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## **The Origin of the Division between Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism (preprint)**

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**Abstract:** The division of Ancient Platonism into Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism is a fairly new one. The conceptual foundation of this division was cemented in Jacob Brucker's pioneering *Historia critica philosophiae* (1742-67). In the 1770s and 1780s, the term 'Neoplatonism' was coined on the basis of Brucker's analysis. Three historiographical concepts were decisive to Brucker: 'system of philosophy', 'eclecticism' and 'syncretism'. By means of these concepts, he characterized Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism as opposing philosophical movements, the former being a genuine form of Platonism, the latter a false form. However, the division is untenable and we ought to abandon it.

**Key words:** Middle Platonism, Neoplatonism, eclecticism, Jakob Brucker.

### **Introduction**

In the 1740s, when the German historian and Lutheran minister Johann Jacob Brucker (1696-1770) established the history of philosophy as a philosophical discipline, he characterized Neoplatonism, as we now call it, as an 'eclectic sect' and as 'Alexandrian philosophy'. By means of this terminology, he intended to separate Neoplatonism from the earlier Platonic tradition, Middle Platonism in particular. These two phases of ancient

Platonism differed by nature, according to Brucker. In the last third of the eighteenth century, the labels ‘eclectic sect’ and ‘Alexandrian philosophy’ were replaced by the term ‘Neoplatonism’.<sup>1</sup>

Brucker’s characterization of Neoplatonism as an eclectic sect did not come out of the blue. Diogenes Laertius had stated in his *Lives* (I.21) that a certain Potamo of Alexandria had practised an eclectic method in philosophy: ‘not long ago an eclectic school was introduced by Potamo of Alexandria, who made a selection from the tenets of all the existing sects.’ (Translation by R. D. Hicks.) In the 17th and 18th centuries, it was debated whether this Potamo mentioned by Laertius was identical with the Potamo mentioned in Porphyry’s *Vita Plotini* (9).<sup>2</sup> Brucker refused the identification, but claimed that Alexandrian theology introduced sectarian eclecticism into Alexandrian philosophy, thereby distorting genuine Greek Platonism. Brucker’s compatriot, the Leipzig professor Gottfried Olearius (1672-1715), theologian and philologist, had prepared this view of so-called Alexandrian philosophy in 1711. It was Brucker, however, who cemented a sharp historiographical divide between Middle Platonism (ca. 80 BCE to ca. 220 CE) and

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<sup>1</sup> I should like to thank George Karamanolis and Troels Engberg-Petersen for their comments to parts of this article, which were presented at The Centre for Neoplatonic Virtue Ethics, University of Copenhagen on May 12, 2011. Likewise, I should like to thank Tue Søvsvø, Giannis Stamatellos and Mark Rene Røge for the critical comments to early drafts of this article.

<sup>2</sup> For the debate in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries on the historical identity of Potamo, see Matton (1992), 655-6. For the debate on this issue in recent scholarship, see Runia (1988) and Hadot (1990), as pointed out in Matton (1992), 655 n. 104. For the Potamo of Alexandria mentioned by Diogenes Laertius, see Hatzimichali (2011).

Neoplatonism (ca. 200 to ca. 550 CE), identifying eclecticism and sectarianism as distinctive features of the latter.<sup>3</sup> Hence, Brucker is no unimportant source of one of our concepts in history of philosophy, ancient eclecticism, or Neoplatonism.

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<sup>3</sup> Brucker separated his accounts of Middle Platonism (Brucker [1742-67], II: 162-88) and Neoplatonism (Brucker [17242-67], II: 189-462), emphasizing the fundamentally different philosophical methods employed within these two movements, as I explain below. Compare this with previous accounts of this period in ancient Platonism, which did not distinguish these periods, and which did not claim a radical shift in method: Alsted (1630), II: 2010-22, did not articulate such a division. When Alsted accounted for the ‘Socratic school’, that is, Platonism — explicitly mentioning Platonists from the Old Academy (e.g. Speusippus), the New Academy (e.g. Carneades) and Neoplatonism (e.g. Porphyry and Plotinus) — he did not separate Neoplatonism from the tradition of Platonism (ibid., II: 2020). Horn 1655 characterized the Platonism of Plotinus and his adherents as a threat to Christian philosophy, but not as eclecticism (269-78). Voss (1658) contended that Plotinus was ‘not foreign to’ (‘nec... alienus fuit’) the ‘elective sect’ (‘secta elective’) of Potamo of Alexandria (mentioned in Laertius, *Lives* I.21) (II: 109). However, Voss did not make much of this and characterized Plotinus as a successor of Platonic theology (I: 143). Joensen (1659), 286-308, offered a historical account of Neoplatonists from Plotinus to Olympiodorus (495-570) without referring to the notion of eclecticism. Bayle (1722) (identical with the 1697 first edition), presented Plotinus as a ‘Platonic philosopher’ (‘Philosophe Platonicien’) without qualifying his philosophy as eclecticism (2454-7). [Olearius] (1711) had prepared this idea articulated by Brucker (1742-67), as I explain below. Walch (1726), I: cols 594-6, referred approvingly to the account of ancient eclecticism found in [Olearius] (1711).

Despite the considerable work that has been lavished on ancient eclecticism, the meaning of the ancient ‘eclectic sect’ in Brucker’s work has not yet been examined. Nor has its methodological implications for our interpretation of Neoplatonism been discussed.<sup>4</sup> This is important, partly in order to understand the historical development of this historiographical tool in the eighteenth century, and partly in order to reflect critically about one concept which is current in modern terminology and historiographical practice relating to Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism. In particular, Brucker’s characterizations of the two periods are crucial to the divide between Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism, and to the widespread assumption that this terminological divide represents a discontinuity in ancient Platonism.

In this article I examine the foundation of the eighteenth-century historiographical concept of eclecticism. In the course of my argument, I discuss some of its unfortunate implications for our understanding of ancient Neoplatonism and its place in the Platonic tradition. I conclude that we ought to give up the division between Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism, since it is artificial and misleading. It is, first of all, an outcome of a

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<sup>4</sup> Neither of these two tasks has been undertaken in the following literature on ancient eclecticism: Zeller (1923), III.1: 547-64, follows to a considerable extent Brucker’s characterization of Neoplatonism as eclecticism. We find no examination of these two issues in Nieke (1972); Hager (1983); Holzhey (1983); Meinhardt (1984); Dreitzel (1991), 288-92; Schneider (1998). Franz (2003), 19-24, addresses Brucker’s juxtaposition of Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism, the latter explained as eclecticism; Franz seems to think that the division is justified (*ibid.*, 20-1). Donini (1988), 23-33, rightly objects to Zeller’s characterization of Neoplatonism as eclecticism, but does not extend his exploration to include Brucker.

theological debate of the eighteenth century that has little value to a modern examination of ancient Platonism.

### **I Brucker's historiographical categories: 'system', 'eclecticism', and 'syncretism'**

Brucker, in his *Historia critica philosophiae* (1742-67), broke with the biographical model of writing the history of philosophy, as exemplified by Laertius. He also broke with 'philosophical history' (*historia philosophica*), largely inspired by Laertius, which was typical of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century historians like Thomas Stanley.<sup>5</sup> Such historians, Brucker contended, ignored the systems of past thinkers, and they failed to exercise their critical power of judgement.<sup>6</sup> Contrary to these predecessors, Brucker wanted to write a 'critical history of philosophy' (*historia critica philosophiae*), which should assess two issues: First, was the system a logically coherent complex of principles (*principia*) and deductions made from these principles? And did it cover all branches of philosophy? Second, were the principles in the system, and the doctrines derived from them, in conformity with Protestant doctrine? I shall not deal with the second normative issue here, focusing my attention instead on the first.<sup>7</sup>

What did Brucker mean by 'system of philosophy'? He stipulates four features:

(a) A system of philosophy, comprising principles and doctrines within various

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<sup>5</sup> Malusa (1993), 161-370

<sup>6</sup> For Stanley as a follower of Laertius, see Brucker (1742-67), I: 36.24-28.

<sup>7</sup> For this normative issue, see Catana (2008), 147-91.

branches of philosophy, is autonomous in regard to other, non-philosophical disciplines such as medicine, astronomy, theology, etc.

(b) All philosophical doctrines within a system of philosophy are deduced from one or a few principles. (Here the term ‘principle’ is used in the logical sense of a hypothesis.)

(c) A system of philosophy, made up of doctrines deduced from principles, comprises all branches of philosophy.

(d) The doctrines stated within the various branches of philosophy are internally coherent.<sup>8</sup>

This essentialistic idea of past philosophy, consisting of such philosophical systems, may appear anachronistic to a modern historian of philosophy. However, it conformed to trends in the contemporary methodology of science, and it transformed — at least in the eyes of Brucker’s contemporaries — ‘philosophical history’ (*historia philosophica*) into a respectable philosophical discipline: It was no longer a history, it was no longer antiquarianism; it was the ‘history of philosophy’ (*historia philosophiae*).

The historiographical concept of a system of philosophy was a methodological innovation of seventeenth-century philosophy and science, which Brucker applied universally to past philosophy from Thales onwards.<sup>9</sup> Brucker’s historiographical concept gained a dominant role in the ensuing tradition of general histories of philosophy. It is important to note, however, that before the seventeenth century the axiomatic-deductive methodological ideal was unknown as an all-embracing method for determining the

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<sup>8</sup> For these four features, see Brucker (1742-67), I: 3.6-16, 15.10-18.

<sup>9</sup> For its employment on Thales, see Catana (2008). 64-72.

doctrinal content of the various branches of a given philosophy. Of course, logical demonstration from premises had been known since Aristotle, but although this method allowed philosophers to use key concepts across his or her writings, it did not require the philosopher to depart from the same few premises in all of his theories, as in the case of Brucker's system concept; on the contrary, Aristotle had proposed a pluralistic methodology in which different branches of philosophy were dealt with from different premises, depending on the matter at hand.<sup>10</sup>

Brucker's historiographical concept is thus inadequate and anachronistic when applied to texts belonging to the pre-modern period. Admittedly, the term 'system' (in Greek σύστημα, in Latin *systema*) was known in antiquity in various contexts, such as organization theory, musicology, biology and astronomy, but it was not employed in a methodological context before the seventeenth century.<sup>11</sup> Hence, the methodological concept denoted by the term 'system' was foreign to pre-seventeenth-century philosophy.<sup>12</sup> This is not to say that pre-modern philosophy was without method and order, only that these methods and orders were different and must be approached independently of Brucker's generic system concept.

