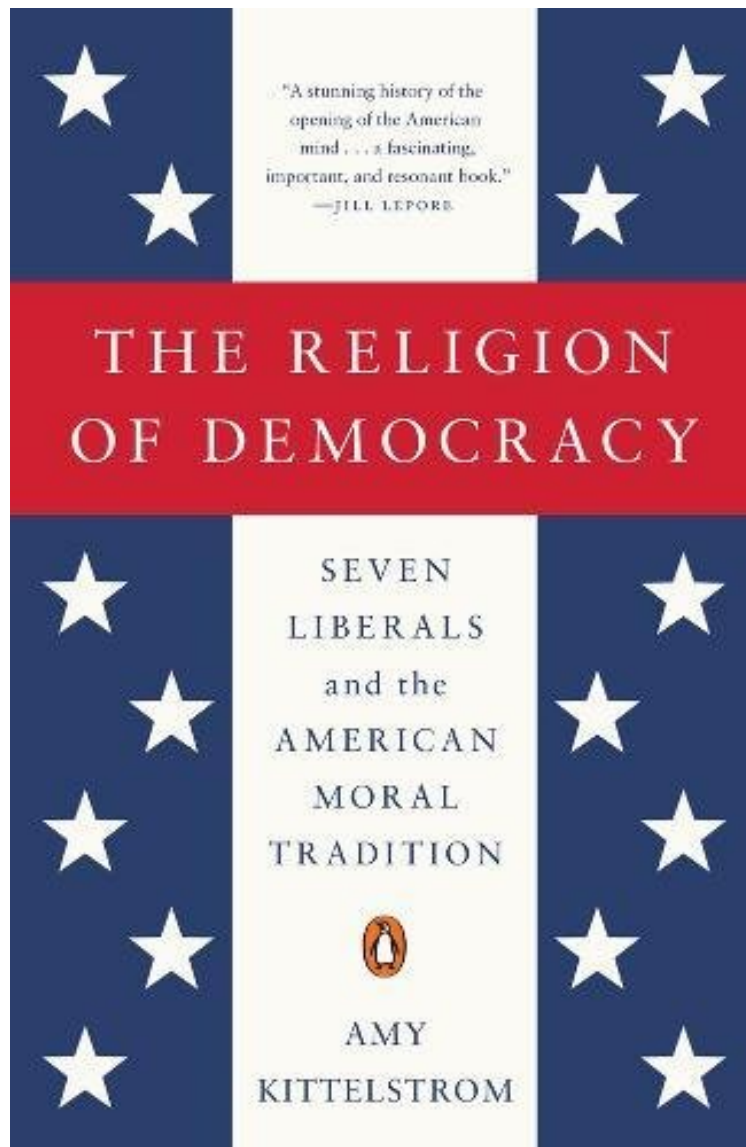


[Mobile pdf] The Religion of Democracy: Seven Liberals and the American Moral Tradition (The Penguin History of American Life)

The Religion of Democracy: Seven Liberals and the American Moral Tradition (The Penguin History of American Life)

Amy Kittelstrom

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Amy Kittelstrom : The Religion of Democracy: Seven Liberals and the American Moral Tradition (The Penguin History of American Life) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Religion of Democracy: Seven Liberals and the American Moral Tradition (The Penguin History

of American Life):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Deep Dive into our Nation's Vision By Bob Hoffmann Folks have told me that my position as a "radical progressive centrist" is a contradiction in terms. Yet professor Kittelstrom's book shows the ways in which our American nation was founded and developed by thinkers with similar essential ideas, in ways that overcame many apparent dilemmas and paradoxes. Kittelstrom does a deep dive into details around Boston and Concord during the Revolutionary era, revealing that the seeds of both American democracy and religion grew especially among particular individuals, such as Declaration signer John Adams. As one who was immersed in family and community discussions about the meaning of dissent from an authoritative Anglican religion and from a tyrannical king and Parliament, it is no wonder that Adams became a radical. Yet Adams struggled to find a way between his desires to become a minister or a lawyer. It seems he sought a balance between the Law of God and the Law of Man - a centrist accommodation. As Kittelstrom relates, he found a holistic view - to honor and respect God and His creation, while honoring and respecting each other, as we strive to learn and grow toward the ultimate truth, using individual free will of choice and action as our gift of life. So Adams initiated a centrist dialog that encompassed the broader scope of the political-religion-social concerns in those times in Massachusetts. But Adams didn't stop with a merely personal and academic understanding of the local/ colonial/ global situation, he became a change agent through the Revolutionary events of the day. He became a progressive to influence the several documents of our Founding Fathers, and later to become our second president, after Washington. Being second does in this respect does not mean being a loser. I was introduced to this book through C-SPAN's Book TV: <http://www.c-span.org/video/?325848-1/amy-kittelstrom-religion-democracy> While I am only now into reading the second subject of the book, its direction seems apparent. It is well-researched, even into the personal letters and sermons of the historical participants. It speaks, and gives justification, to my personal beliefs and understanding as a "radical progressive centrist". Thanks, AK.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent reference material By Customer Significant liberal documentary of the cause of Democracy showing commitment sacrifices these seven liberals made in advancing liberty. Excellent reference material, also worthy of reading three times to instill the wisdom these individuals sought into the readers soul.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A good read. By Femerepi Well written, highlights the generally overlooked religious roots of liberalism. A good read.

A history of religions role in the American liberal tradition through the eyes of seven transformative thinkers Today we associate liberal thought and politics with secularism. When we argue over whether the nations founders meant to keep religion out of politics, the godless side is said to be liberal. But the role of religion in American politics has always been far less simplistic than today's debates would suggest. In *The Religion of Democracy*, historian Amy Kittelstrom shows how religion and democracy have worked together as universal ideals in American culture and as guides to moral action and to the social practice of treating one another as equals who deserve to be free. The first people in the world to call themselves liberals were New England Christians in the early republic. Inspired by their religious belief in a God-given freedom of conscience, these Americans enthusiastically embraced the democratic values of equality and liberty, giving shape to the liberal tradition that would remain central to our politics and our way of life. *The Religion of Democracy* re-creates the liberal conversation from the eighteenth century to the twentieth by tracing the lived connections among seven transformative thinkers through what they read and wrote, where they went, whom they knew, and how they expressed their opinions from John Adams to William James to Jane Addams; from Boston to Chicago to Berkeley. Sweeping and ambitious, *The Religion of Democracy* is a lively narrative of quintessentially American ideas as they were forged, debated, and remade across our history.

Christian Century: *The Religion of Democracy* is an extremely well-researched and interesting description of the sustaining arguments and tenets of the American Reformation, as well as an informative portrayal of the complex lives of some of its central figures. *The San Francisco Chronicle*: Historian Kittelstrom brilliantly presents the historic relationship between Christianity and social progress in American history. *Publishers Weekly* (starred review): Kittelstrom's history stands out for its deeply textured treatment of each of these profoundly important thinkers, permitting appreciation of the influences that brought them to an enlightened view of faith and its sociopolitical implications. This timely, important work by an excellent scholar is part of the Penguin History of American Life series. *Booklist*: Historian Kittelstrom examines the lives and the writings of seven prominent American liberals and suggests that today's pluralistic political liberalism is a direct descendant of the religious liberalism that emerged in, and transformed, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The result is a lively and erudite reminder of pluralism's deep roots in American soil, and religion's role in putting them there. *Library Journal* (starred review): Kittelstrom explores the private and intellectual lives of each individual and provides new insights into the cultural history of liberalism. Readers will appreciate the skillful weaving of primary sources into a compelling chronicle of an idea told through individual experiences. *CHOICE Magazine*: "This book challenges contemporary conversations that conflate secularism and liberalism and expands the scholarly understanding of liberalism in the US.

Highly recommended." Jill Lepore, author of *Book of Ages* and *The Secret History of Wonder Woman: The Religion of Democracy* is a stunning history of the opening of the American mind. Through a shrewd study of seven subtle thinkers, Kittelstrom explores the place of belief, faith, and virtue in the intellectual traditions that lie behind American liberalism. A fascinating, important, and resonant book. Daniel Walker Howe, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*: Amy Kittelstrom here pours new life into intellectual history for scholars and concerned citizens, whether they are religious or not. She traces the commitments of present-day civic liberalism—free inquiry, cultural pluralism, public education, and compassion for the disadvantaged—not to the rise of secularism but to the Christian theological liberalism of New England at the time of the American Revolution. She finds these origins in what she terms, appropriately, an American Reformation. David D. Hall, Harvard University; author of *A Reforming People: Turning the pages of this remarkable book, I found myself moved not only by its intellectual range and the lucidity of Kittelstrom's prose but also by its central theme, the emergence in nineteenth-century America of an ethical commitment to democracy's highest moral and practical possibilities* in effect, a religion of democracy. An illuminating story, for our times as well as for what it tells us about the past. From the Hardcover edition. About the Author Amy Kittelstrom is a scholar of modern thought and culture who lives and works in the North Bay Area of California. She currently serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of American History* and is an associate professor at Sonoma State University. Her research has been supported by fellowships from the Center for Religion and American Life at Yale, the Charles Warren Center for the Study of American History at Harvard, and the Center for the Study of Religion at Princeton. Her next book will put the twentieth-century writer James Baldwin in deep historical context. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

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INTRODUCTION: AN AMERICAN REFORMATION

