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Thomas Morgan (1671/2-1743): from presbyterian preacher to Christian deist : A contribution to the study of English deism

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Chapter Four: Contemporary reactions to *The moral philosopher*

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§1: Introduction

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Morgan's *Moral philosopher* occasioned a flood of responses, most of them quite critical. In this chapter, we shall look at the many contemporary reactions to *The moral philosopher* on a more or less chronological basis. We shall discuss the reactions arising from different religious denominations in England, giving particular attention to the important rebuttals of Leland and Chapman. Next, we will devote attention to the reactions to the second and third volumes of *The moral philosopher*. I hope to have traced most of these reactions.¹

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§2: Warburton's opinion about *The moral philosopher*

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The influential Anglican churchman, William Warburton, advised against any public reaction to *The moral philosopher*. On August 17th 1737, he wrote from Newark-upon-Trent to his friend the Reverend Thomas Birch in London:

There is a book called "The moral philosopher", lately published. Is it looked into? I should hope not, merely for the sake of taste, the sense and learning of the present age; for nothing could give me a worse idea of them than that book's being in any esteem as a composition of a man of letters ... I hope nobody will be so indiscreet as to take notice publicly of this book, though it be only in the fag end of an objection. It is that indiscreet conduct in our defenders of religion, that conveys so many worthless books from hand to hand.²

Warburton's hopes about the defenders of religion were not to be fulfilled. A deluge of answers was published over the next years. I counted more than twenty-five published responses in English to *The moral philosopher*. That is too great a number to say that Morgan never obtained much notice.³ On the contrary, we can agree with those who stated that *The moral philosopher* was widely read in an educated milieu. Morgan displayed in full measure the deist flair for reaching an extensive audience.⁴ This audience was spread all over Britain and abroad.⁵ As to his native country, Presbyterians, Independents, Anglicans and Jesuits, joined hands in defending revealed religion against *The moral philosopher*. One finds discussions about the work in private journals, letters, sermons, and in published reactions in journals and books. Some had more impact than others. But certainly not all were as worthless as Warburton stipulated.

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§3: The first reactions to *The moral philosopher* in 1737

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¹ By using *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* and *Google's Advanced Book Search*, retrieved December 26th, 2017.

² Nichols, *Illustrations*, Volume 2, 69-70.

³ Contra Stephen, sub voce 'Morgan, Thomas', in: *Dictionary of National Biography*, Volume 39, 35.

⁴ Stromberg, *Religious liberalism*, 79 note 2; Herrick, *The radical rhetoric*, 148; Cragg, *Reason*, 68.

⁵ In Chapter 7 we will discuss the reactions abroad.

During the first year after its publication in February 1737, Morgan's *Moral philosopher* received many and mostly negative reactions. Probably the rapid impact of the book made many orthodox believers react quickly. *The moral philosopher* was the talk of the town. The poet John Byrom relates in his private journal, at the end of March 1737, how a certain deist Mr. Reynolds told him to read *The moral philosopher*.⁶ We also remember the satirical poem of Thomas Newcomb about Morgan.⁷

According to a historian of Non-conformity, Morgan was the deist who gave the dissenters the greatest annoyance, precisely because he had been one of them.⁸ Among the dissenters the Presbyterians were the first to react in public. The first reaction appeared anonymously in June 1737 entitled: *The immorality of the moral philosopher*, written by the Presbyterian minister of Exeter Joseph Hallett.⁹ Hallett was very critical about the author and sent his flaming arrows like this: 'He has broken through all the values of truth, decency, and good manners. ... The book is a most tedious, immethodical, enthusiastic jumble of infidel cant, false history, misrepresentation, vain repetition and impertinence'.¹⁰ A nice summing-up of Morgan's 'immorality'. The author of *The moral philosopher* observed no regular method in his book and he has greatly misrepresented innumerable things both in the Old and the New Testament. Hallett makes a impressive list of such falsifications.

Benjamin Andrewes Atkinson, Presbyterian minister of London, published in August 1737 *The decay of practical religion lamented ... in four discourses preach'd ... with an appendix, containing a few remarks on a book lately published, entitled, The moral philosopher*.¹¹

Atkinson thinks 'it is plain enough our philosopher hath struck out the Old Testament from his Canon; and ... he hath endeavoured to explain away a very considerable part of the New'.¹² The Biblical criticism of the deists was felt by the orthodox clergy as the real danger of Deism as such. The Independents also reacted. Philip Doddridge, who as we saw already knew in June 1737 that Morgan was the author of *The moral philosopher*, called him in a letter to his Independent colleague Samuel Clark, dated July 20th 1737, a very scandalous writer, referring also to the savageness of his temper.¹³

As far as the Anglicans are concerned, Ephraim Chambers made his negative opinion about the book known in a long review, published in *The History of the Works of the Learned* with many quotations.¹⁴ In July 1737, the prolific pamphleteer Elisha Smith edited anonymously the second edition of his book, *The cure of deism*, to which was annexed an appendix, in

⁶ R. Parkinson, ed., *The private journal and literary remains of John Byrom*, Volume 2 Part 1, (Publications of the Chetham Society 40), Manchester, 1856, 99.

⁷ Quoted above in Chapter 1 § 17.

⁸ Colligan, *Eighteenth century nonconformity*, 21.

