Jacques Joseph, "Vývoj pojetí světové duše u Henryho Mora"
(*The Evolution of the Notion of a World Soul in Henry More*)

Opponent's Report

Introduction

The author introduces his dissertation by explaining the place of Henry More in early-modern philosophy, and reviews the scope of More's different publications. We are also given an overview of the different disputes he entered into with his contemporaries, and important parallels with the natural philosophy of Isaac Newton are indicated. Somewhat unobtrusively, the author provides us with a definition of the mechanical philosophy which More so resolutely opposed:

> "Mechanicismem rozumím teorii, která se pokouší nějaký jev či soubor jevů vysvětlit čistě prostřednictvím zákonů mechaniky, tj. interakcí částic hmoty (jejich srážkami)" (p. 14n).

This definition adequately captures the causal aspect of mechanism, which always relies on contact and impulse. One might, however, also mention the ontological claim of the mechanical philosophy i.e. that matter is uniform and coheres in bodies which only have the "mechanical" affections of shape, size, motion, extension and (in non-Cartesian versions of mechanism) solidity.

Chapters 1-3

In the first three chapters the author gives a thorough and engaging account of More's principal physical, metaphysical and theological views. In the First Chapter, More's many-layered neo-Platonist emanatory system is set forth. The author's attention then turns to the concept of the Spirit of Nature, which is characterised as a non-material principle penetrating all matter in the universe and whose "plastic power" is responsible for a wide range of phenomena—from gravitation to animal instinct—that cannot, in More's view, be explained by the mechanical philosophy (pp.54-55). The author shows how More, in his *The Immortality of the Soul*, treats the Spirit of Nature as a power that complements mechanical explanations, acting where mechanical causation falls short. This somewhat *ad hoc* conception of the Spirit of Nature—mischievously described by Alan Gabbey as the "Spirit of the causal gaps"—then gives way to a more thoroughgoing and satisfactory conception in the *Divine Dialogues*. Now More attributes even the mechanical powers themselves to the vital principle of the Spirit of Nature. This is demonstrated in the author's illuminating discussion of mechanical causation (pp. 58-60), which shows the depth of More's critique and his awareness that the transmission of motion itself cannot be made fully transparent within the confines of the mechanical philosophy.

At this point, the author might have also discussed More's critique of attempts by mechanical philosophers to explain the cohesion of bodies that he gives in the *Divine Dialogues* (as related by, for example, Jasper Reid in his *The Metaphysics of Henry More*, pp. 294-298). This critique is significant as it means that the very ontology of the mechanical philosophy (cohering bodies with the mechanical affections) could not be understood without the action of the Spirit of Nature. Cohesion will also be relevant later, in the author's chapter on Newton, for Sir Isaac, too, treats the hard atoms that God created in the beginning, as held together by an active, non-mechanical, force of internal attraction.

Henry More's Platonism and its role in his conception of nature is carefully explained, and the author usefully exploits (here and later) Zdeněk Horský's observation that Platonism had two principal influences on natural philosophy in the early-modern period: firstly, it had a vitalistic influence, treating the universe as a living being; secondly, it had a quantificational influence, seeking to understand the cosmos in terms of mathematics (p. 62). These two principles, which were frequently in tension in other thinkers, are reconciled in the moderated Platonism of More's understanding of nature, it is argued. The author sees the basic motive of More's work as the defence of an acceptable form of vitalism against the radical tendency of early-modern science to drive out all traces of a vital spirit from nature. It is argued that More's fundamental vitalistic "intuition", which opposed the inertness of matter in the mechanical tendencies of natural science, stays with him throughout his career, despite the evolution of his outlook in other respects.

In the Second Chapter, a case is made for interpreting More's dualism of spirit and matter as a graduated continuum, in which the Spirit of Nature is an expression of a middle degree, between inert matter and pure spirit ("jakási hraniční entita napůl cesty mezi plnohodnotnými dušemi a pasivní látkou"). In addition, the author argues that the most fundamental difference between spirit and matter for More is to be made not according to the criterion of penetrability and impenetrability, or according to indivisibility and divisibility, but rather spirit is best seen as an active principle and matter as a passive principle (p. 73). He further allows that in More's universe there is actually no instance of pure, inert matter, nor is there any pure, disembodied spirit (p. 93). These various characteristics left me wondering if More's philosophy of nature is not really, *by implication*, close to a kind of quasi-Spinozoist monism. Does not Spinoza also hold that everything in nature has passive and active aspects, and that there is no dead matter lacking in active power (*conatus*) and a spiritual dimension (however rudimentary and inchoate)? Is it not worth considering whether the term dualism is really useful in characterising More's philosophy of nature in the first place? (I ask these questions in the interests of elucidation and I don't expect an affirmative answer.)

