Modern Intellectual History, 13, 1 (2016), pp. 93–122
doi:10.1017/S1479244315000128

"JACOBINS" AT PRINCETON: STUDENT RIOTS, RELIGIOUS REVIVALISM, AND THE DECLINE OF ENLIGHTENMENT, 1800–1817*

CHARLES BRADFORD BOW
Faculty of History, Underwood International College, Yonsei University
E-mail: Bradford.Bow@yonsei.ac.kr

This essay considers how American Enlightenment moralists and Evangelical religious revivalists responded to "Jacobinism" at the College of New Jersey, which later became Princeton University, from 1800 through 1817. At this time, disruptive student activities exemplified alleged American "Jacobin" conspiracies against civil society. The American response to "Jacobins" brought out tensions between two different competing intellectual currents at the College of New Jersey: a revival of Christian religious principles led by Princeton trustee Reverend Ashbel Green and, in contrast, the expansion of Samuel Stanhope Smith's system of moral education during his tenure as college president from 1795 through 1812. As a moralist, Smith appealed to Scottish Common Sense philosophy in teaching the instinctive "rules of duty" as a way to correct unrestrained "passions" and moderate "Jacobin" radicalism. In doing so, Smith developed a moral quasi-relativism as an original feature of his moral philosophy and contribution to American Enlightenment intellectual culture. Green and like-minded religious revivalists saw Princeton student uprisings as Smith's failure to properly address irreligion. This essay shows the ways in which "Jacobinism" and then the emerging age of religious revivalism, known as the Second Great Awakening, arrived at the cost of Smith's "Didactic Enlightenment" at Princeton.

This essay considers how American Enlightenment moralists and Evangelical religious revivalists responded to "Jacobinism" at the College of New Jersey, which later became Princeton University, from 1800 through 1817. In an important sense "Jacobinism," as a conceptual label for agents of radical revolutionary change and a term for pernicious smear, was one of the most enduring legacies of the Atlantic

* I would like to thank Thomas Ahnert, Michael Ratnapalan, Robert Beachy, Martin Wagner, Paul Tonks, the journal's anonymous reviewers, and the journal's coeditor Charles Capper for their thoughtful and generous comments in preparation of this article.

age of revolution. From its moderate ambition at the Jacobin Club in 1789 to radical instrument of the 1793–4 "Reign of Terror," the meaning of "Jacobinism" changed in Revolutionary France as well as across the wider Atlantic world.[1] Afterwards, its use, which became generally interchangeable with allegations of "freethinking," infidelity, immorality, philosophical skepticism, political subversion, and civic disorder, was situated within political, social, religious, and intellectual contexts on either side of the Atlantic. According to R. R. Palmer, Americans, among others, treated "'Jacobinism' as the 'communism' of the eighteenth century."[2] And similar to the American perception of "communism" during the Cold War, "Jacobinism" was generally associated with nefarious activities between *c.*1791 and 1815.[3] While transatlantic figures explicitly and implicitly used different versions of "Jacobinism" for various reasons, this broader concept had a more precise meaning at early American institutions of higher education.

During this transitional period in the early republic, disruptive student activities exemplified alleged American "Jacobin" conspiracies against civil society through irreligious and vicious behavior. Princeton "Jacobins," for example, challenged the college's authority to govern with unprecedented displays of riotous protest, physical and verbal assault of tutors, and petitioning conventional punishments. Youthful rebellion of this kind was not exclusive to Princeton, with similar incidents occurring at Brown, William and Mary, Dartmouth, North Carolina, Dickinson, Harvard, and Yale between 1798 and 1808.[4] These student uprisings caused wider concerns about the republic's religious and moral character.[5] Steven Novak argues, "After the turn of the century student unrest was no longer calmly attributed to the 'influence of the

1 See Jonathan Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas: An Intellectual History of the French Revolution from The Rights of Man to Robespierre* (Princeton, 2014), 228–39, 588–90; Rachel Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Antislavery* (Cambridge, 2009), 1–19; Gordon Pentland, "The French Revolution, Scottish Radicalism and 'People Who Were Called Jacobins," in Ulrich Broich, H. T. Dickinson, Eckhart Hellmuth, and Martin Schmidt, eds., *Reactions to Revolutions: The 1790s and Their Aftermath* (Berlin, 2007), 85–108.

2 R. R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760–1800* (Princeton, 2014), 11.

3 Rachel Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America*, 231, shows the ways in which antebellum abolitionists of the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s echoed these anti-Jacobin sentiments from their childhood.

4 See Steven Novak, *The Rights of Youth: American Colleges and Student Revolt, 1798–1815* (Cambridge, MA, 1977), 95–156.

5 Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789–1815* (Oxford, 2009), 323.

first lapse' but was perceived as 'the product of vice and irreligion'."[6] American Enlightenment moralists and religious revivalists associated vicious behavior and religious heterodoxy with "Jacobinism" at Princeton; however, contrary to what the secondary literature suggests, they did not share the same perspective of vice and irreligion.[7]

This study intervenes in the field of early American intellectual history by showing an example of how "Jacobinism" changed the relationship between American Enlightenment moral "progress" and religious revivalism at Princeton. In his seminal study of Princeton, Mark Noll argues that Princeton presidents Samuel Stanhope Smith (served 1795–1812) and Ashbel Green (served 1812–22) appealed to their teacher and predecessor John Witherspoon's earlier example of combining reason and New Light Presbyterianism.[8] In doing so, Witherspoon's reforms of the curriculum between 1768 and 1794 created an important place for Scottish Enlightenment ideas and values, with a particular emphasis on Scottish Common Sense philosophy.[9] This Scottish tradition in moral philosophy facilitated a clear model for enlightened moral education at Princeton. In preparing young men for public life, principally the emergence of "Jacobinism" at

6 Novak, *The Rights of Youth*, 15.

7 This rich historiography includes noteworthy contributions from Henry May, *The Enlightenment in America* (Cambridge, MA, 1976); Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA, 1992); Eric R. Schlereth, *The Age of Infidels: The Politics of Religious Controversy in the Early United States* (Philadelphia, 2013); James Moorhead, *Princeton Seminary in American Religion and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2012); and, in particular, Mark Noll, *Princeton and the Republic, 1768–1822: The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith* (Vancouver, 1989).

8 In response to unprecedented crowds who gathered in a "revival of religion" during the early 1740s (later known as the "Great Awakening"), the Synod of Philadelphia supporting orthodox Calvinistic views (Old Side) and the Synod of New York endorsing religious revivalism (New Side) effectively split American Presbyterianism. As a testament to the Princeton's New Side attachments, its first five presidents (Jonathan Dickinson, 1747; Aaron Burr Sr, 1748–57; Jonathan Edwards, 1758; Samuel Davies, 1759–61; and Samuel Finley, 1761–6) first made their reputations as religious revivalists. See Thomas Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven, 2007), 43–7; Marliyn Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity: Scots–Irish Piety and the Great Awakening, 1625–1760* (Oxford, 1988), 15–30.

9 Witherspoon introduced his students Smith (Princeton class of 1769) and Green (Princeton class of 1783) to the writings of Scottish moralists such as Francis Hutcheson, Thomas Reid and, of course, his own version of Scottish Common Sense philosophy. This article does not aim to reevaluate the extent to which Smith and Green appealed to or departed from Witherspoon's moral philosophy, nor will it reexamine Noll's argument on the "republican Christian Enlightenment" at Princeton. See Charles Bradford Bow, "Samuel Stanhope Smith and Common Sense Philosophy at Princeton," *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, 8/2 (2010), 189–209.

Princeton changed intellectual and religious perceptions of what moral education should entail.

The response to unruly Princeton students brought out tensions between two different competing intellectual currents at the college: the expansion of Smith's system of moral education and, in contrast, a revival of Christian religious principles led by Green. These tendencies moved differently against "Jacobin" vice and irreligion, differences which this article outlines in two sections. The first section examines Smith's philosophical treatment of the instinctive "rules of duty" as a way to correct unrestrained "passions" and moderate "Jacobin" radicalism. In doing so, Smith developed a moral quasi-relativism that encouraged religious and cultural tolerance as an original feature of his moral philosophy and important contribution to American Enlightenment intellectual culture. Green and like-minded religious revivalists saw Princeton student uprisings as Smith's failure to properly address irreligion. Section II explores Green's efforts to overturn Smith's system of moral education and renew Princeton's diffusion of Christian principles. Their staunch rivalry did not imply that Green opposed all Enlightenment values or that Smith attempted to obstruct religious revivalism. These tensions between different responses to "Jacobins" at Princeton offer an example of the transition from American Enlightenment intellectual culture to the early stages of the "Second Great Awakening."

I

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the College of New Jersey celebrated their president Samuel Stanhope Smith as "the pride and ornament of the institution."[10] Advising his step-grandson on where best to further his education in 1797, George Washington wrote that "no college has turned out better scholars or more estimable characters than Nassau [and] nor is there any one whose president is thought more capable to direct a proper education than Dr. Smith."[11] The positive transatlantic reception of Smith's *Essay* (1788), *Sermons* (1799), and election as moderator of the General Assembly were reasons why he was regarded as an enlightened minister among his contemporaries.[12] For some, these

[10] Fredrick Beasley, "An Account of the Life and Writings of the Rev. Samuel Stanhope Smith," *Analectic Magazine*, 1 (1820), 470.