⁹ Date of preface May 11th 1737.

¹⁰ (J. Hallett), *The immorality of the Moral Philosopher*, London, 1737, 4.

¹¹ Dedicated to John Thompson, Lord Mayor of the city of London, and dated Bridgewatersquare, July 19th 1737.

¹² B.A. Atkinson, *The decay of practical religion lamented*, London, 1737, 114.

¹³ J. Doddridge Humphreys, ed., *The correspondence and diary of Philip Doddridge*, Volume 3, London, 1830, 257-8.

¹⁴ *The History of the Works of the Learned*, 1737, ii, 13-38, already quoted in Chapter 3 § 8.

answer to a book entitled *The moral philosopher*. As Smith put it: ‘You believe too much, mr. Philalethes, for an orthodox deist, and too little for a sound Christian’.¹⁵ As we saw earlier, the combination of Christianity and Deism was not en vogue among traditional believers. In September 1737, another Anglican, Thomas Burnett, published *The Scripture doctrine of the redemption of the world by Christ, intelligibly explained to the capacity of mean people, which may serve as an answer to a book, entitled, The moral philosopher*.¹⁶ Burnett clearly sensed that the orthodox doctrine of the redemption by Christ was at stake, though he did not enter into discussion with Morgan in this book. Reactions came also from the circles of the universities. On Sunday, October 23rd 1737, Francis Webber, Fellow of Exeter College, Oxford, preached a sermon against *The moral philosopher* before the University, in which he referred various times negatively to the book.¹⁷ Finally, the book was noticed in the circles of the Archbishop in Lambeth Palace. The Rector of Lambeth, John Denne, made negative annotations about *The moral philosopher* in the publication of a sermon preached in Lambeth Chapel on January 15th 1738 at the consecration of the new Bishop of Bangor, Thomas Herring.¹⁸ Morgan was also attacked in magazines. A certain ‘Poplicola’ (which means ‘friend of the people’) launched in October 1737 an attack on *The moral philosopher* in the *Grub Street Journal*, published by the bookseller John Wilford.¹⁹ An anonymous author in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* of February 1738 wrote about

the infamous, immoral author of a most blasphemous book, falsely, and impudently entitled, *The moral philosopher*, a wretch, (whoever he is) of whom I cannot speak with temper, and patience, and on whom I cannot think without a just horror and indignation; wherein, I hope, Sir, I am not without your concurrence, and that of all good Christians.²⁰

Some theologians considered the possibility of answering Morgan but in the end decided against doing so. On October 30th 1737 Doddridge wrote to Clark: ‘I am told Dr. Latham of Lindern (sic!) is preparing materials for an answer to Morgan’.²¹ Ebenezer Latham, who conducted an academy in Findern, never published the said answer. Another author who

¹⁵ (Smith), *The cure of deism*, 2nd edition, Volume 2, 41; Smith was lecturer of Wisbeech and later rector in the Isle of Ely.

¹⁶ Dated 15 August 1737; Burnett was rector of West Kington in Gloucestershire.

¹⁷ F. Webber, *The Jewish dispensation consider’d and vindicated, with a view to the objections of unbelievers, and particularly of a late author called The Moral Philosopher. A sermon preach’d before the University of Oxford, at St. Mary’s, on Sunday, 23^d October 1737*, Oxford, 1738, 25, 31-3, 36; a second edition appeared in 1751.

¹⁸ J. Denne, *A sermon preach’d in Lambeth chapel, on Sunday, January 15, 1737, at the consecration of the right reverend father in God, Thomas lord bishop of Bangor*, London, 1737 (i.e. 1738), 10 note.

¹⁹ J.Th. Hillhouse, *The Grub-Street Journal*, reissue of the Boston 1928 edition, New York, 1967, 344; on Wilford see Winkler, *Handwerk*, 452-62.

²⁰ N.N., ‘To the author of the enquiry into the meaning of the demoniacks in the New Testament’, *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, 8 (1738) 69-72 (72).

²¹ Doddridge Humphreys, ed., *The correspondence*, Volume 3, 279.

contemplated answering *The moral philosopher* was John Conybeare, Bishop of Bristol from 1750, but the plan was never carried out either.²²

All in all, there were more than ten reactions in the year of its first publication. The interest in *The moral philosopher* was so great that a second, emended edition of *The moral philosopher* appeared in February 1738, again printed for the author. In the next years many more reactions were to follow, as we will see below. The tendency of all the reactions so far was negative. Morgan's opinions about the Old Testament, about the redemption by Christ, and his style, immorality and misrepresentations were firmly rejected.

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§4: William Warburton's *Divine legation of Moses* is not an answer to Morgan

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An old tradition has it that Warburton's *The divine legation of Moses demonstrated, on the principles of a religious deist, from the omission of the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments in the Jewish dispensation*, published in early 1738, was written by him as a reaction to *The moral philosopher*.²³ Until recently, this thesis had its adherents.²⁴ However, it appears that *The divine legation of Moses* was planned many years before Morgan's publication came from the press and has nothing to do with it. A substantial part of it already existed by the end of 1735, which is evident from Warburton's statement in an appendix to his *The alliance between church and state*, a book which appeared in January 1736. There he writes: 'The substance of the preceding discourse being no other than a single chapter of a treatise which I have now by me ... It is entitled *The divine legation of Moses*.'²⁵ Warburton had started working on *The divine legation of Moses* seven years before, as he confided to his friend, the antiquary William Stukeley, under great injunction of secrecy.²⁶ So one can conclude that Warburton's *Divine legation of Moses* never was intended as an answer to *The moral philosopher*. Warburton did not even want to respond to Morgan, as we saw above in §2.

