

Defoe
☉
CASUISTRY

BY

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Preface

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CASUISTRY: *That part of Ethics which resolves cases of conscience, applying the general rules of religion and morality to particular instances in which "circumstances alter cases," or in which there appears to be a conflict of duties. Often (and perhaps originally) applied to a quibbling and evasive way of dealing with difficult cases of duty. OED*

Nearly all of Defoe's fictional works cause us to identify imaginatively with characters whose actions we regard as blameworthy. At the same time that they compel sympathy, his heroes and heroines evoke moral judgment, and our two responses are often sharply opposed. Several critics have previously noted the paradox; this monograph seeks to elucidate it by examining the influence of traditional casuistry on the subject matter, narrative technique, and ethical outlook of Defoe's writings. The affective problem is posed concisely by Angus Ross, who says of Crusoe, "He knows his disobedience is wicked. So does the reader: but he is drawn on by Defoe to sympathize with Crusoe. . . . the reader is not held at a distance and forced to judge. . . . 'So,' we say, 'if I had been Crusoe, I should have behaved.'"¹ What draws us on to sympathize with Crusoe—and with the more patently "wicked" Moll Flanders and Roxana as well—is in large part Defoe's casuistical emphasis on intention and qualifying circumstances. In terms of overt behavior, we respectable readers are remote from such characters, but there is no such distance between

¹ Introduction to *Robinson Crusoe* (Baltimore, 1965), p. 15.

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their motives and ours. The difference in our circumstances therefore serves to explain, and to bridge the gap between, our dissimilar outward careers. Moreover, the differences between their situations and ours are shown to be largely accidental: this too keeps us from adopting a complacently superior stance, and from passing rigorous judgment on Defoe's erring heroes and heroines.

This is not to say that Defoe forbids us to judge his characters, or that he asks acquittal for one and all. Both their prosecutor and defender, he tends to seek a verdict of guilty, but also a suspended sentence and even, in some cases, a full pardon. The reader, of course, is both judge and jury, which may be why there is so much of what Ian Watt calls "forensic ratiocination" in Defoe's fiction.² Details that appear to be introduced for their psychological, social, or economic import, or for the sake of narrative realism, frequently involve covert appeals for sympathy as well; their function is not only descriptive or analytic, but also rhetorical. Some of them call in question the conventional assumptions and values which ordinarily shape our judgment, and attempt to make us judge more favorably than we otherwise would, given the outward facts of a case. More often, it is the tone rather than the substance of our judgments that they induce us to modify; they insist that reprehensible as a character may be, he merits our compassion, not our contempt. Lionel Trilling has called the traditional English novel "the literary form to which the emotions of understanding and forgiveness were indigenous, as if by definition of the form itself."³ Recent critics pre-

² *The Rise of the Novel* (London, 1957), p. 85.

³ "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," in *The Liberal Imagination* (Garden City, 1953), p. 215. Trilling's two preceding sentences seem to me equally applicable to Defoe's fiction. The greatness and practical usefulness of the novel, he maintains, "lay in its unremitting work of involving the reader himself in the moral life, inviting him to put his own motives under examination, suggesting that reality is not as his

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cupied with irony have tended to lose sight of such emotions in the experience of reading Defoe: this study tries to reaffirm their importance, and to trace the part that casuistry plays in eliciting them.

The chapters that follow are not wholly concerned, however, with the impact that casuistry has upon Defoe's reader. They also examine the role of seventeenth-century casuistical divinity in the genesis of his writings, for it was a significant element in Defoe's artistic as well as intellectual background. Casuistry furnished some of his most characteristic subject matter: many of its traditional cases of conscience turn up as letters to the editor in his periodicals, as matrimonial, mercantile, and religious predicaments in his conduct manuals, and as crucial episodes in his novels. Moreover, the casuistical tradition affected Defoe's attitudes toward these cases of conscience. Neither natural law, divine law, positive law, nor expediency is a touchstone by which Defoe decides all ethical problems. He takes up or sets aside each of these sanctions as the occasion demands, and his moral outlook gains much of its flexibility, independence, and vigor by refusing steady allegiance to any single legal or moral code. Casuistry acknowledges the existence and value of such codes, but comes into play when their scope or meaning is obscure, or when their obligations conflict—as is generally the case in Defoe's fictional works. "His characters live in a moral twilight," Martin Price observes,⁴ and it is in an ethical no-man's-land (to conventional education has led him to see it. It taught us, as no other genre ever did, the extent of human variety and the value of this variety." Tony Tanner has recently made a similar point; the novelist, he says, can effect "a kind of redistribution of our sympathies" which involves "understanding forms of life which hitherto one had rather casually considered as axiomatically alien" ("Realism, Reality, and the Novel," a symposium in *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, II [1969], 208-09).

⁴ *To The Palace of Wisdom: Studies in Order and Energy from Dryden to Blake* (Garden City, 1964), p. 270.

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vary the image) that casuistry flourishes—and Defoe seems most at home. As Spiro Peterson has demonstrated, Defoe makes extensive use of contemporary canon and common law, and Maximilian Novak has shown that natural law also figures prominently in his writings;⁵ my object is not to minimize Defoe's indebtedness to such systems, but rather to suggest that he invokes them, as they serve his turn, in a thoroughly unsystematic fashion. Defoe has not rejected what Watt calls "a transcendental scheme of things" only to put in its place some mundane but equally schematic conception of life.⁶ It is largely by eschewing the schematic, whether in its worldly or otherworldly versions, that Defoe manages to register (if not always to resolve) so many of the moral tensions and complexities of his characters' careers. He is aware that life is infinitely various, that every new situation poses new problems, and that these problems must be dealt with on their own terms. For him, as for earlier English casuists, cases of conscience are not matters of idle speculation, but the very stuff of daily existence. Experience is a constant challenge, since action involves choice and choice involves responsibility. At the same time, each new challenge must be met afresh, since circumstances alter cases. Commonplace situations thus take on moral significance, even an air of adventure; and the adventure is of a distinctly modern kind, in that casuistry offers the tentative in place of the final, the probable in place of the certain. In part, then, this is an essay in the history of ideas, which investigates the casuistical background of Defoe's view of life as intensely problematic; and in part it is a study of the influence of seventeenth-century case divinity on Defoe's choice of specific ethical problems as material for prose fiction.

⁵ "The Matrimonial Theme of Defoe's *Roxana*," *PMLA*, lxx (1955), 166-91; *Defoe and the Nature of Man* (Oxford, 1963).

⁶ *The Rise of the Novel*, p. 80.

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Insofar as it is concerned with what Defoe made of this material as well as where he got it, this monograph is also formal in orientation. Defoe's narrative techniques can be illuminated by examining the adaptation of certain principles and methods of casuistry in his writings. Particularly noteworthy is the relation of casuistry to Defoe's handling of character and action. With respect to character, casuistry is as concerned with the manner in which a man arrives at his decisions as with what he ultimately chooses, as concerned with the motives that influence action as with the eventual actions themselves. It thus rests on an assumption that something definable as conscience or consciousness is at the core of individual identity—and like the French language (*conscience*), it virtually equates the two terms. On this view, a man can be characterized by his outward behavior only if all his grounds for it are taken into account, and from this position it is a very short step to the belief that characterization consists of the analysis of consciousness. It would be an exaggeration to say that any of Defoe's characters embody this principle consistently, for he often employs other ways of presenting them. To some extent they simply *are* what they *do*, and to this extent they differ little from the traditional figures of roguery, voyaging, and romance. Yet for all that they do and undergo, Defoe's heroes and heroines spend a great deal of time weighing their actions, and through this process we come to know and care much more about them than about any of their seventeenth-century predecessors.

The main effect of casuistry on the action of Defoe's imaginative works is to dissolve it into a series of discrete episodes. Casuistry was not the sole source of fragmentation in Defoe's stories, yet its assumptions about experience probably reinforced episodic tendencies inherent in certain literary genres (such as criminal biography) upon which he drew, as well as in his own improvisatory method of composition.

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The continuity of each character's struggle breaks down into a sequence of local crises, each somewhat isolated from those that precede and follow it, and I think we can regard such plotting (or nonplotting) as the expression of a casuistical conception of life without implying that it is peculiar to casuistry, or that it is Defoe's only mode of analyzing experience. Watt remarks that between Defoean episodes there is "an inordinate number of cracks," and although Defoe's having "worked piecemeal, very rapidly, and without any subsequent revision" may be chiefly responsible for "discontinuities" in plot, Defoe's casuistical sense of life's intrinsic discontinuities probably contributed to the same effect.⁷ Whatever larger thematic coherences his books may have, individual episodes tend to be connected chronologically, not causally, and far from helping to organize them into a sustained narrative, casuistry appears to be one of the factors responsible for their disjointedness. Within the individual episode, however, casuistry often afforded Defoe both his subject matter and a distinctive way of treating it. Many scenes are not only based upon traditional cases of conscience, but organized internally in ways that reflect the casuistical method of posing and resolving moral dilemmas. There is a constant marshalling of motives and sanctions, choices and circumstances, precedents and hypothetical analogues; although this procedure can jeopardize any larger pattern or design a book may have, it can also supply a kind of minimal consistency between episodes, and can give each of them a fullness and complexity lacking in earlier fiction.

About the casuistical tradition itself, one or two preliminary remarks are in order. I shall often speak of seventeenth-century English casuistry as if it were a homogeneous body of thought, and to a considerable extent this is justified: between Anglican and Puritan casuists there was a striking community of

⁷ *The Rise of the Novel*, pp. 100, 99.

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methods and assumptions. A full account of the subject, however, would have to bring out the individual character of the various casuistical manuals as well as their similarities. The marked differences of mind and spirit between Jeremy Taylor and Richard Baxter, for instance, are reflected in the very styles of the *Ductor Dubitantium* and the *Christian Directory*. To speak of "traditional casuistry" is not to deny that diversity exists, but simply to stress a remarkable degree of uniformity. In *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography*, I maintained that the leading religious ideas in Defoe's fiction were commonplace of the English Protestant tradition, not merely crochets of his much-discussed Dissenting milieu. That study dealt more with spiritual than moral aspects of Defoe's religious background—with theories of man's relation to God rather than to his fellow man—and concluded that Defoe's attitudes were less exclusively Puritan than they are commonly taken to be. The casuistical writings of such Puritans as William Perkins, William Ames, and Richard Baxter, on the one hand, and of such Anglicans as Bishops Hall, Sanderson, and Barlow, on the other, seem to me to bear out this argument in the moral sphere as well. Not only does agreement greatly outweigh disagreement between these authors, but disagreement does not necessarily follow sectarian lines.⁸ One object in citing Anglican as well as Nonconformist divines is to suggest once again that Defoe's Puritanism (and for that matter post-Restoration Puritanism itself) is a complex problem which calls for further exploration, not a settled historical fact on which interpretations

⁸ See John T. McNeill, "Casuistry in the Puritan Age," *Religion in Life*, xii (1943), 83: "It is not, I think, justifiable, to attempt a clear separation within [casuistical literature] between Anglican and Puritan strains. To a large degree each writer uses his own judgment, and where the particular opinions of predecessors are evaluated there is little or no evidence of party alignment . . . differences in severity and laxity, in conservatism and modernity, cannot safely, in my opinion, be related to the ecclesiastical cleavage."

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of his life and works can profitably be based. A second object has to do with casuistry rather than Defoe. Casuistry has become so completely identified with the continental Jesuits whom Pascal attacked, and so generally discredited, that one must stress the number and variety of English authors who put a high value on it throughout this period. Although casuistry had from the beginning an equivocal reputation, my citations should indicate that its constructive side was recognized by some of the ablest divines of the seventeenth century.

Of the five books discussed here in some detail, four were published in 1722, Defoe's *annus mirabilis*. If my chief concern had been to trace the history of Defoe's involvement with casuistry, I would have examined his own early controversial and journalistic writings as fully as John Dunton's *Athenian Mercury*, his *Family Instructor* and *Conjugal Lewdness* as fully as *Religious Courtship*, his commercial career and *The Compleat English Tradesman* as fully as any of the novels. But it is the novels that interest me most, and rather than using imaginative works to illustrate a historical thesis, I have tried to shed light on the novels themselves by showing how Defoe drew on the materials and methods of traditional casuistry for his own purposes.

Graduate fellowships at Princeton made possible the research on which this monograph is based; a fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies enabled me to write it; and a grant from the University of California assisted me in revising the manuscript for publication. I am grateful to these institutions for their support, and to the editors of the *Journal of the History of Ideas* for permission to reprint here some passages from my article on the *Athenian Mercury*.

Throughout this project I had the benefit of Professor Louis A. Landa's advice and encouragement; Professors John Preston and Eric Rothstein were kind enough to comment

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on parts of the original draft, and in its final stage I received very helpful suggestions from Professors Ian Watt and Spiro Peterson. It is only fair to add that their interpretations of Defoe often differ from mine (and from one another's: if reading Defoe helps one to appreciate "men in their infinite plurality,"⁹ so too, in its way, does criticism of one's own work by fellow scholars whom one respects). My many colleagues and students at Berkeley are also to be warmly thanked for their help, and for giving me a sense of community amidst our diversity. I dedicate this study to them, and particularly to Stanley Fish, Frederick Crews, and Julia Bader.