[11] At this time and afterwards, early Americans often referred to the College of New Jersey as Princeton, after its location, or as "Nassau," from its primary teaching building, Nassau Hall. George Washington to George Washington Parke Custis, 23 July 1797, quoted in John Maclean Jr, *History of the College of New Jersey from Its Origin in 1746 to the Commencement of 1854*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1877), 2: 146.

[12] On 28 January 1787, Smith joined the American Philosophical Society and read *An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species*, which he published

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244315000128 Published online by Cambridge University Press

achievements and associations rendered his version of "Didactic Enlightenment" beyond reproach.

This type of Enlightenment, which Henry May famously identifies as the last of four chronological Enlightenments in America ("Moderate Enlightenment" between 1688 and 1787, "Skeptical Enlightenment" between 1750 and 1789, "Revolutionary Enlightenment" between 1776 and 1800, and "Didactic Enlightenment" between 1800 and 1815), involved efforts to advance and instruct different branches of knowledge amidst intellectual and religious divisions across the republic.[13] American Enlightenment figures at this time, as May emphasizes, made particular use of Scottish Common Sense philosophy. Gordon Graham suggests that "the ambition of Scottish philosophy is to be found in its continuous attempt to combine the educational and investigative roles of philosophy within a single method or discipline."[14] This philosophical system, therefore, furnished the "bones rather than the flesh or muscles" as a way to better understand human nature in pedagogical contexts.[15] Stanhope Smith's system of moral education drew heavily from the Scottish school of Common Sense in teaching values of civic virtue and religious and cultural tolerance, and cultivating the intellectual, active, and moral powers of the mind toward perfection. His lectures of moral philosophy, which differed in content and scope from Witherspoon's earlier moral thought, informed the ideas and values of this program by investigating

> the constitution and laws of mind, especially as it is endued with the power of voluntary action, and is susceptible of the sentiments of duty and obligation. Its chief end is to ascertain the principles, and the rule of duty, and to regulate conduct, both in our individual capacities, and in our social relations, whether domestic or civil.[16]

---

the following year in Britain and America. Smith also had deep family connections to Princeton, which influenced the early reception of his system of moral education. Smith's father Robert and his younger brother John served on Princeton's Board of Trustees. His father was a close friend of Samuel Davies (college president 1759–61), Samuel Finley (college president 1761–6) baptized Stanhope Smith, his maternal uncle Samuel Blair Jr was the interim college president (1766–8), and John Witherspoon (college president 1768–94) became his father in-law in 1775.

13 See May, *Enlightenment in America*, 307–62. This approach contributes to the new historiography described in John Dixon, "Henry F. May and the Revival of the American Enlightenment: Problems and Possibilities for Intellectual and Social History," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 71/2 (2014), 255–80.

14 Gordon Graham, "The Ambition of Scottish philosophy," *The Monist*, 90/2 (2007), 154–69, at 154.

15 James McCosh, *The Scottish Philosophy: Biographical, Expository, Critical, from Hutcheson to Hamilton* (New York, 1875), 2.

16 Samuel Stanhope Smith, *The Lectures, Corrected and Improved, which have been delivered for a series of years, in the College of New Jersey; on the subjects of Moral and Political Philosophy*, 2 vols. (Trenton, 1812), 1: 12–13.

Smith's moral instruction, therefore, was designed to develop virtuous habits of conduct as part of the wider "Didactic Enlightenment." While different versions of this intellectual movement also existed at Yale during the presidency of Timothy Dwight from 1795 to 1817; at Dickinson College during the presidency of Charles Nisbet from 1786 to 1804 and influence of Benjamin Rush from 1794 to 1813; and at Harvard among early nineteenth-century Boston Unitarians, Smith was unique in fostering "Didactic Enlightenment" through his system of moral education as Princeton's reformed institutional purpose.[17] The 1796 amendment to the College Charter, which closely followed his election as president, reflected this aim to "patronize and promote the interest of science and literature, as the surest basis of their [students] liberty, property, and prosperity."[18]

Realizing Smith's ambition for Princeton, however, proved difficult for a variety of reasons. Revolutionary changes in perceptions of public rank, the democratization of political participation, and the rise of mercantile capitalism changed what young men expected from a university education.[19] Following the American Revolution, Smith wrote that "our freedom certainly takes away the distinctions of rank that are so visible in Europe; and of consequence takes away, in the same proportion, those submissive forms of politeness that exist here."[20] The jurist and statesman William Paterson (Princeton class of 1766) noted that

> something of the formal, old-time collegiate manners can be learned from the fact that Samuel Stanhope Smith, when president, refused to speak to his own nephew for a period of six months, owing to the unfortunate young man's breach of etiquette in calling him "Doctor," instead of "Doctor Smith".[21]

For Smith, students' defiance of authority and treatment of education as "nothing more than a subordinate way to getting money" represented decay in Princeton's

---

17 See May, *Enlightenment in America*, 350–57; Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy* (New York, 2005), 269.

18 Princeton 1796 Charter amendments, Seeley Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University AC120. Hereafter Mudd Manuscript Library will be referred to as PUA. For a discussion of Smith's curriculum reforms see Charles Bradford Bow, "Reforming Witherspoon's Legacy at Princeton: John Witherspoon, Samuel Stanhope Smith and James McCosh on Didactic Enlightenment, 1768–1888," *History of European Ideas*, 39/5 (2013), 650–69.

19 See J. R. Pole, "Jeffersonian Democracy and the Federalist Dilemma in New Jersey, 1798–1812," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, 74 (1956), 260–92; Paul Gilje, "The Rise of Capitalism in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 16/2 (1996), 159–181.

20 Smith to Charles Nisbet, 4 Feb. 1785, quoted in Michael Kraus, "Charles Nisbet and Samuel Stanhope Smith: Two Eighteenth Century Educators," *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 6 (1944), 17–36, at 26.

21 William Paterson quoted in W. Jay Mills, ed., *Glimpses of Colonial Society and the Life at Princeton College, 1766–1773* (Philadelphia, 1903), 16–17.

enlightened purpose.[22] Divisive political, intellectual, and religious circumstances throughout the late 1790s introduced urgency to Smith's system of moral education as a measure against vicious behavior.

The American perception of "Jacobinism" significantly affected Smith's presidency and his emphasis on the wider importance of moral education.[23] Princeton's local tavern was a haven for students to discuss politics in the company of those who supported French Jacobins. During the French "Reign of Terror," Smith remarked that in 1794 a Princeton student (Mr Perry) "does not seem very well pleased with any person who does not advocate with zeal all the measures of the French Republic." Smith added that Perry absconded from campus and has "taken his board in a tavern where some French gentlemen [resided] whose political sentiments accord with his."[24] This example was connected with the widespread American distribution of Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* (1791) and then *The Age of Reason* (1794), which popularized "Jacobin" principles of ridiculing the institution of religion and defying established governing systems.[25] The popularity of these works among young men alarmed Princeton trustees and Smith that their students would adopt "French impiety" and "Jacobinism." The former president of Congress and influential Princeton trustee Elias Boudinot regarded Paine's argument as particularly dangerous, because of his highly regarded reputation in America as the author of *Common Sense* (1776).[26] According to Boudinot, "many young and uninformed

---

22 Smith to Benjamin Rush, 27 Feb. 1792, Princeton University Library Special Collections MS14429. Hereafter Princeton University Library Special Collections will be referred to as PUL.

23 Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788–1800* (Oxford, 1993), 309–10.

24 Smith to Wachmuth, 2 June 1794, PUL MS12364.

25 Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791) illustrated that French revolutionary principles drew from America's revolutionary example. See Joyce Appleby, "America as a Model for the Radical French Reformers of 1789," *William & Mary Quarterly*, 28/2 (1971), 267–86; Edward Larkin, *Thomas Paine and the Literature of Revolution* (Cambridge, 2005), 78. On the French appeal to the American Revolution see Elise Marienstras and Naomi Wulf, "French Translations and the Reception of the Declaration of Independence," *Journal of American History*, 85/4 (1999), 1299–1324, at 1299. After receiving accounts of the 1793–4 "Reign of Terror," Americans, however, questioned whether the French Revolution resembled the ideals of American republicanism. See May, *The Enlightenment in America*, 223–5.

26 See Robert Ferguson, "The Commonalities of *Common Sense*," *William & Mary Quarterly*, 57/3 (2000), 465–6; T. H. Dickinson, "Thomas Paine and His American Critics," *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 27 (2011), 174–85.

people ... had with avidity engaged in reading it [*Age of Reason*]."[27] Smith and other Princeton trustees agreed with Boudinot that "Jacobinism" threatened the welfare of Princeton and the republic.