²² A. Chalmers, sub voce 'Conybeare', *The General Biographical Dictionary*, new edition, Volume 10, London, 1813, 182-189 (186).

²³ Lechler, 388.

²⁴ Altmann in his commentary on Moses Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*, 204; Schmitt, *Kirchenlexikon*, 118; J. Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian. The memory of Egypt in Western monotheism*, Cambridge, Mass, 1998, 239 note 1; A.W. Wainwright, sub voce 'Morgan, Thomas', in: J.H. Hayes, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical interpretation*, Volume 2, Nashville, 1999, 163; Graf Reventlow, 'Freidenkertum', 232; D. Cyranka, *Lessing im Reinkarnationsdiskurs, eine Untersuchung zu Kontext und Wirkung von G.E. Lessings Texten zur Seelenwanderung*, (Kirche, Konfession, Religion 49), Göttingen, 2005, 281; U. Lehner, ed., *Martin Knutzen, Philosophischer Beweis von der christlichen Religion*, (Religionsgeschichte der Frühen Neuzeit 1), Nordhausen, 2005, 12 note 5; Beutel, *Die Kirchengeschichte im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, 321; Hudson, *Enlightenment*, 84; Tr. Rendtorff, ed., *Ernst Troeltsch, Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Band 6, Teilband 2: Das historische in Kants Religionsphilosophie*, Berlin/New York, 2014, 1001 note 457; A. Graczyk, *Die Hieroglyphe im achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, (Hallesche Beiträge zur Europäische Aufklärung 51), Berlin/New York, 2015, 51. In the meantime Reventlow, 'English deism', 873 note 153, and D. Cyranka, ' "Warum nicht?" Lessings Äusserungen zur Seelenwanderung' in: H.E. Friedrich, and others, eds., *Literatur und Theologie im 18. Jahrhundert, Konfrontationen – Kontroversen – Konkurrenzen*, (Hallesche Beiträge zur Europäische Aufklärung 41), Berlin/New York, 2011, 122-38 (132 note 8), have corrected their opinion.

²⁵ W. Warburton, *The alliance between church and state*, London, 1736, 156.

²⁶ W.C. Lukis, ed., *The family memoirs of the rev. William Stukeley*, (Surtees Society 73), London, 1882, 127.

In *The moral philosopher* Morgan mentions the absence of the doctrine of immortality as an argument against the Old Testament.²⁷ In the literature about Morgan this has always been taken for granted as the reason why Warburton wrote the *Divine legation*.²⁸ But in these years 1737-38 there was no such thing as a battle about the doctrine of immortality between the two men.²⁹ Only later, in the dedication to the Jews, in Book Four of the *Divine legation*, published in May 1741, one encounters for the first time *The moral philosopher*. But there Warburton again makes it clear that he does not want to participate in the project of the freethinkers. In Book Six he refers only once rather mockingly to Morgan: ‘Who hereafter will talk of ... Morgan?’³⁰ Interestingly, the conflict was the other way round: it was Morgan who reacted to the *Divine legation*.³¹ In 1742, Morgan wrote a reaction to Warburton in *A brief examination of the Rev. Mr Warburton’s Divine legation of Moses ... by a society of gentlemen*, in which he repeats time and again that ‘Moses had nothing to do with a future state’.³²

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§5: The Presbyterian minister of Eustace Row in Dublin, John Leland

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A serious and long-winded opponent to Morgan appeared in the person of the Presbyterian minister of Eustace Row in Dublin, John Leland. Leland was, according to his biographers, the foremost theological writer among eighteenth-century Irish dissenters.³³ He was one of the fiercest opponents of the deists, writing not only against Morgan, but also against Matthew Tindal and Henry Dodwell junior. He has been called the indefatigable opponent of a whole generation of deists.³⁴ As an apologist, he was a vehement fighter against what he called ‘the enemies of the holy religion’.

Leland has become famous because of his *View of the principal deistical writers that have appeared in England during the last and the present century*, published in two volumes, in London in 1754-6, a classical work, reprinted many times, and responsible for the ‘canonical’ list of the English deists. Many of the English deists received their status as such by being listed in Leland’s work. Although he was not the first to enumerate such a list – the Irish divine Philip Skelton was the first to do so³⁵ – Leland has always been credited for it. Until

²⁷ *The moral philosopher*, 26-7.

²⁸ To name only one, Reventlow, *Authority*, 396.

²⁹ Contra D. Klein, *Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768): das theologische Werk*, (Beiträge zur Historischen Theologie 145), Tübingen, 2009, 127 note 149: ‘Streit um die Unsterblichkeitslehre zwischen Thomas Morgan und William Warburton’.

³⁰ W. Warburton, *The collected works of William Warburton*, reprint of the 1811 edition, London/New York, 2005, Volume 4, 15, Volume 6, 43.

³¹ See for the details Van den Berg, ‘Thomas Morgan versus William Warburton’, 82-5.