⁹ The phrase is Hannah Arendt's, from *Men in Dark Times* (N.Y., 1968), p. 31.

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From Casuistry to Fiction

THE CASUISTS have become a by-word of reproach, but their perverted spirit of minute discrimination was the shadow of a truth to which eyes and hearts are too often fatally sealed: the truth, that moral judgments must remain false and hollow, unless they are checked and enlightened by a perpetual reference to the special circumstances that mark the individual lot. GEORGE ELIOT, *The Mill on the Floss*

ONE

Casuistry has always had both positive and negative aspects. As "the art of cavilling with God" and a set of "rules for the breaking of rules," casuistry has frequently and deservedly been a target of ridicule; as "a by-word for hypocrisy and dishonesty," it has been an object of dismay; yet it has also been prized, with equal justice, as a way of examining and resolving difficult moral problems.¹ Today casuistry tends to be regarded as at best ludicrous, at worst sinister: one must therefore stress at the outset that for all its abuses, casuistry also has its uses, and that moralists have long recognized it:

¹ The first phrase is from the *Journal des Savans* of March 30, 1665, quoted in Pierre Bayle, *A General Dictionary, Historical and Critical*, ed. John P. Bernard, Thomas Birch, John Lockman, et al., 10 vols. (London, 1734-38), vii, 196; the second, from Charles F. D'Arcy, *Short Study of Ethics*, 2nd edn. (London, 1901), p. 218; the third, from Benjamin Jowett's "Casuistry," in *A Collection of Theological Essays from Various Authors*, ed. George R. Noyes (Boston, 1857), pp. 312-13. In all subsequent footnotes the place of publication, unless otherwise indicated, is London.

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potentialities for good as well as evil. In *The Rambler*, Johnson acknowledges that casuistry is "useful in proper hands," even though it "ought by no means to be carelessly exposed, since most will use it rather to fill than awaken their own consciences";² and in *Clarissa*, Richardson's hero and heroine offer striking paradigms for the two aspects of casuistry. Both are expert casuists, but Lovelace uses casuistry to quiet his scruples, evade responsibility for his actions, and palliate his baseness, Clarissa to seek moral integrity amidst conflicting duties and complex circumstances.

In the writings of Defoe and his contemporaries, the terms "casuist" and "casuistry" are often but not invariably used in a derogatory sense. Those who could see in "*Unerring Nature*, still divinely bright/*One clear, unchang'd, and Universal Light*" were apt to dismiss casuistry as fundamentally inimical to truth and virtue.³ But those who believed that nature's light had been dimmed by man's fall, or who were skeptical about theories of an innate moral sense, were inclined to regard casuistry as a precarious but necessary enterprise. Defoe himself perceived the dangers and shortcomings of casuistry, yet he was too distrustful of "impulse" and "inclination"—too convinced of the banefulness of everything spontaneous and instinctive in fallen man—to find congenial the moral intuitionism gaining ground in his day. Not that I suppose he was attracted to casuistry on purely philosophical grounds; his personal background and temperament probably con-

² No. 13 (May 1, 1750), *Yale Edition of The Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss (New Haven, 1969), III, 73.

³ Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*, ll. 70-71 (Twickenham Edition, ed. E. Audra and Aubrey Williams [New Haven, 1961], I, 246-47); cf. the vision of "skulking Truth to her old Cavern fled,/ Mountains of Casuistry heap'd o'er her Head," and of "Morality, by her false Guardians drawn,/ *Chicane* in Furs, and *Casuistry* in Lawn" (*The Dunciad*, Bk. IV, ll. 641-42, 27-28; Twickenham Edition, ed. James Suhrland [New Haven, 1965], V, 407-08, 342-43).

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tributed at least as much to his interest in the subject. Like St. Paul, he seems to have imagined an objector always at his elbow, demanding that he account for himself. His social class and education, his commercial disasters, his years as agent and publicist of various ministries, his experience of prison and pillory, and the sheer fact of his being a Dissenter, all provoked him to ceaseless review and redefinition of the grounds he judged, acted, and (frequently) suffered on. He and his varied personae feel compelled to explain themselves—to spell out not only what they are doing but why—and in this respect they show a marked family resemblance. Confronted on the one hand with novel and trying predicaments, and on the other hand with inherited rules of conduct that often seem irrelevant, contradictory, or inequitable, Defoe and his characters alike are naturally drawn (if not driven) to casuistry. Finding themselves at odds with the existing legal and moral order, they are preoccupied with law and morality, and seek to adjust traditional codes to their own aberrant situations, needs, and values. Defoe appears to have believed that in such perplexities one must rely chiefly on one's own conscience. But he also recognized that conscience is prone to negligence and error, and must therefore be exercised and instructed constantly. To these legitimate tasks casuistry had long addressed itself.⁴

Because Defoe was aware of the positive functions of casuistry as well as its hazards, his explicit references to the subject display considerable ambivalence. "I had no Casuists to

⁴ It has been suggested that emphasis on strengthening the layman's own moral powers marks the main departure of English casuistry from its Roman Catholic antecedents: "The teacher's business now became, not to prescribe the outward conduct, but to direct the inward thought; not to decide cases, but to instruct the conscience. . . . attention had hitherto been bestowed mainly on the former word; it was now transferred to the latter" (William Whewell, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy in England* [1852], p. 3).

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resolve this Doubt," Roxana laments during one of her periodic bouts of troubled conscience; nevertheless she manages to allay her misgivings without the help of "any of the Romish Clergy," the traditional exponents (in English eyes) of casuistry *in malo*. Yet she regains her composure by stifling rather than searching her conscience—"Lethargick Fumes doz'd the Soul," as she puts it—for she proves to be an untutored master of what Defoe once called "*Plying-Bopcep* with God Almighty."⁶ If casuistry amounted to no more than this, neither we nor Defoe need have read esoteric treatises to be familiar with it, since the tendency to rationalize misdeeds is timeless and universal. But on other occasions Defoe uses the term without any such connotations. "Strangely surprised" by one of Friday's questions about God and the Devil, Robinson Crusoe confesses that "though I was now an old man, yet I was but a young doctor, and ill enough qualified for a casuist, or a solver of difficulties." In the course of resolving Friday's doubts, Crusoe becomes adept at the kind of casuistry which had been recommended and exemplified in the writings of a century of English divines. In his hands, as in theirs, casuistry is a heuristic mode: "in laying things open to [Friday], I really informed and instructed myself in many things that either I did not know, or had not fully considered before, but which occurred naturally to my mind upon my searching into them for the information of this poor savage." In other respects Crusoe may be an "absolute lord and lawgiver," but his responses to Friday's "serious inquiries and questions" are remarkably free from dogmatism; discovery rather than dictation is the order

⁶ Roxana, ed. Jane Jack, Oxford English Novels (1964), pp. 68, 69; *An Enquiry into the Occasional Conformity of Dissenters* (1698), in *A True Collection of the Writings of the Author of the True Born English-man* (1703), p. 315.

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of the day, and Crusoe's probing is casuistical in the best sense.⁶

The main arguments for and against casuistry have remained constant for three hundred years, and can be readily summarized. Many critics contend that casuistry obscures lines of duty that are intrinsically straightforward, and substitutes legalistic quibbling for the clear light of conscience.⁷ Others charge that casuistry incapacitates man for the ordinary business of life, not only by raising scruples at every turn, but also by making him helplessly dependent for their resolution on the expertise of a clerical adviser.⁸ Some protest that case-books of the Jesuit type, far from enabling man to avert sin, actually put evil suggestions in innocent minds; still others maintain that casuistry caters to man's weaknesses, and makes for moral laxity.⁹ Such complaints, first lodged by Luther and

⁶ Robinson Crusoe, in *Romances and Narratives of Daniel Defoe*, ed. George A. Aiken, 16 vols. (1895), I, 243, 245, 269, 246.

⁷ Jeremy Taylor observes with regret that "what God had made plain, men have intricated"; see the Preface to *Ductor Dubitantium* (1660), ed. Alexander Taylor, in *Whole Works*, ed. Reginald Heber, rev. Charles P. Eden, 10 vols. (1852), ix, xii. Cf. Martin Thornton, *English Spirituality: An Outline of Ascetical Theology According to The English Pastoral Tradition* (London and N.Y., 1963), pp. 245-46, and H. R. McAdoo, *The Structure of Caroline Moral Theology* (1949), p. 74.

⁸ Misgivings on this score were to be summed up in the nineteenth century by Thomas De Quincey in "The Casuistry of Duelling," *Uncollected Writings*, ed. James Hogg, 2 vols. (1892), II, 65-66, and by Benjamin Jowett in "Casuistry," *A Collection of Theological Essays*, pp. 307-09. For seventeenth-century views, see Thomas Wood, *English Casuistical Divinity during the Seventeenth Century* (N.Y., 1952), pp. 55-56.

⁹ On the former issue, see Taylor's Preface to *Ductor Dubitantium*, pp. vi-vii, xi, and De Quincey's "Casuistry of Duelling," pp. 67-68; on the latter, see Robert South, "An Account of the Nature and Measures of Conscience," in *Twelve Sermons Preached upon Several Occasions*,

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brilliantly charged home by Pascal, eventually comprised the prevailing view of casuistry.¹⁰ During the seventeenth century, however, casuistry also found a host of advocates. John Selden, for instance, advises that casuistry is one of the "four things a Minister should be at"; casuists, he says, "may be of admirable use, if discreetly dealt with, though among them you shall have many leaves together very impertinent."¹¹ And George Herbert speaks for many fellow Anglicans when he declares, in his survey of "The Parson's Accessary Knowledge," that "He greatly esteemes also of cases of conscience, wherein he is much versed."¹² In their visitation charges, various prelates prescribe the study of casuistry for the clergy of their dioceses. Thomas Sprat, better known today as historian of the Royal Society than as bishop of Rochester, is typical in maintaining that "the being a sound and well-experienced casuist is . . . a most excellent qualification towards all the other ends of your ministerial office; there being no kind of skill or proficiency in all your theological studies that more becomes a divine of the Church of England, whose highest spiritual art is to speak directly from his own conscience to the Consciences of those under his Pastoral care."¹³ In memoirs of churchmen of the period, a skill in casuistry

3rd edn. (1704), pp. 440-41. Both objections are central in Pascal's *Letres Provinciales* (1656-57); in other lesser-known but able continental attacks on the Jesuits, such as Nicolas Perrault's *La Morale des Jesuites* (Mons, 1667; English translation by Ezerel Tonge, 1679); and in Bayle's *Dictionary*, art. "Sanchez," ix, 45-49.

¹⁰ Other grounds for recent disapproval of casuistry are mentioned by Benjamin Nelson in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1963), art. "Casuistry"; there is also a useful survey by R. M. Wenley in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (N.Y., 1925).

¹¹ *Table Talk*, ed. S. W. Singer (1890), pp. 95-96.
¹² *A Priest to The Temple*, in *Works*, ed. F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford, 1959), p. 230.

¹³ Visitation Charge, 1695, quoted in John H. Overton, *Life in the English Church, 1660-1714* (1885), p. 333; Overton cites Stillingleet and Gardiner to the same effect.

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is often singled out for special praise: thus it is said of one provincial vicar that "his known abilities in resolving cases of conscience drew after him a great many good people, not only of his own flock, but from remoter distances, who resorted to him as a common oracle, and commonly went away from him intirely satisfied in his wise and judicious resolutions."¹⁴ Puritan commendations of casuistry are equally common and emphatic.¹⁵ In short, there appear to have been as many who admired casuistry as loathed it, as many who practiced it as shunned it.

The historically ambivalent status of casuistry can perhaps be further indicated by a brief comparison with rhetoric. Between casuistry and rhetoric there are interesting substantive affinities; what concerns us here is chiefly the equivocal reputations of the two terms. Seventeenth-century attacks on rhetoric contain parallels to many of the complaints against casuistry already mentioned, and the lines of defense were also similar. Casuistry rests on the axiom that "circumstances alter cases"—the principle that every ethical problem must be approached on its own terms and decided on its own merits; rhetoric, on the principle that every occasion demands its own mode of expression. Casuistry and rhetoric thus share a

¹⁴ John Scott, Preface to John March's *Sermons Preach'd on Several Occasions* (1693), quoted in Appendix to *Memoirs of the Life of Mr Ambrose Barnes*, ed. W.H.D. Longstaffe, Surtees Society Publications Vol. 1. (Durham, 1867), 442. Similar praise of William Perkins, Robert Bolton, and William Whately can be found in Samuel Clarke's *Marrow of Ecclesiastical History* (1654), pp. 851, 926, 931. Defoe was to report to Harley that he passed for "an Oracle" among the clergymen of Edinburgh, who attended him "night and Morning . . . to Answer their Cases of Conscience" concerning the Union (*Letters*, ed. George H. Healey [Oxford, 1951], pp. 139-40).