Somehow the word godless got hitched to the word liberal. The story of this coupling has something to do with the Cold War against Soviet communism, but behind this unholy union lies a much more interesting history of how some American elites led a very different fight against well, elitism. Seven liberals, whose lives interconnected across two centuries through shared readings, relationships, and concerns, were so far from godlessness that the pursuit of truth and virtue dominated their lives. The history they lived shows that after the Protestant Reformation in Europe came an American Reformation that built a moral tradition into democracy. John Adams, the irascible, prideful second president of the United States, did not consider all people fit to vote, yet he thought every man had the right to make up his own mind over what to believe about politics, religion, or anything else—not only the right, but the duty to think for himself, because the only being who really knows everything is God. The maiden aunt of Ralph Waldo Emerson made no fame for herself in a lifetime that began just before the American Revolution and ended in the middle of the Civil War. Mary Moody Emerson spoke her mind, though, fearlessly and freely. In this fierce liberty she was not only being a good American, she was being a good Christian. Rev. William Ellery Channing never suffered for want of anything. He lived in an era when the wealthy regarded laborers almost as a separate species, but he called himself a working man to show his solidarity with the new laboring classes of his early industrial age. He believed that all individuals, including slaves, deserved the freedom to think and act by their own best lights, and he believed this because of his Christian faith in what lay inside each soul and what potential all of God's creatures could reach. William James, the most important philosopher in American history, also wanted for nothing, but he never became a Christian. He did not appear to be much of a democrat, either, with his distaste for uneducated speech and his regard for European standards of excellence. Yet he professed to believe in a religion of democracy that took the sacred equality of all individuals as a postulate from which real human progress might flow. The Scottish immigrant Thomas Davidson fell from Christian grace early in life while learning all he could about modern science, ancient and modern philosophy, human languages, religion, and culture. Yet he was more evangelistic than secular. The good news he wanted to spread was how free individuals interacting in all their diversity could make progress together, even Jews, even women, even workers in an age rife with prejudice of all kinds. William Mackintire Salter, son of a minister, also fell from Christian grace as a young man despite his most earnest religious commitment. Actually, his earnestness gave him the integrity to face his growing belief that Jesus Christ was not the one and only uniquely divine being ever to be born. Salter became a post-Christian religious leader who called on the state to treat workers as equals with bosses during the

industrial crisis of the late nineteenth century. Against the laissez-faire majority, Salter asked for social justice as sacred justice. The social thinker and activist Jane Addams did more than cry for social justice; she lived for it. Rather than giving the poor what she thought they needed, she lived among them as she believed Jesus would have done. Through community, she built relationships that taught her what all humans share, a longing for pleasure and beauty as well as security and shelter and a sense of purpose in life. She connected workers and bosses, social scientists and politicians, educators and ministers, and philanthropists and activists from around the world. She wanted for governments to tend human needs and for common human needs to drive global change. The long cultural and intellectual lineage represented by these seven thinkers stretches back to classical liberalism, the political commitment of a society to replace coercion with consent. Their genealogy extends forward all the way to modern liberalism, the moral commitment of a society to the collective needs of all its members, regardless of their differences. Between the ideal of modern liberalism that has never been realized and the theory of classical liberalism that has never been dismantled and amid contrary historical currents, like discrimination and exploitation, that undermine both these liberals and the rest of their intellectual family tree helped Americans and others think about why human beings ought to treat one another as equals who deserve to be free. This book is a history of that idea. This history mostly took place in arguments, over dinner tables, beside campfires, aboard steamers, in the pages of journals, and inside people's heads. Of all the inner lives depicted in this book, that of William James may be the most illustrative because he more than anyone tried to gather up the threads of ideas and values spun by his ancestors and to weave them into the new cloth of the modern era. The effort drove him to complete collapse at age twenty-four. He lost his strength, his energy, even his power of concentration as he squirmed beneath the oppressive weight of a life he now found loathsome. Dark clouds were all James could see as he struggled to reconcile what he thought was true with what he thought was right. Meanwhile, he could not make himself act at all and often wanted to die. This went on for seven years. Spinal paralysis, James called his mental affliction. The phrase holds a lot of historical meaning. If the spine is physical, then the problem is material and the solution may be discovered rationally through the use of reason, evidence, experimentation, and all the other empirical instruments of the Enlightenment, the intellectual transformation that originated in Europe and migrated, unevenly, around the globe. Beyond a doubt, James was a product of the Enlightenment who practiced the scientific method and heeded natural facts. This was true of everyone on his intellectual family tree. Yet most people think of the Enlightenment as a secularizing movement, spreading a loss of faith in religion along with its new faith in human progress. And there is nothing James and his kin cared for more than religion. The spine is not only physical. Call someone spineless, say they have no backbone, and you are saying something about their character, something grave. Cowards are not manly. The weak-willed are not trustworthy. James worried so much about his spinal paralysis because he cared so much about his free will, and this value came not from the Enlightenment, but from the Reformation. Actually, free will is much older than the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. An ancient Christian answer to the problem of evil—the problem of why bad things happen to good people when an all-good God is supposed to be all-powerful, a problem that bothered James although he never believed in that kind of God—free will is particularly important in the history of American democracy because of the role it played in the Reformation and the role the Reformation played in New England. Indeed, free will has everything to do with the democratic principles of liberty and equality. Although the first William James in America arrived after the Revolution, the roots of Jamesian thought lie not with this paternal grandfather but with New England Christians who did not even anticipate that such a war would ever come, yet whose deepest convictions helped make it possible. Heirs to the Puritan tradition, these Christians believed that their ancestors had crossed the Atlantic in devotion to liberty of conscience, or the divine right of private judgment, the idea that God creates every human being a moral agent endowed with free will, which it is each individual's right and duty to exercise conscientiously in order to cultivate virtue and its ally, truth. New England Christians argued with one another over precisely what the truth may be and they always had but as the eighteenth century wore on, most of them came to agree that the British were violating the colonists' essential liberty, which they understood in both religious and political terms. Their devotion to Reformation Christian liberty made New England patriots extremists in the colonies when it came to the cause of independence, but by the time the war arrived they had started to disagree with one another over a fundamental matter of their faith, the very nature of truth. One side, the side the founding father John Adams practiced, believed that the truth could be known in full to no human being, and that humility and open-mindedness as well as sincerity and candor were therefore fundamental characteristics of piety. These Christians became the first people in the world to call themselves liberals, by which they indicated their commitment to open-minded moral agency. The other side of the New England Christian debate believed that ultimate truth was contained in Calvinist articles of faith and ought to be spread evangelically. This side, although its commitment to Calvinism loosened over time, has been contending ever since that the United States is a Christian nation, meaning a nation founded upon an evangelical Protestant faith dubbed orthodox. The argument between these splintering halves of New England Christianity produced a novel turn in thought and culture, an American Reformation.² Up to now the American Reformation has been hard to see for two main reasons. The first is the very myth of orthodox American Christianity produced by the evangelical side of the debate, a useful fiction in a country with a sizable Protestant majority but a guarantee of religious freedom instead of

