Abstract

The main goal of this thesis is to describe the evolution of the concept of a world soul in the thought of Cambridge Platonist Henry More (1614-1687). However, this topic is discussed within the broader context of early modern philosophy and the birth of modern science. The philosophy of Henry More presents a very interesting confrontation between Renaissance Neo-Platonism and Cartesianism, early modern mechanicism and the newest scientific discoveries of his age, the notion of a world soul being exactly the point where all these thought currents meet. The classical conception of a platonic world soul in More's early thought later becomes the *Spirit of Nature*, a principle complimentary to mechanicism (and at the same time acting as its metaphysical foundation). Yet in order for the regularity of such phenomena as gravitation to be guaranteed, the *Spirit of Nature* has to be rid of any conscience and will of its own. However, besides this tendency to "strip" the world soul of its personal aspects, leading ultimately to the notion of a completely impersonal natural law, a deeper analysis of certain aspects of More's philosophical system shows also a determination to preserve the broader connections that tie the classical notion of a world soul to a specific world picture that does not necessarily fit in with the paradigm of early modern science.

The first chapter (which is also the largest) presents a detailed historical analysis of the evolution of More's thought leading from the hypostasis *Psyche* in his early poems (that is at the same time the Holy Spirit and the world soul) to his later, much more impersonal concept of *Spirit of Nature*. The following chapters try to view this evolution within different contexts and from different points of view – in relation with More's conception of dualism, with his theory of the imagination and religious enthusiasm, in connection with a similar development in the thought of More's younger contemporary Isaac Newton, and finally compared to his famous theory of absolute space as the extension of God. The main conclusions of such a thorough analysis are twofold. From the point of view of More scholarship, it shows that on many levels, there is a strong continuity between More's early and later thought, a continuity that remains necessarily hidden when one reads his later works only against the background of early modern natural philosophy. From the point of view of the history of thought in general, this same continuity is also shown to represent one of the last attempts to integrate into the new science a certain line of thought that is in some respects foreign to it and that will eventually end up pushed very much into the background.