Below I examine Brucker's application of the concept 'system of philosophy' and two other concepts which are related to the system concept, and which are central to his characterization of Neoplatonism, namely 'eclecticism' and 'syncretism'. The first of

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<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics* I.3

<sup>11</sup> See Ritschl (1906) and Catana (2008).

<sup>12</sup> Here I side with Hadot (1995), 76. For a discussion of the inadequacy of the historiographical concept in regard to philosophy produced before the seventeenth century, see Catana (2008), 35-145.



these two concepts, ‘eclecticism’, denotes a successfully construed system of philosophy, characterized by the philosopher’s independent selection of principles in the system. Moreover, there is an internal logical coherence among these principles themselves, and the derivations made from these principles are logically valid. The eclectic philosopher is the hero in Brucker’s narrative, as I shall explain in a moment.

The second concept is ‘syncretism’, denoting an incoherent and unsuccessfully construed system of philosophy, typically undertaken by an unoriginal thinker enslaved by the prejudices of one or several traditions.<sup>13</sup> The outcome of syncretism is a patchwork of incoherent principles and doctrines.<sup>14</sup> A syncretistic philosopher’s reason is ensnared by the prejudices of traditions and authorities and therefore unable to choose freely the principles that are foundational to the system. The syncretist’s reason may be hampered by an uncontrolled imagination, provoked by a medical condition caused by an excess of black bile or melancholy. Given this poor cognitive constitution, a syncretist is unable to advance sound and valid premises that are understandable to a human mind; instead, the syncretist offers, at best, beautiful postulates, which are not reasoned, but which one can choose to

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<sup>13</sup> For Proclus as an example of an ancient syncretist, see Brucker (1742-67), II: 325.20-326.5. For a Renaissance Platonist and syncretist, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who, according to Brucke, was enslaved by traditions and thus burdened with their prejudices; see Brucker (1742-67), IV: 59.38-60.4. For ancient eclecticism, see Nieke (1972), Donini (1988), Dillon (1988) and Hatzimichali (2011). For eclecticism in Brucker and his contemporaries, see Albrecht (1994) and Schneider (1998). For ‘eclecticism’ versus ‘syncretism’ in Brucker, see Franz (2003), 21-2; Catana (2008), 11-34.

<sup>14</sup> For Brucker on syncretism, see Catana (2008), 22-31. Diderot (1755), 270[a] retains this distinction.

believe in, if persuaded.<sup>15</sup> As we shall see, Neoplatonic philosophers were syncretists, devoid of the cognitive skills pertinent to admirable eclecticism.

Before Brucker, the term ‘syncretist’ had acquired negative connotations at Lutheran universities in Wittenberg and Helmstedt at the end of the sixteenth century, denoting theological positions that were perceived as heterodox.<sup>16</sup> Although Brucker mainly used the term ‘syncretist’ in a historiographical context, not in a theological, his use tacitly affirmed these negative connotations among Lutherans, and the usage was in harmony with his occupation as a Lutheran minister.

According to Brucker, there were two important eclectic movements in the history of philosophy, that of ancient Neoplatonism, and that of early modern philosophy. René Descartes (1596-1650) and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1648-1716) feature as eclectics from the second movement. Brucker represented Neoplatonism, or the *secta eclectica*, as he called it, as one single and multi-authored system of philosophy; the systems of modern

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<sup>15</sup> Brucker (1742-67), II: 444.20-23: ‘Non enim rationes dari, aut ex principiis deduci conclusiones, aut ullo modo veritatis characteres in ea re detegi posse ab intellectu humano contendit, sed artificii tantum in hac arte pulchra credendum esse postulat.’ Plotinus is depicted similarly; see *ibid.*, II: 227.10-18. In quotations from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Latin texts, I have expanded abbreviations, changed ‘&’ to ‘et’, ‘u’ and ‘v’, omitted accents, and changed ‘j’ uniformly to ‘i’. Otherwise I have retained the orthography and punctuation of the editions I have used. I have modernised the capitalisation and accents in quotations from Greek.

<sup>16</sup> Franz (2003), 22 n. 14

eclectics, on the other hand, he represented as individual systems of philosophy elaborated by individual philosophers.<sup>17</sup>

Contrary to modern parlance, where eclecticism tends to be synonymous with unoriginal and worthless philosophy, Brucker regarded eclecticism as original and esteemed it highly; the eclectic philosopher is able to choose his principles and use them to construe a system of philosophy in an original, emancipated and independent manner. Brucker to some extent identifies himself with the eclecticism, which was — somewhat paradoxically — popular in German philosophy at his time.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> For the ancient *secta eclectia*, i.e. Neoplatonism, see Brucker (1742-67), II: 189-462.

For Descartes as an eclectic philosopher, see *ibid.*, V: 10.33-40; for Leibniz as an eclectic philosopher, see *ibid.*, V: 11. Diderot (1755) similarly distinguishes between ancient eclecticism (270-283, 285-293) and sixteenth- and seventeenth-century eclecticism (271, 283-5). Diderot's account of the system in ancient eclecticism, in Diderot (1755), 285-92, relies heavily on Brucker (1742-67), II: 393-462, although he omits some of the orthodox parts, e.g. Brucker's comparison of Christian Trinity with the Neoplatonic system (Brucker [1742-67], II: 410-1). Diderot mentions Brucker by name in the entry (Diderot [1755], 273, 283, 292, 293). Like Brucker, Diderot (1755), 285-92, depicts ancient eclecticism as a multi-authored system of philosophy. Nevertheless, Diderot's entry on eclecticism as a whole is not without philosophical and theological dissent from Brucker: he tends to compare eclecticism and Christianity from a non-confessional and critical position (e.g. Diderot [1755], 272), whereas Brucker looks at eclecticism, especially Platonism, from the view point of a Christian (Brucker [1742-67], I: 21.10-23.25). For Brucker's influence on Diderot, please see Casini (1962).

<sup>18</sup> For this background, see Albrecht (1994); Schneider (1998).

In the 'Praefatio', Brucker explains the method of eclectic philosophy from the 16th to the eighteenth century in the following words:

Eclectic philosophy, after many wars, is indeed restored, victorious and powerful, having thrown off and trampled upon the sectarian mode of philosophizing. Having cast off this mean and unworthy yoke from human reason, and having cast off that slavish clinging to authority and prejudice of antiquity, some great and acute minds began to select true and universal principles, not by consulting the opinions of others, but by consulting their own [inner] lights. On these principles they began to erect conclusions and, thanks to their meditation, to build for themselves their own personal system of philosophy; these great minds began to store up truths from scattered sects, separating them from dogmas and connecting [the truths] to their convenient and apt place in the system. They did not approve or admit anything that did not appear demonstrated and certain according to the judgment of their reason and according to the clarity of truth.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Brucker (1742-67), V: 3.22-4.11: 'Nempe restituta tandem et post multas pugnas victoria potita est philosophia eclecticica, eiecta et conculcata sectaria philosophandi ratione. Abiecto enim indigno humana ratione hoc iugo, et contemto servili auctoritatis et antiquitatis praeiudicio coeperunt magna quaedam et acuta ingenia non aliorum quidem placita, sed sua lumina consulere, principia vera, universalialia, certa seligere, conclusiones iis inaedificare, et suae meditationis beneficio proprium atque domesticum sibi philosophiae systema condere; veritates autem per sectas omnes sparsas, separatas suisque dogmatibus iunctas in commodum aptumque systematis sui locum reponere:

As this quotation conveys, eclectic philosophizing conformed to Brucker's requirement of genuine philosophy. It was system building. His words about the victorious progress of eclecticism pay tribute to the eclecticism of his own German philosophical culture.<sup>20</sup> As mentioned above, he also regards ancient Neoplatonism as a sort of eclecticism, but how does he fit ancient eclecticism into these historiographical categories?

## **II Historiographical assumptions in Brucker's reconstruction of the *secta eclectica***

Brucker divided the history of philosophy into three periods. The first runs from the beginning of the world until the emergence of the Roman Empire in the first century BCE. The second begins at the time of Christ's birth, coinciding, roughly speaking, with the rise of the Roman Empire, and it lasts until the alleged crisis of scholasticism in the thirteenth century. The third and last period is initiated by the revival of learning in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and continues up till Brucker's own time. The second period is subdivided into two parts: The first comprising non-Christian philosophies, that is, Hellenic (or 'pagan', in Brucker's terminology), Jewish and Arabic philosophies; the second

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nihil vero probare et admittere, quod non rationis iudicio et veritatis evidentia sibi demonstratum certumque videretur esse.' Casini (1962), 259, n. 95, points out that Diderot's entry 'Éclectisme' in his *Encyclopédie* is based on Brucker's conception of 'eclecticism' as it appears in his *Historia critica philosophiae*.

<sup>20</sup> For eclecticism as a positive ideal in contemporary Germany philosophy, see Albrecht (1994); Schneider (1998); Franz (2003), 21-2.

comprising Christian philosophy produced between Christ's birth and the thirteenth century.<sup>21</sup>

Ancient eclectic philosophers are placed in the first part of the second period and include Alexandrian, Athenian and Roman philosophers active between ca. 200 CE and ca. 550 CE.<sup>22</sup> The exposition begins with Potamo of Alexandria and Ammonius (both third century CE), it includes key figures like Plotinus, Porphyry and Proclus, and it ends with Hypatia (370-405) and Damascius (ca. 462-540). This periodization implies that Neoplatonists had the chance to follow Christ's teaching, but tended not to do so. On the contrary, according to Brucker they damaged the Christian church.<sup>23</sup> All this makes his account of Neoplatonism delicate, since it touches upon eighteenth-century German theological discussions of confessional identity.

The characterisation of Neoplatonism as eclectic is noteworthy. Brucker was not the first to label Platonism of late antiquity an 'eclectic sect'. The above-mentioned Leipzig professor Gottfried Olearius had done so too. He had published a Latin translation of Thomas Stanley's *History of philosophy* in 1711, supplied with several supplements, and

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<sup>21</sup> The first period is described in Brucker (1742-67), I: 46-1357. For the second period, see *ibid.*, II: 3-1069, and III: 3-912. For the third period, see *ibid.*, IV: 3-785, and V: 3-923.

