Providence, Predestination and Progress: or, did the Enlightenment Fail?

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Early in 2002, the earth experienced a near-miss: an asteroid passed within a whisker (in astronomical terms) of the planet.[1] Had it struck, it would have done so with a force six hundred times greater than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. No observer saw it coming, and it was tracked only after it had passed; yet this event produced little surprise. We already knew that the secure foundations of modernism had moved beneath our feet: the idea of continental drift; then pollution; then global climate change; then epidemic disease, AIDS; now the realization that life on this planet is regularly challenged, and at longer periods catastrophically transformed, by the impact of extraterrestrial objects. Asteroids are rational in the sense that they obey mechanical laws well understood since Newton; yet their intrusion into our world says nothing of human or divine reason, and seems to re-assert the old doctrine: chance rules all.

Much else now contradicts the confidence in the predictability of the world and in the possibility of human improvement, a faith which it later became conventional to call the Enlightenment.[2] It was identified as the moment when nature first comprehensively yielded to human analysis, and gave rise to the goal of a science of man. It was held to have generated an optimism premised on the possibility of demonstrating order in human affairs as in the physical realm. If this scenario was constructed from diverse parts, its major premise held that providential discourse was replaced by naturalistic discourse;[3] and the natural was now to be understood as the regular, the ordered. Religion (taken to be the sphere of prejudice, the irrational, representing an authoritarianism

[1]This essay began as an address to a conference entitled "Ordering the World in the Eighteenth Century" held by the British Society for Eighteenth Century Studies in September 2002; for comments I am grateful to the audience, and to David Bergeron, Richard Eversole, Richard Hardin, and John Walsh.

[2]It is taken as axiomatic in this article that "the Enlightenment" is a polemical term devised in the nineteenth century to place interpretations on what had happened in the eighteenth: the term did not therefore correspond to any clearly-demarcated eighteenth-century phenomena, and could be made to mean whatever its nineteenth- and twentieth-century users wished. Its use here attends to, without endorsing, the meanings conventionally ascribed to the term in recent discourse.

[3]Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (London, 2000), p. 13. This essay is intended as a tribute to my late colleague, and an attempt to honor his memory by continuing our debate.

built on elite mystification) was held to have been eroded by a widespread process of secularization. Miracles, a major support of Christianity, were discredited by philosophers and scientists. Newtonian physics set human existence in a wider framework of intelligible, regular, general principles. Christians who persisted in their private beliefs were henceforth obliged to express their idea of the Deity in revised terms: He was now rationality personified, the impersonal benign, a generalized First Cause, and the rationality of the universe so conceived guaranteed that happiness, if rationally pursued, could be securely attained.[4] In time, this familiar account was reinforced for later reasons, notably in repudiations of Nazism and in defenses of the public doctrine of the United States against postmodern critiques.[5]

As long as these assumptions were securely entrenched, it seemed appropriate to treat the question of order in eighteenth-century England at the micro level only: public order, whether the role of the mob, the threat of revolution from 1789 to Chartism, or, more recently, the disorderly but very local challenges posed by consumerism and postmodern self-definition.[6] This now-conventional account will be examined and qualified here. Part of the case of the cosmic optimists must of course be accepted. There are indeed stories to tell about the development of astronomy and physics, about the spread of statistical analysis and actuarial science, of the Linnaean classification of species, of ideas about human evolution, stories of navigators, chemists, improvers. The eighteenth century, like all ages, had its cosmic optimists. Yet are historians entitled to say that the optimists won a battle that they had so defined, and that the world view available to educated Englishmen between Newton and Darwin rested on securely ordered certainties? It will be argued here that the observable pattern of belief was on the contrary diverse, predictability and unpredictability being locked in unresolved conflict, and that the long survival of the second set of answers demands a reconsideration of many features of the first. The received historiographical model of "the Enlightenment" had indeed been premised partly

[4]"mainstream [religious] observance became divested of supernatural and spiritual elements....The new hopefulness was often predicated upon claims to lay bare the springs of human nature..."; Hume thought he could show by observation "the constant and universal principles of human nature"; "Prayers and pieties continued, but in the ubiquitous worldly atmosphere devout habits of trusting to Providence were challenged by a new eagerness to practice self-help and take charge where possible"; "The sick no longer needed to abandon themselves to their fate: knowledge and skill would save lives"; "The programmatic shift from Christian Providentialism to more secular, scientific world views...": Porter, *Enlightenment*, pp. 128, 161, 177, 206, 211, 229.

[5]Keith Michael Baker and Peter Hanns Reill, eds., *What's Left of Enlightenment? A Postmodern Question* (Stanford, 2001). For other sorts of qualifications to the use of the term, see for example Jeremy Black, *Eighteenth-Century Europe* (2nd ed.; London, 1999), pp. 246–62.

[6]"the problem lay in ensuring that private fulfilment did not subvert public orderliness": Porter, *Enlightenment*, p. 18.

on the exclusion of certain areas of evidence, partly on the consequent misunderstanding of others. Centrally, the received picture of a long eighteenth century increasingly dominated by naturalistic ideas of order neglects evidence for Providential discourse not being swept away at an early date but surviving in large quantity into the nineteenth century and later as the prevalent idiom in which the course of events was encountered and reflected upon in England.[7]

The triumph of a new mind set cannot be measured against a parody of preceding ages' credulousness in their subscription to an old one. Providence, as an implicit demand for submission to divine purposes, had always enjoyed a troubled history. It "had but a disturb'd Possession in the minds of Men," argued the Rev. Abraham Campion in 1694, "sometimes confess'd, sometimes doubted of, or disputed against, but almost always practiced against."[8] Yet such statements are not necessarily evidence for a collapse of popular providentialism, for it was a definition of man's fallen condition that he should not always see and co-operate with Providence. There is in addition widespread evidence in a range of other discourses for popular willingness to interrogate fate, chance and design outside "Enlightenment" paradigms but irrespective of Christian faith. This evidence of providential and other discourses has been, in part, acknowledged by students of popular belief, but seldom integrated into the dominant model sustained by historians of a "High" Enlightenment.

It should nevertheless be relevant to the way in which an "Enlightenment" was constructed that while serious astrology lost its hold on elite opinion, the population at large provided a lasting market for chapbooks and almanacs offering guides to the vicissitudes of human existence: "after Man is come into the World," wrote one such author in 1697, "it's natural to all, to be inquisitive about future Events, or their Lotts or Chances in this Elementary Life, whether they are born for Great, Mean or Small Fortune."[9] Life experiences therefore provided repeated occasion for such debates. Natural disasters too were one aspect of human experience that fell into the familiar category of "vicissitude."[10]

[7]Porter's argument that "Probabilistic thinking to some extent replaced Providence" (ibid., p. 149 and elsewhere) is evidenced only by reference to modern work on mathematical probability; Porter did not balance it against evidence on Providence. Although historians of mathematics still incline to a "triumphalist" view, for a more nuanced account see, for example, Barbara J. Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton, 1983). Shapiro argues that the empirical and the probable rose together in seventeenth-century England, so strengthening the claims of Providence.

[8]Ab[raham] Campion, *A Sermon concerning National Providence* (Oxford, 1694), p. 2.

[9]John Case, *The Angelical Guide* (London, 1697), sig. B4v (italics and Roman reversed).

[10]For a similar and widespread willingness to read social and political meanings into natural phenomena, see Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971; Harmondsworth, 1973), treating such ideas as "primitive survivals" (pp. 105, 125); Dudley Wilson, *Signs and Portents: Monstrous Births from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment* (London, 1993); Lorraine Daston and Katharine

Attitudes displayed in popular fiction were similarly expressions of a mind set that disclosed no clear watershed between pre-modern and modern in attitudes to life chances. Thomas Dekker's play of 1600, *The Pleasant Comedy of Old Fortunatus*, echoed a familiar assumption: what man needed most was to be not rational, but fortunate. *The History of Fortunatus*, a chapbook, was reprinted again and again into the nineteenth century. Being fortunate was to enjoy "good fortune": Fortune still sometimes appeared as the Roman goddess Fortuna. Plays spoke to this assumption: the reflections on the "sovereign lady" Fortune in the opening scene of William Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* (?1604); Thomas Heywood's *Fortune by Land and Sea* (written *c.* 1606–09, published 1655)[11]; George Villiers, 2nd Duke of Buckingham's *The Chances* (1682), adapted from Beaumont and Fletcher; Thomas Otway's *The Souldier's Fortune* (1681); Aphra Behn's *The Luckey Chance* (1687).

Being "fortunate" also meant, ideally, acquiring "a fortune." James Carlile's *The Fortune-hunters* (1689) stood in a long line of plays on marriage strategies, heiresses and providential enrichment that included Charles Macklin's *The Fortune-hunters* (1750); it was a theme that became prominent in the late eighteenth-century novel. So was the device of reverses of fortune, as in James Holroyd Fielding's *Beauchamp; or the Wheel of Fortune* (1817). Richard Cumberland's play of 1795 on the same theme reinforced its moral in the Epilogue:

> There are — what shall I call them? — two great Powers,
> Who turn and overturn this world of ours,
> Fortune and Folly. — Tho' not quite the same
> In property, they play each other's game;
> Fortune makes poor men rich, then turns them o'er
> To Folly, who soon strips them of their store.[12]

One very public embodiment of the ancient image of the wheel of fortune was indeed the lottery. Public lotteries were promoted with elaborate classical imagery personifying Fortuna, and in one sales promotion of 1698 also Astraea, goddess of justice: Destiny, announced a Miss Porter, representing Fortuna and drawing the lots, was not in charge:

Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150–1750* (New York, 1998); Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1999); Vladimir Jankovic, *Reading the Skies: A Cultural History of English Weather* (Chicago, 2001) and idem, "The Politics of Sky Battles in Early Hanoverian Britain," *Journal of British Studies* 41 (2002): 429–59; William E. Burns, *An Age of Wonders: Prodigies, politics and providence in England 1657–1727* (Manchester, 2002). It will be argued here that although this "culture of wonders" declined in the early eighteenth century, providential discourse as a whole did not, and is not to be understood (cf. Thomas, *Religion*, p. 129) as a survival, inconsistent with other intellectual disciplines.

[11]"The heavens when they be pleased may turn the wheel/Of Fortune round, when we that are dejected/May be again raised to our former height" (Act 1, scene 2).

[12]Richard Cumberland, *The Wheel of Fortune: A Comedy. Performed at the Theatre-Royal, Drury-Lane* (London, 1795), p. 79.

> No; this Decision lies in *Fortune's* Sphere:
> From random *Chance* no partial Judgment fear.
> Then, *Jove*, resign:
> 'Tis I reign Goddess here...
> *Fortune* commands all Hearts: I bend each knee:
> The Court of all Mankind's addresst to Me.[13]

The theme was perennial. Audiences at the Theatre Royal, Dorset Gardens in 1698 could see *The Fool's Expectation: or, The Wheel of Fortune.*[14] In 1810, *Fortune's Levee, or Her Votaries Metamorphised* personified the lottery as Fortune herself, enthroned in her palace, "whom all solicit, and whom all revere."

