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THE METAPHYSICS OF HENRY MORE

Jasper Reid

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The Metaphysics of Henry More

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1 The Place of Henry More in Seventeenth-Century Thought

In his own time, Henry More, D.D., (1614–1687)[1] was regarded as one of the most eminent philosophical authorities in England. Indeed, one could even make a case for treating him as *the* most eminent. Thomas Hobbes was certainly well known, and was acknowledged as a serious thinker: but the contents of his thoughts were widely reviled, while More charted a course that managed to remain near enough orthodox from a philosophical, theological and political point of view. John Locke was beginning to figure out his ideas, but he did not actually get round to publishing them until a couple of years after More's death. And, aside from those two, it is hard to think of another English philosopher of the period who could seriously challenge More for the title. Most of the others who were active at this time—one might perhaps think of Sir Kenelm Digby, or Walter Charleton, or maybe Richard Burthogge, or of More's fellow Cambridge Platonists, such as Ralph Cudworth, John Smith or Nathanael Culverwel—did not even come close to matching More in terms of either the philosophical breadth or the sheer volume of their published works.

[1] On More's life, see Grosart's 'Memorial-introduction' to *The Complete Poems*; the *Conway Letters*; Crocker 2003, and the shorter Crocker 1990a; Hall 1990b, particularly ch. 5; and also Brown 1969. Ward 2000 can be extremely useful on occasion, even if Ward has, with some justification, been accused of achieving 'the difficult task of writing a Biography without giving any information respecting his hero' (by Benjamin Street, as quoted by Grosart in *The Complete Poems*, p. ix, col. a). A similar assessment was made by John Tulloch in 1872: 'Ward's Life is interesting, but vague, uncritical, and digressive, after the manner of the time.' (Tulloch 1874, vol. 2, p. 304 n. 1). At this distance, we can unfortunately say *exactly* the same thing about Tulloch's own long discussion of More. More himself provided some autobiographical and bibliographical details in the epistle to the reader of the 1660 edition of *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness*, and again in the *Praefatio generalissima* to his *Opera omnia* (vol. 2.1, pp. i–xxiv). The *Praefatio generalissima* is especially useful for pinpointing the dates of composition of some of More's works, as are the *Conway Letters*.

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More's career spanned nearly half a century, and he certainly made the most of that time. In the preface to *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness*, his ninth book, More promised his reader 'no small hopes that this Discourse may prove the last from my hand that shall exercise thy patience'.[2] He went on to produce around twenty more. More's work covered topics as diverse as metaphysics, ethics, natural science, Biblical exegesis, natural theology and mystical theosophy, as well as touching more tangentially on epistemology, psychology, politics and even (in the third of the *Divine Dialogues*) social anthropology. Even those of his contemporaries whose output did approach (though not exceed) his own in terms of range or at least size—Joseph Glanvill or Margaret Cavendish, for instance—looked up to More, be it for leadership or as a subject for respectful criticism.

Cavendish is especially worthy of mention here. In her *Philosophical Letters* of 1664, the Marchioness of Newcastle made detailed and extensive examinations of the views of those figures whom she took to be the most important philosophical and scientific authorities of the age. As we might expect when looking back from a twenty-first-century viewpoint, she examined Descartes, Hobbes, J.B. van Helmont and William Harvey. But what might seem more surprising to a twenty-first-century reader—one who is perhaps rather too indoctrinated by the traditional textbook account of the early modern philosophical canon—is that she not only saw fit to place More in this company, but in fact devoted about as many pages of her book to More as to Descartes and Hobbes *put together*! Even Hobbes himself—from More's own point of view, the arch-enemy, whom he took great care in thoroughly refuting—is alleged to have commented that, '*if his* own Philosophy *was not* True, *he knew of none that he should sooner like* than MORE*'s* of *Cambridge*'.[3] As for Descartes, when Cudworth and Samuel Hartlib concocted a plan to initiate a philosophical engagement with the great man, it was to More that they assigned the task of actually writing the letter.[4] The ensuing correspondence is one of the most revealing for scholars of Cartesianism; and it might indeed have been followed by a similar correspondence between More and Gassendi. More initially seemed willing to enter into such a correspondence, but then bowed out, complaining to Hartlib that 'Gassendus is too tedious a philosopher for me.'[5]

Nearly four decades later, More was still active. He is indeed perhaps the only figure who can claim to have engaged personally with both Descartes *and* Newton. More and Newton's times at Cambridge overlapped by a quarter of a century, and they might conceivably have already been acquainted before the younger man even arrived there. (Newton grew up in More's native Grantham; he attended the Free School there, where More himself had studied before progressing to Eton.

[2] *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness* (1660 edition), p. v (To the Reader, §1).

[3] Ward 2000, p. 55. Reported, with some discussion, in Laird 1937, p. 243; Lichtenstein 1962, pp. 169–170; Henry 1986a, p. 195. This slightly surprising claim, it must be acknowledged, is wholly unsubstantiated.

[4] Regarding these machinations, see Webster 1969, here at p. 364.

[5] Webster 1969, p. 375 and (here) p. 376, quoting More to Hartlib, 5 November 1649.

An assistant-master at the school, Dr Joseph Clark, was a former student of More's, as well as being the brother of the man with whom the young Newton lodged, and More would stay with him when he was in town).[6] But, even if they did not get to know one another in Grantham, they certainly did so in Cambridge. Indeed, Newton even ended up being one of only 15 people specifically named in More's will, receiving a funeral ring.[7] In a letter of 1680, More mentioned a discussion he had had with Newton, concerning the interpretation of prophecy—a keen interest for both of them—and he also used the occasion to remark: 'Mr Newton has a singular Genius to Mathematicks, and I take him to be a good serious man.'[8]

Beyond prophecy, however, it is impossible to know and risky to speculate about what else More and Newton might have discussed face to face. It is perhaps unfortunate for us, from a scholarly point of view, that they lived in the same town, and hence could easily meet up for face-to-face discussions, because what that means is that they did not leave a written correspondence behind them. Frustratingly, the very fact that the circumstances were so conducive to a debate between them is precisely what prevents us from having much of a record of any such debate. But Newton was certainly aware of More's work on the metaphysical underpinnings of natural philosophy. His library contained More's *Philosophicall Poems*, *An Antidote Against Atheism* and *The Immortality of the Soul* among several other works, some of them being inscribed as personal gifts from the author.[9] In his notebook of the mid-1660s, known as *Questiones Quaedam Philosophicae*, Newton referred to and quoted from *The Immortality of the Soul* in particular, drawing on More's discussions of atoms, and of physiology and the location of the common sensorium.[10] It is not unrealistic

[6] See *Conway Letters*, pp. 98, 392, 394, 398, 400, 482. There are several biographical details to be gleaned from Turnor 1806, concerning More, and Newton, and the More family, and the Newton family, and (at p. 176) even the Clark brothers. Also see Newton 1959–1977, vol. 1, p. 306 n. 2; Hall 1990b, pp. 82, 102–103, 202–206; and Hall 1996, pp. 7–8.

[7] *Conway Letters*, p. 482 (The Will of Henry More). Dr Clark was also mentioned, and received some medical books.

[8] *Conway Letters*, p. 479 (More to Dr John Sharp, 16 August 1680). On More and Newton on prophecy, see Cajori 1926; and also Hutton 1994, Iliffe 1994, and the other papers in that volume.

[9] The other works were mostly on prophecy rather than metaphysics, but not exclusively so: *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos* (1680), *Discourses on Several Texts of Scripture* (1692), *A Plain and Continued Exposition of the Several Prophecies of… Daniel* (1681), *Tetractys Anti-Astrologica* (1681), *Observations upon Anthroposophia Theomagica, and Anima Magica Abscondita* (1650) (bound with those works by Thomas Vaughan), and *Paralipomena Prophetica* (1685). Newton also had *An Answer to Several Remarks upon Dr Henry More his Expositions of the Apocalypse and Daniel* by 'S.E. Mennonite' (1684), and the anonymous *Remarks upon Dr. Henry More's Expositions of the Apocalypse and Daniel* (1690). See Harrison 1978, pp. 87, 195–196, 205, 210, 226. Hall 1990b, pp. 277–278, presents a table of precisely which of More's works were found, and how many times, in the libraries of various different members of the Royal Society; and he identifies Newton, alongside John Ray, as having possessed the equal largest number, nine each.

[10] See Newton 1983, pp. 341, 383, 385, 393, together with the other references to More as listed in the index, both those within Newton's text and those in the editors' commentary.

to suppose that Newton might have taken up the opportunity he had to discuss such ideas with the man himself. We do know, for instance, that Newton personally endeavoured to get More to join an ultimately abortive project for a Cambridge-based 'Philosophick Meeting'.[11] And, indeed, we can discern certain Morean themes here and there in Newton's own works, such as in his claims about the relationship between God and absolute space, to be discussed further below.

In between More's interactions with Descartes in the 1640s and Newton in the 1680s, he also engaged—in print if not in person—with virtually all of the best minds of his generation. He arrived on the scene just about early enough to qualify as part of the first wave of English philosophers to react to Galileo's discoveries, and he made use of them in his own theory of the physical world, readily pledging allegiance to the doctrine of the motion of the Earth and—at least for a while—to Galileo's theory of tidal motion.[12] He was also an early champion of William Harvey's theory of the circulation of the blood, writing a tribute to Harvey's achievement in verse.[13] And he was elected to the Royal Society in 1662 as one of its earliest members. Admittedly, at least if we trust Henry Stubbe's account, he did not keep up with the weekly contributions thereafter, which amounted to a de facto resignation.[14] (Though More did respond to this allegation, complaining: 'It was a great marvel to me, that he should pretend to know better than my self, whether I still be of the *Royal Society*, or no. For *I take my self still to be of it, and I am sure I have not left it*').[15] Even while he was involved with the Society, there is no evidence that he actually had any hands-on involvement in its experimental research projects.[16] But he was intimately familiar with their results. Among the many other eminent

[11] Newton 1959–1977, vol. 2, p. 415 (Newton to Aston, 23 February 1684/5); Hall 1990b, pp. 169–170.

[12] See Staudenbaur 1968, especially pp. 566–568, 576–578; Hall 1990a, pp. 38–40; Hall 1990b, pp. 275–276.

[13] See Shugg, Sherwin and Freyman 1972.

[14] See Stubbe 1671, p. 64.

[15] More to Glanvill, in an undated (but 1671) letter printed in Glanvill 1671, pp. 154–155. On More's exchange with Stubbe concerning the Royal Society, see Hall 1990b, pp. 177–179; Crocker 2003, pp. 151–156; Hutton 2004, pp. 130–133.