For the first part of the second period, see *ibid.*, II: 3-1069, and III: 3-240. For the second part of the second period, see *ibid.*, III: 241-912.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, II: 189-462

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, II: 357.31-358.17. As Brucker makes clear here, he sides with Mosheim and Olearius in their anti-Platonic position. For Brucker's apologetic motivation for the writing his history of philosophy and his view on Platonism, especially ancient and Renaissance Neoplatonism, as a threat to Christianity, see also *ibid.*, I: 21.10-23.25.

among them we find a section on Neoplatonism, 'De secta eclecticica', where Olearius discussed whether the Potamo of Alexandria mentioned in Laertius' *Lives* I.21 was identical with the Potamo mentioned in Porphyry's *Vita Plotini* 9, an orphan in the care of Plotinus during his stay in Rome. Olearius rejected the identification.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, he claimed that Alexandrian philosophers introduced eclecticism into the thought of Plotinus and Porphyry, and that eclecticism was later on transferred to Athens through various Neoplatonists coming from Alexandria.<sup>25</sup>

Brucker himself rejected the identification, just as Olearius had done.<sup>26</sup> He claimed, however, that Alexandrian philosophers introduced eclecticism, or rather, syncretism, into subsequent Platonism. These Alexandrian philosophers failed to fulfil the requirements of the genuine eclectic philosopher and degenerated into syncretism. The decisive impulse in this direction was not philosophical, but theological: Alexandrian philosophers adopted a syncretistic method taken from the religious sphere, implying that vulgar superstition was reconciled with Alexandrian philosophy in a syncretistic manner.<sup>27</sup> The claim is

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<sup>24</sup> [Olearius] (1711), 1206: 'Fuere autem pr[a]eter istum Potamones alii duo ... Alter ex Porphyrii fuit aequalibus, atque inter alios viros illustres eius aetatibus ab eo censetur in *vita Plotini*.'

<sup>25</sup> [Olearius] (1711), 1209-16

<sup>26</sup> Brucker (1742-67), II: 190-1, 193, 202-4

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, II: 191.1-28, 321-30, 358.18-360.4, Brucker relies to a considerable extent on [Olearius] (1711). Olearius is not mentioned as the translator and author to the supplements, but Heumann (1715b), 331 n. z, Walch (1726), I: col. 594, and Brucker (1742-67), I: 36.29-31, provide this information. Brucker refers approvingly to Olearius in his section on Neoplatonism; see, for instance, Brucker (1742-67), II: 190 n. c .

remarkable. Alexandrian philosophers' views on contemporary religions were complex but far from all-embracing and uncritical — Plotinus' *Ennead* II.9 *Against the Gnostics* being one example; Porphyry's criticism of Christianity being another.<sup>28</sup> To Brucker, however, these Neoplatonists were all 'Alexandrians' and 'syncretists', and these terms, especially the former, remained in control until the end of the eighteenth century, in some countries even longer, after which its replacement, 'Neoplatonists', was coined, as I shall explain below.<sup>29</sup> Brucker's intervention into the philological and historical debate over the identity of Potamo was intriguing: He resolved the Potamo debate by claiming that the religious and cultural syncretism of Alexandria influenced Alexandrian philosophy decisively, not an isolated historical figure named Potamo, whosoever he was. At the same time, Brucker inserted Alexandrian philosophy into a conceptual scheme focused on system building — a scheme, which was to remain powerful in the ensuing history of philosophy.

The French thinker Denis Diderot summed up the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century debate over the identification of Potamo in his entry 'eclectisme', published in his *Encyclopédie* (1751-72). Here he retained the identification. Moreover, he regarded the Potamo mentioned in the *Vita Plotini* as a philosopher practising a version of eclecticism in which several philosophical systems were combined into one. Diderot read Porphyry's vague terms *πολλάκις ἐν* (*Vita Plotini* 9.11) as *πολλάκις εἰς ἓν*, referring, according to

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[Olearius] (1711), 1220, mentions the Greek term for 'systema', but he does not relate it to 'syncretismus'. [Olearius] (1711), 1206 refers to Potamo of Alexandria (Laertius, *Lives* I.21) and Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* I.7) as examples of eclectics.

<sup>28</sup> For Porphyry's criticism of Christianity, see Barnes (1973).

<sup>29</sup> For the emergence of the term 'Neoplatonism' in the 1770s and 1780s, see Hager (1983); Meinhardt (1984); Franz (2003).



Diderot, to Potamo combining several systems of philosophy into one. The Greek term for system (σύστημα), however, is absent in Porphyry's *Vita Plotini*, as well as in Laertius' *Lives* I.21, so Diderot clearly read more into these passages than they could support.<sup>30</sup> Rather curiously, Diderot regarded Potamo in the *Vita Plotini* as a father to an orphan in Plotinus' care — not as an orphan in Plotinus' care himself. This implied, to Diderot, that Potamo flourished as a philosopher at the end of the second century and the beginning of the third. Having made this dubious chronology, Diderot claimed that Potamo passed on his eclecticism to Ammonius Saccas, Plotinus' teacher mentioned in *Vita Plotini* 3. In this way Potamo's eclecticism entered Neoplatonism.<sup>31</sup>

Diderot subscribed to Brucker's view that Alexandrian philosophers introduced eclecticism (or rather syncretism) into Neoplatonism: Religious syncretism in Alexandria spread to moral philosophy and then to other parts of Alexandrian philosophy. Alexandrians approached philosophy just as they approached religion. They were timid minds unable to free themselves from prejudices of tradition and authorities, and they only re-circulated and re-organised existing philosophical views without demonstrating the heroic courage obligatory to a true eclectic philosopher, who should always be ready to

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<sup>30</sup> Diderot (1755), 273-4. *Ibid.*, 273[b], Diderot thus renders Porphyry's *Vita Plotini* 9.11 as follows: 'qu'il [Potamo] se plaisoit à entendre sur une philosophie dont il jettoit les fondemens, ou qui consiste à fondre plusieurs systèmes en un.' For a comparison between Brucker and Diderot concerning ancient and modern eclecticism, see n. 17 above.

<sup>31</sup> Diderot (1755), 274-6

abandon authorities and traditions.<sup>32</sup> Diderot also took over Brucker's interpretation of Neoplatonism and regarded ancient eclecticism as a multi-authored system of philosophy. As demonstrated by Casini, Diderot was directly influenced by Brucker in numerous instances, and this is one of them.<sup>33</sup> Diderot's entry thus corroborated Brucker's interpretation of the *secta eclectica*.

At this point we must separate two discussions. One is historical and concerns the question of whether the two references to Potamo in Laertius and Porphyry concern the same historical person or not. This issue is still debated, but I shall not enter the discussion.<sup>34</sup> Another discussion is conceptual and concerns the meaning of 'eclecticism' in Laertius and Brucker respectively. No matter whether the first question is answered by

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 271[b]: 'La philosophie éclectique, qu'on appelle aussi le 'Platonisme réformé' et la 'philosophie alexandrine', prit naissance à Alexandrie en Egypte, c'est-à-dire au centre des superstitions. Ce ne fut d'abord qu'un sincrétisme de pratiques religieuses, adopté par les prêtres de l'Egypte, qui n'étant pas moins crédules sous le regne de Tibere qu'au tems d'Hérodote, parce que le caractere d'esprit qu'on tient du climat change difficilement, avoient toûjours l'ambition de posséder le système d'extravagances le plus complet qu'il y eût en ce genre. Ce sincrétisme passa de-là dans la morale, et dans les autres parties de la philosophie. Les philosophes assez éclairés pour sentir le foible des différens systèmes anciens, mais trop timides pour les abandonner, s'occupèrent seulement à les réformer sur les découvertes du jour, ou plutôt à les défigurer sur les préjugés courans: c'est ce qu'on appella 'platoniser', 'pythagoriser', etc.'

<sup>33</sup> See references in n. 17 above.

<sup>34</sup> See n. 2 above.

affirmation or negation, this second question remains unresolved. To the best of my knowledge, this second issue has not been addressed so far.<sup>35</sup>

We should discriminate between the rather loose meaning of ‘eclecticism’ in ancient philosophy (e.g. Laertius’ *Lives* I.21 and Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromata* I.7) and the much more narrow meaning assigned to the term by Brucker. Brucker held that the method (*methodus*) of this ancient eclectic sect consisted in the philosopher’s selection of doctrines or *placita* (corresponding to *principia*) from other sects; these doctrines or *placita* were subsequently combined into a system (*systema*) that was internally coherent. This endeavour was undertaken in meditation, and the result was an ‘edifice’ (*aedificium*) of doctrines. In other words, Brucker thought that Neoplatonists were intent on the kind of system building outlined on page 5-6 above. The following words of Brucker are found on the opening page of the lengthy account of Neoplatonism, placed immediately after his account of Middle Platonism:

As we have narrated above, the Platonic sect gave birth to an eclectic philosophy of a monstrous kind and of a monstrous name, if the name [eclecticism] is assigned the original meaning. For a sect is said to be something which follows mainly one philosopher’s way of philosophizing and the system of doctrines which he construed for himself; the eclectic method, on the other hand, is one which, from the propositions of all the sects, chooses those for itself, which are closest to the truth and suitable for being put together through their own [i.e. the eclectics’] meditations. On the basis of these [propositions or meditations] it [the eclectic method] builds its own edifice of

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<sup>35</sup> See references in n. 4 above.

doctrine[s]. Hence it is clear that the sectarian philosophy fights the eclectic to such a degree that they cannot possibly be forced into one single body. If we are willing fully to accept the appellation ['eclecticism'], eclectic philosophy is not new, but very old, and is most characteristic of the most excellent men and all founders of sects.”<sup>36</sup>

This quotation needs some clarification. The term ‘sect’ (*secta*) is used in two different senses. In the first line, Brucker uses the term in the neutral sense of a school preserving a body of philosophical theories, e.g. those of Plato, as was the case in Middle Platonism. In the third line Brucker uses the word in the negative sense of a group of philosophers who are intellectually unable to emancipate themselves from inherited philosophical traditions and to philosophise in a free and independent manner; these philosophers lack the

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<sup>36</sup> Brucker (1742-67), II: 189.4-14: ‘Platonica, quam hucusque enarravimus, secta eclecticam genuit, monstrosi nominis generisque philosophiam, si nomen nativa significatione adhibeatur. Secta enim cum dicatur, quae unius potissimum philosophi rationem philosophandi, quodque sibi construxit, systema doctrinarum sequitur; eclectica vero methodus ea sit, quae ex omnium sectarum placitis ea sibi eligit, quae veritati propiora sunt, et propriis meditationibus iungi apta; exque iis proprium doctrinae excitat aedificium; clarum inde est, sectariam philosophiam adeo repugnare eclecticae, ut in unum redigi corpus nequeant. Nec si proprie appellationem accipiamus, eclectica philosophia nova est, sed antiquissima, maximisque viris sectarumque conditoribus omnibus usitatissima.’ These opinions or truths are used as principles in their systems (189.28). Brucker regards this method as similar to the one used ‘by us’, including such figures as Leibniz (190.1-2).

intellectual robustness and courage required from the genuine philosopher, that is the eclectic philosopher, as described in the quotation on page 11 above. As the above quotation conveys, the very notion of an eclectic sect is an absurdity, since eclecticism and sectarianism denote two mutually exclusive methods. This quotation also reveals one of the paradoxes in Brucker's idea of eclecticism: Although he conceived of eclecticism as something positive, he also maintained that eclecticism could degenerate into something negative, that is, if it was infected with sectarian modes of philosophizing. This is precisely what happened to the ancient eclectic sect, Neoplatonism.

