’

This form of piety is asocial; it detaches the pious believer from the world of men and leads to ‘Enthusiasm’ and ‘Superstition’, as well as fanaticism and sedition.

In contrast to the Pietists, Holberg advances his own conception of piety, one which combines sincere belief with sociability:

They can truly be called Pious, who worship God, their Creator and Benefactor, from the most inner Part of the Heart, who honour and love him not so much on Account of the promised Rewards, which is a slavish Worship, but in Regard to the Rewards they enjoy and have enjoyed, so that they are encouraged rather by Gratitude than the Hope of Advantages. They possess a true Piety, who are rough against themselves, but overbearing and mild to others.

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1115 Holberg, *Moralske Tanker*: 476: ‘De bryde de Baand, som binde et Menneske til et andet, og deres aandelige Speculationer have ingen Overeensstemmelse med den Tilstand Mennesket er sat udi, og som det ikke kand forandre uden at renoncere paa at være Menneske’.

1116 Holberg, *Moralske Tanker*: ‘Disse Slags mystiske Folk forsormme Christendommens Hovedpligte, enskient de meene selv at opfylde alle til Punct og Prikke’.


The civic conversation about religious belief which results from Holberg’s conception of intellectual enquiry is a rejection of the claims to true belief advanced by orthodox Lutherans and Pietists alike. True belief is not the aim of religion; rather, as Holberg argues, a Christian way of life consists in ‘a sincere Devotion’. Human beings can never be absolutely certain that their own beliefs are true, and, since anyone may be mistaken, ‘a Man must examine for as long as he lives.’ The uncertainty which accompanies any religious belief further means that civil conversation entails toleration. If one does not hold to the test of individual scrutiny all articles of faith, Holberg asserts, one believes only by coincidence; on such grounds, one can never hope for blissfulness or salvation. It is better to have failed after having searched for the truth of the revelation than to be right by default, by blindly accepting the dogmas of one’s particular sect and forcing others to accept the same. ‘How can any man be said to believe,’ asks Holberg in the third part of his memoirs, ‘who has never examined the grounds of his belief?’ Since all men, even men of good intent, can err, one can only hope that the sincerity of one’s belief is enough in the eyes of the divinity. ‘In my opinion,’ continues Holberg, ‘heresy after examination is more excusable than orthodoxy without a previous examination of the grounds of belief. For he who believes rightly without any previous doubt or examination, believes rightly by chance, and cannot therefore look forward to more than a fortuitous reward.’

Holberg’s emphasis on examination and civic conversation is not only a refutation of the centrality of inner devotion and heartfelt faith, which flows from the Pietist interpretation of the priesthood of all believers, but also a refutation of the understanding of the individual believer that underpins the pietist view on religion. Holberg offered a competing interpretation of religion, claiming instead that ‘it is by the Use of the Light of Nature and sound Reason that we become Blissful.’ To Holberg, intellectual enquiry leads to reasonable religion. The persona of the Christian believer is a sociable person who enters into dialogue about the doctrines of faith.

Holberg’s call for intellectual enquiry rests on the contention that the orthodox and the Pietists alike entertain wrong notions of the Christian believer. This view on the persona of the Christian believer, and indeed religion as such, was fundamentally different from the orthodox position. As Frandtz Thestrup (1653-1735), the orthodox bishop of Aalborg, argues in his Underviisnings Spørmæaal (Questions for Education), which was printed several times in the 1720s,

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1119 Holberg, Moralske Tanker: 483. ‘en oprigtig Devotion’.
1120 Holberg, Moralske Tanker: 182. ‘et Menneske maa examinere, saa længe han lever’.
1121 Holberg, Memoirs of Lewis Holberg: 201.
1122 Holberg, Memoirs of Lewis Holberg: 201.
1124 I shall return to Holberg’s understanding of reason and religion in the following chapter.
knowledge of true religion is gained only through ecclesiastical institutions and hierarchical orders of the earthly kingdom, within which the true word of God is disseminated in a downward movement from the Church to the school and the household. \(^{1125}\) The persona of the Christian believer is thus a receiver of instructions, an uncritical believer situated at one level or another in the clerical-educational hierarchy that stretches from the Church down to the household. The Pietists, as Holberg saw it, entertained different, but equally wrong notion of the Christian believer.

The Moravian brother Christian David (1691-1751), a self-educated craftsman and missionary, interprets the rebirth of man, his edification, which is instituted only after man's repentance, as a way for man to come to terms with his own affectations and the temptation of evil. This view was expounded in David's *Forklaring over de Otte Saligheder* (Explanation of the Eight Beatitudes), published anonymously in 1733, which explains the necessary stages through which the true Christian believer repents and gains perfection. \(^{1126}\) In repenting, man gains a new nature, but his salvation is not conditional upon good deeds; rather, human beings can only perform good deeds once they have reached salvation through inner belief and repentance. Structured around the eight beatitudes, true Christian believers slowly ascend towards perfection, undergoing transformations related to sufferings, vital human needs, the act of mercy, and, finally, the state of religious persecution. Most modern literary historians have seen David's *Forklaring over de Otte Saligheder* as a contribution to the great ecclesiastical controversy, since the work was fiercely attacked by orthodox Lutherans, particularly for its embrace of the notion of perfection. \(^{1127}\) Yet, in light of the numerous catechisms published from the 1720s onwards, David's tract on the eight beatitudes can also be read as a tract on religious education, a reading which seems closer to its original intention. The work intended to instruct true believers on how to gain perfection through the eight beatitudes and to persuade them that such perfection could be reached without the guidance of any ecclesiastical authorities.

As Thomas Bredsdorff rightly suggests, Pietism contributed to, rather than opposed, the enlightenment. The Pietists sought to bring salvation and beatitude to the individual believer, thus circumscribing the role of the clergy and the established Church. A self-educated figure like

\(^{1125}\) Frandtz Thstrup, *Undervisnings Spørgsmaal For at forstaae og i Levnet til Brug at for D. Morten Luthers Liden Catechismus* (Copenhagen 1721): A+ recto: 'FORdi ingen bliver salig uden ved Troen alleene, og Troens Begyndelse er Kundskab om GUD og den forhvervede Salighed ved Jesum Christum; Derfor har Kongens Høypriislige Lov befauledt, at Undervisning om samme Saliggiørende GUDs Kundskab skal drives paa (I) i Kirkerne af Præst og Døgn, (2) i Skolerne af Døgn og Skoleholdere, (3) i Husene af Huus-Fader og Huus-Moder ved sig selv eller andre'.


\(^{1127}\) Bredsdorff, *Den brogede oplysning* 31-77; Thomas Bredsdorff, 'A Moravian Brother in Greenland'; Hougaard et al, *Dansk litteraturhistorie* 3: 510.
Christian David pursued his own peculiar reading of the Bible, regardless of long-established ecclesiastical structures and traditions. Thus, the enlightenment of David and the Pietists is antiauthoritarian. Yet, the stress on repentance and heartfelt belief differs significantly from the enlightenment of Holberg, particularly his moral philosophy and his promotion of sociality. Centred, thus, on outward human action, rather than an inner relationship with God, human interaction and betterment is the aim of education. From this contention, which connects his religious thought to his idea of civil society, Holberg redescribes the aim of education on two separate, yet interconnected, points. First, he argues, the practices of religious education, which the Pietists and the orthodox Lutherans advocate, are misconstrued, for ‘one begins by crying: “Believe! Believe!” before one has shown what should be believed and should not be believed.’ As he argues in Moralske Tanker, such endeavours serve not the education of the people, but their religious indoctrination, and they pose a severe danger to civil society. Rather than teaching young students theology, a reasonable education must begin with ethics: ‘If one approached this matter in the right way, one would begin with ethics and end with theology, that is, if one undertook to make people first into human beings before one attempted to make them into Christians. The many religion’s sects would be reduced to very few, and the bitterness that holds sway among them would cease completely.’

As Holberg sees it, by their absolute and unreflecting adherence to a single religious creed, the Pietists and the orthodox Lutherans, along with other sects or groups such as the Quakers and the Freemasons, only foster religious conflict, thus upsetting the stability of civil associations, the core of the problem being that each religious sect claims their version of Christianity to represent the only religious truth. Rather than promoting true belief, education must cultivate human beings capable of tolerating one another; for that end, theology is utterly useless, for, as Holberg argues, ‘If one learns theology before one learns to become a human being, one never will become a human being.’ Secondly, next to ethics, Holberg counts history amongst those necessary studies that contribute to the education of human beings, their cultivation, and betterment, for ‘ethics is primarily taught by historical examples’ and any religious confession must be able to ‘demonstrate its authority and origin.’ Thus, Holberg argues against the Pietists and the orthodox Lutherans that ‘there must be established a foundation by means of Christian ethics and

1128 Bredsdorff, Den brogede oplysning 73.
1129 Holberg, Moral Reflections & Epistles: 15.
1130 Holberg, Moral Reflections & Epistles: 14.
1131 Holberg, Moral Reflections & Epistles: 15.
1132 Holberg, Moral Reflections & Epistles: 17.
a sound philosophy before the dogma and secrets of Christianity are taught.'\(^{1133}\) Hence, before a Christian believer even becomes a Christian, the person must first learn how to be a human.

**Enlightenment and Enthusiasm**

In *Moralske Tanker*, Holberg argues that fanatics are most difficult for society or a government to tolerate, for the fanatic, he argues, often confuses the will of God for his own and sets aside the law of God as well as the commandments of secular authority.\(^{1134}\) ‘For illuminated People’, writes Holberg, ‘can be good Human Beings, but never become good Citizens.’\(^{1135}\) We have already seen how he shared a number of contentions with the Pietists, most notably the rejection of the Lutheran state Church, and also how he rejected the individualist consequences of Pietist devotion, advocating instead a civic understanding of religion. To fully understand Holberg’s view on fanaticism and Pietism, we need to have a look at the arguments presented in what is probably Holberg’s most polemical piece on the Pietists: a short pamphlet, entitled *Betænkning om Conventicler* (Reflections on Conventicles), which he wrote in 1733. Holberg had originally intended *Betænkning om Conventicler* to be published in *Dannemarcks Riges Historie*, but ended up deciding against its publication. The pamphlet, which was not published until 1755, contains a fierce attack on Pietism, which in the 1730s had gained royal favour. Although the subject under scrutiny dealt with a royal decree issued in 1655 that banned all conventicles in Denmark, Holberg intended his reflection to mirror his current religious and political context.

Introducing his topic, Holberg situates the royal decree in its historical context, arguing that the monarch, Frederik III, was forced to take action against ‘numerous Separatists, who had secluded themselves from the public Worship of God, and formed secret Gatherings.’\(^{1136}\) Exploring the dangers of conventicles and secret gatherings, Holberg resorts to a medical metaphor. Praising the monarch’s interference in the religious life of his subjects, Holberg argues that, had the monarch failed to act, ‘then one will find such secret Gatherings to be growing at an incredible Rate, and to spread about like Cancer through a whole Country.’\(^{1137}\) The idea of private persons meeting in order to discuss religious matters was not altogether foreign to Holberg’s own religiosity, which might also explain why he attacked their position so harshly. In the early 1730s,

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\(^{1137}\) Holberg, *Betænkning om Conventicler*: 222: ‘saa seer man slige hemmelige Forsamlinger at tilvoxe med en utrolig Hastighed, og at æde om sig som en Kræft igennem et heel Land’.
when he authored the pamphlet, Holberg had himself argued in favour of individual belief, which, as we have seen, he derived from the Lutheran doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. This might explain why he found it necessary to distinguish himself from the Pietist camp. Holberg develops his refutation of Pietism along two interconnected lines of argumentation, objecting to the religious as well as the political consequences of Pietism.

The first objection runs along religious lines of reasoning. 'I have also found it necessary to give a Philosophical Reflection about it,' he writes, 'as it is known that in our Time in several Places in Europe many have sought to plant peculiar Principles in secret Gatherings, which aim rather at Desperation and Despair, than fear of God and Devotion.' Private gatherings foster fanaticism rather than Christian devotion and are therefore opposed to what Holberg in the 1740s came to see as the aim of religion; that is, the civic conversation. The emphasis on inner repentance and heartfelt belief advocated by the Pietists does not lead to a Christian way of life. As Holberg argues, thus prefiguring the position he would publicly advocate from 1739 onwards, 'a Christian Belief' consists in Love of God and Sociality in Regard to other People.

The second objection to the Pietist position runs along a political line of reasoning; to Holberg, this is the weightiest objection. When secluded from civic conversation, Holberg argues, Pietism becomes seditious, as secrecy combined with fanaticism is a dangerous cocktail for any society. It is more important, therefore, to keep a watchful eye on fanatics rather than on 'false Teachers' and other heretics. 'The latter disrupt only the Church,' writes Holberg, 'but the first mentioned put the Church as well as the State into Motion, as Governments do not like that private Persons on their Own attempt the slightest Reformation of either secular or ecclesiastical Matters.' As Holberg further argues, one only needs to consider 'the great English Revolution' to see what terrifying ordeals originate from secret associations, 'for the great English Tragedy, which overthrew Religion and the State, had the exact same beginning, namely secret Gatherings.' It is in light of the English Revolution that Holberg is able to praise the ban on conventicles in Denmark. If allowed to blossom, 'separate holy Societies, and the Fanaticism that
floats from them’ will cease to be controllable by state and church; once it is allowed to spread like a cancer, fanaticism will have to be cured by ‘the medical Faculties.’

Yet, as much as Pietism leads to fanaticism and separatism, Holberg does view Pietism with some nuances. When he issued the second revised edition of Dannemarks og Norges Beskrivelse in 1749 under the new title Dannemarks og Norges Geistlige og Verdslige Staat, he added to the chapter on religion an account of a great disturbance in the state which had recently occurred; the disruptions he had in mind, we soon learn, were those first set in motion by the rise of Pietism. His account does not, however, relate to all Pietists, but only those, who ‘understood themselves to be inspired Christians’, and he proposes to distinguish between ‘simple Pietists and exaggerated Pietists’. Reflecting on the rise of Pietism, Holberg writes: ‘The eager Doctrines of Spener subsequently spread to other Places, so that only in a short Time he gained a Quantity of Followers in several Countries: But, as not everyone was gifted with the Discernment of their Master, an Occasion was given to Separation from the ordinary Congregations, and further to Fanaticism.’ As Holberg saw it, since the teachings of Spener were well intended, one should be careful not to ‘confuse the Pietists with Fanatics; for the Teaching of Spener aimed not at diverging from Orthodoxy, but only at the Strengthening of Christianity.’ Holberg, thus, is not intolerant of the Pietists as such, but only those who fail to recognise two simple principles: sincerity towards God and sociality in what regards other human beings. ‘You may well want to say that I am now acting against my own Principle, and that I speak against the Doctrine of Toleration, which I have sought to defend on all given Occasions. No, by no means! I think that I on no Occasion have advocated the same Doctrine more strongly: For it is not against the Wrong Opinions of the Separatists that I am speaking here, but against their Intolerance.’

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1143 Holberg, Betænkning om Conventicler: ‘separate hellige Societeter, og den deraf flydende Fanaticismo’ … ‘de medicsinske Faculteter’.
1146 Holberg, Dannemarks og Norges Geistlige og Verdslige Staat: ‘confundere Pietister med Fanaticis; da dog Spener’s Lærdom sigtede ikke til at vige fra Orthodoxyen, men alleene til Christendommens Skierelpelse.’
Towards a Theory of Religious Toleration

In this chapter, we have seen how Holberg’s religious thinking was shaped by his experiences of the Roman Catholic Counter Reformation, which he encountered on his numerous travels to Paris and Rome, his reading of prohibited books, and the religious controversies that broke out in Denmark in the 1730s between the orthodox Lutherans and the Pietists. In this period, Holberg placed at the heart of his religious thinking the Lutheran doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, and he emphasised the importance of ecclesiastical history over polemical theology.

Holberg’s religious thinking was, however, challenged on two separate fronts. On the one hand, when reading prohibited books that questioned the authority of revelation, Holberg came to embrace the works of Abbadie and Grotius, who offered an irenicist account of the truthfulness of the Christian religion. On the other hand, Holberg’s emphasis on the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers was challenged by a rival Pietist interpretation of the same doctrine. Yet, in contrast to the Pietists, who emphasised inner repentance and devotion, Holberg stressed the sociable consequences of intellectual enquiry. The aim of intellectual enquiry is not inner repentance, but rather participation in an ongoing dialogue about the truthfulness and reasonableness of one’s religious beliefs.

Holberg, however, shared with the Pietists his aversion towards the established orthodox Lutheran Church in Denmark, which was at the heart of his engagement with ecclesiastical history. As I have argued in this chapter, Holberg’s engagement with church history developed along two lines of argumentation. Firstly, he contrasts ecclesiastical history to polemical theology, stressing the importance of ecclesiastical history in acquiring a solid knowledge of religious doctrines. Secondly, Holberg understands ecclesiastical history as way of revealing the religious narrow-mindedness and the political pretexts of the established Church. Church history, thus, is a subversive way of thinking. As he emphasises in his *Almindelig Kirke-Historie*, true Christianity is closely connected to sociality and agreement on the fundamental articles of faith. Seen in this light, religious orthodoxy, be it Roman Catholic or Lutheran, becomes a form of suppression in that it makes heretics of all who diverge even the slightest from established doctrines. Addressed to the Danish orthodox Church, Holberg argues that this form of orthodoxy betrays its Lutheran origins: it substitutes the doctrines of the priesthood of all believers and Christian freedom for traditional church authority, and intellectual enquiry, sociality, civic conversation, and agreement on the fundamental articles of the faith for religious indoctrination.

Holberg’s contribution, in this period, to the enlightenment understanding of religion consists in his emphasis on intellectual enquiry, sociality, and critical, yet respectful conversation.
Holberg derives his religious thinking not from traditional Church authority, but from human sociality. One needs to learn how to be a human, he argues, before one can learn how to be a Christian. Sincerity, sociability, and enquiry are at the heart of Holberg’s religion. With this emphasis, Holberg, as we shall see, had moved closer to the early enlightenment republic of letters, in particular the Arminian enlightenment of Jean Le Clerc, whom he met in Amsterdam in 1726. This was to be the foundation of his understanding of religion in his major works on moral philosophy, which he published in the 1740s and 1750s. In these works, Holberg gathers various ideas and strands of thought, which he had touched upon in his earlier works, and continues his engagement with a variety of enlightenments. The central theme that binds these intellectual activities together is his argument for toleration. It is to the theme of religious toleration that the following chapter is devoted.
Chapter 6

Toleration, Doubt, and the Fundamental Articles of Faith:
The Religious Enlightenment

About Religion, people forever will strive,
Although faith only in few hearts is seen to thrive.
Ludvig Holberg

‘One must first learn to doubt before one can learn to believe’, writes Holberg in Moralske Tanker, first published in 1744.1149 A central part of his rejection of contemporary religious views, Holberg’s contention that uncertainty must precede a person’s religious convictions, indeed, that doubt is the foundation upon which religious beliefs are formed, can be seen as a form of liberty of conscience and thus as a mode of religious toleration. Holberg’s theory of toleration, which became a central theme in his writings from the 1740s onwards, was closely linked to his thoughts on education, civility, and politics, and he rooted his plea for toleration in long-standing traditions of thought, ranging from Lutheranism and Christian humanism to Arminianism, scepticism, and irenicism. Hence, in concert with his moral philosophy and his theory of monarchism, Holberg’s religious thought, as it was, added important aspects to the discourses of toleration existing within the republic of letters.

The revocation by Louis XIV in 1685 of the Edict of Nantes and subsequently the works of Pierre Bayle, John Locke, Jean Le Clerc, Samuel Pufendorf, Christian Thomasius, and others had already placed the notion of toleration at the heart of contemporary European discussions on

religion and politics, but in Denmark this debate was successfully sidelined by orthodox Lutherans and Pietists alike. Both confessions favoured, although from rather different perspectives, a confessional state centred on absolute monarchy as the defender of true belief. Further, the role of the clergy within the confessional state was to inform the monarch of his moral responsibility according to revelation and to compel his subjects to act according to true belief and their rightful place in civil society. Holberg, by contrast, aligned himself with the early enlightenment cultures of Thomasius, Bayle, Locke, and Le Clerc, to whom toleration was of the utmost importance for civil associations as well as for the Christian world more generally, and he denounced the attempts by his contemporaries to enforce religious conformity. As I shall argue in this chapter, Holberg’s enlightenment is a quintessentially religious enlightenment, simultaneously subverting and strengthening the role of religion in civil society.