[16] The Society did regard More's work as having—despite appearances, as the reviewer (probably Henry Oldenburg) acknowledged—sufficient relevance to its own for it to be worth including a review of *Enchiridion metaphysicum* in its *Philosophical Transactions*: Oldenburg 1671. But few of its members had much sympathy with it. On More's position within the Royal Society, see Hall 1990a, pp. 40–45; Hall 1990b, ch. 9, especially pp. 168–170, 174–175, together with appendix 3 (pp. 277–278). But Hall misinterprets—indeed, misquotes—Pepys's diary as containing a record of More's presence in person at the Society on the occasion of a visit by Margaret Cavendish. In the entry for 30 May 1667, Hall quotes Pepys as having written: 'here was Mr. Moore of Cambridge, whom I had not seen before, and I was glad to see him'. (Hall 1990b, p. 169). But, quite aside from the fact that Pepys, had he been talking about our philosopher, would undoubtedly have called him 'Dr. More' rather than 'Mr. Moore', the fact is that he did not even write that much. The reference is instead to one '*Mrs*. Moore… and I was glad to see *her*'! (Pepys 1953, vol. 2, p. 473, emphasis added).

scientific figures with whom More interacted in print, he both criticised and was criticised in turn by Robert Boyle and Robert Hooke.[17]

Away from natural science, when Cromwell received the great Jewish scholar, Menasseh ben Israel, into England in the 1650s, More met with him and they discussed the pre-existence of the soul together.[18] Admittedly, in relation to Judaism, More behaved as something of a magpie, only really interested in those fragments of Jewish doctrine that he might be able to use for his own purposes. As David Katz has persuasively argued, More probably did meet but made no real effort to pursue Cambridge's own resident expert on Judaism, Isaac Abendana.[19] Nevertheless, in the 1670s, More would be numbered among the contributors to Christian Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabbala denudata*, the most extensive compendium of texts from or concerning the authentically Jewish Cabbala thus far published in any language.[20] Or, again, More was one of the very first authors anywhere in the world to publish a detailed and thoughtful critique of Spinoza. The latter's *Tractatus theologico-politicus* appeared in 1670: More wrote his response, *Ad V.C. epistola altera*, in 1677, and published it in 1679.[21] When Spinoza's *Ethics* appeared posthumously in 1677, More's reply was even quicker. His *Demonstrationis duarum propositionum… confutatio* was written in 1678 and, again, published in 1679. (With Spinoza already dead, it goes without saying that what we do not have in this case, as we do in so many others, is the benefit of a reply to More's criticisms, or any reciprocal criticism directed back against More's own position).

As far as the demand for More's writings was concerned, Ward reports: 'they were in such Request, or so bought up, when time was, that the late Mr. *Chiswel* told a Friend of mine, *that for twenty Years together, after the Return of* King CHARLES the Second [i.e. the period 1660–1680], *the* Mystery of Godliness, *and* Dr. MORE's *Other Works, ruled all the Booksellers in* London.'[22] Even two decades

[17] More criticised both Boyle and Hooke in his *Enchiridion metaphysicum* of 1671 (and he criticised Boyle, at least, in many other places too). Boyle replied to More's criticisms in *An Hydrostatical Discourse occasion'd by some Objections of Dr. Henry More* (1672); Hooke replied in *Lampas: or, Descriptions of some Mechanical Improvements of Lamps and Waterpoises* (1677). More responded to them both in the scholia that he added to the *Enchridion* in its 1679 edition. On the relations between More and Boyle (especially), see Greene 1962; Shapin and Schaffer 1985, pp. 207–224 and passim; Hall 1990b, pp. 181–198; Henry 1990; Jenkins 2000; Crocker 2003, pp. 157–162; Hutton, pp. 133–137.

[18] See *Two Choice and Useful Treatises*, second part, p. 27 (*Annotations upon Lux Orientalis*, on ch. 4, pag. 41), and Berg 1989.

[19] Katz 1990.

[20] See Coudert 1999, ch. 6; Crocker 2003, ch. 12; Hutton 2004, ch. 8.

[21] More had been aware, at least, of Spinoza's book even earlier than this. In a letter to Robert Boyle, of 4 December 1671, he wrote: 'it is not a week ago, since I saw a letter, that informed me, that *Spinosa*, a Jew first, after a Cartesian, and now an atheist, is supposed the author of *Theologico-Politicus*'. Boyle 2001, vol. 4, p. 232.

[22] Ward 2000, p. 101. Also see Nicolson 1925, p. 433; and Tulloch 1874, vol. 2, pp. 303 and 340–341.

after his death, there was still sufficient demand for More's works that Joseph Downing—who had already published his posthumous *A Collection of Aphorisms* and *Divine Hymns* in 1704 and 1706 respectively—published, in the five years from 1708 to 1713, not only a first collected English edition of More's *Theological Works*, and Richard Ward's *Life* of More, bound together with More's own *Select Letters*, but also new editions of *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings*, *Enchiridion ethicum*, and the *Divine Dialogues*. These volumes contained, between them, no fewer than eleven of More's most important works, and a whole host of shorter supporting pieces to boot. They were no mere reprints either: a great deal of painstaking work had gone into translating the Latin notes and scholia that More had added to the revised editions of these works in his *Opera omnia* of 1675–1679.

Outside England, More's Latin works, and the Latin translations of the works originally published in English, assured him a European readership.[23] Among those European authors who took the time to comment in detail on More's philosophy, one might for instance mention Leibniz or J.C. Sturm.[24] Still further afield, Norman Fiering reports that, as a matter of fact, 'no other writer had as much influence on American academic philosophy between 1690 and 1720 as More.'[25] To name just one philosopher of Colonial America—but the greatest one of all—Jonathan Edwards's early opinions do seem to have been at least partially influenced by More's.[26]

[23] Shortly before the publication of the two philosophical volumes of More's *Opera omnia*, a distinct Latin translation of *The Immortality of the Soul* was prepared by Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, and published by Francis Mercury van Helmont as *D. Heinrici Mori Tractatus de anima, ejusque facultatibus et naturali immortalitate* (Rotterdam: Isaaci Naerani, 1677). This edition is now quite rare, but copies of it can still be tracked down. But it was pretty heavily abridged: most (though not all) of bk. 1 is present; but bk. 2 is rattled through rather swiftly; and, as for bk. 3, the final eight chapters there are dropped altogether. Robert Crocker reports (citing Watt's *Bibliotheca Britannica* of 1824, vol. 2, at 682 g) that there may have been an earlier edition of this in 1675. But there no longer seems to be any definite trace of that one and, for my part, I am somewhat sceptical over whether it ever really existed at all. Watt was not infallible. Also missing, presumed lost, is a French version of the same work, which was apparently done in manuscript by Pierre Briot at around the same time, and to which Leibniz seems to have had access. See Grua's note in Leibniz 1948, vol. 2, p. 509 (and, while there, take a look at Leibniz's own comments at pp. 509–511); together with Brown 1990, pp. 77, 91 n. 2; Crocker 1990c, pp. 226, 247 n. 3; and Crocker 2003, pp. 183, 195 n. 5, 211, 236 n. 9.

[24] Sturm examined More's theory of the Hylarchic Principle (Spirit of Nature), as developed in 1671's *Enchiridion metaphysicum*, in an appendix to his *Collegium experimentale sive curiosum* of 1676. More replied in the scholia he added to the 1679 edition of the *Enchiridion*. As for Leibniz, his discussions of More, scattered (as is so much in Leibniz's work) across a diverse collection of papers and letters, also tend to focus primarily on his Hylarchic Principle. More seems to have been oblivious to these mostly private, posthumously published remarks, most of which postdated his own death anyway, and he made no reply to Leibniz.

[25] Fiering 1988, p. 91. See also the similar remark at Fiering 1981, p. 16.

[26] See the editor's references to More, as listed in the index, in Edwards 1980.

Admittedly, it is true that there were many people who really did not think very highly of More at all. For instance, whereas More's first biographer maintained that he had been credibly informed that Descartes had claimed 'that he knew no person who more thoroughly understood his Philosophy then one *More* of *England*',[27] Descartes' own first biographer was utterly dismissive: 'M. Descartes had other friends in England of greater importance, and less capable of the fickleness that appeared in the conduct of M. More.'[28] Nevertheless, he did receive a great deal of attention and, indeed, support from a great many quarters, and from popular ones as well as scholarly. In 1673, More's fame within the republic of letters was sufficient that Aphra Behn could comfortably refer to him (without actually naming him) in the epistle to her 'good, sweet, honey, sugar-candied reader' which preceded *The Dutch Lover*, safe in the knowledge that the afore-mentioned reader would be capable of picking up on the allusion. True, the allusion was not a flattering one. Behn observed how, having been promised topics such as the immortality of the soul, the mystery of godliness and ecclesiastical policy, readers were instead finding themselves treated 'with Indiscerpibility, and Essential Spissitude (words, which though I am no competent Judge of, for want of Languages, yet I fancy strongly ought to mean just nothing) with a company of Apocryphal midnight tales cull'd out of the choicest insignificant Authors.'[29] But, that complaint notwithstanding, it would at least have been common knowledge at whom it was aimed. So central was More to the intellectual life of the period that, many years later, when Joseph Henry Shorthouse prepared a novel set in Restoration England (*John Inglesant*, 1881), he could not resist giving a More a cameo role in the story.

Regarding the Apocryphal midnight tales of which Behn complained, it is also worth mentioning Joseph Glanvill's *Saducismus Triumphatus*, for this work—a major popular success in its day—served to cement not only Glanvill's but also More's reputation still further. Although Behn herself might have turned up her nose, there was, just as there has always been, a lively popular fascination with ghost stories, and Glanvill's book had already been progressing through several editions (and, indeed, titles) before More got his hands on it on the death of its author in 1680. Having originated in a 1666 work called *A Philosophical Endeavour towards the Defence of the Being of Witches and Apparitions*, More gave it its new name in 1681, and it promptly entered into another rapid sequence of editions in this new guise.[30] But More did not merely reprint Glanvill's already-popular text: he added new texts of his own. Some of these were simply further accounts of apparitions, but others were more immediately concerned with abstruse matters of metaphysical analysis.

[27] Ward 2000, p. 338. It is not at all clear who Ward's informant was supposed to have been, or just how credible such testimony can be considered.

[28] Baillét 1691, vol. 2, p. 363 (bk. 7, ch. 15).

[29] Behn 1996, p. 160.

[30] See Coleman O. Parsons' introduction to the 1966 reprint edition of *Saducismus Triumphatus* for an account of its publishing history, together with an assessment of the popularity of books of its kind in England at the time.

After the book's readers—be they philosophers or lay-people—had first devoured Glanvill's discussions of witches, and before they arrived at the collection of relations of apparitions, they would find himself being led through some extremely arid and rarefied philosophical regions, with More as their guide.

It is, of course, true that More is not as well remembered today as some of his contemporaries are: but that is changing. There has been a move in recent decades to expand the historical philosophical canon beyond the traditional names so familiar from undergraduate survey courses. If one is going to get properly to grips with the ideas of any historical philosopher at all, be they great or small, one needs to endeavour to free oneself from anachronistic prejudices, and to enter as far as is possible into that figure's own mind, viewing things through their own conceptual framework and grasping their own motivations (while simultaneously guarding against actually being biased by these, of course, so as to retain a scrupulously objective standpoint). But this is only going to be achievable once one has first grasped the wider intellectual context that was shaping the outlook of all those who worked within it; and, by and large, the 'great' figures are nowadays considered such precisely because they were struggling *against* the tide. It was the philosophers of the *second* rank whose work served to establish the context that informed not only their own ideas but those of the big names. As much as such mainstream figures might be less well remembered nowadays, they were considered important in their own time precisely because they were so instrumental in consolidating a common conceptual backdrop for philosophical activity. Henry More is just such a figure. As John Passmore has put it: 'To ignore the Platonists… is to run the risk of misunderstanding and grossly oversimplifying the history of British speculative ideas and moral attitudes, which are too often taken to be wholly dominated by empiricist and utilitarian concepts.'[31]

So, even if the only reason to study More was to gain a clarificatory and analytical insight into the ideas of other authors, that would already be reason enough. Quite aside from his more general role in contributing to the overall structure of seventeenth-century thought at large, his works also provide important insights into the ideas of a wide array of specific figures. One does really have to go quite a long way to find a thinker of the period whose work remains untouched in More's writings. Besides those great names already mentioned—Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, Boyle, Newton, et al.—More also engaged philosophically with dozens of comparatively less well-known figures, such as Thomas Vaughan, Jakob Boehme, Richard Baxter, Francis Glisson, Matthew Hale, John Norris, F.M. van Helmont and Anne Conway, to name but a few.[32] Many of More's criticisms of his contemporaries are profoundly insightful, and shed important light on both the content and the sustainability of

[31] Edwards 1967, vol. 2, p. 11a (article on 'Cambridge Platonists').