The key concepts in Brucker's above description of ancient eclecticism are found in his own essentialistic statements about the nature of philosophy. He thus measures ancient Neoplatonism against the methodological ideal of eclecticism, as he understood the concept. This feature becomes even clearer in the pages following the above quotation, where he locates the 'origin of the eclectic sect' (*origo sectae eclecticae*) among the Egyptians.<sup>37</sup>

This methodological ideal of ancient eclectics, Brucker continues, resembles that held by prominent philosophers of his own time, e.g. Descartes and Leibniz.<sup>38</sup> If one compares the method assigned to ancient Neoplatonism with Brucker's generic statement about philosophy, obviously alluding to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century eclecticism (as cited on page 11 above), it turns out that they are very similar, reflecting Brucker's historically naive assumption that late antique and early modern philosophers adhered to the same method. This concept of ancient eclectic philosophers was not found in Laertius' *Lives* I.21.

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<sup>37</sup> Brucker (1742-67), II: 190.33-193.13

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, II: 190.1-2

In his account of Neoplatonism, Brucker makes at least two assumptions about ancient eclectics which are not present in Laertius or other ancient thinkers referring to eclectic philosophy. First, Brucker relates ancient eclecticism to the system concept: Ancient eclectic philosophizing, he claimed, was intent on system building.<sup>39</sup> Brucker is clearly anachronistic in his universal retrojection of a generic ideal of philosophizing onto the entire history of philosophy, including ancient Neoplatonism.<sup>40</sup> In his reconstruction of these past systems, he typically distorts Laertius and other ancient accounts of philosophers by interpreting the ἀρχαί of ancient philosophers as logical principles from which a deduction can be made (*principia*), whereas they had been intended as ontological principles. One example is Thales' theory that water is the beginning (ἀρχή) of the universe, which is clearly intended in the ontological meaning of the word, not in the logical meaning.<sup>41</sup>

Second, Brucker connects the concept of ancient eclecticism with another concept, syncretism (*syncretismus*). Although ancient philosophers had used the term 'syncretism', it was not used as a dialectical counterpart to 'eclecticism', and neither of the two concepts were conceived within a wider concept of philosophical method framed within the concept

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., II: 189.4-190.32

<sup>40</sup> Catana (2008), 35-113. Franz (2003), 21-2, does not discern between these two meanings of 'eclecticism'.

<sup>41</sup> For the anachronism of this concept in philosophy produced before the seventeenth century, see Catana (2008), 63-113. For Brucker's dubious reconstruction of Thales' philosophy, see *ibid.*, 63-72.

of a system of philosophy.<sup>42</sup> Even in Laertius' *Lives* I.21, 'syncretism' is not listed as a counterpart to 'eclecticism'. Nor had Olearius, Brucker's near-contemporary, related the two terms.<sup>43</sup>

What are the consequences of Brucker's conceptual innovation in regard to Neoplatonism? Neoplatonists were 'infected' with syncretism, he holds. One instance is Proclus, whose reason and power of judgment, essential to system building, had been ruined by religious superstition and Platonic enthusiasm (*furor* or *enthusiasmus*).<sup>44</sup> Brucker routinely perpetuated this criticism of past philosophers with some inclination towards Platonism, so we should not infer from this judgement that he was familiar with Proclus' writings in great detail.<sup>45</sup> If only enthusiasm, understood as *deificatio*, had been an isolated phenomenon in Proclus but otherwise extrinsic to Neoplatonism, the damage would not have been too great, but it was a general feature of Neoplatonism; *deificatio* was regarded as the highest form of felicity and the aim of philosophizing among Neoplatonists — a

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<sup>42</sup> Here I agree with Donini (1988), 21 n. 15. Walch (1726), I: cols 593-4, had employed a conceptual scheme in which syncretism was the dialectical counterpart to eclecticism.

<sup>43</sup> [Olearius] (1711), 1218-20

<sup>44</sup> E.g. Brucker (1742-67), II: 318.33-319.3, 325.20-31, 330.30-39, 331.37-332.2, 363.31-366.24

<sup>45</sup> Brucker raises the same accusation against alleged syncretists like Pico and Ficino (Brucker [1742-67], IV: 59.38-60.4), who picked up the "Alexandrian philosophy" (ibid., IV: 59.3). Brucker claims that Bruno's undisciplined imagination and weak power of judgement led him to accept prejudices, turning his system into a 'monster' (*monstrum*) rather than an apt and rational system (ibid., V: 38.15-20). In fact, Bruno never intended to build a system of philosophy; see Catana (2008), 35-62.

conception that conflicted with Protestant theology, since it left little room for Scripture as a privileged source of truth and moral instruction.<sup>46</sup>

This aim of philosophy, *deificatio* and its enthusiasm, also corrupted the Platonic system of philosophy as understood by Neoplatonists, since it ruined the power of judgement, vital to system building. For this reason, among others, the ancient *secta eclectica* was first of all a syncretistic sect in the eyes of Brucker.<sup>47</sup> In his ‘Praefatio’, he had stated explicitly that the Platonic theory of *furor* was an error that had entered Christianity, and that his motivation for writing this history of philosophy was to combat this error.<sup>48</sup> He spelled out this contradiction between ancient Platonism and Christianity on several occasions — Proclus being the main target.<sup>49</sup>

Brucker denied that Platonic *furor* or *enthusiasmus* was caused by cognitive content. According to him, the Neoplatonists’ so-called noetic ascent, or *amor*, was a non-cognitive state, falsely interpreted by the Neoplatonists themselves as an elevated and cognitive state. According to Brucker, however, their enthusiasm was caused by a medical condition — an excesses of melancholy producing simulacra and images in their disturbed brains.<sup>50</sup> This accusation was not new. Ancient Neoplatonists themselves had debated the

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<sup>46</sup> Brucker (1742-67), I: 21.10-23.11

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., II: 325.20-326.5, 336.19-34, 363.31-367.41

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., I: 21.10-31

<sup>49</sup> E.g. ibid., II: 332.13-18, 336.17-19. 462.18-22

<sup>50</sup> Brucker (1742-67), II: 366.25-367.3. Brucker may well reflect the medical criticism of melancholy, which had been advanced by Meric Casaubon, among others; see Heyd (1995), 44-92.



divide between physiologically and noetically caused states of enthusiasm.<sup>51</sup> Renaissance thinkers with some inclination towards Neoplatonism had distinguished such charlatans, suffering from medical and physiological states, from genuine contemplative men, who undertake a real noetic ascent, whose cognitive content was not doubted.<sup>52</sup> Brucker — probably influenced by Meric Casaubon's (1599-1671) medical critique of enthusiasm in his *Treatise concerning Enthusiasm* (1656) — did not make such a distinction, but categorically disposed of the Platonic *furor* as a misinterpreted physiological state. Hereby Brucker rejected the endeavour of Renaissance thinkers like Ficino, Pico and Bruno to establish a philosophical theology, which was to a considerable extent based on the doctrine on Platonic *furor*.<sup>53</sup>

### **III Brucker's reconstruction of the system of the *secta eclectica***

How did Brucker represent this ancient eclectic sect within his conceptual framework? As explained on page 9-10 above, he did not account for the individual philosophers belonging to this eclectic sect as in the case of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century eclectic philosophers, but chose to offer one single and comprehensive account of all philosophers belonging to this ancient sect. This choice was based on his belief that all ancient eclectics shared a common impulse (religiously motivated syncretism and sectarianism), and this

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<sup>51</sup> E.g. Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* III.25; Porphyry, *De abstinentia* III.24

<sup>52</sup> Ficino, *De amore* VII.3-13. Bruno made this distinction in his typology of noetic ascent, the fifteen *contractiones*; see Catana (2005), 7-19.

<sup>53</sup> For this tradition, see Nelson (1958).

feature justified the implicit assumption that ancient eclecticism was a multi-authored, propositional complex developed by thinkers scattered all over the Mediterranean region over a period of three hundred years.

In his accounts of past philosophers, Brucker typically outlines the historical circumstances (*circumstantiae*) relevant to their systems of philosophy, and then passes on to the principles in their respective systems. These principles are typically of a metaphysical nature, and from them he ‘deduces’ doctrines within the various compartments of philosophy, ending up with their ramifications in practical philosophy.<sup>54</sup> To note in passing, these connections are not the result of logical deductions in the strict sense, but Brucker clings to the terminology typical of logic (e.g. *principium, deduco*, etc.), probably in order to give his account an air of certainty and authority. He follows a parallel procedure in the case of the ancient eclectic sect.

There he first gives a historical outline of the philosophers belonging to this sect, though without entering their respective contribution to the collective, philosophical system.<sup>55</sup> He then offers some general observations on this movement (*generales observationes de philosophia sectae eclecticae*), including some religious reservations against the sect, claiming that these observations and religious weaknesses are representative of the system of ancient eclecticism as a whole.<sup>56</sup> These general observations correspond roughly to the circumstances normally expounded in connection with individual thinkers in his history of philosophy.

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<sup>54</sup> For the precept, see Brucker (1742-67), I: 15.10-18. For its practice, see Catana (2008), 35-113.