In the decades surrounding the turn of the century, it was widely believed that American "Jacobins" such as Perry plotted against American civil society. Political rhetoric at this time differentiated federalist and republican systems of government from the objectives of so-called "Jacobins" who were known by some as "Democrats."[28] Smith appealed to the well-known Federalist sympathizer Noah Webster's 1806 definition of "Jacobins" as members of "a private club to overturn or manage government, one who opposes government in a secret or unlawful manner or from an unreasonable spirit of discontent."[29] The Federalist and Congregationalist minister Jedidiah Morse furthered these widely shared suspicions by describing a Bavarian Illuminati plot against America from "Jacobin Clubs initiated by Genet" in a series of sermons between 1798 and 1799.[30] Although Morse offered little more than conjecture of this "Jacobin" conspiracy, Smith supported his plea "to withstand the torrent of infidelity & immorality that is overspreading our country."[31] In association with these Federalist beliefs, religious reformers at Princeton believed that these alleged "Jacobin" conspirators used philosophical skepticism and "ambient infidelity" to justify their radical politics and atheist agenda.[32] Princeton trustee Ashbel Green, for example, preached that Jacobins "talked, indeed, of morality, but they openly professed to abhor religion."[33] Smith agreed that "Jacobins" promoted irreligion, but suggested this

---

27 Elias Boudinot, *The Age of Revelation: Or, The Age of Reason Shewn to be an Age of Infidelity* (Philadelphia, 1801), 26.

28 See Peter Porcupine (aka William Cobbett), *History of the American Jacobins, Commonly Denominated Democrats* (Philadelphia, 1796), 18; Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 220.

29 Noah Webster, *Compendious Dictionary of the English Language* (New York, 1806), 179.

30 Jedidiah Morse, *Thanksgiving Sermon in 1798*, 67, quoted in Vermon Stauffer, *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati* (New York, 1918), 232. As shown in a series of letters between Thomas Jefferson, then Secretary of State (1789–1797), and Edmund Charles Genet (also known as Citizen Genet), minister of the French Republic, the French Republic pursued repayment of America's debt in both funds and military support. During this diplomatic mission in America between 1793 and 1794, Genet actively recruited Americans to support "Jacobinism." Washington remarked to Congress that Genet and, in turn, France attempted to "involve us in war abroad, and discord and anarchy at home." George Washington, "A message of the President of the United States to Congress relative to France and Great-Britain: delivered December 5, 1793" (Philadelphia, 1793), 3.

31 Smith to Jedidiah Morse, 24 Feb. 1799, PUL MS12370.

32 See Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 221; Schlereth, *The Age of Infidels*, 9.

33 Ashbel Green, *The Life of Ashbel Green, V.D.M., Begun to be written by himself in his eighty-second year and continued to his eighty-fourth. Prepared for press at the author's request by Joseph H. Jones* (New York, 1849), 31.

should be challenged from the pulpit, not the classroom. His system of moral education, however, responded to the belief that "Jacobinism" disseminated "false philosophy [that led] the mind to universal scepticism" through exciting unrestrained "passions" toward vicious and radical activities.[34] For Smith, this belief was confirmed when "Jacobinism" arrived at Princeton.

During the winter of 1800, three seniors protested against the required assembly for morning prayer. Students justified this protest by complaining that the college chapel was too cold during the winter months and, as such, they should not be required to endure this discomfort. While this objection appeared reasonable enough, their style of unyielding protest, the fact they were seen as opposing public worship, and their reactions to the punishment that followed all proved significant. In response to the suspension of these students, there were disturbances in Nassau Hall; students also refused to follow the college's published laws. Of the three suspended seniors, one returned early only to spur further insurrection. Agden Edwards, a senior from Connecticut, "returned and violently assaulted one of the tutors."[35] The use of violence, coupled with the earlier protest, led Smith to label Edwards and his associates "Jacobins." While the nature of Edwards's actions resulted in his immediate expulsion, his loyal confidants remained at Princeton. In an 1802 letter to a trustee, Jonathan Baynard, Smith wrote,

> You have heard me speak of a young man who about two years ago, attempted to excite an insurrection on jacobistic and anti-religious principles. Since his expulsion, a small sect has still been left in the College, which has lately obtained some augmentation of numbers from the progress of passions very natural to the human heart, and from the encouragement given such opinions by the state of public morals. I am told that hostility to religion and moral order has been among their chief characteristics, but covered with great secrecy till very lately.[36]

Like many students who visited and attended different colleges at this time, Edwards's expulsion from Princeton did not end his radical activities as a student. In 1802, he was part of a student rebellion at the College of William and Mary. According to Smith, "the same young man [Edwards] of whom I have spoken is now finishing his law studies at the College of William and Mary and has lately been principally concerned in an insurrection against the authority of that institution."[37] Similar student protests for greater liberties or in opposition to governing rules also appeared at Harvard, Dickinson, Brown, North Carolina,

34 Smith, *Lectures*, 1: 138.

35 Board of Trustees Minutes and Records, Vol. Two, 9 April 1800, PUA, AC120, 39. Hereafter the Trustees Minutes will be referred to as TM.

36 Smith to Jonathan Baynard, 10 March 1802, PUL MS2164.

37 Ibid.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244315000128 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and Union College between 1798 and 1802.[38] These examples of alleged "Jacobin" designs to challenge university governments supported the Federalist narrative that "Jacobins" conspired against the authority of all civil governing systems through acts of radical rebellion and vicious behavior.[39]

As Smith's "Didactic Enlightenment" attracted young men from across the republic, a significant number of these incoming and continuing students supported republican political ideology, which was largely informed by the thought of Thomas Jefferson, who was elected president of the United States in 1801.[40] Federalists, including Smith, associated this populist republican ideology with "Jacobinism" and "French impiety." This belief went beyond the political maneuvering of securing elections.[41] In an 1802 letter to Jonathan Dayton, Smith wrote,

> I am afraid the present [Jefferson] administration is preparing the way to deliver us over from one hot headed & furious faction to another, till we are torn asunder, or, like France, sink under the power of one despot who will come to save us from the more dreadful will of a million. Good men will be obliged to retire from public affairs and blockheads & villains will soon hold the rein & scourge over us. May the *patricians* yet be able to save the republic when the *tribunes* shall have urged it to the brink of ruin![42]

Countering Jefferson's emphasis on the need to safeguard the "equality of rights,"[43] Smith argued that moderation and cultivating the mind were the best methods of realizing natural liberties in civil society. The alleged existence of "Jacobin" conspiracies to overthrow Princeton's government and the wider republic furthered Smith's commitment to restraining "passions" as the cause of radicalism. He taught that "passions" could motivate virtuous action, but they were also "prone to excess, and by incautious indulgence, are so apt to acquire a dangerous dominion over the heart."[44] Consequently, he suggested "that one of the most important purposes of a wise and virtuous education is to mark out the legitimate objects of their pursuit, and to impose upon them prudent

38 Novak, *Rights of Youth*, 16–19.

39 Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism in the Early Republic* (Richmond, VA, 2011), 98.

40 See John Howe, "Republican Thought and the Political Violence of the 1790s," *American Quarterly*, 19 (1967), 147–65.

41 See Peter Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Richmond, VA, 2000), 87–98.

42 Smith to Jonathan Dayton, 22 Dec. 1802, PUL C0028, original emphasis.

43 Democratic–Republican values at this time were best expressed in Thomas Jefferson's Second Presidential Inaugural Address on 4 March 1805, reprinted in *Jefferson: Political Writings*, ed. Joyce Appleby and Terence Ball (Cambridge, 1999), 530–34, at 532.

44 Smith, *Lectures*, 1: 260.

restraints."[45] Princeton, among other American colleges, enforced stricter rules to deter vicious behavior and, at times, enlisted parental intervention to do so.[46] Yet in contrast to other institutional responses to "Jacobinism," Smith appealed to his lectures on moral philosophy as a way to prepare young men to govern their own "passions" independently.

The understanding and exercise of virtue in public life occupied a central place in Smith's moral thought. Of the faculties that supported this aim, the "moral faculty" included the branches of moral duty and the active powers to judge and perfect virtuous conduct. Smith taught that the "moral faculty" was the source of conceptions of duty and obligation, notions of right and wrong, and judgments of merit and demerit. He added that "besides the conformity of an action to a rule or prescription of law, *right* implies its intrinsic and essential rectitude, as seen and approved by the heart, or moral faculty, when no idea of the control, or authority of law is taken into view at the time."[47] As a Common Sense philosopher, he treated this faculty as universal amongst humankind, but he suggested that the cultural criterion for notions of "right and wrong" was not universal. The exercise of the "moral faculty" enabled agents to be virtuous through fulfilling universal "moral laws" and "rules of duty" implanted by God independent of secular and religious laws. For Smith, the judgment of these instinctive obligations or "moral laws" was improved through "experience and reflection, and especially by profoundly observing the course of human conduct, and tracing its causes, motives, disguises, and consequences."[48] Central objects of the "moral faculty" were the judgment and exercise of fortitude, patience, temperance, and the moderation of "passions" as important parts of civil society. While these qualities of the "moral faculty" closely resembled those taught by Thomas Reid and John Witherspoon, Smith expanded upon its application in response to "Jacobins" and his enlightened ambition for Princeton.[49]

In examining the "moral faculty," Smith placed more importance on the different ways in which agents under different circumstances exercised and judged morals than Witherspoon and Reid had previously attempted. Smith's