[32] Crocker 2003 surveys many of More's debates with other figures, including some that have not been examined elsewhere. I am not going to be touching on every one of these in the present work: but, for those specific cases that I do examine, further suggestions for secondary literature will be given in their proper places below.

their ideas and arguments. Even in those cases where More's criticisms do miss their targets—for sometimes they do—they nevertheless help to bring into vivid focus many of the reasons why the works of these other individuals were deemed so controversial (or so popular, as the case may be) in their day. One might perhaps compare More with a figure like Antoine Arnauld. Both of them were widely respected philosophers in their own day. (Arnauld was somewhat controversial, from the point of view of the Catholic Church, for his Jansenist principles; More was somewhat controversial, from the point of view of the Church of England, for his views on the pre-existence of the soul: but both were largely tolerated). Through correspondence and published works, both of them produced revealing critiques of the philosophical ideas of other major figures of the period: in Arnauld's case, one thinks of the Fourth Set of Objections and the correspondence with Descartes, the even more voluminous correspondence with Leibniz, and the truly colossal polemic exchange with Malebranche.

But then, the fact is that both Arnauld and More did much more than merely criticise their contemporaries. Both of them also came up with a number of genuinely innovative and occasionally quite influential theories that were all their own. Arnauld's direct realism, for instance, was an original and an important contribution to seventeenth-century philosophy of perception, and it is increasingly receiving the scholarly attention it deserves.[33] And More, likewise, is very far from being worthy of study *only* in relation to other authors. He was also a tremendously distinctive thinker in his own right, who developed several highly idiosyncratic views.

For instance, although there were plenty of other atomists around in the seventeenth century, most of them felt that, even if no natural power could divide an atom, an omnipotent God should still remain capable of doing so. More, by contrast, regarded the division of an atom as a strict, metaphysical impossibility, one that not even omnipotence could overcome. Even more unusually than that, More believed in a *plenum* of atoms, adopting one plank of the traditional atomistic system while spurning its usual accompaniment, the void. More unusually still, he refused to allow that individual atoms could possess any shapes whatsoever, in stark contrast to the classical atomists, who had treated the varied shapes of atoms as absolutely key in explaining the differences in the qualities of their compounds.

Or, again, whereas most of his contemporaries were satisfied with the notion that corporeal matter was simply created out of nothing, More stood somewhat apart by carefully continuing to explore the notion of a purely potential *prime* matter, and struggling over several decades to find a coherent way to explicate that classical idea in modern terms. In parallel with this, he also devised a theory of immaterial space that would cast a long shadow over later discussions, Newtonian and otherwise. And then, in parallel with that, he devised a theory of spiritual extension that was even more groundbreaking. Perhaps the first person ever to do so, More argued directly against the traditional 'holenmerian' theory of spiritual presence that had so dominated Classical, Medieval and Renaissance discussions, in favour of a

[33] See, for instance, Nadler 1989.

sophisticated alternative whereby the human soul and a spatial God could possess parts outside parts without thereby being rendered corporeal. The fact that this spiritual extension was supposed to be, in some sense, four-dimensional just serves to make it all the more remarkable. Or, just to give one final example among still others that might be mentioned: More's keenness to test the boundaries of the new, mechanical science of his era generated, over the course of his long career, a number of carefully thought-out positions, which synthesised elements of both modern mechanism and ancient vitalism in an evolving variety of different and original ways.

These, and others like them, are the topics that I shall be examining in detail in this book. As I have said, More's overall project did traverse most branches of philosophy and theology, both pure and applied: but, for reasons of space and focus, I shall gloss over many of these in the present work. But at the heart of More's thought, and the central hub where those various branches all met, was a metaphysical system that was an innovative, a widely discussed and, at least partially, an influential contribution to seventeenth-century philosophy. The goal of this book is to elucidate More's metaphysical views, both corporeal and spiritual. Although several of the various individual components of More's metaphysics have been regularly discussed in the secondary literature (with greater or lesser degrees of adequacy and accuracy), there has been less effort to examine them all together as a corporate whole. But, for More himself, they were all intimately related to one another in one great chain of being. By appealing to the actions of spiritual beings in his explanation of some or ultimately all physical phenomena, by clothing all created spirits in corporeal vehicles of varying degrees of subtlety, and by making all things 'live, and move, and have their being' in God in a strikingly literal sense, More was blurring the line between physics and metaphysics, if not obliterating it completely. To consider his theory of spiritual reality separately from his theory of matter, or vice versa, will be to risk misunderstanding both of them: so we will need to look at both.

Moreover, even individually, some elements of More's system have, to date, been neglected by commentators altogether. To give just one example: nobody seems to have noticed that, in his early writings, More was firmly committed to the view that, notwithstanding the fact that some bodies might be united to really distinct spirits, they *additionally* needed to be granted some minimal form of intrinsic life, all of their own. To be fair, it is understandable that this point might have been missed, given that it was a thesis that More himself vigorously opposed in some of his later writings. But then that fact leads into another lacuna in the existing secondary literature: the existing studies have not done justice to the degree to which More's philosophy *changed* over the decades. Anyone who regards the corpus of More's writings as a single unit, without maintaining a due sensitivity to its chronology and the shifts that occurred in his views, will be in danger of misunderstanding all of it, whether early, middle or late. For his views did also change on many other issues besides this, sometimes progressing gradually along a constant path, but sometimes reversing through a hundred and eighty degrees (and occasionally even then going on to reverse such reversals). His friendship, as he explained when introducing one

such reversal, was more with truth than with himself.[34] Whenever the force of evidence and argument mounted up against one of his own formerly cherished opinions, he was always willing to abandon it, either to switch to another pre-existing viewpoint, or to dream up a completely new one of his own. So the approach of the present work will be a dynamic one, paying to such shifts the attention that they are due.

2 More's Goals, Targets and Influences

More set out his fundamental objective in The Preface General to *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings*. 'The great Cement', he wrote, 'that holds these several Discourses together is *one* main Design, which they jointly drive at, and which, I think, is confessedly generous and important; namely, *The knowledge of God, and therein of true Happiness*, so far as *Reason* can cut her way through those darknesses and difficulties she is incumbred with in this life.'[35] Just as so many other philosophers and theologians had been doing for centuries, More wished to demonstrate the existence of God, to shed some light on his nature, to prove the immortality of the human soul, and to provide some account of the happiness that a deserving soul could expect after its separation from its terrestrial body. But, notwithstanding the timeless universality of his fundamental concerns, More was thoroughly embedded in the general intellectual climate of the day. Despite the extensive use he made of classical texts in his work when it suited him to do so, he was very much a modern philosopher, who, as we have already seen, placed himself at the very centre of some of the hottest debates of the seventeenth century. As far as More was concerned, anyone who would deliberately oppose any of these notions, or whose arguments would tend even unwittingly to undermine them, was a valid target. Consequently, More *had* to be sensitive to the currents of his own time, because the threats to what he viewed as true religion and spirituality were themselves specific to that time. In the seventeenth century, there was little to be gained from rehearsing old arguments against ideas that had been fully extinguished a thousand years earlier. Instead, new arguments had to be found, to combat new dangers.

More viewed the threats of the day as stemming from three main sources: Roman Catholicism, enthusiasm, and materialist atheism.

His critique of Roman Catholicism was largely conducted on a basis of revealed religion, involving the close analysis of scripture, and it generates fewer philosophically interesting issues than many of his other discussions. Consequently, this topic will not feature very much in the present work. But it is at least important to understand More's position: and that position was one of animosity. In a century of Popish plots, Protestant paranoia, persecution in each direction, and regular outright warfare,

[34] *The Complete Poems*, p. 90b (*Democritus Platonissans*, To the Reader).

[35] *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings*, The Preface General, p. iv (§2).

More placed himself firmly at the forefront of the campaign to provide an unassailable intellectual justification of Anglican Protestantism against Roman Catholicism. He might not have shared the vitriolic, often bloodthirsty hatred that so many seventeenth-century Protestants harboured towards the Catholics (and, of course, vice versa), but nevertheless he felt that their views were profoundly incorrect and Antichristian. Indeed, throughout More's extremely voluminous corpus of directly theological works, although a number of different topics do crop up along the way, the central, dominant theme is a minute critique of Roman Catholicism. More approached this topic from all manner of directions, in an sustained attempt to show that the authority of the Church of Rome was entirely unjustified and that its dogmas were riddled with contradictions, while the Church of England was eminently rational in all of its teachings, and that its existence, structure and doctrines were all perfectly grounded in the teachings of scripture and the early Fathers. In recognition of his considerable efforts, More's *Opera omnia* earned themselves a place on the Catholic Index of Prohibited Books in 1696.

But More was always keen to steer his philosophical and theological deliberations down a middle path, and to avoid the excesses of *both* sides in any debate. Thus, despite the fact that he was a committed libertarian in religion, very much one of the 'latitude-men' as the Cambridge Platonists were known in their own day,[36] he was nevertheless deeply concerned about the untoward by-products of such latitude. As England was thrown into chaos and confusion by the Civil Wars of the 1640s, a multitude of ultra-Protestant sects began to spring up. Thanks to the climate of religious toleration of the period, still shaky but nevertheless on the rise, many of these managed to survive through the Commonwealth and into the Restoration period. Indeed, some—most prominently, the Society of Friends, or 'Quakers', founded in 1648 by George Fox—have even survived into our own time. First, the Anglican Church had thrown off the shackles of the Roman Catholic Church. Then the Puritans had (for a while, at least) triumphed over a Church of England that they deemed to be insufficiently Protestant. It was only to be expected that some people would feel that even mainstream Puritanism had still not gone far enough, and would set out to find new prophecies and to build new religious communities of their own. More himself was a staunch Anglican, with no great love for mainstream Puritanism, let alone its more extremist off-shoots.

The central concern that underlay More's distaste for these groups was their enthusiasm. Notwithstanding the more mundane connotations that the word took on as it began to filter into mainstream language, in the seventeenth century 'enthusiasm' referred specifically to the view of certain people that they had been specially singled out by God to receive personal and supernatural revelations of divine truths. Enthusiasm, in this sense, was nothing new: but it was definitely increasing. There might possibly have been a handful among these radical sects that were free of it, but there were not many. Indeed, in England throughout most of More's career, the

[36] See *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness*, pp. 361–370 (bk. 10, chs. 10–12). For a contemporary (1662) account of the 'latitude-men', see Patrick 1963. For more recent views, see Nicolson 1929; Dockrill and Lee 1994; Crocker 2003, ch. 6.

Catholics were on the run, so that, of the two, More felt that it was the enthusiasts who were providing the more pressing danger. 'I dare pronounce with a loud voice aforehand,' he wrote, 'That if ever *Christianity* be exterminated, it will be by *Enthusiasme*. Of so great consequence is it rightly to oppose so deadly an evil.'[37]

More's own attitude—and an attitude in which he was by no means alone—was that these pretended inspirations were nothing more than the effects of melancholy on an overheated imagination. In short, he viewed enthusiasm as a symptom of mental illness. In his writings, More directed his criticisms of enthusiasm against a number of targets, including sects like the Quakers, together with another, slightly older group known as the Family of Love, surrounding one Hendrik Niclaes. He also found the clear traces of similar—and similarly deluded—enthusiasms in a number of mystical theosophists such as Jakob Boehme (1575–1624) and Thomas Vaughan (1622–1666), and he wrote directly against each of these.[38] The subtitle of *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* (1656), the centrepiece of More's writings on the topic, serves to sum up his general objective: *a Brief Discourse of the Nature, Causes, Kinds and Cure of Enthusiasm*.