<sup>55</sup> Brucker (1742-67), II: 189-357

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, II: 357-392

Finally, Brucker exhibits the system of the ancient eclectics. Here it is possible to discern the contours of his usual procedure, beginning with theoretical philosophy and proceeding to practical philosophy.<sup>57</sup> In this reconstruction he cites various passages from different eclectic philosophers, e.g. Plotinus, Porphyry, Macrobius and the Chaldaean Oracles, in order to reconstruct a single system of philosophy worked out collectively by these Neoplatonists. Needless to say, he typically cites these sources out of context. However, this reconstruction follows from his own precepts for the historian of philosophy, who should indeed identify and articulate such a system.<sup>58</sup> The corresponding methodological ideal, however, was foreign to ancient and Renaissance Platonism, as argued above. Admittedly, a Neoplatonist like Proclus was no stranger to axiomatic-deductive modes of argumentation and exposition, but that in itself does not turn Proclus into a system builder as conceived by Brucker.

Brucker's reconstruction sets out with an account of so-called eclectic dialectics, explaining Plotinus' criticism of, and alternative to, Aristotle's *Categories*. Here Brucker relies on *Ennead* VI.1. This account anticipates his exposition of Plotinus' theory of emanation and its theory of ontological dependencies.<sup>59</sup> Brucker then moves on to the foundational metaphysical principles in eclecticism and its conception of the divinity.<sup>60</sup> The first principle in this system is that of the One and its overflowing, as explained in Plotinus' *Ennead* V.1. Brucker reasons that the eclectic system of philosophy was an 'emanative

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<sup>57</sup> For the account of the system, see *ibid.*, II: 393-462.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, I: 15.10-18. For a critical analysis of the Bruckerian interpretation of Proclus as a system builder, see Beierwaltes (1987).

<sup>59</sup> Brucker (1742-67), II: 393.1-395.27

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, II: 395.28-410.15

system of philosophy'.<sup>61</sup> In order to fit Plotinus' texts into his system concept, he interprets these passages as if the One denoted not only a beginning (Greek ἀρχή, Latin *principium*) in the ontological sense, but also in the logical sense of a premise in a syllogism: The One is the foundational principle in his entire system, it is the very 'key' (*clavis*) that opens up the entire edifice of his 'emanative' system, as Brucker explains.<sup>62</sup> Aristotle too had used the term ἀρχή in the logical sense of a premise in a syllogism, but he distinguished this logical sense from the ontological sense.<sup>63</sup> On this background one wonders whether the Bruckerian "key" to the eclectic system is more suitable for "locking up" the ideas of Neoplatonism than for "unlocking" them. At any rate, the first principle thus identified by Brucker is not only a first principle in Plotinus' system, it is the first principle in the system of ancient eclecticism and features, according to Brucker, in various Neoplatonic thinkers belonging to the sect.<sup>64</sup>

The second principle in the eclectic system is Intellect (*intellectus*), ontologically dependent on the One. Again, Brucker relies on Plotinus' *Ennead* V.1.<sup>65</sup> The hypostasis

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<sup>61</sup> For the One as the first principle in the eclectic system, see *Ibid.*, II: 395.35-400.34.

Brucker, at least on some occasions, relies on the Greek-Latin 1580 edition of Plotinus' *Enneads*: The quotation from Plotinus, *Ennead* III.8.9, in Brucker (1742-67), II: 396 n. s, fits with this 1580 edition.

<sup>62</sup> Brucker (1742-67), II: 395.38-396.3: 'Primum et genuinum totius systematis emanativi principium, nempe fontem fontium omnium, omnibus priorem innuit Plotinus, sicque clavem porrigit, qua totum systematis aedificium referari potest.'

<sup>63</sup> Compare with Aristotle, *Metaphysica* V.1.

<sup>64</sup> Brucker (1742-67), II: 396.31-33

<sup>65</sup> For Intellect, see *ibid.*, II: 398.12-400.34.

Soul (*anima*) is ontologically dependent upon the second principle, Intellect, but is not regarded as a principle by Brucker.<sup>66</sup> The third principle is the World Soul (*anima mundi*). Together with the two other principles, it became, Brucker explains, a rival among ancient eclectics to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>67</sup>

The doctrine of the three principles in the eclectic system, as reconstructed by Brucker, implies at least four things. First, Porphyry's ordering of Plotinus' *Enneads*, crucial to Brucker's exposition of the eclectic system, is reversed in Brucker's account: Roughly speaking, Porphyry had placed ethics first (*Ennead I*), then natural philosophy (*Enneads II-III*), psychology (*Ennead IV*) and metaphysics (*Enneads V-VI*); Brucker begins with metaphysics, where he locates three principles in the eclectic system on the basis of *Ennead V.1*; he then moves on to natural philosophy (including psychology) and ends with ethics, citing *Ennead I.2*. Brucker's order was new, and it was instrumental to modern Plotinus scholarship.<sup>68</sup>

Second, Brucker's order was not only novel and somewhat ahistorical and formalistic, it also conformed with his otherwise outspoken hostility to Neoplatonic ethics. According to Brucker, the aim of Platonic philosophy was the individual Platonic philosopher's experience of *furor*.<sup>69</sup> Ancient eclectic philosophers explained this cognitive state by means of the four cardinal virtues, as they understood the virtues. Brucker, however, reduced this psychological state to a non-cognitive state caused by an excess of

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<sup>66</sup> For Soul, see *ibid.*, II: 398.12-399.15, 400.35-405.26.

<sup>67</sup> For World Soul as the third principle, see *ibid.*, II: 405.27-28. For the World Soul and its vexed relationship to the Christian Trinity, see *ibid.*, 405.28-411.17.

<sup>68</sup> See Catana (2013).

<sup>69</sup> Brucker (1742-67), II: 363.31-366.24

melancholic fluids in the brain, provoking all sorts of phantasms.<sup>70</sup> This medical rejection of *furor* fitted well into his explicit theological rejection of Platonism as a kind of philosophical theology; this objection was clearly stated in the preface to the entire work.<sup>71</sup> In Brucker's systematic account of the ancient eclectic sect, Platonic *furor* and its related doctrine of virtue ethics are thus presented as an insignificant appendix to the metaphysical system, even though *furor* was an important aim of this way of philosophizing, and even though Porphyry had ordered Plotinus' works quite differently.

Let me move on to the third implication of Brucker's determination of the three principles in the eclectic system. The ἀρχαί in Plotinus' thought were not intended as hypotheses in an axiomatic-deductive argument, but as first principles in the ontological sense. As such, the One is non-discursive and non-propositional. Brucker, however, imposes a uniform, propositional rationality on a philosophical theory, i.e. Neoplatonism, in which the limit between non-discursive and discursive rationality is essential.

Fourth, Brucker claims that the eclectic emanative system, based on the idea of the overflowing of the One, was a serious distortion of Plato's system, which was a 'dualistic system of philosophy', based on two principles, god and matter.<sup>72</sup> The emanative system of philosophy resembled — at least in the eyes of Brucker — the atheistic and monistic system of Spinoza, which Brucker perceived as a threat to Christian transcendentalism.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., II: 366.25-367.41

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., I: 21.10-31

<sup>72</sup> Brucker (1742-67), II: 395.28-396.10, 407.5-40. Diderot (1755), 286, retains this characterization of Plotinus' philosophy.

<sup>73</sup> Bayle (1722), III: 2455 n. D, makes the startling comment that Plotinus' philosophy resembles the monistic philosophy of Spinoza.

This theological objection becomes very clear in Brucker's criticism of Neoplatonic virtue ethics, as we shall see below.

Having established the One, Intellect and World Soul as principles in the system of eclecticism, Brucker considers the identification of these three principles with the Christian Trinity. Augustine had explained the theory of hypostases among the *platonici* against the background of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, complaining that the Platonists had not dealt with the subject in a clear manner (*De civitate dei* X.23, 29).<sup>74</sup> Brucker, on the other hand, refused the identification as illegitimate and condemnable, implying that Neoplatonism should not be regarded as a guide to this Christian doctrine. It was wrong, for instance, to equate the Neoplatonic idea of the World Soul with the Christian idea of the Holy Spirit.<sup>75</sup> This is an important example of Brucker's distinction between Christianity and Christianizing Platonism, and the example connects well with his ambition governing his history of philosophy as a whole, to detach Christianity's intellectual roots from Platonism, and to defend a purified version of Christianity and its intellectual genealogy leaving greater scope for Christian revelation.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Brucker (1742-67), II: 410.16-411.17, distinguishes emphatically between the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and the Neoplatonic ontological hierarchy with the One, Intellect and Soul or World Soul.

<sup>75</sup> Brucker argues against this identification in *ibid.*, II: 398.21-399.15, 406.33-411.17. Similarly, in his account of Plato, Brucker warns against this conflation. For an equation of the World Soul in Plato and the Holy Spirit in Christianity, see *ibid.*, I: 703.5-29, 704.30-706.11. For the unsatisfactory systematization produced by the alleged, Neoplatonic reading of Plato, see also *ibid.*, I: 703.26-29.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, I: 21.10-23.25

After Brucker's theological *excursus*, he moves on to various ramifications of these principles in natural philosophy, especially in psychology and cosmology. Once again, Plotinus' *Enneads* are used as an important source.<sup>77</sup> Eclectic theology is the next subject considered in his systematic exposition. The account of this topic is not based on Plotinus, however, but on Iamblichus, especially his *De mysteriis aegyptiorum*. Brucker seems to assume that the system reconstructed in Plotinus' writings also underlies Iamblichus' theology.<sup>78</sup>

Finally, Brucker reaches the so-called practical part of the eclectic system, its virtue theory, ultimately derived from the first-mentioned three principles.<sup>79</sup> The 'Plotinian psychology', which in turn presupposes Plotinus' hierarchy of being, is the foundation of the moral philosophy in eclecticism.<sup>80</sup> In his account of eclectic psychology, Brucker observes Plotinus' view in *Ennead* I.1.11-12 that the human soul cannot sin by itself, but only when it is joined with the body in a compound; Brucker notes that this is a 'miserable foundation for a moral philosophy'.<sup>81</sup> Brucker also notes that Plotinus' idea of the One as the source and aim of the individual soul is foundational to the Platonic theory of enthusiasm — a view which he elaborates at length elsewhere.<sup>82</sup> Brucker reports the various

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<sup>77</sup> For psychology and cosmology, see *ibid.*, II: 411.18-431.19.

<sup>78</sup> For theology, see *ibid.*, II: 431.20-457.33.