an established religion. This myth, adopted by scholars and popular commentators alike, equates religion with Christianity, Christianity with supernatural belief, and Christian belief with a particular faith in the special saving grace of Jesus through his blameless death and glorious resurrection. This evangelical kernel of Christianity had certainly been part of the Puritan tradition and of other American Protestant sects as well as Catholicism but the revival movement of the eighteenth century separated this kernel from other beliefs and practices that had grown up with those traditions, delineating the evangelical doctrine starkly so that it alone became the essence of faith. The myth of orthodox American Christianity gave rise to a distinction between head and heart, or the intellect and the soul, making any departure from so-called orthodoxy appear as a falling away from religion, a decline from faith, a crisis, a move of revolt or rejection or outright warfare on religion that inexorably brings on secularization, which measures value by the merely natural or material rather than the ultimate or divine and is widely associated with modernity. Christians who deplore secularization and humanists who applaud it have both found this myth useful, but lifting the veil of orthodoxy from the actual complexity of American religious thought reveals that the liberals who departed from this alleged orthodoxy did so in fidelity to their Christian faith rather than in spite of it.³ The second reason the American Reformation has been hard to see is because of a myth some later liberals created. Actually, it's Ralph Waldo Emerson's fault. This son of a son of a son of a New England minister acted like he was making a complete break with his ancestral faith when he left the pulpit, but actually he left it on grounds of conscience, to develop his moral agency, to pursue virtue and truth as only he could see it. In other words, Emerson was an exemplary fruit of the American Reformation and did not fall far from the tree planted by his forefathers. But admirers of Emerson early in the academic study of American literature were snookered by his story about corpse-cold Boston Unitarianism and erected him king of what they called the American Renaissance, a cultural and literary movement purportedly free of superstition, dogma, and other stale accretions of America's religious past. These scholars knew that Emerson's father had belonged to a small intellectual fellowship in Boston that produced a monthly journal out of weekly conversation over a modest supper of widgeons and teal, as one such scholar put it in 1936, with a little good claret. Yet they had no idea that Rev. William Emerson and his friends practiced moderation for the sake of reason not only because they had absorbed Enlightenment ideas from Great Britain, but also because free inquiry paired so well with free will.⁴ Looking at the historical contribution of New England as an American Reformation instead of an American Renaissance shows that a democratic approach to religion forged the real liberal tradition in America. The American Reformation began as an extended conversation among professing Christians whose basic premises were spare: the perfection of God and the moral agency of human beings. About everything else they argued. In the face of disagreements, liberals tried to maintain open minds and to believe in the possibility and desirability of progress—moral progress, human progress, and social progress dependent on each individual's growth in conversation with other individuals, rather than in opposition to them, in a society that rises together if it is to rise at all. Liberals strove to keep their minds open to other people's perspectives because they knew they were fallible, like all humans, which meant that their own opinions might be wrong, and because they believed that all humans also bore within some unique quality of the infinite divine from which others might learn. Human beings are essentially equal, profoundly equal, as fellow fallen creatures of the same perfect God. They need freedom in order to exercise their divine right of private judgment to heed their sacred inner voices of reason and conscience and to evaluate others' opinions and they have a duty to use this freedom to express their perspective on truth as faithfully as they can. The American Reformation produced not only Christians who called themselves liberals but also liberal intellectual culture, in which both listening with humility and speaking with integrity are acts of piety. Liberals were initially concentrated in New England, the most scholarly and pious scholarly because pious community of discourse in America, but many of their main talking partners were British. Their conversation always reached across the Atlantic. Liberals also stood squarely between the two other most powerful intellectual cultures in what became the United States, the revived Christians of the wider American populace and the rational elites of urban centers. Instead of elbowing out these two groups, their fellow Reformation Christians on the one side and their fellow acolytes of reason on the other, liberals connected them, holding hands with each and translating key terms and critical concerns for the goal of important compromises like declaring independence from Britain and adopting a Constitution for nationhood. The conversation liberals carried on over the eighteenth century and across the nineteenth created such a powerful turn in modern thought because they were moderates, because they were central interlocutors, because they balanced confidence in their own point of view with a commitment to considering other points of view. Most important, their very particular Christian perspective gave them the tools to create, over a long span of intellectual and cultural development, a universal platform for mediating human difference that must be called secular although it is rooted in religion.⁵ Secular and liberal are among the most loaded terms in the English language, carrying so much intellectual freight that no one can conscientiously use them without explaining how they are meant. Conscientiousness, of course, is just what the religious liberals of the Revolutionary era and beyond most valued. Freely chosen action upon mature deliberation, as they would have put it, is right conduct for a moral agent. But liberals were not secular if secular is to mean something somehow opposing religion, or devoid of religion. Far from it. Moreover, they really did not know anyone who truly opposed religion (churches were another matter). The lightest touches on religion came from people like Thomas Jefferson, who conscientiously trimmed the

Christian Bible to dimensions of his liking; he certainly was a moral agent who used his reason and his conscience. Yet Jefferson spent much less time contemplating infinity than John Adams, his comrade, foe, and friend. This put Adams comfortably or rather uncomfortably between Jefferson and Samuel Adams, a cousin of John's who adhered to a much more evangelical, uncritically biblical Christianity and who therefore cannot be called much of a liberal because once one becomes a liberal of any type, one becomes a critic, actively scrutinizing every possible article of belief or value objectively, with an impartial eye and a mind buoyed by the reference point of perfect divine truth which is, unfortunately, invisible, beyond the reach of human senses. Jefferson thought less about the invisible than either Adams did, while being a rational critic; the Adams cousins shared more than a last name; all three could be mapped onto a continuum devised from what scholars refer to by the terms republicanism, political liberalism, and Christianity, as well as several other key words of the modern period, such as civic humanism, tolerance, individualism, rights, and perhaps even modernity itself. John Adams may be the most representative figure of the early American Reformation because he fell most stoutly in the middle of all these markers and because he engaged in active conversation with the biggest variety of representatives from groups who leaned more strongly in one direction or another. He was secular, then, insofar as he believed the public sphere ought to field all viewpoints. Insofar as Adams was liberal, he both stood up for his own point of view and, acknowledging its partiality, remained open to revision. Each of these positions reflected his Christian conviction and piety.⁶ Liberals were ubiquitous in American public culture across the nineteenth century, yet always a numerical minority. Wary of party spirit, they were Federalists and then they were mostly Whigs and then Republicans, and then, at the end of the century, they became Mugwumps who declared themselves independent thinkers while still voting Republican for the most part. It is tempting to claim they became Democrats in the twentieth century, but by then the American Reformation was over and the conversation changed. Although liberals favored a consistent range of social and political positions over this long period, their most fundamental commitment was to their approach to truth. Against those who believed they already knew what was right and pursued policies to reflect this fixed truth, liberals advocated for truths they recognized as provisional and incomplete, and they were committed to listening to contrary opinions for any possible truths the opposition might hold and working dialogically toward consensus. At least in theory. This open-ended conception of truth was born of Christian humility in the eighteenth century, when the American Reformation tied equality and liberty to the human soul at the same moment these root concepts were being tied to American democracy. The democratic idea gradually became not only a political system but also, among liberals, a universal ideal for the social practice of treating others as equals, a religion of democracy. The commitment to universal moral agency was what it meant to be liberal from the early republic into the twentieth century, the period covered in this book. Only with the New Deal did the word liberal come to indicate a political commitment to a federal government responsible for social welfare, a commitment that was indeed produced by the long conversation among liberals with one another and their ever-changing opponents but that, once held as a fixed truth, was no longer liberal in this historically grounded sense of the term.⁷ Two subtle ironies surround the history of this religion of democracy. The first is that the liberal Christians who set its wheels in motion acquired a reputation for softening their religion into mere morality, as though to focus on ethics were to focus on something other than real religion. From the liberal point of view, virtue is the fruit by which true faith is known. This charge is a by-product of the myth of orthodox Protestant Christianity, made especially potent by what happened during the middle period of the American Reformation. When Romantic ideas about universal inner divinity arose amid an exploding literary canon that was globally inclusive for the first time, Christianity's claims to exclusive truth started to look like hubris to some liberals. How could an open-minded moral agent be so sure a Hindu did not know God? Transcendentalists and others then left the Christian fold without really rejecting Christ. To the surprise of many faithful devotees of the American Reformation, liberal Christians started battling their own intellectual and cultural progeny, post-Christian religious liberals who discovered the divine not only in the Christian Bible but far beyond it. This post-Christian turn marked the end of the American Reformation and the beginning of the religion of democracy in which no tradition could boast unique revelation but all individuals bore unique inner divinity. The second irony around this history is that the chief sin of which these post-Christian religious liberals were accused was of discarding ethics altogether by indulging in a moral relativism that verged on nihilism. The charge is delivered with moral indignation if not outrage, as though giving credence to other points of view were not itself a moral commitment with venerable Christian roots. Tolerance looked like apathy to critics and piety to liberals.⁸ Just as there is more than a grain of truth in the myth of orthodox Protestant Christianity in America, there is more than a grain of truth in these criticisms of liberal morality, despite their logical incompatibility, but nuance matters. At least it did to liberals. When Calvinists said that humans were utterly and innately sinful, liberals rejoined that humans were instead subject to sinfulness, prone to sin, the very thing religion is supposed to mitigate. This then highlights another film across this history: the one trend in the history of American religion to resist the myth of orthodox Protestant Christianity is the history of liberal religion, which includes post-Christian, metaphysical, spiritual-but-not-religious, and other nonevangelical forms of religion in the genuine and robust history of religion in the United States and then goes on to treat liberal religion as though it did away with sin, and as though liberal religion had nothing to do with politics. This interpretation is understandable. Liberals had pushed back hard