45 Ibid.

46 Circular letter to parents, 3 Sept. 1799, PUL MS9976. Novak, *Rights of Youth*, 21.

47 Smith, *Lectures*, 1: 301.

48 Ibid., 302

49 According to Reid, "the testimony of our moral faculty, like that of the external sense, is the testimony of nature, and we have the same reason to rely upon it." Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* (Edinburgh, 1788), 238. Witherspoon taught that "the moral sense implies also a sense of obligation, that such and such things are right and others wrong; that we are bound in duty to do the one, and that our conduct is hateful, blamable, and deserving of punishment, if we do the contrary." John Witherspoon, *Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, ed. Ashbel Green (Philadelphia, 1822), 21.

tolerance for differing notions of "right and wrong" opposed "prejudices [that] have been assiduously fostered, and passions artfully inflamed."[50] Smith believed that the moderate value of cultural tolerance would resonate with the new values among Princeton students. In spite of the differences, Smith taught that everyone possessed the same unrefined morals at birth that could be cultivated to "disentangle" prejudices and vicious behavior through refining the "moral faculty." Since the "moral faculty" required exercise for its perfection, differing cultural values conditioned this faculty in different ways. At the same time, everyone shared the influence of universal "moral laws" from the dispositions of virtuous and reflective agents. According to Smith, "the perception which accompanies these dictates of the moral faculty is that of an intrinsic, essential, and unchangeable rectitude, and excellence in virtue, and of guilt and depravity of vice."[51] These "moral laws" affected how virtuous and enlightened men judged the intension of a particular act as evidence of the agent's disposition.[52] In cases where actions did not uniformly coincide with perceptions of "right and wrong," the faculty of reason corrected false judgments. Smith furthered this concept of a moral quasi-relativism by contrasting how some national cultures believe certain religious beliefs to be pious whilst others interpret them as promoting "meanness and grovelling hypocrisy." He illustrated this point further in suggesting that

> [t]he vivacity and excessive complaisance of France, is apt to impress an Englishman with an opinion of frivolity of the nation, which is retaliated by French imputing to the English a savage surliness of character. Nothing can eradicate from the mind of [the] Turk a persuasion of the licentiousness of the manners of Christians, on account of the free intercourse permitted among them between sexes; because in the east, where women are, in a great measure, secluded from public view, such liberties are never seen to take place except among the most profligate part of society; and they are ignorant of the influence of those civil, social, and religious ideas which combine to impress a totally different character on European manners.[53]

This concept drew from the belief that diverse cultures represented the moral norms associated with their particular stage of society (also known as "stadial history," another concept drawn from contemporary Scottish thinkers). Thus as a society "progressed" from a rude to a more advanced civil stage their moral norms would also change. Smith's tolerance did not imply that he agreed with beliefs contrary to Christian principles or American "polite" manners that drew heavily from British standards. Yet he believed that "we may frequently discern unexpected virtues in the midst of unfavorable appearances; and, often, vice

50 Smith, *Lectures*, 1: 304.
51 Ibid., 310.
52 Ibid., 314.
53 Ibid., 314–15.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244315000128 Published online by Cambridge University Press

is found to shelter itself under the imposing aspect of virtue."[54] Cultures that promoted different moral values, therefore, should not prejudice judgments of its citizenry as immoral. Thus he taught that "the justice, or benevolence of an act ought to be judged of differently, according to the mutual dependence of men, and their natural expectations from one another, arising out of their social condition, and the habits of their education."[55] If a particular act adheres to the moral norms of its culture, Smith believed it did not violate an intrinsic "moral law" if the agent's intensions were moral. He argued that "we err in measuring the acts of other men, or the regulations of other nations, by the customs of our own country."[56] Rather than succumbing to political, religious, and cultural prejudices, Smith taught that from cultivating the "rules of duty" attached to this instinctive faculty "we find a solution of that unreasonable bigotry."[57] In doing so, he did not imply that "Jacobinism" represented American culture, nor should his students be tolerant of vicious behavior as detrimental to civil society. The "rules of duty" offered a way in which to judge and moderate "Jacobin" activities.

The "moral faculty" directed humankind towards their instinctive obligations to God, others, and themselves, according to Smith. While his interpretation of these obligations largely coincided with Reid's philosophy,[58] the emergence of "Jacobins" at Princeton explains why he committed more attention and space in both his lectures and sermons to developing these ideas. Beyond examining man's various duties to God at length in sermons at Princeton, Smith taught that everyone had internal and external obligations to a supreme being. Like Reid, Smith taught that the internal duties entailed "love, reverence, and resignation" to God's authority, will, and design. In addition to these, Smith believed that an outward expression of these sentiments was equally important for a Christian. By worshipping God in public, agents demonstrated "adoration, thanksgiving, confession, and prayer," which he considered to be universal amongst all Christian sects. He believed that "all rites deserve to be regarded with respect which custom has sanctified among any people, and has so associated with their religious ideas as to be to them the most serious and affecting expression of their devotional exercises."[59] This too demarcated Smith's promotion of religious tolerance and the diffusion of natural religion at Princeton. For Smith, fulfilling these duties "embrace[d] the whole compass of piety and virtue; because, as they constitute the moral law of the universe prescribed by God, conformity to their dictates is

54 Ibid., 318.
55 Ibid., 322.
56 Ibid., 323.
57 Ibid., 315.
58 See Knud Haakonssen, ed., *Thomas Reid on Practical Ethics* (Edinburgh, 2007).
59 Smith, *Lectures*, 2: 106.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244315000128 Published online by Cambridge University Press

justly regarded as obedience to him."[60] In this view, Smith's system promoted a union of internal (private) and external (public) demonstrations of religious devotion, which exemplified the function of Smith's "rational Christianity" at Princeton.

Although lectures on the "rules of duty" stressed temperance and moderation, preventing the spread of "Jacobinism" was difficult for Smith. During the 1801 college recess for Christmas, five students, who were believed to harbor "Jacobin" values, were reported as drunk and responsible for disruptive conduct in the town of Princeton.[61] All five were suspended when classes resumed after the recess.[62] Following an unsuccessful petition to overturn these suspensions, six students submitted a second petition in which they explicitly denied any affiliation with "Jacobinism." A petition of the students clarified:

> You apprehend, gentlemen, unhappy consequences from the establishment of a Jacobinical precedent. With you we detest Jacobinism. With you we love subordination. You are convinced that it is indispensably necessary to our common interests and comfort. But gentlemen, respectful remonstrance is not the weapon of Jacobinism—Jacobinism does not delight in such decorum.[63]

After dismissing the second petition, an unspecified number of students rioted and vowed not to fulfil their college requirements until the suspended students were readmitted. In revealing these demands, the alleged "Jacobins" delivered a third petition demanding "mildness in administrating the Laws," and, if fulfilled, *they* would reestablish order to the college.[64] On 29 January 1802, Thomas Edwards, a Princeton alumnus, wrote,

> I cannot say I was much surprised in being informed by it, of the rebellion at College. The disposition to disorder was very evident, before our departure and I am very happy to hear it has not broken out in a more violent manner. If the faculty had not in some measure yielded to them much greater lengths would have been taken.[65]

Two months after securing their demands, a faction of alleged "Jacobins" were suspected of orchestrating the most destructive act in Princeton's history.

On 6 March 1802, a fire rapidly consumed the main college edifice, Nassau Hall, at one o'clock in the afternoon whilst most students ate in the dining hall. Several students, including senior George Strawbridge, rushed to extinguish the flames. Observing these efforts fail beside Strawbridge, Smith declared, "This is

---

60 Ibid., 103.
61 TM, 31 Dec. 1801, 58.
62 TM, 1 Jan. 1802, 59.
63 TM, 2 Jan. 1802, 60.
64 Ibid.
65 Edwards to Biddle, 29 Jan. 1802, PUL C1289.

the progress of vice and irreligion," before exiting the room.[66] The fire claimed over three thousand books in the library, destroyed the majority of the newly acquired scientific apparatus, and reduced Nassau to a burnt frame.[67] According to Smith, the ruin of Princeton's main building "may only be construed into a triumph of [Jacobin] principle." He continued,

> Circumstances strongly lead to the belief that the fire was communicated by design, although no direct proof of the fact can be obtained. It is not doubted however by those who are best acquainted with the whole state of opinions here that it is one effect of those irreligious and demoralling [*sic*] principles which are tearing the bands of society asunder, and threatening in the end to overturn our country. It is thought highly probable that they have depraved the mind of some young lad connected with them or even more than one, at length, to become capable of the dreadful act of setting fire to the college without being sensible of its enormity.[68]

Afterwards, the Board of Trustees promptly commissioned committees, led by Smith, to oversee the immediate repair of Nassau and an investigative committee to determine the cause of the fire. Trustees Richard Stockton and John Beatty reported that "those who were first at the place where it made its appearance are of opinion that the edifice of the College was *intentionally set on fire*."[69] Students and servants reported smelling a strong scent of turpentine before they witnessed smoke escaping from inside the roof's trapdoor.[70] It was determined that the flames, which swiftly engulfed the roof, would not have progressed at such a pace without the use of an accelerant fuel. Despite some evidence that suggested arson, the investigation could not reveal the guilty party. Although the board did not prove that "Jacobins" had had a part in the fire, they expelled five students (William Cooper, Ushum [first name unknown], William Burhenm [*sic*], Willey Jones, and Pratt Wilson) whom the faculty believed had encouraged "immoralities, disorders and combinations which prevailed among some of the students."[71] T. J. Wertenbaker suggests that "[e]ven after mature reflection, he [Smith] still believed that the fire had been the work of a small group of students who had been infected with those Jacobinic principles."[72] Without a building for classes and a place for student accommodation, the trustees were forced to temporarily close the college.