Christians were obliged to respond. That reputed spokesman for modernity, Daniel Defoe, conventionally dealt with the issue of human vicissitude in a providential context: his *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) related the misfortunes of a man who wilfully disobeyed clear warnings that he should not "tempt Providence to my ruine" by abandoning his divinely-appointed station, a man who reflected, after his shipwreck on a desert island, "why Providence should thus completely ruine its creatures...that it could hardly be rational to be thankful for such a life." Crusoe's prominent and evolving answers to this question made the book a providentially-directed pilgrimage in which, finally, "I acquiesced in the dispositions of Providence, which I began now to own and to believe ordered every thing for the best."[15] Defoe's fiction had a dominant ethical dimension, but this dimension was a specifically providential one, obscured by later preoccupations that both abbreviated his titles and "modernized" the themes in his plots. *Moll Flanders* (1722) was originally titled *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders*; its successor *Roxana* (1724) was originally titled *The Fortunate Mistress, or a History of the Life and Vast Variety of Fortunes of Mademoiselle de Beleau...Lady Roxana.* The Whig novelist Henry Fielding, in his role as a reforming magistrate, produced in 1750 a collection of remarkable

[13]*The Entertainment perform'd at the Theatre-Royal in Dorset-Garden, at Drawing the Lottery call'd the Wheel of Fortune: Being the Speeches addrest to the Spectators, as Prologues and Epilogues* (London, 1698), pp. 1–2. This contrasts with Porter's argument that "The staging of public lotteries—their philosophy of luck seemingly at odds with Providentialism—symbolizes this more secular bent" associated with the management of risk; "the taming of chance" was "the denial or distancing of the transcendental": *Enlightenment*, pp. 208–09.

[14]*Prologue Design'd for the new last Farce, call'd, The Fool's Expectation: Or, The Wheel of Fortune* (London, 1698).

[15]Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner* (London, 1719; Harmondsworth, 1985), pp. 38, 80, 121, 125. For much of the twentieth century, this novel was conventionally explained via the themes of realism, adventure narrative or political economy. For a recognition of its providential preoccupations see G. A. Starr, *Defoe & Spiritual Autobiography* (Princeton, 1965) and J. Paul Hunter, *The Reluctant Pilgrim: Defoe's Emblematic Method and Quest for Form in Robinson Crusoe* (Baltimore, 1966). G. A. Starr, *Defoe & Casuistry* (Princeton, 1971) explores another theological aspect.

discoveries of murders to prove the interposition of Providence: murders were often detected by "the most unaccountable, indeed miraculous means."[16]

Almanacs or handbooks predicting one's fortune in the vicissitudes of life might therefore sit next to competing but related volumes systematizing the record of Providence. These anthologies of tales of deliverance, retribution or prosperity appeared repeatedly from Thomas Beard's collection of 1597[17] through a folio by Matthew Poole (1624–79) published in 1697[18] to *The Book of Fate* [*c.* 1780] and beyond, a substantial genre neglected by students of English literature. Individuals' own narratives of their lives were conventionally composed within such a general explanatory framework. Fortune, vicissitude and Providence were the themes of much-reprinted tracts like Jonathan Dickenson's in 1700[19] and Peter Williamson's account of delivery from "French and Indian Cruelty" in 1757.[20] Such populist texts were widely current long before better-known but more pessimistic works of the literary elite like Voltaire's *Candide* and Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759), both reflecting on the viability of cosmic optimism in face of the vicissitude of human affairs. In popular discourse, Fate, Fortune or Chance were still widely reified or personified and might (as in the ancient world) wear a benevolent or malevolent face; they competed for popular allegiance above all with the systematically-developed and widely-inculcated Christian doctrine of Providence.

This providential genre, moreover, flourished into the nineteenth century. James Stanier Clarke, the Prince of Wales's chaplain and naval historian, produced a compendium of deliverances from shipwreck in two volumes in 1805–06,[21] using much the same arguments that had informed James Janeway's

[16]Henry Fielding, *Examples of the Interposition of Providence in the Detection and Punishment of Murder. Containing, Above thirty Cases, in which this dreadful Crime has been brought to Light, in the most extraordinary and miraculous Manner; collected from various authors, antient and modern* (London, 1752); cf. *A Warning Piece against the Crime of Murder: or, an Account of many Extraordinary and most Providential Discoveries of Secret Murders. From whence it will appear, That, however secretly they are committed, Providence will interpose, and bring them to Light and Punishment* (London [1750]).

[17]Thomas Beard, *The Theatre of God's Judgements* (London, 1597).

[18]*A Compleat History of the Most Remarkable Providences, both of Judgment and Mercy, Which have Happened in this Present Age...being a Work set on Foot Thirty Years Ago, by the Reverend Mr. Pool...Finish'd, by William Turner, MA Vicar of Walberton in Sussex* (London, 1697).

[19]Jonathan Dickenson, *God's Protecting Providence, Man's Surest Help and Defence...evidenced in the remarkable deliverance of Robert Barrow...from the devouring waves of the Sea...* (London, 1700; 7th ed., 1790).

[20]*French and Indian Cruelty: Exemplified in the Life, And various Vicissitudes of Fortune, of Peter Williamson* (York, 1757; 6th ed., Edinburgh, 1792).

[21]James Stanier Clarke, *Naufragia or Historical Memoirs of Shipwrecks and of the Providential Deliverance of Vessels*, 2 vols. (London, 1805–06).

compendium on the subject of 1675.[22] A formerly-reputed source for Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, the shipwreck narrative of Alexander Selkirk, was published in 1712 and reprinted in the *Harleian Miscellany* in 1745 under the title *Providence Displayed*: Providence was Defoe's cue, not the specific details of survival and capitalist accumulation on a desert island.[23] In 1816 a former naval officer, now an Evangelical Anglican clergyman, Richard Marks, reflected on the incidents of a career that illustrated the Scriptural teaching "one shall be taken, and the other left."[24] In 1818, Thomas Young published a similar compendium.[25] So did Joseph Taylor in 1821.[26] Joseph Fincher's *The Interpositions of Divine Providence: selected exclusively from the Holy Scriptures* (1829) fell into the same mold. So did the Rev. John Young's *The Record of Providence* (1832), a learned work drawn from a wide range of published sources. The continued viability of this genre into the nineteenth century is evidence for the credence given to its central concept.

These collections could retain their currency partly because they were not identified as expressing a world view that was seen as contradicted by a reified "modernity."[27] Natural science diminished but did not seriously reduce natural catastrophe: Harrison's marine chronometer did not end shipwreck, as professionals like these naval officers well knew. But other widespread assumptions identified persisting natural catastrophes as not just chance events; they revealed divine intentions. A naval disaster in 1694 showed that God "hath a controversie with us," argued Jonathan Owen, a London Dissenting minister: the cause was not the nation's rejection of James II, as Jacobites falsely claimed, but its adding "*Inventions of Men*" to "the true Worship of God."[28] Calamities "short of utter Destruction" were all intended for "Reformation," contended Edward Fowler,

[22]*Mr. James Janeway's Legacy to his Friends, containing twenty-seven instances of God's providences in sea-dangers, whereunto is added a sermon on the same subject* (London, 1675).

[23]It was written up by Steele (without title) in *The Englishman* in 1713, and reported in Edward Cooke's *A Voyage to the South Sea*, 2 vols. (London, 1712).

[24][Richard Marks], *The Retrospect, or, Review of Providential Mercies* (London, 1816).

[25]Thomas Young, *Monumental Pillars; or, A Collection of Remarkable Instances of the Judgment, Providence, and Grace of God* (London, 1818).

[26]Joseph Taylor, *Remarkable Providences; or, the Mercies of God exemplified in many extraordinary Instances of Men, Women and Children being almost miraculously preserved from premature death* (London, 1821).

[27]J. C. D. Clark, *English Society 1660–1832: Religion, ideology and politics during the ancien regime* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 1–13, "Keywords" and passim.

[28]Jonathan Owen, *England's Warning, by Late Frowning Providences: Especially the Immediate Hand of God upon the Straits-Fleet* (London, 1694), sig. A3v, p. 7.

latitudinarian bishop of Gloucester, in 1695.[29] The hurricanes of 1698 and 1703 were similarly used: it was God's way to punish sinners "by Concurring with *Second Causes*," argued William Offley, former Fellow of Kings, in 1704.[30] The two earthquakes in London in 1749–50 were similarly interpreted. John Mason argued in 1750 that earthquakes, tempests, conflagrations, wars and epidemics were all produced by natural or second causes; "but are they for that reason not to be acknowledged as divine judgements?"[31] Disastrous fires like that at Honiton, Devon, in 1765 again drove men back to Job.[32] So did an explosion at Chester in 1772.[33] Nor did the elite respond differently. In 1832 the rector of Carshalton, Surrey, Charles Cator, reacted in his published sermon *The Cholera Morbus a Visitation of Divine Providence* as did Joseph Allen, archdeacon of Westminster, preaching to the House of Commons on "the day appointed by His Majesty's royal proclamation, to be observed as a day of solemn fasting and humiliation."[34]

Providence did not provide assured answers in these situations: rather, it was the site of anguished questioning. No sooner had the fair face of nature impressed man with the force of the argument from design and provided an easy proof of the "superintendancy of Providence," wrote John Ogilvie, Scots Presbyterian minister and author in 1764, introducing a poetical vindication of the Almighty, when "Whirlwinds, storms, volcanos, earthquakes; — whatever, in short, of this kind we have been accustomed to consider as productive of evil, reclaims loudly against this decision, and leads us to call in question, if not to deny truths, which appeared to stand upon the best foundation."[35]

If this echoed a still-widespread popular mind set, how did it coexist with scientific orthodoxy? One reason for their compatibility was that the limitations of the natural sciences at this stage of their development were as evident as their achievements. Newtonian physics illuminated something, but how much might easily be questioned. Robert Wallace, Scots clergyman and demographer, sounded a note of caution in 1761:

> After all that we can conceive of the magnificence with which we are surrounded, there is a mystery in the works of God that we cannot fully compre-

[29][Edward Fowler], *A Discourse of the Great Disingenuity & Unreasonableness Of Repining at Afflicting Providences* (London, 1695), p. 68.

[30]William Offley, *The Power and Providence of God Consider'd and Asserted* (London, 1704), p. 11.

[31]John Mason, *The right Improvement of alarming Providences* (London, 1750), p. 18.

[32]Richard Harrison, *The Wisdom and Righteousness of the Divine Providence Illustrated from the Character of Job. In a Sermon Preached at Honiton, the 25th Day of August, 1765. Being the First Sunday after the late dreadful Fire* (Exeter [1765]).