Holberg’s intellectual dispositions in religious matters, have long been debated by modern interpreters, who depict him either as a rationalist or as a deist thinker. Nonetheless, neither deism nor rationalism seems capable of representing Holberg’s stance in contemporary religious controversies. Following one tradition in recent scholarship, Holberg should be construed as a rationalist thinker, who ‘found the philosophical basis for his rationalist program in the European philosophy of natural law’. Whilst natural law, as we have seen, played a crucial role in his political thought and also featured prominently in his religious thought, never did it lay the foundations for a rationalist philosophy of religion. First, comprising empiricism and eclecticism rather than any rationalist ambition, the theory of natural law, which Holberg takes up, was at the

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1151 On the concept of an early enlightenment culture see Marshall, John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture.

1152 In pointing to a quintessentially religious enlightenment, I am greatly indebted to the work of David Sorkin in his The Religious Enlightenment.

opposite end of the philosophical spectrum of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Its foremost representatives, Pufendorf and Thomasius, were engaged in fierce debates with contemporary rationalist philosophers.\footnote{On this philosophical divide see the discussion in chapter 5. See further Tim Hochstrasser, \textit{Natural Law Theories in the Early Enlightenment} (Cambridge 2000); Ian Hunter, \textit{Rival Enlightenments: Civil and Metaphysical Philosophy in Early Modern Germany} (Cambridge 2001); Knud Haakonsen, ‘German Natural Law’, in Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler, eds., \textit{The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought} (Cambridge 2006).} Secondly, though the concept of reason was central to his educational programme, Holberg construes reason and faith not in terms of binary juxtapositions, but as an interplay. Hence, the rationalist interpretation of Holberg is severely flawed.\footnote{Andreas Simonsen, \textit{Holbergs livssyn} (Copenhagen 1981): 117.} As I shall argue in this chapter, Holberg’s writings cannot be reduced to a ‘program of reason’, as one scholar puts it.\footnote{Mai, ‘Holberg, Ludvig’: II:217.} Rather, I argue, Holberg sought to rethink the role of religion in civil associations; in doing so, he emphasised doubt and uncertainty, not rationalist philosophy.

seems rather strikingly at odds with Holberg’s own perspective.1161 ‘The brevity of life’, he argues against the English Deists in the first volumes of his Epistler in 1748, ‘and the hope of a better one after this one are my consolation. I am therefore disquieted more than other people by certain bold publications which recently have seen the light and which would seem to want to rob man of such hope and consolation. This causes me to examine everything from the foundations.’1162 Individual judgement in matters of religion was essential to Holberg’s vision of politics and society, for only by casting doubt upon all traditions and beliefs, including one’s own, can one learn to tolerate others and create a peaceful society.

This brings us to the second variation of the deist interpretation, expounded most prominently by Ole Peter Grell and Roy Porter, who argue that ‘Despite his adherence to a modern Deism he never became an advocate of religious toleration.’1163 To refute this line of interpretation, Holberg’s own allusions to the growing literature on toleration being circulated in the republic of letters will do. ‘It seems’, he writes in 1748 to the imaginary recipient of his Epistler, ‘that my Lord blames me for preaching Tolerance so often. I think that one cannot play too often on this String. For one sees what excellent Effect those Books have had that were written on this Matter towards the End of the last and in the Beginning of this Century.’1164 Therefore, I argue, in defending toleration and freedom of the conscience, Holberg never became a deist. As a response to contemporary religious views, including the rationalists and the deists, Holberg’s moral and religious thought should be seen as a genuine attempt to rethink the role of religion to civil society. As I argue in this chapter, to understand Holberg’s call for toleration, we also need to situate his religious thought within the religious enlightenment more broadly.

**Toleration in the Early Enlightenment**

A novelty in the intellectual history of the early Northern enlightenment, Holberg’s theory of toleration was formed in multiple contexts, both national and international, and his thoughts on religion responded to philosophical, political, and theological problems alike. The immediate context out of which Holberg’s theory of toleration emerged was marked by a growing tension with religious conformity, targeted at the institution of the Church and the persecution of

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religious minorities.\textsuperscript{1165} In response to these problems, various religious enlightenments emerged throughout Europe. In Holberg’s major works of the 1740s and early 1750s, the issues and problems debated within these religious enlightenments were put under scrutiny from the perspective of the Northern enlightenment. To the group of early enlightenment figures to which Holberg belonged, the answer to these problems was religious toleration. The theory of toleration which Holberg came to advocate in this period was largely shaped by his own religious doubts and concerns, and it came to form a pivotal part of his religious thinking.

How did Holberg think about toleration in his major works on moral philosophy, published in the 1740s and 1750s? Holberg’s first treatment of the question of toleration stems from his utopian novel, \textit{Nicholai Klimii Iter subterraneum}, which appeared in 1741 in Leipzig. In chapter IV of \textit{Nicholai Klimii}, the main character of the novel has entered into a discussion with the king of Potu about the religious arrangement of the ideal state, as opposed to the religious climate of the European states on the surface of the Earth:

But when he heard that the Christians were divided into Sects without Number, and that upon some Differences in Matters of Faith, People of the same Blood and Family would cruelly persecute one another, he answer’d thus: “Among us also there are a large Variety of different Sentiments concerning Things pertaining to divine Worship. But one Man does not persecute another for that. All Persecution for speculative Matters or Errors arising from the sole Variety of our Perceptions, can spring from nothing but Pride, one thinking himself wiser and more penetrating than the rest. But such Pride must be highly displeasing in the Eyes of the Supreme Being, who must be a Lover of Humility and Meekness in Mortals. We never tease an Assembly of Judges about any one who shall happen to dissent from the receiv’d Opinions in Points of Speculation. Provided he does it sincerely, and also conforms in practical Matters to the publick Worship of the Deity. And in this we pursue the Track chalk’d out to us by our Ancestors, who always thought it inhumane to fetter the Understanding, and tyrannize over the Conscience. In our Politicks we extremely recommend the Observance of this Rule, so that if my Subject should differ about the Make of my Body, the Manner of my Life, or about my Oeconomy or any such sort of Thing, yet at the same time acknowledg’d me for their lawful Sovereign to whom Obedience is due, I think them all good Subjects”\textsuperscript{1166}

The theory of toleration which Holberg unfolds in \textit{Nicholai Klimii} is centred on three key aspects. First, toleration is closely linked to the conscience. In religious matters, individual believers are answerable only to the ‘Dictates of Conscience.’\textsuperscript{1167} Thus, religion is private, making the use of force in religious matters a form of tyranny. The second key aspect relates to public worship. Following the dictates of conscience, Holberg argues, ‘None are compell’d by Force or by Fines to

\textsuperscript{1165} For a discussion see Hans Erich Bödeker, ‘Prologue: Towards a Reconstruction of the Discourse on Tolerance and Intolerance in the Age of Enlightenment’, in Hans Erik Bödeker, Clorinda Donato and Peter Hanns Reill, eds., \textit{Discourses of Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Enlightenment} (Toronto 2009).


\textsuperscript{1167} Holberg, \textit{A Journey to the World Under-Ground}: 66.
attend the Publick Worship." Yet, as cited in the passage above, all citizens are still required to conform to public worship of the deity in practical matters. The religious freedom of the individual is granted only as long as religion remains a private matter, or, that is, to the extent that religious beliefs are not forced upon others and do not undermine the public worship settled upon in the state.

The third key aspect of toleration is related to freedom of discussion. In Potu, as Holberg writes, 'with respect to Religion, it was prohibited to dispute about the prime Articles of Faith, particularly about the Essence and Attributes of the Deity. But as to all other Points, it is free for every one to propose their Opinions and engage in Controversies.' This aspect of Holberg’s theory of toleration, as we shall see shortly, embedded his thinking in two strands of thought that were to leave a profound mark on his religious thinking more broadly. Whilst, on the one hand, the ban of discussions on the essence and attributes of the deity reflects Holberg’s commitments to a notion of reasonable belief, demarcating the limits of human reason – which should not be confounded with the fideism – his emphasis on the prime articles of faith, on the other, goes in the direction of irenicism. Thus, as Klimius understood the religion of Potu, it resembled what by the theologians in the world he knew, that is, the European states, would ‘be call’d Syncretism, and [it] would be highly condemned by the Learned.’

The antithesis to Holberg’s theory of toleration, as it is mirrored in the religion of Potu, is spelled out in chapter IX of Nicholai Klimii, where Holberg describes the main character’s journey round the planet of Nazar and his encounters with the other nations inhabiting that planet. In the province of Mardak, the inhabitants differ from each other only by the number, the location, and the shapes and sizes of their eyes, which, in turn, determine not only their social and political station, but also their perception of the world. As Klimius learns, in Mardak a ‘sacred Tablet of the Sun is the principal Object of Mardakanian Worship,’ and anyone wishing to enter into ‘the Service of the State’ is obliged to swear an oath stating ‘that the sacred Tablet of the Sun appears to me to be long, and I promise that I will persist in this Opinion to my last Breath.’ Further, ‘any inhabitant who openly taught, that the Table of the Sun seem’d to him to be square’ would be branded ‘a Heretick’ by the rulers of the country. Klimius himself, due to his human anatomy, saw the table with both his eyes as being square and was thus infuriated about the fact that the

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1170 Holberg, A Journey to the World Under-Ground: 49.
1171 Holberg, A Journey to the World Under-Ground: 112.
Mardakanians swear to a religion that forced some believers to believe against their own perception.

Holberg’s description of the religion of Mardak was undoubtedly intended as criticism of the prevailing religious climate in Denmark in the 1730s and early 1740s, where religious life was dominated by what Holberg took to be a staunchly intolerant strand of Pietism. Mardak, the name of the country, as modern interpreters have pointed out, was an anagram for Da(n)mark, short one letter. Consequently, as Klimius came to learn upon his return to Potu, the enforcement of particular religious views upon those inhabitants of a country, to whom such views contradicted both the senses and the conscience, differed not in any significant way from ‘most of the European Dominions’, where heretics were persecuted ‘with Fire and Sword, upon Account of some Defect, not of their Eyes indeed, but of their Reason.’ That Holberg intended Nicholai Klimii to be a criticism of the prevailing intolerance in the early eighteenth century is further evident from his discussion of the reception of Nicholai Klimii in the third part of his memoirs, which he published in Latin in 1743. Shortly after its publication, some Pietists in Denmark, Erich Pontoppidan amongst them, unsuccessfully attempted to impose a ban on Nicholai Klimii. In June 1741, the Göttingische Zeitung von Gelehrten Sachen published a review, bashing the work for its depraved literary style as well as its ill-founded depiction of the ‘Flaws and corrupted Morals of the Europeans’.

There are no men who bear so ill to be told of their vices as those who thunder against vice in public, and none persecute with greater bitterness than those who are always declaiming against persecution. Some declaimers of this description, who bore me no good will, thought proper to attack my book, and took a great deal of pains to persuade people of its dangerous tendency […] These persons are supposed to be the authors of the unjust and scandalous criticism which appeared at Gottingen.

Viewed against the prevailing religious intolerance in Denmark in the early eighteenth century, Holberg, to be sure, did pen Nicholai Klimii with the intention of making it a subversive tract. However, besides the subversive nature of the work, which was conceived along the lines of the notion of public criticism expounded in Holberg's moral philosophy, he authored the work with the intention of moralising to the public and advocating toleration as a sound way of ensuring

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religious peace. Even Klimius, upon opening his eyes to the monstrosities of intolerance, as Holberg writes, became ‘a staunch Advocate for Toleration.’

As modern interpreters have argued, Holberg’s theory of toleration was drawn from the works of Locke and Bayle, whose great achievement (or so the story goes) had been to secularise European thought. At the centre of this interpretation, which dominates current scholarship on Holberg’s theory of toleration, we find the description of the country of Mardak in Nicholai Klimii as well as an essay in praise of toleration, published in the first volume of the Epistler in 1748. Embedding Holberg’s call for toleration in two of his most well-known works from the 1740s, this interpretation is, however, severely flawed. Not only does it focus too narrowly on Holberg as a follower of Locke and Bayle, it also ignores the discussion of toleration which features in Holberg’s two other major works from the same period, published in between Nicholai Klimii and the Epistler: the third part of the memoirs, which appeared in 1743, and the Moralske Tanker from 1744. Considering all of these works, Holberg’s treatment of the issue of toleration was shaped not just by his engagement with two canonical thinkers, but also with much broader genealogies of thought. Searching for a solid foundation for his theory of toleration, all four of Holberg’s major works display a number of tensions and frictions resulting from his engagement with intertwined and, at times, contradictory traditions.

In the discussion of toleration in Moralske Tanker, Holberg praises Locke’s constitution for Carolina. ‘For a thorough Toleration,’ Holberg writes, ‘which institutes Peace in a Country, in which there are several Sects, one can use as a Model that Constitution, which Mr. Locke authored for the Colony in Carolina.’ As Locke argues in The Fundamental Constitution of Carolina, ‘any seven or more persons agreeing in any religion shall constitute a church or profession, to which they shall give some name to distinguish it from others.’ Thus, in Locke’s account, toleration is intimately linked with freedom of conscience and the right to public worship. In the Epistola de tolerantia, which Locke had drafted during his exile in the Netherlands in 1685, he developed this

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1181 Bredsdorff and Kjældgaard, Tolerance: 105-126.
interpretation of public worship, grounding it in a notion of the ‘Church’ as a ‘voluntary Society of Men, joining themselves together of their own accord, in order to the public worshipping of God.'1184 Nonetheless, Locke’s interpretation of the right of all churches to publicly worship the deity is largely at odds with the notion of public worship in Nicholai Klimii, published just three years prior to the Moralske Tanker. Rather than advocating the right of all to public worship, Holberg had in mind a restrained form of public worship, to which all citizens of a state should conform in practical matters. What it is striking to note is that Holberg, on this point, seems to invoke not a Lockeian toleration, but a line of argumentation central to such figures as Thomas Hobbes, Christian Thomasius, and Samuel Pufendorf.1185 Indeed, as the anonymous editor of The Moral and Political Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury, which appeared in 1750, suggests, while referring most probably to the English edition of Nicholai Klimii, Holberg is in fact a Hobbist, having ‘published (tho’ without naming our Author) a very judicious and sensible Apology for his Sentiments.’1186 In the Leviathan, for instance, Hobbes distinguished between ‘Publique’ and ‘Private Worship’, arguing that since ‘a Common-wealth is but one Person, it ought also to exhibit to God but one Worship; which then it doth, when it commandeth it to be exhibited by Private men, Publicque.’1187 Thinking about toleration in terms of conformity to a uniform public worship firmly rooted Holberg’s thought in the tradition of reason of state and is strongly present in his early historical works, particularly in his discussion of Cromwellian freedom of


1186 [Anonymous], The Life of Thomas Hobbes, The Philosopher of Malmesbury, in Thomas Hobbes, The Moral and Political Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury. Never before collected together. To which is prefixed, the author’s life, Extracted from That said to be written by Himself, as also from The Supplement to the said Life by Dr. Blackbourne, and farther illustrated by the Editor, with Historical and Critical Remarks on his Writings and Opinions (London 1750): xxviii.

religion. Toleration cannot be understood without also addressing its limits, and when Holberg addressed such questions, his point of departure was Pufendorf and the tradition of reason of state. Yet, Holberg’s theory of toleration still cannot be reduced to a Pufendorfian discourse of reason of state, or, that is, to a political concept of toleration.

In the third part of his memoirs, Holberg derives his notion of toleration not from a secular way of thinking, but from the moral teachings of Christ, thus embedding his call for toleration in his appropriation of Lutheranism, first outlined in the 1720s:

As I have always been a warm advocate of toleration, I have incurred the displeasure of certain over-zealous divines, who avow principles of intolerance which even the more moderate among Roman Catholics would be maintaining. They suspect me of having leaned of late towards certain persons whose private opinions of religious ceremonies are believed to be sceptical; but I have even from my earliest years considered toleration a true Christian virtue, conformable to the doctrines of Christ, and to the principles of the Protestant religion. This is manifest from the precepts which are to be found in my writings published twenty years; and to recede from these principles is, in my opinion, to destroy the foundations of the reformed religion, and to expose ourselves to the same weapons which we formerly used against the Roman Catholics. Besides, the moral doctrines of Christ, the excellence of which even the bitterest enemies of religion admit, and against which they do not dare to open their mouths, would be rendered unjust, and inferior to the heathen philosophers, if the expression “make to enter” were literally interpreted.1188

Toleration as secularisation, undeniably, had a profound impact on European thought in the early enlightenment, but the conceptualisation of toleration as a true Christian virtue grounded in the doctrines of Christ are the words of a profoundly religious thinker. What Holberg’s treatment of toleration in the memoirs had in common with the earlier discussion in Nicholai Klimii, however, was its severe criticism of the prevailing religious intolerance in eighteenth-century Denmark. When the first Danish translation of all three parts of the memoirs appeared in 1745, parts of the discussion of toleration and freedom of religion were, however, omitted from the text.1189 Whilst the passage quote above found its way into the Danish translation, the part that was left out contained a discussion of toleration in relation to English deism, which Holberg understood not as a heretical or irreligious position, but as an intellectual challenge. What this seems to suggest is that, whereas the moral teachings of Christ formed an acceptable foundation for toleration, an intellectual engagement with English deism did not. The argument on toleration, however, remained the same in both parts. Thus, to fully understand the different stages of Holberg’s theory of toleration as it was shaped in the 1740s and 1750s, we need to consider it in light of his engagement with various religious enlightenments as well as the enemies of religion. Situating Holberg’s religious thinking within such wider genealogies of thought, we are in a better position

1189 The passage should have appeared in Holberg, Ludvig Holbergs Trende Epistler at page 272. For a discussion of the different versions of Holbergs memoirs see Jansen, Ludvig Holberg og menneskerettighederne: esp. 109.
to understand not only the changes and continuities in Holberg’s theory of toleration, but also the different conceptual levels on which it functioned, i.e., toleration as a political and a moral argument.

**Doubt, Enquiry, and Reasonable Belief**

A central idea in Holberg’s religious thinking from the 1740s onwards is the contention that one must examine all traditional articles of faith before one can start to believe. Holberg, as we have seen, first thematised this idea in the 1720s, presenting the call for individual scrutiny as a commonplace Lutheran idea related to the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. In his later works, however, whilst expanding his commitments to Lutheran thought, particularly the doctrine of Christian freedom, he simultaneously began to think about individual enquiry in relation to religious freedom and the concept of toleration. This shift in Holberg’s thought occurred as he became more involved with various genealogies of thought introduced to him chiefly through the intellectual constellations of the early enlightenment republic of letters. As much as Holberg in *Moralske Tanker* interpreted intellectual enquiry in connection with Christian freedom, his emphasis on doubt and enquiry shows how far he had become engaged with alternative traditions of thought. In the 1740s and 1750s, Holberg’s thoughts on intellectual enquiry are best understood in light of his engagement with the Arminian enlightenment.