---

66 Smith quoted in "Memoirs of George Strawbridge," PUL, in Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, *Princeton, 1746–1896* (Princeton, 1946), 126.

67 Maclean, *History of the College of New Jersey*, 2: 32.

68 Smith to Baynard, 10 March 1802, PUL MS2164.

69 TM, 7 March 1802, 62, original emphasis.

70 TM, 16 March 1802, 63.

71 TM, 19 March 1802, 69.

72 Wertenbaker, *Princeton, 1746–1896*, 127.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244315000128 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The fire weakened public confidence in Princeton's moral and civil order. Trustees countered these concerns by arguing that the emergence of "Jacobins" was not exclusive to Princeton, and that the Princeton "Jacobins," who had been expelled, were part of wider youthful uprisings at Brown, Harvard, Williams, South Carolina College, William and Mary, and North Carolina between 1798 and 1802.[73] Sharing this belief, Smith wrote that these "are some signs of the days which are coming upon us ... this College seems to be the last bulwark of old principles ... but what my good friend ... will the new principles at last overturn?"[74] And yet Smith saw periods of conflict as an opportunity for improvement.[75] With Princeton's security and reputation in question, Smith secured the board's support to "correct the ill consequences" of overindulged and unrestrained "passions" through reemphasizing his "rules of duty" and the "advancement of every science."[76] Smith furthered this objective in addressing students from the pulpit. In a sermon on the "Progress of Vice" that followed the 1802 fire, he remarked,

> Of the social connexions of youth, none are more dangerous to the virtue of youth than those which are formed with idle and dissolute companions & no temptations are so fatal to their innocence as those which assail them in society.[77]

This belief mirrored his discussion of the "imitative faculty" in lectures on the "rules of duty." Smith taught that the "imitative faculty" proved useful "in the formation of manners, and moral habits [as] one of the most powerful principles in human nature," but he cautioned young men to consider carefully whom they imitate. He suggested that impressionable young men should draw from the example of experienced and virtuous men instead of looking to their peers, who had "uncorrected passions." He warned that this faculty "is, indeed, liable to pernicious abuse, when young men yield to the impulses of their irregular appetites."[78] By describing the destruction of Nassau Hall as the result of unrestrained "passions" and vicious impulses excited by "Jacobin" principles, Smith justified the timely purpose of his moral program.

---

73 Circular letter to parents and trustees, TM, 19 March 1802, 69–71; Novak, *Rights of Youth*, 16–21.

74 Smith to Baynard, 10 March 1802, PUL MS2164.

75 Smith to Rush, 27 Feb. 1792, PUL MS14429.

76 Circular in TM, 19 March 1802, 69–71; Smith to David Ramsey, 29 Sept. 1805, PUL MS239.

77 Samuel Stanhope Smith, "The Progress of Vice," PUL MS8035.

78 Smith, *Lectures*, 1: 208–9.

II

From Nassau's ashes and burnt remains, Princeton once again became known as an institution of moral improvement and "liberal science." This attraction greatly enlarged the number of incoming students. On 27 September 1804, Smith announced "the perfect restoration of the College Edifice lately destroyed by fire."[79] But an increasing number of trustees did not believe Princeton's restoration was complete. While Smith and trustees identified vice and irreligion as products of "Jacobin" principles, they began to draw firmer distinctions between their resolutions. At odds with Smith's "Didactic Enlightenment," Princeton trustees campaigned to combat irreligion by renewing Princeton's emphasis on New Light religious revivalism, which coincided with the early interests of the "Second Great Awakening." This loosely defined religious movement existed on many fronts (urban and frontier revivals) involving different Christian denominational interests in a concerted effort to expand Christian conversion between *c.*1790 and 1840.[80] Apart from later fractures in national Protestantism, such as Presbyterians pitted against Baptists and Methodists over acceptable theological training of ministers, religious reformers in the first decades of the nineteenth century at Yale and Princeton responded to the significant decline in graduating students entering the ministry and the threat of "Jacobinism" within an increasingly secular American society.[81]

At the turn of the century, trustee Ashbel Green became convinced that under Smith's direction the college neglected Christian religious principles. Green was not alone in his criticism of Smith's religious orthodoxy. A number of newspapers in the middle Atlantic circulated the story that Smith's younger brother, John, had supposedly said, "Brother Sam, you don't preach Jesus Christ and him crucified, but Sam Smith and him dignified."[82] Maclean Jr later claimed that this criticism of Smith's use of "polite" rhetoric and metaphysics in his sermons probably came from "a better judge of strong drink than of sound doctrine."[83] Yet Green's personality and religious convictions would not permit a passive disapproval of Smith's "Didactic Enlightenment." According to William Plumer, "Dr. Green has been, since my first knowledge of him, a firm, fearless, and successful opposer of certain new doctrines and

79 TM, 27 Sept. 1804, 148.

80 Mark Noll, *America's God* (Oxford, 2002), 567; Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 221.

81 Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, 1989), 14; Novak, *Rights of Youth*, 58–78; Schlereth, *Age of Infidels*, 45–109.

82 Maclean, *History of the College of New Jersey*, 2: 133.

83 Ibid.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244315000128 Published online by Cambridge University Press

measures which have obtained in the American churches."[84] With little hope of removing Smith's moral philosophy from the curriculum, Green planted the seed of reviving Princeton's Christian religious principles that later grew into a campaign for education reform. In January 1800, Green introduced the concept of educating "men for the ministry in an institution by themselves" to fellow middle Atlantic revivalists.[85] This whispered opposition against Smith's program of moral education became bolder as "Jacobin" radicalism increased in severity.

Weeks after the 1802 fire the board requested that Green draft an address to the public and the General Assembly regarding Princeton's commitment to diffusing Christian principles. Since Green served as the elected chairman of the Standing Committee of the General Assembly from 1802 to 1812, it was believed he could convince the Church to support Nassau's repair.[86] In addition to achieving this task, Green illustrated what he believed Princeton should be, rather than supporting its objectives under Smith's system of moral education. In doing so, Green suggested that Princeton's purpose was "to make this institution an asylum for pious youth."[87] This objective of developing "pious youth" was fundamentally different from Smith's stated purpose of "forming the intellectual and moral habits of youth, on whom the future welfare of their country depends."[88] These contrasting opinions of Princeton's purpose and how best to combat "Jacobinism" were ripe for tension.

While Smith traveled across middle and southern states to secure funds for the repair of Nassau, Green temporarily fulfilled the duties of president in his absence.[89] Before Smith's departure the board charged Green, Smith, and Elias Boudinot with the task of reviewing the college laws and suggesting changes that would prevent future student disruptions.[90] Green did not wait for Smith's return to submit his recommendations. On 3 April 1803, the board agreed that

> the laws of the College requiring that certain religious exercises be performed by the students on the Sabbath, Dr. Green, as President, recommended the study of Paley's "Evidences of the Christian Religion" as an exercise for the Senior class, Campbell on

84 William Plumer to Joseph Jones, Sept. 1848, quoted in *Life of Ashbel Green*, 503.
85 Green to Griffin, 13 Jan. 1800, quoted in Noll, *Princeton and the Republic*, 156.
86 Green, *Life of Ashbel Green*, 323.
87 Ashbel Green, "Address of the Trustees of the College of New Jersey, to the Inhabitants of the United States," 18 March 1802, quoted in Maclean, *History of the College of New Jersey*, 2: 37.
88 Smith, *Lectures*, 1: 232.
89 TM, 28 Sept. 1802, 86.
90 Ibid.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244315000128 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Miracles for the Junior, and the Catechism, connected with the reading of the Bible, as an exercise of the Sophomore and Freshman classes.[91]

Green's proposed use of Campbell and Paley, whose works were certainly associated with Enlightenment thought, did not greatly diverge from Smith's views. According to Smith, "Theology is the science of divine truth ... divided into two great branches; natural, and revealed."[92] But the new requirements, at the behest of Green, which expanded the role of revealed religion, implied a reform of the curriculum, not an adjustment of the college's disciplinary rules. These activities, particularly the senior and junior mandatory assignments for the Sabbath, were clearly designed to strengthen the institution's religious character and also to increase the number of students preparing for the ministry. However, students of the science program, which Smith established in 1799, had to fulfil this new requirement too. Since Green believed that irreligion and in particular "ambient infidelity" affected the whole of the student body, the universal study of the Gospels was deemed necessary.[93]

Upon his return from the Carolinas, Smith discovered Green's amendments to his system of moral education. Yet, rather than challenge the new laws, Smith, who had proven skilled at adapting to adverse situations, used these changes to serve his moral program. The following academic year Smith furthered his moral quasi-relativism in teaching a course on the evidences of the Christian religion.[94] Smith's initial four lectures, for example, largely demonstrated how central themes of his moral philosophy, such as the "moral faculty" taught in his second lecture, offered natural evidence of "whatever can be known of God and his relations to the world, of his worship, his laws, by the exercise of our own intellectual powers."[95] His treatment of natural religion supported the auxiliary study of revealed religion or "revealed theology" as divinely inspired knowledge that God imparted to the world through holy men. No evidence has surfaced that suggests that Smith was aware of Green's intentions to undermine his system of moral education at this time. He appeared to approve of Green's temperament as conducive to governing young men. On Green's personality, Plumer remarked that he "was earnest, but he was fair."[96] In contrast, Smith was not an effective

91 TM, 30 Nov. 1802, 119.

92 Samuel Stanhope Smith, "Lectures on the Evidences of the Christian Religion," lectures taken by an unknown student, PUA AC052, Lecture 1, 1.