The Third Chapter contains an informative examination of More's distinction between the fancy and the imagination, in which imagination is treated as a higher faculty involved in poetry and certain kinds of religious experience, including prophecy. In the course of this chapter, the author presents an illuminating account of More's attempt to find a middle-way between the extremes of enthusiasm and atheism, both of which are treated as stemming from disorders of the imagination caused by the action of black bile. The author says quite a lot here about More's humoral explanation of excessive religious enthusiasm (distinct from the healthy kind of enthusiasm), but I found little, if any, detail about the humoral theory of atheism. For the sake of completeness, the author could say more about this at the defence.

Chapter 4 on Newton

In the fourth and longest chapter, the dissertation goes beyond the strict limits set by its overall title. Here the author traces the development the notion of the world soul in Isaac Newton's natural philosophy, particularly in the extended attempts that Newton made to give a satisfactory causal explanation of gravitational attraction. I consider this chapter to be an original and well-informed contribution to contemporary scholarly debate on issues in our understanding of Newton's contribution to natural philosophy and, indeed, to the complexities surrounding the emergence of the modern scientific world system. It also builds on, and thus further justifies, the elaborate analysis of Henry More's world soul and the critique of the mechanical philosophy in More's work that is given in the preceding chapters. Because of its particular importance, and also because of my own specialisation, my comments in this report are focused primarily on this chapter.

Joseph wisely eschews the question of the exact historical influence of More on Newton, but he quite rightly suggests that Newton, inhabiting the same intellectual *milieu* as More, would have had any number of opportunities to be aquainted with More's thinking either as it was expressed in print, or as it was conveyed by word of mouth. Joseph narrates how, after some unsuccessful attempts to provide a mechanical explanation of gravitation, Newton turned to a non-mechanical, vitalistic principle, somewhat similar to More's Spirit of Nature, and also parallel to the Stoic notion of *pneuma*. The result is that Newton's mature postulation of a non-mechanical ether, discussed in the speculative "Queries" that conclude his *Opticks*, can be usefully compared with More's spiritual conception of active powers, whatever the factual details of influence may be.

One important characteristic of this chapter is its serious involvement with recent work on Newton's theology. We learn how Newton, always heterodox by the standards of the day, moved from an initial Arianist tendency to become more enamoured of the doctrines of Socianism. These positions mean that Newton always tended to doubt orthodox Trinitarian doctrine at least in so far as he tended to "subordinationism". Such theological leanings ultimately tended to make Newton wary of any view that attributed a direct and continuing interventionist role to God, for such role would not be fitting for God in view of Newton's strongly "monarchical" conception of God as governor. Newton's God would naturally use mediation or intermediaries rather than being directly occupied with the day to day running of things (pp. 166-7, see also p. 210). Nor would direct intervention sit well with Newton's expressed opinion that God's influence works in certain regards *against* gravitational attraction, for example in resisting the influence of gravitation between the sun and the other stars which would otherwise lead to a collapse of the universe (pp. 167-8).

The theological opposition to God's direct intervention leads, then, to the postulation of the naturalistic, but non-mechanical, influence of an ether that acts like the World Soul, divested of any mental intention or conscious *telos*. In this regard, Joseph suggests and explores certain significant parallels with the Stoic notion of *pneuma* which was thought to penetrate and unify the whole universe, guiding its operation, but which was blind and devoid of intention (pp. 169-174). One difference the author notices, however, is that Newton is taken to be postulating a spiritual principle, while *pneuma* was conceived by the Stoics as material. But the author downplays this difference since Newton's abandonment of strict dualism and his gradualistic understanding of the relation between spirit and matter tends to minimise any sharp dualism of the material and immaterial. In addition, the Stoic vitalist conception of matter was far removed from the inert matter of the early-modern period, and thus the Stoic assertion of materiality was consistent with what Newton and his contemporaries might have considered to be a non-material, or spiritual principle (pp. 169-170). He summarises this causal principle in Newton's mature thought thus:

> "Je to světová duše zbavená svých 'metafyzických nadstaveb', slepý, presto však do značný miry vitalistický princip vdechující aktivitu do jinak zcela pasivní hmoty" (p. 173).