against the grim Calvinist insistence on the utter determinism of human sinfulness. Then the liberals of the nineteenth century were succeeded by some extremely optimistic and often politically irrelevant religious liberals in the therapeutic atmosphere of the twentieth century. You are a child of the Universe, said one famous credo, reassuring an affluent public that no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should. No problem of evil there. In the nineteenth century, however, religious liberals both Christian and post-Christian emphasized the positive in order to pull behavior out of its heavy habitual path toward the negative for reasons never unconnected to the public sphere. And they did this by focusing Christian practice and then post-Christian religious practice on mental development, the training of the human mind.⁹ The ideal of mental development is not as elitist as it may sound. Indeed, it is not elitist at all, although its liberal version originated among elite Bostonians. Their development of a culture of lived virtue based on the principle of moral agency provided a major feeder for the modern notion of a universal human equality compatible with human diversity, the pluralism essential to modern liberalism. That knot of refined diners among whom the father of Ralph Waldo Emerson practiced temperance did not know they were paving the way for an egalitarian doctrine of universal human value, but as soon as they declared that the most important thing about a man was the way he used his mind, they opened the theoretical door for men and women of all classes and colors to pursue their most complete mental development as the most important aspect of their religious path, and therefore the most important contribution they could make to the good of society. By any demographic measure, whether race, class, gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation, or public sexual orientation, the early intellectual fellowships of the Boston liberals were strikingly homogeneous. But from the perspective of the liberals themselves blind as they were, at the time, to the impact of socioeconomics on status and access their fellowships were beautifully diverse because liberals varied so much in opinion, taste, and experience, and they bounced these differences off one another so productively. The goal of mental independence, in which the moral agent resists the way of the herd and speaks freely with candor and humility, encouraged every individual to find and develop her or his own inner voice of the divine to join the human chorus for the sake of the common good. Liberals valued individuality, not individualism, and the reason they came out against slavery and for women's rights was because slavery and patriarchy prohibited self-culture. Later liberals found that unregulated capitalism did too. Meanwhile, their reading lists quickly grew to include continental Europeans and more taking in Muslim, Persian, Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucian texts while their correspondents and travel ranged beyond Western Europe around the globe. As their canon expanded over the nineteenth century, the small elite of Boston liberals steadily extended their circles outward from the Northeast across the American West to include women, Jews, immigrants, workers, Native Americans, and former slaves and their descendants in a vast network of liberal intellectual culture lived through educational institutions, sermons and addresses, books and periodicals, friendships, fellowships, associations, and reform movements. It took about a hundred years, but by practicing an ethic of inclusivity and integrity, liberals developed some of the most diverse communities of discourse by any measure ever found in human history up to that point. They also helped make possible both the more diverse fellowships that followed them the United Nations, for example and the more specialized, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The diversity of the liberal fellowships did not correspond in representative percentages to the demographic diversity of American society by the turn of the twentieth century, nor indeed to the diversity of human society. Long after they had theoretically breached the barriers of prejudice and discrimination, most liberal fellowships remained disproportionately Anglo-Protestant and middle class. Such fellowships reflected the long leadership of the liberal movement and the accumulation of liberal privilege, while also including delegates from America's many internal constituencies. The liberal fellowships produced a religion of democracy that fed into both American civil religion and international human rights.¹⁰ This book re-creates the ever-evolving liberal conversation from the eighteenth century to the twentieth by tracing the lived connections between thinkers through what they read and wrote, who they knew, where they went, and how they expressed their opinions. Each chapter overlaps chronologically with its neighbor as generations reach into one another, texts cross oceans and centuries, and languages blend and change. The chapters all center on a single historical figure as a vantage point for seeing into the problems and preoccupations of the time and listening in on arguments, learning vocabularies, and meeting other participants in the liberal conversation. These chapters are not so much biographies aimed at understanding the character or legacy of these specific historical actors as they are reconstructions of key controversies in which the actors participated. The historical guides whose voices govern each chapter were Representative Men and women in the sense in which Ralph Waldo Emerson used the term in 1850: such as are good of their kind.¹¹ Emerson was talking about heroic genius, inspired by Romantic poets, but he too was a liberal who learned almost as much from his aunt who read those poets first as he taught his readers, who read the Romantics too. He and they all believed that everyone is sacred and there are no sacred cows, making heroism the daily act of speaking boldly and listening meekly like a moral agent who fears no truth.¹

JOHN ADAMS, REFORMATION CHRISTIAN THE PROTESTANT MORAL ETHIC AND THE SPIRIT OF INDEPENDENCE

John Adams was a good son. A good son to his father, Deacon John Adams, who made shoes and tanned hides and farmed crops all to the glory of God, whom he served by lay leadership at their village church, a lifestyle of simplicity, modesty, and charity, and the regular enforcement of Christian order at home, where prayer, Bible study, and obedience were on the agenda of each day. Adams family

values cornered on personal morality, so even if the son departed from doctrines held by his father, they agreed on the necessity of reining in the passions, cultivating virtue, and submitting to divine providence. Adams always admired his father's moral character. Nothing that I can say or do, avowed the son late in life, can sufficiently express my Gratitude for his parental Kindness to me, or the exalted Opinion I have of his Wisdom and Virtue. If the letter of their beliefs differed which there is no way of fully knowing because Deacon John Adams, like most yeomen in colonial America, left little written record behind they shared not only the common practices of piety but also a common faith in what their minister called the divine Right of private Judgment. As Reformation Christians, they felt free to disagree with other Christians plenty, yet even disagreement rested on the essential Protestant conviction they shared with other spiritual descendants of Martin Luther, who claimed a fundamental Christian liberty with his historic pledge: Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God.¹ John Adams was a good son of New England too. He knew the ways of his forebears and kept them, hearing sermons twice every Sunday and recording their substance diligently in the homemade diary he started keeping at age seventeen, while a student at Harvard, where for more than a century gentlemen and yeomen alike had been sending their most favored sons as preparation for leadership in church and state. Adams wanted to become a minister, but the church was growing more internally contentious at the time Adams had to make his choice, and he feared it would not tolerate his convictions in a pulpit. He decided he could do more good in law, and in Boston. There, as the movement for independence gained momentum, Adams joined the fray by writing something he called *An Essay upon the Rights of the Colonists*. The Adams farm lay some thirty miles from Plymouth because in order to argue against the injustice of the Stamp Act and for the independent character of the American people, Adams drew on his heritage, telling a story about the Puritans that subsumed the Pilgrims and had nothing to do with Calvinism or theocracy and everything to do with self-government.² Adams was not only being a politician when he cast his ancestors as the originators of American political culture, lovers of liberty who bravely resisted spiritual tyranny. He was being a historian. At the same moment that a group of New England Congregationalists calling themselves orthodox were narrowing down the memory of the Puritan tradition to its Calvinist creed, Adams narrowed it down to its particular moral ethic, one that valued the common good over self-interest, extolled the pursuit of knowledge as a way to worship God and his creation, and insisted on both the divine right of private judgment and the related, God-given dignity of human nature, as Adams put it in the essay. New England Puritans allowed no earthly authority to stand between their consciences and their God, in Adams's telling, which made them nonconformists fitted for self-government as no other people ever had been. Independent thought and action was central to Puritan culture.³ John Adams was, most famously and self-consciously, a good Son of Liberty. In the revolutionary brotherhood he joined in 1766 and arguably even more so in his legal defense of their enemies four years later in the Boston Massacre trial, Adams tried to do what he thought was right regardless of received opinion, to treat others fairly even when he disagreed with their positions, and to represent his own views candidly while keeping his mind receptive to other perspectives and new information. How successful he was in these efforts is up to another kind of history to judge. On the question of how Adams understood liberty and what difference that understanding made to the course of American thought, however, these ethical commitments say a lot. Tolerance, impartiality, and candor were the social virtues of a moral agent, the ideal Christian type produced by the American Reformation that sprang up when new Enlightenment texts fertilized the old Puritan fields of greater Boston. In the theology of the American Reformation, divine moral perfection stood at the center, God being the sole possessor of absolute truth and justice, the very definition of good. Against the wisdom and universal benevolence of God, human limitations are woefully apparent and this is why liberty matters. It is the necessary precondition for the fight against sin. Humans have a duty to exercise liberty because they have mental powers implanted within them, by divine agency, for the purpose of growing virtue by discerning right from wrong. This essential human moral agency mandates both acting with personal integrity and recognizing the common dignity of other equally limited, equally divinely created beings equally endowed with the rights of liberty: of private judgment, conscience, and free inquiry. Because of the American Reformation, whose theology Adams and others brought into the founding of the republic, the American idea was never only the freedom from interference by authority with individual thoughts and beliefs. It was always also the freedom to pursue what is both true and right.⁴ Being a good son did not mean that John Adams was a good person, necessarily. All reports about his vanity, sensitivity, and pride are true. His temper was easy to provoke. He never forgot a grudge. He lorded his superior knowledge over others and needled those he could prove to have been in the wrong. He judged the morals and manners of individuals and whole nations with the condescending eye of the smugly righteous, while worrying too much about what others thought of him. His anti-Catholic bigotry and lack of leadership on the slavery question mark him as a New Englander of his time, and compared to other founders, especially Franklin and Jefferson, he never lost the air of the provincial. Yet this is precisely what makes him such an important figure for understanding the spirit of independence in the American founding and the religious dimension of liberalism. His early social experience with Christians of diverse doctrinal complexions, especially as a schoolmaster after college in a town west of Boston, factored as much in the making of his revolutionary convictions as his readings during those years of natural and moral philosophy, classical republican and Whig political theory, and heterodox Protestant theology from Europe. His intimacy with the culture that produced

him fundamentally shaped how he used the intellectual resources of his age.⁵In 1904 the German sociologist Max Weber chose Benjamin Franklin to represent the Protestant ethic in his famous study of capitalism, and reasonably so, for no American styled himself with savvier self-fashioning than the thrifty, practical, worldly, entrepreneurial, optimistic, and industrious Franklin of his *Autobiography* (1791). Franklin exemplified the American individualism that transferred to this world the efforts once reserved for the next. If Weber had chosen Franklins contemporary Rev. Jonathan Edwards, who redesigned Calvinism for Lockean Americans, he would have discovered a rather different Protestant ethic. Edwards sternly subordinated the things of this world before the judgment of a wrathful God, who offered sinners the only moral progress they could get through the single doorway of repentance and conversion. Edwards provided the eighteenth century a modern salvation-oriented ethic increasingly favored by a revived Christian American majority. This Protestant ethic fostered a different kind of American individualism from that of Franklin, and a different kind of American we. ⁶In John Adams, Weber would have found yet another Protestant ethic, a particular moral ethic, an ethic that provided the politically necessary middle ground between the otherworldliness of an Edwards and the worldliness of a Franklin. Adams could occupy this middle ground because he had a foot in each sphere, equally balanced between the traditional Reformation Christian world of most Americans and the modern rational humanist world of others. Both sides fed what hope Adams had in the human capacity for progress because the perfection of God provided both the tools and the rules for moral growth. At the same time, the more Adams learned about the record of human experience, the more his respect for the power of sin grew. He would never have made a daily chart of the virtues on the presumption that he could master them, as Franklin famously did, nor would he have been satisfied with the mere appearance of virtue, nor with virtue for the sake of prudence or self-interest. Virtue was a revolutionary principle for Adams. The obligation of its pursuit was incumbent on all of humankind because the human relation to a perfect God was the thing in which all were equal. This more than any other concept allowed Adams to pry apart the colonial relationship to the crown as well as the bands of hierarchy within the colonies. By the age of twenty-one, he earnestly believed that the business of life was constantly to improve our selves in *Habits of Piety and Virtue*.... [T]he meanest Mechanick, who endeavours in proportion to his Ability, to promote the happiness of his fellow men, deserves better of Society, and should be held in higher Esteem than the Greatest Magistrate, who uses his power for his own Pleasures or Avarice or Ambition. Adams did his part to overthrow such corrupt magistrates because of his devotion to a religious faith that, by the time he was in his eighties, described the moral ground of Universal Tolleration in four words: Be Just and Good.⁷