93 Schlereth, *The Age of Infidels*, 9.

94 See Miles Bradbury, "British Apologetics in Evangelical Garb: Samuel Stanhope Smith's *Lectures on the Evidences of the Christian Religion*," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 5 (1985), 177–95.

95 Smith, Lectures on the Evidences of the Christian Religion, Lectures 1–4, 2.

96 Plumer to Jones, Sept. 1848, in Green, *Life of Ashbel Green*, 503.

disciplinarian, which was in part by design. For instance, exercising the "rules of duty" required opportunities to do so without interference. This might explain why Smith removed himself from personally disciplining students to the extent that Green showed as acting president in 1802.

Smith's continued struggle with tuberculosis, which he contracted in 1773, coupled with the likely increase of students after repairing the college, persuaded him to recruit Green as vice president. In a 23 March 1803 letter to Green, Smith wrote, "I wish you could consult to transfer yourself to the College as theological professor and vice president [as duties] too apprehensive to my declining strength."[97] In this request, Smith appealed to Green's known interest in improving Princeton's theological studies. He certainly attempted to entice Green too by suggesting that "the theological school by proper exertions might be in a short time considerably increased [and] some important alterations are absolutely necessary which will require time to arrange."[98] Smith's earlier experience as John Witherspoon's vice president between 1786 and 1794, when he assumed many of his college responsibilities, particularly during his final years, probably influenced Smith's request of Green's assistance. But Smith's and Green's different perspectives of moral education and, in turn, disagreement over how best to address "Jacobinism" prevented such an arrangement. Green did not directly decline Smith's offer, but he did not accept it either. Through inquiries among Green's associates Smith was informed that Green thought "it improper to leave [his] church in its present state."[99] Green's devotion to his congregation did not prevent his earlier service just months prior to Smith's offer as Princeton's temporary president. Furthermore, Green's decision not to accept an opportunity to improve Princeton's preparation of men for the ministry as the professor of theology and vice president appeared peculiar considering the evidence that he actively promoted its reform. After Smith informed the board of Green's decision, they elected Henry Kollock as the professor of theology on 8 December 1803.[100] This election occurred during a special meeting of the trustees who had gathered the required quorum of thirteen board members to make this appointment. For those on the board with deeper commitments to religion, particularly Green and the jurist Elias Boudinot, this appointment spoke volumes "that the Trustees think the study of Divinity [is] a subject of small Importance."[101]

97 Smith to Green, 24 March 1803, PUL MS12414.

98 Ibid.

99 Smith to Green, 26 Nov. 1803, PUL MS2166.

100 TM, 8 Dec. 1803, 117.

101 Boudinot to Elisha Boudinot, 27 Dec. 1803, quoted in Noll, *Princeton and the Republic*, 178.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244315000128 Published online by Cambridge University Press

As Green advanced his campaign to reform Princeton into a theological seminary, reasons why Green did not accept the professorship and vice presidency were evident: he opposed Smith's system of moral education. He did not, however, openly express his objection to Smith's moral philosophy.[102] Instead, he circulated reasons why other people questioned Smith's treatment of the "rules of duty" and, in particular, his moral quasi-relativism. Green's activities eventually caught Smith's attention in 1804. But when Smith questioned Green regarding his part in spreading these rumors, Green defensively claimed that such an accusation was a "disadvantage of my character."[103] Smith's suspicions of Green would later prove well founded.

After learning from a "respectable clergyman in Virginia," William Hill, that Smith's lectures of moral philosophy allegedly endorsed polygamy, Green wrote to Princeton tutor John Bradford, "if the Dr and I were on as good terms as we once were, I would write to him at once on the subject, but from [the] whole have been informed, he would consider my doing this as an insidious attempt to injure him."[104] Green requested from Bradford "in perfect confidence" a copy of Smith's lecture notes so he could determine if there was any merit in this complaint. After securing Smith's lecture notes from Bradford, Green discovered that Smith did in fact discuss polygamy.[105] In his nineteenth lecture of his course on moral philosophy, Smith examined the instinctive duties of marriage and its role in society.[106] For Smith, the obligations of marriage were communicated through the "rules of duty." Yet his tolerance for different cultural and religious beliefs led him to question if polygamy was naturally immoral, or was considered immoral only because of Western cultural and religious norms. Smith taught,

> Marriage, according to the precepts of religion and the civil institutions of the Christian world, can take place only between one man, and one woman. But in consequence of the laws of Israel upon this subject, and the customs of patriarchal antiquity, it has become a question among Christian moralists, whether polygamy be contrary to the prescription of the law of nature, or only to the positive institutions of religion and the state?[107]

He considered that the accepted practices of polygamy within Turkey, Persia, and Arabia did not lead citizens of those nations toward promiscuous or immoral

[102] Green wrote to Smith of Mr Morris's complaints against his moral philosophy on 13 May 1804. The contents of this missing letter were described in Green, Diary, 13 May 1804, PUL C0257, Box Two.

[103] Ibid., 14 June 1804.

[104] Hill to Green, 20 Jan. 1804, PUL C0257; Green to John Bradford, Jan. 1804, PUL MS2740.

[105] Bradford to Green, 4 Feb. 1804, PUL MS2434. See Douglas Sloan, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal* (New York, 1971), 164–6.

[106] Smith, *Lectures*, 2: 117–41.

[107] Ibid., 119–20.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244315000128 Published online by Cambridge University Press

conduct. Smith, in turn, distinguished between polygamy and the taking of mistresses or having an extramarital affair, which were considered the result of unrestrained "passions." For these reasons, Smith concluded that "I cannot suppose that there is natural immorality attached to the law of Polygamy ... and its immorality since the coming of Christ, the great moral legislator of the universe, rests chiefly upon his positive institution, supported by the law of the land."[108] While Smith believed polygamy was not wrong on the basis of natural law, he let it be known that "I have no hesitation to admit as a philosopher, and a Christian, that the law of one wife, as prescribed by our blessed Saviour, is most favorable to the interests of human nature, and of civil society."[109] Despite Smith's overt agreement with God's revealed law, Green did not share his notion of moral quasi-relativism. He argued, "there can never be anything improper in what has been taught to youth as a part of public education."[110] In Green's view, impressionable young men should not be exposed to any ideas that could jeopardize religious convictions. Green's demands to censor Smith's future lectures did not persuade the board to take any form of action.

Green's opposition to Smith's system of moral education was, from this point forward, openly known. Green later claimed that his eldest son Robert, who graduated from Princeton in 1805, "had at one time been on the brink of infidelity," as well as encountering unspecified marital problems, in the years following his graduation. He suggested that Robert's careful reading of the Gospels years after leaving Princeton corrected his troubled character. Although Green did not credit Smith as the cause of his son's problems, he implied that Robert's struggles as a husband and Christian stemmed from irreligion at Princeton. After Green's 1804 investigation of Smith's moral philosophy, he sent his younger sons Jacob and James to the University of Pennsylvania and Dickinson College, which had reopened in 1805 after a fire had destroyed its teaching facilities in 1803.[111]

Despite Green's known reservations, the unprecedented number of seniors, fifty-three young men, who graduated on 23 September 1806 testified to the measurable success of Smith's program.[112] Princeton's theological studies under the guidance of Henry Kollock, however, did not contribute any students to this graduation. Kollock struggled with expanding interest in theology and tendered his resignation after enduring four years of sparsely populated classrooms. In resigning, Kollock wrote,

---

108 Ibid., 126.

109 Ibid., 123.

110 Green to John Bradford, 1 July 1804, PUL MS2740.

111 Green, *Life of Ashbel Green*, 353.

112 TM, 23 Sept. 1806, 179.

I flattered myself when I came to Princeton that I might by instructing students of Divinity be of as much service to the Church of Christ as by officiating in any particular congregation—the number of my students however has been and probably will continue to be so small as to render my labors of little consequence.[113]

Kollock's belief that his efforts to improve Princeton's divinity studies had "little consequence" subjected Smith's "Didactic Enlightenment" to further scrutiny from religious revivalists as unruly students became more radical. The loss of a faculty member also limited Princeton's ability to intervene in student affairs. From September 1806 to March 1807, the faculty deliberated over seventeen cases of student misconduct.[114] According to the professor of natural philosophy John Maclean Sr, the students "behaved very badly all this session and ... in consequence several have been suspended." The recent memory of Princeton "Jacobins" certainly played a part in Maclean's conviction that student suspensions were "not being found sufficient" and requested to "purge the College of its unruly members."[115] Yet this measure arrived too late.