¹⁵ See *Life of the Rev. J. Angier* in *The Whole Works of the Rev Oliver Heywood*, 5 vols. (Idle, 1826), 1, 561-64; cf. Gordon S. Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion: Its Place in the Development of Christian Piety* (1957), pp. 111-29; and John T. McNeill, "Casuistry in the Puritan Age," in *Religion in Life*, xii (1943), 76-89.

responsiveness to experience, an adaptability to changing situations, which is in one sense a great virtue; yet this very suppleness has often been seen as their most sinister quality, since it apparently permits them to serve ill purposes as readily as good ones. In the view of their enemies, both casuistry and rhetoric are tools that the just can dispense with, but which the unjust characteristically rely on; to be good, in this view, one's words and actions alike should be spontaneous and unformed, not calculated and variable. Indeed, the term "sophistry" probably occurs as frequently in denunciations of casuistry as in attacks on rhetoric: as a synonym for whichever of the two is under censure, "sophistry" has always linked casuistry and rhetoric in the minds of their opponents. In recent years, however, the term "rhetoric" has been rescued from longstanding and powerful negative associations, and now enjoys considerable prestige, whereas it is still the case that "in popular estimation, no one is supposed to resort to casuistry but with the view of evading a duty."¹⁸ Although this one-sided conception of casuistry has been countered in several valuable exploratory studies,¹⁷ the full-scale history which might effectively rehabilitate the subject has not yet appeared.¹⁸

For our purposes, the precise contours of seventeenth-century casuistical divinity matter less than its contributions to

¹⁶ Jowett, "Casuistry," *A Collection of Theological Essays*, p. 313.

¹⁷ Most notably George L. Mosse's *The Holy Pretence: A Study in Christianity and Reason of State from William Perkins to John Winthrop* (Oxford, 1957). Although the term "casuistry" is never used, J. L. Austin's paper "A Plea for Excuses" is an illuminating inquiry into everyday casuistry, particularly its language (*Philosophical Papers* [Oxford, 1961], pp. 123-52).

¹⁸ Thomas Wood's *English Casuistical Divinity during the Seventeenth Century* deals mainly with Jeremy Taylor, but this work and a more recent essay on "Seventeenth-Century Moralists and the Marital Relationship" (*Trivium*, 1 [1966], 67-87), offer promising specimens of the monumental history of English practical divinity on which Professor Wood has long been engaged.

Defoe's ethical outlook, his fictional subject matter, and his narrative techniques. The task of tracing these lines of influence is hampered by the lack of an adequate history of casuistry, but it is greatly facilitated by the existence of a work which provided an important link between Defoe and the earlier casuistry—John Dunton's *Athenian Mercury*.¹⁹ Although this pioneering periodical of the 1690's deserves to be better known for a variety of reasons, it is significant for the present study primarily as a medium through which traditional casuistry found its way into Defoe's fiction.²⁰

The nature and extent of Dunton's debt to his casuistical precursors can be determined only by comparing his *Athenian Mercury* with their manuals of cases of conscience, but there are prior indications that such a debt exists. In the first place, the original subtitle of the paper is revealing: *The Athenian Gazette: or, Casuistical Mercury, resolving all the most nice and curious questions proposed by the ingenious of either sex*.²¹ Dunton was to supplement the "Casuistical" with the

¹⁹ 20 vols. (March 1690–June 1697); reprinted as *The Athenian Oracle: Being an Entire Collection Of all the Valuable Questions and Answers In The Old Athenian Mercuries*, 3rd. edn., 3 vols. (1706) with *A Supplement To The Athenian Oracle: Being A Collection Of the Remaining Questions and Answers . . . To which is prefix'd The History of the Athenian Society, And an Essay upon Learning* (1710). Subsequent quotations from the *Athenian Oracle* are identified as "A.O."; the *Supplement* is referred to as Vol. iv of the *Athenian Oracle*, since it was issued and bound as such through the 1728 edition; the original *Athenian Mercury* is cited by volume, number, and question (e.g., "A.M., x, x, 10").

²⁰ The *Athenian Mercury* is discussed briefly as a forerunner of the *Tatler* and *Spectator* in such studies as George S. Marr's *The Periodical Essayists of the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1924), pp. 14-15; Bertha Monica Stearns has examined its role as "The First English Periodical for Women," *MP*, xxviii (1930), 45-59; and its editor is the subject of an attractive sketch by Peter Murray Hill in *Two Augustan Book Sellers: John Dunton and Edmund Curll* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1958).

²¹ *Gazette* was immediately dropped from the title, probably because of difficulties with the proprietors of the official publication of the

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historical, the philosophical, the mathematical, and the poetical, but we have here a hint that the "nice and curious questions" themselves, the manner of "resolving" them, or perhaps both, were initially regarded as belonging to the familiar domain of casuistry.

A second piece of evidence is to be found in Dunton's *Life and Errors*, where he undertakes to "oblige the reader with a true Discovery of the Question-Project." The relevant passage is worth quoting, for it suggests that the project was inspired by a case of conscience which troubled Dunton himself:

I had receiv'd a very flaming Injury, which was so loaded with Aggravations, that I could scarce get over it; *my Thoughts were constantly working upon't*, and made me strangely uneasy, sometimes I thought to make Application to some Divine, but how to conceal *my self* and the *ungrateful Wretch*, was the Difficulty. Whilst this perplexity remain'd upon me, I was one Day walking over St. *George's-fields*, and Mr. *Larkin*, and Mr. *Hart*'s were along with me, and on a sudden I made a Stop, and said, Well Sirs, I have a Thought I'll not exchange for Fifty Guineas; they smil'd, and were very urgent with me to DISCOVER it, but they cou'd not get it from me. The first rude Hint of it, was no more than a *confus'd Idea of concealing the Querist and answering his Question*.²³

By guaranteeing the anonymity of querists, Dunton hoped to elicit "nice and curious questions" which his readers were reluctant to pose to divines.²³ To be sure, not all the cases dealt

same name. In his "History of the Athenian Society," Charles Gildon offers a more fanciful pretext for altering the name: see *AO*, IV, 24.
²² *The Life and Errors of John Dunton Late Citizen of London; Written by Himself in Solitude* (1705), sigs. [R7^v]-[R8^r].

²³ In a preface note to the first volume of the collected *Oracles*, the

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with in previous generations by Sanderson, Hall, and their clerical colleagues had been tamely decorous; nor were Dunton and his associates, on the other hand, now free to print whatever they pleased.²⁴ But times were changing, so that a case which once might have been raised more or less publicly in a "scruple shop,"²⁵ or privately in a conference with some grave divine, was now brooded over—"my *Thoughts were constantly working upon't*"—in helpless, agitated isolation.²⁶ The question project may have originated, then, as a

project is said to have as its design "to remove those Difficulties and Dissatisfactions, that shame, or fear of appearing ridiculous by asking Questions, may cause several Persons to labour under, who now have Opportunities of being resolv'd in any Question, without knowing the Informer" (*AO*, I, 1).

²⁴ See several of the rules laid down for prospective querists: "1. That none send obscene Questions, as not fit to be answer'd by any that pretend not to as great Debauchery as the Senders of them. 2. Nothing, the Answer of which may be a Scandal to the Government, or an Abuse to particular Persons. 3. Nothing that may be destructive to the Principles of Virtue and sound Knowledge" (*AO*, IV, 23). In practice, the Athenians were wariest of political controversy. Three decades later, readers of Nahaniel Mils's *Weekly Journal* were invited to submit "such Questions as are pertinent, decent, and diverting;—neither dangerous as to Party, doubtful as to Religion, or Scandalous as to Virtue"; Mils—whose leading writer at the time was Defoe—promises "to give such Satisfaction as may lye in his Way, and do his utmost to direct and oblige his Friends" (Feb. 13, 1720; see William Lee, *Daniel Defoe: His Life, and Recently Discovered Writings*, 3 vols. [1869], II, 201 [cited hereafter as "Lee"]).

²⁵ On the "scruple shop," the undergraduate nickname for a weekly public conference established at Oxford in 1646 to resolve cases of conscience, see Robert Barclay, *The Inner Life of the Religious Society of the Commonwealth* (1876), p. 185. Richard Baxter reports that "Every Thursday evening my neighbours that were most desirous and had opportunity met at my house, and there one of them repeated the sermon, and afterwards they proposed what doubts any of them had about the sermon, or any other case of conscience, and I resolv'd their doubts" (*Autobiography*, ed. J. M. Lloyd Thomas [1931], p. 77).

²⁶ But cf. the *Spectator* for Nov. 12, 1714, in which "J.C. who p. o. poses a Love-Case, as he calls it, to the Love-Casulist, is hereby desired

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opportunity for the more inglorious Duntons of the 1690's to voice their problems and obtain the kind of guidance long afforded by the clergy.²⁷

The background of the collaborators on the Athenian project affords a third kind of evidence. John Dunton was a son-in-law of the Bartholomew Samuel Annesley, whose *Morning-Exercise at Cripplegate* comprised a series of casuistical sermons by the major Nonconformist divines of the 1660's and 1670's; several large quarto collections were issued over a period of twenty years, and Dunton himself published one of them.²⁸ Samuel Wesley and Daniel Defoe also contributed to the *Athenian Mercury*,²⁹ and both were trained for the ministry in famous dissenting academies. Wesley was subsequently to take orders in the Church of England and write against these very academies, and Defoe was in his own words "first . . . set a-part for, and then . . . set a-part from the Honour of that Sacred Employ."³⁰ But both probably had

to speak of it to the Minister of the Parish; it being a Case of Conscience" (ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. [Oxford, 1965], v, 115-16).

²⁷ Dunton claims to have received questions from such distinguished personages as Sir William Temple (*Life and Errors*, sig. S3), but the bulk of those printed purport to be from middle-class readers. The general querists tend to have lost their hands, to have been left unprovided as younger brothers, or to be otherwise in a declining state (cf. *A.O.*, II, 279, 418, 477; III, 303). The laborers, apprentices, and servant-girls are mainly intent on bettering themselves, and seek advice as to ways and means (cf. *A.O.*, II, 202-03, 305, 311, 404-05; III, 239).

²⁸ *A Continuation of Morning-Exercise Questions and Cases of Conscience, Practically Resolved by sundry Ministers. In October, 1682* (1683). The *Morning Exercises* are discussed briefly by John T. McNeill in "Casuistry in the Puritan Age," p. 82.

²⁹ For Wesley's role in the project, see *Life and Errors*, sigs. [R8^v]-Sr. Apart from an ode "To The Athenian Society" signed "D.F." (*A.O.*, II, sigs. [A3^r]-[A3^v]), the extent of Defoe's participation is problematical; see John Robert Moore, *Daniel Defoe: Citizen of the Modern World* (Chicago, 1958), p. 232.

³⁰ *Review*, fac. ed. Arthur W. Secord, 22 vols. (NY, 1938), vi (Oct. 22, 1709), 341.

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an early grounding in casuistical divinity, since the practical works of Perkins, Ames, and Baxter are known to have been standard texts in their academic curricula.³¹ Richard Saul, whose specialties in the *Athenian Mercury* were science and mathematics, also appears to have been qualified to handle casuistical questions, whether or not he actually did so.³²

Finally, scattered through the text are references to the classic manuals. These are not as frequent as the actual borrowings, yet they do confirm the Athenians' familiarity with the major documents of English casuistry, and their consciousness that the question-project lay within a recognizable tradition. At one point, for instance, the querist is instructed to "Read Mr. Perkins's *Case of Conscience*," and supplied with chapter and page; on at least two occasions he is referred to a "Famous Case in Bp. Sanderson"; and once he is sent to "Bishop Barlow's *Posthumous Works*;" when the Oracle modestly protests that "because of that great Esteem that that Learned & great Casuist has justly merited from all Sober and Ingenious Persons, I seem to distrust my own Judgment in the point."³³

³¹ See Lew Girdler, "Defoe's Education at Newington Green Academy," *SP*, I (1953), 573-91, and H. McLachlan, *English Education Under The Test Acts: Being The History Of The Non-Conformist Academies 1662-1820* (Manchester, 1931), pp. 76-80, 303.

³² Except for a few details about Saul's last years, the *DNB* adds nothing to Dunton's account of him in the *Life and Errors*, sigs. [P5^v]-[P7^r], [R8^v]-Sr, and Gildon's halfhearted remarks in the "History" (*A.O.*, IV, 16); but see also the character of "Joachim Dash, Mathematician" in [Elkanah Settle], *The New Athenian Comedy* (1693), pp. 8-9, 12, 20, and Letter IXXII in [Charles Gildon], *The Post-Boy Robb'd of his Mail: Or, The Paquet Broke Open*, 2nd edn. (1706), pp. 156-57.

³³ *A.O.*, III, 273; II, 233; III, 351; II, 56. The diffidence of the final passage becomes less remarkable when we recall that Thomas Barlow's *Genuine Remains* were published by Dunton. Barlow is also cited at II, 206.

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Earlier in the century Joseph Hall had divided into four "Decades" his *Resolutions and Decisions of Divers Practical Cases of Conscience, in Continual Use Amongst Men* (1648). His four categories are "Cases of Profit and Traffick," "Cases of Life and Liberty," "Cases of Piety and Religion," and "Cases Matrimonial."⁸⁴ All four kinds appear in the *Athenian Mercury*: the first and last far outnumber the second and third, and "Cases Matrimonial" are commonest of all. Bishop Hall had observed that "amongst all the heads of case-divinity there is no one that yieldeth more scruples than this of marriage," but that "it were pity that so many should, in that estate, be necessary."⁸⁵ To the Athenian Society, such abundance was scarcely a cause for regret: on the contrary, it proved the very life-blood of the project. By examining specific cases, we can see most clearly how Dunton and his colleagues adapted and modified traditional casuistry.