[33][John Bowden], *The Explosion: or, An Alarming Providential Check to Immorality* (Chester, 1773).

[34]Joseph Allen, *The special Interposition of Divine Providence the ground of National Humiliation for National Sins* (London, 1832).

[35]John Ogilvie, *Providence. An Allegorical Poem. In Three Books* (London, 1764), p. viii.

> hend. We are not only ignorant of the means by which various effects are produced, and of the immediate causes from whence they proceed, which are either not at all, or only faintly discerned; but many of the ends which nature proposes, though in themselves most certainly excellent, are, nevertheless, so far beyond our thoughts, and so contrary to our common apprehensions, that their fitness becomes less perspicuous. Clouds and darkness intercept our view, and being held in anxious suspense about the great design of nature, we are often doubtful concerning the final issue of all her mighty works.[36]

Many English scientists, however, would have agreed.

Cartesianism may have proposed a Godless, mechanical universe, with matter as inert, atoms colliding like billiard balls to create secondary qualities, but by the late 1660s this model had aroused English fears that the French doctrine would exclude Providence. Newton's *Principia* (1687) revealed the mathematical basis of gravity, action from a distance (a concept denounced by continental critics including Leibniz as miraculous or occult); his *Opticks* (1704) implied a new theory of matter itself as fields of force, an element in the book that grew with successive editions to 1717. Both theories posited in nature a tendency to decay, and so involved the Creator in the continuing support of Creation.[37] As Samuel Clarke explained in his exchange of 1715 with Leibniz, "nothing is done without his [God's] continual government and inspection."[38] Nor was it always clear that Newton confined God to using only second causes in bringing about the necessary reformation of the universe;[39] his views evolved on that question.[40] In May 1694, David Gregory noted Newton saying: "A continual miracle is needed to prevent the Sun and fixed stars from rushing together through gravity."[41] The "holy alliance" between natural science and the Church had quickly seen the point: Newton soon intended his *Principia* to refute Hobbesian materialism, and Richard Bentley used the *Principia* in the first series of Boyle lectures in 1692 to prove God's providential design for the universe.[42]

[36]Robert Wallace, *Various Prospects of Mankind, Nature and Providence* (London, 1761), p. 168.

[37]David Kubrin, "Newton and the Cyclical Cosmos: Providence and the Mechanical Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 28 (1967): 325–46; I. Bernard Cohen, "Isaac Newton's Principia, the Scriptures, and the Divine Providence," in Sidney Morgenbesser et al. eds., *Philosophy, Science and Method: Essays in Honor of Ernest Nagel* (New York, 1969), pp. 523–48; M. A. Hoskin, "Newton, Providence, and the Universe of Stars," *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 8 (1977): 77–101.

[38]Quoted Kubrin, "Newton," p. 325.

[39]Ibid., pp. 338–39.

[40]Cohen, "Isaac Newton's Principia," points out that Newton's views on God became publicly apparent only with the Queries published in the second (Latin) edition of the *Opticks* (1706) and the *General Scholium* written in 1712–13 for the second edition of the *Principia* (1713), but that they were present from Newton's earliest drafts.

[41]Quoted Hoskin, "Newton, Providence," p. 77.

[42]Richard Bentley, *The Folly and Unreasonableness of Atheism....In eight sermons* (London, 1693); Henry Guerlac and M. C. Jacob, "Bentley, Newton and Providence (The Boyle Lectures Once More),"

Bentley argued that "all the powers of mechanism are dependent on the Deity," since "gravity, the great basis of all mechanism, is not itself mechanical, but the immediate fiat and finger of God, and the execution of divine law."[43]

Yet, if God was continually involved in supporting the universe at every moment and in every detail, events that had previously seemed against the course of nature became consistent with it: miracles would thereby lose their older function as proofs of Christian revelation. It has been argued that Clarke, Whiston, and others dealt with this problem in a novel way:

> By deleting all reference to breaches of laws of nature and by locating the essence of the miraculous in the concatenation of natural causes, miracle accounts could become immune to the standard criticisms which have become familiar to us since Hume's "Of Miracles." Moreover, such a conception allows for a far more durable synthesis of science and religion than had been possible with the conception of nature promoted by Boyle and others.[44]

Academic analysis thereby aligned itself with a still-powerful popular discourse in which astonishing deliverances, providences and miracles overlapped. Reason was not enough to govern even man's actions in "the Corporeal world," argued Abraham Campion in 1694; there must be "some general Overseer of the works of nature."[45] Nature, according to the Tory MP and industrialist Sir Humphry Mackworth in 1704, must be *"an understanding powerful Being,"* not *"a dead Lump of Matter"*; chance alone could never have constructed the world. Without reference to Newton, Mackworth too described a world that rested at each moment on God's support.[46] No machine "is or can be *simply* and *absolutely* mechanical," argued Henry Stebbing, defender of Anglican orthodoxy against Whitefield and Hoadly in 1757, "for mechanical Causes and Effects cannot go backwards forever"; God was necessary to underwrite "that GRAVITATING FORCE which gives Consistency and Stability to all material Substances."[47]

Nor was this position confined to churchmen. Joseph Priestley, Unitarian and chemist, rejected freewill as inconsistent with Providence.[48] For John Fawcett,

Journal of the History of Ideas 30 (1969): 307–18; Margaret C. Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution 1689–1720* (Hassocks, 1976), ch. 5, "The Boyle Lectures and the Social Meaning of Newtonianism."

[43]Quoted in Peter Harrison, "Newtonian Science, Miracles, and the Laws of Nature," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56 (1995): 537, an article which documents similar later arguments in William Whiston and Samuel Clarke.

[44]Harrison, "Newtonian Science," p. 544.

[45]Ab[raham] Campion, *A Sermon concerning National Providence* (Oxford, 1694), p. 15.

[46]Sir Humphry Mackworth, *A Treatise concerning Providence: By Way of Dialogue* (2nd ed.; London, 1704), p. 1.

[47]Henry Stebbing, *A Discourse concerning the Providence of God* (London, 1757), pp. 3–4.

[48]Joseph Priestley, *The Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated: being an appendix to the Disquisitions relating to matter and spirit* (London, 1777).

Yorkshire Baptist minister, in 1797, "The laws of nature, as they are called, are no other than the uniform agency of Providence."[49] For William Tucker, Calvinist, in 1798, "Created understanding cannot grasp, nor fully comprehend, the least of God's designs, or works. It is non-plused in its researches after the real essence of a plant, a pebble, or the least dust of a balance."[50] Nature, for the Rev. Thomas Etherington of St. Alban Hall, Oxford, in 1799, was not enough: "the heavenly bodies cannot have moved from eternity; because their velocity, gradually decreasing, must have come to an end, and the whole disposition of the system must, long before this time have been destroyed."[51] The Rev. David Savile, in Edinburgh in 1807, quoted Samuel Clarke: we should not ascribe events to nature as if "the word *nature*, was *a real intelligent agent*; or meant any thing more than the *usual* and *ordinary* method of God's governing the world."[52] It has been argued that there was a "secularization of matter theory" in the century after Newton;[53] but this argument calls for qualification. A mechanical reading of Newtonianism as synonymous with "classical physics" only became the norm in the light of the programmatic work of later mathematicians and physicists, notably Pierre-Simon Laplace in Paris in the 1790s and Hermann von Helmholz in Berlin in the 1890s. Yet the secularizing implications of Laplace's ideas were quickly understood and resisted by English or Scottish scientists like John Robison, David Brewster, Samuel Vince and William Whewell: in both countries, a providential natural science was evidently still prevalent.[54]

It has also been argued that advances in the mathematical study of probability steadily diminished the sphere of the random, and this is in some senses correct as far as it goes; yet such regularity applied retrospectively, and only to the whole sample studied: within lived experience, vicissitudes still impinged unpredictably and catastrophically on the individuals composing the sample. Providence was not therefore excluded, and statisticians themselves sustained a re-

[49]Joseph Fawcett, *An Essay on the Wisdom, the Equity, and the Bounty of Divine Providence* (Ewood Hall, 1797), p. 5.

[50]W. Tucker, *Predestination Calmly Considered from Principles of Reason, in consistency with the Nature of Things, and the Scriptures of Truth, in a series of letters to a friend* (London, 1798), p. 5.

[51]Thomas Etherington, *The Being and Attributes of God, Deduced from the Works of Creation; and Divine Providence asserted and defended* (London, 1799), p. 14.

[52]David Savile, *Dissertations on the Existence, Attributes, Providence, and Moral Government of God* (Edinburgh, 1807), p. 117.

[53]Porter, *Enlightenment*, pp. 140–41.

[54]Simon Schaffer, "Newtonianism," in R. C. Olby, et al. eds., *Companion to the History of Modern Science* (London, 1990), pp. 610–26.

ligious faith. One such was the Dutch physicist and mathematician Christiaan Huygens (1629–95), who published in 1657 a Latin treatise on probability, translated by John Arbuthnot in 1692 as *Of the Laws of Chance* (reprinted in 1714 and 1738).[55] Arbuthnot supplied a worldly Preface, arguing that man's success in any affair depended on his conduct and on Fortune, i.e. chance, that is, events whose causes we cannot see—"for it is no Heresy to believe, that Providence suffers ordinary matters to run in the Channel of second Causes."[56] Huygens had taken a more pious view, however; he elsewhere excused his speculations about life on other planets, since such a discovery would mean that

> we shall worship and reverence that God the Maker of all these things; we shall admire and adore his Providence and wonderful Wisdom which is displayed and manifested all over the Universe, to the confusion of those who would have the Earth and all things formed by the shuffling Concourse of Atoms, or to be without beginning.[57]

The mathematician Abraham De Moivre (1667–1754), who founded actuarial science in England, was a Huguenot. His treatise *The Doctrine of Chances* (1718) offered to show how to fix "certain Rules, for estimating how far some sorts of Events may rather be owing to Design than Chance"—that is, "how to collect, by a just Calculation, the Evidences of exquisite Wisdom and Design, which appear in the *Phenomena* of Nature throughout the Universe," and dispel the "*Superstition*" that there was such a thing as luck. The universe was rational because of God: "*where Uniformity, Order and Constancy reside, there also reside Choice and Design.*"[58] In due course the man who first tidied up the history of the subject, Isaac Todhunter, author of *A History of the Mathematical Theory of Probability from the Time of Pascal to that of Laplace* (1865) was also the author of *The Doctrine of a Divine Providence is inseparable from the belief of an absolutely perfect Creator* (1849). Nor was the practical application of probability theory extensive until much later: writers like Huygens, Moivre, and others still worked out their mathematical techniques in relation to card games, not to the general fabric of daily life.