³² (A Society of Gentlemen), *A brief examination*, 39, 41.

³³ V. Nuovo and M.A. Stewart, sub voce ‘Leland, John’, in: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, volume 33, Oxford, 2004, 301-3 (302).

³⁴ A. Dulles, *A history of apologetics*, San Francisco, 2005, 182; W. Edgar and K.Sc. Oliphint, eds., *Christian apologetics past and present*, Volume 2, Wheaton, 2011, 302.

³⁵ Skelton, *Deism revealed*, 2nd edition, 2 volumes, title page; cf Introduction § 6.

this day he has been referred to as one of the most valuable apologists. In a way he is co-responsible for the conviction that the English deists formed a movement. According to him ‘that which properly characterizes these deists is, that they reject all revealed religion’.³⁶ They disagree about the notions of natural religion. Leland already had a long experience in this fight when he announced, in November 1738, the first part of *The divine authority of the Old and New Testament asserted. With a particular vindication of the characters of Moses, and the prophets, our saviour Jesus Christ, and his apostles, against the unjust aspersions and false reasonings of a book, entitled, The moral philosopher*. A second edition appeared in 1739 and a second volume in June 1740. Together, these volumes contain more than 900 pages. Morgan received among all the so-called English deists the most verbose attention from Leland, though, interestingly, the latter was unfamiliar with the name of the author of *The moral philosopher* at the time of the publication of *The divine authority of the Old and New Testament asserted*.

Just as Morgan quoted a text from Job on the title page of *The moral philosopher*, so Leland quoted Job 33:13-4: ‘Why dost thou strife against God? For he giveth not account of any of his matters; For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not’ on the title page of *The divine authority*. A telling quotation on the same matter, but the opposite of Morgan’s. Unsurprisingly, Leland is very critical of *The moral philosopher*: ‘There are many things in his book, that look like a wilful perversion and misrepresentation of facts, as well as arguments’. This apologetic zeal leads him to a frontal attack on Morgan. Morgan openly and avowedly rejects the Old Testament. But he clearly rejects Christianity also: ‘All his pretended regard for Christianity, and the religion of Jesus, is only the better to carry on his design of subverting it’. Leland appears to have thought of not answering Morgan at all, as proposed by Warburton: ‘Perhaps to have taken no notice of him at all would have been a greater mortification to this writer, than the best answer that could be published against him’. But Leland decided otherwise.³⁷

The result is the first volume of his *The divine authority of the Old and New Testament asserted* which contains sixteen chapters of which the second to the seventh are dedicated to the defence of the law of Moses, the eighth to the eleventh to the prophets, and the rest to the defence of the New Testament. In the book, Leland quotes entire pages of *The moral philosopher*. He examines the value that Morgan gives to revelation and his criteria for the truth of such a revelation.

He criticizes the strange representation Morgan makes of the law of Moses and his objections to the Old Testament. For Leland, there is nothing absurd in the Mosaic constitution. Miracles are no poetic embellishments, but real facts. He places all the orthodox arguments on the table: the moral precepts are all pure and excellent; they offer beauty and harmony, instead of absurdity. He defends the authority of Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul with respect to the divine origin of the law of Moses and the internal constitution of the Mosaic law against Morgan’s criticism: this law required inward purity of heart and affections. Leland devotes much time to Morgan’s claim that the law of Moses encouraged human sacrifices: such sacrifices were forbidden in the law. Similarly, he discusses Morgan’s account of the origin of the priesthood.

Leland criticizes Morgan’s ‘bitter invectives against the Jews, and the strange representation he makes of that people’. He objects that, on the contrary, the Jews exceeded all other nations in wisdom and religion. He also criticizes the strange, inconsistent representation, which Morgan gives of the character and conduct of the prophets, defending the clear and

³⁶ Leland, *A view*, Volume 1, 3.

³⁷ Leland, *The divine authority*, v, vi, xii.

circumstantial predictions of the prophets. Samuel and David were excellent persons, Leland maintained. Elijah and Elisha and the other prophets were not the great disturbers of the country, as Morgan would have them. Leland emphatically denies that ‘the whole nation of the Jews from the time of Moses to Ezra were Sadducees or deistical materialists’. He complains about ‘the malice and disingenuity’ of the author. As to the conduct and character of Jesus Christ, Leland contends that Morgan is insinuating that he brought his own death upon himself. In publishing the Gospel the apostles were all under the unerring guidance of the Holy Ghost. Leland defends the harmony between St. Paul and the other Apostles, denying that there was any difference between them. He refers to Morgan’s critical view about the Apocalypse as a Jewish gospel.³⁸ The last chapter of Leland’s rebuttal is devoted to Leland’s orthodox defence of the doctrine of the redemption by Christ. In the end the conclusion is that in *The moral philosopher* there are many things that are little better than downright misrepresentation and abuse.³⁹ In general, one can say that Leland scrutinizes Morgan’s text entirely from an orthodox point of view. Clearly, Leland wrote his apology with all the orthodox energy he had in an attempt to diminish the influence of *The moral philosopher*. For him personally this book turned out to be a great success. He received for this publication the degree of Doctor of Divinity from the University of Aberdeen in 1739. Doddridge remembered it ‘among the best books our age has produced’.⁴⁰