<sup>79</sup> For moral philosophy, see *ibid.*, II: 457.34-462.22.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, II: 419.14-17

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, II: 416 n. p

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, II: 417 n. w. For Platonic enthusiasm or *furor*, see also references in nn. 47-9 above.



degrees of virtue among Neoplatonists, but he ends up condemning their virtue theory in strong terms as utterly unchristian.<sup>83</sup>

The higher virtues, as the ancient eclectics, e.g. Proclus, understood and practised them could certainly not pass as genuine Christian virtues, according to Brucker, although some Platonists had claimed this. In fact, this eclectic doctrine of virtue amounted to nothing but ‘stupid emulation’ (*stulta aemulatio*).<sup>84</sup> At this point Brucker’s motive for writing his *Historia critica philosophiae* emerges: He wanted to expurgate Christianity from various strains of Platonism, Neoplatonism in particular, that had entered the religion and now posed a danger to it — and his account of ancient eclecticism — was a Lutheran counterblast to this challenge, presented in the form of an unbiased, systematic exposition. Brucker reinserts revelation into a privileged position and dethrones the Platonic theological and ethical pretention to oneness with the divine through the exercise of the higher virtues.

#### **IV The *secta eclectica*: Brucker’s legacy in general histories of philosophy**

Brucker did not use the Latin terms for ‘Neoplatonism’ and ‘Neoplatonist’ in his *Historia critica philosophiae*. In the ancient, medieval and Renaissance periods, ancient Platonists had uniformly been called *platonici*, and Brucker continued this tradition. He thus used the

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., II: 462.15-22

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., II: 462.2-22. Similarly, Brucker condemns Plotinus, and other Neoplatonic philosophers infected with Platonic enthusiasm, from the ‘Christian republic’; see *ibid.*, II: 231.16-19.

phrase *platonici* when referring to philosophers like Plato, Alcinous, Plotinus and Proclus. Recently, Hager and Meinhardt have demonstrated that the term ‘Neoplatonism’ emerged in German scholarship in the last third of the eighteenth century with historians of philosophy like Büsching (1774), Meiners (1786), Eberhard (1788), Fülleborn (1793) and Buhle (1796-1801).<sup>85</sup>

Although Brucker did not invent the terms ‘Neoplatonism’ and ‘Neoplatonist’, his historiographical concept of a system of philosophy, as well as his ideas of eclecticism and syncretism, were decisive to those subsequent German historians who did invent these terms, since they were shaped by the semantics of these three Bruckerian concepts. Hager and Meinhardt have not paid sufficient attention to this conceptual dependence upon Brucker’s key concepts. In fact, these eighteenth-century German historians of philosophy regarded Neoplatonism as ancient Alexandrian eclecticism, and they justified the label ‘Neoplatonism’ on the basis of Brucker’s distinction between genuine Platonism and the so-called eclectic, or rather syncretistic, Platonism of the Alexandrians. The German historian of philosophy Büsching, among the first to use the German phrase for ‘Neoplatonism’, expressed this view eloquently in 1774:

Hence, they [the Alexandrian philosophers] were, and were called, eclectics. However, they preferred to be seen as adherents of Plato, whose doctrines on god, soul and the universe they liked better than what other philosophers had thought about these matters. Moreover, they preferred to be called Platonic philosophers. Posterity, however, has called them Neoplatonists [neuen Platoniker] in order to distinguish them from the ancient and genuine Platonists.

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<sup>85</sup> Hager (1983) and Meinhardt (1984)

One would not inflict any injury upon them by calling them enthusiasts, since their system and its ornament bears witness to the fact that they were men of this kind.<sup>86</sup>

For Büsching and subsequent historians of philosophy of his period, the term ‘Neoplatonism’ thus came to denote a discontinuity in the Platonic tradition, a corruption of genuine ancient Platonism, and a low point in the history of philosophy.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Büsching (1772-4), II: 471 spoke of the ‘Ursprung der eklektischen Philosophie der neuern Platoniker’. Ibid., II: 472, Büsching distinguished genuine ancient Platonism from Neoplatonism: ‘Also waren und hießen sie [Alexandrian philosophers, mentioned ibid., II: 471-2], Eklektiker. Jedoch sie wolten insonderheit für Anhänger des Plato angesehen seyn, dessen Lehrsätze von Gott, der Seele und Welt, ihnen besser gefielen, als was andere Philosophen davon gelehret hatten, und ließen sich also auch gern Platoniker nennen. Die Nachwelt aber hat sie zum Unterschied von den alten und ächten Platonikern, die neuen Platoniker genannt. Man thut ihnen nicht unrecht, wenn man sie für Enthusiasten ausgiebt, denn ihr System und desselben Ausschmückung, bezeuget es, dass sie dergleichen gewesen.’ For the theological and medical accusation against enthusiasts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Heyd (1995), 44-92.

<sup>87</sup> The following historians of philosophy can be seen in the historiographical tradition established by Brucker: Meiners (1782) (ignored by Meinhardt [1984]) spoke of Neoplatonism (‘Neu-Platonisches Philosophie’, 6, 7, 9 *et passim*), or the Neoplatonists (‘neuen Platonikern’, 8, or ‘neuern Platonikern’, 9, *et passim*). He characterized these Neoplatonists as eclectics, led by Potamo and Ammonius, who combined different philosophical systems (9-16; ‘System’ is mentioned on 10, 13, 14, 16). Eberhard (1788),

The Germans were at the forefront of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century scholarship, and their historiographical categories and evaluations were perceived as authoritative and reliable, although they were at times imbued with considerable religious prejudices. However, given the status of these categories and evaluations in the scholarly community, they spread to other countries. One example is the British philosopher James Mill. In 1804, he attacked Thomas Taylor's interpretation of Plato for its debt to these abominable "Alexandrian" philosophers.<sup>88</sup> As Mill's vehement attack testifies, it was not necessary at this point in history to argue for a negative view of these Alexandrians — everyone assumed that they were bad philosophers, and all a critic had to do was to claim

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211-221, picks up the main features of this tradition, reusing the term 'Neoplatonic' ('neu-platonischen', 211; or 'Neuplatonische', e.g. 212). He characterizes the Neoplatonic philosophy as 'eclectic' ('eclectischen', 212), and he brings forward Brucker's contention that the Alexandrian philosophers construed a system (213). Eberhard (1788) refers approvingly to Brucker (1742-67) (219), and he regards Justinian's closure of Plato's Academy as an adequate ending of 'heathen' ('heidnische'), that is, Hellenic philosophy, after the rise of Christianity (222). Fülleborn (1793), 70-85, uses the term 'Neoplatonism' and its cognates as a well-established term, largely relying on the tradition going back to Brucker and Meiners. Buhle (1796-1804), IV, refers to Brucker (1742-67) (181): Buhle uses the term 'Neoplatonism' and its cognates (e.g. 211), and he reports several of features that had become standard in the interpretation of Neoplatonism (183-215). However, Buhle is among the first to reject Mosheim's theological and orthodox Protestant criticism of Neoplatonism (215-9).

<sup>88</sup> [Mill] (1809), 191-200, 211, uses the phrase 'Alexandrian' for ancient Neoplatonic philosophers, typically with strong negative connotations.

that some Plato interpretation was associated with Neoplatonism for it to lose credibility in the scholarly community.

Hegel later questioned the legitimacy of the term ‘Neoplatonism’ in his lectures on the history of philosophy, pointing out the presence of non-Platonic elements as well. He also denied the common characterization of Alexandrian philosophy as eclectic, in the negative sense of the word; that is, as an unoriginal and incoherent sampling of various philosophical doctrines. Nevertheless, he still regarded Alexandrian philosophy as an all-embracing synthesis of all past philosophical systems — Plotinus’ philosophy being a rare example of an internally coherent synthesis.<sup>89</sup> Although Hegel’s positive evaluation and serious exposition of the so-called Alexandrian philosophy marks a turning point in the reception of Neoplatonism, his interpretation was still indebted to previous interpretations on at least two counts. First, as with Brucker, Büsching and other historians of philosophy, Hegel held that this development of the Platonic tradition did not bring the Neoplatonists closer to genuine Platonism; on the contrary, it was very far from the original Platonism. Second, Hegel retained the characterisation of Neoplatonism, and of Plotinus in particular, as eclectic, though not of a defective and sectarian kind, intent on system building. Thereby he remained largely within the historiographical tradition initiated by Brucker.

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<sup>89</sup> We find an exposition of Neoplatonism in Hegel (1959), XIX: 3-96. For non-Platonic elements in Neoplatonism, see *ibid.*, XIX: 10, 40. For Hegel’s rejection of Alexandrian philosophy as eclectic, see *ibid.*, XIX: 33. For Alexandrian philosophy (including Plotinus’) as a synthesis of previous systems, see *ibid.*, XIX: 33. The last-mentioned claim should be seen on the background of Hegel’s general view on the history of philosophy as a series of philosophical systems which are ‘aufgehoben’ into subsequent ones; see *ibid.*, XVII: 35-80.

Eduard Zeller carried on the tradition going back to Brucker, though not without polemical outbursts. Zeller is above all the late nineteenth-century historian of philosophy whose account of ancient Greek philosophy is still important, still reprinted (the latest reprint from 2006) and still cited as an authority. As observed recently by Christoph Horn, Zeller rejected the concept of Alexandrian philosophy as ‘superficial’ and inadequate, and Zeller was clearly targeting the interpretation and evaluation of Neoplatonism found in earlier generations of nineteenth-century German historians of philosophy.<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, Zeller characterized Neoplatonism as eclecticism, verging on syncretism, and he adopted the Bruckerian system concept in his assessment of the movement.<sup>91</sup> At this point it should be observed that Zeller, and other modern historians of philosophy, did not understand

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<sup>90</sup> Horn (2010), 138. *Ibid.*, 138-9, Horn identifies Schleiermacher’s Plato interpretation of 1804 as the first attack on the so-called Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato that had any substantial influence upon German scholarship. I think it would be reasonable to pay attention to the anti-Platonic campaign—attacking Neoplatonists on theological, philosophical, philological and medical grounds— that emanated from Leipzig publishers between 1715 and 1744, counting figures like Olearius (1711), Heumann (1715a) and (1715b), Hansch (1716), Mosheim (1725), and Brucker (1742-67); the latter certainly did have a considerable influence on German scholarship, and on the history of philosophy in particular. Remarkably, this widespread anti-Platonic campaign has largely been ignored among historians of philosophy working on the eighteenth century.