MORAL AGENCY IN THE AMERICAN REFORMATION

The American Reformation began in 1749 when the Adams family pastor delivered a sermon at the West Church of Boston. It was a rare treat for Parson Lemuel Briant to make the trip from Braintree to the colonial capital at all, much less to appear before a well-heeled congregation already primed by the cutting-edge preaching of its regular minister, Rev. Jonathan Mayhew, to appreciate Briants message. It was not so rare for colonial New England ministers to favor one another with sabbaticals by trading pulpits, which was the only way they could develop their sermons for publication that is to say, the only way they could become scholars but Briant and Mayhew were limited to trading with one another because they had yet to break into the old boys network that distributed such favors, the Boston Association of Ministers. In fact, neither ever did. Both were young and idealistic and both revered moral agency over prudence on the scale of human virtues, which means that both of them were outspoken too, and tactless. Both were to die rather young as well, but before they did they and their like-minded brethren influenced the Christian and civic faith of not only John Adams, but a large enough and powerful enough portion of the Congregational body that by the eighteenth century their new flavor of Christianity had won over Harvard, most of Bostons better sort, and much of the merchant class in New England.⁸Jonathan Mayhew was another good son, whose parents carried the Puritan line in their very names. His mother, Remember, was a living symbol of the Reformation Christian injunction to bend all thoughts toward the divine. His father, Rev. Experience Mayhew, reflected in his name the centrality in Reformation Christian theology of each individuals experience of the divine in the life of their faith. And the Missionary Mayhews, as the family became known around New England, really meant to include each individual in that doctrine; Experience was the fourth Mayhew minister to preach to the Native Americans on Marthas Vineyard. Fluent in the Massachusett language, Experience made a new translation of the Psalms and the Gospel according to John early in the eighteenth century. He later wrote two different books testifying to the religious conversions and faithful lives of the Pokanoket among whom he lived, believing as many Puritans did not that Indians were fully capable of Christian sainthood. Not far away and not much later, John Adams frequently visited the nearby homes of Ponkapoag and Neponset, who shared their bounty of fruit with him. By the early nineteenth century, though, New England Natives had lost so much economic power that the Girls went out to service and the Boys to sea, Adams wrote in an 1812 letter to Jefferson, till not a Soul is left. We scarcely see an Indian in a year. ⁹Jonathan Mayhew left the Vineyard ministry to his father and younger brother, but he kept up the family tradition in other ways. As a minister, he called on his parishioners to keep Gods perfection in mind and to imitate it, and to do so not blindly but by the light of their own senses, including the internal evidence provided by reason and conscience. His choice of language, his extrabiblical references, and his willingness to stand up to the authority of tradition all mark him as a child of the Enlightenment and reasonably so, since the Harvard Mayhew attended had been including Locke and his

epigoni in its curriculum for three decades by the time Mayhews generation came along. Yet Mayhew was among the first to integrate Enlightenment material into his Reformation Christianity. His theology was new and daring to a degree that delighted his congregation while offending some other ministers. The novelty of his sermons also earned him an honorary degree from the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, which fostered a variety of dissenting Protestantism that American Christians, first Mayhew and friends and later including many who considered themselves orthodox, found enormously appealing into the last third of the nineteenth century. But in the mid-eighteenth century, Scottish and other dissenters were controversial in the colonies.¹⁰ Mayhew developed a reputation for Arminianism, the religion of free will and morality long a dirty word in Calvinist circles. This reputation convinced historians from the antebellum era to the present to depict him as a radical who destroyed core principles of the theology he inherited. Yet evidently he upheld enough other core principles of that tradition to retain the approval of his Honor'd Father, as Jonathan addressed his letters to Experience, letters he carefully smoked before mailing whenever there was sickness raging in Boston. The elder Mayhew initially drew up a will dividing his property on the Vineyard equally between Jonathan and Jonathans older brother, but by 1755 at the same time John Adams was worrying about his prospects in the ministry given how much he liked Mayhews theology Experience had changed his mind: My Will now is that he shall have the Whole of it.¹¹ One reason Jonathan and Experience Mayhew only became more harmonious over the years was their agreement on the proper character of Christian ministry. Both generations of Mayhews practiced the plain style of preaching favored among New England Congregationalists since the first generation, which meant that they severely disliked the new revival fevers burning in the colonies. When the famed Anglican evangelist George Whitefield came to Boston in 1747, Jonathan reported to his father that although the event was well attended, it was chiefly by the meaner sort, excepting those that heard him from a Principle of Curiosity, as Mayhew himself did. Mayhew judged the last sermon Whitefield delivered to be as low, confused, puerile, conceited, ill-natur'd, enthusiastick, c. Performance as ever I heard in my life. The key word here is enthusiastic, for Old Lights like the Mayhews and New Lights like Whitefield and Edwards had a disagreement over intellectual style rather than doctrine. After all, Edwards was as Calvinist as they came, and his brand of Calvinism was soon to be scholasticized in New England by Congregationalists who then wielded Edwardsian theology against fellow Congregationalists in the Mayhew strain. The New Lights, in their thirst for conversion and its fruits, were united not so much by their doctrines as by their willingness to interpret passionate human emotions what one historian calls fits, trances, and visions as signs of divine grace, and to gear the style of sermons toward arousing those emotional states. The Old Lights disagreed, insisting that sobriety in both preacher and parishioner remained the optimal mode of religious instruction. As Briant attested from Mayhews pulpit, Christianity is a Doctrine of Sobriety, Righteousness and Piety.¹² Possibly the most vocal opponent of the new revivalism, Rev. Charles Chauncy of Bostons First Church (or Old Brick), developed his contribution to the American Reformation out of his critique of the revival style. Chauncy, born a year after Edwards, was already settled at Old Brick when the first revivals began. Initially his response modeled the temperance he advocated. Distinguishing the Reformation Christian ideal from other approaches to belief in a 1739 sermon, for example, he explained that in the scripture Compel them to come in, Christ speaks, not of physical, but moral Compulsion; not of Compulsion by outward Violence, but internal Persuasion; that which is effected, not by Fines, Imprisonments, Racks and Tortures, but by Application to the Understandings of Men. Chauncy identified the Christian faith with a mild evangelism of reasoning and argumentation, sensitive to the mental states of individuals and protective of moral agency. By illustrating the specter of forceful compulsion with Inquisition-style Christianity, he defended and amplified the standard of sober, reasoned Christian faith against which revival methods contrasted so strongly. Enthusiastic evangelism stoked the very passions God had provided reason to contain. In the view of Reformation Christians like Chauncy, revivalist methods led to Error in Principle, wildness in Imagination, Indecency in Language, and Irregularity in Practice among unreliable witnesses to a corrupted Christian faith. He challenged the Protestant credentials of revivalists, urging his hearers to imitate the first Reformers, when Luther himself inveighed against the pretended Prophets, who boasted of angelic Revelations, and immediate Converse with GOD. Chauncy placed his own theology squarely in the Reformation Christian tradition.¹³ Chauncy was among the few senior ministers in Boston to welcome Mayhew onto the scene in 1747. Before receiving the call from West Church, Mayhew had candidated for a congregation in Worcester, but he was handily beaten by a fire-and-brimstone preacher, Thaddeus Maccarty (who later found the town a new schoolmaster in a bright fresh Harvard graduate with excellent Christian character, John Adams). Mayhew was not popular in the provinces. Even in Boston many wondered whether his brilliance might not be suspicious in itself, but his career was safe so long as the people of West Church were happy with him. Chauncy whose published sermons had earned him an honorary degree from the University of Edinburgh in 1742 quite liked Mayhew, and so did Ebenezer Gay (1696-1787), beloved pastor on Bostons South Shore at Hingham, another architect of the American Reformation and a former teacher of Mayhews. Gay ordained Mayhew and later joined Chauncy in burying him. As the senior theologian of the American Reformation, Gay who initially supported evangelical revivalism before gradually disassociating himself from it articulated the definition of religion that distinguished the kind of Christianity to emerge from the American Reformation, a definition that remained remarkably constant across the nineteenth century even as Reformation Christians turned into