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§6: The Anglican divine, John Chapman

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A second voluminous book against Morgan’s *Moral philosopher* was written by John Chapman, an Anglican divine and classical scholar, Fellow of King’s College in Cambridge, and chaplain to Archbishop John Potter. The book entitled *Eusebius, or the true Christian’s defense against a late book entitul’d The moral philosopher*, is dedicated to the Archbishop - it was by encouragement of the Archbishop that he had started this work. Chapman had already written against Anthony Collins.⁴¹ The preface is dated November 26th 1738; it was published in Cambridge in 1739.⁴² A second volume appeared in 1741. Chapman was much interested in Thomas Morgan’s works. In 1785, the year after his death, his library was sold at an auction by Leigh and Sotheby. It contained nearly all Morgan’s books.⁴³ Since Warburton’s observations, Chapman’s work has always been seen as an attempt to gain ecclesiastical preferment for the author. Warburton wrote to Doddridge on February 12th 1739: ‘Pray how do you like Chapman’s book against the moral philosopher? He writes by order of the A B C’, that means by order of the Archbishop of Canterbury.⁴⁴ Doddridge was

³⁸ Cf Chapter 3 § 9.

³⁹ Leland, *The divine authority*, 43, 200, 217, 329, 346, 491.

⁴⁰ Nuttall, *Calendar*, 100. The book has been reprinted in 1837. A German edition appeared in 1756 and a Dutch edition in 1776.

⁴¹ (J. Chapman), *The objections of a late anonymous writer, against the book of Daniel, consid’red in a letter to a friend*, Cambridge, 1728.

⁴² A German edition appeared in 1759.

⁴³ (Leigh and Sotheby), *A catalogue of the entire and valuable library of the late rev. John Chapman*, s.l.s.a. (=London, 1785), 15 nrs. 521-3.

⁴⁴ Doddridge Humphreys, ed., *The correspondence*, Volume 3, 352.

more positive. Two weeks later, on February 27th 1739, he wrote to Clark: 'I have read Chapman against Morgan with a great deal of pleasure'.⁴⁵ But not everyone was as content with the book as Doddridge. In a letter to Warburton dated September 4th 1739, another Anglican, Conyers Middleton, the principal librarian of Cambridge University, styled it a stupid book against Morgan.⁴⁶ The evaluation of the book has even in our time resulted in conflicting opinions. One scholar has called it an important contribution to the orthodox cause, whereas another calls Chapman a third-rate opponent. Another harsh judgment about Chapman was formulated as follows: 'His incautious extremism received a swift and, for the most part, richly deserved rebuttal from Morgan, entitled *Letter to Eusebius*'.⁴⁷

Chapman's aim was to examine distinctly the whole system of *The moral philosopher*, and 'to obviate every artful suggestion of his against the evidence to any divine revelation from miracles or prophecy'. He wants to defend the prophets against the many injurious reflections and calumnies. He hopes it 'will be an useful preservative against the most dangerous positions of the Christian-Deist'.⁴⁸

In the introduction, Chapman criticizes the author, whose identity he did not know at the time, for his 'quibbles, witticisms, parallels, and vulgar rants against divines'. He states that Morgan presents the world with a mere farce instead of a real dispute.⁴⁹ He criticizes the definition of Christianity by *The moral philosopher* as loose, irregular, and arbitrary.⁵⁰ He attacks Morgan on a principal front 'shewing that the moral truth, reason, and fitness of things is no certain mark, nor proper criterion of any doctrine as coming of God'. Moreover, he defends the great use of miracles and prophecy. He refers to Morgan's predecessors in Christian deism, the Blounts, Tindals, Shaftesburys, Woolstons etc. He proceeds to defend the certainty of revelation. He gives evidence of the divine authority in Jesus Christ and his Apostles. Chapman reproaches *The moral philosopher*: 'You undermine the foundations of all historical faith, as well as evangelical, and of all Christianity too, by such an intemperate zeal against the Jewish'.⁵¹ Morgan had stated that no Jew would convert to Christianity. Trying to contradict this opinion, Chapman quotes an impressive list of Jewish converts to Christianity.⁵²

Explaining the difference between Christianity and Deism, Chapman states: 'It (deism) is a mere shadow instead of the substance of Christianity, that you offer to us'. Resuming he declares that 'the Christian system is distinguish'd from the religion of nature' by revelation, by doctrine, by covenant, by the Holy Trinity, by grace, and by the doctrine of the future

⁴⁵ Doddridge Humphreys, ed., *The correspondence*, Volume 4, London, 1830, 535.

⁴⁶ C. Middleton, *The miscellaneous works*, Volume 2, London, 1752, 480.

⁴⁷ Herrick, *The radical rhetoric*, 20; Stephen, *History of English thought*, Volume 1, 169; Burns, *The great debate*, 103.

⁴⁸ J. Chapman, *Eusebius, or the true Christian's defense against a late book entitul'd The Moral Philosopher*, Cambridge, 1739, The preface.

⁴⁹ Chapman, *Eusebius*, 2.

⁵⁰ Chapman, *Eusebius*, The contents.

⁵¹ Chapman, *Eusebius*, 7, 70, 369.