Entering Holberg’s religious thinking at this stage, we find not only Locke and Bayle, but also Jean Le Clerc. Despite the tensions and disputes between them, Bayle and Le Clerc responded to many of the same experiences. Both men were fugitives from religious persecution in France and both were disenchanted with the orthodoxies of the Reformed Church. More importantly, however, their thoughts and ideas were equally rooted in the strand of enlightened Calvinism taught at Geneva by Louis Tronchin (1629-1705). A professor of theology leaning towards Arminianism, Tronchin challenged Reformed scholasticism, championing the right to scrutini any idea on the basis of Scriptures and Cartesian philosophy, although he never

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1192 In Danish historiography, Holberg’s relationship to Locke and Bayle is well explored, whilst Le Clerc’s role has remained – wrongly, I should add – largely unacknowledged. Le Clerc is briefly mentioned, however, alongside Locke and Bayle in Billeskov Jansen’s comments to his edition of Holberg’s *Epistler*, but without any further explanation. See F. J. Billeskov Jansen, *Kommentar*, in Ludvig Holberg, *Epistler*, 8 vols., F. J. Billeskov Jansen, ed., (Copenhagen 1944-54): VI.147.
abandoned the idea that Scripture contained a single unified meaning.\textsuperscript{1195} To the writers of the early enlightenment such as Bayle and Le Clerc, toleration was often seen in connection with a call for intellectual scrutiny.\textsuperscript{1196} It is largely through his engagement with Le Clerc and Bayle that Holberg’s call for intellectual enquiry in religious matters becomes a call for toleration. Yet, Holberg’s engagement with Bayle and Le Clerc also created certain tensions in his thought, not because Bayle and Le Clerc entertained widely different, if not incommensurable notions of toleration, as Jonathan Israel has suggested – the fact that Holberg, albeit in unequal measures, takes ideas from both of them seems to challenge this assertion – but because his engagement with these writers opened his own thinking about toleration to intellectual consequences he was not prepared to accept.\textsuperscript{1197}

Le Clerc was a strong advocate of intellectual enquiry, ‘that great Duty, of never embracing a Religion without Examination’.\textsuperscript{1198} To Le Clerc, unbelief was a vice, but unreflective belief was an even greater one.\textsuperscript{1199} ‘[L]et us examine into Things’, writes Le Clerc in a manner that would later be echoed by Holberg, ‘which alone can be a Foundation for our Belief.’\textsuperscript{1200} In Le Clerc’s account, through examination of the traditional articles of faith it is possible for the individual believer to establish the truthfulness of religious beliefs. Yet, examination is still couched in uncertainty; it leads not to an absolute truth, since such a truth is outside the reach of human reason, but a sincere belief. ‘For God,’ writes Le Clerc, ‘who requires nothing impossible to Man, demands no more of us at present, than a just and sincere Inquiry after our Duties: And provided we afterwards demean our selves conformably to such Inquiry, we shall never fail of his Acceptance.’\textsuperscript{1201} Hence, to Le Clerc, the examination of religious doctrines aims at reaching a sincere and reasonable belief, and is thus shielded from scepticism. Secondly, a central part of Le Clerc’s religious thought consisted of his advocacy of critical, yet respectful conversation; like Holberg would argue half a century later, enquiring into matters of a religious nature also entails civil conversation with others about those matters. This ethos of civility was, as John Marshall

\textsuperscript{1195} On Tronchin’s enlightened orthodoxy see generally Klauber, ‘Reason, Revelation, and Cartesianism’.
\textsuperscript{1196} Marshall, John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture: 517.
\textsuperscript{1198} Jean Le Clerc, Mr. Le Clerc’s Extract and Judgement of the Rights of the Christian Church asserted &c. Translated from his Bibliothaque Choisie (London 1708): 14.
\textsuperscript{1200} Jean Le Clerc, An Oration Concerning the Excellence and Usefulness of Ecclesiastical History, Pronounc’d Septemb. 6. 1712. By Mr. Le Clerc, Upon his being chosen PROFESSOR of Ecclesiastical History among the Remonstrants at Amsterdam (London 1713): 91.
\textsuperscript{1201} Le Clerc, Mr. Le Clerc’s Extract and Judgement : 14.
has pointed out, central to the early enlightenment culture of the republic of letters,\textsuperscript{1202} and it was this that Holberg picked up on when he spoke of sociality in matters of religion.

Le Clerc was staunch defender of religious tolerance.\textsuperscript{1203} Without ‘mutual Toleration’, Le Clerc stated in a funeral oration on his friend Philipp van Limborch, ‘Men wou’d become wild Beasts to each other, or somewhat worse.’\textsuperscript{1204} Le Clerc’s toleration, though, came with a price, for he was never able to rid himself of charges of Socinianism being levelled against him after he had defended the toleration of the Socinians in an anonymous work.\textsuperscript{1202} ‘For as soon as ever he went into the College of the ARMINIANS,’ writes Le Clerc in his autobiography from a third person perspective, ‘and began to get some Reputation by his Writings, there were not wanting some Men, who made it their Business to overthrow that growing Credit he had gain’d, with the same Envy and ill Nature, with which they commonly bespatter the ARMINIANS; and therefore, whatever he wrote relating to Divinity, was immediately blasted with the odious Name of SOCINIANISM.’\textsuperscript{1206} To Le Clerc, who was in contact with several Socinian writers, his orthodox critics were clear examples of the prevailing intolerance that inevitably resulted in religious persecution. ‘To such a Height of Slander is this Age arriv’d,’ he continues, ‘that CHRISTIANS at this Day persecute one another with as much Malice as the HEATHENS did the Primitive CHRISTIANS formerly.’\textsuperscript{1207}

Le Clerc, however, refused ‘to submit to the Authority of a crowd of learned Men, who only say the same thing one after the other, without ever examining or bringing Reasons for it.’\textsuperscript{1208} Traditional orthodoxies are not consistent with the Christian religion, Le Clerc claimed, as they amount to ‘little more than a Cloak made use of, to hide the small Esteem’ that orthodox theologians ‘have for the real Religion of Jesus Christ.’\textsuperscript{1209} Amongst the Christians numerous factions had emerged over the right meaning of the Scriptures, and ‘Men have thought it an Honour to be stiled Zealously Orthodox, to be firmly linked to a certain Party, loading all others with Calumnies, and damning by an absolute Authority the rest of Mankind; without taking care to demonstrate the Sincerity and Fervour of their Piety, by an exact Observation of Gospel

\textsuperscript{1202} Marshall, \textit{John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture}. 516-17.
\textsuperscript{1204} Jean Le Clerc, \textit{A Funeral Oration upon the Death of Mr. Philipp Limborch, Professor of Divinity among the Remonstrants at Amsterdam: Who died April 30. 1712. Pronounc’d May 6. following, being the Day of his Interment, by Mr. John Le Clerc} (London 1713): 12.
\textsuperscript{1205} Marshall, \textit{John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture}. 474-75; see further Klauber, ‘Between Protestant Orthodoxy and Rationalism’.
\textsuperscript{1206} Jean Le Clerc, \textit{An Account of the Life and Writings of Mr. John Le Clerc} (London 1712): 26-27.
\textsuperscript{1207} Le Clerc, \textit{An Account of the Life and Writings of Mr. John Le Clerc}: 27.
\textsuperscript{1208} Jean Le Clerc, \textit{Free and Important Disquisitions Concerning the Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures} (London 1750): 61.
\textsuperscript{1209} Le Clerc, \textit{Free and Important Disquisitions}: 82.
Morals." In light of the theological controversies fought within the republic of letters from the 1680s onwards, Le Clerc advocated the middle way, rejecting both traditional orthodoxies and the positions of Richard Simon and Benedict de Spinoza respectively.

Holberg had met Le Clerc in Amsterdam in 1726, but it is not until the 1740s and 1750s that the Remonstrant philosopher takes centre stage in Holberg's religious thinking. In light of the religious climate in Denmark in the 1740s, engagement with Arminianism, let alone Socinianism, which had become a difficult label to remove, could potentially lead to charges of heresy. Holberg, however, took it upon himself to defend the Arminians against the charge of Socinianism, arguing that their only fault had been that they 'judged the Socinians milder, than did other Christians.' Although Holberg granted that some Arminians were in fact secret Socinians, he could find no theological arguments against examining their writings. Heresy resulting from sincere examination of the doctrines of religion, Holberg argues, should not be confused with blasphemy, which deliberately aimed to overthrow religion. The principal aim of the Arminians, as Holberg sees it, was not to undermine the Christian religion, but to improve it. 'Arminius' Principles were quite reasonable,' Holberg asserts, 'His Writings chiefly aimed at a Christian Tolerance and Compassion towards Heretics.' In the context of the confessional state in which Holberg lived and wrote, and in light of the religious climate in early eighteenth-century Denmark, such arguments were considered extremely subversive.

Redescribing the position of his opponents, for whom Arminianism diverged from true Christianity, Holberg, using a favourite rhetorical move, turns their own weapons against them. In matters of religion, he argues, it is far more enlightening to learn about theology from such learned writers as 'Erasmus, Grotius, Clericus, and others', who have enquired into the Christian tradition, than from partisan clergymen, 'bound to the particular system of religion accepted in their country,' and salaried to teach 'certain accepted and prevailing opinions.' As Holberg sees it, the problem is not the confessional state in itself, but rather short-sighted and bigoted theologians, who, when faced with even the slightest difference in opinion, will preach persecution of their fellow Protestants. Such displays of violence and intellectual indifference not only destabilise the peace and tranquillity of the state, they also contradict 'sound Reason and the

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1210 Le Clerc, *Free and Important Disquisitions*: 81-82.
1212 Holberg, *Epistler*: II.174-75: 'dommede mildere om Socinianer, end andre Christne'.
Teachings of the Gospels'. Holberg’s position, by contrast, entails allowing the reading of edifying books and to admit freedom of enquiry in religious matters. ‘Nothing’, writes Holberg, ‘advances Knowledge more than the Freedom of Knowledge.’

In epistola XXXII, published in the first volume of his Epistler in 1748, Holberg expands his commitments to the role of intellectual enquiry and defends theological views expounded in the works of Jean Le Clerc:

Since I follow Philipp Melanchthon’s principle that men of good intent can err, I pass less severe judgement on Le Clerc than many others do. I have read all his work and can from them conclude nothing but that he was a good Christian despite all the errors which are ascribed to him and which he possibly can have made. I have the same opinion about the great Grotius in whose footsteps he followed. Both these worthy men have with the best of intentions undertaken reasoned expositions of the Holy Scriptures.

Referring to Le Clerc’s biblical criticism, which turned the discussion of Revelation into a discussion about the history of the languages in which the word of Christ had been revealed, Holberg invokes a longer humanist tradition in defence of Le Clerc’s and his own views on revelation. Though these views had not played any significant role in Holberg’s Almindelig Kirke-Historie, his call for toleration rests on a historicisation of religion that distinguishes the culture and practices of religion from theological doctrine.

Embedded, moreover, in the freedom to err, as derived from the thought of Melanchthon, Holberg’s call for intellectual enquiry and toleration rests on humanist, as well as Christian, foundations, brought together in the Arminian enlightenment. As he argues, ‘both Le Clerc and Grotius worked for the best of the Christian religion [and] they have regularly urged concord and mutual tolerance upon those, who, although in agreement about the fundamental articles of faith, are separated by petty differences. It is by such means that the bulwarks of religion best can be defended.’ Holberg’s engagement with the Arminian enlightenment was couched in a language of enquiry and toleration. Moreover, from Holberg’s engagement with the Arminian enlightenment a genealogy of thought emerges, one intended to circumvent the prevailing religious orthodoxies. Holberg constructs a broad genealogy of thought, ranging from

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1218 Holberg, Selected Essays of Ludvig Holberg: 35.
1221 Holberg, Selected Essays of Ludvig Holberg: 36, 37.
Lutheranism to Christian humanism and Arminianism. Comprised of such figures as Luther, Erasmus, Melanchthon, Arminius, Grotius, and Le Clerc, he together different strands of thought partly corresponding to the tradition in which Le Clerc also placed himself. Holberg is, in other words, beginning to practise the kind of *theologia eclectica* which he had first called for in Moralske Tanker, though he insists that his thoughts only pertains to ‘certain moral subjects’.

Yet, as much as this genealogy does inform Holberg’s theory of toleration, his emphasis on doubt still contains elements of scepticism which we need to explore further. Intellectual enquiry, Holberg argues in the memoirs, may still lead to error, resulting from ‘the frailty of human reason.’ To raise this issue is at the same time to ask about the place of Bayle in Holberg’s religious thinking: to what extent should we, as F. J. Billeskov Jansen has suggested, think of Holberg as Bayle’s Danish disciple? In many ways, Bayle was a controversial figure in the early enlightenment, and his thoughts on religion, reason, and philosophy have continued to puzzle modern interpreters. Like Le Clerc, his thoughts on toleration served to distance him from the Reformed Church. Whilst in exile, Bayle got enrolled in a fierce debate with the champion of orthodox Calvinism and theorist of revolt Pierre Jurieu (1637-1713) about obedience to political authorities as well as the nature and scope of toleration. Bayle and Jurieu had been colleagues first at the Protestant Academy of Sedan prior to its forced abolishment in 1681, and then at Rotterdam in the Dutch Republic, where they taught philosophy and theology respectively.

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The central contention in Bayle's writings on toleration, which he unfolded in his major works published in the 1680s, was the idea of an erroneous conscience.\textsuperscript{1228} In the \textit{Philosophical Commentary}, which appeared in 1686, 'on occasion of the late Persecution in \textit{France}',\textsuperscript{1229} the same year that Bayle's brother died in prison, Bayle asserts that one must follow the dictates of one's conscience, even when dictated erroneously.\textsuperscript{1230} As the title of his work suggests, Bayle offers a philosophical commentary on a famous and, in his opinion, much misinterpreted phrase from the Gospel of Luke: 'Compel \textit{em} to come in.'\textsuperscript{1231} This phrase had been used by St Augustine in his defence religious persecution, and it was widely recognised at the time when Bayle composed the \textit{Philosophical Commentary} as a legitimate reason to employ force against heretics.\textsuperscript{1232} It was this contention that Bayle put on trial so that it could be judged 'in the supreme Court of Reason and natural Light.'\textsuperscript{1233}

At the heart of his theory of toleration, as he expounded it in the \textit{Philosophical Commentary}, Bayle operated with such concepts as an erroneous conscience and sincere belief. 'Religion is a matter of Conscience', Bayle argues, 'subject to no controul.'\textsuperscript{1234} What mattered to Bayle was that, since human conscience can be erroneous and therefore no religious sect can be certain about the truth of their doctrines, no religious sect anywhere can claim the right to persecute others for their beliefs. No human can be forced to 'betray Conscience', Bayle argues, 'because his Mind has one Set of Ideas rather than another, and because he follows the Light of his Conscience.'\textsuperscript{1235} Despite the fallibility of human reason, no human being has the authority to force another man's conscience, not by the power that stems from God nor by that which stems from the contracts with which societies are formed. Liberty of conscience must, therefore, prevail in order for a society to avoid 'the evil effects of Constraint in Religion.'\textsuperscript{1236} As he writes:

\begin{quote}
For the same Reason it's evident, that no Body of Men, who enter into Society, and dispose their Libertys in the hands of a Sovereign, ever meant to give him a Power over their Consciences; this were a Contradiction in terms: for unless we suppose the Partys to the original Contract errand Ideots or mad Men, we can't think they shou'd ever entrust the Sovereign with a Power of enjoining 'em to hate God, or
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{1230} Marshall, \textit{John Locke, Toleration, and Early Enlightenment Culture}: Ch 5; Zagorin, \textit{How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West}: Ch 2.
\textsuperscript{1231} Bayle, \textit{A Philosophical Commentary}: 84.
\textsuperscript{1232} Marshall, \textit{John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture}: Ch 5; Zagorin, \textit{How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West}: Ch 2.
\textsuperscript{1233} Bayle, \textit{A Philosophical Commentary}: 68.
\textsuperscript{1234} Bayle, \textit{A Philosophical Commentary}: 214.
\textsuperscript{1235} Bayle, \textit{A Philosophical Commentary}: 208.
\textsuperscript{1236} Bayle, \textit{A Philosophical Commentary}: 58.
\end{footnotes}
despise Laws, clearly and distinctly dictated to their Consciences, and engrave on the Tables of their Hearts.1237

In contrast to Bayle, Jurieu believed that the persecution of the Huguenots in France was wrong not because of the use of religious persecution *per se*, but rather because the French Calvinists, and thus the defenders of true religion, were being persecuted by the Roman Catholics. Jurieu’s position thus differed only little from that of the French Catholics, since both the Roman Catholics and the Orthodox Calvinists rejected the doctrine of mutual toleration. What Jurieu wanted, and what he was wiling to incite rebellion for in order to gain, was for France to ensure the toleration of the Huguenots.1238 To Bayle, on the other hand, the only reasonable position was to offer mutual toleration of all sects.1239 ‘Non-Toleration’, he argues, ‘is the sole cause of all the Disorders which are falsely imputed to Toleration,’ and rather than constituting a threat to the peace and security of a society, toleration is ‘the very Bond of Peace, and Non-Toleration the Source of Confusion and Squabble.’1240 As modern interpreters of Bayle have stressed, his theory of toleration further proved a strong defence of political absolutism against rebellious and seditious sects. Yet, absolutism did not extend to the freedom of conscience of the individual.1241 Hence, as Luisa Simonutti has argued, Bayle’s views on religious toleration and political absolutism become paradoxical. On the one hand, he advocates toleration as opposed to religious persecution while, on the other, he reserves for the absolute monarch the task of securing the peace and tranquillity of civil society, which opens the door to religious persecution.1242

In the controversy between Bayle and Jurieu, Holberg sided with Bayle, arguing that what Jurieu took to be ‘Anti-Christian’ in his opponents, he applied to himself as ‘a Christian Virtue’.1243 Yet, Holberg’s encounter with Bayle was more troublesome than his engagement with Le Clerc; although he never came to fully appreciate the consequences of Bayle’s ideas, the Philosopher of Rotterdam left a significant mark on Holberg’s religious thought. Holberg’s emphasis in the 1740s and 1750s on the role of doubt in religious matters overlapped, at least to some degree, with

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1239 Bayle, *A Philosophical Commentary*: 211.
1240 Bayle, *A Philosophical Commentary*: 57.
Bayle’s fideism. ‘To err,’ Holberg argues, ‘is part of human frailty.’ On the one hand, Holberg embraces, at least partly, those aspects of Bayle’s fideism that dealt with the frailty of human reason, but, on the other, he rejects the more sceptical tenets of Bayle’s thought.

In Holberg’s understanding, Bayle’s religious thinking was shaped as part of a broader constellation of religious and philosophical scepticism that challenged the fine balance between reason and revelation. Moreover, although Holberg praises Bayle’s dictionary as an astonishing intellectual achievement, he finds it difficult to accept Bayle’s views on atheism and the origin of evil. In the 1740s and 1750s, Holberg’s made several attempts to come up with a response to Bayle’s ‘peculiar paradoxical opinions’. Holberg's theory of toleration, which he grounded in such notions as doubt and enquiry, is indebted to Bayle, although Le Clerc plays a more crucial role. Whilst Bayle’s religious belief entails an unqualified faith detached from reason, Le Clerc advocates reasonable faith through rational enquiry. The theory of toleration which Holberg came to advocate in the 1740s and 1750s is, thus, best understood in light of his encounters in the 1740s and 1750s with Le Clerc and the Arminian enlightenment. Yet, through his engagement with the early enlightenment republic of letters, Holberg also encountered the works of various critics and enemies of religion, which was to challenge not only his own religious beliefs, but also his toleration.

Natural Religion and the Fundamental Articles of Faith
Natural religion was one of the defining traits of the religious enlightenment, flourishing within modern discourses on natural law advocated by Locke, Pufendorf, Thomasius, and others. ‘Of all the notions which everyone must hold about God,’ writes Pufendorf in De Officio, first published in 1671, ‘the first is a settled conviction that God exists, that is, that there really is a supreme and first being on whom this universe depends.’ Drawn from the presupposition that man's duty towards God can be known from natural reason, and thus natural religion, the second notion that all human beings must hold ‘is that God is the Creator of this universe. For since it is self-evident that all this world did not come into existence of itself, it must have a cause and that cause is what we call God.’ Moreover, as Thomasius argues in the Institutes of Divine

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1245 Holberg, Selected Essays of Ludvig Holberg: 38
Jurisprudence, 'natural religion and revealed religion differ in that the latter is salvificatory, while the former is directed only to the temporal well-being of man.' Natural law thus springs from the precepts of natural religion, made known to human beings through natural reason. To Pufendorf, therefore, the separation of theology and natural law is pivotal. As we have seen, Holberg framed the argument of *Naturens- og Folke-Rettens Kundskab* within the Pufendorfian tradition of natural law, thus placing the distinction between moral theology and natural law at the heart of his theory of natural jurisprudence. Though Holberg, through the various editions of the *Naturens- og Folke-Rettens Kundskab*, generally follows the structure of Pufendorf’s *De Officio*, he decided to leave out the chapter on natural religion. This does not, however, mean that natural religion was absent from his treatment of natural law. As Holberg argues in *Naturens- og Folke-Rettens Kundskab*, ‘Reason’ holds ‘a Light before our Actions’. ‘God’, Holberg writes, has ‘granted the natural Law, and imprinted it in the Hearts of Human Beings’, thus enabling them to distinguish between ‘Evil and Good’; it ‘can be understood and known from the Light of Nature’, though it is even clearer expressed ‘in the holy Scripture, most notably in the Ten Commandments.