<sup>91</sup> For Zeller’s use of the historiographical concept eclecticism in regard to Neoplatonism, see Zeller (1923), III.1: 547-64. See also the critical discussion of Zeller on this point in Donini (1988) and Beierwaltes (1989), 1182-91. Compare with Horn (2010), 142, who praises Zeller’s interpretation of Neoplatonism as adequate and nuanced.

eclecticism as Brucker had done — to Zeller, it merely meant some random selection of doctrines from the philosophical tradition, not the same as in the thought of Brucker. Laertius, Brucker and Zeller thus upheld three different conceptions of eclecticism.<sup>92</sup> Zeller also retained Brucker's division between Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism. In short, Brucker's influence is considerable, even after Zeller.<sup>93</sup>

### **V Problems in Brucker's reconstruction of the *secta eclectica***

There are several problems in the reconstruction of the *secta eclectica*. First, it construes a discontinuity between Platonists and this eclectic sect, i.e. Neoplatonism, on the basis of a methodological ideal, which was absent and unintended among Neoplatonic philosophers, but superimposed on their writings, namely that of eclecticism, as Brucker understood the concept. This distance was enforced by the inward-looking nature of the respective systems in Plato and Neoplatonism, based as they were, according to Brucker, on their respective,

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<sup>92</sup> To Laertius, an 'eclectic school' makes selections from the doctrines of existing sects (e.g. *Lives* I.21). To Brucker, 'eclecticism' typically denotes an internally coherent complex of doctrines derived from one or a few general theories, or principles, which have been chosen among existing philosophical principles. To Zeller, 'eclecticism' merely means a random collection of doctrines from the philosophical tradition.

<sup>93</sup> Compare my analysis with Hager (1983), 101, claiming that the term 'Neoplatonism' is justified.

over-arching principles. Brucker's account thus obscures instances of continuity between Plato and Neoplatonists, as in the case of Platonic ethics emphasizing divine likeness.<sup>94</sup>

Second, Brucker's novel way of presenting Neoplatonic philosophy, namely in the form of a system based on metaphysical principles, implies that a variety of philosophical areas, such as natural philosophy and political philosophy, are best explained when understood against the background of these asserted metaphysical principles. This unilateral, metaphysical contextualization hinders us from understanding areas in Neoplatonic thought that may be explained on their own, or which may be contextualized to fields outside the alleged system.<sup>95</sup>

Third, the phrase 'eclectic sect' negates the explicit statements of intent of ancient Neoplatonists, claiming that they are legitimate heirs to the philosophy of Plato and the "pre-Platonists" (e.g. Plotinus, *Ennead* V.1.8).<sup>96</sup> This self-understanding conflicts with Brucker's definition of eclectics, who choose doctrines from *all* sects.<sup>97</sup> Brucker and his like-minded colleagues want us to believe that what mattered to Neoplatonists was to combine the doctrines or principles from the systems of the various ancient philosophical schools almost as if they were placed on an equal footing, with the exception of Plato's

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<sup>94</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus* 176A-B; Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* 28; Plotinus, *Ennead* I.2.1. For this instance of continuity, see Annas (1999) 52-69. *Ibid.*, 53, Annas points out that this idea in the *Theaetetus* 176A-B and *Didaskalikos* 28 has often been ignored by Plato scholars.

<sup>95</sup> For recent studies in Neoplatonic natural philosophy, see Wilberding (2006); Chiaradonna and Trabattini (eds) (2009). Similarly, for political philosophy, see O'Meara (2003).

<sup>96</sup> For Plotinus and the Presocratics, see Stamatellos (2007).

<sup>97</sup> Compare with Brucker (1742-67), II: 189.4-14, as cited in n. 36 above.



philosophy.<sup>98</sup> This way of thinking certainly obscures the fact that some Neoplatonists regarded themselves as legitimate heirs not only to Plato, but also to the “pre-Platonists”, including Parmenides and Heraclitus, to whom Plotinus refers frequently.<sup>99</sup>

Fourth, Brucker’s account fails to explain the positive statements about method advanced by the Neoplatonists themselves. One example is Plotinus’ *Ennead* III.7.1, which does not even point in the direction of an eclectic method even in the vague sense of the word. In fact, one could ask on a more general level, where is the evidence for the claim that Neoplatonists regarded their method as eclectic? One may even ask how widespread this method was in ancient philosophy. I find it hard to come up with more than a few insubstantial examples.

Fifth, Brucker’s complaint against Neoplatonists, that they were sectarians and syncretists with a corrupt faculty of reason, was accompanied by a new accusation; Neoplatonists excelled in allegorical reasoning, though not because they were excellent exegetes of Plato, but because this mode of reasoning was the only form open to them and their disturbed brains, ruined as they were by enthusiasm.<sup>100</sup> This accusation becomes standard some time after Brucker.<sup>101</sup> Though it is true that Neoplatonists occasionally did

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<sup>98</sup> For this tendency, see also Meiners (1782), 10, who claims that Alexandrian philosophers sought to harmonize different philosophical schools, especially the Platonic and the Aristotelian.

<sup>99</sup> For Plotinus’ use of Presocratic thinkers, see Stamatellos (2007).

<sup>100</sup> See for instance the exposition of Proclus method in Brucker (1742-67), II: 325.20-31, 333.12-23, 359.30-37.

<sup>101</sup> E.g. Tennemann (1798-1819), VI: 10, 17, juxtaposes the Neoplatonists’ allegorical interpretation of Plato with a proper systematic exposition.

advance allegorical interpretations, and that allegorical interpretation is subject to all the weaknesses of unrestricted subjectivism, two things need to be pointed out. The first is that allegorical interpretation was an integral part of Plato's works, as he admits himself.<sup>102</sup> Hence it was not completely illegitimate to pursue a hermeneutics, which sought to uncover such allegorical meanings. The second thing is that the label 'allegorical interpretation' is not a full and adequate indication of the methods employed by ancient and Renaissance Neoplatonists. In addition, they also used standard philosophical methods such as analysis of philosophical concepts, theories and arguments. Some Neoplatonists, e.g. Proclus, openly profess a pluralistic hermeneutics when faced with Plato's writings.<sup>103</sup> The accusation of being allegorical implied, however, that subsequent historians of philosophy tended to ignore these non-allegorical analyses.

Sixth, Brucker's codification of philosophical originality, in the form of successful construction of philosophical systems, implies that philosophical discourse that falls outside this form — the commentary, for instance — fails to qualify as proper philosophy worthy of the attention of the historian of philosophy. These are "only" commentaries and can be ignored in general histories of philosophy. However, as Richard Sorabji and George Karamanolis have recently demonstrated, it would be a gross mistake to reduce ancient commentators to anything like that; they were most certainly able to produce original and challenging ideas.<sup>104</sup> When we get to Renaissance commentators, e.g. Marsilio Ficino's commentary on Plotinus, we also find Brucker ignoring important texts. To this day, most

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<sup>102</sup> E.g. Plato, *Gorgias* 493A-C. For this theme, see Tarrant (2000).

<sup>103</sup> Proclus, *In Timaeum* I.68.15-22. I owe this reference to Karamanolis. For hermeneutic techniques among Neoplatonists, see Tarrant (2000).

<sup>104</sup> Sorabji (1990); Karamanolis (2006)

of these Renaissance commentaries, including Ficino's commentary on Plotinus, are not even edited or translated, let alone analyzed and discussed, by historians of philosophy.

Seventh, the characterisation of the *secta eclectica* as syncretist had normative implications. Syncretism was perceived as an inferior philosophy and reproached by Brucker. This applies to syncretism in both ancient and Renaissance Neoplatonism, especially the latter, which was perceived as a real threat to the kind of theology favoured by Brucker.<sup>105</sup> This normative degradation was reinforced by external factors, especially the institutionalization of the history of philosophy, relying heavily on Brucker's conceptual schemes. This occurred when courses in the history of philosophy began to flourish in philosophy departments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and this institutional setting gave Brucker's narrative momentum. Brucker's idea of the history of philosophy, including his historiographical concepts like 'system of philosophy', 'eclecticism' and 'syncretism', was affirmed and adopted by most eighteenth-, nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians of philosophy writing general histories of philosophy, Friedrich Copleston perhaps being the latest example.<sup>106</sup> Given this educational and institutional context, Neoplatonism was left little room for fair play, since Bruckerian precepts had the upper hand. This unfavourable historiographical determination of Neoplatonism induced subsequent historians of philosophy to treat it disrespectfully in their general histories of philosophy, and it probably led quite a few nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophy

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<sup>105</sup> Brucker (1742-67), IV: 59.38-60.4, rejects Renaissance Neoplatonism as syncretism.

<sup>106</sup> For Brucker's influence, see Catana (2008), 193-282. For one late follower of Brucker's precepts about history of philosophy as the history of philosophical systems, see Copleston (1985), I: 2-9.

departments to scale down their introduction to Neoplatonism, thus cementing its low status.

Finally, Brucker's assessment of Egyptian or Alexandrian philosophy, decisive to the development of the eclectic sect, meant that Egyptian philosophy was now seen as an intrusion and distortion of Greek philosophy. Compared with earlier accounts of the history of philosophy, Brucker stood out by identifying the beginning of the history of philosophy in Greece, namely with Thales, and by regarding philosophical movements in the Middle East as distortions of that Greek philosophy. Earlier Renaissance accounts had identified the Middle East, Egypt in particular, as the origin of Greek philosophy. In the Renaissance tradition of *prisca theologia* (ancient theology), Egypt had been seen as the source of Plato's philosophy.<sup>107</sup> After Brucker, however, Europe's intellectual roots were to be found inside Europe itself.<sup>108</sup>

These problems can be seen as objections against Brucker raised from the perspective of modern historical scholarship, which seeks a critical account of past philosophers that is independent of confessional ties. Brucker, however, was no such scholar. As he states in his preface, his motivation for writing the massive Latin volumes on philosophy's past was to serve Christianity and its church.<sup>109</sup> For him, it was less important if Neoplatonism was separated from the earlier Platonic tradition in an unhistorical manner,

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<sup>107</sup> For this Renaissance tradition, see Walker (1972). For Brucker's re-orientation, see Blackwell (1997).

<sup>108</sup> Compare with Bernal (1985), I: 3-4 *et passim*, who claims that romanticism introduced a euro-centric model. For discussions of non-Hellenic origins to Hellenic philosophy, see also contributions in *Isis*, 83 (1992).