A perfect Creator presumably could not have been responsible for evil;[59] but how, in that case, could the presence of evil in the world be explained? The

[55]Ivo Schneider, "Christiaan Huygens's Contribution to the Development of a Calculus of Probabilities," *Janus* 67 (1980): 269–79.

[56]Arbuthnot added: "all the Politicks in the World, are nothing else but a kind of Analysis of the Quantity of Probability in casual Events, and a good Politician signifies no more, but one who is dexterous at such Calculations": [Christiaan Huygens], *Of the Laws of Chance, or, a Method of Calculation of the Hazards of Game* (London, 1692), Preface, n.p.

[57]Christiaan Huygens, *The Celestial Worlds Discover'd: or, Conjectures Concerning the Inhabitants, Plants and Productions of the Worlds in the Planets* (London, 1698), p. 11.

[58]Abraham de Moivre, *The Doctrine of Chances: or, A Method of Calculating the Probability of Events in Play* (London, 1718), sig. A2v, pp. iv, vi.

[59]"God's benevolence resolved the theodicy problem": Porter, *Enlightenment*, p. 17.

theodicy problem, as it was known from Leibniz's work of 1710,[60] also involved the nature of Providence. Why did evil men prosper, and good men suffer? Was there a larger pattern within which all was for the best? Christians of all denominations insisted that there was. Chance, argued Sir Humphry Mackworth in 1704, was the surface appearance of things, but it also often rewarded good men, preserved the Church, punished the wicked: "*the Rewards and Punishments of Chance and Accident, are all as wisely done, as if there had been nothing of Chance or Accident in it.*"[61] The opposite position, too, was a theological one: a Deist like Thomas Chubb argued equally against original sin, predestination and special providences on the grounds that they would deprive man of free choice and remove from him responsibility for his actions.[62]

In 1738, Joseph Hallett, Presbyterian minister and critic of the Deists, saw a debate polarizing. "Some late *metaphysical* writers have taught, that all the motions of the heavenly bodies, gravitation, the tides, and all other events are owing to the *immediate action* of the creator"; but this must be wrong, since it would make God the author of the Crucifixion. "The other *extreme* is to teach, as Mr. C[hubb] does, that God does not now interpose at all by any *particular* providence in the affairs of mankind," but ruled instead by general providences.[63] Particular providences, Hallett contended, were the middle way. But if Providence was particular as well as general, where did that leave miracles?

The debate on miracles was extensive even in that age of controversies. It was not begun (as was once thought) by Deists speaking for modern science and using new ideas of scientific rationality to attack orthodox religion; rather, it was initiated as a Deist reaction against churchmen, for it was churchmen who were deeply involved in and committed to the scientific innovations of the age.[64] Such divines and scientists were also the most keen to defend the idea of miracle. Deists by contrast were theorists, distant from the latest developments in the natural sciences. These developments inevitably raised the general question of how laws of nature were to be understood;[65] and initially they were

[60]G. W. Leibniz, *Essais de Théodicée sur la Bonté de Dieu, la Liberté de l'Homme, et l'Origine du Mal* (Amsterdam, 1710).

[61]Mackworth, *A Treatise Concerning Providence*, pp. 33–34.

[62]T. L. Bushell, *The Sage of Salisbury: Thomas Chubb 1679–1747* (London, 1968), pp. 17, 23, 51–52, 88–89.

[63]Joseph Hallett, *The Consistent Christian: being a Confutation of the Errors advanced in Mr Chubb's late Book: intituled, The true Gospel of Jesus Christ asserted....With Remarks on his Dissertation on Providence* (London, 1738), pp. 40–41.

[64]R. M. Burns, *The Great Debate on Miracles: From Joseph Glanvill to David Hume* (London, 1981).

[65]Laws of nature had formerly been chiefly a philosophical construct, understood no longer as immanent principles in nature but by analogy with the commands of an omnipotent Deity. See Francis

pictured very differently from the immutable secular principles that they became in the nineteenth century. Robert Boyle described miracles as "extraordinary and supernatural interpositions of divine providence" in which one might see God "to over-rule or controul the established course of things in the world by his own omnipotent hand."[66] For good reasons, Newton "both believed in and did not believe in miracles."[67] The prevalence of a Christian Newtonianism in the natural sciences meant that the philosophical attack on miracles largely ended with Hume, rather than finding in him a culmination and a triumph. Miracles survived him, under the heading of providences.[68] Publications on miracles were much less frequent after the 1750s; works on Providence continued in full flood.[69] It is necessary to understand more clearly why that was.

Oakley, "Christian Theology and the Newtonian Science: the Rise of the Concept of the Laws of Nature," *Church History* 30 (1960): 433–57; John R. Milton, "The origin and development of the concept of the 'laws of nature'," *European Journal of Sociology* 22 (1981): 173–95; Harrison, "Newtonian Science, Miracles, and the Laws of Nature" (1995).

[66]Robert Boyle, *A Free Inquiry into the Vulgarly received notion of Nature*, in *Works*, 5: 163–64, quoted in Oakley, "Christian Theology and the Newtonian Science," p. 448.

[67]Richard Westfall, *Science and Religion in Seventeenth Century England* (New Haven, 1970), p. 204. "Leading scientists of this [Newton's] era, almost without exception, had a dual commitment on the one hand to a science premised upon a mechanical universe governed by immutable laws of nature and on the other to a omnipotent God who intervened in the natural order from time to time, breaching these 'laws' of nature": Harrison, "Newtonian Science," p. 531.

[68]Major works in the debate included [Charles Blount], *Miracles no Violation of the Laws of Nature* (London, 1683); John Locke, "A Discourse of Miracles," in *Posthumous Works* (London, 1706); Anthony Collins, *A Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (London, 1724); Samuel Chandler, *A Vindication of the Christian Religion* (London, 1725); William Warburton, *A Critical and Philosophical Enquiry into the Causes of Prodigies and Miracles, as Related by Historians* (London, 1727); Thomas Woolston, *Six Discourses on the Miracles of our Saviour* (London, 1727–28); Zachary Pearce, *The Miracles of Jesus Vindicated* (London, 1729); Thomas Sherlock, *The Tryal of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus* (London, 1729); Conyers Middleton, *A Letter from Rome, shewing an exact conformity between Popery and Paganism* (London, 1729); John Conybeare, *A Defence of Revealed Religion* (London, 1732); Joseph Butler, *The Analogy of Religion* (London, 1736); Caleb Fleming, *An Answer to Mr. Thomas Chubb's Book, entitled, The True Gospel of Jesus Christ* (London, 1738); idem, *Remarks on Mr. Thos. Chubb's short Dissertation on Providence* (London, 1738); Thomas Chubb, *A Discourse on Miracles* (London, 1741); Arthur Ashley Sykes, *A Brief Discourse Concerning the Credibility of Miracles and Revelation* (London, 1742); Abraham Lemoine, *A Treatise on Miracles* (London, 1747); Conyers Middleton, *A Free Enquiry into the Miraculous Powers, which are Supposed to have Subsisted in the Christian Church from the Earliest Ages* (1749); William Dodwell, *A Free Answer to Dr. Middleton's Free Inquiry* (London, 1749); [John Wesley], *A Letter to the Reverend Dr. Conyers Middleton* (London, 1749). Hume was also eclipsed by the controversy that followed Conyers Middleton's *An Examination of the Lord Bishop of London's Discourses concerning the Use and Intent of Prophecy* (London, 1750).

[69]Early responses to Hume on miracles were few in number by comparison with the contributions to the debate on Providence: [David Hume], *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding* (London, 1748), section 10, "Of Miracles"; William Adams, *An Essay on Mr. Hume's Essay on*

The rise of natural science had indeed promoted discussion of miracles by defining more sharply those laws of nature to which some things might need to be exceptions. Twentieth-century modernists too often assumed a two bucket theory, science rising as miracle declined; it seems on the contrary that both at this period rose together. Even if mutual exclusivity was the nineteenth-century outcome, for Boyle and Newton the laws of nature still seemed provisional and local. Newton, in his *Opticks*, argued that God could "vary the laws of nature, and make worlds of several sorts in several parts of the universe."[70] This idea made it more urgent to discover empirically just what the laws of nature in this world were. What might be exceptions to them, and what might be examples of God changing his mind? The new understanding of laws of nature as divine commands, after all, implied that God might command differently. The Stoic idea of Fate must be rejected, argued Walter Charleton (1619–1707), later a Fellow of the Royal Society, in so far as it "blasphemously invades the Cardinal Praerogative of Divinity, Omnipotence, by denying him [God] a reserved power, of infringing, or altering any one of those laws which he himself ordained and enacted, and chaining up his armes with adamantine fetters of Destiny."[71] Even Robert Boyle (1627–91), a founder of the natural sciences, argued that God could "do whatever involves no contradiction."[72]

The conventional view has been that Protestant thought came to rely on miracles conceived as breaches of the laws of nature in the context of the debate on Christian evidences: miracles were regarded as the strongest proof of the credentials of a person or institution. Thus some Protestant thinkers, most famously Conyers Middleton in 1749, argued (or in the case of religious sceptics apparently argued) for the reality of ancient miracles allegedly reported in Scripture but denied recent miracles allegedly wrought by the Catholic Church, and, by implication, witnessed anywhere else in the eighteenth-century world. The publication of Middleton's tract and Hume's essay in successive years has been assumed to show that the argument was won by a secular rejection of the pos-

Miracles (London, 1752); John Leland, *A View of the Principal Deistical Writers*, 3 vols. (London, 1754–56); David Hume, *Four Dissertations. I. The Natural History of Religion...* (London, 1757); [Richard Hurd], *Remarks on Mr. D. Hume's Essay on the Natural History of Religion; addressed to the Rev. Dr. Warburton* (London, 1757); [S. T.], *Remarks on the Natural History of Religion by Mr. Hume* (London, 1758); George Campbell, *A Dissertation on Miracles; containing an examination of the principles advanced by D. Hume, Esq. In an Essay on Miracles* (London, 1762); Richard Price, *Four Dissertations* (London, 1767). There was little more before the publication of Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* in 1779.

[70]Quoted Oakley, "Christian Theology," p. 437.

[71]Walter Charleton, *The Darkness of Atheism dispelled by the Light of Nature: a physico-theological Treatise* (London, 1652), cited Oakley, "Christian Theology," pp. 444–45.

[72]Robert Boyle, *Some considerations about the Reconcileableness of Reason and Religion*, in *Works*, 4: 159, quoted in Oakley, "Christian Theology," p. 445.

sibility of intervention by a Deity, but the adverse reaction to Middleton and the silence that greeted Hume may indicate otherwise.[73] The degree of overlap between miracle and Providence working through second causes (the astonishing concatenation of events each of which, alone, was commonplace) meant that divine interventions survived under another label. The question "do miracles happen?" was overtaken in public debate by another: "does God act through general or special providences?" Special providences remained a link between theology and natural science that might negate determinism, and these providences could be understood in a hard or a soft sense.