Moreover, in his major works on moral philosophy, Holberg ascribes to natural religion a central role. In an essay published in the second volume of the *Epistler* in 1748, Holberg reiterates the Pufendorfian distinctions between moral theology and natural law, as founded in natural religion. ‘Christian ethics’, he writes, ‘are founded on the teachings of nature; the only difference is that Christian ethics are more fully delineated. From this it does not follow that authors are to be looked upon as heathens because they undertake to show man’s duty from nature’s teachings and because to this end they employ ancient philosophical work and testimony which the Apostles themselves did not despise.’ Thus, heathen philosophy should not be considered heretical, but rather be taken as a guide to natural morality; as Holberg contends, natural religion provides a much firmer base for morality than does theology. Yet, more than resting on a Pufendorfian

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discourse on natural law, Holberg’s treatment of natural religion also drew on Grotian irenicism, strongly present in the Arminian enlightenment. A central contention in Holberg’s moral philosophy, and his religious thinking more generally, natural religion features prominently in Nicholai Klimii, in the third part of the memoirs, and in Moralske Tanker. In the latter work, at what is to be considered one of the defining moments of Holberg’s enlightenment, Holberg advocates natural religion, as opposed to the prevailing religious practices in early eighteenth-century Denmark. As he writes:

If one learns theology before one learns to become a human being, one never will become a human being [...] One must impress upon human beings sound ethics and show them what they ought to believe before asking them to believe, and instruct them in a kind of *ars critica*, lest they confuse the shadow with the object [...] If one begins in the right way, and demonstrates in general what a reasonable soul should believe and what is should reject; what is in accord with natural law and what is in conflict with it, and only then puts forward the revealed teachings, that are thus shown to be in conformity with natural law, with which certain mysteries are not in conflict either, one can expect that the conversion will be permanent; for no doctrine can become an article of faith unless it is basic and reasonable.  

As Johan Adolph Scheibe writes in his biography on Holberg, this call for a reasonable faith based on ‘Moral Philosophy and natural Theology’ caused as many polemics upon its publication as did Nicholai Klimii. The religious context against which Holberg wrote was soaked in a discourse of original sin, piety, and heartfelt belief. Despite his anti-dogmatism, Holberg insists on natural religion as a reasonable way of assimilating one’s duty towards God and the moral teachings of Christ. In one of the central essays published in the first volume of the Epistler, Holberg answers criticisms of the *Moralske Tanker*. Largely reiterating his previous position, he outlines a suggestion for what he calls a moral catechism drawn from the precepts of natural religion. The contention that one must begin with moral philosophy before venturing into theology, he argues, should not be seen as an affront to religion, since a moral philosophy based on natural religion is consistent with ‘the Morals of Christ’. Rather, what he intended to confute was the kind of practices that begin by teaching the ‘Mysteries of Religion’. What Holberg intended was, in other words, to offer ‘an Idea about Men’s common Duty towards GOD and their fellow Human Beings, to teach them those Rules, whereby the Truth can be known, and to show them what they are to believe, before they are commanded to believe.’

Holberg intended his moral catechism, which comprised six articles, to provide a minimal conception of the duties that human beings owe to God, themselves, and others: 1) to believe in the existence of God; 2) the duty to honour and worship God; 3) to believe in the afterlife, in punishments and rewards; 4) to believe nothing without reasonable enquiry and nothing that is contrary to the senses; 5) to believe nothing which offends the holy attributes of God, his divine goodness, and justice, whereby God becomes the author of sin; and, finally, 6) never to hate and persecute others for their sincere, but erroneous beliefs.1261 ‘Therein consists my whole System’, writes Holberg, ‘which is so short that it can be written on a single Sheet, and so clear that all Youth can understand it.’1262

To Holberg, accepting natural religion as he unfolded it in his moral catechism was inextricably linked with broader issues such as religious persecution and toleration. Religious persecution, he asserts, is ‘contrary to both the Law of God and Nature’.1263 Accompanying his call for a moral catechism based on natural religion, Holberg’s rests on a notion of the fundamental articles of faith. Agreement on the fundamental articles of faith, as Holberg sees it, would not only put an end to all religious controversies, detrimental to both people and nations, but would also incur toleration of Christian sects and even other religions. ‘There is no Doubt’, writes Holberg, ‘that, if such a Catechisation had been accepted everywhere, then many Religious Sects and Controversies about the Fundamental Articles of Faith, which tears apart the Bounds of Unity between States and People that Nature recommends, could never have erupted.’1264 In the account of toleration in epistola LXXVIII, a centrepiece in his theory of toleration, Holberg further explores the interrelation between toleration and agreement on the fundamental articles of faith:

As far as I have been able to see, many Remains are still left from the old Sourdough; Wherefore I take it that those Sermons on Christian Toleration and Meekness cannot be repeated too often. GOD will that it become a Principal Article of Faith amongst us, that those in particular must be considered Heretics, with whom one finds no Conformity with other Children of God in regard to Mores and Christian Virtues, and that one would pass milder judgement on certain brave Men, who have sought to encourage Christians to live in Peace and Concord, and shown how dangerous it is to separate one another on the basis of certain insignificant dissenting and sometimes meaningless Opinions. A Melanchthon, A Grotius, and a Le Clerc have therefore been smeared with the appalling Name of Syncretists, and a Duraeus, who with such holy Intent travelled from Country to Country, won nothing thereby, than hatred and scorn.1265

1261 Holberg, Epistler: I.200-02.
1262 Holberg, Epistler: I.196: ‘Der i bestaaer mit heele Systema, hvilket er saa kort, at det kand forfattes paa et Blad, og saa tydeligt, at et hvert Barn det kand begribe’.
1263 Holberg, Epistler: I.199: ‘baade GUds og Naturens Lov.’
1264 Holberg, Epistler: I.199: ‘Der er ingen Tvivl paa, at, hvis saadan Catechisation over alt havde været antagen, saa mange Religions-Secter og Stridigheder over Troens Fundamentale Artikle aldrig kunde have reyset sig, hvilke snderbrude de Foreenings Baand imellem Steder og Folk, som Naturen recommenderer’.
1265 Holberg, Epistler: I.295: ‘Saavidt jeg haver kunnet mærke, ere endnu hos os Levninger tilbage af den gamle Surdey; Hvorudover jeg holder for, at de Frædikener om Christelig Tolerance og Sagtmadighed ikke kand for ofte igentages. GUD give, at det vilde blive en Hovet-Troes-Artikel hos os, at de fornemmeligen maatte blive anseet for Kiettere, hos hvilke var ingen Conformitet med andre GUds Born udi Sæder og Christelige Dyder, og at man vilde
The key concept here is syncretism. In the context in which Holberg wrote, it was common to use the concept of syncretism negatively to denote those who mix or seek to bridge different confessions. Whilst this usage of the concept informed Holberg’s *Almindelig Kirke-Historie*, he also uses it to denote the position of such writers as Grotius and Le Clerc, but in a more polemical vein. Once theologians have realised that the best way of defending the Christian religion is through toleration and agreement on the fundamental articles of faith, Holberg writes in the *Epistler*, thus redescribing the meaning of the concept, ‘syncretists like Grotius, Le Clerc, and others will be looked upon as the pillars of religion.’ Moreover, reading these passages in the *Epistler*, which further serve to suggest the genealogy of thought in which Holberg intended his call for toleration to be understood, it is worth noticing that he had already defended ‘Syncretism’ in Nicholai Klimii at the beginning of the 1740s. Holberg’s assertion in Nicholai Klimii and elsewhere that Christians must agree on the fundamental articles of faith is essentially a Grotian contention. What Holberg has in mind is a Grotian irenicism. Exploring the place of this contention in Holberg’s theory of toleration, as well as his religious thinking more broadly, is to situate him in the context of the Arminian enlightenment.

In the *De Veritate Religionis Christianae* (The Truth of the Christian Religion), which Hugo Grotius published in 1627, and in *Meletius*, which remained unpublished in his own lifetime, Grotius explores the points of agreement between Christians, thereby suggesting a minimum conception of religion. Within the religious enlightenments with which Holberg was engaged, fundamental articles of faith played a crucial role. Whilst the orthodox Calvinists perceived fundamental articles to be vast in number and linked together in a sequence of truths, Le Clerc and the Arminians listed only a few articles of faith. John Locke, in turn, remained even more
sceptical about the fundamental articles of faith. Even if an agreement on such articles could be reached, Locke asserts, disagreement would erupt over who should have the right to interpret them. What should be required, therefore, was a belief in Christ as the Messiah.1273 The use of the concept of fundamental articles in the writings of Le Clerc has a certain openness to it, intended to make possible, as Martin Klauber has suggested, ‘a pan-Protestant union’.1274 De Veritate Religionis Christianae is of particular importance to Le Clerc’s view on the fundamental articles.1275 During his lifetime, from 1709 onwards, Le Clerc edited and published Grotius’ text in several versions, to which he added notes and comments.1276

In what regards the fundamental articles of faith, it is clear that Holberg still preserves a certain openness intended to give space for intellectual or reasonable enquiry. ‘I have thoroughly investigated all Main Articles,’ Holberg writes in the Moralske Tanker, ‘and after enduring Meditation formed my System, though in such a way that I still take into consideration the Explanations of reasonable People and correct what I find in need of Correction.’1277 Holberg does not, however, define what actually counts as fundamental articles, though he does assure his readers that ‘in the fundamental articles of religion I do not recede a nail’s breadth from the doctrines of the true church.’1278 Elsewhere he writes, ‘I willingly subscribe to all the fundamental Articles of Faith that comprises our Confession, though I would rather limit, than seek, as some, to increase their Number.’1279 Furthermore, ‘I believe in the perfect goodness and mercy of God, and I believe that he is the friend of mankind.’1280 These contentions, which featured strongly in his moral catechism, were conceived with such simplicity that all would be able to agree on them. It was with this form of Grotian irenicism, central, as it were, to the Arminian enlightenment, that Holberg aligned himself.

Yet natural religion, as Holberg sees it, is not sufficient in itself. As much as the light of nature does provide a solid and reasonable foundation for religion and for relation between human beings living in civil associations, revelation is necessary to civil society, for without revealed

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1274 Klauber, Between Protestant Orthodoxy and Rationalism: 614.
1275 Jean Le Clerc, A Book of Monsieur Le Clerc’s, Concerning the Choice of our Opinion amongst the different Sects of Christians, in Hugo Grotius, The Truth of the Christian Religion, In Six Books by Hugo Grotius. Corrected and Illustrated by Mr. Le Clerc. To which is added a Seventh Book Concerning this Question, What Christian Church we ought to join our selves to; By the said Mr. Le Clerc, John Clarke, trans., (London 1711): 299-302.
1276 Klauber, Between Protestant Orthodoxy and Rationalism: 618.
1277 Holberg, Moralske Tanker: 269: ‘Jeg haver med Fliid udforsket alle Hoved-Poster, og efter nøye Meditation formeret mit Systema, dog saaledes, at jeg endnu hører fornuftige Folks Forklaringer, og corrigerer, hvad som jeg finder behove Correction’.
1278 Holberg, Memoirs of Lewis Holberg: 204.
1279 Holberg, Moralske Tanker: 273: ‘Jeg underskriver villigen alle fundamentale Troens Artikle, som findes udi vor Confession, skønt jeg heller indskranker, end med nogle forøger deres Tal.’
1280 Holberg, Memoirs of Lewis Holberg: 203.
religion, there are no means of deterring humans from acting in ways solely governed by their passions – even when considering, as Holberg did, the fear and promise of an afterlife one of the articles of natural religion. In the discussion of natural religion in chapter VI, ‘Of the Religion of the Potuan Nation’, of *Nicholai Klimii*, Holberg describes the religious ideas and practices of his ideal state, which was comprised of such notions as freedom of conscience, their rejection of the use of force in matters of religion, and the ban on public disputations of the essence and attributes of the deity. As Holberg’s main character, Klimius, notes:

> These are some of the principal Doctrines of the Potuan Divinity, which to some must appear like mere natural Religion; and so indeed it did at first to me. But they assert that all was divinely reveal’d to them, and that some Ages ago they receiv’d a Book, which contain’d their System of Faith and Practice. Formerly, say they, our Ancestors liv’d contented with the Religion of Nature only; but Experience taught them, that the sole Light of Nature was insufficient, since all those noble Principles thro’ the Sloth and Carelesness of some were forgot, and thro’ an airy Philosophy of others, (nothing being able to check their licentious Career) were utterly deprav’d and corrupted. Hereupon God gave them a written Law. Hence it appears how great is their Error, who obstinately deny the Necessity of a Revelation.

Thus, revealed religion is necessary to civil society, but it can never take precedence over the fundamental articles of faith comprised in his natural religion. Offering a minimalist conception of the articles of natural religion, Holberg’s *Systema* is the foundation upon which the Christian believer can become acquainted with theological doctrines and the mysteries of the faith.

Holberg’s conception of natural religion also informs other provinces of his religious thinking. In *Nicholai Klimii*, Holberg describes a ‘Land of Atheists’, governed solely by human laws. ‘The laws of the country were good, but no ‘Safety’ could prevail, since the inhabitants had no sense of ‘religious Obligation’.

Holberg intended his discussion of the necessity of revelation to civil society in *Nicholai Klimii* as an intervention in the debate on atheism raised by Bayle’s claim that a society of atheists could persist. In an essay on Bayle which appeared in volume four of the *Epistler*, Holberg confirms this interpretation of his intentions. ‘In my *Journey to the World Underground,*’ he writes, before entering into a discussion of Bayle’s claims, ‘I have depicted a republic consisting of atheists and, in describing it, shown how necessary religion is for the vigor and preservation of society.’ In *De Officio*, Pufendorf had likewise pointed out that religion was necessary for civil society to persist. Similar thoughts were also expressed in the Arminian enlightenment. As Le Clerc argues:

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1285 Holberg, *Selected Essays of Ludvig Holberg*: 112.
Religion is so necessary for the Support of human Society, that it is impossible it should subsist, as Pagans no less than Christians confess, if an invisible Power, that over-rules human Affairs, be not admitted. The Fear and Reverence that People have for such a Being, proves more effectual to make Men discharge the Dutys, whereon their Happiness on Earth depends, than all the Punishments which Magistrates can threaten. Atheists themselves can’t deny this, and ’tis for this reason, that they suppose Religion a politick Contrivance, to keep Society more easily in order.1287

Le Clerc’s contention had twin targets. For more than disciplining the atheists, who cannot deny the necessity of religion, his comments are also addressed to Pierre Bayle. ‘Behold here Sentiments most true’, Le Clerc goes on to argue, ‘but very different from Mr. Bayle’s, who in his Reflections on Comets, and in the Continuation, has asserted, That Religion is not necessary to Society, and that a Commonwealth of Atheists might as well subsist, as the very best among the ancient Pagans.’1288

In his Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet, in which he intended to combat superstition with philosophy, Bayle had argued that not only would a society of atheists be possible, it was preferable to superstition and blind reliance on tradition.1289

Equally critical of superstition, Holberg was more ambiguous when it came to Bayle’s views on atheism.1290 In the discussion of toleration in Moralske Tanker, Holberg offers a reflection on ‘ungodly People and Atheists’.1291 Surprisingly, in Holberg’s account, not all atheists are to be considered a danger to state and religion. This claim, which went against the prevailing orthodoxies, is centred on a distinction between two different forms of atheism.1292 The first group is comprised of the ‘theoretical’ atheists, who, due to ‘Speculations and Heathen Philosophy’, have come to doubt ‘Revelation’ and ‘the Existence of GOD’.1293 Largely, he argues, the theoretical atheists ought to be tolerated, at least for a short period, as ‘Sermons and Persuasions’ together with ‘thorough Learning and Exhortation’ may dissuade them from their erroneous doctrines.1294 However, although Holberg is thus willing to tolerate this form of atheism, albeit in moderate amounts, this toleration ought not to become a ‘lasting Tolerance’.1295 The second group comprises of the ‘practicing or practical’ atheists, ‘who lead a reckless and ungodly Way of Life, and therefore see it as an Advantage that there is no GOD and no Punishment or Reward to

1287 Le Clerc, Mr. Le Clerc’s Extract and Judgement: 10.
1288 Le Clerc, Mr. Le Clerc’s Extract and Judgement: 11.
1289 On Bayle’s work see Israel, Radical Enlightenment: 333–35.
1290 For his critique of superstition see Holberg, Epistler: II.5–10, 139; III.91.
1291 Holberg, Moralske Tanker: 71: ‘ugudelige Folk og Atheister’.
1292 This largely goes against the account offered in Jonathan Israel, Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670–1752 (Oxford 2006): Ch 7.
1295 Holberg, Moralske Tanker: 71: ‘bestandig Tolerance’.
expect.'1296 Whilst theoretical atheists could be tolerated for the purpose of leading them back to the right track, practical atheists were considered dangerous to the state. ‘For I cannot condone Mr. Bayle,’ Holberg asserts, ‘who argues that a Republic of Atheists can persist. For an Atheus, who has no other God than his own Utility and Magnificence, does not refrain from committing the greatest Misdeeds, when only they can remain hidden.’1297 Thus, this kind of atheism is an affront to both natural and revealed religion.

In the third volume of the Epistler, Holberg reconsiders the challenge of Bayle’s atheist state, pointing out that Bayle’s treatment of the matter contradicts his own teachings that human action is guided by the ‘Affects and Passions’ rather than by principles or conceptions of virtue and vice.1298 Moreover, Holberg argues in another essay intended to refute Bayle’s reliance on the example of the Epicurean societies, ‘history provides many examples, and common sense teaches us, that few persons eschew sins which they consider to be unpunishable or to lie beyond the jurisdiction of secular authority. Furthermore experience shows that to practice virtue and to eschew vices solely because they are vices is but a façon de parler. Such prattle is as ill-founded as that of the Stoics who say that a man can disassociate himself from all emotions – that is to say, cease being man.’1299 Thus, to Holberg, the notion of rewards and punishment in the afterlife is as crucial to civil societies as it is to religion, for without this ‘Principal Article’, no religion, and thus no civil society, can exist.1300

Freedom of the Will and the Goodness of God

In the early enlightenment, the Manichean controversy sparked fierce debate about the origin of evil and the goodness of God.1301 At the heart of the controversy was Bayle’s reiteration of the Manichean interpretation of the origin of evil, where he raised the question of how a good and merciful God could allow evil to prevail in the world and how, if allowed, God would become the origin of evil. The Manicheans were dualists; next to the principle of good, they saw evil as an

1297 Holberg, Moralske Tanker: 71-72: ‘Thi jeg kand ikke bifalde Mr. Bayle, der holder for, at en Republiqve af Atheister kand bestaae. Thi en Atheus, om ingen anden Gud haver end sin egen Nytte og Høyhed, undseer sig ikke at bedrive de største Misgierninger, naar de ikkun kand blive skulte’.
1299 Holberg, Selected Essays of Ludvig Holberg: 113-14.
1300 Holberg, Epistler, V.214: ‘Hoved-Artikel’.
independent and eternal substance. To the Christian church, who recognised only one eternal and supreme being, this interpretation was problematical; as St Augustine had argued, evil flowed not from an independent and eternal substance, but rather from freedom of the will. Amongst Bayle’s staunchest critics were such prominent figures as Le Clerc and Leibniz, who devoted his 1710 *Theodicy* to this issue; echoes of the controversy were still heard as late as the 1770s.

Although Bayle proposed his ‘paradoxes’ with ‘judgement’, Holberg writes in 1743, his ideas ‘have given just offence to Christians.’

Holberg discussed the problem of the origin of evil chiefly in his major works on moral philosophy, published roughly from the 1740s onwards, where he reviewed various positions and sought to formulate what he took to be a middle position. As F. J. Billeskov Jansen has argued, Holberg’s response to the Manichean controversy goes through several stages.

Beginning in 1737 in his Latin epigrams, Holberg, as did the Stoics, emphasises the existence of both good and evil as well as the prevailing harmony between them. The second stage of Holberg’s engagement with the problem of evil is dated to the early 1740s. In the third part of his memoirs and *Moralske Tanker*, Holberg abandons his initial interpretation, adopting instead Leibniz’s position in the *Theodicy* that this world is the best of all possible worlds, a position also praised by others in the Danish debate. Amongst the multitude of beings created by God, some creatures are surely created more perfect than others; however, all creatures, i.e. as specific kinds of creatures, are perfect in themselves. ‘I am surprised’, Holberg argues in the memoirs, alluding to the position of Leibniz, ‘that Bayle’s hypothesis of the two principles should have produced such a commotion. For nothing is proved from the unequal condition of created beings, unless you mean to say that flies, because they are meaner animals than lions, and lead, because it is less valuable than gold, are derived from the evil principle.’ Holberg’s discussion of the origin of evil entered a third stage in the two volumes of the *Epistler* that appeared in 1748, where he substitutes Le Clerc for Leibniz; however, in 1750, when he published the two subsequent volumes

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1302 Holberg first addressed the Manichean position in his *Almindelig Kirke-Historie* in 1738, although he does not pass any judgement. See Holberg, *Kirke-Historie*: 166.
of the *Epistler*, he abandoned the position of Le Clerc, declaring the problem of the origin of evil an unsolvable mystery, ‘impenetrable by human reason’.\textsuperscript{1310} Holberg’s final treatment of the problem of evil was, in Billeskov Jansen’s account, a retreat to revelation.