The relationship can be traced first of all in the very substance of the questions, apart from the form in which they are presented. The matrimonial queries, for instance, cover a great variety of topics, including incest, separation, and divorce; the obligatory force of rash vows; the efficacy of oral and otherwise irregular contracts; and the extent of parental power over the choice and rejection of mates. Some of these matters obviously extend beyond the domain of casuistry. Whether incest, for instance, is a *malum in se*, and whether it is lawful or expedient for certain close relatives to marry, are

⁸⁴ Richard Baxter's *Christian Directory* (1673) is divided into four rather different parts: "Christian Ethicks (Or Private Duties); Christian Economics (Or Family Duties); Christian Ecclesiastics (Or Church Duties); Christian Politics (Or Duties To Our Rulers and Neighbours)" (*Practical Works*, ed. William Orme, 23 vols. [1830], II-vi). Other arrangements of cases differ still further from that of Hall; his is cited as a lucid and comprehensive pattern, not an invariable one.

⁸⁵ *Resolutions and Decisions*, in *Works*, ed. Philip Wynter, 10 vols. (Oxford, 1863), VII, 408, 367; cf. Taylor, *Ductor Dubitantium*, in *Whole Works*, x, 500.

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problems that interested canonists and civilians as well as casuists. What places a question within the special domain of casuistry is the fact that it is a case of conscience: whether hypothetical or actual, it is someone's practical moral dilemma, not merely a topic of abstract speculation. This point can be illustrated by putting off for a moment the discussion of "Cases Matrimonial," and observing that virtually anything, from depositing kings to dissecting dogs, can pose a case of conscience. One of the Athenians' correspondents reports:

*I am mightily addicted to the Study of Anatomy, I have dissected many Dogs and other Animals alive, not out of any design of cruelty; but, I protest, purely out of a design to be perfect in that excellent Study. . . . I desire to know, whether it is a Sin to put those Creatures to such Tortures, as they must needs suffer in live Dissections . . . to further my own Knowledge in particular, and the good of Mankind in general, my Study being Physick. I shall be Impatient till I hear your Answer to this Question, which however Inconsiderable it may seem to you, has made so deep an Impression on my Thoughts, that I am grown very Melancholy about it.*⁸⁶

Although this is clearly a case of conscience, it should be equally clear that the moral problem of cruelty to animals can be discussed—as it began to be during this period—without being cast into the form of a case of conscience, and thus in a manner having little to do with casuistry.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ *AM*, VI, xxvii, 11. In Aescop, dogs themselves grapple with such questions as whether promises made under duress are binding; see Fable 119, of "A Dog and a Wolf," which Roger L'Estrange labels "a kind of a Dog-Case of Conscience," in *Fables, of Aescop and Other Eminent Mythologists: With Morals and Reflections*, 6th edn. (1711), p. 136.

⁸⁷ See the *Tatler*, No. 134 (Feb. 16, 1710), ed. George A. Aitken, 4 vols. (1899), III, 109-14; cf. also *Original and Genuine Letters sent*

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On the other hand, certain cases of conscience recurred so frequently in the casuistical literature that their very topics became intimately associated with casuistry. As "Inconsiderable" (or "low") as the preceding question in subject matter, but standing in a long casuistical tradition, are such *Mercury* cases as the following: "Having lately bought an Horse vouch'd to me for a sound one, and upon tryal find him otherwise,——Query, whether I am obliged to discover his faults unask'd to him that shall buy him of me?" (*A.M.*, III, xxi, 6). Among the "Cases of Profit and Traffick" pondered in nearly every manual of casuistry, one finds the question "Whether is the seller bound to make known to the buyer the faults of that which he is about to sell."³⁸ To call attention to this tradition is not to challenge the genuineness of the horse-vending query submitted to the Athenian Society—like many other classic cases of conscience, this question must have arisen often in the actual life of the period³⁹—but merely to suggest that in its formal deliberations on these everyday problems, the *Mercury* was heir to a considerable body of earlier casuistical discussion. Still other predicaments could scarcely have been common among Dunton's readers, and yet had ample precedents in the literature of casuistry. One man, for instance, who learns that he has by mistake married

to the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, During the *Time those Works were publishing*, ed. Charles Lillie, 2 vols. (1725), I, 25-29.

³⁸ See Hall, *Resolutions and Decisions*, in *Works*, VII, 277-79; cf. Baxter, *Christian Directory*, in *Practical Works*, VI, 308.

³⁹ One seventeenth-century diarist records similar misgivings about selling some horses: he had instructed his agents "to speak truth, neither denying nor using any means to conceal any Fault: Only I doubted I was not sufficiently careful to have the Buyers acquainted with all I knew my self. . . . Yet I could not learn the Buyers were damaged, nor say that they paid too dear; and good Men laugh'd at my Scruples, professing themselves would do as I had done" (*Some Remarkable Passages in the Holy Life and Death Of the late Reverend Mr. Edmund Trench* [1693], p. 42).

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his own daughter, inquires whether he is obliged to reveal this fact to her; he fears that the news will kill her, and that their children will also suffer greatly from the scandal. Bizarre and unlikely as such a case may sound, it had been discussed with somber relish by Taylor and Hall, who had found it in earlier continental manuals.⁴⁰ Both Anglican and Puritan casuists had confessed—if at times grudgingly—their indebtedness to Roman Catholic writings,⁴¹ and although the Athenians acknowledge no such mentors, there may be occasional traces of them.⁴² But whatever the actual range of the Athenians' reading, the content of many questions suggests a familiarity with traditional casuistry.

Far more important, however, is the way the *Athenian Mercury* presents its questions. The most notable innovation

⁴⁰ *A.O.*, II, 183; Taylor, *Ductor Dubitantium*, in *Whole Works*, IX, 149; Hall, *Resolutions and Decisions*, in *Works*, VII, 410-14; see the discussion of the first Virginian episode in *Moll Flanders*, p. 134 below.

⁴¹ In the preface to *Ductor Dubitantium*, Taylor laments that his countrymen are unprovided with casuistical treatises, and are "forced to go down to the forges of the Philistines to sharpen every man his share and his coulter, his axe and his mattock" (*Whole Works*, IX, V). William Ames had employed this very image (from I Sam. 13) to deplore the same situation a generation earlier, in his *Conscience With The Power And Cases thereof* (1643), sig. B. Cf. also Baxter's "Advertisement" to the *Christian Directory*, in *Practical Works*, II, viii.

⁴² In the ninth book of his *De Matrimonio*, for instance, Tomás Sanchez inquires "An licet sponsus de futuro delectari in cogitatione copulae habendae, vel viduis in cogitatione habitae tempore matrimonii?" In the *Athenian Mercury*, a young man who has for some time "made Honourable Love to a young and Beautiful Lady" finds that a strong imagination leads his "revolving Thoughts to anticipate what's yet to come," and inquires whether "the last Transport of Thought can be a Sin?" (R. P. Thomaes Sanchez *Cordubensis*, *E Societate Jesu, De Sancto Matrimonii Sacramento Disputationum*, 3 vols. [Venice, 1754; first edn. 1602-05]. Lib. IX, Disp. XVII, III, 243-44; *A.O.*, I, 497). The writings of Sanchez were known in England; his opinions are cited by Hall, *Resolutions and Decisions*, in *Works*, VII, 367.

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is that most cases are posed in the first person singular; the actual or supposititious querist addresses the Athenians *in propria persona*. Even if all the letters printed were genuine, which I doubt,⁴⁸ Dunton and his colleagues could have transcribed them into the third person; this had been the practice of earlier divines, and is sometimes followed by the Athenians. The decision to allow querists to speak for themselves had important consequences, to be considered shortly, but another feature of the questions should be noted beforehand, since its effects are closely connected with those of first-person narration. I refer to the sheer abundance of detail in the presentation of cases. This constitutes an extension of traditional practice, rather than a departure from it. Casuistry had long embodied the principle that every relevant circumstance must be taken into account in resolving a case of conscience; indeed, it had been charged at times with an excessive concern for seemingly marginal and trivial factors. But if a tendency towards circumstantial realism had been inherent in the entire casuistical method, it was nevertheless exploited by the Athenians to an unprecedented extent.

Through the use of first-person querists who report their predicaments in detail, the *Athenian Mercury* creates char-

⁴⁸ See Defoe's *Commentator*, No. xv (Feb. 19, 1720): "Do you believe these People really receive all the Letters they publish? Not one in Fifty of them. But it is a Way of Writing, that has mightily obtained of late Years, and is found to be of singular good Use." There is documentary evidence, however, that various letters printed in the *Spectator* were based on ones submitted by readers, and that the editors received many others which were not used: see Bond's Introduction, I, xxxvi-xliii, and *New Letters to the Tatler and Spectator*, ed. Richmond P. Bond (Austin, 1959). As for the queries printed in the *Athenian Mercury*, there was some suspicion at the time that "the Bookseller proposes and answers most of the Questions therein contained"; the Society neither denies nor confirms this charge, but maintains that "if our Papers have any thing useful in them, it matters not whether the Bookseller [Dunton] be taken for the Author of them or not" (*AM*, xv, xvii, 2).

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acters, settings, and actions that surpass those in the traditional manuals both in vividness and complexity. The Athenian Society says of the writer of the following letter that "Her Character and Quality . . . might have been guess'd at without much difficulty, by her way of Spelling and Writing":

I Have been in Love this three Years, almost to Distraction—I have had one Child by him i Love so dear, he is very scuil to me, but visits me very seldom, unless I send to him, and then he is angry, then am i one ten thousand Rack's. . . i have been advised by all my Friends never to see him more, i have strived to do it, but can't. . . Now Gentilmen, I beg your Answer what I must do in this Case, leave him i never can; all I desire is, that he will never marry unless it is to me, or Else never forsake me, for if he do, I shall sartainly murder my self. I bags your Advise in your next Mercury—thus bagging your pardons, I hope you will give a charitable anser. . . . (*AM*, ix, iii, 1).

Here the correspondent's social and psychological "Character and Quality" are vividly suggested, but there is little of the self-awareness or moral perplexity that gives so many *Mercury* queries their vitality. In the following case, for example, the woman grasps the moral implications of her behavior, although she alleges extenuating circumstances; her case has additional interest in that it reappears, considerably amplified but not greatly altered, first in Defoe's *Review* and later in the opening episode of *Roxana*:

O. I'm a Gentlewoman of a small Fortune, and Married to a Man who . . . left me with a Charge of Children, and went to another Country, without making the least Provision either for them or me—Nor will his Friends look on us, and I've been already very chargeable and

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*troublesome to my own, who are now grown as Cold as his: A Gentleman now Importunes me very much to be his Mistress, who I know Loves me passionately, and will provide for me and them. I desire your Advice what I were best do, Whether I must lay my Children to the Parish; for Begging won't maintain us, and Stealing is as bad as Whoring? Or how I ought to behave my self for I can find no Means, but either to yield to this Temptation; or see my Children starve? I know I ought not to do the least Evil that Good may come of it; but yet of two Evils, we must chuse the least: An Answer to this would both oblige and quiet, your, &c.***

This woman's nature is a curious mixture of pious and worldly prudence. The combination occurs more strikingly in some of Defoe's fully developed characters, but it is shared by a number of querists in the *Athenian Mercury*. It is most evident in what Hall had labelled "Cases of Profit and Traffick," for as Defoe was to remark in the *Review*, "People are very willing to have their Profit and their Conscience go together."⁴⁶ Such mingling of mundane self-interest and lofty morality is a much-discussed feature of the period, and need not be dwelt on here; it should be noted, however, that the literature of casuistry offers no evidence that this tendency was peculiarly Puritan or middle-class, as is frequently main-

⁴⁴ *A.O.*, III, 350-51; cf. *Review*, II (Apr. 14, 1705), 70-71.

⁴⁶ *Supplement* (Nov., 1704), p. 17; Defoe is accounting for the fact that "These sort of Money Cases of Conscience, have always something of Interest attends them." In a similar vein Archbishop Sharp observes that what "has given Occasion to the Discussion of so many Cases of Conscience" is the fact that men "have a great Mind to *serve* their *Pleasure* and their *Ambition*, and their secular Ends, and yet to *serve* *God* too; and this puts them upon tampering and trying to reconcile these interests together" (John Sharp, "Rules for the Conduct of Our-selves," preached in April 1690, in *Fifteen Sermons Preached on Several Occasions*, 7th edn. [1738], p. 215).

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tained. At all events, it is an ambivalence to be found in many of the *Mercury* queries on love and marriage, as well as those on profit and traffic.