The reason why More felt that it was so important to 'cure' the enthusiasts of their delirium was because it was causing them to depart from the tenets of true Christianity, to just the same degree as the Roman Catholics were being compelled by their Church to swallow absurd and Antichristian dogmas. More's own Christianity was a thoroughly *rational* religion, and this was what both the Catholics and the enthusiasts were turning their backs on. More did not reject the traditional Christian mysteries, the comprehension of which was bound to exceed the capacities of the human mind. But what he certainly did feel was that anything that directly contradicted the dictates of natural reason had no place in true religion. This, however, was what the Roman Catholic Church was insisting on, with its (as he saw it) literally incoherent dogmas such as that of Transubstantiation—'infallible contradictions', as More derisively termed them.[39] That Church was not permitting its adherents fairly to weigh up these dogmas against the dictates of their God-given faculty of reason. Had they been allowed to do so, they would quickly have found them wanting. The enthusiasts, by contrast, although they might have had the *opportunity* to appeal to that faculty, were voluntarily declining to do so, favouring instead their own pretended inspirations. The thing that set the enthusiasts' inspirations apart from the natural light of reason was that the latter was a universal capacity, common to all mankind. The very fact that these enthusiastic inspirations were, by definition, private to the individuals in question was, from More's point of view,

[37] *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness* (1660 edition), p. vi (To the Reader, §6).

[38] The principle study of More's treatment of enthusiasm in general is Fouke 1997. See also Crocker 2003, ch. 4 and passim. On the controversy with Vaughan in particular, see also Burnham 1974; Brann 1980; Guinsberg 1980; Crocker 1990b, pp. 144–47. On More and Boehme, see Hutton 1990b.

[39] More produced long lists of such 'infallible contradictions', for instance in *A Modest Enquiry into the Mystery of Iniquity*, pp. 464, 484–485 (bk. 2, ch. 4, §5; ch. 8, §§19–21).

sufficient to prove that they amounted to a false light, not coming from God but instead arising out of the melancholy temperaments of those individuals themselves. As More told his reader, his ultimate goal was 'to make thee so wise, as neither to impose upon thy self, nor be imposed upon by others, in Matters of Religion; and so Orthodox, as to become neither *Enthusiast* nor *Romanist*, but a *true Catholick* and *Primitive Apostolick Christian*.'[40] The Romanists were being deceived by their Church; the enthusiasts were deceiving themselves: but, either way, neither was following the correct path of rationality.

But of considerably greater relevance to our current project than those two, More's third main target was materialist atheism. Whereas Roman Catholicism was to be combated primarily on the basis of revealed theology, and enthusiasm was reduced to a psychological or even physiological aberration, it is the case of materialist atheism that leads us most directly into the realm of metaphysics.

More viewed the rise and spread of atheism as a second consequence of the way in which the era's political climate was 'loosening the Minds of Men from the Aw and Tyranny of meer customary Superstition, and permitting a freer perusal of matters of Religion than in former ages'.[41] On the one hand, the increase in religious toleration that followed this liberation from Roman Catholic domination had generated the excesses of the enthusiasts. On the other hand, the new free-thinking tendency elsewhere seemed to be manifesting itself in outbreaks of full-blown atheism. Naturally, then, just as More had sought to discover the nature, causes, kinds and cure of enthusiasm, it was also incumbent on him to do the same for atheism—hence his *Antidote* against that alarming disorder.[42] As for atheism's nature, causes and kinds, More connected it directly with philosophical materialism. There is, perhaps, no necessary conceptual link between materialism and atheism: but they do, nevertheless, seem to be natural partners; and, certainly as far as More was concerned, all of the real-life materialists of the period were atheists, and vice versa.

More viewed Hobbes as the leading proponent of this position.[43] Hobbes, freely by his own admission, was indeed a materialist, claiming that the very notion of an 'immaterial substance' was a contradiction in terms. At the same time, he did continue to insist that he was a faithful theist and Christian. But More felt that such claims simply could not be taken seriously. Hobbes also admitted explicitly that not even God was to be excluded from the scope of his materialism—that God was a body.[44] From More's point of view, no 'god' like *that* was genuinely worthy of the name; and, if this was the only 'god' that Hobbes was prepared to countenance, then Hobbes was an atheist, pure and simple. Besides which, even leaving God out of it,

[40] *A Brief Discourse of the True Grounds of the Certainty of Faith in Points of Religion*, p. 770.

[41] *An Antidote Against Atheism*, p. 9 (bk. 1, ch. 1, §1).

[42] On the background to *An Antidote Against Atheism*, see Ward 2000, pp. 234–236, and Gabbey 1982, pp. 198–199.

[43] On More's critique of Hobbes, see Mintz 1962, ch. 5.

[44] Hobbes 1994, p. 540 (Appendix, ch. 3, §§5–6). See Pasnau 2007, pp. 285–289.

if the human soul was itself corporeal, then it would surely be divisible and consequently destructible, with no real prospect of achieving everlasting heavenly happiness. As More saw it, all religion, all morality and all philosophy would be swept away. Consequently, in works from *The Immortality of the Soul* (1659) onwards, he was at pains to criticise Hobbes in detail.

Subsequently, when Spinoza came into view, More was inclined to read him in Hobbesian terms. Here was someone else who was prepared to say explicitly that God was extended, and that all material things existed in him. More's materialist reading of Spinoza might have been on considerably shakier ground than his materialist reading of Hobbes, and his accusation of atheism was equally dubious. Nevertheless, the accusation was made. Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus* seemed to be undermining religion, and his *Ethics* seemed to be undermining the more philosophical side of theology (not to mention ethics itself), and so More wrote the above-mentioned tracts against the two of them, published in his *Opera omnia* (vol. 2.1, 1679).

Still in the same general area, a considerably more nuanced case is that of Descartes. More's attitude to Descartes fluctuated over the course of his career.[45] On initially encountering his mechanical physics in the mid-1640s, he was extremely taken with it. Even in this early stage of his career, More's support for Cartesianism was by no means blind and uncritical (as their 1648–1649 correspondence demonstrates). But, broadly speaking, it was warm and solid. Later, however, he came to feel that Descartes' theories of thoroughly transcendent spirits and purely mechanical bodies were jointly excluding God from the world and undermining his very existence. He did not actually believe that Descartes himself was an atheist, even covertly, and he deliberately sought to clear him of such a charge in his *Epistola ad V.C.* (written around 1658, published 1662). He did, however, come to feel that Descartes' mechanical philosophy was not only inadequate in explaining natural phenomena, but that it lent itself much too readily to more deliberately atheistic uses. Consequently, More's later works came to be filled with firm denunciations and careful refutations of Descartes' principles.

The evolution of More's attitude to Descartes in particular, and to the issue of mechanism in general, can provide a framework for a wider examination of his philosophical influences—which will also lead us into an excursus into the earlier history of philosophy as More conceived it—and help to shed further light on his overall philosophical objectives.

Descartes did not feature in More's very first philosophical work, *Psychodia* [*Psuchōdia*] *Platonica* (1642). Indeed, More did not there display much awareness of (or, at any rate, interest in) contemporary philosophical discussions at all. The authors whom More named in the course of these philosophical poems were

[45] The most complete account of More's relationship to Descartes is Gabbey 1982. In addition, Anderson 1933, ch. 4; Lamprecht 1935; Laird 1937, pp. 243–246; Bréhier 1937, pp. 21–27; Koyré 1957, chs. 5–6; Saveson 1960; Webster 1969; Rogers 1985, pp. 291–294; Hall 1990b, ch. 8; Gabbey 1995; and Crocker 2003, pp. 66–70 (and passim), all have something to offer.

almost exclusively classical figures, including Hermes Trismegistus, Pythagoras, Democritus, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Lucretius and Plotinus. He was especially keen on Plotinus and the Neoplatonists; or, to avoid that anachronistic term (which would have meant nothing to More), the Platonists. Within Platonism, other important influences on More's early thought included Proclus, Porphyry and Michael Psellus; and he was also very keen on the Platonising Fathers of the Church—Origen was a particular favourite. He did show some awareness of modern physics, particular in relation to issues surrounding the heliocentrist controversy: but, as far as philosophers in the narrower sense were concerned, the most up-to-date figure to have had a clear and significant influence on More's earliest poems seems to have been Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), who had already been lying in his grave for nearly a century and a half, and who was, in any case, just another proponent in this same Platonic tradition.[46]

But most prominent among these, and by far the greatest early influence on More, was Plotinus. We can actually date More's discovery of Plotinus fairly precisely. In a letter of 1673, he recalled his first acquisition of Plotinus's *Enneads*: 'I bought one when I was *Junior* Master for 16 shillings, and I think I was the first that had either the luck or courage to buy him.'[47] More graduated Master of Arts in 1639, and he began writing his philosophical poems in early 1640.[48] By the time of the publication of *Psychodia Platonica* in 1642, he had already thoroughly digested Plotinus's version of Platonism, and that first batch of poems was utterly riddled with Plotinian doctrines. Indeed, as More observed at the outset, 'My task is not to try / What's simply true. I onely do engage / My self to make a fit discovery, / Give some fair glimpse of Plato's hid Philosophy.'[49] On the other hand, these were no mere expositions of other people's views, hidden or otherwise. As More also remarked in a note on the canto wherein this observation is to be found, 'even in the middest of Platonisme… I cannot conceal from whence I am, *viz*. of Christ.… To which *Plato* is a very good subservient Minister; whose Philosophy I singing here in a full heat; why may it not be free for me to break out into an higher strain, and under it to touch upon some points of Christianity'?[50] Moreover, in his later works, he made plenty of references back to these poems, either to indicate his continuing endorsement of views that he had expressed therein; or, where he had changed his mind, to indicate that he had indeed changed *his* mind. The poems were certainly inspired by the Platonists, but not uncritically so, and the views expressed can legitimately be regarded as those of More himself.

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[46] On the influence of Ficino's *Platonic Theology* on More's philosophical poems, see Staudenbaur 1968 and Jacob 1985.

[47] *Letters on Several Subjects*, p. 27 (More to Edmund Elys, 27 December 1673).

[48] See the individual title-page for *Psychozoia* in *Psychodia Platonica* (1642 edition); along with *Opera omnia*, vol. 2.1, p. viii (*Praefatio generalissima*, §11).

[49] *The Complete Poems*, p. 13a (*Psychozoia*, cant. 1, st. 2).

[50] *The Complete Poems*, p. 10b (To the Reader, upon the first Canto of *Psychozoia*).

In his next publication, *Democritus Platonissans* (1646), the situation was quite different. More did still continue to name and to be heavily influenced by (or, as the case may be, to react against) all the same old figures, but both his awareness of and his interest in the groundbreaking new work that was being done in his own time had now become greatly increased as a result of his discovery of Descartes.[51] Descartes' *Principia philosophiae* of 1644 seems to have been the first of his works that More noticed; and, although he certainly did subsequently read Descartes' other works and those of his followers, the *Principles of Philosophy* always remained, from his point of view, the key text of Cartesianism. And yet, as far as More was concerned, Descartes' skill was almost entirely limited to his treatment of the physical world, and More never showed much sympathy for the *Meditations* or for Descartes' more strictly metaphysical philosophy in general. Ward reported: '*Des-Cartes* his *Metaphysicks* I could never perceive that he much admird; but his Physicks he did exceedingly.'[52] And More himself confirmed this impression: 'I believe his excellence is on account of his other writings rather than of his metaphysical *Meditations*, which I certainly could in no way admire, even when I enjoyed them extremely wonderfully along with the rest of his writings. For, although he is seen to suppose with me that incorporeal substance is the legitimate and adequate object of metaphysics, I could however never approve of his demonstrations of their existence or his explanations of their nature, if you would except the first argument of the divine existence.'[53]

But then, More simply had no need for Descartes' metaphysics. He had already discovered to his mind an unsurpassable metaphysical treatment of the spiritual world in the works of Plotinus and the other Platonists. However, such a spiritual philosophy was only ever going to provide half the story, and it needed to be augmented with an account of physical phenomena. The trouble with the Platonists was that, while they might have been extremely capable on questions pertaining to God himself and to created spirits, they tended to gloss over issues pertaining to the physical constitution of the universe, providing a much less satisfactory treatment of those things if, indeed, they bothered to offer one at all. In Descartes' mechanical philosophy, More felt that he had found an exemplary physical system. Even in the first flush of his engagement with Cartesianism, he already realised that certain

[51] Also Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583–1648). *Democritus Platonissans* is introduced by a pair of passages drawn from Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy* (pt. 3, §§1–2) and Herbert's *De causis errorum*. See p. 58 below.