Despite certain changes in Holberg’s treatment of the subject, however, Billeskov Jansen’s account is severely problematic. Firstly, the different stages that Holberg’s engagement went through are not as easily separated as Billeskov Jansen would have it. Already in the third part of the memoirs, Holberg aligns himself with the position of Le Clerc, ‘to which nothing can be added.’\textsuperscript{1311} Reflecting on the controversy between Bayle and Le Clerc, Holberg writes:

> It is well known with what acrimony, and even fury, this controversy was carried on. It was astonishing that men who had hitherto been distinguished for their moderation, should have been so regardless of their own character, and so unmindful of the precepts they inculcated, as to attack each other with such unmeasured invectives. They were like Pompey and Cesar, of whom the one could bear no equal, and the other could acknowledge no superior. Le Clerc and Bayle were the last great champions of the declining republic of letters. The former was the more learned, the latter the more ingenious disputant.\textsuperscript{1312}

Moreover, the genealogies of thought which Holberg encountered on this issue were thus much larger than Billeskov Jansen’s account suggests. In his *Moralske Tanker*, for instance, Holberg also attempts to reject Bayle and the Manichean argument with reference to William Wollaston (1660-1724), or ‘Wholston’ in Holberg’s spelling, a British moral philosopher who authored a tract on the *Religion of Nature Delineated* first published in 1724.\textsuperscript{1315} And, as Leif Nedergaard-Hansen has shown, Holberg relied at key points in his argumentation on the Archbishop John Tillotson (1630-1694).\textsuperscript{1319} Although this does not exclude his engagement in the memoirs and *Moralske Tanker* from the thought of Leibniz, the place of Le Clerc in Holberg’s encounter with Bayle and the Manichean controversy in the early 1740s is in need of a reappraisal. Secondly, Holberg’s encounter with the Manichean controversy, I shall argue, entered through three, rather than four, stages. The first stage I limit to the stress on the harmony between good and evil in the Latin epigrams. The second stage I shall date to the period between the publication of the third part of the memoirs in 1743 and the publication in 1750 of the third and fourth volumes of the *Epistler*. In this period, Holberg leaves behind the notion of harmony and explores, instead, the

\textsuperscript{1310} Holberg, *Selected Essays of Ludvig Holberg*: 102.
\textsuperscript{1311} Holberg, *Memoirs of Lewis Holberg*: 194.
positions of Leibniz, Le Clerc, Wollaston, and others; although he eventually abandons the Leibnizian discourse, his engagement in the Manichean controversy constitutes a coherent whole. Thus, I see no decisive break between the memoirs and Moralske Tanker on the one hand and the first two volumes of the Epistler in 1748 on the other. The differences that do occur in this period, I take it, are chiefly marked by differences of emphasis. The third and final stage occurs when he, around 1750, begins to emphasise the limits of human reason.\footnote{Koch, Dansk oplysningsfilosofi 1700-1800: 217.}

When Holberg revised his stance in relation to the Manichean controversy in the 1750s, he did not abandon the position of Le Clerc as such, but rather his reliance on the early Christian theologian Origen (c. 185-254). Origen, whose teachings had been declared heretical by the early Christian Church, had taught that the merciful God would eventually forgive those who had been condemned to Hell.\footnote{Holberg, Kirke-Historie: 141, 293.} In his encounter with ‘Manicheism, or the Doctrine of the Two Principles’ in chapter VI of the Parrhasiana, first published in Amsterdam in 1699, Le Clerc refutes Bayle and the Manichean argument by paraphrasing Origen, arguing that the Manichean position ‘is altogether inconsistent with the Christian Religion, one Essential Article whereof is to acknowledge but one God Creator of all Men.’\footnote{Jean Le Clerc, Parrhasiana: Or, Thoughts upon Several Subjects; As, Criticism History, Morality, and Politics (London 1700): 217-225, quoted at 224-25.} In Holberg’s reading, Le Clerc had been forced to ‘renew the Teachings of Origen on the Punishment of the Condemned, in order to show that evil Things, natural as well as moral, are consistent with the ideal Goodness of GOD.’\footnote{Holberg, Epistler: IV.50: ‘at fornye Origenis Lærdom om de Fordomtes Straf, for at vise, at de ode Ting, saavel naturlige som moraiske kand \textit{consistere med GUDS ideale Godhed.’}

Although Holberg recognises that Le Clerc invoked the position of Origen in order to answer Bayle’s objection that eternal punishment is inconsistent with the idea of a merciful and benevolent God, and that, therefore, God is arbitrary and evil, he remains disenchanted with this position. Firstly, this position is frighteningly close to that of the Socinians, who reduce God’s punishment to such an extent as to make it into ‘empty Threats without Execution’, thus granting to all ‘evil People’ a carte blanche.\footnote{Holberg, Epistler: IV.60: ‘pure Trusler uden Execution’, ‘onde Mennesker’.} Needless to say, the moral consequences of this position were profoundly unacceptable. Secondly, the position of Origen does not provide a full answer to Bayle and the Manicheans, as it fails to account for divine providence in relation to sin and the persistent cruelty that springs from freedom of the will.\footnote{See generally Holberg, Epistler: IV.57-63.}

Rather than taking recourse in ‘Origenism’, Holberg writes in 1748, Le Clerc would have been better off if he had argued that ‘the freedom of the Will’ does not contradict ‘the Providence
of God'. God, as Holberg sees it, is not the author of evil, and divine providence does not entail that God prevents human beings from acting, be it for good or evil. At creation, God granted to all human beings freedom of the will not to watch them fail, but to test them. 'It may be said', writes Holberg in epistola I, which dealt with Bayle's refutations of the goodness of God, 'that God found it necessary at the creation to give free will to all creatures, spirits as well as human beings, so that they could choose evil as well as good and therewith have an opportunity to practice virtue and good works.' As I hope to have shown by this short exposition, the alternative between Leibniz and Le Clerc, at least in what regards Holberg's early treatment of the problem of the origin of evil, is a false alternative. What Holberg was doing in the memoirs and Moralske Tanker should rather be seen as an exploration of different positions in relation to various aspects of the Manichean controversy. Rather than changing his opinion on the matter at hand, he was exploring different ways of answering it, some of which he eventually abandoned. Seen in this light, Holberg's engagement with Le Clerc reveals a considerable degree of continuity.

Holberg's treatment of the problem of evil in the 1740s and 1750s revolved around two central contentions: freedom of the will and the goodness of God. The significance of freedom of the will and the goodness of God should not be underestimated. In the Epistler, Holberg time and again defends freedom of the will, taking it as one of his most cherished principles; he also refuses to ever accept anything that undermines the goodness of God. This line of argumentation, however, dates back to his first encounters with the problem of the origin of evil. In the third part of the memoirs, in a passage drawing on both Leibniz and Le Clerc, Holberg already conceptualises what is to become the central contention in his religious thinking from the 1740s onwards:

Every animal is perfect in its kind. I admit too that men might have been created more perfect than they are; I admit too that they might have been created impeccable; lastly I admit that God could of his grace effect that they should not transgress his laws. But if men were made impeccable, they would be either angels or machines; and if God by his constant intervention were to prevent them from transgressing his laws, he would cease to be a legislator; he would cease to be a judge; for to make a law, and at the same time by his absolute omnipresence to prevent man from transgressing it, implies a contradiction. As to the punishment of the wicked, it will be sufficient to answer simply with Le Clerc, that God would do nothing which is inconsistent with his justice and divine goodness.

1324 Holberg, Memoirs of Lewis Holberg: 196.
Freedom of the will, Holberg writes in *Moralske Tanker*, 'causes no Necessity of Sin' and therefore does not contradict 'the Goodness of GOd in creating Humans with a free Will'. This line of argumentation was to inform also his later writings on Manichean controversy, though he came to abandon the Leibnizian emphasis on *de mundo optimo*, or the world as the best of all possible worlds. In the *Epister*, Holberg draws a distinction between the original creation of spirits and humans, and the state of the world proceeding the fall from grace. Upon their creation, he argues, both humans and spirits were originally given freedom of the will and were thus placed in the same state. Yet, the fall of the spirits and that of human beings had different effects and were punished differently by God. After the fall, the good angels 'remain the same in Number, as they were at the Beginning' and, as they could mirror themselves in the 'evil Spirit’s Fall and subsequent Punishment, they retained a complete Concept of GOD, not only as a Creator, but also as a wise and just Ruler. However, since human beings reproduce themselves and thus increase in number, the descendants of Adam would all too soon have forgotten about the fall from grace and God’s mercy had they been separated from the gift of free will. Thus, in order for human beings not to lose ‘the Idea and Knowledge, which the first Parents had of GOD’, and in order for them not to become like ‘a Form of Machines’, it was necessary for God to preserve their freedom of the will.

Considering the central place ascribed to the role of freedom of the will and the goodness of God in Holberg’s religious thinking, what emerges from his writings on the Manichean controversy is first and foremost an engagement with the Arminian enlightenment. Well aware of the intellectual connections between Arminianism and his own religious thinking in this period, Holberg places the teachings of Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) in a positive light, praising the founder of Arminianism for his defence of freedom of the will and the goodness of God. To Arminius and his followers, the Grace of God is considered a gift and, departing from orthodox Calvinism, the Arminians argued that the gift of Grace, though offered to all, was not irresistible. Human beings to whom God had given freedom of the will could, in other words, decline the

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1326 Still, Holberg does on occasion take up Leibniz in *Epister*, but his discourse on the origin of evil never again settles on *de mundo optimo*. Cf. Holberg, *Selected Essays of Ludvig Holberg*: 100-02.
1328 Holberg, *Epister*: IV.45: ‘ere de samme udi lige Tall, som de vare i Begyndelsen’ … ‘onde Aanders Fald og paafulde Straf, saa at de have fundkommen Begreb om GUD, ikke alleene som en Skaber, men ogsaa som en viis og retfærdig Regent.’
offer. Moreover, Holberg argues, in an essay which appeared in the first volume of the *Epistler*, the Calvinist doctrine of predestination is an affront to God, as it undermines divine mercy and takes away man’s only means of accepting the divine gift of grace, namely free will. To Holberg, as to the Arminians, predestination was unacceptable. Holberg’s position thus echoes the position of the Arminians; throughout his engagement with the various religious enlightenments, he enlisted in order to refute Bayle’s objections to the goodness of God – that is, not only Le Clerc and the Arminians, but also Leibniz, Wollaston, and others. This was the position he would keep defending.

One question, however, remains to be answered, namely why Holberg around 1750 began to argue that it is beyond the faculty of reason to settle the question of the origin of evil. In his earlier treatments of the problem of the origin of evil, he had warned against the fideist position. In the memoirs, for instance, he argues ‘that it seems to be absurd to deny the goodness of God on account of the innate frailties and vices of man’; in the two first volumes of the *Epistler*, published in 1748, he repeats a similar assertion. Moreover, throughout his published works Holberg had been a staunch critic not only of metaphysics, which, as we have seen, had two meanings in his works, but he was equally critical of Scepticism or Pyrrhonism, which should not be confused with his emphasis on the limits of human reason. Holberg does not see himself as a participant in a metaphysical debate, but rather as a spectator who puts under scrutiny the contested positions. Holberg’s interventions in the Manichean controversy should thus be understood as a series of reviews on the prevailing positions. ‘I am not one for making decisions in philosophical disputes’, he writes in the *Epistler*, ‘and the less so where one cannot take sides without laying oneself open to dangerous criticism’. Declaring the issue an irresolvable mystery is not the argument of a metaphysician, but a spectator. Holberg’s position at this stage should not be seen as an embrace of scepticism or metaphysics. What was at stake, as Holberg saw it, was the status of religion on a broader scale. Through thorough examination of various positions in the Manichean controversy, Holberg had reached the conclusion that to take sides in the debate meant to sacrifice religion. Holberg had used similar arguments in other controversies,

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1335 Holberg, *Epistler*: I.89.
1336 Holberg, *Selected Essays of Ludvig Holberg*: 100.
such as the debate on the immateriality of the soul – a debate that is beyond the scope of the present study to analyse.\textsuperscript{1337}

Holberg’s reliance on revelation was thus a way of ensuring that the two religious principles which he had sought to defend all along, that is, freedom of the will and the goodness of God, would remain unchallenged, for the consequences of abandoning this position would be devastating to religion as well as civil society. Had humans not been given freedom of the will, God would be reduced to an arbitrary judge and nothing would prevent evil people from doing harm to other human beings. This, he argues, contradicts the notion of a benevolent and merciful God. As Holberg sees it, humans must have free will, not only in what regards salvation, but also in order for human societies to persist. To Holberg, it was paramount that human beings be judged according to their ‘actions and deeds’.\textsuperscript{1338} Yet, more than through his encounter with Bayle’s arguments on atheism and his reinvention of the Manichean position on the origin of evil, Holberg’s religious thinking also responded to ‘the Enemies of Religion’ and to certain ‘Free-Thinkers’.\textsuperscript{1339} Holberg’s religion was challenged, as we shall now see, by the English deists.

**Reason and Revelation**

Holberg’s religious thinking in the 1740s and 1750s can also be read as an encounter with deism, which not only came in different forms, but also shared common ground with arguments for natural religion.\textsuperscript{1340} Consequently, in Holberg’s vocabulary, labels such as deists, naturalists, atheists, and freethinkers were used interchangeably. At the time when Holberg was writing the *Epistler*, the English deists in particular seem to have preoccupied his thoughts; although he also devoted a few epistles to French and German tenets,\textsuperscript{1341} when Holberg wrote on the deists, he often had in mind a small circle of English writers comprising of figures such as John Toland (1670-1722), Matthew Tindal (1657-1733), Anthony Collins (1676-1729), Thomas Morgan (d. 1743), Thomas Chub (1679-1747), and Thomas Woolston (1670-1733), whose name Holberg often misspells as ‘Woolaston’.\textsuperscript{1342} Holberg’s private library, which is only known partially, contained works by all those writers with the exception of Toland.\textsuperscript{1343} Whilst Tindal, in the *Christianity as Old as Creation*, which appeared in 1730, questioned the necessity of revealed

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\textsuperscript{1338} Holberg, *Moralske Tanker*: 287: ‘Opførsel og Gierninger’.


\textsuperscript{1342} On the English Deists see Porter, *Enlightenment*: Ch. 5.

\textsuperscript{1343} *Fortegnelse over en del af Ludvig Holbergs Bibliotek*, ed., Chr. Bruun (Copenhagen 1869): 7-8, 10.
religion on the grounds that natural religion was already known to mankind through the light of reason, Woolston questioned the validity of miracles, even those performed by Christ, and Collins advocated the right to individual scrutiny against all traditional authorities. Perhaps the most notorious of the English deists was John Toland. In *Christianity not Mysterious*, first published in 1696, Toland sets out to show ‘that Reason is the only Foundation of all certitude.’ Intending thus to convince his Christian readers that ‘the Use of Reason is not so dangerous in Religion as it is commonly represented’, Toland refutes both those who understand reason in opposition to revelation and those who believe the mysteries of religion to be above what reason can comprehend.

Presumably, Holberg first encountered deism in the 1720s when he experienced his crisis of faith, but he only returned to the issue again in the 1740s. In the third part of the memoirs, Holberg writes:

As I consider it the duty of man to examine everything connected with the ground of his religious belief, I have read heretical as well as orthodox books. I perused everything which England has of late vomited forth against religion. But whatever scruples Toland, Collins, Tindal, Woolaston [i.e. Woolston], and the author of the Moral Philosopher [i.e. Thomas Morgan], raised in my mind, have been happily settled by others who have come forward as strenuous defenders of the Christian religion; for all the pious as well as all the irreligious productions of the day are regularly imported from England to this country. If Hobbes and Spinoza be compared with Woolaston, they will appear to be decent and temperate writers; such is the imprudent audacity with which Woolaston raves against religion.

In this passage, which was part of the larger discussion of tolerance and religious freedom that was omitted from the Danish translation of the memoirs in 1745, Holberg depicts deism as an attack on the Christian religion. When Holberg returned to the issue of deism in the *Epistler*, his emphasis was much the same as it had been in the memoirs. ‘The Deists in Great Britain’ writes Holberg in the first volume of the *Epistler*, ‘continue to attack revelation and their boldness increases. It seems that the aversion which Englishmen have toward absolute power in civil government also extends to God’s domain.’ What Holberg found particularly detrimental about the deist attack on revelation was that it came from within the ranks of Christianity, from

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1345 John Toland, *Christianity not Mysterious: or, a Treatise Shewing, That there is nothing in the GOSPEL Contrary to REASON, Nor ABOVE it. And that no Christian Doctrine can be properly call’d A MYSTERY* (London 1696): 6.
1346 Toland, *Christianity not Mysterious*: vii-viii.
1347 Toland, *Christianity not Mysterious*: 5.
1348 Although there was only little debate about deism in Denmark in the 1720s, the deists were considered problematic in learned circles. A few reviews appeared in *Nye Tidender om Lærde og Curieuse Sager* (1724-1748): No. 24 (1726), No. 31 (1728).
'Men who proclaim to know the Scriptures, and to have studied the Christian Doctrines in all its Detail.'\textsuperscript{1352} On this point, Holberg largely followed the common perception of deism in early eighteenth-century Denmark. However, in the \textit{Epistler} as well as in the memoirs, Holberg goes further than this. Not only does Holberg insist that the deists should not be perceived as enemies of religion coming from outside Christianity, but rather as religious thinkers with whom one should enter into dialogue, he also insists that that examination of religious belief, which is a Christian duty, necessarily entails the reading of heretical works. Entering thus into a civil conversation about religion, which, as we have seen, was central to Holberg’s religious thinking in general, the reading of heretical books opens the possibility of embracing what to some would count as heretical opinions. What was at stake in Holberg’s encounter with the English deists was, in other words, the larger issue of religious conformity and true belief. Holberg’s call for toleration and intellectual enquiry was at odds with the religious settings in which he lived and wrote, that is, with orthodox Lutheranism and that form of intolerant Pietism that dominated the Danish religious life in the 1730s and early 1740s. Thus, to fully understand Holberg’s encounter with deism, we need to situate it in the context of those lines of contestation that dominated the reception of deism in the Danish-Norwegian monarchy, and thus the context in which Holberg wrote and published the \textit{Epistler}.\textsuperscript{1353}

The reception of deism in the early Northern enlightenment was ambiguous. By the time when Holberg published the \textit{Epistler} in the late 1740s and 1750s, two major lines of contestation had taken shape, countering the deist challenge from two different perspectives: one religious and one philosophical. The first was primarily represented by theologians, and it was shaped along confessional lines. To Pietists and orthodox Lutherans alike, the use of reason in religious matters was perceived as an infringement upon the purity of faith. Religion is under siege by reason, ‘secular Wisdom’, and ‘Philosophical Sciences.’\textsuperscript{1353} A staunch defender of revealed religion, Erich Pontoppidan saw ‘the Deists of this Age and the Enemies of God’s Word’ as two sides of the same coin.\textsuperscript{1354} In \textit{Sandheds Kraft} (The Force of Truth), first published in 1758, Pontoppidan sets out to refute the way of life of the infidels, offering a compilation of historical examples, with which he intended to show how even the most notorious unbelievers had finally embraced revealed religion. Thus, Pontoppidan’s work was targeted against the ‘Atheists, Deists, Naturalists or similar Enemies

\textsuperscript{1352} Holberg, \textit{Epistler}: I.270: ‘Mænd, der give sig ud for at være skriftkloge, og at have udstuderet den Christelige Lærdom til Punct og Prikke.’  
\textsuperscript{1354} Erich Pontoppidan, \textit{Afhandling om Verdens Nyehed} (Copenhagen 1757): 275: ‘denne Tiids Deister og GUds Ords Fiender’.
and Blasphemers of God and his sacred Word.' In chapter XI of *Sandheds Kraft*, Pontoppidan lists as potential infidels who had repented either on their deathbed or towards the end of their life ‘both Toland and Collins.’ The truthfulness of their repentance remains, however, uncertain. ‘But what regards their Repentance,’ Pontoppidan writes, ‘it is better left to him, who rightfully judge the Living and the Dead.’ What better way of refuting the enemies of religion than to claim that the deists themselves had realised their mistakes and embraced true religion. Not all Pietists followed the example of Pontoppidan. As Johan Ernst Gunnerus argued in 1758, in order to pre-empt the ferocious subtleties of ‘the Naturalists, the Deists, the Doubters and the Enemies of Religion’, which could potentially lead astray a whole congregations, a true Christian preacher must possess ‘a greater Enlightenment, than that to which all Christians are obliged.’ Rather than depicting a state of war between reason and revelation, Gunnerus embraced philosophy and made it an integral part of theology. Gunnerus, in other words, belonged to that tradition of religious thought that mixed Pietism with the philosophical rationalism of Christian Wolff, a tradition that reached its height during the decades around the middle of the eighteenth century.