<sup>109</sup> Brucker (1742-67), I: 21.10-31

or if Europe's philosophical tradition was somewhat misrepresented as a self-contained unit; the important point to him was that the Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato was disqualified, because it posed a theological threat.

This disqualification meant that Christians could now deal with Plato without accepting his metaphysical and ethical idea about divine likeness, which was strongly emphasised by the Neoplatonists, and which bypassed Scripture as a privileged source for our knowledge of truth and bliss. The Plato reconstructed by Brucker was one in which *deificatio* and *furor* played no central role, if any at all; it was a reconstruction in which Plato was primarily a metaphysician presenting a doctrine of ideas. The passages in *Phaedo* 69C and *Theaetetus* 176A-B, vital to ancient Platonism and its theory of divine likeness, were now out of sight; Alcinous' *Didaskalikos* 28 and Plotinus' *Enneads* I.2.1 and IV.7.10 were no longer considered central to our understanding of the aim of Platonic philosophy.<sup>110</sup>

## **VI Brucker's alternative guides to Plato: Cicero, Alcinous and Apuleius**

If Neoplatonists were unreliable guides to Plato's philosophy, who were reliable guides in the eyes of Brucker? Cicero and the Middle Platonists Alcinous and Apuleius, Brucker answers in his exposition of Plato's philosophy.<sup>111</sup> They pre-dated Neoplatonism and its perverse interpretation of Plato, for which reason they could be used as a pure and uncontaminated source to Plato's philosophy. Brucker explains:

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<sup>110</sup> For this rediscovery, see Annas (1999) 52-71; Karamanolis (2004).

<sup>111</sup> For Plato's philosophy, see Brucker (1742-67), I: 627-728. For an analysis of Brucker's interpretation of Plato, see Catana (2008), 73-94.

Let us look back, however, to those among the ancients, who were less infected by detestable syncretism, as the school of Plotinus, and who must therefore be considered to have reported Plato's doctrines in a somewhat purer form. Among these, the first place is unquestionably owed to Cicero. In the *Academica*, an elegant and brief treatise, he reported, in a very eloquent form, Plato's doctrines, which were taught in the Academy. To this we can rightly add Apuleius and also Alcinous, who, most satisfactory of all, paid attention to the order and connection in the Platonic philosophy...<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Brucker (1742-67), I: 669.13-23: 'Respiciemus tamen ad eos quoque ex veteribus, qui detestabili syncretismi peste non tantopere, ut Plotini schola, infecti, aliquanto purius Platonis dogmata enarravisse censendi sunt. Inter quos sine controversia Ciceroni primus locus debetur, qui in Academicis quaestionibus<sup>h</sup> eleganti compendio Platonis decreta, qualia in Academia docebantur, purissimo sermonis genere enarravit. Huic merito addimus Apuleium<sup>i</sup> atque Alcinoum,<sup>k</sup> qui, ut omnium optime ad ordinem nexumque philosophiae Platonicae attendit, ita dux erit nobis in itinere, quo ipsius Platonis, nullum philosophiae suae ordinem, systema nullum in scriptis suis sequentis, sed cuncta in dialogis dispersa ratione enarrantis, doctrinas ex eius colloquiis eruemus.' Ibid., n. h reads: 'Lib. I. c. 5. seqq.' (= Cicero, *Academica* I vff., ed. Reid). Ibid., n. i reads: 'Libris tribus, *de dogmate Platonis*, quorum primis de philosophia naturali, secundus de morali, tertius de rationali agit.' (= Apuleius, *De Platone et eius dogmate* I-II, ed. Beaujeu. Apuleius' work only contains the first two books, not a third on logic, as Brucker says; see Beaujeu [1973], 49, 52). Ibid., n. k reads: '*In delineatione doctrinae Platonis*, quam

Accordingly, Brucker uses Cicero and the Middle Platonists Alcinous and Apuleius to present Plato as a system builder. Brucker interpretes the two ἀρχαί (matter and God) reported in Plato's *Timaeus* 32C-33A and in Alcinous' *Didaskalikos* 9 as the two general theories, so-called principles of Plato's system, from which Plato allegedly deduced the doctrines in his system.<sup>113</sup> This system underlies Plato's otherwise unordered dialogues, Brucker holds.<sup>114</sup> In fact, these ἀρχαί were not logical premises, principles, in the *Timaeus* and *Didaskalikos*, but ἀρχαί in the ontological sense of beginning. Neither Cicero, Alcinous nor Apuleius assigned a system to Plato, at least in the sense used by Brucker. Moreover, Brucker did not offer a Middle Platonic account of Plato. Instead, he used these Middle Platonists — especially Alcinous — as a pretext for a reconstruction of Plato's philosophy that was entirely his own, and which was deeply dependent upon his system

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quoque historiae philosophicae suae inservit Stanlei. P. IV. p. 326.' (= Alcinous, *Doctrinae Platonis lineamenta autore Alcinoo*, in Stanley [1711], 326-57.)

<sup>113</sup> Brucker (1742-67), I: 677.11-16: 'Certe Platonici ipsi eclecticæ scholæ priores nunquam aliter magistrum intellexerunt, nec Cicero,<sup>ss</sup> Apuleius,<sup>t</sup> Alcinous,<sup>u</sup> et ipse quoque, his iunior Chalcidius<sup>w</sup> tradiderunt, quam, admisisse Platonem principia prima duo, Deum et materiam, hanc vero esse, ut Apuleii verbis utamur, improcreabilem incorruptamque: hisque demum adiici ideam.' Ibid., n. ss reads 'Q. q. *Academ.* l. I. c. 6' (= Cicero, *Academica* I vi 22-4, ed. Reid, 121-6). Ibid., n. t reads: '*De dog. Plat.* l. I. p. m. 284' (= Apuleius, *De Platone et eius dogmate* I v 190, ed. Beaujeu, 63). Ibid., n. u reads: 'c. 12. Stanlei. p. 338' (= Alcinous, *Doctrinae Platonis lineamenta autore Alcinoo* xii, 338). Ibid., n. w reads: 'Opp. p. 3. Comm. in *Tim.* c. 13. § 305' (=?).

<sup>114</sup> Brucker (1742-67), I: 669.13-23, as cited in n. 112 above.

concept. The Middle Platonists certainly did offer pedagogical systematizations of Plato's philosophy, but they were different from that of Brucker.<sup>115</sup> On the background of this misreading, Brucker uses Alcinous as a guide to Plato's system, claiming that it was a 'dualistic system of philosophy'. This system is then presented in opposition to the

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<sup>115</sup> Compare with Tigerstedt (1974) and (1977), who does not examine the meaning of Brucker's concept system of philosophy, and who therefore fails to differentiate Brucker's introduction of this historiographical systematization from the systematizations of the Middle Platonists. Tigerstedt (1974), 68, thus ignores that Brucker imposed this category on Plato, and that it was foreign to the Neoplatonists: 'But though Tennemann's Kantian interpretation of Plato did not carry conviction, he nevertheless bequeathed two ideas of great importance to the Platonic scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The first was the belief that Plato had a philosophic system. This assumption was, of course, no invention of Tennemann's, for it was more or less shared by all earlier Platonists, save the New Academy, and can be traced back to Plato's immediate successors in the Old Academy, Speusippus and Xenocrates, though it culminated in the Neoplatonists.' Compare also with Burnyeat (2001), 106 who states: 'Alcinous' Plato is still a systematic thinker, albeit in a Hellenistic rather than NeoPlatonic mould'. If 'systematic' implies that Alcinous' professed a system in the Bruckerian sense of the word, I disagree. I also disagree with Franz (2003), 24, who argues that Brucker re-introduced Plato's system as it had been explained among these Middle Platonists. For a full analysis of Brucker's interpretation of Plato, see Catana (2008), 73-94, 109-113.



Neoplatonic ‘emanative system of philosophy’.<sup>116</sup> Hence, Brucker reasoned, genuine Platonism was fundamentally different from Neoplatonism.

## Conclusion

I think there are lessons to be learned from the above analysis. One is that we, as historians of philosophy, do not have good reasons to accept the assumption that the Neoplatonists collaborated on a single and highly sophisticated theoretical complex, an eclectic system of philosophy. It is implausible that such a project could get off the ground, given the vast distances in time, place and philosophical preferences of the co-writers involved. Besides, it

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<sup>116</sup> For the view that Plato’s dualistic system was perverted into an emanative system by Neoplatonists, see Brucker (1742-67), II: 364.4-9: ‘Quod ut facilius fieret, relicto, quod Plato assumerat, systemate dualistico, emanativum ab iis ex philosophia Orientali revocatum et admissum, et per varios emanationum fontes, gradus, naturas, modos, classes, totus rerum et visibilium et invisibilium orbis, maxime vero infinita naturarum spiritualium et inteligibilium series deducta est.’ Rather inconsistently, Brucker (1742-67), I: 695.30-37, contends that Plato’s doctrine of ideas is a third principle in his system, on which his theology, metaphysics, and his natural and moral philosophy hinge. Here Brucker seems to contradict his claim about a dualistic system in Plato. This distance between Plato’s dualistic system of philosophy and the Neoplatonic emanative system of philosophy is underlined by Brucker’s claim that the Neoplatonic eclecticism originated from Egypt, first of all Alexandria, not from Greece; see Brucker (1742-67), II: 190-3.

is in urgent need of textual evidence. Also, it does not accommodate the explicit statements of intent advanced by the Neoplatonists themselves.

Furthermore, two specific problems stand out in relation to Neoplatonism. First, the characterization of Neoplatonism as a system of philosophy, which is more or less coherent internally, invites us to understand the complex of philosophical theories pertaining to Neoplatonism as a self-contained and inward-looking unit; it hinders us from understanding the connections made by so-called Neoplatonists between philosophical and non-philosophical areas. As outlined above, the application of the concepts 'eclecticism' and 'system of philosophy' to Neoplatonism introduces a series of problems to our interpretation of the texts themselves. Second, the divide between Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism is justified on the part of Brucker by means of assumptions that are untenable. Hence it becomes very difficult to maintain a divide between the two periods which is not only chronological, but which concerns the very nature of these two phases of Platonism. I think we ought to abandon the divide completely, since it cannot be justified in the essentialistic manner proposed by Brucker. Given the fact that the division obscures more than it reveals, we would be better off without it.

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