Complexities of characterization can also arise when the querist recounts or anticipates mischief but is unwilling or unable to recognize it as such. The case that follows is presented in the third person, but offers revealing points of contrast with the preceding one: "*Q. A Gentlewoman that has a Husband who used her barbarously, makes her go in danger of her Life, and keeps a Whore, refusing to live with her, but making her work for her Bread, having the offer of a single Gentleman that will maintain her very well: Whether it be any Sin to accept of his kindness?*" (*AM*, v, xiii, 2). The Athenians remark at once that "Here are several ambiguous words in this Question, which must be explained before we can go any further;" and eventually demand, "Why all this fine clean Language to wrap up that broad word *Whore*, with which she so fairly *brands* one that is kept by her Husband, when about to bring her self into the same Circumstances: Is't any *Case of Conscience* whether a Woman ought to turn *Whore* because her Husband is a *Whoremaster*?" Other querists reveal even more about themselves through their very obtuseness. There is the man who has promised two different women that he will marry them after his present wife dies, and is troubled only by doubts as to which one he should marry.⁴⁸ There is the woman who has exchanged similar "*Yows and Protestations*" with a married man, but reports that "*he has disoblid'd me so highly, that out of Revenge I wou'd now marry*," and only wants to know whether such promises need restrain her.⁴⁷ And there is the

⁴⁸ *A.O.*, I, 372-74; a virtually identical case is considered at III, 306-07.

⁴⁷ *A.O.*, IV, 244-45; a precedent for this query and the preceding one is to be found in Robert Sanderson's "Case of Unlawful Love," in *Works*, ed. William Jacobson, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1854), v, 88-103.

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woman whose seducer, a charming but poor man, is willing to marry her; a wealthy but less attractive man has also proposed to her, and she is "wreck'd with Confusion" only as to which suitor is preferable.⁴⁸ In such cases the querist incriminates himself unwittingly, and ignores or evades the real issue of conscience. The Athenians make this quite explicit in their answers, often with considerable irony at the querist's expense, but the content of the question has already enabled the reader to discover it for himself. In other words, it is not left altogether to the Athenian respondents to settle these perplexed cases, or to point the moral of these curious tales. The reader is made to resolve them in his own mind, and the effectiveness of any given question depends largely on its ability to engage and exercise his conscience.

All this would appear to reduce the relative importance of the responses, but they are no less interesting than the questions, and reveal just as much about the relationship between the *Athenian Mercury* and traditional casuistry. The answers tend to consist of two distinct parts, a discussion of general principles and a determination of the case at hand. Cases of conscience had always demanded both, but one or the other had usually received greater attention. In the *Athenian Mercury* a certain balance is struck: an immediate dilemma will be referred to its theoretical context, yet the specific case is not lost sight of amidst ethical speculation. There are ex-

⁴⁸ *AO*, III, 325-26; cf. *Review*, I (Sept. 19, 1704), 243, for the case of a young lady whose seducer is willing to marry her: she cannot decide whether "I had better have a *Knaave*, for a *Spark*, or a *Fool* for a *Husband*." The same case arises over the Dutch merchant's offer of matrimony in *Roxana*, and over the hero's second marriage in *Colonel Jack*. William Perkins had seen knavery in the second alternative as well: "It is an unseemly thing for a man to make promise of marriage to such a woman, as hath been formerly deflowered. . . . Nay, I addle further, that a contract made with such a one, as himselfe hath before deflowerd, is by the law of God unlawfull" ("Of Christian Oeconomye, or Household government," in *Works*, 3 vols. [1616-18], II, 680).

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ceptions, but by and large the Athenians set an admirable example for later moralists in the periodical essay and the novel. An interest in the concrete and particular *case* goes hand in hand with a concern for its wider implications of *conscience*.

When they come to weigh cases, the Athenians invoke at least four distinct norms: divine law, natural law, human or positive law, and expediency. It is difficult to generalize about the use of these principles in the *Athenian Mercury*, but two points can be made. In the first place, there are a number of cases in which the lawfulness of an action is vindicated, but its inexpediency is regarded as a decisive obstacle. The "Condescension of a Protestant Lady to the *Contingual Request of a Romish Gentleman*," for instance, is not unlawful, but is discountenanced by a long recital of its "signal inconvenience[s]."⁴⁹ On the other hand, though an action may thus be condemned as inexpedient even when natural, divine, and human laws do not forbid it (or are silent), the converse is not true: expediency is never a sufficient argument for doing what any of the three laws prohibits.⁵⁰ In the second place, no consistent hierarchy obtains among the

⁴⁹ *AO*, I, 169-70; for other determinations of this case, see the discussion of *Religious Courtship*, p. 44 below. Joseph Hall remarks that "A wise and good man will not willingly trespass against the rules of just expedience, and will be as careful to consider what is fit to be done as what is lawful" (*Resolutions and Decisions*, in *Works*, VI, 408). William Perkins frequently invokes the same standard, saying of one or another practice that though it "is not expressly forbidden in the word; yet it is agreeable to the rules of expedience and decencie" that it be avoided ("Of Christian Oeconomye," in *Works*, II, 680). The basis for such reasoning is St. Paul's "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient" (I Cor. 6:12).

⁵⁰ Expediency is seldom simply a matter of self-interested calculation: for this the more usual term is "policy." Expediency is associated rather with what L'Estrange calls such "Necessities" as "Honour, Decency, and Discretion, Humanity, Modesty, Respect, &c." (*Fables, of Aesop*, p. 234).

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three forms of law, but some common patterns are discernible. The Athenian Society appeals to natural law either to reinforce or to supplement the laws of God and England; only the querists appeal to natural law *against* the precepts of divine and human law, and allege it as a higher authority. Mischief of all kinds is defended by querists as conforming to a law of nature; the Athenian response tends to be that on many questions natural law has been superseded by divine and human enactments, and is itself obscure and contradictory on almost every point but self-preservation.⁵¹ The Athenians show considerable sympathy for the victims of harsh ordinances, but refuse to endorse violations of them in the name of natural law. In their hands casuistry is humane, but does not encourage "Playing-Bopeep" either with God or the civil authorities.

That tolerance and flexibility need not imply laxity is borne out by a typical group of cases concerning bigamy. The issue is one of particular interest: it was to arise prominently in *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana*, and two scholars have recently discussed it in terms of one or another of the sanctions I have mentioned.⁵² In the query that follows, for instance, the

⁵¹ See *A.O.*, II, 74-75, in response to an inquiry "Whether Retaliation in cases not otherwise unlawful, be not according to the Law of Nature": "Tis no easie matter to know what the Law of Nature is: The best way to discover it is by what seems to come nearest it, namely the Law of Nation[s], or the common usages, and consent of mankind . . . but indeed this is very narrow, there being not many Cases wherein all the World agree, and the Law of Nature; supposing we think, a state of Nature, and what this is, there may be also some difficulty in discovering, some making it a State of War, . . . others thinking with Reason, that such Persons mistake corrupted Nature, for Nature true, genuine and unsophisticate, or indeed making their own Nature the Standard of all others."

⁵² For the hearing of canon and common law on Defoe's treatment of his heroines' many marriages, see Spiro Peterson, "The Matrimonial Theme of Defoe's *Roxana*," *PMLA*, lxx (1955), 166-91, esp. pp. 172-75;

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Athenian Mercury anticipates the dilemmas of Moll and Roxana over remarriage:

One of a Sanguine Complexion being married to a Husband, who soon after went upon a Trading Voyage for Virginia, intending to return back in a Years time, but hath been absent from her for above these Eight Years; neither hath she received any Letter from him in all the time, and not knowing whether he be dead or alive, but by uncertain reports, she desires to be inform'd whether she may lawfully marry another Man?

To this the Athenians reply,

The Law provided formerly *seven Years*, after which it suppos'd the Man dead, but since *Navigation* and *Commerce* are so well settled, a less time is requir'd, because Advices arrive much sooner and more certain than formerly; if she means by *lawfully*, according to our *Law*, she may Marry another, but we can't Promise her *Free by the Law of God*, which no where makes such an Exception. We have several Instances of this Nature. . . . [we] desire her to secure the *Quiet of her Conscience*, and advise with the *Ecclesiastick Authority*, since the other gives her the Liberty she wants.⁵³

The lawfulness of remarriage is shown to be a more complex question than the query itself would indicate, since two distinct sanctions are insisted upon. In a sense, the Athenians complicate the matter rather than resolve it: they acknowledge that common law allows the proposed marriage, but warn that the spiritual courts may invalidate it, and advise her to con-

for the pertinence of current theories of natural law, see Maximilian E. Novak, *Defoe and the Nature of Man* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 96-103. ⁵³ *AM.*, IV, vii, 3; cf. IV, xxiv, 1.

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sult "the *Ecclesiastick Authority*" beforehand.⁵⁴ We may doubt whether a querist "of a *Sanguine Complexion*" would be altogether satisfied by this response, and if the lady were to appear in a work by Defoe, we would not be surprised if she ventured into the match, armed with the law of man against her scruples about the "Law of God." In the *Athenian Mercury*, such a marriage is not prohibited, but a formidable obstacle is placed in its way. Together with this caution in the substance of the answer, there is a notable absence of anything dogmatically prescriptive in its tone.

Difference of opinion within the Athenian Society also fosters a tone of judicious moderation. Although no consistent attempt is made to characterize the Society as a group of distinct individuals, there are occasional debates and changes of mind among the Athenians, and these help to create an air of open-minded deliberation. Defoe was to make similar use of this device in the *Review*: the pretense that questions are being answered by a "Club" of learned men allows him to do justice to opposing sides of a question, and to reach his conclusions in a seemingly inductive manner. Thus it is not a mere ruse to give greater authority to Defoe's single-handed pronouncements, but serves to keep the advice eventually given from seeming hasty or peremptory.

When the facts warrant it, the Athenian Society can be very forthright in its decisions. One lady discovers that her husband is already married to another woman, parts from him, is courted by another man, and writes to inquire whether she can lawfully remarry. She adds that her first husband has married a third wife in the meantime. The Society abruptly declares, "Your *Marriage* to this *Great Turk of a Husband*, that keeps such a *Seraglio of Women*, must be void, because by our *Laws* a Man can have but one *Wife* at one time, nor (we think) does the *Christian Law* allow any more: Consequently you are not in *Bondage* in that *Case*, but may embrace any *fair Offer* that's made you."⁵⁵ When a question is posed "Whether *Polygamy* were lawful to the *Jews*," the Athenians do take into account the law of nature, just as they invoke the standard of expediency when asked "If *Polygamy* were again introduc'd, whether would it bring more *Trouble* or *Pleasure* to *Mankind*?" (*A.O.*, I, 8; I, 503). But these are historical and speculative questions, not cases of conscience, and although the Athenians hold that polygamy is unnatural as well as inexpedient, they appeal to neither standard in answering the two queries on bigamy cited previously. What the situation may have been among the Jews, or might prove to be if the custom "were again introduc'd," would be relevant to the practical decisions of an English Christian only if the laws of Christianity and England were silent about the matter, which they are not.⁵⁶

It remains to consider briefly the effects of the question project on subsequent literature. The influence of the *Athenian*

⁵⁴ *A.O.*, III, 337; the Society does caution, however, that "you ought not to impose upon your new *Servant*, but let him know what a sort of a *Widow* you are, if he's yet ignorant of it."

⁵⁵ Such considerations regain a degree of relevance if such a man is placed in a non-Christian, non-English setting—a marginal locale in which several of Defoe's characters find themselves. But it is a mistake to assume, or to represent Defoe as assuming, that the law of nature takes automatic priority over the law of God even under such circumstances.

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Mercury on the writings of Defoe will be noted from time to time in later chapters, but this is an appropriate point to mention the clearest instance of direct contact, and also to consider briefly the impact of Dunton's journal on other works of the early eighteenth century. On the most elementary level, there is the matter of overt adoption of the Athenian question-and-answer device. Critics have long recognized that the "Advice from the Scandal Club" and the later *Supplements* in Defoe's *Review* are modelled on the *Athenian Mercury*.⁵⁷ In fact, Dunton himself complained that "[Defoe's] answering Questions Weekly put a stop to my 'Monthly Oracle' . . . for most are seized with the Athenian Itch, and chuse rather to be scratched *Weekly*, than stay till the *Month* is out for a perfect cure."⁵⁸ Defoe was not the only interloper, however. While the original *Athenian Mercury* was still in existence, it had a short-lived rival in the *London Mercury*, continued as the *Laedemonian Mercury* (Feb.-May 1692); and there was at least one later attempt to exploit "the Athenian Itch," entitled *The British Apollo, Or, Curious Amusements for the Ingenious* (Feb. 1708-May 1711).

Although letters from readers were an important feature of both the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*, neither journal gave cases of conscience as prominent a place as they had found in the *Athenian Mercury*. The *Tatler's* Mr. Bickerstaff is "an excellent casuist," who occasionally resolves classic cases in the traditional manner,⁵⁹ and the *Spectator* has its "Love-Casuist,"

⁵⁷ See Paul Dotin, *Daniel De Foe* (Paris and London, 1924), pp. 129-30; James Sutherland, *Defoe*, 2nd edn. (1950), pp. 123-24.

⁵⁸ "It is strange," Dunton continues, "that such a first-rate Author as Daniel De Foe should be so barren of new Projects, that he must interlope with mine." ("A Secret History of The Weekly Writers," from *The Whipping Post* [1706], reprinted in *Life and Errors*, ed. John B. Nichols, 2 vols. [1818], II, 423-24).