The Protestant denial of modern Roman Catholic miracles involved a denial in the hard sense: the modern Roman Church could not suspend the laws of nature. This was exploited by Hume for the cause of scepticism, by his argument that the testimony of witnesses to a miracle could never be more reliable than the uniformity of natural laws. Hume here depended on an assumption that natural laws were indeed uniform; but a major gap in his knowledge was the natural sciences, for Newtonian physics had indeed left room for irregularities that demanded divine intervention, and this element of Newtonianism was widely known. In brief, Newton did not underwrite Hume. Even if Newtonians of the generation of Clarke and Whiston rephrased the question (as Peter Harrison has argued), miracles understood as results of the concatenation of second causes might still astonish.

Religious sceptics therefore preferred to debate miracle in the hard sense: did the Red Sea part to admit the passage of the Israelites? Were Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego preserved unharmed when Nebuchadnezzar had them thrown into the fiery furnace? But few people in the eighteenth century experienced apparent suspensions or reversals of physical laws in their daily lives. What they might easily experience were instead astonishing conjunctures, or vicissitudes, or survivals, or reversals in human affairs, like 1688; and the forces at work in such cases were, each separately considered, not unusual.

If God operated through second causes, there could be a simple identity between providences and miracles. A "miracle" would be an instance of God's using the laws of nature to a good end in an astonishing conjuncture. The preservation of English rights and privileges over so many centuries since 1066 "hath to a miracle, been solely from the Providence of God," argued the aged republican Slingsby Bethel in 1691; the rise and preservation of Protestantism was a sure sign of Providence. In Bethel's discourse, "providence" and "miracle" performed the same function (Abraham Campion similarly wrote in 1694 of "a

[73]Ted A. Campbell, "John Wesley and Conyers Middleton on Divine Intervention in History," *Church History* 55 (1986): 39–49; David Wootton, "Hume's 'Of Miracles': Probability and Irreligion," in M. A. Stewart, ed., *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 191–229.

standing miracle of Providence").[74] Yet Bethel's long list of astonishing events in 1688 that had brought about the Revolution was perfectly commonplace: it was not against nature that the wind had remained in the East, for example, wafting William down the Channel while keeping James's fleet in the Thames estuary. A miracle might be an improbable but deeply desired event produced by second causes. Miracle proved the reality of Providence, argued the Rev. Henry Topping in 1715; but as an example of a miracle he gave only the Restoration of Charles II.[75] Yet miracle in the hard sense survived too, since science developed fast enough to emphasize its own ignorance. For the ecclesiastical historian Samuel Roffey Maitland, in 1831, a miracle was a suspension of the laws of nature; but what were the laws of nature? How could we know them for certain? History recorded many unusual, irregular occurrences; why were these too not part of the natural order? [76]

Religion prevented scientific and philosophical debates from being academic affairs only, and the conflicts between Calvinist predestination and Arminian freewill were already ancient. In a tract of 1705 dated from Shatton in Cumberland, Jane Fearon recorded being provoked to a critique of Calvinism by hearing a sermon in an Independent congregation at Cockermouth. Her argument was a series of forty-eight points, mostly depending on a single Scriptural text, mentioning no theologian and no social dimension except her having known one man who was led into a vicious life by the doctrine of absolute predestination.[77] The minister in question, John Atkinson, duly replied in a tract of his own: predestination and special providences, for him, evidently went together; they were consequences of God's sovereignty, and he was enabled to reply by the "*Special Providence*" that had placed him among his flock.[78] A knowledge of these alternatives had penetrated far beyond the elite.

Between the Arminian and the predestinarian positions ran an argument later revived in the Oriel of the 1820s. It was first classically expressed by William King (1650–1729), Archbishop of Dublin, in his sermon on predestination of 1709. The problem he addressed was that "there yet remain form'd and separate Parties, that mutually refuse to communicate with one another," the Calvinist

[74]Slingsby Bethel, *The Providences of God, observed through several ages, towards this nation, in introducing the true religion* (London, 1691), p. 40; Campion, *Sermon concerning National Providence*, p. 12.

[75]Henry Topping, *The Certainty of an Over-ruling Providence. A Sermon Preach'd...at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul. On May 29. 1715. Being the Restoration of King Charles II* (London, 1715), p. 8.

[76][Samuel Roffey Maitland], *Eruvin: or, Miscellaneous Essays on Subjects connected with the Nature, History and Destiny of Man* (London, 1831), pp. 250–52.

[77]Jane Fearon, *Absolute Predestination not Scriptural* (London, 1705), pp. 17–18 and passim.

[78]John Atkinson, *A Discourse of Election* (London, 1708), sig. A2r.

and the Arminian. King's attempted irenic solution was that God's attributes were so much beyond human understanding that they were to be interpreted "by way of Analogy and Comparison." Literalism was to be rejected.[79] The Deist Anthony Collins seized on King's arguments: King had given the game away. God, if not literally described in Scripture, must be understood as "a *Being that is a general Cause of the wonderful Effects in Nature, to which we cannot give any particular Attributes or Perfections.*"[80] John Edwards, a Cambridge Calvinist divine, critic of Socinianism and Locke's *The Reasonableness of Christianity,* similarly pointed out in 1710 that King conceded a key advantage to Deists and Unitarians, for the doctrine of the Trinity would thereby become mere figurative language.[81]

Those who believed in determinism and those who believed in freewill had equally to argue that their positions were consistent with God's superintendance. Deism, especially, obliged its subscribers to consider what they meant by Providence. Since open atheism was a rare and dangerous position, religious sceptics could at most push back the sphere of action of the divine: Providence for them was to be redefined as general providence, that beneficent provision which God had made for all things in common by establishing fully sufficient, but unvarying, natural laws. For Thomas Chubb, divine oversight entailed merely a "general providence," that is, "God, at the creation, put the natural world under the direction of certain laws." But this was all. Particular providences, defined as special interventions of the Deity "*above*, or *beside* the ordinary course of nature, or of those *laws* by which the world is governed," were not provable; they would be synonymous with miracles. Some people, argued Chubb, saw special providences as rare, others as common; in either case, they would make God a party to the evil in the world, and would imply that creation was imperfect, in need of perpetual "*patching* and *mending.*"[82] Like Chubb, the Deist Thomas Morgan sided with "general Laws" that were "so perfect as not to require any farther Alterations or Amendments."[83] But what was a general providence, what

[79]William King, *Divine Predestination and Fore-knowledg, consistent with the Freedom of Man's Will. A Sermon Preach'd at Christ-Church, Dublin; May 15. 1709* (London, 1709), pp. 4, 8 and passim.

[80][Anthony Collins], *A Vindication of the Divine Attributes. In some Remarks On his Grace the Archbishop of Dublin's Sermon, Intituled, Divine Predestination and Foreknowledge consistent with the Freedom of Man's Will* (London, 1710), pp. 12–13.

[81]John Edwards, *The Divine Perfections Vindicated; or, some brief Remarks On his Grace William Lord Arch-Bishop of Dublin's Sermon* (London, 1710).

[82]Thomas Chubb, *The True Gospel of Jesus Christ Asserted....To which is added A Short Dissertation on Providence* (London, 1738), pp. 197, 207–10.

[83]T. Morgan, *Physico-Theology: or, a Philosophico-Moral Disquisition concerning Human Nature, Free Agency, Moral Government, and Divine Providence* (London, 1741), p. v.

a special providence? Presumably the Deist John Toland placed into the first category the event predicted in his tract of 1718, *The Destiny of Rome: or, the probability of the speedy and final destruction of the Pope.* Deists were not necessarily more consistent than anyone else.

A Socinian like the Independent minister Caleb Fleming could join in the denunciation of Chubb: the Deist had not proved that there were not *continual* divine interventions; he had not proved that special providences and miracles were the same. How could "beings or things continue to exist, without that *energy* being continued which first caused their existence?" Chubb's was in fact a "*doctrine of predestination.*" [84] Abolishing particular providences turned God "the kind Father of the Universe" into "the God of *Fate* or necessity."[85] An Anglican like Lawrence Jackson could seize on Chubb's argument to abolish the difficulty of miracles: "general Providence is made up of an infinite Number of particular Providences," and hence "God has been continually working Miracles: for to create and sustain the System of Nature is a continued Miracle, and requires a Power equal to that of suspending or overturning the Course of Nature."[86] The Deist Lord Bolingbroke insisted that particular providences would subvert "the Whole Order of Nature"; [87] this strategy was recognized and resisted by William Dodwell, canon of Salisbury, on the grounds that there was no difference between particular and general providence; and, especially relevant in the Deist controversy, that Providence could be established from natural religion itself.[88]

The debate about miracles, the debate about predestination, and the debate about providences all significantly overlapped; in turn, they overlapped with another debate, the philosophers' dispute over freewill. It, too, was undecided, and it, too, was theological. Classically educated, the participants in this conflict had routinely situated it in a long retrospect reaching back to the Epicureans and the Stoics, as well as Augustine; but the debate again came to a theological head in the 1650s when Hobbes set the argument within his doctrine of mate-

[84][Caleb Fleming], *Remarks on Mr. Tho. Chubb's short Dissertation on Providence. With Animadversions on his True Gospel of Jesus Christ asserted* (London, 1738), pp. ix–x, 16, 93 and passim.

[85]Caleb Fleming, *Remarks on Mr. Thomas Chubb's Vindication of his True Gospel of Jesus Christ....His Vindication of his Short Dissertation on Providence consider'd* (London, 1739), pp. 65–66.

[86]Lawrence Jackson, *An Examination Of a Book intituled The True Gospel of Jesus Christ Asserted, By Thomas Chubb: And also of His Appendix on Providence* (London, 1739), pp. 256, 261–62.

[87]*The Works Of the late Right Honorable Henry St. John, Lord Viscount Bolingbroke*, ed. David Mallet, 5 vols. (London, 1754), 5: 85.

[88]William Dodwell, *The Doctrine of a Particular Providence stated, confirmed, defended and applied* (Oxford, 1760), pp. 1–3, 6.

rialistic determinism.[89] In his view, ideas and motives were movements of the brain and produced by causes in the external world; the will thereby became identified with appetite and fear. The experience of defeat, regicide, and flight gave a practical dimension to the urge to interrogate Providence, and an urge of exceptional force. Hobbes's fellow royalist exile in Paris, John Bramhall, Bishop of Derry and later Archbishop of Armagh, rightly saw that Hobbes's argument, however effective as a justification for the restoration of a strong monarchy, would exclude the Anglican God entirely.[90] What Hobbes had done was to take Lutheran and Calvinist teaching on predestination and press it to an extreme, in the context of a materialist philosophy that made God irrelevant; and he had done so under cover of Scriptural reference.[91] Both sides believed in Scriptural authority, claimed Hobbes, but he adhered to the view that "the Will of God makes the Necessity of all things"; Bramhall, Hobbes asserted, contended that man was free to will as he chose, and that "many things come to pass without Necessity, by Chance," by arguing that divine foreknowledge did not undermine human freedom. Freewill was a Popish doctrine, Hobbes shrewdly claimed, not found in Scripture.[92] Yet Hobbes's irreligion and notoriety placed such doctrines out of bounds for many.