liberal Christians who turned into post-Christian religious liberals. Religion, according to Gay, is An Obligation lying upon Men to do those Things which the Perfections of God, relative unto them, do require of them. In other words, religion is not a set of beliefs but an action-generating principle.¹⁴ The action that religion obliges humankind to undertake is, of course, moral virtue. This was the subject that got Briant in trouble after his appearance at West Church. Mayhew had already preached and published on the issue, claiming in 1748 that the moral perfection of God places upon all intelligent beings the obligation to practice what is usually called moral virtue; for by this we imitate God: and fall in with his benevolent design in creating and governing the world. Briant agreed. His 1749 sermon, however, was not simply an affirmation of Mayhew's point of view; it was a salvo fired at their fellow Congregationalists who seemed to preach otherwise. Briant's West Church sermon was called *The Absurdity and Blasphemy of Depreciating Moral Virtue*, and it challenged the evangelical denial of the spiritual value of moral effort as an idea opposing the religion of Christ, a challenge Briant tethered to biblical proof. Briant used as his text Isaiah 64:6 (All our Righteousnesses are as filthy Rag[s]). He argued that this verse was specific to the cultural context in which it was uttered and could not mean that God's creatures are totally depraved, not when the Bible shows that moral virtue is what Christ himself laid the chiefest Stress upon. Briant's evidence was the divine Sermon on the Mount; which contains the Sum and Substance of his whole Doctrine. These radically moral teachings in the Gospel according to Matthew also provided the central text for three of Mayhew's published sermons, *The Love of God*, *The Love of our Neighbor*, and *The first and great Commandment*. The Christ of the American Reformation saved humankind not by atonement but by mediating between earthly sin and heavenly perfection through the example of his life as supreme moral agent as well as the golden rule of his teaching.¹⁵ Undoubtedly this was shocking doctrine from a Calvinist perspective, but Briant was prepared for the reaction. He anticipated the criticism of his doctrinal antagonists, rebutting in advance by stating a principle he knew was shared across the Congregationalist spectrum that of private judgment and resting his case on it. To the expected objection that his sermon would feed a sense of sanctimoniousness and righteousness in its hearers, he responded simply, I have no other Answer to make, but to leave every one to judge for himself, how groundless it is. The centrality of the divine right of private judgment was also the subject of one of Mayhew's 1748 sermons; it was the liberals' best tool for legitimizing doctrinal novelties. This principle was so deeply rooted in New England culture that the Massachusetts charter of 1691 had guaranteed all Reformation Christians a liberty of Conscience. The architects of the American Reformation invoked this right again and again as they argued for their own interpretations as scripturally grounded, against the legitimacy of authority standing outside the individual, and for appeal to the standard of evidence. Objections must have grounds. Claims must stand on the strength of their argumentation. The conjoining of the Reformation Christian commitment to liberty of conscience with the Enlightenment standard of empirical discovery brought about something new, a practical approach for ascertaining truth and justice and for acting with moral virtue. Briant called this approach *right Reasoning*.¹⁶ Right reasoning laid out the tools for building the understanding of what is true and the practice of what is right. Briant, Mayhew, Gay, Chauncy, and other ministers who read the new theology coming out of Britain used its Enlightenment tinges to specify how Christians should enlist their mental powers in developing their moral virtue in the direction of divine perfection. The first rule was for Christians to acknowledge that they are not yet in possession of truth. Call it humility, call it partiality, call it fallibility, it is objectively true from a Reformation Christian perspective that no one can claim to possess the whole truth any more than they can claim to be free of sin. Therefore all must continue to seek more truth. Briant urged his audience to listen to his sermon in meekness of Wisdom, the remembrance that the only ultimate viewpoint belongs exclusively to God. Christians proceed open-mindedly, therefore, in real Love to the Truth wherever we find it. The alternative to acknowledging human ignorance relative to God is swallowing doctrine that is not only false but downright dangerous in pretending to truth. For with what Air of Infallibility soever Men may vent the Fictions of their own weak or disordered Brains for the Doctrines and Precepts of the Gospel, Briant complained, the greatest Absurdities, the most palpable Nonsense will get foisted upon those uncritical enough to believe it.¹⁷ The second rule taught the critical thinking necessary to discern between doctrines. Truth-seekers must be open-minded, honest, and sincere. They resist appeals to authority, tradition, or superstition, thinking for themselves and being both candid about what they think and willing to consider all claims. Mayhew stated such a rule in a 1748 sermon when he criticized the scribes and Pharisees in the time of Christ as imposing upon the people on the basis of their authoritative air, thereby acting without such an unprejudiced and candid disposition as became inquirers after the truth. Briant skipped the Pharisees and went straight after those who sustain the Character of Teachers in the Christian Church. At all of twenty-seven years old, he chided his fellow ministers that they are under special Obligations to search the Scriptures daily, to give themselves to Study, Meditation and Prayer so that they do not mistakenly expound doctrines from particular Scraps of Scripture, and from the bare jingle of Words. Only with Christian teachers like these can parishioners consider with themselves what meaning to take away from scripture. The rule of critical thinking applies two ways, then, upon both the manner of preaching and the manner of listening. The good Christian is the Sober, and the Sensible evaluator of doctrine, who would never receive any Thing for Truth only because tis spoken with an Air of Assurance and Godly Tone. The right of private judgment connotes a duty of critical thinking.¹⁸ The third rule of right reasoning directed the Christian to consider the effects of a doctrine as indicative of its degree of validity. If the

fundamental reasonable Christian premise is the moral perfection of God, all other doctrines must be evaluated according to their ability to foster human virtue. Of the false Gloss that holds the Isaiah verse to mean that humankind can produce no goodness whatsoever, Briant warned against the dangerous Consequences of admitting this Sense of the Text. Such a reading tends to prejudice the most Sensible against the Christian Profession, and confirm Men in their Infidelity. Indeed, such a misreading amounts to the most effectual Discouragement that could be given to the Practice of Christian Morality, and consequently one of the most fatal Snares that could be laid for the Souls of Men. The practical effect of some Calvinist doctrines was immorality and infidelity, not righteousness. Worst of all, some Christian teachers think so mistakenly about the role of grace in salvation, according to Briant, that they conceive of it so as to destroy all moral Agency, and set themselves down with this vain Thought, that nothing on their Part is necessary to Salvation, but if they are designed for it, they shall irresistably be driven into Heaven, whether they will or not. A doctrine that saps Christians of moral agency cannot be true.¹⁹This direct connection between articles of faith and moral behavior became one of the hallmarks of the American Reformation. As Mayhew put it in a sermon on The Difference Betwixt Truth and Falshood, Right and Wrong, whether Christs use of right refers to what is true in theory, or what is right in practice, it will come to much the same thing at last. Seeing this is a matter of clear thinking. If certain things are true in speculation, there must be some correspondent fitness of actions resulting therefrom, Mayhew explained. More pointedly, Briant averred that no Scheme can be right, no Doctrine from God that abates the Motives of Vertue, or discourages the Practice of any one Duty. What is true begets what is right. What is right must be true.²⁰All of these rules blended Reformation Christian and Enlightenment principles. Fallibility works as well in experimental science as in Calvinism, and reason was held to be the voice of God within, alongside conscience. Right reasoning meant acknowledging fallibility, thinking for oneself, expressing ones views forthrightly, evaluating others views with a mind both critical and receptive, and attending particularly to the moral effects of beliefs. This Christian mental training sharpened the precision with which the implications of truth-claims are brought to light. From this process, truth and morality as lived and understood by earthbound humans could no longer appear in black-and-white terms, either absolutely right or absolutely wrong. They appeared in shades of gray, all polluted by sin against the heavenly purity of Christ and his Father, but polluted to different degrees, differences with real moral meaning. Briant argued in his sermon that the doctrine of total depravity, in failing to distinguish between degrees of moral misconduct, equated the Character of a very loose and abandoned People with that of the best Righteousness of the most improved Christians, ultimately insulting Gods judgment. In one of his rebuttals to the fallout that ensued upon the sermons publication, he was more specific. I always thot that so far as any Man is pure, (let it be in a greater or lesser Degree) he is not filthy. Moreover, for a New England tradition committed to carrying on a glorious Work of Reformation in the Land, Briant thought it a terrible hindrance to make personal Goodness of no Account, and to load it with the most Opprobrious Language, because we ant so perfect in the Practice of it, as some other superior Beings in the Universe.²¹Finally, Briant presented the pursuit of moral virtue as the pursuit of happiness, which God wants for humankind. The God of the American Reformation was all-wise, all-knowing, and all-benevolent too. Mayhew called him Parent of the world, characterizing his attitude toward humanity as one of loving-kindness. Briant agreed that it must be the grand Design, the ultimate View of God, in all his Dispensations, to promote the moral Rectitude and Happiness of his Creatures. This was much more significant than simply believing in an ordered universe and a rational conception of the deity. God lost none of his power by being defined by his benevolence. Instead, the starting premise of Gods benevolence created a logical progression of inferences that all of his laws, moral and natural, tended toward the good, so that examining, understanding, and following those laws worked both to fulfill Gods will and to effect human good. Salvation itself became reconfigured in the progressive terms of the American Reformation. Not a black-and-white deal done in a predestined moment or a rapturous one, salvation was a gradual drawing near the goodness of God through successive acts of moral agency. Virtue was not some arbitrary thing God wants for his own glory, but is consistent with his benevolence. Either our Righteousness is of some Use and Significancy in the Affair of our Salvation, Briant pointed out, or it is not. Either it has some Connection with, and actual Influence on our Happiness, or it is of no real Necessity as to us. This view of happiness is neither the simple contentment of prudence and self-interest nor the ultimate glory of heaven. It is the sign of Gods love. Denigrating the importance of virtue denigrates the character and wisdom of God. To love God is instead to believe with Paul, with whose words from Titus 3:8 Briant closed his sermon, that moral actions are GOOD, and PROFITABLE unto Men. In essence, the theology of the American Reformation challenged part of the doctrinal interpretation of the Protestant Reformation traditional in New England with arguments rooted in an equally traditional commitment to private judgment.²²Reaction to Briants sermon came in two waves. The first, a pamphlet war, came from other provincial ministers taking to pulpits in direct challenge to Briants theology, and Briant answering them. The second wave erupted in Briants home congregation, when a brother of Deacon John AdamsEbenezer Adamsagitated to have Briant removed from the pulpit, adding charges of personal and ministerial misconduct to those of false doctrine. Various councils of ministers and church members ensued. The controversy set the template for the rest of the American Reformation, during which Congregationalist ministers and laity argued among themselves and against one another over doctrinal matters, generating a flood of literature that refined the edges between doctrines, creating a polarization