⁵² Chapman, *Eusebius*, 530-48; among this list we find well-known names such as those of Paulus of Burgos, Levita, and Tremellius.

resurrection of the body. We shall see ‘how much Christianity will remain to us, when we have thrown out the religion of nature’.⁵³

Just like Leland, Chapman quotes entire pages of *The moral philosopher*. Throughout the book he shows abundant knowledge of Hebrew, Greek and Latin, quoting many authorities. It is ironic that at that time Chapman did not know that Morgan was the author because he refers to ‘having such an ally on my side as Dr. Morgan’, quoting from Morgan’s *Tracts*, and thereby proving that Morgan was not known as a deist in the 1720s.⁵⁴

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§7: Reactions which appeared after the publication of the second volume of *The moral philosopher*

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After the publication of the second volume of Morgan’s *The moral philosopher* in 1739 the flow of reactions continued.⁵⁵ The Anglicans took the lead in 1739. The Archdeacon of Wiltshire, Henry Stebbing, compared *The moral philosopher* with the work of Thomas Chubb and with Tindal’s *Christianity as old as the creation*, in his charge to the clergy at the Easter visitation of 1739. ‘What is this but the very scheme advanced by the author of *Christianity as old as the creation*, and since espoused by the *moral philosopher*?’⁵⁶ Like other authors, Stebbing heaped the deists together. Master John Hildrop, whom Morgan contended with in 1722, referred in 1739 ironically to ‘the inimitable writings of Hobbes, Blunt, Toland, Tindal, Collins, Gordon, and that prince of Paralogicians, the Moral Philosopher’.⁵⁷ It is clear that, whatever he may have understood by a paralogician, the characterization was negative. On June 3rd 1739, John Cradock, Fellow of St. John’s College, Cambridge, later Bishop of Kilmore and Archbishop of Dublin, preached a sermon in St. Mary’s Church, Cambridge, ‘in which are occasionally considered the Moral Philosopher’s doctrines’.⁵⁸ Still in June 1739, an anonymous author called Scoto-Britannicus published *A letter to Philalethes* against the second volume of the *Moral philosopher*.⁵⁹

Warburton continued to hold Morgan in contempt. From Brant Broughton, he wrote to Philipp Doddridge on August 13th 1739: ‘As for that fellow Morgan, he is, I think, below my notice, any farther than to shew my great contempt of him occasionally. Besides, I ought to leave him to those who are paid for writing against him’.⁶⁰ There were probably many writers

⁵³ Chapman, *Eusebius*, 425, 427-8, 432.

⁵⁴ Chapman, *Eusebius*, 289.

⁵⁵ We deal here with the reactions to Volumes two and three because the starting points in these volumes do not alter principally, with the exception of the nascent historical criticism, see Chapter 5 § 7-8.

⁵⁶ (H. Stebbing), *A charge delivered to the clergy of the archdeaconry of Wilts, at the Easter visitation in the year 1739, containing observations on Mr. Chubb’s True Gospel of Jesus Christ asserted*, London, 1739, 20.

⁵⁷ (J. Hildrop), *An essay for the better regulation and improvement of free-thinking*, London, 1739, 30. A paralogician is someone who reasons falsely and speciously.

⁵⁸ J. Cradock, *The insufficiency of the principal objections whether of Jews or Greeks to Christianity*, Cambridge, 1739, title page.

⁵⁹ This pamphlet, which I have not been able to see, is mentioned in the monthly catalogues of *The London Magazine* for June, 1739, 312 nr.34.

⁶⁰ Nichols, *Illustrations*, Volume 2, 817.

who took this seriously. An anonymous pamphlet was published in September 1739, entitled: *Truth triumphant, or a summary view of the late controversy, occasioned by a book, intituled The moral philosopher*. The author ‘heard, that this book, ... was in high esteem among a certain set of men, called moralists, alias deists’. This author seems well informed about the life of Morgan, because he notes: ‘The Dissenters expelled you from their society at Marlborough ... the Quakers would not receive you at Bristol’.⁶¹

From the Roman Catholic side, the controversial writer and Jesuit John Constable entered the debate. After an education at the English College in St. Omer in France, he returned to England about 1726 to work in Staffordshire. In *Deism and Christianity fairly consider’d ... to which is added ... two letters to a friend upon a book intituled The moral philosopher*, published in December 1739, he wrote that *The moral philosopher* was much valued by the deists. He criticizes Morgan for his many strange misrepresentations of the history of the Old Testament. All in all, he thinks the book is a ‘jumbled, inconsistent, and impious piece’.⁶² Constable is, as far as I know, the only English Roman Catholic who attacked Morgan publicly.

