Conclusions about Morality and Knowledge

The last quarter of the seventeenth century has frequently been described as a period of crisis in the European conscience, when the Christian foundations of the intellectual heritage collapsed and the ideal of the cultivated man was changing.\textsuperscript{1} The Christian and Renaissance humanist ideal of an educated man in whom morals and intellectual virtues were interwoven was challenged by new social and political ideals, which undermined traditional authority. At the same time, learning was no longer required to have any strong effect upon individual virtue, since particular emphasis was laid on the practical usefulness of learning. But this general development also had its critics, especially among religious writers and Protestant scholars who were seeking some kind of justification for their own traditional orientations in the changing world. Research has recently given considerable attention, for example, to curiosity as a crucial scientific virtue, and the moralists often feel old-fashioned in their arguments. But this study has given voice to the moralising discourses in particular, describing how conservative critics and Protestant scholars identified different traditional vices in learned men and in contemporary academic life. Ethical and theological considerations maintained that true knowledge was only achieved by a righteous agent, whose character manifested the Christian virtues of humility and modesty and who avoided the vices of pride, ambition and curiosity. The various vices were used for polemical purposes, to construct an ideal type of scholar as well as to categorise fellow scholars as proud and difficult individuals. Thus, the main observation of this study is that in early modern polemical discourses the acquisition of knowledge was not a morally neutral activity.

This book has studied academic morality by examining its concepts and how they were used in texts on academic virtues and vices. I hope that the alleged vices of scholars have become clear in this literary and historical academic context in which they were discussed. Some of the vices, such as pride and curiosity, were rooted in Christian discourse, while anti-social behaviour was criticised especially by early Enlightenment rationalists who advocated the ideal of the man of the world. It is crucial to note that scholarly pride was

\textsuperscript{1} The formulation of a crisis of conscience in the background of the Enlightenment was introduced by Paul Hazard (see his \textit{La Crise de la conscience Européenne 1680–1715}, 1935) and mentioned, for instance, by Forster (1987, 203; 1993, 249).
seriously criticised by Pietists and religious writers, and this criticism seemed to gain new relevance in the late seventeenth century. In the Christian theology of the Middle Ages pride in particular was “the sin of rebellion against God,”2 where man deemed his own interests as supreme. Pride and self-love were the vices of exaggerated individualism and self-sufficiency, which had immediate epistemic consequences as these vices promoted cognitive arrogance and prevented scholars from learning new things and accurately assessing their own abilities. Early modern critics suggested that such individualism had become prominent in their own time. An historical analysis of intellectual and other scholarly vices has uncovered aspects of scholarly behaviour in response to these changing social demands and disclosed attitudes to the learned in a period when perceptions of academic dishonesty were particularly prevalent.

All the vices studied here have something in common: they manifest the scholarly desire for fame and for promoting private interests. The chapter on literary Machiavellians showed that scholars told untruths and revelled in all kinds of depravity and deceit in seeking to satisfy their selfish interests and trying to secure advantages for themselves. Lilienthal’s discussion centred on the issue of fame, and somehow all the vices of learning connected to this human desire. The old dangers of self-admiration and false security of independence familiar from religious warnings were now re-employed in the more targeted attacks against vicious and fame-seeking scholars in the university context. The temptations of the world that had been doomed by Augustine were continually rejected, but now they were also interpreted in the sense of scholarly fame and reputation, which represented the temptations of the outer world in academia. Early modern scholars were described as insatiable when it came to their own success, and the vice of incontinence carried its old negative connotations. It was underlined that such external things as the appetite for fame should not be the primary motivation behind scholarly conduct, since scholars should give up recognition altogether. Vicious scholars wrongly ranked themselves among the gods (pride) or raised themselves above their peers (the desire for fame). Some scholars acted against their colleagues (logomachy, quarrelling) or transgressed the proper boundaries of human conduct (curiosity). Isolated scholars, for their part, turned their back on the world, and this too indicated misplaced values. The vices studied here seem to have clear relevance to the expected ends of scholarly activities. Scholars’ wrongheaded preference for self-promotion over knowledge, self-knowledge and knowledge of God is a pervasive theme in the texts studied here.

2 Bloomfield (1952, 75).