Locke attempted to solve the dilemma expressed in the Hobbes-Bramhall debate, whether we are free not just to will, but to will what we will, by focusing on the question whether we are free to do what we will;[93] but Locke did not necessarily emancipate men from an old dilemma. The Rev. Richard Warner, Foxite and antiquary, preaching in Bath on the peace in 1814, quoted "the in-

[89]Thomas Hobbes, *Of Liberty and Necessitie* (London, 1654); John Bramhall, *A Defence of True Liberty from Antecedent and Extrinsecall Necessity, being an answer to a late book of Mr Thomas Hobbs of Malmsbury, intituled, "A Treatise of Liberty and Necessity"* (London, 1655); Thomas Hobbes, *The Questions Concerning Liberty, Necessity and Chance* (London, 1656); John Bramhall, *Castigations of Mr. Hobbes his last animadversions in the case concerning liberty, and universal necessity* (London, 1658).

[90]Leopold Damrosch, Jr., "Hobbes as Reformation Theologian: Implications of the Free-Will Controversy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40 (1979): 339–52; Vere Chappell, ed., *Hobbes and Bramhall on Liberty and Necessity* (Cambridge, 1999); Yves Charles Zarka, "Liberty, Necessity and Chance: Hobbes's General Theory of Events," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 9 (2001): 425–37.

[91]"Luther and Calvin took away freedom so that man's will might be merged in God's; Hobbes takes it away so that events may unwind with an inexorability that Bramhall rightly likens to Stoic fate": Damrosch, "Hobbes as Reformation Theologian," p. 346. Damrosch shows how the theological setting of the question of freewill is made far more explicit in the debate with Bramhall than in Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651).

[92]Hobbes, *The Questions Concerning Liberty, Necessity and Chance*, sigs. A2r–v.

[93]For freewill debate see John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* (London, 1690), Book 2, ch. 21.

comparable Locke": he had been equally sure that he was free and that God was omnipotent, but how were they consistent? Locke had written: "I have long given off the consideration of that question, resolving all into this short conclusion, that *if it be possible for God to make a free agent, then man is free, though I see not the way of it.*"[94] Without a better argument Locke did not end the debate, which continued unresolved.[95]

It should come as no surprise that most of the participants were either clergymen, or arguing with clergymen. For this was not a secular question, but one that concerned the interpretation of God's interaction with Creation. After the Deist controversies of the 1730s the conflict between freewill and determinism was fought out in the 1740s chiefly within the Church, under the heading of predestination, between the followers of the Calvinist George Whitefield and the Arminian John Wesley.[96] Reassertions of militant predestinarianism among his followers provoked Wesley's publication of a deliberately anti-Calvinist sermon in 1739, and he followed it with publications defining Calvinist teaching in a hard sense.[97] Whitefield replied,[98] and the starkly polarized debate ran on into the 1750s.[99] William Parker kept the debate alive with his discourses before the University of Oxford in 1759,[100] and the controversy of the 1740s and 1750s led straight to the debate of the 1770s,[101] triggered by Augustus Toplady's

[94]Richard Warner, *Divine Providence Evidenced in the Causes, Consequences and Termination of the late War* (Bath [1814]), pp. 7–8.

[95]See e.g. William L. Rowe, "Causality and Free Will in the Controversy between Collins and Clarke," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 25 (1987): 51–67.

[96]For which see especially W. Stephen Gunter, *The Limits of "Love Divine": John Wesley's Response to Antinomianism and Enthusiasm* (Nashville, 1989); Herbert Boyd McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley's Evangelical Arminianism* (Carlisle, 2001).

[97]John Wesley, *Free Grace* (Bristol, 1739); idem, *Serious Considerations Concerning the Doctrines of Election and Reprobation* (London, 1740); idem, *Serious Considerations on Absolute Predestination: Extracted from a Late Author* (Bristol, 1741); idem, *The Scripture Doctrine Concerning Predestination, Election and Reprobation: Extracted from a Late Author* (London, 1741); idem, *A Dialogue between a Predestinarian and his Friend* (London, 1741).

[98]George Whitefield, *A Letter to the Reverend Mr John Wesley: in answer to his Sermon, entituled, Free-Grace* (London, 1741).

[99]John Wesley, *Predestination Calmly Considered* (London, 1752); John Gill, *The Doctrine of Predestination Stated, And set in the Scripture-Light; In Opposition to Mr. Wesley's Predestination calmly Consider'd* (London, 1752); *A New Essay on Divine Providence....Being a very proper Supplement to the late Dr. Sherlock's Treatise on the same Subject* (London [1752]).

[100]William Parker, *The Scripture Doctrine of Predestination stated and explained* (Oxford, 1759).

[101]Gunter, *Limits of "Love Divine,"* pp. 277–79, provides a chronology of the controversy of 1769–77, including 57 published items.

edition of Jerom Zanchius in 1769,[102] which asserted absolute predestination.[103] Wesley in turn replied, and his close associate John Fletcher took an ever more prominent role; Toplady was seconded by Sir Richard Hill.[104] It broke out again with the revival of Calvinistic Dissent in the 1790s, which, according to Thomas Le Mesurier, Anglican vicar and Bampton lecturer, brought predestination "into fashion, almost exclusively, among the uninformed and labouring classes of mankind";[105] at the same time, it might be added, as Calvinism softened among much more comfortably placed Evangelical churchmen.

Were the Thirty-nine Articles Calvinistic or not? Did they commit churchmen to the doctrine of predestination, and, if so, in what sense? This debate, too, ran throughout the century, and John Henry Newman's *Remarks on Certain Passages in the Thirty-Nine Articles* (the famous Tract 90 of 1841) revisited an old debate in a new context. It could be very old indeed: *The Churchman's Remembrancer* for 1806 reprinted an anti-Calvinist tract of 1653 by John Plaifere, reprinted before in the Cambridge collection of writings on predestination of 1719.[106] The idea that predestination was an Anglican doctrine in the Articles, argued Thomas Le Mesurier in 1809, had been refuted by the charges of George Pretyman Tomline, bishop of Lincoln, Richard Laurence's Bampton lectures, and Dean Tucker's letters to Kippis.[107] Others were certainly involved, but it might be argued that Le Mesurier was correct in his understanding of how the debate had developed, and it was this Arminian predominance that Newman later sought to extend.

[102]Girolamo Zanchi (1516–90), a Calvinist theologian.

[103][Augustus Toplady, trans.], *The Doctrine of Absolute Predestination...asserted....Translated in great measure from the Latin of J. Zanchius* (London, 1769); idem, *The Church of England Vindicated from the Charge of Arminianism* (London, 1769); idem, *A Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley: Relative to his pretended Abridgement of Zanchius on Predestination* (London, 1770); idem, *More Work for Mr. John Wesley; or, A Vindication of the Decrees and Providence of God from the Defamations of a late printed Paper, entitled, "The Consequence Proved"* (London, 1772); idem, *Historic Proof of the Doctrinal Calvinism of the Church of England* (London, 1774).

[104][John Wesley], *The Doctrine of Absolute Predestination Stated and Asserted. By the Reverend Mr. A— T——* (London, 1770); idem, *The Consequence Proved* (London, 1771); [Walter Sellon], *The Church of England Vindicated from the Charge of Absolute Predestination, As it is Stated and Asserted by the Translator of Jerome Zanchius, in his Letter to the Rev. Dr. Nowell* (London, 1771); John Wesley, *The Scripture Doctrine concerning Predestination and Election, and Reprobation. Extracted from a late Author* (London, 1776).

[105]Thomas Le Mesurier, *The Doctrines of Predestination and Assurance examined...with large notes* (London, 1809), p. 2.

[106]*A Collection of Tracts Concerning Predestination and Providence* (Cambridge, 1719).

[107]Le Mesurier, *The Doctrines of Predestination and Assurance examined;* Richard Laurence, *An attempt to illustrate those Articles of the Church of England, which the Calvinists improperly consider*

Active as this debate on the Articles was, the major theological explosion over freewill and necessity came in and after 1821. In that year the Provost of Oriel College, Edward Copleston, Pittite, reformer and classicist, published *An Inquiry into the Doctrines of Necessity and Predestination*, arguing against Calvinism. His argument was fully consistent with Archbishop William King's sermon on predestination and foreknowledge, he wrote.[108] From Oriel again, in 1821, Richard Whately republished King's sermon, with notes, claiming that King's notions "must be the proper basis of all sound theology."[109] Calvinists were outraged, as were all those who saw the Christian message resting on a literal use of language. If the attributes of God were only known analogically, argued the Rev. E. W. Grinfield, a Biblical scholar and anti-Calvinist, all certainty in religion was at an end; it would have the same effect as "the well-known mystical interpretations of Mr. Woolston respecting the miracles of Christ." Grinfield, in his reply to Copleston of 1822, sided with Bishop Butler: whether we are free or not, men are always treated in the New Testament *as if* they were free. Collins's objection to archbishop King was right: if language describing the divine attributes was only a "representation and resemblance," that gave up the doctrine of the Trinity to the Unitarians.[110]

Did God intend the general pattern of development of eighteenth-century England? One of the largest bodies of evidence that providential discourse was not erased by naturalistic or social-scientific discourse is found in commentary on political events.[111] This, too, had its wider premises: English historiography

as Calvinistical (Oxford, 1805); Josiah Tucker, *Letters to the Rev. Dr. Kippis, occasioned by his treatise, entituled, "A Vindication of the Protestant Dissenting Ministers," with regard to their late Application to Parliament* (Gloucester, 1773). Arguments against Calvinism continued, e.g. George Pretyman Tomline, *A Refutation of Calvinism* (London, 1811); William Harness, *The Scriptural Doctrines of Predestination explained* (London, 1819); Thomas Young, *Three Sermons, on St. Paul's Doctrine of I. Justification by Faith: II. Original Sin: III. Predestination: With Notes* (York, 1820).

[108]Edward Copleston, *An Enquiry into the Doctrines of Necessity and Predestination. In Four Discourses preached before the University of Oxford. With Notes, and an Appendix, on the Seventeenth Article of the Church of England* (London, 1821), p. 115.

[109]Richard Whately, *The Right Method of Interpreting Scripture, in what relates to the Nature of the Deity, and his Dealings with Mankind, illustrated, in a Discourse on Predestination, by Dr. King, Late Lord Archbishop of Dublin, Preached at Christ Church, Dublin, before the House of Lords, May 15, 1709* (Oxford, 1821), p. ix.