where before there had been a spectrum of difference. The later controversies have been well studied by scholars, who dub them the Unitarian controversies, since they resulted in the schism within the Congregational Church that produced the Unitarian denomination in the nineteenth century. Here at the start of the American Reformation, though, the doctrine of the trinity was not at issue. Instead, as arguments against Briant sharpened the distinction between the orthodoxy his opponents claimed for themselves and the heresy they pinned to him, the once common ground of the divine right of private judgment became a battleground.²³ The first to respond to Briants sermon, published soon after its delivery, was Rev. John Porter of Bridgewater, who legitimated his own New Light heterodoxy via his attack on Briant. Porter delivered his response in one of Briants competitor churches in Braintree six months after Briants appearance at West Church, pointedly titling his sermon *The Absurdity and Blasphemy of substituting the personal Righteousness of Men in the Room of the Surety-Righteousness of CHRIST, in the important Article of Justification before GOD*. Naturally, the sermon aimed to present the evangelical view of Christs atonement of sins as the scripturally based one, expressing astonished outrage at how some entertaining an high Opinion of their Gifts and Abilities overlook the text and context of the infallible word of God in preaching otherwise. A textbook exposition of the justification of sinners by grace ensued. Yet Porter had to allow that Christianity did indeed prescribe Duties of Piety, Righteousness, and Sobriety, and further that doctrines were to be judged in part by whether dreadful Consequences ensued. Porter simply insisted that the ill consequences followed what he named the modern Arminian Way, which he contrasted with the good old calvinistical Way. But his sermon, which was signed by five other ministers supporting his position against that of Briant, was not necessarily the good old way of New Englands heritage. Neither John Cotton nor Increase Mather would have recognized the evangelical message in Porters sermon, which he closed on an Edwardsian note, warning any wayward members of the flock to whom he preached, *You are this Moment upon the Brink of eternal Burnings: and should God cut the slender Thread of your Lives, you would be immediately beyond all Hope and Help for ever. The only solution to this plight is to repent and be saved at once.*²⁴ Briants initial answer to Porter was relatively temperate he entitled it *Friendly Remarks*, anyway and cheerfully denied both his Arminianism and Porters Calvinism. The most significant feature of his reply was where he aimed for harmony, and how. Briant praised the degree of protection in their time of the Freedom and Plainness of Speech (which is an essential Branch of that Holiness that becomes Gods House forever), clearly including Porter in this Reformation Christian value. We are all agreed in the divine Right of private judgment, Briant concluded, a point Porter conceded in his next reply. Insisting again on his own fidelity to Calvin and Briants to Arminius, Porter laid out his case and then handed off the verdict: *Let the World judge.* When Rev. Samuel Niles chimed in after Briants *Some more friendly remarks* quite intemperately accused Porter of plagiarizing one of the English theologians he claimed to find so heretical Niles upheld at least one plank of Briants right reasoning when he claimed that his convictions are not built on Tradition, or the Authority of our Fathers. The claim rang a little hollow, coming after the ministers who appended their signatures to Porters initial criticism signed under the claim that Porter preached the truth as it hath been taught in these Churches from the Beginning of New England. The fight was on.²⁵ The venue shifted from the theoretical realm of the pulpit to the practical question of what to do about Briant. In addition to his error-ridden preaching, Briant had not performed public fasts adequately, nor taught the catechism. He had alienated his wifes affections to such a degree that she left him, accusing him of tippling and of not using her well, as Jonathan Mayhew described the situation in a letter to his father. Briant was also in trouble for recommending that a parishioner read a dangerous book by an English dissenter, Rev. John Taylor. All of these instigations brought together a Number of aggrieved Persons in requesting an investigation, which materialized in the form of an ecclesiastical council made up of seven churches. They met at the end of 1752 at the House of Deacon John Adams.²⁶ Deacon Adams himself did not sign the document of grievance generated by that meeting, appearing to support Briant. Young John was off at Harvard by this point, so he could not witness the discussions, but he followed the drama through print and gossip. The council laid out the charges against Briant, including his refusal either to meet with the council or to call a church meeting. The members of the council notably insisted that they arrived at their grievance after engaging, in good Congregationalist fashion, in a serious, deliberate and impartial Consideration.²⁷ Briant was not dismissed. Despite the assembly of opponents to his ministry from other churches, his own church supported him. The congregation formed a committee to field the concerns of the ecclesiastical council, demonstrating in their report what good students of the American Reformation they were. The principles of right reasoning appeared throughout the short document. The committee praised Briants sermons as having a direct Tendency to inspire every unprejudiced Mind with the Love of Virtue and Goodness. They affirmed Briants personal Right of private Judgment and, to the charge regarding the book recommendation, underscored the importance of conscience by explaining that we cant but commend our Pastor for the Pains he takes to promote a free and impartial Examination into all Articles of our holy Religion, so that all may judge of themselves, what is right. The members of the committee did not necessarily agree with Briants doctrines, noting in the report that he may differ from some of us, but they insisted upon his Right to judge for himself. Any Difference in Opinion between them was acceptable in light of the greater obligations of private judgment.²⁸ Briant did not last long after this controversy, however. His wife stayed away. His health worsened, whether owing to the fondness for drink of which she had accused him or to some other cause history will never know. He asked for a leave

of absence from his duties, and then died. He was thirty-two years old. Yet he had set the American Reformation on its course, with effects far wider than a single sermon. By creating a big enough interest in the question of moral virtue, Briant had helped shape the careers of his opponents almost as much as of his allies. Although he did not oppose the Puritan tradition itself but only the legitimacy of appeals to tradition as reasons not to think for oneself, he lost the claim to orthodoxy in the fight against the neo-Calvinists, who thereby gained in their quest to legitimate the new evangelical focus on conversion. But the neo-Calvinists lost too. The new Boston Christianity of Briant and Mayhew seized the high ground of the divine right of private judgment, and from it generated rules of right reasoning that would prove potent in arguments of all kinds. By reformulating religion around the idea that Gods perfection obligated humankind to act with moral agency, the American Reformation invested the individual with a new kind of sovereignty, and with it a new responsibility to behave with personal integrity. Now good Christians will (if they are honest Men) with all Openness declare their Sentiments, said Briant, and by the Force of right Reasoning endeavor to propagate them.²⁹

COSMOPOLITAN PROVINCIAL John Adams at college read all the sermons and reports related to the Briant affair and much else besides with great interest. He was trying to decide between ministry and law, a pleasant state of suspension while he excelled in his classes, dabbled in the new scientific Experimental Philosophy, and argued with his friends. As he recalled to Jefferson more than half a century later, at the time he thought himself a metaphysician, and his friends thought me so too; for we were forever disputing though in great good humor.³⁰ The disputes of this phase of the future statesmans life were formative. In his old age Adams often referred back to this era, especially the years he spent considering the ministry while teaching school in Worcester, as the time when he settled on his personal brand of religion, which he practiced with temperate zeal for the rest of his life. It was a religion in which the difference between the good-natured disputes he had with his peers and the ecclesiastical disputes that almost brought down Briant was morally meaningful. It was a religion that had room for differences of opinion while uniting around moral conduct. It was a religion, as he declared to Jefferson near the end of their lives, consisting of a simple twofold active practice. Allegiance to the Creator and Governor of the Milky-Way... and benevolence to all his creatures, is my Religion, Adams declared. Then he added, in Latin, that if Jefferson had any better ideas he should candidly share them.³¹

Before Adams even entered college, he had heard Mayhew preach from Briants pulpit a number of times and read his published sermons, one in particular with great avidity. It was the sermon that made a Noise in Great Britain where it was reprinted and procured the Author a Diploma of Doctor in Divinity, Adams explained to Jefferson sixty-nine years later, enclosing a copy of what was a tolerable Chatechism for The Education of a Boy of 14 Years of Age, who was destined in the future Course of his Life to dabble in so many Revolutions in America, in Holland and in France. Adams told Jefferson that he had read it, till the Substance of it was incorporated into my Nature and indelibly engraved on my Memory. The sermon was called A Discourse, Concerning the Unlimited Submission and Non-Resistance to the Higher Powers (1750). It made the linkage between civil and ecclesiastical tyranny that Adams later harnessed for revolutionary purposes in his published response to the Stamp Act, on grounds that he also helped see into the Declaration of Independence. He gave credit where it was due, ever after describing Mayhew and Chauncy as responsible for the change in the peoples hearts and minds that brought about the Revolution.³²

