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‘Calvinist Doctrines at the Beginning of the Scottish Enlightenment:
Archibald Campbell vs. The Committee for Purity of Doctrine on
Human Nature and Self-Love’

Monday 15th October, 5pm: Old Combination Room, Trinity College

The Author

Christian Maurer is Assistant docteur at the Département de philosophie of the Université de Fribourg. He completed a doctorate entitled *Self-Love in Early 18th Century British Moral Philosophy: Shaftesbury, Mandeville, Hutcheson, Butler and Campbell* at the Université de Neuchâtel, and recently published an edition of Shaftesbury’s Latin manuscript *Pathologia* with Laurent Jaffro and Alain Pettit. His research focus is 17th and 18th century moral philosophy, moral theology and moral psychology, with emphasis on particular issues such as self-love, egoism, friendship and pity.

Christian’s doctoral thesis explored the concept of self-love in 18th century British moral philosophy. Although self-love is standardly assumed to be a basic, uniform concept in this period, he demonstrated that this is far from so. Self-love was a malleable and contested term, and different thinkers innovated extensively in their definition and use of it. Due to the centrality of moral psychology and problems posed by self-interested behaviour to 18th century debates, Christian’s thesis established that a recognition of the complexity of the concept of self-love is an essential pre-requisite for their adequate recovery and assessment.

The Paper

The subject of Christian’s paper is Archibald Campbell. A now little-known philosopher of the Scottish Enlightenment, Campbell’s first work, *An Enquiry into the Original of Moral Virtue*, featured in the immediate reception of both Bernard Mandeville and Francis Hutcheson. Although largely forgotten even by specialists in the Scottish Enlightenment, Campbell’s philosophy offered an alternative to both the debunking ethical scepticism of Mandeville, and the philosophically controversial and highly ornate system of Hutcheson. In opposition to both these thinkers, Campbell sought to harness a psychology of self-interested pleasure-seeking, typically associated with Epicureanism, with a Christian providentialism usually thought incompatible with the materialistic atheism of the Epicureans.

His aim was to guarantee “the reality of moral distinctions” from Mandeville’s claim that because all action was ultimately self-interested, systems of morality were sham arrangements men used in attempts to dominate each other. But equally, Campbell set himself against what he took to be Hutcheson’s unrealistic psychology, wishing to retain a parsimonious account of human motivation with an optimistic view of his moral potentialities in a divinely ordered universe.

Although Campbell was not in the first rank of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, examining his work both makes clearer the precise positions of his opponents, whilst demonstrating the complex range of intellectual options available in the period. Campbell is also of significant historical interest insofar as many of his arguments – in particular his conception of “sympathy” – prefigure the revolutionary innovations that would be pioneered by David Hume a generation later. Similarly, and as Christian’s paper explores, Campbell’s is an important case for understanding the relation of moral philosophy to a Scottish Calvinist tradition with a powerful presence not just intellectually, but institutionally.

Campbell was himself an ordained minister of the Kirk, who took the Westminster Confessions, and rose to the Professorship of Ecclesiastical History at the University of St. Andrews. Yet the moral philosophy he put forward strained against Calvinist doctrines of man’s postlapsarian predicament and the nature of his relationship to God. Campbell’s friend and former tutor, John Simson, had earlier been stripped of the right to teach undergraduates after his doctrines were deemed unacceptable. Campbell’s writings put him at risk of the same fate. His encounter with the Committee for Purity of Doctrine is a crucial moment at which we can assess the changing institutional and intellectual relationship between Calvinism and moral philosophy at the outset of the Scottish Enlightenment.

Preparatory Readings

- Christian Maurer, ‘Archibald Campbell’s Views of Self-Cultivation and Self-Denial in Context’, *Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 10, 2012, pp. 13-27.
- Christian Maurer, ‘Hutcheson’s Relation to Stoicism in the Light of his Moral Psychology’, *Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 8, 2010, pp. 33-49.
- Luigi Turco, ‘Sympathy and Moral Sense: 1725-1740’, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 7(1), 1999, pp. 79-101.
- James Moore, ‘Utility and Humanity: The Quest for the *Honestum* in Cicero, Hutcheson and Hume’, *Utilitas* 14 (3), pp. 365-86.
- Anne Skoczylas, ‘Archibald Campbell’s *Enquiry into the Original of Moral Virtue*, Presbyterian Orthodoxy, and the Scottish Enlightenment’, *The Scottish Historical Review* 87 (1), 2008, pp. 68-100.
- M.A. Stewart, ‘The Scottish Enlightenment’, in *British Philosophy and the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Stuart Brown, (London: Routledge, 1996).