[110]E. W. Grinfield, *Vinciciae Analogicae. A Letter to the Rev. Edward Copleston, DD...on his "Enquiry into the Doctrines of Necessity and Predestination"* (London, 1822), pp. 27–28, 40, 48, and passim.

[111]For an earlier period, see Blair Worden, "Providence and Politics in Cromwellian England," *Past and Present* 109 (1985): 55–99; John Spurr, "'Virtue, Religion and Government': the Anglican Uses of Providence," in Tim Harris, Paul Seaward, and Mark Goldie, eds., *The Politics of Religion in Restoration England* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 29–47.

since Bede was familiar with providential survival as an organizing category, and providentially-ensured triumph was shared out to many sides in the kaleidoscope of seventeenth-century politics. The vicissitudes of political affairs still brought the periodic disappointment of sizeable sections of the population. The events of 1660 meant "the experience of defeat" for the republican cause, 1689 (and many later events) meant the same for the Jacobites, 1760 for the Old Corps Whigs, 1784 for the Foxites; 1714 was no secure arrival of pudding time, but merely a prelude to armed insurrection. The *annus mirabilis* of 1759 was unexpected, coming as it did after the indecisive war of 1739–48 and the early reverses of the Seven Years' War, and the hopes of 1759 were dashed in 1776. In turn, 1789 provoked profound reflection: even a Whig reformer like Burke thought the "ostensible causes" of the French Revolution wholly inadequate to explain what occurred,[112] and many observers interrogated the Almighty for a clue to the providential meanings of events. Much political commentary did not explicitly invoke the Deity; but much did, and with no sense of inconsistency between providential and political discourse. Throughout the long eighteenth century, political events were scrutinized to find in them the hand of God: the accessions, depositions, or deaths of monarchs; the outbreaks or terminations of wars; political revolutions. The most providentially-charged of all the "classic" revolutions indeed took place within a transatlantic realm of discourse, in 1776.

Other images and discourses survived to explain these events in the political realm. One such, the idea of the wheel of Fortune, enjoyed a continued currency. A satire on Laud, published in 1640, was entitled *Fortune's tennis-ball...or, a proviso for all those that are elevated, to take heed of falling*. In 1790, Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* used the same image of the great brought low and the elevation of the base as the source of its emotional intensity and its analysis of the nature of revolution itself. Fortune's wheel was an image offering no sense of structured process, for its very point was its capriciousness; it was revolutionary optimism that was now premised on the possibility of (a new) order. Locke was not such a cosmic optimist, for he saw God's intentions for man (in revealed and natural law) continually threatened by absolute monarchy; such an optimism was not fully formulated until the freethinker Paine, for it was he who devised a concept of society as a free-standing entity, independent of the state and not indebted to it, that would embody the ability of mankind to lead their daily lives by co-operation. Yet, Paine's analysis did not adequately describe what happened in the American colonies after 1776, or in France after 1789: spontaneously-arising social order was an idea that could be

[112]J. C. D. Clark, ed., Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Stanford, 2001), Introduction.

entertained only by a minority, men like William Godwin, dominated by their own theological preoccupations.[113]

Optimists, like pessimists, had political agendas, and both could be found at all points on the political spectrum. The Restoration was widely described by royalists as a special Providence. Whigs then elevated Providence after 1688 to justify the change of regime: "The Providence of God, tho' for several reasons it may not always be a good rule of action, yet may be a good rule of after-compliance. If God has a right to pull down one King and set up another, His finger when visible transfers the right, and his King must be submitted to; the change of circumstances necessarily inferring an alteration of duty."[114] William III was hailed by John Whittel in 1693 in a tract entitled *Constantinus Redivivus: or, a full account of the wonderful providences and unparallel'd successes that have attended the glorious enterprises of William the 3d*, and his survival of an assassination attempt produced in 1694 the modestly-titled tract *The Triumphs of Providence over Hell, France and Rome*. Others were not so confident about this inevitability. "The success of the greatest undertakings often depend upon very small accidents," wrote Abraham Campion in 1694, "meer contingencies; which does shew how little the Watchman has to do in the Case," how much Providence.[115]

Men could often not see this, said the Rev. Thomas Lynford in 1689, only because "So intricate and obscure are oftentimes the means upon which the preservation of any Government does depend." Yet, God "calls Cities and Commonwealths to present judgment"; Providence concerned not just individuals but polities, oscillating between great judgements and great mercies: "God's dealings with us have been all along variously chequered with good and evil."[116] Inflexible Fate and uncertain Fortune were alike refuted by the operation of Providence, argued John Moore, a royal chaplain, in 1690. It explained the sudden catastrophic changes in men's political fortunes, including the sudden disintegration of long-established kingdoms or empires, which no other explanations could do.[117] God acted in politics "according to the ordinary Methods of Providence, which is wont to entertain the world with Vicissitudes and Changes," argued the Whig divine John Edwards at Cambridge in 1710.[118] However theo-

[113]Godwin's was a vision in which men "will perhaps be immortal": *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* 2 vols., (London, 1793), 2: 871–72.

[114]Campion, *A Sermon concerning National Providence*, pp. 32–33; Tony Claydon, *William III and the Godly Revolution* (Cambridge, 1996).

[115]Campion, *A Sermon concerning National Providence*, p. 12.

[116]Thomas Lynford, *God's Providence the Cities Safety* (London, 1689), pp. 5, 35, 39.

[117]John Moore, *Of the Wisdom and Goodness of Providence* (London, 1690), pp. 5, 14–15, 17.

[118]John Edwards, *Great Things done by God for our Ancestors, and Us of this Island* (2nd ed.; London, 1710), pp. 17–18.

logically orthodox, change was politically dangerous. Robert D'Oyly, preaching in the chapel of Lady Hastings in 1710 on political providences, "National Sin," and the forfeiture of divine favor, had to explain (or profess) that his object had been to reconcile divisions at home, not to raise the "*Hopes* of the *Pretender*."[119]

In the Whig scheme, the Christian drama of man's creation, fall, and redemption was re-enacted in the secular realm as a series of political deliverances. To John Edwards in 1710, Archbishop William King's theology would undermine this Whig scenario by derogating from the doctrine of predestination (there was nothing inevitable about the victory of the Whigs). King, alleged Edwards, thereby capitulated to the Nonjuror and Jacobite Charles Leslie, who had flatly denied divine foreknowledge and predestination.[120] Politics was an unstable realm, far more so than Newton's cosmos. Just as the Newtonian physical universe required the continual intervention of God, so did the political world. As Joseph Wilcocks, bishop of Gloucester, argued in 1728: "Government itself would be impossible without Providence," since men were corrupt, profligate and self-willed; they were, alone, unable to support the state.[121] Bishop Berkeley consciously directed himself against Shaftesbury's *Characteristics* in stirring up in his contemporaries "a thorough Sense of the Deity inspecting, concurring, and interesting it self in humane Actions and Affairs."[122]

Appeals to Providence were prominent again after 1745,[123] but non-Christian alternatives could also be invoked. The author of the anonymous *Fortune's Tricks in Forty-Six* prefaced it with a motto from Sallust, *Fortuna in omni Re dominatur*; the author created a dialogue in which Fortune, the classical goddess, took malicious delight in spinning her wheel, raising the undeserving and destroying the great, "All to shew my Pow'r, and confound that formal Creature, *Reason*." Such was her power that "I can convert a Patriot into a Courtier; make a good Subject become a Rebel, and a Rebel a good Subject again."[124] But the

[119]Robert D'Oyly, *Providence Vindicated, as permitting Wickedness and Mischief* (London, 1710), sig. A3v, italics and Roman reversed.

[120]Edwards, *The Divine Perfections Vindicated*, p. 9.

[121]Joseph Wilcocks, *The Providence of God, the Preservation of Kingdoms* (London, 1728), pp. 4–5.

[122][George Berkeley], *The Theory of Vision, or Visual Language, shewing The Immediate Presence and Providence of a Deity, Vindicated and Explained. By the Author of Alciphron, or, The Minute Philosopher* (London, 1733), p. 12.

[123]L[eonard] Howard, *The Deliverance of Jersusalem from the Insults and Invasion of the Idolatrous Assyrians, a Motive to revere the Providence of God* (London, 1745); P[hilip] Doddridge, *Reflections on the Conduct of Divine Providence in the Series and Conclusion of the Late War* (London, 1749).

[124]*Fortune's Tricks in Forty-Six. An Allegorical Satire* (London, 1747), pp. 13–14.

optimists were again in the ascendant when Providence was evoked in the annus mirabilis of 1759, and after the accession of George III in 1760.[125]

In some areas, it was acknowledged that providential explanations were indeed being challenged by the *bienpensants*. Thomas Hunter in 1774 lamented how recent historians tended to exclude Providence: Clarendon had written in 1702–04 of general Monck as "God's instrument" in the Restoration of Charles II, but Voltaire's *Siècle de Louis XIV* in 1751 ascribed that event to "chance"; an "honest" *History of England* would feature Providence as its "most interesting and instructive part."[126] Yet this was but one swing of an old pendulum, and even the new historiography had soon to grapple with the cataclysm of the American Revolution. American colonial discourse was saturated with invocations of or reflections on Providence, as was American republican historical writing after independence.[127] It was expressed within a transatlantic idiom, spoken by that new arrival from Scotland, John Witherspoon, now President of the College of New Jersey, in a revolutionary sermon on *The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men*, a tract reprinted in Scotland and England.[128] The same year saw the churchman George Horne, at Oxford, preaching on *The Providence of God Manifested in the Rise and Fall of Empires*: Providence was "the divine oeconomy in the government of the world from the beginning." Empires too were mortal: "The Assyrian, the Babylonian, the Persian, the Graecian, the Roman—where are they?"[129]

The rise and fall of empires became a yet wider issue after 1789. The Unitarian Dissenting minister Newcome Cappe's insights, preached as sermons in 1786–87, were published in 1795 and aimed at "Times so awful as the present": yet he was no determinist, urging that

> we stand in awe of those events, that come to pass but once in a course of ages, and acknowledge them to be divine; we overlook the miracles that God is working in us, and around us, every day. Whatever is common, we say, is natural: often we hardly know what we mean when we say so. We receive the ordinary occurrences of life, with such sentiments, as if they were truly the result of chance, or the effects of an unintelligent fatality, and speak of them in such

[125]J. Williams, *The Favours of Providence to Britain in 1759* (London, 1759); John Rotheram, *A Sermon on the Wisdom of Providence in the Administration of the World* (London, 1762).

[126]Thomas Hunter, *Moral Discourses on Providence and other important Subjects*, 2 vols., (Warrington, 1774), 1: 80–84.