In the next year the flow did not stop. The Rector of Buckland in Hertfordshire, Thomas Morell, known as librettist of various oratorios by George Frideric Handel, preached on January 9th 1740, in Kew Chapel, referring to the ‘im-moral philosopher’.⁶³

The dissenters were also active in defending the orthodox truth. In 1740, Joseph Hallett produced a reprint of *The immorality* together with *A rebuke to the moral philosopher*, in which he states: ‘The moral philosopher makes no conscience of what he writes. He denies certain facts, and forges history’.⁶⁴ In April 1740, Moses Lowman, Independent minister at Clapham, published in nearly 300 pages a *Dissertation on the civil government of the Hebrews ... vindicated: in particular, from some late, unfair and false representations ... in the moral philosopher*.⁶⁵ He wishes to defend the justice, wisdom and goodness of the Mosaical constitutions. The author speaks in the preface of his age as inclined to unbelief.⁶⁶ After a quotation from *The moral philosopher*, Lowman criticizes it as ‘so heavy a charge, drawn up in so insolent terms’. He discusses the chief designs and principal intention of the civil government of the Hebrews, but also the territory, the government of the tribes, and especially the constitution of the tribe of Levi. What follows is the union of the tribes and the congregation of all Israel. In all this Lowman criticizes *The moral philosopher*, discovering ‘an instance of enormous ignorance, or something worse in our author, as is not to be excused in any man who shall pretend to write on the subject’. Another great mistake he finds in Morgan’s second volume. He criticizes the author extensively on the subject of the tithes and on his explanations about the oracles, concluding that *The moral philosopher* is very unfair.⁶⁷

⁶¹ N.N., *Truth triumphant*, London, 1739, v, 2.

⁶² (Constable), *Deism and Christianity*, 241, 273, 282.

⁶³ Th. Morell, *The surest grounds for hopes of success in war*, London, 1740, 11.

⁶⁴ (J. Hallett), *A rebuke to the moral philosopher*, London, 1740, 14-5.

⁶⁵ The book was dedicated to the barrister and book-collector Sir Richard Ellys.

⁶⁶ M. Lowman, *Dissertation on the civil government of the Hebrews ... vindicated: in particular, from some late, unfair and false representations ... in the Moral Philosopher*, London, 1740, iii.

⁶⁷ Lowman, *Dissertation*, 3, 100, 108, 110-121, 206-210, 277.

In general, Lowman is very accurate and detailed in his criticism of Morgan.⁶⁸ The book was very popular and was quoted positively, for example in the notebooks of the English literary critic Samuel Taylor Coleridge.⁶⁹

John Leland had hoped to stop *The moral philosopher*, but reacting to its second volume, he published in June 1740 a second volume of his own *The divine authority of the Old and New Testament asserted ... being a defence of the first volume of this work, against the exceptions and misrepresentations in the second volume of the moral philosopher*. He criticizes the author by saying that ‘the methods he makes use of are fit only to serve error and imposture’.⁷⁰ Morgan, according to Leland, has not acknowledged any of his mistakes in the first volume. On the contrary, he has made things even worse. For Leland, this controversy was not an agreeable employment. Throughout the book he criticizes Morgan’s style. He repeats his errors over and over again, referring to his heap of loose, rambling reflections, his confused way of talking about revelation, his absurdity and inconsistency, his ambiguities, the extravagance of his suppositions, and the ‘falsehood and extravagance of his computations’. Leland defends the miracles of Moses and states that the law of Moses is reasonable and excellent. He defends the oracle of Urim and Thummim. He ends with the fierce exclamation: ‘Never were the sacred names of truth and reason more prostituted and abused, than they are by this writer’.⁷¹ So Leland did defend the authority of the Old and New Testament. He received much praise for his defence from orthodox believers. Thus, we have seen that in the space of a year ten apologetic reactions appeared against Morgan’s second volume. The tone of all of these was negative. But Morgan was not defeated, nor convinced by the arguments of such apologists. His vehement character led him to make another statement in the third volume of *The moral philosopher*.

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§8: Reactions which appeared after the publication of the third volume of *The moral philosopher*

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After the publication of the third volume of *The moral philosopher*, which came from the press in 1740, the flow of reactions continued. Another university preacher, Richard Brown, Fellow of Trinity College Oxford, referred to *The moral philosopher* in a sermon before the university, at St. Mary’s, on October 12th 1740.⁷² In a letter to Warburton dated January 8th 1741, Conyers Middleton called Morgan a subtle and ingenious, but infamous writer.⁷³ The year 1741 brought more publications. In February 1741, Samuel Chandler, the Non-conformist minister of the Old Jewry in London, published *A vindication of the history of the*

⁶⁸ An appendix appeared in 1741 and a second enlarged edition appeared in 1745. This work by Lowman was twice translated into German: in 1755 and 1756, and a Dutch edition appeared in 1747 and a reissue in 1768.

⁶⁹ K. Coburn and A.J. Harding, eds., *The notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Volume 5, 1827-1834, Princeton, 2002, 406, 410, 415; also in the lectures on politics and religion in 1795, see L. Patton and P. Mann, eds., *S.T. Coleridge, Lectures, 1795, on politics and religion*, (The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 1), Princeton, 1971, 122.

⁷⁰ J. Leland, *The divine authority of the Old and New Testament asserted*, Volume 2, London, 1740, iv.

⁷¹ Leland, *The divine authority*, Volume 2, vii, ix, 30, 56, 124, 214, 368.

⁷² R. Brown, *The case of Naaman considered*, Oxford, 1741, 27 note 1.

⁷³ Middleton, *The miscellaneous works*, Volume 2, 484; see on the so-called deism of Middleton, van den Berg, ‘Should Conyers Middleton’.