[52] Ward 2000, p. 339.

[53] *Enchiridion metaphysicum*, vol. 1, pp. IV–V (Preface to the Reader, §3). It seems likely that the 'first argument' for the existence of God, for which More here expresses approval, refers to the Ontological Argument. More himself endorsed this argument elsewhere in his works, whereas he never displayed any real approval for Descartes' other main argument, from the presence in our minds of an idea with infinite objective reality. Although the reference in this passage is to the *Meditations*, where the Ontological Argument comes after that other one (in the Fifth and Third Meditations respectively), it does come first in the alternative presentation that Descartes provided in the *Principles of Philosophy* (pt. 1, §§14 and 18 respectively).

details were going to need to be corrected, on physical as well as on metaphysical issues. But, as far as the general thrust of Descartes' approach was concerned, More was not only greatly enamoured with it in itself, but crucially he felt that it was consistent with and could be joined to the Platonists' account of the nature of the spiritual realm and of God himself.

However, More still did not feel that he was actually blending *new* ideas together with the more entrenched wisdom of the Platonists. He felt rather that *both* of these philosophical systems, the Cartesian account of the physical realm as well as the Plotinian account of the spiritual, were continuations of a single tradition that was considerably more ancient than either one. Over on the more theological side of things, More was very keen to defend himself from the charge that he was introducing novelties into religion. He insisted that, on the contrary, it was the Catholics who had most egregiously added to scripture and who, under the pretence of explicating the doctrines of the Fathers of the Church, had actually abandoned them. The Christian Church, More argued, had been free from idolatry and Antichristianism for about the first four hundred years after Christ, but it had then become corrupted when it was established at Rome, initiating a 1260 year reign of Antichrist.[54] We may smile now at the lucky coincidence that led to More's just happening to be alive during the very period when the glorious Millennium could be expected: but we should nevertheless respect the fact that he did sincerely believe that the restoration of true Christianity to the world was imminent, and that, through his own works, he could even assist in bringing about its final triumph. In order to achieve true Christianity, it was necessary first to reject the dogmas of the Church of Rome. But then, in casting about for a satisfactory replacement, one should not presume to replace the Roman Catholic novelties with still greater novelties, but should instead endeavour to revive the most ancient wisdom of all—a wisdom of which both Plotinus and Descartes were showing the vestigial traces.

One of the key texts of this most ancient wisdom was, unsurprisingly, the Bible itself. More certainly believed that the Bible could be trusted to deliver some basic truths in religion and morality: but he also felt that there were limits to its usefulness. First, some of its teachings were deeply obscure, and hidden under a symbolic veil. In those cases, More felt that, after a lot of work, they could nevertheless be extracted and made more perspicuous. In his *Synopsis Prophetica*, for instance, he began by providing a taxonomy of the various different types of obscurity that were employed in the Apocalypse, setting out an alphabet of prophetic symbols with their 'real' meanings explained, and listing some general rules for interpreting prophecy. With that groundwork done, he could then go on to interpret the text in detail, with (he felt) so much success that he could finally declare: 'And truly I find nothing in the *Apocalyps*, though the Style seems *mysterious* and *Aenigmatical*, but what is very rational, and look upon it as the most *Faithful* and *Philosophical* Writing that ever was penned.'[55]

[54] *Synopsis Prophetica*, pp. 634–635 (bk. 2, ch. 6, §§1–5).

[55] *Synopsis Prophetica*, p. 713 (bk. 2, ch. 23, §5).

Elsewhere, however, no amount of interpretation would be able to elicit all that might be desired from the Bible, for it simply remained silent on certain key philosophical issues. It discussed 'not the *Mundus Philosophorum*, but the *Mundus Plebiorum*'.[56] It addressed the ordinary man in his own terms, and, although it was to be trusted on matters of theology, morality and history, there was never any intention that it should be regarded as a textbook of metaphysics, physics or mathematics. As More wrote, in reference to such texts as Genesis 1:16 and 1 Kings 7:23 or 2 Chronicles 4:2: '*Verily* I shall believe the *Scripture* to be the *Measure* of *Philosophy*, when it hath been *demonstrated* unto me, That the *Moon* is bigger than the *Stars*, and *three Diameters* equal to the *Circumference* of a *Circle*.'[57] On such points as these, the prophets were speaking 'not according to the Astronomicall truth of the thing, but according to sense and appearance', and, again, were speaking 'according to the common use and opinion of Men, and not according to the subtilty of *Archimedes* his demonstration'.[58]

Nevertheless, More did still believe that these inspired prophets did *know* such truths, even if it did not always suit their own rhetorical purposes to mention them in their religious texts. More was a firm believer in *prisca sapientia*/*prisca theologia*, an oral, cabbalistical tradition of esoteric teachings among the ancient prophets—a notion that was already well-entrenched long before More took it up.[59] The ultimate originator of this supposed chain of ancient wisdom was, in many quarters, taken to have been the legendary Egyptian philosopher-king, Hermes Trismegistus. Hermes was identified, on the one hand, with Theuth who (as no less an authority than Plato himself informs us) 'invented number and calculation, geometry and astronomy, not to speak of draughts and dice, and above all writing'.[60] If Hermes Trismegistus invented writing itself, then his book, the *Poemander*, could be regarded as the most

[56] *The Apology of Dr. Henry More*, p. 484, (ch. 1, §6). See also More's comment to Baxter in *Two Choice and Useful Treatises*, second part, pp. 187–188 (*Annotations upon the Discourse of Truth*, The Digression).

[57] *A Collection of Aphorisms*, p. 8 (part 1, aphorism 27). The dating of these aphorisms is uncertain. Even at the time of their posthumous publication, the editor, in his (unpaginated) epistle to the reader, found himself unable to say on what occasion they had been written. But there is a large amount of internal evidence that they were probably written in the 1640s, or, at the latest, the early 1650s. The parallel here between aphorism 27 and More's 1651 remarks to Vaughan (see the next note immediately below) provides just one example of resemblances between these remarks and More's published works of this period. In my subsequent references to aphorisms from this little book, I shall have occasion to point out a couple of other such parallels: see p. 83 n. 33 and p. 164 n. 94. In addition, Gabbey 1992, pp. 115–121 (at 118–119), points out another one, comparing a metaphorical reference to 'neurospasts'/puppets at p. 13 (part 2, aphorism 27) both with a discussion in More's 1642 poems (cf. *The Complete Poems*, pp. 48b–49b: *Psychathanasia*, bk. 1, cant. 2, sts. 27–37, especially st. 34) and with Cudworth's *A Sermon Preached before the House of Commons* of 31 March 1647 (cf. Cudworth 1743, separately paginated second part, p. 64).

[58] *The Second Lash of Alazonomastix*, pp. 108–113, here at pp. 112 and 111 respectively (upon page 51, line 25, observation 12).

[59] See Yates 1991, passim: see '*Prisca theologia*' in the index.

[60] Plato 1963, p. 520 (*Phaedrus*, 274d).

ancient text in existence, and this work—which contains various striking 'anticipations' of later Christian doctrines—had a significant influence on the development of Renaissance philosophical ideas. But then, on the other hand, there were also several attempts to identify Hermes directly with certain specific Biblical prophets, in order further to validate his philosophical authority by giving it a proper footing in divine inspiration. Perhaps Hermes/Theuth was one and the same man as Enoch, the sixth descendent after Adam, who was said to have walked with God (Genesis 5:22, 24); or maybe Joseph, who was, after all, supposed to have been made governor of Egypt (Genesis 41:40–43); or Moses, who was supposed to have been adopted into the Egyptian royal family (Exodus 2:10).[61] Now, in 1614, the philologist, Isaac Casaubon, showed that the *Poemander* and other Hermetic works were actually of a much later origin, postdating the initial development of the Christian doctrines that they were supposedly anticipating. But More was just one among a great many people who continued to feel, even post-Casaubon, that, 'though there may be suspected some fraud and corruption in several passages in that Book, in reference to the interest of Christianity', it could nevertheless, on other points, be trusted as a genuine and accurate presentation of the thought of an extremely ancient Egypt.[62] To name but one particularly noteworthy example, Ralph Cudworth shared this attitude with his colleague.[63]

But, assuming that Hermes Trismegistus was not in fact the same person as Moses, from More's point of view it was the latter who really got things going in philosophy. Besides giving the Law to the Israelites, and doing all of the other things recorded in the Pentateuch, More's Moses was also a very sophisticated philosopher: 'in the expounding of *Moses*,' he wrote, 'I think I may lay down this for a safe Principle, That there is no considerable Truth in *Nature* or *Divinity* that *Moses* was ignorant of.'[64] Moses may not have written his more abstruse doctrines down—not explicitly, at any rate—but he had a philosophical cabbala of secret insights, which he preached orally to his most intellectual acolytes.

Thus, for instance, in theology More believed that Moses had a proper grip on the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, many centuries prior to the establishment of this as an explicit religious tenet in the time of Christ.[65] More was keen to clear the Trinity of

[61] On the identification with Enoch, see Baldwin 1967, pp. 47–49. On Joseph, see Gale 1671, pp. 12–14; and also More's own discussion of this suggestion, in *Tetractys Anti-Astrologica*, pp. 22–23 (annotations upon ch. 14, §5). On Moses, see Ficino 2001–2006, vol. 6, p. 83 (bk. 18, ch. 1), together with p. 303 n. 16; though also compare Ficino's preface to his edition of the *Poemander*, as quoted in Copenhaver 1992, p. xlviii; and see Hankins 1990, vol. 2, pp. 459–464 (appendix 17).

[62] *The Immortality of the Soul*, p. 115 (bk. 2, ch. 12, §10).

[63] Cudworth 1743, pp. 319–334/Cudworth 1845, vol. 1, pp. 540–565. More generally, see Yates 1991, ch. 21. Also, on the position of Isaac Newton in relation to the Hermetica, see McGuire 1977; not to mention McGuire and Rattansi 1966, and Casini 1984.

[64] *Conjectura Cabbalistica*, p. 72 (*The Defence of the Philosophick Cabbala*, upon ch. 1, vers. 1); see also p. iii (Preface, §4).

[65] *Conjectura Cabbalistica*, p. 73 (*The Defence of the Philosophick Cabbala*, upon ch. 1, vers. 1).

the charge that it was a pagan invention, borrowed by the Fathers of the Church from the Platonic or Pythagorean school, which might seem to undermine its claim to a rightful place in true Christianity.[66] But the response to this charge was simple. Any similarities between the Christian and the pagan Trinities were not to be explained by the borrowing of the former from the latter. Rather, the pagan Trinity had itself been borrowed from a still earlier stage in the Judeo-Christian tradition.[67]

Second, in metaphysics, More believed that Moses endorsed the doctrine of the pre-existence of the soul[68]—a great favourite of his own, as we will see in our final chapter below.