Between the 1740s and 1760s, several Danish writers took up the pen against the deists, but, in contrast to Pontoppidan’s pious point of departure, these writers all shared a common admiration for rationalist philosophy, one which marks the second major line of contestation in the Danish reception of deism. In 1754, Peder Rosenstand Goiske (1704-1769), a professor of theology at Copenhagen, published a work on freethinking in which he grouped together the ‘Deists’ and the ‘Naturalists’ to form the second out of three major group of erroneous freethinkers, the remaining two being atheists and idolaters. Aspiring to Wolffian philosophy, Goiske’s theology was not principally opposed to reason, but rather advocated the view that religion prevailed in the harmony between reason and revelation. Thus, the freethinkers, and the deists in particular, were mistaken not so much because they ascribed to reason a central role in religion, but because they tailored their understanding of reason to a form of natural religion,

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1360 On Goiske as a Wolffian see Koch, *Dansk ophøjningsfilosofi 1700-1800*: 31-34.
'which Man himself by the Use of natural Reason could discover, as if the Bible had never existed.'

In Goiske's account, as natural religion cannot provide sufficient ground for religious knowledge, reliance on revelation is unavoidable. 'Reason itself', Goiske claims, will tell the deists and the freethinkers exactly that.

Both reason and revelation are necessary to religion, a notion that was also supported by the French poet Louis Racine (1692-1763), whose La Religion, first published in 1742, appeared in the Danish translation between 1758 and 1763.

In a similar vein, the rationalist philosopher Frederich Christian Eilschow attacked the notion of reason entertained by the deists. 'Nothing is called for, by them, more often than Reason', writes Eilschow in his Philosophiske Breve over adskillige nyttige og vigtige Ting (Philosophical Letters on Several Useful and Important Matters), but reason is in a poor state if it is to be valued according to the rationality of the Deists, whose 'confused Notions, unfounded Judgements and false Conclusions' were advanced at 'the Expense of Reason and Philosophy'.

Others spoke about the 'unreasonable Objections' of the deists against the divine miracles of Christ.

In 1745, the publicist and moralist Jörgen Riis expressed similar views in a short pamphlet, authored in connection with the publication of the last issue of Den Danske Spectator. 'Reason seduces many to Atheism, Deism, Spinozism, etc.', Riis admits, alluding to the many fallacies that flow from these positions; however, 'in and of itself,' as he continues, 'Reason is never fallacious in its Truths and Judgements.'

Holberg's encounter with the English deists takes shape along two lines of argumentation, which can be seen as a rejection of both the confessional and the rationalist interpretations. As Holberg sees it, deism presents an intellectual challenge in need of response. 'I have read most new Deist Works without any Hardship', writes Holberg in 1748, 'But I have taken offence from several Replies.'

What Holberg had in mind was the rich flow of premature refutations published against the deists, often penned by 'young and half-learned People' with no sound understanding of the subject.

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1361 Goiske, Fortsættelse: 227: 'som Menniske ved sin naturlige Fornufts Brug selv kunde udfinde, om der aldrig var nogen Bibel til'.

1362 Goiske, Fortsættelse: 227: 'Fornuften selv'.


1364 Frederich Christian Eilschow, Philosophiske Breve over adskillige nyttige og vigtige Ting (Copenhagen 1748): 'Intet raabe de oftere paa end Fornuft' … 'forvirrede Forestillinger, ugrundede Domme og falske Slutninger' … 'paa Fornuftens og Philosophiens Regning'.

1365 Martin Knutzen, Philosophisk Beviis paa den Christelige Religions Sandhed (Copenhagen 1742): 143: 'ufornuftige Indfald'.

1366 "[Jørgen Riis], Kierligt og Velmeent Svar paa det Kierlige Brev til den Danske Sande-Mand (Copenhagen 1745): 8: 'Fornuften forfører mange til Atheisterie, Deisterie, Spinozisterie, o. s. v.' … 'Fornuften er i og for sig selv i sine Sandheder og Slutninger aldrig vildfarende'.

1367 Holberg, Epistler, I.9: 'jeg haver læset de fleeste nye Deistiske Skrifter uden nogen Anfegtning: Men jeg haver forarget mig over adskillige Besvaringer'.
knowledge of ecclesiastical history and religion more generally. Targeted equally against the English debate, where the Anabaptist clergyman James Foster (1697-1753) had ‘been successful in overcoming the principal difficulties involved’ whilst others had not, and the Danish positions, Holberg stresses the need for a reasonable refutation that neither underestimates the deist challenge nor overestimates it. ‘I take the one to be a reasonable Christian, who sees the Stones, but who strives to clear them from the Way.’ Not anyone, Holberg thus suggests, should be allowed to take up the pen against the deists and other critics of religion, as this would only have a bad impact on the bookmarket, which would be burdened by an endless flow of bad books.

‘Revelation’, Holberg argues, simultaneously rejecting both the rationalist and the Pietist positions in the Danish debate, ‘corresponds with sound Reason’. To simply brush aside the role of reason not only leads to a blind reliance on traditional authorities, but also legitimises intellectual mediocrity and stubbornness. By contrast, as Holberg envisions the clerical office, ‘learned Theologians’ should take pains ‘rather to diverge from the Letter and the commonly accepted Opinions, than to appeal to the Imperfection of Reason and the mysterious Ways of God.’ To Holberg’s critics, most notably the Pietists, Holberg’s interpretation of reason and revelation was outright heretical and offered no real alternative to deism. As Holberg replied to his critics in epistola XVII, published in the first volume of the Epistler in 1748, he never intended to see ‘Revelation subordinated’ to ‘the Light of Nature’, but rather to take the ‘Middle-Way between the Moravian Brethren and the Naturalists, between those who reject Reason altogether, and those who offer too much Incense on its Altar.’ On the one hand, Holberg writes:

Reason ought willingly to subject itself to the revealed Word; but if anyone pretends that one thus ought to imprison Reason under the Obedience of Faith that the Light of Nature is altogether pushed aside, then he is thereby teaching that one must reject Faith itself, as it is impossible to believe without the Assistance of Reason: For it is only by the use of Reason that I can be certain about the revealed Truths, and Reason is never obedient, unless it deems itself obliged to Obedience.

1376 Holberg, Epistler: I.71: ‘Forstanden bør vel læreviligen underkaste sig det aabenbarede Ord; men hvis nogen foregiver at man saaledes bør lage Fornuften under Troens Lydighet, at man gandske til Side setter Naturens Lys, saa lærer han derved, at man maa forkaste Troen selv, saasom det er umuligt at troe uden Fornufts Hjelp: Thi det
On the other hand, the rationalist position is equally problematic, 'falling into another Extreme', for the rationalists believe nothing 'which is above Reason'; they not only pretend to possess a privileged insight into 'all divine Secrets', they also 'require the Creator to give Reason for his Teaching, and to prove it using mathematical Arguments'. Holberg further supports his position with reference to John Locke, or 'a certain Author', as he writes, who had argued in book IV, chapter XIX of An Essay Concerning Human Understanding that 'he that takes away reason, to make way for revelation, puts out the light of both.' Reason and revelation cannot be separated; indeed, Holberg argues that even 'the Scriptures bid all men search for truth and use their reason'.

Reassessing what he took to be the positive consequences of the deist challenge, Holberg argues that the defenders of religion have yielded 'certain outworks in order better to protect the main redoubts'. In praising the defenders of religion for abandoning a position only upheld by 'an exaggerated orthodoxy', Holberg applauds the new approach, which grants to everyone the 'freedom to examine the main tenets of religion and to dispute against them.' The new approach to which Holberg himself subscribes further entails the abandonment of the 'literal interpretation of Scriptures in certain matters', the limitation of 'divine inspiration of Biblical authors' to teachings but not to historical details or to style, and, finally, the recognition of 'occasional copyists' errors' in biblical texts. Though Holberg does not allude directly to the position of Le Clerc at this particular point in the Epistler, the religious agenda which he advocates is fully in line with that of the Arminian enlightenment and the particular branch of Grotian irenicism on which it was founded. Holberg shared this agenda, or at least parts of it, with key figures in the early English enlightenment, such as Locke and the theologian William Warburton (1698-1779), whose moderation he defended against the deists, and more broadly with the Latitudinarians and the Rational Dissenters.
Insisting, however, on the duty of Christians to enquire into the foundations of religion, Holberg had also moved into deist territory. Most notably, Holberg shared this contention with Anthony Collins, whose *Discourse of Free-Thinking*, first published in London in 1713, advocated the right of all human beings to *The Use of the Understanding, in endeavouring to find out the Meaning of any Proposition whatsoever*. Holberg had first read Collins’ work in the late 1720s, presumably in the 1714 French translation, around the time when he was defending the examination of the Scriptures and religious teachings as a commonplace Lutheran doctrine, related to the priesthood of all believers. In the 1740s and 1750s, when Holberg had abandoned much of the Lutheran discourse, the notion of religious enquiry advocated in the *Epistler* came inextricably close to the position of the English deists. Holberg needed, in other words, to distinguish his own position from that of Collins and the English deists. ‘Generally,’ Holberg writes in the fourth volume of the *Epistler* in 1750, ‘I condemn the aforementioned Book by Collins on the Freedom to think, though not all of it; for I have myself shown that it is the Duty of all Christians to enquire into everything down to the Fundamental Doctrines, and argued that Error following thorough Examination is easier to excuse than Orthodoxy without prior Enquiry.’ This position, as Holberg was well aware, came surprisingly close to Collins, who understood ‘Free-Thinking in matters of Religion to be the Duty of all Men on the face of the Earth.’ The core of the problem was the scope of this duty to enquire into the foundations of faith. ‘But I have also said’, continues Holberg, ‘that there are certain People, whom Nature has denied its Gifts, or who are in such a Condition that they cannot on their own examine Faith, and that they in that Regard not only do well in following the Guidance of their Teachers and Confessors, but also that they are required to do so. This, however, our Author will not grant, but rejects all such Limitation.’

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1387 Holberg, *Epistler*: IV.172: ‘Jeg fordømmer i Almindelighed Collins ovennævnte Bog, som handler om Frihed at tænke, men dog ikke i alt; thi jeg haver selv viset, at det er enhver Christens Pligt at efterforske alting indtil Grun-Lærdomme, og holdet for, at Vildfarelser efter nøje Examen er meer at undskyde, end Orthodoxie uden foregaende Efterforskn ing’.
1388 Collins, *A Discourse of Free-Thinking*: 42.

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In contrast to the form of universal freedom of thought advocated by Collins, Holberg begins from the functional notion of enquiry rooted in the notions of character, office, and duty he expounded in his moral philosophy. Yet, despite his attempts to distinguish his own position from that of the deists, Holberg is walking a tightrope, embracing, on the one hand, the ‘Freedom to examine’ and, on the other, seeking to limit this freedom only to those whose ‘natural Faculty,’ allows for such examination.\footnote{Holberg, \textit{Epistler}: IV.174–75: ‘Frihed at examinere’, ‘naturlig Evne’.} Intending thus to limit the duty of examination in matters of religion, Holberg argues that it is the intellectual or natural faculty of human beings that steers the individual either towards examination or obedience. To become a good citizen and good human being simply means to follow one’s natural faculty. Whilst, for instance, it is the duty of theologians and philosophers to enquire into the nature of things, a peasant or a tinker should rather devote themselves to improving their own trade.

To Holberg, this line of argumentation is not only intended to value the pragmatic and functional understanding of human nature, the duty of particular civil offices, and the character of persons, but also to limit the vast flow of unreasonable works on religion. For to enquire into the foundations of religion is \textit{eo ipso} to engage in civic conversation about religion; put in this light, as Holberg sees it, a society can simply not afford to drown the book market with unreasonable tracts on religion, which are damaging not only because such works, despite their intentions, do more harm than good to religion, but also because an endless flow of unreasonable works on religion might excite the citizens of a state to take up arms against one another. To limit the duty of examination is, to Holberg, a way of ensuring the peace and security of a commonwealth, both civil and religious. A key aspect of Holberg’s religious thinking, this line of interpretation also framed his encounter with the English deists. As all human beings must first learn to doubt before they can learn to believe, as Holberg argued in \textit{Moralske Tanker}, the arguments of the English deists cannot just be brushed aside, but should be perceived as an intellectual challenge. This explains how Holberg, in the fifth and final volume of the \textit{Epistler}, is able to praises Collins for his sincere intentions in advocating freedom of thought.\footnote{Holberg, \textit{Epistler}: V.61.} To Holberg, deism springs not from an unreasonable use of reason in matters of religion, as the rationalists claimed, but rather from pushing the precepts of reason and natural religion too far, thereby destabilising the correspondence between reason and revelation.

However, when Holberg was preparing the final volume of the \textit{Epistler}, his attention had shifted from the English deists to the enemies of religion on the European continent, who advocated a far more aggressive form of deism. The fifth volume of the \textit{Epistler} contains a
commentary on 'a book entitled *L'Homme Machine*,’ which was authored by the French materialist thinker Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709-1751).\footnote{Holberg, *Selected Essays of Ludvig Holberg*: 126. On La Mettrie see Ann Thomson, ‘Introduction’, in Julien Offray de la Mettrie, *Machine Man and Other Writings*, Ann Thomson, ed., and trans., (Cambridge 1996). On eighteenth-century French materialism see Ann Thomson, ‘French Eighteenth-Century Materialists and Natural Law’, *History of European Ideas* (2014).} Although Holberg understood the work to be both irreligious and unethical, ‘indeed one of the most abominable publications which have come to light for some time’, he did not find it necessary to place La Mettrie’s *L’Homme Machine* in the same category as the deists on the continent.\footnote{Holberg, *Selected Essays of Ludvig Holberg*: 126; Holberg, Epistler: V.62.} Holberg still rejected both the deists and La Mettrie, but the distinctions he drew between them, though paper thin, shed some light on Holberg’s engagement with the enemies of religion. Whilst the deists on the continent had grown even bolder in their attacks on religion and revelation than the English deists had originally been, La Mettrie had fallen prey to his own ‘subtle speculations’, having come to advocate a set of ‘dangerous convictions’, like to ‘deny the soul and its effects’.\footnote{Holberg, *Selected Essays of Ludvig Holberg*: 126, 127.} Holberg’s objections were not so much levelled against the scientific method that underpinned the La Mettrie’s arguments, which were ‘based on experience’, but rather the materialism of *L’Homme Machine*.\footnote{Holberg, *Selected Essays of Ludvig Holberg*: 127.} Though Holberg was willing to assign to ‘the organs of the body, the blood, and the humors’ a role in understanding human ‘reason’ as well as ‘emotions and inclinations’, La Mettrie’s materialism reduced the thoughts and actions of human beings to their physical composition.\footnote{Holberg, *Selected Essays of Ludvig Holberg*: 127.} ‘The ability to think can be restricted by physical disability, but it cannot be stifled entirely, as we know from experience, which is the author’s criterion.’\footnote{Holberg, *Selected Essays of Ludvig Holberg*: 127.} *L’Homme Machine*, in other words, should be rejected on the grounds that it neglected ‘the struggle between the flesh and the spirit, as the Scriptures put it’ and failed to account for the ‘duality or double source’ of human thought and action.\footnote{Holberg, *Selected Essays of Ludvig Holberg*: 127.}

**Toleration, Persecution, and Intolerance**

So far we have seen how Holberg founded his theory of toleration, and his religious thinking more generally, on an irenicist account of Christian agreement about the fundamental articles of faith, and how he responded to various enemies of religion, whose ideas challenged his religious thinking. Yet, Holberg engaged the enemies of religion not as heretics, but as a challenge to both religious and civil peace, to which he saw it as his Christian duty to respond. Holberg thus
advocated a wide-reaching moral concept of toleration, including both Christians and non-
Christians, enthusiasts and naturalists. In the fifth volume of the *Epistler*, published in 1754,
Holberg devotes an essay to the religious policies of Frederick the Great (1712-1786), who had
granted extensive toleration in his kingdom, including, next to all Christian denominations,
’Socinians, Naturalists, and Enthusiasts [Sværmere]’ as well as ‘Jews and Mohammedans’.1399
Holberg was largely in agreement with this account of toleration, which should be denied to
nobody ‘for as long as he acts as a decent Subject and a good citizen.’1400 Holberg was tolerant not
only of Arminianism, but also Calvinism, as is evident, for instance, in his praise of Jean La
Placette (1639-1718), the author of a celebrated tract on the Christian religion and a preacher to
the Huguenot émigrés in Copenhagen after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.1401

Moreover, in 1742, Holberg published a history of the Jews in two volumes. The status of
the Jews in early eighteenth-century Denmark was marked by fierce anti-Semitism. The Pietists
had attempted to convert the Jews into Christianity and, in 1728, the Jews were accused of
causing the great fire of Copenhagen.1402 Whilst Holberg’s history of the Jews reiterates a range
of anti-Semitic themes such as the foolishness and stupidity of the Jews, their trickiness as well as
their dishonesty, his history of the Jews can still be seen as a plea for toleration, as their history
only points to their harmlessness and helpless existence. It is a central argument to Holberg that
the Jews throughout history have been severely mistreated, and he is critical of the expulsion of
the Jews from Spain in the fifteenth century.1403 In the history of the Jews, Holberg’s plea for
toleration rest on twin pillars; it is, as John Christian Laursen has stressed, a plea for toleration by
diminution.1404 But it is also an argument for toleration which relies on divine providence in that
the mere fact that the Jews have endured through history is a sign of providence, which should be
honoured with toleration.1405 Equally, although he was critical of the ‘Mohammedans’, who, like
the orthodox Lutherans, ‘take care not to begin with philosophy’, he was still tolerant, thus

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1402 On these instances of anti-Semitism see Sven Cedergreen Bech, *Oplysning og Tolerance, 1721-1784: Danmarks
Historie* 9 (Copenhagen 1964): 115-16, 162-63. The most comprehensive study of contemporary attitudes towards the
Jews is Martin Schwarz Lausten, *De fromme og jøderne: Holdninger til jødedom og jøderne i Danmark i pietismens tid
(1700-1760)* (Copenhagen 2000).
1404 John Christian Laursen, Ludvig Holberg’s *History of the Jews [1742]: Arguments for Religious Toleration*, in
1405 Lausten, *De fromme og jøderne* 107-12.
countering the common tendency amongst theologians and clergymen to depict paganism and Islam as hedonistic religions and as human creations.\footnote{Holberg, \textit{Moral Reflections \\& Epistles}: 14. For the orthodox view see Hagerup, \textit{Nogle Pæste-Vielses Talere}: 16-17.}

Yet, there were limits to his toleration, and whilst Holberg often had different reasons for tolerating particular sects and denominations, he also had different reasons for excluding sects as well.\footnote{In recent scholarship the question of limits is now being conceptualised as paradoxes and blind spots. For this literature see John Christian Laursen, 'Blind spots in the toleration literature', \textit{Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy} 14:3 (2011); John Christian Laursen and María José Villaverde, 'Introduction', in John Christian Laursen and María José Villaverde, eds., \textit{Paradoxes of Religious Toleration in Early Modern Political Thought} (New York 2012).} To fully appreciate Holberg's theory of toleration, his views on intolerance and persecution, which has so far remained in the background, need to be brought out. The way in which Holberg dealt with these issues had consequences for the way in which he sought to square a moral concept of toleration as duty to enquire into the foundations of one's faith with a political concept of toleration.