Old Testament, in answer to the misrepresentations and calumnies of T. Morgan, M.D., and moral philosopher. Chandler was educated for some time at Bridgwater academy, just like Morgan, but at another period. He worked for some time as a bookseller in London. He wrote not only against Morgan, but also against Collins. Though many knew the identity of *The moral philosopher*, Chandler was the first to publish his real name in this book. He criticized Morgan as follows: ‘No one can read this author, without perceiving in every page of him almost, a very deep prejudice against the Old Testament history, and all the characters there in recorded’. He made a comparison between Morgan’s early confession of faith and his later opinions. Morgan wished to prove in his three volumes marks and appearances of fraud, artifice and deception in the Jewish and Christian writings.⁷⁴ Otherwise, Chandler’s book is for the most part dedicated to the defense of the character and personality of Abraham. From the Anglican side, Samuel Squire wrote pamphlets on various subjects and published, under the pseudonym Theophanes Cantabrigiensis in March 1741, *The ancient history of the Hebrews vindicated, or, remarks on part the third volume of the moral philosopher*.⁷⁵ With reference to Squire’s publication, Warburton wrote on April 22nd 1741 to Doddridge: ‘All I have seen of Morgan is in that pamphlet; and for my part I am amazed that any one should think it worth while to answer the most senseless and abandoned scribbler that ever came from Bedlam or the Mint’.⁷⁶

A second volume of Chapman’s *Eusebius* containing another 500 pages appeared in early 1741. There he observed in *The moral philosopher* ‘little more than a fresh retail of the old Manichees and Marcionites, of Spinosa, Toland, and Oracles of Reason’. Chapman probably mentions Mani and Marcion here because of their disparagement of the Old Testament. After a preface of 32 pages, he devotes some six chapters defending the New Testament and the doctrine of redemption by Christ. He defended these topics from many gross misrepresentations, loose fallacious accounts and groundless objections.⁷⁷ Warburton wrote in April 1741 to Thomas Birch about this book with a certain disdain: ‘The mighty splendor of *the great Eusebius*, which I find has got the start of him. Is this second dose more palatable than the first? Or is it as rough in taste, and potent in operation, as the other?’⁷⁸

Ebenezer Hewlett, who lived at the New Pales in Sun Street, outside Bishopsgate, London, wrote in 1741 *A vindication of the Bible, ... being some remarks on many willful errors of the moral philosopher*. In another pamphlet published in the same year Hewlett stated: ‘I had once a good conceit of the deists, as being honest and well-meaning men, but I find now, that Mr. Morgan and Mr. Chubb have dipped too deep in the bag of deceit’.⁷⁹

Not only theologians, but also physicians battled against their fellow physician Morgan. The physician Nicholas Robinson wrote, besides many medical works, also *The Christian*

⁷⁴ Chandler, *A vindication*, iii, xxiv-xxvi, 3.

⁷⁵ Squire was Bishop of St. David’s from 1761; Hudson, *Enlightenment*, 175 note 60, ascribes it erroneously to Chapman; see about Squire R. Browning, ‘Samuel Squire, pamphleteering churchman’, *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 5 (1978-9) 12-20.

⁷⁶ Nichols, *Illustrations*, Volume 2, 825.

⁷⁷ J. Chapman, *Eusebius*, Volume 2, London, 1741, iv, 1, 261, 349; a German edition of this second volume appeared in 1761.

⁷⁸ Nichols, *Illustrations*, Volume 2, 124.

⁷⁹ E. Hewlett, *Miracles real evidence of a divine revelation*, London, 1741, 24.

philosopher, published in 1741.⁸⁰ He reproaches *The moral philosopher* that ‘he, from the reason of things and from the rectitude of their nature, labours, with all his might, to invalidate the doctrines of revelation’.⁸¹

But afterwards the reactions diminished and the storm abated. In 1742, the Presbyterian minister of Kaye Street Chapel in Liverpool, John Brekell, criticized *The moral philosopher* in a pamphlet entitled *The Christian warfare*: ‘One of the many blunders of a modern author, who stiles himself, for-sooth, the *moral philosopher* to pretend that St. Peter was in a different way of thinking from St. Paul’.⁸²

Thus, we have counted more than twenty-five published reactions during Morgan’s lifetime, not counting the many reactions in contemporary correspondence. There are probably more to be found, but this is sufficient to show the range of voices in this controversy.

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§9: Summary

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It can be concluded that much contemporary attention was given to *The moral philosopher* in England. The text most received negative criticism from apologetic sides of all denominations: Presbyterians, Independents, Anglicans and Roman Catholics. They came from all parts of Britain and Ireland. They comprised local clergy and university teachers. The most prolific were Leland, Chapman and Lowman. The others wrote pamphlets, articles in journals, letters and occasional commentaries. All these criticisms focused on Morgan’s negative view of the Old Testament and the Jews, the negation of the doctrine of the redemption by Christ, the difference between Peter and Paul, his negation of inspiration, and his dislike of miracles and revelation in general. For all these apologists Morgan situates himself outside the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy. These criticisms were also aimed at his style and his self-complacency. All this made Morgan’s ideas known among a greater public. The most important and most verbose critic is without doubt the Presbyterian John Leland. Not one of those critics found anything positive in Morgan’s reasoning.

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⁸⁰ Dated ‘from my house in the Royal College of Physicians’, December 6th 1740.

⁸¹ N. Robinson, *The Christian Philosopher*, London, 1741, xi.

⁸² J. Brekell, *The Christian warfare*, London, 1742, 33 note.