⁵⁹ See No. 20 for May 26, 1709, where the question is one of divorce for impotence; Steele advises the distressed wife that "in case of infirmity, which proceeds only from age, the law gives no remedy" (1,

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whose task is "giving Judgment to the Satisfaction of the Parties concerned, on the most nice and intricate Cases which can happen in an Amour."⁶⁰ But on the whole, Steele and Addison seek to show that morality is a broad, well-lit, well-posted highway without sharp turnings or steep grades; the tortuous, obscure, and uneven path of casuistical ethics is therefore alien to the essential spirit of their writings. At the same time, it is characteristic of both authors that casuistry should be treated as at worst something superfluous and faintly ridiculous—as a kind of equivalent in the realm of ethics to Sir Roger de Coverley in the social or political sphere. But the popular taste for casuistical journalism was unaffected by the gentle mockery of Addison and Steele, as is shown by the number of cases of conscience which they themselves continued to receive from readers. As late as 1725, Charles Lillie issued two substantial volumes of letters which Addison and Steele had not seen fit to use;⁶¹ their publication testifies not only to the enduring prestige of the *Spectator*, but to the steady public demand for casuistical reading matter—a demand which has kept advice-to-the-lovelorn columns alive to this day.

Even more influential than its question-and-answer format, however, was the actual content of many of the *Athenian Mercury's* queries. Although Defoe probably knew some of 166-69). English casuists had been unanimous on this point (e.g., Hall, *Resolutions and Decisions*, in *Works*, vii, 399-400; cf. also *Contingal Lewdness* [1727], pp. 69-70). Elsewhere Steele tends to introduce cases of conscience as points of departure for more general discussions—as in No. 98 for Nov. 24, 1709—or as occasions for drollery, as in No. 228 for Sept. 23, 1710 (II, 328-30; IV, 167-68).

⁶⁰ The Love-Casuist appears late in the paper's life, in numbers written by Budgeell and Tickell: see No. 591 for Sept. 8, 1714, No. 614 for Nov. 1, 1714, No. 619 for Nov. 12, 1714 (V, 22-23; V, 98; V, 115-16).

⁶¹ See n. 37 above (*Original and Genuine Letters*): among the twelve pages of subscribers are "Mr. Daniel De Foe" and "Mr. Daniel De Foe junior."

the earlier casuistical manuals at first hand,⁶³ the *Mercury* is nevertheless a more immediate and likelier source for certain cases incorporated in the *Review*, especially since their circumstantial, epistolary presentation to a learned "Club" or "Society" had no other precedent. Dunton's periodical seems to have been regarded as a convenient storehouse of lively and occasionally risqué casuistical subject matter, and a number of its cases turn up in writings of the period other than Defoe's. An apprentice reports to the Athenians his discovery that "my Mistress entertain'd an unlawful Amour, with a Gentleman who lodg'd in our house," and asks whether he is not "bound in Conscience to . . . divulge the matter?" In 1726 another apprentice, the hero of a novel by William Rufus Chetwood, learns of his master's wife's adultery and has the same difficulty deciding whether he is obliged to inform his master.⁶⁴ Examples could be multiplied, and although one can never be certain that Dunton's journal is the sole or specific source of such material—Chetwood could have encountered the apprentice's case of conscience in *The British Apollo* or in the earlier casuistical writings of Sanderson or Hall⁶⁵—the immediate popularity and frequent reprinting of the *Athenian*

⁶³ In *Coniugal Lewdness*, for example, Defoe acknowledges his indebtedness to Jeremy Taylor, who had inquired three-quarters of a century earlier whether the virtue of chastity is called for within marriage (pp. 51-56; cf. Taylor's *Holy Living* [1650], Ch. II, Sect. III, in *Whole Works*, III, 55-58). William Perkins had maintained that "eugen in wedlocke excesse in lusts is no better then plaine adulterie before God" and defended as "the iudgement of the auncient Church" the principle that "intemperance, that is, immoderate desire[is] euen between man and wife are fornication" ("Of Christian Oeconomy," in *Works*, II, 689). This thesis is the ideological point of departure for *Coniugal Lewdness*—a title Defoe probably chose as a catchy oxymoron, but which he eventually makes into a virtual tautology.

⁶⁴ See *A.M.*, VIII, xi, 5; cf. also *A.M.*, VII, I, 5; *The Voyages and Adventures of Captain Robert Boyle, In several Parts of the World*, pp. 3-7.

⁶⁵ See *The British Apollo*, Supernumerary Paper No. 5 (Aug. 1708), p. [4], for the same case; Hall, *Resolutions and Decisions*, in *Works*,

Mercury make it reasonable to suppose that other writers knew and used it. Indeed, even unsympathetic witnesses testify to the durability of the Athenian vogue, for the *Mercury* and its cases of conscience were not only adapted but parodied widely in the literature of the period. The *Spectator's* "Love-Casulist" has already been mentioned; in Captain Alexander Smith's *Complete History of the Highwaymen* (1710), there is a leering discussion of a case which is said to have been "a month's theme, or more, for the Athenian Society, at that time of day, to resolve";⁶⁶ and burlesques of Athenian questions and answers turn up for years in unexpected places.⁶⁷

However important the *Athenian Mercury* may have been as a source or transmitter of casuistical subject matter, its em-

⁶⁶ VII, 314-16, on the question "Whether, and in what cases, am I bound to be an accuser of another?"; *ibid.*, pp. 413-14 on the question "How far we may or ought to make known the secret sin of another." For the influence of such queries on other novelists, see Natascha Wütz-bach's useful introduction to *The Novel in Letters: Epistolary Fiction in the Early English Novel 1678-1740* (Coral Gables, 1969), pp. xx, xxiii-xxiv.

⁶⁷ Ed. Arthur L. Hayward (1926), p. 196. Cf. also Settle's *New Athenian Comedy*, n. 32 above.

⁶⁸ A 1734 collection of criminal trials says of a convicted felon named Philip Storey that "While he was under Condemnation, his Conscience was puzzled with a scruple not very common with Men of his Profession. He had taken it into his Head that the most heinous offence a Man could be guilty of, was Sacrilege, thereupon was very inquisitive to know whether picking Pockets in a Church was a species of that Crime or not. To this the Ordinary of Newgate (who was a profound Casuist) answer'd affirmatively. Picking Pockets in a Church, says that Ghostly Father, is certainly one sort of Sacrilege, and may perhaps be more offensive in the sight of God, than what is generally call'd by that Name, because it may possibly deter some from frequenting God's Temple, or make those who are there, so cautious and uneasy for fear of losing their Money, as to take their thoughts off from Heaven, and damp their Devotion . . . Now stealing the Vessels or Ornaments of the Church can have none of these effects, and consequently picking Pockets there must be the greater Sin" (*Select Trials . . . at the Sessions-House in the Old-Bailey . . . From the Year 1720, to 1724* [1734], p. 79).

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ployment of casuistical methods probably made an even greater contribution to early eighteenth-century literature. In Dunton's periodical, highly diverse ethical dilemmas are resolved through detailed consideration of the relevant circumstances and sanctions; as a consequence, each case of conscience becomes something of an episode, and each querist is more or less fully realized as a character. Such a technique was obviously adaptable to prose fiction, although it was better suited to portraying and assessing character than to organizing a sustained narrative. Owing to the assumption that life is composed of a series of cases of conscience, each of which must be decided on its own merits, the casuistical method tends to dissolve narrative into a series of discrete episodes. It is not my contention that there ever existed such a thing as a "casuistical novel," or that Defoe ever attempted to write one, but rather that the paratactic structure of such books as *Moll Flanders*, *Colonel Jack*, and *Roxana* is in part ascribable to Defoe's habit of approaching experience casuistically, case by case. Each hero and heroine passes through numerous self-contained scenes, often based directly on traditional cases of conscience, and even when conscience plays little part in a character's deliberations, the internal shape of an episode will often preserve the case-stating, case-resolving pattern. There is a similar absence of direct causal linkage between scenes in *A Journal of the Plague Year*, although the progress of the plague provides a loose chronological and geographical structure, and in Defoe's conduct manuals, where the primary aim is a full and persuasive treatment of moral problems, there is still less concern with novelistic plotting.

TWO

My initial object has been to show that John Dunton's *Athenian Mercury* effectively developed and popularized var-

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ious features of seventeenth-century casuistical divinity, and thus served as a valuable intermediary between the writings of Perkins, Taylor, and Baxter, and those of Defoe. In the transmutation of traditional cases of conscience into the materials of prose fiction, Defoe's so-called conduct manuals represent the next significant stage. To this class belong *The Family Instructor* (1715-18), *Religious Courtship* (1722), *A New Family Instructor* (1727), and one or two other similarly titled works. Chronologically, the casuistical portions of the *Review* appear midway between the *Athenian Mercury* and Defoe's first novels, and as subsequent discussion of the novels will indicate, the *Review* adumbrates many of their cases of conscience. Formally, however, the *Review* does not seem to me to have appreciably altered or improved upon Dunton's successful formula for casuistical journalism, whereas the conduct manuals do mark a distinct advance. The pages that follow will therefore trace what becomes of the traditional methods and materials of casuistry in these conduct manuals; and since later discussions of *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* will be particularly concerned with matrimonial casuistry, it will be appropriate to give special attention to *Religious Courtship*, which contains a number of classic "Cases Matrimonial." What one finds in the conduct manuals is that cases of conscience are investigated in "purer" form than in the novels. Defoe is more detached from the people whom he puts in casuistical predicaments, and more intent on the moral principles which character and action alike are designed to illustrate. As a consequence, cases of conscience can be presented and resolved somewhat more straightforwardly than is usually possible in the novels, where various factors—notably Defoe's imaginative involvement in the fate of his heroes and heroines—complicate the presentation, and sometimes prevent any final resolution, of the same traditional dilemmas.

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Before turning to *Religious Courtship*, we should briefly consider the features which the conduct manuals share with one another and with the novels, as well as the differences between them. Benjamin Franklin first noted their common use of "Narration and Dialogue,"⁶⁷ and there are many other similarities: a comparable attainment of circumstantial realism through concrete detail; an analogous preference of exhaustiveness to conciseness, of reiteration to understatement, of plainness to elegance; and (more generally) the same focus on bourgeois characters winning material and spiritual victories in demanding environments. What, then, are the differences? As the very term "conduct manual" would suggest, critics have felt that a fundamental distinction of intent separates this genre from the novel. As long ago as 1895, George A. Aitken argued that the story exists for the sake of the moral in the conduct manuals, and vice versa in the novels; he saw the two types of work as closely connected, and maintained that the novel emerged from the conduct manual through a reversal of priorities on Defoe's part.⁶⁸ Although not all subsequent scholars have granted the conduct manuals such a decisive role in Defoe's literary development,⁶⁹ Aitken's line

⁶⁷ Speaking of Bunyan in his *Autobiography*, Franklin says that "Honest John was the first that I know of who mix'd Narration and Dialogue, a Method of Writing very engaging to the Reader, who in the most interesting Parts finds himself as it were brought into the Company, and present at the Discourse. Defoe," he goes on to say, "in his Crusoe, his Moll Flanders, Religious Courtship, Family Instructor, and other Pieces, has imitated it with Success" (ed. Leonard W. Labaree, *et al.* [New Haven, 1964], p. 72). All quotations from *Religious Courtship* (1722) refer to the second edition of 1729.

⁶⁸ In Aitken's words, the change "was one of degree rather than kind. The difference lay chiefly in the prominence now given to the story, which took the leading place, hitherto occupied by the moral" (Introduction to *Romances and Narratives*, 16 vols. [1895], 4, xxix).

⁶⁹ See Arthur W. Secord, *Studies in the Narrative Method of Defoe* (Urbana, 1924), pp. 16-17. According to Secord, Aitken's thesis exaggerates the importance of the conduct manuals in the genesis of Defoe's

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of demarcation between the two genres has not been challenged; its main drawback, of course, is the difficulty of determining whether "the moral" or "the story" was uppermost in Defoe's mind in any given work of fiction. There are moments in all the conduct manuals when the story takes on a momentum of its own, or at any rate is shaped by other than moral interests, just as there are moments in all the novels when moral impulses clearly dominate the narrative. None of the conduct manuals, however, offers as much sustained storytelling as any of the novels; Defoe never focuses on a single individual, as he always does in the novels, but on small groups of people bound together by blood, marriage, or professional relationships. The result is that each conduct manual contains a series of short narratives which exemplify various responses to the same cases of conscience. The novels are no less episodic, but their fragmentation is offset by the constant presence of a first-person narrator, chronicling experiences which are mostly his own; in the conduct manuals the narrator is sometimes a participant but more commonly a chance observer, less interested in connecting scenes than in commenting on them individually.⁷⁰ Thus the persistence of a single voice, which gives a minimal coherence to even the most disjointed of Defoe's novelistic plots, is absent in the

prose fiction, and correspondingly slights the influence of other genres, such as voyage and criminal literature.