The author further explores the similarities between the non-mechanical ether of the Queries of the *Opticks* and the active Stoic principle of *pneuma* (174-8). This ether, by being endowed with repulsive forces, can act at a distance, and would not slow the movement of the planets as a mechanical ether would inevitably do. A twist in the plot comes when the author then argues (pp. 180-1) that this active ether actually constitutes a phenomenal quality for Newton and that it is causally actuated by a non-material spiritual influence, which (if I have followed this dense but crucial passage) is now identified with a law of nature. Newton's mathematical laws of nature, it would seem, are rendered the ultimate causal powers of gravitation and other natural forces. The author reinforces this interpretation in the final section, stating: "Metafyzická příčina gravitace je tak postupně vytlačena a zbývá pouze přírodní zákon" (p. 186). This *dénouement* in which laws of nature amount to, or replace, the long-searched for causal power, seems to be arrived at rather abruptly. Above all, it makes me wonder what exactly Newton is referring to when he confesses, in Query 31 that the cause of gravitation is "not yet discover'd" and is yet "to be found out", which leads me to the first of three questions in relation to the author's interpretation of Newton, which I invite the author to address during the defence:

(i) Regarding the overall interpretation of Newton's reflections and speculations on the causal principle(s) involved in gravitational attraction, it has seemed to many interpreters that his ultimate position is agnostic. In other words, he was never fully satisfied with any explanation that he entertained, and he thought a solution to the problem was beyond the reach of himself and his contemporaries. This is the basic message contained in numerous remarks stating that the cause of gravitation (and other active forces such as fermentation, electricity, magnetism etc) remains "undiscovered". This agnostic conclusion is traditionally represented by the famous slogan "*Hypotheses non fingo*" from the General Scholium to *Principia*. The *Opticks* also comes to an agnostic conclusion, with Newton only aspiring to the articulation of the "manifest Principles" of corporeal nature, while leaving "the Causes of those Principles" undiscovered (Query 31). Samuel Clarke makes similar assertions in his correspondence with Leibniz, admitting, in his Fifth Reply, that while the manifest laws of the phenomenon of gravitational attraction have been proved beyond doubt, the cause, whether mechanical *or non-mechanical*, is "not yet discovered". The same conclusion is expressed by Roger Cotes' in his Preface to the Second Edition of *Principia* (1713), which was written in close consultation with Newton: "the cause of gravity itself is occult [i.e. hidden] and not yet found". These open admissions of ignorance on the part of Newton and his pupils form an unassailable part of Newton's legacy which, I believe, should be incorporated into any interpretation. The author does mention the *Hypotheses non fingo* theme (there are comments, for example, on pages 154 and 156), but he concludes as follows: "není možné jeho *hypotheses non fingo* chápat jako apriorní bagatelizaci otázky jako takové [i.e. as dismissing speculations about the causal explanation of the force of gravitation]". This is certainly true. But we do still need to hear from the author how he is going to deal with Newton's conspicuous agnosticism, and how it affects the ultimate status of Newton's unpublished speculations and the import of the various Queries that he draws on (the Queries are meant, it should be remembered, as tentative suggestions for future research and reflection). The official agnosticism constitutes one of the most notable differences between the thinking of Newton and More, and it thus constitutes one of the most important challenges to an interpretation of Newton in the light of More's metaphysical commitments.