Third, in cosmology, he believed that Moses had endorsed the doctrine of the motion of the Earth around the Sun, another doctrine to which he pledged his own firm support. It was commonplace at the time for the Copernican system to be associated with the ancient Pythagoreans, and More himself was happy to describe it indifferently as the 'Copernican or Pythagorean' hypothesis. That latter association was backed up by the considerable authority of Aristotle,[69] and it was endorsed by most of the modern heliocentrists too. As for going further, however, and projecting heliocentrism onto Moses himself, More might have been on considerably shakier grounds, and he had to concede that Moses did not openly write in this way in the Pentateuch. But he argued that certain remarks could be construed as hints that this was his real opinion. More's *Conjectura Cabbalistica* was an attempt to elicit philosophical principles from mystical clues contained within the text of the first three chapters of Genesis. While it ultimately had to remain somewhat conjectural, More did nevertheless feel that such a project could be carried out with a reasonable degree of reliability. But in any case, he said, 'that *the Motion of the Earth* has been lost, and appears not in the remains of the Jewish *Cabbala*, this can be no argument against its having once been part thereof.'[70]

Fourth, in physics, More believed that Moses was an atomist and, indeed, that he was the first inventor of atomism. This notion was based on some rather flimsy evidence (out of Strabo, Iamblichus and others) that atomism had been devised by a Sidonian or Phoenician by the name of 'Mochus' or 'Moschus', together with the speculation—guided by the belief that whoever had first managed to get a grip on the invisible, microscopic essence of corporeal matter must surely have been someone

[66] *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness*, pp. 5–7 (bk. 1, ch. 4, §§1–7).

[67] *Conjectura Cabbalistica*, p. 73 (*The Defence of the Philosophick Cabbala*, ch. 1, upon ch. 1, vers. 1). This was also an issue of great concern to Cudworth, who discussed it ad nauseam in the colossal fourth chapter of *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*. (The chapter itself drags on for 450 quarto pages, accounting for half of the book; and this topic takes up a considerable portion of it). See Cudworth 1743, pp. 546–632/Cudworth 1845, vol. 2, p. 311–486.

[68] *Conjectura Cabbalistica*, pp. 156–157 (*Appendix to the Defence of the Philosophick Cabbala*, ch. 6, §§1–2).

[69] Aristotle 1984, vol. 1, pp. 482–483 (*On the Heavens*, bk. 2, ch. 13; 293a15–293b16).

[70] *Conjectura Cabbalistica*, p. 157 (*Appendix to the Defence of the Philosophick Cabbala*, ch. 6, §§2–3, here §2).

very wise indeed—that this name 'Mochus' was probably just a corruption of 'Moses', and that they were one and the same man.[71] This was, indeed, a popular view in More's time (and earlier, throughout the Renaissance). Again, one might cite Cudworth as another notable believer in the Mosaic origins of the atomic theory.[72]

After Moses, and until the time of Christ, the most important new work in philosophy did then come to be carried out within pagan circles, both in the written texts that survived into More's day and our own, and also in the continuation of that esoteric, oral tradition. Crucially, though, there was still a direct lineage that connected this work back to that of Moses, so that the divine inspiration of the latter could, at least partially, provide a solid foundation for the former. The next major figure in the chain was Pythagoras. More believed that Pythagoras may very well have been a Jew himself and that, at any rate, he certainly studied the Mosaic philosophy under the Jewish doctors at Sidon, and fully embraced the whole range of Moses' (supposed) teachings, both physical and spiritual. Without hesitation, More's Pythagoras accepted the Trinity, the pre-existence of the soul, the motion of the Earth and the atomic theory. Pythagoras was then, in turn, broadly followed in such opinions—particularly those on the spiritual side, though now with some uncertainty and confusion on the physical side—by Plato.[73] After all, as Numenius famously asked: what was Plato, but Moses speaking Attic Greek?[74] After Plato, things developed still further down the same path with the work of Aristotle. Although More never showed any special fondness for Aristotle, he did at least concede that, notwithstanding his errors, Aristotle would often argue 'like an Orthodox Scholar of his excellent Master *Plato*; to whose footsteps the closer he keeps, the less he ever wanders from the Truth.'[75]

Increasingly, though, these twin philosophies of matter and spirit, which had formerly been united within a single system under Moses and Pythagoras, were beginning to come apart. Atomism fell into the hands first of Leucippus and Democritus, and then of the Epicureans, while the Mosaic conception of immaterial

[71] *Conjectura Cabbalistica*, pp. 110–114 (*Appendix to the Defence of the Philosophick Cabbala*, ch. 1, §§3–8).

[72] Cudworth 1743, pp. 12–13/Cudworth 1845, vol. 1, pp. 20–21; Cudworth 1996, pp. 38–39. The latter, together with its editorial footnotes, identifies the various classical sources of this notion. More generally, see Sailor 1964.

[73] *Conjectura Cabbalistica*, pp. iii–iv, 37–39, 110–113, 156–157 (Preface, §4; Preface to *The Defence of the Threefold Cabbala*, §§2–4; *Appendix to the Defence of the Philosophick Cabbala*, ch. 1, §§2–8; ch. 6, §§1–4); *Refutation of Spinoza*, p. 107; *The Complete Poems*, p. 80a (*Psychathanasia*, bk. 3, cant. 3, st. 43).

[74] More himself cites this line in *Conjectura Cabbalistica*, pp. iii, 112 (Preface, §4; *Appendix to the Defence of the Philosophick Cabbala*, ch. 1, §5).

[75] *The Immortality of the Soul*, p. 117 (bk. 2, ch. 12, §15). Thomas Vaughan viewed More as an Aristotelian, probably largely on account of the fact that, in their exchange, More was keen to defend Aristotle from Vaughan's criticisms: but this did not mean that More was positively committed to any form of Aristotelianism, but merely that he felt that Aristotle deserved vastly more respect than Vaughan was willing to give him—and, indeed, vastly more than Vaughan himself deserved.

spirits, finite and infinite, became the centrepiece of the Platonic tradition. More very much preferred the latter to the former, and he found the materialist irreligion of the Epicureans to be utterly repugnant. The Epicureans had resolved *everything* into atoms and void, thereby ruling out the very possibility of immaterial spirits and of any God worthy of the name. More certainly could not accept that. However, particularly once he had discovered Cartesian physics—not strictly atomistic, perhaps, but definitely corpuscularian—and recognised just how successful that was, he came to a grudging acknowledgement of the value of this earlier physical research in the same general area. As long as the proper domain of atomist physics was properly circumscribed, the Democritic or Epicurean treatment of it did actually have a lot to offer.

More's attitude was that, notwithstanding the use to which mechanical or atomist physics had perennially been put in the name of a materialist atheism, or at least of something very close to it, there was nothing truly inherent to such a physical system that should render it incompatible with a proper (i.e. Platonist) account of the spiritual realm. As we have seen, More felt that these theories had once been united in a single, all-encompassing system, divinely revealed to Moses himself. After so protracted a divorce, it was high time that they should be reunited. Far from their being inherently opposed to one another, these two branches, 'the one travelling in the lower Road of *Democritism*, amidst the thick dust of Atoms and flying particles of *Matter*; the other tracing it over the high and aiery Hills of *Platonism*, in that more thin and subtil Region of *Immateriality*, meet together notwithstanding at last (and certainly not without a Providence) at the same *Goal*, namely at the Entrance of the holy Bible.'[76] It was when More discovered Descartes' philosophy of nature that he began to realise that such a synthesis of these two branches really had become a genuine, living possibility. As he put it: 'the *Cartesian* Philosophy being in a manner the same with that of *Democritus*; and that of *Democritus* the same with the Physiological part of *Pythagoras* his Philosophy; and *Pythagoras* his Philosophy, the same with the *Sidonian*; as also the *Sidonian*, with the *Mosaical*; it will necessarily follow, that the *Mosaical* Philosophy, in the Physiological part thereof, is the same with the *Cartesian*.'[77]

It was for this reason that More became as exuberant as he did in his praise for Descartes. The rapture he felt at the perspicacity, the breadth and the success of Descartes' mechanical account of physical phenomena was, at least for a while, almost boundless. The term 'mechanical' had been absent from *Psychodia Platonica* in 1642, but, from *Democritus Platonissans* (1646) onwards, it became a buzz-word for More, so thoroughly enamoured was he with Descartes' skill in that field.

[76] *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings*, The Preface General, p. xii (§11). In place of the word 'Goal', the text here actually gives the word 'Gaol'. But this is obviously a misprint, and the 1662 edition has 'Goale'. More certainly did not regard the Bible as a gaol!

[77] *Conjectura Cabbalistica*, p. 114 (*Appendix to the Defence of the Philosophick Cabbala*, ch. 1, §8). Gérauld de Cordemoy also believed that the Cartesian system was, to all intents and purposes, the same as the Mosaical, and he claimed that it seemed that Descartes had only become a philosopher by reading Moses. See Ablondi 2005, pp. 112–114.

He gushed to Thomas Vaughan that Descartes had 'the most admirable Philosophy, that ever yet appeared in these *European* parts since *Noahs* floud'.[78] Indeed, and significantly, he was even prepared to go so far as to suggest that Descartes' knowledge of nature might itself have had its basis in a personal inspiration directly from God himself.[79] Notwithstanding More's attacks on the enthusiasts' melancholy 'inspirations'—the unreliability of which was demonstrated by their authors' extravagant exuberance, in contrast to Descartes' own sobriety and modesty, not even acknowledging his own inspiration as such—More did not believe that there was anything impossible about God's electing someone to receive a supernatural implantation of knowledge into his mind. This was, after all, precisely what he had done with the first great author of this same system, Moses himself; and, even if he had long since ceased to behave in this way, there was nothing to prevent him from starting up again if it suited him to do so. And it might well have so suited him in the middle of the seventeenth century, if the Millennium was as imminent as More believed it was, and God was making the requisite preparations to usher it in. Among the conditions that were necessary before the true Church could finally vanquish Antichrist, it was rather important that it should get its doctrines right, and this should include an accurate system of natural philosophy along with the rest. More viewed Descartes' role as being one of reviving and rehabilitating the physical branch of the ancient Mosaic cabbala. And he viewed his own role as being one of reuniting this branch with its proper spiritual partner. In one extraordinary remark, More even drew a parallel between himself and Moses, as he indicated the conception he had of himself as the great restorer of the Mosaic philosophy to the world. Recalling the criticisms that some had levelled against him for the extravagantly satirical tone he had adopted in his relatively early writings against Thomas Vaughan, prior to composing his more serious philosophical prose works, More wrote: 'I did easily bear with their ignorance, deeming it in my silent thoughts in some sort parallel to that of the peevish Hebrew who reproached *Moses* for slaying of the *Egyptian*, not knowing that it was a preludious act to his delivering of his whole nation from the bondage of *Aegypt*.'[80] On accomplishing his revolutionary task of restoring Moses' complete system of philosophy to the world, More believed that he would thereby have provided the world with an absolutely unassailable system that would not only constitute a thoroughly true account of the nature of the entire universe, but would, in so doing, also prove abundantly useful to the Church, for promoting true Christianity and defending it against assaults from every possible side, delivering mankind from the bondage of Antichristianism, enthusiasm and atheism with one single blow.

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[78] *Observations upon Anthroposophia Theomagica, and Anima Magica Abscondita*, p. 88 (upon *Anima Magica Abscondita*, pag. 55, lin. 13). 'Sure then *Aristotel* was *before* the *Floud*', sniffed Vaughan in response. Vaughan 1650b, p. 37 (observation 3).

[79] *Conjectura Cabbalistica*, p. 114 (*Appendix to the Defence of the Philosophick Cabbala*, ch. 1, §9). More did not presume to offer any explanation of why God would have chosen a Catholic to receive such an inspiration.

[80] *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness* (1660 edition), p. vi (To the Reader, §5). The reference is to Exodus 2:11–14.

And thus, almost as soon as More had begun his philosophical career, his discovery of Descartes caused his philosophy to shift from a fairly faithful Christian Platonism, wherein physical concerns took a back seat to spiritual ones, to a synthesis of such an account of spiritual reality with an approximately Cartesian account of the physical world. The extent of More's mechanism was always somewhat narrower than that of Descartes' own, for not only did he exclude human actions from its domain (as Descartes himself also did), but he also excluded animal behaviour, vegetative activity, and even the activity of the stars in the heavens and certain other ostensibly inanimate bodies. However, he was at least prepared to allow that *most* physical phenomena could be explained by mechanical principles alone.