In the last week of March 1807, three students, Francis Cummins (a senior), Henry Hyde (a junior), and Francis Matteus (a sophomore) were suspended for separate transgressions of Princeton rules. On 24 March, Cummins was discovered intoxicated and belligerent towards Princeton citizens.[116] Later that week, Hyde received suspension for verbally assaulting a tutor, Alexander Monteith, after he intervened in a dorm room disturbance.[117] On the same day, Maclean encountered "insolent" behaviour from Matteus after he uncovered alcohol in his room.[118] Matteus too was suspended. The following day, on 31 March, the student body rallied in support of these suspended students. Maclean wrote,

Soon after three young men were suspended and that justly if ever were conscious to themselves they would be sent away to raise a commotion and the consequence was a petition or remonstrance couched in the most impertinent terms was presented to the faculty demanding the immediate reinstatement of these young men, with an intimation that the future conduct of the students would be regulated by what we should resolve—we were unanimously of opinion that by the fundamental laws of the institution we could not suffer the students to interfere in the government.[119]

---

113 TM, 24 Sept. 1806, 184.
114 TM, 29 Sept. 1806 to 30 March 1807, 189.
115 John Maclean to Ashbel Green, 3 April 1807, PUL MS12175.
116 TM, 25 March 1807, 187.
117 TM, 30 March 1807, 189.
118 Ibid.
119 Maclean to Green, 3 April 1807, PUL MS12175.

Contrary to the earlier petitions of 1800 and 1802, this demonstration was no minor faction of the student population; upwards of 160 students signed the petition. Although a number of rebelling students included young men of Federalist families, the petition reflected Jeffersonian notions of liberty, republicanism, and patriotism.[120] Smith associated "Jacobinism" with the students' demanded "right to resist or even overthrow" an unjust government that did not follow the interests of its citizens.[121] Since Princeton's Board of Trustees and its faculty members enforced its own rules of government, rebelling students treated the institution as a sovereign nation within which student liberties were greatly limited. Smith's moral quasi-relativism encouraged students to defend their liberties, if threatened, within the established tribunal system.[122] But he did not believe that these rights entitled students to deny the just punishment of crimes committed.[123] Believing that the students' 1807 petition obstructed justice as well as moral and civic order at Princeton, Smith stood firm in rejecting their demand for leniency.

The trustee Richard Stockton, who lived a few hundred yards from Princeton in Morven, addressed the student body at the evening prayer with the threat that anyone who defied College authority in the form of petitions or otherwise would be suspended. Following this speech, Smith requested that students individually withdraw their complaints as he called their names. Instead, he was interrupted with "shouting and yelling" as he witnessed 126 students turn their backs to him as they walked toward the chapel exit. In response, Smith declared "to the students who were going out in this riotous manner [that they] were now suspended from the College."[124] Of those who assembled, only thirty-five students remained to withdraw their names from the petition. One of those who rebelled, William Meade, later reflected,

> Myself and many others, through want of experience, were imposed on, and signed, without consideration, an offensive document, which led to the suspension of one hundred

[120] For a description of how Federalists saw Democratic–Republican values see James H. Read, "Alexander Hamilton's View of Thomas Jefferson's Ideology and Character," in Douglas Ambrose and Robert Martin, eds., *The Many Faces of Alexander Hamilton* (New York, 2006).

[121] TM, 10 April 1807, 199; on Jefferson's treatment of liberty see Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and the Ordeal of Liberty* (Boston, 1962), 302–7.

[122] Smith, *Lectures*, 1: 230.

[123] Ibid., 225.

[124] TM, 31 March 1807, 190.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244315000128 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and fifty out of two hundred students, because they did not on the spot withdraw their names, when suddenly and in a very unhappy manner required to do so.[125]

Meade and other rebelling students implied that their resistance to Smith's demand for the most part stemmed from the manner of its delivery. But republican principles of defending natural liberties, as later shown in the terms of capitulation, played a more significant part in their principled resistance.

This considerable number of rebellious students did not end their protest upon exiting the chapel. As students began breaking windows and doors, the faculty escaped Nassau in search of assistance. The Princeton militia was mustered to surround the Hall and protect the town in case the riotous student mob turned its sights outward. After occupying the college for nine days, the trustees met with a representative of the student rebellion, Abel Upshur, a sophomore from Virginia, to discuss terms of reconciliation.[126] Although the trustees praised the presentation of Upshur's passionate case for defending natural liberties, it was agreed that those who had signed the petition and participated in the rebellion would be allowed to return only if they served suspension and pledged in writing their future obedience to the college laws. Of the 126 rebellious young men, eleven refused the offer and were consequently expelled. Later that year Princeton graduated thirty-five seniors with bachelor of arts degrees; the student rebellion, however, had cost twenty-two seniors their degrees.[127]

The board that judged Smith's program in the aftermath of the "Great Rebellion" was not the same group that had encouraged Smith's "Didactic Enlightenment" after the 1802 fire. After the death or resignation of influential trustees from 1805 through 1807, newly appointed trustees joined Green's enthusiasm for religious reform at Princeton.[128] According to Mark Noll, these religious reformers dominated the board and gradually removed Smith's

[125] Meade slightly exaggerated the number of students suspended as 150. The trustee's records indicate that approximately 126 students were suspended. William Meade, *A Memoir of the Life of the Right Rev. William Meade* (Baltimore, 1867), 23.

[126] See Claude Hall, *Abel Parker Upshur: Conservative Virginian, 1790–1844* (Madison, WI, 1964), 12–14; TM 10 April 1807, 198–9.

[127] Maclean, *History of the College of New Jersey*, 2: 80. See Mark Noll, "The Response of Elias Boudinot to the Student Rebellion of 1807," *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 42 (1981), 1–22.

[128] Trustees John Bayard, Rev. William Boyd, and Rev. Alexander MacWhorter died in 1807. John Rodgers, Jonathan Smith, and Azel Roe resigned from the board due to old age. The new trustees included Samuel Bayard, Andrew Kirkpatrick, Samuel Miller, Robert Finley, James Richards, George Spafford Woodhull (Noll, *Princeton and the Republic*, 240–41). For a more detailed discussion of these newly elected trustees see Mark Noll, "The Princeton Trustees of 1807: New Men and New Directions," *Princeton University Library Chronicles*, 41 (1980), 208–30.

influence in determining college affairs.[129] William Hudnut suggests that "the trustees began meddling in the affairs of the college and enacting a long series of petty disciplinary regulations that served only to exacerbate the hostility between the governors and the governed, with President Smith caught helplessly in the middle."[130] The decision to discontinue language courses, particularly French, in the spring of 1808 marked the first reduction of Smith's curriculum.[131] Instead of expanding the faculty and course offerings as the board had approved in 1803, the trustees reasoned that the severe reduction of the student population to ninety-two students, after the 1807 "Great Rebellion," required fewer professors to teach in the college. This reduction of professors and courses in turn greatly diminished Princeton's reputation. American Enlightenment polymath Benjamin Rush, for example, claimed in 1808 that "Princeton has lately lost popularity among us."[132]

Green's considerable influence in the American Presbyterian Church and then as a leader of religious reform interests within the Board of Trustees positioned him to advance his design of establishing a theological seminary. After Kollock's resignation and further controversy about Smith's religious convictions that followed his unorthodox statements on baptism in 1808,[133] Princeton forfeited any creditable claim of offering seminary training. Meanwhile, the 1808 General Assembly furthered Green's interests by targeting Smith's system of moral education as an impediment to founding a theological seminary at Princeton. As the previous moderator in 1807, Rev. Archibald Alexander addressed the 1808 General Assembly on the perceived problems of preparing future ministers. Alexander remarked,

> Our seminaries of learning, although increasing in literature and numbers, furnish us with few preachers. The great extension of the physical sciences, and the taste and fashion of the age, have given such a shape and direction to the academical course, that I confess, it appears to me to be little adapted to introduce a youth to the study of the sacred Scriptures.[134]

Alexander targeted Princeton in this plea for revived piety and theological training in American higher education. As the first and only American college at that time to offer a degree program in the natural sciences, Smith's "Didactic

[129] Noll, *Princeton and the Republic*, 240–42.

[130] William Hudnut III, "Samuel Stanhope Smith: Enlightened Conservative," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 17/4 (1956), 540–52, at 542.

[131] Thompson to Green, 16 Sept. 1807, PUL MS2167.

[132] Benjamin Rush to John Montgomery, 5 July 1808, in *Letters of Rush*, ed. Lyman H. Butterfield, vol. 2 (Princeton, 1951), 970.

[133] See, Noll, *Princeton and the Republic*, 246–53.

[134] Archibald Alexander, *The Life Archibald Alexander*, ed. James Alexander (New York, 1854), 314–15.