Holberg had been a staunch critic of intolerance through all his major works on moral philosophy. Religious persecution is a 'violation of the humanitarian principle and the chief tenet of Christian teachings.'\footnote{Holberg, \textit{Moralske Tanker}: 139: ’er jo ikke andet end et Tyrannie, og foraarager, at et Menneske er det andets Bøddel: thi at betage en, hvad han finder Behag udi, er at berove ham hans Frihed, og at bringe ham udi Trældoms Stand'.} In Holberg's view, to force others to think like one's self in religious matters accomplishes nothing and must be seen as immoral. Intolerance equals enslavement of the conscience. As he argues, the use of force in religious matters 'is nothing but Tyranny, and causes that one man becomes the executioner of another: for to take away from a man that in which he finds pleasure is to take away his Freedom, and bring him into a State of Servitude.'\footnote{Holberg, \textit{Moralske Tanker}: 386: ’Man kand ved Straf og strænge Love hinder en Vantroende at forplante sin Vantro, og at forføre andre dertil: man kand med Magt tvinge ham til at underskrive alle Troens Artikle: man kand bringe ham offentligen til at fordømme og at tilbage kalde, hvad han enten haver talt eller skrevet mod en almindelig Troes Bekendelse. Men, enskint man kand tvinge ham til at sige, at han troer, saa kand man ikke tvinge ham virkelig til at troe, saasom det er ligesaa ugifort at bestorme Vantro med Magt, som at drive en Kriigshær paa Flugten med logiske Argumenter'.} The use of force in matters of the conscience is not only immoral, but also utterly useless. Holberg writes:

With Punishment and severe Laws one can prevent a Heretic from spreading his Heresy and misleading others: with Power one can force him to sign all the Articles of Faith: one can bring him to publicly condemn and take back what he either has spoken or written against a common Confession of Faith. Nonetheless, although one can force him to say he believes, one cannot really force him to believe, for it is as impossible to pester the Infidels with Power, as it is to make an Army flee using nothing but Logical Arguments.\footnote{Holberg, \textit{Moralske Tanker}: 151.}

The notion of the freedom of the conscience on which this line of argumentation rested, was accepted across by confessional divides. Yet, although it was common to Lutherans, Calvinists and
Arminians alike to appeal to the conscience, the connection between toleration and conscience was widely contested. Whilst a concept such as the ‘Rights of Conscience’ was in broad currency within the Huguenot diaspora of the early enlightenment, particularly with writers such as Bayle, Le Clerc, Élie Saurin (1639-1703), Holberg’s thinking about conscience and toleration seems strangely at odds with the writers with whom he engaged. In the discussion of the rights of conscience in the second part of the Philosophical Commentary, Bayle argues that ‘either we must allow all or none; there can be no solid Reason for tolerating one Sect, which does not hold for every other.’ Yet, there are still limits to Bayle’s toleration, for ‘a Religion which forces Conscience, does not deserve to be tolerated.’ Bayle was also intolerant of the fanatics, whose ardent claim to religious truth had led them to persecute others. As Bayle insists, God is the author of the rights of conscience, and to act against the rights of conscience is to act against God.

Although Holberg, like Bayle, advocates that individual believers in matters of faith are answerable only to the ‘Dictates of Conscience,’ as opposed to this or that religious majority, Holberg’s discussion hinged not on the discourse of rights, but on a discourse of Christian and moral duties. In Holberg’s view, the fact that individual believers may base their religious beliefs on an erroneous conscience does not entail that such believes are held with any rights, and that those rights protect the individual believer against religious persecution. To Holberg, the argument from an erroneous conscience is interpreted alongside his interpretation of sincere belief and his call for intellectual enquiry. As each individual believer might be mistaken in matters of religion, nobody, no matter how strongly a particular doctrine is believed to contain the truth, no individual believer has the right to enforce his own view upon another. In a crucial passage in the Epistler, Holberg underscores this interpretation, alluding to Locke’s Epistola de tolerantia:

An eager Hereticator only has to imagine this, when he is caught by the greatest Enthusiasm or Zealousness in his persecution of Heretics: Were I to become a Citizen in another Country, where my Orthodoxy was considered Heretical, and where I saw myself persecuted for that which I am now persecuting others, would I not then condemn that Principium Intolerantiae with which I have thus far been so much in love?

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1411 Le Clerc, Mr. Le Clerc’s Extract and Judgement: 16.
1413 Bayle, A Philosophical Commentary: 211.
1414 Bayle, A Philosophical Commentary: 214.
1418 Holberg, Epistler: I.929: ‘En ivrig Kiettermager, naar han angribes af den største Enthusiismo, eller Nidkierhed i at forfolge Kiettere, haver kun at forestille sig dette: End om jeg blev Borger udi et andet Land, hvor min Orthodoxie blev
Holberg’s criticism of religious persecution also informed his engagement with the religious views of Montesquieu in the 1750s, and it may well have been what moved him to translate Book 25, chapter 13 of Montesquieu’s *L’esprit de lois*, in which Montesquieu reproduced a short work by an invented Jew, who was condemned to death and ‘burned in Lisbon’.

The prevailing intolerance, Holberg argues with Montesquieu, is an affront to the morality of the Gospel, about which mankind has never before been so enlightened. ‘Nothing can be written with greater force’, Holberg concludes his translation, ‘against Intolerance in matters of Religion’.

Holberg’s discussion of the limits of toleration is drawn from two distinct, yet intertwined, principles. The first concerns the attitudes of persons towards others and their willingness to doubt and examine the foundations of their religion; the second the relation between the individual believer and the state. Although Holberg, as we have seen, extend toleration to all Christian denominations, he does have certain reservations when it comes to the Roman Catholics. As he asserts, ‘where Freedom of Conscience is given to all Sects,’ he writes, ‘one must keep an Eye on the Roman Catholics and the Enthusiasts.’ The reservation towards the Roman Catholics is related to his broader view on the use of force as a violation of the freedom of conscience and the general concern for the public peace. ‘The only persons I exclude from the benefit of toleration,’ he writes in the third part of the memoirs, ‘are those who avow principles opposed to the civil power. I exclude Roman Catholics, because they are themselves intolerant, and because they endeavour by force and fraud to propagate their opinions. I exclude dissenting fanatics, because they refuse to take the oath of allegiance, and, under pretence of conscientious scruples, make religion a cloak for their contumacy.’

Placing at the heart of his thinking a concern for the public peace, Holberg thinking about the limits of toleration must be situated in a Pufendorfian tradition that grounded the concept of toleration in the discourse of reason of state. In the 1670s and 1680s, Pufendorf outlined his religious views in two works: the *De habitu religionis Christianae ad vitam civilem* (Of the Nature and Qualification of Religion in Reference to Civil Society), published in 1687 in response to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and in the *Jus feciale divinum* (The Divine Feudal Law), which

1420 Holberg, *Epistler*: V.30: ‘hvor Samvittigheds Frihed gives til alle Secter, maa man have Øye paa Roman-Catholske og Sværmere’.
was published posthumously in 1695.\footnote{1423} Although Pufendorf’s works were both tolerationist and ecumenical, he remained particularly suspicious of what he saw as the self-interest of the Roman Catholic clergy.\footnote{1424} As Pufendorf writes in De habitu, the ‘Roman Catholick Party’ does not deserve the title of Catholic, i.e. universal, for it rather resembles a ‘Temporal State; where, under a Religious pretext, the chief aim is to extend its Sovereignty over the greatest part of Europe’.\footnote{1425} Pufendorf placed the power to draw the limits of toleration in the office of the prince,\footnote{1426} but despite this power, no state could coercion in order to force a religious minority to convert to the state religion. The result of such coercion could only be hypocrisy, not sincere belief.\footnote{1427} ‘Tis true, he argues in De habitu, ‘a Prince may force a Subject to make an outward Confession by way of Mouth, to comply in his Behaviour, with his Commands, and to dissemble his Thoughts or to speak contrary to his Belief; but he can force no body to believe contrary to his own Opinion.’\footnote{1428}

Like Pufendorf, Holberg argues that it is up to the secular government to legislate in regards to the public worship as well as ‘to ordain what shall be taken as appropriate or inappropriate in Matters indifferent.’\footnote{1429} However, this did not entail any right of enforcement in matters of the conscience, and nor did it entail that the sovereign, as some scholars seem to suggest, possessed the right to determine what religions should be tolerated.\footnote{1430}

The reason of state discourse also underscored Holberg’s interpretation of religious persecution in France before the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. In epistola X, Holberg puts under scrutiny the persecution of the Huguenots. Arguing against the contention that ‘the French government’s attitude toward the Huguenots […] was contrary both to God’s word and to sound politics as well as to France’s own welfare’, Holberg frames his discussion on a political conception of toleration which drew on the principles of reason of state and his political thought more generally.\footnote{1431} Whilst the disarmament and limitations of their rights, Holberg claims, were necessary for the preservation of the commonwealth, the persecution of the Huguenots leading up

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\footnotetext{1425}{Pufendorf, Of the Nature and Qualification of Religion in Reference to Civil Society: 116-117.}
\footnotetext{1427}{Ahnert, ‘Samuel Pufendorf and Religious Intolerance in the Early Enlightenment’: 22-24.}
\footnotetext{1428}{Pufendorf, Of the Nature and Qualification of Religion in Reference to Civil Society: 15.}
\footnotetext{1429}{Holberg, Moralske Tanker: 253.}
\footnotetext{1431}{Holberg, Moral Reflections & Epistles: 99.}
\end{footnotesize}
to and immediately following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes was severely damaging to the reputation of the French. In the first part of the argument, Holberg follows a commonplace argument levelled against the Huguenots by the leading French Catholic writer Antoine Arnauld (1612-1694), who feared the emergence of a state within the state.\footnote{On the Catholic and Huguenot positions in this controversy see Luisa Simonutti, ””Absolute, Nor Arbitrary, Power”: Monarchism and Politics in the Thought of the Huguenots and Pierre Bayle”, in Hans Blom, John Christian Laursen & Luisa Simonutti, eds., Monarchism in the Age of Enlightenment: Liberty, Patriotism, and the Common Good, (Toronto, Buffalo & London 2007): 45–51, on Arnauld’s argument see p. 49.} Holberg goes to great lengths to justify the treatment of the Huguenots in France prior to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes; although he never approves of the religious persecution of the Huguenots or the St. Bartholomew massacre in 1572, he is largely apologetic for the French policy. No state, he argues, can survive when large numbers of its subjects are ‘commanding certain cities, fortifications, and troops, having their own parliament and conventions which were independent of the government [...] One may say therefore that the abridgement of the Edict of Nantes, by which Protestants were put on the same footing as all other French subjects, can to a certain extent be excused.’\footnote{Holberg, Moral Reflections & Epistles: 99, 100.} Yet, the religious violence in France, which stemmed not from ‘religion itself’ but from ‘persecution of the religion’, might easily have been avoided by adopting a ‘Christian tolerance’\footnote{Holberg, Moral Reflections & Epistles: 100.} Indeed, as Holberg sees it, toleration and agreement on the fundamental arguments are the best ways of ensuring the public peace:

For nothing beautifies a Society more than Concord and brotherly Love; And nothing is a more false Principle than contention that such Peace and Concord can have no Place in Countries, where Freedom of Conscience is allowed: For it is clear that Instability and internal Wars Springs as little from different Opinions on Religion, as it does from different Taste in regard to Food and Drinks; but they Spring alone from Persecutions, and, subsequently, that one Citizen wants to compel the other to find Pleasure in that which he naturally Displeases, that is, to refuse his own Light and his own Senses. I have often Stated that in this dangerous Century, it is necessary to set Aside curious Issues and to work for the Union of the Christian Sects for it is now heard: the Canaanites are in the Country, Hannibal or Deism are at the Gates, which is why internal Strife and Civil Wars must cease.\footnote{Holberg, Epistle I.326: ’Thi intet zirer et Societet meere end Eenighed og broderlig Kierlighed; Og intet er falskere Principium end dette, at saadan Fred og Eenighed ikke kand have Sted udi de Lande, hvor Samvittigheds Frihed tillades: Thi det er klart, at U-roigheder og indbyrdes Krigre reyse sig lige saa lidt af differente Meeninger i Religion, som af different Smag udi Mad og Drikke; men de reyse alleene af Forfølgelser, og deraf, at den eene Borger vil tvinge den anden, til at finde Smag udi det, hvor han harer naturlig Afsmag, det er, at nøgte sit eget Lys og sine egne Sandser. Jeg haver ofte givet tilkende, at udi dette farlige Seculo er fornødent at sette curieuse Spørgsmål til Side, og at arbejde paa Christelige Secters Forening; thi det heeder nu: Canaaniterne ere udi Landet, Hannibal eller Deismus ere ved Porterne, hvorudover indbyrdes Tvistighed og Borgerlige Krigre maa ophøre’.}

Holberg’s intolerance includes only those who fail to recognise two simple principles: sincerity towards God and sociality in what regards other human beings. As for the first, Holberg does not find it necessary for anyone to know true religion, only that the religion they do know is arrived

1453 Holberg, Moral Reflections & Epistles: 99, 100.
1454 Holberg, Moral Reflections & Epistles: 100.
1455 Holberg, Epistle I.326: ’Thi intet zirer et Societet meere end Eenighed og broderlig Kierlighed; Og intet er falskere Principium end dette, at saadan Fred og Eenighed ikke kand have Sted udi de Lande, hvor Samvittigheds Frihed tillades: Thi det er klart, at U-roigheder og indbyrdes Krigre reyse sig lige saa lidt af differente Meeninger i Religion, som af different Smag udi Mad og Drikke; men de reyse alleene af Forfølgelser, og deraf, at den eene Borger vil tvinge den anden, til at finde Smag udi det, hvor han harer naturlig Afsmag, det er, at nøgte sit eget Lys og sine egne Sandser. Jeg haver ofte givet tilkende, at udi dette farlige Seculo er fornødent at sette curieuse Spørgsmål til Side, og at arbejde paa Christelige Secters Forening; thi det heeder nu: Canaaniterne ere udi Landet, Hannibal eller Deismus ere ved Porterne, hvorudover indbyrdes Tvistighed og Borgerlige Krigre maa ophøre’.
at after thorough examination of the doctrines of faith. Such religion may be erroneous, but when arrived at with sincerity and ‘with good faith’, as opposed to a bad faith, which is deliberately upheld despite the knowledge that it is wrong, it is acceptable to the divinity.\footnote{Holberg, Memoirs of Lewis Holberg: 206.} In the second category, Holberg groups everyone who ‘have the audacity to disseminate their [erroneous] opinions; for then they become disturbers of the public peace, and in that light deserve to be punished [….] for whatever disturbs society ought to be put down by the laws of society.’\footnote{Holberg, Memoirs of Lewis Holberg: 206.} To Holberg, such action fails the test of sociality and become a form of fanaticism. Hence the limits to Holberg’s toleration are based not on confessional creed, as it was in the case of Jurieu, but on a conception of human action. Boiled down to its essentials, the only actions Holberg does not tolerate are those that seek to force upon others a particular set of religious beliefs to which those others have not arrived at on their own accord, and those who, under the pretext of religious doctrine, seek to undermine the peace and tranquillity of civil associations. As the twin pillars of Holberg’s, these contentions unites a moral and a political conception of toleration, drawn respectively from his engagement with a Pufendorfian discourse of reason of state and from the Arminian enlightenment.

**Reasonable Belief and the Duty of Toleration**

This chapter has situated Holberg’s religious thinking, as it took shape in the 1740s and the 1750s, in relation to a variety of religious enlightenments. Holberg’s religious thinking, and his theory of toleration in particular, was formed by his encounters and his engagements with multiple traditions of thought. Thinking about religion in connection with intellectual enquiry and civic conversation, this chapter has argued that Holberg’s religious thinking from the 1740s onwards was shaped simultaneously by his commitment to Lutheranism, particularly such doctrines as the priesthood of all believers and Christian freedom, and his engagement with the Arminian enlightenment in this period, the writings of Jean Le Clerc in particular. Merging these traditions of thought, Holberg’s religion takes shape as an irenicist emphasis on the fundamental articles of faith, the goodness of God, and freedom of the will. Furthermore, the chapter argues, it was largely through his engagement with the Arminian enlightenment, and with the early enlightenment republic of letters more broadly, that Holberg became familiar with a number of critical attitudes towards religion that were to challenge his own religious beliefs. The main challenges to Holberg’s religious thinking came from Manichaeism, the deists, the naturalists, the materialists, and the freethinkers.
Holberg’s theory of toleration should be seen in relation to his reworking of traditional Lutheran doctrines and the Arminian enlightenment. From the early 1740s, when he first became an advocate of toleration, Holberg’s concern for toleration centred on two central issues: the relation between individual believers of different religious creeds and the relation between the individual believer and the state. In terms of the first issue, Holberg’s theory of toleration flows directly from his broader religious thinking, emphasising aspects such as intellectual enquiry and civic conversation. Seen in this light, Holberg’s main contribution to the enlightenment debate on toleration consists of his understanding of toleration not as a right which all believers possess, but rather as a duty. Whilst no person has the right to be tolerated, everybody have the duty to tolerate. Holberg’s intolerance of the Roman Catholics is grounded in this contention. The duty to tolerate is rooted in the notion of intellectual enquiry. Holberg’s theory of toleration is, thus, partly founded on a sceptical argument regarding the frailty of human reason, resulting in sincere or reasonable belief. As for the second issue, Holberg’s theory of toleration moves in the direction of a reason of state argument, strongly emphasising security and peace. This line of argumentation was largely to frame his discussion of the limits of toleration. Though he was a staunch critic of religious persecution, Holberg tolerates only those who are themselves tolerant and reasonable. ‘I am most indulgent towards those who err,’ Holberg writes, ‘condemning only those who bitterly proscribe others.’

Conclusions and Perspectives

The Burdens of History, or Why Enlightenment Matters

Holberg has been more Useful to Denmark, than Voltaire has to France.

Peter Frederik Suhm

The eighteenth century, here encapsulated in Suhm’s words of praise, placed Holberg on a pedestal. Holberg’s contemporaries and the following generations considered him a literary genius of great originality. Although the generations of writers that followed Holberg realised that Holberg’s time was somehow different from their own, that it was irretrievably lost (or so they hoped), Holberg occupies a central place in their narratives of enlightenment as his literary production prepared the way for a thriving patriotism, a new more enlightened age. As Holberg’s friend and biographer Johann Adolph Scheibe wrote, Holberg was a man of great learning, ‘a Philosopher of independent thought’; he was, above all else, a devoted ‘Patriot’. In his published works, he aimed to enlighten his fellow citizens, and ‘he took pains to liberate everyone from Delusion, Superstition and slavish Imitation, and to make them think for themselves.’

The historian and philosopher Tyge Rothe offered a similar account of Holberg’s place in the intellectual history of the Danish enlightenment in his *Tanker om Kierlighed til Fædernelandet*, which appeared in 1759. As Rothe argued while praising Holberg for his literary and philosophical endeavours, an obelisk ought to be erected in his honour, on which should be inscribed the words: ‘The Patriotic Learned.’

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In the late eighteenth century, Scheibe’s discourse about Holberg as a patriot and a literary genius was still largely in stock. The writer and book collector Peder Topp Wandall (1737-1794), for instance, refers to Holberg as the ‘Benefactor of his fellow Citizens’, and Peter Frederik Suhm valued Holberg even higher than Voltaire, canonical figure already in his own lifetime. Moreover, as Andreas Christian Hviid (1749-1788), theologian and philologist, records in his journal from his travels through Europe between 1777 and 1780, he had had a conversation with Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), whom he met in Göttingen. He spoke to me about Holberg, whom he called our Plautus, and asked me where his Monument was erected, about which I did not know whether or not it was a Satire, wherefore I avoided the Answer by asking him whether Holberg was as famous in Germany as he was in Denmark, to which he replied Yes. Lessing knew Holberg’s works; he had reviewed some of the German translations for the Berlinische privilegerte Zeitung in 1751 and 1753 and he even (or so the story goes) used Holberg’s plays as inspiration for his own. On various occasions on his journey, Hviid is eager to bring up Holberg in conversations with learned scholars, for, as he notes, ‘How much one Man alone can contribute to make a Nation Famous, of this Holberg is Proof, which everyone know to talk about. Linné likewise, Sweden’s Honour, who now is known to almost all the World.’