[127]Lester H. Cohen, *The Revolutionary Histories: Contemporary Narratives of the American Revolution* (Ithaca, 1980).

[128]John Witherspoon, *The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men. A Sermon, Preached at Princeton, May 17, 1775, being the General Fast Appointed by the Congress through the United Colonies* (London, 1778).

[129]George Horne, *The Providence of God Manifested in the Rise and Fall of Empires. A Sermon Preached at St. Mary's, in Oxford, at the Assizes...on Thursday, July 27. 1775* (Oxford, 1775), pp. 2, 22.

> terms, as sufficiently indicate, that the divine agency and providence enter not into our common notions of them.

Cappe argued for mankind's dependence every moment on God.[130] But Unitarian theology did not offer an unambiguous solution to this problem. Another Unitarian minister, John Disney, accepted in 1803 the general principle of the progressive fulfilment of prophetic Scriptural passages, but warned how "little precision can be obtained with respect to many inferior occurrences," so that "much is therefore left open to conjecture"; men should "hesitate" before they claimed Providence on their side.[131]

Would Providence defend Britain from the cataclysm of revolution? If national survival hung by a thread, the old issues were newly pressing. From Oxford, Thomas Etherington combated Jacobinism in 1799 by defending Providence and illustrating it from Aristotle.[132] In 1806 Vigors M'Culla, a Dissenting minister, saw the hand of God, not the Royal Navy, in Britain's deliverance.[133] Events since 1789 manifestly displayed the hand of God, argued Richard Warner in 1814; they had had the divinely-intended effect of "a revival of the religious spirit throughout Europe."[134] *National Providence* was the theme of a long tract by the bishop of Calcutta in 1815. The fall of Napoleon was an event that "the ordinary operation of natural causes" was wholly insufficient to explain, he urged; the events of the French Revolution his contemporaries had witnessed "are perhaps as instructive and as awful, as any which the annals of the world record."[135] For William Thorp, in 1831, Providence was acting through British patriotism "in spreading the blessings of eternal salvation, through the most distant regions of the world" by missionary endeavor. All earthly kingdoms must fall, but this one was preparing the way for the kingdom of God, a mission only lately thrown in doubt by Catholic Emancipation, passed "for what reason no mortal can tell."[136]

[130]Newcome Cappe, *Discourses on the Providence and Government of God* (London, 1795), pp. 1, 3, 11.

[131]John Disney, *Trust and Confidence in the Universal and Sovereign Government, and Constant Providences of God* (London, 1803), p. 9.

[132]Thomas Etherington, *The Being and Attributes of God, Deduced from the Works of Creation; and Divine Providence asserted and defended* (London, 1799).

[133]V[igors] M'Culla, *The Purpose of God, and Cause of His Church, set forth in the workings of Divine Providence* (London, [1806]).

[134]Richard Warner, *Divine Providence Evidenced in the Causes, Consequences, and Termination of the late War* (Bath [1814]), p. 15.

[135]Thomas Fanshaw Middleton, *National Providence: A Sermon...A General Thanksgiving throughout the Honourable Company's Territories in India, for the great and public Blessings of Peace in Europe* (Calcutta, 1815), pp. 16–17.

[136]William Thorp, *The Destinies of the British Empire, and the Duties of British Christians at the Present Crisis* (London, 1831), pp. 3, 53, 68.

Throughout these debates, it remained a consistent theme that Providence concerned nations as such, as well as individuals as such. "National Sins call for national Judgments," argued the Rev. Francis Fox, Whig churchman, in 1705.[137] "SOVEREIGN PRINCES and STATES are the Chief Instruments which Divine Providence imploys in its Administrations here below," recorded Bishop Atterbury in his *Maxims*, published in 1723 after the failure of the Jacobite conspiracy that took his name, and he went on to reflect on the issue at length: again, the Restoration of 1660 was an undoubted providence.[138] This familiar insight encouraged Christians of whatever denomination to extend it by constructing catalogues of national providences, a scenario that in the nineteenth century was secularized to become the organizing framework known since 1931 as "the Whig interpretation of history." The Rev. Thomas Harrison, in 1717, offered a catalogue of providential punishments in England, including the plagues of 1348, 1361, 1407, 1563, 1603 and 1665; the Fire of London in 1666; and a series of violent storms like 1091, 1661 and 1703: these must be set against "Instances of God's Kindness to us," like the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot in 1605, the Revolution of 1688, and the defeat of the rebellion in 1716.[139] In 1790 an Evangelical, the Rev. C. E. de Coetlogon, celebrated three key instances of Providence in English history: the Reformation, the Restoration, and the Revolution.[140] In 1800 Thomas James, formerly Headmaster of Rugby School, added to these providential deliverances the Armada, Gunpowder Plot, and now the war that "has, through the protection of the Almighty, saved us from that revolutionary abyss into which we seemed to be fast approaching."[141]

This organizing framework yielded a perspective on history that could become progressively more synoptic. Samuel O'Sullivan, Fellow of Trinity College Dublin, wrote in 1816 an historical overview of British history since 1688 that rested on both freewill and divine foreknowledge. He quoted William Robertson's *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V* (1769) in favor both of what Robertson had acknowledged as "miracles and prophecies," and of Robertson's argument that "the same hand which planted the Christian religion, protected

[137]Francis Fox, *The Superintendancy of Divine Providence over Human Affairs* (London, 1705), p. 21.

[138]Francis Atterbury, *Reflections and Observations, Divine, Moral and Political* (London, 1723), pp. 51, 60.

[139]Thomas Harrison, *The Duty of calling to mind Remarkable Events of Providence, recommended* (London, 1717), pp. 13–16.

[140]C. E. de Coetlogon, *National Gratitude, for Providential Goodness, recommended in a Sermon...* (London, 1790), pp. 14–18.

[141]Thomas James, *Evil providentially conducted to some ultimate Good. A Sermon, preached in the Cathedral Church of Worcester, on Wednesday, March 12, 1800, being appointed, by his Majesty's Proclamation, as a Day of Solemn Fasting and Humiliation* (Worcester, 1800), p. 15.

the reformed faith." Once this long-term pattern in human affairs was revealed, it would be as "preposterous...to deny, that the whole was contrived by the wisdom, and upheld by the power of Providence, as it would be in the astronomer, now that the order of the heavenly bodies stands revealed in the full blaze of science, to deny the presiding divinity of him, who suspended, and set in motion the universe."[142]

O'Sullivan appropriately looked to Robertson, Presbyterian of the Moderate party and Scotland's leading historian, for reflections on the role of Providence in history. Robertson's volumes embodied a number of vocabularies, and the "Protestant-providential" was unavoidably one of them: for him as for many Whigs, progress was underwritten by a larger providential scheme. For a predestinarian, even a Calvinist with softened edges, the record of history would be especially declarative of divine purpose.[143] In this, Robertson expressed a familiar position: it was Hume and Gibbon who in their religious scepticism were exceptional in their own day. Only in the century that followed were they rehabilitated, as Providence slowly elided into Progress. Robertson was unusual among historians, it has been suggested, chiefly in the complexity of his thinking about Providence,[144] not in having conceded Providence a place at all.

Much in the historical scenario of this subject, conventional by the late twentieth century, was at bottom a theory of secularization.[145] Yet this theory was both an over-simplification, and sometimes a parody of a culture in which religion, however changing, was subject to no such marginalization as the term "secularization" now proposes. Changes occurred, and were eventually major ones when the so-called "holy alliance" between natural science and the Church of England was broken down in the nineteenth century. As natural science and Anglican theology were then increasingly pictured as alternatives, not allies, the first increasingly profited and the second lost. But the effects of the division were ambiguous: the world could increasingly be explained in terms of secular, rational causes, but those causes could often seem trivial, blind, and capricious.

Chance rather than reason could be the beneficiary of nineteenth-century "secularization"; even a materialist determinism seemed a more attractive option

[142]Samuel O'Sullivan, *The Agency of Divine Providence Manifested in the Principal Transactions Religious and Political, connected with the History of Great Britain from the Reformation to the Revolution in 1688* (Dublin, 1816), pp. 23, 126.

[143]Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 122–28, esp. p. 125 for Robertson's confidence in God's acting almost always through second causes.

[144]Nicholas Phillipson, "Providence and progress: an introduction to the historical thought of William Robertson," in Stewart J. Brown, ed., *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 68–69.

[145]"The tragic mind set of Stoicism and the otherworldly fixations of Christianity yielded to a faith in man's temporal capacity to remould himself...a shift from God-fearingness to a selfhood more psychologically oriented": Porter, *Enlightenment*, pp. 20, 22.

to many in the twentieth century than a merely random model. These options were famously confronted in Darwinian evolution theory, and recurred in their most generalized form in quantum physics; yet even here a final answer proved elusive. In the twentieth century physicists echoed an old issue with the new question: "does God play dice?" This is, of course, a problem yet unresolved.[146] Physics and cosmology still have the capacity to remake themselves, and the latest destabilizing element in the debate is the hypothesis that the speed of light is not constant: if so, historical method, and the theological problems concerning God's relationship to man in history, will also need to be rethought. Herbert Butterfield, who did much in Cambridge to found post-Whig historiography by his stress on complexity and unpredictability, was also drawn back to an earlier terminology of "vicissitudes" and "chances and changes."[147] His argument had a delayed impact: in the humanities and social sciences, the last thirty years have seen the breakdown in area after area of the old over-determined models and social-structural certainties.[148]

It may indeed have been modernism or positivism in the late nineteenth century that produced the real erosion of providential discourse rather than any of the changes conventionally appealed to by historians who locate an "Enlightenment" in the eighteenth century or the seventeenth;[149] and historical explanations of those later polemical projects are eroding their claims to self-evidence. One consequence is that "the Enlightenment" can no longer be simplistically characterized as a process of awakening to the real nature of things, a correct response to how things really are. What, then, is the essential condition of the world: order or disorder? Opinions have always differed: historians are obliged to record a continuing secular doubt. The element of perceived order in human affairs expands and contracts over time. Which will prevail in the end? Will "the Enlightenment" finally triumph? Historians might ask the survivors after the next major asteroid strike.

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[146]For recent theological reflection on these issues see Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Does God Play Dice? Divine Providence and Chance," *Theological Studies* 57 (1996): 3–18.

[147]Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London, 1931; Harmondsworth, 1973), pp. 23–24, 36–37, 54, 56.

[148]J. C. D. Clark, *Our Shadowed Present: modernism, postmodernism and history* (London, 2003).

[149]Charles D. Cashdollar, "The Social Implications of the Doctrine of Divine Providence," *Harvard Theological Review* 71 (1978): 265–84; idem, *The Transformation of Theology, 1830–1890: Positivism and Protestant Thought in Britain and America* (Princeton, 1989), pp. 346–63 (p. 380 for Benjamin Jowett's Comtean conclusion that "we thankfully look upon the world as a scene of law and order").