⁷⁰ The role of the narrator varies from one conduct manual to another, and even to some extent within single works. At the beginning of *The Family Instructor* (1715-18), Defoe's first major venture in the genre, short dialogues are held together with extensive authorial notes; as the work progresses, dialogues grow longer and are linked by short narrative passages. Authorial comment is curtailed and relegated to the end of parts—each "Part" of the book is subdivided into "Dialogues"—as Defoe appears to grow more confident of having made his meaning clear, either through the action or through the speakers' own comments on it.

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conduct manuals, and the lack of it prevents "the story" from developing as we should expect it to in a novel.

But the conduct manuals are no more failed novels than the novels—in which Defoe partially relaxes his emphasis on the exemplary episode, and allows a single character to give an unbroken account of his vicissitudes—are failed conduct manuals.⁷¹ The primary task of *Religious Courtship*, for instance, is to show the necessity, as the extended subtitle puts it, of *Marrying Religious Husbands and Wives only, Of Husbands and Wives being of the same Opinions in Religion with one another, and of taking none but Religious Servants*. But the important thing is that these "necessities" be proven, not merely asserted as they are on the title page; and what makes Defoe's demonstration interesting is that despite the dogmatic air of their initial assertion, these propositions are generated within the text in a seemingly inductive fashion. No other device plays a greater part in creating this effect than the dialogue method. This is usually spoken of as a means simply of achieving narrative realism or of enlivening dry precepts, but its functions in *Religious Courtship* are more subtle and varied. Through dialogue we are persuaded that the speakers are groping their way toward principles of behavior, not serving.

⁷¹ That apologues and other didactic fictions cannot be regarded as novels *manqués*, but must be seen as obeying generic requirements of their own, is convincingly argued by several recent commentators on *Rasselas*. See Bertrand H. Bronson, "Postscript on *Rasselas*" in *Rasselas Poems, and Selected Prose* (New York, 1958), p. xvi, on Johnson's work as a "philosophical dialogue"; Gwin J. Kolb, Introduction to *Rasselas* (New York, 1962), pp. v-vi; and especially Sheldon Sacks, *Fiction and the Shape of Belief* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1964), pp. 49-60. One advantage of the term "conduct manual" over "apologue" as a description of these works of Defoe is that it suggests the rootedness of the theoretical and didactic—the "manual" aspect—in actual behavior—"conduct." Moral issues here are not speculative but firmly practical: it is as if Defoe had altered Socrates' maxim to read, "The unlived life is not worth examining."

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ing as mere mouthpieces for the author's predetermined views. Without claiming that they engage in full-fledged dialectic, one can maintain that through their discussions various characters gradually arrive at solutions of the cases of conscience confronting them. It is the very gradualness of this process, punctuated by doubts, tentative judgments, and changes of mind along the way, which allows an inductive spirit to prevail, and gives the eventual attitudes of Defoe's characters such persuasiveness as they possess. To put it another way, conduct manuals attempt to make characters (and by extension, readers) arrive with an air of discovery at what the author knew in the first place: one way Defoe achieves this in *Religious Courtship* is by making various people discuss cases of conscience aloud. In their casuistical periodicals, both Dunton and Defoe posit a collective entity—an Athenian *Society* or a *Scandal Club*—within which there can be difference of opinion; this helps to create an atmosphere of open-minded deliberation. Cases of conscience are thus explored in a stochastic, not a peremptory manner. The family discussions in *Religious Courtship* represent an extension of the same device, with the members of the group given more specific and distinct identities, and their views more fully articulated and qualified in the give-and-take of dialogue. Defoe himself may finally be "The Family Instructor," but he is careful to keep from delivering the instruction *ex cathedra*, or even from above. Rather, he is fond of making it move in the opposite direction; and instead of fathers, husbands, and masters laying down the law to children, wives, and servants, it is "from the mouths of babes" that wisdom most commonly—and most convincingly—comes. The native woman who converts Will Atkins in *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* is one well-known instance of a pattern characteristic of all the conduct manuals: the slave, the child, the youngest

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sibling, the apprentice, the unlettered peasant, and the savage are Defoe's favorite spokesmen.

We can best illustrate some of these generalizations by turning directly to *Religious Courtship*. The first part deals with what the title page calls *The Necessity of Marrying Religious Husbands and Wives only*, but in the text this is posed as a question rather than an assertion. The youngest of three sisters is courted by a man who has everything to recommend him but religion. He is no atheist, but religion is "a Road he had never travelled" (41); his worldly upbringing makes him one of those who "would choose a Wife first, and then choose his Religion" (42). The problem is whether the girl ought to marry him all the same; not a subject, one might suppose, capable of interesting most modern readers. Nevertheless, this central question takes on considerable dramatic force through an accumulation of peripheral questions. Each of the latter might have been the essential question in a different context, for most are based on traditional cases of conscience; yet their chief role here is to involve the characters in a maze of conflicts and anxieties, without which any prolonged treatment of the central issue would be lifeless.

Prior to the beginning of the action, for instance, the girls' dying mother had laid down two "Maxims in the Choice of their Husbands," the first of which was "Never to Marry any Man, whatever his Person or Fortune might be, that did not at least, profess to be a Religious Man" (3). These are represented several times as "injunctions" on the part of the mother, and elsewhere as "promises" on the part of the girls; the question becomes, how far are such deathbed injunctions or promises binding on the daughters? A related question arises in connection with the father, a passionate man who makes various oaths and vows about banishing and disowning his daughter if she refuses to comply with his wishes and marry her suitor. One recent commentator represents

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Defoe as holding that all vows are sacred, however rash, but neither he nor his casuistical predecessors went quite this far.⁷² Robert Sanderson's "Case of a Rash Vow Deliberately Iterated" may be taken as a typical resolution of this problem;⁷³ his view that such oaths are *not* binding is echoed in several of Defoe's works.⁷⁴

Behind both of the preceding questions lies a more general one, which had formed a staple of the seventeenth-century casuistical manuals and was to be crucial to the opening

⁷² See Maximilian E. Novak, *Defoe and the Nature of Man* (Oxford 1963), pp. 99.

⁷³ See Sanderson's *Works*, ed. William Jacobson, 6 vols. (Oxford 1854), v, 60-74: "A Gentleman of good estate hath issue one only Daughter, who, placing her affections upon a person much below her rank, intendeth Marriage with him. The Father, hearing of it, is of great displeasure voweth, and confirmeth it with an Oath, that if she marry him, he will never give her a farthing of his estate. The Daughter notwithstanding marrieth him: after which the Father sundry times iterateh and reneweth his said former Vow. . . . *Quest*: Whether the Father's Vow so made, and so confirmed and iterated as abovesaid, be Obligatory or not?" Sanderson's opinion is that "the Vow was Rash, and is not at all Obligatory." See the *Athenian Mercury*, vii, ii, 2; viii, v, 5.

⁷⁴ What Defoe did believe is that such vows, whether kept or not, necessarily plunge those making them (as well as those against whom they are made) into terrible difficulties, and must issue either in repentance or general misery. In *The Family Instructor*, several stories are told about rash vows and their aftermath. One man stalks out of his house in a rage, and wishes "it might fall on his Head if ever he came into it again," but later makes the following reflections, which Defoe evidently regards as sound: "I have sinn'd greatly in making this rash Vow, but I must continue to sin as long as I live, if I keep it; I'll cast myself upon GOD's Mercy and ask Pardon for my Sin, and venture the Consequence" (Vol. II [1718], p. 210). In *Apples and Honey* a husband who signs himself "Furiouso" describes a similar predicament: "This horrid Case" concerns an oath made twenty years earlier by the separating spouses, never to see each other again; they had cursed one another heartily, and now, two decades later, are afraid to come together "for fear the House should fall upon our Heads" (Mar. 27, 1725; Lec, iii, 369-71).

volumes of *Clarissa*: namely, the extent to which parents can legitimately determine whom their children are to marry. *Religious Courtship* contains Defoe's fullest exploration of this topic. Like John Harlowe, the father in this book is an autocrat who manages to "hurry and terrify his Children so with his Fury and his Passions, that they are afraid to see him, and ready to swoon when they hear he is coming to them" (103); and like John Harlowe, this man assumes that it has "been always the Right of Fathers to give their Daughters in Marriage," and cites Old Testament texts to justify his patriarchal pretensions. But he is advised by his own sister that neither "the Laws of God or Man give Parents that Authority now," and that "there is a great Difference between your negative Authority and your positive Authority in the Case of a Daughter" (98-99). This conventional distinction grants both father and daughter a veto power: the girl cannot choose her own husband, nor can the father choose one for her, without the other's consent.⁷⁵ The youngest daughter therefore appeals to established principles, which Richardson's heroine would likewise invoke, in telling her father, "If I was going to marry any one you did not like, it was, no doubt, in your Power to command me not to do it, but I cannot think you ought to command me to marry any Man against my Will" (28). Despite her painful awareness that "there is a powerful Force in a Father's Command," whether or not that command is just, she nevertheless believes that "as I am

⁷⁵ See *Conjugal Lewdness* (1727), in which Defoe says that "The Limits of a Parent's Authority, in this Case of Matrimony, either with Son or Daughter, I think, stands thus: The Negative, I think, is theirs, especially with a Daughter; but, I think, the Positive is the Childrens" (p. 170). For earlier defenses of the right of children to reject matches proposed by their parents, see Jeremy Taylor, *Doctor Dabianium*, ed. Alexander Taylor, in *Whole Works*, ed. Reginald Heber, rev. Charles P. Eden, 10 vols. (1852), x, 496; Richard Baxter, *Christian Directory*, in *Practical Works*, ed. William Orme, 23 vols. (1830), iv, 196.

sure I am right, I must do my Duty, and trust Providence; if my Father does not do the Duty of his Relation to me, I'll pray to God to forgive him" (33, 34).⁷⁶

A hazard here is that the girl will seem priggishly willful, but Defoe sees the danger and takes various precautions against it. For one thing, all the arguments for her marrying the man are given their full weight. Before she is able to discover her suitor's want of religion, his "very agreeable Person" and his "engaging Conduct" have "made some Way into her Affection," and eventually "she not only has a Respect for him, but really loves him" (115). Defoe develops with some skill the girl's struggle between love and principle; the "poor young Lady" is so afflicted by her plight that—like Moll Flanders during her Colchester *crise de coeur*—"she fell very sick with it, and it was fear'd she inclined to a Consumption" (116). In the second place, any feeling we might have that the girl exaggerates the importance of religion is neutralized by making the father callously reiterate this very charge; through his sneers at her "canting Scruples" and "fine-spun Notions" it is suggested that there is nothing trifling or arbitrary about her misgivings (28, 111). On the other hand, sympathetic characters like the aunt praise the girl's conscientiousness as "the noblest

⁷⁶ William Perkins had maintained that "the parent is the principal agent and disposer of the child" in matrimony, but adds that "although his authority be not so great as that the child is to be forced and compelled by him; yet the reverent and dutiful respect which the child ought to bear towards him, ought to be a strong inducement, not to dissent, or renounce his advice, without great and weighty cause. Yea, the child must endeavour by all manner of dutiful carriage to overcome, or at least to mitigate his parents severity in that behalf" ("Of Christian Oeconomy, or Household government," in *Works*, 3 vols. [1616-18], II, 695). Cf. Hall's similar response to the question "Whether the authority of a father may reach so far as to command or compel the child to dispose of himself in marriage where he shall appoint," *Revolutions and Decisions*, in *Works*, ed. Philip Wynter, 10 vols. (Oxford, 1863), vii, 380-82; cf. also *The Ladies Library*, 3 Vols. (1715), II, 29.

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Resolution that ever I heard of, since the Story of *St. Catharine*" (98). Also effective is the way the reality of the girl's own immediate predicament is heightened by the introduction of other, imaginary ones. Her "actual" case, of course, is itself only hypothetical, invented by Defoe to convey his notions of religious courtship; but by making the actors in it discuss still other cases as hypothetical, Defoe strengthens our belief in the genuineness of their own. This is a recurrent strategy in *Religious Courtship*; the characters have such active imaginations that we tend to forget that they and their cases of conscience are themselves imaginary. Their inventiveness conceals (yet in another sense testifies to) that of Defoe.

Most important, however, is the fact that many lines of communication remain open, and that the question can be canvassed from many points of view. What becomes so oppressive and fatal in the Harlowe household—Clarissa's gradual isolation from her family, their growing imperviousness, and her growing desperation—is adumbrated here in a temporary estrangement between father and daughter. But the tragic potentialities of the situation are curbed, partly by the fact that even when the principals are not in direct contact, third parties keep the circuits of discussion unbroken, and partly by the fact that the father, for all his intransigence on matrimonial questions, is by no means a complete ogre, so that the possibility of his being sooner or later amenable to reason is also kept open. Similarly the suitor, despite a breezy aloofness towards religion at the outset, is shown as a victim of the genteel miseducation which Defoe was to deplore in *The Compleat English Gentleman*, rather than of ill-nature: he is endowed with enough modesty and sense to seem reclaimable, and we are not surprised when a poor but pious tenant of his—whose role resembles that of Colonel Jack's slave-tutor in Virginia—becomes his spiritual father and sets in motion his conversion. Defoe never presents a reformed

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rake as an ideal husband, but he is rather partial to weaned worldlings.