(ii) Newton's departure from mechanism, particularly as time went on, is pretty clear (although he does seem to leave the door open to some kind of mechanical speculation as Clarke's Fifth Reply, paraphrased above, indicates). On the other hand, his attachment to the Epicurean doctrine of atomism, or material indivisibles, also seems to be unwavering. In Query 31, which plays an important role in the author's interpretation, Newton suggests that God originally created the world by forming atoms, or particles of indivisible hardness ("God in the Beginning form'd Matter in solid, massy, hard, impenetrable, moveable Particles …"). These material particles clearly have the power to act mechanically since Newton tells us that when they collide their inelasticity causes them to come to an abrupt halt. This mechanistic element would seem (at first sight) to sit awkwardly with the continuity and wave-like properties of *pneuma*, and it might also suggest a problem with the interaction between the brassy, material indivisibles and the vital, spiritual, principle that Newton is said to invoke. While Newton's opposition to the Epicurean doctrine of inherent attractive power is discussed by the author in an illuminating way (pp. 182-3), Newton's positive endorsement of the ontology of atomism should also be commented upon. I think a consideration of Newton's view of the cohesion of bodies (of which the hardness of the atoms is a special case) would also be very helpful. By understanding cohesion as an active force, the mechanical power of the atoms could be brought into the sphere of the immaterial vital principle. Here we see how a consideration of cohesion in Henry More earlier might have been useful.

(iii) The author might further explain the concept of natural law that he is ascribing to Newton, and how it becomes transformed into a causal principle (if it is). It would certainly require extensive textual evidence if the author was making the surprising claim that we should understand Newton's term "law" as the *modus operandi* of gravitational force, since Newton goes to pains to distinguish the question of describing the *law* of gravitation, by which he means mathematically describable regularities in observed movements, from the question of how the force of gravitation actually causes these regular movements. In *Opticks* Query 31, for example, Newton writes: "…we must learn from the Phenomena of Nature what Bodies attract one another, and what are the Laws and Properties of the Attraction, before we enquire the Cause of which the Attraction is perform'd."

Chapter 5 on Space

In the final chapter More examines More's concept of space, and his famous claim that space is divine, also making useful comparisons with the conceptions of space in Patrizi and Newton. The author argues that More, in his original discussion in his Appendix to *An Antidote against Atheism*, intended the thesis of the divinity of space in a straightforward way: space is God. This, however, gave way to a vaguer and more anodyne claim, in *Enchiridion Metaphysicum*, according to which space is a confused representation of God's essence when that essence is viewed in abstraction from God's life and operations. The inadequacy of this representation can be appreciated when we realise that God's essence is in fact indivisible and therefore no attributes can properly be considered in isolation from one another (pp. 197-8). Despite the tenuousness of this later version of the divinity of space, More appears to hold that space is a spiritual existence (pp. 198-201), a thesis that is tension with the author's earlier claim that activity is the essential characteristic of the spiritual. Towards the end of the chapter the author argues that just as space, for More, is an "inadequate representation" of God in abstraction from his life and operations, so might we understand the Spirit of Nature as an inadequate representation of God's active relation to matter.

Conclusion

The dissertation ends with a conclusion that reviews the ground covered, with some additional speculative reflection.

Overall Assessment

This dissertation constitutes an independent and philosophically stimulating interpretation of Henry More's thought, and I believe it meets the requirements of the PhD exam. I am particularly impressed by the judicious use of the secondary literature, and the comprehensive grasp of the different influences and motives working on More's philosophical system. In addition, the author is sensitive to the development in More's thought and seeks to make sense of the evolution of his theory of the Spirit of Nature, as the title indicates, while doing justice to the abiding "vitalistic intuition".

Henry More's philosophy is little known, even in his home country, and this dissertation is, in virtue of its very subject-matter, a pioneering contribution to scholarly understanding of the early-modern period. I shall leave it to the other opponent and the other members of the examining committee to assess the treatment of More's reception of neo-Platonism. From my point of view, I find the author sheds much light on John Locke's later critique of mechanism, and I saw interesting points of contact with other more well-known figures such as Leibniz and Spinoza. I also think the chapter on Newton, which gives us insight into the philosophical issues behind his physics, illuminates the influence of Newton on later philosophers, including those in the Romanticist movement. Henry More emerges as a significant figure for our understanding of early-modern approaches to science and nature, and for appreciating the early philosophical opposition to the mechanisation of nature, an opposition that will grow and gain the ascendance in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The various questions and points of criticism that I have raised should be addressed by the candidate in the defence. They are not, however, meant as fundamental criticisms, but are rather designed to point to areas in which his views could be profitably discussed and developed.

doc. James Hill
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