Mayhew had gotten much of his argument from *The Independent Whig* (1721), a polemical work by an anonymous pair of English dissenters, John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, who also produced the widely influential *Catos Letters* (1724), which mixed liberal and republican political languages to create the radical Whig ideology later to prove so potent in American revolutionary thought. *The Independent Whig* burnished the anti-Catholic prejudice that Mayhew and Adams and everyone else in the American Reformation displayed. As Adams wrote in his diary after reading *The Independent Whig* in Worcester, The Church of Rome has made it an Article of Faith that no man can be saved out of their Church, and all other religious Sects approach to this dreadfull opinion in proportion to their Ignorance, and the Influence of ignorant or wicked Priests. Fears of papacy ran deep in Anglo-American religious culture, of course, as did fears of papist principles infiltrating Reformation Christian circles. The new aspect of the radical Whig critique of **PRIEST-CRAFT** and Nonsense, as Mayhew put it, was the idea that there is something wrong with claiming exclusive truth, and something downright tyrannical about imposing such a claim on others. The only aspect of religion everyone with their different sensory experiences and personal understandings can agree upon is the behavior that religion should produce, which is morality, a social Virtue, or rather the Mother of all social Virtues, according to Trenchard and Gordon. It wishes and promotes unlimited and universal Happiness to the whole World, they argued in one of the more serious moments of a rather playful text. Morality, the common ground of civil and religious society, regards not a Christian more than a Jew or an Indian, any further than as he is a better Citizen; and not so much, if he is not. On the basis of morality and not authority, differences of doctrinal allegiance and what may be called culture are compatible with the fundamental equality with which all are born.³³

Mayhew plastered *The Independent Whigs* arguments about tyranny onto the Bible and the divine right of private judgment in other words, onto the New England tradition. From a robust and reasoned defense of human dignity with extensive scriptural citations, he paired moral virtue, which God gave his creatures liberty in order to pursue, with the style of intellectual candor in which ones own opinions are spoken plainly and those of others respected. Tyranny of either church or state degrades men from their just rank, into the class of brutes. Mayhew argued that the spirit of civil and

religious liberty is promoted by overcoming divisions on the common ground of moral pursuit. There are virtuous and candid men in all sects, after all, and all such are to be esteemed. But there are also vicious men and bigots in all sects; and all such ought to be despised.³⁴Tolerance? Not exactly. The idea of transcending sectarian divisions in the name of virtue did reflect the pioneering opinions of Locke and the radical Whigs, who advocated a latitudinarian style of Christianity that defined the church broadly enough to include different beliefs on grounds of prudence. Whether those beliefs were true or not, the latitudinarians thought, it was better for the church to tolerate them than to repress them. Yet in the American Reformation, the right of private judgment pointed to a duty of public expression too, evaluating the results of holding this or that belief by measure of the virtue or nonvirtue such a belief produced. There was no shortage of judgment in Mayhew's sermon on unlimited submission in relation to civil power. He qualified the degree to which subjects ought to submit on Lockean grounds of consent and governments subserviency to the general welfare. King Charles I was certainly judged by Mayhew as a vicious bigot with a taste for Rome, who died an enemy to liberty and the rights of conscience, and Mayhew notably enumerated a long list of grievances against the king, prefiguring the Declaration of Independence. He offered evidence for his moral judgments, as well as for his claim that he had a right as a minister to comment on political concerns, which grounded his judgment in terms that could be considered by others. In an exercise of candor, he offered his point of view up to his readers' judgment. Exercising the same freedom with political questions as with other doctrines and precepts of Christianity, he assured his reader that he spoke so freely not doubting but you will judge upon every thing offered to your consideration, with the same spirit of freedom and liberty with which it is spoken.³⁵John Adams carried this imprint on his mind into his Worcester years. He was twenty when he arrived, the protégé of Rev. Maccarty, whose sermons he heard most often and with whom he frequently dined. Maccarty's favorite expressions Adams recorded in his diary: Carnal, ungodly Persons. Sensuality and voluptuousness. Walking with God. Unregeneracy. Rebellion against God. The litany rolled on and on, calling up the proud precise faith of a doctrine-driven Reformation Christian. Adams recorded these observations without judgment in his diary, which provides a patchy record of the breadth and diversity of Christian opinion in the hinterlands of Boston. Reading Protestant dissenters from Great Britain and taking tea with neo-Calvinists, Adams appeared to be on equally good terms with Maccarty as with the household of Major Gardiner Chandler, where Enlightenment ideas were on open spigot. One evening the company there thought that the design of Christianity was not to make men good Riddle Solvers or good mystery mongers, but good men, good majistrates and good Subjects, good Husbands and good Wives, good Parents and good Children, good masters and good servants. In the objective tone of his diary, Adams appeared to set all these opinions down to consider at his own liberty.³⁶One such opinion is particularly illustrative of the early American Reformation in two respects, the first related to how the divine right of private judgment still served as common ground among Congregationalists and the second to the relationship between Adams and Mayhew. Adams took a spring journey from Worcester toward home. Setting off early after a drink of fresh milk, he stopped first at an uncle's house, then after his next stretch of riding he rested and fed his horse with one family of Clarks and later dined with another. Finally, he visited with a most interesting pair of ministers: Stopped to see Mr. Haven of Dedham, who told me very civilly that he supposed I took my faith on Trust from Dr. Mayhew, and added that he believed the doctrine of the satisfaction of J[esus] C[hrist] to be essential to Christianity, and that he would not believe this satisfaction, unless he believed the Divinity of C[hrist]. Mr. Balch was there too, and observed that he would not be a Christian if he did not believe the Mysteries of the Gospel. That he could bear with an Arminian, but when, with Dr. Mayhew, they denied the Divinity and Satisfaction of J[esus] C[hrist] he had no more to do with them. That he knew not what to make of Dr. Mayhew's two discourses upon the Expected Dissolution of all Things. They gave him an Idea of a Cart whose wheels wanted greasing. It rumbled on in a hoarse rough manner. There was a good deal of ingenious Talk in them, but it was thrown together in a jumbled confused order. He believed the Dr. wrote it in a great Pannick. He added farther that Arminians, however stiffly they maintain their opinions in health, always, he takes notice, retract when they come to Die, and chose to die Calvinists.³⁷This extraordinary passage with two obscure Reformation Christians in a classic New England town provides a snapshot of a friendly, critical conversation, an exemplary model of virtue and candor. It begins with a civil rebuke, the suggestion by Haven of Dedham that young John took his faith on Trust, which is to say that he arrived at his convictions not by a process of sober deliberation but instead felt awed by Mayhew's doctorate or air of authority, never thinking for himself. Haven and Balch agreed on what was wrong with Mayhew's Christology, but Balch's criticism at least the parts that Adams recalled also provides a colorful and informal but serious and penetrating analysis of Mayhew's intellect, style, and argumentation. The remarks reflect the mind of a Christian who troubled to read the work of someone with whom he disagreed, and to develop an opinion for himself.³⁸One gets the sense that Adams paid such close attention to these observations because he was preoccupied with the prospect of becoming a minister, admitting to his diary on this period that my Inclination I think was to preach. Being linked with such a controversial figure was one matter, concern enough that when he decided against the ministry, he gave his diary the reason of his Opinion concerning some disputed Points. But equally vivid in this entry is how attentive Adams was to the matter of style, the form of the conversation. As when he recorded Maccarty's favorite phrases, and elsewhere when he commented on sermons some of which he found Frigid performances, others worth paraphrasing at great length he constantly tested languages and

concepts for possible adoption in his own faith and, potentially, his career. He copied sermons and theological tracts also, in order to impress them on his mind as he had Mayhew's work. Writing Tillotson was a frequent notation, which meant he had spent part of his day copying out in longhand the same English latitudinarian whom Briant had accused his opponent of plagiarizing. We are told that Demosthenes transcribed the history of Thucydides 8 times, in order to imbibe and familiarize the elegance and strength of his style, Adams observed one fine February day. Will it not then be worth while for a candidate for the ministry to transcribe Dr. Tillotson's Works.³⁹ Haven of Dedham was wrong about Adams. He did not take his faith from Mayhew, strictly, and certainly not on trust. Adams had one of the most restless, hungry minds in the colonies. He read, he listened, he disputed, and he contemplated a wide range of Reformation Christian opinions, testing them against his experience of his own inner awareness as well as his observations of others—their characters, their strengths, their weaknesses. Some of his reflections read like paraphrases verging on interpretations, others more like the application of principles to fresh experience, as when he cast his eye about his surroundings and reflected on the glory of God in arranging the universe. The dominant note of the diary, though, is his conviction of his own sin through meditative self-awareness and honest self-examination. I find myself very much inclined to an unreasonable absence of mind, and to a morose, unsociable disposition, he confessed one Friday in February 1756. Let it therefore be my constant endeavor to reform these great faults. ⁴⁰Inattentiveness and misuse of his time were the chief faults for which Adams castigated himself, but his defects of character bothered him too, particularly his arrogance. Good sense will make us remember that others have as good a right to think for themselves and to speak their own Opinions as I have, he reminded himself, before acknowledging that he was to a very heinous Degree, guilty in this Respect. He detailed at length his specific tendencies to fail to exhibit tolerance and respect for others and then urged himself to take a better course. I now resolve as far as lies in me, to take Notice chiefly of the amiable Qualities of other People, to put the most favourable Construction upon the Weaknesses, Bigotry, and Errors of others... and to labour more for an inoffensive and amiable than for a shining and invidious Character. ⁴¹