But then he went and changed his mind again. In Chaps. 8 and 9, we will examine the development of More's views in this area in some detail. Suffice it for now to say that, by the 1660s, he had come to the view that, as a matter of fact, the mechanical philosophy could explain virtually nothing at all. Naturally, then, its principal modern author became a target for criticism. The criticisms of Descartes in More's later writings perhaps never achieved the same level of exuberance as the encomiums for him in his earlier writings had done. Descartes certainly never received the kind of vitriolic invective that More (as, admittedly, a considerably younger man) had hurled at Thomas Vaughan. But these criticisms were forceful ones, even so.

More ultimately came to the view that Descartes' 'gross Extravangancies (such as making Brutes mere *Machina*'s, the making every Extension really the same with Matter, his averring all the *Phaenomena* of the World to arise from mere Mechanical causes) will be more stared upon and hooted at by impartial Posterity, than any other pieces of wit he may have light on can be admired or applauded.'[81] Descartes' equation of matter with extension immediately generated the view that immaterial spirits could not be extended; which, for the Cartesians, meant that they did not exist in any place; which apparently amounted to the view that they existed nowhere—the view that More dubbed 'nullibism'. But to say that spirits, and God in particular, did not exist anywhere struck More as tantamount to saying simply that they did not exist. As for mechanism itself, as More wrote elsewhere, 'a greater wound or injury cannot be inflicted to the most essential parts of religion than the presumption of a possible resolution of all phenomena into purely mechanical causes (not even the bodies of plants or animals excepted). Indeed, as if this corporeal world, on condition only that so much motion be supposed to be imposed on matter as is in fact found in it till now, can generate itself. Which, however, is the Cartesian hypothesis.'[82] To say that natural phenomena could be resolved into purely mechanical causes was equivalent to saying that they did not require any immaterial causes. This would therefore undermine any theoretical need for such spirits to exist at all, which would

[81] *Divine Dialogues*, p. 185 (dial. 3, §3). Although the remark is placed in the mouth of a character (namely, Philotheus) within a dialogue, it does seem to represent More's mature attitude accurately enough.

[82] *Enchiridion metaphysicum*, vol. 1, p. V (Preface to the Reader, §4).

further undermine confidence in that existence, thereby injuring the interests of religion. Since the interests of religion were always those of More himself, he thus came to the view that it was incumbent on him to oppose Cartesianism, not only in its details (as he had always done), but also in its most fundamental principles. 'For, indeed, as matters now stand, if the Cartesian philosophy, both physical and metaphysical, were allowed to abide, I certainly fear to say in what a proclivity and in how dangerous a precipitancy towards atheism the souls of mortals would be placed, as no sufficiently firm check occurs in its ways of philosophising which prohibits them from lapsing into this insane disease.'[83] Much as Descartes himself might not personally have been an atheist, this was the direction that his philosophy was going in. Mechanism led to materialism, and materialism was tantamount to atheism. This drift needed to be halted at its source.

The key, for More, had always been to find the correct *balance* between his theories of physical and spiritual reality. On discovering Descartes in the mid-1640s, he had decided that the physical side had previously been wanting in his own philosophy, and so he sought to provide a proper counterbalance for his spiritualism. During the 1650s and early-1660s, he came to decide that even just to strike an equal balance between the two was already to place an undue emphasis on the physical, and so the spiritual side began to dominate once more. According to More's new conception of matter, far from being sufficient to account for physical phenomena by itself, matter's nature actually revealed, by dint of its very insufficiency, the absolutely unavoidable need for a distinct spiritual realm also to be postulated. However, what we do not get in More's later writings is simply a revival of the more or less faithful Plotinian Platonism that had characterised his earliest poems, those written prior to his discovery of Cartesianism. Too much water had passed under the bridge since then. More's engagement with Cartesianism, and with all of the other systems he examined over the course of his long career, had led him down new paths of enquiry, and prompted him to come up with ideas that were all his own. Whereas the ideas of the earliest poems could be traced directly back to Plotinus, and the immediately subsequent works offered a modified synthesis of Platonism and Cartesianism, the two principal works of More's mature period (*Divine Dialogues* and *Enchiridion metaphysicum*) present a genuinely novel system of his own devising. (Indeed, it is rather telling that Cuphophron, the character in the *Dialogues* who often most closely represents More's own earlier Platonist-Cartesian position—a 'zealous, but Aiery-minded, *Platonist* and *Cartesian*, or *Mechanist*', as More now described him[84]—is presented as *losing* most of his arguments). The emphasis in these late works was still in the same place, on an immaterial realm of spirits and of God in particular, but the details were quite different.

[83] *Enchiridion metaphysicum*, vol. 1, pp. VII–VIII (Preface to the Reader, §6).

[84] *Divine Dialogues*, p. xxxii (cast of characters).

3 Epistemology and Rhetoric

One of those branches of More's philosophy which (focusing as I shall be on his metaphysics) I am not going to examine in detail is his epistemology. But then, like most other English philosophers during this period—in contrast, perhaps, to the period that followed Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*—epistemological concerns were not uppermost in More's mind anyway. However, like them, he did have at least something to say about such matters, and it would be worth saying a few words about his position, with a view to painting a methodological backdrop against which his more metaphysical views might be better understood.

Unlike his metaphysics, More's epistemology does seem to have remained fairly constant throughout his career. He used the word 'reason' as a blanket term to cover all of the mind's various paths to knowledge, and he identified three such paths. In *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*, the three 'known Faculties of the Soul' were enumerated as 'the *Common notions* that all men in their wits agree upon, or the *Evidence of outward Sense*, or else a *clear and distinct Deduction* from these'.[85] Again, in *The Immortality of the Soul*, More listed the same three cognitive faculties, now also adding to the external sense its 'faithful Register', namely memory.[86]

More never sought to diminish the value and importance of the senses as reliable guides to truth, in the way one might have expected a Neoplatonist to do. Admittedly, they were never going to reveal the very highest things to us: but, within their own proper domain, their testimony was as unimpeachable as anyone could seriously desire. That is not to say that our senses can never lead us into error: we all know perfectly well that they can, as in cases of optical illusions and such like. We look at a tower in the distance, and it appears to be round, whereas in fact it is square.[87] But what is the proper way to correct such errors? It is to use these very same senses to correct *themselves*. Nothing else is going to correct them for us. We cannot establish that the tower is square just by closing our eyes and thinking really hard about it: we need to get closer, and then *look* again. Cartesian concerns about the possibility of global error, and the possibility that the corporeal world might not actually exist at all, or might exist but in some radically unfamiliar way, simply did not trouble More at all. He did occasionally engage with and borrow from Descartes' *Meditations* (even though he always preferred his *Principles*): and yet the one portion of it that seems to have left him entirely cold is the First Meditation. As long as the conditions are not obviously such as would make the senses unreliable—too great a distance, poor lighting, etc.—More felt that it would be quite literally *irrational* not to trust their evidence regarding the existence and the qualities of the

[85] *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*, p. 38 (§54).

[86] *The Immortality of the Soul*, pp. 3–4 (bk. 1, ch. 2, axiome 3 and §4).

[87] The example is from Descartes' Sixth Meditation, CSM 2:53/AT 7:76.

bodies in one's immediate environment. 'But as for perfect *Scepticism*,' he wrote, 'it is a disease incurable, and a thing rather to be pitied or laugh'd at, than seriously opposed. For when a man is so fugitive and unsettled, that he will not stand to the verdict of his own Faculties, one can no more fasten any thing upon him, than he can write in the water, or tie knots of the wind.'[88]

Now, Richard Popkin has made much of remarks like this one about 'a disease incurable', and the other occasional truisms in More's works to the effect that one cannot doubt one's own rational faculties and yet at the same time use those same rational faculties to extricate oneself from such doubt. He has identified these remarks as vestiges of an early '*crise pyrrhonienne*' from which More never managed to extricate himself.[89] But Alan Gabbey is sceptical of Popkin's ascriptions of 'super-scepticism' and 'ultimate scepticism' to More,[90] and he has denied that epistemological scepticism was really a serious concern for More at all.[91] In this debate, I side firmly with Gabbey. As far as More was concerned, the three branches of reason—sensation being one of these—were just fine as they were. It was, indeed, a fundamental axiom of More's epistemological system that '[w]hatever is clear to any one of these Three Faculties is to be held undoubtedly true, the other having nothing to evidence to the contrary.'[92]

Within their own proper domain, then, the senses were perfectly autonomous, and there was no need for any innate ideas to assist in purely sensible matters. Descartes had suggested that, given that there was no similarity between, on the one hand, the ideas of pain, colours, sounds and the like, and, on the other hand, the corporeal motions that stimulated them in sensation, these ideas had to be innate within our minds and were merely prompted out into conscious actuality on the occasion of those corporeal motions.[93] More was not persuaded. 'To all sensitive Objects the Soul is an *Abrasa Tabula*', he straightforwardly declared.[94] However, no matter how reliable and independent the senses might have been within their own proper domain, their domain was still fairly narrow. More was satisfied that a man's thoughts could reach very much further than the senses would allow by themselves, and that he could intellectually penetrate into the eternal truths and the immutable essences of things. Notwithstanding that 'tabula rasa' comment, More certainly could not be described as an empiricist. The very same remark immediately continues: 'but for *Moral* and *Intellectual* Principles, their Idea's or Notions are essential to the Soul'.

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[88] *The Immortality of the Soul*, pp. 2–3 (bk. 1, ch. 2, §1).

[89] Popkin 1987, pp. 170–174; Popkin 1990, pp. 98–99, 101; Popkin 2003, pp. 176–180, and also see 210–211, 215, and 357 n. 8; also Coudert 1990, pp. 126–128.

[90] Popkin uses these expressions in Popkin 1990 p. 99.

[91] Gabbey 1993, pp. 81–90.

[92] *The Immortality of the Soul*, p. 4 (bk. 1, ch. 2, axiome 5).

[93] CSM 1:304/AT 8B:359 ('Comments on a Certain Broadsheet', on article 13).

[94] *Two Choice and Useful Treatises*, second part, p. 19 (*Annotations upon Lux Orientalis*, upon ch. 3, pag. 17).

This second class of principles did not overlap with the class of sensible truths: it was something additional, something that the mind could grasp by very different means. More felt that every man's mind was imprinted with certain innate ideas, essential to the soul; and that, in virtue of these, there were certain general principles to which everyone, the world over, would assent.[95] The latter were the common notions. They were 'true at first sight to all men in their wits upon a clear perception of the Terms, without any further discourse or reasoning'.[96] Whatever was not consonant with these, as More proceeded to declare, was mere fancy. The very universality of these common notions was itself a testament to their truth, in stark contrast to the exclusivity of the enthusiasts' supposed personal revelations. The fact that the latter could never be tested by an impartial arbiter itself constituted a reason to distrust them.

More did not, of course, believe that innate ideas were explicitly conscious in the mind from birth. He compared them to the latent skill of a sleeping musician. There would be no actual representation of anything musical in his mind: but, on his being prompted with only the most 'slight and slender intimation'—the first two or three words of a song—he would spontaneously proceed to sing the remainder. Likewise, some kind of stimulus would be required to stir up the innate knowledge that had formerly been purely latent within a man's mind. But, when it was thus roused into consciousness, this innate knowledge would provide his mind with 'a more full and clear conception of what was but imperfectly hinted to her from external Occasions'.[97] More described these innate ideas as the 'natural Furniture of humane Understanding', and he placed them at the foundation of our moral, mathematical and logical knowledge. Among these notions, he included such things as: '*Cause*, *Effect*, *Whole* and *Part*, *Like* and *Unlike*, and the rest. So *Equality* and *Inequality*, *logos* and *analogia*, *Proportion* and *Analogy*, *Symmetry* and *Asymmetry*, and such like: All which *Relative Ideas* I shall easily prove to be no material Impresses from without upon the Soul, but her own active Conception proceeding from her self whilst she takes notice of *external Objects*.'[98] Once such ideas had first been stimulated out of their state of latent potentiality, the mind could then recognise that certain relations held between them, and it could thereby achieve knowledge of the common notions: that the whole is greater than the part, that every number is even or odd, and so forth.[99]

Finally, man could infallibly draw deductions from what he had learnt from his senses or from the common notions. Such deductions would be as self-evident as

[95] See *Antipsychopannychia*, 109–111 (cant. 2, stanzas 22–44). On innate ideas among the Cambridge Platonists at large, see Lamprecht 1926, and also DeBoer 1931. On More's treatment in particular, see Crocker 2003, pp. 70–74.