The sheer indefatigability of all these talkers gives us confidence in the eventual success of their negotiations,⁷⁷ but for Defoe's purposes it is also important that the two high-principled daughters be able, as an acquaintance says of one of them, "to run down a whole Society of Doctors in these Points." It is not enough that they be innocent as doves: they must also have enough serpentine wisdom to make us confess, as does one potential objector within the story, "I have not been able to open my Mouth against one Word she says" (146).

The second part of the book concerns the middle daughter, whose history, Defoe claims, is "no less fruitful of Instruction than the other, tho something more tragical." This girl "would not trouble herself, when it came to her Turn, what Religion the Gentleman was of, or whether he had any Religion or no, if she had but a good Settlement" (183); she therefore ventures to the altar without determining beforehand whether her suitor, a rich merchant, has been tainted with Popery during his long residence in Italy. Not until long after the wedding does she realize that her husband's valuable paintings are objects of a superstitious devotion, that his exotically furnished closet is a private chapel, and that his con-

⁷⁷ In *The Family Instructor*, the conflict of wills within a family is allowed to reach its tragic conclusion, but this outcome is compatible with the point Defoe is making about how a family ought to be governed. In *Religious Courtship*, if his interest had been centered on the question of paternal rather than filial conduct, he could have kept the father tyrannically inflexible, made "a Consumption" consume the daughter, and so on, with no loss of edifying effect. But since he is intent on recommending the daughter's exemplary behavior, and is unwilling to defer its reward to an uncertain afterlife (as Richardson had the temerity to do in *Clarissa*), he eventually unites her with her now-worthy suitor.

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fidential secretary is a disguised priest. She is eventually "delivered" from this fatal mismatch by her husband's death, and in this part of the book, the tearful widow and her more prudent sisters discuss the dire consequences of failing to recognize "the necessity of husbands and wives being of the same opinions in religion with one another." This monitory tale, which balances the other exemplary ones, rests on a case of conscience which nearly every seventeenth-century English casuist had discussed: that is, whether Protestants are justified in marrying Roman Catholics.⁷⁸ The question had usually been resolved more or less as it is here: such marriages are not sinful, but are attended with such "signal inconveniences" that they ought to be avoided.⁷⁹ Yet the episode is not really an attack on Roman Catholicism; Defoe lets the Papist put his best foot forward, so as to show that even when both spouses grant one another complete liberty of conscience, and all sectarian friction is happily avoided, a difference in religious opinion is nevertheless bound to generate "Sighs and sad Hearts," and "No Kindness, no Tenderness, no Affection can make it up" (258, 257).

On the other hand, the Papist is not idealized, either. Defoe wants to show a girl who, though in a sense innocent, comes to grief through a lack of her sisters' serpentine pru-

⁷⁸ Typical is "The Case of Marrying with a Recusant" in Sanderson, *Works*, v, 75-80; the *Confession of Faith* of the Westminster Assembly of Divines (1643) declares that "such as profess the true reformed religion should not marry with infidels, Papists, or other idolaters" (Chap. xxiv, Par. iii [Edinburgh, 1877], p. 102), but the Canons of the Church of England contain no such provision.

⁷⁹ See *AM*, vii, xix, 4; xvii, i, 5; xiii, xv, 6; and v, ix, 8, where the Athenian Society prefers to leave this question "to the decision of all Learn'd and Casuistical Divines," and modestly concludes that "tho we have given our [negative] Opinion, we desire you not to rely on it, unless confirm'd by the Approbation of some of our Bishops, for 'tis a matter of great Moment, that pretends to the decision of an Interest in both Worlds."

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dence. He therefore puts in the mouth of the Papist several equivocations which she ought to see through (or at least question), but blithely accepts at face value. Thus in recounting the gradual stages by which she learned of her husband's Catholicism, she says that one day as he was entering his closet "he made an extraordinary low Bow towards that Place where the Candlesticks stood: Indeed I took no notice of it at first, for I verily thought he had stoop'd for some thing, but when he carry'd the Candlesticks in again he did the same, and that gave me . . . some Idea of this being an extraordinary Place, tho I did not know what; and I very innocently ask'd him this foolish laughing Question; My Dear, you are mightily mannerly to your empty Rooms, you bow as if the King was there; he put it off with a Smile, and an Answer that was indeed according to *Solomon*, *Answer a Fool in his Folly*. My Dear, says he, 'tis our Custom in *Italy*." "He was not Fool," the eldest sister observes, "what he said was very true" (251-52). Richard Baxter had declared, in his *Christian Directory*, that "If I find a man in an ignorance or error which I am not bound to cure . . . I may either be silent, or speak darkly, or speak words which he understandeth not, (through his own imperfection,) or which I know his weakness will misunderstand: but I must speak no falsehood to him."⁸⁰ "Tis our Custom in *Italy*" would appear to satisfy Baxter's criteria of truthfulness, but what Defoe stresses in this passage is the girl's gullibility, rather than the ethical status of the man's words. On another occasion the Papist resorts to a still more dubious amphibology. While the courtship is still in progress, the bride-to-be reports that "accidentally speaking about Religion, he declared he was a Member of the Church of *England*, as by Law establish'd." Her eldest sister replies, "Well, you are an easy Lady; a little Matter satisfie"

⁸⁰ *Practical Works*, iii, 509.

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you; I should presently have said, I hope, Sir, you mean the Protestant Church of *England*; Why, [do you] not imagine, the Roman Catholics think the Popish Church is the only Church of *England* that is establish'd by Law?" At this the unwary young lady is aghast: "Sure, Sister, you take all the World to be Hypocrites and Cheats; I never can suspect any Gentleman, that bears the Character of an honest Man, would set up to impose upon me with such equivocal Speeches; why I never heard such a vile Distinction in my Life."⁸¹ We need not enter into the legitimacy of the man's ruse here, since the subject of mendacity is discussed in an Appendix below. The point is that whether or not this equivocation is a "vile Distinction," we see that the girl's dovelikeness is extremely vulnerable, and the contrast with the other sisters suggests that her naïveté is blameworthy, however charming.⁸²

The two scenes just discussed also illustrate the effectiveness of Defoe's dialogue, the nuances of which keep the central topic—whether Protestants should marry Roman Catholics—from becoming drearily tendentious. The same may be said of graphic detail. In the *Review*, Defoe's Scandal Club had considered the case of a Protestant lady wearing a crucifix,

⁸¹ P. 191; cf. Pascal's Jesuit on such equivocations: "In social intercourse and intrigues," he says, "one of the most embarrassing problems is how to avoid lying, especially when one would like people to believe something untrue. This is where our [Jesuit] doctrine of equivocation is marvelously helpful, for it allows one 'to use ambiguous terms, conveying a different meaning to the hearer from that in which one understands them oneself,' as Sanchez says" (*Provincial Letters*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer [Baltimore, 1966], p. 140). But cf. also n. 17 to Appendix below.

⁸² In *Applebee's Journal* for Sept. 16, 1721, Defoe cites a relevant text (Prov. 27:12): "The Prudent Man foreseeth the Evil, and hideth himself; but the Simple pass on and are punish'd" (Lee, II, 430). More severe is the remark earlier in *Religious Courtship* that "if we are deceived, it may be our Unhappiness, but will not be our Fault; but if we neglect the Caution, it may be a double Misery, by its being our Sorrow, and our Sin too" (p. 15).

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and had reprimanded her for it."⁸³ Here the husband gives his wife a diamond cross, "worth above six hundred Pounds," and for five pages the widow discusses with her father and sisters the difficulties that this gift caused. These difficulties are not exclusively moral ones; or rather, the genuineness of the moral problem is established partly through the vivid presentation of prosaic, non-moral *realia*. The father points out that Protestant ladies in Italy all wear crosses, but avoid any religious contretemps by putting them out of sight. The daughter replies, "I did so. . . . I lengthen'd the String it hung to, that it might hang a little lower, but it was too big, if it went within my Stays, it would hurt me; nor was it much odds to him; for if he [her husband] saw the String, he knew the Cross was there, and it was all one" (270). The homely realism of such passages may border on the bizarre, but various comparable scenes indicate that Defoe's imagination was at work in this book, not merely his urge to instruct, and they help to make palatable precepts which might have been only wearisome.

According to the title page, the final portion of *Religious Courtship* concerns the necessity "of taking none but *Religious Servants*," but this is actually displaced by the more general question of recommending servants. This problem recurs elsewhere in Defoe's writings and in contemporary literature; a century later, in fact, Thomas De Quincey was to single out, as typical of "the many cases of conscience daily occurring in the common business of the world . . . the case which so often arises between master and servant, and in so many varieties of form—a case which requires you to decide between some violation of your conscience, on the one hand, as to veracity, by saying something that is not strictly true, as well

⁸³ *Review*, 1 (July 18, 1704), 171-72.

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as by evading (and that is often done) all answer to inquiries which you are unable to meet satisfactorily . . . or, on the other hand, a still more painful violation of your conscience in consigning deliberately some young woman . . . to ruin, by refusing her a character, and thus shutting the door upon all the paths by which she might retrace her steps."⁸⁴ This is the same dilemma that exercises the characters in *Religious Courtship*, but Defoe attaches decisive importance to one factor which De Quincey neglects. He anticipates De Quincey's view that to deny an unsatisfactory servant a recommendation may be to plunge her into even more mischievous courses. But he insists that the alternative—to give bad servants good characters, and to evade inquiries which would handicap the servant if answered truthfully—involves not only a violation of one's own conscience, but also an injury to the prospective employer. Defoe's stress on this latter consideration may reflect his own middle-class bias, and it is true that when he discusses the servant problem his tone sometimes becomes more petulant and alarmist than usual. But his assessment of the matter in the closing pages of *Religious Courtship* is both judicious and humane, and from a literary standpoint his manner of treating it is as significant as his conclusions.

The following dialogue between an aunt and her two nieces epitomizes several of the techniques already mentioned. The first niece takes what she imagines to be a charitable position: "We are loth to hinder poor Servants; for to take away their Character is to take away their Bread." But the second niece replies, "We may say the same of a Thief, or a House-breaker, when we find them in our Houses or Gardens, and take them even in the very Fact: We are loth to ruin them for it; that it was Necessity forc'd them to do what they did, and if we have them committed, they will be hang'd or trans-

⁸⁴ "The Casuistry of Duelling," in *Uncollected Writings*, ed. James Hogg, 2 vols. (1890), II, 71.

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ported; nay the Argument is stronger, because the Injury done may have been trifling, and the Punishment there is Loss of Life, which we may be loth to be concern'd in." "You carry the Case a great deal too high," protests the first niece. "I cannot think they are alike." But the aunt finds the analogy valid, and supports it with further arguments:

If I take the Thief, and give him up to the Law, he is undone, and his Life must pay for it; and 'tis a sad Thing for me to let a poor Fellow be put to Death or transported for robbing me of a Trifle. But on the other Hand I am to consider, (1) I am oblig'd by the Law to do it; that it is not I that put him to Death, but the Laws of his Country; and his own Crime is the Cause of it; and I am an Offender against that very Law, and in some sense a Confederate with him, at least an Encourager of him in his Crime, if I omit it: But which is more than that, (2) By my perhaps unseasonable and indeed unjust Compassion, I become accessory to all the Robberies he shall be guilty of after it; because if I had done as the Law directed me, I had put him out of a Condition to rob or injure any other Person (343-44).

The first thing to note here is that instead of moral principles being laid down and enforced, the use of dialogue allows a more inductive spirit to prevail. These people do not seem to be merely acting out assigned parts in an ethical game whose every move and eventual outcome have been settled before hand. In the second place, an issue that might at a glance seem trifling is shown to have serious and extensive implications. On the one hand, the servant problem is metaphorically associated with thievery and housebreaking—hanging matters on the other hand, legal and moral sanctions are invoked which are at once weighty and far-reaching. Defoe thus establishes the total context of his original problem by investing it

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not only with further concreteness through analogies, but also greater generality through abstractions. This pattern, at once ethical and rhetorical, is highly characteristic of him—especially of his way of resolving cases of conscience in the conduct manuals; for as I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, both his methods and his results tend to be “purer” in these works than in the novels. Finally, this scene further illustrates Defoe’s awareness of the interrelatedness of ethical issues. For these characters the immediate question, about recommending bad servants, can properly be solved only by taking into account its distinctive circumstances as well as its practical and theoretical ramifications. Critics of casuistry have always objected to such a complex procedure, and Defoe himself knew its pitfalls and abuses, but in such instances as this he clearly regarded it as not only legitimate but also necessary. In the novels, as we shall see, various factors can render it impracticable. Instead of wise old aunts and precociously prudent sisters to discuss their cases of conscience with, the heroes and heroines are either alone, or are thrown together with midwives, fortune-hunters, and highwaymen. Instead of the leisure for casuistical deliberation which the “middle station of life” permits, the heroes and heroines of the novels find themselves hurried along by events, and in some cases seem enabled to reflect on their actions only by the very rise in fortune which has already permitted them to change their actions. Perhaps most crucial of all, the novelistic heroes and heroines tell their own stories, and this makes for an imaginative involvement on Defoe’s part—and ours—which (as I shall suggest in the following chapters) often qualifies to the point of reversal the kind of judgments typified by the title page of *Religious Courtship*.