Enlightenment" received heightened attention after Alexander's speech. In league with Alexander's proposed plan, Green claimed that "encouraged by this, I used all my influence in favour of the measure."[135] He delivered on this promise by persuading the Board of Trustees to discontinue Princeton's science program on 27 September 1809.[136] The discontinuation of the science program removed any doubt that the board wanted to end Smith's version of Enlightenment.

In spite of Smith's firm objections, the board authorized a committee consisting of trustees Green, Miller, Clark, Woodhull, and Richards to meet with the General Assembly and discuss plans of founding a theological school in Princeton.[137] Green had previously designed these plans as the chairman of a General Assembly committee for a new seminary in 1810 and he also began writing his lectures on a shorter catechism, which he completed in 1811.[138] These lectures would certainly have a place in a newly established theological seminary. Three days after the board approved the establishment of a theological seminary at Princeton (later known as Princeton Theological Seminary) on 12 April 1812, Smith resigned as president.[139] Green remarked that "Dr Smith offered to resign if we would comply with certain terms which we did not accept."[140] Although Green did not specify what Smith demanded, it probably involved his earlier requests for the continuation of his moral program. He became the first Princeton president to resign and not die whilst in office. Later that year, Smith wrote,

> Some of my opinions are too philosophical for several of my brethren who are so deadly orthodox, that they cannot find words in the English language to express their zeal and jealousy upon the subject and therefore oblige their candidates to swear ex animo to all their doctrines.[141]

Smith's grim depiction of Protestant ministers, which undoubtedly included Green, who opposed his moral quasi-relativism touched upon a shift in the reception of American Enlightenment intellectual culture among the religious reformers who ushered in the "Second Great Awakening."

III

The removal of Smith and his system of moral education did not complete Green's plans for Princeton. Samuel Miller, a trustee who shared Green's vision

135 Green, *Life of Ashbel Green*, 333.
136 TM, 27 Sept. 1809, 375.
137 TM, 12 April 1812, 324.
138 Green, *Life of Ashbel Green*, 317.
139 Green, Diary, 15 April 1812, PUL C0257, Box Two.
140 Ibid.
141 Smith to Rush, 27 Sept. 1812, PUL C0028.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244315000128 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of Princeton, petitioned the other trustees to elect Green as president, not vice president as had been initially suggested.[142] In the same year, Green returned the favor by nominating Samuel Miller as professor of ecclesiastical history at Princeton Theological Seminary, over which Archibald Alexander presided as senior professor.[143] During the founding of Princeton Theological Seminary, Green advanced the seminary's interests as a member of Princeton's board with "a severity to which I am unaccustomed, which I am surprised did not keep them from giving me a *unanimous* vote to the president of the college."[144] Under Green's guidance as president, the College of New Jersey at Princeton and the General Assembly's theological seminary in Princeton shared largely the same vision of diffusing Christian religious principles and preparing young men for the ministry.

The election of Green, Alexander, and Miller to influential offices within Princeton and the infant seminary demonstrated their triumph over Smith's system of moral education. Smith noted years after his resignation that "Dr. Green has entirely disused my lectures on the Evidences of Religion and on Moral Philosophy, on the plea that they are not exactly conformed to his notions on the subject of divine grace."[145] The fact that Green did not use Smith's lectures in moral philosophy on the grounds of conflicting views of the powers of God and those attributed to humankind provides further evidence of his objection to Smith's moral philosophy. Green never claimed to be a moral philosopher and in teaching the subject he used Witherspoon's lectures on moral philosophy, which he heavily edited, as his course textbook.[146] He also remained committed to promoting Christian religious principles by making his lectures on a shorter catechism required reading at Princeton.[147] Miller later remarked that "we honour him [Green] as the first head of a college in the United States who

[142] Miller's earlier contribution to American Enlightenment thought and then religious revivalism is an excellent example of the identifiable intellectual and religious transition to the Second Great Awakening at this time. Like Smith, Miller actively promoted literature and science (natural and moral philosophy) as the best way to "progress" American civil society from the 1790s through 1803. See Samuel Miller, *A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century, Containing A Sketch of the Revolutions and Improvement in Science, Arts, and Literature during that Period* (New York, 1803), 390. Later in his career as a Presbyterian minister, Miller shifted his emphasis to the belief that revealed religion was the only source to prevent "human ruin." Samuel Miller, *A Sermon Delivered at the Ordination of William Goodell, William Richards, and Artemas Bishop* (Boston, 1822), 25.

[143] Green, *Life of Ashbel Green*, 348.

[144] Green to Archibald Alexander, 30 Sept. 1812, PUL C0257, added emphasis.

[145] Quoted in Ezra Gillett, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia, 1864), 223 n.

[146] Maclean, *History of the College of New Jersey*, 2: 134.

[147] Green, *Life of Ashbel Green*, 542.

introduced the study of the Bible as a regular part of the collegiate course."[148] The shift from Smith's version of "Didactic Enlightenment" toward Green's emphasis on Christian reform exemplified Princeton's renewed religious purpose.

Where Smith enhanced the existing elements of Enlightenment, Green guided the College toward a stricter interpretation of evangelical principles than John Witherspoon had previously attempted. For example, he established Princeton's Bible Society; Bible study became mandatory as an end-of-year field of examination; he sent parents reports of student conduct (an early version of the report card); and he required juniors and seniors to study Greek and Latin, previously only studied by freshmen, in preparation for further divinity studies.[149] After Green's first academic year as president, he claimed, "the system I had been laboring to establish seemed to have gone into complete effect [which] is all I could wish."[150] And yet these religious reforms to the curriculum did not prevent youthful "Jacobin" rebellion.

Two weeks into the academic year between autumn 1813 and spring 1814, "On a sudden, without any known cause, disorder commenced; and there was a series of attempts, in every imaginable form, to promote and produce insubordination and mischief," according to Green.[151] At two in the morning on 9 January 1814, the privy roof was set on fire with gunpowder. Later that day, a hollowed log filled with two pounds of gunpowder known as a "big cracker" was ignited behind the second chapel entrance whilst students occupied the building. No one was injured in the blast, but chapel windows were destroyed, among other damages amounting to $1,000. Evidence led the faculty to charge an unnamed student with this criminal offence. Green identified seven students, whom he suspected had a part in the "big cracker" explosion, to testify at the student's criminal trial in New Brunswick. Believing the court proceedings were confidential, four students exercised their Fifth Amendment right to refuse to testify on self-incriminating evidence. Upon learning of this, Green believed they were complicit in this crime and, in turn, were expelled from the College. Green claimed, "The master spirits of mischief had by this time poisoned the minds of almost the whole of the young and thoughtless part of the College."[152] These students re-created a remarkably similar incident in their final year at Princeton. On Sunday, 19 January 1817, unruly Princeton students rebelled against religious exercises at chapel. Describing the episode in his diary, Green wrote,

148 Miller, June 1847, quoted in Green, *Life of Ashbel Green*, 611.
149 Novak, *Rights of Youth*, 157.
150 Green, *Life of Ashbel Green*, 358.
151 Ibid.
152 Ibid., 358–64.

Last night, or rather this morning at two o'clock, there was a very serious riot in the College. A great deal of glass was broken; an attempt was made to burn the out buildings, and the bell was rung incessantly. The doors of the College, those of the tutor's rooms, and those of the religious students were first barred. The Vice-President broke into the College through a window in the basement story, and with the assistance of the tutors quelled the riot.[153]

While it was unclear if Green identified divinity students or Princetonians who were considered religious as having their doors barred, this added note implied that "religious students" would have intervened in the riot.[154] Green's conviction that the adoption of Christian religious principles ultimately determined the difference between civil and uncivilized behavior was strengthened by Princeton's earlier large-scale religious revival between 1814 and 1815. On 4 April 1815 Green reported to the board,

A very large proportion of the students have attended on all the religious exercises and instructions of the College with more than ordinary seriousness ... it appeared as if the whole of our charge was pressing into the kingdom of God. This revival of religion commenced without noise, [and] such causes appear to have had a manifest agency—chiefly, the study of the Holy Scriptures.[155]

Princeton student uprisings of 1814 and 1817 certainly resembled earlier activities that Smith explicitly labelled as "Jacobin" conspiracies. Faced with similar incidents as president, Green's solution to youthful rebellion unsurprisingly involved enhancing the role of revealed religion in the curriculum, which defied Smith's earlier emphasis on religious and cultural tolerance, moderation, and, above all, restraining "passions" through the "rules of duty." Green's religious revival of Princeton demarcated a new era of learning in the early republic with similar religious movements occurring at Yale, Harvard, Brown, Middlebury, and Williams.[156] This emerging age of religious revivalism, known as the "Second Great Awakening," arrived at the cost of Smith's "Didactic Enlightenment."

153 Green, Diary, 19 Jan. 1817, PUL C0257, Box Two.

154 The board and Green expelled fourteen students who rioted. Green, Diary, 21 Jan. 1817, PUL C0257, Box Two.

155 TM, 4 April 1815, 427.

156 Novak, *Rights of Youth*, 162.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244315000128 Published online by Cambridge University Press