[96] *The Immortality of the Soul*, pp. 3–4 (bk. 1, ch. 2, §4).

[97] *An Antidote Against Atheism*, p. 17 (bk. 1, ch. 5, §3).

[98] *An Antidote Against Atheism*, p. 18 (bk. 1, ch. 6, §3).

[99] *An Antidote Against Atheism*, p. 19 (bk. 1, ch. 6, §6). See also *The Immortality of the Soul*, pp. 66–67 (bk. 2, ch. 2, §§9–12), where More sought to refute Hobbes's nominalist account of these common notions.

the fundamental common notion upon which they all collectively rested, namely that a contradiction cannot be true. The Roman Catholics and the enthusiasts, by contrast, turned their backs on all of this. The Catholics were misled by the false authority of their Church into embracing contradictions that violated their rational faculties. The enthusiasts, meanwhile, rejected reason 'under pretence of expectation of an higher and more glorious Light', whereas in fact this more mundane and universal reason was already derived directly from Christ himself, 'who is the Eternal *logos*, the all-comprehending Wisdom and Reason of God, wherein he sees through the Natures and *Ideas* of all things, with all their respects of Dependency and Independency, Congruity and Incongruity, or whatever Habitude they have to one another, with one continued glance at once.'[100]

There are passages here and there where More did appear to allow man a further cognitive faculty, superior to all three of these branches of reason, and where he thereby appeared to be verging rather close to enthusiasm himself. For instance, in the *Divine Dialogues*, the character of Philotheus—who can generally be relied upon to speak for More himself—insisted that 'there is a kind of Sanctity of Soul and Body that is of more efficacy for the receiving or retaining of Divine Truths, than the greatest pretences to Discursive Demonstration', and he attacked the use of '*dry Reason* unassisted by the *Spirit*'.[101] Another character, Philopolis, complained that 'this seems to open a gap to all Wildness and Fanaticism.' But Philotheus disagreed: 'I understand by the *Spirit*, not a blind unaccountable Impression or Impulse, a Lift or an Huff of an heated Brain; but the *Spirit of Life in the new Birth*, which is a discerning Spirit.'[102] This might not have been quite the melancholy fancy of the enthusiasts, then, but nevertheless it would still appear to transcend common human reason.

However, despite Philotheus's reference to the reception of 'divine truths', perhaps we do not have to interpret such remarks as these in a genuinely epistemological manner. When discussing inspiration and enthusiasm in *Conjectura Cabbalistica*, More referred to 'an ineffable sense of life, in respect whereof there is no true Christian but he is inspired'.[103] More did not elaborate, but his idea seems to have been something akin to the 'sense of the heart' which various other theologians described in considerably more detail.[104] According to the doctrine, when a Christian was reborn in the Spirit, God would grant him a new sense of divine things, but—crucially—the experiences that this new sense would give him would not have any propositional content of their own. He would not learn any new *facts* about God or anything else. Rather, he would achieve a more profound appreciation of the same

[100] *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus*, pp. 38–39 (§54).

[101] *Divine Dialogues*, pp. 10–11, 495 (dial. 1, §4; dial. 5, §28).

[102] *Divine Dialogues*, p. 495 (dial. 5, §28). Crocker has examined More's conception of a 'new birth', and his 'illuminism' in general, in Crocker 2003, passim; see also Crocker 1990b. Otherwise, it has been rather neglected in the secondary literature on More.

[103] *Conjectura Cabbalistica*, p. 114 (*Appendix to the Defence of the Philosophick Cabbala*, ch. 1, §9).

[104] See, for instance, Erdt 1980, chs. 1–2.

old truths that he had already known intellectually or through revelation. He would already have known that a sentence like 'God is love', for instance, expressed a truth: what this new sense would give him was a *taste* of that very love itself. In The Interpretation Generall to his poems, More alluded to 'the vanity of superficiall conceited Theologasters, that have but the surface and thin imagination of divinity, but truly devoid of the spirit and inward power of Christ, the living well-spring of knowledge and virtue, and yet do pride themselves in prattling and discoursing of the most hidden and abstruse mysteries of God, and take all occasions to shew forth their goodly skill and wonderfull insight into holy truth, when as they have indeed scarce licked the outside of the glasse wherein it lies.'[105] These theologasters might have had the 'dry reason' to which Philotheus would later be referring, but what they lacked was this deeper relish of the truths that they were expressing. More's discussions of this 'sense of life', which God granted to true Christians as they were reborn in the Spirit, are not explicit, one way or the other, on the question of whether there was any new propositional content involved therein: but they do at least permit a reading according to which there would not be. If this reading is correct, then we need not classify it as an additional *epistemological* faculty. More, after all, did not mention it in the same contexts as those in which he discussed the three branches of reason: sensation, common notions and deduction. We will also be able to clear More of the charge of succumbing to his own bugbear of enthusiasm—something that he, at least, was entirely confident that he was not doing—for genuine enthusiasm certainly *did* purport to produce genuine knowledge of new facts.

However, now turning our attention to More's practical method of discovery, as opposed to his more theoretical epistemology, he did have a fourth source of information at his fingertips: namely, those ancient philosophical and religious texts, the authority of which he held in such high regard. Much as the modern enthusiasts might have been deluded in their own pretended inspirations, More felt that the prophets of the past really had been infallibly inspired by God, and that many important truths could be gleaned from their writings. And not only from the writings of the Biblical prophets themselves, but also of their pupils—recall how More felt that Pythagoras had been trained in the secret teachings of Moses at Sidon—and their pupils' pupils after them. Of course, these latter texts could never match the writings of the Biblical prophets themselves in the infallibility stakes; and the further removed they were from their original inspired source, the less reliable they would become: but still useful guides, nevertheless. The fact that a certain doctrine had been endorsed by a select group of ancient authors was, prima facie, a strong point in its favour. However, such doctrines would still always need to be cross-checked against the tribunal of reason. If they were found wanting, then they would need to be jettisoned, no matter how eminent the authority behind them might have been. Even in the case of the Bible itself, some major interpretative effort might be required before

[105] *The Complete Poems*, p. 163b (The Interpretation Generall: 'Psittaco').

its true message could be extracted, and this process would, again, need to be conducted rationally. Biblical texts would always be true when interpreted correctly: but, as we saw, More did not think that the correct interpretation was always going to be the literal one. If a Biblical text seemed to suggest that the circumference of a circle was three times its diameter, then reason itself would dictate that the literal reading was not appropriate in this particular instance. Thus, notwithstanding the fact that certain authorities, Biblical and pagan alike, might have taken the lead in steering More's attention in the direction of certain ideas, their role would end there. Reason would always have the final say on whether he should actually endorse these ideas or not.

On the other hand, once he had come to a rational decision within himself, that he should embrace a certain position, when it then came time to present it to his readers, it could not hurt to toss in a few references to particularly esteemed authors. Philosophically speaking, their authority could not prove the truth of the claim in question: reason alone could do that. But an appeal to authority could nevertheless help to convince a sceptical reader. Right across the board, there was a lot of rhetoric in More's writings. He was not interested in discovering dry, sterile truths, merely for his own personal edification. He wanted to *persuade* his readers of such truths, his ultimate goal being nothing less than to save their immortal souls by bringing them to a proper knowledge and love of their creator; and he was prepared to make use of almost any ammunition or strategy he could find that might assist him in this campaign. Ideally, everyone in the republic of letters would have been perfectly receptive to thoroughly rational philosophical arguments, established by clear deductions from common notions and the sorts of sensible phenomena that were familiar to all. But many people simply were not like that. If, then, a quotation from an eminent authority could have the effect of winning a reader round, by awe if not by argument, then so be it.

One might make an analogous point about More's ghost stories.[106] More himself would doubtless have been considerably less credulous of these tales of apparitions if he had not been satisfied that the existence of spiritual world they suggested could be independently supported by rational arguments. Philosophically speaking, the apparitions were no more sufficient by themselves to prove the existence of such a realm than the authority of an eminent ancient thinker was sufficient by itself to prove the truth of his opinions. After all, even in the case of a genuine apparition, the thing that was actually appearing to the senses would still only be the aerial vehicle of the spirit, not the immaterial spirit itself. The unassisted senses could never reach beyond the physical effect, either to prove or to disprove a spiritual cause. However, what such stories *could* do was stir up the emotions of More's less intellectual readers in such a way as to draw them round to his way of thinking. There were more souls out there in need of saving than merely those of the more erudite philosophical community and, if More could not reason them into a belief

[106] See Coudert 1990; Hall 1990b, ch. 7; Crocker 2003, ch. 9; Jesseph 2005, especially pp. 212–215.

in spirits, perhaps he might yet be able to scare them into one. Consequently, More presented his theories in a variety of ways, multiplying arguments to a common conclusion in hopes that every group of readers, from the most intellectual to the least, might find at least one approach that suited its own particular capacity and was to its own particular taste.

Consider, for example, *An Antidote Against Atheism*. This work was divided into three parts. In the first book, More appealed to the Ontological Argument for the existence of God, based on his essence or definition as a supremely perfect being. This argument, as More himself acknowledged, did not even command universal consent within the intellectual community; and he recognised that it was nigh on impossible for the common man to get his head around it at all, and still less to find it compelling. Therefore, in the second book, he changed his tack and pursued the more down-to-earth Argument from Design. But still, much as this argument might have been grounded in the familiar, sensible objects of the material world, it did nevertheless require an intellectual leap, to rise up from these intricate and harmonious bodies themselves, in order to discover the omnipotent spiritual designer behind them all. And so, in the third book, More turned to his ghost stories, in hopes of convincing even the dullest, most sensual reader of the existence of a realm of immaterial spirits (for, once that had been done, it would then be only a short step to the existence of an ultimate spiritual principle to preside over this realm).

More presented a concrete example of the sort of effect he hoped to achieve by this method, in a prefatory letter to Glanvill's *Saducismus Triumphatus*, 'sadducism' (or 'saducism') being the name they gave to a denial of the existence of immaterial spirits.[107] He recalled a conversation he had had with one Father L., who had been a sadducist in this sense. More had initially tried to persuade him by means of dry discourses, but Father L. would always brush him off with a dismissive retort: 'This is Logick, Henry.' Even after Father L. had himself been subject to an apparent apparition, he had still been inclined to disregard it as a mere delusion, so entrenched was his sadducism. But then later, as the man lay dying, More reminded him of the experience, and what he found was that this had a far greater impact on his beliefs than any of his subtle reasonings about the future state of the soul had ever done. More asked him: 'Do you remember the clap on your Back when your Servant was pulling off your Boots in the Hall? Assure your self, said I, Father *L.* that Goblin will be the first that will bid you welcome into the other World. Upon that his Countenance changed most sensibly, and he was more confounded with this rubbing up his memory, than with all the Rational or Philosophical Argumentations that I could produce.'[108] More hoped that the readers of the third book of *An Antidote Against Atheism*, and of *Saducimus Triumphatus* itself, might encounter a similar epiphany.

More generally, More was always conscious of his readership, and he endeavoured to cater for all sections thereof. He wrote technical Latin works for the cognoscenti;

[107] After Acts 23:8: 'For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.'

[108] *Saducismus Triumphatus*, pp. 23–25, here p. 25 ('Dr H.M. his Letter').