The reception of Holberg’s ideas, however, took different shapes in these countries. Whilst Holberg’s European reception followed similar trends, there are notable differences as well. In Germany, where nearly all his works were translated, Holberg was praised for his histories and his comedies, and his natural jurisprudence. In his bibliography of philosophy and learning, the German philosopher Johann Christoph Stockhausen (1725-1784) recommended Holberg’s natural jurisprudence, which appeared in a German translation in 1748, listing it amongst the works on practical or political philosophy, a subcategory of philosophy. Stockhausen particularly praised Holberg’s use of Nordic history and laws to illustrate the principles of natural law. In England,
Holberg was occasionally mistaken for ‘a Dane by birth’,¹⁴⁴⁸ as one of his English translators writes, and at times he was taken to be a Hobbist.¹⁴⁴⁹ Holberg was mainly known to his English readership, however, as an historian and a novelist. ‘The history of polite learning in Denmark’, writes the Anglo-Irish playwright Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774), ‘may be comprized in the life of one single man; it rose and fell with the late famous baron Holberg.’¹⁴⁵⁰ Having authored one of the ‘most useful’ accounts of universal history, Holberg was accorded not an insignificant role in Joseph Priestley’s (1733-1804) historical thought, most prominently in his Lectures on History, and General Policy, which appeared in 1788.¹⁴⁵¹

Holberg’s French reception centred on his comedies and his moral philosophy.¹⁴⁵² ‘The Danish comedy’, writes the French Huguenot Laurent Angliviel de la Beaumelle (1726-1773), ‘owes its birth and progress to the Baron Holberg.’¹⁴⁵³ La Beaumelle resided in Copenhagen from the late 1740s onwards, until he was finally expelled in 1751; between 1748 and 1750 he published his La Spectatrice danoise ou l’Aspasie moderne (The Danish Female Spectator or the Modern Aspasia), a French journal written in a female voice,¹⁴⁵⁴ and in 1751 he published his provocative and subversive Mes Pensées ou Le qu’en dira-t-on (My Thoughts, or what will be said), in which he discussed religious, political and social issues.¹⁴⁵⁵ Whilst residing in Copenhagen, La Beaumelle came to know Holberg personally, and the two writers originally planned to collaborate on the La Spectatrice, with Holberg in the role of translator.¹⁴⁵⁶ Due to difficulties with the Danish censorship as well as personal attacks, their intended collaboration shipwrecked. Behind La Beaumelle’s seemingly kind words of praise lurked a deeper criticism of Holberg. La Beaumelle blames the Danish theatre for its poor taste in fashion, essential to ‘keeping continually alive the curiosity of the publick,’ and its lack of tragedies, for, as he writes (possible addressed to

¹⁴⁴⁹ [Anonymous], The Life of Thomas Hobbes, The Philosopher of Malmesbury, in Thomas Hobbes, The Moral and Political Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury. Never before collected together. To which is prefixed, the author’s life, Extracted from That said to be written by Himself, as also from The Supplement to the said Life by Dr. Blackbourne, and farther illustrated by the Editor, with Historical and Critical Remarks on his Writings and Opinions (London 1750): xxviii.
¹⁴⁵³ Laurent Angliviel de La Beaumelle, Reflections of **** being a Series of Political Maxims (London 1753): 139.
¹⁴⁵⁶ Israel, ‘Northern Varieties’: 28.
Holberg), ‘they never will have excellent Comedies, till they have, at least, bad tragedies.’ The stage that Holberg had fathered was still in a state of immaturity. Yet, their shipwrecked relationship might equally have been rooted in differences of political opinion. Whilst Holberg was a monarchist, La Beaumelle was an ardent admirer of the Swedish constitution. ‘The constitution of Sweedn is admirable,’ he writes, ‘the power of the king is limited by the senate; the power of the senate is circumscrib’d by the diet.’

La Beaumelle’s view on the Swedish constitution may have contributed, in addition to his religious and social views, to his expulsion from the Danish-Norwegian monarchy in 1751.

The diversity of Holberg’s thought and his reception hinges on a central question, namely what is the identity of Holberg’s thought, or to put it in way closer to what has been the main concern of this thesis, what kind of enlightenment, if any, did Holberg represent? In terms of drawing out the conclusions to this thesis, I shall not attempt to summarise the arguments of the individual chapters, but rather seek to place Holberg and the early Northern enlightenment within the broader currents that constituted the early European enlightenment on a larger scale, thus bringing together the major claims of the thesis.

The Early Northern Enlightenment in European Context

In this study, I have been dealing with a particular branch of enlightenment thought. An attempt to think anew about the intellectual history of the early Northern enlightenment, the thesis has engaged with Holberg’s thought on monarchy, civil society and religion. Reconstructing the trajectories of Holberg’s thought, the main argument of the thesis is that Holberg’s enlightenment is an eclectic blend of Lutheranism, Arminianism and modern natural law. The early Northern enlightenment is largely a response to a range of intellectual problems inherited from the Protestant Reformation and the Wars of Religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Yet, the enlightenment is not, as Koselleck claims in his influential study of enlightenment political thought, a reaction against the immoral politics of the absolute state, but rather, at least in the case of the early Northern enlightenment, an attempt to rethink the foundations of absolutism, the structures of society, and the place of the citizens or subjects within it, both in terms of civic and religious duties. As the thesis has shown, in order to rethink the foundations of the absolute monarchy, Holberg cultivated a broad range of personae, and he made use of a corresponding range of literary genres and strategies. Creating a space of authority, each persona becomes for Holberg a

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1457 La Beaumelle, Reflections: 163, 165.
1458 La Beaumelle, Reflections: 211.
1459 Koselleck, Critique and Crisis.
way of arguing a specific point, which takes from the *persona* a specific moral force. Within his repertoire, the historian, the poet, the playwright and the moral philosopher are the most frequent, and it is by understanding how Holberg used each of these *personae* to argue specific points that we get a view of the early Northern enlightenment: The enlightenment of Holberg was created both in argument and in practice. As a historian and a moral philosopher, Holberg sought not only to educate the prince, but also the public, thus bringing together the main currents of his thought. This intention was at the heart of Holberg’s enlightenment project, and it runs through his the three main areas of thought with which this thesis has been dealing: monarchism, civil society, and religion.

As John Robertson has recently argued, the enlightenment can be seen as an intellectual movement devoted to the improvement of the human condition ‘through the study of morals, history, society, and political economy,’ as well as the intention of educating the peoples of Europe, the rulers and the administrators. As a general exposition of an eighteenth-century, European enlightenment, Holberg’s thought fits well within Robertson’s account, for which reason alone he should be qualified as an enlightenment thinker. Yet, as I have argued in this thesis, it is worth insisting that the way in which Holberg engaged these issues that according to Robertson defined the enlightenment *per se* as an intellectual movement, differed fundamentally from other enlightenment figures. For this reason alone the historical study of enlightenments entails a pluralist conception, to allude once more to Pocock’s view of the enlightenment.

In his early writings, Holberg derived his thinking about monarchism from the discourse of natural law. Placing himself in the tradition of modern natural law, Holberg sets out to reject not only the Christian political thought, whose view on absolute monarchy had become the predominant way of thinking in the late seventeenth century, but also what can be considered the republican critique of Danish absolutism. Whilst Holberg’s theory of monarchism was a novelty in its Danish-Norwegian context, being the first Danish work to ground the absolute monarchy in a discourse of modern natural law, it was hardly revolutionary in its wider European context. Holberg sought to conceptualise the actions of the monarch not in relation to a particular confessional creed, but in relation to a specific set of moral duties and obligations attached to the office of kingship. Although monarchical power is absolute within the sphere of politics itself, it is limited by the moral duties of political office. In a Danish context, this way of thinking about the office of kingship, which also informed Holberg’s thinking about civil society more broadly, was a novelty.

Holberg’s thinking about civil society was derived partly from the tradition of modern natural law, from where he adapted such central notions as office, duty, and sociability, and partly from his engagement with the early enlightenment republic of letters. Comprised of multiple offices, to which are ascribed a particular set of duties and obligations, Holberg’s view on civil society was founded on the notion of sociability; seen in this light, his numerous plays, written from the 1720s onwards, display a number of contentions which would later become central to the writers of the Scottish enlightenment. However, the Scottish enlightenment took a different view on the history of civil society, which was to become one of the principal contributions to political economy and the science of man. What concerns Holberg is not the universal features of human nature. What concerns Holberg is the character of persons; he seeks not to judge people in relation to a universal human nature, but in relation to the office that each person occupies in civil society.\footnote{On the science of man see Anthony, The Enlightenment And Why It Still Matters (Oxford 2013): Ch 4.}

Holberg’s view on civil society was closely related to his thoughts on education, and to the \textit{persona} of the philosopher in particular. As an enlightenment thinker, moreover, Holberg belongs to the party of humanity, to invoke Peter Gay’s description of the French \textit{philosophes}\footnote{Peter Gay, The Party of Humanity: Essays in the French Enlightenment (New York and London 1971).}. Yet, his thinking about central enlightenment themes differs markedly from some the canonical figures that Gay ascribed to the party of humanity.\footnote{Isaiah Berlin, The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas, Henry Hardy, ed., (Princeton 1990).} Holberg still believed in human betterment. In contrast to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, therefore, Holberg seeks not to idealise the original state of mankind.\footnote{Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Discourse on the Origin of Inequality (Mineola, NY 2004).} Yet the enlightenment of Holberg is not a story about progress. As a practising philosopher, playwright, and poet, the three offices in civil society to which he ascribes the moral duty of education, Holberg’s principal aim was to educate the public by ridiculing certain general traits associated with particular offices or social groups, such as the peasant, the tinker, or the philosopher.

Holberg’s religious beliefs were Lutheran, yet the way in which Holberg thought about religion differed from other Lutheran writers of the eighteenth-century on central points. In the Danish context, Holberg was the first to advocate religious toleration of a broad range of confessional creeds; although his theory of toleration had certain limits, in his own context it was almost as wide-ranging as it could be, excluding only the Roman Catholics, who were themselves intolerant, and fanatics. Yet, whilst Holberg is broadly acknowledged as a theorist of toleration, the prevailing account of his toleration has interpreted his theory of toleration narrowly in light of
two canonical figures, Locke and Bayle, thus ignoring the broader tenets of his religious thinking, and failing to connect his theory of toleration to the wider religious concerns out of which it grew. One of the principal aims of this dissertation, therefore, has been to trace the development of Holberg’s religious thinking and to relate it to his theory of toleration.

Thus, as I have argued, between the 1710s, when Holberg published his first works, and the 1730s, Holberg derived his religious thinking from commonplace Lutheran doctrines such as the priesthood of all believers and Christian freedom while contrasting his religious beliefs to the Roman Catholicism and the enthusiasm and fanaticism of the Pietists. From the 1740s onwards, however, the Lutheran foundations merged together with a set of attitudes which he derived from the early enlightenment republic of letters, particularly from the works of the Arminian theologian and philosopher Jean Le Clerc. However, through his engagement with the Arminian enlightenment and the early enlightenment republic of letters, Holberg also encountered the works of the enemies of religion, who challenged his religious foundations. Holberg’s opposition to the English deists, in whose work he took an interest as he got further involved with the early enlightenment republic of letters from the 1740s onwards, reflects a deeply seeded worry for religious radicalism, questioning the foundation of all religion. Yet, to Holberg, the English deists should not be regarded as heretics; rather, they should be engaged intellectually. In this respect, Holberg’s engagement with the English deists can be seen as an attempt to enter into critical, yet respectful conversation, using arguments, not persecution or exclusion, as a means of combating their views.

Holberg’s religious convictions in the 1740s and 1750s orbited around a concern for the intellectual enquiry, civic conversation, and agreement on the fundamental articles of faith. The latter aspect was emphasised in Pufendorf’s work on religion, published in the aftermath of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, but, more importantly, it featured prominently in the Arminian enlightenment, introduced to Holberg through the works of Jean Le Clerc. Central aspects of Holberg’s later religious thinking can, as we have seen, be traced back to the Arminian enlightenment. However, in Holberg’s works, these ideas are fused together with a set of traditional Lutheran doctrines. Thus, Holberg’s theory of toleration, as it emerges from his engagement with Lutheranism and the Arminian enlightenment, constitutes one of his most distinctive contributions to early enlightenment thought. None of the canonical writers on toleration in the early enlightenment, some of whom were central to Holberg’s thinking, sought to provide the foundation for toleration based on a reading of traditional Lutheran doctrines.
Whilst Holberg’s thoughts on religion and civil society were based on a defence of plurality, that is, a plurality of religions and a plurality of duties and offices in civil society, his theory of monarchism is structured through concepts such as security, stability, obligation, and unity. Whilst Holberg in his early political writings had been concerned with what he took as a republican discourse against monarchy, a discourse which embodied such dangerous doctrines as political freedom and popular participation in government, his later writings from the 1740s and 1750s embrace a limited notion of political freedom in a monarchical state. Freedom, Holberg argued in his later works, finds its best conditions in a monarchical state. With this contention, Holberg did not, perhaps, strike a chord with the mainstream of the enlightenment, particularly not as it was to develop in France; however, his thinking about freedom and monarchy laid the foundations for a late eighteenth-century theory of monarchism, in which freedom and monarchy were considered as two sides of the same coin.  

Normative Enlightenments

The ‘Age of Enlightenment’ – which Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) famously referred to as an unfinished process – still plays tricks on the modern mind. Enlightenment is the attitude of emancipation we are told by Michel Foucault, in his interpretation of Kant’s essay. Perhaps the most famous response to Kant in the twentieth century, Foucault sees the answer to the question of what enlightenment is as the principal task for modern philosophy. Foucault sets a normative agenda, but not a revolutionising one; much of the twentieth-century controversy about the enlightenment was, as one commentator recently suggested, ‘heavily ideological’.

With Ernest Cassirer, Jürgen Habermas, and Peter Gay as the most notable exceptions, the twentieth century interpretation of enlightenment was predominantly negative. The enlightenment, Reinhart Koselleck argues in his pivotal study of its political thought, signifies the

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utopian origin of the monstrosities of the modern world.\textsuperscript{1469} Koselleck’s work was, as he himself acknowledges in the preface to the English edition, ‘a product of the early post-war period’.\textsuperscript{1470} In this context, Koselleck’s view on the enlightenment was accompanied by a number of influential works dealing with the enlightenment and modernity.\textsuperscript{1471} The most notable account was that by Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer who argued that the enlightenment had succumbed to the myth it was intended to replace and, rather than emancipating the human race, it imprisoned mankind anew. ‘Enlightenment’, writes Horkheimer and Adorno, ‘is totalitarian’.\textsuperscript{1472} Furthermore, similar interpretations of the ‘Enlightenment Project’ have been in broad currency amongst postmodern writers.\textsuperscript{1473} Although these interpretations have largely been abandoned in recent historiography, the close connections between enlightenment and modernity still prevail, evident, for instance, in Jonathan Israel’s claim ‘that the Enlightenment has been and remains by far the most positive factor shaping contemporary reality and those strands of “modernity” anyone wishing to live in accord with reason would want to support and contribute to.’\textsuperscript{1474} Against this connection, one of the principal aims of the present study has been to detach the yoke of modernity and secularism from our understanding of the enlightenment.\textsuperscript{1475}

Despite the historical turn in enlightenment studies over the past decades, enlightenment thought continues to play a part in our modern political imagination. Images of the enlightenment thus feature prominently in modern political debates, for instance on cosmopolitanism, toleration, and the freedom of speech. Anthony Pagden’s \textit{The Enlightenment and Why It Still Matters}, for instance, takes account of everything that hinges on secularism and cosmopolitanism to account for a continued relevance of this (arguably) central historical phenomenon.\textsuperscript{1476} Still, in scholarly

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\textsuperscript{1469} For a discussion of this periodisation see Reinhart Koselleck, \textit{The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History}, \textit{Spacing Concepts} (Stanford, California 2002): 154-169.

\textsuperscript{1470} Koselleck, \textit{Critique and Crisis}. 1.


\textsuperscript{1476} Pagden, \textit{The Enlightenment}. 

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circles today, Jonathan Israel is perhaps the strongest advocate of the view that we should think of the (radical) enlightenment not only in terms of the intellectual origin of modern democratic values, but also as a current political-ideological attitude, critical of religious fanaticism and traditional authorities on the one hand, and multiculturalism and relativism on the other.\footnote{Jonathan Israel, ‘Tankefrihed versus religionsfrihed – et dilemma fra det 18. århundrede, nu også et dilemma for det 21. århundrede’, Kritik 188 (2008).} This view of the enlightenment has recently risen to great prominence in Danish intellectual and political life, where Israel’s interpretation finds resonance with a group of scholars and intellectuals, who accept the distinction between the moderate and the radical enlightenment as an ontological truth.\footnote{Esben Schørring, ‘Hvis vi skal fremad, er vi nødt til at gå tilbage til oplysningstiden: Interview med professor Jonathan Israel’, Scenario, no. 2 (2010); Frederik Stjernfelt, ‘Den radikale oplysning’, Weekendavisen 1 October (2010).} This view of enlightenment, which so far stands unchallenged, has had a detrimental effect on current Danish discussions of freedom of speech, rather than contributing to a solution to these problems, it serves to underscore the all too familiar us-and-them attitude. To the modern protagonists of radical enlightenment, freedom of speech is an universal value that cannot be compromised, regardless of the circumstances in which an utterance or a statement is made. Any attempt to qualify this freedom according to changing circumstances is a betrayal of the radical enlightenment’s heritage to the modern world, a betrayal of freedom and democracy, and each time it is compromised it is a victory for religious fanaticism and the relativist attitude of multiculturalism, or the modern day moderate enlightenment. This interpretation is untenable not only because its view on modern politics is problematic, but more so because it rests on a flawed historical interpretation of the enlightenment.

Remembering Holberg’s contention in the \textit{Moralske Fabler} from 1751 that history needs a critical edge in order for it not to be reduced to ‘Daily Records and dry Annales,’ we should do well to welcome normative reflections into the field of enlightenment studies.\footnote{Holberg, \textit{Værker i Tolv Bind}: IX.400: ‘Dag-Registere og tørre Annales.’} But, following Holberg, we should also do well to remember that such matters as freedom of speech are relative not only to shifting circumstances, but also to the \textit{persona} that makes, or has the duty to make specific utterances. Surely, with Kant, and perhaps with Foucault, we can still think about enlightenment as an unfinished process, not, of course, in terms of a teleological history that has not yet reached its final goal, but rather as an attitude that continues to be of value if not to all, then at least to some moderns – be they intellectuals, academics, and politicians alike. What we cannot do, however, is to force upon the enlightenment such straitjackets as emancipation (which can only be anachronistically applied to the thought of Holberg), secularisation or irreligion (which seems historically insensitive when applied on a grand scale), or the pre-eminence of an...
alleged radical enlightenment, based solely on our modern prejudices. These conceptions, or so it seems, takes the enlightenment as a prisoner in a current political debate, and seeks to justify modern dispositions by reference to an enlightenment past and its normative force in our modern intellectual world. Yet, if the enlightenment as an historical past can be said to have any relation to our modern world, that relationship must be conceptualised differently. This is, to allude to Hayden White’s Nietzschen interpretation, ‘the burden of history.’

The Burdens of History, or Why Enlightenment Matters

Intellectual history is a kind of storage room where old-fashioned ideas can be stowed away until they once again become fashionable. In accordance with this contention, one of the underlying aims of this thesis has been to reconstruct or recover a forgotten way of thinking about the relationship between politics, society, and religion. My argument here is not that we should begin to think like Holberg or other early enlightenment writers. Rather, my argument is that from the historical reconstruction of the intellectual world inhabited by, and constituted through the works of Holberg and other early enlightenment writers, we can learn to think differently about our own. In that regard, I do subscribe to Quentin Skinner’s contention that ‘we shall do better to do our own thinking for ourselves.’

The implications, however, seem to have been misunderstood by the critics of historical contextualism – an approach that underscores the perspective of this study. Peter E. Gordon, for instance, has recently argued that the consequence of Skinner’s contention is a complete detachment of the past from the present which prevents critical engagement with past ways of thinking. This is not the case. Engaging with these kinds of questions, however, we are, as historians, walking a tightrope. As Skinner asserts:

As with all tightropes, moreover, it is possible to fall off on one side or the other. It seems to me that most historians fall off on the side of worrying too little about the point of what they are doing. I am more in danger of falling off in the direction of sacrificing historicity. If the choice is between historical impurity and moral pointlessness, then I suppose that in the end I am on the side of the impure. But I see myself fundamentally as an historian, so that my highest aspiration is not to fall off the tightrope at all.

Running the risk of falling off the tightrope, this dissertation directs our attention to a range of interconnected political contentions about enlightenment thought. As the enlightenment of

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Holberg clearly illustrates, enlightenment thought is not totalitarian in the sense suggested by Max Horkheimer, Theodore W. Adorno, and their postmodern successors. Thinking about the enlightenment as totalitarian has little to do with the intellectual world inhabited by eighteenth-century writers. The enlightenment is not to blame for the monstrosities and the ideological antagonisms of the twentieth century. Nor is the enlightenment the source of everything that we cherish about our modern world. Some scholars and intellectuals today might see themselves as the champions of a range of enlightenment values such as democracy and universal freedom of speech. It is worth remembering not only that many enlightenment thinkers such as Holberg remained hierarchical, indeed anti-democratic in their social and political views, but also that to these writers irreligion was the problem, whilst irenicism and the moral duty to tolerate others who are themselves tolerant was the solution. The advocacy of such view does not take away their place amongst the thinkers of the enlightenment still worth reading today. in fact, as this thesis has aimed to show, it is what guarantees their place in the enlightenment, and perhaps even their relevance to us today. This ideological contention on which the radical enlightenment interpretation is based (a contention against which this dissertation has been a silent revolt), not only confuses enlightenment thought for what may at best be considered its ideological *wirkungsgeschichte*, it also excludes from our modern thinking potentially enriching languages of politics, society, and religion, which might serve as a healthy and much needed antidote to some of the concepts and ideas that underpins current debates on freedom and democracy along with recent events in world history. 'The moral chaos of the modern world stems not from the failure of the Enlightenment Project,' writes the late Robert Wokler, 'but from its neglect and abandonment.'

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